



Job - Chapter Thirty Nine

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

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

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

Summary of Chapter Thirty Nine

God's response to Job continues to consider some of the animals and birds that God created, along with their key attributes. Does Job know all these things? Is it he that gives them such attributes? Can he control nature in any way?

- 1 'Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?
Do you observe the calving of the deer?
- 2 Can you number the months that they fulfil,
and do you know the time when they give birth,
- 3 when they crouch to give birth to their offspring,
and are delivered of their young?
- 4 Their young ones become strong, they grow up in the open;
they go forth, and do not return to them.

Job 39:1-4

Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Here God kept bringing the level of knowledge down for Job. He could, quite conceivably, know such facts of nature from simple observation. Yet even this relatively low level of knowledge was beyond Job. Although Job did not know these principles of the natural order, at the same time he had to admit that the natural order all seemed to work pretty

well. All these questions brought Job before another truth: “I see that this world made by God operates with remarkable order and wisdom; can I deny his wisdom and government of all things just because there are things in my own life I cannot understand? Or, should I simply trust this God who does all these other things so marvellously well?”

They crouch to give birth to their offspring, and are delivered of their young. Here God reminded Job of the arrangement of growth and maturity he had engineered for the natural order. Did Job design this or even know much about it?

- 5 ‘Who has let the wild ass go free?
Who has loosed the bonds of the swift ass,
6 to which I have given the steppe for its home,
the salt land for its dwelling-place?
7 It scorns the tumult of the city;
it does not hear the shouts of the driver.
8 It ranges the mountains as its pasture,
and it searches after every green thing.

Job 39:5-8

Who has let the wild ass go free? Job had little or no knowledge of these facts of nature; he had even less power over the animals and their life cycle. These things belonged to God and not to Job.

It ranges the mountains as its pasture, and it searches after every green thing. God knew how the wild donkey lived and was provided for; Job obviously did not.

- 9 ‘Is the wild ox willing to serve you?
Will it spend the night at your crib?
10 Can you tie it in the furrow with ropes,
or will it harrow the valleys after you?
11 Will you depend on it because its strength is great,
and will you hand over your labour to it?
12 Do you have faith in it that it will return,
and bring your grain to your threshing-floor?

Job 39:9-12

Is the wild ox willing to serve you? No one would doubt that Job was smarter than a wild ox; yet the ox would not serve him. He lacked in both knowledge of and mastery over the natural world.

The beast in question is not a common ox or the fabled 'unicorn' of the KJV, but the aurochs. Extinct since 1627, this enormous animal was the most powerful of all hoofed beasts, exceeded in size only by the hippopotamus and the elephant. It is the standard symbol of strength in the OT, where it is mentioned nine times. Hunting the aurochs was a sport of royalty. Shalmaneser III of Assyria had it portrayed among the items of tribute on his famous monument - the Black Obelisk.



The aurochs (*Bos primigenius*)

Can you tie it in the furrow with ropes? Understanding the fearsome nature of this ancient wild ox or aurochs, God created a humorous image for Job. One might just as easily picture Job using a rhino to plough his field or put into his barn.

- 13 'The ostrich's wings flap wildly,
though its pinions lack plumage.
- 14 For it leaves its eggs to the earth,
and lets them be warmed on the ground,
- 15 forgetting that a foot may crush them,
and that a wild animal may trample them.
- 16 It deals cruelly with its young, as if they were not its own;
though its labour should be in vain, yet it has no fear;
- 17 because God has made it forget wisdom,
and given it no share in understanding.
- 18 When it spreads its plumes aloft,
it laughs at the horse and its rider.

Job 39:13-18

The ostrich's wings flap wildly or proudly. God here spoke of the wildly or proudly waving wings of the flightless ostrich. Perhaps Job could explain why a flightless bird has wings or why a winged creature is flightless?

A foot may crush them. The ostrich lays her eggs in a shallow nest on the ground and sometimes scatters some of them or even deliberately destroys them if the nest is discovered.

God has made it forget wisdom. Here God reminded Job that he and not mankind is the dispenser of wisdom; he gives or withholds as pleases him.

When it spreads its plumes aloft, it laughs at the horse and its rider. The ostrich makes sport of the fearless warhorse. As it flees, the ostrich reaches a height of over 8 feet or 2.4m, strides of over 15 feet or 4.6m in length, and speeds of more than 40 miles or 64km an hour.

- 19 'Do you give the horse its might?
Do you clothe its neck with mane?
- 20 Do you make it leap like the locust?
Its majestic snorting is terrible.
- 21 It paws violently, exults mightily;
it goes out to meet the weapons.
- 22 It laughs at fear, and is not dismayed;
it does not turn back from the sword.
- 23 Upon it rattle the quiver,
the flashing spear, and the javelin.
- 24 With fierceness and rage it swallows the ground;
it cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet.
- 25 When the trumpet sounds, it says "Aha!"
From a distance it smells the battle,
the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.

Job 39:19-25

Do you give the horse its might? Like many, Job could be impressed with the majestic strength of the horse. Yet he had no strength to give the horse; it came from God and not from Job or any other man.

It laughs at fear, and is not dismayed; it does not turn back from the sword. Job could give no explanation for the warrior nature of a horse, which operates against reason and the self-interest of the horse.

- 26 'Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars,
and spreads its wings towards the south?
- 27 Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up
and makes its nest on high?
- 28 It lives on the rock and makes its home
in the fastness of the rocky crag.
- 29 From there it spies the prey;
its eyes see it from far away.
- 30 Its young ones suck up blood;
and where the slain are, there it is.'

Job 39:26-30

Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars? After considering many land animals and the wisdom and mystery surrounding them, now God turned to a majestic bird - the hawk. Job could not explain, much less create the mechanics of flight for this noble bird.

God also wanted Job to be astonished at the wildness of it all, even allowing for the fact that God had given man dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over all animals on the earth and over everything that creeps upon the earth; refer to Genesis 1:26. Even with dominion over all these, man did not make or sustain these great wild animals. If mankind had so little authority over nature, could Job expect to have more control over the mysterious events of his life?

Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes its nest on high? Job was equally powerless to explain the eagle and its ways, much less to command it. It might seem that God was being harsh with Job; but one must compare what God said to Job with what Job's accusers thought God should say to him. God did not come to Job as a judge; he came to Job as a teacher - a loving, winsome, vivid, powerful, humorous teacher. God was once again in his proper relationship with Job and that was enough for Job.