

Job

Knowing God in Pain



Lesson 9 Job 38:1-42:17

THE THEOPHANY: GOD'S UNEXPECTED, UNFORGETTABLE RESPONSE

*Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind...
— Job 38:1*

When was the last time you watched... and listened... as a storm approached? Raised back east, spectacular thunderstorms were a common experience as I was growing up. Often they were family entertainment. It would begin with low rumbles you almost felt more than you heard. The air would tingle as the sky darkened; the temperature dropping as the winds rose. That's when we would gather in my brothers' room in front of the big bay window—all five of us kids lined up with our faces pressed to the glass. (Mom must have loved that!) Then it would happen—the sky would light up, the thunder would CRACK and the windows in the old parsonage would literally rattle. We'd burst into cheers and giggles until the older ones hushed us in anticipation for the next show.

Throughout Job 37, Elihu has been describing an approaching storm. In all likelihood, a literal storm was rolling towards them as he gave the closing portion of his monologue. He used the mesmerizing power of the storm to speak figuratively about God's majesty.

*My heart trembles, and leaps from its place. Listen closely to the thunder of His voice, and the rumbling that goes out from His mouth... and His lightning to the ends of the earth. After it, a voice roars: He thunders with His majestic voice.
—Selection from 37:2-4*

Imagine everyone's astonishment when the rumbles and roars took the shape of audible words! The Almighty suddenly spoke out of the whirlwind for all to hear. In Job 38-41 we find God's monologue in which He speaks directly to Job. Known as the *theophany* meaning "appearance of God," Job finally gets his request. Out of the midst of a horrendous storm (*isn't that where Job has been living for the past weeks and months?*), Job at last hears the voice of the Lord for whom his heart longs.

As if God speaking in an audible voice isn't surprising enough, what He has to say to Job is equally unexpected. Some people read these concluding chapters and walk away confused and unsatisfied. Like with some movies these days, they wish there was a video out there with an alternative ending. But there is great wisdom and precious treasure to be found here!

When God appears, Job sees Him as he never has before. I pray you, too, will end this study by seeing the Lord in a fresh and powerful way. I recommend you begin by reading all of God's monologue in one sitting to get the full impact of His words to Job. Be prepared to do some thinking. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes and guide your heart.

DAY 1

- 1) Plan a quiet place and time for today's lesson; set aside at least 20 minutes to be alone with the Lord. Read Job 38-42:6 without stopping. Read slowly, letting God's words sink into your heart. Imagine how these words must have sounded to Job—sitting in the ashes, aching inside and out, full of confusion and despair. *Warning: Chapter 41 is difficult to understand. Don't get bogged down here; we'll work out the details later.*

After reading, consider the following questions and record your observations below.

- What surprised you about what God says to Job...and what He doesn't say?
- How would you have reacted to these words if you were Job?
- Does God ever answer Job's question as to why?
- Do you think Job is satisfied with God's response? Why or why not?
- Are you satisfied with what God says to Job? Why or why not? *Be sure to answer truthfully—remember God desires an honest relationship with His own.*

Observations and Questions:

DAY 2

- 1) Reread Job 38:1-40:5 which contains God's first discourse and Job's first response.
- 2) Focus on 38:2. What accusation does God make against Job?

Find at least one example from an earlier chapter where you feel Job was guilty of doing this. Include the reference if possible.

- 3) Focus on 38:4-38. List the natural wonders of creation that God points to as testifying to His sovereignty and power.
- 4) Focus on 38:39-39:30. List the living wonders of creation that God points to as testifying to His sovereignty and power.
- 5) Focus on 40:1-5. As God concludes His first discourse, He challenges Job to answer Him. What is Job's response?

Selah

Psalm 104 is a song of praise that closely resembles God's monologue in the book of Job. After listing the mighty works of the Lord the psalmist exclaims,

I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. Let my meditation be pleasing to Him; as for me, I shall be glad in the Lord.
—Psalm 104:33-34

Why do you think focusing on creation fills our hearts with joy and draws our attention to God? Take time this week to notice the wonders of God's handiwork. (Even on the 91 you can catch a glimpse of His glory if you look for it!) If possible spend some time out in nature: take a walk in a park, plan a drive to the beach or the mountains, or go golfing! Take your Bible along and pray the words of Psalm 104 back to the Lord.

