



Sunday School Lesson for January 25, 2004.  
Released on January 22, 2004.

Study Job 38:1-7; 40:6-9; 42:1-6. Integrity in God's Presence  
Questions and answers below.

TIME: about 2000 B.C.  
PLACE: Land of Uz

Job 38:1-7

1 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said,  
2 Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?  
3 Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.  
4 Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding.  
5 Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? Or who hath stretched the line upon it?  
6 Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? Or who laid the corner stone thereof;  
7 When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

Job 40:6-9

6 Then answered the Lord unto Job out of the whirlwind, and said,  
7 Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.  
8 Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?  
9 Hast thou an arm like God? Or canst thou thunder with a voice like him?

Job 42:1-6

1 Then Job answered the Lord , and said,  
2 I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.  
3 Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.  
4 Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.  
5 I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee:  
6 Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

## Lesson Background

In last week's lesson we learned Job's responses to the accusations of his three friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. These accusations had landed on deaf ears, at least as far as they were concerned. In the chapter preceding this week's lesson texts, another character had presented himself, a man named Elihu (Job 32-37).

Elihu's speech forms a potent introduction to God's response to Job. Elihu reminded Job of God's ultimate justice (Job 34). He reminded Job that he should speak to God humbly, carefully addressing his Creator (Job 35). He argued that Job should acknowledge God's sovereignty (Job 36). He called on Job to express his ultimate trust in God, regardless of his understanding of God's ways (Job 37). We have no record of any response from Job. The next voice we hear is that of God Himself (Job 38).

## Sovereign Power (Job 38:1-7)

God spoke to Job in the midst of a mighty wind storm. Some scholars have taken words in Job 37:21, 22 to mean that a storm was approaching as Elihu spoke. The storm would descend upon Job and his companions with an intense fury, and out of that fury Job would hear God speaking to him. Job gets what he requested. God is there, but God will speak while Job listens.

### 1. How did God come to Job (v. 1)?

Elihu's speech ended with a reminder that people fear (or revere) God because of His splendor, majesty, power, and justice (Job 37:22-24). Then God speaks. Job has wanted God to answer him (31:35). Now God is doing just what Job wants, but His voice does not come to Job in the midst of a moment of quiet contemplation. God's voice rises above the howling gale of a terrible storm. We might compare how God speaks here with how He speaks in passages such as Exodus 19:16-19; 1 Kings 19:9-12; and Ezekiel 1.

### 2. What were these "words without knowledge" that God pointed out to Job (v. 2)?

As we consider Job's words, however, we recall that he "sinned not, nor charged God foolishly" (1:22), and that Job did not "sin with his lips" (2:10). The words without knowledge that God points out likely include Job's complaint-out of his very great pain!-that God has not heard his cry, thereby denying him justice (19:6, 7; 27:2). Even so, when all is said and done it is Job (and not Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) who has spoken of God "the thing that is right" (42:7, 8). Whenever we question God's justice today we, too, speak foolish "words without knowledge."

### 3. What does it mean to "Gird up" ones "loins" (v. 3)?

God tells Job to get ready for a battle. To gird up the loins means to gather the outer garment into the belt or sash in order to be ready to run, fight, or work strenuously (2 Kings 4:29; 9:1; Job 40:7; Jeremiah 1:17). This is not to be a physical wrestling match as in Genesis 32:22-28, but Job will know that he has been in a battle when God is through questioning him.

Is Job prepared for this mental test (1 Peter 1:13)? Will he be able to defend himself on the charge of presumption? God is going to be a demanding Teacher-and Job had better be ready with good answers.

#### 4. What purpose did God have for asking Job questions about Creation (vs. 4,5)?

God now begins a series of more than seventy questions to Job. The first question alone reminds Job of his proper place. God began to ask Job questions from the areas of cosmology, oceanography, meteorology, and astronomy. He apparently wanted Job to realize without doubt that he was far from capable of running the universe God had created. He began with questions about the earth, asking Job where Job was when the Lord laid its foundations. Job was immediately faced with the fact that he was most insignificant relative to God's work, for he was not even present at Creation.

God compared the creation of the universe to the construction of a building. Here He spoke of the foundations as well as the proper dimensions and measurements. Not only was Job not present at the time of Creation, but he also had nothing to do with the initial planning and layout. The entire universe had been determined without a single statement of input from Job. It was immediately made clear to Job that God was the sovereign Planner and had not required his assistance.

