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Job 11 - 17



Job - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses the speeches given by Job and his friends in the book of Job. He observes that Job's responses have been interpreted as sarcastic, but the tone of voice is uncertain. Gregg notes that Job accuses his friends of speaking obvious things and not truly knowing God's thoughts. While Eliphaz initially had a good point about fearing God, the speakers' egos and biases seem to have taken over the conversation. Gregg suggests that re-examining one's theological position may be necessary when faced with unusual providences.

Transcript

Alright, we now come to the speech of Zophar. Now, I mentioned in the introduction that there are three cycles of speeches. There is Eliphaz and then there's Job's answer to Eliphaz.

There's Bildad and Job's answer to Bildad. Then there's Zophar and Job's answer to Zophar. That's one complete cycle.

All three men speak in that order. Then all three of them will speak in the same order again. That's going to be the second cycle.

Eliphaz will speak, followed by Job. Bildad will speak, followed by Job. Zophar will speak, followed by Job.

There's a third cycle also, but it's not complete. It begins the same way. The third cycle will begin with Eliphaz once more, probably the oldest of the three.

Always speaks first, followed by Job. Then Bildad, but Bildad kind of fizzles out in the third round. Bildad just gives a few verses that don't make any sense anyway.

And then he's done. And then Job answers him and Zophar never comes back. Zophar, I guess, admits defeat or at least frustration and therefore we don't hear from him again.

But we are now reaching the latter, the last part of the first cycle. We've heard only from two of the friends. Now we have the third one.

And in my opinion, Zophar is the most rude of the three. And it may be because he may be the youngest of the three. They're all older men, as they mention.

And Elihu mentions later on that they're all older men. But he might, since he's the third speaker of the three, he might be the youngest and also the most brash. He also might be more impatient than the others because he has had to sit through Job's responses.

Now, I don't personally think that Job's responses should have made him angry. He should have taken Job's responses seriously. The man's speaking out of anguish.

He's speaking hyperbole. He says, I'm just ventilating. But the main thing, of course, is that Job is not really agreeing that his case conforms to the theology of these men.

And this is the big issue in the book of Job. And that is, what do you do when good theological principles or what's always been considered to be good theological principles don't agree with reality? And Job's experience is reality. The theories of these men is theory.

It's good theory, but it's not it's not universally applicable, obviously. And that's something they had not yet acknowledged or ever considered, probably. Chapter 11, then, so far, the Nehemianite answered and said, should not the multitude of words be answered? He means Job's long speeches.

And should a man full of talk be vindicated? Should your empty talk make men hold their peace? And when you mock, should no one rebuke you? Now, he says that Job is mocking. This has led some commentators to think that some of the things Job said in his speech were perhaps sarcastic. After all, Job does say a number of things in his previous speech that agree with what his friend said.

If he had said them in a sarcastic tone, as if to mock them with their simplistic answers, this might explain why Zophar says that he's mocking and he should be answered. And that would explain perhaps why Zophar is irritated. On the other hand, there's no reason to assume that Job was sarcastic because everything that he said, he knew to be true also.

And therefore, Zophar saying that Job was mocking could be imputing to Job an attitude that Job did not have. He was resisting. He was refuting.

He was not agreeing with their views, but he wasn't necessarily mocking them unless he was. We don't know if he was for sure because we don't have his tone of voice here. But it's possible that it's not even that he was mocking or being sarcastic, but that they're just these counselors think he's really mocking wisdom.

He's mocking orthodoxy by simply not accepting it. Now, later on, Job turns around in Chapter 12, versus I'm one mocked by my friends. Now, I'm not mocking anybody, but

I'm being mocked and that by my friends.

Anyways, Zophar responds like this. He says, for you have said, verse four, eleven for my doctor is pure and I'm clean in your eyes. But oh, that God would speak and open his lips against you, 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. Now, this statement in some context might seem true. It may be true of everybody, because all of us really are sinners and we all deserve punishment for our sins.

And most of us don't get as much punishment as we probably deserve. We have suffered. Most of us, if you live very long, you've probably suffered consequences for things you've done wrong.

But it's likely that you've done more things wrong in your life than you've actually suffered for specifically. And so it may be true if you would add up the sum total of someone's sins and the sum total of what they've suffered. That many people do deserve more suffering than what they've experienced.

They may have experienced some, but they deserve more than that. And he's saying God has actually been merciful to you in giving you all these horrible trials because you deserve far worse than that. Now, that is a that's not a very sympathetic thing to say, because for one thing, the suffering of Job has not been experienced by his friends.

Zophar hasn't experienced this or Eliphaz or Bildad. And so they're saying to Job, you're getting what you deserve and you even deserve worse than what you're getting. Well, what about you guys, Zophar? Do you deserve less than this? You're not getting that.

Are you saying that I'm that much more wicked than you are? And of course, that is what Zophar is saying. He's saying that you're more wicked than we are because you're receiving, you know, less than you're due. If we were as bad as you, we'd experience those things, too.

But we're not. You are. Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the almighty? They are higher than heaven.

What can you do deeper than Sheol? What can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea. If he passes by in prisons and gathers to judgment, who can hinder him? For he knows deceitful men. He sees wickedness also.

