

Zophar's First Speech to Job, and Job's Initial Response

Job 11-12

Job 11:1-6 – *“Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said: ² “Should not the multitude of words be answered? And should a man full of talk be vindicated? ³ Should your empty talk make men hold their peace? And when you mock, should no one rebuke you? ⁴ For you have said, ‘My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in your eyes.’ ⁵ But oh, that God would speak, and open His lips against you, ⁶ that He would show you the secrets of wisdom, for they would double your prudence!*

Know therefore that God exacts from you less than your iniquity deserves.”

Background Notes

The name Zophar means a “sparrow.” It comes from the root verb “twitter.” Names in the Bible often have something to say about the overall message of the passage in which they occur. Listen to the words of one commentator about Zophar's counsel: “His vehement denunciations, being totally out of place, were as harmless as the twittering of the bird for which he was named!”

in his counsel, Zophar is more blunt and harsh to Job than were Eliphaz and Bildad. He accused Job of excessive talk, boasting, self-righteousness, and ignorance (v2-6). If God were to speak, said Zophar, and reveal His wisdom, then Job would see that he deserved to be punished even more! *“Know therefore that God exacts from you less than your iniquity deserves” (v6)*. Can you believe it? How harsh!

And Zophar was dogmatic about it as well. There was no grace in Zophar's approach. So if ever you are suffering, don't hope for a friend like Zophar.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. Zophar's first speech is the same argument – but without authority.

Job 11:7-12 - *“Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? ⁸ They are higher than heaven— what can you do? Deeper than Sheol— what can you know? ⁹ Their measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea. ¹⁰ “If He passes by, imprisons, and gathers to judgment, then who can hinder Him? ¹¹ For He knows deceitful men; He sees wickedness also. Will He not then consider it? ¹² For an empty-headed man will be wise, when a wild donkey's colt is born a man.”*

Verse 12 may have been a common expression in Job's day: *"Just as it's impossible for an animal to give birth to a human, so it is impossible for a fool to become wise."* Zophar's point here is that the wisdom and understanding of mere man is far below the wisdom of God's ways. What Zophar says about God's omniscience and sovereignty is certainly true. **The rest of Scripture backs it up.** So Zophar acknowledges truths about God - but his problem is that he thinks he knows the ways of God in regard to Job's suffering.

And so in verses 13-20 we see the same old argument that Eliphaz and Bildad have already presented: "All personal suffering is the result of personal sin. Job is suffering, therefore Job must have sinned."

Job 11:13-20 - *"If you would prepare your heart, and stretch out your hands toward Him; ¹⁴ If iniquity were in your hand, and you put it far away, and would not let wickedness dwell in your tents; ¹⁵ then surely you could lift up your face without spot. Yes, you could be steadfast, and not fear, ¹⁶ because you would forget your misery, and remember it as waters that have passed away. ¹⁷ And your life would be brighter than noonday! Though you were dark, you would be like the morning.*

¹⁸ And you would be secure, because there is hope. Yes, you would dig around you, and take your rest in safety. ¹⁹ You would also lie down, and no one would make you afraid. Yes, many would court your favor. ²⁰ But the eyes of the wicked will fail, and they shall not escape, and their hope—loss of life!"

It's easy to see the same old argument in these verses. "Job, if only you would repent, and pray, and turn your life around! Then you would have a clear conscience, and you could to forget your troubles (v13-16). You would have joy and hope and rest (v17-18). You would have peace, and you would be restored to your place of leadership (v19)!

But Job, be warned! If you don't repent of your secret wicked ways, there will be no escape from your suffering, and no hope for you in the end (v20).

So we see that Zophar pushed the same the old argument that Eliphaz and Bildad presented to Job. But Zophar used his personal **intuition** as the authority for his argument. Eliphaz, remember, used his personal **experience** as his authority. Bildad went with **tradition** for his authority. But Zophar seems to fly by the seat of his pants! He claims his own common sense and his own intuition as his sole authority. That certainly doesn't provide a solid foundation for building a case!

The first speech of Zophar is the same argument – but with no authority!

2. Job's first response to Zophar is the same defense.

In this first round of the dialogue between Job and his three friends, Job's response to Zophar runs from Job 12 -14. This response could be divided into two parts. Part One is in Job 12:1-Job13:19. Job tells his friends that they are wrong, and that he is right! That's the same defense that Job has maintained all along.

In Job 13:20-Job 14, the second part of his response, Job appeals his case to God once again. The second part of Job's response to Zophar is really a prayer.

Here in Job 12, we're looking at the first part of Job's response to Zophar, and we see that Job is maintaining his same defense: His friends are wrong about his suffering. He is not involved in personal sin.

Chapter 12

Job 12:1-12 - *"Then Job answered and said: ² 'No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you! ³ But I have understanding as well as you. I am not inferior to you. Indeed, who does not know such things as these?*

⁴ 'I am one mocked by his friends, who called on God, and He answered him, the just and blameless who is ridiculed. ⁵ A lamp is despised in the thought of one who is at ease; it is made ready for those whose feet slip. ⁶ The tents of robbers prosper, and those who provoke God are secure in what God provides by His hand."

⁷ 'But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you, and the birds of the air, and they will tell you. ⁸ Or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; and the fish of the sea will explain to you. ⁹ Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this, ¹⁰ in whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind? ¹¹ Does not the ear test words and the mouth taste its food?

¹² Wisdom is with aged men, and with length of days, understanding."

Job uses sarcasm and irony in this response to his friends. Look at verse 2. That's like telling a know-it-all Christian friend: "You think you're God's only gift to the church? That without you, the church would disappear?"

Job maintains that he is just as intelligent as his friends. He is blameless, but God has unfairly let his servant become a laughing stock (v3-4). Meanwhile, those who are not blameless are at ease. Even the wicked and unbelievers are secure and prosperous (v5-6)!

How does all of this fit in with the incorrect theory held by his three friends? Why, even the animals know that calamities come from the hand of God – and the calamities are not the result of the animals' personal sin (v7-10). This should be as obvious as tasting food (v11)! Why can't his wise friends understand these things (v12)? Notice again what appears to be irony: "*Wisdom is with aged men, and with length of days, understanding*" (v12).

Job 12:13-25 - *"With Him are wisdom and strength; He has counsel and understanding. ¹⁴ If He breaks a thing down, it cannot be rebuilt. If He imprisons a man, there can be no release. ¹⁵ If He withholds the waters, they dry up; if He sends them out, they overwhelm the earth. ¹⁶ With Him are strength and prudence. The deceived and the deceiver are His.*

17 He leads counselors away plundered, and makes fools of the judges. 18 He loosens the bonds of kings, and binds their waist with a belt. 19 He leads princes away plundered, and overthrows the mighty. 20 He deprives the trusted ones of speech, and takes away the discernment of the elders. 21 He pours contempt on princes, and disarms the mighty. 22 He uncovers deep things out of darkness, and brings the shadow of death to light. 23 He makes nations great, and destroys them; He enlarges nations, and guides them. 24 He takes away the understanding of the chiefs of the people of the earth, and makes them wander in a pathless wilderness. 25 They grope in the dark without light, and He makes them stagger like a drunken man."

In verses 13-25 Job recounts God's great wisdom and mighty power. His goal is to prove to his three counselor friends that they know very little about God's ways, even though they think they have all the answers!

God is in control of the action of nations and nature (v13-16). God determines the ups and downs of kings and priests and nobles and judges (v17-21). God can bring hidden things to light (v22). And he can reverse the fortunes of nations, as well as the leaders of nations (v23-25). Again, Job's point in all of this was to show that his three friends were ignorant of God's ways, and thus, their major premise about Job was wrong.

Job's first response to Zophar is the same defense.

Practical Application

Use sarcasm sparingly!

Should a Christian ever be sarcastic? Yes - but not often! There is a place for sarcasm, but it's best to use sarcasm sparingly.

Proverbs 26:5 says, *"Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit."* Job's three friends were taking a wrong and foolish attitude toward his suffering, and toward suffering in general, so Job used sarcasm in his responses to them. Job's counselors were convinced that they were so wise - but Job brought them down a notch when he sarcastically said, *"Doubtless you are the only people who matter, and wisdom will die with you!" (12:2 NIV).*

The prophet Elijah used sarcasm when he mocked the prophets of Baal, who were calling on their pagan gods to answer them with fire. So sarcasm can be used by believers, and has a right time and place. But not often!

Use sarcasm sparingly.