



The Serpent King - Job Part 8

Job 40-41

6/4/2023

We are picking up in Job 40 today. (We will have this week and next week in Job, followed by studies in Proverbs this summer and Matthew in the fall.)

We've been in Job for a couple of months, and we are nearing the resolution in the book. Job's life has been destroyed: he lost his kids, his fortune, and his fame in an instant. And Job never learned why.

His friends came along and tried to convince him that to suffer this greatly he must have sinned greatly. But Job hadn't sinned greatly. So he, understandably, complained about how things were going:

He had two main categories of complaints:

(1) The World That God Made Is Not Good

Job 14:1 [1] "Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble.

That's what life in the world is like - you live just a handful of days and they stink.

(2) God is Not Good

Speaking to God in Job 10:3, Job says:

Job 10:3 [3] Does it seem good to you to oppress, to despise the work of your hands and favor the designs of the wicked?

So Job says to God, "You made me so you could despise me, and you show favoritism toward wicked people while the good are oppressed and suffer."

That's how it looks to Job. Job's friends think that Job is his own worst enemy, Job thinks God is his worst enemy. Job never asks to get back all that he lost, except the closeness

with God that he once knew. As he wrestles, he isn't perfect, but he does keep clinging to God and refuses to curse God and die. So after Job and his friends go 'round and round for a long time, finally, at the end, God speaks into the chaos.

And God gives mysterious answers, unexpected answers, but good answers. Answers that don't explain his plan or all of our suffering, but prove that God hasn't abandoned us in our suffering.

So to answer the first complaint, that the world is not good, God took Job on a verbal tour of the cosmos, pointing out the goodness in creation, as well as God's care for it. God showed how involved He was in creation, how much He cared for it, how much He ruled over it, and how much He was moving it toward his intended end. He demonstrated that God understood far more than Job did.

So in response to that first speech, Job said:

Job 40:3-5 [3] Then Job answered the LORD and said: [4] "Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. [5] I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further."

So Job withdraws his complaint and pledges to be silent and not complain anymore.

But God is gracious and kind. He's a God of "how much more." God isn't after a cease-fire or a partial peace or a false peace. He loves Job, and is working to restore Job to a relationship with Himself.

So God speaks again, as if to say, "You may have decided to be quiet, Job, but you still have these thoughts, specifically thoughts that I am not good. So let me address those, too." He's so kind, so willing to condescend, working to bridge the gap between Himself and Job when Job could never bridge it with his own reason.

And then God makes a second speech that we will look at today. And this is where Job will end up after God's second speech:

Job 42:1-6 [1] Then Job answered the LORD and said: [2] "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. [3] 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. [4] 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.' [5] I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; [6] therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

So Job, at the end, is not silent, but speaking, and knowing he is heard. (He had said before that God would never listen to him (9:16).

But now He says his eye sees God - His fellowship with God is restored like he wanted it to be - he is closer to God than before. And he says “I repent in dust and ashes,” which could be literally translated, “I am comforted about the dust and ashes.”¹ In other words, he is finally comforted about all of the suffering he went through.

He is once again enchanted with God.

So what is it that God says in the second speech that makes this difference?

At first glance, it seems that all that God does is describe two more animals. He just described 8 wild animals and Job decided to be quiet. God describes two more, and Job is all better?

As if Job is still on the outs with God, God shows him a Hippo, and he says, “That’s the answer I was looking for. My kids all died, but Hippos are cool so I like God again.”

That doesn’t seem like all there is to it.

What was there for Job in this second speech that restored the vitality of his relationship with God? And might it be there for us, too? There are some things that God says here that can change the way we think about the world, about the evil and chaos in it, and about God that can help re-enthrall us with God as well.

So let’s work our way through Job 40.

Job 40:6–8 [6] “Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:

[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?”

So that’s the question that will be addressed here: Is Job right to say that God has been wrong, that God is unjust? And God gives a three part answer to that question:

Job 40:9–14 [9] Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?

¹ Ortlund, Eric. Piercing Leviathan. P. 156.

[10] “Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor.

[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. [13] Hide them all in the dust together; bind their faces in the world below. [14] Then will I also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can save you.

