

## **A Guide To The Reader**

*Pastor recommends that to obtain maximum benefit from his comments you read in full from the Bible every reference whenever one appears. Otherwise the reading of the comments is simply a skimming over the surface. They are rather designed to make you stop and meditate and even look up further references as the Holy Spirit guides you. Do pray before you read that the Holy Spirit will be your Tutor and that the time you spend will be time spent with Him.*

### **Job 38**

38.1. The approach of a whirlwind is unnerving. Its arrival is frightening. The Lord of creation may use any of His created order to inspire such a state of mind and heart in His creatures as pleases Him. His appearance in a burning bush which was not consumed (Exodus 3) excited Moses' curiosity years afterwards and was the prelude to his being sent to Pharaoh for the deliverance of His people.

38.2. The reasons for thinking the Lord is referring to Elihu when He addresses Job at this point are that it is Elihu who is interrupted by the Lord Himself here; and his dismissal is summary as he is never mentioned again, whereas the comforters are both mentioned and restored and, for all we can tell, saved in the same way as Job.

If the Lord, on the other hand, were addressing Job about his own "darkening of counsel by words without knowledge" it seems to run contrary to the Lord's own declaration in 42.7,8, as we have seen, that Job has spoken the thing that is right. It is true that in 42.3 Job confesses that he has hidden counsel without knowledge, but a distinction is probably to be made between hiding and darkening counsel. The one may indicate alteration of God's counsel, while the other simply that it has been obscured. Allowance also may be made, inasmuch as when a man is confessing his sins he magnifies them and admits himself to be the greatest of sinners. When Job admits hiding counsel he may be making much of his sometimes rash utterances.

So if, as I think, Elihu is referred to here his counsel is darkened, disqualified even. Elihu's words were sometimes right, there was some counsel. But it was darkened, obscured by his inaccurate diagnosis of Job's state before God. His advice was no use to Job, though his words may be of value to subsequent generations where men have indeed vaunted themselves against God.

38.3. The very things which Job had longed for are now granted, which argues no disapproval of his behaviour. Job had earnestly pleaded (23.3-7), "Oh that I knew where I might find him! That I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me. Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me. There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge". Now the time has come and God bids him arise. Such was His dealing with Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1.28-2.1), with Daniel (Daniel 8.17,18; 10.10,11), with Paul (Acts 26.13) and with John (Revelation 1.17). Though "with God is terrible majesty" (37.22) He imparts the very

strength to His elect at the time of their regeneration and at times such as Job is experiencing here. He bestows what we do not have by nature that we might speak with Him. Such condescension on God's part was not understood by Elihu or the friends. To them that majesty of God made Him remote, not only that He could not be seen, which is the experience of all of us, but that they could not imagine Him being approachable in a Fatherly way.

38.4. It is one thing for the Lord Himself to declare His wonder to Job in a friendly but awesome way, quite another for Elihu to "speak on God's behalf" (36.2) in an unfriendly, hostile way. The former was longed for and welcomed and melted Job's heart; the latter was uninvited, unwelcome and offputting. "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" Clearly non-existent, except as chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. But Job had no being and had no part in anything which was before his time. But God accomplished these mighty things when no man, Job included, was there to help or even observe. How infinitely greater than Job, and all of us, is Almighty God! And this not only something to be understood with the mind but to be felt and stood in awe of, for which Job and the friends were prepared by the whirlwind. It would appear that the whirlwind continued throughout God's speech (40.6) and that when Job gave the answer as he was required to do (40.3) the whirlwind continued unabated. The whole revelation of God was conducted in the most awesome circumstances designed to renew in Job his proper place before God of awe yet approachability. Though we are not thus confronted, God's word reminds us vigorously of our place. It is a kind place but brooks no insolence.

38.5-6. The Lord now continues until the end of chapter 39 uninterrupted and unabated to describe His power. While the whole of scripture is God's word, these words are direct speech and the language is exalted. God's words bring life, and here they inspire Job with God's creative power, omnipotence in sustaining his created order, His justice in His dealings with him and His mercy. "If thou hast understanding...if thou knowest" simply puts Job in his place to prepare him for the overwhelming volume of His power.

