

The Nature of God

by Ray C. Stedman

All through this book Job has been crying out of his pain, his bewilderment, and his tortured heart for an interview with God, asking God to explain what is happening to him, hoping that he could come before him and ask him some questions about what is going on. Suddenly, God speaks to Job out of the whirlwind and grants him his desire. As Job viewed the situation, God in his judgment was unfair with him. He was a righteous man, and God was treating him as though he were unrighteous. Surely there is no more common complaint or experience in the world today than that very attitude. We feel we are being unjustly treated in what our lot in life is, that what is being handed to us is not fair. This is why this book of Job is so eternally relevant to us because it deals with the common problems that all of us face at one time or another. Now Job is going to be taught by God himself what the true situation is, and there is surely no tougher lesson to learn in life. There is nothing more difficult for us than to see where we have been wrong when we were sure we were dead right.

Life itself has a way of teaching this as we grow older. Many of us have had the experience of looking back at some of the convictions of our youth. What we stood for, and were absolutely certain was the right thing to do or the right attitude

to have, we now see to have been wrong. Carl Jung, the great Austrian psychologist, put it this way:

In the second half of life the necessity is imposed of recognizing no longer the validity of our former ideals but of their contraries; of perceiving the error in what was previously our conviction; of sensing the untruth in what was our truth, and of weighing the degree of opposition, and even of hostility, in what we took to be love.

How many of us have felt that way! Looking back, we have seen that what we thought was an action of love was really a self-centered exhibition of our own pride and desire. Life has a way of teaching us that, and that is what God is teaching Job now, helping him to see that his righteousness was an external matter only, and internally there was a deep and serious problem. This is the toughest lesson to learn.

In our last study we saw how God took Job on a great, extended tour of the universe and showed him the kind of a God he was up against, the Being Job was challenging and calling to account. God revealed his creative wisdom in all that he had made, in the manifold forces of nature, and he sub-

jected Job to a penetrating examination on natural subjects. Job was not able to answer a single question – not one! In our so-called days of advanced science, we found that we could only answer parts of two or three questions in that whole series. God also showed Job his providential care over the animal world, and asked him if he could handle that. Job ended that account with his hand on his mouth, silenced, but not convinced.

Now Jehovah takes up the argument again, and in Chapter 40, Verse 6, he brings up another matter with Job:

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:

“Gird up your loins like a man;

I will question you, and you declare to me.

Will you even put me in the wrong?

Will you condemn me that you may be justified?” {Job 40:6-8 RSV}

God is still speaking out of the whirling wind before Job. What an amazing experience it must have been to have a voice coming out of a whirlwind! God is still employing the great symbol of the Spirit’s power, the mighty rushing wind. This time he brings before Job another issue: “Can you handle the moral government of earth?” Job has already admitted that he is not in God’s league when it comes to understanding the world of nature or caring for the animal creation. Now God says, “What about the moral realm? That is the realm you have been charging me with fault in. Can you handle that? Are you able to put me in the wrong in this area of morality and justice and fairness?”

Then in the next section he invites Job to *mount the throne of God*, as it were, to see what he would do with the problems God has to face. Verse 9,

“Have you an arm like God,

and can you thunder with a voice like his?

Deck yourself with majesty and dignity;

clothe yourself with glory and splendor.

Pour forth the overflowings of your anger,

and look on every one that is proud, and abase him.

Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low;

and tread down the wicked where they stand.

**Hide them all in the dust together;
bind their faces in the world below.
Then will I also acknowledge to you,
that your own right hand can give you victory.” {Job 40:9-14 RSV}**

This is God’s challenge now to Job: “Can you look and sound like God? Can you clothe yourself with majesty and dignity so that all the created universe is immediately aware that you are a being capable of handling them and all their problems? Can you appear like God, look like God, and especially, can you handle the problem of the proud?” Now God puts his finger on what has been the problem running all through the book of Job; the problem that is in Job’s heart, though he does not know it. “Can you handle the proud? Can you find a way to abase these proud, strutting creatures who think they have all that they need to handle life, and bring them low?”

