

JOB

Chapter 38

The Lord Answers Job

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: 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. 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? 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. 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! 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. 31 “Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion? 32 Can you lead forth the Mazzarot 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? 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? 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? 41 Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God for help, and wander about for lack of food?

38:1–42:6 The theophany (appearance of God) to Job, consisting of two discourses by the Lord (38:1–40:2; 40:6–41:34), each of which receives a brief response from Job (40:3–5; 42:1–6). (CSB)

38:1 *the LORD*. The Israelite covenant name for God. (CSB)

Hbr *yahweh* is used as in the opening chapters. By this name, God revealed Himself to Moses as the Savior and as the God who established a gracious covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex 3:15). (TLSB)

It is significant that in verse 1 God is referred to by his name the Lord (Yahweh – covenant/promise keeper). Throughout the greatest part of the book he is referred to by three titles” Shaddai (the Almighty – the Mountain One), El and Eloah (both meaning God). Only once in these 35 chapters do we find the name Lord. From this we can conclude that Job knew the true God by his name and that he stood in a covenant relationship with him. (PBC)

whirlwind. See 40:6. Elihu had imagined the appearance of the divine presence as a display of “golden splendor” and “awesome majesty” (37:22). He also had anticipated the storm or whirlwind (see note on 37:22), from which Job would hear the voice of God. Job had said, “Let the Almighty answer me” (31:35). He now receives the Lord’s answer. (CSB)

Mighty tornado like tempest threatens Job with destruction, in marked contrast to the “still small voice” that came to Elisha (1Ki 19:12). God often appeared in storms (Ex 19:16; 2Ki 2:1; Ps 18:12–14; Zec 9:14). The Lord comes to Job as Job had requested (23:3–5), answering Job’s blustery and windy words (16:3). Earlier, Job stated that if the Lord came to him in a whirlwind, He would crush Job (9:17). Instead of crushing him, the Lord speaks with him as Job had hoped (23:6–7) and as Elihu had assured him (33:14–17). His confrontation is a loving, gracious response to Job’s many questions. *said*. Instead of answering Job’s specific questions, the Lord floods Job with further questions to demonstrate His creative power and continuing presence in the midst of the ambiguities of this life. (TLSB)

Storm of hurricane proportions. Storms involve clouds and God used clouds to protect his people from his brilliance. The storm might also have been a reminder to Job that his children had perished in a storm. At any rate it would get Job’s attention.

Exodus 19:16-20 “On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him. The LORD descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up”

Ezekiel 1:2-4 “On the fifth of the month—it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin—the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the LORD was upon him.

I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal.”

Zechariah 9:14 “Then the LORD will appear over them; his arrow will flash like lightning. The Sovereign LORD will sound the trumpet; he will march in the storms of the south,”

38:2 See 35:16. In 42:3, Job echoes the Lord's words. God states that Job's complaining and raging against him are unjustified and proceed from limited understanding. (CSB)

darkens counsel – In this case it means to hinder God's counsel or take the true light from it. (QV)

Job's questions, which he thought would teach the Lord, were corrupted by his ignorance of the Lord's inscrutable ways (cf Ac 2:23; Rm 11:31–33). Job did not just cloud the issue; he spoke out of ignorance. Elihu warned Job that no mortal could stand before the Lord in a legal battle (34:23). Yet the Lord graciously and caringly restrains judgment. God's theme throughout the following two speeches is that His design of creation needed no counsel or cooperation by humanity. (TLSB)

by words without knowledge – The passage below point to the problem of speaking without having the proper information.

Proverbs 10:19 “When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.”

Proverbs 29:11 “A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself Under control.”

Ecclesiastes 5:3 “As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words.”

Titus 1:10 “For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group.”

38:3 Repeated in 40:7 (see also 42:4). The format of God's response is to ply Job with rhetorical questions, to each of which Job must plead ignorance. God says nothing about Job's suffering, nor does he address Job's problem about divine justice. Job gets neither a bill of indictment nor a verdict of innocence. But, more important, God does not humiliate or condemn him—which surely would have been the case if the counselors had been right. So by implication Job is vindicated, and later his vindication is directly affirmed (see 42:7–8). The divine discourses, then, succeed in bringing Job to complete faith in God's goodness without his receiving a direct answer to his questions. (CSB)

dress for action like a man – Literally those words read, “Gird your loins like a man.” In ancient time people didn't wear slacks, jean or short as people do today. They wore long, flowing garments which they would tie up with a sash or belt when they engaged in some physical activity. That was particularly true in the case of warfare or athletic contests. In these words God challenges Job to get ready for a contest with him. (PBC)

