

08b JOB

Let's resume our study now in the book of Job. We are at chapter 12. All three friends have now spoken.

Each of them has made good points that are what we would call biblical, in terms of talking about God's righteousness, about God's judgment of sin, about the possibility of restoration through repentance. The problem is twofold. First of all, the philosophy or the motivation, the viewpoint that prompts these comments is satanically inspired.

It is an attack on Job because, secondly, Job is not guilty of anything that would bring divine discipline on him. Now, let's stop and recall for a moment that throughout human history, since Adam and Eve left the garden, people have been sinful, right? And even great famous biblical personages have committed sins. Remember when Abraham lied about Sarah being his wife? Remember when Jacob lied to his father Isaac and said, I'm Esau.

Here's the nice tasty venison, or whatever it was, that I shot for you. And he made him this tasty meal and then had to run away because his brother was trying to kill him. There's a list of huge mistakes that even great biblical personages have made.

Moses almost got killed before he ever got back to Egypt to lead the people out to the promised land because he had not circumcised his children. And he knew better. He had already written the book of Genesis by this time, probably.

He had certainly found the source documents in the library at Egypt. And he knew about the Genesis 17 covenant of circumcision. And he had not done it.

And he's supposed to go be the leader. And the New Testament says, if a man cannot rule well his own house, how can he exert any authority over the house of God? And in the same way, Moses had not squared away his own personal business. He had no business leading the children of Israel until he did.

So, people committed sins. This is the point. Now, let's think about what happened.

Noah got drunk. And something bad happened with Ham. And a curse was put on Ham's fourth son, Canaan.

Without going into all the gory details, something bad happened. What divine discipline came down from God on Noah for getting drunk? What divine discipline came down on Ham? How about Cain? Cain killed Abel. What divine discipline came down on Cain for killing Abel? He didn't get executed.

God actually made provision for him so that other people wouldn't kill him by putting a mark on him, right? He became a fugitive and a vagabond because the rest of his family didn't trust him

anymore. Kill one brother, he's liable to kill others. Imagine Seth kept a safe distance from Cain, his big brother.

It is generally the case that people commit sins in the Bible and there's not an immediate divine retribution for that sin. Why is that? People tend to recognize their sin. They tend to repent.

They tend to claim God's grace. They sacrifice. They recover.

David, the king, committed many egregious sins. But you read Psalm 51. This was the pattern of his life.

Against thee and thee only have I sinned. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

And there is grace available from God that alleviates the need for divine discipline. If you have already recognized your sin and you have already turned back to God, what's the point of punishment? There isn't any. There's no point in punishment if you've realized that you've done wrong.

You've claimed God's grace. You've cleansed yourself. You've gotten back where you need to be.

It'd be sort of strange for God to say, well, sorry, but I'm going to clobber you anyway. It's a complex subject and you could make an argument based on David losing his son and one thing and another that there was ongoing discipline from his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah. But generally speaking, people who commit a sin in the Old Testament, when they claim God's grace and ask God's forgiveness and go through the appropriate procedures, there is not this ongoing.

Many times, God never mentions that sin. Abraham made all kinds of mistakes. God never brings it up to him.

Moses made mistakes. God doesn't bring it up to him. Except that one last case, which is a symbolic one, where he struck the rock and he couldn't go into the land.

But generally speaking, there is this policy by God of forgiveness. So, what does that have to do with Job? There is this idea put forth by Eliphaz, by Bildad and by Zophar that all of this bad has happened because you have sin in your life, you have evil in your life and you have not done anything about it. Well, how does Job respond? Chapter 12-14 is sort of the transition between the first dialogue cycle and the second dialogue cycle.

Job answered and said, No doubt you are the people and wisdom will die with you. You're God's gift to the human race. You've got it all figured out.

But I have understanding as well as you. I am not inferior to you. Indeed, who does not know

such things as these? You guys are masters of the obvious.

