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

Lesson Twelve: God’s First Challenge to Job and Job’s Answer

(Job 38:1-40:5)

***Objective(s):***

1. Be able to describe the character and purpose of God’s speech.

2. Recognize the effect on Job of God’s speech.

1. **God questioned Job concerning inanimate nature (38:1-38).**
   1. Job had frequently expressed the desire to talk/debate with God and his wish was fulfilled, but the “discussion” was not exactly what Job imagined it would be!
   2. God questioned Job regarding his (Job’s) knowledge of creation (vv. 4-7).
      1. Obviously most of the questions posed by the Almighty are rhetorical in their nature.
      2. “Morning stars” in verse 7 seems to be a synonym for the sons of God.
   3. He questioned Job about the origin and containment of the sea (vv. 8-11).
      1. He described its beginning in the figure of a birth.
      2. There are few things as powerful as the sea and yet God affirmed that He had set its limits.
   4. God wondered if Job was responsible for the dawning of a new day (vv. 12-15).
      1. Note the comment of Driver and Gray on verse 14:1
         1. *The earth, deprived by night of both form and colour, receives both again at dawn, which stamps it afresh, so that all objects on it stand out in clear relief, and colours it afresh as a garment that is dyed.*
      2. From the facts that dawn “stays the hand of the wicked” and that God is responsible for the morning light, it seems likely that God was making a point about His moral justice, a matter which Job had called into question.2
   5. Job was asked whether he had any knowledge of the depths of the earth; if so, he was encouraged to “tell it” (vv. 16-18).
   6. God wanted to know what Job knew about the dwelling places of light and darkness (vv. 19-21).
      1. Light and darkness are personified to an extent; did Job know the way to their homes?
      2. In a stinging fashion, God suggested that perhaps Job knew the way because he was very old (i.e., present at creation when light and darkness were created).
   7. God questioned Job further about the elements (vv. 22-30).
      1. He wanted to know if Job had inspected His treasuries of snow and hail. Notice that there is again a reference to God’s moral justice in the purpose of the snow and hail (vv. 22-23; see Joshua 10:11).
      2. God divided light into its resplendent colors in the rainbow, but did Job know how it was done (v. 24)?
      3. God posed more questions regarding the weather and which also served to emphasize that God’s care extended beyond mankind (vv. 25-27).
      4. Using the figure of a birth, God asked Job about the origin of rain, dew, frost and ice (vv. 28-30).
   8. Turning His attention to the heavenly bodies, God asked Job if he could control them (vv. 31-33).
   9. God wondered if the elements would respond at Job’s pleasure (vv. 34-38).
      1. While it may seem that verse 36 is referring to man, the context of the section would appear rather to dictate that clouds and lightning are the subject of the verse.
      2. Job, of course, had to answer that he couldn’t command these forces and surely his “littleness” was brought home to him.
2. **God questioned Job concerning the animal kingdom (38:39-39:30).**
   1. Turning His attention to animate nature, God asked Job if he could provide food for the lion and the raven (vv. 39-40).
      1. In the case of the lion(ness), it may be that God was referring to that wonderful thing that animals possess – instinct.
      2. The following comment about the raven may serve to bring out the point of God’s question further:3
         1. *The raven is repeated cited as manifesting the goodness and care of God for His lower creatures. Not only is its home in desolate places, but its food is scanty and precarious, and must be sought out over a wide extent of country, as may be seen by its habit of flying restlessly about in constant search of food.*
   2. God inquired of Job concerning the birthing habits of the wild goat and the does (“deer” - NKJV; “hinds” - KJV; 39:1-4).
   3. God wondered if Job was responsible for giving the wild donkey his desire for freedom. “Does Job provide for him in the barren land?” (vv. 5-8).
   4. Job was next questioned concerning the wild ox (vv. 9-12).
      1. The term “unicorn” (KJV) stems from an inaccurate translation peculiar to the Septuagint.
      2. Whatever animal was indicated, it was obviously a beast of enormous strength and Job was asked if he could control this animal to the point of using him for domestic purposes such as plowing.
   5. God drew Job’s attention to the ostrich (vv. 13-18).
      1. From the description given this bird, it seems obvious that the translation “peacock” (KJV) is incorrect.
      2. Job was not asked anything in this section. In the NKJV, it appears that God’s purpose was to impress Job with the diversity of nature as He contrasted the stork and the ostrich. The ESV does not mention the stork and the point of that translation may simply be to point out that God gave different instincts to different creatures. Apparently the Hebrew is unclear in v. 13b.
      3. The ostrich is a poor mother by comparison (to the stork) and yet God gave her such impressive speed (sometimes up to 40 miles per hour4) that she can easily outrun a horse and rider.
   6. Resuming His questioning of Job, God asked him what part he played in making the horse the magnifi­cent animal that it is (vv. 19-25).
      1. The translation “leap like the locust” (v. 20a; ESV) seems preferable to that of the NKJV and KJV. Being “frightened like a locust” doesn’t seem to make much sense.
      2. The fierceness and courage of a warhorse is rather graphically de­scribed. Could Job lay claim to having produced such a fine specimen of strength?
   7. God wondered if Job was responsible for the amazing feats of the hawk and eagle (vv. 26-30).
      1. “Hawk” is a generic term used to describe a number of predatory birds, some of which are migratory (v. 26).5
      2. Verse 29 refers to the remarkable eyesight of these birds of prey. Note the comment of Gibson:6
         1. *The power of vision in the eagle is amazing, almost incredible. No sooner does a kid fall in the wilderness among the thick bushes, than some of these keen-sighted hunters after prey notice it from their pathway in mid-heaven, and circling round and round, they pounce down upon it and bear it away to their nest.*
3. **God’s challenge and Job’s answer (40:1-5)**
   1. Now Job was asked if he still wished to contend and instruct God (vv. 1-2).
      1. It was probably no accident that God was described here as the Almighty!
      2. If Job wished to continue, he must answer the questions God had just posed – obviously an impossible feat.
   2. Job had gotten the point; he had been impressed with his smallness in comparison to God the Creator and vowed to be silent (vv. 3-5).

