

JOB

Chapter 12

Job Replies: The LORD Has Done This

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 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 trackless waste. 25 They grope in the dark without light, and he makes them stagger like a drunken man.

12:1–14:22 As before, Job’s reply is divided into two parts: He speaks to his three friends (12:2–13:19), then to God (13:20–14:22).

12:1 *Then Job answered.* Having responded to Eliphaz and Bildad, Job begins his third monologue in answer to his would-be comforters. It is the longest, covering three chapters. Job’s concept of God is much loftier and more awesome than that of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Although Job cannot reason out God’s dealings, he does comprehend that God’s ways are far above the puny insights and efforts of mortal man. In this way, Job shows how limited and small their outlooks are. (TLSB)

12:2 For the first time, Job reacts with sarcasm to the harshness of his counselors (see v. 20). (CSB)

Seems to be a sarcastic reference to Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar as the great or outstanding people in the land. Expression has to do with the landed gentry, the upper class or elite. (TLSB)

12:3 *not inferior*. Job counters that he knows as much as his friends. Indeed, Job will go on to show that he is superior (42:8). (TLSB)

Who does not know ... ? See v. 9. The advice of Job's friends is trivial and commonplace. (CSB)

Job says they have nothing to offer but clichés, which are of no help. Moreover, Job will show that true common sense is on his side. (TLSB)

12:4 *laughingstock*. Once the most powerful and influential man in the land, Job is now, in his fallen condition, so lowly that anyone can mock him and laugh at him—and they do. (Cf 19:18.). (TLSB)

12:5 The prosperous despise those who, like Job, have trouble. (CSB)

contempt for misfortune. When life is going smoothly, it is easy for people to become arrogant and condescending toward those who are down and out. But that life of ease could be turned upside down overnight. (TLSB)

At this time it is obvious that Job's irritation at his friends' unkind accusations made him react by overstating his case. (PBC)

12:6 Such statements (see 9:21–24) irked the counselors and made them brand Job as a man whose feet were slipping (see v. 5). (CSB)

robbers are at peace. Job asserts that God does not punish the wicked (cf Ps 73). Ultimately, of course, those who reject God are punished (Ps 73:27). (TLSB)

who bring their god in their hand. Idol worshipers, who must carry their gods about by hand. Cf Jer 10:5. Most idols were doll-sized and could easily be carried. Cf Gn 31:19, 34. (TLSB)

12:7–12 Job appeals to all creation to prove that God does what he pleases—that he does not use a person's piety as the sole basis for granting freedom from affliction. (CSB)

Based on God's creation—including our own experiences we can draw conclusions about reality. Job concludes that obviously many things in life—in particular, human suffering—are beyond human control. Contrary to what his friends have been arguing, our welfare is not a simple cause-effect relationship with our righteousness or sinfulness. Rather, God is in control. What He does frequently has no apparent relationship to our efforts to do what is right. This is the heart of Job's dilemma. (TLSB)

12:7–8 *beasts ... birds ... bushes ... fish*. In referring to these creatures and plant life, Job alludes to all of nature. The words are reminiscent of Gn 1, which recounts God's creation of everything in six days. (TLSB)

12:7 *they will teach you*. That the righteous suffer and the evil are secure. (CSB)

Job not doubt stretched the truth somewhat. (PBC)

12:9 *LORD*. The only place in Job's and his friends' speeches (chs. 3–37) where the divine name "LORD" (Hebrew *Yahweh*) is used (see Introduction: Author). (CSB)

Rich poetic language of Jb is evident in this verse, as Job enlists various figures of speech. One is anthropomorphism, in which human characteristics are applied to God (as a spirit [Jn 4:24], God does not have physical hands). Another figure of speech is synecdoche, in which a part of something represents the whole. "The hand" represents God's power. (TLSB)

12:10 *In His hand*. God controls everything. (TLSB)

12:11 Echoed by Elihu in 34:3. Cf. 6:6, where Job says that Eliphaz's words are like "tasteless food." (CSB)

ear ... palate. Job turns from all of nature to the individual person. He argues that our senses, through which we experience life, enable us to verify what is true or false. Later, Elihu will echo these words (34:3). (TLSB)

