***Job: A Study in Suffering…And Faith***

Lesson Ten: Job’s Two Monologues

(Job 27:1–31:40)

***Objective(s):***

1. Be able to contrast Job’s standing among his peers prior to and after his suffering.

2. Understand the textual difficulties in this section of Job.

1. **First Monologue: Job’s declarations concerning himself and God (27:1-23).**
   1. Job reaffirmed his claim to innocence (vv. 1-6).
      1. Taking an oath, Job averred that he would not sin with his tongue.
      2. It seems that what he had in mind is the sin of confessing sin of which he was not guilty. That would be “deceit” (see v. 4).
         1. To say that his friends were right would be the same for Job as admitting that he had sinned in such a way as to deserve the “punishment” he was receiving.
         2. By continuing to affirm his innocence Job would be “holding fast his righteousness.”
   2. Special note:
      1. The rest of the lesson text comprises one of the most difficult sections of the book of *Job*. Some of the material (cf. 27:7-23) doesn’t seem to fit into the thinking of Job as we have previously observed it. Some material (e.g., chapter 28) seems to be rather loosely connected to the material around it.
      2. To deal with these “problems,” the suggestions of commentators include assigning parts of chapter 27 to Zophar as his third speech and making the whole of chapter 28 a later editorial addition.
      3. In these notes, I will treat the whole section as belonging to Job. However, I believe the following comments by various commentators may be helpful:
         1. *It is assumed that the following section (13-23) is a continuation of Job’s speech, and not, as some have argued, words from Zophar. Though Job has wondered why the innocent suffer, and why wicked men go on prospering at length, he has nonetheless believed that the godless would eventually get their just deserts. A time of equity will come (cf. 24:18-25). He now discourses concerning that principle....The connec­tion between chapter 28 (discourse on Jehovah’s wisdom) and the foregoing is rather obscure [thus some have assigned the language to persons other than Job], but the thought may be this--though one may be confident that the wicked will be punished eventually, the "how" and "when" of such matters are within the province of the Lord’s wisdom. Man, therefore, as a finite creature, can never hope to analyze the seeming irregularities in, and exceptions to, the consistent administra­tion of divine justice in the world.1*
         2. *Many biblical scholars believe that 27:8-23 should be assigned to Zophar because the statement that the wicked shall suffer harmonizes with the theories of Zophar but not with those of Job. But Job, as we have seen, believes that the wicked will pay for their sins ultimately though he does not know how nor when. Job also believes that sin leads to misery. What he does not believe is that one can make up a neat formula in which the right amount of suffering is immediately dealt out to all sinners. There is, therefore, no good reason for assigning this passage to Zophar instead of Job.2*
         3. *The common view among those who uphold the integrity of the text is that Job has at last found his way to a position of assured trust in God, and that in this description of the fate of a sinner he is modifying his former extravagant utterances. There are, however, grave objections to this view; (1) in chapters 29-31 he dis­tinctly maintains his former position and still speaks of God as his "adversary" (31:35). (2) The description of the fate of a sinner is no "modification" of his earlier view, but an absolute and sweeping contradiction of it. Formerly he had maintained that no moral rule was discern­ible in the government of the world: now (on the view that these verses contain his own sentiments) he roundly accepts the orthodox doctrine of retribution which the friends had all along maintained, and yet reproaches them with folly (12)! As Davidson dryly remarks: To appropri­ate their sentiments and cover the operation by calling them foolish persons is not generous. Another view is that Job is here not giving his own views at all, but simply repeating with bitter scorn the kind of language used by his friends and almost parodying it, before proceeding in [chapter-asd] 28 to give up the problem altogether as insoluble, and fall back on the practical wisdom of a life of duty. In favor of this it may be noticed (1) that he has already in a somewhat similar way cited in scorn their descrip­tion of the fate of the wicked in 24:18-21, and placed side by side with it what he holds to be the true state of the case, and (2) that verse 13 is drawn almost word for word from the conclusion of Zophar’s speech in 20:29, in which he had so strongly insisted on the very points here urged. This looks very much as if the passage was intended to be a citation of the friends’ words.3*
