

Job 12-13:19
May 17, 2026

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What's the difference between speaking honestly and speaking wisely? [Let people engage]

Transition: This opening question sits right at the center of Job's response to his friends. He isn't giving polished theology. He's frustrated, wounded, and determined to speak truthfully. And sometimes the most truthful words aren't the wisest words – and sometimes wisdom sounds uncomfortable. Let's read and see how Job balances raw honesty with wisdom. Let's begin.

BOOK:

12 Then Job replied:

² “Doubtless you are the people,
and wisdom will die with you!

³ But I have a mind as well as you;
I am not inferior to you.

Who does not know all these things?

⁴ “I have become a laughingstock to my friends,
though I called upon God and he answered—
a mere laughingstock, though righteous and blameless!

⁵ Men at ease have contempt for misfortune
as the fate of those whose feet are slipping.

⁶ The tents of marauders are undisturbed,
and those who provoke God are secure—
those who carry their god in their hands. (*Or secure / in what God's hand brings them*)

⁷ “But ask the animals, and they will teach you,
or the birds of the air, and they will tell you;

⁸ or speak to the earth, and it will teach you,
or let the fish of the sea inform you.

⁹ Which of all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?

¹⁰ In his hand is the life of every creature
and the breath of all mankind.

¹¹ Does not the ear test words
as the tongue tastes food?

¹² Is not wisdom found among the aged?
Does not long life bring understanding?

¹³ “To God belong wisdom and power;
counsel and understanding are his.

¹⁴ What he tears down cannot be rebuilt;
the man he imprisons cannot be released.

¹⁵ If he holds back the waters, there is drought;
if he lets them loose, they devastate the land.

16 To him belong strength and victory;
both deceived and deceiver are his.
17 He leads counselors away stripped
and makes fools of judges.
18 He takes off the shackles put on by kings
and ties a loincloth (Or *shackles of kings / and ties a belt*) around their waist.
19 He leads priests away stripped
and overthrows men long established.
20 He silences the lips of trusted advisers
and takes away the discernment of elders.
21 He pours contempt on nobles
and disarms the mighty.
22 He reveals the deep things of darkness
and brings deep shadows into the light.
23 He makes nations great, and destroys them;
he enlarges nations, and disperses them.
24 He deprives the leaders of the earth of their reason;
he sends them wandering through a trackless waste.
25 They grope in darkness with no light;
he makes them stagger like drunkards.

13 “My eyes have seen all this,
my ears have heard and understood it.
2 What you know, I also know;
I am not inferior to you.
3 But I desire to speak to the Almighty
and to argue my case with God.
4 You, however, smear me with lies;
you are worthless physicians, all of you!
5 If only you would be altogether silent!
For you, that would be wisdom.
6 Hear now my argument;
listen to the plea of my lips.
7 Will you speak wickedly on God’s behalf?
Will you speak deceitfully for him?
8 Will you show him partiality?
Will you argue the case for God?
9 Would it turn out well if he examined you?
Could you deceive him as you might deceive men?
10 He would surely rebuke you
if you secretly showed partiality.
11 Would not his splendor terrify you?
Would not the dread of him fall on you?
12 Your maxims are proverbs of ashes;
your defenses are defenses of clay.
13 “Keep silent and let me speak;

then let come to me what may.

¹⁴ Why do I put myself in jeopardy
and take my life in my hands?

¹⁵ Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him;

I will surely (*Or He will surely slay me; I have no hope — / yet I will*) defend my ways to his face.

¹⁶ Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance,
for no godless man would dare come before him!

¹⁷ Listen carefully to my words;

let your ears take in what I say.

¹⁸ Now that I have prepared my case,

I know I will be vindicated.

¹⁹ Can anyone bring charges against me?

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Be careful Speaking for God. Job rebukes his friends because they speak confidently about things they don't truly understand. They assume suffering always means guilt, and in trying to defend God, they misrepresent Him. We need to be humble when talking about why difficult things happen in people's lives. Not every situation has a simple explanation, and careless spiritual advice can wound people instead of helping them.

Honest faith includes honest questions. Job does not hide his confusion, grief, or frustration. Yet he continues directing his words toward God instead of away from Him. God can handle honest prayer. Faith is not pretending everything is fine. Sometimes real faith means bringing difficult questions, pain, and doubt honestly before God.

