

God Answers Job

SCOTT HOEZEE

On the TV show, *Mash*, Corporal Radar O'Reilly once had to take a test. His commanding officer asked the questions: What is 258 plus 374, and Radar wrote down The Gettysburg Address; then, what was President Lincoln's most famous speech, and Radar wrote down 632. Well, it turns out Radar had peeked at the test, but memorized the answers in the wrong order. Have you ever asked someone a question only to get what seems like the answer to a different question? Well, something like that happens at the end of Job, and today on *Groundwork*, we will wonder why. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we are now on program five—the final episode in a series we have been doing on the book of Job; and so, of course, just to recap, so far in this series we have seen how the setup of the book is odd, we admitted: A wager between God and Satan to see whether Job's faith was only based on the good stuff God did for Job, or whether Job just loved God for God's own sake. So, Job first loses all his of possessions and family, then he loses his health; but he does not give up on God. He has lots of questions. He laments; he is not sitting quietly, but he does not give up on God. Four friends show up and they try to convince Job that his theology is wrong and theirs is right; and they try to convince him that Job did something bad; and anyway, you know, better to be a good person than bad because wicked people are always miserable. Job does not buy any of that; even as we saw in the previous program, he says some amazing statements of faith along the way, but through it all, we have not heard a word from God.

DAVE BAST

And what Job really wants, and what he keeps coming back to during the course of those long discourses, is a chance to ask God his questions.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

He wants to be able to see God. He says to God: Now, I know you are going to have to take it a little bit easy on me. I don't want you to blast me; I don't want to be destroyed just by entering your presence; I don't want to be scared so silly that I cannot even open my mouth; but I want to be able to talk to you. I want to be able to argue my case even with you. Even if you kill me, I still want to...I want to do this; and at the climax of the book...the great and amazing climax of the book...God says okay. God shows up; God appears and speaks with Job.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what an appearance it is! The whole book so far has just been Job literally sitting on an ash heap on the ground with four friends around him. It is a very, very quiet book; not much is happening; but now, all of a sudden, in Chapter 38, it is like a Stephen Spielberg Hollywood movie with special effects: this huge

whirlwind like a giant tornado or hurricane or something shows up and roars across the prairie toward Job and his friends; and out of the whirlwind, God speaks.

DAVE BAST

And he says: ²Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? ³Brace yourself like a man; I will question *you* and you shall answer *me*.

So, Job wanted to question God, and God says: No, I am going to question you!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

⁴Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me if you understand. ⁵Who marked off its dimensions; surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? ⁶On what were its footings set; or who laid its cornerstone, ⁷while the morning stars sang together and all the angels of God shouted for joy? What a beautiful line that is!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

The morning stars sang together and the angels shouted for joy when God created the universe.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But in some ways, God's answer is a little odd, and it is going to get odder yet, as we will see in just a moment. The whole book has been saying: Why is there evil, God? Why do bad things happen to good people? In answer, God is going to give this giant tour of the creation. Now, in one sense, from what you just read, Dave, we can understand it. God is putting Job and his friends in their place, right? We said on a previous episode, what is the theme of Job? God is God and you are not.

DAVE BAST

Right; God is God and you aren't.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You didn't create the universe. Could you have done that if you had even tried? So, in one sense...

DAVE BAST

Or were you even there?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Nobody was there. I was there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Did you set the galaxies to spinning?

DAVE BAST

In the beginning, God. No people at all.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, I am God; you are not. That part we get; but then, for a long stretch things go in a different direction; and here is a sampling of that from God's voice out of the whirlwind now, from Job 39, where God says: Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn? ²Do you count the months till they bear? Do you know the time they give birth? ³They crouch down and bring forth their young; their labor pains are ended. ⁴Their young thrive and grow strong in the wilds. They leave and do not return. ⁵Who let the wild donkey go free? Who untied its ropes? ⁶I gave it the wasteland as its home; the salt flats as its habitat. ⁷It laughs at the commotion in the town; it does not hear a driver shout. ⁸It ranges the hills for pastures and searches for any green thing. ⁹Will the wild ox consent to serve you? Will it stay by your manger at night? ¹⁰Can you hold it to the furrow with a harness?

