

## **Series Job**

### **This Message Now, Finally, I Get It!**

#### **Scripture Job chapters 38-42**

We have finally reached the last chapters of the book of Job. God is the speaker in chapters 38 through 42. Going into these chapters there are a lot a questions to resolve. Will Job be granted his day in court to confront God? Will he receive the vindication he desires? Should he have made the bold statements about God as his enemy? What will God say to the three friends and Elihu? Will the contest between the Accuser and God be revealed?

At the end of his speeches, Job was still talking about his desire for justice. He was contemplating a meeting with God in which he would present evidence about his past behavior and demand that God reveal the reasons for his suffering. Job was confident that God would either accept him on the basis of his ethical record and vindicate him, or God would reveal some secret accusation which was not known to him.

Job was a person trying to make sense of an experience that didn't fit within his concept of the nature of God. He no longer believed in a moral order guided by cause and effect, in which a righteous life was identified with peace, comfort, and blessing, and a wicked life resulted in multiple problems. Job knew that he had not done anything to warrant his suffering and grief. For many years he had been a godly example to the people around him, and then, suddenly, he was subjected to days of darkness and gloom. His perception of God had become split between God as a good sovereign who always took right action and a God who was a perpetrator of cruel and unjust actions.

Job had demanded that God speak to him (*Job 13:22-24; 31:35*) and in this final section of the book, he finally got his wish. God appeared to Job in a powerful storm, or "whirlwind tempest." This was a good image for God's presence since the wind, like God, is a powerful force which we can feel and the effects of which we can see, although we cannot see the wind itself. This was the way God appeared to several other people in the Old Testament (*for examples, see Ezekiel 4:1 and II Kings 19:11*).

### **Read Job 38:1-3**

1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm, He said, 2 “Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? 3 Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you will answer me.”

The title for God used in this last section of Job is “Yahweh,” which is translated into English as “LORD.” This title was used in the prologue section (chapters 1 and 2) but not again until chapter 38.

The LORD’s first response to Job was not a declaration or explanation that addressed any of Job’s complaints or questions. The LORD had a different agenda. This was not going to be a legal confrontation in the context of a court of law. Rather, Job was going to be confronted with a series of challenging questions that would teach him about the LORD’s power and authority.

The LORD began by accusing Job of “darkening counsel with words without knowledge.” The Hebrew words for “knowledge” and “understanding” occur 16 times in this chapter and the next. Job needed to understand how ignorant he was about the ways of God. According to the LORD, during the dialogues, Job had spoken without the wisdom necessary to draw correct conclusions about God’s plans and purposes.

By focusing on Job’s ignorance, the LORD shifted the framework of their interaction away from Job’s desire for a legal confrontation in a courtroom. It was the LORD’s intention to teach Job about Himself. What the LORD said in chapters 38 through 42 was essentially a lecture in which He compared His greatness with the insignificance of humans. The LORD moved their encounter from the courtroom to the classroom. The LORD was the teacher and Job was the student. The next reading informs us how the lecture began.

### **Read Job 38:4-7**

4 “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. 5 Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? 6 On what were its footing set, or who laid its cornerstone – 7 while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?”

These were just the initial questions asked by God. In all, there are about 70 of these rhetorical questions. They were the kind of questions to which a person could only answer, “I don’t know” or, “I can’t do that.”

I will summarize what the LORD said. The questions in chapter 38 related to the creation of the world. God wanted to know where Job was when everything was created. Did he know all the details of measuring the foundations of the earth? Or limiting the areas of the seas? Or regulating the light and darkness? Or sending rain and snow? Or establishing the movement of the stars? According to verse 7, the angels were present and “shouting for joy” when they saw the work of the LORD, but Job obviously came on the scene much later.

Other questions concerned who was actually taking care of all the details of sustaining the cosmos. The answer was, of course, the LORD. With His power He could do all the things that humans cannot do. He had knowledge of all the things that humans cannot understand. The LORD’s questions highlighted the fact that there is an incredible gap between what is divine and what is human.

The next set of questions were about animal life on earth. The LORD mentioned several different species. Lions, ravens, mountain goats, the wild ass, the wild ox, the ostrich, the horse, and birds of prey were given as examples of the beauty, strength, courage, and instincts of the creatures in the LORD’s world. The LORD wanted Job to understand that He had given all creatures their places to live according to His will and purposes. In place of the dark reality about God that Job denounced, the LORD presented His world as a delightful, varied place, the product of His wisdom and plan.

The LORD ended His description of the inanimate and animate worlds with a challenge to Job:

**Read Job 40:1-2**

1 The LORD said to Job: 2 “Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!”

Job had accused God of acting capriciously and unjustly, but he was being taught that he had neither the insight or background to fully understand the LORD’s power, authority, and design for creation.