Wisdom is more than being correct. Job's friends sound theological and confident, but they lack compassion and understanding. Job reminds us that wisdom is not merely saying true things – it's knowing how and when to say them. We need to be reminded that we can be technically right and still deeply unwise.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W.W. (1996). *Be Patient*. (pp. 49-52) Victor Books

The greatness of God (Job 12). First, Job challenged his friends' declaration that they had more wisdom than he did. True, they were older than Job; but age is no guarantee of wisdom. There are old fools as well as young fools.

Then, Job rebuked them for being so unfeeling toward him and turning him into a laughingstock. He felt he was just and upright, which is the way God described him (1:1, 8; 2:3). "You who are at ease have no concern for people who are slipping. You say God is punishing me for my sins. Then why doesn't He punish robbers and other people who provoke God?" (12:5-6) Zophar claimed that wisdom was not accessible to man (11:7-9), but Job said that God's creatures could teach them what they needed to know (12:7-11; see Gen. 1:26-28). Even "dumb" creatures know that God's hand made everything and keeps everything going. In fact, the very breath they were using to accuse Job was God's gift to them; and He could remove it without their permission. God gave men and women the ability to taste and judge food. Would He not give them the even more important ability to evaluate words and assess truth? (Job 12:11)

In verses 12-25, Job describes the wisdom and power of God. Verse 12 likely refers to God, "the Ancient One" and "the One who lives long." These divine names are a rebuke to Job's aged friends who thought that their years of experience had taught them so much!

Job pointed out that God is completely sovereign in what He does with nature (vv. 14-15) and with people (vv. 16-25). What He destroys cannot be rebuilt, and what He locks up cannot be released (Rev. 3:6-8). He can send drought or flood, and nobody can stop Him (Job 12:15). He has the wisdom to know what to do, and He has the power to accomplish it (vv. 13, 16).

In His sovereignty over people, no matter what their status, God is in control. Job's argument is that all kinds of people experience difficulties in life because God can do what He pleases. He is no respecter of persons and is not impressed by a person's rank, wealth, or social status.

For example, if it is God's will, king's counselors will lose their authority and wealth, and judges will become confused and mad. In fact, kings themselves will lose their girdles (an insignia of authority), and priests ("princes," v. 19, KJV) will be stripped and become captives. Wise people like counselors and elders will be silenced (v. 20), and princes (nobles) and the mighty (v. 21) will lose their respect and strength.

But God is sovereign over nations as well as individuals (vv. 23-25; Dan. 2:20-22; Acts 17:24-28). He can enlarge a nation or destroy it, or give it freedom or bondage. All He has to do is take wisdom away from the leaders, and the nation's destruction is sure. Proud people don't like to hear this message. Ever since the city of Enoch (Gen. 4:16-18) and the Tower of Babel (11:1-9), mankind has been trying to build and manage things without God; and the end has always been failure and judgment.

The integrity of Job (Job 13). In this part of his defense, Job first expressed his *disappointment* in his three friends (vv. 1-12), then his *declaration* of faith in the Lord (vv. 13-17), and finally his *desire* that God come to him and get the issue settled once and for all (vv. 18-28).

(1) *Disappointment* (vv. 1–12). Job’s friends had not been an encouragement to him. They had taken a superior attitude as judges, assuming that they knew God better than Job did. They did not identify with him in his grief and pain. Job called them “forgers of lies,” “physicians of no value,” and “deceitful defenders of God.”

The word “forgers” (v. 4) also means “whitewashers.” They smeared the whitewash of their lies over the discussion so that they avoided the difficult problems while maintaining their traditional ideas (Ps. 119:69). They stayed on the surface of things and never went deep into God’s truth or Job’s feelings. Counseling that stays on the surface will accomplish very little. If we are going to help people, we must go much deeper; but this demands love, courage, and patience.

As physicians, their diagnosis was wrong, so their remedy was useless (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). And as “defenders of God,” they would be better off silent; for they did not know what they were talking about. They had such a rigid and narrow view of God, and such a prejudiced view of Job, that their whole “case” was a fabrication of lies. What would they do when God turned the tables and examined them? (See Rom. 14:1–13.) “Your maxims are proverbs of ashes; your defenses are defenses of clay” (Job 13:12, NIV). What the three friends thought were profound statements of truth were only warmed-over ashes from ancient fires, clay pots that would fall apart. A good counselor needs much more than a good memory. He or she also needs wisdom to know how to apply the truth to the needs of people today.

