

JOB  
Chapter 38

Technical Notes of Matthew Henry

*SUMMARY:* In most disputes the strife is, "Who shall have the last word?" Job's friends had, in this controversy, tamely yielded it to Job, and then he to Elihu. But, after all the wranglings of the counsel at bar, the judge upon the bench must have the last word. So God had here, and so he will have in every controversy; for every man's judgment proceeds from him, and by his definitive sentence every man must stand or fall and every cause be won or lost. Job had often appealed to God and had talked boldly how he would order his cause before him, and as a prince would he go near unto him; but, when God took the throne, Job had nothing to say in his own defense but was silent before him. It is not so easy a matter as some think to contest with the Almighty. Job's friends had sometimes appealed to God too: "O that God would speak!" ch. 11:5. And now, at length, God does speak, when Job, by Elihu's clear and close arguments, was mollified a little and mortified and so prepared to hear what God had to say. It is the office of ministers to prepare the way of the Lord. That which the great God designs in his discourse is to humble Job, and bring him to repent of, and to recant his passionate indecent expressions concerning God's providential dealings with him. And this he does by calling upon Job to compare God's eternity with his own time, God's omniscience with his own ignorance, and God's omnipotence with his own impotency.

- I. He begins with an awakening challenge and demand in general, vv. 2,3.
- II. He proceeds in divers [several/various] particular instances and proofs of Job's utter inability to contend with God, because of his ignorance and weakness; for,
  - (1) He knew nothing of the founding of the earth, vv. 4-7.
  - (2) Nothing of the limiting of the sea, vv. 8-11.
  - (3) Nothing of the morning light, vv. 12-15.
  - (4) Nothing of the dark recesses of the sea and earth, vv. 16-21.
  - (5) Nothing of the springs in the clouds, vv. 22-27, nor the secret counsels by which they are directed.
  - (6) He could do nothing towards the production of the rain, or frost, or lightning (vv. 28-30,34,35,37,38), nothing towards the directing of the stars and their influences (vv. 31-33), nothing towards the making of his own soul (vv. 36). And, lastly, he could not provide for the lions and the ravens (vv. 39-41). If in these ordinary works of nature Job was puzzled, how dared he pretend to dive into the counsels of God's government and to judge of them? In this (as Bishop Patrick observes), God takes up the argument begun by Elihu (who came nearest to the truth) and prosecutes it in inimitable words, excelling his and all other men's in the loftiness of the style, as much as thunder does a whisper.

**(1-3) Then Yahweh answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself [gird up your loins] like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me.**

Let us observe here,

1. Who speaks--*The Lord*, Jehovah, not a created angel, but the eternal Word himself, the second person of the blessed Trinity, for it is he by whom the worlds were made, and that was no other than the Son of God. The same speaks here who afterwards spoke from Mount Sinai. Here he begins with the creation of the world, there with the redemption of Israel out of Egypt, and from both is inferred the necessity of our subjection to him. Elihu had said, *God speaks to men and they do not perceive it* (ch. 33:14); but this they could not but perceive, and yet we have *a more sure word of prophecy* (2 Pet. 1:19).

2. When he spoke--*Then*. When they had all had their say, and yet had not gained their point, then it was time for God to interpose, whose judgment is according to truth. When we know not who is in the right, and perhaps are doubtful whether we ourselves are, this may satisfy us, That God will determine shortly *in the valley of decision* (Joel 3:14). Job had silenced his three friends, and yet could not convince them of his integrity in the main. Elihu had silenced Job, and yet could not bring him to acknowledge his mismanagement of this dispute. But now God comes, and does both: convinces Job first of his unadvised speaking and makes him cry *Peccavi--I have done wrong*; and, having humbled him, he puts honor upon him by convincing his three friends that they had done him wrong. These two things God will, sooner or later, do for his people: he will show them their faults, that they may be themselves ashamed of them, and he will show others their righteousness and bring it forth as the light, that they may be ashamed of their unjust censures of them.

3. How he spoke--*Out of the whirlwind*, the rolling and involving cloud, which Elihu took notice of (ch. 37:1,2,9). A whirlwind prefaced Ezekiel's vision (Ezek. 1:4), and Elijah's (1 Kings 19:11). God is said to have *his way in the whirlwind* (Nah. 1:3), and, to show that even the stormy wind fulfills his word, here it was made the vehicle of it. This shows what a mighty voice God's is, that it was not lost but perfectly audible, even in the noise of a whirlwind. Thus God designed to startle Job and to command his attention. Sometimes God answers his own people in terrible corrections, as out of the whirlwind, but always in righteousness.