The measures. The world is founded upon mathematics. The universe is precisely calculated in all its orbits. No foundations are ever laid by human beings, made in the image of God, without planned calculations and measurements, so surely we might expect God to have acted prudently, seeing that we observe such a wonderful creation.

How do you keep a line straight, or indeed, its replica, the finished article? How do you keep a curve true? Indeed being Spirit, how wonderfully does the physical concept of straightness and curvature, and many other suchlike things, take form in the divine mind!

The fastening of foundations. The invisible suspensions are as firm as physical fastenings. With what skilful power they are eternally sustained. Where is the corner stone of the planet, that which secured its architecture in its measured place? All these things are unanswerable. But more than that, they evoke wonder. "Every man at his best state is altogether vanity" (Psalm 39.5) and his best state is nothing when viewed alongside the "best state," the unalterable perfection, of his Creator God.

38.7. What freshness, what sheer exuberance and joy this verse evokes! Though "he made the stars also" (Genesis 1.16) seems at first glance to suggest an afterthought to the two great

lights, the sun and moon, here they take priority. In all their pristine glory in space, their movement, their constitution, their pre-ordained directions all eloquently proclaimed the glory of their Creator in that first day on which the earth was formed. All the angels, wonderfully created beings themselves revelling in their newness of being in a pristine universe, exuded joy, sheer, unadulterated and undiluted joy, and praised the Lord with a shout, a cheer in persistent and continual adoration.

38.8-11. The sea has immense power and the One who controls it, by definition, has power greater still. However, it is the moment of creation, of its release (Genesis 1.6-10), when it was first called Seas, when God saw that it was good, which is here described; that moment of delivery of cascading waters, separating the waters under the heaven from the other waters when previously it had been held as a cloud and in thick darkness, and, though breaking forth, were retained, kept under control by the word of God, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further". The bars and doors are indeed in place and except for flooding, for the purpose of the correction of mankind (37.13), the seas are maintained in perfect balance for the sustaining of human life, by its resources within and its effect on climate. It is probable that the parting of the Red Sea is referred to in Psalm 77 but there are sufficient parallels to recall the Creation and understand that the parting of the Red Sea is but a small scale replica of the former. "The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled. The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook. Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known" (Psalm 77:16-19).

38.12-15. The expressions "Hast thou commanded?...Hast thou entered?...Hast thou perceived?...Hast thou entered?...Hast thou given strength?" are only one kind of the many expressions with which the Lord introduces the different aspects of His creative power as far beyond that of any man.

God has designed the seasons. "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8.22). Among these seasons is the recurrence of day and night. It is of ancient origin, not a new thing originating with Job. The breaking of dawn does not take its rise from Job. The light of the dayspring, even before sunrise, touches every part of the world and controls its daily pattern of life, both man and beast. Though a creation ordinance is referred to here, the Lord then alludes to a consequence of the fall, that the day rises upon the wicked as well as the good. However, to those whose night-time activities are evil, the light comes as the turning of a stone which sends the dark-loving insects scurrying; it shakes them out of sight, out of the light when others begin their legitimate work, back to their homes and the darkness of a conscience ridden sleep.

"It is turned as clay to the seal; and they stand as a garment." There are two word pictures here. The expositor Joseph Caryl says that just like soft clay receives the impression of a seal, so the earth receives the impression of the morning light and rising sun. Just like we put on our clothes afresh, so the clothing of the earth - its greens, browns and purples; its cattle and wildlife - appear in full definition again.

The Saviour said, "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good" (Matthew 5.45). The daylight hours of the wicked are misused, and ultimately, perhaps, brought to an early end. Their light of life may correspondingly be removed. The light of the glorious gospel of Christ shall be withheld. Their power shall be broken by the powers that be.

38.16. Job had not been given a Jonah experience. But even Jonah saw that which was already in place, a marvellous undersea world. "I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me" (Jonah 2.6). It is a wonderful thing to go on a voyage of discovery; quite another to descend into the depths; still another to be the Creator of it all. "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths...they reel to and fro" (Psalm 107.23-27).