To free the legs for running, people would gird their loins by binding their flowing garments around their waists. Now is the time for Job to “roll up his sleeves” and prepare himself for verbal combat and to talk like God—if he dares. (TLSB)

38:4–38 Inanimate creation testifies to God’s sovereignty and power (the earth, vv. 4–7, 18; the sea, vv. 8–11, 16; the sun, vv. 12–15; the netherworld, v. 17; light and darkness, vv. 19–20; the weather, vv. 22–30, 34–38; the constellations, vv. 31–33). See note on 38:39–39:30. (CSB)

38:4–5 See the similar questions of Agur, and the similar irony in his demand for a response (Pr 30:4). (CSB)

where were you – Job had set himself up as the judge of his situation. God needs to bring Job back to reality. This is reminiscent of 9:20-21 “But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’” Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?”

laid the foundation. The Lord speaks of creation in terms of building a house with plans (v 5) that are known to the Architect of the universe, but not to the laborers in the building. The Lord echoes Eliphaz’s sarcastic comment about Job being born “before the hills” (15:7). With sarcastic questions, the Lord shows Job how little he knows. All is under His control, as Job had acknowledged earlier (12:13). (TLSB)

understanding. Comes only from the One who is Wisdom Himself, the Word who was with God and who was God (Jn 1:1) at creation. (TLSB)

Proverbs 30:4 “Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and the name of his son? Tell me if you know!”

Psalms 104:5 “He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved.”

Isaiah 40:12-31 “¹²Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales - and the hills in a balance? ¹³Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? ¹⁴Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? ¹⁵Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. ¹⁶Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, -nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. ¹⁷Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. ¹⁸To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to? ¹⁹As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. ²⁰A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple. ²¹Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? ²²He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. ²³He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. ²⁴No sooner are the planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them

away like chaff.²⁵ “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.²⁶ Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.²⁷ Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God”?²⁸ Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;³¹ but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

38:7 See Ps 148:2–3; see also note on Ps 65:13 (in the exuberant language of the psalmists, all creation—even its inanimate elements—joins the human chorus to celebrate the goodness of God in creation, blessing and redemption (see 89:12; 96:11–13; 98:8–9; 103:22; 145:10; 148:3–4, 7–10; see also Job 38:7; Isa 44:23; 49:13; 55:12). When the earth was created, the angels were there to sing the praises of the Creator, but Job was not (see vv. 4–5). He should therefore not expect to be able to understand even lesser aspects of God’s plans for the world and for mankind. (CSB)

morning stars sang together. Chemnitz: “He adds this regard to the angels” (*LTh* 1:165). Angels sang festively at creation. They rejoiced again at re-creation, which began at the incarnation of Jesus and culminated in Christ’s resurrection and ascension. There was celestial joy at the beginning of time, and there will be joy at the end of the world (Rv 19:1–3). The preeminent Morning Star is Jesus Himself (Rv 22:16). Yet Job was unaware of these heavenly hosts. (TLSB)

sons of God. People often ask the question, “On what day were the angels created?” Genesis chapter 1 doesn’t answer that question, perhaps because angels are invisible beings. This verse strongly suggests that God created angels on the one of first days of creation, perhaps the first day when he created light. Some angels rebelled against God and were banished from heaven (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). The devil was already at work in the Garden of Eden to tempt Adam and Eve as we read in Genesis 3. From these verse it appears as if the angels were present at the time God created the earth and separated the land from the water. (PBC)

38:8 *shut in the sea with doors* – About three-fourths (some say four-fifths) of the earth’s surface is covered by water. What a powerful force water is! We have seen instances of the devastating damage inflicted upon homes that have been struck by hurricanes and flood. How much greater was the damage caused by the flood in the days of Noah! If he so willed, God could send another universal floods, but in his underserved goodness he has promised not to do so (Genesis 8:21). God has the powerful forces of water under his control. Addressing God, the psalmist states: “You set a boundary they (the waters) cannot cross; never again will they cover the earth” (Psalm 104:9). (PBC)

when it burst out from the womb. Personifies creation of the seas as a birthing event. The infant waters gush into the swaddling clothes of the clouds (v 9). Many in the ancient Near East thought of water as an evil element, but it is a gracious gift from God, always under His caring dominion and delimitation (vv 10–11). Babylonian mythology described the creation as the destruction of a monster, Tiamat, whose body was used to construct the world. (TLSB)

To the people of that time the sea symbolized chaos and something to be feared. When John describes heaven he addresses that concern. Revelation 21:1 “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.”

