

Who Is This?
Job 38–39

Turn to Job 38. Satan's terrible tests in Job 1–2 were designed to do one thing: turn Job against God. In this Satan failed completely, because Job's loyalty to Yahweh never wavered. He kept the faith, and that's why James uses Job as a model of perseverance.

But after his tests, Job got stuck on God's justice. By Job's understanding, God had not been just with Job, because Job thought his righteous life deserved better from God than he got. In Job's speeches, Job several times said he wished he could meet God in a courtroom. Job wanted to put God in the witness stand and have God answer Job's questions. "What have you got against me? Why have you done this to me? How can you, a just God, call this justice?":

After Job finished speaking, young Elihu spoke, and Elihu's role in this story is to get Job ready to hear from God. Elihu leads into God in two ways. One, he sharply criticized Job for calling God's justice into question. God invented justice, so who are we to say God is not just? The other way Elihu introduces God is that Elihu finishes his speech by describing our Storm God. Right after Elihu finishes, and guess what: God speaks out of a storm.

In Job 38–41, God comes to Job and speaks twice from a tempest. This storm, this tempest, does not mean anything angry from God, it just means that God has arrived. That's how God arrives. God came to Job to reveal himself to Job. Job wanted God to answer his questions about his life. It didn't go that way. What is God saying in this first speech?

God's Opening: Who Is This who Obscures My Plans with Words without Knowledge?

God opens with "Who is this?" God puts Job in his place at the very start. "Who is this?" That's not how two equals discuss a quarrel. The superior person, God, is annoyed with the inferior's lack of understanding. This will not be a legal argument. God is annoyed with Job.

"Who is this who obscures my plans with words without knowledge?" This is Job's crime. He obscures the divine plan with his words. So this is not because Job did anything wrong to bring his testing on him, this is because of words that Job has used since then.

"Who obscures my plans without knowledge?" "Who darkens my plans without knowledge?" Job's offense was not that he complained to God, or even that he complained about God's injustice. "Who obscured my plans without knowledge" is very different than "Who dares question my justice?" God did *not* say "Who dares question my justice?"

He said, "who darkens my plans?" All Job cared about was justice. Job was fixated on justice, and fixated on justice not for everyone but only for him personally. But he did not know God's plans. God did not find Job disrespectful, God found him ignorant.

God has a big plan, a grand design. All Job’s emphasis on how God treated him, all Job’s words without knowledge, have muddied the water about God divine plans for his whole creation. That’s what annoyed God, that’s why God needed to put Job in his place, that’s why God asked Job all kinds of questions that did not include Job or even humans.

Then God says, “I will ask, and you will answer me.” And then God asks Job a lot of questions, and they are all designed to do one thing: to put Job in his place by showing him how little he knows about how God’s creation works. God asks, “do you know this?” and Job has to say “no, I don’t know that.” God asks “were you there for this?” and Job has to say, “no, I was not there.” God asks, “can you do this?” and Job has to say “no, I cannot do that.”

For Job, and for us, growing in wisdom is knowing which things we do *not* know. Every time Job cannot answer a question about the world, he’s learning. He’s learning that there’s a lot he does *not* know about the world. He’s growing in wisdom.

God Spoke to Job and We are to Listen

There’s real sense that the book of Job would not be complete if God did not show up at the end and speak for himself. We’ve had so much discussion by others about God, that the book needs God to show up and speak for himself.

But listen, people, this is not precedent. Job is not teaching us that if we pester God long enough, then he will show up and speak to us. That is *not* the point. God’s two storm speeches to Job are also his speeches to *us*. Almost all of God’s people have had troubles they did not understand, and wondered what God was doing. God does *not* give the rest of us two speeches.

We have this in the Bible so that in *our* unexplained tragedies, we have a better sense of how God would respond. It would be like this. We are to take to heart what God told Job. He’s speaking to us. Listen to what he said – here’s God’s first storm speech:

*Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said:
“Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?
Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.*

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

*“Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb,
when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness,
when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, ‘This far you may come
and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt’?*

*“Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place,
that it might take the earth by the edges and shake the wicked out of it?
The earth takes shape like clay under a seal; its features stand out like those of a garment.
The wicked are denied their light, and their upraised arm is broken.*

*“Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?
Have the gates of death been shown to you? Have you seen the gates of the deepest darkness?
Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth? Tell me, if you know all this.*

*“What is the way to the abode of light? And where does darkness reside?
Can you take them to their places? Do you know the paths to their dwellings?
Surely you know, for you were already born! You have lived so many years!*

*“Have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail,
which I reserve for times of trouble, for days of war and battle?
What is the way to the place where the lightning is dispersed,
or the place where the east winds are scattered over the earth?*

*Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain, and a path for the thunderstorm,
to water a land where no one lives, an uninhabited desert,
to satisfy a desolate wasteland and make it sprout with grass?*

*Does the rain have a father? Who fathers the drops of dew?
From whose womb comes the ice? Who gives birth to the frost from the heavens
when the waters become hard as stone, when the surface of the deep is frozen?*

