

No one is righteous enough, strong enough, or knows enough to blame God for mishandling the terrifying evils we face, so it is best to repent of our human pride, acknowledge our creaturely limitations, and justify God who is supremely righteous in his grace, power, and privilege.

Introduction – Job is for graduates who have finally figured out that they’ll never figure it out. Sometimes life is hard, and it hurts.

Background – The book of Job (which is 95% poetry) is an ancient literary masterpiece about human suffering and the unsearchable wisdom of God. Satan challenges God regarding the integrity of Job’s life as a servant of God. So God permits Satan free reign to torment Job with only one rule—Satan can’t kill him. So Satan manages to destroy Job’s family, wealth, and health. Then Job’s friends come to sit and comfort Job. Here the poetry begins as the story unfolds through a series of conversations between Job and his friends trying to make sense of Job’s terrible and undeserved suffering. Maintaining his innocence as a righteous man suffering for no good reason, Job eventually demands his day in God’s court. At the end of the book, God replies to Job twice. This is the second reply and the magnificent climax of the book when Job, who had heard of God before, now encounters the Almighty and Omniscient One.

I. The Achilles Heel of a Suffering Righteous Man

A. Self-justification that dabbles in judging God (vv. 40:6-9)

Job assumed a measure of divine knowledge and strength. Many people, even Christians, fall into this self-justification trap because they have a faulty view of the foundation of justice. Like you and me, Job was inclined to think there is a “law of fairness” that resides outside God and thus stands over God judging his actions. In this view the Law of Justice is more absolute than God, and therefore God must act in accordance with that higher law to be fair. Isn’t it true if God doesn’t give you relief quickly enough, you’re tempted to dabble in judging God. “God I don’t deserve this! You’re not being fair!” And once you appeal to a Law of Justice that governs God, then you start wondering how you might deal with suffering if you were in charge. In Job’s case, God decided to humor him.

B. “I just can’t wait to be king!” (vv. 40:10-14)

Job had spoken some true and right things about God’s character. But when he extended the topic to God’s justice throughout the whole earth, Job ventured into matters of which he was ignorant. God’s providential rule of the world is vastly complex and extensive. No man could possibly comprehend or accomplish what God does because, compared to God, human knowledge and power are puny.

II. The Evil Threats to a Suffering Righteous Man

There are two main interpretations identifying Behemoth and Leviathan. The first says they are particular animals you might see at the zoo, but described as they appear in the wild. The second believes they are fantasy monsters with some poetically embellished characteristics of large fearsome creatures in the natural world.

A. Behemoth, the Super-Beast (vv. 40:15-24)

Some see a hippopotamus here. Behemoth (“beast” in the plural form) is large, powerful, and has an insatiable vegetarian appetite. He lays low in the marsh but gets his food in the mountains where wild animals play. He is immovable when facing rushing water and cannot be caught with a snare. He holds primacy over God’s creative works. But he is vulnerable, for the Creator is able to subdue him with sword. This is a beast of magnificent power and untamable by man.

B. Leviathan, the Dragon (vv. 41:1-34)

Some think Leviathan is a crocodile in this poem, but ancient Near East mythology and the Bible both attest that Leviathan can be a horrible sea monster you'd find in a storybook (Pss 74:12-14; Isa 27:1). Notice his fantasy-like attributes: many heads, breathing fire, called a "monster" and a "dragon," "playing" in the deep waters. There is dark humor in this poem, more absurd than morbid. It is as if God is chiding Job. "This is not your friendly neighborhood petting zoo. More like Jurassic Park!"

C. Storybook symbols of spiritual realities

1. Leviathan is Job's adversary, Satan (Rev 12:9). If Satan was the primary cosmic adversary who inflicted terrible evil on Job at the beginning of the story, then why would Satan disappear from the end of the book? But if Satan is Leviathan, there is literary symmetry and climax. If Job's Achilles Heel is his overreaching claim to administer divine justice, then how exactly do the examples of a hippo and a croc provide climactic evidence of Job's inability? Ancient hieroglyphs confirm Egypt boasted of their ability to capture and subdue those animals. Without the poem ending with Satan the king of pride on God's leash (vv. 41:33-34), the whole story feels a bit unresolved, anti-climactic, even unintelligible. But if Satan is Leviathan, then he is on God's leash.

2. Admittedly Behemoth's symbolism is less clear from our passage. But other Bible passages reveal clues that Behemoth may be the *power* of Satan, that is, death (Heb 2:14; Rev 13:2, 7, 10). Death and Satan are Job's greatest foes, just as they are your greatest foes. And not coincidentally, here in God's final answer to Job, the LORD climactically presents the two fiercest examples of Job's adversaries in monster-like imagery that also happen to be under God's sovereign authority and control: Behemoth and Leviathan. Death and Satan. Do you see the connection?

III. The Godly Response of a Suffering Righteous Man

A. Humbly confess your creaturely limitations (vv. 42:1-3)

Job eventually learned there is no Law of Justice external to and higher than God. True justice is rooted in God's character. When God demonstrates his justice it is merely God being God. Not only that, Job admitted his ignorance. Essentially he confessed, "You're God and I'm not. You can do whatever you want, no one can stop you, and now I see that's a good thing because I understand your ways are higher, better, and too wonderful for little old me to grasp."

B. Take comfort in seeing God's grace and power (vv. 42:4-6)

God changed Job when he showed up in the whirlwind. Before Job had merely heard of God. But now that Job has verbally interacted with God, it is as if he has seen God face to face with his own eyes. And he was "comforted." The same word translated "repent" in 42:6 is used by the friends to "comfort" Job in 2:11. Hence there is a word-play giving a sense of closure, of coming full circle for Job seeking comfort. Job is finally comforted in dust and ashes. What is his comfort? Not that he now has answers to all his "why" questions. But that he knows that God knows. And that is enough.

Conclusion – The way to avoid condemning God to justify yourself is to see Jesus Christ as the key to Job's suffering. Job points finally to Jesus. When you encounter Christ the Greater Job, and as you humble yourself before him as Savior and Lord, you will find comfort while sitting on the ash heap of your suffering. And comfort to sit on the ash heap of someone else's suffering to offer the hope of Christ. In light of God's compassion and mercy revealed in Christ, the famous Bible commentator Matthew Henry wrote, "Let us leave it to God to govern the world, and make it our care, in the strength of his grace, to govern ourselves and our own hearts well."