Will he not then consider it for an empty headed man will be wise when a wild donkey's calf is born a man. Now, this sounds to me like it's like he's quoting some kind of a proverb. Obviously, a wild donkey's calf isn't going to be born human.

And so it's sort of like when hell freezes over. You know, we would say something will happen when hell freezes over means it's never going to happen. And he's saying that when a donkey's cult is born a man, that's when an empty headed man will be wise.

Now, probably so far is quoting some kind of a known proverb. And the proverb probably implies that all men are because they are mere men, empty headed and therefore can't expect the wise. Although it might simply be a statement made up particularly foolish men, men who are not wise are never going to be wise.

And if so, he's saying that Job is not one of the wise. And one could expect to find a wisdom in Job's speeches as much as they expect to find a man born to a donkey. If you would prepare your heart and stretch out your hands toward him, if iniquity were in your hand and you put it far away and would not let wickedness dwell in your tent, then surely you could lift up your face without spot.

Yes, you could be steadfast and not fear because you would forget your misery and remember it as waters that have passed away and your life would be brighter than noonday. Though you were dark, you would be like the morning and you would be secure because there is hope. Yes, you would dig around you and take your rest in safety.

You would also lie down and no one would make you afraid. Yes, many would court your favor, but the eyes of the wicked will fail and they shall not escape and their hope loss of life. Now, nothing really new here except perhaps greater dogmatism than the others had, because the others at least appealed to something outside their own opinions.

Or at least they appealed to something. Eliphaz appealed to what he had observed in life and also what a spirit had spoken to him. Bildad had appealed to the ancients and their wisdom and tradition.

Both Eliphaz and Bildad at least respectfully did not say, I know more than you know, Job. But they said there is experience that has shown or tradition and the ancients have always said this and they are affirming from those sources. Zophar doesn't appeal to any authority except his own opinion.

And he suggests that Job is just an empty headed man because he doesn't agree with the opinion of Zophar and the others. And so Job answered and said in chapter 12, no doubt you are the people and wisdom will die with you. Now, he truly has been sarcastic in this case, but I have understanding as well as you.

I'm not inferior to you. Indeed, who does not know such things as these? Now, there is a sense in which he's kind of mocking them because he's saying everything you're saying, everyone knows you guys are supposed to be insightful. Who doesn't know these things? You think I'm so stupid, so inferior to you that I don't know these obvious things that you're saying.

This is universally believed by all of us. Why don't you tell me something I don't know? I am one mocked by his friends who called on God and he answered him the just and blameless who is left to scorn. Now, the next verse says a lamp is despised, but actually the word lamp is a strange translation.

The Hebrew word should be something like disaster or calamity or something like that. I don't know why the same Hebrew word would be translated a lamp in this case, but it's basically it's disaster or calamity. Let's take disaster.

Disaster is despised in the thought of the one who is at ease. It is made ready for those whose feet slip. The tents of robbers prosper and those who provoke God are secure in what God provides by his hand.

Now, when he says disaster is despised by the one who's at ease, he's saying that a person who is at ease who's never known disaster. When he encounters it in somebody else, he thinks lightly of it. The word despised means to think lightly of to not give much weight to it.

It's easy for someone who's never suffered to make light of somebody else's suffering, to not be able to enter into it, to not be able to empathize. That's what he's saying. You guys can talk so breezily, so philosophically, so abstractly about disaster and what causes disaster and so forth.

But you guys are not. You've never had it. You're at ease.

You've never experienced this. So you're not really speaking from the kind of experience that you would need to be able to speak wisely and sympathetically. He says, but now ask the beasts and they will teach you and the birds of the air and they will tell you or speak to the earth and it will teach you.

And the fish of the sea will explain to you who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this. In whose hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind does not the ear test words and the mouth tastes its food. Wisdom is with the age of men and length of days understanding with length of days understanding.

Some of this is I'm not going to comment on partly because it's hard to follow some of the exact connections with him, our wisdom and strength. He has counsel and understanding. If you break the thing down, it cannot be rebuilt.

If he imprisons a man, there can be no release. If he withholds the waters, they dry up. If he sends them out, they overwhelm the earth with him, our strength and prudence, the deceived and the deceiver are his.

He leads counselors away, plundered and makes fools of the judges. He loosens the

bonds of kings and binds their waist with a belt. He leads princes away, plundered and overthrows the mighty.

He deprives the trusted ones of speech and takes away the discernment of the elders. He pours contempt on princes and disarms the mighty. He uncovers deep things out of darkness and brings the shadow of death to life.

He makes nations great. He destroys them. He enlarges nations and guides them.

He takes away the understanding of the chiefs of the people of the earth and makes them wander in the pathless wilderness. They grope in the dark without light and he makes them stagger like drunken men. Again, these are just affirmations of God's sovereignty.

He controls. He does what he wants to with nations, with kings, with for that matter, the world. With waters, he can withhold them and there be no water for people.

He can bring out the waters and flood the whole earth. He might even be referring to the flood of Noah's day. It's not clear whether he is.

That's in verse 15. He is speaking somewhat generically. He could even be talking about local flooding in this case.

