

God is God and Job is Not

Job 38:1-7, 34-41 (October 17, 2021)

Job 38:1-7, 34-41

38 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind: ²“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? ³ Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me. 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 heavenly beings shouted for joy?

³⁴ “Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, so that a flood of waters may cover you? ³⁵ Can you send forth lightnings, so 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 has the wisdom to number the clouds? Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens, ³⁸ when the dust runs into a mass and the clods cling 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 covert? ⁴¹ Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?

Historical Context

Job's dialogue with God (Job 38:1-42:6) stands as one of Scripture's most vivid depictions of the struggle to understand and respond to suffering and evil. The divine speeches in Job 38:1-41:34, along with Job's final reply in 42:1-6, stand as the theological and literary climax of the book. The speeches, which take the form of a legal dispute, utilize a number of different genres that are intended to evoke an emotional response from Job. The purpose of the speeches is to show Job the error of his worldview and to re-orient Job to a right understanding of God,

Theme: God is God and Job is Not

What is immediately striking about the divine speeches (which don't conclude until the end of chapter 41) is that they are full of powerful images that are focused almost entirely on workings of the universe itself, on things which humans know little about and over which they have no control. When you put these chapters alongside the first creation story in Genesis 1 there is a significant overlap — God is the one calling creation into being and setting it in motion before humans even existed. This is a God who just has to say the word and the forces of nature obey.

How do these chapters, though, with question upon question, serve as an answer to Job? They are clearly not a response to Job on Job's terms or to his particular concerns. In fact, God's many questions seem to be a pretty straightforward way of showing that “God is God, and Job is not.” But is this the only point that the biblical writer is making about the relationship between God and humanity in this book?

God's response to Job highlights the notion that God is not an automaton, rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked. For Job, this system has worked for him — he's been good and received reward — up until now. Now he wants to know why the system seems to have broken down and why God isn't doing God's job.

In a universe created by God and in which humans live, the challenge is how to hold these two aspects together — 1) the world is orderly and 2) tragedy doesn't always have a reason. In some

ways, these two aspects show very different realities that exist simultaneously. The realities of Job and God collide in this section, and they are both true. The fact that God responds with questions, though different than Job's, also suggests that the dialogue between them is ongoing, open and unfinished. This might be the best news of all. Job is not God but they are somehow connected to each other.