

Job Chapter 12

In verses 12:1 – 14:22, Job responded in his defense with strong words, completing the first cycle of speeches.

Verses 12:1 – 13:19: In his reply, Job mocked his friend's claims, sarcastically stating that all "wisdom shall die" with them. Zophar and the others did not hold a corner on wisdom; Job was also a wise man who trusted fully in the ways of the Lord. Job declared that he would continue to look to God for forgiveness, protection, and provision. ("Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him").

Job 12:1 "And Job answered and said,"

In reply to Zophar, and in defense of himself; what is recorded in this and the two following chapters.

Verses 2-4: Job responded with cutting sarcasm directed at his know-it-all friends (verse 2), and then reminded them that he understood the principles of which they had spoken (verse 3), but they were irrelevant to his situation. On top of that, he despaired at the pain of becoming a derision to his friends, though he was innocent (verse 4).

Job 12:2 "No doubt but ye [are] the people, and wisdom shall die with you."

Job takes the opportunity, now that all three friends have spoken, to give his opinion of their counsel: "No doubt . . . wisdom shall die with you". This statement is dripping with sarcasm, but is an appropriate answer to these three who thought that they had all the answers to his dilemma.

This was the first sarcastic remark that Job had made. He had been treated so poorly by his friends, and especially by Zophar, that I am not surprised. He said that these three friends thought they were wise. He said he supposed that all of the wise people of the earth would die, when they died. This was really how ridiculous they had been to him.

Job 12:3 " But I have understanding as well as you; I [am] not inferior to you: yea, who knoweth not such things as these?"

Hebrew, a heart. Which is oft put for the understanding (as Job 34:34; Jer. 5:21; Acts 8:22). I.e. God hath given me also the knowledge and ability to judge of these matters.

"I am not inferior to you": In these things which he speaketh, not in a way of vain-glorious boasting, but for the just and necessary vindication both of himself; and of that cause of God. Which for the matter and substance of it he maintained rightly, as God himself attests (Job 42:7).

"Who knoweth not such things as these?" The truth is, neither you nor I have any reason to be puffed up with our knowledge of these things; for the most foolish and barbarous nations know that God is infinite in wisdom, and power, and justice. But this is not the question between you and me.

Job suddenly spoke of himself as having as much wisdom as any of his friends. He was not morally or intellectually inferior to any of them. They had no right to presume that he was of less stature with God than they were.

Job 12:4 "I am [as] one mocked of his neighbor, who calleth upon God, and he answereth him: the just upright [man is] laughed to scorn."

"The just upright man": If this sounds like presumption, one only needs to recall that this was God's pronouncement on Job (1:8, 2:3).

They had accused him of mocking God, and he had not. They were the ones who had mocked Job. They mocked Job, and he had always been true to God. He had lived as near the perfect life in God's sight as he knew how. He had always been upright in his dealings with God and man.

Job 12:5 "He that is ready to slip with [his] feet [is as] a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease."

"A lamp despised in the thought": When all was at ease with Job's friends, they didn't need him, and even mocked him.

Job had fallen into misfortune by none of his own doing. They believed because he had fallen, that God was punishing Job. They despised Job for no reason at all.

Job 12:6 "The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth [abundantly]."

"God bringeth": Job refuted the simplistic idea that the righteous always prosper and the wicked always suffer, by reminding them that God allows thieves and sinners to be prosperous and secure. So, why not believe He may also allow the righteous to suffer?

It sometimes appears to Godly people that those who are living as robbers, and thieves are prospering. Job attributed their prosperity to the hand of God. It appeared to Job that the houses of the robbers were prospering.

Verses 7-25: Job believes in God's omnipotence too, through here he emphasizes its destructive capacity.

In verses 7-10 all these elements (animals, birds, earth and fish) of creation are called as illustrations that the violent prosper and live securely (verse 6). God made it so that the more vicious survive.

Job 12:7 "But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee:"

Job here begins his review of all creation, to show that God has the absolute direction of it. The order of beasts, birds, and fishes, is that of dignity (compare Gen. 9:2; Psalm 8:7-8). Job maintains that, if appeal were made to the animal creation, and they were asked their position with respect to God, they would with one voice proclaim him their absolute Ruler and Director.

"And the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee": The instincts of birds, their periodical migrations, their inherited habits, are as wonderful as anything in the Divine economy of the universe, and as much imply God's continually directing hand.

Job is using the beasts and the fowls to prove that the hand of God is in control of everything. If the beasts and birds could speak they would proclaim God Ruler of them all.

Job 12:8 "Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee."

