

Confused By Friends, Yet Hopeful

Job 12:1-25

- A. Though his friends had tradition on their side, Job felt confident he was as competent they were to seek truth **1-3**
1. Zophar implied Job was witless, devoid of wisdom (11:12), thus easily dismissing his arguments as foolishness
 - a. Job was not willing to be ignored and so with a great deal of sarcasm tells his friends they are the fools
 - b. His use of the second person plural 'you' (vs 2) tells us he is talking to all three of his friends
 - c. 'You are the people, you are the ones who serve as the repository for all the wisdom of the ages
 - d. 'Thus, when you die, wisdom will die with you and the world will be deprived of access to wisdom itself
 - e. His point is that they seem to think that if anyone disagrees with them, that person must be wrong
 2. Job believed he had every right they did to be heard as one who was and had lived as a wise man
 - a. His suffering had not made him any less perceptive and knowledgeable of God's ways than they were
 - b. They may have been thought wise by others, but he was counted as the greatest of the men of the East
 - c. The kind of arguments they were using with him were nothing more than what everyone knew
 - d. Wise men though are to have answers to those unusual situations that demand uncommonly astute thinking
 - e. To this point his friends had only offered the kind of answers any man on the street could have given
- B. He was confounded by the fact that the justice of God seen in his treatment of men seemed upside down **4-6**
1. Job had enjoyed a close relationship with the Lord so that when he prayed, God was certain to listen to him
 - a. He was faithful to God, righteous in his obedience and blameless so his godly reputation was well known
 - b. The Lord's evaluation of Job supported the fact that he was godly, and his friends once agreed with this
 2. Since these disasters had struck, the very idea that Job was a righteous man was laughed at as ludicrous
 - a. Without producing any evidence of sin in his life, their theological assumptions condemned him
 - b. And while he suffered this shame, 'marauders were undisturbed, and those who provoked God were secure
 - c. Idolaters who rejected the Lord as their God and worshiped other gods found rest and peace in life
 3. His friends could look at him with contempt, as one who deserved his lot, because it wasn't happening to them
 - a. It is easy to think we have all the answers when we haven't struggled with sorrow that runs as deep as Job's
 - b. It was easy for them to say blameless men do not suffer because they had not suffered as blameless men
 - c. Because we know the whole story, we know that Job suffered precisely because he was a righteous man
 - d. This was perplexing to him because he had believed like his friends that good is blessed, bad is punished
- C. Speaking as a blameless man made to suffer, he calls witnesses that affirm this was the Lord's work **7-12**
1. He calls on lower creation to testify the world is not always fair, tho he does not say how they do this **7-10**
 - a. We can guess at the sort of thing he had in mind, eg where brute strength is more important than being cute
 - b. Are we to assume that parrots are better than dogs because they are blessed with a much longer life?
 - c. Are cheetahs to be counted as nobler creatures than gazelles who are not blessed with the cat's speed?
 - d. Is the bear that slaughters livestock and pets more worthy of our praise because of its great power?
 - e. Is it fair that a bear has the power to slaughter man's livestock that feeds us and pets that we care for?
 - f. God has given life and abilities to all these animals, yet the disadvantages of the weak can seem unfair
 2. He also makes appeal to the aged who thru long life have seen enough to know the just are not always blessed
 - a. Just as the tongue can tell you whether food tastes good, so the ear can tell when words spoken are good
 - b. The one who has listened and watched carefully for years knows how easily simplistic answers fail us
 - c. Could it really have been that his friends had been alive for so many years and never seen a good man suffer
 - d. Had they never seen a bad man rise to prominence, outlive his righteous neighbors and die at peace
 - e. Could they really have known blameless Job and on the basis of circumstances alone count him as wicked
- D. Job offers evidence that God's power does not always produce the results that mortal men think it should **13-25**
1. His friends thought they had figured out how God worked, but Job says the Lord is unpredictable **13-15**
 - a. Tho Job did not agree with what God had done to him, he never doubted the Lord's power and wisdom
 - 1) Wisdom gave insight into how to achieve his goals, and power insured his success in pursuing them
 - 2) That means what happens is exactly what God intends, even if men cannot understand his reasons
 - b. As one puts it, 'God ... is no placid governor of a universe of order but is inapprehensible and untameable'
 - 1) Others get at the same basic idea by saying that the Lord is dangerous and destructive
 - 2) This reminds us of the beaver who said of Aslan that he was good, but that he was not safe
 - c. Wise men may tear down so they can build something new, but God tears down so rebuilding is impossible
 - 1) What God intends to destroy cannot be repaired by anyone so as to be useful or productive again
 - 2) When he imprisons a man, there is no one who can overrule his judgement and allow the man's release