4. To whom he spoke--He *answered Job*, directed his speech to him, to convince him of what was amiss before he cleared him from the unjust aspersions cast upon him. It is God only who can effectually convince of sin, and those shall so be humbled whom he designs to exalt. Those who desire to hear from God, as Job did, shall certainly hear from him at length.

5. What he said. We may conjecture that Elihu, or some other of the auditory, wrote down *verbatim* what was delivered out of the whirlwind, for we find (Rev. 10:4) that, when the thunders uttered their voices, John was prepared to write. Or, if it was not written then, yet, the penman of the book being inspired by the Holy Ghost, we are sure that we have here a very true and exact report of what was said. *The Spirit* (says Christ) *shall bring to your remembrance*, as he did here, *what I have said to you*. The preface is very searching.

(1) God charges him with ignorance and presumption in what he had said (v. 2): "*Who is this who talks at this rate? Is it Job? What! a man? That weak, foolish, despicable creature--shall he pretend to prescribe to me what I must do or to quarrel with me for what I have done? Is it Job? What! my servant Job, a perfect and an upright man? Can he so far forget himself and act unlike himself? Who, where is he who darkens counsel thus by words without knowledge? Let him show his face if he dare, and stand to what he has said.*" **Note:** Darkening the counsel of God's wisdom with our folly is a great affront and provocation to God. Concerning God's counsels, we must own that we are without knowledge. They are a deep which we cannot

fathom; we are quite out of our element, out of our aim when we pretend to account for them. Yet we are too apt to talk of them as if we understood them, with a great deal of niceness and boldness; but, alas! we do but darken them instead of explaining them. We confound and perplex ourselves and one another when we dispute of the order of God's decrees, and the designs, and reasons, and methods of his operations of providence and grace. A humble faith and sincere obedience shall see further and better into the secret of the Lord than all the philosophy of the schools and the searches of science, so called. This first word which God spoke is the more observable because Job, in his repentance, fastens upon it as that which silenced and humbled him (ch. 42:3). This he repeated and echoed as the arrow that stuck fast in him: "I am the fool who has darkened counsel." There was some color to have turned it upon *Elihu* as if God meant *him*, for he spoke last and was speaking when the whirlwind began; but Job applied it to himself, as it becomes us to do when faithful reproofs are given, and not (as most do) to billet them upon other people.

(2) He challenges him to give such proofs of his knowledge as would serve to justify his inquiries into the divine counsels (v. 3): "*Gird up now your loins like a stout man; prepare yourself for the encounter; I will demand of you, will put some questions to you, and answer me if you can, before I answer yours.*" Those who go about to call God to an account must expect to be catechized and called to an account themselves, that they may be made sensible of their ignorance and arrogance. God here puts Job in mind of what he had said, ch. 13:22. *Call thou, and I will answer. "Now make your words good."*

**(4-11) Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth and issued from the womb; when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band; when I fixed My limit for it, and set bars and doors; when I said, "This far you may come, but no farther, and here your proud waves must stop!"**

For the humbling of Job, God here shows him his ignorance even concerning the earth and the sea. Though so near, though so bulky, yet he could give no account of their origination, much less of heaven above or hell beneath, which are at such a distance, or of the several parts of matter which are so minute, then, least of all, of the divine counsels.

1. Concerning the founding of the earth: "If he has such a mighty insight, as he pretends to have, into the counsels of God, let him give some account of the earth he goes upon, which is given to the children of men."

(1) Let him tell where he was when this lower world was made, and whether he was advising or assisting in that wonderful work (v. 4): "*Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Your pretensions are high; can you pretend to this? Were you present when the world was made?*" See here, (a) The greatness and glory of God: *I laid the foundations of the earth.* This proves him to be the only living and true God, and a God of power (Isa. 40:21, Jer. 10:11,12), and encourages us to trust in him at all times (Isa. 51:13,16). (b) The meanness [lowliness] and contemptibleness of man: "*Where were you then? You who have made such a figure among the children of the east, and sets up for an oracle and a judge of the divine counsels, where were you when the foundations of the earth were laid?*" So far were we from

having any hand in the creation of the world which might entitle us to a dominion in it, or so much as being witnesses of it by which we might have gained an insight into it, that we were not then in being. The first man was not, much less were we. It is the honor of Christ that he was present when this was done (Prov. 8:22, &c., John 1:1,2); but *we are of yesterday and know nothing*. Let us not therefore find fault with the works of God, nor prescribe to him. He did not consult us in making the world, and yet it is well made. Why should we expect then that he should take his measures from us in governing it?

