

Job and His Three Friends: The Introduction of Zophar

Job 11

Job 11:1–3 Then answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said,

²Should not the multitude of words be answered? and should a man full of talk be justified?

³Should thy lies make men hold their peace? and when thou mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed?

ZOPHAR esteems Job full of words, as uttering mindless chatter and possessing complete lack of wisdom. How could a man, he reasons, *so full of talk be justified?* Like his contemporaries, Zophar feels it his religious duty (albeit not a duty received from God) to set Job right. Consequently, he enters into the discussion not with friendly consideration but with venomous accusation. He possesses an even more caustic attitude toward Job than did either Eliphaz or Bildad; his speech is seen to be more sharp and his judgments more condemning. No doubt he is offended and frustrated that Job could defend himself against Eliphaz's and Bildad's reasonings concerning his perceived sin. This has incensed him, and judgment flows from his unrighteous,

seemingly uncontrolled anger. From the moment Zophar speaks, neither love nor compassion is seen as his motive but only religious indignation—a personal animosity produced from the fact that Job could not be humbled.

(Benson Commentary, Job 11:1) Then answered Zophar the Naamathite— . . . Eliphaz began modestly: Bildad was a little rougher: but Zophar falls upon Job without mercy. “Those that have a mind to fall out with their brethren, and to fall foul upon them, find it necessary to put the worst colours they can upon them and their performances, and, right or wrong, to make them odious.” Zophar, highly provoked that Job should dare to call in question a maxim so universally assented to as that urged by his friends, immediately charges him home with secret wickedness. He tells him that he makes not the least doubt, were the real state of his heart laid open, that it would be found God had dealt very gently with him, Job 11:2–7.¹ That he was highly blameworthy to pretend to fathom the depths of divine providence, a task to which he was utterly unequal: that, however his wickedness might be concealed from me, yet it was open and bare to God's all-seeing eye; could he therefore imagine that God would not punish the wickedness

¹ Job 11:2–7 *Should not the multitude of words be answered? and should a man full of talk be justified? ²Should thy lies make men hold their peace? and when thou mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed?* ⁴For thou hast said, My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in thine eyes. ⁵But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee; ⁶And that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is! Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth. ⁷Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?

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he saw? Job 11:7–11.² It would surely be far more becoming in him to submit, and give glory to God, by making an ample confession and full restitution. In that case, indeed, he might hope for a return of God's goodness to him; but the way he was in at present was the common road of the wicked, whose only hope was annihilation, Job 11:12–20.³—Heath and Dodd.

Bitterness and even greater false judgments often overwhelm the self-righteous when their arguments and accusations are soundly rebutted and do not take hold. This is the case with Zophar. No doubt the frustration could be traced to the fact that he felt himself and his other friends superior to Job.

(*Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary*, Job 11:1–6) Zophar attacked Job with great vehemence. He represented him as a man that loved to hear himself speak, though he could say nothing to the purpose, and as a man that maintained falsehoods. He desired God would show Job that less punishment was exacted than he deserved. We are ready, with much assurance, to call God to act in our quarrels, and to think that if he would but speak, he would take our part. We ought to leave all disputes to the judgment of God, which we are sure is according to truth; but those are not always right who are most forward to appeal to the Divine judgment.

The Scriptures reveal that men should cherish, love, and obey the truth and not

the unrighteous indignation and anger that live within them. *But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath* (Rom. 2:8). What men obey—whether it is God, His Spirit, and/or His Word, or rather the carnal impulses that originate from the flesh—reveals of what nature they are. Since those who are not born of God lack the fruit of the Spirit, which includes love, joy, peace, and so on,⁴ and will accompany being filled with the Spirit, it is easy to see why discontentment fills them. Coupled with this is the fact that when sinners do not possess strong arguments in an attempt to condemn those they view lower than themselves, they will often use exaggeration and outlandish lies to strengthen their case. This is exactly what is evidenced in Zophar's hateful rhetoric. In reality, what Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar accused Job of was actually true of themselves. They claimed they had come to help and comfort their friend, but ultimately their actions demonstrated a far different motive, bordering on sinister.

