

# Eliphaz, The Pious Sage in Job: Edomite Wisdom

## Session 1

**By Dr. Kyle Dunham**

1) Abstract, 2) Briefing Document, 3) Study Guide, 4) FAQs

### 1. Abstract

2. This academic text, "Dunham\_Job\_EN\_Eliphaz\_01.pdf," presents Dr. Kyle Dunham's initial lecture on Eliphaz, a key figure in the Book of Job. Dunham, an Associate Professor of Old Testament, explores Eliphaz's role within the context of Edomite wisdom, drawing from his dissertation on the topic. The lecture examines Job's friends as interlocutors, their varied interpretations throughout history, and the historical and cultural background of Edomite wisdom that shaped their counsel. Ultimately, Dunham argues that Eliphaz, though embodying profound human wisdom, represents a flawed legalistic approach to suffering, highlighting the Book of Job's counterpoint to traditional ancient Near Eastern theological perspectives. The discussion also touches upon the meaning of Job's name and the geographical and cultural evidence linking Job and his companions to Edom.

### 2. Briefing Document:

#### **Briefing Document: Eliphaz in the Context of Edomite Wisdom**

##### Overview of Sources

The provided source is "Dunham\_Job\_EN\_Eliphaz\_01.pdf," consisting of excerpts from Dr. Kyle Dunham's teaching on Eliphaz, the pious sage in Job. Specifically, it covers session one, focusing on Eliphaz in the context of Edomite Wisdom. Dr. Dunham is an Associate Professor of Old Testament at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary and has published extensively on Eliphaz.

##### Main Themes and Important Ideas/Facts

This briefing document summarizes the key insights from Dr. Kyle Dunham's session on Eliphaz, focusing on his role, interpretive history, Edomite provenance, and the underlying tenets of Edomite wisdom.

1. The Interpretive Ambiguity of Job's Friends, Particularly Eliphaz

- Initial Sympathy, Later Condemnation: The friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, initially come to show sympathy and comfort to Job, sitting in silence with him for seven days (Job 2:11-13). However, their ensuing long-winded speeches raise questions about their true intentions and how they should be perceived.
- Eliphaz as Chief Counselor: Eliphaz is the eldest and most respected of the three, the first to speak, and his speeches are the longest. He "provides a paradigm for the later friends as they follow him" and "touch upon each of the various theodicies that are offered by the human speakers in Job."
- Contrasting Interpretations: Traditionalist/Sympathetic: Some view Eliphaz as a traditionalist who errs only in the rigid application of his theological principles. Scholars like Carol Newsome and Manfred Oeming argue for rehabilitating the friends, seeing them as "sophisticated counselor[s] with substantial theological contributions" and "genuine friends and good ministers." Oeming points to their initial silence, waiting for Job to speak, and pastoral care as evidence.
- Pernicious/Villainous: Others criticize Eliphaz for his harshness, casting him as a "villain who wants to destroy Job" or even "inadvertently used by Satan." These interpretations see the friends as "scoundrels" providing a shallow counterpoint to Job's theology.
- Interpretive Bipolarity: Dr. Dunham notes an "interpretive bipolarity" since the Reformation, with earlier periods (Septuagint, Apostle Paul) showing more ambivalence or even authoritative citation (1 Corinthians 3:9 quoting Job 5:13), while later periods harshly criticized him. The 21st century sees scholars arguing for an intentional ambiguity by the author, eliciting both negative and positive reactions.
- Composite View Approach (Dunham's Stance): Dr. Dunham adopts a "composite view approach," seeing Eliphaz as neither a "straw man, nor as a parodied buffoon." Instead, Eliphaz "ties together important elements of ancient Near Eastern theodicy to suggest that Job's only way to resolve his predicament is divine appeasement." He is a proponent of "the finest elements of ancient Near Eastern and ultimately of human wisdom," yet his counsel is ultimately flawed and fails, underscoring the "failure of traditional ancient Near Eastern theological perspectives to solve the deepest questions of suffering."

