

Out of the Whirlwind



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 38–39, John 1:29, Matt. 16:13, 1 Cor. 1:18–27, Job 40:1–4, 42:1–6, Luke 5:1–8.*

Memory Text: “‘Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding.’” (*Job 38:4, NKJV*).

Whatever their differences, the characters in the book of Job had one thing in common: each had a lot to say about God, or at least about his understanding of God. And, as we have seen, much of what they said we could agree on. After all, who would argue with this: “‘But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; and the fish of the sea will explain to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this, in whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind?’” (*Job 12:7–10, NKJV*)? Or with this: “‘Does God subvert judgment? Or does the Almighty pervert justice?’” (*Job 8:3, NKJV*)?

And while the context was Job's suffering, the main focus of discussion was God. With the exception of the first two chapters, though, the Lord remained hidden, in the background, as the book progressed.

All that, however, was about to change. God Himself—the subject of so much discussion and debate in the book of Job—will now speak for Himself.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 10.

Out of the Whirlwind

Read Job 38:1. What happens here that is different from everything else in all the other dialogues?

Suddenly and unexpectedly, the Lord now appears in the book of Job, the first time since Job 2:6—“And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life.’” (NKJV).

Nothing really prepares the reader for this sudden appearance of God. Job 37 ends with Elihu’s speech, and the next thing we know, “the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind” (Job 38:1). Instantly it is just God and Job, as if the other men are irrelevant, at least for now.

The word *whirlwind* comes from a Hebrew word that means “storm” or “tempest,” and it has been used in connection with the appearance of God to humans (see Isa. 29:6, Zech. 9:14). It was also the word used in the context of Elijah’s being taken to heaven: “When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a *whirlwind*, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal” (2 Kings 2:1, NIV; *emphasis added*).

Though we are not given any physical details about this “theophany” (a visible manifestation of God to humanity), it is clear that God isn’t speaking to Job in a “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12). Instead, the Lord manifested Himself in a very powerful way, one that certainly got Job’s attention.

Of course, this wasn’t the only time God had revealed Himself to fallen humans. Again and again, the Scriptures show us the closeness of God to humanity.

What do these texts teach us about how near God can be to us? Gen. 15:1–6, Gen. 32:24–32, John 1:29.

The Bible teaches us the great and important truth that our God is not a distant God who created our world and then left us to ourselves. Instead, He is a God who closely interacts with us. No matter our sorrows, our troubles, or whatever we face in this life, we can have the assurance that God is near and that we can trust Him.

It’s one thing to believe intellectually in the nearness of God to us; it’s quite another to experience that nearness. How can you learn to draw close to God and to derive hope and comfort from this relationship?

God's Question

After what must have seemed to Job like a very long silence, God finally speaks to him, even if what He first said might not have been what Job wanted to hear.

What was the first question that God asked Job, and what was implied in that question? *Job 38:2.*

All through the Bible we find God asking humans questions. This is not because He doesn't know the answers already. Instead, as a good teacher often does, God asks questions because they are an effective way to get us to think about our situation, to make us confront ourselves, to help us work through issues and come to the proper conclusions. The questions, then, that God asks are not to teach the Lord something that He didn't already understand. Rather, they are often asked in order to help people learn things that perhaps they needed to understand better. God's questions are a rhetorical device to help reach people with truth.

Read the following questions from God. What do you think God's purpose was in asking those questions? What point was He making?

Gen. 3:11 _____

Gen. 4:9 _____

1 Kings 19:9 _____

Acts 9:4 _____

Matt. 16:13 _____

Job had a lot to say about God, and the Lord obviously wanted him to see that, in fact, there was a lot he didn't know or understand about his Creator. In many ways, God's opening question to Job parallels some of the words that these men had said to him as well (*see Job 8:1, 2; 11:1-3; 15:1-3*).

If God were to ask you a question about the state of your life right now, what do you think He would ask, and what would you answer? What do the question and the answer teach you about yourself?

The Lord as Creator

Read Job 38:4–41. What questions does God ask Job, and what is the purpose of those questions?

If Job expected some detailed explanation about why all these calamities happened to him, he didn't get it. Instead, what he got was a flow of rhetorical questions contrasting the Lord in His creative might to the transience and ignorance of poor Job.

“‘Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?’” the Lord begins (*Job 38:4, NKJV*). After echoing some of the earliest images in Genesis—for example, the origins of the earth, the sea, light, and darkness—God says to Job (basically) that, of course you know all these things “because you were born then, or because the number of your days is great” (*see Job 38:21, NKJV*).

