

The God of Nature

by Ray C. Stedman

Surely Chapters 38-41 are the climax of this great book of Job. Here the voice of Jehovah himself is heard, speaking out of the whirlwind. There are many places in the Scriptures where God symbolizes his presence by a wind.

- Jesus said to Nicodemus, “The Spirit of God is like the wind. It is sovereign, it blows where it will, and except a man be born of wind and water he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,” {cf, John 3:8}. Jesus used two symbols – the wind for the Spirit of God, and the water for the Word of God. We are born again by the Word and by the Spirit of God.
- On the day of Pentecost God turned on a mighty, rushing wind, like a great siren, that brought the whole city down to the temple courts to see the strange phenomenon that was taking place there: the speaking in other tongues and the dancing flames of fire upon the heads of the disciples.

So this is a frequent symbol in Scripture for God. Out of this whirling wind the voice of God comes.

Chapter 38:

**Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:
“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?
Gird up your loins like a man,
I will question you, and you shall declare to me.” {Job 38:1-3 RSV}**

Some of the commentators have thought that perhaps those words were addressed to Elihu, that God is saying to the young man, “Who is this that darkens counsel with words without knowledge?” But, at the end of the book, Job applies these words to himself, and therefore it is clear that it is not Elihu but Job that God is speaking to. God challenges Job and says that Job, by the ignorant words that he uttered, has been darkening the light that could have come to him.

I wonder how many times we have done that same thing? God is trying to speak to us but we have darkened the light by ignorant words of complaint, rebuke, and rebellion against his will.

So Jehovah challenges Job, “Gird up your loins like a man and let me ask you some questions. You have claimed that you want a trial before me. Well, let me examine your competence to see if you can answer some simple questions first.” He indicates that the questions will be those that a man can answer, and, in the account that follows, God’s great discourse to Job, which runs through Chapters 38 to 41, you have the voice of Jehovah subjecting Job to a series of very penetrating questions in three different areas:

- First, he examines his creative wisdom in the world around and in the heavens.
- Then, second, God turns to the theme of his providential care of the animal creation, and what he does in that area.
- And finally, he turns to his restraint of the forces of evil at work in the world.

We are only going to take the first two of these, covering Chapters 38 and 39. Jehovah introduces this with a series of questions about *the foundations of the earth*, Verse 4:

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

**Tell me, if you have understanding,
Who determined its measurements – surely
you know!**

**Or who stretched the line upon it?
On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone,
when the morning stars sang together,
and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”
{Job 38:4-7 RSV}**

There is no more magnificent poetry in all the world than in this section of the book of Job. It is put in marvelous language. Here God is calling Job’s attention to some of the bases upon which the earth itself rests. He calls them “the foundations of the earth,” and challenges Job to explain them. Notice how simply he puts the questions. These are just kindergarten questions. They come in terms of “Where?” and “Who?” and “What?” and “When?” did these things happen.

First, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” Where was man? He was not even in existence yet. That is why in all the centuries since this question was asked of Job, man has never been able to settle the question of origin. Where did the universe come from? How did it originate? Who brought it into being? What process was followed? The whole world is debating that question today, but man has never been able to answer the question of the origin of the earth because he was not there to observe it.

Then in Verse 5 the Almighty infers that someone helped him in this:

**“Who determined its measurements –
surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?” {Job
38:5 RSV}**

There is at least a hint there that someone assisted him in this work. You recall how the Gospel of John begins:

**In the beginning was the Word, and the
Word was with God, and the Word was
God... all things were made through him,
and without him was not anything made
that was made. {John 1:1, 1:3 RSV}**

There we learn that the Trinity was at work in creation.

In this question to Job there is a hint that God the Father was not alone in this work, that the other members of the Trinity were involved with it as well. Then Verse 6 is the question of what was the procedure. How did God hang the earth upon nothing, as Job himself put it earlier in this account?

Back in the days when the Scriptures were written down, the scientific world of that day believed that the earth was flat. There were strange, legendary accounts of how the earth came into being, that it floated on elephants’ backs, or rested on turtles swimming in the sea, this kind of thing. But in the book of Job you have the clear statement that God has hung the earth upon nothing.

Now God asks Job, “How did that happen?” The only answer that science can give today is gravity, but nobody knows what gravity is. It is just a word we use, but it does not tell us what it is. Here again is a question that we still cannot answer today. How is the earth suspended between the various heavenly bodies in such a way that it moves in such orderly procession through the illimitable reaches of space? How can it be? We still do not know. Finally, God says, “Were you there when it happened?” and he links it with a tremendous event when the whole creation seemed to break into harmony and melody, “when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.”

