

Session 19

*The Lord Speaks of the Complexities
of Nature to Humble Job*

Job 38:37–39:30

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Job 38:37 Who can number the clouds in wisdom? or who can stay the bottles of heaven,

Rain is the largest source of fresh water where rivers, lakes, streams, and aquifers are not accessible. All abundance, therefore, especially physical nourishment, comes from the processes that God has established to supply water to the earth. Mankind and the earth's creatures are only content, full, and satisfied because the Lord has furnished consistent natural laws of nature for them to be so.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 38:37

Who can number the clouds?—The word here rendered clouds (שחַקִּיִּם *shachaqiyim*) is applied to the clouds as made up of “small particles”—as if they were composed of fine dust, and hence, the word *number* is applied to them, not as meaning that the clouds themselves were innumerable, but that no one could estimate the number of particles which enter into their formation.

In wisdom—By his wisdom. Who has sufficient intelligence to do it?

Or who can stay the bottles of heaven?—Margin, as in Hebrew “cause to lie down.” The clouds are here compared with bottles, as if they held the water in the same manner; compare the notes at Job 26:8.

Job 38:38 When the dust groweth into hardness, and the clods cleave fast together?

Pulpit Commentary, Job 38:38

When the dust groweth into hardness. ‘*Aphar* (aw-FAR) (עֶפֶר) here, as often, means “earth,” or “soil,” rather than “dust.” When by the heat of the sun's rays the ground grows into hardness, and the clods cleave fast together, baked into a compact mass, then is the time when rain is most needed, and when the Almighty in his mercy commonly sends it. The consideration of inanimate nature here ends, with the result that its mysteries altogether transcend the human intellect, and render speculation on the still deeper mysteries of the moral world wholly vain and futile.

*Job 38:39–40 Wilt thou hunt the prey for the lion? or fill the appetite of the young lions,
40 When they couch in their dens, and abide in the covert to lie in wait?*

Shifting from the heavens, the Lord now directs Job's attention to the creatures of the earth, which God cares for through divine providence.

The text mentions lions, which many consider to be the most regal of nature's creatures, to show that even their needs are provided for by the Lord.

Just as man cannot care for himself without an environment supplied by God, likewise he cannot care for or sustain the well-being of any other of the earth's creatures without the natural agencies that God has created to maintain the earth's inhabitants.

Matthew Poole's Commentary, Job 38:39

Is it by thy care and providence that the lions, who live in desert places, are furnished with necessary provisions? This is justly mentioned as another wonderful work of God.

Job 38:41 Who provideth for the raven his food? when his young ones cry unto God, they wander for lack of meat.

It is not man but rather God Who provides food for the wild creatures such as the raven.

Psalms 147:9 He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry.

It is the Lord Who sustains not only man but also all the other wild creatures far removed from him.

Job 39:1–2 Knowest thou the time when the wild goats of the rock bring forth? or canst thou mark when the hinds do calve?

² Canst thou number the months that they fulfil? or knowest thou the time when they bring forth?

The Lord now asks Job what he knows about the wild goats that live in the uppermost mountains. If Job could speak very little about these majestic creatures who inhabit the loftiest regions of the earth, how could he know a God Whose habitation is heaven?

If he could not without great effort discern the ways of the mountain goat, which makes its home on some of the highest peaks of the earth, how could he so easily presume to understand the God of heaven, Whom no man can approach and is so much more a mystery than wild goats and their young?

Job 39:3 They bow themselves, they bring forth their young ones, they cast out their sorrows.

Continuing with the subject of the wild goats, the Lord reveals to Job how man has no role whatsoever in helping them bring forth their young since by divine providence they are born and survive in the harshest of wintry and barren environments without any assistance or help from man.

The Lord uses this to impress upon Job that unlike domesticated animals, many creatures of the earth do not depend on human aid whatsoever. They are God's creatures, they are under His care, and He abundantly supplies for them all that is critically needed for their survival.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 39:3

They bow themselves—literally, they curve or bend themselves; that is, they draw their limbs together.

They cast out their sorrows—That is, they cast forth the offspring of their pains, or the young which cause their pains. The idea seems to be, that they do this without any of the care and attention which shepherds are obliged to show to their flocks at such seasons. They do it when God only guards them; when they are in the wilderness or on the rocks

far away from the abodes of man. The leading thought in all this seems to be, that the tender care of God was over his creatures, in the most perilous and delicate state, and that all this was exercised where man could have no access to them, and could not even observe them.

Job 39:4 Their young ones are in good liking, they grow up with corn; they go forth, and return not unto them.

Though born in harsh and dangerous conditions, the young kids of the goats seemingly grow and develop like domesticated animals that are fed with corn. All this speaks to the Lord's wisdom as He has adapted so many of His creatures to survive and even thrive in precarious and dangerous environments, which even men find it extremely difficult and challenging to live in.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 39:4

They go forth, and return not unto them—God guards and preserves them, even when they wander away from their dam, and are left helpless. Many of the young of animals require long attention from man, many are kept for a considerable period by the side of the mother, but the idea here seems to be, that the young of the wild goat and of the fawn are thrown early on the providence of God, and are protected by him alone. The particular care of Providence over these animals seems to be specified because there are no others that are exposed to so many dangers in their early life.

