Job 38:1-38
November 15, 2026

Open with Prayer

HOOK:
The dominant theme we have processed over multiple weeks is that God is sovereign—the idea that because God is God, what He does is just - even when we can't comprehend it. God is sovereign over the seas, time and seasons, the cosmos, light and darkness, weather phenomena, the animal kingdom, etc.

Q: Why might God systematically cover so much ground rather than focusing on Job's specific complaint? [Let people engage]

Transition: What we will discover is that instead of defending His justice in response to Job's complaint, God reframes the entire conversation. The real issue isn't whether God's actions are just; it's whether Job has any legitimate basis to question them in the first place. As Paul later echoes the same logic: "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?'" (Rom 9:20–21) Let's begin.

BOOK: ***The Lord Speaks***

38 Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm.
He said:
2 "Who is this that darkens my counsel
with words without knowledge?
3 Brace yourself like a man;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me.
4 "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?
Tell me, if you understand.
5 Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!
Who stretched a measuring line across it?
6 On what were its footings set,
or who laid its cornerstone—
7 while the morning stars sang together
and all the angels shouted for joy?
8 "Who shut up the sea behind doors
when it burst forth from the womb,
9 when I made the clouds its garment
and wrapped it in thick darkness,
10 when I fixed limits for it
and set its doors and bars in place,
11 when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther;
here is where your proud waves halt'?
12 "Have you ever given orders to the morning,

or shown the dawn its place,
13 that it might take the earth by the edges
and shake the wicked out of it?
14 The earth takes shape like clay under a seal;
its features stand out like those of a garment.
15 The wicked are denied their light,
and their upraised arm is broken.
16 “Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea
or walked in the recesses of the deep?
17 Have the gates of death been shown to you?
Have you seen the gates of the shadow of death?
18 Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth?
Tell me, if you know all this.
19 “What is the way to the abode of light?
And where does darkness reside?
20 Can you take them to their places?
Do you know the paths to their dwellings?
21 Surely you know, for you were already born!
You have lived so many years!
22 “Have you entered the storehouses of the snow
or seen the storehouses of the hail,
23 which I reserve for times of trouble,
for days of war and battle?
24 What is the way to the place where the lightning is dispersed,
or the place where the east winds are scattered over the earth?
25 Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain,
and a path for the thunderstorm,
26 to water a land where no man lives,
a desert with no one in it,
27 to satisfy a desolate wasteland
and make it sprout with grass?
28 Does the rain have a father?
Who fathers the drops of dew?
29 From whose womb comes the ice?
Who gives birth to the frost from the heavens
30 when the waters become hard as stone,
when the surface of the deep is frozen?
31 “Can you bind the beautiful Pleiades?
Can you loose the cords of Orion?
32 Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons
or lead out the Bear with its cubs?
33 Do you know the laws of the heavens?
Can you set up God’s dominion over the earth?
34 “Can you raise your voice to the clouds
and cover yourself with a flood of water?
35 Do you send the lightning bolts on their way?

Do they report to you, ‘Here we are’?
36 Who endowed the heart with wisdom
or gave understanding to the mind?
37 Who has the wisdom to count the clouds?
Who can tip over the water jars of the heavens
38 when the dust becomes hard
and the clods of earth stick together?

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Resist the urge to explain suffering through human logic. We won’t always understand why personal tragedy, disease, or disaster occurs, and there’s a natural tendency to search for higher purposes in these events.1 When catastrophes happen—whether tsunamis, wars, famines, or epidemics—we’re tempted to assign blame or divine judgment, but this approach fails because innocent people suffer alongside the guilty, making it impossible to determine why some individuals experience more hardship than others.1 Job’s experience teaches us to abandon this framework entirely.

Accept the limits of your understanding. A complete human explanation of how divine sovereignty and goodness coexist with human suffering cannot be provided because of human knowledge limitations and the true nature of God’s power.2 Rather than treating this as a failure, recognize it as liberation—you’re freed from the exhausting work of justifying God’s actions.

