

WOMEN IN THE WORD OF

FELLOWSHIP BIBLE CHURCH

“Job: A 12-Week Study” by Eric Ortlund

Week Nine: The Lord’s First Speech

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The moment we have all been waiting for finally arrives: God appears and addresses Job directly.

Job has demanded a hearing from God, but he does not get what he expected. In God’s speeches, we will see that He does not answer Job’s questions, nor even mention the issue of vindicating Job, as he had requested. He does not explain the reason for Job’s suffering. Neither does He rebuke Job from some wrongdoing, as the friends might have anticipated. By pointing Job to the natural world, and asking him a series of rhetorical questions, God instructs Job.

At times it could seem that God is trying to belittle Job by pointing out His own greatness, power and wisdom compared to a seemingly insignificant man. He persuades Job to surrender his complaint. In the end, Job will have a greater understanding of God’s sovereignty, he will know that God rules in justice and kindness, and he will be able once again to put his trust and hope in God.

Chapter 38

In verse 1, it is clarified for us that God is addressing Job now. This is important, since Elihu was the last speaker.

Elihu had spoken of a storm at the end of his last speech. Many commentators believe that an actual storm was brewing at that time. So it seems that this storm was the foreshadowing that God would be arriving soon.

There are numerous Biblical passages describing God’s presence in powerful natural phenomena: Psalms 77:18-19, 18:7-13, Nahum 1:3, Isaiah 66:15, Jeremiah 4:13 and Ezekiel 1:4 are some of the Scriptures that describe God’s appearing using images of the whirlwind, lightning, thunder, earthquakes, dark clouds, darkness and fire.

God rebukes Job for “darkening counsel” because he doesn’t know what he has been talking about. Some translations read that God tells Job to “gird his loins” in verse 3.

God takes Job back to the beginning of creation, reminding Job that it was through His power alone that the universe was created

God uses the metaphor of childbirth in His description of the creation of the sea. In ancient times, the sea was often thought of as symbolic of evil and chaos.

It’s interesting to read here that the heavenly hosts rejoiced at God’s work of creation (verse 7). This is something that we are not made aware of in the creation account in Genesis. God and his angels rejoiced in creation, and His creation continues to bring Him joy.

God portrays Himself not just as the Creator, but the Lord over the universe.

Then His description of the power of light in suppressing the actions of the wicked (verses 13-15) is an answer to Job’s statement that the wicked prosper and God does nothing (Chapters 21 and 24).

God reminds Job of the limits of his knowledge due to his physical limitations as a human being.

In verses 16-17, God responds to Job’s mistaken ideas about what happens after death.

God also points out that Job is limited not just by space but also by time, in verse 21 as well as verse 4. God is eternal, but Job is a mere man, with a man’s brief lifespan.

God continues with His description of His dominion over the earth in controlling the weather. Even with all our technological advances, the weather remains among the things we still can’t control or understand.

God can use the weather to accomplish His will. He keeps the snow and hail in His “storehouses” and can bring them out when He wants to use them in battle, as described in Joshua 10:11.

The constellations in verse 31 are clear, but there is some uncertainty about which ones are being named in verse 32. Regardless of that, God is continuing to emphasize that it is He who is master over His creation.

Job has no control over stars or any heavenly bodies. Only God determines their appearance in the night sky.

God returns to the motif of weather and Job's inability to command it in any way. There is considerable difficulty with the translation of verse 36.

The main emphasis, despite translation difficulties, is that it's God's wisdom alone that is the driving force behind all these phenomena of nature.

Up to this point, God has been teaching Job by questioning him about His creation of the earth, the elements in the heavens, the weather, all of which are inanimate. He will now shift the focus to His creatures. He recounts the habits and qualities of several species of wild animals.

These wild animals are associated with the desert or a similar desolate area, which would also have been considered the abode of demonic spirits.

God is teaching Job that his dominion is over the entire earth, not just the areas inhabited by people.

Job knows that people have domesticated many animals to use them to serve human needs.

But only God watches over and provides for the wild ones.

