

JOB
Chapter 38

Technical Notes of Matthew Poole

(1) Then Yahweh answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said:

Answered Job, i.e. began to debate the matter with him, as Job had desired. *Out of the whirlwind*, i.e. out of a dark and thick cloud, from which he sent a terrible and tempestuous wind as the harbinger of his presence. In this manner God appears and speaks to him, partly, because this was his usual method in those times, as we see in Exod. 19:18; Num. 9:15,16; see also 1 Kings 19:11; Ezek. 1:4; partly, to awaken Job and his friends to the more serious and reverent attention to his words; partly, to testify his displeasure both against Job and against his three friends; and partly, that all of them might be more deeply and thoroughly humbled and abased within themselves and prepared the better to receive, and longer to retain, the instructions which God was about to give them.

(2) "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?"

Who is this? It is a question of admiration and reprehension: What and where is he who presumes to talk at this rate? This language becomes not a creature, much less a professor of religion. The person here designed is not Elihu who spoke last, but Job who had spoken most, as is apparent from ver. 1, and from chap. 42:3 where Job takes the following reproof to himself, and from the following discourse wherein God convinces Job by divers [several] of the same kind of arguments which Elihu had used against him. *Who darkens counsel*; either, 1. His own counsel, i.e. that expresses his own mind darkly and doubtfully. But that was not Job's fault. He spoke his mind too plainly and freely. Or rather, 2. God's counsel, which is called simply *counsel* by way of eminency, as *the word* and *the commandment* are oft put for *the word* and *command of God*. For the great matter of the dispute between Job and his friends was concerning God's counsel, purpose, and providence in afflicting Job, which being a wise, just, and glorious action of God, Job had endeavored to obscure and misrepresent and censure. And God's decrees and judgments are frequently called his *counsels* as in Ps. 33:11; Prov. 19:21; Isa. 28:29; Acts 2:23. *By words*; God does not charge Job, as his three friends had done, with hypocrisy and wickedness in the course of life, nor with atheistical opinions of God or his providence, as some of the Hebrew writers do, but confines his reproof to his hard speeches. *Without knowledge*; proceeding from ignorance, mistake, and inconsiderateness; not from malice or rage against God, as his friends accused him.

(3) Now prepare yourself [gird up your loins] like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me.

Gird up now your loins; as warriors then did for the battle. Prepare yourself for the combat with me, which you have oft desired. I accept your challenge; see chap. 13:22 and elsewhere. *I will demand of you*; or, *I will ask you questions*; which he does in the following verses.

(4) Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding.

Then you were nowhere, you had no being; you are but of yesterday. And do you presume to

judge of my eternal counsels? I made the world without your help, and therefore can govern it without your counsel, and I do not need you to be the controller or censurer of my works. *When I laid the foundations of the earth;* when I made the earth, which is as the foundation or lower part of the whole world, and settled it as firm and fast upon its own center as if it had been built upon the surest foundations. But if you are ignorant of these manifest and visible works, do not pretend to the exact knowledge of my secret counsels and mysterious providences?

(5) Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?

Who has prescribed how long and broad and deep it should be? *Or who has stretched the line,* to wit, the measuring line, to regulate all its dimensions so as might be most convenient both for beauty and use?

(6) To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone,

This strong and durable building has no foundation but in God's power and word, which has marvelously established it upon itself. *Or who laid the cornerstone thereof;* by which the several walls and parts of the building are joined and fastened together, and in which, next to the foundation, the stability of any building does consist? The sense is, Who was it who built this goodly fabric, and established it so firmly that it cannot be moved without a miracle?