If the material earth be intended, the appeal must be to its orderly course. Its summers and winters, its seedtime and harvest, its former and latter rains, its constant productivity, which, no less than animal instincts, speak of a single ruling power directing and ordering all things. If the creeping things of the earth, the reptile creation being meant, then the argument is merely an expansion of that in the preceding verse. The instincts of reptiles are to be ascribed, no less than those of beasts and birds, to the constant superintending action and providence of the Almighty.

"And the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee": The testimony will be unanimous, beasts, birds, reptiles, and fishes will unite in it.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. He created fish also as He is Creator God. It should not be strange to anyone, that the Creator of all the earth would be ruler over His creation.

Job 12:9 "Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this?"

Or "by" or "from all these" creatures. What man is there so stupid and senseless, that does not discern, or cannot learn, even from irrational creatures, the above things, even what Zophar had discoursed concerning God and his perfections, his power, wisdom and providence? For, by the things that are made, the invisible things of God are clearly seen and understood, even his eternal power and Godhead (Rom. 1:20). Particularly it may be known by these, and who is it that does not know thereby;

"That the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?" Made this visible world, and all things in it, to which Job then pointed as it were with his finger. Meaning the heavens, earth, and sea, and all that in them are, which were all created by him. Hence, he is called the Former and Maker of all things. And which are all the works of His Hand. That is, of His power, which is meant by His Hand; that being the instrument of action. This is the only place where the word "Jehovah" is used in this book by the disputants.

Somewhere behind all of the happenings upon the earth, is the Hand of God. Job knew that God had allowed his persecution. He did not know why, but he knew God had to give permission for these terrible things to happen to him. He was fully aware of who God is, and what His power is.

Job 12:10 "In whose hand [is] the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind."

A brief summary of what had been said (in verses 7-8), to which is now appended the further statement that in God's Hand; wholly dependent on him, is the entire race of mankind also.

"And the breath of all mankind": Literally, and the spirit of all flesh of man.

The entire of humanity, and in fact all living things on the earth and even the earth itself, is in the Hand of the LORD. Even the very breath we breathe is a gift from God. God breathed the breath of life in us giving us the power to live.

Job 12:11 "Doth not the ear try words? and the mouth taste his meat?"

Rather, as the mouth (literally palate), tastes his meat. Does not the understanding ear discern and appropriate sound knowledge, as the palate discerns and relishes wholesome food? The ear (as well as the eye, Job 12:7-10), is a channel of sound information.

This is speaking of the senses of man being in tune with God as well.

Job 12:12 "With the ancient [is] wisdom; and in length of days understanding."

"With the ancient is wisdom": The questioning force of the preceding verse may carry over to make this a question also. "Shouldn't ancient men be wise?" If this is true, then (verse 12), is stinging sarcasm against Job's aged friends who gave unwise advice (compare 15:10), and heard and spoke only what suited them (verse 11).

This was a profound statement from Job. The older people have learned much that they know from the school of experience. The older people are wiser, because of the things they have faced in their lives and found a way to overcome. Understanding comes from accumulating learning.

Verses 12:13 – 13:3: This section gives vivid definition to the wisdom, power and sovereignty of God (verse 13). Job, despite his questions about his suffering, affirms that God's power is visible

in nature, human society, religious matters, and national and international affairs. Job, however, expressed this in terms of fatalistic despair. Job knew all this and it didn't help (13:1-2); so he didn't want to argue with them anymore, he wanted to take his case before God (verse 3).

Job 12:13 "With him [is] wisdom and strength, he hath counsel and understanding."

While his distress clouded this truth at times, Job knew deep down that God was the only reality in his life.

This is speaking of God. He is the source of all wisdom and strength. God's wisdom and understanding never changes. It is God who makes it possible for us to understand. It is His strength that makes it possible for us to do all things.

Job 12:14 "Behold, he breaketh down, and it cannot be built again: he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening."

To wit, houses, castles, and cities, which God designed to destroy utterly.

"He shutteth up": If he will shut up a man in prison, or in any straits or troubles.

"There can be no opening": Without God's permission and providence.

God builds up and God tears down. This was never more evident than in the nation of Israel. God made Israel great. He made Solomon the richest man who had ever lived. He became unfaithful to God and God took the kingdom away from his family. Israel fell and was taken into captivity because of their unfaithfulness.

Job 12:15 "Behold, he withholdeth the waters, and they dry up: also he sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth."

God, at his pleasure, causes great droughts, which are among the worst calamities that can happen. He withholds the blessed rain from heaven (Deut. 11:17; 1 Kings 8:35; 17:1), and the springs shrink, and the rivers dry up, and a fruitful land is turned into a desert. And famine stalks through the land, and men perish by thousands.