I am one mocked by his friends who calls on God and he answered him, the just and blameless who is ridiculed. Job says, I've got a track record of righteousness. I have a relationship with God.

I've called on God. God has answered me. I can speak just as well as you.

I know the things that you know. You haven't told me anything I don't know. A lamp is despised in the thought of one who is at ease.

It is made ready for those whose feet slip. The tents of robbers prosper and those who provoke God are secure in what God provides by his hand. Now, what is Job's argument here? He says, look, this light that you're trying to shine for me is unnecessary in the daytime.

It's unnecessary when I'm not trying to go anywhere in the dark. You're giving me something I don't need. Your advice is superfluous.

It doesn't pertain and it doesn't apply any more than a guy who's laying back and not planning to go anywhere doesn't need a lamp. Who needs a lamp? Somebody who's going to go out in a place where his feet might slip. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path so that I might not sin.

The tents of robbers prosper and those who provoke God are secure in what God provides by his hand. Job is basically saying, look, if you look around and see that there are many wicked people, far more wicked than Job, and they haven't been hammered, they haven't lost all ten of their children, they haven't lost all their possessions, they haven't broken out in sore boils, this logic doesn't really follow because it doesn't always happen that way. All three of the friends have said, well, you know, God is going to hammer those who are evil.

And Job says, look, there's lots of people who have secure tents and those people provoke God and they're still secure. He says in verse 7, Now ask the beasts and they will teach you. Ask the birds of the air, they will tell you.

Speak to the earth and it will teach you. And the fish of the sea will explain to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In whose hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind? Does not the ear test words and the mouth taste its food? Wisdom is with aged men and with length of days understanding.

Listen to the difference between what Eliphaz and Bildad and Zophar have said. They have referred to God, but they have talked about God's policy. God has a policy of justice.

God has a policy of punishment of wickedness. God has a policy of restoring those who do the appropriate thing. And it's all about, this is what you need to do.

Job, here is what you should do. Job isn't talking about what he does. He's talking about what God does.

What does God do? And he says, look at nature. Look at the animals. Look at the birds.

Look at the fish. They all manifest God's hand. God orders events.

And there's more to God than justice. There's more to God than... This is the problem that people have in the world today. Have you ever heard somebody say, if there was a God, why does he let children in Afghanistan starve? If there were a God... In fact, there's a famous quote that talks about, well, if God is... It talks about God being able to do things and God being willing to do things.

And it talks about evil. And it says, well, if there is a God and he is able to fix evil, but he's not willing, then he's an uncaring God. If he's willing but he's not able, then he's not an all-powerful God.

If he is neither willing nor able, then he doesn't deserve any worship. If he's both willing and able, then why hasn't he done something about it? And so they say, no matter what combination of God's willingness and God's ability, evil disproves God as he's revealed in the Bible. You see the logic of that? Think about it.

If God is able to fix evil situations, but he's not willing to do it, then he's not really a righteous God. He's apathetic, he's indifferent, he's not the God of the Bible. If he's willing but he's not able, then he's really not powerful enough.

He's not really God because he's not as powerful as he should be. If he's both willing and able, then we wouldn't have evil. And so there must not be a God.

Or if he's neither willing nor able, well, then by definition he's not God anyway. And so they use this little syllogism, this little piece of logic, to conclude that there is no God. Because if there was a God, he would be willing and he would be able, and there wouldn't be evil.

Well, Job has just the opposite argument. By the way, do you see the flaw in that logic? Why is that logic faulty? Is God willing to eradicate evil? And is he able to eradicate evil? Is there still evil in the world? Does that mean that there is no God? Why is there evil in the world if God is both willing and able to do something about it? Because God has a plan and a purpose. Look at it this way.

You can make the same argument about a little child who needs a shot at the doctor. Is my parent able to keep those people from sticking the sharp needle in me? Yes. Is my parent desirous that I not suffer pain and not have a needle stuck in me? Yes.