DAY 3

- 1) Reread Job 40:6-42:6 which contains God's second discourse and Job's second response.
- 2) Focus on 40:8. What is the second accusation God makes against Job? (The first was in 38:2.)

Find at least one example from an earlier chapter where you feel Job was guilty of doing this. Include the reference if possible.

- 3) What aspect of His own power and sovereignty does God point to in 40:10-14?
- 4) Focus on 40:15-24. God draws Job's attention to a particular animal that displays His might and glory, the *Behemoth*. Using whatever study aids you have available, what do you think this animal might have been and why?
- 5) Focus on chapter 41. God now draws Job's attention to another animal, the *Leviathan*. Utilizing your study aids, what do you think this animal might have been and why?
- 6) Focus on 42:1-5. As God concludes His second discourse, what is Job's response?

Selah

Job didn't get an answer as to why he was suffering—he got something much better! God told him things he didn't understand, things too wonderful to even know. And in the process Job's eyes were opened to see the God he longed for in a way he never had before. From the sound of Job's words, I don't think he was disappointed!

God wants to address the deep questions of our hearts as well, perhaps not in a whirlwind or an audible voice but in a way that is just as real.

Thus says the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it, the Lord is His name. "Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know." —Jeremiah 33:2-3

As we have been studying the Book of Job, it has been my prayer that God would call to your heart—that He would open your eyes to great and mighty things about Himself and about your personal hardships and heartaches that you didn't know before. How has the Lord answered that prayer in your life? How has studying Job helped you to see God in a new way? Be ready to share your life lessons with your small group.

DAY 4

- 1) Read the amazing conclusion in Job 42:7-17.

- 2) Focus on 42:7-9. What is God's opinion of the three friends? What does He command them to do?

Although Job challenged God, here he is commended for speaking right about Him while the three counselors are rebuked... the ones who so often seemed to be defending God against Job's accusations. What do you think they said about God that angered Him?

The passage implies that Job indeed did pray for God to be merciful to the three counselors. What does this tell you about the character of Job?

- 3) Focus on 42:10-17. In His monologue, God told Job that He was all powerful and in control. That was enough for Job. But God didn't stop there. He went on to demonstrate to Job and to all the world for all time in no uncertain terms that he was loved by God. How does God restore Job in this passage?

How do the number of children and amount of possessions mentioned in these verses compare to those at the beginning of the book in Job 1:2-3?

Selah

Has God told you lately that He loves you? God's love is so easy to believe in when we are being blessed here on earth as Job was at the conclusion of chapter 42. But God's love was just as real in chapters 1 and 2 when He allowed Job the honor of suffering for righteousness' sake, displaying the genuineness of his faith before all the heavenly host.

Are you confident of God's love for you today no matter what your circumstances? Read Philippians 4:11-13. What "secret" have you learned about enduring hardship in the Book of Job? Can you trust in God's love and care even when you are facing difficult times? Let the lessons of Job sink deep into your mind and heart enabling you to find contentment in every situation.

DAY 5

Read through the EXPOSITION & EXPLANATION section that follows.

EXPOSITION & EXPLANATION

Storm Watchers (38:1)

In his book, *Job*, Chuck Swindoll makes the observation, "God doesn't always tiptoe into our world making His presence known in a gentle manner." God always tells us exactly what we need to hear, the way we need to hear it, and at the perfect moment.

At last God appears to Job out of a storm. There are other occasions in Scripture in which the Lord chose this form to manifest Himself. When He appeared to Moses to give him the Law at Mount Sinai *there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled* (Exodus 19:16). The prophet Nahum writes of God, "In whirlwind and storm is His way, and clouds are the dust beneath His feet" (Nahum 1:3).

When the prophet Elijah was in need of renewed vision, the Lord came to him in a much different way. Elijah stood on a mountain as God passed by first in a great windstorm, then in an earthquake, then in a fire... but He never said a word. Then came a "still small voice" and Elijah heard the voice of God (I Kings 19:11-21).