The point here is mostly overlap with some stuff we said last week, so we'll fly over this one. But God is saying here that He will one day bring the proud low. He says he has a strong arm, which is not just God flexing like a teenage boy walking by a mall mirror. It is saying God has the power to judge evil. And he says he can not only punish evil with death, but also in the afterlife, or the underworld (verse 13 - the world below.)

And God says to Job, “If you can do that better than I can, Job, then you are in a position to judge my justice.” Job would have to be more able to bring about justice than God to judge God, so God reminds Job of Who God is here.

So the first part of God's answer to Job's question is that:

I. God has the power to bring about true justice and can be trusted to do so.

Then the second and third parts of God's answers are the descriptions of two more creatures, creatures far more mysterious than the ones he described in the previous chapter: Behemoth and Leviathan.

Job 40:15–24 [15] “Behold, Behemoth, which I made as I made you; he eats grass like an ox. [16] Behold, his strength in his loins, and his power in the muscles of his belly. [17] He makes his tail stiff like a cedar; the sinews of his thighs are knit together. [18] His bones are tubes of bronze, his limbs like bars of iron. [19] “He is the first of the works of God; let him who made him bring near his sword! [20] For the mountains yield food for him where all the wild beasts play. [21] Under the lotus plants he lies, in the shelter of the reeds and in the marsh. [22] For his shade the lotus trees cover him; the willows of the brook surround him. [23] Behold, if the river is turbulent he is not frightened; he is confident though Jordan rushes against his mouth. [24] Can one take him by his eyes, or pierce his nose with a snare?”

There isn't agreement on what this creature Behemoth was. I think you can make the case that it's a hippo. Its name literally means "the beast" or "the super-beast." It seems to be some kind of bovine super-beast² that really existed, but in many of the surrounding areas was worshiped as a god and a lot of mythology got attached to it in peoples minds. The Egyptians told stories of their gods appearing as hippopotami.³

So it was thought to be more than an ordinary animal, supernatural even.

But God here says, "I made it just like I made you." It's got huge strength, but it is a created being. And its maker brings near his sword for its slaughter in verse 19. So God is pictured like a rancher - here's this untamable super-beast, and God is fully in control of it, God is over it, God is not at all equalled by it. God is its owner.

This animal that has come to be thought of as a supernatural evil power is tamed by God completely.

So - this beast that the nations fear as a supernatural evil power is like God's farm animal. Not a big deal to God. So Job's thoughts that supernatural evil is too big and powerful and untamed are not at all true.

II. God has not lost control, even over supernatural evil.

But we'll focus more today on the next creature: Leviathan:

Job 41 [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?"

So this Leviathan is a sea creature. In the minds of people in that day, the sea was a symbol of unpredictable chaos. Storms came up quickly on the sea, huge waves rose up that crashed against the boats, and none of it could be predicted.

And what was under the sea was a huge mystery. We have underwater cameras and submarines and diving gear so we've seen a lot more of the sea, but even still the sea is so vast that there's a lot of mysterious, scary stuff down there.

I love going to the ocean, being at the ocean or the mountains to rest and read and think and pray is one of the most restorative things I can do. I love being at the ocean, but not in it.

Because there's a lot in it that wants to kill you, and you can't see it. Debbie likes to swim in the ocean, and I like to walk along it...The sea is chaotic and dangerous.

²Ortlund 112.

³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Set_\(deity\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Set_(deity))

And within the chaotic, powerful sea, is another real creature that came to be thought of in supernatural terms, the Leviathan. A chaotic, untamable serpent-like super-creature within the chaotic, untamable sea.

And because Leviathan lived in the water, it was even more mysterious to people. They only saw parts of it and their imagination would run wild imagining what the rest of it looked like. (There are lots of different images of Leviathan that look different from one another if you google it.)

I don't know of any non-extinct creatures that fit the description today - so I'm not sure what it was, but it was some kind of untamable dragon in an untamable sea. And that huge water-dragon-serpent creature came to represent unstoppable satanic power.

People all over the ancient near east came to fear leviathan, that dragon that ruled the sea.

And God says, "I go fishing for it." That supernatural power you fear that seems to be so strong in your life? I can pull it in with a fish hook.