Well, then why is my parent allowing this stranger, this doctor, to stick this needle in me and

cause me pain? My parent must not exist because they are willing and able and they are not doing anything about my pain. The parent knows something the child does not about the need for this painful process, right? God knows something that smart human beings don't know about the need to allow evil to run its course for a space of time. God is willing and God is able, but God is allowing evil because it accomplishes a purpose.

It is teaching sentient creation something they can learn in no other way. And it's just like when we allow our children to suffer, even though it's not our will that they suffer and we don't have to let them suffer, but we consciously and willfully do so because there's a greater good involved. So that's the fallacy of that logic.

Well, look at what Job says here. He basically says, look at nature. Whether it's animals, birds, fish, the earth itself, the hand of the Lord does this.

His hand holds the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind. Does not the ear test words and the mouth taste its food? Wisdom of aged men and length of days and understanding. And what Job is referring to is the arguments of Bildad and the arguments of Eliphaz and the arguments of Zophar.

And he's saying, do you not think that I can tell the parts of your argument that are true? I test it and there's a part of it that's right. Yes, there is wisdom with the aged men, the tradition and the history. That's not totally invalid.

And back in verse 10, when you see that, it says the breath of all mankind. I'll give you a hint. One of the things we're going to straighten out in our annotated translation is when you see references to wind and references to breath, there's more going on there than meets the eye.

These are very erudite, very wise men. They enjoy wordplay. And Job, even in his decrepit state, is talking with very smart men.

And there is an interplay and there is a wordplay going on where they're saying one thing and they're saying something else at the same time by the vocabulary that they use. And they're little, not quite humorous, but little jabs, little digs, little references back, little allusions to things that others said. And it's very sophisticated.

If you've ever sat and listened to a really sophisticated conversation, they used to have this on, whatever it was, Firing Line with William F. Buckley, when Buckley was on, and he would have somebody else smart. Dick Cavett, I didn't ever like Dick Cavett, but he was another one of these guys that could talk at a very sophisticated level. And you really have to pay attention when people like that are talking because they will say something and you think you know what they said, but then when you think about it, Winston Churchill was this way.

Winston Churchill had a very sharp wit, and he could say a thing that meant something on the

surface, but when he thought about it, he was really saying something else. It's along the lines, one of my favorite little comments like this was when somebody had written a really bad book and the reviewer said, this book fills a much needed void. This book fills a much needed void.

And originally you think, well, so he likes it. But if you think about that, he didn't like it. Well, that's the level at which these men are talking.

And this is a book of wisdom. It's not called wisdom literature for nothing. These are not ham-handed, ham-fisted, blunt instrument, dull intellect guys.

They're sharp. Even Zophar, who's the cut to the chase guy, is nobody's fool. He's not a dummy.

So when Job refers back to the spirit that animates life, when he talks about the ear that tests word and the mouth that tastes food and the wisdom of the aged men, he's going back to what Bildad was talking about. With God, he says in verse 13, of wisdom and strength, he has counsel and understanding. If he breaks a thing down, it cannot be rebuilt.

If he imprisons a man, there can be no release. If he withholds waters, they dry up. If he sends them out, they overwhelm the earth.

What do you think he's talking about there? If God sends out waters and they overwhelm the earth? Did these men know about the flood? It wasn't all that long ago. I was thinking about the Civil War. Remember the years of the Civil War, 1861 to 1865? When I was born, there were people still alive who could remember the Civil War.

Not very many, but there were people who were children in the days of the Civil War when I was born. They were in their 90s or their early 100s, but I was born in 1957 and somebody could have been 6 or 8 years old when the Civil War ended and have been alive when I was born if they lived to be 100, as people occasionally do. I thought, think of that.

Someone who might have been in a crowd that watched President Lincoln give a speech could have seen me get born. You think about the span of time that goes by. Well, Job says, here's God who sends out the waters and overwhelms the earth.

It was in a fairly recent memory in their days. Oral history. It hadn't been that many generations since the flood.

So it was something that to their minds was reasonably fresh. So he says, with God are both strength and prudence. The deceived and the deceiver are his.

