

God and Evil

Job 40:6-41:34

Intro: One of the most commonly raised objections to the Christian faith is the “problem of evil”. The challenge goes like this: If God is really all-good and all-powerful, why is there so much pain and suffering in the world? It’s a fair question. And it seems, at least to many people, to answer itself. The reality of unrelenting pain and horrific suffering in the world seems to provide irrefutable proof that the God of the Bible doesn’t exist. The unquestioned assumption is that, if an all-good and all-powerful God DID exist, He would put an end to the suffering. The world doesn’t have a category for a good God allowing “good” people to suffer.

And, if we are honest, we struggle with the same thing. We sincerely believe that God is good – but almost nothing challenges our faith as much as times of deep pain. Our assumption is that suffering and pain don’t fit with the concept of Gods’ goodness. We don’t have a robust category for God, *in His goodness*, causing his people to suffer.

That, of course, is just what we saw with Job’s three friends. Pain made sense as long as it was handed out to the wicked. But pain for those who were righteous didn’t fit their framework. That’s why Job’s friends insisted that he must have done something very wicked. They had no category for righteous suffering. And Job didn’t either. His response to his pain was to try to show that this was all wrong. God had failed to follow the rules. Job was righteous – and yet God was causing him to suffer - and that couldn’t be right. An all-good and all-powerful god would simply not allow such a thing.

The book of Job was written, in part, to destroy our assumptions of what God should be allowed to do. And in the process, it reveals to us a God much greater and more glorious and worthy of worship than the small god of our self-centered assumptions.

In chapter 40 we come to the second part of God’s speech to Job. In part one, God had challenged Job with many questions – but it was really all over with the first one: “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” God revealed to Job how pitifully little Job actually knew about the world and the way it worked. And Job’s response shows he got the message.

“Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you. I lay my hand on my mouth.”

Job was done talking, but God had more to say. In :7ff, He specifically challenges Job.

⁷ "Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me.

⁸ Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?

Job had strongly suggested that God was in the wrong in His ordering of Job's life. How often haven't we done the same when we grumble and complain. God's rebuke of Job is a rebuke for every one of us when we assume to know better than God how the world ought to be run and our lives should unfold.

In verses 10-14 God invites Job to clothe himself with glory and splendor, to put on his judge's robe, and step into the shoes of God.

¹¹ Pour out the overflowings of your anger,
and look on everyone who is proud and abase him.

¹² Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low
and tread down the wicked where they stand.

This is what God does in the world. He opposes the proud. He humbles them, just as He is humbling Job. And that sets up the following discourse on two beasts – the Behemoth and the Leviathan. What are they? And how does this relate to Job's questions and his suffering?

I. The Behemoth

In verses 15-24 God invites Job to "Behold the Behemoth".

¹⁵ *"Behold, Behemoth, which I made as I made you; he eats grass like an ox.*

There are several things to notice about this beast.

1. He is created by God (vs 15). He is a creature, like Job.
2. He eats grass like an ox (15) but lives in both the land and water (22).
3. He is incredibly strong (16-18). In fact, God specifically says "Behold, his strength".
4. The Behemoth has no fear (23) and cannot be conquered by man (24).

Biblical scholars have debated the specific identity of this animal and most have concluded that this sounds very much like the hippopotamus. And that is very possible.

But there are several clues that this isn't only a hippopotamus. This beast is something more. One clue is his name. In the Hebrew, the word "Behemoth" is in the plural.

Ash: Here the plural seems to be a plural of majesty, conveying something like "The Superbeast".

Another clue is the statement in verse 19, that *“He is the first of the works of God”*. Was the hippopotamus the first thing God created? No. So, while the description seems to point to the Hippopotamus, there are clues in the text that suggest that God is speaking of something more. This is a Superbeast, one of the very first creations of God, and he is extremely powerful. Behold him.

II. The Leviathan

The Lord takes much more time to talk about the next beast – the Leviathan. Once again scholars debate his identity.