The LORD's words in verse 2 seem to refer to Job's demand for a trial. ("Will the one who contends with the Almighty ...?" and "Let him who accuses God ...") The LORD was giving Job an opportunity to state his complaint and present his evidence, but Job was too overwhelmed by the awesomeness of the LORD to present any of his arguments. The descriptions given by the LORD were forcing Job to rethink his perceptions of reality and, in the process, to reconsider his own place in it. His previous concept of God was better than that of his friends, but even Job's concept of God was limited and inadequate. The LORD was teaching him that He was much, much greater than Job had imagined.

And so, even though the LORD had not so much as touched on the questions about innocence and suffering, Job wisely refused to protest. In the presence of the awesome LORD, he could only say:

### **Read Job 40:4-5**

4 "I am unworthy (can mean "insignificant") – how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. 5 I spoke once, but I have no answer, twice, but I will say no more."

Job had previously adopted an adversarial position against God, but this attitude quickly evaporated in the presence of the LORD. Job could not continue to hold on to his angry accusations of injustice. The change in him was not the result of threat or condemnation. It sprang from his new understanding of the LORD — from what the LORD revealed concerning His design and maintenance of the world.

The LORD was not yet finished teaching Job. Job had been silenced, but it was not yet clear that Job had pushed out of his mind all the issues with which he had been wrestling. For this reason, the LORD continued to press forward in His teaching.

### **Read Job 40:6-8**

6 Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm: 7 "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you and you will answer me. 8 Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?"

Once again the LORD told Job to prepare himself for more questions. On this go-around, the theme was to be "justice." Job had accused God of perverting justice (*Job 8:3*). In chapters 21 and 24 he had complained about God's indifference toward the wickedness of evil men. Here, in verse 8, Job is accused of condemning God in order to justify his personal righteousness.

The LORD's accusation related to the courtroom mentality of Job. As long as he held to the opinion that God had to reward the righteous and punish only the wicked, Job would continue to be caught in the dilemma of how to blame God for his sufferings. Job had insisted on his innocence so strongly that he had let his defense of his integrity lead him to the extreme position of accusing God of injustice.

The LORD wanted Job to move beyond his fixation with finding fault. He wanted Job to begin to trust Him without having to think about blame and injustice. This is why the LORD spoke the words recorded in chapters 40 and 41.

God taught this part of His lesson in an unusual way. First, Job was invited to take the LORD's place and try to execute justice himself. The logic behind this invitation was simple enough: Job had assumed a superior position to God by accusing God of injustice. Since superiority in matters of justice is closely associated with superiority of power and authority, Job was challenged to imagine himself in control of the earth, to "play God" and see if he could do better than God.

### **Read Job 40:9-14**

9 "Do you have an arm like God's, and can your voice thunder like his? 10 Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty. 11 Unleash the fury of your wrath, look at every proud man and bring him low, 12 look at every proud man and humble him, crush the wicked where they stand. 13 Bury them all in the dust together; shroud their faces in the grave. 14 Then I myself will admit to you that your own right hand can save you."

Job had been critical of the way the LORD was ruling. Hence, he was given permission to try to achieve perfect justice in the world his way, with his limitations. He was expected to bring low those who were proud and to destroy those who were wicked. If Job was able to do that, then, the LORD said, He would admit that Job had the power to overcome evil and save himself. If Job could be like God, he would be worthy of the "glory," "splendor," "honor," and "majesty" of God.

Obviously, Job did not have this ability. Not even close. He was human, not divine, and his human power was woefully inadequate compared to God's. The LORD was trying to broaden Job's understanding about the exercise of justice. The LORD wanted Job to know that the One who built the cosmos and set the times for the seasons and maneuvered the stars and controlled the weather, all tasks that are beyond the ability of humans, was the same One who had the vastly superior ability to execute justice within the realm of creation. In contrast to Job, the LORD authentically had the power to govern.

Once again, Job was being forced to think about reality in a new and expanded way. Before this lecture of the LORD, Job had been substantially ignorant of the ways of God. His previous understanding had been in the simplistic "cause and effect" terms of human understanding. If he had been able to exercise justice according to his previous understanding, he would have destroyed proud and wicked people — physically eliminating them from the earth. But Job was not God, and he learned that God had a different way, a more merciful way, of exercising justice. Under God, proud and wicked people were allowed to exist, but they, like every other living creature, had to live within the boundaries of God's authority.

The LORD then provided two unusual illustrations in order to further clarify this teaching. These two illustrations concerned two creatures from the animal kingdom, one named Behemoth and the other Leviathan. The identity of these two beasts has been the subject of a lot of debate. Were they mythical or real? I take the position that they were real, that Behemoth was an animal like a hippopotamus or perhaps a water buffalo, and Leviathan was like a crocodile.