Job 41:3-11 [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?

[6] Will traders bargain over him?

Will they divide him up among the merchants?

[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.

[10] No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up.

Who then is he who can stand before me?

[11] Who has first given to me, that I should repay him?

Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.

So God shows his power over the most powerful supernatural evil there is - the serpent monster in the chaotic sea. Then goes on to describe Leviathan in vivid detail: detail that even Job, who knew about Leviathan already, never could have come up with. Because it was all obscured by the water.

But it isn't obscured to God:

Job 41:12-34 [12] "I will not keep silence concerning his limbs,

or his mighty strength, or his goodly frame.

[13] Who can strip off his outer garment?

Who would come near him with a bridle?

[14] Who can open the doors of his face?

Around his teeth is terror.

[15] His back is made of rows of shields,

shut up closely as with a seal.

[16] One is so near to another

that no air can come between them.

[17] They are joined one to another;

they clasp each other and cannot be separated.

[18] His sneezings flash forth light,

and his eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn.

[19] Out of his mouth go flaming torches;

sparks of fire leap forth.

[20] Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke,

as from a boiling pot and burning rushes.

[21] His breath kindles coals,

and a flame comes forth from his mouth.

[22] In his neck abides strength,
and terror dances before him.

[23] The folds of his flesh stick together,
firmly cast on him and immovable.

[24] His heart is hard as a stone,
hard as the lower millstone.

[25] When he raises himself up, the mighty are afraid;
at the crashing they are beside themselves.

[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.

[30] His underparts are like sharp potsherds;
he spreads himself like a threshing sledge on the mire.

[31] He makes the deep boil like a pot;
he makes the sea like a pot of ointment.

[32] Behind him he leaves a shining wake;
one would think the deep to be white-haired.

[33] On earth there is not his like,
a creature without fear.

[34] He sees everything that is high;
he is king over all the sons of pride.”

So God describes Leviathan, emphasizing his strength and power and unstoppable.

In many ways, Leviathan mimics God. It seems impenetrable, invincible, omnipotent.

In fact, listen to verses 18-21 again:

**Job 41:18-21 His sneezings flash forth light,
and his eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn.
[19] Out of his mouth go flaming torches;
sparks of fire leap forth.
[20] Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke,
as from a boiling pot and burning rushes.
[21] His breath kindles coals,
and a flame comes forth from his mouth.**

Now listen to this poetic description of God in Psalm 18:

**Psalm 18:7-8 [7] Then the earth reeled and rocked;
the foundations also of the mountains trembled
and quaked, because he was angry.
[8] Smoke went up from his nostrils,
and devouring fire from his mouth;
glowing coals flamed forth from him.**

Leviathan, “big evil” mimics god.

And the suffering we go through can be like that - it seems eternal (this will never end,) it seems omnipotent (I am powerless in this situation,) evil can seem omniscient (I keep getting outwitted by manipulators and evil people.) Satan masquerades as an angel of light, Satan takes on some false versions of the attributes of God. Satan convinces us that the power of evil is all-powerful.

But God has no equal - He plays with Leviathan as with a pet bird.

God fills his back with arrows. God, in almost gleeful terms is describing Leviathan, like a mighty hunter might describe the strength and speed and power of his prey. In this

description of Leviathan, God seems like He is almost gleeful at how under-control the super-serpent is.

And then the description of Leviathan ends, and so does God's speech. And then Job worships. Which is weird because God never makes any points. He just describes the satanic sea monster. I went to college to learn how to write sermons, and I don't really follow all of their rules, but one of the big rules is there's supposed to be application! What are the therefores? There's supposed to be a point.

But God just describes his prey, Leviathan, and His superior power over it.

So what about this speech might have restored Job's soul here? And what in it could maybe help restore ours?

1) God points to the real enemy in the world.

Job's friends came along and said Job was the enemy. Job wasn't a fan of his friends, but Job said God was the enemy.

But it's like God takes Job to the seashore here and says, "Look out there at the powerful serpent. That's the enemy."

Did you think I was against you, Job? I heard you when you said back in chapter 6:4

Job 6:4 "For the arrows of the Almighty are in me; my spirit drinks their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me."