Over 2,000 years ago, God spoke in His clearest, most perfect Voice: His Son Jesus Christ. "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). We must never make the mistake of wishing we lived in Old Testament times when on rare occasions a handful of people experienced physical manifestations of God. We have the very words and example of Jesus Christ in whom *all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form* (Col 2:9), who is now our Mediator in heaven (I Tim. 2:5). We have the power of indwelling Holy Spirit and the light of the completed Scriptures to guide us in every area of our lives. Job never would have needed a storm if he had had the vast spiritual resources which we can avail ourselves of at any moment—yet too often neglect.

So as you hold your Bible in your lap this moment, just think, *That's MY whirlwind, my voice from heaven, and my glimpse of the face of God.*

God's Monologue: An Overview (chps 38-41)

How He Responds: Answering Questions with Questions

Having your questions answered with yet more questions can be a maddening experience. (If you've ever chatted with a toddler who's recently discovered the word *why* you already know this!) That's exactly the strategy God uses throughout His monologue. Some people read these divine speeches and come away frustrated and disappointed. They see an uncaring God flaunting His power, bullying poor suffering Job into keeping his mouth shut and his gripes to himself. Worse yet He never answers Job's questions!

Look more closely and consider what is happening. Job has in essence called God out, challenging His justice. Instead of raining down lightning bolts and turning Job to toast, the Creator humbles Himself to take part in an intellectual duel with His creation. God asks a total of 77 questions, using Job's own rational approach to show the error of his reasoning.

God's questions are designed to teach Job, not to humiliate him. Jesus Himself used this method of answering questions with questions at times in His ministry (Luke 14:1-5; 20:1-8, 27-44). The purpose is to get the doubter to doubt his doubts... to stimulate thinking "outside the box." Job was dismayed that he couldn't understand what God was doing. Instead of explaining Himself, instead of fruitlessly attempting to answer Job's questions, God shows him just how vast his inability to understand Him really was. He opens Job's eyes to the reality that he could never begin to comprehend the workings of the Almighty. At the same time, the questions God asks draws his attention to the reality that He does know what He is doing in His universe.

What He Doesn't Say: No Answer to the BIG Question

Even in the end God offers Job no explanation for his suffering. He never lets him in on the information we learned in the first two chapters of the Book of Job: that his faith was being tested because he was indeed a righteous man and his faithfulness was bringing great glory to God in the throne room of heaven.

Why didn't God tell Job? If Job had learned the "why" behind his suffering, the book would have immediately lost its message to all other sufferers. If the ability to stand in the crucible of pain rested on eventually having some Divine appearance to explain the meaning of it all, what benefit could that possibly offer you and me today? The depth of hope and comfort countless souls have found in Job's story for thousands of years would never have been possible. Besides, the reason why wasn't the information Job truly needed most.

What He Does Say: "I Have Not Abandoned You"

God needed to solve the problem of Job's lack of knowledge... not about why he was suffering but about who God is. Job needed to know that God wasn't his enemy and He wasn't punishing him. Through the theophany God opens Job's eyes to see Him as Creator, Sustainer and Friend.

God walks Job through the wonders of His creation. His questions open Job's eyes to his limitations as a creature compared to God's power and wisdom in creating and sustaining the universe. The speeches succeed in bringing Job to complete faith in God's goodness without receiving a direct answer to his questions. Job is made wonderfully aware of who God is in a universe full of paradoxes for man and yet filled with joy and wonder (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*).

Outline

Speech #1

- Introductory Rebuke/Challenge (38:2-3)
 - Subject: The Lord of Nature
 - I. The Creator (38:4-15)
 - II. The Ruler of Inanimate Nature (38:16-38)
 - III. The Ruler of Animate Nature (38:39-39:30)
- Closing Rebuke and Challenge (40:1-2)
- Job's First Response (40:3-5)

Speech #2

- Introductory Challenge to Job (40:6-7)
 - Subject: The Lord of History
 - I. Prologue: Lord Over the Moral Order (40:8-14)
 - II. The First Monster (40:15-23)
 - A. His might (40:15-23)
 - B. Under God's control (40:19)
 - C. His security (40:20-23)
 - III. The Second Monster (40:24-41:34)
 - A. Man (Job) and Leviathan (40:24-41:10)
 - B. God and Leviathan—under God's control (41:11)
 - C. Description of Leviathan and other mighty beings (41:12-34)

— adapted from *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*

Speech #1 (38:2-40:2)

God's First Accusation (38:2-3)

God charges that Job "darkens" (obscures or confuses) the issue by talking about things he doesn't understand. This refers to the extreme language Job resorted to at times during his speeches as he struggled to understand his affliction. God offers little condemnation for Job's hasty words; His overwhelming focus is on providing a cure to the problem by instructing him. Once Job sees God for who He really is, repentance flows from his heart as a natural response (42:2-6).

