

Job 38-39 – “The LORD Answered Job”
Psalm 29 (65, 148)
Luke 12:13-34

July 1, 2012

God now asks, “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?”

God very clearly addresses Job in chapters 38-41,
but of course, Job hasn’t spoken since chapter 31.

The last voice that we have heard (for the last six chapters)
was Elihu.

Elihu had claimed perfect knowledge (36:2-4),
and claimed to speak on behalf of the one who has perfect knowledge (37:16).

So when the LORD says,
“who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge,”
we need to catch a glimpse of the divine smirk
as the LORD chuckles at his court jester, Elihu,
even as the LORD turns his attention directly to Job.

Certainly, in 42:3, Job will accept these words as being directed at him.
So we must say that the LORD’s words are focused on Job.
But if *Job* darkens counsel by words without knowledge,
how much more do Elihu and the three friends darken counsel!

And with that divine smirk, Elihu disappears from the book of Job.
Elihu’s task is finished.
The court fool has played his role.
Everyone has had their chuckle – and their come-uppance –
because just when you start laughing at Elihu,
he pops back with one of those zingers that puts you in your place!

And now the voice of the LORD sounds forth from the whirlwind!
We sing of that voice in Psalm 29.

Sing Psalm 29
Read Luke 12:13-34

Today we finally come to God’s speeches in the book of Job.
Job spent 25 chapters waiting for God to say something.
Elihu spent six chapters insisting that God would never show up!

And when God shows up, he doesn’t seem all that interested in answering Job’s questions!

What do you make of this?

After all Job has been through,
we want God to speak words of comfort –
we don't want God to thunder out of the whirlwind!

But then again, remember what Job has said!
Job did not ask God to “make everything better.”
Job did not ask God to “explain *why* you did this.”

Job asked God for the opportunity to lay his case before God Almighty.
Job wanted an audience before the heavenly king
where he could lay out his lawsuit
demonstrating his innocence before God.

His friends all told him,
“Don't be nuts – that'll never happen!”
Elihu said
“Don't waste your time – I'll speak for God!”

And then, contrary to every expectation,
God shows up.

Have you ever wanted God to show up and listen to your complaint?
If you listen to what he says to Job,
you will hear what he has to say to you.
The author of the book of Job knows that *everyone* has these questions,
and so he tells us the story of Job –
the most righteous man who ever lived –
the suffering servant of the LORD,
who feared God and turned away from evil.
God wants you to hear his answer to Job as his answer to you as well.
If you are going to bring a complaint to God,
you need to remember who you are dealing with!

(read verses 1-3)

Introduction: The Divine Whirlwind (38:1-3)

38 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^[a] like a man;*
I will question you, and you make it known to me.

Before we get to what God says, we need to pay to *who* says it!
The LORD – Yahweh.
All throughout the wisdom debate,
Job and his friends have spoken of God (Elohim)
or the Almighty (Shaddai).

Not Yahweh.

Now Yahweh speaks.

We have been listening to a wisdom debate between Edomites –
people who do not know the covenant God of Israel.

But now the covenant God of Israel – Yahweh – answers Job out of the whirlwind.

As we saw last time, there are two words for whirlwind in Hebrew.

Elihu had used the other one – the one that refers to normal whirlwinds.

But now Yahweh appears in the divine whirlwind –

a whirlwind like the one that took Elijah into heaven –

a whirlwind like the one that appeared to Ezekiel.

Why is the use of the name Yahweh important?

Because as you listen to the “creational” language in chapters 38-39,
you need to hear Exodus language – covenant language –
the language of salvation in the background.

But we also need to pay attention to the person to whom the LORD is speaking:
“my servant Job.”

If Job is innocent – if Job has triumphed over his friends in the wisdom debate –
and if Job is truly the suffering servant of the Lord –
then why does God now speak to Job like this?

God has said of Job that there is no one like him on earth.

And now God is about to vindicate Job and exalt him.

But before he does, he wants to remind Job that no matter how innocent and good he is,
he is still but a man.

Job may be wiser than the wise men of Edom,
but how does he compare to God?

Gregory the Great wisely comments,

“But O how mightily is he exalted, who is so sublimely humbled!

O how great is the victory of the man, to have been foiled on comparison with God!

O how much greater is he than men, who is proved by testimony to be less than God!

For he is very mighty, who is proved by such questioning not to be mighty.”