38:9 *clouds its garment* – God describes himself as making the clouds a garment for the sea and wrapping it in thick darkness. The picture is that of wrapping a baby. (PBC)

38:11 *thus far...and said*. God the Father controls the sea by speaking to it, as does God the Son (see Lk 8:24–25). (CSB)

God can control the mighty waters of the sea more easily than you or I can turn on a water faucet to fill a bathtub. (PBC)

38:12–13 The arrival of the dawn sends the wicked scurrying for cover. – In this section God reminds Job of the great marvels of the dawn, when the darkness of night yields to the light of the day. Like Job, we also take it for granted that each morning the sun will rise, and each evening it will set. We assume there will always be the regular sequence of night and day. We really don’t appreciate the marvelous creation of light. (PBC)

38:13 *skirts of the earth*. Edges of daylight—dusk and dawn—are portrayed as folds of a tablecloth or blanket, under which evil activities occur. (TLSB)

shaken. As the sun rises, the wicked are shaken out of the dark folds of their sinful practices and exposed by the bright light of God’s justice (cf Jn 3:19–21). (TLSB)

In a very striking manner the Lord describes the effects of dawn. As a homemaker takes a tablecloth by the corners and shakes out the food crumbs, so the rays of dawn shake out the wicked from the earth. (PBC)

38:14 *clay under a seal*. Either a cylinder seal – Probably a small cylinder seal of the type used to sign clay documents by rolling them over the clay. The owner wore it around his neck on a cord threaded through a hole drilled lengthwise through it) or a stamp seal. (CSB)

Once a seal is pressed into the clay, the image is clear. So also once the sunlight begins to brighten the eastern skies, the beautiful contours of creation take on greater clarity and details. Earth’s colors become visible in the Lord’s sunlight, as the texture of a garment becomes clear in daylight. (TLSB)

Just as a lump of clay is turned into a beautiful design beneath a seal, so too the earth glistens in beauty beneath the sun’s first rays. (PBC)

38:15 *their light*. The night is when the wicked are active (see Jn 3:19; for the imagery cf. Lk 11:35). (CSB)

In ancient times as now, burglars, sex offenders, and murderers felt more secure committing their crimes under the cover of darkness than in broad daylight. (PBC)

uplifted arm is broken. Although the wicked literally raise their arms in violence, the Lord hampers them in His own ways. In the very midst of their evil acts, God has the power to intervene mercifully, as in the case of Abimelech (Gn 20:6) and Abraham (Gn 22:12). (TLSB)

38:16 *springs of the sea*. See Ge 7:11; 8:2. (CSB)

The ocean's depth continues to be explored today. Only God knows the full, extravagant beauty and oddities of nature. (TLSB)

These could include the rivers that feed into the ocean and the fountains below. People in ancient times expressed great wonder at the ocean. Even today, in spite of extensive research by oceanographers and marine experts, the ocean still holds many mysteries we can't comprehend. (PBC)

38:17 *gates of death*. See note on 17:16 (In Mesopotamian literature, all who entered the netherworld passed through a series of seven gates); see also 26:5–6. (CSB)

The Lord is refuting Job's earlier assertions about Sheol (10:21–22; 14:13–14; 17:13–16; see p 792). Earlier, Job and Zophar had spoken about death and the place of the dead as though they understood it (7:9; 11:8; 26:5–6; cf 33:18), but now such audacity is silenced. *death ... deep darkness? Hbr maweth ... tsalmaweth*; wordplay. Deepest depths are easily within the Lord's providential care. (TLSB)

This language suggests that when a person enters the realm of death the gates are closed behind him. There is no turning back to life in this world. (PBC)

38:19 *dwelling*. At creation, the Lord set the limits of light and darkness by separating them into their own "areas" (Gn 1:4). In this verse, they are personified as residents of two distinct regions, completely unknown to Job and unable to be controlled by him (v 20). (TLSB)

38:21 *you know* – Those words must have humbled Job. God would teach him and also you and me to let God be God and put ourselves in submission to him. (PBC)

Sarcasm. A ridiculous suggestion to silence Job's impudence. Job was not very old in terms of the age of the rest of creation, perhaps 70, but he spoke as though he knew things about the very act of creation itself. There is no biblical evidence that Job or others existed as spirits before birth. (TLSB)

38:22–25 Rain is a blessing (Dt 28:12). From the Lord's celestial arsenal, natural elements become weapons of mass destruction. On several occasions, the Lord used the weather to help His people, particularly in times of battle (cf Ex 9:18–26; Jsh 10:11; Is 30:30–32; Jer 10:13; Ezk 13:11, 13; 38:22). So the Lord continues providentially to supervise every aspect of the world and individual lives. (TLSB)

38:22–23 *hail ... for the day of battles*.

