

JOB 11-14

Why are Job's friends so bent on countering Job's point of view, born of his experience of suffering?

- 1) They genuinely believe that by taking issue with God, Job may be denying himself healing resources from God. If he repents genuinely, God may forgive and restore him.
- 2) Job challenges their world view about God and the way the world and life work. They are not prepared to let it go or question it seriously. Maybe Job is the wise one and the world makes less sense than they want to believe.

ZOPHAR SPEAKS

11: 1-6 Zophar rebukes Job for questioning God the way he does. Can fault ever be with the Almighty? God knows us better than we know ourselves and if God is punishing us, it must mean that we have done something to deserve it.

11: 7-12 God is much more powerful, all-knowing and all-seeing than us. God knows the truth about us better than we do. God's judgments are never wrong.

11: 13-20 If Job humbles himself and turns to God in confession and remorse, God will forgive him and restore him. That's the way things work in the traditional faith that Job knows well. The wicked will get what's coming to them one way or another. The humble righteous who give God God's due, will be vindicated in due time.

JOB RESPONDS

12: 1-6 Just because Job has fallen into misfortune, it doesn't mean he is inferior in wisdom to his friends. Quite the contrary. He claims he has a greater wisdom than them because of what his experience is teaching him. He has become a pathetic figure to everyone who beholds him. But this is something unjust. As much as there are cases and times when the wicked get what they deserve and the righteous are blessed, there are other times when "the tents of robbers are at peace, and those who provoke God are secure." (6)

12: 7-25 Every creature on earth knows that God ordains and causes all that happens to happen (Job still holds to this part of the traditional faith). However, what God does is not necessarily good or right (this is the point of controversy between Job and his friends). God is all powerful and therefore God can do whatever God wants to do, right or wrong. God humbles the great, the proud and the successful, even though it is God who made them great, proud and successful in the first place. It is the same up and down reality for nations (23). Therefore, God's ways are hard to understand, even for those who want to understand.

13: 1-19 Job tells his friends that they should be quiet about things they do not understand and listen to him. Their attempt to help him by telling him to repent in order to be forgiven and restored is bad medicine and bad advice. What Job believes would do him good would be to have a chance to have it out with God face to face. Job wants an opportunity to state his case, for he is sure he is in the right. Job also has no faith that were his friends the jury, they would be impartial. They are making a case on God's behalf without really trusting Job's innocence or his experience. Job's only hope is a chance to make his case and to be vindicated by God. How will this vindication show forth itself?

13: 20 – 14: 6 Job now addresses God directly in a kind of prayer. He asks for two things from God. First, he asks that God pull back from afflicting him the way God is doing so (remember that Job believes God is the cause of his suffering). Second, he wants God to show him his sin so that he may understand it and repent. Truthfully, though, Job believes he is in the right and he is being wrongfully accused and punished. Even further, God punishes human creatures like Job who are so fragile. It is really not worthy of God to do this.

14: 7-17 Job's focus now, his dream, is to have a chance to make his case before God, to be vindicated. Unfortunately, he says, once a human being like him is destroyed, he cannot be restored. At this point in Older Testament theology, the resurrection of the dead is not a core belief. Unlike a tree, Job says, human beings who are cut down cannot grow back again. Were he a tree, he would grow back and have another chance to make his case and be justified. At the very least, Job asks, let God turn away from him, let God hide him until God's judging wrath is past. Perhaps, then, there may come a day of release from Sheol, vindication and possibly resurrection. Maybe, possibly...

14: 18-22 But Job's imaginary hope is dashed again as he faces sober reality. Like a mountain or like stones in a river, torrents wash away and wear away anything that appears to stand firm. For all the glory, success or happiness human beings come to experience, they also taste the bitter fruit of suffering and loss, and few if any really notice or appreciate the weight of it all. It is a lonely business when one is living through it.

Job continues to experience fluctuations in his state of being. From extreme hopelessness to imaginary points of hope (for a chance to make his case before God, for vindication, even resurrection); from terrible loneliness to a deeper wisdom about the way things are and a deeper solidarity with the mass of suffering humanity; from terrible rage at the injustice of God, to a desperate plea for God to help him understand and to restore their relationship as a blessing rather than a curse.

Does any of this touch you as you ponder the world around you, people you know and hold dear, or your own life experience at points?