## 2. Edomite Provenance of Job and His Friends

- **Geographical and Genealogical Evidence: Job's Origin:** Job is from "the land of Uz" (Job 1:1), which Dr. Dunham argues is most likely "identified with Edom, southeast of Palestine or Canaan." This is supported by the patronym Uz in the Edomite genealogy (Genesis 36:28), poetic parallelism linking Uz to Edom (Lamentations 4:21), and the Edomite origin of most names in the book.
- **Eliphaz's Origin:** Eliphaz is a "Temanite" (Job 2:11), and Timan is a region "subsumed under Edom proper" and "associated with Edom and Edomite wisdom." The name Timan is linked to a grandson of Esau and son of Eliphaz in Genesis 36.
- **Septuagint Appendix:** The Septuagint translation of Job characterizes Job and his friends as kings of Edomite origin, further linking Job to the Edomite genealogy in Genesis 36.
- **Edom's Renowned Wisdom:** Edom was "renowned for its wisdom" both biblically (Jeremiah 49:7, Obadiah) and extra-biblically (Baruch 3:14). It was an established monarchy with significant political and societal organization, situated along the King's Highway, a major trade route connecting Egypt and Damascus. This location facilitated the "flow of both trade ideas and religion," exposing Edom to many cultures and societies.
- **Scarcity of Edomite Inscriptions:** Despite its reputation for wisdom, there's a scarcity of direct written evidence of Edomite wisdom. Proposed reasons include:
  - Incorporation into the Hebrew Bible (Pfeiffer).
  - Complete obliteration of Edomite culture.
  - Misidentification of Edomite inscriptions as Hebrew or Moabite.

## 3. The Theological Contours of Edomite Wisdom (as embodied by Eliphaz)

Based on Pfeiffer's work and his own study, Dr. Dunham summarizes Edomite wisdom as incorporating three key tenets:

- **God is a Fearsome God (Kos):** The Edomite God was known as Kos, possibly related to the Hebrew word *kotz*, meaning "to feel a sickening dread."

- Eliphaz's visionary experience in Job 4:14-15 vividly describes the "dread" and "trembling" induced by this mysterious being.
- Eliphaz consistently uses "dread" or "fear" to describe divine presence and retribution, indicating that "the wicked person is visited by divine retribution when the sounds of dread or terror are in his ears."
- God is Distant and Utterly Transcendent: Eliphaz emphasizes a "vast chasm between God and man that allows no mortal to attain righteousness with God" (Job 4:17-18). Not even angels are free from corruption.
- God is "largely undiscernible to mankind" (Job 5:9) and "has no concern for the affairs of humanity" (Job 22:2-3, 12).
- This divine remoteness means "human efforts are of no value to him."
- God is Capriciously Retributive: Eliphaz portrays God as a "cosmic justice meter" who "rewards man according to divine whims."
- God "wounds, but he binds up, he shatters, but his hands heal" (Job 5:18), implying that blessings and punishments issue from his arbitrary will rather than his moral character.
- The wicked are punished for defying the Almighty, implying that "submission to the sheer power of God is the highest good."

#### 4. Eliphaz's Flawed Counsel and the Purpose of Job

- The Ineffectiveness of Human Wisdom: Eliphaz's counsel, grounded in these Edomite wisdom tenets, aims to force Job to acknowledge and repent from his sins to regain God's favor. However, this approach is "misguided and ultimately failed."
- Subverting Retributive Approaches: A significant purpose of the book of Job is to "subvert these retributive approaches to discerning the designs of God's providence." The book demonstrates that "God is sovereign, free, and gracious" and "cannot be forced into this simplistic cause and effect."
- Human vs. Divine Wisdom: Eliphaz embodies the "highest achievement and most profound perspectives of human wisdom in the ancient Near East," but his "outlook remains in the end, merely human." The book of Job highlights the "dark

side of wisdom," showing how traditional wisdom principles fail to account for the realities of a fallen world.

- **God Has the Last Say:** In contrast to human wisdom, "God's solution... is marked by counterpoint. In the book of Job, as in history, God has the last say."
- **Theological Legalism:** Eliphaz is presented as a "foremost ancient theological legalist who seeks to attain righteousness before God by humanly rather than divinely prescribed means," a trait "endemic to humanity since the fall." His failure, like Adam and Cain, demonstrates the inadequacy of human attempts to attain righteousness.
- **Profound Truths:** The book of Job ultimately provides "significant truths about sin, suffering, righteousness, and divine providence" and "solace for the despairing believer" by portraying a "divine benevolent providence, which directs the details of life for God's people."