God included some irony in His initial questions, implying that Job was giving the impression he had a vast store of knowledge about how God should do things. He asked where Job had been when He had laid the foundations of the earth. He challenged Job, saying, "Declare, if thou hast understanding" (Job 38:4). We could accurately substitute the word "since" for "if" and get the proper implication God was making. The same is true of God's next questions, in which He asked Job who had determined and measured the dimensions of the earth, adding the words "if thou knowest" (v. 5).

#### Looking for Answers

William Temple (1881-1944) said that God minus the world would still equal God, but that the world minus God would equal nothing. If we eliminate God from our thinking, then there are too many questions without answers and too many puzzles without solutions. Certainly believers do not have all the answers, but they have better answers than those who do not believe.

Just the thought of a universe without God is depressing: a universe empty, lonely, friendless, and without purpose. But believers can look out into the vastness of space and know that we are not alone; we are not orphans. We are children. Like all children we keep asking questions. And like all children, we receive answers to some of them, but not to all of them. A child does not need to know all the answers, and we do not need to know all the answers. We have a Heavenly Father who does know all the answers, and we are to be content with that.

It is not wrong to ask questions. Job, Moses, and John the Baptist are among the many in the Bible who asked questions. But they asked them out of a heart of faith. Some think faith never asks questions, but they are wrong. Some think faith has all the answers, but they are wrong. Faith asks questions, accepts God's answers when they are given, and rests calmly when God withholds answers. The old song is right: "We'll understand it better by and by." -Robert C. Shannon

5. How did God use the figure of the construction of a building in His questions (v. 6)?

The foundations of creation are mentioned again, along with the cornerstone, another significant part of any building. A foundation anchors a building and provides a support on which it can stand securely. This concept relative to the earth, which is floating in space, has a number of interesting implications. Exactly what is the foundation on which the earth rests? Technically there is none, of course; yet God implied to Job that it is securely in place with no possibility of collapse.

This led to the further conclusion that God alone keeps the earth in place-and without Job's help! Job was not there when the earth was put into place, and he had no role in keeping it there. A cornerstone is placed at the corner of a building where it unites two intersecting walls. Since the earth is a sphere, it has no need for a cornerstone; God used this analogy to point out to Job that He had constructed the earth in such a way that everything stays together perfectly. Again Job had no role in this construction.

6. Was there anyone present at Creation, and if so, what did they do (v. 7)?

There were other beings present at Creation, however; and they sang and shouted for joy during the process. The terms "morning stars" (Job 38:7) and "sons of God" seem to refer to the same beings, namely, angels. We know for certain that the sons of God were angels, for they are said to be the ones who gathered in God's presence in Job 1:6 and 2:1. Perhaps they are referred to as sons because they were created by God. Since the two phrases in 38:7 are parallel in structure, we conclude that the morning stars were also angels.

Job was again reminded of his insignificance, with the implication being that he had no cause for questioning what God was doing with him. His place was simply to trust God.

Sovereign Justice  
(Job 40:6-9)

Throughout chapters 38 and 39, God continues to question Job regarding his knowledge-or lack of knowledge-of the elementary workings of the systems of the earth and its creatures. Now in chapter 40 God switches themes as He begins to question Job about his accusations (Job 40:1, 2). It seems that Job is beginning to get the picture because he does not try to answer. He knows this is a time to keep his mouth shut (Job 40:3-5). Job's silence does not, however, silence God.

7. What personal and intense questions did God ask Job (Job 40:8, 9)?

Again He spoke out of the whirling storm (v. 6). Once again He challenged Job to prepare himself, because the questioning was going to continue to be penetrating and difficult, just as it had been up to this time.

Job is now faced with a far more serious charge. God's questions have made it clear to Job that he is ignorant of His ways. Now, however, God directly confronts Job with Job's allegations of injustice in 19:6, 7 and 27:2.

First He asked if Job dared discredit His judgment (Job 40:8). God had seen Job's complaints as implications that he thought God did not have the understanding to do what was right for him! We can imagine how much small Job must have suddenly

felt. The second question was just as penetrating: "Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?" Who would dare put down the Supreme Being in order to make himself look better?