(7) When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

The morning stars; either, 1. The stars properly so called, which are said to sing and praise God, objectively, because they give men ample occasion to do it in regard of their glorious light and stupendous motions, &c. Compare Ps. 19:1; 148:1. But, (1) these stars are not here the objects or matter, but the authors or instruments of God's praises for the founding of the earth. (2) The stars were not created when the earth was founded, but upon the fourth day. (3) There is no satisfactory reason given why all the stars should be called *morning stars*, especially when there is but one star known by that name. Or rather, 2. The sons of God, as it here follows, the latter clause of the verse being explicatory of the former, as is most frequent in this and some other books of Scripture; to wit, the angels, who may well be called *stars*, as even men of eminent note, and particularly ministers of God's word, are called, see Dan. 8:10; 12:3; Rev. 1:16,20; and *morning stars*, because of their excellent luster and glory, for which they are called *angels of light*, 2 Cor. 11:14, and Christ for the same reason is called the *Morning Star*, Rev. 22:16. *The sons of God;* the blessed angels, for man not being yet made, God had then no other sons; and these are called *the sons of God* partly because they had their whole being from him, and partly because they were made partakers of his Divine and glorious image. And *all* these are said to join in this work of praising God, probably because none of the angels were as yet fallen from their first estate, though they did fall within a very little time after. *Shouted for joy;* rejoiced in and blessed God for his works, whereby he intimates that they neither did advise or any way assist him in his works, nor dislike or censure any of his works as Job had presumed to do with the works of his providence, which are not inferior to those of creation.

(8) Or who shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth and issued from the womb;

Who was it, you or I, who did set bounds to the vast and raging ocean, and shut it up as it were

with doors within its proper place and storehouse, that it might not overflow the earth; which without God's powerful restraint it would do? See Ps. 33:7; 104:9. This sense seems most proper and to be confirmed by the following verses. *When it broke forth, or, after it had broken forth*, to wit, from the womb or bowels of the earth, within which the waters were for the most part contained, Gen. 1:2; compare 2 Pet. 3:5; and out of which they were by God's command brought forth into the proper place or channel which God had appointed for them.

(9) When I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band;

When I covered it with vapors and clouds which arise out of the sea, and by God's appointment hover above it and cover it like a garment. *Thick darkness*, i.e. black and dark clouds, called *darkness* by a usual metonymy of the adjunct. So the same thing is repeated in other words, after the manner. Having compared the sea to a newborn infant, he continues in the same metaphor and makes the clouds as swaddling-bands to keep the sea within its bounds; though indeed neither clouds, nor air, nor sands and shores can bound the sea, but it is God alone who does it in and with these things.

(10) When I fixed My limit for it, and set bars and doors;

Broke up for it my decreed place, i.e. made those valleys, or channels, and hollow places in the earth which might serve for a cradle to receive and hold this great and goodly infant when it came out of the womb. See Gen. 1:9,10; Ps. 33:7. Or, *ordained or established my decree upon or concerning it*. *Set bars and doors*, i.e. fixed its bounds as strongly as if they were fortified with bars and doors.

(11) When I said, "This far you may come, but no farther, and here your proud waves must stop!"

To wit, at the sand and shore of the sea, Jer. 5:22. *Your proud waves*; which rage and swell as if they would overwhelm all the earth.

(12) Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place,

The morning, i.e. the morning light, or the sun which is the cause of it. Did you create the sun and appoint the order and succession of day and night? *Since your days*; since you were born. This work was not done by you, but by me, and that long before you were born. *To know his place*; to observe the punctual time when, and the point of the heavens where, it should arise, which varies every day. What this your contrivance or mine?

(13) That it might take hold of the ends of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it?

That this morning light should in a moment spread itself over the face of the whole earth, from one end of the hemisphere to the other. *Shaken out of it*, from the face of the earth. And this effect the morning light has upon the wicked, partly because it discovers them and drives them into their lurking holes; whereas the darkness hides them and draws them forth, and gives them opportunity to execute their villainies without observation, Job 24:15-17; and partly because it brings them to condign [well-deserved] punishment, the morning being the most fit and the most

usual time for executing judgment, of which see Ps. 101:8; Jer. 21:12.

(14) It takes on form like clay *under* a seal, and stands out like a garment.