We don't know if he's talking about Noah's flood, but he does make reference to the fact that God has the power to withhold waters, which God does from time to time with his drought, and he can send them out and overwhelm the earth or the land. That would be flooding, whether he's thinking of the major flood of Noah's day or just the generic fact of there are local floodings. He sees God as the one who's in control of those things and that no one can really... God's in control of things that man can't have any power over.

Chapter 13. Behold, my eye has seen all this. My ear has heard it and understood it.

Notice you're not telling me something that you've seen and I haven't seen. I've seen it, too. I've been in the world as long as you have.

What you know, I also know. I'm not inferior to you. Now, he doesn't claim to be superior to them, but sometimes just to say I'm not inferior to you sounds very arrogant.

But he's just saying you're treating me as if I'm your inferior, like I don't know the ordinary stuff that everybody knows, including you. I really do know those things. You're not really that much smarter than me, but I would speak to the almighty and desire to reason with God.

But you forgers of lies, you're all worthless physicians. They've come to try to be helpful, to be counselors, sort of mental health physicians or emotional physicians. But they're worthless because they make up stuff.

They make up their philosophy. It's well, they didn't just make it up. Other people made it up, too.

They're passing along the standard philosophy, but you're not listening to the patient. You're not really doing an examination on the patient. You're just diagnosing without any research on the facts.

So you're worthless physicians. Oh, that you would be silent. That would be your wisdom.

Now, hear my reasoning and heed the pleadings of my lips. Will you speak wickedly for God and talk deceitfully for him? Now, that's kind of what they were. They were trying to defend God in the situation.

They're saying, Job, it's either you or God that's in the wrong. Because if God's punishing you, he'd be wrong to do it if you're innocent. So you can't be innocent.

Either you're wrong or he is. And of course, when that's the choice, you have to come out on the side of God. So they feel they're speaking on behalf of God.

They're defending God's righteousness in the situation. They're talking deceitfully for him. They're speaking wickedly for God.

And it's a shame that people who speak wrong things do it in the name of God so often. Like those people who get in the news all the time, who carry signs that say God hates fags. You know, I mean, they're not speaking correctly for God.

The Bible doesn't say that God hates fags. They're speaking as if for God, that they're speaking wickedly and deceitfully. And it just brings disdain on God.

It'd be better if they just say, we hate fags and leave God out of it. Why bring his reputation into the picture? You don't really know what God thinks. Just be silent.

That'd be more wise, he says. Verse eight, will you show partiality for him? Will you contend for God? Will it be well when he searches you out? Or can you mock him as one mocks a man? He will surely reprove you if you secretly show partiality. Will not his excellence make you afraid and the dread of him fall upon you? Your platitudes are proverbs of ashes.

Your defenses are defenses of clay. So in other words, the things you've been saying. The arguments you've been making and the proverbs and platitudes you've been reciting, they're empty.

They're not worth anything. They're not true. Hold your peace with me and let me speak.

Then let come on me what may. So he says, I'm going to ventilate and then, you know, I'll take my lumps. Why do I take my flesh in my teeth and put my life in my hand? The

expression taking my flesh in my teeth, I don't know what that really means.

I mean, it seems the expression similar to putting his life in his hands. Although he might be literally speaking, he might actually be biting himself as he might be itching so badly that he not only scrapes himself, but bites himself like a dog does when it's itching. You know, it's he's kind of reduced to some pretty miserable conditions.

He might even be using his teeth to try to alleviate the itching. But I don't think we have to see that that way. I think the parallel suggests that it means something like put my life in my hands.

But it's an old expression that we don't use, though he slay me yet. Will I trust him? Even so, I will defend my own ways before him. He also shall be my salvation for a hypocrite could not come before him.

So he's saying, I don't understand what he's doing. He might even slay me. I mean, it kind of looks like that's the way things are going.

And it looks like he's my enemy because he's treating me that way. But I still don't have any choice but to hope in him, to trust in him. He's the only salvation I can hope.

And I'm going to, you know, that's my story. And stick with it. You know, I can trust God no matter what happens in this situation.

Now, just that one line by itself, though he slay me, it will I trust him is often quoted by itself. And I think legitimately some people think that you need to take it more in context. It doesn't mean what we normally say.

But I think I think it means exactly what that line by itself means that that we put our trust in God, regardless of his of what his providences in our lives turn out to be like. And that is where, again, there are some people whose Christian theology is not quite adequate there because they believe that trusting God means you trust him to keep you well. You trust him to make sure disasters don't come.

You trust him to do good things for you. And that's what trusting God is. And if you have enough faith, then only good things will happen to you.

And if you make negative confessions, like, say, I'm sick or I'm poor or something, that is about to happen. Well, then you're bringing it on yourself. And that's bad.

That's not faith. But faith is not trusting that God will do a certain thing for me. Faith is just trusting in God, trusting in who God is, trusting that he's a good God, an honest God, a God who doesn't do anything wrong.

He may slay me and I won't even know why that's right, but I'll still trust him. I can't I can't change my opinion about God because God doesn't change. And he is just and

that's going to be just no matter what my circumstances seem to advertise about that.

I'm just going to keep the faith. Now, in a sense, he was kind of keeping his faith stubbornly against appearances, just like his friends were. His friends had that faith in that particular way of providence that God punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous with blessing.