Just because a man feels the urge to speak and give an answer for something does not mean that he should. Scripture often instructs believers to hold their peace, even if what is being said or spoken against them is wrong.⁵ Jesus exhibited

2 Job 11:7–11 *Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? ⁸It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? ⁹The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea. ¹⁰If he cut off, and shut up, or gather together, then who can hinder him? ¹¹For he knoweth vain men: he seeth wickedness also; will he not then consider it?*

3 Job 11:12–20 *For vain men would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt. ¹³If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him; ¹⁴If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles. ¹⁵For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be stedfast, and shalt not fear. ¹⁶Because thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away:*

¹⁷*And thine age shall be clearer than the noonday: thou shalt shine forth, thou shalt be as the morning. ¹⁸And thou shalt be secure, because there is hope; yea, thou shalt dig about thee, and thou shalt take thy rest in safety.*

¹⁹*Also thou shalt lie down, and none shall make thee afraid; yea, many shall make suit unto thee. ²⁰But the eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall not escape, and their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost.*

4 Gal. 5:22–23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,*

²³*Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*

5 Jas. 1:19 *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: Prov. 10:19 In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.*

Prov. 18:13 *He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.*

this behavior when the two false witnesses accused Him.⁶ Answering a fool according to his folly⁷ actually only provides him more grounds for conceit. The more Job's three condescending friends spoke, the more they strengthened the Lord's case against themselves. Eventually their own words would produce the reason for the Lord's growing wrath being directed toward them.⁸

Scripture instructs all believers to *study to be quiet, and to do your own business.*⁹ Saints should never get so caught up in other people's lives that they forget to examine and mind their own.¹⁰ Job's friends had assumed the roles of judges when in fact they should have remained students. By inserting themselves and their limited and erring understanding into Job's life, they only brought disgrace upon themselves. And though they spoke of Job as thinking himself innocent and pure, this is actually what they conceitedly believed their own character to be. Had they remained quiet and continued praying for their friend, God's anger would have no need to eventually be directed toward

them. They had taken the highest seat,¹¹ and the Lord would very soon direct them to assume the lowest. *For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again* (Matt. 7:2).

(Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, Matt. 7:2) *For with what judgments ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete*—whatever standard of judgment ye apply to others.

it shall be measured to you again—This proverbial maxim is used by our Lord in other connections—as in Mr 4:24,¹² and with a slightly different application in Lu 6:38¹³—as a great principle in the divine administration. Unkind judgment of others will be judicially returned upon ourselves, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.

Job 11:4 *For thou hast said, My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in thine eyes.*

Zophar's words, at least initially, appear similar to Elihu's correction in Job 33:8–9: *Surely thou hast spoken in mine hearing,*

Prov. 21:23 *Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.*

6 Matt. 26:61–63 *And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days. 62 And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? 63 But Jesus held his peace, And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.*

7 Prov. 26:4 *Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.*

8 Job 42:7 *And it was so, that after the LORD had spoken these words unto Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath.*

9 1 Thess. 4:11 *And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;*

10 1 Tim. 4:16 *Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.*

11 Luke 14:7–11 *And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them. 8 When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; 9 And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. 10 But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.*

¹¹For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

12 Mark 4:24 *And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given.*

13 Luke 6:38 *Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.*

and I have heard the voice of thy words, saying, I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me. The difference between Zophar's and Elihu's words lies in the inward motivation for speaking them. Hence, whereas Elihu sought Job's reformation, Zophar desired nothing more than producing condemnation. It is thus not always exactly what is spoken but also the manner and the motive we speak from that allows the broken to hear the truth. So while Zophar sought to incriminate Job of sin, feeling himself free from it, Elihu sought to enlighten Job to come to realize his sin in order that he might be forgiven and ultimately healed of his pain. Hence, while Zophar sought a verdict of condemnation and nothing more, Elihu sought to clear Job of his confusion in order that through repentance he might be given mercy from the Lord. This is also why Job rejected Zophar's words but did not reject Elihu's. Elihu's correction furthermore adds additional truth, which was absent in Zophar's address. *Behold, he findeth occasions against me, he counteth me for his enemy* (Job 33:10). In reality, Job had accused the Lord of the very same sin that his friends had committed against him—manifesting blame without any true understanding of the situation. It is one thing to defend our faith when it is challenged with insincerity by men like Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, but it's quite another matter to lay charges against the Lord for His perceived injustice because we think ourselves pure.

Job 11:5–6 *But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee; ⁶And that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is! Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth.*

It is hard to imagine that Job's pain and the loss he endured were less than his iniquity,

but this is exactly what Zophar asserted. Through personal imagination Zophar claimed to speak for the Lord when in fact he was far removed from Him. It is spiritually presumptuous for any to assume, and even worse to declare, what God thinks, if in truth God has never even spoken to them at all. To do this is to prophesy out of one's own heart, which the Lord greatly despises and considers highly deplorable. *Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts. . .* (Ezek. 13:2). As revealed in Ezekiel, it is a great and notable sin to speak something that originates from man while deceitfully claiming its origination as from God.