It, to wit, the earth, mentioned in the next foregoing verse. *Is turned*; is transformed and changed in its shape and appearance. *To the seal*, or, *by the seal*, which makes a beautiful or valuable impression upon that clay, which in itself has no form nor worth nor comeliness in it. So the earth, which in the darkness of the night lies like a confused heap without either form or beauty, when the light arises and shines upon it appears in excellent order and great glory. *They*; either, 1. The inhabitants of the earth, and particularly the wicked mentioned both in the foregoing and following verses. Or, 2. More generally, the men and things of the earth, whether natural, as living creatures, herbs, and trees, &c.; or artificial, as houses or other buildings. *Stand*, i.e. present themselves to our view, for which that posture of standing is most convenient. Or *consist*, or *abide*, or *are constituted*. *As a garment*; wherewith the earth is in a manner clothed and adorned as with a garment; as the blessed God himself is said to *cover himself with light as with a garment*, Ps. 104:2.

(15) From the wicked their light is withheld, and the upraised arm is broken.

And, or *but*; for the following words seem to be added by way of opposition to what went before. The earth and the men and the things in it have the comfort and benefit of the light, but so have not the wicked. *Their light*, i.e. their portion of light. That light which is enjoyed by others is withheld from them either by their own choice, because they love and choose darkness rather than light, or by the judgment of God or the magistrate, by whom they are cut off from *the light of the living* (as it is called in Job 33:30), or at least deprived of their peace, comfort, and prosperity, which frequently goes under the name of light in Scripture, and may be so called here by an elegant allusion to the natural light of the sun mentioned before. *The high arms*; their great strength, which they used tyrannically to the oppression and crushing of others.

(16) Have you entered the springs of the sea? Or have you walked in search of the depths?

The springs, Heb. *the tears*, i.e. the several springs out of which the waters of the sea flow as tears do from the eyes. Have you found out the utmost depth and bottom of the sea, which in divers [several] places could never be reached by the wisest mariner or the longest cables? And how then can you fathom the depths of my counsels?

(17) Have the gates of death been revealed to you? Or have you seen the doors of the shadow of death?

Have you seen, or do you perfectly know, the place and state of the dead, the depths and bowels of that earth in which the generality of dead men are buried, or the several ways and methods of death, or the various states and conditions of men after death? And the same things is repeated.

(18) Have you comprehended the breadth of the earth? Tell Me, if you know all this.

Do you exactly know the whole compass and all the parts of the earth, and the state and quality of all countries, and of the men and things in them? Give me an answer to these questions, which is far more easy to do than to give me an answer to many other questions which I could

put to you about my secret counsels and providences, and the reasons of my dealing with you as I do.

(19) Where is the way to the dwelling of light? And darkness, where is its place,

The way; or rather, the place, as the next clause explains it and the Hebrew phrase will bear. Where light dwells, i.e. has its constant and settled abode; for in the place where Job lived, and in most other parts of the inhabited world, it is like a traveler who comes and goes continually every day. This may be referred either, 1. To the place under the two poles, where first the light and then the darkness continues for six months together. Or rather, 2. To the sun, the fountain of light. And as this is a poetical book, so this may be a poetical expression and question: Where does the sun go when it departs from this hemisphere? Where is the tabernacle and the chamber in which both sacred, as Ps. 19:4,5, and profane poets suppose the sun to rest? Do you know the place where the sun may be found when it sets and from where you can fetch it back again? For it is to be carefully observed that he speaks not here of a bare and simple knowledge of this matter, which was plain and easy to Job and many others who were not ignorant that the sun was the fountain of light, from whose approach light comes and by whose departure darkness is caused; but of an operative knowledge, even such as could and did enable him to take it to the bound thereof, as it follows, ver. 20. And withal, he seems here to speak not only of the daily course and motion of the sun and the vicissitude [regular change] of day and night, but also and especially of the first production of the light, which was before Job was born, as is evident from ver. 21. And this makes the question more difficult and more considerable [for Job], the sense whereof may be this: Seeing there was a time when there was nothing but gross and comfortless darkness upon the face of the earth, how did light come into the world? Which was the place where light dwelt at that time, and from where was it fetched? And from where came that orderly constitution and constant succession of light and darkness? Was this your work? Were you privy to it or a counselor or assistant in it? Or was it not done by me alone long before you had a being?

(20) That you may take it to its territory, that you may know the paths to its home?

