

“Shall a Faultfinder Contend with the Almighty?” (Job 38:1–42:6)

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Many Americans have a very casual relationship with God. Over ten years ago, a couple of sociologists studied the religious beliefs of teenagers. They summarized the predominant religious views of teenagers as “moralistic therapeutic deism.” Yes, that’s a mouthful. But we can break that down word by word: it’s deism because it involves a general notion of God who doesn’t much interfere with the world. It’s therapeutic because the point of this religion is to make us feel good. And it’s moralistic because the idea is that if we’re good boy and girls, we’ll go to heaven. The core doctrines of this religious worldview are:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.¹

This worldview reduces God to a nice, grandfatherly sort of being, who exists to make us happy. As long as we’re decent enough, he won’t cut us out of the family or stop giving us gifts. He doesn’t mind if we don’t visit him much. In fact, he’s delighted that we would bother to think of him at all.

C. S. Lewis once wrote, “What would really satisfy us would be a God who said of anything we happened to like doing, ‘What does it matter so long as they are contented?’ We want, in fact, not so much a Father in Heaven as a grandfather in heaven—a senile benevolence who, as they said, ‘liked to see young people enjoying themselves,’ and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day, ‘a good time was had by all.’”² That’s the kind of God that most people seem to believe in. And it’s not just teenagers who hold this view.

¹ Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religions and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162–63.

² C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (1940; repr. New York: Touchstone, 1996), 35–36.

When things are going well for us, we tend to ignore God. We think we have life figured out and simply don't need him. When we want something, we may turn to God, our grandfather in heaven. And when something very bad happens, we may get angry. We may even ask, "Where were you?" We may ask, "Where were you, God, when my loved one was suffering and dying?" "Where were you, God, when that earthquake struck, or that famine carried on for years?"

Never do we imagine that God—the true God, the Creator and Lord of heaven and earth—may ask us, "Where were you?" But that's exactly what God asks Job in the passage we'll look at today. We have lots of questions for and demands of God, but the truth is that he has questions for us and demands of us. And God certainly isn't a senile benevolence or an impotent and nice grandfather. He is an all-powerful God who doesn't owe us answers to all our questions. He is a God who inspires awe and even terror. But he's also a God who graces us with his presence.

Today, we'll look at God's two long speeches in chapters 38–41 of the book of Job. We'll also see how Job responds to both speeches. If you haven't been with us before, Job is a God-fearing man who has suffered greatly. God had blessed him with a large family and wealth. But, for reasons that Job doesn't understand, God has allowed Job to suffer. He lost his wealth and all ten of his children. We know that this didn't happen to Job because he did something wrong. He's not being punished for his sin. But though we know more than Job knows, we still have questions. Why would God do this? Why is there such evil in the world? Why is there so much suffering?

Job had questions of his own. He wanted to know why God had become his enemy. He wanted God to explain himself. He wanted someone to vindicate him, to declare that he was in the right. By claiming his innocence and that God had become his enemy, he implied that God was in the wrong. His demands to speak to God makes the readers of Job wonder how long God would allow Job to speak that way. We've been waiting for God to show up, and now he's here.

Let's see what God has to say. Turn to chapter 38 and look at the first three verses:

¹ Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:

² "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

³ Dress for action like a man;

I will question you, and you make it known to me.

God doesn't appear to Job in the form of a daisy, a rainbow, or a unicorn. He appears in the form of a whirlwind. This must have been jaw-dropping and even scary. The initial audience of the book of Job may have wondered if God was going to destroy Job.

I don't know about you, but if God appeared in a whirlwind and said to me, "Dress for action like a man," I would be terrified. God is literally telling Job to gird up his loins, to get ready for a wrestling match. God says that Job has spoken "without knowledge." To reveal just how much Job doesn't know, God is going to ask him a series of rhetorical questions. In fact, God asks Job over sixty questions.