Trust me, when we get our annotated translation, this verse is really going to stick out. Look at verse 16. This is the summation of the whole first cycle of dialogue.

Job says, I know what's going on here. Everything is in God's hand. The deceived and the

deceiver are his.

Who are the deceived? Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar. Who is the deceiver? That dark spirit or the agent behind that dark spirit. And Job says, I know that in the same way that God allowed my loss of property and God allowed the loss of my family and God has allowed the loss of my health.

God is allowing this very process. The deceived and the deceiver are his. Job is no slouch.

How do you think Job gets through this 30 odd chapters of testing? It's not by being a dummy. He knows what's going on. He says, God leads counselors away plundered and makes fools of the judges.

Now, who are the counselors and judges in this conversation? But by speaking in the third person as in principle, he's not directly insulting his counselors and judges, is he? He says, God is going to lead you counselors away plundered and he's going to make fools of the judges. And that's exactly what's going to happen at the end of this book. This is a very important section of Job's response.

He loosens the bonds of kings and binds their waist with a belt. He leads princes away plundered and overthrows the mighty. He deprives the trusted ones of speech and takes away the discernment of the elders.

Once again, think back. Who has been citing the elders? Who's been citing the mighty and the trusted ones? Now, this word, mighty, I so wish that I had been able to get my annotated translation. This word, mighty, is one we're going to be coming back to.

When you go back a few chapters, there's a phrase about the mighty wind. This word, mighty, is a technical word. It's a special word for mighty.

And it is a reference to higher and grander things. He deprives the trusted ones of speech, takes away the discernment of the elders. The trusted ones, what did Eliphaz say? God puts no faith in his holy ones.

His trusted ones are not trusted anymore. They were trusted for a while, but now they're not trusted. And this is referencing the higher, grander realms.

He pours contempt on princes and disarms the mighty. Who's the mighty that got disarmed and had contempt poured on him? Of course, this is true in the human realm, but there's an allusion here to the agent behind Job's distress. He uncovers deep things out of darkness and brings the shadow of death to light.

God can make sense out of things that are in the shadow of death. He makes nations great and destroys them. He enlarges nations and guides them.

He takes away the understanding of the chiefs of the people of the earth. Who's the chief guy in the land of us? We're listening to him, aren't we? It's very interesting, by the way, because when we get to Elihu, later, much later, after the third cycle of dialogue, Elihu, when we look at his ancestry, he is descended from Buz. Buz is one of his ancestors.

Not B-U-Z-Z, it's just B-U-Z. Buz in Hebrew, but we'll call him Buz. But Job lives in the land of what? Uz.

Uz and Buz were sons of... Do you know who Uz and Buz had for a father? A man named Nahor. Who is Nahor? Abraham's brother. Abraham's brother, Nahor, had a total of twelve sons.

He had eight or nine with his wife, and then he had three or four with a concubine. I think this is in Genesis... I want to say Genesis chapter 22. And Nahor... In fact, if you find the account of Abraham and Isaac up on the mountain, and he's about ready to slay Isaac, and then he finds the ram with his horns in a thicket, immediately after that account, the next little section talks about Nahor and lists Nahor's twelve sons.

And in the first little group there, you have Uz... Actually, I think it's H-U-Z in your New King James. H-U-Z and B-U-Z. But if you have a cross-reference Bible, a lot of them will have a reference to Job 1.1 for H-U-Z.

And B-U-Z is an ancestor of Elihu. Well, why is this important? He uncovers deep things out of darkness and brings the shadow of death's light. He makes nations great.

He takes away the understanding of the chiefs of the people of the earth. These men are prominent princes. They are from prominent families.

They have ancestry that goes back and is recorded in the Bible. Remember, we looked at these names and who the Amathites are and who the Shuhites are and who the Temanites are. And they're prominent.

Teman is the eldest son of Esau. And so, these are prominent men. And yet, Job says he takes away the understanding of the chiefs of the people of the earth.