That you should take it, i.e. taking, bring or lead it, as this verb is oft used, see Exod. 25:2; Ps. 68:29, compared with Eph. 4:11; 1 Kings 3:24; 17:10; Hos. 14:2. And many other such pregnant verbs there are in the Hebrew language, having the signification of two verbs included in one. And this it refers principally to the light, and secondarily to darkness as the consequent of the other. To the bound thereof, i.e. its whole course, from the place of its abode from where it is supposed to come, to the end of its journey which it is to go. Did you direct or guide the light or the sun, that it should at first take and afterward constantly continue in that course which now it holds? That it should go from east to west, and rise sometimes in one point or part of the heaven and sometimes in another, and that its day's journey should be longer in one season of the year and shorter in another? This regular and excellent course must needs be the effect of great wisdom. And whose wisdom was it? Yours or mine? That you should know, to wit, practically, so as to direct or lead it in the manner now expressed. The paths to the house thereof; where you may find it and from where you may fetch it.

(21) Do you know it, because you were born then, or because the number of your days is great?

An ironical question: If you pretend to know these things and can readily answer these questions,

how did you come by this knowledge? Was it because you were born when I made the world and that first constitution of light and darkness in the order and succession which continues to this day, and thereby [you] had the opportunity of inspecting my works and seeing from where the light came, and because you have gained this knowledge by long experience, as having lived ever since the creation of the world until this time? In truth you are but *of yesterday, and know nothing* (as was said in chap. 8:9). But the words are and may be otherwise rendered, *Do or did you know*, either by your own remembrance or by the information of others, *that you were then born?* (to wit, when I made the world. Or, *Did you know that you should then be born? then,* to wit, when you were born. Or, *Did you then know*, the two Hebrew particles being transplaced, as is not unusual in that language, *that you should be born?* How could you know this when you had no being?) *and that the number of your days should be great?* that you should live so long as you have lived? You could neither foreknow the time of your birth nor the length of your life. Or, *and is the number of your days great*, i.e. so great that it reaches to the time of the world's creation?

(22) Have you entered the treasury of snow, or have you seen the treasury of hail,

Do you know where I have laid up those vast quantities of snow and hail which I draw forth when I see fit? Do you know the causes of them and the way to produce them? But if you are unacquainted with these treasures, it is intolerable presumption in you to pretend that you know those treasures of wisdom that lie hid in my own breast.

(23) Which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war?

Which, i.e. which snow, and especially hail. *Against the time of trouble*, i.e. when I intend to bring trouble or calamity upon any country or people for their sins, or for their trial. Or, *against the time of the enemy*, i.e. when I intend to punish my or my people's enemies, and to fight against them with these weapons; of which see instances Exod. 9:14; Josh. 10:11. Compare 1 Sam. 7:10; Job 36:31; Isa. 30:30.

(24) By what way is light diffused, or the east wind scattered over the earth?

By what way; Do you know all the causes, means, methods, and circumstances of this work of God? *Is the light parted, or dispersed, or distributed*, to wit, in the air or upon the face of the earth? By *light* he understands either, 1. The lightning, which breaks forth suddenly out of a cloud and with strange swiftness disperses itself and flees from east to west, as is noted in Matt. 24:27. But this word *light*, put by itself and being understood properly, is constantly used in this book for the light of the sun and never for the lightning; and where it is meant of the lightning, there is some other word added to it, as chap. 37:15, where it is called *the light of his cloud*. And besides, he speaks of the lightning in the next verse, which would be superfluous if it were here mentioned. Or rather, 2. Of the light of the sun, which is commonly called *light* without any other word added to it, as Job 3:4,9,16; 24:14; 25:3, &c.. And this light of the sun is variously parted or distributed in the world, shining in one place and time when it does not shine in another; or for a longer time or with great brightness, power, and virtue than it does in another; all which are the effects of God's infinite wisdom and power, and such as were out of Job's reach to understand, or at least to effect. *Which scatters the east wind upon the earth*, i.e. which light scatters, &c., i.e. raises the east wind and causes it to blow here and there upon the earth. For as the sun is justly called by the poets and others *the father of the winds*, because it draws up those exhalations which give matter to the winds (among other reasons), so in particular the east