Then, in the next section, God turns to the most prominent feature on the earth, *the sea*. If you look at the pictures of the earth as it is seen from space, you will see that three-quarters of the globe is covered with water. God employs a beautiful symbolism here, as though the oceans suddenly were born, like a baby springing forth from the womb, Verse 8:

**“Or who shut in the sea with doors,
when it burst forth from the womb;
when I made clouds its garment,**

**and thick darkness its swaddling band,
and prescribed bounds for it,
and set bars and doors,
and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no
farther,
and here shall your proud waves be
stayed?’” {Job 38:8-11 RSV}**

We know that water is made up of two invisible gases, hydrogen and oxygen, and when these two are combined, a visible substance, water, springs into being. What a dramatic moment when God caused these invisible gases to join together in such quantities that an ocean suddenly spread across this planet! God is asking Job about it, but Job knows nothing at all about it.

Yet the emphasis of this seems to be on how the ocean is controlled. God said he puts bounds to it and said to it, “Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed.” It has always seemed to me symbolic of the ways of God that the substance he uses to keep the ocean in its bed, sand, is one of the most shifting, unreliable substances we know of. Beaches of sand hold the oceans in place and say, “Thus far shall you come.”

Then, in the next verses, Jehovah examines Job on some of the secret processes of earth. First, on *the matters of day and night*, Verse 12:

**“Have you commanded the morning since
your days began,
and caused the dawn to know its place,
that it might take hold of the skirts of the
earth,
and the wicked be shaken out of it?
It is changed like clay under the seal,
and it is dyed like a garment.
From the wicked their light is withheld,
and their uplifted arm is broken.” {Job
38:12-15 RSV}**

God describes here how the sun rises in a different place every morning, changing according to the seasons, moving from north to south. His question is, “Have you caused the dawn to know its place? Are you the one? Are you able to tell the sun just where to get up so that it marks the exact season of the year?” Then he says, “Are you able to control the effect of the light upon society?”

Light “takes hold of the skirts of the earth,” he says.

Have you ever seen the sun coming up and noticed how the fingers of light seemed to lay hold of the darkness and dissipated it? This imagery speaks of how the wicked are shaken out of it. They hide from the light and go back into their dens. Then as the day goes on the sun, rising and coursing across the heavens, changes the colors of things. Like clay under the seal it is dyed like a garment. We know how scenery is changed by the different positions of the sun through the day. In the evening hours when the redness spreads across it, what a different cast it puts upon things. God is asking Job, “Can you do this? Are you able to change it all like this?” Finally, “Can you govern how the light affects the night and controls the length of time that darkness prevails (when the wicked operate) and to stop them in their deeds (when the daylight comes again) – their uplifted arm is broken?”

Then he speaks of *the deep things of the earth*, Verse 16:

**“Have you entered into the springs of the
sea,
or walked in the recesses of the deep?”
{Job 38:16 RSV}**

It is remarkable that we are only now beginning to plumb and map some of the deep places of the sea. The secrets of the deep are still hidden to us, and we are just beginning to get into it.

Then God says, “How about beyond life, Job? Can you understand that?” Verse 17:

**“Have the gates of death been revealed to
you,
or have you seen the gates of deep dark-
ness?” {Job 38:17 RSV}**

This is still a mystery to us. Science is unable to help us here.

Verse 18 represents, perhaps, one question out of all this list that we can answer today:

**“Have you comprehended the expanse of
the earth?
Declare, if you know all this.” {Job 38:18
RSV}**

“Do you know what is on the surface of the globe?” Today, perhaps, we can say “Yes,” we pretty well know what is there. We have mapped most of the earth – not all of it – but it has almost all been explored. So thousands of years after Job we have come to an answer on that. We know that you can take a jet plane in London, have lunch in New York and dinner in San Francisco, and, of course, baggage in Buenos Aires! We have covered the expanse of the earth at last, even though there are still some areas we do not know much about. But how long it has taken to solve even one of these simple problems that Job was asked about.

God goes into other mysteries, *the common things of life*, Verse 19:

**“Where is the way to the dwelling of light,
and where is the place of darkness,
that you may take it to its territory
and that you may discern the paths to its
home?
You know, for you were born then
and the numbers of your days is great!”
{Job 38:19-21 RSV}**

God heaps irony on Job. What he is asking, basically, is, “Do you understand how light is produced?” Once again, the scientific world is baffled even today by that. Two conflicting theories exist that try to explain how light emerges, how it suddenly comes into being, but no one knows. We cannot yet “take it to its territory and discern the paths to its home.” We are unable to solve even that simple process.