## Conclusion

Dr. Dunham's analysis positions Eliphaz not as a simplistic antagonist, but as a complex figure embodying the pinnacle of ancient Near Eastern human wisdom, deeply rooted in Edomite cultural and theological traditions. His counsel, while sophisticated and well-intentioned from that perspective, ultimately fails to grasp the full nature of God's sovereignty and grace, thereby highlighting a central message of the book of Job: that human wisdom, even at its best, is insufficient to fully comprehend divine providence and the complexities of suffering.

## 3. Study Guide:

### The Pious Sage in Job: Eliphaz in the Context of Edomite Wisdom - Study Guide

This study guide is designed to help you review and deepen your understanding of Dr. Kyle Dunham's teaching on Eliphaz in the book of Job, focusing on his role within the context of Edomite wisdom.

#### I. Core Concepts and Themes

- **The Book of Job's Interpretive Difficulties:** Explore why interpreters have struggled with Job, especially regarding the friends' role and speeches.
- **The Friends' Initial Appearance and Intent:** Analyze Job 2:11-13, focusing on the friends' initial actions and stated purpose (sympathy and comfort).
- **Eliphaz's Prominence:** Understand why Eliphaz is considered the "chief counselor" and "primary spokesman," including his age, speaking order, and length of speeches.
- **Interpretive Bipolarity of Eliphaz:** Discuss the wide range of interpretations of Eliphaz, from a traditionalist to a villain, and how this has evolved over time (Septuagint, Early Church, Middle Ages, Reformation/Enlightenment, 20th/21st Century "rehab").
- **Two Main Camps of Eliphaz Interpretation:**
  - Pernicious Counselor:** Eliphaz as damaging, shallow, a "scoundrel" illustrating the challenge of suffering.
  - Sophisticated Counselor:** Eliphaz as a genuine friend, providing substantial theological contributions, operating within the wisdom dialogue genre.
- **Oeming's Perspective on the Friends:** Understand his arguments for viewing the friends as genuine friends and good ministers, highlighting their initial silence, waiting for Job to speak, and pastoral care (reminding Job of his theology, divine promises, common wisdom, act-outcome connection).
- **Dunham's Composite View Approach:** Eliphaz as a chief interlocutor who embodies ancient Near Eastern theodicy, advocating for divine appeasement through repentance, but ultimately failing.
- **Rectifying Insufficiencies in Previous Approaches:** Understanding Eliphaz's reception history.
- Exploring the implications of his Edomite provenance.
- Moving beyond an overly restrictive view of wisdom sources (e.g., Deuteronomic retributive theology).
- Situating Eliphaz against the backdrop of ancient Near Eastern theodicies and the role of the "chief counselor" in those works.

- **The Author of Job's Purpose:** How the friends' failure to bring Job to reconciliation highlights the inadequacy of traditional human/ancient Near Eastern theological perspectives to solve suffering.
- **Job as a Counterpoint:** The book of Job functions as a counterpoint within biblical wisdom, showcasing the limitations of human wisdom and the ultimate sovereignty and grace of God.
- **Eliphaz as a Legalist:** His advocacy for divine appeasement through humanly prescribed means, foreshadowing Mosaic law, and demonstrating humanity's fallen tendency towards self-righteousness.
- **The Character of Job:**References in Ezekiel 14 and Ben Sira (paragon of faith, justice).
- James (model of exemplary endurance).
- Attestation of the name in ancient inscriptions.
- Meaning of the name: "enmity" vs. "where is my divine father?" (Clines/Dunham's preference).
- **Job's Provenance (Land of Uz):**Syrian vs. Edomite/Arabian theories.
- Evidence for Edomite connection: Genesis 36 genealogy (Uz, Eliphaz), Lamentations 4:21 (poetic parallelism), Edomite names, Eliphaz from Timan (Edomite region), renowned Edomite wisdom, Septuagint appendix.
- **Edomite Wisdom Tradition:**Evidence: Established monarchy, interaction with world powers (Egyptian Pharaohs, obelisks, Anastasi Papyri, Papyrus Harris), prime location on the King's Highway (trade of ideas, Gilgamesh epic, Kassite seals).
- Scarcity of written evidence and proposed solutions (incorporation into Hebrew Bible, complete destruction, misidentification).
- Robert Pfeiffer's synthesis: Legendary wisdom (Jeremiah 49, Obadiah), Solomon "wiser than sons of the East," affinities with Proverbs 30, Psalms 88-89.
- Pfeiffer's contrast: Jewish theology vs. Edomite (pessimistic, agnostic, remote God, no retributive reward/punishment).