And they were going to stick to that story, even if it didn't seem to be true in Job's case. Well, he was sticking to a story, too, but he was doing so out of sheer determination to honor God. You know, he can slay me.

I'm still going to maintain my righteousness. I'm still going to say I didn't deserve this, but I'm going to nonetheless keep my trust in him. He's going to somehow work this out because he shall be my salvation one way or another.

Now, I don't know if Job expected God to come through for him, as he actually did in the end of the book, or if he was thinking of salvation beyond the grave. If he was thinking of salvation beyond the grave, he was doing so without necessarily having a direct revelation about that. But just thinking that knowing what I know about God, there's got to be some time somewhere that God settles the scores and makes things right.

And if it doesn't happen before the grave, it's going to have to happen somewhere and have to happen after the grave somehow. And that may have been just a deduction based on God's character, rather than on some revelation about the resurrection. He did seem to actually believe in the resurrection and he believed that God will someday vindicate him.

He says that in verse 18. But in verse 17, he says, listen diligently to my speech and to my declaration with your ears. See now I have prepared my case.

I know that I shall be vindicated. Who is he who will contend with me? If now I hold my tongue, I perish. Only two things do not do to me.

Then I will not hide myself from you. He's talking to God again. Withdraw your hand from me and let me not dread.

Let not the dread of you make me afraid. Then call and I will answer or let me speak and you respond to me. Now, what do you think I want? I'm asking two things, God.

First of all, stop afflicting me like this so that I don't have to be terrified of you and then call me. Or if you want, you can just respond to my call. Let's just say I want to reestablish communication with you.

You seem to have gotten alienated from me somehow. And I want if you call me, I'll answer. That is, if you lift your hand and I know that you're not scared.

I'm not going to be able to answer you as long as I'm terrified of you. But if you withdraw the hand and let me not dread you, then you can call and I'll answer or if you want, I'll call you. Have your people call my people.

We'll make an appointment. In any case, we'll get back together and talk. How many are the are my iniquities and sins make me know my transgression and my sin.

So, you know, he's he's very clear that, you know, he's open to being shown by God that he has sinned. But God has not shown him that he has. And if God doesn't show me as then his friends certainly haven't done so either.

It's not enough for the friends that you must have. Someone has to have some hard evidence and more than the fact that he's suffering. That's not hard evidence that he's sinned, but he's willing to have God show him if he has.

Why do you hide your face and regard me as your enemy? Will you frighten a leaf driven to and fro? Will you pursue a dry stubble? I'm not anything more important than a leaf or dry grass. Why? Why take the energy to persecute me? I'm not even that significant for you write bitter things against me and make me inherit my the iniquities of my youth. This is apparently what he's assuming since he's checked his conscience.

He knows he didn't do anything recently, but there must be something he did when he was younger that has caught up with him. It's the only explanation he knows how to get. He's wrong about that, too, because we know from what the first two chapters says that God is not punishing him for something he did any time.

He's just bringing a test upon him. But he's trying to figure out, OK, if I'm being punished for something must be something I did when I was younger because I know I didn't do anything recently. You put my feet in the stocks.

You watch closely all my paths. You set a limit for the soles of my feet. He says man decays like a rotten thing, like a garment that is moth eaten.

Chapter 14, he continues, man who is born of woman is a few days and full of trouble. He comes forth as a flower and fades away. He flees like a shadow and does not continue.

He's just talking about things that have short life. A shadow lasts only during the day when the sun goes down, the shadow is gone. It doesn't continue.

Flowers, they last for a short time, then they wilt. Man is like that, short lived. And do you open your eyes on such a one and bring me to judgment with yourself? You can bring a clean who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one.

I'm not sure that means that you have to say that, you know, God, if you're expecting perfection, how can that come out of an imperfect source? A human being is imperfect.

And if you're expecting something to be totally clean coming out of a human being that's not totally clean, then that's asking too much. Since his days are determined, the number of his month is with you.

You have appointed his limits so that he cannot pass. Look away from him that he may rest till like a hired man, he finishes his day. For there is hope for a tree if it is cut down, that it will sprout again.

Now, he's going to contrast that with his own case. He's saying a tree if it cuts down, you know, it might sprout. He's going to go on, say, but I'm not going to sprout again.

I'm cut down for good. He says, and that its tender shoots will not cease, though its root may grow old in the earth and its stump may die in the ground. Yet at the scent of water, it will bud and bring forth branches like a plant.

But man dies in his laid away. Indeed, he breathes his last. And where is he? So a tree can almost have life after death.

And you will see it. You know, there are stumps around here. Probably some of them will eventually have some shoots coming up around them, probably more offspring of them than their own branches.

But you do see it happen. A tree that seems to have gone totally dead, under the right conditions, it can begin to have some new life springing from it. But he says, man's not that way.

When man's dead, he's dead. He breathes his last. He's gone.

Where is he? As water disappears from the sea and the river becomes parched and dries up, so man lies down and does not rise. Still, the heavens are no more. They will not awake, nor be roused from their sleep.

Well, this is not. We shouldn't take this as, you know, a doctrinal revelation, since many things, Joe Stainer, mere speculation. But he happens to be right about this.

