

Is It Ok To Be Angry With God?

August 26, 2018 - Job 10-12 - <https://epmkg.com/job10-12>

JOB 10

1 "I loathe my life; I will give free utterance to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. 2 I will say to God, Do not condemn me; let me know why you contend against me. 3 Does it seem good to you to oppress, to despise the work of your hands and favor the designs of the wicked? 4 Have you eyes of flesh? Do you see as man sees? 5 Are your days as the days of man, or your years as a man's years, 6that you seek out my iniquity and search for my sin, 7although you know that I am not guilty, and there is none to deliver out of your hand? 8 Your hands fashioned and made me, and now you have destroyed me altogether. 9Remember that you have made me like clay; and will you return me to the dust? 10 Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? 11 You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews. 12 You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit. 13 Yet these things you hid in your heart; I know that this was your purpose. 14 If I sin, you watch me and do not acquit me of my iniquity. 15 If I am guilty, woe to me! If I am in the right, I cannot lift up my head, for I am filled with disgrace and look on my affliction. 16 And were my head lifted up, you would hunt me like a lion and again work wonders against me. 17 You renew your witnesses against me and increase your vexation toward me; you bring fresh troops against me. 18 "Why did you bring me out from the womb? Would that I had died before any eye had seen me 19 and were as though I had not been, carried from the womb to the grave. 20 Are not my days few? Then cease, and leave me alone, that I may find a little cheer 21 before I go--and I shall not return-- to the land of darkness and deep shadow, 22 the land of gloom like thick darkness, like deep shadow without any order, where light is as thick darkness."

E. Job complains about God's inconsistency in dealing with him—10:1-17

Isn't a plaintiff required to state the charges against the defendant? What possible motive could God have for afflicting Job? What "profit" or "good" (v. 3) could come of it? Doesn't the worker take pride in his efforts? Why, then, is God treating Job, his creation, this way? It seems as if God is resorting to methods that humans require because of their limitations. "Do you have 'eyes of flesh,' God, which because they see only partially look on the externals, not on the internal reality? Are you so limited by time that you must employ such tactics in searching out my every sin?"

The most painful and confusing thing is that God knows (v. 7) Job is innocent and Job knows that God knows!

F. *Job contemplates his death—10:18–22*

Job’s confusion continues: “God, you knew all this beforehand. So why did you even bring me forth from my mother’s womb? It seems like a charade” (vv. 18–19). Furthermore, “since I’m obviously going to die soon, won’t you at least grant me a little relief in the few days I have left?” (vv. 20–22).¹

(1) Job’s challenge to God.

10:1–7. Since no mediator could arbitrate Job’s case, he decided to become his own defense attorney. Risk was involved. He was taking his life in his hands (**I loathe my very life**; cf. 9:21). But he would vent his **complaint** in his **bitterness** even if it killed him. Rehearsing his speech, he would give **God** an order (**Do not condemn me**; cf. 9:20; 15:6; and comments on 40:8) and would insist that God list His **charges ... against** him. In this sudden burst of self-confidence (contrast 9:3, 14, 32), Job said he would confront God with several questions: (1) Does God get some kind of sadistic pleasure out of abusing Job, whom He had made with His very **hands**? (cf. 10:8–12; 14:15) (2) Does God have **eyes** like a man and have to investigate Job? (3) Are God’s **days** short so that He has to **probe after** Job’s sins? Surely God is not like that. And yet, knowing of Job’s innocence, God still seemed to oppress him.

(2) Job’s reminder to God.

10:8–12. In destroying Job with His hand (cf. v. 7), God was being inconsistent because He had previously created Job in his mother’s womb by His **hands**. Like a potter, God had **molded** Job, so why should he so soon be discarded to the **dust** from which he had been made? (cf. 7:21; 34:14–15; Ps. 104:29–30; Ecc. 3:20; 12:7) Job said his intricate embryonic development was like the curdling of **milk** into **cheese**, a process in which he was given **skin and flesh and knit ... together** (cf. Ps. 139:13, 15) **with bones and sinews**. After giving him **life** (cf. Job 12:10; 27:3; 34:14–15) and watching **over** his **spirit** (cf. 29:2; 36:7), why should God turn against him? Again Job thought God was being inconsistent (cf. 10:3).