*(Benson Commentary, Ezek. 13:2–4) Song of Solomon of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel—*So they called themselves, as if none but they had been worthy of the name of Israel's prophets, who were indeed Israel's deceivers. *Say unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts—*According to their own fancy, without having received any revelation from God. . . *Wo unto the foolish prophets—*Ignorant and wicked, and who, while they willfully deceived the people, unthinkingly brought destruction upon themselves. Observe, reader, foolish prophets are not of God's sending: those whom he sends, he either finds or makes fit for his work. Where he gives warrant, he gives wisdom. *That follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing—*Who utter their own imaginations for true prophecies, and pretend to have visions when they never had any.

There are many matters that God's Word declares should not be judged until the Lord comes and provides sufficient spiritual light to judge them correctly. The tragedies in Job's life are a clear example of this. None, including Job himself, knew the real cause of his trial nor the deep spiritual reason the Lord allowed it. *Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to*

light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God (I Cor. 4:5).

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Cor. 4:5) Judge nothing—Pass no decided opinion; see the note at Matthew 7:1.¹⁴ The apostle here takes occasion to inculcate on them an important lesson—one of the leading lessons of Christianity—not to pass a harsh opinion on the conduct of any man, since there are so many things that go to make up his character which we cannot know; and so many secret failings and motives which are all concealed from us.

Until the Lord come—The Lord Jesus at the Day of Judgment, when all secrets shall be revealed, and a true judgment shall be passed on all men. . . .

(1) That we should not be guilty of harsh judgment of others.

(2) the reason is, that we cannot know their feelings and motives.

(3) that all secret things will be brought forth in the great Day, and nothing be concealed beyond that time.

(4) that every man shall receive justice there. He shall be treated as he ought to be. The destiny of no one will be decided by the opinions of people; but the doom of all will be fixed by God. How important is it, therefore, that we be prepared for that Day; and how important to cherish such feelings, and form such plans, that they may be developed without involving us in shame and contempt!

Job 11:7–10 *Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?*

⁸ *It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?*

⁹ *The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.*

¹⁰ *If he cut off, and shut up, or gather together, then who can hinder him?*

Zophar asks Job to do something he neither knows how to do nor can do himself—to search and *find out God*. Contrary to those who ignorantly think themselves religiously wise is true wisdom, which is fully aware that whatever is known is not nearly as much as what *should* be known. *And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know* (I Cor. 8:2). Whatever any man thinks he knows of the Lord, and especially the Lord's dealings with man, is vastly inferior to what he *should* know. There is no exception to this enduring truth, and no man should think himself above this revealed revelation, that whatever men think they know of the Lord is far below what they *should*.

(Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary, I Cor. 8:1–6) There is no proof of ignorance more common than conceit of knowledge. Much may be known, when nothing is known to good purpose. And those who think they know any thing, and grow vain thereon, are the least likely to make good use of their knowledge. Satan hurts some as much by tempting them to be proud of mental powers, as others, by alluring to sensuality. Knowledge which puffs up the possessor, and renders him confident, is as dangerous as self-righteous pride, though what he knows may be right.

Job 11:11 *For he knoweth vain men: he seeth wickedness also; will he not then consider it?*

Because of his pride, Zophar foolishly believed Job to be both wicked and vain, which was in fact the complete opposite of Job's true character. In reality, if any man possessed vanity and wickedness, it would be Zophar and his other two friends—and not Job.

¹⁴ Matt. 7:1 Judge not, that ye be not judged.

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(*Benson Commentary*, Job 11:11) *For he knoweth vain men*—Though men know but little of God, and therefore are very unfit judges of his counsels and actions, yet God knows man exactly. He knoweth that every man in the world is guilty of much vanity and folly, and therefore seeth sufficient reason for his severity against the best men. *He seeth wickedness also*—He perceiveth the wickedness of evil men, though it be covered with the veil of religion.

The emptiness that Zophar referred to lay not in Job's religion but in his own. He had foolishly assumed his own faith as holy, pure, and righteous, yet Job's vain. Time would prove the complete opposite to be true. It is also worth noting that later in the record the Lord never speaks directly to Zophar, revealing also that when the Lord resists the proud¹⁵ He will often not even speak to them directly.

Job 11:12 *For vain men would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt.*

Other translations give us a more insightful understanding of Zophar's words.

(NIV) *But the witless can no more become wise than a wild donkey's colt can be born human.*

(*Berean Study Bible*) *But a witless man can no more become wise than the colt of a wild donkey can be born a man!*

(NAS) *An idiot will become intelligent When a wild donkey is born a human.*

(*Benson Commentary*, Job 11:12) *For, or, yet, vain man would be wise*—Man, who since the fall is void of all true wisdom, pretends to be wise, and able to pass a censure upon all God's ways and works. *Born like a wild ass's colt*—Ignorant, and dull, and stupid, as to

divine things, and yet heady and untractable. Such is man by his birth; this evil is now natural and hereditary, and therefore common to all men: of consequence it is not strange, if Job partake of the common distemper.

