



## Job - Chapter Forty

### II Job 3:1-42:6 - Dialogue: Job, His Suffering, and His Standing before God (continues)

#### II.e Job 38:1-42:6 - Challenge: the Lord answers Job (continues)

#### II.e.i Job 38:1-40:2 - The Lord Answers Job (continues/concludes)

#### Summary of Chapter Forty

Job, in his earlier defence before his friends, had pleaded for an opportunity to state his case before the Lord. At the end of his first questioning of Job, God provides Job with the opportunity to defend his case but his response shows that he has no case to put before the Lord.

God then starts his second questioning of Job, asking whether Job should take the place of God. Could he possibly do so? Does he have the power and authority to take on the role? God uses one particular beast that he had created, the Behemoth, as an example of the wonders of creation.

<sup>1</sup> And the Lord said to Job:

<sup>2</sup> ‘Shall a fault-finder contend with the Almighty?

Anyone who argues with God must respond.’

#### Job 40:1-2

And the Lord said to Job. This continued God’s challenge to Job, where God answered Job’s heart without specifically answering Job’s questions. It came after the extended time of fellowship, wonder and teaching described in Job Chapters 38 and 39.

Shall a fault-finder contend with the Almighty? Job, speaking from what he felt to be his God-absent agony, longed to contend with God. Yet after God appeared

in his love and glory, Job now felt humbled about his previous demand. He rightly felt he was in no place to contend with the Almighty, much less to correct him or rebuke him. It might be said that Job and God had a wonderful time together in Job Chapters 38 and 39; God taught Job all about his greatness using the whole world as his classroom. Yet in it all God remained God and Job remained a man: *<<But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is moulded say to the one who moulds it, 'Why have you made me like this?''>>* (Romans 9:20).

The Lord refers to Job as a fault-finder and asks him to answer; but the questions help Job to recognise what is beyond the reach of any mortal's knowledge or power.

### II.e.ii Job 40:3-5 - Job's Response to God

In the face of the Lord's questions, Job puts his hand over his mouth (v.4), just as princes had done in his own presence (Job 29:9), and pledges silence (v.5).

<sup>3</sup> Then Job answered the Lord:

<sup>4</sup> 'See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?

I lay my hand on my mouth.

<sup>5</sup> I have spoken once, and I will not answer;  
twice, but will proceed no further.'

#### Job 40:3-5

Then Job answered the Lord. Job had prayed often throughout the dialogue with his friends; he was the only one of the five to speak to God. Yet now Job spoke after God's great revelation of himself and will speak with a quite different tone than he had before. The different tone was not because Job's circumstances had substantially changed. He was still in misery and had lost virtually everything. The tone changed because while he once felt that God had forsaken him, now he felt and knew that God was with him.

See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? Job once wanted to question God and with great passion demanded to be brought into God's court; refer to Job 31:35-37. Now, after the revelation of God and the restoration of a sense of relationship with him, Job sensed his own relative position before God and that he could not answer God.

I am of small account. Some translations have this as 'Behold, I am vile.' This was a perfectly correct translation in the time of King James because then 'vile' did not mean what it has come to mean over the years. In the Hebrew word there is no suggestion of moral failure. Quite literally it means 'of no weight.' Job did not

here in the presence of the majesty of God confess moral perversity but comparative insignificance.

Charles Spurgeon saw it more in the modern definition of vile and commented, “Surely, if any man had a right to say I am not vile, it was Job; for, according to the testimony of God himself, he was ‘a perfect and an upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil.’ Yet we find even this eminent saint when by his nearness to God he had received light enough to discover his own condition, exclaiming, ‘Behold I am vile.’” And again, “Job said, ‘Behold, I am vile.’ That word ‘behold’ implies that he was astonished. The discovery was unexpected. There are special times with the Lord’s people, when they learn by experience that they are vile.”