(3) Job’s blaming of God.

10:13–17. Maybe, Job opined, God had in **mind** this affliction all along. God was **watching** him (cf. 7:19–20; 13:27; 31:4) ready to chalk up every **offense**. Yet even in his innocence Job had no boldness before God (in contrast with his spurt of confidence recorded in 10:2–7). For God was stalking him **like a lion** (cf. 16:9), ready to pounce on

¹ Storms, S. (2016). *Biblical Studies: Job* (Job 10:1–22). Edmond, OK: Sam Storms.

him with His **awesome** strength (cf. 9:4–13) and summon **witnesses against** him. (**Anger** is *ka'as*, “an angered irritation or resentment”; cf. 5:2; 6:2, “anguish.”) Job’s innocence, he sensed, meant nothing to God, since the Sovereign was against him, no matter what (cf. 9:15–20).

(4) Job’s request to God.

10:18–22. Once more the complainant asked for death (cf. 3:20–23; 6:8–9; 7:15; 10:18–19; 14:13), wishing he had never been born (cf. 3:17). Had he gone, like a stillborn, directly from **the womb** to the tomb, he would have bypassed all this misery. But since he was about to die (cf. 7:6–9; 9:25–26; 14:1–2, 5; 17:1) he asked God to give him at least a brief reprieve with **a moment’s joy** (cf. “joy” in 9:25). Death would be final (**no return**) and gloomy. Four Hebrew words for darkness were amassed to depict the darkness of the grave (**gloom**, *hōšek*; cf. 3:4, “darkness”; **deep shadow**, *šalmāwet*; cf. 3:5; **deepest night**, *’ēpāh*, used only here and in Amos 4:13, “darkness”; and **darkness**, *’ōpel*; cf. Job 3:6; 23:17; 28:3). This speech, like some others of Job’s ended on a doleful note about death (cf. 3:21–22; 7:21; 14:21–22).²

JOB 11

Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said: 2 "Should a multitude of words go unanswered, and a man full of talk be judged right? 3 Should your babble silence men, and when you mock, shall no one shame you? 4 For you say, 'My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in God's eyes.' 5 But oh, that God would speak and open his lips to you, 6 and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom! For he is manifold in understanding. Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves. 7 "Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? 8 It is higher than heaven--what can you do? Deeper than Sheol--what can you know? 9 Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea. 10 If he passes through and imprisons and summons the court, who can turn him back? 11 For he knows worthless men; when he sees iniquity, will he not consider it? 12 But a stupid man will get understanding when a wild donkey's colt is born a man! 13 "If you prepare your heart, you will stretch out your hands toward him. 14 If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, and let not injustice dwell in your tents. 15 Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish; you will be secure and will not fear. 16 You will forget your misery; you will remember it as waters that have passed away. 17 And your life will be brighter than the noonday; its darkness will be like the morning. 18 And you will feel secure, because there is hope; you will look around and take your rest in security. 19 You will lie down, and none will make

² Zuck, R. B. (1985). Job. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 732–733). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

you afraid; many will court your favor. 20 But the eyes of the wicked will fail; all way of escape will be lost to them, and their hope is to breathe their last."

11:1–20 Zophar’s first speech: ‘Repent!’

Zophar is the least sympathetic of the three friends. His message to Job is simple: you are suffering because God knows that you are a secret sinner (6), therefore repent (13–14)!

11:1–6 ‘God knows that you are a secret sinner’. Zophar is a man of principle, who agrees with Job that the real issue is the question of sin. It is not obvious that Job is a sinner; so he must be a secret sinner, whom God has found out. Job claims that his *beliefs are flawless* and that he is *pure* before God (4), but God knows otherwise—and somehow Zophar too has been let in on the knowledge—that Job is really an evildoer. Probably, his sin is so great that even with all this punishment God has *forgotten* or overlooked *some of your sin* (6). It may well be that Job is getting off lightly!