If God provides for the survival and healthy development of young mountain goats, could He not also provide the necessary assistance and strength for Job to successfully overcome and gain victory in his trial?

And since He gives kids the ability to survive and flourish in the severest of habitats, could He not also provide for people the means to escape and gain victory over their temptations?

Just as harsh weather and rocky mountains cannot impede the birth or development of the mountain goat, so also is the Lord more than able to care for the needs of man, regardless of the challenging trials and temptations in his life.

Job 39:5–8 Who hath sent out the wild ass free? or who hath loosed the bands of the wild ass?

⁶ *Whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings.*

⁷ *He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver.*

⁸ *The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing.*

The wild ass spoken of here has no respect or desire for the bustling cities of man and is said to despise them. Instead, it prefers the mountains and the green and wide-open pastures that the Lord has provided not only for its survival but also for its solitude.

Some creatures the Lord has intended for domestication, and others, like the wild ass, He has established to be free from human servitude.

The Lord also delights in giving certain creatures freedom from domestication as much as He enjoys it when other animals provide both companionship and usefulness to man.

Job 39:9–12 Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib?

¹⁰ *Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? or will he harrow the valleys after thee?*

¹¹ *Wilt thou trust him, because his strength is great? or wilt thou leave thy labour to him?*

12 Wilt thou believe him, that he will bring home thy seed, and gather it into thy barn?

If God has decreed that it is necessary that some animals need not be under either human dependence or governance, then there is nothing any man can do that will enable him to reverse their natural and genetic independence.

If any creatures have been set free by God, men shall never be able to reverse the natural and free instincts He has imparted to them, which remain also critical for their survival.

Benson Commentary, Job 39:9

Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee—Canst thou tame him, and bring him into subjection to thy command? Or, abide by thy crib?—Will he suffer himself to be tied, or confined there all night, and kept for the work of the next day as the oxen are? Surely not. It is much disputed among the learned, whether this reem, which is the Hebrew name of the animal here spoken of, be the rhinoceros, or a certain kind of wild goat, called orix, or a kind of wild bull, which seems most probable, both from the description of it here and elsewhere in Scripture. Schultens inclines to this opinion, thinking it to be the Arabian buffalo of the bull species, but absolutely untameable, and which the Arabians frequently hunt.

Job 39:13–18 Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks? or wings and feathers unto the ostrich?

14 Which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in dust,

15 And forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them.

16 She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not her's: her labour is in vain without fear;

17 Because God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding.

18 What time she lifteth up herself on high, she scorneth the horse and his rider.

Though God has deprived some creatures such as the ostrich of great wisdom, nevertheless He has provided for all creatures the necessary instincts for their survival.

And though some creatures are endowed with less intelligence, still the Lord has ensured that they possess other strengths and abilities to maintain their independence and freedom to live upon the earth as God has purposed that they should.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 39:17

Because God hath deprived her of wisdom . . . —That is, he has not imparted to her the wisdom which has been conferred on other animals. The meaning is, that all this remarkable arrangement, which distinguished the ostrich so much from other animals was to be traced to God. It was not the result of chance; it could not be pretended that it was by a human arrangement, but it was the result of divine appointment. Even in this apparent destitution of wisdom, there were reasons which had led to this appointment, and the care and good providence of God could be seen in the preservation of the animal. Particularly, though apparently so weak, and timid, and unwise, the ostrich had a noble hearing Job 39:18, and when aroused, would scorn the fleetest horse in the pursuit, and show that she was distinguished for properties that were expressive of the goodness of God toward her, and of his care over her.

Job 39:19–25 Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder?

20 Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? the glory of his nostrils is terrible.

21 He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men.

²² *He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword.*

²³ *The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield.*

²⁴ *He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage: neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet.*

²⁵ *He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.*

The Lord now brings Job's attention to the war horse, with an emphasis on its fearlessness and readiness for battle. Few creatures on the earth are as powerful, athletic, and majestic as the horse.

The horse, and especially the war horse, is noble and worthy of great spiritual attention, as Scripture reveals that the Lord Jesus shall return on a white horse, signifying His readiness for battle to conquer both the devil and all those who have followed his lead, and therefore willingly become part of his confederacy.

Revelation 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 39:19

Hast thou given the horse strength?—The incidental allusion to the horse in comparison with the ostrich in the previous verse, seems to have suggested this magnificent description of this noble animal—a description which has never been surpassed or equalled. The horse is an animal so well known, that a particular description of it is here unnecessary. The only thing which is required is an explanation of the phrases used here, and a confirmation of the particular qualities here attributed to the war-horse, for the description here is evidently that of the horse as he appears in war, or as about to plunge into the midst of a battle.