**Additional Note:** I feel the following summary of God’s speeches to Job is particularly good. Although we have not studied both of those speeches, perhaps this quote will help in understanding the one in this lesson and the second one also.7

*The purpose of His revelation is to discipline the heart rather than to satisfy the intellect, and this purpose the manifestation here granted to Job completely fulfils. All through Job’s speeches there had been visible a sense of injustice on the part of God. It is to rebuke this and to bring him back to a right frame of mind towards God that the revelation is made. Job had not failed under the trial imposed upon him. He had never bidden farewell to God, as Satan had suggested that he would do. Moreover, as compared with the friends, he had spoken that which was right of God (see 42:8). He had been true to facts. The friends by their theory of retributive justice had dishonored the Divine administration; and Job by holding up the inequalities and perplexities of life had at least kept free from false and unfair inferences as regards others. But all the same he has said many blameworthy things; and to this point the answer is directed. The speculative question of the purpose of suffering is nowhere dealt with or even touched upon: but the condemnation of the friends in the epilogue give the Divine verdict in Job’s favor on this issue. The speeches of the Almighty are directed to another point, viz., to that attitude of soreness and feeling of injustice which can never be justified unless the whole case is known; and by means of this wonderful panorama of creation there is brought home to Job the conviction that the whole case is not known. He therefore feels that he was wrong in his charges against God, and the vision finally brings home to him,...the sense of personal sin.*

**Endnotes:**

1Driver and Gray, p. 330. 2Jackson, p. 80.

3Gibson, p. 212. (The quote is from Tristram, *Nat. Hist. of the Bible*, p. 199). 4Jackson, p. 83.

5Driver and Gray, p. 346. 6Gibson, p. 218. 7Gibson, p. 206.

***Study & Discussion Questions:***

1. In what two broad areas did God question Job’s knowledge and power?
2. Contrast Job’s confrontation with God with that “debate” that Job had desired.
3. What are Pleiades and Orion? What point did God make by His mention of them?
4. What did God ask Job about the wild goats and deer?
5. Note several wonders of nature and the animal kingdom that God used to make His point with Job.
6. Did God deal with the question of innocent suffering at all in this speech? Why not?