



Job - Chapter Thirty Eight

II Job 3:1-42:6 - Dialogue: Job, His Suffering, and His Standing before God (continues)

Summary of Chapter Thirty Eight

The Lord now appears and answers Job out of a whirlwind, challenging him to answer (vv.1-3). God convinces Job of ignorance and weakness by an enumeration of some of his mighty works; particularly of the creation of the earth (vv.4-7). God makes references to his creation including the sea and the deeps (vv.8-18), the light (vv.19-21), snow, hail, thunder, lightning, rain, dew, ice and hoar-frost (vv.22-30). He refers to different constellations and the ordinances of heaven influencing the earth (vv.31-33). The chapter concludes as the Lord demonstrates his own power and wisdom in the atmosphere, particularly in the thunder, lightning and rain (vv.34-38), and his providence in reference to all his creation (vv.39-41).

II.e Job 38:1-42:6 - Challenge: the Lord answers Job

The Lord responds in two speeches, each followed by a brief response from Job. In the first, the Lord asks Job whether he knows how creation and its creatures are governed (38:1-40:2). Job, now made conscious of his ignorance, responds by pledging silence (40:3-5).

In his second speech, the Lord asks Job particularly about power in relation to himself and other creatures he has made (40:6-41:34). Job, directly aware of God as never before, responds by humbly submitting to God's sovereignty and penitently despising himself for his earlier wild words (42:1-6). While Job had rightly defended himself against his friends' accusations of sin and had defined his circumstances as being governed by God, he had drawn conclusions about what his affliction meant that did not account sufficiently for what was hidden in the knowledge and purposes of God.

In all, God will ask Job seventy seven questions but they can be considered to be just three broader questions:

- Do you comprehend my creation? (Job 38:1-38).
- Can you care for my creation? (Job 38:39-39:30).
- Can you control my creation? (Job 40:6-41:34).

II.e.i Job 38:1-40:2 - The Lord Answers Job

After addressing Job and calling him to prepare himself (vv.1-3), the Lord asks whether he knows how creation was established (vv.4-11) and if he has the knowledge or ability to govern it (vv.12-38) or to shape the lives of its wonderful variety of creatures (Job 38:39-40:2).

During his earlier speeches, Job asked God to speak with him on thirty six occasions. Now he gets his wish. There is much humour in the way that God addresses him. God reminds Job that he alone is the creator of all things. He goes through his awesome activity of creating and sustaining the entire universe, asking Job whether he could match this work. He finishes by asking whether Job is in a position to judge, telling him that it is impertinent for Job to believe that God should explain himself to him or, indeed, to anyone else. Job must have felt very small and eventually he replies: <<*See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but will proceed no further*>> (Job 40:4-5).

¹ Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:

Job 38:1

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind. The heading of the speech is brief but important for what it signifies in the context of the book as a whole. The three friends and Elihu had all assumed in one way or another that Job's circumstances and/or his response to them revealed a repudiation of the God whom he claimed to serve faithfully. They warned that if he did not repent and accept his affliction as corrective, he could only expect further judgement. However, the heading suggests that God reveals himself to Job in a display of both majestic power and relational presence: 'the Lord' (Hebrew YHWH), the name most often used to signify God's covenant character and promises (refer to Exodus 3:14-15 and the associated comments), was used in the prologue where God describes Job's relationship to him (refer to Job 1:8 and 2:3); the fact that the Lord answered Job contrasts with what the friends and Elihu indicated he should expect: <<*Because of the multitude of oppressions people cry out; they call for help because of the arm of the mighty. But no one says, "Where is God my Maker, who gives strength in the night, who teaches us more than the animals of the earth, and makes us wiser than the birds of the air?" There they cry out, but he does not answer, because of the pride of evildoers. Surely God does not hear an empty cry, nor does the Almighty regard it*>> (Job 35:9-13).

Although Elihu had already described the display of God's power and purposes in elements of weather in Job 36:22-37:13, it is a covenantal gesture when the Lord reveals his power and his presence as he speaks to Job out of the whirlwind. While he does not come simply to justify Job, the Lord's presence shows that his reproof comes in the context of steadfast love toward Job and not as judgement for what the friends assumed was Job's repudiation of the path of righteousness.

The use of God's covenantal name Yahweh here is used by some scholars to suggest that Job can be dated to around the time of the Exodus or even later rather than the time of Abraham or even before as favoured by the majority.

Over the previous 35 chapters since Job Chapter 2, God has been directly absent from the account. There appears to be nothing of God's direct role in comforting, speaking to, or sustaining Job in the midst of his crisis. Over that time, Job has ached repeatedly for a word from God. Elihu saw the coming storm and spoke about God's presence in such powerful phenomenon; refer to Job 36:22-37:24. Yet now God himself speaks to Job. God will indeed settle this dispute but he will do it his way. Job wanted God to settle it by proving him right and explaining the reason for all his afflictions; Job's friends wanted God to prove them right and for Job to recognise his error. God will not satisfy either one of these expectations. Significantly, God did not obviously answer one of Job's questions seventy six questions. In fact, he now asks seventy seven questions of his own that Job cannot answer.