- **Dunham's Summary of Edomite Wisdom (Three Tenets):** **God is a fearsome God:** Induces dread (Kos, Hebrew *kotz*, "fear of Isaac"), evidenced in Eliphaz's dream vision (Job 4:14-15) and descriptions of judgment.
- **God is distant/utterly transcendent:** Vast chasm between God and man, incomprehensibility, no mortal can attain righteousness, not even angels are pure, unconcerned with human affairs (Job 4:17-18, 15:14-16, 22:2-3, 12).
- **God is a capriciously retributive God:** Rewards/punishes based on divine whims, not necessarily moral character (destroyed by breath of God, wounds and binds up, defies Almighty, submission to power is highest good).

## II. Quiz: Short Answer Questions

1. How do the initial actions of Job's friends, as described in Job 2:11-13, set up an interpretive challenge for readers later in the book?
2. What is the "interpretive bipolarity" surrounding Eliphaz, and what historical periods saw a shift in how he was perceived?
3. According to Manfred Oeming, in what three ways would an original audience likely have perceived Job's friends as effective counselors, particularly at the outset of the dialogue?
4. Briefly explain Dr. Dunham's "composite view approach" to Eliphaz. How does it differ from the two main interpretive camps?
5. What significant purpose does the author of Job underscore by depicting the friends' ultimate failure to lead Job to repentance and reconciliation?
6. List three pieces of evidence that suggest Job and his friends were likely Edomite in origin, according to the lecture.
7. Beyond the biblical text, what archaeological and historical evidence is presented to support the idea of an organized and influential Edomite culture?
8. According to Dr. Dunham's summary of Edomite wisdom, what does it mean to say that God is a "fearsome God"? Provide an example from Eliphaz's speeches.
9. Explain the Edomite wisdom tenet that "God is distant." How does Eliphaz's speech in Job 22:2-3 and 12 reflect this view?



10. What is the key difference between the Edomite concept of God's retribution and a view where retribution stems from divine moral character, as described in the lecture?

### III. Quiz Answer Key

1. The friends initially come to "show sympathy and comfort" Job, sitting in silence for seven days. This sets up an interpretive challenge because their subsequent "long-windedness" and accusatory speeches seem to contradict their initial compassionate intent, leaving readers curious about their true role and motives.
2. "Interpretive bipolarity" refers to the wide range of interpretations of Eliphaz, oscillating between seeing him as a pious sage and a harsh critic or even a villain. After the Reformation and Enlightenment, he was often criticized, but the mid-20th century saw an "interpretive rehab" where scholars argued for intentional ambiguity in his role, eliciting both positive and negative reactions.
3. Oeming suggests the original audience would see them as effective counselors because they maintained silence upon arrival, expressing solidarity and patience. Second, they waited for Job to speak first, demonstrating restrained listening. Third, they perceived one another as participants in a deliberate exchange, aiming for mutual resolution and offering pastoral care.
4. Dr. Dunham's "composite view approach" views Eliphaz as the chief interlocutor who embodies the finest elements of ancient Near Eastern theodicy, advocating divine appeasement through Job's repentance. Unlike camps seeing him as purely pernicious or sophisticated, Dunham emphasizes Eliphaz's human wisdom, which is ultimately flawed and insufficient in the face of Job's suffering.
5. By showcasing the friends' ineffectiveness in leading Job to repentance, the author of Job underscores the failure of traditional ancient Near Eastern theological perspectives to resolve the deepest questions of suffering. It highlights that human wisdom, even at its best, is ultimately flawed and cannot fully account for God's complex providence.
6. Three pieces of evidence include: (1) The patronym Uz is found in the Edomite genealogy (Genesis 36:28). (2) Uz is linked to Edom via poetic parallelism in passages like Lamentations 4:21. (3) Eliphaz, Job's primary interlocutor, is from Timan, a region subsumed under Edom proper and renowned for its wisdom.