- Some suggest a pre-historic animal like the T-Rex.
- Some think this is a mythological creature – a fire-breathing dragon (20-21).
- Others, pointing to the vivid description of verses 12-17, believe that that this is a reference to the crocodile. *“His teeth are terror. His back is made of rows of shields, shut up closely as with a seal.”*

Once again, the Lord emphasizes the great power of the beast and highlights the utter inability of Job to tame it.

¹ *“Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook or press down his tongue with a cord?*

² *Can you put a rope in his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook?*

³ *Will he make many pleas to you? Will he speak to you soft words?*

⁴ *Will he make a covenant with you to take him for your servant forever?*

⁵ *Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you put him on a leash for your girls?”*

⁷ *Can you fill his skin with harpoons or his head with fishing spears?*

⁸ *Lay your hands on him; remember the battle—you will not do it again!*

⁹ *Behold, the hope of a man is false; he is laid low even at the sight of him.*

Here is a being completely impervious to human capture or taming. Leviathan is vastly too great a force for mankind to conquer.

²⁶ *Though the sword reaches him, it does not avail, nor the spear, the dart, or the javelin.*

²⁷ *He counts iron as straw, and bronze as rotten wood.*

²⁸ *The arrow cannot make him flee; for him, sling stones are turned to stubble.*

²⁹ *Clubs are counted as stubble; he laughs at the rattle of javelins.*

The point is clear. Leviathan can't be tamed, captured, subdued or defeated by men. And yet he is a great threat to mankind!

- He is a dragon spewing fire.

²¹ *“His breath kindles coals and a flame comes forth from his mouth.”*

- He is a sea-beast who stirs up the evil and chaos of the deep.
 - ³¹ He makes the deep boil like a pot; he makes the sea like a pot of ointment.

Leviathan breathes death and stirs us the chaos and evil of the deep. He is a clear and present danger to humanity. So, who is he??

Once again there are clear clues that this isn't just a crocodile like those you can find in the zoo. There is a mythological nature to this beast. There are several reasons to suggest that this is an image representing to Satan and the powers of hell.

1. In ancient times, Leviathan was the name of a mythical, terrifying sea-creature who wreaked havoc on earth and made war against the pantheon of the gods. His name and nature would have been as well known to the people of Job's day as Goldilocks or Pinocchio are known by children today.
2. The Bible picks up and uses this imagery.
 - In Psalm 74 Asaph speaks of God's rescue of Israel out of Egypt as a matter of God "crushing the heads of Leviathan" (Psalm 74:14). When God rescued Israel out of Egypt, it was not simply a battle between God and Pharaoh, but primarily a battle between God and Leviathan.
 - The prophet Isaiah spoke of a coming day when God will "punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent,and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea" (27:1).
 - This image of beast and dragon is picked up in the book of Revelation.
 - In chapters 12-13. John sees two beasts, a land beast and a sea beast who rise up to wreak havoc in the world with mighty and devastating evil.
 - In Revelation 20:2 we read that the angel of God, "seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years,

The identification of Leviathan as Satan himself is confirmed in Job 40:34.

³⁴ He sees everything that is high; *he is king over all the sons of pride.*"

Who is the king over all the sons of pride? The Devil is. We saw, in our study of Revelation, that evil boasting and pride are the calling cards of the Devil and all who follow him.

And that's where the Lord's speech to Job ends. He has nothing more to say. There has been no answer to Job's question. No explanation for the reason this happened. God has done something else, something better. God has given Job a new, more accurate framework of reality and a deeper understanding of God.

III. The Lessons

There are two essential lessons to be learned from God's speech to Job.

A. There is a stunning and complete God-centeredness to this world. The universe, and the events of human history, are not purposed for the benefit of man but for the glory of God. God does not apologize for the suffering Job has experienced because God is neither obligated to do certain things for Job or explain the things He has done.

Job 41:11 "Who has first given to me, that I should repay him?"

God's words are meant to free us from the spiritual blindness of a self-referential worldview. This world is not, primarily about us or for us. God has left evidences of this fact in the world around us. The Behemoth and the Leviathan do not exist for our benefit, they cannot be tamed and made useful to our ends.

