

“*God Responds*,” Part I
Job 38:1 – 40:5
Series: Book of Job [#06]
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Introduction

In 1972 the late Francis Schaeffer published his book *He [God] Is There And He Is Not Silent*. Schaeffer argued in this book for the necessity of God’s existence and not being silent.

As we return to the book of Job today, we find Job after weeks and months of suffering. Throughout this time he would have argued with Schaeffer on that title. Yes, he believed God “*Is There*.” But he would say, “God is *not here* with me.” Nor would he agree that “[*God*] *Is Not Silent*,” at least in his own recent experience. Job would proclaim, “I have not heard from God in all this time. He has been silent!”

This all changes at the beginning of chapter 38. God, who *has* always been there, now reaches out and makes contact with Job in a clear and powerful way. After all the speeches and debates of Job and his friends, finally, “*God Responds*.”

We will be looking at God’s response over two weeks—one week for each of His two speeches to Job. Let’s begin with...

A Brief Review.

We start at the beginning, with Job’s *terrific* past. He was righteous in character and conduct. God said there was no one like His servant Job. God also said Job was blameless and upright; that he feared God and turned away from evil.

God blessed Job in every area of his life.

- God’s friendship was over his home.
- He had a large and wonderful family.
- He was wealthy.
- He was the leader of the leaders.
- He was “the greatest of all the men of the east.”

But then, everything changed. Satan quickly struck with disaster after disaster when God gave him permission to test Job. Now his life was *terrible*.

- His children were dead.
- His wealth was gone.
- His health was ruined.

- His wife’s support had vanished.
- People now thought he was “the greatest of all the *hypocrites* of the east,” and God was punishing him for that.
- Even the lowest of the low mocked him.
- Only his three good, long time friends came to sympathize with him and comfort him. And they turned out to be “sorry comforters” and “worthless physicians.” (16:2; 13:4)

Beyond all of this—worse than all of this—God, who had been so close to him, now seemed to have abandoned him. God was not answering, nor rescuing him. Job didn’t know about Satan’s challenge. He didn’t know that God was allowing this testing. He didn’t know why this was happening.

So in pain and confusion, he cried out, “Why?” “*Why this? Why me? Why doesn’t God hear and answer me?*” “*Why?*”

Finished with his arguments, Job has rested his case. He is still hanging on to God, still hoping in Him. He is waiting for God to either clear him or show him his sin and convict him.

God Breaks His Silence.

God breaks a long silence for Job, and for us. God had not spoken to Job since the disasters struck. By *speaking* to him, I am not referring necessarily to an audible voice, but *any* sense of communication. Job prayed, but his prayers seemed to go nowhere. Job considered his situation, looked at the world around him, thought of God’s truth ... and he felt all alone. God did not prompt him, assure him, encourage him, or even convict him. It was a long, excruciatingly painful time of silence.

As well, *we* have not heard God speak in the book since His second conversation with Satan in chapter 2. *But now, in 38:1* we read, “Then the LORD answered Job out of *the whirlwind...*”

Have you ever wondered why did God spoke to Job out of a *whirlwind*? a strong, tornado-like wind? This was not a unique, once-in-history experience. The prophet **Nahum** says, “The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. In *whirlwind* and *storm* is His way...” (1:3)

But a powerful appearance is not always related to God’s judgment. We see this when God gave the Law to Israel. When Moses met God on the Mt. Sinai, we are told there were thunder and lightning flashes and a very loud trumpet sound. The mountain was shrouded in a cloud of smoke rising up like a furnace and shook violently. Moses spoke to God, and God answered him with thunder. As you can imagine the people were terrified. (Exodus 19:16-19)

After God gave the commandments, Moses assured the people, “*Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin.*” (Exodus 20:18-20)

God did not do all of this as a *raw demonstration* of His power, nor to frighten them. He did this to inspire awe and obedience.

We see the same thing here. God definitely was getting Job’s attention. And, beyond that, God displayed His sovereign power to inspire reverence and obedience in Job.

And then God breaks His silence and answers Job, *or does He?*

“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now gird up your loins like a man, and I will ask you, and you instruct Me!” (38:2-3)

Job had wanted to argue his case face to face with God. Do you recall these words from him?