I'm going to read the first long speech, which takes up most of chapter 38 and all of chapter 39. As I do, notice that God states, through his questions, that he is the Creator of the world, he's in control of the sea and the weather, he is in charge of the light and the dark, and he is the Creator of all animals. God, in his wisdom, has set up all the elements of nature, even the frightening parts. God has created all animals, even the scary and odd ones. Though we don't know why God causes both rain and drought, thunder and lightning, God has his reasons. Though to us some animals seem frightening or just plain weird, each one plays a role in God's creation.

So, let's read God's first speech, beginning in chapter 38, verse 4.

- 4 "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.
- 5 Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?
- 6 On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone,
- 7 when the morning stars sang together
and all the sons of God shouted for joy?
- 8 "Or who shut in the sea with doors
when it burst out from the womb,
- 9 when I made clouds its garment
and thick darkness its swaddling band,
- 10 and prescribed limits for it
and set bars and doors,
- 11 and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stayed'?
- 12 "Have you commanded the morning since your days began,
and caused the dawn to know its place,

13 that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth,
and the wicked be shaken out of it?
14 It is changed like clay under the seal,
and its features stand out like a garment.
15 From the wicked their light is withheld,
and their uplifted arm is broken.

16 “Have you entered into the springs of the sea,
or walked in the recesses of the deep?
17 Have the gates of death been revealed to you,
or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?
18 Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?
Declare, if you know all this.

19 “Where is the way to the dwelling of light,
and where is the place of darkness,
20 that you may take it to its territory
and that you may discern the paths to its home?
21 You know, for you were born then,
and the number of your days is great!

22 “Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,
or have you seen the storehouses of the hail,
23 which I have reserved for the time of trouble,
for the day of battle and war?
24 What is the way to the place where the light is distributed,
or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?

25 “Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain
and a way for the thunderbolt,
26 to bring rain on a land where no man is,
on the desert in which there is no man,
27 to satisfy the waste and desolate land,
and to make the ground sprout with grass?

28 “Has the rain a father,
or who has begotten the drops of dew?
29 From whose womb did the ice come forth,
and who has given birth to the frost of heaven?
30 The waters become hard like stone,
and the face of the deep is frozen.

31 “Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades
or loose the cords of Orion?
32 Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season,
or can you guide the Bear with its children?
33 Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?

Can you establish their rule on the earth?

- 34 “Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
that a flood of waters may cover you?
35 Can you send forth lightnings, that they may go
and say to you, ‘Here we are’?
36 Who has put wisdom in the inward parts
or given understanding to the mind?
37 Who can number the clouds by wisdom?
Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens,
38 when the dust runs into a mass
and the clods stick fast together?
- 39 “Can you hunt the prey for the lion,
or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,
40 when they crouch in their dens
or lie in wait in their thicket?
41 Who provides for the raven its prey,
when its young ones cry to God for help,
and wander about for lack of food?
- 1 “Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?
Do you observe the calving of the does?
2 Can you number the months that they fulfill,
and do you know the time when they give birth,
3 when they crouch, bring forth their offspring,
and are delivered of their young?
4 Their young ones become strong; they grow up in the open;
they go out and do not return to them.
- 5 “Who has let the wild donkey go free?
Who has loosed the bonds of the swift donkey,
6 to whom I have given the arid plain for his home
and the salt land for his dwelling place?
7 He scorns the tumult of the city;
he hears not the shouts of the driver.
8 He ranges the mountains as his pasture,
and he searches after every green thing.
- 9 “Is the wild ox willing to serve you?
Will he spend the night at your manger?
10 Can you bind him in the furrow with ropes,
or will he harrow the valleys after you?
11 Will you depend on him because his strength is great,
and will you leave to him your labor?
12 Do you have faith in him that he will return your grain
and gather it to your threshing floor?

13 “The wings of the ostrich wave proudly,
 but are they the pinions and plumage of love?
 14 For she leaves her eggs to the earth
 and lets them be warmed on the ground,
 15 forgetting that a foot may crush them
 and that the wild beast may trample them.
 16 She deals cruelly with her young, as if they were not hers;
 though her labor be in vain, yet she has no fear,
 17 because God has made her forget wisdom
 and given her no share in understanding.
 18 When she rouses herself to flee,
 she laughs at the horse and his rider.