(2) Let him describe how this world was made, and give a particular account of the manner in which this strong and stately edifice was formed and erected: "*Declare, if you have so much understanding as you fancy yourself to have, what were the advances of that work.*" Those who pretend to have understanding above others ought to give proof of it. Show me your faith by your works, your knowledge by your words. Let Job declare, if he can, (a) How the world came to be so finely framed, with so much exactness, and such an admirable symmetry and proportion of all the parts of it (v. 5): "*Stand forth, and tell who laid the measures thereof and stretched out the line upon it.* Were you the architect who formed the model and then drew the dimensions by rule according to it?" The vast bulk of the earth is molded as regularly as if it had been done by line and measure. But who can describe how it was cast into this figure? Who can determine its circumference and diameter and all the lines that are drawn on the terrestrial globe? It is to this day a dispute whether the earth stands still or turns round; how then can we determine by what measures it was first formed? (b) How it came to be so firmly fixed. Though it is hung upon nothing, yet it is established that it cannot be moved. But who can tell *upon what the foundations of it are fastened*, that it may not sink with its own weight, or *who laid the cornerstone thereof*, that the parts of it may not fall asunder? (v. 6). *What God does, it shall be forever* (Eccl. 3:14); and therefore, as we cannot find fault with God's work, so we need not be in fear concerning it. It will last, and answer the end, the works of his providence as well as the work of creation. The measures of neither can never be broken, and the work of redemption is no less firm, of which Christ himself is both the foundation and the cornerstone. The church stands as fast as the earth.

(3) Let him repeat, if he can, the songs of praise which were sung at that solemnity (v. 7), *when the morning-stars sang together*, the blessed angels (the firstborn of the Father of light), who, in the morning of time shone as brightly as the morning star, going immediately before the light which God commanded to shine out of darkness upon the seeds of this lower world, the earth, which was without form and void. They were *the sons of God*, who *shouted for joy* when they saw the foundations of the earth laid, because, though it was not made for them but for the children of men, and though it would increase their work and service, yet they knew that the eternal Wisdom and Word, whom they were to worship (Heb. 1:6) would *rejoice in the habitable parts of the earth*, and that much of his *delight would be in the sons of men* (Prov. 8:31). The angels are called *the sons of God* because they bear much of his image, are with him in his house above, and serve him as a son does his father. Now observe here, (a) The glory of God, as the Creator of the world, is to be celebrated with joy and triumph by all his reasonable creatures; for they are qualified and appointed to be the collectors of his praises from the inferior creatures, who can praise him merely as objects that exemplify his workmanship. (b) The work of angels is to praise God. The more we abound in holy, humble, thankful, joyful praise, the more we do the will of God as they do it. And whereas we are so barren and defective in praising God, it is a comfort to think that they are doing it in a better manner. (c) They were unanimous in singing God's praises; they sang together with one accord, and there was no jar in their harmony. The sweetest concerts are in praising God. (d) They all did it, even those who afterwards fell and left

their first estate. Even those who have praised God may, by the deceitful power of sin, be brought to blaspheme him, and yet God will be eternally praised.

II. Concerning the limiting of the sea to the place appointed for it, v. 8, &c. This refers to the third day's work, when God said (Gen. 1:9), *Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and it was so.*

1. Out of the great deep or chaos, in which earth and water were intermixed, in obedience to the divine command the waters *broke forth like a child out of the teeming womb* (v. 8). Then the waters that had covered the deep and stood above the mountains retired with precipitation [rapidity]. *At God's rebuke they fled* (Ps. 104:6,7).

2. This newborn babe is clothed and swaddled (v. 9). *The cloud is made the garment thereof*, with which it is covered, and *thick darkness* (that is, shores vastly remote and distant from one another and quite in the dark one to another) *is a swaddling-band for it*. See with what ease the great God manages the raging. Notwithstanding the violence of its tides and the strength of its billows, he manages it as the nurse does the child in swaddling clothes. It is not said, He made *rocks and mountains* its swaddling bands, but *clouds and darkness*, something that we are not aware of and should think least likely for such a purpose.

3. There is a cradle too provided for this babe: *I broke up for it my decreed place* (v. 10). Valleys were sunk for it in the earth, capacious enough to receive it, and there it is laid to sleep. And if it be sometimes tossed with winds, that (as Bishop Patrick observes) is but the rocking of the cradle, which makes it sleep the faster. As for the sea, so for every one of us there is a decreed place; for he who determined the times before appointed determined also the bounds of our habitation.