“But I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue with God ... Behold now, I have prepared my case; I know that I will be vindicated.”
(13:3, 18)

“Oh that I knew where I might find [God], that I might come to His seat! I would present my case before Him and fill my mouth with arguments.”
(23:3-4)

God begins by reminding Job that He is the Sovereign Creator and Ruler. Job needed a fresh view of who God is and who he himself is. Now, having Job’s attention, God continues ... *with answering Job’s questions point by point?*

In a word, *No!* God does not explain why He has been silent, nor why Job has suffered, nor yet why there is suffering in the world at all. Look again at part of God’s opening statement, in 38:4-7,

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it? On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone.”

From here on through God’s second speech God shoots question after question at Job in rapid-fire-succession. God asks Job over 50 questions in this first speech, and almost 80 in the two speeches combined.

To say the least, the tables have been turned on Job. *He* is in the witness box, not God. God *does* give Job answers in this process, although they are not the answers for which Job had pleaded, even demanded.

God's Questions To Job.

God has two extended series of questions in this speech, followed by a concluding question or challenge to Job. There are some fascinating poetic descriptions in these questions. Today we are taking an overview, and will not be delving into the details.

God's first question is, "Job, can you explain the origins and functioning of My creation?" This first series of questions starts in 38:4.

- "Were you there when I set out the measurements of My creation, laid the cornerstone and foundation?"
- "Do you know, can you explain the extent and measurements of all I have created?"
- "Do you know all about the seas I have created and upon which I have sent boundaries—Job, have you explored their deepest depths?"
- "Have you ever spoken and brought about morning light to replace darkness? Do you even know all about them?"
- "Have you explored and do you understand the darkness of death?"
- "Job, do you know all about how I use hail, snow, lightning and ice, and why I send rain on places where no one lives? Can you command any of these things?"
- "Can you control the stars and constellations?"

God is saying to Job, "You say that I have not run My creation well, that I have wronged you, that if able to argue your case before Me you would win." "How much understanding, wisdom and power do you really have, Job?"

"Explain it to me. Tell me all you know. If you can explain the origins of creation and tell me how it all really works, and are able to command it, then I will listen to you."

God's second question is, "Job, do you understand, provide for and oversee the animals?" Here God brings the questions closer to home. "Job, what about the animals around you that I have created?" Starting at 38:39, God parades before Job the lion, raven, mountain goat, wild donkey, wild ox, ostrich, horse, hawk and eagle.

The poetic description of the horse in 39:19-25 is exquisite. In it we see the horse's ...

- beautiful mane;
- its great strength and jumping ability, as well as it snorting and pawing the ground;
- we see its bold and fearless thundering into battle despite all the trumpets blaring and clanging and clashing of weapons.

Earlier, in 39:13-18, God mentions the ostrich. This poetic description is from the perspective of people who really didn't have a detailed understanding about the bird. It can look silly flapping its wings, without being able to fly. To the average observer, it doesn't

seem to have much sense. Indeed, some think of it as “one of God’s jokes,” or that it here it is even a picture of Job himself. Despite all of this, the ostrich displays the wisdom and power fo God.

God asks Job,

- “Can you feed these creatures?”
- “Do you understand how they are born and grow?”
- “Can you make the wild ox work for you ... and *like* working for you so it willingly goes to the stalls?”
- “Job, did you give the horse its majestic strength, or the hawks and eagles their ability to fly? Can you speak and direct them to fly?”

“Job, do you understand, provide for and oversee the animals? If so, perhaps you are qualified to debate with Me about how a I run My creation.”

Then we come to God’s concluding question in 40:2,

“Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it.”

“Job, you have found fault with Me and reproved Me, but in light of all I have said now, do you really want to debate with Me?” Job had accused God of not treating him well.

In 30:19 he said, “He [God] has cast me into the mire, and I have become like dust and ashes.”

Then, in 30:21-23, “You have become cruel to me; with the might of Your hand You persecute me. You lift me up to the wind and cause me to ride; and You dissolve me in a storm. ...I know that You will bring me to death.”

Job did not, and never would understand everything about God’s creation any more than we do or will. That was way beyond him as it is way beyond all of us. Romans 11:33,

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!”

This is more than a “*wake-up call*.” God is “*bringing Job to heel*,” putting his righteous servant in his place. “Job,” God asks, “do you realize what you have been saying? Do you really want to debate with *Me*?”

Job’s Response To God.

40:3-5 “Then Job answered the LORD and said, ‘Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth. Once I have spoken, and I will not answer; even twice, and I will add nothing more.’”