11:13–20 ‘Therefore you must repent!’ Zophar now tries to persuade Job of the blessings of repentance. Where Eliphaz was tentative, Zophar is peremptory. And he makes clear that restoration depends entirely on Job’s complete repentance: it is only if Job follows his advice that he can have anything to hope for. Job must *devote* his *heart* to God, direct his mind to God with full concentration and not rest content with outward symbols of repentance, and he must pray (13) and renounce his present evil behaviour.

The result will be a clear conscience (*you will lift up your face*) and a sense of security (*you will stand firm*; 15). But the reader notes the irony in all this; for everything Zophar recommends to Job has been Job’s constant practice all his life (1:1).³

e) First Discourse of Zophar. 11:1-20.

Job had reacted to Eliphaz’ and Bildad’s concentration on his judicial status with increasingly intense protestations of innocence. These in turn provoked the friends to ever more consistent application of their theory, until Zophar now bluntly condemns Job’s alleged iniquity (vv. 1-6). He supports his charge by appealing to God’s infinity (vv. 7-12), yet he concludes with an assurance of restored prosperity (vv. 13-20).

1-6. Job had insisted that God had afflicted him knowing him to be righteous (v. 4; cf. 9:21; 10:7). That, Zophar points out, contradicts traditional theory, is irreligious, and can not be allowed to stand as the last word. **Should a man full of talk be justified?** (v. 2b) The customary introductory courtesies, dispensed with altogether by Bildad, are thus dispatched by Zophar with such haste and distaste that accusation merges with apology.

³ Clines, D. J. A. (1994). Job. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 467). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee (v. 5). Job seems irrepressible in controversy with his fellows; but if he were granted the very thing he himself longs for, an open debate with God (cf. 9:35), he would be silenced. **Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth** (v. 6b). More literally, *God causes to be forgotten for thee some of thine iniquity*. In his zeal to contradict Job's complaint that God searches out and mercilessly marks his every sin (cf. 10:6, 14), afflicting him out of proportion to his iniquities, Zophar ventures to modify the other two friends' theory of direct ratio—but in the opposite direction from Job! Here is the climax of condemnation in the first cycle. Job 11:6 is pivotal; it concludes the indictment but also introduces the following theme by mentioning the unfathomable wisdom of God (cf. 5:9).

7-12 Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? (v. 7b) By his infinite wisdom God comprehends and controls creation in its height and depth, length and breadth (v. 8, 9). **Who can hinder him?** (v. 10b) If God wills to bring a man into judgment, the man cannot escape. Zophar thus endorses the conclusion Job had earlier drawn from the absolute wisdom of God, namely, that resistance to Him is futile (cf. 9:12; 10:7b). But while Job had also appealed to the divine omniscience for vindication of his innocence (10:7a), Zophar does so to convict Job of guilt: **He seeth wickedness also** (v. 11b). Having openly condemned Job, and being ignorant himself of any direct evidence to substantiate his charge, Zophar finds it convenient to supplement his own ignorance with the omniscience of the Almighty. He would have made better use of his excellent doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God, however, if he had humbly recognized the limitations of his own knowledge of divine providence and had not presumed to understand Job's sufferings to perfection. This truth of God's unsearchable wisdom, though sadly mishandled by Zophar, is the doctrine that should have quieted Job's spirit and silenced his complaints. By reckoning more seriously with it, Job and his friends alike would have recognized that his sufferings were compatible with exemplary piety on one side and divine favor on the other. It is primarily by the proclamation of His incomprehensibility that the Lord Himself later delivers Job from his temptation. Thus again the author of the book employs veiled anticipation. In 11:12 he uses another favorite device, clinching an argument with a proverbial saying. He cites the asininity of vain men as a foil for the infinity of divine wisdom.