4. This babe being made unruly and dangerous by the sin of man, which was the original of all unquietness and danger in this lower world, there is also a prison provided for it: *bars and doors are set* (v. 10). And it is said to it, by way of check to its insolence, *Hitherto shall you come, but no further*. The sea is God's, for he made it, he restrains it. He says to it, *Here shall your proud waves be stayed* (v. 11). This may be considered as an act of God's power over the sea. Though it is so vast a body, and though its motion is sometimes extremely violent, yet God has it under check. Its waves rise no higher, its tides roll no further than God permits. And this is mentioned as a reason why we should stand in awe of God (Jer. 5:22), and yet why we should encourage ourselves in him; for he who stops the noise of the sea, even the noise of her waves, can, when he pleases, still the tumult of the people (Ps. 65:7). It is also to be looked upon as an act of God's mercy to the world of mankind and an instance of his patience towards that provoking race. Though he could easily cover the earth again with the waters of the sea (and, I think, every flowing tide twice a day threatens us and shows what the sea could do, and would do, if God would give it permission), yet he restrains them, being not willing that any should perish, and having *reserved the world that now is unto fire* (2 Pet. 3:7).

**(12-24) Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, that it might take hold of the ends of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it? It takes on form like clay under a seal, and stands out like a garment. From the wicked their light is withheld, and the upraised arm is broken. Have you entered the springs of the sea? Or have you walked in search of the depths? Have the gates of death been revealed to you? Or have you seen the doors of the**

**shadow of death? Have you comprehended the breadth of the earth? Tell Me, if you know all this. Where is the way to the dwelling of light? And darkness, where is its place, that you may take it to its territory, that you may know the paths to its home? Do you know it, because you were born then, or because the number of your days is great? Have you entered the treasury of snow, or have you seen the treasury of hail, which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war? By what way is light diffused, or the east wind scattered over the earth?**

The Lord here proceeds to ask Job many puzzling questions, to convince him of his ignorance and so to shame him for his folly in prescribing to God. If we will but try [challenge] ourselves with such interrogations as these, we shall soon be brought to own that what we know is nothing in comparison with what we know not. Job is here challenged to give an account of six things:

1. Of the springs of the morning, the day-spring from on high (vv. 12-15). As there is no visible being of which we may be more firmly assured that it is, so there is none which we are more puzzled in describing, nor more doubtful in determining what it is, than the light. We welcome the morning and are glad of the day-spring; but

(1) It is not commanded since our days; but what it is, it was long before we were born. Thus, it was neither made by us nor designed primarily for us, but we take it as we find it, and as the many generations had it who went before us. The day-spring knew its place before we knew ours, for we are but of yesterday.

(2) It was not we--it was not any man--who commanded the morning light at first, or appointed the place of its springing up and shining forth, or the time of it. The constant and regular succession of day and night was no contrivance of ours; it is the glory of God which it shows and his handwork, not ours (Ps. 19:1,2).

(3) It is quite out of our power to alter this course: "*Have you countermanded the morning since your days? Have you at any time raised the morning light sooner than its appointed time, to serve your purpose when you have waited for the morning, or ordered the day-spring for your convenience to any other place than its own? No never. Why then will you pretend to direct the divine counsels or expect to have the methods of Providence altered in your favor?*" We may as soon break the covenant of the day and of the night as any part of God's covenant with his people, and particularly this, *I will chasten them with the rod of men.*

(4) It is God who has appointed the day-spring to visit the earth and who diffuses the morning light through the air, which receives it as readily as the clay does the seal (v. 14)--immediately admitting the impressions of it so as suddenly to be all over enlightened by it, as the seal stamps its image on the wax. *And they stand as a garment*, or as if they were clothed with a garment. The earth puts on a new face every morning and dresses itself as we do, puts on light as a garment, and is then to be seen.

(5) This is made a terror to evildoers. Nothing is more comfortable to mankind than the light of the morning. It is pleasant to the eyes, it is serviceable to life and the business of it, and the favor of it is universally extended, for *it takes hold of the ends of the earth* (v. 13). In our hymns we should dwell on the light, on its advantages to the earth. But God here observes how unwelcome it is to those who do evil and therefore hate the light. God makes the light a minister of his justice as well as of his mercy. It is designed to *shake the wicked out of the earth*, and for

that purpose *it takes hold of the ends of it*, as we take hold of the ends of a garment to shake the dust and moths out of it. Job had observed what a terror the morning light is to criminals, because it discovers them (ch. 24:13, &c). God here seconds the observation and asks him whether the world was indebted to him for that kindness. No, the great Judge of the world sends forth the beams of the morning light as his messengers to detect criminals, that they may not only be defeated in their purposes and put to shame, but that they may be brought to condign [well-deserved] punishment (v. 15), that their light may be *withheld* from them (that is, that they may lose their comfort, their confidence, their liberties, their lives), and that their *high arm* which they have lifted up against God and man may be *broken*, and they deprived of their power to do mischief. Whether what is here said of the morning light was designed to represent, as in a figure, the light of the gospel of Christ and to give a type of it, I will not say. But I am sure it may serve to put us in mind of the encomiums [tributes] given to the gospel just at the rising of its morning-star: [first] by Zechariah in his *Benedictus* (Luke 1:78)--By the *tender mercy of our God, the day-spring from on high has visited us, to give light to those who sit in darkness*, whose hearts are turned to it *as clay to the seal* (2 Cor. 4:6); and [second] by the virgin Mary in her *Magnificat* (Luke 1:51), showing that God in his gospel has *shown strength with his arm, scattered the proud, and put down the might*, by that light by which he designed to shake the wicked, to shake wickedness itself out of the earth, and break its high arm.