Job 11:13–16 *If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him; ¹⁴ If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles.*

¹⁵ *For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be steadfast, and shalt not fear:*

¹⁶ *Because thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away:*

Zophar proclaims that if Job would repent of his vanity, his countenance would be changed and he would soon forget his misery. Thinking himself a prophet, Zophar foolishly concludes that he knows Job's future. The truth is, Zophar is nothing that he either claimed or thought himself to be. Hence, just as he did not know Job's present sin, equally as ignorant was he of Job's foreseeable future. It is also possible that Zophar was the last to speak simply because he never could distinguish himself among his other friends. The more insecure a man is, the more judgmental and harsh he can be on others. In truth, Zophar was neither a prophet nor a seer and should never have thought himself able to correct Job, let alone speak anything concerning Job's future. He did not know Job's sin, and it was pride and spiritual arrogance that initiated him to assume that he did. He had taken on the role of a prophet, but in doing so he only revealed himself a genuine fool.

Job 11:17–20 *And thine age shall be clearer than the noonday: thou shalt shine forth, thou shalt be as the morning.*

¹⁵ Jas. 4:6 *But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.*

¹ Pet. 5:5 *Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*

¹⁸ *And thou shalt be secure, because there is hope; yea, thou shalt dig about thee, and thou shalt take thy rest in safety.*

¹⁹ *Also thou shalt lie down, and none shall make thee afraid; yea, many shall make suit unto thee.*

²⁰ *But the eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall not escape, and their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost.*

These are hopeful thoughts concerning Job's future, but the Lord had inspired none of them. Those deceived by themselves in religion often promise that God's blessings will come upon others when in fact the Lord has revealed nothing to them. Even today many who claim themselves as messengers of God come in His name promising both revival and blessing, which has no chance of coming to pass. This is because the source of what they speak is not in God but rather in the empty, vain, and hopeful imaginations of man. A biblical example of this sin is seen in Ahab's 400 false prophets, who prophesied of victory,¹⁶ whereas the true prophet of the Lord, Micah, prophesied of defeat as well as ultimately the death of the one seeking counsel.¹⁷ It is also a sign of false prophets who deceptively present themselves as sent by the Lord but are not sent,

who imply that if their revelations are both believed and obeyed, then spiritual blessings will be given. Yet the truth is that one of the very first and credible signs that a man is not sent by the Lord, and that he does not speak for Him, is that his prophecies do not come to pass.¹⁸ It is also by applying this simple principle, of whether or not something actually comes true after it is spoken, that reveals who are the Lord's true prophets and those who are merely religious counterfeits. It is only those who are truly commissioned by the Lord and ordained to speak on His behalf whose words God will not allow to fall to the ground. Spiritual impersonators have no such divine promise. *And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground* (I Sam. 3:19).

(*Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, I Sam. 3:19) *The Lord was with him*] This was the one source of strength for all the "heroes of Hebrew history;" for Abraham, Genesis 21:22; Jacob, Genesis 28:15; Joseph, Genesis 39:2; Moses, Exodus 3:12; Joshua, Joshua 1:5; Gideon, Jdg 6:16; David, 1 Samuel 16:18; 1 Samuel 18:14.¹⁹

did let none of his words fall to the ground] The fulfilment of his prophetic utterances was the attestation of his divine mission.

¹⁶ I Kgs. 22:6 *Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramothgilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king.*

I Kgs. 22:12 *And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramothgilead, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the king's hand.*

¹⁷ I Kgs. 22:17 *And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the Lord said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace.*

¹⁸ Jer. 28:15 *Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; The LORD hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie.*

¹⁹ Abraham: Gen. 21:22 *And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest:*

Jacob: Gen. 28:15 *And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.*
Joseph: Gen. 39:2 *And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.*

Moses: Exod. 3:12 *And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.*

Joshua: Josh. 1:5 *There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.*

Gideon: Jdg. 6:16 *And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.*

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Cp. Deuteronomy 18:21–22.²⁰ ‘Falling’ is a natural metaphor in all languages for ‘failing.’

By Samuel’s example and many others, we learn that those whom God is truly with

and who are actually led by His Spirit will see their spiritually inspired words upheld—a divine and eternal promise that those who promote only themselves as speaking for the Lord will never possess.

David: *I Sam. 16:18 Then answered one of the servants, and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the LORD is with him.*

I Sam. 18:14 Then answered one of the servants, and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the LORD is with him.

²⁰ *Deut. 18:21–22 And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken?²² When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.*