DAVE BAST

So, yes; what is with all the animals, you know? And actually, it goes on from there. God starts to talk about leviathan and the sea monster and the hippopotamus; and it makes me think of a line in a Charles Williams novel. Charles Williams was a Christian British writer and novelist; a great friend of C. S. Lewis—some say his best friend. In one of his novels he has a character say of this very passage in Job: As a mere argument, there is something lacking, perhaps, in saying to a man who has lost his money and his house and his family and is sitting in the dustbin, all over boils: Look at the hippopotamus...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, yes; what is going on? I mean...

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have been...throughout most of Job with his friends...almost in a... Now, we have said all along in this series that the book of Job is not academic...it is not ivory tower. This is real life, and one of the reasons we relate to this book is we have been Job or we have been in the position to try to comfort a Job-like person whom we know; but there is a sense in which a lot of this could have taken place in the theology classroom in a seminary. It is very deep theology. There is a lot of wrangling...a lot of arguing about philosophy and theology; and the whole thing is what we call a theodicy, which is from the Greek *theo dikaio*s. How do you justify the ways of God to people? How do you explain...that is what theodicy is. So, this has been a theodicy. You and I both went to seminary. We heard these discussions in seminary classrooms or in coffee shops after class. So, how is it that at the end we end up at the zoo?

DAVE BAST

Yes...

SCOTT HOEZEE

How does the discussion all of a sudden focus on mountain goats and donkeys?

DAVE BAST

Yes; so, theodicy is the issue. There is actually an old German hymn...a chorale...*Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan*? What God does is rightly done. That is what theodicy means. Everything that God does is right and good, and we cannot accuse him of any wrongdoing or evil; but in response, instead of saying: Well, here is what I am doing, Job; and here is the reason why; and here is why all of this makes sense, as you will see if you look at it from my perspective...instead, God begins to speak about what we could call the fecundity of creation. It is teeming with life; all these different creatures, and they have life in themselves. They give birth, and God knows how that works, and God...it is like he is saying: Life, life, life—L'chaim—God is the author life; and life fills the world that he created; and that is how he begins his response to Job. It is a bit puzzling, and we will think some more about it in just a moment.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are looking today in this final program of a five-part series on the book of Job at what God finally has to say when God arrives on the scene in dramatic fashion, in like the middle of a tornado or something, starting in Job 38; and Dave, we were just saying that most of God's fairly long reply to Job and to his friends involves a tour of creation. Here is just a short list of some of the creatures God mentions: Mountain goats, wild donkeys, oxen, horses, hawks, eagles, storks, ostriches, the hippopotamus, whales...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What has that got to do with anything?

DAVE BAST

Right; there they are. Well, it has to do with the richness of creation. One of my theological professors in seminary wrote a little book about Psalm 104, actually, which is a wonderful psalm of creation—also a wisdom psalm—that he called *The Garment of God*: The world—the universe—as God's garment. It is not God itself. We are not pantheists. We do not believe that God is coterminous with the creation. That he is the same as the creation. We believe that he is above and outside the creation; but the creation points to his glory. It tells us something about God. The heavens declare the glory of God; and it is like this magnificent robe...this garment that God wears...that he drapes himself with. So, we can learn something about God by looking at the richness of the creation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

My professor, too, John Stek, called creation the glory robe of God...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, here is an instructive point for us; particularly, I think, in the modern world, where we tend to live very often disengaged from the creation wonders. We spend our time looking at computer screens and walking in malls...inside manmade—human made—fabrications. We do not connect to mountains and to storks and to ostriches...except maybe once in a while we go on vacation. So, here is something instructive for us: To us, it seems odd that God would answer these deep theological conundrums with a tour of creation. The grandeur and the majesty of creation has something to do with everything, it turns out. We just do not always see those connections.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, one of the facts of our modern life is light pollution. We live in cities. We light up our cities at night; we light up our houses; we cannot even see the stars anymore; and ancient man was always overwhelmed when he looked up at the night sky...man or woman...they looked up at the night sky, and to see those starry heavens was to make them begin to sense the wonder of the greatness of God; the God who could create all that; and then down to the minutest level on earth...insects and little creatures and creepy-crawly things. God made it all. That is a key thing to remember about him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; there is this wonderful IMAX movie that came out a few years ago called *Cosmic Voyage*. It begins with a close-up shot of a couple in Grant Park in Chicago having a picnic, and then the camera starts pulling back until you can see, you know, all of Chicago, then all of Lake Michigan, then all of the world... It pulls back to the edge of the universe; then it zooms back in as a close up of the man's hand and goes down to the molecular level of our cells and everything going on inside our bodies. God made all of that.