2. Of the springs of the sea (v. 16). *Have you entered into them, or have you walked in the search of the depth?* Do you know what lies in the bottom of the sea, the treasures there hidden in the sands? Or can you give an account of the rise and original of the waters of the sea? Vapors are continually exhaled out of the sea. Do you know how the recruits are raised by which it is continually supplied? Rivers are constantly poured into the sea. Do you know how they are continually discharged so as not to overflow the earth? Are you acquainted with the secret subterraneous passages by which the waters circulate?" God's way in the government of the world is said to be *in the sea*, and *in the great waters* (Ps. 77:19), intimating that it is hidden from us and not to be pried into by us.

3. Of the gates of death (v. 17). *Have these been open to you?* Death is a grand secret.

(1) We know not beforehand when, and how, and by what means we or others shall be brought to death, by what road we must go the way whence we shall not return, what disease or what disaster will be the door to let us into the house appointed for all living. *Man knows not his time.*

(2) We cannot describe what death is, how the knot is untied between body and soul, nor how the *spirit of a man goes upward* (Eccl. 3:21), to be we know not what and live we know not how, as Mr. Norris expresses it; with what dreadful curiosity (says he) does the soul launch out into the vast ocean of eternity and resign to an untried abyss! Let us make it sure that the gates of heaven shall be opened to us on the other side death, and then we need not fear the opening of the gates of death, though it is a way we are to go but once.

(3) We have no correspondence at all with separate souls nor any acquaintance with their state. It is an unknown undiscovered region to which they are removed. We can neither hear from them nor send to them. While we are here in a world of sense, we speak of the world of spirits as blind men do of colors; and when we remove thither, we shall be amazed to find how much we are mistaken.

4. Of the breadth of the earth (v. 18). *Have you perceived that?* The knowledge of this might seem most level to him and within his reach; yet he is challenged to declare this if he can. We have our residence on the earth; God has given it to the children of men. But who ever surveyed it or could give an account of the number of its acres? It is but a point in the universe. Yet, small as it is, we cannot be exact in declaring the dimensions of it. Job had never sailed around the world, nor anyone before him. So little did men know the breadth of the earth that it was but a few ages ago that the vast continent of America was discovered, which had, till this time, lain hidden. The divine perfection is longer than the earth and broader than the sea. It is therefore presumption for us, who perceive not the breadth of the earth, to dive into the depth of God's counsels.

5. Of the place and way of light and darkness (v. 19). Of the day-spring he had spoken before (v. 12), and he returns to speak of it again. *Where is the way where light dwells?* And again (v. 24): *By what way is the light parted?* He challenges him to describe,

(1) How the light and darkness were at first made. When God, in the beginning, first spread darkness upon the face of the deep, and afterwards commanded the light to shine out of darkness by that mighty word "*Let there be light,*" was Job a witness to the order, to the operation? Can he tell where the fountains of light and darkness are, and where those mighty princes keep their courts distinct while in one world they rule alternately? Though we long ever so much either for the shining forth of the morning or the shadows of the evening, we know not where to send or go to fetch them, nor can we tell *the paths to the house thereof* (v. 20). We were not then born, nor is the number of our days so great that we can describe the birth of that firstborn of the visible creation (v. 21). Shall we then undertake to discourse of God's counsels which were from eternity, or to find out the paths to the house thereof, to solicit for the alteration of them? God glories in it that he forms the light and creates the darkness. And if we must take those as we find them--take those as they come--and quarrel with neither but make the best of both, then we must in like manner accommodate ourselves to the peace and evil which God likewise created (Isa. 45:7).