12:12 Job sarcastically chides his counselors for being elders and yet lacking in true wisdom. (CSB)

Wisdom ... understanding. With the accumulation of experience, we gain wisdom and understanding. (CSB)

12:13–25 The theme of this section is stated in v. 13: God is sovereign in the created world, and especially in history. The rest of the poem dwells on the negative aspects of God's power and wisdom—e.g., the destructive forces of nature (vv. 14–15), how judges become fools (v. 17), how priests become humiliated (v. 19), how trusted advisers are silenced and elders deprived of good sense (v. 20). Contrast the claim of Eliphaz that God always uses his power in ways that make sense (5:10–16). (CSB)

12:13 *With God are wisdom and might ... counsel and understanding*. Job begins a doxology or poem of praise for God's wisdom and power (vv 13–25). In contrast to his friends, Job maintains an outlook that is God centered, not human centered. He appeals to what is called the "natural knowledge of God" to make his point that God is in control of His creation. Job's reference to God's attributes brings to mind Paul's famous doxology (Rm 11:33–36). Though Job acknowledges that God's ways are beyond us, he is not yet ready to praise God. Instead, he questions why God acts as He does. Rather than accept the Almighty's mysterious ways, Job wants to argue. (TLSB)

12:14–15 Nothing can resist God, not an individual person or the forces of nature. Job's doxology declares that God is the originator of both pain and pleasure. (TLSB)

12:16 *the deceived and the deceiver are His*. Some human beings are gullible, and others are deceptive. Neither can mock or fool God. Indeed, while Job does not speak of God as a prankster, he does insinuate that God toys with people for seemingly arbitrary reasons known only to Him. (TLSB)

12:17–21 *stripped*. Job lists those who rely on wisdom for their authority: counselors, judges, kings, priests, elders, and princes. Job says that God takes away what knowledge they have. Paul would later echo the words of Job (and Is 29:14): "I [God] will destroy the wisdom of the wise.... Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" (1Co 1:19–20). (TLSB)

binds a waistcloth. In some ancient wrestling matches, the winner would remove the belt of the defeated, which symbolized the removal of the person's power. With so many examples, Job shows that, unlike Zophar, he is not speaking theoretically. God can and does bring down the mighty. History is replete with examples. Moreover, people in Job's day, as in our own, could no doubt look at contemporary examples of this truth. (TLSB)

12:21a, 24b The Hebrew text of these lines is repeated verbatim in Ps 107:40. (CSB)

12:22 God knows even secret, evil plans. (CSB)

Uncovers the deeps out of darkness. Job breaks away from what God can do against specific people to a more general statement of God's power. God can bring to light what is hidden to human beings. Zophar had wished that God would enlighten Job. Job responds that God can indeed cast light on the mysterious. Both Job and Zophar are confident that if and when God does make His purpose clear, they will be vindicated. (TLSB)

12:23 *He makes nations great.* In making his case for divine control over all of life, Job gave examples from the natural world and from human leaders; he now points to nations. God can and does set up and bring down nations (40:15–23). (TLSB)

12:24 *He takes away understanding.* What understanding leaders have is a gift from God, but God can remove that insight and thus hasten the downfall of nations, as even “the chiefs of the people ... wander in a pathless waste.” (TLSB)

12:25 *grope in darkness.* Job concludes this section with a parody of Eliphaz's confident assertion in 5:14. (CSB)

stagger like a drunken man. The line between the high and mighty and the lowly and mocked is thin. Job satirizes an earlier statement by Eliphaz (5:14). (TLSB)

Ch 12 Whereas Zophar has wrongly focused on people's supposed ability to shape their own destiny, Job correctly recognizes God's control. Our righteousness does not determine our well-being, or lack thereof. Rather, it is all in God's hands. When we become discouraged, it is vital that we remember God's wisdom and power. Although Job does not acknowledge God's use of these attributes for our good, in Christ “we know that for those who love God all things work together for good” (Rm 8:28). • Lord, keep us always in this blessed assurance! Amen. (TLSB)