God now directs Job's attention to his marvelous manner of providing moisture to sustain his creation. In his wisdom he manages the weather for the benefit of people and animals and vegetation. (PBC)

38:24 *east winds*. The sirocco that blows in from the desert. (CSB)

38:28–30 The Lord implies that He alone is the cause of the natural world. (TLSB)

father. The Lord not only creates but also cares for His creation, just as a good earthly father begets, nurtures, and cares for his family. (TLSB)

38:29 Rather than being the work of mythical (and pagan) deities, dew, frost, rain, and snow are products of the Lord's continuing preservation of the world. (TLSB)

38:31–32 *Pleiades ... Orion ... Bear*. These three constellations are mentioned again in 38:31–32, and the last two are mentioned in Am 5:8. Despite their limited knowledge of astronomy, the ancient Israelites were awed by the fact that God had created the constellations). (CSB)

38:31 *Pleiades ... Orion?* Well known constellations. Pleiades is sometimes popularly called “the Seven Sisters.” The stars of constellations were thought to be held together by chains. The ancients used constellations as celestial timekeepers and guides, marking the arrival of the fall and winter seasons (9:9). Already by 4000 BC, the Pleiades announced the vernal equinox. Today, they are still recognized for their seasonal significance. (TLSB)

In speaking of those constellations God suggests that he binds and looses them, bring them forth and leads them out, as if they were animals. (PBC)

38:32 *Mazzaroth*. Difficult Hbr term; transliterated here. Refers to a star or a constellation (*Mazzaloth* in 2Ki 23:5) that appeared only at certain times of the year as part of a zodiacal sign. (TLSB)

Bear. Lit, “the lion.” Constellation Ursa Major, “Big Bear,” contains the Big Dipper, the stars of which are often called “children.” These star clusters are all under God's providential dominion. (TLSB)

38:33 *rule*. Constellations' patterns of appearances have always provided guidance for human beings, particularly for ancient astronomers. According to the Lord's own divine creation (Gn 1:14), they were created “to rule the day and ... rule the night” (Gn 1:16). (TLSB)

38:36 *inward parts...mind*. It is possible that the first word should be translated “ibis” and the second “rooster,” two birds whose habits were sometimes observed by people who wished to forecast the weather. If so, the words would serve as a transition to the next major section of the first divine discourse. (CSB)

Meteorologists can predict rain, but they can't produce it. (PBC)

38:37 *waterskins of the heavens*. Hides of animals were used as containers for liquids, particularly for water and wine. Although God sends rain on all people (Mt 5:45), the rain does not always water the same area. The Lord is precise in ordering where rain lands and what it waters. (TLSB)

38:39–39:30 Animate creation testifies to God's sovereignty, power and loving care (the lion, 38:39–40; the raven, 38:41; the mountain goat, 39:1–4; the wild donkey, vv. 5–8; the wild ox, vv. 9–12; the ostrich, vv. 13–18; the horse, vv. 19–25; the hawk, v. 26; the eagle, vv. 27–30). See note on 38:4–38. (CSB)

38:39 *lion*. The Lord now turns to the kingdom of wild animals. Asian lions, smaller and more aggressive than African lions, once roamed throughout southeastern Europe, the Near East, North

Africa, and into India. The Lord cared for them, providing instinctual direction (v 40) and unique abilities. (TLSB)

In our country we don't see lions except in zoos and circuses. In ancient time, particularly in the Middle East, it was not unusual for people to see lions in the open. No doubts Job had seen them. People were aware of the presence of lions and treated them with great respect. (PBC)

38:41 *provides food for the raven.* God cares for and feeds all the birds, of which the raven is representative (e.g., compare Lk 12:24 with Mt 6:26). (CSB)

Young ravens are similarly cared for by the Lord. The psalmist reminds us, “The eyes of all look to You, and ... You satisfy the desire of every living thing” (Ps 145:15–16). (TLSB)

One of the least attractive of birds, it is a scavenger that feeds on rotten flesh and makes a rather unglamorous croaking noise as it flies. As long as her baby birds are unable to take care of themselves the raven searches for food to satisfy their hunger. As different as ravens and lions are, they have one important thing in common: they must search for food for themselves and their young. God has given them the ability to do so. (PBC)