- 3) This is encouraging if this wisdom and power are directed against an enemy, against wicked men
- 4) Job however says nothing about tearing down enemy fortresses or imprisoning violent criminals
- d. His incomprehensible destructiveness is evident also in one of the basic necessities of human life
 - 1) The water that he provides, sometimes miraculously, is both necessary and offers great pleasure
 - 2) At his word though those waters can be withheld so that a whole nation can suffer from drought
 - 3) Or the Lord may turn them loose so that life giving water becomes a death dealing, destructive flood
 - 4) Can these be so easily explained as saying droughts and floods only harm the wicked among us?
2. God's strength enables him to find victory over all men, to humble even the greatest of human leaders **16-21**
 - a. This section begins with language similar to that of 13-15, and also speaks of God's unpredictable ways
 - 1) The picture some have of God as insulated from all evil so he has no input in its direction is wrong
 - 2) Again Job is trying to prove the Lord is not that 'tame' God whose actions are always predictable
 - b. 'One might suspect God would control the deceiver to aid the deceived, but that is not the point here'
 - 1) The deceived and the deceiver are put into the same category, those the Lord controls by his strength
 - 2) Wherever deception is found, whether in the perpetrator or the duped, God controls what happens
 - 3) When Ahab was convinced to go to war by lying prophets, the Lord was involved **1 Ki 22:19-23**
 - 4) The Lord truly does move in mysterious ways, ways Job's friends could not bring themselves to see
 - c. One might think God always wants to make leaders wise and honorable, but that is not the case **17-21**
 - 1) Counselors can give good advice but be stripped of their persuasiveness so they are ignored
 - a) Like Ahithophel they can find their counsel no longer taken, and their reputation and life ruined
 - 2) Judges can lose the powers of discrimination so they can no longer discern between right and wrong
 - a) They exchange truth for personal feelings and (unintentionally) subvert the good of a people
 - 3) Kings may have power to enforce their will on the people, but God can reverse their decisions
 - a) Though the translation and thus application of vs 18 is difficult, its basic meaning is clear enough
 - b) What a king binds can be unbound by the Lord, and by so doing humble them
 - 4) Priests, like counselors, can be stripped of their power to influence others through their counsel
 - a) This may be because people no longer seek their counsel or because thru sin they become foolish
 - b) In either case God takes away the very heart of their work, discerning between holy and profane
 - 5) Long established leaders, pillars of the community, who provide stability are removed
 - a) Their being overthrown leaves the people with greater uncertainty, less wisdom, more confusion
 - 6) Trusted advisors and elders whose years of experience give special insight are silenced by God
 - a) When God's ways are so different, seemingly capricious, even the wisest are left speechless
 - b) In times of upheaval when old answers no longer fit, it is hard for anyone to see what God is doing
 - 7) Nobles whose integrity provides a shining example and mighty men who led in war would both fall
 - a) The nobles would be seen with contempt so their good example had no effect on others
 - b) Warriors would be rendered incapable of fighting by some means that left the people vulnerable
 - d. The Lord gave men government as a means of providing order, justice and security to people in society
 - 1) Based on this one might think he would always provide the best leaders and endue them with honor
 - 2) When we think only in broad terms we can miss the strange, unexpected works of the sovereign Lord
 - 3) Like Job's friends we can speak confidently of what God does when we really do not know
3. Though it is our desire that he would, God's plan is not always to make the best of a bad situation
 - a. The Lord 'uncovers the deeps out of darkness and brings deep darkness to light' (ESV)
 - 1) This sounds like exposing darkness so it can be overcome, but our context suggests otherwise
 - 2) This is more akin to the opening of the Abyss so that its darkness can obstruct the light of day
 - 3) When it suits his purposes God uncovers the deeps to cloud the light of human reasoning
 - b. In what can seem an arbitrary fashion he raises up then destroys a nation, enlarges then disperses it
 - 1) Leaders who helped build a nation can be followed by those he strips of their reason
 - 2) Rather than leading the people to greater strength and stability, they wander aimlessly in a wasteland
 - 3) These leaders and their people grope in darkness without any clear sense of direction as to what to do
 - c. Despite what his friends think, the ways of God are not as easy to discern and predict as they believe
 - 1) He sometimes moves in mysterious ways that confound even the most astute of his followers
 - 2) His ways with men in broad, general terms can be known, but the specific details can be confusing
 - 3) Even so, we are on the right track if we agree that to God belong wisdom, power, strength and victory