38.17. "Have the gates of death been opened unto thee?" Not in the sense of dying, but a glimpse, an understanding of the whereabouts, the functioning of the spiritual entrance to heaven and hell and the lake of fire also. And again, of course, just a viewing of what is already in existence. Not one person of mankind, in any of these things, saw their creation. It is enough for a believer to know that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Saviour's purposes or the Saviour's people (Matthew 16.18).

38.18. "Hast thou perceived the breadth of the earth?" The Creator knows everything there is to know about it. Job neither knows its dimensions nor has explored its recesses. Satan may have exercised himself "going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it" (1.7;2.2) but Job only knew his own place and its environs and the scope of his God-ordained endeavours. Beyond that he had not passed. That there was a greater world out there, he was aware. But he had not explored it, and the great vistas which God opened now to his mind only served him to understand how little he knew. He had nothing to declare.

38.19-21. The way of light; the place of darkness – how brilliantly the Lord expresses it. Light is all movement; darkness is static, simply where light does not come. Light dwells in a constantly moving path to illuminate all as we revolve around the sun. The light of the glorious gospel is ever saving and ever renewing the souls of the redeemed. We use the expression to take something to extremes. The Hebrews thought of wing tips, as in the "ends of the earth" of verse 7, "the wings of the earth." Only the Lord defines and "beats the bounds" of light's boundaries. He is light; the Saviour is the light of the world. Job knows nothing of intrinsic light, nor how to disperse nor distribute created light. God's dwelling place is the house of light and, while Job is a saved man, he does not know his own detailed path to glory let alone that of another.

As to his being the originator of light or the director of its beams Job is simply a child of his generation; greatly honoured in being saved and greatly honoured in his station in life, but a created being of limited lifespan nevertheless.

38.22-23. Snow and hail are treasures. The structure of each snowflake and the different forms of snow, as, indeed, of hail display the Lord's great love of infinite variety down to the smallest detail of an individual flake or stone. Hail is, so to speak, a reserve division to discomfit in

trouble, battle and war. It was one of the plagues of Egypt (Exodus 9.18-26) and when Joshua fought against Adonizedek “they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword” (Joshua 10.11).

It is a wonderful thing to know that God by His knowledge, and indeed foreknowledge, keeps things in reserve. God “reserveth wrath for his enemies” (Nahum 1.2). Speaking of the elect He says through Jeremiah, “I will pardon them whom I reserve” (Jeremiah 50.20). “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Peter 2.9). In that passage the concept of “reservation” features strongly – 2 Peter 2.4,9,17;3.7. Believers have an inheritance “incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1.4). The word is not used in 1 Kings 19.18 but it is in Romans 11.4, “I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal”.

The Lord is able to reserve the impact of our prayers, the effect of our words, the memory of our love and the power of our example for the day of their greatest effect, their ripest fulfilment, even long after we are gone, in the lives of those He gave us to serve in our generation. “All these things worketh God oftentimes with man” (33.29).

38.24. In Jonah 4.8 we read, “it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah that he fainted...” When in a dream Pharaoh saw “seven thin ears (of corn) ... blasted with the east wind” (Genesis 41.6) Joseph began his interpretation to him, “God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do” (Genesis 41.25). In both these cases God raises an east wind to destroy. Whether the dawn which parts the day from the night or lightning which streaks down to earth, like Job we do not know the “how” or “when”. If scientists could claim they know “how” it happens they could not anticipate “when” by more than the shortest of times.

38.25-27. There is a great difference between man-made aquifers and aqueducts and natural watercourses. Using picture language, by the Spirit of God Jeremiah declares “my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2.13). That water should always flow downhill to the sea; that the surplus which is not absorbed into the earth should flow in brooks, torrents, mighty rivers and deltas into the sea; that the waters which have distilled into the soil and sunk down deep should then form deep watercourses below the earth – all these things are way beyond man and entirely the doing of a wonderful Creator God. The storm with its lightning and thunder (though we say thunder and lightning), and its stormwaters falls not only on the habitable parts of the earth but on the vast uninhabited wildernesses. Those annual floods of the Nile are caused by the waters falling deep in vast scarcely populated areas of Africa way to the south. Man has no knowledge of or control over such expanses; but God knows every tract of land. Flowers and plants grow to the glory of God which no man sees.