 19 “Do you give the horse his might?
 Do you clothe his neck with a mane?
 20 Do you make him leap like the locust?
 His majestic snorting is terrifying.
 21 He paws in the valley and exults in his strength;
 he goes out to meet the weapons.
 22 He laughs at fear and is not dismayed;
 he does not turn back from the sword.
 23 Upon him rattle the quiver,
 the flashing spear, and the javelin.
 24 With fierceness and rage he swallows the ground;
 he cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet.
 25 When the trumpet sounds, he says ‘Aha!’
 He smells the battle from afar,
 the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.

 26 “Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars
 and spreads his wings toward the south?
 27 Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up
 and makes his nest on high?
 28 On the rock he dwells and makes his home,
 on the rocky crag and stronghold.
 29 From there he spies out the prey;
 his eyes behold it from far away.
 30 His young ones suck up blood,
 and where the slain are, there is he.”

God begins by asking Job, “Where were you?” Of course, Job was not there when God created the world. Job doesn’t know how God made the world. And Job couldn’t have made a better world.

God’s description of the world as having a foundation and a cornerstone is a poetic way of describing a building. God is a master builder. But throughout the Bible, there are descriptions

of the world as a temple. God made the world to be a temple, a theater of his glory, where he meets with his people and they worship him.

God describes the sea as bursting out of the womb. God gave birth to the sea. In the Bible, the sea is often associated with chaos, evil, and death. It has “proud waves” (38:11). Yet the sea has limits. Its limits are prescribed (v. 10). God says to it, “Thus far shall you come, and no farther” (v. 11). One of the major points in God’s speeches to Job is that even things that can be chaotic, destructive, and evil have a place in God’s world, but God is in control. Evil has a place, but it has boundaries. It has limits. God is greater than evil.

God has also commanded the day to begin, the way a general may summon an army (38:12). God says that when he commands the light to appear, the wicked are “shaken out” (v. 13). God uses light to expose the wicked. But God has a place in his world for “the gates of death” and “the place of darkness.” It’s interesting that God describes things in terms of dark and light, life and death. God is in control of all, and all things have a purpose.

God is even sarcastic. In the midst of asking Job questions, in verse 21, God says,

You know, for you were born then,
and the number of your days is great!

God puts Job in his place.

God describes bringing rain on desolate lands where no people live (38:25–27). Why would God do that? Perhaps because while humans are the height of God’s creation, they aren’t the only things he’s concerned with. Perhaps pouring out rain on those desolate lands helps sustain a complicated ecosystem. Edward Lorenz, a meteorologist and a professor at MIT, noticed how small changes in the environment can lead to big changes in the weather. He once wrote, over fifty years ago, “One meteorologist remarked that if the theory were correct, one flap of a sea gull’s wings would be enough to alter the course of the weather forever. The controversy has not yet been settled, but the most recent evidence seems to favor the sea gulls.”³

God’s point in all of this is that Job doesn’t have his power or wisdom. Job needs to know that God has a place for everything in his world. But Job can’t possibly understand the role

³ Edward Lorenz, “The Predictability of Hydrodynamic Flow,” *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences*, vol. 25, no. 4 (1963): 431, available online: http://eaps4.mit.edu/research/Lorenz/Predictability_hydrodynamic_flow_1963.pdf.

of each thing in God’s world, because Job doesn’t have the capacity to understand the complexity of God’s creation. The same can be said of us. We see in part, not the whole. So, we should be careful to judge by “feeble sense,” as William Cowper’s famous hymn says.⁴ Sure, we know more about the natural world that Job did, but that doesn’t mean we can control it. We often know when bad weather is coming, but we can’t stop it. We, too, are mere mortals.

As far as the animals go, most of the animals God describes are wild. Some are even dangerous. He describes birds of prey like the hawk (39:26–30). Birds of prey are associated with the covenant curses. If Israel broke the covenant God made with them, God would cause Israel’s enemies to defeat them and their corpses would be “food for all the birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth” (Deut. 28:26; cf. Rev. 19:21). Even dangerous beasts are under God’s control. Wild animals can’t be tamed by man, but they are governed and cared for by God.

