

Job 2:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.

Analysis

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This verse captures one of the most powerful acts of compassion in Scripture—the ministry of presence. Job's three friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—demonstrate profound empathy by sitting in silent solidarity with their suffering friend. The Hebrew verb *yashab* (יָשַׁב, "sat down") indicates intentional, deliberate action; they chose to enter into Job's grief.

The seven-day period parallels ancient mourning customs (Genesis 50:10, 1 Samuel 31:13) and symbolizes completeness in Hebrew thought. Sitting on the ground was a traditional posture of mourning, symbolizing humility and identification with the sufferer. Their silence was not awkward or empty, but filled with shared sorrow—they recognized that Job's pain was beyond words.

The phrase "his grief was very great" (*kiy-gadal hakkeh-ev me'od*) emphasizes the overwhelming magnitude of Job's suffering. His friends' initial response models biblical comfort: presence over platitudes, solidarity over solutions. Tragically, when they later broke their silence, they abandoned this ministry of presence for theological arguments, becoming "miserable comforters" (Job 16:2). This teaches that sometimes the most powerful ministry is simply being present with those who suffer.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern mourning customs provide important context for understanding this passage. Archaeological evidence and comparative literature reveal that sitting on the ground or in ashes, tearing garments, and observing periods of silence were common practices across the region when grieving death or catastrophe.

The seven-day mourning period was standard in Israelite culture and surrounding nations. However, the complete silence maintained by Job's friends for seven days and nights was extraordinary, demonstrating the exceptional severity of Job's losses. In ancient communities, friends and family would gather to mourn with the bereaved, offering presence as the primary comfort.

This cultural practice reflects a profound understanding absent in many modern contexts—that suffering requires presence more than explanation. Job's friends came from distant places (Job 2:11), undertaking significant journeys to be with him. Their initial response exemplifies the biblical ethic of bearing one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2). The contrast between their silent compassion and their later theological arguments serves as a cautionary tale throughout Scripture about the danger of prioritizing theological correctness over compassionate presence.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does the ministry of silent presence challenge modern tendencies to offer quick solutions or theological explanations to suffering?
2. What can we learn from Job's friends' initial response about how to support those experiencing profound grief or loss?

3. In what situations might silence be more appropriate than speaking when ministering to those who suffer?
4. How can we cultivate the patience and compassion needed to sit with others in their pain without rushing to fix or explain?
5. What does this passage teach us about the biblical model of community and mutual support during times of crisis?

Interlinear Text

וַיֵּשְׁבוּ	אִתּוֹ	לְאָרְצוֹ	וַיֵּשְׁבוּ	יָמֵי	וַיֵּשְׁבוּ
So they sat down	H854	with him upon the ground	and seven	days	and seven
H3427		H776	H7651	H3117	H7651
לַיָּלִים	וְאֵין	דָּבָר	אֵלָיו	דָּבָר	כִּי
nights	H369	and none spake	H413	a word	H3588
H3915		H1696		H1697	
					וַיֵּשְׁבוּ
					unto him for they saw
					H7200
כִּי	גָדֹל	הַכָּאֵב	מְאֹד:		
H3588	great	that his grief	was very		
	H1431	H3511	H3966		

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 50:10 (Parallel theme): And they came to the threshingfloor of Atad, which is beyond Jordan, and there they mourned with a great and very sore lamentation: and he made a mourning for his father seven days.

Nehemiah 1:4 (Word): And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,

Ezekiel 3:15 (Parallel theme): Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.

Isaiah 3:26 (Parallel theme): And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground.

Psalms 77:4 (Parallel theme): Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

Job 4:2 (Parallel theme): If we assay to commune with thee, wilt thou be grieved? but who can withhold himself from speaking?

Genesis 1:8 (Parallel theme): And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

Genesis 1:5 (Parallel theme): And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

Ezra 9:3 (Parallel theme): And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.

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