We know how in our own day what a difficult problem this is. Here in our country we have an organization that everyone calls the “Mafia,” made up of proud men who think they have power to run life to please themselves. They are criminals, basically. They live for their own purposes and advance their own interests. They are parasites on the structure of society. They extract hundreds of thousands of dollars from innocent people. All the power of government and of our judicial system is unable to lay hold of these men and arrest them in their proud, selfish course and stop this kind of pride. We cannot do it. They remain untouched among us for the most part, and they still continue, decade after decade. It is not easy to run the earth. It is not easy to bring justice. God says, “Can you do that, Job? Can you handle proud men and abase them and bring them low and even, if necessary, consign them to the world below? (i.e., to Hades, to hell). Can you do that? If you can, Job, then I will be willing to grant that you are able to handle your own problem and give yourself victory, as you claim you can.”

Now God is moving right in on the problem with Job. In the next sections he brings before us two amazing animals, one called “Behemoth,” a land animal, for the most part, and one called “Leviathan,” a sea creature. Commentators have had a great deal of difficulty trying to determine just which animals in our natural world are referred

to here. Some think that Behemoth is either the hippopotamus, or the elephant, or perhaps the rhinoceros. Others say that Leviathan is the crocodile, though some think it could be the whale. Whatever version you read will present these animals in one form or another according to the interpretative conviction of the commentator, or the editors of the version.

For the most part I think it is a waste of time to argue which animals are here before us simply because the language employed here clearly goes beyond the actual realm. In the last section where God was taking Job through a tour of his created universe, all the animals were recognizable and were in line with what anyone can still observe in nature about these animals though they were described in poetic language. But here you have something that goes beyond the natural. Therefore, some of the commentators have felt these are mythical creatures, legendary creatures, like the unicorn and the dragon. But I think if we admit that this is mythical language, we can also see that it very likely is referring not to myth, but to supernatural beings. These beasts that appear here are symbolic beasts, tied to animals in the natural realm as symbols of that which is invisible and supernatural.

The reason I think that this is a warrantable conclusion is because this is what Scripture does in many places. In the books of Daniel, and Zechariah, and Revelation, forces on earth are symbolized by beasts – beasts that rise up out of the sea and beasts that come up on the land. They symbolize movements and individuals and leaders, and even invisible and supernatural powers. Here we have another example of that very kind of thing. In fact, we are given some help in some of the other Scriptures to recognize what some of these beasts are. Isaiah 27 tells us plainly what Leviathan represents. In the opening verse of Chapter 27, Isaiah says,

In that day [referring to the final day, the great day of the LORD] 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.” {Isa 27:1 RSV}

It is very interesting that the names of these beasts in Hebrew mean something very significant. *Behemoth* is the Hebrew word for “beasts” (in the plural, not just a beast but all beasts seemingly lumped together are symbolized by Behemoth), while *Leviathan* means “the folded one.” You can see in that the description of a dragon with the elongated body that is always represented as folded up, like a snake with its loops. Here in Isaiah we are told very plainly that Leviathan is that twisting, folded serpent that is also called “the dragon that is in the sea.”

Now your mind, I am sure, has already run ahead to the great section of the book of Revelation where in Chapter 13 you have two beasts emerging that dominate the scene in the last days. One is a beast that comes up out of the sea, and that beast reigns over the waters which, we are told in Revelation, represent the multitudes of peoples of the earth. The other beast is a beast that comes up on the land. Behind both of these beasts is still a third incredible animal called the great dragon (of Chapter 12). There we are told plainly that that dragon is Satan, and he gives his power and authority to the beasts. Now tracing this symbolism through, and applying it here in the book of Job, I believe that it is warranted that we should say that these beasts represent a satanic power made visible in terms of our earthly existence.

The first of these beasts, Behemoth, represents the satanic twist that we all labor with and struggle against in our own lives which the Bible calls *the flesh*, the fallen nature within us, our humanity, with its continual desire to assert itself and live for itself.

The second beast represents *the world* in all its vast influence upon every one of us, pressuring us to conform, to reflect the values and attitudes of those around us, dominating all our thinking and all our life in every possible way.

Behind them both is *the devil*, with his malevolent, cunning wisdom and power, incredible in his might and his control of human events.