13-20. Compare the similar appeals of Eliphaz (5:8ff.) and Bildad (8:5-7, 20-22). Contrary to Job's pessimistic opinion (9:28; 10:15), suit for God's favor would be successful (v. 15). At least it would be if preceded by thoroughgoing repentance, extending to heart, hand, and home (vv. 13, 14; cf. Ps 24:4). By laying down this condition Zophar manages to insinuate accusation into the midst of consolation. Renewal of God's favor will be accompanied by restoration of prosperity, in which present grief will be forgotten **as waters that are passed away** (v. 16b, ASV). Also, contrary to Job's forebodings of unrelieved darkness (10:21, 22), a bright dawning of hope, peaceful security, and honor, as of old, awaits him (vv. 17-19). **But the eyes of the wicked shall fail** (v. 20a). Zophar's

growing suspicion of Job suggests the advisability of his seasoning consolation further with warning. He closes by identifying the only hope of the wicked with death, in words clearly resembling Job's description of his own prospects. Zophar's pattern of repentance and restoration was to be worked out; but in a way quite surprising to him.⁴

THE SPEECH OF ZOPHAR

If A Man Could Meet God

Job 11:1-20

In his opening lament Job did not assert his innocence, but only bewailed his fate. Thus Eliphaz tacitly assumed his guilt without alluding to it. In his response to Eliphaz (chs. 6-7) Job only incidentally affirmed his innocence. Bildad overlooked these passing remarks. He regarded them as natural and not seriously intended. In his response to Bildad (chs. 9-10), however, Job had vigorously denied his guilt. Thus a new element is introduced into the debate. Job really *did* believe in his own innocence. Zophar addresses this issue head on.

A. Zophar's Wish (11:2-6)

After Job's last speech the friends sat in stunned silence for a time. Then Zophar spoke up. He felt compelled to reply lest Job think that by his many words he had proved his point. Zophar asks: "Should a man full of talk (lit., a man of lips) be justified?" The insinuation is that Job's words came merely from his lips. He had not spoken from the heart as had the ancients (cf. 8:10). His oration was so much hot air. Zophar accuses Job of "boastings." The reference is probably to the protestations of innocence. He also accused Job of mockery, i.e., of irreligious or skeptical talk. Someone had to stand up to this insolence. Someone had to make Job ashamed that he had ever uttered such words (11:2-3).

Specifically, Zophar accuses Job of having said: "My doctrine is pure." Though Job had never used precisely such words, Zophar is giving the gist of the patriarch's position. Job's doctrine is the shocking allegation that God afflicts a man whom he knows to be righteous. In addressing God, Job had said in effect: "I am clean in your eyes" (cf. 9:21; 10:7). He was the living proof of the truth of his "doctrine" about God. Zophar had never met a man with such a doctrine before. His irritation and lack of patience with such a novel idea are evident in the language he uses (11:4).

Job brashly had expressed his readiness to meet God face to face and plead his cause before him (cf. 9:16). Zophar wishes that such would transpire. He was quite sure, however, that the results of such a meeting would be very different from what Job

⁴ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: Old Testament* (Job 11:1-13). Chicago: Moody Press.

imagined. The Lord would show Job “the secrets of wisdom,” i.e., his omniscience. After all, sound wisdom has two sides, that which is obvious and that which is hidden. God knows both. Should the requested confrontation with God take place, Job might discover that he is actually being given less than he deserves from the hand of God (11:5–6).

B. God’s Wisdom (11:7–12)

As Eliphaz focused on the holiness of God, Zophar now begins to describe the wisdom of God. By *wisdom*, Zophar refers to what theologians call the omniscience of God. He makes four points on this subject.

First, God’s wisdom cannot be fathomed by man. The point is made by means of two questions: “Can you find out the deep things of God?” “Can you find the limits of the Almighty?” (11:7).

Second, God’s wisdom fills all things. It is as high as the heavens and deeper than Sheol, the abode of the dead. It is longer than the earth and broader than the sea. Job cannot scale heaven nor penetrate Sheol. Job cannot travel across the earth nor span the sea. Thus his knowledge must be inferior to that of God (11:8–9).

Third, God’s wisdom perceives hidden wickedness. No man can restrain the Lord when he “passes by” (cf. 9:11), or “shuts up,” i.e., arrests people, or “calls an assembly” for judgment on a sinner. God is irresistible and accountable to no one. Why? Because he alone knows “false men.” Without expending any effort to investigate, God “sees iniquity.” His omniscience is immediate, absolute and beyond challenge (11:10–11).

Fourth, God’s wisdom is the more glorious when compared to the stupidity of man. Empty headed men will only get understanding when a wild donkey gives birth to a man. This proverbial statement suggests something which can never be. It is impossible for human beings to ever achieve anything like the wisdom of God (11:12).