Significantly, God did not immediately or directly answer Job's friends; not the older friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, or Zophar) and not the young friend (Elihu). God answered Job. Perhaps this was because Job was the one wrongly accused and although he was wrong, he was more right than any of his friends. Perhaps this was because Job was the only one of the group to actively cry out to God and pray through the ordeal. Only Job talked to God; now the Lord will only speak to Job.

Elihu had seen an approaching storm and described it as an example of the power of God; refer to Job 36:26-37:24. When he described the clearing of the storm, he probably spoke before the storm actually had cleared; now in this same storm God speaks to Job.

Repeatedly 'in the whirlwind' is associated with the divine presence. It speaks of the powerful, unmanageable nature of God; that he is like a tornado that cannot be controlled or opposed:

- God brought Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1-11).
- God's presence is in the whirlwind (Psalm 77:18 and Nahum 1:3).
- God's coming is like a whirlwind (Isaiah 66:15, Jeremiah 4:13 and 23:19).
- God appeared to Ezekiel in a whirlwind (Ezekiel 1:4).

Introduction to Job 38:2-11

Job had begun by lamenting his birth and the time of his life in Chapter 3. Using the same language of birth, God now asks Job about the birth of the universe. Can Job explain how the origin of the cosmos could or should have been different?

- ² 'Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?
³ Gird up your loins like a man,
I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

Job 38:2-3

Elihu had accused Job of being someone whose words were generally 'without knowledge' (Job 34:35 and 35:16) or 'without insight' (Job 34:35), and represented rebellion in addition to his sin (Job 34:37). The Lord does not reprove Job so extensively when he indicates that he darkens counsel by words without knowledge: <<*But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, 'Inquire first for the word of the Lord'>> (1 Kings 22:5), and: <<Who has directed the spirit of the Lord, or as his counsellor has instructed him?>> (Isaiah 40:13). There appears to be a play on the notion of darkness and something being hidden: <<"Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know>> (Job 42:3), which is Job's reference to the image. Job had drawn conclusions about the nature of God's rule from what was revealed on earth in his and others' circumstances. However, he did not account fully for what is hidden from him and thus his words cast a shadow on the wisdom and righteousness of God's rule. In his speech, God will question Job in order to remind him that, even in what is revealed of God's powerful and majestic governance of the natural world and its inhabitants, much is still hidden. And if this is true for creation and its creatures, how much more is it true in relation to the wisdom and purpose of the creator?*

Although it is generally accepted that God is addressing Job directly, the reader may justly wonder to whom God asked this question. It might have been mainly directed to Elihu, who was the previous speaker interrupted this word from the Lord, and who claimed to speak for God (Job 36:1-4). It can rightly be said that all the characters in this drama did darken counsel by words without knowledge. Each one of them - Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar and Elihu - spoke without accurate knowledge of what the reader knows from Job Chapters 1 and 2. The reader should not think that God expected them to know what they could not know; rather, he expected them to appreciate that there were aspects to the matter known to God but hidden to man, and these aspects made sense of what seemed to make no sense.

Gird up your loins like a man. Job had previously complained that God was battling against him in a great contest; Job 16:7-14 is one example of this. It might be said that Job, without knowing, was really battling against Satan. Now he would indeed wrestle with God and God challenged him to prepare like a man.

I will question you, and you shall declare to me. Job had insisted that God bring answers to him. God turned the matter around and told Job that before he would answer questions for Job, Job had some questions to answer before God. Jesus spoke in much the same way when he was questioned by the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders in the temple: <<*Jesus said to them, 'I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me.'* They argued with one another, 'If we say, "From heaven", he will say, "Why then did you not believe him?" But shall we say, "Of human origin"?' – they were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet. So they answered Jesus, 'We do not know.' And Jesus said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things'>> (Mark 11:29-33).

The questions God had for Job were simply unanswerable and were meant to show Job that he really had no place to demand answers from God. Yet to see this appearance of God to Job only as a rebuke is a grave mistake. God has now appeared to Job. Job's greatest agony was that he felt God had abandoned him, and now he knew he was not abandoned. Like any true revelation of God there were plenty of elements that would make Job feel small before the greatness of God; yet it could not take away from the massive comfort Job felt in simply being once again consciously in the presence of God.