Verse 22:

**“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 trou-
ble,
for the day of battle and war?” {Job
38:22-23 RSV}**

That verse is to me one of the most intriguing verses in all of the Scriptures. For years I have wondered what that is talking about. It suggests that there is some hidden process in the formation of snow and hail – the process of vaporizing or freezing or whatever it may be – that will release

tremendous power which God says man will probably discover in the time when the whole of the earth is engaged in battle and war. Something is hidden there. I have asked scientists about that and they shake their heads and say they do not know what that means. But there must be something there.

God says, “I have reserved it for the time of trouble.” That is almost always in Scripture a reference to the last days, the terrible time of Jacob’s trouble, when the great tribulation bursts out upon the earth. God says “I have hidden something in the snow and the hail, Job, do you understand that?”

Can you imagine what Job must be looking like by now? – all these questions coming and he has not got one of them right yet!

Then God goes on, Verse 24:

**“What is the way to the place where the
light is distributed,
or where the east wind is scattered upon
the earth?**

**Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of
rain,
and a way for the thunderbolt,
to bring rain on a land where no man is,
on the desert in which there is no man;
to satisfy the waste and desolate land,
and to make the ground put forth grass?
Has the rain a father,
or who has begotten the drops of dew?”
{Job 38:24-28 RSV}**

Here Jehovah is examining the forces in the common phenomenon of a storm, and he says, “Can you understand this, Job?” Many of the scholars have been puzzled by the way this section begins. The question is, “What is the way to the place where the light is distributed?” For years many have wondered why God begins with light being distributed, but at last we have begun to get a little clue as to what this may mean, for now the scientific world knows that all energy comes to us from the sun. It is the rays of the sun, broken into various forms of ray activity – x-rays, actinic rays, rays of various forms – that activate processes in the world around us from which all functioning in the natural world comes. Energy comes from the sun and it produces various phenomena, including the evaporation of water, the formation of clouds; it

produces thunder and the release of great bolts of lightning. All this is coming, ultimately, from the rays of the sun as they strike the earth. It is amazing how much is revealed here that we have painfully worked out after thousands of years of scientific endeavor, but it all seems to fit into what God is saying to and asking of Job.

Then God speaks of the way he takes care of the desert. "Who cares for the desert?" Have you ever flown the entire distance of this country from coast to coast and noticed, as I have, that though we think of this as a populated country, there are hundreds of thousands of acres of desert? "Who cares for that," God says. Who brings the rain to cause the desert blossoms to come that no man ever sees, except God himself? As the poet says,

"Full many a rose is born
to blush unseen
And waste its sweetness
On the desert air."

The only answer, of course, is God does this. Man does not think of those things. He has a hard enough time handling his own problems, let alone taking care of the deserts of the earth.

Then God asks, "Has the rain a father, or who has begotten the drops of dew?" Science now knows that the rain does have a father. Before rain can form into drops, there must be dust in the air, and raindrops form around these little specks of dust. That is why we spray the clouds with certain substances to try to increase the rainfall – because we know the rain has a father.

Then in Verses 29-30 you have *Jehovah's* questions about the frost:

**"From whose womb did the ice come forth,
and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of
heaven?
The waters become hard like stone,
and the face of the deep is frozen." {Job
38:29-30 RSV}**

Who understands the processes by which ice is formed? We see it happen but nobody has ever been able to answer the question why water, when it freezes, does something that hardly any other substance on earth does. Instead of contracting like all normal substances, water expands when it freezes. That simple fact makes life possible on

earth. It would be impossible to have humanity here if water acted like everything else. But it does not. God is asking some very penetrating questions, and, for him, they are simple ABC's of life, but Job is unable to answer them.

In Verse 31 the Almighty turns to explore the heavens. First, *the stellar heavens*:

**"Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
or loose the cords of Orion?
Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their
season,
or can you guide the Bear with its chil-
dren?
Do you know the ordinances of the heav-
ens?
Can you establish their rule on the earth?"
{Job 38:31-33 RSV}**

From the very beginning of time men have known that in some strange way the stars affect the earth. No one has ever been quite able to analyze it. Many wild guesses have been made, and many strange, so-called sciences have emerged from it, such as astrology, which insists that every human life is governed by what the stars do. Many people read their horoscopes every day to see what the stars have said they can do that day.