*“Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades? Can you loosen Orion’s belt?
Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons or lead out the Bear with its cubs?
Do you know the laws of the heavens? Can you set up God’s dominion over the earth?*

*“Can you raise your voice to the clouds and cover yourself with a flood of water?
Do you send the lightning bolts on their way? Do they report to you, ‘Here we are’?
Who gives the ibis wisdom or gives the rooster understanding?
Who has the wisdom to count the clouds? Who can tip over the water jars of the heavens
when the dust becomes hard and the clods of earth stick together?*

*“Do you hunt the prey for the lioness and satisfy the hunger of the lions
when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in a thicket? Who provides food for the raven
when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food?*

*“Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn?
Do you count the months till they bear? Do you know the time they give birth?
They crouch down and bring forth their young; their labor pains are ended.
Their young thrive and grow strong in the wilds; they leave and do not return.*

*“Who let the wild donkey go free? Who untied its ropes?
I gave it the wasteland as its home, the salt flats as its habitat.
It laughs at the commotion in the town; it does not hear a driver’s shout.
It ranges the hills for its pasture and searches for any green thing.*

*“Will the wild ox consent to serve you? Will it stay by your manger at night?
Can you hold it to the furrow with a harness? Will it till the valleys behind you?
Will you rely on it for its great strength? Will you leave your heavy work to it?
Can you trust it to haul in your grain and bring it to your threshing floor?*

*“The wings of the ostrich flap joyfully, though they cannot compare with the wings and feathers
of the stork. She lays her eggs on the ground and lets them warm in the sand,
unmindful that a foot may crush them, that some wild animal may trample them.
She treats her young harshly, as if they were not hers; she cares not that her labor was in vain,
for God did not endow her with wisdom or give her a share of good sense.
Yet when she spreads her feathers to run, she laughs at horse and rider.*

*“Do you give the horse its strength or clothe its neck with a flowing mane?
Do you make it leap like a locust, striking terror with its proud snorting?
It paws fiercely, rejoicing in its strength, and charges into the fray.
It laughs at fear, afraid of nothing; it does not shy away from the sword.
The quiver rattles against its side, along with the flashing spear and lance.
In frenzied excitement it eats up the ground; it cannot stand still when the trumpet sounds.
At the blast of the trumpet it snorts, ‘Aha!’ It catches the scent of battle from afar,
the shout of commanders and the battle cry.*

*“Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom and spread its wings toward the south?
Does the eagle soar at your command and build its nest on high?
It dwells on a cliff and stays there at night; a rocky crag is its stronghold.
From there it looks for food; its eyes detect it from afar.
Its young ones feast on blood, and where the slain are, there it is.”*

Ten Principles in these Speeches that God Described but Never Said

1 The world is carefully organized. This speech is carefully organized. There is no chaos in the world. Everything has forethought and planning and wisdom. The structure of the speech itself already gives us that sense. Ten stanzas on the world, beginning with creation, and then seven stanzas on wild animals. The world is carefully organized.

2 God is an infinitely competent Creator. He obviously has a great deal of power, but his power is not the center of this speech. His skill and insight dominate these pictures, not his power. Even more than *powerful*, he is infinitely *competent*.

3 God knows his universe intimately. He knows how wide the earth is, he knows the system of the stars and the birth cycle of mountain goats and he knows what terrible mothers ostriches are, and how fast they can run. He knows all about all of it. He knows the path of every storm, and when deserted wasteland sprouts grass. Jesus said not a sparrow falls without God knowing. He knows how many hairs are on each of our heads. He knows his universe intimately.

4 God always sustains and nurtures his creation. Whether the physical world or the animal world, God keeps life going. Creation is not just a past event. Every day the morning has to be made by its creator. He calls up every dawn, grabbing the edges of the earth. He counts the months of pregnancy of every mountain goat.

God feeds the predators. God hunts the prey for the lioness, and God satisfies the hunger of the lions. When lions are lying and waiting, he can feel their hunger and helps them. Psalm 104 says the lions roar for their prey, and seek their food from God. Ravens live off the lions' leftovers, and God hears the young raven cry out to God for food.

Something innocent has to die for all these to eat. Job, you want to be in charge of justice? You want to decide what is fair? What will you do about hungry predators? Eagles can see food from afar, and their young ones feast on blood. God always sustains and nurtures his creation.

5 The world has immense variety. The purposes of the big picture are incredibly multiple. So many separate things, clouds and sunrise and wild oxen and ostriches, none of them interested in anything but themselves, all of them operating according to God's plan. People devote their lives to studying one particular of creation, and there are innumerable particulars. Each particular functions magnificently, just as God intended, and they all together are his plan and purpose. That's why Job is out of his league to question what's going on in one aspect. He does not have this wisdom. It is beyond humans.