But there are other created realities that speak the same message. There are deep caverns in the sea known and seen only by God. They are not there for our benefit but for His. The same is true of the vast universe around us. Why are there billions of galaxies in the known universe and possibly billions beyond that we can't ever possibly see? They are of no practical use to us at all. Why are they there? Because they don't exist for our benefit, but for God's.

We live in a profoundly God-centered world. And that means that our complaints when things don't go our way are not only sinful, they are completely irrelevant. The world doesn't exist to make things go our way.

Tremper Longman, "The final speech of God is the culmination of the argument that the universe was not created for human wishes to govern the way in which it operates. People must rethink the outrage they feel at the things they perceive to be out of order. ¹

This doesn't mean that we shouldn't grieve suffering and feel outraged at horrific evil. But it means that we should never charge God with wrong in them. Why does God allow evil to devastate His world and destroy His people? I don't know. He doesn't say. Even in the book of Revelation, we aren't told **why** the beasts are given authority to kill the saints. We are just told that they are, and that they will.

God won't tell us precisely why He allows a particular trial or tragedy in our life. It will almost certainly not make sense to us. But that's simply because we can't see what God sees. We don't know what God knows.

¹ Konkel, A. H., & Longman, T., III. (2006). [*Cornerstone biblical commentary, Vol 6: Job, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs*](#) (p. 237). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Tim Keller, 'God will only give you what you would have asked for if you knew everything he knows'

That's a staggering thought. And it's absolutely true.

Just because we don't understand His reasons doesn't mean God has failed.

Deuteronomy 29:29 "The secret things belong to God. The revealed things belong to us and to our children."

God reserves the freedom to keep His sovereign secrets to Himself and He does not owe us an explanation. That's the first lesson. God is God. This world exists for Him.

But that isn't all God has to say. There is a second lesson, an essential lesson.

B. Evil is under God's Sovereign control and will be defeated.

The book of Job reveals to us the reality of a righteous man suffering, and a tormenting Satan, and a sovereign God. We haven't heard anything about Satan since chapter 2. But in these last chapters we come back to the reality of a Satan, the king over the sons of pride, or, as Paul says, "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph 2:2). Evil is real. Satan exists. But his power is limited to the sovereign purposes of God.

Satan is a created being and though he is much too strong for mankind, he is no match whatsoever for the Living God. Job cannot defeat the great Leviathan. But God can and does! Leviathan is a mighty foe. The whole world was held under his demonic control. We cannot possibly conquer him in our strength.

Oh loving wisdom of our God, when all was sin and shame
A second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came.

This is the gospel message for our world today. All across our nation people are marching and rioting, calling for a revolution to rid our country of her sins and create a brave, new world of justice and peace. But we are powerless to do so! Behind all the sins and injustices of this world is a Devil, a serpent, a fire-breathing dragon. And every human attempt to defeat him fails. Every revolution is doomed. We can't defeat the Leviathan! We have no weapons mighty enough to destroy him. But God does! And has!

God sent a warrior King to wage war with the great Leviathan and to crush the serpents head! I love what John writes in 1 John 3:8,

"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil."

Brothers and sisters, I promise you, on the authority of Gods' word and on the basis of an empty tomb, Jesus has crushed the Serpents head!

This is our answer to the “problem of evil”. The God who allows evil in this world for His own purposes and glory, because He is rich in mercy and full of compassion and love, came into this world to suffer the greatest evil possible, in order to rescue evil people like you and me. The cross stands as the gospel response to the problem of evil. Does it answer all our questions? No. The message of the cross does more – it anchors all our hopes.

If God, in mercy and love, has freely done this for sinners, then no matter what evil lies within me, no matter how fierce the evil around me – I am safe in Jesus. God is for me. Jesus rules over me. The Spirit is within me. Nothing can harm me. Everything God brings into my life, the blessings and the pain, is for my eternal joy and everlasting good. Amen?