

# Job 2:11-13

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## *Job's Visitors*

*Three of Job's friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—come to visit him in his suffering, hoping to comfort him. They do not even recognize Job when they first see him, due to the boils all over his body. Each man tears his clothing and throws dust, weeping and mourning their friend's condition. They sit with him for a week silently waiting for him to speak. They see Job is in severe pain.*

Now we are introduced to three new characters in the story. So far we have met three named characters: God, Satan, and Job. We were not told the name of Job's wife or children. It would seem that we are told the name of Job's *three friends* because they are also main characters in the story.

*Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, they came each one from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite; and they made an appointment together to come to sympathize with him and comfort him.*

We see that Job's *three friends* live in three different places. There is some debate whether the text is describing where these men are from, or from whom they are descended, in the way that a member of the tribe of Benjamin was known as a Benjamite. Some believe *Eliphaz the Temanite* was from Teman, a city in the land of Edom. There is much ambiguity around the book of Job, as few details are given. No one knows for certain who these men were, this is lost information to us, but if we look for these names in the Bible, we find some possible clues.

Esau settled Edom, a land to the south of Israel, and interestingly enough had a son named *Eliphaz* who had a son named Teman (Genesis 36:10-11). This *Eliphaz* may have been a descendant of Teman, named after the original *Eliphaz*.

It seems possible that *Bildad the Shuhite* was a descendant of Abraham and Ketura's son Shuah:

“Now Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. She bore to him Zimran and Jokshan and Medan and Midian and Shuah.”  
(Genesis 25:1)

*Zophar the Naamathite* is more difficult to place. Some think *Zophar* might be another grandson of Esau, referred to as “Zepho” in Genesis 36:11 and “Zephi” in 1 Chronicles 1:36.

These names would likely have meant something to the people at the time Job was “published.” Since Moses is traditionally believed to be the one who assembled the initial Bible, it would seem reasonable that these geographic places or tribes would have been familiar to the people of that era.

If these ancestors of Esau and Abraham are the namesakes of the cities/regions, it may mean that Job occurred during the time Israel is in Egypt, perhaps a couple hundred years into their slavery. That could mean that Job was penned around 1700 BC, then later compiled into the Old Testament by the scribes of Moses around 200 years later.

It is possible Job's friends were designated based on the regions they came from before these regions were settled and named, to give the audience some insight into where they were from. We have the instance in Genesis 2:14 where it locates the river Tigris to be east of Assyria well before the time Assyria was established. Similarly to how in modern times, in speaking of an ancient tribe such as the Picts, we would say they lived in Scotland, even though in their time there was no Scotland; they called their homeland "Alba." It would seem to follow that if these geographic regions were not known during the time of Moses, they might have updated to names of places that were then contemporary.

We are not told how Job came to be friends with these three men, but we can infer that they were also wealthy men of standing. Perhaps Job had traded with these friends, or conferred with them as fellow community leaders (Job 29:7-10).

The LXX (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) calls each of them a "king." In ancient times, many wealthy men of authority were known as kings of small regions which to modern readers would appear to be more like towns or counties. Before Israel was established, Edom had generations and generations of rulers. Genesis 36:31-43 lists the names of many kings and chiefs "who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the sons of Israel."

Job's friends had *heard of all this adversity that had come upon Job and made an appointment together to come to sympathize with him and comfort him*. It seems that they sent messengers to one another and organized a plan to *come to Job's home, that they might sympathize with as well as comfort their friend*.

The Hebrew word translated *comfort* is "nacham" and is translated as "sorry" in Genesis 6:6, which says,

"The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart."  
(Genesis 6:6)

The goal of these *friends* seems to be genuine; they have a friend who is suffering and are coming to grieve with him. However, it does not seem that they were prepared for what they were to encounter.

*When they lifted up their eyes at a distance and did not recognize him, they raised their voices and wept. And each of them tore his robe and they threw dust over their heads toward the sky.*

Job's appearance was so altered with the skin disease that his three friends *did not recognize him* when they saw Job *at a distance*. As a result of their observation regarding their friend's adversity, *each of them tore his robe*. Job also tore his robe when he lost his children and

possessions in the previous chapter (Job 1:20). This is a sign of mourning or grieving throughout scripture (2 Samuel 13:19; Ezra 9:3).

They also *threw dust over their heads toward the sky*, which is apparently also a custom to show great grief. In the New Testament, the Jews listening to Stephen's testimony also threw dust in the air; in their case, their grief was accompanied by great anger (Acts 22:23).