And makes them wander in a pathless wilderness. They grow up in the dark without light and he makes them stagger like a drunken man. Now, why is Job saying this about God? Well, it's not just about God.

It's also about his counselors and his judges. And he's saying, you know, God has allowed this to happen to me and I'm confused. And guess what? You three are confused as well.

Don't be sitting there as my counselors and judges thinking you've got it all figured out. God is bigger than all of us. Eliphaz cites the dark spirit.

Bildad cites history and tradition. Zophar cites pragmatic, practical, let's get after it and get it done, common sense. Job says, God has outfoxed all of you.

We're all in the dark at this point. So don't be sitting there looking down on me thinking you've got it figured out. You don't.

This is the kind of thing that God does. What is God going to say at the end of this book? Only my servant Job has spoken rightly of me. And this is one of the things Job says that is absolutely right.

God is doing something bigger than any of these believers is able to figure out at this point in the discussion. And that's what we need to remember as believers. Many times God is doing something in our life that neither we nor any of our fellowship of friends as believers can necessarily figure out.

There's a situation right now where I work where there are legal issues that are in court to be resolved and we've been praying and hoping for a certain outcome and a totally unexpected setback has occurred and none of us can figure it out. It just seems contrary to everything that God seems to have been doing up to this point. And for me, this is a great application of the truth of this passage.

It's a little bit presumptuous to think you know what God's doing and to build all your expectation on that and then to be shocked if it doesn't necessarily turn out as we expect. We tend to think that God is sort of a big Coke machine where you put in a dollar and out comes a Coke. And if you kind of get everything figured out and do the right thing, why, everything happens in a predictable way.

That's the mistake that these three friends have made. God is predictable. God is basically almost impersonal.

If you perform the right actions and if you do the right thing, why, this is the response you're going to get from God. And Job says, listen, God is not an automaton. God is not a machine.

And God can do things that leave all of the princes and the mighty men of the earth in the dark. And you counselors and you judges are in the dark just like I am. And we're not going to know what's going on, as he says back in chapter 9 and 10, until we hear from God himself.

Job is actually going to get his wish, isn't he? He said in chapter 10, I wish that God would speak. And guess what? After these friends have exhausted their repertoire, God is going to speak. And after God speaks, what is Job going to say? I have nothing more to say.

I shut my mouth. This is what we want to watch for. We want to look in the word of God and let God speak.

Instead of trying to put a definition and put a construct and put an understanding on the events of this life and the events of our lives, we have to fall back on faith and recognize that whatever is happening, God knows what it is. God has a plan and a purpose. And based on his character, we have faith.

And we may not understand. And nobody else may understand. But God understands.

And knowing God and trusting God is the essence of our calling in this life. We continue to obey. We continue to press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, no matter what life throws at us.

Because that's why we're here. And many of us, at some time in life, are going to get a Job-like test. Probably not this severe.

Probably not this intense. But the same kind of test. Satan is going to insinuate his half-truths into our thinking.

And he's going to try to create a false expectation that erodes our confidence in God. That makes us think, well, maybe the Christian life is really not worth living. Maybe the Bible isn't really all it's cracked up to be.

Maybe I need to get out of this and go do something different. It's an insidious attack on our faith. And it is satanic in origin.

It's satanic in its brilliance. And it may come from doctrine of demons. It may come from history and tradition.

Or it may come from people who are just real practical. Saying, look, you've got to get off your duff here and get a solution. But from whatever quarter it comes, we have to fall back on the knowledge that God is God.

And our faith in Him will always be vindicated. Well, we have to close here. We'll get into some of the details of this next time.

But let's close in a word of prayer. Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You for the confidence that we can have in You.

That whatever we encounter, You have everything in Your hand. Nature itself teaches us this. The universe itself displays Your handiwork.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress those truths on our hearts and help us to endure to the end, to be faithful to the end, and to lay hold of Your righteousness so that we can be prepared for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask it in His name. Amen.