

God Responds to Job (Chapters 38-42)

- 1) What was Job asking of God? Does God address Job's questions, either directly or by implication?
- 2) God says Job, "darkens counsel by words without knowledge" (38:2), yet at the end of the day God says that his "servant" Job has "spoken rightly of me" (42:7). Many see God as condemning Job, even to the point of being sarcastic (38:36). Tim Keller makes two relevant observations:

But despite the strong, challenging language, God has not come to judge or crush Job but rather to reach out to him in grace. The first indication of this is the sudden appearance of the Hebrew personal name Yahweh... which has been almost completely absent from the book of Job until now...

Also we are told that Yahweh answered Job out of the storm. This phrase, as generic as it looks to us in English, is significant. Many readers, such as George Bernard Shaw, have understood God's speech to Job as a "sneer" and a "jeer". But in Hebrew idiom, to "speak to" someone indicates a one-way communication of an authority to an inferior, while to "answer" or "reply to" expresses a dialogue between two parties. It is striking, then, that when God shows up, he enters into a dialogue – he does not come to simply denounce. In other words, God is inviting Job into a relationship. He even gives Job the final word! (*Walking With God Through Pain and Suffering*, 281)

What is God's tone toward his grieving servant? Is it what you would have expected?

- 3) Job responds first by being flabbergasted (40:1-5) and later by repenting and despising himself (42:1-6). What is Job repenting of? What knowledge did Job lack (38:2)?
- 4) D. A. Carson writes,

This is, at the end of the day, the ultimate test of our knowledge of God. Is it robust enough that, when faced with excruciating adversity, it may prompt us to lash out with hard questions, but will never permit us to turn away from God? ...When we suffer, there will sometimes be mystery. Will there also be faith? (*How Long, O Lord*, 156)

What in God's response changes Job's heart? Was it changed by God's words or God's presence ("now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself," 42:5-6)? Or does Job's faith survive by means of the relationship with God built long before tragedy ever darkened his doorstep?

- 5) God's two speeches focus on creation – the animal world (lions, ravens, goats, asses and oxen, ostriches, horses, hawks and eagles), the environment (foundations of the earth, sea, clouds, morning, light and darkness, stars, hail, rain, snow and thunder), and two amazing creatures which seem to represent the natural and supernatural forces of chaos (leviathan and behemoth).

- a) What is God’s relationship to these? (Dominion? Understanding of? Loving husbandry?) In Hebrew poetry, parallelism is king, and can be used for various purposes. What’s it for here?
 - b) God’s response, focused on creation, intersects with Job’s story in 40:15, where God points out that just as God created the behemoth, God also created Job (40:15). What’s God saying here?
 - c) How does it help to know that God is sovereign over creation if creation is red in tooth and claw? How much consolation is God’s provision for the birds of the air (Mt 6:25-34) to the birds eaten by predators or driven extinct by global warning? How does it help Job to know that Satan was given permission to murder Job’s family? Is God just saying we aren’t worthy to ask the question in the first place?
- 6) Doesn’t God’s main point – that God alone is in control, and worthy to be in control – only provide solace if God is loving and if our suffering has meaning? What do we make of the disagreement between Satan and God which prompted Job’s travail?¹
- 7) Diogenes Allen writes,

Job recognizes that the Creator is worthy of admiration regardless of his own condition and his ability to account for his suffering. God is worthy of worship, apart from our blessing or our woe, just as a painting of great beauty or a work of brilliant design is worthy of respect and admiration apart from any benefit it may bring us.

All too often in our worship... we praise God for what he has done for us perhaps as a people, but mostly for ourselves as individuals, and all too often we fail to realize that God – apart from our well-being, for which we should indeed offer God thanks – is worthy of admiration and praise. This ought to be part of our worship too, and indeed, if it forms part of our being, it can enable us to bear inexplicable loss and harm... (*Theology for a Troubled Believer*, 65)

How can our worship (or prayer) prepare us to face suffering?

- 8) Read pp. 160-162 of *Walking With God*. What similarities do you see between Job’s story and Andi’s?

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Fun fact: The Jerusalem Bible, relying on the Septuagint, translates 38:17 as, “Have you been shown the gates of Death or met the **janitors of Shadowland?**” (NRSV, NIV, NASB have “gates of deep darkness,” NKJV has “shadow of death,” and *The Message* has “death’s dark mysteries.”)

¹ Keller (284), assuming Job isn’t fiction, points out that Job’s suffering was not without meaning, as the prologue might make us think: “Satan’s attack in the end gave Job a name that will live forever, made him one of the most famous men in history. If you knew that 3,000 years later, millions of people would be reading and discussing your words and deeds, you could consider yourself successful. And in afflicting Job with suffering, God created one of the great resources in the history of the world, which has inspired countless sufferers to face their adversity with endurance and patience”