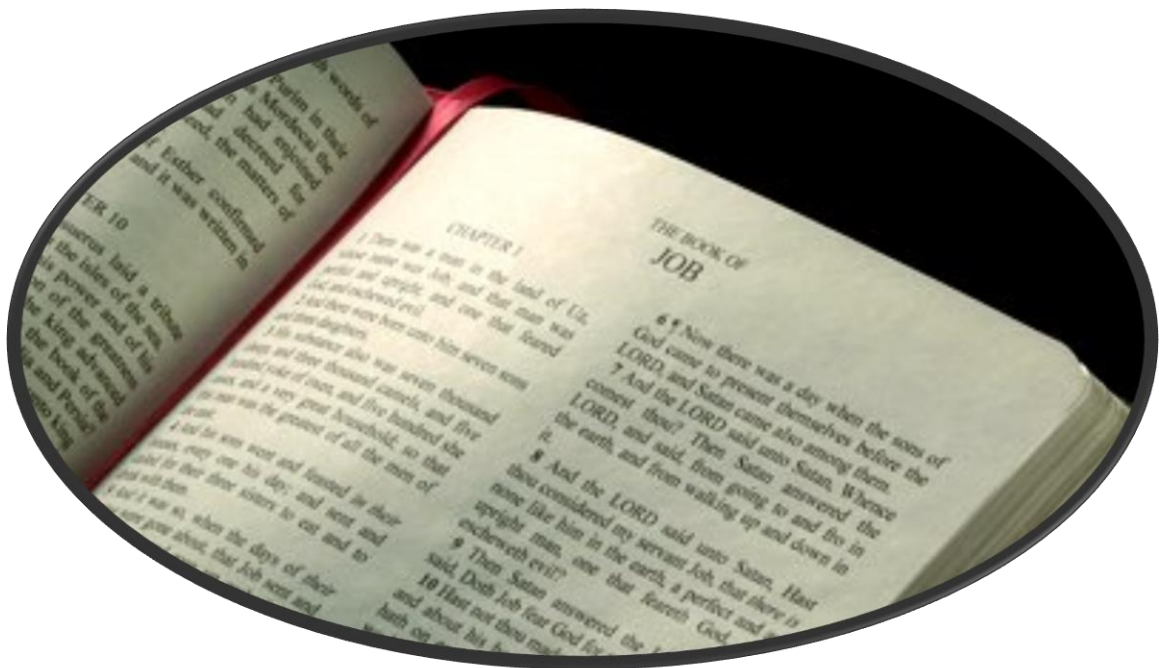


JOB

GOD ANSWERS



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

36:17-39:8: God Answers

The LORD shows up, and Job's desire to question Him melts away in a heartbeat.

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Thank you.

Job 36:17-39:8: God Answers
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1 Job 36:17-33 (ESV)

“But you are full of the judgment on the wicked; judgment and justice seize you. Beware lest wrath entice you into scoffing, and let not the greatness of the ransom turn you aside. Will your cry for help avail to keep you from distress, or all the force of your strength? Do not long for the night, when peoples vanish in their place. Take care; do not turn to iniquity, for this you have chosen rather than affliction. Behold, God is exalted in his power; who is a teacher like him? Who has prescribed for him his way, or who can say, ‘You have done wrong’?”

“Remember to extol his work, of which men have sung. All mankind has looked on it; man beholds it from afar. Behold, God is great, and we know him not; the number of his years is unsearchable. For he draws up the drops of water; they distill his mist in rain, which the skies pour down and drop on mankind abundantly. Can anyone understand the spreading of the clouds, the thunderings of his pavilion? Behold, he scatters his lightning about him and covers the roots of the sea. For by these he judges peoples; he gives food in abundance. He covers his hands with the lightning and commands it to strike the mark. Its crashing declares his presence; the cattle also declare that he rises.”

Elihu shifts gears again – and this time he hits the very point that God Himself will soon make. He doesn’t argue the specifics of God’s actions, nor try to explain them. Instead, Elihu notes that it’s all beyond their understanding.

Behold, God is exalted in his power; who is a teacher like him? Who has prescribed for him his way, or who can say, ‘You have done wrong’? ... Behold, God is great, and we know him not.