We find many people today who are very willing to accuse God of injustice. They ask why God causes (or allows) natural disasters like floods, earthquakes, and hurricanes. They ask why little children die in the midst of wars. They, like Job, need to learn that we do not have the right to question God's justice. God's sovereign justice prevails in His appointed time and fashion.

Questions three and four (v. 9) were about whether Job had the same level of strength God had. Job would certainly have felt totally crushed into nothingness by then. But God completed this series of questions by telling him that maybe since he knew so much he should just take over and be God himself (vs. 10-14).

### Shame and Sorrow (Job 42:1-6)

We now hear Job speak. He has been inundated with questions he cannot answer. He has admitted that he is unworthy. Will God's questions lead Job to the proper conclusion? Will Job finally see the "big picture"?

8. What did Job acknowledge about God first as he began to respond (Job 42: 2)?

Job first acknowledged that he knew God was omnipotent. God is all-powerful and able to do whatever He wills consistent with His nature. Job realizes now, however, that his insistence to have his case heard in God's court is foolish since God knows all thoughts anyway. The sovereign God who can do all things is the One who has been fully aware of Job's situation all along.

9. What did he admit as truth (v. 3)?

Job seems to be crawling out from beneath his layers of self-defense as he uses the same words God has spoken against him (38:2). Job is saying, in essence, "Yes, God-You have me pegged." Job's attitude goes from that of a Mister Know-It-All to one of humble admission. This is the kind of transformation that we could all use from time to time!

Realizing the limits of your knowledge and wisdom can be very liberating. It seems so with Job. He moves beyond his pride and finds the joy of honesty. He realizes that he has pondered on matters far beyond his intellectual capacity. He finally concludes that the wonderful and majestic ways and abilities of God are beyond his comprehension. Job does not have God figured out, after all. And that is okay! It is not Job's responsibility to define God's path. That is a valuable lesson for all of us to learn. There is a limit to how much we can analyze God. Above all, He is there to be adored!

10. How was Job's understanding different from earlier in his life (vs. 4, 5)?

Again, Job quotes the Lord's words back to Him (v. 4). God has instructed Job to listen, and Job has indeed heard. Job is beginning to understand God's true nature. "Job still did not know why he suffered so profoundly, but he was done complaining, questioning, and challenging God's wisdom and justice." (MacArthur).

Now a major and remarkable change had come over Job in the process of God's dealings with him. For many years he had known about God's works through what he had heard (v. 5). It was true that he was not present at the time of Creation; he had only heard about it. It was true he could not control or understand the intricacies of nature; he had only observed it. It was true he had no control over the powerful creatures God had created; but he knew how magnificent they were.

Now, however, Job knew more of God than he had previously known through all that he had heard. God had dealt personally with him, giving him a firsthand knowledge he had never before experienced. He now saw some of the greatness and majesty of God he had not realized previously. He understood God's omnipotence and sovereignty in a new light. It was true that his trials had been very grievous, but they had not occurred apart from God's allowance and control.

11. What was Job's final statement and confession about himself (v. 6)?

Job's response, based on his enlightened understanding, was that he abhorred himself for his previous words. He had spoken rashly and foolishly and had reflected badly upon his faithful God. Realizing this he could do nothing else but say, "Wherefore I . . . repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). Perhaps we should examine our hearts to see how we have handled what God has allowed in our lives. Bitterness and complaining should not take root in the hearts of God's children.

## CONCLUSION

Many people think the book of Job is about suffering or patience. Those themes are part of the book, but more important is faith. What was the essence of Job's faith? Did he understand that God has the right to declare without explanation? God's sovereignty authorizes declaration, not explanation!

When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abendego refused to worship the image of Nebuchadnezzar, they were thrown into a fiery furnace. They believed God would deliver them from that fate, but their faith is expressed in this declaration: "but if not . . . we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image" (Daniel 3:18). Even if God decided not to deliver them, it made no difference. The essence of faith is trusting God even when you do not understand what He is doing. Job finally learned that valuable lesson. How about you?

## PRAYER

Father, we thank You for being who You are. Help us learn to trust You more. May we remember Job when we are tempted to question Your ways or Your timing. Help us to follow the Spirit's leading in our lives when the way is not clear. In Jesus' name, amen.

## THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15).

## ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In our lesson next week, we look at the words of a rich king who had learned from life's experiences. Study Background Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3.

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