Outline Lecture Two—Understanding Suffering: The Book of Job

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPyyXQN8cG0&NR=1

I) The Enigma of Suffering
   a) To be human is to suffer and to suffer is to inquire
   b) Wisdom narrative from the Old Testament—the Book of Job

II) “Watchers of men” or the “Rubber-necker” Reflex
   a) Response of Job’s friends
      i) Silence first, followed by judgment, blame, and chastisement
         (1) Eli’phaz insinuates that Job had probably sinned in some undisclosed way
         (2) Bildad reminds Job that God does not “pervert justice” (Ch. 8)
         (3) Zophar’s even harsher assessment
      ii) Their counsel of patience
   b) Judgment vs. Compassion
      i) Our tendency to blame the victim rather than to show compassion
         (1) E.g. Pat Robertson’s “historical” justification for the earthquake in Haiti
      ii) By blaming others for their suffering, we may feel better about ourselves
         (1) Meaning of “schadenfreude”
      iii) “Even if I sin, what do I do to thee, thou watcher of men?”

III) Suffering and Divine Justice
   a) Key theme: how to reconcile human suffering with the idea of a benevolent and just God
      i) Does God always reward good and punish evil?
      ii) The preponderant question for the ancient Israelites in the 6th century B.C.E.
      iii) Alternative understanding of divine justice from the mainstream view of Deuteronomy
   b) The Historical Context behind the Book of Job—The Trajectory of Ancient Israel’s Rise and Fall
      i) Unity and Expansion under King David around the 10th century BCE
      ii) Excesses of his successor Solomon (961-922)
         (1) Creation of the 12 Administrative Districts (show map)
         (2) Treaty with King Hiram of Tyre
      iii) The Period of Division 933-722
         (1) Ten tribes of Israel in the North vs. Judah and Simeon in the South
         (2) Jerobam bypassed priests of Shiloh in performing sacrifices
      iv) Fall of Israel in 722 at the hands of the Assyrians
         (1) “The Ten Lost Tribes of Israel”
      v) Key lesson of the chroniclers of “Samuel” and “Kings”:
         (1) Ethical accountability of a nation
   c) Ancient Israel’s Test of Faith—The Fate of Judah (8th to 6th centuries)
      i) Geopolitical Shifts
         (1) After the fall of Northern kingdom in 722, the precarious existence of Judah
         (2) Prophet Isaiah’s caution
      ii) The Ascension of King Josiah (640-609)
(1) His 622 religious “awakening”
(2) “Discovery” of a “lost” book of the law—“Deuteronomy”

iii) Why produce such a book in a time of crisis?
   (1) Meaning of “Deuteronomy”
   (2) Ethical Code of the Deuteronomists
   (3) Wipe clean its spiritual slate

iv) The Period of Exile
   (1) The Destruction of Jerusalem 586
   (2) Israelites’ darkest hour

IV) The Virtues of Job
   a) Pre-affliction Job
      i) Very wealthy and pious
      ii) Wager between God and Satan—the “prosecutor”
         (1) Satan’s cynical view of human nature:
         (2) Satan using Job to test this hypothesis
   b) Job’s insistence on explanation of divine justice
      i) “I will hold fast to my integrity as long as the spirit of God is in his nostrils” (Ch. 27)
      ii) What is the connection between integrity and faith?
         (1) Genuine, deep faith should compel us to question substance of our beliefs
      iii) Key illuminations of wisdom in the Book of Job
   c) Job’s Progression in Faith or Integrity
      i) Much less naïve and self-centered by the end of his questioning
      ii) Better understands that “wisdom is many-sided” (Ch. 11)
      iii) We cannot see the cosmic picture (Ch. 14)
         (1) Puncture and deflate human presumption
         (2) The “truth” is subtle and elusive to people
      iv) The wisdom of acceptance, humility, and the integrity of faith