"Also he sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth": I.e. he causes the flooding. Once upon a time he overwhelmed the whole earth, and destroyed almost the entire race of mankind, by a deluge of an extraordinary character, which so fixed itself in the human consciousness, that traces of it are to be found in the traditions of almost all the various races of men. But, beside this great occasion, he also in ten thousand other cases, causes by means of floods; tremendous ruin and devastation, sweeping away crops and cattle, and even villages and cities. Sometimes even "overturning the earth," causing lakes to burst, rivers to change their course, vast tracts of land to be permanently submerged, and the contour of coasts to be altered.

All of nature is at God's command. He brings great droughts and brings floods as he did in the time of Noah. God used the flood in Noah's time to destroy the people of the earth, because of their great evil.

Job 12:16 "With him [is] strength and wisdom: the deceived and the deceiver [are] his."

Rather (as in the Revised Version), with him is strength and effectual working. God has not only the wisdom to design the course of events (verse 13), but the power and ability to carry out all that he designs.

"The deceived and the deceiver are his": Not only does God rule the course of external nature, but also the doings of men. "Shall there be evil in a city, and shall not he have done it?" (Amos 3:6). He allows some to deceive, and others to be deceived. Moral evil is thus under his control, and, in a certain sense, may be called his doing. But it behooves men, when they approach such great mysteries, to be very cautious and wary in their speech. Job touches with somewhat too bold a hand the deepest problems of the universe.

God not only plans the events of the earth, but He has the power within Himself to see that it is done. God rules people, as well as nature. He is the Creator of them all. The person who is deceived was made by God. The deceiver was created by God as well. All mankind is God's creation. Only those who believe are His sons.

Verses 17-25: A series of action verbs point to God's sovereignty. While no explanation is given for Job's suffering, these terms underscore that no event or circumstance can affect God's sovereign might and purpose.

Job 12:17 "He leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the judges fools."

The wise counsellors, or statesmen, by whom the affairs of kings and kingdoms are ordered, he leads away as captives in triumph. Being spoiled either of that wisdom which they had, or seemed to have; or of that power and dignity which they had enjoyed.

"And maketh the judges fools": By discovering their folly, and by infatuating their minds, and turning their own counsels to their ruin.

The wise counsellors are earthly men, and they are still in the control of God. He can build them up or tear them down as He desires. The judges of the earth must remember that they will someday stand before the Judge of all the world. He judges in righteousness.

Job 12:18 "He looseth the bond of kings, and girdeth their loins with a girdle."

He takes from them the power and authority wherewith they ruled their subjects. Ruled them with rigor, perhaps tyrannized and enslaved them. And he divests them of that majesty which he had stamped upon them, and by which they kept their people in awe. These God can, and often

does, take away from them, and thereby free the people from their bonds, of which we have abundance of instances in the history of different nations.

"And girdeth their loins with a girdle": He reduces them to a mean and servile condition. Which is thus expressed, because servants used to gird up their garments, (which, after the manner of those parts of the world, were loose and long), that they might be fitter for attendance upon their masters. He not only deposes them from their thrones, but brings them into slavery.

Job 12:19 "He leadeth princes away spoiled, and overthroweth the mighty."

Rather, priests. In antiquity priests occupied influential places. Compare what is said of Melchizedek (Gen. 14; of Jethro, priest of Midian in Exodus 2:16). And of the influence of the priests in several crises of the history of Israel. On "spoiled" (see Job 12:17).

"The mighty": Literally the established or perennial. Being in apposition with priests, usually a hereditary class. The word describes those who occupied high permanent place among men.

Kings are king, because God ordained it. When a king becomes evil, God may send another king to put him into captivity. It is God who looses him to greatness, or binds him as a common criminal. We saw this very thing in our study of Israel's captivity in Babylon. God led the king of Babylon to take the king of Israel. Later on, God had another king to overthrow the king of Babylon.

Job 12:20 "He removeth away the speech of the trusty, and taketh away the understanding of the aged."

God deprives trusted statesmen of their eloquence and destroys their reputation and their authority.

"And taketh away the understanding of the aged": He turns wise and aged men into fools and drivellers, weakening their judgments and reducing them to imbecility.

Sometimes, God will take a powerful statesman and make him unable to speak. The aged are sometimes, turned into people with no understanding. The Alzheimer's disease does this to many of the elderly.

Job 12:21 "He poureth contempt upon princes, and weakeneth the strength of the mighty."

I.e. he makes them contemptible to their subjects and others.

"Weakeneth": Hebrew, he looseth the girdle; which phrase signifies weakness (as Isa. 5:27); as the girding of the girdle notes strength and power (as Isa. 22:21; 45:5). Both these phrases being taken from the quality of their garments, which being loose and long, did disenable a man for travel or work.

