

JOB

Chapter 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.”

39:1 *mountain goats*. Perhaps ibex, which live on extremely steep cliffs even today in Israel. Known to give birth speedily and without complications. A newborn kid is able to walk within a day and to run and jump within 48 hours. The Lord has established the orderly times for all these nearly miraculous events, in the complete ignorance of human beings. (TLSB)

The mountain goat, also known as the ibex, inhabits the steep cliffs of the wilderness. It is still found in various parts of the Middle East. It is very shy and timid. As a protection against hostile forces God has endowed this animal with a keen sense of smell, sure and nimble feet that enable it to climb rocks and run swiftly, and a tan color that blends in well with the rocky hillside. God has created this animal to be totally independent of any human help. (PBC)

39:5 *wild donkey*. See 24:5; see also the description of Ishmael in Gen 16:12 and note there (Away from human settlements, Ishmael would roam the desert like a wild donkey). (CSB)

In the opening chapter of this book the writer informs us that Job owned 500 donkeys (1:3). In the closing chapter he tells us that the number of donkeys was doubled to 1000 (42:12). Those were domesticated animals that were useful to the owner for labor and transportation, and milk. The donkey mentioned in these four verses of this chapter is a different breed, was wild donkey. It would be difficult if not impossible to tame him. He is a free and wide-ranging animal who inhabits desolate places, “salt flats.” Like other animals he craves salt to supplement his diet of grass. He also shies away from venturing to a city where people might disturb his carefree lifestyle. He enjoys his unlimited freedom. He stands in sharp contrast to the slow, plodding and submissive domesticated donkey. And yet the two kinds of animals had something in common. Both the wild donkey and the domesticated donkey were created by the all-wise and all-powerful God, who watches over both and provides for them. (PBC)

39:6 *salt land*. Asiatic wild donkeys can live where vegetation and water are very scarce and where no other large animal could be supported. Researchers have observed that the wild donkey can live without water longer than any other animal in the horse family. These donkeys were unperturbed by the fear of being domesticated (v 7). They lived in relative safety on the open salt flats near the Salt Sea, where they could see humans from a great distance. (TLSB)

39:9–12 As there was an implied contrast between the wild donkey and the domestic donkey (see v. 7), here there is a more explicit contrast between the wild ox and the domestic ox. (CSB)

Under no circumstances would this ox consent to submit to Job or serve him. (PBC)

39:9 *wild ox*. Hbr uncertain. Suggests an enormous beast with great horns, probably a kind of bison. Word is sometimes translated “unicorn” (KJV), but with no justification; word implies the animal had two large horns. Ancient rulers hunted wild buffalo; their extraordinary strength was proverbial (Nu 24:8). Undomesticated animals in this section of God’s speech are still cared for by the Lord Himself. (TLSB)

39:11 *strength is great*. In the OT, the wild ox (the now virtually extinct aurochs) often symbolizes strength (see, e.g., Nu 23:22; 24:8; Dt 33:17; Ps 29:6). Next to the elephant and rhinoceros, the wild ox was the largest and most powerful land animal of the OT world. (CSB)

39:13–18† This stanza is unique in the discourses, because in it the Lord asks Job no questions. (CSB)

This description of the ostrich provides a comic shift. (TLSB)

39:13 *pinions and feathers of the stork*. A stork’s wings were particularly impressive (see Zec 5:9). (CSB)

Hbr *chasideh*; can be translated as “gracious”; i.e., the ostrich’s wings are graceful, yet lack an actual functional purpose for flight. (TLSB)

In sharp contrast to the sections that precede and follow, this passage describes a creature that appears to be stupid, awkward, and comical. In these lines God describes a female ostrich. She has a small head attached to a large body by a long, skinny neck. She has long legs and short, stubby wings that are unable to lift the big bird into flight, but rather serve to enable her to run swiftly. With unattractive physical features and her swiftness of foot she reminds one of a camel. (PBC)