7. Archaeological and historical evidence for an organized Edomite culture includes Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses II cataloging Edomite chief names, obelisks from Tanis mentioning Mount Seir and Asiatic nomads, and the Anastasi Papyri referring to Edom as a "foreign land," indicating a partly sedentary population.
8. To say "God is a fearsome God" in Edomite wisdom means God induces dread and terror. Eliphaz exemplifies this in Job 4:14-15, describing his visionary experience where "dread came upon me and trembling, which made all my bones shake. A spirit glided past my face, and the hair of my flesh stood up."
9. The Edomite wisdom tenet that "God is distant" implies an utterly transcendent God, far removed from the created order and largely unconcerned with human affairs. Eliphaz reflects this in Job 22:2-3 by asking, "Can man be of benefit to God? Can even a wise man benefit him?" and in verse 12, "Is not God high in the heavens? See the highest stars, how lofty they are."
10. In Edomite wisdom, God's retribution is seen as "capriciously retributive," meaning it issues forth from divine whims and sheer power or will, rather than directly from God's moral character. This contrasts with a view where punishment or blessing is consistently tied to an inherent divine morality.

#### IV. Essay Format Questions (No Answers Supplied)

1. Analyze the evolution of scholarly interpretation regarding Eliphaz's role in the book of Job, from ancient translations to modern "interpretive rehab." Discuss how different historical and theological perspectives have shaped his portrayal.
2. Evaluate Dr. Dunham's "composite view approach" to Eliphaz. How does this approach integrate the strengths of previous interpretations while addressing their weaknesses, particularly concerning Eliphaz's connection to ancient Near Eastern wisdom?
3. Discuss the significance of identifying Job and his friends as Edomite. How does understanding the Edomite provenance, its wisdom tradition, and its geographical context enrich our understanding of Eliphaz's speeches and the overall message of the book of Job?
4. Examine the three tenets of Edomite wisdom as summarized by Dr. Dunham: God as fearsome, distant, and capriciously retributive. Provide specific examples from

Eliphaz's speeches that illustrate each of these tenets and explain how they inform his counsel to Job.

5. How does the book of Job function as a "remarkable counterpoint" within biblical wisdom literature, especially in light of the friends' failure to bring Job to reconciliation? Discuss how Eliphaz's "human wisdom" ultimately proves flawed and what this implies about divine providence.

## V. Glossary of Key Terms

- **Act-Outcome Connection:** The theological principle that good actions lead to positive outcomes and wicked actions lead to negative outcomes, often a tenet of traditional wisdom theology.
- **Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) Theodicy:** Efforts within ancient cultures of the Near East to reconcile the existence of suffering and evil with the belief in a just and benevolent deity or deities.
- **Apophatic Theology:** A theological approach that attempts to describe God by negation, by saying what God is not, emphasizing divine transcendence and incomprehensibility.
- **Capriciously Retributive God:** A deity perceived to deliver rewards or punishments based on arbitrary whims or expressions of sheer will, rather than consistent moral character or principles.
- **Composite View Approach (Dunham):** Dr. Dunham's interpretive stance that sees Eliphaz as a prominent interlocutor embodying the finest elements of human (ancient Near Eastern) wisdom, advocating for divine appeasement, but ultimately flawed and failing to resolve Job's predicament.
- **Counterpoint (Book of Job):** The idea that the book of Job presents a contrasting perspective to traditional wisdom, particularly concerning suffering and divine justice, highlighting the limits of human understanding.
- **Deuteronomic Retributive Theology:** A theological framework often associated with the book of Deuteronomy, emphasizing that obedience to God brings blessing and disobedience brings curses/punishment.
- **Divine Appeasement:** The act of making peace with or satisfying an offended deity, often through rituals, sacrifices, or repentance, in hopes of regaining favor.