What God, then, is setting before Job is a very pertinent question for all of us: “Are you able to handle the enemy within, and the enemy without, especially that malicious being who is behind them all – the world, the flesh, and the devil?”

One biblical commentator, Mr. Wordsworth, puts it this way:

It seems probable that Behemoth represents the evil one acting in the animal and carnal elements of man's own constitution, and that Leviathan symbolizes the evil one energizing as his external enemy [i.e., man's external enemy]. Behemoth is the enemy within us; Leviathan is the enemy without us – the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Now, with that to guide us as we look at these two beings, let us see *how God sets them before Job*, Verse 15:

**“Behold, Behemoth, which I made as I made you;
he eats grass like an ox.
Behold, his strength is in his loins,
and his power in the muscles of his belly.
He makes his tail stiff like a cedar;
the sinews of his thighs are knit together.
His bones are tubes of bronze,
his limbs like bars of iron.” {Job 40:15-18 RSV}**

Incredible strength! Total self-sufficiency! That is the picture here. An animal so well adapted to its environment that it is totally self-sufficient – the symbol of strength and sufficiency.

Verse 19 is very interesting:

**“He is the first of the works of God;
let him who made him bring near his sword!” {Job 40:19 RSV}**

That is another of those verses which in the original Hebrew language is difficult to understand. Perhaps another translation from the New English Bible would help us at this point. That version reads,

**He is the chief of God's works,
made to be a tyrant over his peers!” {Job 40:19 NEB}**

Here is an animal that stands for that sense of tyranny that wants to rule over everyone else. It is the picture of self-centeredness, that tyranny within us that wants to be in domination and in control of everything in our lives.

Jehovah goes on, Verse 20:

**“For the mountains yield food for him
where all the wild beasts play.
Under the lotus plants he lies,
in the covert of the reeds and in the marsh.
For his shade the lotus trees cover him;
the willows of the brook surround him.
Behold, if the river is turbulent he is not frightened;
he is confident though Jordan rushes against his mouth.
Can one take him with hooks,
or pierce his nose with a snare?” {Job 40:20-24 RSV}**

The obvious answer to all those questions is “Here is a being that is so self-sufficient and so completely in control that he is filled with self-confidence no matter what happens to him.” So you have the qualities of self-sufficiency, self-centeredness, and self-confidence. What better description of this enemy within us, our inheritance from Adam, this independent spirit that says “I don't need God nor anyone else. I'm sufficient unto myself.”

I read four descriptions the other day concerning British people:

A Welshman prays on his knees and on his neighbors;
A Scotsman keeps Sunday and everything else he can lay his hands on;
An Irishman does not know what he believes but is ready to die for it; and,
An Englishman is a self-made man and worships his creator!

Though we may laugh at that application to British people, it applies to the whole human race. We are all like this. We uphold this independent spirit. We glorify it in our movies and television. We hold it up before our young people as something to be aped and followed. We acclaim it as “the American way of life”! It is all characterized by self-sufficiency, self-centeredness, and self-confidence. We take courses to increase this spirit within us. Yet God says that is the enemy; that is what we have to overcome.

Then in Chapter 41 we get this other animal, *Leviathan, coming before us*. The first was a land animal; this is a water animal, and we get a vivid, detailed description of it throughout this account.

First, his untamability:

**“Can you draw out Leviathan with a fish-hook,
or press down his tongue with a cord?
Can you put a rope in his nose,
or pierce his jaw with a hook?
Will he make many supplications to you?
Will he speak to you soft words?
Will he make a covenant with you
to take him for your servant for ever?
Will you play with him as with a bird,
or will you put him on leash for your maidens?
Will traders bargain over him?
Will they divide him up among the merchants?”** {Job 41:1-6 RSV}

In all the course of human history, who has ever been able to reform the world and to make it serve the ends of humanity? The whole nature of the struggle of history is to take the world system, with all its many problems of relationships, its pride and all its self-sufficiency, and make it serve the ends of humanity. This is why every government, every administration, struggles with the same problems. It has been true all the way back through history to the earliest dawn of recorded events. No one has ever been able to master the problems of the world and its ways, because our system is wrong. Every generation of young people growing up senses it deep in its bones and somehow finds a means of expressing its revolt against “the system.” This is the system that is described to us here. It lays its heavy hand of control upon all of us and insists that we conform to its system of values, its illusions of what are important and profitable in life. We all find ourselves constantly living under this tremendous pressure and finding ourselves unable to resist it, just as it is described here. We cannot make it serve us, we cannot control it.