That’s true of the strange animals, too. The ostrich (39:13–18) is literally an odd bird. They have wings but can’t fly. They lay massive eggs and only 10 percent of them survive. God says that he has made the ostrich “forget wisdom and given her no share in understanding” (v. 17). Yet ostriches are also incredibly fast. Ostriches and other strange creatures may seem like evolutionary accidents to some, but God has made this animal for his purposes.

After finishing his first speech, God gives Job a chance to speak. How does Job respond? Let’s look at the first five verses of chapter 40:

¹ And the LORD said to Job:

² “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?
He who argues with God, let him answer it.”

³ Then Job answered the LORD and said:

⁴ “Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?
I lay my hand on my mouth.

⁵ I have spoken once, and I will not answer;
twice, but I will proceed no further.”

God asks Job if he, who seems to have found fault with God, will argue with God. God had complained about God’s justice. (6:4; 7:19–21; 9:17–18; 16:7–17; etc.) Will Job now complain to God’s face? Wisely, Job realizes that he can’t say anything.

⁴ “God Moves in a Mysterious Way.”

But Job hasn't said he was wrong yet. He doesn't say, "God, I went too far. I should have been quiet and simply trusted in you." So, God must continue to ask Job questions. Let's read verses 6–14:

- ⁶ Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:
- ⁷ "Dress for action like a man;
I will question you, and you make it known to me.
- ⁸ Will you even put me in the wrong?
Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?
- ⁹ Have you an arm like God,
and can you thunder with a voice like his?
- ¹⁰ "Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity;
clothe yourself with glory and splendor.
- ¹¹ Pour out the overflowings of your anger,
and look on everyone who is proud and abase him.
- ¹² Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low
and tread down the wicked where they stand.
- ¹³ Hide them all in the dust together;
bind their faces in the world below.
- ¹⁴ Then will I also acknowledge to you
that your own right hand can save you.

Again, God tells Job to dress for action and to answer his questions. Then he asks, "Will you . . . put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?" Job has sworn his innocence so much that he has implied that God was wrong. He said that God crushed him and multiplied his wounds without cause (9:17). He was clearly wrong. God had a cause, even if Job didn't understand. Certainly, Job doesn't have God's knowledge. And Job doesn't have the power to judge the wicked, to tread them down and bind them in "the world below." Only God can do that. And Job can't save himself. Only God can do that. The same is true for us.

Then God goes on to speak of two beasts, Behemoth and Leviathan. Some people have thought that these are the hippopotamus and the crocodile. I don't think we're meant to think of literal animals like the hippopotamus and crocodile, because they aren't terribly scary or frightening. Even in the ancient Near East, Egyptians killed these animals. It seems best to think of these beasts representing cosmic evil forces. These are no mere animals, which is clear from their descriptions. We have to remember that this is poetry. We also need to remember that there are times when the Bible describes realities using symbolic language. That doesn't make it any less true. It just means we have to understand the language and culture of the biblical world.

Let's first read about Behemoth. He is described in verses 15–24:

- 15 “Behold, Behemoth,
 which I made as I made you;
 he eats grass like an ox.
16 Behold, his strength in his loins,
 and his power in the muscles of his belly.
17 He makes his tail stiff like a cedar;
 the sinews of his thighs are knit together.
18 His bones are tubes of bronze,
 his limbs like bars of iron.

19 “He is the first of the works of God;
 let him who made him bring near his sword!
20 For the mountains yield food for him
 where all the wild beasts play.
21 Under the lotus plants he lies,
 in the shelter of the reeds and in the marsh.
22 For his shade the lotus trees cover him;
 the willows of the brook surround him.
23 Behold, if the river is turbulent he is not frightened;
 he is confident though Jordan rushes against his mouth.
24 Can one take him by his eyes,
 or pierce his nose with a snare?

God's point is that this creature, Behemoth, is powerful. He is not frightened. According to that last verse, no man can capture him. The clear implication is that only God can do that.

Obviously, this cannot be any animal.