<http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoralia/Book28.html>

1. Did You Form the Heavens, the Earth, or the Seas? [Days One, Two and Three] (38:4-30)

In verses 4-30, the LORD questions Job

as to where he was and what he was doing during the creation.

These 27 verses focus on the formation of the heavens, the earth and the seas –

roughly the same material that you find in the first three days of creation in Genesis 1. In Genesis 1, God is portrayed as the master craftsman who designs and builds the world as a temple – a holy dwelling place – where God may dwell with his people.

In Job 38, there are lots of architectural terms as well:

“the foundation of the earth” (v4) with its measurements (v5),
its bases and cornerstone (v6), doors and bars (v10), gates (v17) and storehouses (v22).

The LORD asks Job, “where were you” when I constructed the heavens, the earth, and the seas?

a. Where Were You When the Morning Stars Sang? (38:4-7)

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?

Now, what’s so interesting about God’s description of the creation is that he is constantly paraphrasing and quoting *Job!*.

Job had said that God “alone stretched out the heavens” (9:8)

and that God “stretches out the north over the void and hangs the earth on nothing” (26:7)

In other words, God now says, “I heard you.”

You have spoken rightly of me.

But my question for you is –

if you want to challenge me,

if you want to make your case,

then think about the implications of what you have already said.

We have seen throughout the book of Job that knowledge and power are closely related.

If you have knowledge, then you have power.

God is saying to Job –

you may know correct *words* –

but do you know the things themselves!

If you do, then you would have power over them.

b. Where Were You When I Set Limits for the Waters? (38:8-11)

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'?*

In verses 8-11 God speaks of the “birth” of the sea.

When the sea burst out of the primordial womb,
who set the limits of the waters?
Who established the clouds as its garment,
and the thick darkness as its swaddling band.

Job had used similar language to speak of his own birth in Job 3:

“Let the stars of its dawn be dark; let it hope for light, but have none,
nor see the eyelids of the morning,
because it did not shut the doors of my mother’s womb,
nor hide trouble from my eyes.” (3:10-11)

We saw back in Job 3, that Job had cursed the day of his birth in vain –
and now God reminds him of that, and says, in effect,
the only way for you to obliterate the day of your birth
would be if you were me!

Job had asked in chapter 3,

Why didn’t I die at birth?
Why is light given to him who is in misery?

God finally answers by using Job’s own language to describe the created order.

Job had wished that the night of his conception could have been blotted out.
But God is the one who orders day and night.

You said it was bad for that day to exist.
I say that *every day* is good.

c. Have You Commanded the Morning (38:12-15)

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.*

In verses 12-15, God asks,

“Have you commanded the morning?”

Does the dawn obey your command?

You may wonder why God brings up the wicked in verses 13 and 15.

Well, Job had spoken of

“those who rebel against the light, who are not acquainted with its ways,
and do not stay in its paths...
For deep darkness is morning to all of them;
for they are friends with the terrors of deep darkness.” (24:13, 17)

God now says,

If you only look at the wicked in terms of the here and now,
then yes, it may appear that deep darkness is their friend –
and the wicked get away with all sorts of evil.

But if you commanded the morning since your days began,
and caused the dawn to know its place –
then you would know the fate of the wicked.

And that fate is where God goes in verses 16-18:

d. Do You Understand the Gates of Death? (38:16-18)

- 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.”*

Then in verses 16-18, he turns to the gates of death –
the underworld – the deep – the gates of deep darkness.
And God asks, “Have the gates of death been revealed to you,
or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?”

Well, Job had said in 3:5, let the day perish on which I was born,
“Let gloom and deep darkness claim it.
Let clouds dwell upon it;
let the blackness of the day terrify it.”

Job *has* come to the very brink of the gates of death.

What God is doing is taking Job’s *correct* statements about God
and recasting them in order to show that all that Job has said about God is true –
but the result of Job’s speeches tended towards Job justifying himself;
whereas the same content, reoriented with God at the center,
would justify God!

Job has spoken rightly – but he has not yet seen what *God* is doing.

e. Where Is the Dwelling of Light? (38:19-24)

- 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?*

Then in verses 19-24, the LORD inquires into Job's knowledge regarding the dwelling of light. There are echoes of Job 28 here.

Job had reflected on the way to place of wisdom.

Job had said,

“From where, then does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding?
It is hidden from the eyes of all living and concealed from the birds of the air.
Abaddon and Death say, ‘We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.’
God understands the way to it, and he knows its place.” (28:20-23)

Again, God is saying “you have understood this correctly –
but think about the implications of what you have said!”