(2) *Declaration* (vv. 13–17). This is one of the greatest declarations of faith found anywhere in Scripture, but it must be understood in its context. Job is saying, “I will take my case directly to God and prove my integrity. I know I am taking my life in my hands in approaching God, because He is able to slay me. But if He doesn’t slay me, it is proof that I am not the hypocrite you say I am.” Later, Job will take an oath and challenge God to pass judgment (Job 27). To approach God personally was a great act of faith (Ex. 33:20; Jud. 13:22–23), but Job was so sure of his integrity that he would take his chances. After all, if he did nothing, he would die; and if he was rejected by God, he would die; but there was always the possibility that God would prove him right.

Zuck, R. B. (1985). *Job*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 733-735) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

a. Job’s repudiation of his friends (12:1–13:19)

(1) Job’s retort to the three (12:1–12).

12:1–3. **Job** jeered their alleged wisdom. He sarcastically responded to Zophar’s snidely calling him a stupid donkey (11:12) by saying that they thought they were so smart that when they would **die** all **wisdom** would be gone! Though Job was in pain, he could still think. He was **not inferior to** them (a point he repeated in 13:2); in fact what they said about God was only common knowledge.

12:4–6. God used to respond to Job’s prayers but now, even though he was still **blameless** (cf. 1:1, 8; 2:3; 9:21–22), **God** had let Job **become a laughingstock**. It seemed so unfair, Job observed, for **men at ease** (like the three advisers!) to have such an attitude toward his **misfortune** while **the tents of the wicked were secure**, despite what Eliphaz and Bildad had said (4:21; 8:22). To **carry their god in their hands** speaks of those who make and carry idols. Why should idolaters prosper while Job, a man of true piety, suffered?

12:7–12. Again Job responded to Zophar’s comment about the son of a donkey (11:12) by telling him (**you** in 12:7–8 is singular) he needed to learn from **animals ... birds**, even **the earth**, and **fish**. Job said that all of them were smarter than Zophar, knowing that calamities come from God’s **hand** (cf. 2:10), not necessarily from one’s sin. They also knew that their very **breath** (like that of man; cf. 10:12; 27:3; 34:14–15) comes from God’s **hand**. Job said he could see through the friends’ faulty arguments just **as his tongue tasted food** (cf. 6:30). He said he was surprised that the three were not displaying **wisdom** which normally accompanies older people (cf. Elihu’s similar words in 32:7). This refuted Bildad’s assertion that wisdom comes from age (8:8–10). So in 12:1–12 Job gave responses to all three of his friends.

The word **Lord** (*Yahweh*, v. 9) occurs only here in the poetic discourses. Elsewhere in Job it occurs only in chapters 1–2; 38; 40; 42. Therefore some scholars say this occurrence in 12:9 is a later insertion. However, the name Lord is intentionally conspicuous here by its rare occurrence within the debates. In the Book of Job, this name for God is spoken only by Job (1:21; 12:9). All other instances are in prose narrative portions (in statements such as “The Lord said to Satan,” 1:7). In 1:21 Job acknowledged that calamities came from the Lord and in 12:9 he affirmed that same truth.

(2) Job’s recounting of God’s wisdom and power (12:13–25).

12:13–16. Job was saying, in effect, “You say God is wise and powerful (5:9–12; 11:7–10), but I know more about that than you do.” **God** can reverse the fortunes of leaders and even entire nations. In His **wisdom and power** (cf. 9:4) God can control nature, tearing down what man had built, imprisoning **man** (cf. 37:6–7), and bringing **drought** and flood.

12:17–21. Also all people are under God’s control. He humbles **counselors** (was Job referring to his three friends?), **judges.... kings.... priests**, well-established officials, **advisers ... elders.... nobles**, and **the mighty**. By stripping away their wisdom and power, God reveals His superior wisdom and power.

12:22–25. God in His wisdom can bring to **light** things that are difficult to comprehend (in mental **darkness**), things that leaders (vv. 17–21) are supposed to do. God is sovereign over **nations**, setting them up and putting them down. He can also darken **leaders** by depriving them **of their reason** and sending them into an intellectual **waste** (the same Heb. word is rendered “formless” in Gen. 1:2), causing them to **grope** and **stagger**.

While one would normally expect leaders to be powerful and elders to be wise (cf. Job 12:12), God sometimes reverses that; for Job’s advisers, older than he, were not as wise.

(3) Job’s requests to the three (13:1–19).