- 4 'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.
- 5 Who determined its measurements – surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?
- 6 On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone
- 7 when the morning stars sang together
and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

Job 38:4-7

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? The intention of this question is obvious. Job was nowhere to be found when God laid the foundations of the earth. God was ancient in his power, wisdom and might, and Job could never be considered to be on the same level as God. God is essentially saying: "Job, if

you can answer these things, then you are fit to question me. If you cannot answer these things then you do not have a place to demand answers from me.” This statement is also a reminder that God indeed did lay the foundations of the earth; he is the creator of heaven and earth just as the Genesis record states; refer to Genesis Chapter 1.

Who determined its measurements? Who laid its cornerstone? Job was not present at the creation of the world so he had no understanding of the measurements or foundations of the earth. The earth indeed has measurements and foundations; yet Job did not know them.

When the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy. This reveals that angelic beings did in fact witness, in part at least, the creation of the earth and they rejoiced at the glory, power and wisdom of God in his creation: <<*The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world*>> (Psalm 19:1-4a).

The expression the heavenly beings (‘the sons of God’ is a more direct translation from the Hebrew) is the same expression found in the prologue; refer to Job 1:6 and the associated comment. It refers to the members of the heavenly court surrounding God’s throne.

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

Job 38:8-11

Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb? This is probably a reference to God’s work on the second day of creation when God divided the waters and separated the land from the sea; refer to Genesis 1:6-8. Job was not around when God did this and therefore had no idea how it was done.

Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped. Job had no understanding of how God set the boundaries for the sea. He

knew such boundaries existed but could not explain how, why or exactly where they were set.

Introduction to Job 38:12-38

The Lord questions Job about whether he has either the knowledge or the ability to govern elements of creation that he experiences regularly. In light of the obvious answer, the Lord also reminds Job that he cannot fully see or know what the Lord is doing with respect to justice and judgement.

- 12 'Have you commanded the morning since your days began,
and caused the dawn to know its place,
13 so that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth,
and the wicked be shaken out of it?
14 It is changed like clay under the seal,
and it is dyed like a garment.
15 Light is withheld from the wicked,
and their uplifted arm is broken.
16 'Have you entered into the springs of the sea,
or walked in the recesses of the deep?
17 Have the gates of death been revealed to you,
or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?
18 Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?
Declare, if you know all this.

Job 38:12-18

Have you commanded the morning since your days began? This was a wonderful question for God to ask. "Job, have you made morning to come even once all the days of your life? Is this in your power to do?"

The repeated reference to the wicked indicates that the situations Job was lamenting on earth (e.g. Job 24:1-12) are not exhaustive of the Lord's counsel in relation to them (vv.22-23).

It is dyed like a garment. The coming of the dawn is compared to the dyeing of a garment.

Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? Job knew that the Lord controlled the physical elements: <<*He is wise in*

heart, and mighty in strength – who has resisted him, and succeeded? – he who removes mountains, and they do not know it, when he overturns them in his anger; who shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble; who commands the sun, and it does not rise; who seals up the stars; who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the Sea; who made the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the chambers of the south; who does great things beyond understanding, and marvellous things without number>> (Job 9:4-10), but he probably did not even know there were springs of the sea, much less ever enter them. He certainly did not know other hidden things, such as the gates of deep darkness or the expanse of the earth.

- 19 ‘Where is the way to the dwelling of light,
and where is the place of darkness,
20 that you may take it to its territory
and that you may discern the paths to its home?
21 Surely you know, for you were born then,
and the number of your days is great!
22 ‘Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,
or have you seen the storehouses of the hail,
23 which I have reserved for the time of trouble,
for the day of battle and war?
24 What is the way to the place where the light is distributed,
or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?

Job 38:19-24

Where is the way to the dwelling of light? It was as if God asked, “Job do you know where light comes from? Do you know its nature and its source?”

Surely you know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is great! Perhaps Job was so old and so wise that he did indeed know these things. If this were the case, God invited Job to speak up at any time.

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? On several spectacular occasions in the biblical record, God used and will use hail as bombs and missiles from heaven against those hostile to him and his people. Hail is frequently a tool of judgement against God’s enemies, as seen against Egypt (Exodus 9:24), the Canaanites (Joshua 10:11),

apostate Israel (Isaiah 28:2), and Gog and Magog (Ezekiel 38:22), and against a rebellious earth in the Great Tribulation (Revelation 16:20-21).

The reference to storehouses that are reserved for the time of trouble is another reminder to Job that the Lord's governance of earth's inhabitants is not limited to what is revealed on earth (vv.13-15).

- 25 'Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain,
and a way for the thunderbolt,
26 to bring rain on a land where no one lives,
on the desert, which is empty of human life,
27 to satisfy the waste and desolate land,
and to make the ground put forth grass?
28 'Has the rain a father,
or who has begotten the drops of dew?
29 From whose womb did the ice come forth,
and who has given birth to the hoar-frost of heaven?
30 The waters become hard like stone,
and the face of the deep is frozen.