wind is oft observed to rise together with the sun, from which also it has both its Latin and Greek name. But some make this a distinct question from the former and render the words thus: and (repeat, *by which way*) *the east wind* (under which all the other winds may be comprehended) *scatters itself upon the earth*, i.e. whence the winds come and where they go, which is mentioned as a secret in nature, John 3:8, and how it comes to pass that they blow in such several manners and with such various and even contrary effects. Or thus, and by which way *the east wind scatters* (to wit, the clouds or other light things; for this is noted in Scripture to be a most vehement wind, and to scatter the clouds, Exod. 14:21; Jonah 4:8) *upon the earth*, i.e., whence it comes to pass that the east wind was so violent and furious. But the words may be rendered thus, which (i.e. which light of the sun, or when it, to wit, this light) *scatters itself* (as several here render this word, that conjugation being often used reciprocally, as is confessed) from (the prefix *mem* being understood, as it is very frequently in the Hebrew text) *the east* (for this Hebrew word does not only signify the *eastern wind*, but also the *east*, or the eastern part of the heavens or earth, as Ezek. 40:19; 42:16; Hab. 1:9, and in many other places; and *kedem*, the root of this word is constantly so used) *upon or over the earth, all over the earth*. And this is justly mentioned as a wonderful work of God, that as soon as ever the sun arises, it parts or scatters its light in an instant from one end of the hemisphere to another. But this I propose with submission.

(25) Who has divided a channel for the overflowing *water*, or a path for the thunderbolt,

For the overflowing of waters; for the showers of rain which come down out of the clouds, orderly, moderately, and gradually, as if they were conveyed in pipes or channels; which, without the care of God's providence, would fall confusedly and all together; and instead of refreshing, would overwhelm the earth. *For the lightning of thunder*, i.e. for that lightning which, breaking out of the cloud with violence, causes thunder. Or, *for lightning and thunder*. Who opened a passage for them out of the cloud in which they were imprisoned? And these are here joined with the rain because they are commonly accompanied with great showers of rain; which is here noted as a wonderful work of God, that fire and water should come out of the same cloud.

(26) To cause it to rain on a land *where there is no one*, a wilderness in which *there is no man*;

To cause it to rain; that the clouds being broken by lightning and thunder might pour down rain. *Wherein there is no man*, to wit, to water those parts by art and industry, as is usual in cultivated and inhabited places; which makes this work of Divine Providence more necessary and more remarkable in providing for the relief of the wild beasts, and plants, and other fruits of these forsaken lands, which otherwise would perish with drought.

(27) To satisfy the desolate waste, and cause to spring forth the growth of tender grass?

To satisfy, by raining not sparingly, but liberally and abundantly upon it. *To cause the bud of the tender herb to spring forth*; there being many excellent and useful herbs found in desert places, which otherwise would be utterly neglected and despised.

(28) Has the rain a father? Or who has begotten the drops of dew?

To wit, besides me. Is there any man upon earth who can beget or produce rain at his pleasure? No, this is my peculiar work. And therefore seeing you know and can do nothing as to the government of these ordinary effects of nature, how great presumption is it to arrogate to yourself the knowledge and management of the secret and mysterious affairs of my providence in the disposal of men!

(29) From whose womb comes the ice? And the frost of heaven, who gives it birth?

What man either can produce them or does fully understand where or how they are engendered? For philosophers speak of these things only by guess, and the reasons which some assign for them are confuted by others; and so they will confute one another to the end of the world and prove nothing solidly but their own ignorance and the reasonableness of these questions.

(30) The waters harden like stone, and the surface of the deep is frozen.

As with a stone, i.e. with ice as hard as a stone. *The face of the deep*, i.e. the great sea, which is oft called *the deep*, as Gen. 7:11; Ps. 107:24; Isa. 51:10; 63:13; 2 Cor. 11:25, which in some parts is frozen, which is a wonderful work of God.

(31) Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades, or loose the belt of Orion?