39:16 *deals cruelly*. Ostriches often clumsily trample on their own nests and break their own eggs. This gave rise to the folk saying “cruel as ostriches.” Yet the ostrich is capable of great speed when running and is respected for that fact (v 18). Not a bird for flight, the ostrich still is able to laugh at horses (v 18). (CSB)

39:18 *horse and his rider*. Forms a transition to the next paragraph. (CSB)

39:19–25 The horse is the only domestic animal in the discourses. This fact, though unexpected, serves the Lord’s purpose, since it is specifically the war horse that is in view. (CSB)

This eloquent passage gives us one of the most striking descriptions of an animal in all literature. The horse is no doubt the noblest of all domesticated animals. It is a creature of true beauty. (PBC)

39:19 *horse*. Only domesticated animal in this list. Horses, employed chiefly in warfare, were imported from the steppes of Central Asia, first appearing in Mesopotamia and Egypt around 2000 BC. Horses were valued for their speed, strength, and aggressiveness. Thus, in Job’s time, horses were seen as awesome wonder-animals. (TLSB)

39:20 *like a locust*. Horses and locusts are compared also in Jer 51:27; Rev 9:7; cf. Joel 2:4. (CSB)

39:21 Battle imagery. Mighty chargers often brought terror to warriors who were used to fighting on foot. Spirited steeds of beauty, strength, and speed were nearly fearless; they reflected a superior confidence in their own Creator. (TLSB)

39:24 *swallows the ground*. Distances were quickly diminished as the horses sped across the open plains. (TLSB)

39:26 *hawk*. The sparrow hawk, not resident to Palestine, stops there in its migration south for the winter. (CSB)

Large bird of prey, perhaps a falcon (Lv 11:16 and Dt 14:15 are the only other places where the word is used). These birds follow the thermal updrafts as they effortlessly soar above the earth. They picture humanity’s desire for freedom in their awesome ability for unfettered flight. (TLSB)

The Bible mentions the hawk in only two other passages, Leviticus 11:16 and Deuteronomy 14:15. In both passages it is listed among the unclean birds that Israelites were forbidden to eat. The hawk is a bird that can swiftly swoop down on other birds and kill them. (PBC)

39:27 *eagle*. Or possibly “vulture” (see v. 30). (CSB)

Another bird of prey, perhaps a vulture. Eagles always locate their nests in the tops of trees or in craggy overhangs in rocky heights. In Ex 19:4, God says He carried Israel as on “eagles’ wings.” So Job has been carried by the Lord, despite his ignorance of God’s preserving presence (2:6). (TLSB)

In its graceful flight the eagle can swoop down upon its prey with uncanny precision and incredible speed. God has endowed this majestic bird with unusually keen sight so that it can detect its victim from a distance and quickly pounce upon it and carry it off to its nest. (PBC)

In this speech God's description of selected animals began with the lion, the king of beasts, and ends with the eagle, king of birds. In between he directed Job's attention to a lineup of interesting animals and birds. These are only a small sampling of God's marvelous creatures. As with Job we ponder the great mystery of God's work of creation, must we not bow in deep humility and praise our almighty God? And when we pause to reflect that this same God created us human beings in his own image and also redeemed us through his Son Jesus Christ, we must surely joyfully exclaim with David: "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). (PBC)

38:1–40:2 In the whirlwind, Job comes face-to-face with the reality of his humanity. Although Job accused the Lord of being unfair, God responded with a mild, yet firm counteraccusation. The Lord reminded Job that He not only created the world but also continues to care for it. We, too, question God and wonder whether He is actually in charge of the daily events of our lives. Coming face-to-face with our Creator brings us to our knees. Yet the fearsome face of the Creator also smiles on Job and shows him mercy. • Thank You, Lord, for answering us face-to-face in the person of Your Son. His life, death, and resurrection give us answers to our deepest questions. Your love is awesome. Amen. (TLSB)