The LORD described these two creatures as the ultimate wild and frightening animals of the known world, creatures which could not be controlled by human effort. The LORD declared that they were His creation, just as all other animals were His creation. He declared that it was impossible for Behemoth and Leviathan to be captured and domesticated by humans, and that there were no human weapons capable of killing them. The point of the illustrations was that, while the LORD permitted these creatures to occupy their space and display their power, yet they were never out of His control. He was the only One with the ability to humble such creatures.

The imagery of these creatures was like an object lesson for Job. The beasts represented the uncontrollable evil that existed in the world. Although this evil was beyond human control, the LORD wanted Job to understand that it was not outside His control, just as no other creature or situation could be beyond His control. In other words, the justice of God functioned in a different and more powerful way than humans could understand. The purpose of the object lesson was to impress upon Job his weakness and puniness in contrast with the unlimited power of God. Job needed to understand that the LORD was on top of every situation.

The objective of the LORD was to change the thinking and understanding of Job. The LORD sought to stir up Job's imagination, to help him to recognize that the LORD worked in new and surprising ways which were unfamiliar to Job. What was Job's response?

### **Read Job 42:1-6**

1 Then Job replied to the LORD: 2 "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. 3 You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. 4 You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you and you shall answer me.' 5 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. 6 Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

The LORD's lecture made it clear to Job that he had had nothing to do with making, sustaining, or controlling creation and the creatures in it, and therefore he was not in a position to question or challenge divine ways. Job had wanted an explanation of certain questions, but he only received a description of the LORD's power and authority. Instead of explaining to Job why he was suffering affliction, God recounted the marvelous way He had created the world and described the judicious and meticulous way He governed it.

As Job contemplated the words of the LORD, he gained a new appreciation of the unlimited depths of the wisdom, power, and governing authority of God. He was led to proclaim, "I know that you can do all things." More importantly, Job acknowledged, "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand," and "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you." Job recognized that it was useless for him to question God's actions and he surrendered his demands for justice. His new awareness of God was like "seeing" compared to "hearing;" like the gaining of personal experience compared to information gained through rumor and tradition.

Because of his deeper insight into the character and actions of God, Job acknowledged his own human inadequacies, “Therefore,” he said, “I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” Of what did Job repent? He did not need to repent of his responses to the accusations of the three friends; he knew their theology was wrong. He did not need to repent of any wrongdoing; remember that God Himself had declared him to be “blameless.” The only repentance necessary was his accusations that God was unjust in afflicting him and his brash insistence that God must meet with him in court.

In looking back over the chapters of dialogue, we can recognize that Job’s foremost problem was his lack of confidence in God. Given his blameless life and his condition of suffering, he did not know for sure that God cared about him and could be trusted to help him. That’s why the LORD’s presence in chapters 38 through 42 was a great boost to his confidence. Knowing that the Almighty God, the Creator and Sustainer of everything, was in control meant that he had not been abandoned. The fact that God was in control of his sufferings was very reassuring. Job became convinced that he could trust God to accomplish divine, eternal purposes, even through his undeserved suffering.

**Read Job 42: 7-8, 10, 12a, 16-17**

7 After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. 8 So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.”

10 After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before.

12 The LORD blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the first.

16 After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years. He saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. 17 And so he died, old and full of years.

The three friends had insisted that suffering was always the judgment of God on sin. Job knew that their theology was wrong; he himself was the proof that they were wrong. The LORD’s commendation of Job and anger with the friends on this point was proof that Job had been on the right track in his thinking. Note that the LORD identifies Job as His servant 4 times in verses 7 and 8.

The LORD restored Job's fortunes, giving him double the possessions he had lost in chapter 1, and 10 more children. Job lived long enough to see great-great-grandchildren.

Job never learned of the challenge of the Accuser. Without his knowing it, Job had the honor of being used by God to silence the greatest enemy of mankind, the Accuser, Satan. By his faithfulness during the time of suffering, by his refusal to curse God, Job upheld both his reputation and God's.

The message for everyone who suffers is that God is present. Awareness of that fact is more important than answers to all of our questions. After Job was made aware of the greatness of God, he understood that he could live with his problems, even though he received no specific explanations about them, because he knew that God was with him. As believer, we need to understand that when God's presence is acknowledged and appreciated, the need for specific answers is greatly diminished. Instead of searching frantically for elusive answers to "why?" questions, believers can, like Job, rest in the sovereign care of God. Instead of pounding walls in angry frustration, believers can quietly accept God's purposes, knowing that He has purposes that may be beyond our abilities to understand.

Let me close with a New Testament comment about Job from the letter written by James: "Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy" (*James 5:10-11*).