

**The Book of Job**  
**Chapter 15**  
**The Second Cycle of Speeches Begins**

The second cycle of speeches contains a full round of speeches by each friend and a response by Job. Each speech of the second cycle is shorter than the corresponding speech in the first cycle, except for that of Zophar. As was true of the first cycle, Eliphaz has a significantly longer speech than the speeches of the other friends. Also similar to the first cycle, Job's speeches are longer than those of the friends. If one compares each friend's second speech with that friend's first speech it's clear that they're becoming increasingly impatient with Job. They're more suspicious that his affliction is the result of some serious sin on his part. Job continues to resist their claims and holds to his innocence.

**15:1-16**

In the first speech, Eliphaz had politely asked if Job would listen. This speech begins with questions about the difference between a genuinely wise person, and one who merely throws words around. The questions are pointedly designed to imply that Job had spoken empty words. In verse 2, Job is accused of having filled his belly with "*the east wind.*" The east wind refers to the dreaded days in the Middle East when the wind blows off the hot, dry eastern wilderness day after day. Eliphaz was rebuking Job, telling him essentially that he "was full of hot air," that Job was full of hot emotion rather than calm wisdom.

Verse 5 accuses Job of trying to cover up his sin by "*crafty*" words designed to throw his friends off the track of their duty. Eliphaz correctly understands the close relationship between a person's heart and mouth, which Jesus would later express in Matthew 12:34, "*You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*"

The Bible often urges us to guard our lips because it knows that the mouth reveals the heart. Where Eliphaz went wrong was in his initial assumption that Job must have sinned to have suffered so much. He blamed Job's bitter words on that sin, rather than on the depth of his pain.

Verses 7-8 turn to sarcasm. Was Job the first man born? Did he come into being before the eternal hills? Had Job sat in on "*the council of God*"? Where does Job get off thinking he's so wise? The questions of verse 7 are built on the cultural assumption of the ancient Near East that *older* is superior to *younger and newer*. This is the opposite of modern Western society that worships youth and whatever

is new. Were Job as “*old as the hills*” that wouldn’t be an insult—as in our world—but a compliment! The same thinking explains verse 10. Eliphaz claims the wisdom of the ages to be on his side, and that Job has rejected it.

Verse 11 criticizes Job for rejecting God’s comfort, although Eliphaz understands that comfort as the words of he and his friends.

The double question of verse 12, “*Why have you let your heart carry you away? And why do your eyes flash?*” is instructive. In Semitic (Middle-Eastern) thought, the heart was the center of the will and reason. But, the eyes were closely connected to the heart since they were the gate of information to bring input to the heart; and the eyes were the mirror of the heart revealing its state even before the mouth spoke. Eliphaz is sure that Job’s flashing eyes reveal anger against God.

Verses 14-16 replay the message Eliphaz was said to have received in a vision in Job 4:12-19. Verse 14 asks the rhetorical question of whether human beings can be righteous, and pure from sin. Eliphaz correctly implies that the answer is “no,” but incorrectly implies that Job thus must be guilty of great sin. Verse 15 repeats the inaccurate affirmation of Job 4:18 that God doesn’t even trust the heavenly beings who surround him in heaven. These two verses enable Eliphaz to draw his conclusion in verse 16 that it’s impossible for a human being to be pure or considered righteous in the sight of God. Eliphaz is convinced that human beings are thoroughly depraved, that there’s nothing good in a human being. Thus it isn’t surprising that he would find Job’s claim to innocence to be shocking—and even sinful.

Eliphaz’s view of human sinfulness isn’t surprising. It says no more than much of traditional Protestant understanding of the total depravity of humankind. Eliphaz is correctly stating the Law. What is he leaving out though?

### **15:17-35**

These verses describe the fate of the wicked. Verses 17-19 form the introduction, with Eliphaz promising to deliver the wisdom of the fathers. Verses 20-24 describe some of the terrible consequences of wickedness. The wicked are tormented with pain. They live in perpetual fear—hearing terrifying sounds, and experiencing destruction in the midst of prosperity. The wicked have no confidence that their lives will ever turn from darkness to the light. In other words, he’s describing Job.

The reasons for such a terrible life begin to unfold in verse 25. The Hebrew text speaks of a person who has “*stretched out their hands against God.*” The Hebrew expression of “*stretching out one’s hand against*” was used to refer to fighting and warfare. The NIV catches the sense when it paraphrases, “*he shakes his fist at God.*” Such defiance of God reveals a deep sense that we can somehow overpower or outsmart God. Though our theology teaches us quite differently, rebellion against God knows no logic. How do we sometimes pretend that we can overpower or outsmart God?

Verse 26 continues the figure of speech of fighting. The woes of the wicked are suffered because the sinner “*defiantly*” charges “*against*” God “*with a thick, strong shield*” (NIV). While such language seems a bit exaggerated for most of us, it’s an amazingly accurate description of Job’s angry desire to file a lawsuit against God (chapters 12-14). Sin is both the product of, and the producer of, an attitude of arrogance toward God.

Verse 27 gets personal for some of us. The point is that even though the wicked may be prosperous now, they will eventually suffer loss. Why is this personal for some of us?

Verses 28-35 then return to the consequences of wickedness. In a variety of ways Eliphaz proclaims, “*you reap what you sow.*”

Eliphaz offers Job no encouragement in this speech. He argues that Job must accept the traditional teachings of the wise, and acknowledge that his pain is the result of his sin.