- **Edomite Provenance:** The origin or source of Job and his friends from the land of Edom, a region southeast of Canaan renowned for its wisdom tradition.
- **Eliphaz the Temanite:** The eldest and foremost of Job's three friends, serving as the chief counselor and primary spokesman in the dialogues. He hails from Teman, an Edomite region.
- **Interlocutors:** The participants in a dialogue or conversation; in Job, refers to Job's three friends who engage him in debate.
- **Interpretive Bipolarity:** The phenomenon of widely divergent and often opposing interpretations of a character or text, as seen with Eliphaz (e.g., pious sage vs. villain).
- **Kotz (Hebrew) / Kos (Edomite God):** A Hebrew word meaning "to feel a sickening dread," which Lawrence Zalcman suggests is etymologically related to Kos, the principal deity of the Edomites, implying a fearsome, dread-inducing God.
- **Legalist:** One who emphasizes strict adherence to laws or rules (divinely prescribed or humanly formulated) as the means to achieve righteousness or gain divine favor.
- **Ludlul bel nemeqi:** A Babylonian wisdom text, often translated "I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom," which describes a righteous sufferer who endures affliction and is eventually restored, used as an ancient Near Eastern parallel to Job.
- **Reception History:** The study of how a text or character has been interpreted, translated, and understood by various audiences throughout history.
- **Septuagint:** The earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, which sometimes softened the harshness of Eliphaz and the other friends in its rendering of Job.
- **Synecdoche:** A figure of speech in which a part is made to represent the whole or vice versa (e.g., Timan referring to all of Edom in terms of wisdom).
- **Theodicy:** An attempt to reconcile the existence of evil and suffering in the world with the belief in an omnipotent, benevolent, and omniscient God.
- **Theophoric Constituent:** A part of a name that refers to a god or deity (e.g., "of" in "Job" potentially referring to "divine father").

- **Timan:** A prominent region within Edom, frequently associated with Edomite wisdom and the origin of Eliphaz.
- **Transcendence (Divine):** The aspect of God's nature that refers to His being completely separate from, independent of, and exalted above the created universe and all material things.
- **Uz:** The land from which Job hails, most likely identified with Edom in the scholarly consensus presented.
- **Wisdom Dialogue:** A literary genre, particularly in ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, characterized by an exchange of ideas or an evenly balanced debate between speakers on profound topics.

## 4. FAQs

What is the Book of Job about, and why is it considered a literary masterpiece?

The Book of Job is a complex literary work that explores the problem of suffering and the righteousness of God. It tells the story of Job, a righteous man who experiences immense suffering despite his blameless character. The book's intricate dialogues and profound themes have led many, including Thomas Carlyle, to praise it as "one of the grandest things ever written with a human pen." Interpreters have often been baffled by its complexities, particularly regarding the role of Job's three friends.

Who is Eliphaz, and what is his role among Job's companions?

Eliphaz the Temanite is the foremost of Job's three companions (alongside Bildad and Zophar) and the primary spokesman in the dialogues. He is considered the eldest and most respected of the friends, being the first to speak and delivering longer speeches than the others. Scholars often view him as a traditionalist and a guardian of traditional wisdom theology. He plays a "paradigmatic role" in the book, with his speeches outlining the various "theodicies" (attempts to reconcile suffering with God's righteousness) offered by the human characters. Despite his eloquence, he receives a harsh rebuke from Yahweh at the end of the book, leading to a wide range of interpretations regarding his true character and intentions.

How have interpretations of Eliphaz evolved throughout history?

Interpretations of Eliphaz have been subject to "interpretive bipolarity" over time. Early Greek translations (Septuagint) softened his harshness, while the New Testament (Paul citing Job 5:13) even quotes him authoritatively. However, by the Middle Ages, a "very harsh reading" took hold, criticizing him as a "rough counselor" given to "theological excess." The mid-20th century saw an "interpretive rehab" or "renaissance" for Eliphaz, with scholars increasingly arguing that the author intentionally created ambiguity in his role, eliciting both negative and positive reactions. Today, some see him as a "pernicious counselor" offering no theological contribution, while others view him as a "sophisticated counselor with substantial theological contributions" and a genuine friend.

What are the two main interpretive camps regarding Eliphaz's role in the Book of Job?

The first interpretive camp views Eliphaz as a "pernicious counselor with no theological contribution," suggesting he was designed to provide a shallow contrast to Job's profound theology. In this view, the friends are seen as "wooden and static" with little to add to the book's theological depth. The second camp, in contrast, sees Eliphaz as a "sophisticated counselor with substantial theological contributions." Recent studies in this camp argue that the "Wisdom Dialogue" genre implies an "evenly balanced debate" and that the friends were intended to be perceived as "true friends" and "good ministers" offering pastoral care.