DAVE BAST

And he did not just make it, Scott, and then leave it...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

I mean, he is still running it. He has got his finger on the pulse of a gazillion things at once; and because of that...because the world is so complex...because the universe is infinitely more complex than just our little world...we cannot make these direct, simplistic connections: A leads to B leads to C; therefore, this is what God is doing in your life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

It just does not work that way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what God is saying to Job, therefore, with this majestic tour of his grandeur in creation is: Look, if you can figure all that out...if you can figure out how I manage all that...if you can figure out how I designed all that, then we have a level playing field. You want to talk, Job? Let's talk. God is saying: I think maybe, just possibly, the playing field is not quite level here...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You can only conceive of...right...simple formulas: $2+2=4$; A leads to B because of C; but it doesn't work that way. What is interesting is, of course, Job never hears from God: Look, here is what happened. Satan and I, we have this bet...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yeah, nope; Job never gets that explanation. Job died without knowing what we readers are told was some weird stuff going on behind the scenes. All Job is told is, there is some weird stuff going on behind the scenes...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But trust me, I got this.

DAVE BAST

Right; and in fact, in Chapter 40...we have read from 38 and 39...little bits of it. Here is something from Job 40, beginning at verse 8, where God actually does get a little more confrontational with Job. So, he says to him:

⁸Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?

Wow, how many people don't do that, huh? They condemn God to justify themselves: I didn't deserve this, God, you blasted so-and-so.

And the Lord goes on:

⁹Do you have an arm like God's? Can your voice thunder like his? ¹⁰Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor and clothe yourself in honor and majesty; ¹¹unleash the fury of your wrath; look at all who are proud and bring them low. ¹²Look at all who are proud and humble them; crush the wicked where they stand.

¹³Bury them all in the dust together; shroud their faces in the grave; ¹⁴then I myself will admit to you that your own right hand can save you.

Yes, he says you want judgment? Try it!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, you do it. You deal with wicked people. Go ahead, unleash your fury on them; see if it even makes a dent. It is complicated, God is saying...it is complicated. There are more things going on in heaven and on earth than you could possibly conceive of in your philosophy, to quote Shakespeare.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, and here is another thing that complicates it. If God were really going to set everything to right and punish all the evil in the world, he would have to start with us, wouldn't he? Maybe we need to step back and let God be God, as we have said several times; that is the message of Job.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which is ultimately what Job does. So, now we come to the final chapter of Job, Chapter 42, where Job replies to the Lord: ²"I know that you can do all things. No purpose of yours can be thwarted. ³You asked, 'Who is it that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand; things too wonderful for me to know. ⁴You said, 'listen now and I will speak. I will question you and you answer me.' ⁵My ears have heard you, but now my eyes have seen you; ⁶therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

DAVE BAST

Yes; so Job gets right back down into that dustbin. Now he has laid his hand over his mouth. He does not want to talk back any more to God; he does not want to have any more questions or encounter with him. He repents...kind of gets low...just realizes: Boy, you know, I was talking about things I didn't really understand, and now I will just be quiet.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, I think...I have this feeling that what happened in Job 38 to 41 was not only that Job was hearing these things from God, but that God swept him and his friends up and took them on this tour, like they were on some flying carpet or something...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And actually took them on this cosmic tour, which just left them...

DAVE BAST

Like the IMAX theater.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; it just left them numb...everything that they had seen. So, God just sort of sweeps them up into this whirlwind, shows them all these created wonders, from the morning stars that sang for joy at the beginning, right on down to the donkeys and the whales and the hippopotamus; and then God plunks them back down on earth and says: Well? And they say: I got nothing.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I got nothing to say: but that is not quite the end of the story of Job; and we want to look at the way the book does end in just a moment.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this final program in a five-part series on Job—the final segment of this final program; and Dave, we just saw that after this majestic tour of the grandeur of creation, God has basically said: I did all that; I am doing all that; I am maintaining all of that. If you can figure that out, then we are equals and we can talk; and Job says: Nope; we are not equals...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I got nothing left to say; I am sorry I even asked some of the questions I did ask.

