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

Lesson Seven: The Speeches of Bildad and Zophar and Job’s Replies

(Job 18:1 – 21:34)

***Objective(s):***

1. Be able to summarize the speeches of Bildad and Zophar.

2. Be able to identify the yearning of Job.

1. **Bildad’s second speech (18:1-21)**
   1. Bildad upbraided Job (vv. 1-4).
      1. Bildad wondered how long Job would continue to argue (v. 2).
      2. One can sense his indignation at Job’s disregard for the friends’ wisdom (v. 3).
      3. Bildad affirmed that it was Job who was tearing himself. He may have been answering Job’s comments in 16:6-14. He asked further if Job expected the natural order of things (by implication, the law of retribution) to be changed for his sake (v. 4)?
   2. Bildad again described the fate of the wicked man (18:5-21).
      1. The wicked man would go into darkness (vv. 5-6). Gibson comments on this interesting figure:1
         1. *The putting out of the lamp in the tent forms a natural figure for the extinction of the family, just as the kindling or keeping alive the lamp denotes the continuance and preservation of the house. See 1 Kings 11:36; 15:4; 2 Kings 8:19.*
      2. His path would be difficult (v. 7).
      3. Bildad affirmed the inevitability of the wicked man’s downfall by piling up six different words for hunting devices (vv. 8-10).2
      4. It is hard to say if the “terrors” of verse 11 are actually troubles afflicting the wicked, dogging his steps, or if Bildad was making reference to the terrors of an evil conscience as described by Eliphaz (15:21-23).
      5. The wicked man would be afflicted by weakness, disease (“firstborn of death”) and would finally succumb to death (vv. 12-15).
         1. The “king of terrors” seems to be a personification of death.
         2. His house lies desolate and accursed.4
      6. Bildad claimed the wicked would “dry up” and “wither,” leaving no posterity behind (vv. 16-19).
      7. Such a fate astonished men far and wide (vv. 20-21).
2. **Job’s reply to Bildad (19:1-29)**
   1. Job responded to Bildad’s rebuke (vv. 1-6).
      1. He wondered how long the friends would continue to attack him (v. 2).
      2. By their reproaches they had wronged him and yet exhibited no shame for their conduct. “Ten” is a number meaning “frequently” (v. 3).5
      3. Despite the friends’ affirmation of his sinfulness, Job wanted them to know that God had wronged him (vv. 4-6).
   2. Job recited God’s treatment of him (19:7-20).
      1. The “troops” of verse 12 are a metaphor for Job’s afflictions.6
      2. God had caused all those who might comfort or console Job to be estranged from him (vv. 13-20).
         1. There is a significant difference between the ESV and NKJV in verse 17.
            1. **Job 19:17 (ESV)** **17** My breath is strange to my wife, and I am a stench to the children of my own mother.
            2. **Job 19:17 (NKJV)** **17** My breath is offensive to my wife, And I am repulsive to the children of my own body.
            3. Chapter one, however, recorded the death of Job’s children (1:18-19).
         2. In his commentary, Driver supports the reading of the ESV which references Job’s siblings rather than his children.7
         3. The effect of such estrangement as described in this section on one accustomed to the respect of others should not be underestimated.
   3. Job’s pleas (19:21-27)
      1. He cried out for pity from his friends, asking if they must persecute him as God had done (vv. 21-22).
      2. He wished that his declarations of innocence could be preserved for posterity in a book or, better yet, written in rock (vv. 23-24).
      3. In a triumphant expression of faith, Job voiced his conviction that ultimately God would vindicate him. Note Gibson’s comment on verses 25-27:8
         1. *But the word redeemer does not express the meaning of the original so accurately as the Vindicator or the margin of the R.V. The word used is Goel, the participle of a verb which signifies to “procure compensation for the down-trodden and unjustly oppressed,” and so to “rescue.” It is often applied to God as the deliverer of His people out of captivity, especially in the latter part of Isaiah, e.g. 43:1; 44:22, 23. Under the Mosaic system the participle Goel (the form used here) was the technical term for the nearest blood relation, who had both the right of redemption of property (see Lev. 25:25; Ruth 4:4) and also the duty of avenging bloodshed (see Num. 35:19, 21). By Job’s assertion, therefore, that his Goel liveth he declares his conviction that in spite of all, God (for 26, 27 make it clear that it is to Him he refers) will rescue him, and vindicate him from the unjust and cruel imputations under which he lies.*
   4. Job issued a warning to his friends (19:28-29).
3. **Zophar’s second speech (20:1-29)**
   1. Apparently stung somewhat by Job’s warning (19:28-29), Zophar felt compelled to “share” his understanding with Job (20:1-3).
   2. Zophar reminded Job that the prosperity/life of the wicked is brief (20:4-11).
      1. The brevity of the wicked man’s prosperity was a fact known from antiquity--surely Job knew this (vv. 4-5)!
      2. Regardless of the height of his arrogance, he would perish and not be remembered (vv. 6-9).
      3. His posterity would not enjoy his prosperity (v. 10).
      4. The wicked man would die young/in his full strength (v. 11).