(2) How they still keep their turns interchangeably. It is God who *makes the outgoings of the morning and of the evening to rejoice* (Ps. 65:8); for it is his order, and no order of ours, that is executed by the outgoings of the morning light and the darkness of the night. We cannot so much as tell where they come from nor where they go (v. 24): *By what way is the light parted* in the morning, when in an instant it shoots itself into all the parts of the air above the horizon as if the morning light flew upon the wings of an east wind, so swiftly and so strongly is it carried, scattering the darkness of the night as the east wind does the clouds? Hence we read of the *wings of the morning* (Ps. 139:9), on which the light is conveyed *to the uttermost parts of the sea, and scattered like an east wind upon the earth*. It is a marvelous change that passes over us every morning by the return of the light and every evening by the return of the darkness; but we expect them, and so they are no surprise nor uneasiness to us. If we would, in like manner, reckon upon changes in our outward condition, we should neither in the brightest noon expect perpetual day nor in the darkest midnight despair of the return of the morning. God has set the one over against the other, like the day and night, and so must we (Eccl. 7:14).

6. Of the *treasures of the snow and hail* (vv. 22,23). *"Have you entered into these and taken a view of them?"* In the clouds the snow and hail are generated, and thence they come in such abundance that one would think there were treasures of them laid up in store there, whereas indeed they are produced *extempore--suddenly*, as I may say, and *pro re nata--for the occasion*.



Sometimes they come so opportunely to serve the purposes of Providence, in God's fighting for his people and against his and their enemies, that one would think they were laid up as magazines, or stores of arms, ammunition, and provisions, against the time of trouble, *the day of battle and war*, when God will either contend with the world in general (as in the deluge when the windows of heaven were opened and the waters fetched out of these treasures to drown a wicked world that waged war with Heaven), or with some particular persons or parties, as when God out of these treasures fetched great hailstones with which to fight against the Canaanites (Josh. 10:11). See what folly it is to strive against God who is thus prepared for battle and war, and how much it is in our interest to make our peace with him and to keep ourselves in his love. God can fight as effectually with snow and hail, if he pleases, as with thunder and lightning or the sword of an angel!

**(25-41) Who has divided a channel for the overflowing *water*, or a path for the thunderbolt, to cause it to rain on a land *where there is no one*, a wilderness in which *there is no man*; to satisfy the desolate waste, and cause to spring forth the growth of tender grass? Has the rain a father? Or who has begotten the drops of dew? From whose womb comes the ice? And the frost of heaven, who gives it birth? The waters harden like stone, and the surface of the deep is frozen. Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades, or loose the belt of Orion? Can you bring out Mazzaroth in its season? Or can you guide the Great Bear [Arcturus] with its cubs? Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you set their dominion over the earth? Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, that an abundance of water may cover you? Can you send out lightnings, that they may go, and say to you, 'Here we *are*'? Who has put wisdom in the mind? Or who has given understanding to the heart? Who can number the clouds by wisdom? Or who can pour out the bottles of heaven, when the dust hardens in clumps, and the clods cling together? Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions, when they crouch in *their* dens, or lurk in their lairs to lie in wait? Who provides food for the raven, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?**

Hitherto God had put such questions to Job as were proper to convince him of his ignorance and short-sightedness. Now he comes, in the same manner, to show him his impotency and weakness. As it is but little that he knows, and therefore he ought not to arraign the divine counsels, so it is but little that he can do, and therefore he ought not to oppose the proceedings of Providence. Let him consider what great things God does and try whether he can do the like, or whether he thinks himself an equal match for him.

1. God has thunder, and lightning, and rain, and frost at command, but Job has not; therefore let him not dare to compare himself with God or contend with him. Nothing is more uncertain than what the weather shall be, nor more out of our reach to appoint. The weather shall be whatever pleases God, not what pleases us--unless, as becomes us, whatever pleases God pleases us. Concerning this observe here,

(1) How great God is.

(a) He has a sovereign dominion over the waters, has appointed them their course even then when they seem to overflow and to be from under his check (v. 25). He has *divided a watercourse*, directs the rain where to fall, even when the shower is most violent, with as much certainty as if it were conveyed by canals or conduit pipes. Thus the hearts

of kings are said to be *in God's hand*; and as the rains, those rivers of God, he turns them wherever he will. Every drop goes as it is directed. God has *sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more return to cover the earth*; and we see that he is able to make good what he has promised, for he has the rain in a watercourse.

(b) He has dominion over the lightning and the thunder, which go not at random but in the way that he directs them. They are mentioned here because he *prepares the lightnings for the rains* (Ps. 137:7). Let not those who fear God be afraid of the lightning or the thunder, for they are not blind bullets, but go the way that God himself, who means no hurt to them, directs.