Military planners speak of something called “unk-unks.” In war, there are knowns, unknowns, and unknown unknowns (unk-unks). You can plan for the things you don’t know, when you at least understand what it is that you don’t know. It’s the things you haven’t even thought of – the things you don’t even know that you don’t know – that are the greatest threat.

While this book is giving us a glimpse of some of God’s higher purposes, the truth is that most of his higher agenda is beyond our comprehension.

So it’s even worse than unk-unks. God doesn’t tell us what He’s up to because we wouldn’t understand it if He did.

Though we should always seek wisdom and understanding, we must also be prepared to accept that some things are above our pay grade. Our understanding of anything is always, in some sense, incomplete.

I don’t even understand how my chainsaw works.* What chance do I have of understanding God?

Don’t run away from tough subjects, but don’t think that you’re superman either.

*No one completely understands the physics of combustion at the quantum mechanical level.

2 Job 37:1-24 (ESV)

“At this also my heart trembles and leaps out of its place. Keep listening to the thunder of his voice and the rumbling that comes from his mouth. Under the whole heaven he lets it go, and his lightning to the corners of the earth. After it his voice roars; he thunders with his majestic voice, and he does not restrain the lightnings when his voice is heard. God thunders wondrously with his voice; he does great things that we cannot comprehend. For to the snow he says, ‘Fall on the earth,’ likewise to the downpour, his mighty downpour. He seals up the hand of every man, that all men whom he made may know it. Then the beasts go into their lairs, and remain in their dens. From its chamber comes the whirlwind, and cold from the scattering winds. By the breath of God ice is given, and the broad waters are frozen fast. He loads the thick cloud with moisture; the clouds scatter his lightning. They turn around and around by his guidance, to accomplish all that he commands them on the face of the habitable world. Whether for correction or for his land or for love, he causes it to happen.

“Hear this, O Job; stop and consider the wondrous works of God. Do you know how God lays his command upon them and causes the lightning of his cloud to shine? Do you know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge, you whose garments are hot when the earth is still because of the south wind? Can you, like him, spread out the skies, hard as a cast metal mirror? Teach us what we shall say to him; we cannot draw up our case because of darkness. Shall it be told him that I would speak? Did a man ever wish that he would be swallowed up?

“And now no one looks on the light when it is bright in the skies, when the wind has passed and cleared them. Out of the north comes golden splendor; God is clothed with awesome majesty. The Almighty—we cannot find him; he is great in power; justice and abundant righteousness he will not violate. Therefore men fear him; he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit.”

Elihu supports his point about God’s higher agenda with examples of things we cannot understand.

“Hear this, O Job; stop and consider the wondrous works of God. Do you know how God lays his command upon them and causes the lightning of his cloud to shine?”

But then he says something puzzling. *“Teach us what we shall say to him; we cannot draw up our case because of darkness. Shall it be told him that I would speak? Did a man ever wish that he would be swallowed up?”* What’s that all about?

Elihu is pointing out that while our ignorance of God’s purposes is great, our sin is even greater. Speaking to God (which, remember, Job has asked to do) isn’t as easy as Job thinks it is.

God is about to set Job straight. He is the Lord most high and worthy of all worship. God invented weekends for this purpose.

Worship is all about acknowledging and celebrating God’s position above and our position below. Unfortunately, most worship services are more about making us feel good and strengthening our faith.

There’s nothing wrong with those two things; they’re just not the heart of worship.

3 Job 38:1-15 (ESV)

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:

“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me.

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

“Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed’?

“Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it? It is changed like clay under the seal, and its features stand out like a garment. From the wicked their light is withheld, and their uplifted arm is broken.”

Sounds like Job is really getting hammered, right?

Actually, God displays incredible mercy by not doing something – showing up visibly. Job hears Him, but doesn’t see Him.

God could scare the daylights out of Job by simply showing His face. Even sending an angel would do the trick; just look at the shepherds quaking at the sight of the angels announcing Christ.

But no. God, in his infinite wisdom, elects to teach Job with strong words, but doesn’t use any visual effects.

It’s grace – it’s always about grace – but notice how this is purpose driven. Job is plenty focused already; God can leave the gloves on and His message will still come through loud and clear.

