Today I will not attempt to explain what God says to you. That would be something our windy friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar would not hesitate to engage in! And I don’t want to be like them!

But I hope I may, without danger of arousing God’s indignation, talk about the context of his speech and help us not only “hear” God’s words but “see” God (Job 42:5-6).

**God**

Let’s approach this speech of God from the point of view of the structure of the book. We see that God appeared briefly in chapters one and two, and then as a remote, rather unfeeling deity, entertaining wagers in the divine council. This is why we don’t use Job to actually build a theology of the person of God; rather we read it as the colourful story that it is, so full of the pathos of the human struggle to understand, to cross the gap between human understanding and the wisdom of God.[[1]](#endnote-1)

We learned nothing about his nature or the depth of his being in those first two chapters, only that he was interested to put to the test his most pious follower to the test to see if Job would follow him out of his own independent will, to know whether his service was given freely and without promise of reward.

Did your grandma every give you a red-letter edition of the Bible, one where all the words of Jesus are in red type? My grandma did, it was small and it had a zipper and cool old-fashioned pictures of Moses and David. I looked this morning and couldn’t find it – I guess I’ve moved once too often.

I don’t know of any place in the Bible where God himself utters more that a few phrases at once. It is ironic that the God, who kept his peace while others spout their worldly wisdom, the God of silence (this is the pain of Job, that God is so silent), now becomes quite talkative. God to Abraham, God to Moses, God to anyone of the prophets, the Samuel, to Elijah. The bat kohl in the NT, “This is my son with whom I am well pleased.” God doesn’t say much.

I’m happy to be corrected but this is more than God says in most of the rest of the Bible. It is his longest discourse. Stephen in Acts 6 is second.

Now that he speaks we can ask what we learn about the nature of this God, not just from what he says, but from how he elects to reveal his inner being.

Yes, God is angry with Job on one level for questioning him along the path of suffering. He seems almost sad, disappointed in it all. But… “At the same time the Lord cares for Job so much that he reveals himself personally and shares with him the vision of the cosmic responsibilities” (Oxford Study Bible, p. 625). He challenges him to, you know, just try being God-for-a-day. Put yourself in my shoes Job. If you can thwart the proud and tread down the wicked, like I must do, then have at it: Then I will also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can give you victory. (40:6-14)

He is “A God who confesses his burdens to a human being… a God who is profoundly involved in human destiny,” (ibid). Yes, raising up the righteous and bringing low the proud and wicked.

**Job**

Job, initially suffering stoically eventually wanes in courage and enters despair, the slough of despond. He wonders if God is even interested anymore? Job’s consternation arose from the felt reality that God had abandoned him, targeted him for suffering. ‘Is this the truth of the matter, the reality?’, Job asks.

He folds his arms, aloof from the despair of the innocent… (9:23); he has set me up with a target on my back… (16:12); he shakes me by the collar of my coat… (30:18); I stand and you merely look at me… (30:20).

As Job’s indignation at his suffering grows he becomes arrogant. I’m blameless (9:21); I would give him an account of all my steps; like a prince I would approach him! (35:37).

If I summoned him and he answered me,  
    I do not believe that he would listen to my voice.  
For he crushes me with a tempest… (9:16b, 17)

Let the Almighty answer me! (31:35);

Job… a bit too far bro!

God Holds Forth

Through the long tiresome recitations of men he held his distance, his remote presence scarcely felt at all. Long held he his peace.

But when he speaks it is a time of reckoning! Job gets his real tempest! God’s views come pouring out in a metaphorical torrent.

He who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt (38:25) now has his say in like manner.

The seemingly distant figure of God suddenly appears out of the whirlwind, with the intensity of a swirling wind. But God does not come to crush Job, as he feared he would, but to put him in his place, to show Job who is God and who is the creature.[[2]](#endnote-2) The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom.

That which has long been hidden is now laid out in his impassioned speech. It is one long recitation of truth in metaphor, because it is the only was we could possibly approach his wisdom – through metaphor.[[3]](#endnote-3) The foundations of the earth are laid out with a line, the morning stars sing together, the sea shuts its doors (38:4ff), from whose womb did the ice come forth (38:29). The recitation is quite stunningly brilliant in its every word.

Let the Almighty answer me, said Job. What he gets is 58 rhetorical questions – it’s not a discussion: ‘Do you know this? Were you there when? Can you do this? Have you seen?’

The creation of the earth, the sea, the dawn, the depth of Sheol, the light, the waters and clouds, the waterskins of heaven, the snow, the mountain goats, the wild ass, the wild ox, the ostrich, who forgets its young and tramples on them, the ostrich who has no share in understanding (according to the Lord, the dumbest creature he ever made), the horse, the Behemoth, the Leviathon.

The mythical Behemoth, its tail stiff like a cedar… its bones are tubes of bronze (40:17-18); The Leviathan, will you play with is as with a bird, will you put a leash on it for your girls? (41:5), these ancient symbols of watery chaos. Think here of Genesis: In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and empty ( הּךּ ךּﬤﬣךּ tohu wa bohu) and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters (Gen 1:2; also Job 3:8; 26:13). Of God it says in Psalms, You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan… (Ps 74:13-14).

These ancient powers of chaos held only in abeyance by God himself! Can you Job put the powers of chaos on a leash for your girls? Surely you know Job, for you were born then, and the number of your days is great! I think not.

Hear now the Word of the Lord.

1. “Yahweh’s speeches are intended not to give Job an answer to the question of why he suffers but to re-establish the proper relationship between God and his human creature. Job has sought God to accuse him of injustice (40:8), but God, through a display of his power and wisdom, brings Job to the point where he “repents: (42:1-6). He no longer seeks an answer to the question of his suffering: he simply bends the knee to God in submission.” (Longman, *Job* p. 65) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. See Longman, *Job,* p. 426-427. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Here is a question for you… should we use the metaphorical speech of God in Job to build a theology of God? Put another way, to what extent can we use the Book of Job as a basis for theology? Or is it more of a morality tale that instructs us more about faith and life than about the nature of God? [↑](#endnote-ref-3)