The king of Babylon was thought of as one of the mightiest men of the world, until the handwriting appeared on the wall condemning him and the city of Babylon. This of course, was the hand of God.

Job 12:22 "He discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death."

I.e. the most secret and crafty counsels of princes, which are contrived and carried on in the dark.

"And bringeth out to light the shadow of death": There is nothing secret which God cannot, if he choose, reveal. Nor is there anything hid which he cannot make known. Dark, murderous schemes, on which lies a shadow as of death, which men plan in secret, and keep hidden in their inmost thoughts, he can, and often does, cause to be brought to light and made manifest in the sight of all. Every such scheme, however carefully guarded and concealed, shall be one day made known (Matt. 10:26). Many are laid bare even in the lifetime of their devisers.

There are no things planned by men that God does not know. They may have planned it in some secret place, but God knows all of their plans. Even plots to kill someone are known of God. Death was defeated for all believers, when Jesus rose from the grave. In that sense, death was defeated by the Light (Jesus Christ).

Job 12:23 "He increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them: he enlargeth the nations, and straiteneth them [again]."

In this discourse of God's wonderful works, Job shows that whatever is done in this world both in the order and change of things, is by God's will and appointment. In which he declares that he thinks well of God, and is able to set forth his power in words as they that reasoned against him were. What before he said of princes, he now applies to nations and people, whom God does either increase or diminish as he pleaseth.

"He enlargeth the nations": He multiplies them, so that they are forced to send forth colonies into other lands.

"Straiteneth them again": Or, leads them in, or brings them back, into their own land, and confines them there.

Israel became almost three million people while they were slaves in Egypt. Just over seventy people went into Egypt and almost three million came out. This same three million were reduced to just a remnant by God for their unfaithfulness.

Job 12:24 "He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness [where there is] no way."

The word heart here evidently means mind, intelligence, and wisdom (see the notes at Job 12:3).

"Of the chief of the people": Hebrew "Heads of the people;" that is, of the rulers of the earth. The meaning is, that he leaves them to infatuated and distracted counsels. By withdrawing from them, he has power to frustrate their plans, and to leave them to an entire lack of wisdom (see the notes at Job 12:17).

"And causeth them to wander in a wilderness": They are like persons in a vast waste of pathless sands without a waymark, a guide, or a path. The perplexity and confusion of the great ones of the earth could not be more strikingly represented than by the condition of such a lost traveler.

When the leader of the people is filled with confusion and wanders in the wilderness, they wander around as sheep without a shepherd.

Job 12:25 "They grope in the dark without light, and he maketh them to stagger like [a] drunken [man]."

Like blind men, as the men of Sodom, when they were struck with blindness. Or "they grope", or "feel the dark, and not light", as the Targum. As the Egyptian did when such gross darkness was upon them as might be felt.

"And he maketh them to stagger like a drunken man": That has lost his sight, his senses, and his feet, and knows not where he is, which way to go, or how to keep on his legs. But reels to and fro, and is at the utmost loss what to do. All this is said of the heads or chief of the people, in consequence of their hearts being taken away, and so left destitute of wisdom and strength.

Those who walk in darkness have no direction in their lives.

John 11:10 "But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him."

Job Chapter 12 Questions

1. What was the first sarcastic remark that Job had made?
2. Who did he make the statement to?
3. In verse 3, how did he compare himself to them?
4. Job said, he was as one _____ of his neighbor.
5. They had accused him of _____ God.
6. Job had fallen into _____ by none of his own doing.
7. It, sometimes, appears to Godly people, that those who are living as robbers, and thieves are _____.

8. What was Job using the beasts and the fowl, in verse 7, to prove?
9. In the _____ God created the heavens and the earth.
10. It should not be strange to anyone that the _____ of all the earth would rule over His _____.
11. Somewhere, behind all the happenings upon the earth, is the hand of _____.
12. Even the very breath we breathe is a _____ from God.
13. Verse 11 is speaking of what?
14. How have the older people become wise?
15. What does understanding come from?
16. Who is the source of wisdom and strength?
17. _____ builds up, and _____ tears down.
18. What is a good example of that?
19. What is a good example of God bringing a flood?
20. All mankind is God's _____.
21. Only those who _____ are His sons.
22. What must earthly judges keep in mind?
23. What is a modern disease that takes away the understanding of the elderly?
24. When did the king of Babylon fall?
25. When was death defeated for all believers?
26. What was a good example of God increasing the nations?
27. When the leader of the people is filled with confusion, the people wander as _____ without a _____.