And that is that the dead won't rise until the heavens are no more. It's on the last day. Jesus said that he'll raise this up on the last day.

That's also the day when the heavens will be dissolved and the earth will melt and so forth. And the earth will be burned up and there'll be a new heaven and new earth. So he's actually correct here.

But he's kind of accidentally correct. He's saying a whole bunch of things, some of them correct and some less so. But this happens to hit the target.

Oh, that you would hide me in the grave, that you would conceal me until your wrath is

passed, that you would appoint me a set time and remember me. If a man dies, shall he live again? Now, this question is rhetorical, as if the answer that is expected is no. If a man dies, he won't live again.

Not like not like a tree. A tree gets cut down, but it could come back to life. But man, no, he's already said that doesn't happen.

In verse 10, he breathes his last. He's gone. He disappears like the water from the sea.

So he says, all the days of my hard service, I will wait till my change comes. Now, he may be again speculating that there will be some possibility of man living again. He seems to deny that in the earlier part.

But he wavers between various thoughts. He is, after all, just thinking out loud. He's just just ventilating thoughts.

As they come to him, he seems to at first say, trees that die may come back to life, but people don't. But then the more he talks about things, I think, well, maybe, you know, maybe can man come back again? Maybe that does make sense. Maybe that does explain some things.

Maybe that would make God just even if man's present circumstances on Earth are not exactly just because God, the judge, can correct things in another life. He seems to be toying with that. He says, you shall call and I will answer you and you shall desire the work of your hands, meaning me.

He refers to himself as the work of God's hands earlier on. For now, you number my steps, but do not watch over my sin. My transgression is sealed up in a bag and you cover my iniquity.

I'm not sure what this means. I mean, I'm not really sure what he's thinking there. When he says, I'm going to wait until my change comes and you'll call and I'll answer you.

It is possible he means the change that comes in the resurrection. But he hasn't really affirmed that he believes in the resurrection at this point. Later, he makes a stronger statement that is usually interpreted to mean that he does believe in resurrection or at least comes to in the course of this amusing.

But my change comes just could mean when things change for me, you know, when I get well, when I return to prosperity again, when things get better, I'll just have to wait for that because I can't make it happen at that time. You and I'll be back together. God will talk again.

You'll call and I'll answer you. Verse 18, but as a mountain falls and crumbles away and as a rock is moved from its place, as water wears away stones and as torrents wash

away the soil of the earth, so you destroy the hope of man, you prevail forever against him and he passes on. You change his countenance and send him away.

His sons come to honor. He doesn't know it. They are brought low and he does not perceive it, but his flesh will be in pain over it and his soul will mourn over it.

And then Eliphaz speaks again. This is his second time, the beginning of the second cycle. Eliphaz, the Temanite, answered and said, should a wise man answer with empty knowledge and fill himself with the east wind? Should he reason with unprofitable talk or by speeches with which he cannot do no good? Yes, you can.

Yes, you cast off fear. You restrain prayer before God. Basically, you're saying things that are unwise to say about God and what Job is doing is he is saying things about God that, by the way, when God actually shows up and Job sees God, he doesn't talk that way to God and no one would.

No one who sees God face to face would say brash things as he is saying, but he's saying the kinds of things that men sometimes say when they don't see God and when they're wanting to see God. And they're imagining that God could be reasoned with about these things. And Eliphaz is correct in one sense, that he's casting off fear.

And he says in verse five, your iniquity teaches your mouth and you choose the tongue of the crafty. Your own mouth condemns you, not I. Yes, your own lips testify against you. He says, are you the first man who was ever born? Or were you made before the hills? Have you heard the counsel of God? Do you limit wisdom to yourself? What do you know that we do not know? What do you understand that is not in us? Both the gray haired and the aged are among us much older than your father.

So some of these guys, I guess, were older than Job's father. Job, it may be thought, was a fairly young man then at this time, especially if he lived 140 years after this. Maybe he was in his 30s or 40s and they could if these men were like 70 or 80, then they could be older than his father conceivably.

But notice that these wise men, they don't like someone suggesting that they know less than someone else, because, you know, when they when they acted like Job didn't know as much as them, he objected. I know as much as you do. I'm not inferior to you.

What do you think? I don't know these things. And now they come back. They what do you think, you know, what do we do? There's a little bit of ego getting involved in this discussion.

And, you know, it's not entirely an objective exchange of consideration of the arguments, but they're getting their egos involved here. You think you understand more than we do? Verse 11, are the consolations of God too small for you and the word spoken gently with you? Why does your heart carry you away? And what do your eyes wink at that you turn

your spirit against God and let such words go out of your mouth? Now, there's a sense which this criticism is legitimate, although God seems to be more willing to wink at Job's bitter expression than the friends are. It certainly is true that Job's spirit appears to be turning against God.

Of course, he's not really turning against God. He's just ventilating his. His frustration and anger and confusion about what God's doing, he's not really saying that God is unjust, he's just saying, God, show me why it is just tell me why I deserve this.

What is man that he could be pure? And he was born of a woman that he could be righteous. If God puts no trust in his saints and the heavens are not pure in his sight, how much less man who is abominable and filthy, who drinks iniquity like water. You know, I think Eliphaz probably was maybe the first teacher of total depravity.