But that is not what God is asking about here. He is saying, "What about the influence the stars seem to have upon the seasons? The Pleiades, that little circle of stars high in the heavens appears in the springtime, it ushers forth the spring. What he is asking here is, "Can you bring the spring out in its season?" Orion is the mighty hunter who strides across the winter skies. You can see him this month of December. What God is asking Job is, "Can you produce winter, in its season?" "Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth?" It is a bit doubtful as to what that word means, but many of the scholars take it as referring to the constellations that make up the zodiac. He is asking, "Can you control the zodiac and its influence upon the affairs of men?" The Bear is what we call the "Great Dipper," and it points unerringly to the north. (If you stay up all night in the open and observe the stars, you will see them wheel in an endless circle around the north.) So the Great Bear points to the north, and in Scripture the north is always seen as the seat of God, so that the whole universe seems to revolve

around his throne. Job is being questioned here as to how much he understands about this.

Now, even astronomy today does not understand this. There are mysterious objects in space we know nothing about. These great “black holes” are to us a puzzling, mysterious phenomenon that we have not begun to understand. So we cannot go much further than Job in the answering of these questions.

Verses 34-38 cover *the atmospheric heavens*:

**“Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
that a flood of waters may cover you?**

[How much would you give today to be able to do that? – to say to the clouds, “Come on, rain!”]

**Can you send forth lightnings,
that they may go and say to you, ‘Here we
are’?**

**Who has put wisdom in the clouds,
or given understanding to the mists?**

Who can number the clouds by wisdom?
[Here’s a tough one!]

**Or who can tilt the waterskins of the
heavens,
when the dust runs into a mass
and the clods cleave fast together?” {Job
38:34-38 RSV}**

When you have a drought and you desperately need rain, who can say to the heavens “Rain,” and it will come? God is teaching us some mighty lessons right now in this area. He is showing us the impotence of man and of science to solve some of the most fundamental problems of life.

Now in these last three verses, which really belong with Chapter 39, God turns to his providential care of *the animal world*. He begins by saying that he supplies food for them:

**“Can you hunt the prey for the lion,
or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,
when they crouch in their dens,
or lie in wait in their covert?
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 RSV}**

What do you think we would do if God suddenly gave to mankind the responsibility to feed the animal world, as well as ourselves? When you

consider the mess we are making of welfare today, can you imagine how much worse it would be if all the animals had to stand in line for food stamps? Can you see them shivering and dying and starving to death waiting for the red tape of government to grind its eternal way before they get anything to eat? God is saying to Job, “Do you handle that sort of thing?” No, he does not. Yet the animals exist and have existed for centuries. They prosper and increase when man is out of the picture. God preserves the species; it is man who wipes them out.

So he goes on, “What about *obstetrical care for the animals*?”

**“Do you know when the mountain goats
bring forth?**

**Do you observe the calving of the hinds?
Can you number the months that they ful-
fill,**

**and do you know the time when they bring
forth,**

**when they crouch, bring forth their off-
spring,**

**and are delivered of their young?
Their young ones become strong, they grow
up in the open;**

**they go forth, and do not return to them.”
{Job 39:1-4 RSV}**

“Do you handle that? Have you got a big Blue Cross plan for the animal world to take care of them when they come to birth?” No, Job has to hang his head again. He does not know anything about it and neither do we.

So God goes on to examine the varied nature of the animal world. He examines *the wide-ranging freedom of the wild ass*, Verse 7:

**“He scorns the tumult of the city;
he hears not the shouts of the driver.
He ranges the mountains as his pasture,
and he searches after every green thing.”
{Job 39:7-8 RSV}**

“Who made animals to have these distinctive natures and to be driven by such powerful instincts that they will invariably do what they were made to do, and yet not be like other animals in this regard. Who gave them those instincts?” That is the question Job faces.

God speaks then of *the wild ox*,

**“Is the wild ox willing to serve you?
Will he spend the night at your crib?
Can you bind him in the furrow with ropes,
or will he harrow the valleys after you?
Will you depend on him because his
strength is great,
and will you leave to him your labor?
Do you have faith in him that he will re-
turn,
and bring your grain to your threshing
floor?” {Job 39:9-12 RSV}**

The untamable nature of certain animals is something that God alone has given them.