13:1–4. Job had **seen** and **heard** what they were saying about God; and he was **not inferior** to them (cf. 12:3; **you** in 13:2, 4–6 in Heb. is plural). But they were not the ones he wanted to debate. He wanted to **argue** (*yākaḥ*, “dispute, debate in court”) his **case with God**. Why waste time arguing with this terrible triad who were smearing the facts **with lies** about his being a sinner and who were **worthless** medical doctors with no prescription to alleviate his pain?

13:5–12. Their words, Job complained, revealed their folly; hence their silence would show their **wisdom**. Repeatedly in this chapter he pleaded for their listening, attentive ears, not their ignorant words (cf. vv. 6, 13, 17, 19). He wanted them to **listen** to his **argument** (this Heb. noun is related to the verb “argue” in v. 3) and his **plea** to God. It would do them no good to be deceitful in accusing him of sin, for the impartial **God** would not benefit from their **partiality**.

Certainly, they could not be God’s defense attorneys (**argue the case for** translates *riḥ*, a legal term, “to bring a court litigation”). In fact if God scrutinized their lives, they could not possibly **deceive Him**. He would ... **rebuke** (from *yākaḥ*, the word for “argue” in v. 3 and related to “argument” in v. 6) them and **terrify** (*bā’at*; also in 7:14; 9:34; 13:21) them. Later they actually were reproved by God, when He convicted them of the errors of their views (42:7–9).

These men were incompetent to counsel, for their words were **proverbs of ashes**, a fitting description in view of the pile of ashes where Job was sitting (2:8). Their arguments, behind which they hid like fortresses made of weak **clay**, failed to help Job.

13:13–19. Fearlessly Job was ready to speak out to God and to take the consequences (**let come ... what may**) even though it meant risking his **life**. The NIV marginal reading, “He will surely slay me,” is preferable to the better-known rendering, **Though He slay me**. Anticipating the **jeopardy** (cf. v. 14) involved in his presenting his case to God, he was determined to **defend** (*yākaḥ*; cf. v. 3) his case even though it might kill him! But he was willing to risk it because of the remote possibility that God would exonerate him. Verses 14–16 show that Job was confused in his thinking. Perhaps God would kill him, but maybe not if Job’s defense was well delivered.

Job’s willingness to dare to confront God showed he was not **godless**. Again Job asked these self-hired attorneys, these lawless lawyers, to **listen** to his **case** (cf. vv. 5–6, 13; in vv. 6, 13, 17 in Heb. the verbs and the word **your** are plural), for his case was **prepared** (*ārak*, “his arguments were marshaled”) and he was certain God would acquit him. Later Elihu used that same verb in telling Job that man cannot marshal or “draw up” arguments against God (37:19). This contrasts with his earlier words of despair that God would *not* acquit him (9:28); his emotions were fluctuating. If **anyone** could possibly **bring charges against** him, only then could he **be silent and die**. His own silence, then, would replace the silence he requested from his protagonists.

Garrett, D. A. (1998). *The Poetic and Wisdom Books*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 206-207). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Second Cycle (12:1–14:22). The major divisions of this lengthy discourse are as follows: (1) The Shallowness of the Wisdom of the Three Friends (12:2–13:19) and (2) Job’s Third Prayer (13:20–14:22).

Job's assault on the advice of his friends is in two parts. First, he proved that he could cite the wisdom of the former generations as well as anyone. Second, he said his argument was really with God and appealed for the friends at least to be quiet if they could not say anything better than what they had already said.

After the initial outburst of anger chapter 12, recites traditional teaching (indeed, much of it could have been said by any one of the friends). The natural world and the teachings of the aged are both guides into wisdom. God's power is irresistible and sovereign: all of life is in His hands, and He brings down the haughty and the proud. Job was in effect saying to his friends: "I know all this. You have told me nothing." But in Job's mouth even orthodoxy appears dark and threatening. God's power appeared almost arbitrary and destabilizing. It negated all human attempts at wisdom.

For Job his friends' hackneyed and conventional arguments were meaningless. They were worthless physicians who always prescribed the wrong medicine. Job even claimed that God could not be satisfied with their hollow defense of divine justice and correctly predicted that God would not be pleased with their refusal to look at the facts of this case objectively. It would have been better by far if they had just let Job take up his case with God, for it was He with whom Job had a complaint. Job knew that God, although He had become like an enemy to him, was still his only hope.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Job 12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

© 2026 Lee Ann Penick