C. Zophar’s Exhortation (11:13–20)

Zophar appeals directly to Job. The second person pronoun in v. 13 is emphatic and serves to set Job apart from the “idiot” (NASB) of v. 12. First, he appeals to Job to set his heart right, i.e., bring his heart into a condition of right thought and feeling towards God. Second, Job needs to “stretch out” his hands in supplication to God. Third, he urges Job to put far away his personal “iniquity.” Fourth, Zophar implores Job to remove “wickedness” from his “tents,” i.e., his home (11:13–14).

Job had complained that he was not able to lift up his head before God (10:15). If Job will pursue the four-point plan outlined by Zophar then he would in fact be able to lift his head up “without spot,” i.e., in conscious innocence. Job would then be “steadfast,” i.e., would not experience those radical swings in feelings which he had displayed in his previous

speeches. Gone will be the “fear” of which Job complained in 9:28. His misery then would be removed. He would forget his afflictions “as waters that are passed away.” His life would be “clearer than the noonday,” i.e., the confusion and perplexity would be gone. The “darkness” which he would experience in his life would only be a lesser light like that of the morning (11:15–17).

Zophar continues his litany of blessing which would follow Job’s repentance. He would enjoy security. His despondency would be replaced by “hope.” Before retiring at night he would look about for any potential dangers. There would be none. He would be able to rest in peace. His security and prosperity would draw to him the homage of many, who (as before) would seek his favor, lit., stroke your face (11:18–19).

On the other hand, Zophar sees a terrible fate for the wicked. Their eyes would fail, i.e., they would go blind. For them there is no escaping the righteous retribution of God. Their only hope is “to breathe their last,” i.e., die. Eliphaz spoke of no cloud in the brightness which he anticipated for Job’s future (cf. 5:19–26). Bildad spoke of perishing, but that would be the future of Job’s enemies (cf. 8:22). Zophar threw out his warning in a more general way. Job may accept it if he feels it applies to him (11:20).⁵

JOB 12

1 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. Who does not know such things as these? 4 I am a laughingstock to my friends; I, who called to God and he answered me, a just and blameless man, am a laughingstock. 5 In the thought of one who is at ease there is contempt for misfortune; it is ready for those whose feet slip. 6 The tents of robbers are at peace, and those who provoke God are secure, who bring their god in their hand. 7 "But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you; 8 or the bushes 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 all mankind. 11 Does not the ear test words as the palate tastes food? 12 Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days. 13 "With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding. 14 If he tears down, none can rebuild; if he shuts a man in, none can open. 15 If he withholds the waters, they dry up; if he sends them out, they overwhelm the land. 16 With him are strength and sound wisdom; the deceived and the deceiver are his. 17 He leads counselors away stripped, and judges he makes fools. 18 He looses the bonds of kings and binds a waistcloth on their hips. 19 He leads priests away stripped and overthrows the

⁵ Smith, J. E. (1996). *The wisdom literature and Psalms* (Job 11:1–20). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

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 loosens the belt of the strong. 22 He uncovers the deeps out of darkness and brings deep darkness to light. 23 He makes nations great, and he destroys them; he enlarges nations, and leads them away. 24 He takes away understanding from the chiefs of the people of the earth and makes them wander in a pathless waste. 25 They grope in the dark without light, and he makes them stagger like a drunken man.

'I am a laughing stock'

(Job 12:1–13:28)

The considerable length of Job's reply to Zophar has already been noted and commented on. We shall therefore divide it into two parts. Leaving chapter 14 for treatment on its own because of the importance of its theme, I will focus our attention here on the first section of the speech.

Just as in his earlier responses, Job moves in this speech from addressing the Friends to talking to God, but at what point he does so is difficult to determine. Obviously he has God in view in 13:20, but there are signs in several of the immediately preceding verses that he is speaking in the hearing of his Friends rather than addressing them directly. Taking note of this, I will divide my comments after 13:17 because the **'you'** in that verse is in the plural. It clearly refers to the Friends.

'I am a laughing stock to my friends' (12:1–6)

12:4

I am a laughing stock to my friends;

I, who called to God and he answered me,

a just and blameless man, am a laughing stock.