DAVE BAST

So, Job ends in this posture of humility. I don't think that negates all the things he said earlier in the story. After all, we are told the whole story; so, you know, his laments, his cries, his demands for explanations and reasons...those are all legit, and they stand; they were not taken out of the story; but in the end, just this sense that God is so much more than we could imagine; that God's ways are not my ways, as the prophet Isaiah would put it. His thoughts are not our thoughts. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. That could be written over this ending part of Job, too...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And Job acknowledges that; he recognizes it; and though we believe all of these good and true things about God: God is just, God is good, God is righteous, God is loving, God is merciful; in the daily...day-to-day craziness of life...in the chaotic things that can sometimes happen to us, we cannot always work out the whys and the wherefores.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Job tries to do that, and then kind of apologizes and says: I will never have enough data; I will never know enough to make sense of this, so I am sorry I bothered you, God; but God smiles at Job and God is not angry with Job...

DAVE BAST

And remember, Job has gone on trusting God through this whole time, that is the key thing. Even when he does not understand...even when he is angry, he still trusts.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God is not angry with Job; however, in Job 42:7, we read: After the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “I am angry with you and your two friends because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has.”⁸ So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job. Sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly; you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has.”⁹ So Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar did what the Lord told them, and the Lord accepted Job’s prayer. Now there is a turn of events.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; so they have been accusing Job. They have even gotten angry with him and called him wicked things and bad names; and now it is they who actually stand condemned of wrong, and Job has to pray for them to get them off the hook with God...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Job stands in the gap for them!

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; and they offer these sacrifices...lavish sacrifices to sway God’s wrath and avert it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; that is grace. The book ends with a note of grace that God does forgive. He is not angry with Job in the first place; he forgives the friends for misspeaking. Job prays for them; and it ends on this really lyric note of grace. By the way, we should notice that the fourth friend, Elihu, isn’t mentioned here at all; and I don’t think anybody is exactly sure why. I cannot imagine he was off the hook with God because he basically said most of the same things that the other three did. So, Elihu kind of shows up late, speaks late, and then drops out of the picture at the end. I am not sure anybody is quite sure why.

DAVE BAST

Yes; but then there is a coda; after Job prays for his friends; after God apparently forgives them...accepts Job’s prayer...suddenly we read that Job gets everything back, and it is kind of doubled. All the animals that he had lost...he gets bigger herds. The family that he lost, he has more sons and daughters; and again, there is almost a parabolic sense to this. I mean, it is hard to imagine in a real-life story that, oh, Job suddenly...he gets over his boils and he goes back and starts having kids again.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Happily ever after, it seems.

DAVE BAST

Right; it is almost a fairytale ending; but not quite a fairytale ending...it is not quite a happily-ever-after ending, is it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Job will not forget the pain of the past and the pain of what he lost; and we even read near the end of Job 42 that even though God heals him—God restores him—still when his extended family comes, they still have to console him, because there are those moments when he still remembers the first ten kids and it kind of catches up with him. So, the pain lingers, and Job is chastened. He is a changed man. His faith never went away anyway, but he is chastened...he is humbled...he knows what the score is now. Could you call it a happy ending? Not in the Hollywood sense...not happily-ever-after fairytale sense. It is maybe a deeper thing. Maybe it is a joyful ending...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There is a difference, as we talked about in the Fruit of the Spirit series; there is a big difference between happiness and joy.

DAVE BAST

Well, suffering does mark us. Yes, we go on; we can adapt; we can adjust; but it leaves a hole in our lives. I mean, if a child dies, having another child later does not make up for that loss. You can learn to sing again; you can learn to laugh again; but there is always that sense...and that stays with Job, too. So that, too, makes Job true to life, doesn't it? Despite all the rather unusual events of this book, and some of the things that sort of stretch our imagination, it rings true; and I think that is why, as we said, it is not just a great book in the Bible, it is a great part of human wisdom, of world literature, because these are human questions that the book struggles with; and it is a divine answer, really, that the book offers. There is a sense of God's greatness and goodness.

I have often thought the best way for us to deal with these questions of our lives and with the struggles of our lives is just to remember the childhood prayer that we learned so long ago: God is great and God is good; and if we can hang onto both of those things, we are kind of on the right track as far as Job and the Bible are concerned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Job is not finally given an explanation. He does not really get his question answered; but here is what he does learn: That so long as there is a God who created the Pleiades star cluster, the mighty humpback whale, and the majestic bald eagle...so long as that God exists, there is ultimately an answer at the end of the cosmic day for all that is happening; and God will find a way. We believe now as Christians through Jesus Christ and the resurrection, God will find a way to restore us...

DAVE BAST

Yes...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And to restore the whole creation. He will make all things new.

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast, and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

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