         4. *Chapter 26 is Job’s final recognition of God's great power, of which a complete account is impossible. The same applies to God's justice, which can be perceived only in bits and pieces. This limitation does not prevent Job from reaffirming the justice of God (27:7-23). He can only insist on his own righteousness (verse 6) if he is confident that God will endorse it. Hence his prediction of judgment on the godless is not a belated conversion to his friends’ point of view; nor is it a slice of orthodoxy put into the text long after it was finished, by some worried scribe (much as the Chris­tians converted Josephus posthumously in the manuscripts of The Jewish War). Nor need we re-label 27:7-23 as the lost third speech of Zophar, even though this proposal has enjoyed considerable prestige among scholars for two centuries. Since Job nowhere denies the justice of God, it is not inconsistent for him to affirm it here. The disagreement between Job and his friends is not over whether God is just or not; it is over how the justice of God is seen to work out in particular events, and specifically in Job’s experiences. The friends think they know the answer, and they have offered it to Job. Job knows that they are wrong, not in affirming the justice of God, but in applying it to himself. But since he does not know how the justice of God is being fulfilled in his case, he is neither able to refute the friends nor able to satisfy his own mind.4*
   3. Job declared the justice of God (27:7-23).
      1. The section is introduced by Job’s wish for his enemies to be punished as the wicked are (v. 7).
      2. Verses 9-10 may be intended to show a difference between the wicked man and himself. Job has continued to “call upon God.”
      3. The emphasis in verse 18 is upon the temporary nature of those shelters and, by comparison, that of the wicked man.
      4. Job’s declaration is the same as that of the friends’: if the wicked prospers, it will not be for long (vv. 19-20).
2. **Man’s inability to discover wisdom (28:1-28)**
   1. Job related the amazing ability of man to mine the earth for treasures (vv. 1-11).
      1. Job emphasized the intelligence of man and his superiority over the animals (particularly the falcon with its superior eyesight and the lion, a beast of immense courage) who have, after all, not trodden these paths deep in the earth.
   2. Wisdom is a treasure of immense value (vv. 12-19).
      1. Despite man's intrepid search for valuable metals and stones, he is unable to “mine” wisdom; in fact, he does not even know its value (vv. 12-14).
      2. Not only can wisdom not be extracted from the earth like mining treasures, its value is so far above such treasures that they cannot be exchanged for it (vv. 15-19).
   3. God is the possessor of true wisdom (vv. 20-28).
      1. The wisdom under consideration is hidden from man (vv. 20-21).
      2. Even Death and Abaddon (destruction) have only heard a report of wisdom (v. 22).
      3. Job gave evidence of God’s possession of wisdom by noting the orderly workings of nature (vv. 23-26).
      4. Man can only know wisdom as God reveals it and His declaration was stated by Job (v. 28).
3. **Second Monologue: Job described his happy past (29:1-25).**
   1. Job longed for the time when God “watched over him” (vv. 1-10).
      1. It was a time of plenty and prosperity (v. 6).
      2. Job enjoyed the respect of all other men, both young and old (vv. 7-10).
   2. He declared the reason for such respect (vv. 11-17).
      1. His righteous conduct was known by others.
      2. He had aided those in need, even to the extent of rescuing them from the wicked (v. 17).
   3. Job remembered his former feelings (vv. 18-20).
      1. He had anticipated the continuance of blessings/prosperity in view of his righteousness.
      2. To “die in my nest” seems to mean that Job had anticipated dying in his own home (see NIV) or perhaps that he would die in the presence and comfort of his children (v. 18).6
      3. The bow was a symbol of strength; Job had anticipated the blessing of unabated vigor (v. 20).
   4. Job continued to remember the respect paid him in the past (vv. 21-25).
      1. His counsel was as well received as the necessary rains and his advice was not disputed (vv. 21-23, 25).
      2. Verse 24 may mean either that Job’s peers treasured his benevolence (NIV) or that he was a source of cheer for those who were despondent while not letting himself be affected by their despondency (RSV).
4. **Job described his present condition (30:1-31).**
   1. He described the younger men who now mock him (vv. 1-8).
      1. While he used to enjoy the respect of the aged and noble, he was now mocked by those who belong to the lowest echelon of society.
      2. *“These scoffers were: profitless (2); wasted away (3); scavengers (4); outcasts (5); hermits (6); animal-like (7); and, in general, a base, nameless pack (8).”* 7
