

JOB

Chapter 11

Zophar Speaks: You Deserve Worse

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 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 Like Eliphaz (see 4:7–11) and Bildad (see 8:3–6), Zophar claims that Job's sins have caused his troubles.

11:1 *Zophar*. Third of Job's friends to speak. Being last suggests that Zophar was the youngest or perhaps simply the least respected; in contrast to Eliphaz and Bildad, who each speak three times, Zophar speaks twice. (TLSB)

11:2–3 Zophar's failure to put himself in Job's place before condemning him shows a lack of compassion. Nor is Zophar entirely correct in his condemnation: Job has sincerely challenged what he perceives to be God's unjust actions (see 9:14–24), but he has not mocked God (as Zophar accuses him of having done). (CSB)

11:2 *multitude of words*. Zophar accuses Job of talking too much; Zophar will go on to add the accusations that Job is self-righteous (vv 4–6), opinionated (vv 7–12), and headstrong (vv 13–20). In all of this, he exaggerates. (TLSB)

a man full of talk. Lit, “a man of lips”; in general, Hbr is concrete and uses strong images rather than abstractions. (TLSB)

11:3 *Should your babble silence men*. Zophar continues the rhetorical questions of the previous verse. To him, the answers are obvious: Job needs to be answered and refuted. (TLSB)

11:4 *I am clean.* In 10:7, 15 Job had disclaimed being guilty, and in 9:21 he said he was “blameless,” the word God used to describe him in 1:8; 2:3. Zophar, however, implies that Job was claiming absolute purity (sinless perfection), but Job nowhere uses such terms of himself. (CSB)

My doctrine is pure.” Not a fair summary. While Job has protested his innocence, he has claimed neither that his doctrine or teaching was pure nor that he was “clean in God’s eyes.” Job admitted he was a sinner (7:21) and he simply wanted to get a hearing with God (9:14), although he was arguing his case too strongly. (TLSB)

11:5 Zophar thought God should speak against Job, but eventually God spoke against Zophar himself (see 42:7). (CSB)

But oh, that God would speak. Zophar wishes that God would speak to Job, confident that He would agree with Zophar’s position. (TLSB)

open His lips. Zophar contrasts God’s silence with Job’s verbosity (v 2). (TLSB)

11:6 *secrets of wisdom.* OT wisdom literature (especially Proverbs) makes abundant use of the term. – The best explanation appears to be that God knows both sides of every matter, the manifest as well as the hidden, and that it is the hidden side that he would reveal if he were to speak to Job’s challenge. (PBC)

According to Zophar, Job needs to be enlightened. (TLSB)

mashal (“proverb,” “riddle,” “parable”), which often had a hidden as well as an obvious meaning. Zophar thinks Job is shallow and lacks an understanding of the true nature of God (see vv. 7–9).

manifold in understanding. Lit, “twofold”; wisdom is not simply one-sided or simple, but it has a hidden side as well as the obvious. Zophar wants God to enlarge Job’s understanding so that he will see the error of his ways. (TLSB)

God exacts less of you than your guilt deserves. Lit, “God is forgetting [much of] your guilt.” (TLSB)

Zophar’s words may at first sound charitable, but they strongly imply that Job had sinned so greatly that no punishment would be great enough to cover his sin. (PBC)

11:7 Unwittingly, Zophar anticipates the Lord’s discourses in 38:1–42:6.

find out the deep things. Zophar says that Job is unable to understand God, esp since he refuses to accept God as Zophar presents Him. (TLSB)

11:8–9 In the same way that Zophar speaks of the height, depth, length and width of God’s knowledge, Paul speaks of Christ’s love (see Eph 3:18). (CSB)

11:8 *higher than heaven.* God Himself expresses a parallel thought in Is 55:9. (TLSB)

what can you do? Can you climb into the heavens and explore God’s knowledge? (CSB)

Sheol. Here used to mean the place or abode of the dead. It swallows up everyone—both the wicked and the righteous—for all must die. (TLSB)

11:9 *longer ... broader*. Darkness of death into which all must pass is vast and incomprehensible. (TLSB)