You can hear a little sarcasm in the LORD's voice when he says,

“You know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is great!” (v21)

f. Whence Come the Waters? (38:25-30)

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.*

In verses 25-30, the LORD turns to the waters,
and asks regarding Job's knowledge of the rain, the ice, and the dew.

Of course, Job had already said what God now says:

“For he [God] looks to the ends of the earth
and sees everything under the heavens.

When he gave to the wind its weight and apportioned the waters by measure,

when he made a decree for the rain and a way for the lightning of the thunder,
then he saw it and declared it; he established it and searched it out.” (28:24-27)

Why does God keep paraphrasing and quoting Job?

If God wanted to rebuke Job and shut him up proper,
then he’s not doing a very good job of it!

Now it’s true that God is revealing his glorious knowledge and power.
And the result is that Job looks very small next to the great and glorious God Almighty!

It is here that we need to see where God is going with his speech.

Because one day, God’s suffering Servant will walk in the recesses of the deep –
not just metaphorically!

Our Lord Jesus Christ will become in reality all that Job was in a picture.

All of these questions that God asks Job, he will ask Jesus.

And when God comes in the whirlwind to his beloved Son,
he will ask, “have the gates of death been revealed to you”
and Jesus will say, “Yes, and I have triumphed over them!”

When God asks, where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth,
he will say, “I was beside you as your wisdom and word!”

2. Did You Fill the Earth? (Days Four, Five and Six) (38:31-39:30)

Starting in chapter 38, verse 31, God turns to the themes of the second triad in the creation week,
days 4-6.

In days 1-3 God formed the heavens, the earth, and the seas.

In days 4-6 God filled the heavens, the earth, and the seas.

And now God questions Job regarding the filling of the earth.

a. Can You Control the Signs of the Heavens? (38:31-38)

³¹ *“Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades
or loose the cords of Orion?*

³² *Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth^[b] 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^[c]
or given understanding to the mind?^[d]*

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?*

In verses 31-38 the LORD asks if Job can govern the heavens.

In 9:9, Job had said that God “made the Bear and Orion,
the Pleiades and the chambers of the south.”

The constellations of the heavens were made by God
for signs and seasons – for the ordering of human life.

And now God says, can you establish the rule of the ordinances of the heavens?
God is the one who has put wisdom in the inward parts
and given understanding to the mind.

This theme of God as the one who gives wisdom and understanding,
then pervades the rest of the chapter (39).

**b. Can You Feed the Lions and Ravens, or Rule the Birth of Mountain Goats?
(38:39-39:4)**

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?*

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.*

In 38:39-39:4, the LORD then speaks of various animals:
the lion hunting prey,
the raven wandering, looking for food,
the mountain goats giving birth.

Do you understand all these things?

Science may help us with the ‘intellectual’ side of knowledge,
but God’s question goes beyond the intellectual.

Job has already demonstrated his wisdom in terms of understanding “what.”

But God’s question goes deeper:

do you have the wisdom to know how to provide food?
can you satisfy the appetite of the young lions?
Does your wisdom enable you to provide for all creatures?

The answer is clear: God does!

c. Can You Control the Donkey or Wild Ox? (39:5-12)

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?*

Likewise, in verses 5-12, the LORD asks Job if he controls the wild donkey or the wild ox.
If you leave them to their own devices, will they serve you?
(the implication is, that God leaves them to their own devices, and they serve him!)

d. Did You Form the Ostrich or Horse? (39:13-25)

¹³ *“The wings of the ostrich wave proudly,
but are they the pinions and plumage of love?^[e]
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,^[f]
she laughs at the horse and his rider.*

In verses 13-18, God speaks of the ostrich –
the most foolish of creatures, because she leaves her eggs on the ground,
and runs away (yet God provides for her).
“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.”

The image of the mighty war horse then connects to God’s next challenge:

- 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^[g] 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.*

The mighty war horse is not afraid of the sound of battle.

The ostrich uses speed to escape.

The horse uses his speed and strength to trample his foes to the ground.

In a cavalry charge, the main goal of the rider is to stay seated on the horse.

The horse will actually do most of the work of killing and maiming.

e. Does Your Understanding Guide the Hawk or the Eagle? (39:26-30)

- 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.”*

Verses 26-30 then turn to the hawk (v26) and the eagle (v27-30).

There are lots of different Hebrew words for birds of prey.