(c) In directing the course of the rain he does not neglect the wilderness, the desert land (vv. 26,27), *where no man is*. (i) Where there is no man to be employed in taking care of the productions. God's providence reaches further than man's industry. If he had not more kindness for many of the inferior creatures than man has, it would go ill with them. God can make the earth fruitful without any art or pains of ours (Gen. 2:5,6). When *there was not a man to till the ground*, yet there went up a mist and watered it. But we cannot make it fruitful without God; it is he who gives the increase. (ii) Where there is no man to be provided for nor to take the benefit of the fruits that are produced. Though God does with very peculiar favor visit and regard man, yet he does not overlook the inferior creatures, but causes *the bud of the tender herb to spring forth for food for all flesh*, as well as *for the service of man*. Even the wild asses shall have their thirst quenched (Ps. 104:11). God has enough for all, and wonderfully provides even for those creatures that man neither has service from nor makes provision for.

(d) He is, in a sense, *the Father of the rain* (v. 28). It has no other father. He produces it by his power; he governs and directs it and makes what use he pleases of it. Even the small drops of the dew he distills upon the earth, as the God of nature. And, as the God of grace, he rains righteousness upon us and is himself as the dew unto Israel. See Hos. 14:5,6; Mic. 5:7.

(e) The ice and the frost, by which the waters are congealed and the earth encrusted, are produced by his providence (vv. 29,30). These are very common things, which lessens the strangeness of them. But considering what a vast change is made by them in a very little time--how the waters are hid as with a stone, as with a gravestone laid upon them (so thick, so strong is the ice that covers them), and the face of the deep is even sometimes frozen--we may well ask, "*Out of whose womb came the ice?* What created power could produce such a wonderful work?" No power but that of the Creator himself. Frost and snow come from him, and therefore should lead our thoughts and meditations to him who does such great things, things past finding out. And we shall the more easily bear the inconveniences of winter weather if we learn to make this good use of it.

(2) How weak man is. Can he do such things as these? Could Job? No (vv. 34,35).

(a) He cannot command one shower of rain for the relief of himself or his friends: "*Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, those bottles of heaven, that abundance of waters may cover you, to water your fields when they are dry and parched?*" If we lift up our voice to God to pray for rain, we may have it (Zech. 10:1); but if we lift up our voice to the clouds to demand it, they will soon tell us they are not at our beck, and we shall go

without it (Jer. 14:22). The heavens will not hear the earth unless God hears them (Hos. 2:21). See what poor, indigent, depending creatures we are. We cannot do without rain, nor can we have it when we will.

(b) He cannot commission one flash of lightning, if he had a mind to make use of it for the terror of his enemies (v. 35): "*Can you send lightnings, that they may go on your errand and do the execution you desire? Will they come at your call and say to you, Here we are?*" No. The ministers of God's wrath will not be ministers of ours. Why should they, since the *wrath of man works not the righteousness of God?* See Luke 9:55.

2. God has the stars of heaven under his command and cognizance, but we have them not under ours. Our meditations are now to rise higher, far above the clouds, to the glorious lights above. God mentions particularly, not the planets which move in lower orbs, but the fixed stars which are much higher. It is supposed that they have an influence upon this earth, notwithstanding their vast distance. Not [an influence] upon the minds of men or the events of providence (men's fate is not determined by their stars), but upon the ordinary course of nature; they are set for signs and seasons, for days and years (Gen. 1:14). And if the stars have such a dominion over this earth (v. 33) though they have their place in the heavens and are but mere matter, much more has he who is their Maker and ours, and who is an Eternal Mind. Now see how weak we are:

(1) We cannot alter the influences of the stars (v. 31), not those that are instrumental to produce the pleasures of the spring: *Can you bind the sweet influences of Pleiades?*--the seven stars of that constellation which lie in so small a compass and yet shed very benign [beneficial] influences upon the earth. Nor can we alter those that introduce the rigor of the winter: *Can you loose the bands of Orion?*--that magnificent constellation which makes so great a figure (none greater) and dispenses rough and displeasing influences which we cannot control nor repel. Both summer and winter will have their course. However, God can change them when he pleases. He can make the spring cold and so bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, and the winter warm and so loose the bands of Orion. But we cannot.

(2) It is not in our power to order the motions of the stars, nor are we entrusted with the guidance of them. God, who *calls the stars by their names* (Ps. 147:4), calls them forth in their respective seasons, appointing them the time of their rising and setting. But this is not our province. We cannot *bring forth Mazzaroth*--the stars in the southern signs, nor *guide Arcturus*--those in the northern (v. 32). God can bring forth the stars to battle (as he did when in their courses they fought against Sisera) and guide them in the attacks they are ordered to make. But man cannot do so.

(3) We are not only unconcerned in the government of the stars (the government they are under and the government they are entrusted with, for they both rule and are ruled), but utterly unacquainted with it; *we know not the ordinances of heaven* (v. 33). So far are we from being able to change them that we can give no account of them; they are a secret to us. Shall we then pretend to know God's counsels and the reasons of them? If it were left to us to set the dominion of the stars upon the earth, we should soon be at a loss. Shall we then teach God how to govern the world?

