

The Book of Job **Chapter 11-14**

Job 11 Zophar's First Speech

Zophar is the third friend to respond to Job. As in the case of Eliphaz and Bildad we have no historical information about Zophar. There's little evidence that he's the youngest of Job's comforters, but he does have the least status in that he only makes two short speeches. He doesn't appeal to a revelation from God like Eliphaz did, nor to the traditions of the fathers like Bildad. Rather, he offers only the cold logic of his theology. In his opinion, people are either contrite worshipers of God or arrogant sinners. Thus, he has no delusions that Job might be right. His goal is to convince Job to stop his foolish claims of innocence.

11:1-6

Zophar begins by accusing Job of talking too much. He's afraid that some will be persuaded by the abundance of Job's words and rhetoric. He tries to deflate Job's responses by scornfully calling them a "*multitude of words*" in verse 2 and "*babble*" in verse 3. He questions whether anyone who talks as much as Job did can possibly be justified. Zophar seems completely untouched by Job's pain, and he caricatures Job's words. In verse 4 he accuses Job of claiming that his "*doctrine*" (as the ESV & KJV translate the word) is pure. The NIV gives a more powerful paraphrase of Zophar's statement when it translates, "*You say to God, 'My beliefs are flawless'*"

In fact, Job had made no such claim. His speech in chapters 9-10 show that his thoughts about God are in turmoil and confusion. Zophar also states that Job claimed to be pure in the sight of God. Zophar's word for "*pure*" speaks of spotless moral purity. In fact, Job had claimed to be blameless (Hebrew- *tam*)—a person of integrity, not a person with no flaws. The weakness of Zophar's speech is already clear. He has no sympathy for Job and he hasn't listened well enough to accurately summarize Job's statements. Neither Zophar nor anyone else should expect to be heard with respect when he shows such rude disregard for the other person's position.

Job had wished that God would speak to him. Zophar also wants God to speak, but he has no interest in having God argue Job's case. Rather he simply wants God to set Job straight.

Verse 6 declares the content of what Zophar wants God to tell Job. The hidden secrets of wisdom and the full scope of sound wisdom would surely convince Job

that he had sinned and that his sufferings were punishment for those sins. What claim does Zophar make in this verse?

11:7-11

Here Zophar points out that God is beyond human understanding. The obvious conclusion is that Job is wrong and arrogant to claim that God has mistreated him. Since the ways of God are past finding out, Job has no business complaining according to Zophar. He (Job) should be praising God rather than complaining. These verses are almost hymnic in their exalted description of God's surpassing wisdom. But, Zophar's praises to God ring hollow because of their superficiality. Worship arises from a person's deep love for God. Zophar's experience of God hasn't taken him into the deep waters being experienced by Job. Zophar was quick with the simplistic answer, but it wasn't an answer tried and tested by the real experience of a person God described as blameless.

What accusation is made in verse 11?

11:12-20

Zophar's conclusion is to call Job to repentance. If Job will remove evil from his life, Zophar lays out the benefits in verses 15-19. God will lift up Job's face, Job will be secure, he will be free from fear, and he will forget his troubles. These reassuring promises, however, depend on Job's confession of and repentance from sin. That Job wouldn't be conscious of serious sin is incredible to Zophar. Thus, verse 20 describes the doom coming to the unrepentant wicked. Their eyes will fail, their hope will turn to despair, and there will be no hiding place for them. Why is this very pointed for Job?

Job 12-14 Job's First Response to Zophar

All three of Job's friends have now spoken. Job's response to Zophar is his final speech in the first cycle of speeches and it functions as the transition between the first cycle and second cycle of the friends' speeches. There's a change in Job's mood at this point. Job's emotions have fluctuated wildly and his words have bordered on outrageous. However, this speech reflects a greater sense of self-control and a calmer tone.

12:1-6

This begins in verse 2 with sarcasm on Job's part: "*Doubtless you are the people, and wisdom will die with you.*" But, verse 3 shows that Job doesn't at all believe his biting comment of verse 2. He's convinced that he knows as much as they do. In fact, anybody could make the observations they've made. Part of Job's complaint is that his friends have done nothing but repeat back the standard clichés about sin and punishment. What *he* needed, and what many hurting people today

need, is someone to think past the superficial answers to find the depths of God that will match the depths of human pain. What depths of God might those be?

While Job had defended himself in verse 3, he still feels deeply disgraced and describes that feeling in verses 4-6. The key word of this paragraph is “*laughingstock*.” While no one likes to be made fun of, the ancient (and modern) Near East was a culture especially built on status and respect. Loss of face was a devastating loss, and Job isn’t only being mocked by those who had hated him before for his great wealth, he’s now also being ridiculed by his friends. Job describes himself in verse 4 as one who continually called upon God, a person who was righteous (or just) and blameless. Something terrible has gone wrong when such a person has become a laughingstock.

What might be the meaning of the end of verse 6: “*who bring their god in their hand*” or “*those who carry their god in their hands*,” (depending on the translation)? See Jeremiah 10:5 and Genesis 31:19, 34. This is one of those passages where we don’t have a definitive translation, but the ones similar to those above are likely correct.

12:7-11

Job appeals to the example of the animals, the birds, the fish, and the plants. The point isn’t made until verse 11. All nature tests food with taste to determine whether it’s good or bad. Likewise, the ear is created to test words to determine whether they’re correct or not. Thus, Job is not only *justified* in his questioning of God, God’s own creation *demand*s it. How are we to test God? “*Now these Jews [the Bereans] were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so*” Act 17:11.

12:12-25

These verses form an interlude in Job’s complaint, turning to praise for God’s sovereign rule over the world. These verses proclaim God as the source of all things. He’s superior in wisdom to any rival. All earthly rulers, no matter how powerful, are subject to him. Their power depends on his favor. Nothing lies outside his power or beyond his wisdom. The implication of this emphasis on God’s power over creation and earthly rulers is that God is also in control of Job’s circumstances. Zophar had implied that anyone suffering God’s judgment is stupid or worthless. Job’s description of God’s establishing and destroying of earthly leaders makes it clear that not everyone who experiences God’s destructive power is stupid or worthless. Devastation falls on people regardless of their social status

or spiritual standing. These verses paint a picture of God more awesome, more mysterious than the god of Job's comforters.

How does verse 12 apply to congregational life?

13:1-12

Job charges his friends with not listening to him. Verse 4 described his friends as whitewashers or painters of lies, and verse 5 declares that the wisest thing they could do is to be quiet. Verse 7 criticizes the comforters for defending God with perversity. Their answers are as worthless as ashes and their defense of God as reliable as pottery according to verse 12.

How is Job's complaint that his friends are "*worthless physicians*" (vs. 4) especially meaningful?

13:13-17

Job calls on his friends to be silent while he argues his case with God personally.

13:18-28

Job's describes his readiness to place his case before God. He requests two considerations in the process. In verse 21 he asks that God "*withdraw your hand far from me*". This is a plea for God to stop the physical suffering Job is enduring so he will have the strength to present his case.

What point is Job making in verse 26?

The NIV has a curious translation of the end of verse 27, "*...by putting marks on the soles of my feet.*" Most translations say, "*...you set a limit for the soles of my feet*"—another way of Job indicating that he feels "hemmed-in" by God.

Chapter 14

In verse 1, Job expresses the same thoughts he did in 5:7, "*man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.*" From experience we know this, yet why are we still so surprised when troubles come into our lives?

Verses 7-9 probably refers to the olive tree, which sprouts again even after being cut down.

Despite the despairing words of verses 10-13, what reason for hope does Job still express in verses 14-17?