Job 38:25-30

Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain. In the previous section God spoke of his wisdom in the management and use of snow and hail; here he speaks of his ability engineer drainage systems.

Has the rain a father, or who has begotten the drops of dew? In Job 36:22-37:24 Elihu used the water cycle (as displayed in an approaching storm) as an example of God's greatness. Here God took credit for knowing how these things are designed and maintained, and he asked Job if he had similar knowledge.

God showed Job that man was completely unable to cause rain. Charles Spurgeon took this idea and likened rain to the grace of God. "If both Houses of Parliament were to be called together, and the Queen were to sit upon her throne of state, and they were unanimously to pass an act ordering the rain to fall, he that sits in the heavens would laugh, the Lord would have them in derision, for the key of the rain is in no hand but that of Jehovah. It is exactly so with the grace of God. You and I cannot command it. The presence of the most holy men in our midst would not of itself bring it. The most earnest preaching, the most Scriptural doctrine, the most faithful obedience to

ordinances, would not make it necessary that we should receive grace. God must give it; he is an absolute Sovereign and we are entirely dependent upon him.”

31 ‘Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
or loose the cords of Orion?

32 Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season,
or can you guide the Bear with its children?

33 Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?
Can you establish their rule on the earth?

Job 38:31-33

Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the cords of Orion? God did not merely challenge Job on his lack of knowledge; he also exposed Job’s lack of might and greatness in comparison to God. Obviously, Job was not able to manage or master or change any of the stars or constellations in the sky; yet God can. With these high and almost outrageous examples pointing out what Job did not know, the reader should remember that God’s purpose here was not to humiliate Job. Instead, God seems almost playful here in making the point that God is omniscient and man is not.

The Mazzaroth. This is a transliteration of a Hebrew word otherwise unknown. In the context, it must refer to one of the constellations.

The Bear is also a constellation, as indicated by the reference to it along with Orion and Pleiades in Job 9:9. Two of these three are also referenced by Amos: <<*The one who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the Lord is his name*>> (Amos 5:8).

Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Like many in the ancient world, Job probably understood the arrangement and patterns in the starry sky, and he, like the psalmist, knew they were God’s creation: <<*Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. He established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed*>> (Psalm 148:5-6). Yet he could not even begin to explain the natural forces which governed this arrangement.

34 ‘Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
so that a flood of waters may cover you?

35 Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go

and say to you, “Here we are”?

³⁶ Who has put wisdom in the inward parts,
or given understanding to the mind?

³⁷ Who has the wisdom to number the clouds?

Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens,

³⁸ when the dust runs into a mass
and the clods cling together?

Job 38:34-38

Can you lift up your voice to the clouds? Job was not only powerless over the starry sky and constellations; he was also powerless over the clouds and lightnings. He was powerless over natural phenomenon, both far and near to him.

The translation of this line is difficult because the Hebrew terms are rare. If they are translated as ‘ibis’ and ‘rooster,’ the line has a sense that fits well in the context of the section to come; refer to Job 38:39-40:2. The combination of wisdom and understanding may make it more likely that these terms refer to inward parts or mind, as that which governs a person’s actions and appropriates wisdom from the Lord. This increased knowledge is a wonderful and glorious thing, and scientific inquiry is to be applauded. It is a wonderful fulfilment of human abilities as creatures made in the image of God that they can investigate and better understand the natural world. Indeed: <<***It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out***>> (Proverbs 25:2). Yet with all this increased knowledge - as wonderful and glorious as it is - mankind is really not much closer at all to answering these questions that God set to Job. Small details have been filled in around the edges, but there is still a vast gap between the knowledge and wisdom of man and that of God and that is the way it is destined to be for all time.

Introduction to Job 38:39-39:30

The Lord now turns from describing his governance of creation to the governance of specific creatures. The speech finishes with a request for Job to answer: <<***And the Lord said to Job: ‘Shall a fault-finder contend with the Almighty? Anyone who argues with God must respond’***>> (Job 40:1-2).

³⁹ ‘Can you hunt the prey for the lion,
or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,

⁴⁰ when they crouch in their dens,
or lie in wait in their covert?

41 Who provides for the raven its prey,
when its young ones cry to God,
and wander about for lack of food?

Job 38:39-41

Can you hunt the prey for the lion? In his speech to Job, God moved from the distant expanse of the constellations, down to the clouds, down to the human mind, and here still further down to simple animal instinct such as the ability to hunt prey for the lion. Job could not even do this; therefore it was presumptuous for him to demand answers from God the way that he had done.

Who provides for the raven its prey? God provides food for the birds: <<**Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them**>> (Matthew 6:26a); it would be impossible for Job or any other man to do so. God here is reminding Job of the distance between himself and Job.