

Job 38-39: When God Speaks to Job

By Carla Alvarez

In Job 38, we come to the climax of the book of Job. Job has experienced loss and devastation in every area of his life: his family, his business, his health, his influence, and his relationships. He has defended himself against the accusations of his friends, insisting that he is innocent, and calling on God to vindicate him.

In Job chapters 26-31, Job presents his case to God and asks God to point out where he is wrong. In response, Elihu appears on the scene, answering Job and telling him that it is prideful to think that he can question God. Now finally, God himself appears to Job. We will see what the Lord says in these final chapters of Job. The commentator of the NET study Bible makes the following observation:

Job 38:1 sn This is the culmination of it all, the revelation of the Lord to Job. Most interpreters see here the style and content of the author of the book, a return to the beginning of the book. Here the Lord speaks to Job and displays his sovereign power and glory. Job has lived through the suffering—without cursing God. He has held to his integrity, and nowhere regretted it. But he was unaware of the real reason for the suffering, and will remain unaware throughout these speeches. God intervenes to resolve the spiritual issues that surfaced. Job was not punished for sin. And Job’s suffering had not cut him off from God. In the end the point is that Job cannot have the knowledge to make the assessments he made. It is wiser to bow in submission and adoration of God than to try to judge him. The first speech of God has these sections: the challenge (38:1-3), the surpassing mysteries of earth and sky beyond Job’s understanding (4-38), and the mysteries of animal and bird life that surpassed his understanding (38:39-39:30).¹

What is God’s response to Job?

38 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:

¹ *NET Bible*, Full-notes Edition. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019) Job 38, note a.

2 “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?
3 Dress for action like a man;
I will question you, and you make it known to me.

As the NET commentator notes, a whirlwind is often associated with the presence or acts of God. The whirlwind is often associated with a theophany, a physical manifestation of the work of God; however, I think it can also be a metaphor of the way that even in the middle of the trials of life, God is still with us.

God asks Job, who is he who is weighing in on matters (who darkens counsel) that he really doesn’t know anything about. The ESV translates verse 3 as “dress for actions like a man.” Another common translation of this verse is the instruction to “gird up your loins,” which means to prepare yourself for action, or as the NET commentator explains:

Job 38:3 tn Heb “Gird up your loins.” This idiom basically describes taking the hem of the long garment or robe and pulling it up between the legs and tucking it into the front of the belt, allowing easier and freer movement of the legs. “Girding the loins” meant the preparation for some difficult task (Jer 1:17), or for battle (Isa 5:27), or for running (1 Kgs 18:46). C. Gordon suggests that it includes belt-wrestling, a form of hand-to-hand mortal combat (“Belt-wrestling in the Bible World,” *HUCA* 23 [1950/51]: 136).²

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 sons of God shouted for joy?

We discussed in our study on Job 37, that God set not only the natural laws in place, but the processes of everything that would happen at the moment of creation. God is asking Job if he was there when the Lord did this; otherwise, how could he possibly understand the reason for why things happen the way they do. Does Job even understand the physical world around him, the things that he sees every day?

In verse 7, God says that the “morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” The “sons of God,” or the “bene elohim,” are

² *NET Bible*, Full-notes Edition. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson,) Job 38, note f.

the same host of divine beings referred to in the first two chapters of the book of Job, those that make up the Divine Council. As Michael Heiser has noted, in the Ancient Near East, stars were often associated with divine beings. He writes:

The point of the terminology isn't hard to figure out. It has to do with (drum roll, please): brightness. Stars were bright. Brightness is a common description of divine beings throughout the ancient world. They are often described as luminous or fiery (biblical examples include Ezek 1:13; Psa 104:4). Divine beings were therefore associated with, or identified with, objects in the sky – stars or planets. This idea is all over the ancient Near East. In terms of the Old Testament, Job 38:6-7 is the best example (and note that it pluralizes “morning star”):³

Adam Clarke, in his commentary on the Book of Job, adds to this and speculates that the “morning stars” are referring to the same group of beings as the “sons of God” who were part of the creation referred to when God created “the heavens.”

Verse Job 38:7. When the morning stars sang together – This must refer to some intelligent beings who existed before the creation of the visible heavens and earth: and it is supposed that this and the following clause refer to the same beings; that by the sons of God, and the morning stars, the angelic host is meant; as they are supposed to be first, though perhaps not chief, in the order of creation.

For the latter clause the Chaldee has, "All the troops of angels." Perhaps their creation may be included in the term heavens, Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." These witnessed the progress of the creation; and, when God had finished his work, celebrated his wisdom and power in the highest strains.⁴

³ Michael S. Heiser, “Morning Star,” *Michael S. Heiser*, May 8, 2014, <https://web.archive.org/web/20201112012329/https://drmsb.com/the-naked-bible/morning-star/>.

⁴ Adam Clarke, “Commentary on Job 38:7,” in *The Adam Clarke Commentary* (StudyLight, 1832), <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/acc/job-38.html>.

The Septuagint (LXX) translators saw this reference as the creation of the stars and the “sons of God” as angels, translating the verse as “When the stars were made, all my angels praised me with a loud voice.⁵”

8 “Or who shut in the sea with doors
when it burst out from the womb,
9 when I made clouds its garment
and thick darkness its swaddling band,
10 and prescribed limits 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 stayed’?