You're not my target, Job - Leviathan is. Satan is. He's the one I'm shooting my arrows at. He's my real enemy, and he's your real enemy. I'm not the chaos monster, he is. You're not my prey, he is. And, with no risk of losing, I am at war with him on your behalf.

You couldn't see that that's what was going on, but it is what is going on. Job, you got me all wrong. The real enemy is Satan.

And in our lives, we know God is sovereign over everything, He has control over everything. But let's not start to think of God as the author of evil. He draws evil in with a fish-hook, it's no match for God. It is allowed to do what it does right now. But God didn't make evil, He is not evil, He is in a very calculated battle against evil on our behalf.

And because He is God He will win precisely when He wants to - He isn't overwhelmed by evil. But He isn't evil. He isn't the enemy. And Job isn't the ultimate enemy here either.

This is important for us because so often we get locked in battles with one another: with our spouses, with one another, with brothers and sisters in Christ in the church. And it's so easy to treat them like they're the ultimate enemy.

Ephesians 6:12 [12] For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

2) God's long description says that God knows evil better than we do.

Job knew some things about Leviathan, but it was all murky, obscured by the waves. And God describes this being that has come to symbolize satanic evil in detail.

And there are not a lot of long physical descriptions in the Bible. We don't know what Jesus looked like, we don't know what the patriarchs looked like. We get descriptions like "Rachel was beautiful" and that's it - not a lot more, in most cases.⁴ There aren't descriptions of the animals in Genesis, it just wasn't typical to give long physical descriptions. (They are rare, not non-existent.)

But here, there's vivid description of the sea dragon that symbolized evil.

God is saying, "I know far more about evil than you do."

And God doesn't downplay it.

So as Job thinks, "How could God be good when there's evil in the world," God says, "Evil is stronger than you think, it's worse than you think, and I know about every clasp on every scale on its back. I know its strength, I know its power."

So if you, Job, think, "I know God isn't good because I understand evil," don't I know it better than you? And I'm telling you, I'm good - you can't put me in the wrong.

When we see evil in the world, that the new understanding we have of how bad people are or how bad life is or how bad the church is or how bad society is will either make us malevolent and bitter, Or, all the more appreciative of God's final defeat of evil.

3) God's Joyful Tone in Both Speeches Shows Us His Fearlessness, His peace, and His mastery over everything we are afraid of.

God knows evil better than we do, and still speaks of the world in a joyful tone.

⁴ Ortlund, Eric. Piercing Leviathan.

God knows how bad things really are more than we ever could, and He still speaks positively about the direction of history.

Job saw evil in the world and thought, “Burn this whole thing down, shut out the lights.” (Job 3).

But God, who knows evil, is not at all pessimistic.

Because nothing is more sure than the defeat of Leviathan at the hands of the skilled divine hunter.

In fact, this promise is made all through the Bible.

When the serpent came to the garden at the beginning of the Bible and deceived Adam and Eve, as God was handing out the curse. And to the serpent, God said:

**Genesis 3:15 [15] I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.”**

In Isaiah 26, there’s a prayer prayed by Israel, lamenting the fact that they failed to change the world and eliminate evil:

Isaiah 26:18 - 27:1

**[18] we were pregnant, we writhed,
but we have given birth to wind.**

**We have accomplished no deliverance in the earth,
and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen.**

[19] Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise.

You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!

**For your dew is a dew of light,
and the earth will give birth to the dead.**

**[20] Come, my people, enter your chambers,
and shut your doors behind you;**

hide yourselves for a little while

until the fury has passed by.

[21] For behold, the LORD is coming out from his place

to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity,

and the earth will disclose the blood shed on it,

and will no more cover its slain. (ESV)

Isaiah 27:1[1] In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea. (ESV)

So the people say, “we couldn’t conquer evil. But the fury of the Lord is coming, and He is going to punish Leviathan, the fleeing serpent.”

Revelation 20:1–3 [1] Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. [2] And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, [3] and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

Revelation 20:10 [10] and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Leviathan is real, evil is real, satan, sin, and death are real.

And God joyfully, gleefully even, is hunting that serpent and will surely finally slay him.