Then he speaks of *the stupidity of the ostrich*, and he himself takes the blame for it. This is, I think, one of the most humorous passages in Scripture:

**“The wings of the ostrich wave proudly;
but are they the pinions and plumage of
love?
For she leaves her eggs to the earth,
and lets them be warmed on the ground,
forgetting that a foot may crush them,
and that the wild beast may trample them.
She deals cruelly with her young, as if they
were not hers;
though her labor be in vain, yet she has no
fear;
because God has made her forget wisdom,
and given her no share in understanding.
When she rouses herself to flee,
she laughs at the horse and his rider.”
{Job 39:13-18 RSV}**

An ostrich can outrun a horse, and yet it is so stupid that it walks off and leaves its eggs right out in the open! It will not take care of its young. But God says, “I like it that way, I made her that way.” The ostrich, the camel and some of these other strange animals show that God has a sense of humor.

When I was in Australia I saw the duck-billed platypus, which looks like it was put together from all the left over spare parts of creation. Why does God make animals like that? Well, I think it is largely to show us certain characteristics of our humanity. That is what he is describing here.

In Verses 19-25 you have one of the most beautifully poetic descriptions of *the courage of the horse*:

**“Do you give the horse his might?
Do you clothe his neck with strength?
Do you make him leap like the locust?
His majestic snorting is terrible.
He paws in the valley, and exults in his
strength;
he goes out to meet the weapons.
He laughs at fear, and is not dismayed;
he does not turn back from the sword.
Upon him rattle the quiver,
the flashing spear and the javelin.
With fierceness and rage he swallows the
ground;
he cannot stand still at the sound of the
trumpet.
When the trumpet sounds, he says ‘Aha!’
He smells the battle from afar,
the thunder of the captains, and the
shouting.” {Job 39:19-25 RSV}**

From time immemorial man has used the horse in battle because the horse has a unique character – he loves conflict and competition.

When I was a boy in high school I had my own horse. He was a kind of maverick, a short animal (his name was Shorty), but he had an unconquerable spirit. He would never let another horse get ahead of him. I had all I could do to keep him under control when some other horse tried to pass him. He would burst himself to get out in front, because he had a competitive spirit. He loved a race, and wanted to be right in it. This is the nature of a horse.

Now who made him that way? That is God’s question.

Then he speaks of the hawk and the eagle, and of their strange ways, the keenness of their sight, and the fierceness of their character.

Finally, he concludes with this question, Chapter 40:

**And the LORD said to Job:
“Shall a faultfinder contend with the Al-
mighty?
He who argues with God, let him answer
it.” {Job 40:1-2 RSV}**

“Are you able, Job? How have you done in this examination? I have asked all these questions. How many have you got right? If you can’t handle these little things, how are you going to press me on these great questions of what lies behind the strange experiences of life?” Verse 3:

**Then Job answered the LORD:
“Behold, I am of small account; what shall I
answer thee?
I lay my hand on my mouth.
I have spoken once, and I will not answer;
twice, but I will proceed no further.” {Job
40:3-5 RSV}**

Job is silenced by this display of God’s creative wisdom. What Job says is, basically, “I see that I am not in the same league as you are. I am of small account.” Remember, earlier he had said, “If I could just come before the Lord, like a prince would I come before him. I would present my case and prove myself right,” {cf, Job 31:37}. But now he says, “I’m not in the same league at all. I’m just small peanuts. I couldn’t handle this.” But notice, he has not gone deep enough yet. Job is silenced, but he is not convinced. He has not yet seen what the basic problem is. He has not learned what God had in mind when he invited Satan to try him in the first place.

So Jehovah picks it up again, and, in the next account, he produces by the use of symbols, a revelation of truth about what he is doing in the life of Job that leaves Job absolutely without an an-

swer, leaves him humbled before him, spread out on his face before God, waiting for God to deliver him and restore him – which he immediately does. But so far he has only been silenced.

This often happens to us. Sometimes our troubles bring us to a place where we shut up. We stop complaining, but that is not what God wants. What he wants is for us to trust him, to put the matter back into his hands and believe that he is working things out right.

God will show us in our next study why he has to do it this way.

Prayer:

Like Job, Father, we bow in silence before you. Who are we to accuse the Almighty? Who are we to charge you with injustice? Who are we to complain about our lot in life and say it is wrong, that we have been treated unfairly? Lord, we too have been silenced, but we pray that you will take us deeper even as you do Job, and in graciousness show to us mighty things that you are working out through the very circumstances of our lives that we never dreamed about. Help us to understand what is going on. We pray that we may bow before your majesty, and humbly and graciously and with sincerity ascribe to you the glory that is due your name. In Jesus’ name, Amen.