

Creation in the Bible Reflection #4
The Wild Creatures of Job

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We are accustomed to reading the Book of Job as a book about suffering, which it certainly is. But Job also, in many profound ways, teaches us that we can best learn who we are by paying attention to the wild creatures, our brothers and sisters.¹

In 12:7 Job says “Ask the beasts (*behemoth*), and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you. Ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you.” In 30:29 Job says, “I am a brother of jackals, and a companion of *ostriches*.” Job says this as a complaint, but he is soon to discover that his observations are true in ways he had failed to grasp.

Strikingly, God, in the extended response to Job at the end of the book, agrees that just such creatures are our best teachers. God introduces Job (and us) to the lion, mountain goat, wild ass and ox, *ostrich*, horse, hawk and vulture, and finally we are introduced to *Behemoth* (40:15... which I made just as I made you) and Leviathan.

These animals are wild, outside the human sphere, liminal. And notably, most of the creatures (all but the mountain goat, deer, and wild ox) are “unclean” or “detestable, to be shunned.” In Job God not only accepts such creatures but also shows them to be worthy of divine love, care, and admiration. These creatures are God’s children. And throughout this speech from the whirlwind, God, with great subtlety, tells Job (and us) that he (and we) are like these creatures in their wildness, and even in their unclean boundary crossing. Job and we do not become more loved when we are upright and admired by all. We are loved in our brokenness. We are admired and loved as God’s wild beasts.

¹ Much of what is written here is taken from my article, “God’s Natural Order: Genesis or Job?” in *“And God Saw That it was Good”: Essays on Creation and God in Honor of Terence E. Fretheim, Word & World Supplement Series 5*, 2006: 49-56.