Think about what Job is saying and doing here. He says, “I have done a lot of talking; in

fact, I have done too much talking. Now I will be quiet and listen.” “I recognize that I am *insignificant*.” The basic idea behind this word is of *slightness*; of not having great significance or worth.

Job admits overstepping his bounds, of elevating himself to think he could debate with God, demand of God, almost, if not as an equal; and also in questioning God’s justice and love. While it may not be a full confession, Job shows us what a righteous person does when he sees sin in his life:

- he stops talking, demanding and protesting;
- he confesses.

I have said from the start that God declaring Job as righteous, upright and blameless did not mean Job never sinned. He did. And here God calls Job to account.

For perspective, we also need to see what God says about Job after His speeches. 42:7,

“It came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, ‘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.’”

Let’s wrap this up with some lessons for Job and for us.

First, God *is* the Almighty Creator who *is* in control. Job had known this truth objectively and experientially for a long time. But his physical, emotional and spiritual pain had now become his focus. As a result, he no longer saw, felt, thought and lived in the truth he knew.

Whenever a believer’s focus is centered on anyone or anything other than God, he will no longer see God, himself, or his situation and world accurately.

It was not wrong or sinful for Job to look at his situation ...

- and say to God, “This is terrible! It isn’t fair!”
- To tell God, “How can this happen if You are really in control? It looks like total chaos to me!”
- “How can such terrible things happen to me and my family when we have trusted and loved, obeyed and served you for so long?”

Job’s focus became locked on himself. So, he no longer saw himself, his circumstances or God accurately. Being isolated and rejected, Job had taken up residence at the local garbage dump.

We must be careful not to read too much into this as a symbol, but one writer has a point when he tells us, “The ash heap may be an appropriate place to sit if we are mourning, but it is no place to stay if we wish to feel better.”

Job got *stuck* in the garbage dump—physically, emotionally and spiritually. He wasn’t

moving forward, working through his grief. That distorted his view.

In addition, when we live in the reality that God is the Almighty Creator who is in control, we can rely on the fact that God *does* set limits, that he *does* restrain evil. Without God's Almighty control our world would be a chaotic hell-on-earth scene. In this first speech, God only hints at His control, His setting boundaries, as He talked about the seas in chapter 38. There is more about this in His second speech.

And then, knowing God is in control, we can trust Him. I'm not talking about the trite, "*Chill out. Everything is going to be okay,*" kind of thinking. Rather, a deep and certain conviction that...

- it doesn't depend on me and what I can understand or figure out;
- it doesn't depend what I can change or fix;
- but on God, who is in control.

A second truth to take with us is that we cannot understand or even know all of what God does and why He does it. It is one thing to have this filed away as a fact in our mind. It is quite another to live in light of it. Job struggled here. He used his good mind to understand what he could, as he should have done. But he kept on pushing beyond what he could understand, or even know.

As we saw earlier, we need to live in light of Romans 11:33,

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"

This is not resigning ourselves to fate or fatalism. It is living in light of who we are, and who God is.

One more truth, God is always with you, even when you don't think He is. Job struggled with this. He desperately called out, "Oh that I knew where I might find [God], that I might come to His seat!" (23:3)

Righteous Job whom God commended saying "there is no one like him on the earth," felt that God had abandoned him. He wasn't the only one, of course. The Psalmists and prophets expressed the same feelings.

Should it surprise us then when we feel that way?

Always remember, God promises not to abandon us. He told the people of Israel through Moses that He would not fail them or forsake them (Deuteronomy 31:6). Then Moses repeated it personally to Joshua, his successor. After Moses was gone, God reminded Joshua, "I will not fail you or forsake you." (Joshua 1:5)

And God has said the same thing to us, through the writer of Hebrews, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you." (13:5)

Yes, in your most desolate hours when you think that God has abandoned you, remember His promise. “He is always with you, even when you don’t think He is.”

Conclusion.

Finally, *finally*, “*God Responds*” to Job. As you reflect on this truth with God, ask Him to point out the ways in which you have been, or are being like Job in ...

- forgetting that your loving, Almighty God is in control;
- or in finding fault with how God is running His world, what He has both brought and allowed in your life.

And then, thank God. Thank Him for being the Almighty who is faithful in His loving-kindness to all His people, to you—even when you don’t see it, and can’t feel it.

Tell Him, “Yes, I know that Your ‘lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, ... [Your] compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness’” (Lamentations 3:22).

Tell Him, “I know God, You are the Faithful One, the One who never changes, the One who will always love, guard, provide for and keep me.”

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