What are the key characteristics of Edomite wisdom, and how does Eliphaz embody them?

The study of Eliphaz's Edomite provenance suggests that Edomite wisdom likely comprised three main tenets, which Eliphaz embodies in his speeches:

1. **God as a Fearsome God:** The Edomite God, Kos (related to the Hebrew *kotz* meaning "sickening dread"), was seen as one who induces fear. Eliphaz's dream vision vividly describes "dread" and "trembling" in the presence of the divine, and he frequently uses this terminology to describe the "dismaying presence of God in judgment" for the wicked.
2. **God as Distant and Transcendent:** Edomite wisdom emphasized God's utter transcendence, a vast chasm between the divine and humanity. Eliphaz reiterates that "no mortal to attain righteousness with God," and that even "celestial angels are not free from corruption." He portrays God as "largely undiscernible to

mankind," "unsearchable, marvelous things without number," and "unconcerned for the affairs of humanity."

3. **God as Capriciously Retributive:** Edomite theology posited a deity who rewards or punishes based on divine whims, rather than a consistent moral character. Eliphaz describes God as one who "destroys by the breath of God" and "consumes by the blast of his anger," arbitrarily meting out "punishment or blessing at the dictates of his will." Submission to God's sheer power is the highest good, while defiance is rank evil.

How does understanding Eliphaz and Edomite wisdom help in interpreting the Book of Job as a whole?

By understanding Eliphaz as the leading proponent of Edomite wisdom and its tenets (a fearsome, distant, and capriciously retributive God who demands appeasement for sin), we gain a deeper insight into the Book of Job's overarching purpose. The friends' counsel, grounded in this human wisdom, ultimately fails to resolve Job's predicament. This failure highlights the biblical author's intention to emphasize the "failure of traditional ancient Near Eastern theological perspectives to solve the deepest questions of suffering." The book ultimately demonstrates that God is "sovereign, free, and gracious" and "cannot be forced into this simplistic cause and effect." Eliphaz's outlook, though representing the "highest achievement and most profound perspectives of human wisdom," remains "merely human," contrasting with God's ultimate solution and benevolent providence.

Where did Job and his friends likely come from, and why is this significant?

Job and his friends were likely Edomite. Job is from the land of Uz, which is often identified with Edom, southeast of Palestine. Eliphaz is from Teman, a region bordering Edom proper and renowned for its wisdom. This Edomite provenance is supported by:

- The patronym Uz in the Edomite genealogy (Genesis 36:28).
- Poetic parallelism linking Uz to Edom in the Old Testament (Lamentations 4:21).
- Many names in the book, including Eliphaz, appearing in Edomite genealogies.
- The consistent biblical and extra-biblical association of Edom and Teman with profound wisdom traditions. This connection is significant because it allows scholars to situate Eliphaz's theological outlook within the known contours of

ancient Near Eastern, specifically Edomite, wisdom, providing a richer understanding of his arguments and their eventual subversion within the Book of Job.

Why is there a scarcity of tangible written evidence for Edomite wisdom, despite its renown?

The scarcity of Edomite inscriptions has puzzled scholars. Several theories attempt to explain this:

- **Incorporation into the Hebrew Bible:** Some early 20th-century scholars, like Robert Pfeiffer, suggested that primary Edomite wisdom exemplars were incorporated into the Old Testament. However, this view is often criticized for being "theologically careless" as it implies revelation originating outside of Israel.
- **Obliteration by Destruction:** Others propose that the Edomite people and their written evidence were so thoroughly destroyed, as prophesied by Jeremiah and Obadiah, that little survived.
- **Misidentification of Inscriptions:** Another suggestion is that Edomite inscriptions might have been misidentified as Hebrew or Moabite due to similarities in ancient Semitic languages. Despite the lack of direct evidence, scholarly work, particularly by Pfeiffer, has attempted to reconstruct Edomite wisdom by identifying its "ethos" and "approach to certain tenets of theology" within existing biblical texts, such as specific proverbs and psalms, and by contrasting it with "Jewish theology."