Then God goes on to describe how unconquerable it is, Verse 7:

**“Can you fill his skin with harpoons,
or his head with fishing spears?**

**Lay hands on him; think of the battle;
you will not do it again!
Behold, the hope of a man is disappointed;
he is laid low even at the sight of him.
No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up.”** {Job 41:7-10a RSV}

Think back through history of all the proud conquerors with their fierce spirit that would not brook opposition. How many times we have been afraid to try to oppose them!

Then in the second half of Verse 10 and in Verse 11, God interjects a little parenthesis for Job to consider. “If you cannot handle this beast,” he says,

**“Who then is he that can stand before me?
Who has given to me, that I should repay him?
Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.”** {Job 41:10b-11 RSV}

What God argues is, “Job, if you cannot handle the scrub team, what are you going to do when the varsity plays?” Or as Jeremiah puts it, “If you are faint and weary when you run with the footmen, what are you going to do against horses?” God says, “I handle Leviathan all the time. That is my problem, and I can handle it. But Job, what are you going to do? If you cannot handle him, how do you ever hope to challenge me?” It is a good question for Job to consider.

Then God goes on to describe Leviathan further. He speaks of his ability to defend himself, Verse 12:

**“I will not keep silence concerning his limbs,
or his mighty strength, or his goodly frame.
Who can strip off his outer garment?
Who can penetrate his double coat of mail?
Who can open the doors of his face?
Round about his teeth is terror.
His back is made of rows of shields,
shut up closely as with a seal.
One is so near to another
that no air can come between them.
They are joined one to another;
they clasp each other and cannot be separated.”** {Job 41:11-17 RSV}

You can see why many have thought this was the crocodile because of the description of the overlapping shields on his back and sides. But the next section goes far beyond the crocodile. It is obviously a picture of a deeply-entrenched, well-defended system that cannot be overthrown. Here we read of his awesome fierceness and frightening power, Verse 18:

**“His sneezings flash forth light,
and his eyes are like the eyelids of the
dawn.
Out of his mouth go flaming torches;
sparks of fire leap forth.
Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke,
as from a boiling pot and burning rushes.
His breath kindles coals,
and a flame comes forth from his mouth.
In his neck abides strength,
and terror dances before him.
The folds of his flesh cleave together,
firmly cast upon him and immovable.
His heart is hard as a stone,
hard as the nether millstone.
When he raises himself up the mighty are
afraid;
at the crashing they are beside them-
selves.” {Job 41:18-25 RSV}**

What a picture of incredible strength and power – the great dragon breathing out flame from his nostrils and wiping out everything that comes against him!

Then we have a section again on his invulnerability, how irresistible he is, Verse 26:

**“Though the sword reaches him, it does not
avail;
nor the spear, the dart, or the javelin.
He counts iron as straw,
and bronze as rotten wood.
The arrow cannot make him flee;
for him slingstones are turned to stubble.
Clubs are counted as stubble;
he laughs at the rattle of javelins.
His underparts are like sharp potsherds;
he spreads himself like a threshing sledge
on the mire.” {Job 41:30 RSV}**

Then his power:

“He makes the deep boil like a pot;

**he makes the sea like a pot of ointment.
Behind him he leaves a shining wake;
one would think the deep to be hoary.”
{Job 41:31-32 RSV}**

Finally, the secret of his life, his pride:

**“Upon earth there is not his like,
a creature without fear.
He beholds everything that is high;
he is king over all the sons of pride.” {Job
41:33-34 RSV}**

What a creature! What a being! This incredible beast is king over all the sons of pride. He teaches men how to act in pride and independence and self-sufficiency. He works it into a vast system of control that lays over all industry, labor, government, art and music, social and economic intercourse of every kind, and works it all together so that it rises up against God and his power and his might. This is the beast that Job is up against.