Build your faith on trust rather than comprehension. While God’s ways are sometimes incomprehensible, He can always be trusted.2 God is sovereign and we are not; He isn’t asking us to figure everything out, but to trust Him and live in dependence on Him whatever the circumstances.1 This shifts the foundation of faith from intellectual certainty to relational confidence.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:
Wiersbe, W.W. (1996). Be Patient.* (pp. 144-147) *Victor Books

1. "Can you explain My creation?" (Job 38:1–38)
Job was sure that his speeches had been filled with wisdom and knowledge, but God's first question put an end to that delusion: "Who is this that darkens My counsel with words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2, NIV) *The Living Bible* paraphrases it, "Why are you using your ignorance to deny My providence?" (TLB) God didn't question Job's integrity or sincerity; He only questioned Job's ability to explain the ways of God in the world. Job had spoken the truth about God (42:7), but his speeches had lacked humility. Job thought he knew about God, but he didn't realize how much he *didn't* know about God. Knowledge of our own ignorance is the first step toward true wisdom.

God began with *the Creation of the earth* (38:4–7) and compared Himself to a builder who surveys the site, marks off the dimensions, pours the footings, lays the cornerstone, and erects the structure. Creation was so wonderful that the stars sang in chorus and the angels (1:6; 2:1) shouted for joy, *but Job wasn't on the scene!* Then, how can he claim to know so much about the works of God?

From the beginning, God planned His Creation to be a garden of joyful beauty; but sin has turned Creation into a battlefield of ugliness and misery. Man in his selfishness is wasting natural resources, polluting land, air, water, and outer space, and so ravaging God's Creation that scientists wonder how long our planet will support life as we know it. Mahatma Gandhi was right: "There is a sufficiency in the world for man's need but not for man's greed."
The Lord then moved to a consideration of *the seas* (38:8–11). The image here is not *building* but *birth:* The seas were "knit together" in secret (v. 8; see Ps. 139:13) and then burst forth like a baby emerging from the womb. They were clothed with clouds and darkness, and their limits were set by God. "Who did all of this?" asked God of Job, and Job knew the answer.

next aspect of Creation that God mentioned was *the sun* (Job 38:12–15). Here God pictured Himself as a general commanding His troops (the heavenly host). Had Job ever told the sun to rise and dispel the darkness? As the light spreads across the world, it reveals the details of the landscape, like the impression of a seal on clay or the unfolding of a beautiful garment taken out of a dark closet. But the light also puts an end to the evil deeds done in the darkness (John 3:19–21) and stops the criminal from attacking his victim.

The next eleven questions (Job 38:16–24) relate to the *vast dimensions of creation*. The average child today knows more about the heights and depths of the universe than Job and his friends could ever have imagined. Had Job ever taken a walk in the depths of the sea and visited "the gates of Sheol"? Did he know how far down he had to go to find the ocean's floor? (The greatest depth measured so far is in the Pacific Ocean—35,810 feet or 6.78 miles.) And as for the reaches of space, *Voyager 2* spent twelve years going 4.4 billion miles, and in 1989 passed within 3,000 miles of Neptune's cloud bank!

In verses 19–21, God asked Job if he could calculate the reaches of east and west, or if the horizons were too much for him to measure. Then God inquired if Job understood the heights

where the snow and hail were stored until God needed them (vv. 22–23; Ex. 9:18–26; Josh. 10:11) or the places where God kept His lightning and winds (Job 38:24). To be sure, God's words are full of irony; but that's what Job needed to puncture his pride and bring him to his knees in repentance.

How much did Job know about *the rain?* (vv. 25–28) Did he know how to plot its course so that it would accomplish God's purposes? Could he tell the lightning where and when to flash? Was he able to "father" rain and dew so that the land would have the water that it needed? Can he explain why God sends rain to the places where nobody lives? Then God turned from the spring and autumn rains to the winter *hail and frost* (vv. 29–30). If Job didn't know how the rain was "fathered," did he understand how the ice was "born"?

By this time, Job was probably wishing for a reprieve; but the Lord kept right on. He centered Job's attention on the heavens—the Pleiades, Orion the hunter, the various constellations ("Mazzaroth," KJV), and the Bear ("Arcturus" with his cubs). Did Job understand the laws that governed their movements, and could he control these stars and planets and make them appear in their proper seasons? Man may study the heavens, but he can't control them.

The question "Canst thou set its dominion in the earth?" (v. 33) is translated in the NASB, "Or fix their rule over the earth?" The NIV reads, "Can you set up God's dominion over the earth?" and *The Living Bible* says, "Do you know … how the heavens influence the earth?" Is there a suggestion here that the stars and planets have a direct influence over events on earth as the advocates of astrology maintain? Not at all. The statement can be paraphrased: "Job, if you understand so much about the heavenly bodies that are thought by some to affect the earth, then why don't you use that authority to change your situation?" The Lord was speaking with "holy sarcasm" and not revealing some profound truth.