God communicates differently with different people. Job’s a good listener, so God doesn’t need to shout. There’s a lesson in that.

Everyone who confesses Jesus as their Lord, agrees to not be left alone. A coach only yells at his team members. If you’re a Christian, God is going to communicate with you.

But how well you listen determines how that goes. A coach only yells when he needs to. Try to hear what God is saying and He will speak plainly. Try to ignore what He’s saying – as Jonah did – and He’ll crank up the volume big time, just like He did with Jonah.

4 Job 38:16-30 (ESV)

“Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this.

“Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness, that you may take it to its territory and that you may discern the paths to its home? You know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is great!

“Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail, which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war? What is the way to the place where the light is distributed, or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?

“Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain and a way for the thunderbolt, to bring rain on a land where no man is, on the desert in which there is no man, to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground sprout with grass?

“Has the rain a father, or who has begotten the drops of dew? From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the frost of heaven? The waters become hard like stone, and the face of the deep is frozen.”

Notice that God doesn't ask simple things like, “Can you run as fast as a horse?” Instead of simply asking the impossible, God asks questions that are over Job's head.

Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?

Death has gates? What?

Although God is being gentle with Job physically, he still totally pins him back. The things Job wanted to question God about are so far over his head that Job isn't even prepared to discuss the topic.

Job's statements to God now look clueless. If Job is clueless, what does that make us?

We all pray. We want God to do this or that thing to help us achieve something. Or we ask for help with some important decision. Hopefully our goal is to serve and glorify the Lord.

But how often do we even ask for the right thing? We know what we want but not what we really need. We don't know the future and we don't understand the past. So then, how should we pray?

On our knees. Prayer should always begin with praise and worship. Then we should seek His will.

It's OK to ask for favors – He says we should – but what we really need is guidance.

5 Job 38:31-39:8 (ESV)

“Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion? Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season, or can you guide the Bear with its children? Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on the earth?”

“Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, that a flood of waters may cover you? Can you send forth lightnings, that they may go and say to you, ‘Here we are’? Who has put wisdom in the inward parts or given understanding to the mind? Who can number the clouds by wisdom? Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens, when the dust runs into a mass and the clods stick fast together?”

“Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions, when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in their thicket? Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God for help, and wander about for lack of food?”

“Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you observe the calving of the does? Can you number the months that they fulfill, and do you know the time when they give birth, when they crouch, bring forth their offspring, and are delivered of their young? Their young ones become strong; they grow up in the open; they go out and do not return to them.”

“Who has let the wild donkey go free? Who has loosed the bonds of the swift donkey, to whom I have given the arid plain for his home and the salt land for his dwelling place? He scorns the tumult of the city; he hears not the shouts of the driver. He ranges the mountains as his pasture, and he searches after every green thing.”

God continues to pepper Job with questions he cannot answer, but He also throws in a few facts. Of mountain goats He says, *“Their young ones become strong; they grow up in the open; they go out and do not return to them.”* Of wild donkeys He says, *“He scorns the tumult of the city; he hears not the shouts of the driver. He ranges the mountains as his pasture, and he searches after every green thing.”*

These are familiar facts to people who’ve seen lots of nature films, but not to Job. This is amazingly graceful, almost enjoyable. Even though He’s in the middle of calling out Job, God never stops being the great educator.

This is the key to the book. God is teaching Job some advanced lessons. Life is full of trials, but they lead somewhere. God is always up to something, and we’re privileged to be part of His plan. It’d be nice if we knew where all this is going, but we’re rarely told the higher purpose for our day-to-day struggles.

And that’s what happened to Job. We may not get to see the point of our trials but we will for Job’s, and it’ll be all about taking Job’s character to the next level. That’s encouraging.

Trials can be painful, and the resulting character development often doesn’t seem to be worth it.

But that’s our perspective, not God’s.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Have you ever had something you thought you understood absolutely completely, only to learn something new and realize your understanding was incomplete after all?
2. What things do you like most about Sunday Worship Service? What things do you like least? How do your preferences line up with how God prescribes we should worship?
3. God communicates with different people differently. How does He communicate with you? How often is it painful and in what ways?
4. Do you usually pray for direction? Or do you mostly ask for help?
5. Have you seen trials grow someone's character? Yours?

Items for prayer: