



## Job - Chapter Twelve

### **II Job 3:1-42:6 - Dialogue: Job, His Suffering, and His Standing before God (continues)**

#### **II.b Job 4:1-25:6 - The Friends and Job: Can Job be Right Before God? (continues)**

##### **II.b.i Job 4:1-14:22 - The First Cycle (continues)**

#### **Summary of Chapter Twelve**

Job reproves the boasting of his friends and demonstrates their uncharitableness towards him (vv.1-5). He asserts that even the tabernacles of robbers prosper; and that, notwithstanding, God is the ruler of the world, a truth which is proclaimed by all parts of the creation whether animate or inanimate and by the wars and revolutions which take place in the nations (vv.6-25).

##### **II.b.i.6 Job 12:1-14:22 - Job: a Challenge to the Wisdom of his Friends**

In the longest response of the dialogues with the three friends, Job shows his growing frustration with their claims to wisdom even though he agrees with them about God's supreme power (12:1-13:2) and with the conclusions they have drawn (13:3-19); then, once again, he addresses his lamentation directly to God (13:20-14:22).

##### **II.b.i.6.A Job 12:1-13:19 - Job Replies: I Am a Laughing-stock**

In his reply, Job mocked his friend's' claims, sarcastically stating that all 'wisdom shall die' with them. Zophar and the others did not hold a corner on wisdom; Job was also a wise man who trusted fully in the ways of the Lord. Job declared that he would continue to look to God for forgiveness, protection, and provision.

<sup>1</sup> Then Job answered:

<sup>2</sup> 'No doubt you are the people,  
and wisdom will die with you.

<sup>3</sup> But I have understanding as well as you;  
I am not inferior to you.

Who does not know such things as these?

### Job 12:1-3

No doubt you are the people. Job reveals his frustration through sarcasm. In what may be a rejoinder to Zophar's wish that God would tell Job 'the secrets of wisdom' (Job 11:5-6), he states wisdom will die with you to make the point that his friends speak as though they alone were wise. However, says Job I am not inferior to you (also in Job 13:2b), and he sets out to illustrate the lack of depth and breadth in their approach (vv.4-25).

But I have understanding as well as you; who does not know such things as these? In rebuke to Zophar and his friends, Job made two points. First, that he also was a man of understanding. Second, that the theological principles presented by Zophar and the others were really widely known. In response, Job will speak plainly about the wisdom and greatness of God. Charles Spurgeon commented, "I would we had another Job, to chastise the high-sounding language of modern theologians. There are starting up in our midst men, who if they are not heretics in doctrine, are aliens in speech."

<sup>4</sup> I am a laughing-stock to my friends;  
I, who called upon God and he answered me,  
a just and blameless man, I am a laughing-stock.

<sup>5</sup> Those at ease have contempt for misfortune,  
but it is ready for those whose feet are unstable.

<sup>6</sup> The tents of robbers are at peace,  
and those who provoke God are secure,  
who bring their god in their hands.

### Job 12:4-6

I am a laughing-stock to my friends. Job complained that even though he was a godly man, i.e. I, who called upon God and he answered me, a man who was just and blameless - even so, he was mocked and ridiculed. The way that innocent Job

was mocked by others is a reminder of what Jesus endured in his sufferings and on the Cross, when he was mocked by the soldiers who beat him in Matthew 27:29, was mocked by the chief priests as he hung on the Cross in Matthew 27:41, and was ridiculed by others according to Mark 15:27-31.

Those at ease have contempt for misfortune. Job reproves his friends by pointing out that their approach to wisdom seems to ignore the realities of both the suffering of the righteous, just like his own, and the safety of the wicked. Furthermore, his friends have not acted as true wisdom requires, but have instead expressed contempt rather than comfort from their place of being at ease; Job had laid down a similar challenge to them before: <<***Those who withhold kindness from a friend forsake the fear of the Almighty***>> (Job 6:14).

The tents of robbers are at peace. With the reference to the image of the tents of the wicked, Job may have intended a counterpoint to one or more of his friends' earlier assertions, that is: <<***You shall know that your tent is safe, you shall inspect your fold and miss nothing***>> (Job 5:24), <<***Those who hate you will be clothed with shame, and the tent of the wicked will be no more***>> (Job 8:22), and: <<***If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, and do not let wickedness reside in your tents***>> (Job 11:14).

Those who provoke God are secure, who bring their god in their hands. Now it seemed to Job that his life and prior understanding was upside down. Before, everything seemed to make sense - the righteous seemed to be blessed and the wicked seemed to be afflicted. Now it is all different. Job did not give up on God, but he had to give up on his prior understanding of God.

- 7 'But ask the animals, and they will teach you;  
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
- 8 ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;  
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
- 9 Who among all these does not know  
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
- 10 In his hand is the life of every living thing  
and the breath of every human being.
- 11 Does not the ear test words  
as the palate tastes food?
- 12 Is wisdom with the aged,  
and understanding in length of days?

## Job 12:7-12

But ask the animals, and they will teach you. Job here expands on the idea first made earlier: <<*Indeed I know that this is so*>> (Job 9:3a). The point is that what his friends say about God is so elementary that even the animals know it.

As further reproof, Job suggests that his friends ought to inquire of the animals and plants of creation, which all know that it is ultimately the Lord who governs all of life.

The hand of the Lord has done this. This line is the only occurrence of the name of God (Hebrew YHWH) in Job outside of the prologue and Chapters 38-42 and is identical to a line in the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 41:20c).

Does not the ear test words. In these few verses Job recites a truism; statements that are understood as obviously true. The idea is that as clearly as these things are true, so is the power and majesty of God also easily understood as true.

## Introduction to vv. 13-25

Job asserts that the scope of God's providential governing of the world is much more extensive than what his friends assume by their responses. Again, as in Job 9:3-10, Job employs the distinctive form of the 'participial hymn' (refer to the comment made there) in an ironic fashion. Here, Job asserts God's sovereign control over nature and its destructive powers before employing the participial form to survey God's supreme prerogative over human rulers.

- 13 'With God are wisdom and strength;  
he has counsel and understanding.
- 14 If he tears down, no one can rebuild;  
if he shuts someone in, no one can open up.
- 15 If he withholds the waters, they dry up;  
if he sends them out, they overwhelm the land.
- 16 With him are strength and wisdom;  
the deceived and the deceiver are his.
- 17 He leads counsellors away stripped,  
and makes fools of judges.
- 18 He looses the sash of kings,  
and binds a waistcloth on their loins.

- 19 He leads priests away stripped,  
and overthrows the mighty.
- 20 He deprives of speech those who are trusted,  
and takes away the discernment of the elders.
- 21 He pours contempt on princes,  
and looses the belt of the strong.
- 22 He uncovers the deeps out of darkness,  
and brings deep darkness to light.
- 23 He makes nations great, then destroys them;  
he enlarges nations, then leads them away.
- 24 He strips understanding from the leaders of the earth,  
and makes them wander in a pathless waste.
- 25 They grope in the dark without light;  
he makes them stagger like a drunkard.

#### Job 12:13-25

With God are wisdom and strength; he has counsel and understanding. In this section, Job rebuked the previous speech of Zophar recorded in Job 11:1-20, especially where Zophar criticised Job for not knowing God and likened him to an empty-headed man; refer to Job 11:7-12. Here, Job showed that he did indeed know that God was great in wisdom and strength, and that he was mighty in counsel and understanding. Job's message to his friends was clear: "I do know God and how great he is. Don't criticise me on this point any longer."

If he tears down, no one can rebuild. With wonderful poetic beauty and repetition, Job described the power and majesty of God. By this statement Job showed God's power over material things. He also demonstrated other aspects of God's power:

- He showed God's power over men (if he shuts someone in).
- He showed God's power over minds (the deceived and the deceiver are his).
- He showed God's power over the wise (he leads counsellors away stripped, and makes fools of judges).
- He showed God's power over rulers (he looses the sash of kings, he pours contempt on princes).

- He showed God's power over the eloquent (he deprives of speech those who are trusted).
- He showed God's power over the darkness (he uncovers the deeps out of darkness, and brings deep darkness to light).
- He showed God's power over the nations (he enlarges nations, then leads them away).

The whole of social order and any sphere of leadership within it are subject to God and his purposes: counsellors, judges, kings, priests, advisors, elders, princes, and soldiers.

He looses the sash of kings, i.e. kings lose their thrones and their kingdoms. The sash may be thought of as the sign of royal authority and status, which is replaced by that of an ordinary robe, i.e. and binds a waistcloth on their loins.

He pours contempt on princes and makes them wander in a pathless waste are identical in Hebrew to the two lines of Psalm 107:40. The psalm speaks of judgement against oppressive rulers; in Job these phrases serve as a part of the description of God's sovereign governing over all social order.

Looses the belt is a common metaphor for disarming a soldier, i.e. the strong.

He enlarges nations, then leads them away. This may have the negative sense of 'disperse' or 'scatter,' making the second line antithetical to the first. Sometimes God makes nations great and then destroys them, while other times he first scatters a nation and then gives it peace or leads it in an orderly way.