All of the arguing of Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar and Elihu could not bring Job to this place. Only the revelation of God could so humble Job and set him in his right place before the Lord. Job made his strong and sometimes outrageous statements when he felt, to the core of his soul, that the Lord had forsaken him. Now with his sense of the presence of the Lord restored, Job could better see his proper place before God. It is important to remember that God never did forsake Job; that while he withdrew the sense of his presence, and this was the cause of profound misery to Job, God was present with Job all along, strengthening him with his unseen hand. Job could have never survived this ordeal without that unseen, un-sensed hand of God supporting him. To bring Job to this place, the reader need not think that God was angry and harsh with Job in Chapters 38 and 39. It is still entirely possible - likely, indeed - that God’s manner with Job in those chapters was marked by warm and loving fellowship more than harsh rebuke. It should be remembered that it is the goodness of God that leads man to repentance, something that Paul agrees with: <<*Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realise that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*>> (Romans 2:4).

I lay my hand on my mouth. Job was now ashamed at the way he spoke about God and his situation. He would use his hand to stop his mouth, and he would proceed no further.

### II.e.iii Job 40:6-41:34 - God’s Challenge to Job

At the hands of his three friends, Job knew what it felt like to have what was hidden about him (e.g. the state of his heart before God) questioned and judged by those who had drawn wrong conclusions from what was visible in his circumstances. The Lord now questions Job for overextending his judgement of what his suffering meant about the Lord’s just governance of the world (vv.6-9).

In his faithfulness, Job had embodied aspects of the Lord’s just and right character: <<*When the ear heard, it commended me, and when the eye saw, it*

*approved; because I delivered the poor who cried, and the orphan who had no helper. The blessing of the wretched came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy, and I championed the cause of the stranger. I broke the fangs of the unrighteous, and made them drop their prey from their teeth>>* (Job 29:11-17). However, the Lord makes the point that, in speaking about justice on earth, Job is referring to something much more extensive than he could comprehend or accomplish (vv.10-14). The Lord illustrates this point further by describing two beasts of creation: Behemoth (vv.15-24) and Leviathan in Chapter 41. If Job is unable to subdue these powerful beasts who are themselves a part of creation, how much less should he presume to be able to maintain his own right toward the Lord: *<<Any hope of capturing it will be disappointed; were not even the gods overwhelmed at the sight of it? No one is so fierce as to dare to stir it up. Who can stand before it? Who can confront it and be safe? – under the whole heaven, who?>>* (Job 41:9-11).

<sup>6</sup> Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:

<sup>7</sup> 'Gird up your loins like a man;

I will question you, and you declare to me.

<sup>8</sup> Will you even put me in the wrong?

Will you condemn me that you may be justified?

<sup>9</sup> Have you an arm like God,

and can you thunder with a voice like his?

<sup>10</sup> 'Deck yourself with majesty and dignity;

clothe yourself with glory and splendour.

<sup>11</sup> Pour out the overflowings of your anger,

and look on all who are proud, and abase them.

<sup>12</sup> Look on all who are proud, and bring them low;

tread down the wicked where they stand.

<sup>13</sup> Hide them all in the dust together;

bind their faces in the world below.

<sup>14</sup> Then I will also acknowledge to you

that your own right hand can give you victory.

## Job 40:6-14

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind. God was still present with Job in the midst of the strong, untameable storm. He had not morphed into a gentler presence. The Lord addresses Job (v.7) and questions him particularly about how Job sought to defend his integrity in such a way that he seemed to imply that it was God who was acting out of accord with his own character (v.8). In doing so, Job has spoken beyond his knowledge or power to act justly (vv.9-14).

Gird up your loins like a man; I will question you, and you declare to me. By using the same phrasing that began this encounter in Job 38:3, God indicated to Job that he was not yet finished. There was more to show Job and to teach him from creation.

Will you condemn me that you may be justified? Throughout Job's questioning of God, it could be said that he seemed more concerned with the defence of his own integrity rather than God's. This was natural since Job's integrity was under harsh attack, but it was not good or the way it should be. It might be said that Job fell into the trap of thinking that because he could not figure God out, that perhaps God was not fair. Yet in this larger section of God's revelation of himself to Job, God has demonstrated that there are many things that Job does not know and therefore he was not a fit judge of God's ways: <<***What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?***>> (Romans 3:3).