God's First Lesson (38:4-40:2)

God sets out to solve the problem of Job's limited knowledge by displaying Himself as the Lord of nature. He begins by showing His power in the creation of the world. If Job wasn't even there when the world was created, how can he dare to criticize how the Creator runs the universe? The angels who were there shouted for joy in response to His handiwork (38:7). He goes on to display Himself as ruler over natural wonders and phenomena, such as the sea, the morning, and the weather.

God then demonstrates His authority and sustaining care over His creatures. There is no obvious reason for the animals selected; they are simply examples among countless

possible illustrations that demonstrate that His power and purpose exceed our comprehension. For example, in the case of the ostrich (39:13-18) the lesson is that God can make whatever pleases Him even if it seems bizarre to us. Imagine a bird that can't fly but can run faster than a horse (vs. 18)! While Job is struggling to understand what God is doing in his life, God demonstrates that His ways in the created world are just as difficult to comprehend.

Job's First Response (40:3-5)

"Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You?" (vs. 3). This is quite a change of heart from a man who was going to approach God like a prince (31:37)! And remember: Job still has no answers to his questions; he still has no relief from his suffering. So what has changed? His perspective and focus. Once Job began to see God as God once again, his concern over being vindicated and his bitterness over his circumstances vanished along with any trace of pride in his spirit.

Speech #2 (40:6-41:34)

God's Second Accusation (40:8)

Now that Job's heart is softened and his attitude adjusted, God cuts a little deeper with His second charge against him: "Will you condemn Me that you will be justified?" Job had found God unjust for allowing him to suffer, in his mind punishing him, when he had done nothing wrong, AND he also found God unjust for *not* punishing those who truly were wicked.

God's Second Lesson

Job had a misconception of God's attitude toward evil and the wicked. This is the area God deals with in His second speech: the relationship between a righteous God and a fallen world.

- In His first speech, God demonstrates to Job that he doesn't have knowledge of the ways of the universe, so he must trust the Creator to run things in the way that is best.
- In His second speech, God demonstrates to Job that he doesn't have the power to restrain evil, so he must trust the Almighty to establish moral order in the way that is best.

The purpose of the second speech is to show that "God alone has the power and majesty it takes to combat evil and turn it to good" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*). Here Job would learn that God was not only Creator but Savior.

In 40:10-14 God takes Job beyond the wonders of creation and introduces a new theme: the issue of moral order. This is an important transition that helps us understand the detailed and lengthy descriptions of Behemoth and Leviathan.

Two Awesome Creatures

It is difficult to say with absolute certainty what the two creatures in chapters 40-41 really are. Following are the most generally accepted possibilities.

1) Literal Present Day Creatures

A commonly held view is that the two creatures in Job 40-41 are literal present day creatures described in poetic hyperbole. Those who hold this view generally consider Behemoth to be a hippopotamus and Leviathan a crocodile.

2) Literal Ancient World Creatures

Others consider some of the descriptions in these chapters to be too far out of line with reality to apply to any living creatures. For example, there is little resemblance between the tail of a hippo and the trunk of a cedar tree (vs. 17). Those in this camp consider these to be descriptions of dinosaurs who arguably may have continued to exist in the time of Job and the patriarchs.

3) Mythological Creatures

Still others hold that these are mythical creatures that were familiar in the oral traditions of the day. Behemoth would have represented a powerful beast and Leviathan a fire-breathing dragon.

4) Symbolic Creatures

According to this view, the creatures take on a symbolic quality that conveys a deeper spiritual significance. While a little complex, this view fits the context of the passage and offers a poignant conclusion to God's monologue. (I have to admit, I've never been able to understand why God spends so much time talking about these two creatures until studying this view which is favored in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*.)