Therefore...

God is joyful even though there is great evil in the world. So if you are waking up these days to a world filled with Leviathans, you can take joy in the power and skill and knowledge and wisdom of the Hunter.

Evil is worse than we know. And the one who knows it perfectly is joyful.

When our kids were little, if they would fall down, often they would immediately look up at us to see how serious it was and what their reaction should be. And if we looked panicked, if we responded with fear, they'd cry and panic too. If we said, "You're ok!", then they'd often just brush it off.

And so here we are in this "world with devils filled that threatens to undo us." We look around and see evil and loss and grief and sin and fear and uncertainty and sickness and broken government and broken churches and hopeless situations. We've crashed into the reality of evil and suffering, we look up at our Father, and He's not at all panicked. He's smiling.

Which means, Christian, you're ok!

Evil is more deadly than we ever feared, and God is enjoying the goodness of His creation without being anxious or troubled at all.

And we can look up at our Father to gauge what our reaction should be!

If God is joyful, and He is, can't we be, too? (Even though we often mourn and weep and cry?)

If God is completely confident in the defeat of evil, can't we rest, knowing that the defeat of evil is sure?

You wake up to panicked kids and panicked employees and panicked news media, but you look at your Father, and He says, "I've got this."

If I believed that like I should, I would be far less anxious, far less prone to making decisions from fear, my attitudes would be different, my pattern of frenzied over-work would change, my fear that maybe this time some evil circumstance will win would diminish.

If I could look to this Father, who knows evil better than I do but is reeling it in laughing, then my reaction to life would be far different.

Proverbs 31:25 [25] Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.

This is the Christian response to evil: it's never to deny it exists, it's never to not feel loss or remorse or pain, it's never to not grieve - evil is real, and it's worse than we know. AND God's got this. And we will be ok.

And if God can look at His good world and call it good, rejoice in it, while still not denying that there's evil and brokenness in it, and as we look to Him to see how we should react, couldn't that become our perspective?

We could take a lot more joy in people if we didn't deny the evil that's in them, but also saw them as made in God's image and worthy of dignity and respect. We could enjoy them and be fascinated by them and befriend them, without feeling the need to endorse sinful behaviors or deny that they're sin. Leviathan is real in a good and beautiful world, and evil is real in people that are wonderfully made in God's image.

We could take a lot more joy in our spouses, our kids, our church, and all of our lives if we didn't have to deny the wrong exists, but also shared God's jovial and peaceful attitude toward it all.

God takes joy in his creation where evil and chaos dwell. So could we take joy in our families? In people? In our spouses? In our kids? In our church?

And as you follow the storyline of the Bible forward, we get to the cross of Jesus.

And there, the head of the serpent is crushed by the bruised heel of the savior.

God doesn't deny evil's badness: on the cross we can see that the evil in us was so bad that the Son of God had to be crushed for it.

But Jesus rose from the dead - that's how sure the final defeat of evil is.

Overcoming Leviathan is nothing compared to overcoming death, but God burst out of the grave - **Who then is he who can stand before [Him]?**

Lord's Supper:

In the Lord's supper, we are reminded of the Gospel.

We should have died for our sin - evil is that bad. And not just the evil out there, the evil in here.

But in the great exchange, Jesus came to slay that Leviathan. He took our sin on Himself, went to the cross where He died in our place, and three days later defeated the grave.

And the way we receive that gift is through faith - it's by turning from sin and unbelief and turning to Him in faith. The Lord's supper reminds us of his body torn and blood spilled.

And so if you are someone who has received that - if you are a Christian who has believed in his victory over sin on the cross, if you've repented of your sins, we invite you to take this supper to symbolize that.

If you are not a Christian, we invite you to stay around church, to keep asking questions, but if you don't believe what this supper says, we'd ask you to sit out this observance.

Prayer of Confession:

Father, we are thankful for your complete mastery of your creation and of our hearts. Though you are not the author of evil, you have it under control, and will one day fully el

Assurance:

Job 26:12–14 [12] By his power he stilled the sea; by his understanding he shattered Rahab. [13] By his wind the heavens were made fair; his hand pierced the fleeing serpent. [14] Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?"