12 “Have you commanded the morning since your days began,
and caused the dawn to know its place,
13 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 its features stand out like a garment.
15 From the wicked their light is withheld,
and their uplifted arm is broken.

These verses paint a vivid image of the creation account in Genesis 1.

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.

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 You know, for you were born then,
and the number of your days is great!

⁵ “Job 38 - LXX Bible - Bible Study Tools,” *Biblestudytools.Com*, accessed December 9, 2021, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lxx/job/38.html>.

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?

25 “Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain
and a way for the thunderbolt,
26 to bring rain on a land where no man is,
on the desert in which there is no man,
27 to satisfy the waste and desolate land,
and to make the ground sprout with 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 frost of heaven?
30 The waters become hard like stone,
and the face of the deep is frozen.

The Lord describes all of this natural phenomenon, which we so often see as commonplace and not out of the ordinary at all. Today, we may be able to describe these processes whereas Job could not; but still, do we really understand the wonder and magnitude of the world around us?

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?

God has described the processes on earth, and now he moves to the heavens. The Pleiades, the Orion, and the Bear are all constellations that are still known today.⁶ There is a little confusion about “the Mazzaroth.” The

⁶ J. Warner Wallace, “Is the Astronomy in the Book of Job Scientifically Consistent? | Cold Case Christianity,” August 17, 2018, accessed December 9, 2021,

ESV notes that it is probably a constellation. The NET commentator writes:

The word מַזְרוֹת (mazzarot) is taken by some to refer to the constellations (see 2 Kgs 23:5), and by others as connected to the word for “crown,” and so “corona.”⁷

The Septuagint translate it as

31 And dost thou understand the band of Pleias, and hast thou opened the barrier of Orion? 32 Or wilt thou reveal Mazuroth in his season, and the evening star with his rays? Wilt thou guide them? 33 And knowest thou the changes of heaven, or the events which take place together under heaven?

Likely, the Mazzaroth was another familiar constellation in the time of the patriarchs.

34 “Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
that a flood of waters may cover you
35 Can you send forth lightnings, 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 can number the clouds by wisdom?
Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens,
38 when the dust runs into a mass
and the clods stick fast together?

The description has moved from creation itself, to the creation of the divine beings that populate those “heavens,” to the visible universe. God then describes the workings of the earth’s atmosphere, and he describes the actions of the beings that inhabit the earth itself, the birds of the air and the animals that roam the earth.

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 thicket?

<https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/is-the-astronomy-in-the-book-of-job-scientifically-consistent/>.

⁷ NET Bible, Full-notes Edition. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson,) Job 38, note au.

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

39 “Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?
Do you observe the calving of the does?

2 Can you number the months that they fulfill,
and do you know the time when they give birth,

3 when they crouch, bring forth their offspring,
and are delivered of their young?

4 Their young ones become strong; they grow up in the open;
they go out and do not return to them.

5 “Who has let the wild donkey go free?

Who has loosed the bonds of the swift donkey,

6 to whom I have given the arid plain for his home
and the salt land for his dwelling place?

7 He scorns the tumult of the city;
he hears not the shouts of the driver.

8 He ranges the mountains as his pasture,
and he searches after every green thing.

9 “Is the wild ox willing to serve you?

Will he spend the night at your manger?

10 Can you bind him in the furrow with ropes,
or will he harrow the valleys after you?

11 Will you depend on him because his strength is great,
and will you leave to him your labor?

12 Do you have faith in him that he will return your grain
and gather it to your threshing floor?

13 “The wings of the ostrich wave proudly,
but are they the pinions and plumage of love?

14 For she leaves her eggs to the earth
and lets them be warmed on the ground,

15 forgetting that a foot may crush them
and that the wild beast may trample them.

16 She deals cruelly with her young, as if they were not hers;
 though her labor be in vain, yet she has no fear,
17 because God has made her forget wisdom
 and given her no share in understanding
18 When she rouses herself to flee,
 she laughs at the horse and his rider.

19 “Do you give the horse his might?
 Do you clothe his neck with a mane?
20 Do you make him leap like the locust?
 His majestic snorting is terrifying.
21 He paws in the valley and exults in his strength;
 he goes out to meet the weapons.
22 He laughs at fear and is not dismayed;
 he does not turn back from the sword.
23 Upon him rattle the quiver,
 the flashing spear, and the javelin.
24 With fierceness and rage he swallows the ground;
 he cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet.
25 When the trumpet sounds, he says ‘Aha!’
 He smells the battle from afar,
 the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.

26 “Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars
 and spreads his wings toward the south?
27 Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up
 and makes his nest on high?
28 On the rock he dwells and makes his home,
 on the rocky crag and stronghold.
29 From there he spies out the prey;
 his eyes behold it from far away.
30 His young ones suck up blood,
 and where the slain are, there is he.”

Job was the richest and most influential man in his area, yet he lost it all and was brought low. Job feared God, but respecting and honoring God doesn't mean that we don't question him at times.

When life seems overwhelming, take a page out of Job ... this particular page ... and really consider wonder of the world around you. All of this God

made. When we consider how awesome the workings are of the most simple things in the world around us, this gives us just a tiny understanding of the power and greatness of God. If God can do all this, whatever your problem is ... he can handle it.

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