

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP STUDY IN THE BOOK OF JOB

PART 4 – CHAPTERS FIFTEEN TO THIRTY-ONE

HOW TO MAKE A BAD SITUATION WORSE

Just as Job's emotions change as he works through the grief process, so his counsellors are also changed by their involvement in his life. Eliphaz begins in chapter 4 with a compliment to Job for the benefit he has been to others in trouble but as Bildad and Zophar follow him in chapters 8 and 11, and when he speaks again in chapter 15 their whole attitude has deteriorated so that they are openly critical of him as 'a bag of wind'! If those we counsel do not seem to be responding to our point of view we may unconsciously turn against them out of wounded pride that they are not seeing it our way.

When we look closely at the content of the speeches of the 3 counsellors, what is striking is that they follow a pattern in which there are three elements. Firstly their basic premise is wrong. They say that bad things only happen to bad people and that this is the judgement of God now on our sin. This view is repeated in every speech with variation. Secondly, however, each speech does contain some statement which is true and Biblical. For example Eliphaz in chapter 4 presents the theme of Romans 3:9-18 that no-one of himself can be righteous before God. Thirdly and most important there is a vital element missing from each speech, Christ and the cross. They talk of the sin of man and the judgement of God but offer no way by which we can be forgiven and justified before God as Paul does in the second half of Romans 3.

Job struggles through the emotions of grief with the hurt deepened by the inadequate and wrong teaching of his friends. In his first four replies there is a section in which having answered as best he can the view of his friend, he speaks to God. What is interesting is that he says very different things to God from what he says to his friends. We should be aware that what we hear on the surface is not necessarily what is going on underneath.

In Job's prayers there is a progression of ideas in which we can see him gradually coming to an understanding of the gospel. In other words God is teaching him even though he thinks God is not answering him.

The three friends have each made one attempt to help Job. To their surprise their efforts have not been appreciated. Job seems more depressed than when they arrived! In a mixture of genuine concern for their misguided friend and wounded pride they determine to try harder – and hurt more. Little by little Job works through his anger towards God until finally he is ready to hear what God has to say.

Q.1 Eliphaz' first argument(chapters 4,5) was 'suffering is the result of sin, and all have sinned, so you are getting what you deserve.' To his surprise Job refused to see this as the explanation of his pain. What now,(chapter 15) is his reason for claiming that he is right and Job is wrong? What forms does this point of view take in our time? Why is it damaging? How would you answer it? In the second half of this chapter Eliphaz repeats his original position – the wicked are punished here and now, so if you are suffering, you must be wicked!

Q.2 Job is fast losing patience with his 'comforters'(16:1-5). In verses 4,5 he suggests that counsellors can either rebuke or encourage, and he needs encouragement. Is there a place for both? What is it? What happens if we choose the wrong one on any particular occasion?

- Q.3 What in chapters 16,17 is Job's view of God's character and part in his suffering? In what verses is he speaking to God? How does the N.T. answer his plea to the Lord?
- Q.4 In Bildad's second speech,(chapter 18) his relationship with Job deteriorates a stage further. How and why is this? What new ideas does he introduce this time?
- Q.5 Job's reply,(chapter 19) still shows anger and resentment towards God, but for the first time there is a glimmer of hope. What is it? How is his view of the gospel still inadequate?
- Q.6 Zophar sees that their vague generalizations about suffering being God's punishment of the wicked have been rejected, so in chapter 20 he tries to make specific accusations against Job personally. What are they? How do Jesus' words in Matt.7:1-5 apply to a situation like this?
- Q.7 Job in chapter 21 has a very different view of the connection between suffering and judgement. What is it? How does Luke 16 support his argument? What in the light of this should be our attitudes to good times and hard times?
- Q.8 Eliphaz also makes specific allegations of sin.(chapter 22) What are they? Bearing in mind how far Teman was from Uz, where is he likely to have got these accusations from? What does the New Testament say about this situation? How does Jesus make use of Job 22:16? In what circumstances would 22:21-30 be appropriate?
- Q.9 Why does not God let me talk with Him, Job asks in chapter 23,24. How would you help someone who is having problems with unanswered prayer in circumstances like Job's? Does Bildad's last answer help?(chapter 25)
- Q.10 In Job's final answer to his three friends,(chapter 26-31) he agrees with their teaching up to a point but denies that it applies to him. On what points are they in agreement? He insists that he is innocent of the charges they bring against him. What further ideas does this section give about how to respond to criticism, deserved and undeserved?