Have you an arm like God? God here again reminded Job of the distance between himself and Job. Yes, the sense of fellowship had been restored to Job; but it did not mean that God and Job were on the same level. There was still the distance that exists between God and man.

**The arm of God is a symbol of his strength and is often used to describe the way in which he defends and upholds his people:** <<'Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him; for there is one greater with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles.' The people were encouraged by the words of King Hezekiah of Judah>> (2 Chronicles 32:7-8), and: <<O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvellous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gained him victory>> (Psalm 98:1).

Deck yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendour. Look on all who are proud, and bring them low; tread down the wicked where they stand. God challenged Job to do these things that only God can do. As Job recognised his inability, it reminded him of his proper place before God.

Hide them all in the dust is a euphemism for bury. This was most graphically illustrated following Korah's rebellion: <<As soon as he finished speaking all these words, the ground under them was split apart. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, along with their households – everyone who belonged to Korah and all their goods. So they with all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol; the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. All Israel around them fled at their outcry, for they said, 'The earth will swallow us too!''>> (Numbers 16:31-34).

Bind. Death is an imprisonment; the image is that of faces pushed into the grave. Faces is metonymy for the whole person.

Then I will also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can give you victory. With this, God strongly brought the point to Job. Since he could not do these things that only God could do, i.e. those described in vv.9-13, neither could he save himself with his own right hand.

God's right hand in particular is synonymous with his power and victory: <<Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power – your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy>> (Exodus 15:6), <<You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand has supported me; your help has made me great>> (Psalm 18:35), and: <<do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand>> (Isaiah 41:10).

#### Introduction to Job 40:15-24

God gave Job a remarkable survey of the wonders of creation in Job Chapters 38-39 including a look at many remarkable animals and their ways. Now lastly, God gives Job a look at two remarkable creatures: Behemoth (vv.15-24) and Leviathan (Job Chapter 41).

- 15 'Look at Behemoth,  
which I made just as I made you;  
it eats grass like an ox.
- 16 Its strength is in its loins,  
and its power in the muscles of its belly.
- 17 It makes its tail stiff like a cedar;  
the sinews of its thighs are knit together.
- 18 Its bones are tubes of bronze,  
its limbs like bars of iron.

- 19 'It is the first of the great acts of God –  
only its Maker can approach it with the sword.
- 20 For the mountains yield food for it  
where all the wild animals play.
- 21 Under the lotus plants it lies,  
in the covert of the reeds and in the marsh.
- 22 The lotus trees cover it for shade;  
the willows of the wadi surround it.
- 23 Even if the river is turbulent, it is not frightened;  
it is confident though Jordan rushes against its mouth.
- 24 Can one take it with hooks  
or pierce its nose with a snare?

#### Job 40:15-24

**Behemoth** usually refers to cattle but in at least one other reference it most likely signifies a hippopotamus. It is almost universally so interpreted in this passage, taking the description of vv.16-18 as poetical extravagance. Some, however, suppose that the description requires some kind of mythical beast to be in view, as a parallel to Leviathan in Job 41:1; the first option is simpler.

**It eats grass like an ox; and its power in the muscles of its belly.** God seems to rejoice in his own creation as he describes the wonder of this remarkable animal, noting its strength, size, appetite, and habits. The image is clear. If Job cannot contend with this fellow creature, how could he ever contend with the God who created the Behemoth?

**It makes its tail stiff like a cedar.** Tail is a common euphemism for phallus. It is to be so interpreted in this verse considering the description of the anatomy of the animal. Potency is often associated with procreative power. In the medieval period, Behemoth was conceived as a symbol of sensuality and sin.

**The sinews of its thighs are knit together.** The word for **sinews** is otherwise unknown. Some ancient versions such as Targum and Latin took it to mean 'testicle,' in keeping with the interpretation of the first line.