3. God is the author and giver, the father and fountain, of all wisdom and understanding (v. 36). The souls of men are nobler and more excellent beings than the stars of heaven themselves, and

shine more brightly. The powers and faculties of reason with which man is endued and the wonderful performances of thought bring him into some alliance to the blessed angels. And from where does this light come but from the Father of lights? *Who else has put wisdom into the inner parts of man, and given understanding to the heart?*

(1) The rational soul itself, and its capacities, come from him as the God of nature; for he forms the spirit of man within him. We did not make our own souls, nor can we describe how they act nor how they are united to our bodies. He only who made them knows them, and knows how to manage them. He fashions men's hearts alike in some things, and yet unlike in others.

(2) True wisdom, with its furniture and improvement, comes from him as the God of grace and the Father of every good and perfect gift. Shall we pretend to be wiser than God when we have all our wisdom from him? Nay, shall we pretend to be wise above our sphere and beyond the limits which he who gave us our understanding sets to it? He designed that with it we should serve God and do our duty, but never did he intend that with it we should set ourselves up as directors of the stars or the lightning.

4. God has the clouds under his cognizance and government, but we do not (v. 37). Can any man with all his wisdom undertake to *number the clouds*, or (as it may be read) to *declare and describe the nature of them*? Though they are near us, in our own atmosphere, yet we know little more of them than of the stars which are at so great a distance. And when the clouds have poured down rain in abundance so that *the dust grows into solid mire and the clods cleave fast together* (v. 38), *who can stay the bottles of heaven*? Who can stop them that it may not always rain? The power and goodness of God are herein to be acknowledged in that he gives the earth rain enough but does not surfeit [sate] it, softens it but does not drown it, makes it fit for the plow but not unfit for the seed. As we cannot command a shower of rain, so we cannot command a fair day without God--so necessary and so constant is our dependence upon him.

5. God provides food for the inferior creatures; and it is by his providence, not by any care or pains of ours, that they are fed. The following chapter is wholly taken up with the instances of God's power and goodness about animals, and therefore some transfer to it the last three verses of this chapter, which speak of the provision made,

(1) For the lions (v. 39,40). "You do not pretend that the clouds and stars have any dependence upon yourself, for they are above you. But on the earth you think yourself paramount. Let us then ask: *"Will you hunt the prey for the lion?* You value yourself upon your possession of cattle which you were once owner of, the oxen, asses, camels that were fed at your trough. But will you undertake the maintenance of the lions and *the young lions when they couch in their dens*, waiting for a prey? No, you need not do it, for they can shift for themselves without you. You cannot do it, for you have not the wherewithal to satisfy them. You dare not do it, for should you come to feed them they would seize upon you. But I do it." See the all-sufficiency of the divine Providence. It has the wherewithal to satisfy the desire of every living thing, even the most ravenous. See the bounty of the divine Providence, that wherever it has given life it will give livelihood, even to those creatures that are not only not serviceable but dangerous to man. And see its sovereignty, that it suffers some creatures to be killed for the support of other creatures. The harmless sheep are torn to pieces to *fill the appetite of the young lions*, who yet sometimes are made to lack and suffer hunger to punish them for their cruelty, while those that fear God lack no good thing.

(2) For the young ravens (v. 41). As ravenous beasts, so ravenous birds are fed by the divine Providence. *Who* but God *provides for the raven his food?* Man does not; he takes care only of those creatures that are, or may be, useful to him. But God has a regard to all the works of his hands, even the meanest [lowliest] and least valuable. The ravens' *young ones* are in a special manner necessitous, and God supplies them (Ps. 147:9). God's feeding the fowls, especially these fowls (Matt. 6:26), is an encouragement to us to trust him for our daily bread. See here,

(a) What distress the young ravens are often in: *They wander for lack of meat.* The old ones, they say, neglect them and do not provide for them as other birds do for their young. And indeed those that are ravenous to others are commonly barbarous to their own, and unnatural.

(b) What they are supposed to do in that distress: They *cry*, for they are noisy clamorous creatures, and this is interpreted as crying to God. It being the cry of nature, it is looked upon as directed to the God of nature. The putting of so favorable a construction as this upon the cries of the young ravens may encourage us in our prayers, though we can but cry "*Abba, Father.*"

(c) What God does for them. Some way or other he provides for them so that they grow up and come to maturity. And he who takes this care of the young ravens certainly will not be lacking to his people or theirs. This, being but one instance of many of the divine compassion, may give us occasion to think how much good our God does every day beyond what we are aware of.