Wild animals like lions survive under the care and sustenance that He gives them. As supreme Ruler, he governs the entire world for the well-being of all.

Chapter 39

Moving on from the subject of providing food, God now points out to Job that He is in control of the perpetuation of the wild species.

In verse 4, God notes that He continues to look after the young ones even when they leave the care of their mother.

Next, we have God's picture of two other untamed animals: the wild donkey, or *onager*, and the wild ox, or *aurochs*.

He is not burdened by the demands of a master or bothered by the noise of human activity.

The aurochs is completely beyond the control of any person, and although big and strong, he cannot be harnessed for use by people.

Next we have an unusual section in that narration is used exclusively instead of beginning with questions aimed at Job. Some scholars consider this problematic, and there are some translation difficulties as well.

This comical depiction of the ostrich makes us chuckle. Indeed she is an unusual bird, with her small head atop a long neck and a body so large that no matter how vigorously she flaps her wings, she will not fly.

As Master Creator, it is God's privilege to create as He wishes. He chose not to give her the same level of "wisdom" and "understanding" as other animals.

God has made every living thing just as He sees fit.

We have quite a contrast with the description of the silly ostrich being followed by the majestic, beautiful, and courageous horse.

He serves mankind by being useful in war, due to his courage and strength. But even this one domesticated animal can be difficult to tame and control.

God finishes this lesson on the wild animals with a description of birds of prey. The instinctive behaviors we can observe in all animals are knowledge given to them by God, their Creator. The majestic eagle dominates the sky as the lion does the land.

God gives special abilities to the birds of prey to provide for themselves and their young.

Chapter 40

Looking back at verse 3, where God said He would ask the questions and then Job could instruct Him, here He stops to allow for that. Job had said in 13:22 that he wanted God to call and he would answer.

So, has everything been resolved now? God has silenced Job, so is He finished? No, God has not finished the lesson yet, and we will see next week that His instruction continues.

Application

God has instructed Job in these chapters, but the lessons are for us as well.

1. God is not trying to denigrate or humiliate Job. On the contrary, that God appears and converses with him is evidence of his great love and care for Job.

Only human beings can enjoy relationship with their Creator, because they have been made in His image. When God is disciplining, teaching, or dealing with us, we need to remember this.

2. People have limited mastery over the environment, but God has total sovereignty. In Genesis 1:26, we read that God gave “dominion” over the earth to mankind, but He retains a measure of control that people cannot have.

God is not constrained by the limits of time and space as human beings are.

3. Some of the things that God says or implies in his questions have already been stated by the comforters:

Eliphaz, 5:9-10

Zophar, 11:7-9

Eliphaz, 15:7-8

Bildad, 25:2-3

Even Job himself has declared great truths about God that sound much like what God has said to him. Chapter 9:8-10 is one example.

So why does Job's attitude change now? Because God Himself has appeared and spoken!

Luke 4:31

In the presence of God, there is an almost indescribable authority, more than just the sound of His voice, His charisma or His vast knowledge.

We tend to go first to friends, perhaps counselors or therapists and that is not necessarily wrong, but we need to recognize that God is the Supreme Authority.

4. God delighted in making the universe, and He continues to watch over it with care and great joy, despite the problems that resulted from the fall of man.

This is a clear refutation of the Gnostic heresy which arose in the early church era.

God's amazing universe can be a great comfort to us in times of challenge and stress.

5. Jesus reaffirmed that God cares for his creatures, and even more so for His people. We see this in Matthew 6:26-30 and Matthew 10:29-31.

Job's greatest distress was his perceived loss of relationship with God. He feared that God was absent, but God was there all the time, waiting for the right moment to appear and set everything straight. Surely the God who cares so much about our physical needs is even more concerned about our emotional and spiritual needs. During our dark hours of trial, we can cling to the promise that Jesus is always for us, and that He will never leave us nor forsake us.

Next week:

Week 10: The Lord's Second Speech, pp. 75-80 in the study book
Job, Chapters 40:6-41:34