The idea that, you know, man by nature is just as wicked as can be. He's a bombable and filthy thing. He drinks iniquity like water.

That isn't the true description of Job. And the Bible does not say that's a true description of every man. That's what Eliphaz assumes is true of every man.

And he considers that Job is, of course, arrogant for suggesting that he doesn't fall into that category. Eliphaz says, I will tell you, hear me what I have seen. I will declare what wise men have told, not hiding anything received from their fathers to whom alone the land was given and no alien passed among them.

Apparently, what he's appealing here to is the antiquity of the wisdom he's giving it. You know, our fathers knew this. I don't mean just our recent fathers, the ones who live way back then when they lived alone on this land.

And there was no other people had come through like the first ones to settle this area. The earliest men after the flood, no doubt is what he's referring to. The wicked man writhes with pain all his days and the number of years is hidden from the oppressor.

Now, this is not true, but this is, you know, he's stating the same thesis they say before, but now he's kind of getting a little overboard on it. It is not really true that a wicked man writhes in pain all his days. It'd be nice if only wicked men writhed in pain all their days.

Job is writhing in pain and he's not a wicked man. But the point is being made here is that he's basically saying what you are going through, Job, is what God does to wicked people, not good people. And through this whole chapter, actually, he's going to refer to Job as a hypocrite and even imply that Job at some point was involved in bribery.

Apparently taking bribes because Job seems to have been a man of power and influence and maybe took bribes. It's been implied in verse 34. But so this section, the rest of this

speech, he's basically going to describe what happens to wicked men.

And by implication, Job, since these things are happening to you, I guess that tells us what kind of a man you are. The wicked man writhes in pain all his days and the number of years is hidden from the oppressor. Dreadful sounds are in his ears.

In prosperity, the destroyer comes upon him, as happened to Job. He does not believe that he will return from darkness and he watches for the sword. He wanders about for bread, saying, where is it? He knows that a day of darkness is ready at his hand.

Trouble and anguish make him afraid. They overpower him like a king ready for battle. For he stretches out his hand against God and acts defiantly against the almighty, running stubbornly against him with his strong embossed shield.

So he describes the wicked man as one who's decided to declare war on God, stretching out his sword against God and running against God, attacking God like a warrior. And, of course, implying that Job must have done this because otherwise God wouldn't have come to his own his own defense against Job as he has and hurt Job so bad. Though he has covered his face with his fatness and made his waist heavy with fat, which, by the way, was considered to be a positive thing in that culture.

Nowadays, this is what people try to get rid of. But in those days, a man who was fat and plump was considered to be prosperous and blessed. It was a proof that a man had the blessing of God on him, that he was prosperous.

And the proof that he was prosperous was that he ate as much as he wanted to. And the proof that he ate as much as he wanted to was seen in how fat he was. But though the man has these evidences of prosperity at one time, he now comes to ruin.

He dwells in desolate cities, in houses which no one inhabits, which are destined to become ruins. He will not be rich, nor will his wealth continue, nor will his possessions overspread the earth. He will not depart from darkness.

The flame will dry out his branches, and by the breath of his mouth, he will go away. That is, by the breath of God's mouth, the man will be blown away off the earth. Let him not trust in futile things, deceiving himself, for futility will be his reward.

It will be accomplished before his time, and his branch will not be green. He will shake off his unripe grape like a vine, and cast off his blossom like an olive tree. For the company of the hypocrites will be barren, and fire will consume the tents of bribery.

They conceive trouble and bring forth futility. Their womb prepares deceit. Now, of course, this is just a speech about what happens to wicked people, and people who take bribes, and people who are hypocrites.

But, of course, it has no place in this conversation unless he's saying, all these things obviously are you, Job. No sense giving sort of a detached, you know, moral lesson if he's not thinking it applies in this situation. Then Job answered in chapter 16 and said, I have heard many such things.

Miserable comforters are you all. Shall words of wind have an end? Or what provokes you that you answer? What did I ever do to you that you bring these kinds of speeches to me? Who provokes you? I also could speak as you do if your soul were in my soul's place. I could heap up words against you, and shake my head at you.

You know, if the tables were turned and you were the one in affliction, and I came to visit you, I suppose I could do the same thing to you that you're doing to me. But he said I wouldn't. He said I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the comfort of my lips would relieve your grief.

This is what I would want you to do to me. You're doing the opposite. I would be more compassionate if you were in this situation.

I came to comfort you. Though I speak, my grief is not relieved. And though I remain silent, how am I eased? In other words, you're complaining that I'm ventilating.

But, you know, I have no relief whether I ventilate or not. Whether I speak or whether I hold in my speech, there's no ease. Why don't you just let me do what comes naturally and not criticize? I'm in agony no matter what I do.

But now he has worn me out. You have made desolate all my company. You have shriveled me up, speaking to God.

And it is a witness against me. My leanness rises up against me and bears witness to my face. He, meaning God, tears me in his wrath and hates me.

He gnashes at me with his teeth. My adversary sharpens his gaze on me. They gape at me with their mouth.

They strike me reproachfully on the cheek. They gather together against me. Now, he says my adversary in verse 9, which would be the word Satan in Hebrew, but in this case not referring to Satan, but referring to his human adversaries.