The scripture's description of these three men as Job's *friends* is now validated, as the men sit with Job without speaking for a solid week:

*Then they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great.*

That the men *sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him* is consistent with Jewish custom for comforting one who is mourning. The custom is to wait for the aggrieved to speak first, as Job will do in the next chapter. That the men sat silently with Job for an entire week shows their commitment to him. This is important, because these three friends will discourse with Job and, like Job's wife, their words will tempt him, to lead him astray.

From Chapter 3 through Chapter 31, Job will now discourse with his three friends. The three friends will attempt to "help" Job, but in doing so they will actually be tempting Job to agree with Satan's view of God as being a transactional being who can be "bought off." We are not told directly that Satan worked through Job's wife or these three friends. But we can infer from the context that this is the case, given the "divine wager"—so to speak—that frames the entire story. God bragged to Satan that Job was genuinely righteous. Satan asserted that he could get Job to "curse you to your face" if allowed to sift Job.

It will seem that Job's three friends are genuine in their desire to help Job, but are misled in their understanding of God. Given that they do not understand who God is and what He desires for us, they do not speak rightly of Him, and therefore give Job bad advice. At the end, we will see that God will assert to Job's friend Eliphaz, who is apparently the chief among the three friends:

"It came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has.'" (Job 42:7).

The three friends will be counseling Job, but they will be speaking incorrectly about God. Their basic point to Job will be "You must have done something wrong for God to do this to you, so repent of it, then God will restore you." In taking this position, the three friends are speaking of God as a transactional being, who must be bribed or appeased in order for humans to gain benefit.

This is the same basic view humans have of idols—sacrifice to idols is supposed to cause the deity to give us what we desire. It is also Satan's inaccurate characterization of God (Job 1:10-

11). So, while it has been and is a common view of God and spiritual forces throughout history, the book of Job goes to great lengths to assert that it is a completely false view of God. As the Apostle Paul stresses:

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”  
(Romans 11:33-36)

We will see in this unfolding saga that Job never speaks wrongly about God; Job steadfastly maintains that God is God, and therefore does as He pleases. Job refuses to agree that his actions have manipulated God's. In affirming this, Job speaks rightly of God (Job 42:7).

But the book of Job also gives us a peek into the mind of God, who desires a greater reward for His righteous ones. Certainly, He desires them to know Him by faith. We will see that Job will assert that God is missing a proper perspective about him and his plight (Job 23:1-7). However, God will make clear to Job that God is not distant, but near. God lets Job know He has been intimately involved with him all along, and Job comes to see and know God in a new and intimate way (Job 41:5-6).

What Job says of God is right (Job 42:7). But it seems Job's perspective of God is incomplete—including the idea that He is distant. Job will state that he believes that if he were able to have an audience with God and explain himself, then God would relent and restore him (Job 23:7). Job does indeed get an audience. But in his interaction with God, Job learns that it is his own perspective that needs to be altered (Job 42:5-6).

To cap off the lesson that God is not a transactional being that might be manipulated (as Satan claims) God forgives Eliphaz and his two friends who spoke wrongly about Him. They have no negative consequences. Job intercedes on their behalf, and God accepts it. The three friends came to console Job, but in the end it is Job who helps them in their trouble.

Eliphaz and his two friends maintained that God was transactional; if you appease Him then He will give you your desires. In speaking this way, they spoke wrongly of Him (Job 42:7). According to their own philosophy, they should therefore have suffered at God's hand, because they did not speak rightly of Him. But God forgives them completely, accepting Job's intercession.

We will see then that God will prove to Satan that his accusation regarding Job is wrong; Job is indeed righteous. Job's friends will learn that their transactional view of God is wrong as well, but (to further show them wrong) God will forgive them and not cause them any negative consequences.

Job will speak rightly of God. But Job will also learn to know God in a new and deeper way. This is greatly in Job's benefit, since knowing God leads us to the greatest possible fulfillment in

life (John 17:3). We can infer from the fact that the angels can see and know God in person, and yet are watching us to understand His wisdom, that knowing God by faith is a grand and amazing opportunity (Ephesians 3:10).

This is consistent with what Jesus told Thomas, that he was blessed because he believed, but those who believed without seeing would receive a much greater blessing (John 20:29). It seems that God desired Job, His favorite, to gain the greatest benefit in life by allowing him to learn of Him deeply by faith.

No right-thinking person desires to go through the kind of suffering Job endured. But every human endures difficulties. Perhaps by learning from Job, we can embrace what difficulties we do endure in a manner that allows us to know God by faith, and in doing so also gain the greatest possible blessing from life.

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>11</sup> Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, they came each one from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite; and they made an appointment together to come to sympathize with him and comfort him. <sup>12</sup> When they lifted up their eyes at a distance and did not recognize him, they raised their voices and wept. And each of them tore his robe and they threw dust over their heads toward the sky. <sup>13</sup> Then they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that *his* pain was very great.**