

The Book of Job

Lesson 6: Zophar Speaks and Job Replies -- Job 11:1–14:22

If Bildad was cold, Zophar is hot. He is the third friend, and he comes out swinging with the harshest words yet. “Should a multitude of words go unanswered, and a man full of talk be judged right?” (11:2). He calls Job a babbler whose mockery deserves to be shamed (11:3). Then, with breathtaking presumption, he wishes that God would speak, certain that if he did, God would tell Job he is getting off easy: “Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves” (11:6). Imagine saying that to a man who has lost everything. Zophar is so sure of his theology that he has lost all sight of the broken man in front of him. We have met people like this. We have, in our worst moments, been people like this.

Zophar’s certainty has a logic, and it is the same retribution machine the other two have been running: God punishes sin, you are punished, therefore you are a great sinner who should repent and be restored (11:13–20). There is even some true comfort buried in his speech about what happens when one puts away iniquity. But it is offered as a diagnosis Zophar has no right to make. He plays God, reading the secret verdict of heaven off the surface of Job’s suffering, and he gets it exactly backward. Be slow, this lesson urges, to judge the suffering. You rarely know the whole story, and the One who does has not appointed you to render the verdict.

Job answers with weary sarcasm and rising dignity. “No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you!” (12:2). He knows what they know; God’s power and justice are not news to him. But he will not pretend, to flatter them or even to flatter God, that their neat formula fits his life. “I desire to argue my case with God. As for you, you whitewash with lies” (13:3–4). And then a line that has steadied sufferers ever since: “Though he slay me, I will hope in him” (13:15). Even cornered, even baffled, Job will not let go of God. His faith is bruised, but it is bedrock.

Out of that battered faith rises one of the great longings of the Old Testament. Looking at how short and sorrowful human life is, Job asks the question every grave forces upon us: “If a man dies, shall he live again?” (14:14). He does not have the full answer; he is reaching toward a hope he can barely see. But the question itself is a seed, and the gospel is the harvest. “I am the resurrection and the life,” Jesus would one day say. “Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live” (John 11:25). Job asked into the darkness. We get to read the answer in the light of an empty tomb. Walk through these chapters reverently, and let Job’s question become your living hope.

Group Discussion: Zophar was certain he knew exactly why Job was suffering, and he was completely wrong. As a class, why are we so quick to assume we know the reasons behind other people’s hardships, and what would it look like to be genuinely slow to judge those who suffer?

Personal Reflection: Job said, Though he slay me, I will hope in him (13:15). What is the hardest thing God has allowed in your life, and can you honestly say you still hope in him through it? What would help you get there?

Read Job 11:1–14:22

Study Questions

1. Zophar claims to know that God is exacting less of Job than his guilt deserves (11:6), and he urges Job to repent of sin (11:13–15). What is Zophar's underlying assumption, and why does Scripture, and Job's true situation, expose it as false?
2. Zophar spoke with harsh, unbending certainty about another man's pain (11:2–6). When have you been too quick to judge why someone was suffering, and how can you cultivate a slower, gentler heart toward the hurting?
3. Job declares that with God are wisdom and might, counsel and understanding, that he overturns the mighty and the nations alike (12:13–25). What does this sweeping picture teach us about God's sovereignty over all of human life and history?
4. Job accuses his friends of being worthless physicians who whitewash with lies (13:4). How can well-meant words actually wound, and how can you tell the difference between true comfort and a comfortable-sounding lie?
5. In the depths of his trial Job says, Though he slay me, I will hope in him (13:15). What does this reveal about the nature of real faith when God neither explains himself nor relieves the pain?

6. Job is willing to argue his case before God even though it may cost him (13:15–18). Where in your life do you need the kind of bold, honest faith that brings everything to God without pretending?
7. Job describes man as few of days and full of trouble, who comes up like a flower and withers, who flees like a shadow (14:1–2). How should the plain brevity and frailty of human life shape the way we think and live?
8. Job observes that a tree cut down may sprout again, but he wonders whether a man has any such hope (14:7–12). When you face your own mortality or the death of someone you love, where does your hope actually rest?
9. Job lifts the question that every grave forces upon us, If a man dies, shall he live again? (14:14), and wrestles with God's complete sovereignty over the number of our days (14:5). How does this longing find its full and certain answer in Christ and the resurrection, and what does it mean that the God who numbers our days is the same God who conquered death?
10. Looking back across these chapters, where Zophar judged harshly, Job clung to God through the dark, and the cry If a man dies, shall he live again? rose from the ashes, name one specific way Jesus is forming you through Job's longing into a person who both refuses to judge the suffering and rests in the hope of the resurrection.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: John 11:25–26, Jesus declares Himself the resurrection and the life, the direct answer to Job's question; 1 Corinthians 15:20–22, Christ has been raised as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep; Psalm 90:10–12, the brevity of our days and the prayer to number them wisely; Job 19:25–27, Job's faith presses on to a Redeemer he will see with his own eyes; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14, we do not grieve as those without hope because Jesus died and rose again

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