As one of the things that has happened to him that is part of his suffering, his adversaries, they kind of gloat over what's happened to him. They gaze at him. They gape at him with their mouth.

They strike him reproachfully. They take advantage of him while he's down. They kick him while he's down is basically what they do.

God has delivered me to the ungodly and turned me over to the hands of the wicked.

Now, I don't know if he's referring to his counselors as the wicked and the ungodly, and he feels like he's been turned over to their verbal abuse by God, or if there's been more gone on that has not been recorded. We don't know how long it was between Job's initial sufferings and the arrival of his guests.

If weeks had passed, which is not impossible to imagine, or months, it's possible that Job has already suffered reactions from other people before his counselors arrived. He may have been kicked out of the city because everyone says, oh, you're under the curse of God, we don't want you around here. Because of his sores, they may have taken him to be a leper and made him live isolated.

His enemies may have come and taken advantage of his weak position. I'm not sure how, but perhaps we don't know what kind of adversaries he had. We don't know exactly what position he held before all these things came to him.

But if he was like a magistrate or a judge or a ruler or a chief or something like that, there might have been people who were rivals for his position, but who could never muscle in on it when he was in good health and prospered. But now they take advantage of his weakness, and those who had been his former adversaries are now in the position to do what they want without his being able to defend himself because God has given him over to them. He's turned me over to the hands of the wicked.

I was at ease, but he has shattered me. He also has taken me by the neck and shaken me to pieces. He has set me up for his target.

These are all, of course, hyperbole, but this is how he feels. God is shaking him like a rag doll or that he's set him up for target practice to shoot at him. His archers surrounding, he pierces my heart and does not pity.

He pours out my gall on the ground. He breaks me with wound upon wound. He runs at me like a warrior.

Now, Zophar had accused Job of making war against God and running in chapter 15, verse 26, running stubbornly against God with his strong embossed shield. In other words, Zophar says you must have launched the first attack against God because God wouldn't respond with the kinds of things that have happened to you unless you had done something to provoke him. And Job says, no, it's the other way around.

I was minding my own business. I was at ease. And then God came and made war with me.

He ran at me like a warrior. I was just being normal. I was just minding my own business.

And he came and shattered me, shook me, shot at me, attacked me. Verse 15, I have sewn sackcloth over my skin and laid my head in the dust. My face is flushed from

weeping and on my eyelids is the shadow of death.

Although no violence is in my hands and my prayer is pure. So he's sticking with that story. I haven't done anything that deserved this.

I have not done any violence. My prayers should be heard because I don't have a sinful motive or sinful. I have clean hands and a pure heart.

You know, why doesn't God hear my prayers? Oh, Earth, do not cover my blood and let my cry have no resting place. Surely, even now, my witness is in heaven and my evidence is on high. You know, oh, Earth, do not cover my blood could be an allusion back to Cain killing Abel because we don't know that it is.

It could be not. But we know that in the story of Cain and Abel, when Cain killed Abel, God said to Cain, your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now, what's that mean? It's a figure of speech.

Of course, blood doesn't really talk. But it's saying that the killing of Abel was an injustice. And it was an injustice that cries out to be redressed.

It cries out to be righted by God. God alone is the one who can settle all the injustices. And therefore, the innocent blood of Abel, the very fact that he had been slain and innocent blood was shed, cried out to God, demanding that God come and do something about it to set things right.

And so Job says, don't cover my blood, oh, Earth. Because when I die, I want my blood to be shouting out for justice, too. And I don't want that to be concealed or ignored or covered over.

My friends scorn me. My eyes pour out tears to God. Oh, that one might plead for a man with God as a man pleads for his neighbor.

For when a few years are finished, I shall go the way of no return. Interesting that he feels like he may last a few more years. I would have thought that he'd think death was nearer than that.

But he doesn't have that hope. He asked God to end his life sooner, but he realized that his suffering, his sickness was painful and agonizing, but not necessarily something that would quickly kill him off, which he wished it would. But he anticipates a few more years of suffering like this before he finally goes to his relief.

And Job then continues, and we'll just take this next chapter because that finishes out his speech and then we'll be done with this. He says, my spirit is broken. My days are extinguished.

The grave is ready for me. And are not mockers with me? Meaning apparently his he's

calling his counselors mockers. And does not my eye dwell on their provocation? Now put down a pledge for me with yourself.

He's speaking to God. Who is he who will shake hands with me? For you have hidden their heart from understanding. Therefore, you will not exalt them who speaks flattery to his friends.

Even the eyes of his children will fail. I think this is I think this is like a proverb. He who speaks flattery to his friends, even the eyes of his children will fail.

It sounds very much like something out of the book of Proverbs. It's kind of a generic saying. I'm not sure exactly how it's applying here.

I'm not sure if it's saying that he did not expect them to come and flatter him. And a man shouldn't flatter another man. There's there's consequences for flatterers.

But though I wasn't expecting flattery, I also wasn't expecting this, this mockery from my friends. But he has made me a byword of the people. And I have become one of whose face in whose face men spit.

My eye also has grown dim because of sorrow and all my members are like shadows. Upright men are astonished at this. And the innocent stirs himself up against the hypocrite.