In verses 34–38, the Lord called Job's attention to the clouds. Since Job knew the laws of the heavens, could he order the clouds to give rain? Was the lightning his servant, reporting for duty? Could Job take inventory of the clouds and "tip them over" like jars to make the rain come?

Creating all these things is one thing; maintaining them for man's good is quite something else. The Lord moved next into a series of questions about His providential working in the world. He moved from the inanimate world to the animate.

***Zuck, R. B. (1985). Job. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 766-767) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

a. God's opening rebuke and challenge to Job (38:1–3)

38:1. God's appearance was accompanied by a **storm**, possibly the storm Elihu may have sensed was approaching (37:22). "Storm" translates *se'ārâh*, "a tempest or storm accompanied by violent wind" (also used, e.g., in 2 Kings 2:1, 11; Isa. 40:24, "whirlwind"; Ps. 107:25; Isa. 29:6, "tempest"; Ezek. 1:4, "windstorm"). Ironically "a mighty wind" caused the death of Job's 10

sons and daughters. Now a violent storm accompanied God's communication. Whereas the one was the occasion of ruin resulting in personal sorrow, this one was the occasion of revelation resulting in personal submission. Sometimes God used storms to dramatize awesome occasions (cf. Ex. 19:16–17; 1 Kings 19:11–13).

38:2–3. Opening with a rebuke, God accused Job (by means of a question) of darkening **counsel**, of beclouding God's design for the universe. Job's questioning confused rather than clarified the issues (cf. Elihu's comment about man's darkness, 37:19). For Job to suggest that God had become his enemy would only confuse others about God rather than shed light on His ways. Because of this Job, though he sometimes extolled God, did not really know whereof he spoke when he blamed God for being unfair. Job's **words** were **without knowledge** (as Elihu had twice said; 34:35; 35:16).

Then God told Job to get ready for His questions. (**Brace yourself like a man**; cf. 40:7, is lit., "gird up your loins like a man," *geḇer*, "strong man," that is, tuck your outer robe-like garment into your sash-belt as a man does before taking on a strenuous task such as running or fighting in a battle, Ex. 12:11; 1 Kings 18:46.) Job was to be alert so he could **answer** God intelligently. This is a striking reversal of Job's words to God, "Let the Almighty answer me" (31:35). Job the plaintiff had now become the defendant!

b. God's questioning of Job regarding inanimate nature (38:4–38)

In a series of questions on cosmology, oceanography, meteorology, and astronomy, God challenged Job's competence to judge His control of the world. God used irony to point up Job's ignorance (e.g., "Tell Me," vv. 4, 18; "Surely you know!" vv. 5, 21).

(1) Questions about the earth (38:4–21)

38:4–7. Job was immediately confronted with his insignificance, for he was not present **when** God created the earth. Since he did not observe what had taken place then, he could not **understand** it. How could he hope to advise God now? Creating the earth is depicted like constructing a building with a **foundation.… dimensions.… a measuring line.… footings**, and a **cornerstone**. When God put the earth into orbit, it was similar to placing parts of a building in place.

Job was absent when **the morning stars** (possibly Venus and Mercury; "morning stars" were mentioned by Job in 3:9) **sang** and **the angels** (lit., "the sons of God"; cf. 1:6; 2:1) **shouted** with **joy** over God's Creation of the earth. The stars' singing is a poetic personification, not a reference to the noise made by stars as detected by radio astronomy. In Psalm 148:2–3 angels and stars are together commanded to praise the Lord.

38:8–11. The origin of the earth was depicted as being like the construction of a building (vv. 4–7); the origin of the oceans was described like childbirth. Job was not in God's obstetric delivery room when He created the oceans, seas, and lakes, which were like a baby coming **from** a **womb** (cf. v. 29). God confined the waters, His newborn, by means of shorelines (**shut … behind doors … fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars** [as on a city gate] **in place**). The waters

could no longer cover the entire globe as they had done (cf. Gen. 1:2, 9; Ps. 104:9). God separated the waters on the globe from the land; also above the earth's waters He placed **the clouds** (cf. Gen. 1:6) which like a baby's **garment** (cf. Job 38:14), shroud the earth's waters at night **in thick darkness**. In limiting the waters' **proud waves**, pounding at the shore, God may have subtly hinted at His control of Job in his proud allegations. God obviously had these cosmological elements under control.