Robert Fyall, a biblical scholar, wrote a book about Job. In it, he says that he believes Behemoth is supposed to represent the god Mot, the god of the dead.⁵ Of course, there is only one true God. But the Bible recognizes that there are false gods, and the Bible states that God is more powerful than these false gods, which are really demonic in nature and not actually gods. (Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37; 1 Cor. 10:20). If Fyall is correct, then the point is that no human being can defeat death. I think it's hard for us to see this from text, but it fits in the context of God's speeches. God has already said that the chaotic sea, which often is associated with sin and death,

⁵ Robert S. Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You: Images of Creation and Evil in the Book of Job*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 126–137.

is under his control. God has said that both light and darkness, both birth and death, are governed by him.⁶

The figure of Leviathan represents someone else. First, let's read about him in chapter 41:

- 1 “Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook
or press down his tongue with a cord?
- 2 Can you put a rope in his nose
or pierce his jaw with a hook?
- 3 Will he make many pleas to you?
Will he speak to you soft words?
- 4 Will he make a covenant with you
to take him for your servant forever?
- 5 Will you play with him as with a bird,
or will you put him on a leash for your girls?
- 6 Will traders bargain over him?
Will they divide him up among the merchants?
- 7 Can you fill his skin with harpoons
or his head with fishing spears?
- 8 Lay your hands on him;
remember the battle—you will not do it again!
- 9 Behold, the hope of a man is false;
he is laid low even at the sight of him.
- 10 No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up.
Who then is he who can stand before me?
- 11 Who has first given to me, that I should repay him?
Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.

- 12 “I will not keep silence concerning his limbs,
or his mighty strength, or his goodly frame.
- 13 Who can strip off his outer garment?
Who would come near him with a bridle?
- 14 Who can open the doors of his face?
Around his teeth is terror.
- 15 His back is made of rows of shields,
shut up closely as with a seal.
- 16 One is so near to another
that no air can come between them.
- 17 They are joined one to another;
they clasp each other and cannot be separated.
- 18 His sneezings flash forth light,
and his eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn.
- 19 Out of his mouth go flaming torches;
sparks of fire leap forth.

⁶ This idea may seem like a stretch, but the Hebrew word for death used in Job 18:13; 28:22 is *ma'wēt* (מֵוֶת), which sounds similar to “Mot” and is personified at times, as in those Job references and in Hos. 13:14.

20 Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke,
as from a boiling pot and burning rushes.
21 His breath kindles coals,
and a flame comes forth from his mouth.
22 In his neck abides strength,
and terror dances before him.
23 The folds of his flesh stick together,
firmly cast on him and immovable.
24 His heart is hard as a stone,
hard as the lower millstone.
25 When he raises himself up, the mighty are afraid;
at the crashing they are beside themselves.
26 Though the sword reaches him, it does not avail,
nor the spear, the dart, or the javelin.
27 He counts iron as straw,
and bronze as rotten wood.
28 The arrow cannot make him flee;
for him, sling stones are turned to stubble.
29 Clubs are counted as stubble;
he laughs at the rattle of javelins.
30 His underparts are like sharp potsherds;
he spreads himself like a threshing sledge on the mire.
31 He makes the deep boil like a pot;
he makes the sea like a pot of ointment.
32 Behind him he leaves a shining wake;
one would think the deep to be white-haired.
33 On earth there is not his like,
a creature without fear.
34 He sees everything that is high;
he is king over all the sons of pride.”

The general point about Leviathan is clear: he is a ferocious beast that no mere human can defeat. Weapons such as arrows and stones are useless against him, so are clubs and javelins. If someone tries, he will be sorry. And if you can't defeat Leviathan, how can you dare fight against God? He breathes fire, like a dragon. He is king over the “sons of pride.” Who is this beast?

I mentioned that a scholar named Robert Fyall believes that Behemoth is the god of death. He also believes that Leviathan is a poetic representation of the devil, calling this creature “a guise for Satan.”⁷ This matches Isaiah 27:1, which depicts Leviathan as “the fleeing serpent” and “the dragon that is in the sea.” Revelation 12:9 refers to Satan as “the great dragon” and

⁷ Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You*, 141.