Bind, i.e. restrain or hinder them. Can you bind or shut up the earth when they open it? *The sweet influences*; or, *the delights*; because this constellation by its benign and opening influences brings in the spring, the herbs and flowers, and other delights of the earth. *Pleiades*, called also the Seven Stars. Of this and the following constellation, see Job 9:9. *The bands*; by which it binds up the air and earth, by bringing storms of rain or hail, or frost and snow; and withal binds or seals the hands of workmen, as is noted, Job 37:7. *Orion*: this is another constellation, which rises in November and brings in winter. So the sense of the verse is, You cannot bind the earth when the one looses or opens it, nor loose or open it when the other binds or shuts it up.

(32) Can you bring out Mazzaroth in its season? Or can you guide the Great Bear [Arcturus] with its cubs?

Can you bring forth, to wit, into view? Can you make him to arise and appear in your hemisphere? *Mazzaroth*; by which he designs either, 1. All the constellations, and especially the twelve signs of the zodiac; or rather, 2. Some particular constellation, as all the rest here mentioned are understood. But whether this be that which is called the *chambers of the south*, chap. 9:9, or the Dog Star, or some other visible in Job's country but not in ours, we may be safely and contentedly ignorant, seeing even the Hebrew doctors are not agreed therein. *Arcturus*; a northern constellation, of which see on Job 9:9. *With his sons*, to wit, the lesser stars which belong to it, and are placed round about it, and attend upon it, as children upon their parents.

(33) Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you set their dominion over the earth?

Do you know? either, 1. Simply, and by speculation, Do you understand them? Or, 2. Practically, or operatively, so as to establish or rule them, as the next clause implies. *The ordinances of heaven*; the laws, which are firmly established concerning their order, motion, or rest, and their

powerful influences upon this lower world. Did you give these laws? Or do you perfectly know them? *Can you set the dominion thereof in the earth?* Can you manage and overrule their influences so that they shall bring such seasons and such weather as you would have?

(34) Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, that an abundance of water may cover you?

Can you lift up your voice to the clouds; either thundering in them, or calling to them with a loud voice, commanding them to rain? *May cover you,* i.e. your land, when it needs and requires rain.

(35) Can you send out lightnings, that they may go, and say to you, 'Here we are!'

Can you send at your pleasure, and upon your errand? *Here we are;* an expression of servants, declaring their readiness to obey their masters' commands; of which see Gen. 22:1; Isa. 6:8.

(36) Who has put wisdom in the mind? Or who has given understanding to the heart?

In the inward parts, to wit, of a man. Compare Job 19:27; Ps. 51:6. Who gave you that wit and understanding which you have, and which you now use so arrogantly and wickedly, to contend with me and to censure my actions? *Who has given understanding to the heart;* so he limits the former general expression of the *inward parts*. The heart is made by the Hebrews the seat of the understanding, and is commonly put for it in Scripture.

(37) Who can number the clouds by wisdom? Or who can pour out the bottles of heaven,

Who can wisely search out and exactly find the number of the clouds? They are numberless, and filled with water, as the next clause implies. *Who can stay the bottles of heaven,* to wit, the clouds? in which the rain is kept as in bottles, out of which God pours it when he sees fit.

(38) When the dust hardens in clumps, and the clods cling together?

This verse contains a description, either, 1. Of a great drought, when the earth grows very hard and close and compact; or, 2. Of the condition of the earth presently after the fall of rain, when the earth, which in time of drought was much of it dissolved into dust, is now by the rain cemented or united together. In either of these cases it is the work of God alone to keep the clouds from pouring down more rain upon the earth.

(39) Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,

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

(40) When they crouch in *their* dens, or lurk in their lairs to lie in wait?

When through age and infirmity they cannot range abroad for prey, as the young lions do; but lie still in their dens, as it were expecting their food from God, from whom also they receive it. *To lie in wait;* watching till some beast comes that way upon which they may prey.

(41) Who provides food for the raven, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?

Having mentioned the noblest of brute creatures, he now mentions one of the most contemptible and loathsome, to show the care of God's providence over all creatures, both great and small; which is more remarkable in ravens, because, 1. They devour flesh, which it is not easy for them to find. 2. They are greedy, and eat very much. 3. They are generally neglected and forsaken by mankind. 4. Their young ones are so soon forsaken by their dams that if God did not provide for them in a more than ordinary manner, they would be starved to death.