6 God speaks only of the real world, many different pictures of the real world. God does not talk about principles or rules. God does not use the kind of language that Job and his friends used. It is not the kind of language Job wanted to hear from God, and we need to keep this in mind. If God showed up for us, as he did for Job, he'd show us pictures of things that had no obvious connection to our questions. God just wanted Job to submit.

7 The real world is good. There is nothing that God needs to set right. Everything is doing just what it was made to do. God does not need to justify anything that's happening, because everything is obviously good. The world is as he designed it, carrying on as he carries it on. This includes God limiting evil. God put boundaries on the seas, put the waters behind doors, so they

would not overwhelm the land. Every day God calls forth dawn, because the light drives wicked people back into their holes. They only work in the dark. God limits evil; the real world is good.

8 God delights in the world, Not only is there no problem in the world, God delights in the world. Almost all of Job 38 is God asking Job questions, but two thirds of Job 39 is not questions at all. God is praising his own creation. God gets carried away with his topic, leaves questions behind, and just talks about how wonderful it is, the mountain goats and wild donkeys and ostriches.

In the creation story, after God made something, we read, “and God saw that it was good.” Not just that what God made was good, but God himself saw that it was good. He enjoyed what he was putting together. After the sixth day, “and God saw that it was very good.” When he was done, he was totally pleased with what he had accomplished.

Psalm 104 praises God for creation, and near the end we read, “*May the LORD rejoice in his works.*” That’s what God is doing in both of these Job speeches. God stops asking questions about his work and instead he enjoys and praises his work. God delights in the world.

9 There is nothing about humans in these speeches. God’s plans and purposes in the world can be seen without looking at humans. In the next speech, God speaks of behemoth, which the experts all take to be hippopotamus. God says, ‘Look at behemoth, which I made along with you, Job,’ and a few lines later says, “it ranks first among the works of God!”

The point is not that humans don’t matter or don’t count. After all, God is speaking to a human, and through Scripture to all humans. Humans matter a great deal. God’s point is that the principles on which the universe is founded can be seen in the natural world around us. We live in God’s mysterious and varied world. When humans want to learn about the principles of the universe, we should look carefully at the natural world around us.

10 God is free. See especially 39:9–12, the wild ox, which is generally identified with the auroch. They were large cows, six feet tall at the shoulder, two long heavy horns. The last one is said to have died in 1627. Listen to what God says to Job about them:

*Will the wild ox consent to serve you? Will it stay by your manger at night?
Can you hold it to the furrow with a harness? Will it till the valleys behind you?
Will you rely on it for its great strength? Will you leave your heavy work to it?
Can you trust it to haul in your grain and bring it to your threshing floor?*

God wants to get just one thing across: “This wild ox will not answer to you, Job, it will not serve you, it will not do your heavy work. I made wild oxen, Job, and I like them that way. So what makes you think I will consent to serve you? Do you think you can put a harness on me? Do you think if you pray the right way, or pray long enough, I must serve you?”

God is more direct in 41:10–11. Here God speaks to Job about Leviathan, the crocodile. *No one is fierce enough to rouse leviathan. Who then is able to stand against me? Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me.* Here's the line: "*Who has a claim against me that I must pay?*" God is never obliged to us. We can count on God to do what he said he would do, because he is utterly faithful and dependable. That's fine, and remember that even there he often does not keep his promises in the way we thought or when we thought.

But he never submits to our harness. He simply acts out who he is. I am who I am. That's his name in Exodus 3, and that's our God. The wild ox acts out who he is, the crocodile acts out who he is, and our God acts out who he is. I am who I am. And if you're afraid to poke a crocodile with a sharp stick, says God, don't you dare try to put a leash on me.

Brief review of the ten principles (most of which I got from David Clines' Job commentary):

- 1 The world is carefully organized.
- 2 God is an infinitely competent Creator.
- 3 God knows his universe intimately.
- 4 God always sustains and nurtures his creation.
- 5 Variety: the world has immense and unbelievable variety.
- 6 God's speech is only pictures of the real world.
- 7 The real world is good. It does not need to be put right.
- 8 God delights in the world, and praises it.
- 9 God's two speeches ignore humans.
- 10 God is free. Humans never have any claim on him. Like wild animals. I am who I am.

A theodicy is a writing that defends God's justice when bad things happen to good people. The book of Job is about bad things happening to a good person, but it is not a theodicy. It's not a theodicy because in Job, God does not defend his justice.

Job said, "You are not being just with me, God. Tell me how this is fair." Elihu found Job's complaint offensive, but God did not. God was only annoyed that Job would say this with so little knowledge of God's plans and purposes. Job wasn't disrespectful, he was ignorant. Job needed to humble himself and submit. We don't know enough about God's good creation to tell him if he's being fair or not. But it is always good, he is always sustaining and nurturing. Amen.

PRAYER: Father, Peter says we should humble ourselves under your mighty hand, so you could lift us up at the right time. Here and now, we humble ourselves under your mighty hand. Peter also says we should throw all our cares on you, because you care for us. Father, we're trusting your help for all our cares. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and into Christ's perseverance. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.