It's worth the effort to explore this view more closely. Using the symbolic perspective, both creatures are seen in two ways. The first is the visible quality of a powerful beast that man cannot control. This meets the need of Job who required a lesson in the Lord's omnipotence. The second is the hidden quality of a cosmic creature (the Accuser of chps 1-2) whose creation preceded (40:19) and whose power exceeds (41:33) all other earthly creatures. Again the Lord shows Himself omnipotent, this time over evil and sin.

By telling of his dominion over Behemoth and Leviathan, the Lord is illustrating ...his moral triumph over the forces of evil. Satan, the Accuser, has been proved wrong though Job does not know it. The author and the reader see the entire picture that Job and his friends never knew.

— *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

This view is consistent with the use of the words Behemoth and Leviathan elsewhere in scripture. Both words are often used in the OT without any symbolic significance

(Pss. 8:8; 50:10; Joel 1:20). However, at other times they are used as symbols of evil, particularly Leviathan. An important example is Isaiah 26:21-27:1.

*See the Lord is coming out of his dwelling
to punish the people of the earth for their sins....
In that day—
the Lord will punish with his sword,
his fierce, great and powerful sword,
Leviathan the gliding serpent,
Leviathan the coiling serpent;
He (God) will slay the monster of the sea.*

The serpent imagery is an important link to Genesis 1-3 which describes the beginning of the history of sin in the world, where the Isaiah passage points to its end. Similar imagery is found in Revelation where we find a beast and a dragon that only God can defeat. Revelation 12:9 says: "The great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world."

For us as readers who are aware of the whole story behind Job's suffering, what an immeasurable comfort to know that Satan will ultimately face his final and full defeat at the hands of the Almighty, and even now is under His omnipotent hand. What a grand finale to God's message of instruction and hope to all who will ever suffer the pains of a world broken by sin.

Job's Second Response (42:1-6)

(42:1-6) This time Job does more than concede his ignorance; he realizes he has been wrong and repents in dust and ashes. Through it all he has come away with a priceless blessing: he has seen God with his own eyes.

The Tables are Turned (42:7-9)

After having judged Job relentlessly, the tables are turned on the three friends. God speaks to Eliphaz as their representative: "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has" (vs7).

What has Job said that was so right, and where have they been so wrong? The structure of the wording in the original Hebrew suggests that the best interpretation of the word *right* here is "reliable information." The right information Job clung to was that he was a righteous man and his suffering could not rightly have been God's punishment against him. The counselors on the other hand, while offering many beautiful platitudes about God, did not have reliable information about Job's heart or the Lord's purposes. They again and again insisted that God was judging Job for his wickedness, heaping the pain of accusation on his already tortured soul. They were more concerned about defending their theological perspectives than being an encouragement to their friend.

The friends are ordered back to Job to make an atoning sacrifice for their sins. Job performs the sacrifice, acting as priest and praying on their behalf. His humble, merciful response opens the floodgates of God's blessing in his life.

...And He Lived Happily Ever After (42:10-17)

God fully restores Job by doubling all of his original possessions, which is really saying something considering Job was the "greatest of all the men of the east" (1:3) the first time around!

Wouldn't you know, as soon as things start going his way look who shows up? The relatives! Job's brothers and sisters and all who had known him gathered around to console and comfort him (42:11). Again Job demonstrates amazing grace and humility by accepting their help, late as it was in coming. Each one contributed an amount of money and a gold ring. (Remember Job had suffered complete financial ruin with the loss of his livestock and property. This may well have served as "startup" funds as he made a fresh start with God richly blessing every step of the way.)

God's abundant restoration of Job wasn't about how righteous he was—it was about how much the Lord loved him. The purpose of the blessings He bestows and the struggles He allows is all the same. It is about displaying His glory in us.

Job ends his life "old and full of days"... an expressive description of a thoroughly fulfilled life lived in devotion to the Lord.

Congratulations on making it through the Book of Job! I pray these truths have deepened your trust in our loving God, given you strength for the trials that come your way, and provided insights on how to be a good comforter to others. —Marti