Job addresses all the Friends as he begins his speech (12:2–6) and then he singles out Zophar (verses 7, 8 have a singular pronoun). Stung no doubt by being called a donkey, he sarcastically refers to his friends as **'the people'**, those with whom wisdom begins and ends (12:2). Vigorously defending himself, he asserts that he is not without **'understanding'**, as Zophar had said (see 11:12), and claims that what the Friends presented is no more than common knowledge (12:3). His quarrel with them, therefore, is not about God's power (about which Eliphaz had spoken, see 5:8–9), nor about his justice (which was Bildad's theme, see 8:3); nor was it about his wisdom (which Zophar trumpeted, see 11:6). His argument with them is that they had used these truths to 'frame

him'. They had turned all these divine attributes into accusations and had just not dealt with *the facts* of his case.

He therefore proceeds to set out those facts before them as plainly as he can. In order to do this, he uses the term '**laughing stock**' twice. First he connects it with his friends, and also by implication with God (12:4), implying that neither they nor God should have treated him so. Human friendship should have prevented their mocking him; divine friendship should have prevented God from attacking him. But the one who '**called to God**' and was '**answered**' by him, the '**just and blameless man**' (see 1:1), is *now* held up to open ridicule and disgrace. 'Explain that!' he says to them in effect. He then proceeds to further his challenge in two ways—and in both he is speaking more wisely than he knew.

First, he says that for someone who is at ease to treat a sufferer contemptuously is to increase the latter's anguish greatly. To add scorn to pain makes that pain so much harder to bear (12:5). That was something Job never did—not even to someone who was his enemy (see 31:29). It is therefore not how friends should behave—but it is something that is Satan's stock in trade. It is he who 'kicks a person when he is down'.

Secondly, Job refers to the fact that ungodly, marauding bands often live securely themselves (12:6), and that is something that the Friends seem not to have observed, or reflected on, in connection with their representation of God to Job. Indeed, Job himself has not yet realized the full significance of this fact and its potential as a rebuttal of the thesis of his Friends (the distortion of Satan), but he will do so later (see chapter 21).

'Ask the beasts, and they will teach you' (12:7–12)

12:7, 9–10

But ask the beasts, and they will teach you;

the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you ...

Who among all these does not know

that the hand of the Lord has done this?

In his hand is the life of every living thing

and the breath of all mankind.

Job continues in a sarcastic vein. He has already charged the Friends with dressing up common knowledge as if it were the preserve of only a few. Here he says four times that the animals '**teach**' such truth (12:7–8). Climactically (and rhetorically) he says that all the creatures know that the hand of Jehovah has made them! (Cf. Gen. 1; Rom. 1:20).

God's wisdom and power are therefore known by all that he has made, and not only by the pompous Zophar. Job majors on these themes because Zophar had spoken about them (see 11:7–12). This subsection is therefore not just a discussion of a truth in the form of a hymn of praise; it is a continuation of the debate. By what he says Job is showing God to be his friend, whereas Zophar has been making God out to be Job's foe!

In a way that is typical of wisdom, Job uses an analogy to present the point that he is driving at. Observing that an ear and a tongue are given to a human being for the purpose of evaluating words and foods, he deduces that corresponding critical faculties are also provided (by God) so that what passes for wisdom may be evaluated by others (12:11). The wisdom of the aged is therefore not to be regarded as the last word (nor of course is it to be sniffed at). What Job has been, and is still, doing in replying to his Friends is reflecting on what they have said to him, agreeing with the accuracy of their general principles, but challenging the correctness of the interpretation that they based upon them in relation to his case. He is therefore exalting 'the right of private judgement' over against community consensus as represented by the Friends and the view of the aged (see 13:1–4).

Treading such a path can, of course, be hazardous but when an individual evaluates his circumstances in the light of what God has revealed about himself the danger is greatly reduced. That is what Job is doing by way of these magnificent statements about God's power and wisdom. He is not making himself the centre of God's world, but just trying to find a corner for himself in a world that has become bigger and more mysterious as a result of the tragedy that has befallen him. In doing so he points out that such a world is also larger than the platitudes which the Friends are uttering! Job is a believing pioneer.