11:10 *imprisons and summons the court*. God is in control and acts as both arresting officer and sentencing judge who calls the court to order. God is the all-powerful Lord of nature and also the dispenser of justice. (TLSB)

who can turn Him back? Again Zophar uses rhetorical questions to make his point. (TLSB)

11:11–12 Zophar indirectly accused Job of being deceitful, evil, and witless. Those were cruel words, and they must have deeply hurt Job. He implies that Job is lacking brains and judgment. (PBC)

11:11 *worthless men*. Carries idea of “men of emptiness”; we might say “hollow men.” Zophar’s language is insulting, implying that Job is among these people. (TLSB)

11:12 *when a wild donkey’s colt is born a man!* Proverb. Job cannot accept Zophar’s insights anymore than a wild ass can give birth to a person. Zophar will argue that if Job repents, there is still a chance for him. (TLSB)

11:13–20 Zophar assumes that Job’s problems are rooted in his sin; all Job has to do is to repent, and then his life will become blessed and happy. But God nowhere guarantees a life “brighter than noonday” (v. 17) simply because we are his children. He has higher purposes for us than our physical prosperity, or people courting our favor (v. 19). Zophar’s philosophy is in conflict with Ps 73. (CSB)

As wise King Solomon noted, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ec 1:9). Zophar would fit well with many today who preach “victorious” living. He asserts that we are able to live a good life and that when we do, God will bless us abundantly. He allows little place for suffering in the life of the godly, because, by his definition, godly living goes hand in hand with a life of comfort and blessings while suffering belongs with the wicked. (TLSB)

11:13 *stretch out your hands toward him*. For help (see Pr 1:24; La 1:17). (CSB)

If your heart is right with God, outward worship—as symbolized by hands outstretched in prayer—will follow. Individuals must prepare their own hearts and behavior.. (TLSB)

His manner of speaking reminds us of the “decision theology” that is prominent in the preaching of certain religious evangelists today. (PBC)

11:14 *put it far away*. Zophar’s human-centered religion is esp clear here, where he asserts that individuals can put away their own iniquity. (TLSB)

11:15 *lift up your face without blemish*. Zophar echoes Job’s thought in 10:15. (CSB)

When you put sin out of your life, Zophar contends, you will be spotless. In contrast, biblical teaching says that it is impossible to save ourselves because by nature we “were dead in the trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). (TLSB)

11:16–17 *forget your misery ... brighter than the noonday.* Zophar continues with the argument that Job can change his condition of suffering once he changes his behavior. (TLSB)

11:18 *feel secure.* Zophar’s idea of security rests in a person’s control over his or her own spiritual destiny. (TLSB)

This is “prosperity theology” and false and misleading. (PBC)

11:19 *many will court your favor.* Rather than fearing what might happen from others, Zophar’s good man will be honored by others. History has shown the falseness of this notion, since the righteous are often persecuted and hated by the world. (TLSB)

11:20 Bildad ended his speech in a similar way (see 8:22). (CSB)

their hope. Zophar closes his argument by contrasting the end of the wicked with what he has just described as the lot of the godly. The only hope that the wicked have is to escape this miserable life in death. But wicked people often prosper in this life, while the God-fearing suffer (Ps 73:5). Rather than wanting to die, the psalmist says that “they have no pangs until death” (73:4). (TLSB)

This is no true. Often they are successful in this life. He further implied that Job was one of the wicked unless he turned to God. He therefore presumed to judge Job to be a wicked person. In so doing, Zophar sided with Satan against God, who commended Job. (PBC)

Ch 11 Of the three friends, Zophar is the most vehement in his denunciation of Job. He does not appeal to visions (Eliphaz) or tradition (Bildad). He simply knows Job is a terrible sinner, for how else can Job’s extreme sufferings be explained? This is the natural religion of humans in its clearest form: there is no Gospel, only Law. As Zophar focuses on condemning the sinner, he has no room for sympathy or even tact. • Heavenly Father, keep us from all self-righteousness, which sees our blessings as coming from our flawed and feeble efforts rather than from Your almighty and gracious hand. Amen. (TLSB)