38.28-30. God has delegated to none other but His own spoken word the creation of rain, dew, frost and ice with the conditions necessary for each and the purposes enshrined in each. Job

must admit, as we must admit, “such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it” (Psalm 139.6).

38.31-33. Job has indeed himself spoken (9.8-9) of the greatness of the God who is now speaking to him. “Which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea. Which maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south”. It is one thing to know with the head and another with the wonder and awe of the heart. God both confirms and inspires Job’s knowledge and his affections, and removes his doubts and fears. Indeed, the Lord directs Job’s mind to consider not only His creation of these great luminaries but His control over them; that is, His providential ordering of them. God can bind, loose, bring forth and guide each at His pleasure. “He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names” (Psalm 147.4). It is thought that Mazzaroth here may be the same as “chambers of the south” in 9.9. Caryl remarks that these Greek names were given long afterwards as a translation of the Hebrew words, and these constellations are they which partly control the advent of the seasons. Pleiades refers to spring; Orion winter; Arcturus autumn; Mazzaroth summer. Also Arcturus refers to north (as in Arctic); Mazzaroth south; Orion east; Pleiades west. We may understand these as examples of all the stars in the sky, as if the Lord said, “Can you bind, for example, Pleiades? Can you loose the bands of Orion, among others?”

No man can restrain the appearance of spring or its contributory causes in all its delightfulness. When winter binds the earth with snow and ice what man can reverse it? Can you bring to the birth, swelling all the ripening grain of the summertime? Can you conduct autumnal changes as its fruitfulness gives way to mists; and its mists to the approaching cold of winter? In short, what influence can a man have on the seasons, the planets, the constellations? What input did he have into the orbiting of the comets and all the movements of the solar system? “Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven?” Indeed not. “Canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth?” No, God has done it. “And God said, let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years. And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so” (Genesis 1.14-15).

38.34-38. God may cause it to rain upon one city and not upon another for discipline (Amos 4.7) but no man can do that. Gideon’s fleece was wet with dew while all the surrounding earth was dry; and then the fleece was dry and the earth wet (Judges 6.36-40). That it was God who exercises such precision we are expressly told:- “And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground”. An Elijah may pray to God for rain and God may give it, but Elijah cannot control rain, as is evident from his sevenfold prayer (1 Kings 18.42-45). Neither idol gods, nor even the clouds themselves can bring rain without the authorisation of the Lord. “Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? Or can the heavens give showers? Art not thou he, O LORD our God? Therefore we will wait upon thee: for thou hast made all these things” (Jeremiah 14.22).

It is the Lord who gives wisdom to a man, but He has not bestowed upon him all wisdom to number the clouds or control the rain. When the land is parched men may humble themselves before the Lord and pray for rain but only the Lord brings it to pass. When the rains come no

man can halt them when paths and roads become impassable. David does seem to have been meditating on verse 36 when he penned Psalm 51.6 under the influence of the Holy Spirit:- “Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.”

38.39-40. God now moves to assure Job that he is no less ignorant concerning wild animals, birds and fish. Man may be expected to have observed cattle at close quarters (though, even so, he did not create them) but few have observed the wild beasts closely. He starts with the King of beasts, the lion. The lion needs no help. The Lord has given innate skills. Who like members of the cat family can relax so completely? Job does not have it in him to relax and then spring into life. Most people worry and lose their alertness correspondingly. God rests in His love (Zephaniah 3.17). It is, in a cat, preparation for ultimate effort. We are familiar with what a “couch” is; namely, a bed on which to lie. We are not so familiar with the verb nowadays, “to couch,” which simply means to lie down and rest.

38.41. While the lion eats raw flesh of his recent kill, the raven eats carrion. The Lord has provided for both alike, each in the way which the Lord has appointed as suitable for each. A child’s cry for food, though too young to speak, is understood well enough by its parents. So our heavenly Father provides for all creatures and interprets their cries. His provision is usually through secondary causes but these are as much of His appointment as if the provision were of His direct intervention. In their extremity God guides their wanderings. And He will guide His people in their extremities, for they are of more value than many sparrows, or creatures of any sort (Luke 12.7).