

“And the Lord Restored the Fortunes of Job”

Job 42:1-6, 10-17

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If you are just joining us, we are wrapping up today a four-part series on the biblical book of Job. This book is the Bible’s *tour de force* on the great theological questions about evil and suffering. Why do good people sometimes experience incredible pain and suffering? Why do evil people sometimes prosper? Why does the justice of God sometimes feel lacking? Why does God sometimes feel absent? Why does it seem that God permits murderers, thieves, adulterers, and rogues to have their way?

In the story, Job was a good, righteous, and God-fearing man who lost everything. His ten children – dead. His wealth – gone. His body – afflicted with sores from head to toe. Job tried to hold on to his faith, but after a while lost that too. Three friends came to console him, but they all thought that Job must have done something *horribly* evil, and that Job is experiencing God’s punishment. In their view, Job simply needs to repent of his evil ways and confess his sins. But their theology is all wrong. Job truly had done *nothing* wrong. Conventional “wisdom” turned out not to be *wise* at all. Job and his friends get into a lengthy and heated debate. Then along comes a young man, Elihu, who brazenly claims to be wiser than any of them. He accuses Job of no longer even *trying* to listen for God.

Then ... *God* speaks. God comes thundering onto the scene, blasting away at Job with question after question. “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” Where does light live? Where does darkness reside? Where do the snow and hail, rain and thunder, wind and ice come from? Can you make the stars stop moving across the night sky? How do animals know where to go to find food? How do birds know when to fly south? Do you know the answer to *any* of *those* questions, Job?

No. No, he doesn’t. There are just three chapters left in the book. Are Job’s questions going to get satisfactorily answered? Or are the deep mysteries of the universe going to remain deep mysteries?

God speaks to Job one final time. God has three final, very last things to share with him.

First: “Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?” Job – *are you God?* “Deck yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor.” Put on all the might and the power of God, if you can, Job. Then look out upon the whole earth. If you are God, Job, then *do the things that God should do*. “Look on all who are proud, and bring them low.” Bring *God’s justice* on the world. Give the evil people their just desserts. Can you do that, Job? Can you *do my job*, says God?

Of course he can’t. *No human* can display God’s majesty or wield God’s power. Not even a good and righteous man like Job. *He’s not God*. None of us are. Sometimes we forget that ... don’t we?

Second: “Look at Behemoth, which I made just as I made you.” *Behemoth*. You know the English word “behemoth,” which commonly refers to “something of monstrous size, power, or

importance,” according to Merriam-Webster. Our English word comes directly from a Hebrew word: *Bahamot*. It occurs one and only one time in the entire Bible: here in the 40th chapter in the book of Job. Some of you may have heard of Bahamut, an immense creature in traditional Arabian mythology, or the god “Bahamut” in the role-playing game Dungeons and Dragons; both of those conceptions trace their origins back to Hebrew word, *Bahamot*. What is *Bahamot*? Ten verses describe it. It is a creature, an incredibly strong creature, with bones like bronze, limbs like iron, and a tail as sturdy as a cedar tree. It eats grass, and maybe wild animals too; it is not stopped by a rushing river. It cannot be captured by hooks or snares, or injured by any other human means; “only its Maker can approach it with the sword.” God says “it is the first of the great acts of God.” Later Jewish writers would say that it was created on the fifth day of creation, the day all the other land animals were created, but God created it first of all.

Now, why would God want to educate Job about *Bahamot*? What purpose would that serve?

Hold that thought. Let’s move on to God’s third topic. “Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook, or press down its tongue with a cord? Can you put a rope in its nose, or pierce its jaw with a hook?” *Behemoth* is the great *land* creature; *Leviathan* is the great *sea* monster. Merriam-Webster says that the word can refer to “something large or formidable” or to “a large sea animal,” but, once again, our English word comes from an ancient Hebrew word: *Livyatan*. This creature is mentioned six times in the Bible: twice in Job, once in Psalm 74, once in Psalm 104, and twice in Isaiah 27. “There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it,” we read in Psalm 104. Isaiah calls it a “twisting serpent,” and “the dragon that is in the sea.” 34 verses describe it in the book of Job. “Can you fill its skin with harpoons, or its head with fishing spears?” No. “Any hope of capturing it will be disappointed; were not even the gods overwhelmed by the sight of it? ... Who can stand before it? Who can confront it and be safe?” It has “mighty strength,” a “splendid frame,” and a “double coat of mail.” “From its mouth go flaming torches; sparks of fire leap out” – this is a *fire-breathing* sea monster. “Out of its nostrils comes smoke ... and a flame comes out of its mouth.... When it raises itself up the gods are afraid.... Though the sword reaches it, it does not avail, nor does the spear, the dart, or the javelin.... On earth it has no equal, a creature without fear. It surveys everything that is lofty; it is king over all that is proud.”