The Lord reminds Job that He is the One Who has given the horse its strength and fearlessness to disregard its own well-being and therefore plunge into battle, unafraid and without hesitation. So confident is the war horse in its ultimate victory, that it seemingly laughs before the upcoming conflict. Neither the shouts of its rider, nor the commotion of anxious soldiers, nor the sound of the trumpet, have any negative impact on this majestic creature to either produce or prompt fear in its heart, regarding the fierce battle which lay ahead.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 39:25

And he smelleth the battle afar off—That is, he snuffs, as it were, for the slaughter. The reference is to the effect of an approaching army upon a spirited war-horse, as if he perceived the approach by the sense of smelling, and longed to be in the midst of the battle.

What a stark contrast it is between Jesus Christ first entering Jerusalem on a donkey, and then returning in resurrected glory, riding upon a white horse, symbolizing His assurance of complete and total victory over the devil, the kings of the earth, and all others who have collectively risen up in defiance against God.

Revelation 6:2 And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

Benson Commentary, Rev. 19:11

Many paid little regard to Christ when he came meek and lowly, riding upon an ass: but what will they say or think, when he comes forth upon his white horse, with the sharp sword of his mouth? The white horse, on which Christ is represented as riding, was intended to denote his justice and holiness, and also that victory and triumph should mark his progress.

Job 39:26 Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom, and stretch her wings toward the south?

The Lord now inquires of Job whether the hawk has gained its extraordinary power of flight because of his, Job's, human, natural wisdom.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 39:26

Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom—The appeal here is to the hawk, because it is among the most rapid of the birds in its flight. The particular thing specified is its flying, and it is supposed that there was something special in that which distinguished it from other birds. Whether it was in regard to its speed, to its manner of flying, or to its habits of flying at periodical seasons, may indeed be made a matter of inquiry, but it is clear that the particular thing in this bird which was adapted to draw the attention, and which evinced especially the wisdom of God, was connected with its flight. . . . The falcon, or hawk, is often distinguished for fleetness. One, belonging to a Duke of Cleves, flew out of Westphalia into Prussia in one day; and in the county of Norfolk (England) one was known to make a flight of nearly thirty miles in an hour. A falcon which belonged to Henry IV of France, having escaped from Fontainebleau, was found twenty-four hours after in Malta, the space traversed being not less than one thousand three hundred and fifty miles; being a velocity of about fifty-seven miles an hour, on the supposition that the bird was on the wing the whole time. It is this remarkable velocity which is here appealed to as a proof of the divine wisdom. God asks Job whether he could have formed these birds for their rapid flight. The wisdom and skill which has done this is evidently far above any that is possessed by man.

Job 39:27 Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high?

The Lord now brings to Job's attention another glorious creature, the eagle, highlighting the spectacular wisdom necessary to create such a regal bird that make their nests in the heavens.

Like the goat, the eagle lives in the highest regions of the earth. No doubt the Lord chooses to speak of majestic creatures like the mountain goat and the eagle because their homes are high and lofty, far above the earth, and at times literally in the clouds.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 39:27

The eagle has always been celebrated for the height to which it ascends. When Ramond had reached the summit of Mount Perdu, the highest of the Pyrenees, he perceived no living creature but an eagle which passed above him, flying with inconceivable rapidity in direct opposition to a furious wind. *Edin. Ency.* "Of all animals, the eagle flies highest; and from thence the ancients have given him the epithet of the bird of heaven."

Job 39:28–29 She dwelleth and abideth on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong place.

²⁹ From thence she seeketh the prey, and her eyes behold afar off.

Keeping Job's attention and focus on the eagle, the Lord now mentions its astonishing natural sight. So great is the eagle's eye that scientists claim it can see four to eight times farther than the human eye. It is also said that with its acute vision, it can perceive an ant from a vantage point as far up as a ten-story building.

Hence, not only does the eagle have the glorious power of flight, and is the greatest and most glorious of all the earth's birds, but God has also endowed it with an extraordinary gift of natural sight.

The Lord Speaks of the Complexities of Nature to Humble Job

Matthew Poole's Commentary, Job 39:29

Her sight is exceeding sharp and strong, so that she is able to look upon the sun with open eyes, and to behold the smallest prey upon the earth or sea, when she is mounted out of our sight; which when she spies, she flies to it with incredible swiftness, even like an arrow out of a bow.

Job 39:30 Her young ones also suck up blood: and where the slain are, there is she.

Because young eagles, like many other nestlings and fledgling birds, live in nests high above the earth and have no access to water, the Lord has ensured that the blood of their mothers' kill will aptly care for their thirst and then their continuing growth.

Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible, Job 39:30

Her young ones also suck up blood, . . . As well as herself, being brought up to it by her. The eagle cares not for water, but drinks the blood of her prey; and so her young ones after her, as naturalists report (w). And Aelianus says (x) the same of the hawk, that it eats no seeds, but devours flesh and drinks blood, and nourishes her young ones with the same. . . . Job was ignorant of the nature of these creatures and incapable of governing and directing them; any excellency they have is of God and not of him or of any man. So then, how unfit must he be to dispute with God, and contend with Him about His works of providence?