   2. Job recounted his treatment at the hands of these outcasts (vv. 9-15).
      1. They abused Job as if he were the outcast.
      2. Job used the figure of a city under siege to depict their abuse (*cf.* verses 12, 14).
   3. Job turned his attention to the suffering caused him by God (vv. 16-23).
      1. He had become despondent because of his plight (v. 16).
      2. He rehearsed the effects of his physical affliction (vv. 17-18).
      3. Beginning with verse 20, Job addressed his comments to God Himself.
         1. He charged God with being cruel to him and then being indifferent to his suffering (vv. 20-21).
         2. Verse 22 seems to mean that God had made Job’s life stormy.8
         3. Job was certain that God would cause his death (v. 23).
   4. Job bemoaned his treatment at the hands of his fellowman (vv. 24-31).
      1. The meaning of verse 24 is very uncertain.
      2. Reasoning that he had helped others, Job was distressed that he had received so little help and comfort himself (vv. 25-26).
      3. He was consumed by misery (vv. 27-31).
         1. He is considered fit company only for the beasts of the wilderness (v. 29). It may be that Job mentions these animals because of their unique cries which resemble the sounds of suffering.9
         2. His physical suffering is great, leaving him no reason to rejoice (vv. 30-31).
5. **Job asserted his innocence (31:1-40).**
   1. For nearly every sin of which Job declared his innocence, the pattern is the same. He pronounced a curse upon himself “if” he had committed such wickedness--the implication being that his integrity was intact.
   2. He proclaimed his guiltlessness in the matter of sensual sins (vv. 1-12).
      1. He had been diligent to avoid lusting after women, realizing that he could not expect God’s blessings if he sinned in that fashion (vv. 1-4).
      2. *“Job’s friends had charged him with living a lie [a life of hypocrisy] (cf. 4:7-9; 8:6, 12; 11:4-6, 11-14; 15:30-35; 18:5-21; 20:5-29, etc.), but he denies that such is true (5).”* 10
      3. Notice the curses he placed upon himself in this section:
         1. Deprivation of the benefits of his labors (v. 8).
         2. His wife to slave for another man and to suffer sexual violence at the hands of other men (v. 10; see NIV for an explanation of the ESV/NKJV euphemism).
   3. He cited his refusal to misuse his power over his servants, reasoning that they were formed by the same God as he (vv. 13-15).
   4. Job declared that he had always fulfilled his benevolent responsibilities to the unfortunate and not taken advantage of the helpless (vv. 16-23).
      1. The expression “from my mother's womb” is a hyperbolic figure meaning “from one’s youth.”
      2. Verse 21b apparently refers to the opportunity of taking advantage with the approval of those who normally were responsible for seeing that justice was done.
   5. By implication, Job claimed to be free from the sin of trusting in his wealth (vv. 24-25).
   6. By implication, he denied being guilty of idolatry (vv. 26-28).
   7. He was innocent of dishonorable thoughts toward his enemies (vv. 29-34).
      1. Notice that this section consists primarily of incomplete sentences in which Job presents the condition but neglects to include the consequence. Note the partial defenses (see vv. 30, 32).
      2. He claimed that he had not hidden his sins as Adam did; he was not afraid for others to know of his conduct (vv. 33-34).
   8. Having completed his defense, Job again expressed his desire to meet with God and to know the charges being brought against him (vv. 35-40).
      1. He would gladly have given account for his conduct, confident that he had lived righteously and that such would be recognized (vv. 35-37).
      2. Job concluded by calling his land as a witness that he had not sacri­ficed his integrity (vv. 38-40).

**Endnotes:**

1Jackson, p. 62. 2Hesser, pp. 54-5. 3Gibson, p. 145. 4Andersen, pp. 219-20.

5Gibson, p. 147. 6Driver and Gray, p. 249. 7Jackson, p. 64. 8Andersen, p. 237.

9Gibson, p. 168. 10Jackson, p. 65.

***Study & Discussion Questions:***

1. What do all of the following passages have in common: 6:29, 30; 10:7; 12:4; 13:18, 19; 16:17; 23:1-12; 27:1-6?
2. Why do some scholars assign 27:7-23 to Zophar as his third speech?
3. What contrast stands out as Job compared his past with his present?
4. Of what sins did Job declare that he was innocent?
5. How did Job declare himself innocent of these sins?
6. What reason(s) did Job give for his caution in avoiding lusting after young women?
7. List the passages in the lesson text which suggest Job’s commitment to benevolence. What lesson can we take from his emphasis?

**Additional Discussion Questions:**

1. Why might Job have said the things contained in 27:13-23?
2. With what accomplishment did Job illustrate the skill and intelligence of man?
3. What is the only way by which man may possess wisdom from God?