“that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.”

Another biblical scholar reports that “*Leviathan* is the name of a seven-headed sea dragon in the old myths, particularly those of Canaan before the Israelite occupation.”⁸ Fittingly, Revelation 12:3 depicts Satan as a seven-headed dragon.

So, if Leviathan represents Satan, then God’s point is that he is a monster that is dangerous and can’t be defeated by mere humans. However, Satan is not equal to God. He is a pet on a leash, the one God “formed to play in” the sea, as Psalm 104:26 says. “Satan may be the chief mischief-maker of the universe, but he is a mere creature, puny compared with the Lord. He can do only what God permits him to do.”⁹ Satan may be more powerful than we are, but to God, he is a dog—a particularly nasty dog—on a leash.

That may all sound a bit far-fetched if it’s a new idea to you, but think about this: in Revelation 20, we’re told that at the final judgment, Satan, Death, and Hades will be cast into the lake of fire, a place of destruction, where they will be tormented forever. In Revelation 21:1, we’re told that the sea was no more. Here in Job, we have mentions of Satan, death, and the sea. For now, they serve God’s purposes, though it’s hard for us to know how or why. But one day, they will be defeated. I don’t think that means there will be no literal sea in the new world. The point is there will be no more sin, chaos, and death. All the forces of evil will be removed from God’s world. But for now, they serve a purpose.

At the end of God’s second speech, Job has another chance to reply. He quotes some of God’s words, and he realizes that he spoke foolishly. He lacked understanding. But now that he sees God, he doesn’t need any answers. He turns back from his accusations against God.

Let’s read the first six verses of chapter 42:

¹ Then Job answered the LORD and said:

² “I know that you can do all things,

and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

³ ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’

Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

⁴ ‘Hear, and I will speak;

I will question you, and you make it known to me.’

⁵ I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,

⁸ Francis I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. Donald J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 312.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

but now my eye sees you;
6 therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes.”

Job realizes that there is nothing more to be said to God. There’s some question of whether Job has sinned in his comments during his speeches in the book. God never said that Job sinned. God doesn’t rebuke him. But God seems to correct him. God reminds Job of his power and wisdom. He also reminds Job of Job’s lack of power and wisdom. In short, God says to Job, “I have my reasons, and even if I told you them, you might not understand.”

The question of whether Job sinned may be a bit too simplistic. It seems that Job said some wrong things, but he said them in faith. His view of God wasn’t entirely accurate, but he never cursed God and never turned away from God. Even when he complained about God, he did it in the context of a relationship with God. He wrestled with God. And, in the end, God said, “Okay, let’s wrestle.” And Job realized he was no match for God.

Now that we’ve looked at this important part of the book of Job, I want to make four points.

One, God is God, and we are not. God created the universe. We cannot create life out of raw elements in a lab. We know much more about science than Job knew, but we know so little. And we’re often very unwise. We don’t have God’s power, wisdom, intelligence, or knowledge. Therefore, who are we to question God? God is certainly not the senile benevolence that C. S. Lewis described. He’s not the grandfatherly genie in the bottle of “moralistic therapeutic deism.” He’s not the God who simply suffers and empathizes, like the God of *The Shack*. He is a God to be feared.

I think the main reason why people reject the true God, the God of the Bible and not their own desires, is because they don’t want God to be King. The issue is authority. God is the ultimate authority, but many people don’t want that. God is the one who designed reality to function in a certain way. But people don’t like that. They want to set the terms for their own lives. They want to determine what is right and what is wrong. But we simply lack the authority, the wisdom, the intelligence, the knowledge, and the power to do that. God is God and we are not. We cannot wrestle with God and win. We cannot kill God or defeat him. We can reject him, but if we go to the grave doing that, we will lose in the end, and God will reject us.

Two, God doesn’t owe us answers. God never tells Job why he suffered. God does not say to Job, “Well, here’s the deal: In heaven, I had this conversation with Satan, and I asked if he

had considered you, a blameless servant who feared me. And he said you served me only because I blessed you. So, I let him take away your children, your wealth, and your health.” God gives Job no clue as to why Job suffered. God is the one who asks questions.