Yet the righteous will hold to his way. And he who has clean hands will be stronger and stronger. This is not everything in this is entirely clear.

But please come back again, all of you, for I shall not find one wise man among you. My days are past. My purposes are broken off.

Even the thoughts of my heart. They change the night into day. The light is near.

They say in the face of darkness, if I wait for the grave as my house, if I make my bed in the darkness, if I say to corruption, you are my father and to the worm, you are my mother and my sister. Where then is my hope? As for my hope, who can see it? Will they go down to the gates of shale? Shall we have rest together in the dust? Now, frankly, some of the illusions he makes here and some of the imagery he uses is a bit obscure and not very easy to grasp. But he's obviously still just kind of letting fly his grief and his complaints and his confusion.

And we're next to hear Bill Bill that come back with his second speech. One wonders why we need to be have to endure that. But I guess that's probably so that we'll know how much Job had to endure.

Besides the sufferings mentioned initially, he had, you know, it's annoying, no doubt to us to have to put up with these speeches. But imagine if you were the one that they

were directed against and and what you needed was a little bit of encouragement and you're not getting it. So, again, I think one of the lessons we have to learn from the book of Job is that we need to be better counselors than that, not worthless physicians.

They're miserable counselors, he said. And when people are in pain and when people are in need, we need to listen to them and try to figure out really what's going on and not just try to fit them into some kind of a pigeonhole of presupposed ideas about, you know, this causes that and so forth. Life is more nuanced, life is more complex than we like it to be.

We like to simplify things so we can grasp them, get a handle on them, feel like we can control them somewhat. But we can't. I mean, God is a complex being.

I think that's one thing that this comes out. God is not so simplistic and so easy to predict and easy to analyze as these people think. He has complex purposes.

And, you know, the book of Job doesn't really explain why he has these particular purposes. But we just see that the book of Job does tell us that we can't just think we've got God all figured out. And we need to find God in reality, not find him in platitudes about him.

And Job is searching for him. His friends think they already know where God is. They think they already know all about him because they have these statements about God.

Job is talking to God, begging God to reveal himself and to clear things up. And so Job is actually still more connected to God than they are, because he's still talking to God. And he realizes that God has got to be found in these unusual providences that don't have any explanation by current theories.

So here we have a case of a new reality challenging an old theory about God. And, you know, there are old theories about God that Christians hold to. There are standard theological platitudes that we teach.

And we don't like them to be challenged because once we've got them down, we feel like we've got it all mastered. That's how systems of theology are. And yet we should be willing to revisit our theological systems if we find that reality and even Scripture many times don't fit it very nicely.

And we might have to just go back to square one, back to the drawing table, and try to figure out from scratch, from new insight that God gives through really how experience does shed new light on the Scripture itself. We can't allow experience to cancel out Scripture. Scripture's authority is greater than the authority of experience.

But experience often does clarify things. An example, real quickly, is this, that one of the theological propositions I was taught, and this is entirely unrelated to Joe, but it's just an

example of what I'm talking about. I was taught in my youth, for example, that Christians can't have demons.

Now, I'm not going to tell you that they can or cannot. I don't know the answer to that. But I was taught as a proposition.

It was almost as an orthodoxy. Christians can't have demons. And then I began to encounter people who seemed very much to be Christians and seemed very much like they had demons.

And I had to think, okay, do I force these into the paradigm of my doctrine? Or do I go and revisit my doctrine to see if it's really true? Because if I insist that Christians can't have demons and I encounter these cases, I either have to say this person is not a Christian, when in fact they might be. It's not very charitable for me to tell them they're not a Christian if they are. Or maybe they have a demon and I'm not willing to recognize it, and therefore I can't help them.

So actually in that case, I did go back and relook at the arguments I'd had for my theological position and found that they were very lacking. And although I would not say today that for sure a Christian can have a demon, I can say that the Bible does not clearly say they cannot. And therefore, my theology, which was very orthodox for the group I was in, they were emphatic about this point, new realities, new experiences actually make us revisit those theologies and say, are we seeing this right? Are we reading something between the lines that isn't there? And there's been many things in my own life, frankly, many theological points I was raised with, that just in the experience of walking with God and being in the ministry and talking to people whose experiences were different than mine, I had to go back and say, well, does the Bible really say what I always thought it said about this? And sometimes it doesn't.

Sometimes it says something less inflexible about certain things. So we become very insecure when our orthodoxy is challenged. But if we do, then you see we're finding our security not in the truth, but in orthodoxy.

That is, we're finding our security in our present beliefs rather than in truth, because if we are concerned about truth, then we will let all the data come in to correct and bring our beliefs closer to what is true. But sometimes we don't want to change. We don't want more data.

We don't want to challenge what we believe because we've already got it all worked out. And it seems to us like if we have to challenge that, then we have to go back and work it all out from scratch again. That sounds like a lot of work.

It might even be scary. So that's what Job's Council, I think, were doing. They encountered a new experience, challenged their old orthodoxy, and they weren't really

willing to revisit the question.

They just wanted to try to shoehorn the circumstances into this framework of theology they already had. And they made a mistake in doing that. So it's a mistake that can be made.

All right, we'll stop there.