This is God’s third and final point. Again I ask: why would God want to educate Job about *Livyatan*? Or about *Bahamot*? What purpose does this serve? *How does this answer Job’s questions?*

Okay. Pause, take a step back, put on your thinking caps. God has just given Job a description of two great primordial creatures. Mythological creatures, some would say, although other interpreters have tried to suggest that *Bahamot* is really just a hippopotamus, or an elephant, or a dinosaur; and *Livyatan* is really just a crocodile, or a serpent or a whale. Those suggestions are, frankly, absurd; no creature that we know of – living or extinct – has the immense strength that the Bible says these two creatures have. Clearly, these are no ordinary creatures on the land or in the sea, nor are they something that we can observe with our ordinary senses. Kind of like ... *angels*. Or *demons*. Supernatural beings that exist in the spiritual world, which the Bible describes as being very, very *real*.

Later commentators, both Jewish and Christian, interpreted this further. Ancient rabbis said that when the Messiah comes, Leviathan would be defeated and killed by the archangel Gabriel. God would hold a banquet for righteous people, and the flesh of Leviathan would be served. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, “Leviathan” became *drakon*, which means “serpent” or “dragon.” That should cause the hair on your neck to stand up, because there is a dragon in the New Testament, in the book of Revelation; the “great red dragon” who casts a third of the stars down from heaven, and

stands ready to devour a woman's child, and who fights against the archangel Michael and all the other angels, and who is cast out into the earth, together with his angels. Now that dragon wages war with the woman's other children, "those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus." Revelation says this dragon "is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world."

So ... is *Leviathan* the same as *Satan*? Or, perhaps, one of Satan's minions? Is Behemoth, too?

Go back to the beginning of the book. In the opening chapters, there are a couple scenes in the heavenly realm. Satan, also called "the Adversary," challenges God to something like a game of chess, playing with Job's life, trying to get Job to curse God. Everything that happened to Job was a result of Satan's schemes. But Job didn't know that. Neither did his friends. They didn't have Satan in their theology. They thought *God* was responsible for everything that happens on earth. They were wrong.

So God asks Job: *are you God?* Of course he isn't. But then God points to two other beings, these two primordial creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan, creatures of chaos and destruction, creatures that no human can defeat. These creatures had been *created by God*. They stand, ultimately, under *God's power*. But they also seem capable of independent action. Like Satan, in the opening chapters in the book. Job does not appear to be aware of the existence of Satan. He *does* seem to be aware of the existence of the two creatures. So God points to the two creatures, basically saying to Job, "Okay, Job, you want to know why bad things happen to good people, you want to know why evil exists, why there is suffering and death and pain, why the justice of God sometimes seems absent, *why, why, why*. Here's your answer: there are *cosmic forces at work* in this universe that are bent on chaos and destruction."

This satisfies Job. He has had an epiphany here, a spiritual awakening. He has suddenly realized that there is more at play in the universe than just *humanity* and *God*. There are other forces at work. "I have uttered what I did not understand," he says, "things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.... I ... repent in dust and ashes." Job realizes: *his theology had been too small*. Maybe ours is too.

Several things happen at the end of the book. Job's three friends are reprimanded by God, and Job prays for them as they offer sacrifices to God. God restores Job's fortunes, giving Job *twice* as much wealth as he had before. He is reconciled with all his brothers and sisters; Job and his wife have ten new children, to replace the ten they had lost. Job lives a good, long, full life. He died "old and full of days."

But questions remain. *Why did God allow Satan to do all that evil to Job?* The answer might be simply this: not so much to teach *Job* a lesson – for there is no evidence that Job *actually existed* as a flesh-and-blood person; this whole book may simply be a theological lesson told in the form of a story. Perhaps this book isn't about God teaching *Job* a lesson. Maybe it's God's way of teaching *us* a lesson.

One final question. *Why do you think evil exists?* What is *your* explanation for all the suffering, pain, and injustice in the world? If you think it's all *God's* fault – well, then you are going to be mighty disappointed in God, time and time again. Maybe, like Job and Job's wife, it will cause you to seriously question or lose your faith. But if you are willing to grant that there are *cosmic powers* that are opposed to the goodness of God ... that primordial forces like Behemoth and Leviathan really do exist ... that there really is an Adversary who conspires against God, which are all points the Bible makes in various ways across both Testaments – well, then, you've found some wisdom. You've had an epiphany, a spiritual awakening, like Job had. Things start to make sense ... and a whole new set of questions awaits.

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