Three, even if we had more answers, we’d still have more questions. Imagine if God had told Job what I just said. Job might ask, “Wait, why were you talking to Satan? Why was he in heaven? Why did you bring my name up to him? Why did you let him do that to me?” Job might have had even more questions.

I have a friend whose wife died when she was only 38. She was a godly woman. She died suddenly and very unexpectedly. It didn’t make sense. Wouldn’t a godly woman be able to accomplish much more if she lived longer? Why did God take her? I know my friend struggled, though he has a secure faith in Jesus. But I wonder, hypothetically speaking, what would happen if God would answer the question of “why?” What if God told my friend that his wife died because it set up a long series of events that led to some greater good? Perhaps this woman’s death was the first domino that knocked down many more, which led to many people being saved, or which prevented World War III, or something that we can’t even imagine? Even if my friend had this knowledge, he might ask, “Couldn’t there have been another way?” We can always ask more questions.

What’s more important is that we come to rest in God. We must come to trust him. Our children always ask questions. We can answer and answer, but often the real and complete answers are too much for them to understand. I think that’s the way it is with God and his children. A child may not know how immunizations work, but he or she knows that getting those needles stuck in them is painful. But they have to trust that the pain is worth it, that his or her parents are putting them through the pain for their good. Something similar happens with God. We can always ask him more questions, but we must learn to put our questions to rest. Sometimes, we have to stop asking questions and say, “Okay, I don’t understand. But I trust you.”

Four, God’s presence is more important than answers. We might think that God is being a bit of a bully. He shows up in a whirlwind, asks Job a series of questions that he can’t answer (at least not with a “yes”), doesn’t tell Job why Job suffered, and then compels Job to repent. But God is gracious. God could have remained quiet. He could have remained unseen. But God came to Job. He came down. And God spoke. God didn’t have to do that. And when God came, he

didn't destroy Job. He didn't condemn him. And when Job finally understood that God was in control of the whole situation, and that God has his reasons that we can't completely fathom, Job understood that answers weren't important. In a way, the fact that God showed up and didn't condemn Job was a vindication of Job's innocence. But what Job really needed was God's presence. He needed communion, or fellowship, with God.

That's why Job said, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes have seen you." Throughout the Bible, the great hope, the great end of our deepest longings, is to see God. David said that if he could ask God one thing, it would be "to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD" (Ps. 27:4). Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). And in the end, we're told that in the new creation, when God remakes the world into a paradise, God's servants "will see his face" (Rev. 22:4).¹⁰

Job didn't see God in all his glory. He only saw God in the form of a whirlwind. But he knew God was with him, that God hadn't given up on him, that God cared enough to reveal himself and speak. That's what Job needed. That's what we need.

God has come down to us, too. But he didn't come in a whirlwind. He came in the form of an average-looking man.¹¹ Jesus is the God-man. He is truly God and he added a second nature, so that he is also truly human. Jesus told his disciples that those who saw him saw the Father (John 14:9). We know that God isn't just an awe-inspiring, all-powerful, cryptic deity. He is a God who cares, who comes down to us in our need. Jesus, like God in the book of Job, asked a lot of questions. But he also gave us answers. He gave us a message of grace and forgiveness. He told us to live holy lives, but he also died because we so often fail to live by God's standards and design. Jesus can't be fit into neat boxes. He's a fire-and-brimstone preacher of hell and a friend of sinners. He could get angry and also cry. He could chew out self-righteous religious hypocrites but also warn all of us of our sin. He could hang out with repenting prostitutes and also condemn sexual sin. He is a savior and a judge, a King and a brother. And he's much more.

If we trust him, if we rest in him, we will one day see God's face. Jesus came the first time not to condemn, but to save. He entered the whirlwind of God's righteous wrath so that we don't have to. If we would only repent of our old ways and cling to him, no faultfinder will be able to contend with us and declare us guilty.

¹⁰ See also 1 John 3:2.

¹¹ See Phil. 2:5-8; cf. Isa. 53:2.