   3. Zophar underscored the wages of wickedness (20:12-29).9
      1. Driver comments on the interesting figure of verses 12-14:10
         1. *Wickedness is compared to a dainty morsel (12a, 14a) which is kept in the mouth as long as possible (12b) that full enjoyment may be had from the taste of it (13), but which, when it passes into the system, proves poisonous (14).*
      2. In the same vein as above, the wicked man would not enjoy nor retain the fruits of his wickedness (vv. 15-23, 28-29).
         1. He will even become the prey of others (v. 22).
         2. As he attempts to enjoy his prosperity, God will punish him (v. 23).
      3. Judgment would be sure and complete (vv. 24-26).
      4. Whereas Job had pled with the earth to call for his vindication, Zophar here personified heaven and earth as rising to testify against the sinner (v. 27).
4. **Job’s reply to Zophar (21:1-34)**
   1. Job appealed to his friends (21:1-6).
      1. He suggested that their attention to his speech would be appropriate consolation (v. 2).
      2. After he finished, they could mock if they pleased (v. 3).
      3. Job claimed that his complaint was not against man and justified his impatience (vv. 4-6).
         1. Some commentators believe that it was Job’s condition that caused Job’s impatience and should have caused the friends’ astonishment.11
         2. Others believe that Job had in mind the apparent inequity of God's ways.12 This latter view is supported by the fact that Job would embark on a discussion of God’s treatment of the wicked.
   2. Job related the prosperity of the wicked (21:7-16).
      1. Job drew the attention of his friends to the actual facts of life:
         1. The wicked do, in fact, have long lives and see their descendants (vv. 7-8).
         2. They prosper materially (vv. 9-10).
         3. They enjoy life (vv. 11-13a).
         4. In contrast to Job, the wicked often die quickly and without suffering (v. 13b).
         5. Job affirmed that these were people who were openly defiant to God (vv. 14-15).
      2. Despite these facts, Job was not sympathetic with the wicked (v. 16).
   3. Job answered the arguments of the friends (21:17-21).
      1. Bildad had suggested in his speech that the lamp of the wicked is put out (18:5-6). Job asked, “How often does this actually happen (v. 17)?”
      2. “How often does it happen that they receive punishment as the friends have asserted?”
      3. Anticipating a hypothetical answer (v. 19a), Job suggested that actual justice would result in the punishment of the wicked and not punish his children instead (vv. 19-21).
         1. After all, the wicked man didn’t care what happens to his household after he died (v. 21).
         2. Such a doctrine offered no deterrent to sin.
   4. Job’s conclusion (21:22-26)
      1. God’s actions are inscrutable (v. 22).
      2. Note Jackson’s comment on these verses:13
         1. *Job contends that there is no generalization that can be made regarding the temporal punishment of the wicked. Some die at the height of health and prosperity, but others die in bitterness of soul [i.e., under miserable conditions; cf. 3:20; 7:11] (23-25), but in the final analysis death gets them both (26). Job’s argument is simply this: one’s earthly circum­stances cannot be used as a barometer for determining his spiritual condition!*
   5. Job answered his friends further (21:27-34).
      1. He was aware that they had sought to characterize him as wicked (v. 27).
      2. In response to a hypothetical question of the friends (asking for evidence of the wicked man’s prosperity as Job had detailed it), Job replied that any traveler could tell them that things were not as they had been affirming (v. 29).
      3. The translation of verse 30 varies in the ESV and NKJV.
         1. **Job 21:30 (ESV)** **30** that the evil man is spared in the day of calamity, that he is rescued in the day of wrath?
         2. **Job 21:30 (NKJV)** **30** For the wicked are reserved for the day of doom; They shall be brought out on the day of wrath.
         3. The ESV appears to be saying that the wicked manage to escape “calamity” and “wrath.” The NKJV, however, seems to be indicating that the wicked would ultimately not escape the “day of doom” or the “day of wrath.” I believe the translation of the ESV is more in harmony with the context.
      4. Rather than being condemned, men honor the wicked in his death (vv. 31-33).14
      5. In view of the falsehoods in their theory, Job asked how his three friends expected to console him (v. 34).

**Endnotes:**

1Gibson, p. 90. 2Andersen, p. 189. 3Driver, p. 160. 4Driver, p. 161.

5Jackson, p. 51. 6Jackson, p. 51. 7Driver, pp. 167-8. 8Gibson, p. 99.

9Jackson, p. 53. 10Driver, p. 178. 11Jackson, p. 54. 12Driver, p. 183.

13Jackson, p. 55. 14Jackson, p. 55.

***Study & Discussion Questions:***

1. What is the main thrust of Bildad’s second speech? How is this different from his first speech?
2. List some details in Bildad’s description of the fate of the wicked man that indicate that he had Job in mind.
3. What fact added greatly to Job’s suffering (19:13-19)?
4. What conviction did Job express in 19:23-27?
5. What was Zophar’s emphasis in 20:4-11?
6. What did Job affirm about the wicked in 21:7-15?
7. What question did Job ask in 21:17?

**Additional Discussion Question**

1. What important conclusion concerning God’s dealings with man did Job reach (21:30-33)?