38:12–15. God's control of the earth also includes the daily sequence of **dawn** and darkness. The dawn causes **the wicked**, who are active at night (cf. 24:14–17; John 3:19), to hide. It is as if **the morning** light were shaking them out of a blanket (Job 38:13), causing them to be **broken** in their power (**upraised arm**, v. 15; cf. 40:9). As the sun comes up the earth's contours become evident and **the wicked** no longer have darkness, which they call **their light**, in which to work. Since Job had nothing to do with establishing or controlling this aspect of Creation how could he question God's doings now?

38:16–18. God also put Job in his place by asking if he had ever explored such unseen realms as: (a) **the springs of the sea** (the Heb. word for "springs," *nēḇek*, occurring only here in the OT, probably refers to springs of water pouring into oceans from the ocean floors), (b) **the recesses of the deep** (the depths of the oceans), (c) **death**, pictured as having **gates** which open for its entrants (cf. Pss. 9:13; 107:18; Isa. 38:10) and pictured as being in darkness (cf. NIV) and

(d) the extensive regions **of the earth**

38:19–21. God personified **light** and **darkness** as living in houses. By rhetorical questions the Lord pointed up to the complainant that he, a mere human, had no way of following the light, at sunset, to see where it goes, or of pursuing the darkness, at sunrise, to see **where** it resides. Their **places** and **dwellings** are inaccessible in the sense that Job could not explain how God moves the earth around the sun. **Surely you know** (cf. v. 5), **for you were already born!** was God's ironic way of affirming that Job did *not* know since he was *not* around when God set the earth's rotation in motion. Job's years were few compared with God's eternity (cf. 36:26).

(2) Questions about the sky (38:22–30)

38:22–24. Job had no idea how God makes **snow** or **hail**, pictured as if they were kept in **storehouses** (cf. Pss. 33:7; 135:7; Jer. 10:13) and released by God when He chooses. Causing hail in battle (cf. Josh. 10:11) is an example of what Elihu had said about God's using elements of weather to stop people from working (Job 37:6–7), or to punish people (37:13). Job could not predict where God would dispense **lightning** flashes (cf. Elihu's words along this line in 36:30, 32; 37:3, 11, 15; cf. 38:35) or where the **winds** would blow.

38:25–30. Nor can God's ways with the **rain** and **ice** (cf. Elihu's comments about them in 36:27–28; 37:6, 10) be comprehended by man. Only God **cuts a channel** (an imaginary path) in the sky through which rain and **the thunderstorm** (cf. 28:26) come. **Man** does not even see where God often makes rain to fall—in **a desert** and a **wasteland**.

Again, using the figure of childbirth (cf. 38:8) God asked Job if he knew whether **the rain** and **dew** have **a father** and **the ice** and **frost** have a mother. This may possibly be an allusion to and a polemic against the Canaanite myth that viewed rain as the semen of the gods, by which "mother earth" supposedly bears her "children," the crops. Certainly no one knows completely how the earth's Master sends rain and formulates elements of cold weather, including dew, ice, frost, and **frozen** lakes and rivers.

(3) Questions about stars and clouds (38:31–38)

38:31–33. Job knew that God made the **Pleiades … Orion**, and **Bear** constellations (9:9), but here God pointed out that Job had nothing to do with holding together the cluster of stars known as the Pleiades, nor could he alter the configuration of stars in the Orion **constellation**, nor cause the Bear (perhaps the Big Dipper) to appear at night. And since Job knew nothing of **the laws of the heavens**, the principles by which God regulates the stars, planets, and moon, how could he begin to criticize God's laws in His dealings with mankind? **Dominion over the earth** is **God's**, not Job's.

38:34–38. God also belittled Job by pointing to his inability to call down rain at will or to send down **lightning bolts** (cf. v. 24). In verse 36, difficult to translate, the word **heart** could perhaps be rendered "cloud layers" and the word **mind**, "celestial phenomenon" (see Rowley, *Job*, pp. 315–6). If those translations are accepted, they fit God's practice in this chapter of personifying inanimate nature. The clouds and lightning bolts seem to operate as if they have minds of their own. Or if the NIV rendering of verse 36 is correct then the thought is that God gives man wisdom; yet man in all his wisdom cannot tabulate the number of **clouds** nor can he time the "tilting" of the clouds (like animal skins that hold **water**) to moisten **the dust** and **the clods**.

LOOK:

1. Mark L. Strauss, *How to Read the Bible in Changing Times: Understanding and Applying God's Word Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 149.

2. Thomas Nelson Publishers, *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts: Old and New Testaments* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996).

3. Allen C. Myers, "JOB," in *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 584–585.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Job 38). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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