

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 39

39.1-8. If size were perhaps the predominant characteristic of lion and raven, wildness is the characteristic of the next three creatures which the Lord chooses to enumerate. "The wild goats of the rock," the hinds (the females of the wild deer) and the wild ass.

The wild goats are elusive. They seek out the heights and the uninhabitable places. Their ordinary habits are known by but few; their breeding habits by still fewer and the period and place of their gestation and birth then yet to be discovered. But the Lord has established their ways.

In the original Hebrew "bring forth" and "calve" are the same word. It is a happy turn of phrase of the translators, as "calving" in English is a most appropriate word for deer; and also for its cadence.

"They cast out their sorrows." "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also..." (Romans 8.22-23). Wild creatures suffer because of man's sin but God takes care for these also, for their young ones are in good liking – what an evocative expression of the silky, healthy condition of their fur and the robustness of their general health! If they grow up with corn, it is likely that they scavenge or browse among the cornfields much to the dislike of the owners. However, corn probably stands for any sort of food, in the same way as we use "bread" to stand for any sort of food. Independence is the keynote of this and other species from their youngest days. And the Lord has made them so.

"Who hath sent out the wild ass free?" Again, such an evocative expression! Unlike cattle, born to serve mankind, God has placed this creature to roam. Man feeds his cattle; the wild ass must fend for itself. But God cares for such also in the way appropriate to his kind. The Lord's use of the expression "sent out" perhaps speaks of the effect of the flood, after which the creatures whom Noah had gathered under His direction were dispersed under that same oversight. The ass does not, on the whole, respond kindly to being tamed. It reacts with stubbornness. It is a creature of wide-ranging barren uplands, eating whatever is available of the Lord's provision.

39.9-12. The word "unicorn" means having one horn. Nobody knows for certain which beast this is, but for practical purposes we may think of the rhinoceros and see the humour of the Lord, the absurdity of such a beast abiding by the crib as docile as a sheep. He is strong but so strong that he could not be trusted to plough or harrow under the driver's direction. At

reaping time he is more likely to trample the harvest than bring it home. But the Lord created the unicorn and can control him.

39.13-18. The Lord chooses to speak of two of the more unusual birds. Other birds are frequently mentioned in the scriptures but the Lord fastens on two distinctively here, and two (not so unusual) later in the chapter. The goodly wings of the peacock illustrate a unique design for God's pleasure, "for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Revelation 4.11).

But the Lord goes into more detail with the ostrich. Only the Lord knows why He gave wings and feathers to the ostrich, a flightless bird. It pleased God to deprive her of wisdom with regard to her young ones. Yet the species is not extinct because it is God's pleasure to preserve them. He will doubtless preserve many unto salvation who are deprived of much capability but who as fools cannot err in the most important thing of all when God opens the way for them. "The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein" (Isaiah 35.8). The ostrich with all its failings has this one capability that it can, of its own volition, outstrip for speed and height the horse with its rider. People with but one great gift often have a flawed character but can by God's grace, for He careth for His people, be saved also; "casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Peter 5.7).

One New Testament passage interprets these verses for us most significantly. "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory...?" (Romans 9. 20-23).

39.19-25. Even though the ostrich might outrun the horse, the horse has mettle which clearly the ostrich has not. Certain breeds may be used for domestic purposes but a thoroughbred may race and no other animal is so equipped (not even Hannibal's elephants) to welcome the sounds and sights of the battlefield. His animated spirit is inspiring when he flares his nostrils and spars (so to speak) when he rises up on his hind legs.

"Hast thou given the horse strength?" That there is such an inward characteristic as strength speaks of an original, constantly sustaining power within the person of God; not only for the horse but for all the vast universe. This life, this strength, this power never wanes in God Himself though in an individual creature it waxes and wanes. "Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder?" The horse is immune to the sudden noise of thunder and the lightning which precedes it; as equally immune to the thunderous noise of the battlefield. The sights and sounds of battle "clothe" him; he is comfortable with them. Thunderous galloping; thunderous cries of command and of sudden pain above the noises of the battle itself. Fear may come but he rises above it and rears up. He will not refuse battle, though he may refuse a fence. "He swalloweth the ground." His speed over all terrain he finds exhilarating; he has an inkling that the trumpet means battle and though the noises of a battle may be confused he is animated by it all. He is made for war though he could live without it. And God hath made him so.

39.26-30. The capacities of the hawk, the smaller birds of prey, and the eagle at the summit of the avian food chain all take their rise from the design and intricate knowledge and creative capacities of God. They differ from species to species. Hawk and eagle alike enjoy the currents and spot their prey from vast heights because God has made them so. Where no man climbs the eagle builds her nest, raises her young and feeds them.

“Where the slain are, there is she.” She is capable of taking fairly large prey live, but is not averse to the carrion of larger flesh and blood. The Saviour refers to this verse in Matthew 24.28, “For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together” and similarly in Luke 17.37.