His opening statements about God's wisdom are built around the question, '**Who ... does not know?**' (12:9), and this supports Job's allegation that his friends are not the pundits they think they are. Zophar's remarks had tended in the direction of God's being inaccessible, but here Job asserts that God has not entirely concealed himself; he has shown his hand in what he has done. There are many echoes of Genesis 1 here. The animal world and the human world—birds, beasts, reptiles and humans—all come from God. Their lives (literally, their breath) are upheld by him and their habitats are determined by him (12:7–10). '**Life**' is therefore common to all, but only human beings possess 'spirit'. So Zophar's claim that God knows wicked men (see 11:11) is a commonplace, rather than a wonderful discovery! To this Job adds a sarcastic comment about the Friends' belief that those who have lived longest must know the most (12:12).

'With him are wisdom and might' (12:13–25)

12:13–16 (NASB)

With him are wisdom and might;

To him belong counsel and understanding.

Behold, he tears down, and it cannot be rebuilt;

He imprisons a man and there can be no release.

Behold, he restrains the waters, and they dry up;

And he sends them out, and they inundate the earth.

With him are strength and sound wisdom,

The misled and the misleader belong to him.

Although there is no word in the Hebrew text of these verses that corresponds to ‘God’, the use of the terms **‘wisdom and might’** and **‘counsel and understanding’** (12:13, 16) and the activities described in this passage are hardly applicable to anyone else. This section therefore stands in contrast to the sarcastic comment about the aged (12:12) and also to the Friends, who are regurgitating their teaching. This section is more than a positive statement; it has a polemical edge—throughout.

The main focus of Job’s remarks is on what God does in his wisdom and power. Twice the word **‘Behold’** occurs in order to underline the stupendous features of the divine sovereignty (12:14, 15). Job describes the manifold nature of God’s activity with regard to nature and mankind. God is regarded as the source of everything, and nothing can be conceived of that either lies beyond the scope of his reign, or that can effectively resist its exercise. Three things should be noted about this description.

First, Job majors on *the human realm*. In what he says he only makes one statement about natural things (12:15; verse 22 is a metaphor). The remainder concentrates on the world of human affairs, whether religious or political, judges or priests.

Secondly, this is a declaration of *God’s power* rather than his wisdom. Job is asserting that power is what is uppermost in God’s activity. None can rebuild what he pulls down, or open what he closes (12:14). Job here picks up what Zophar had said (see 11:10). He agrees with it as a fact, but not with the explanation Zophar had given of it. Zophar had declared how God arrests offenders and imprisons them, believing this to be what has happened to Job. By a strange irony that is also exactly what Job believes has happened to him—but not for the reason that Zophar had advanced, which was that God always acts on the basis of human morality, or its opposite in the case of Job. Job therefore rejects Zophar’s explanation as being too simplistic by far.

Thirdly, Job’s chosen examples are full of *the imagery of loss and reversal*. Those that are wise, mighty, noble or strong are all deprived of what makes them great. (Did Paul have

this in mind when he wrote 1 Corinthians 1:18–25?) This depiction matches Job's experience of course, but he is not just looking at the world through the window of his own affliction; he wants the Friends to focus their attention on the bigger picture too.

By implication, Job is refuting Zophar's thesis that adversity always points to iniquity and he is seeking to confront the Friends with the mystery of God's administration. While he is right in this, there is also something that he needs to learn about God's power, namely that it is also exercised with his goodness, and thus for a beneficent purpose. Elihu will teach him that.

But Job has been seized and bound and is being denied due process of law. So he sees a world in which the wise and the strong, the deceiver and the deceived, the ruler and the ruled are all vulnerable to an intervention of God. Counsellors, priests and princes are exhibited to derision and contempt (12:17, 19, 21). Nations rise and fall (12:23). It is a world in which things are often turned upside down and inside out—and by God, seemingly without any human agency. He is the one who does all these things, and he cannot be resisted.⁶

⁶ Jones, H. R. (2007). *A Study Commentary on Job* (pp. 116–122). Darlington, England; Webster, New York: Evangelical Press.