So the language of the “eagle” mounting up

convinced me of a connection that I had thought I had seen earlier.

Remember the horse and its rider in verse 18?

I wondered, is the horse and rider connected with the song of Moses?

And then I said, “No, that’s just too much of a stretch.”
But then the LORD asks Job in verse 27,
“Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up?”
This is the language of Exodus 19:4 –
“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians,
and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.”

As we often seen throughout Job,
the language of creation has lots of Exodus themes woven together into it.

Job and his friends do not know the story of the Exodus,
so we shouldn’t expect them to use that language “intentionally.”
But of course, the author of the book of Job *does* know the story of the Exodus!
And so he tells the story of Job in such a way
that his readers will hear echoes of God’s mighty deeds in Israel’s history.

Now, whether or not the *human author* of Job is doing this, I cannot answer for certain
(though I think it quite likely that he did!).

But beyond doubt, *God*, the divine author of Job, wants you to see these connections.
After all, Job is the suffering Servant,
the one who is all that Israel was called to be –
and the one who has suffered all that Israel was called to suffer.

Therefore, we should not be surprised to hear the language of Exodus and Restoration from Exile
applied to Job here at the end of the book!

Conclusion: “Who Wants to Argue with Me?” (40:1-2)

40 And the LORD said to Job:

² “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?

He who argues with God, let him answer it.”

“Faultfinder” is too strong a translation.

The verb *yasar* is a common word that means “to discipline, chasten, or admonish.”

The noun *yisor* is derived from that root,
but only appears here in the Hebrew Bible.

The root is found in Proverbs 19:18,
“Discipline your son while there is hope...”
or Psalm 118:18,
“the LORD has chastened me severely”

Indeed, it is hard to find a negative use of “*yasar*.”
The whole idea of chasten, admonish, or discipline in the Bible
generally carries a positive sense of correction.
So I would suggest that instead of “faultfinder”

God is addressing Job as one who has chastised his friends *properly*.

And the verb here “to contend” is the same verb that Job has used
when he said that he wanted to file his complaint with God.
This is the verb used of the covenant lawsuit that the prophets brought against the people of God.
The LORD now says to Job,
 You who have chastened and admonished your friends,
 do you now wish to bring your complaint – your lawsuit –
 before me?
 You have defeated your friends in the wisdom debate.
 You have disciplined them.
You win!
Here I am.
 Make your case.

Job now has his opportunity!
 God showed up!
 And yes, God has shown up in the whirlwind –
 he has displayed his glory.
 But God has offered to Job *precisely* what Job had requested.

You have disciplined others – you have admonished the fools –
 now bring your legal case before me!

Have you ever wished that God would show up,
 so that you could give him a piece of your mind?
Have you ever thought that you had a just complaint
 that God had better listen to?!

Well, Job certainly did!

And yet listen to his reply:

Job’s Reply: “I Lay My Hand on My Mouth” (40:3-5)

³ *Then Job answered the LORD and said:*

⁴ *“Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?*

I lay my hand on my mouth.

⁵ *I have spoken once, and I will not answer;*

twice, but I will proceed no further.”

Now – notice two things about Job’s reply:

1) Job takes nothing back!

 Job does not say, “Oh, wow, I was wrong!”

 He does not back down from case that he had laid out before God
 in chapters 9-10, and again in 13-14,
 and defended in 16, 17, 19, and finally in chapters 29-31.

After all, if Job backs down and admits his fault,
then God would be proved a liar –
because God himself had declared that Job was blameless.
2) but secondly, notice that Job has nothing more to say.
All he can say is “Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?
I lay my hand on my mouth.”
Job had said that if God answered him,
God would shut him up.

Job has nothing to say, because as he listens to God’s questions,
he knows that he cannot answer God.
He sees the majesty of God – and he hears the voice of the LORD
thundering out of the whirlwind –
and he realizes “I have nothing further to say.”

As Isaiah will say,
“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.” (53:7)

God’s verdict at the end of the book will be that Job has spoken rightly of him.
Job, the innocent suffering servant,
must endure not only the death of his children and the destruction of his wealth,
not only his physical pain and suffering in disease,
not only the mockery and insults of his friends and companions,
but also the withering voice of the LORD
as it declares the mighty power and all-surpassing wisdom of God.

And in this way, our God shows us (as he showed Israel)
what our Lord Jesus Christ would have to endure.
The innocent one must suffer –
not only at the hands of sinners –
but also at the hands of his friends –
and even (dare I say it) at the hands of God himself!