Now God’s question is, “Job, are you able to handle this?” Of course, God has brought Job to an awareness that these are the very things Job has in his own heart and life, and they represent a power over which he has no control.

Now I think at this point (though it is not said in the account), God has made clear to Job what we were informed of at the very beginning of this book: that behind his sickness, his pain, and his protracted agony lies this intense struggle with the satanic power. We know that this is the way the book began, but Job did not know that until this point.

Now, at last, he is given a strong hint that the reason behind his illness is not his own failure or his own willful misdeeds, but a deep and serious problem so embedded in his nature that he is not even aware that it exists – yet it is destroying him. This is what God has to deal with, and this is what he still deals with, with us.

Now we get **Job’s reaction**, Chapter 42:

**Then Job answered the LORD:
“I know that thou canst do all things,
and that no purpose of thine can be
thwarted.” {Job 42:1-2 RSV}**

His first reaction is a new view of God himself. Notice the distinction he makes here, or the subjects he brings out: "I know that thou canst do all things." God is omnipotent. Job knew that at the very beginning. Now he sees it expanded tremendously, but also he sees the sovereignty of God: "that no purpose of thine can be thwarted." The amazing mystery is that nothing that God ever plans ever sets aside man's responsibility. Yet nothing man ever chooses thwarts the purpose God intends to carry out.

Isn't that amazing?

Job has now learned that God is a sovereign being, and that all he does is right. It is not only mighty, but it is right. It is in line with his character of love. He is consistent, ever, with himself. Then Job, when he sees God this way, sees himself rightly. This is always true. If we cannot understand ourselves it is because we do not know our God. When man loses God he always loses himself. When man discovers God he finds himself. This is what Job sees.

Now he has *a new view of himself*.

'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? [He is quoting God's first address to him.]

Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know.

'Hear, and I will speak;

I will question you, and you declare to me.' [Here he is quoting God's second address to him.]

I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear,

but now my eye sees thee; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." {Job 42:3-6 RSV}

Notice the difference – "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee." The inner eye of the heart sees the nature of God. And the result? Job says, "I despise myself."

Now that is repentance. What he is really doing is agreeing with what God says about him. He quotes what God says twice. He says, in effect, "Lord, you asked me, 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' You are right, Lord. It is

me. That is what I have been doing. I am an ignorant man. I do not know enough to begin to challenge the wisdom of the Almighty. I am an ignorant, limited man who speaks without even knowing what he is talking about. You are quite right, Lord, it is me."

Then he quotes God again: "Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me." He is saying, "Lord, you are right about that, too. I have been an arrogant man. I have been thinking I could answer your questions, and that I would even ask you questions that you could not answer. Lord, I have been an arrogant man. I see it now. Something within me has been proud, lifted up, self-righteous, confident that I was right. I have been wrong all along." So, he says, "Lord, I despise myself."

Job has never been in this place before. He is learning at last the hardest lesson of life, what God seeks to teach us all: the problem is never in others, or in God, the problem is in us. And it is a problem that only God can handle. We are unable, unequipped to handle it ourselves. All we can do is put it back in his gracious hands.

Now it looks as though God has humiliated Job and brought this poor, broken-hearted man down into the dust almost cruelly. Yet it is not cruelty, it is love – because, at this point, when Job has finally given up trying to defend himself and justify himself, God begins to heal and to pour into this man's life blessing he never dreamed of.

Now this is the story of the whole of Scripture, isn't it? Everywhere the Scriptures seek to tell us this. Jesus said. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, the men and women who are bankrupt in themselves, who stop counting on what they've got to make it. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

God will begin to heal a life that repents before him and begin to fill it with blessing and honor and glory and power. None of these things will be worth one whit of the glory and joy we have discovered in coming into a relationship with God himself.

That is what we are going to see in the closing section of Job. Here he is, now, confessing his sin, but discovering the gift of forgiveness.

Prayer:

Thank you, our Father, for this searching and penetrating look at our own hearts and lives. How proud we have been, how filled with self-justification, with complaints before you, the living God. Lord, teach us to

put our hand upon our mouth, and to do more than that, to admit to you that the problem lies with us, and put it back into your loving hands that by your redemptive grace, you will heal us and restore us. We thank you for the glorious gift of forgiveness. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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