The Lord then points to wonders and mysteries of Creation, again with a series of rhetorical questions that cover not just the foundations of the earth but also the mysteries of the weather and even of the stars themselves. “‘Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades, or loose the belt of Orion?’” (*Job 38:31, NKJV*). He then points Job back to the earth, to everything from human insight (*Job 38:36*) to the lives of wild animals (*Job 38:39–41*)—a theme that is fleshed out in much more detail all through Job 39, as well. Had the book been written today, the Lord might have asked, “Who binds the quarks in protons and neutrons?” “Where were you when I first measured out a Planck mass?” “Is it by your wisdom that gravity bends space and time?”

The answer to all these questions is the same: *of course not*. Job wasn't there for any of those events, and he had little knowledge about any of the phenomena the Lord referred to. God's point was to show Job that even with all his wisdom and knowledge and even though he spoke “right” (*Job 42:7*) about God in contrast to these other men, Job still knew so little. And his lack of knowledge was best revealed by how great Job's ignorance of the created world was.

If Job knew so little about the creation, how much could he understand about the Creator? What a powerful contrast between the Creator and the created, between God and humanity. Though God contrasted Himself to Job, any other human being (with the exception of Jesus) would have sufficed as well. What are we in contrast to God? And yet, look at what this God has done to save us and to offer us the hope of eternal fellowship with Him.

The Wisdom of the Wise

From our perspective today, it's easy to look at the questions that God had asked Job and realize how little a man like Job, living thousands of years ago, could understand about the created world. It wasn't until the A.D. 1500s, for instance, that humans (at least some of them) finally understood that the motion of the sun in the sky was the result of the rotation of the earth on its axis, and the reverse of the commonly held belief that the sun orbits around the earth—a truth that most of us take for granted now.

Thanks mostly to modern science, we live today with knowledge of the natural world that people in Bible times couldn't begin to comprehend. And yet, even with all this acquired knowledge, we humans are still limited in our understanding of the natural world and its origins.

Read over the questions God asked Job in chapters 38 and 39. How much better could people answer them today?

There is no question that science has revealed to us facets of reality that were previously hidden. However, so much still remains for us to learn. In many ways, far from removing the majesty and the mystery of God's creation, science has made it even more fascinating, revealing a depth and complexity of the natural world that previous generations knew nothing about.

“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever.” Deuteronomy 29:29. Just how God accomplished the work of creation He has never revealed to men; human science cannot search out the secrets of the Most High. His creative power is as incomprehensible as His existence.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 113.

What warning, however, should we take from the following texts in regard to the great limits of human knowledge? *1 Cor. 3:19, 1 Cor. 1:18–27.*

Even with all the knowledge humans have accumulated in the past few hundred years, the Creation remains full of wonders and mysteries that we can barely fathom. The more we learn about the created world, the more amazing and mysterious it appears to us. In what ways does the created world cause you to marvel before the power of our God?

Repenting in Dust and Ashes

Read Job 40:1–4 and Job 42:1–6. What was Job’s response to God’s revelation of Himself?

Obviously Job was overwhelmed by what God had shown him. In fact, in Job 42:3, when he says, “ ‘ “Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?” ’ ” (*NKJV*), he was simply repeating God’s first question to him. Job knew the answer now: it was Job himself who spoke about what he really didn’t know.

Notice, too, what Job said in Job 42:5. Though he had only heard about God, now that he saw God—that is, now that he got a better view of God—he saw himself for what he really was. That’s why he reacted as he did, abhorring himself and repenting in dust and ashes.

Read Isaiah 6:1–5 and Luke 5:1–8. How do the reactions described there parallel that of Job?

What we see in all these cases are manifestations of a key Bible truth, and that is the sinfulness of humanity. Job was “blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil” (*Job 1:1, NKJV*). And despite Satan’s best attempts to turn him against God, Job stayed faithful through it all. We are dealing here with a solid, faithful believer in the Lord.

And yet—what? As with Isaiah and Peter, a glimpse of the holiness and power of God was enough to make Job cringe with a sense of his own sinfulness and smallness. That’s because we are all fallen, sin-damaged beings whose very nature itself brings us into conflict with God. That’s why, in the end, no one can save himself; no one can do enough good works to merit any favor before God. That’s why we all—even the “best” among us, those who, like Job, are upright and blameless and who fear God and shun evil—need grace, need a Savior, need Someone to do for us what we can never do for ourselves. Fortunately we have all that, and more, in Jesus.

Imagine yourself, right now, standing face to face before God. What do you think your reaction would be?

Further Thought: “God has permitted a flood of light to be poured upon the world in both science and art; but when professedly scientific men treat upon these subjects from a merely human point of view, they will assuredly come to wrong conclusions. It may be innocent to speculate beyond what God’s word has revealed, if our theories do not contradict facts found in the Scriptures; but those who leave the word of God, and seek to account for His created works upon scientific principles, are drifting without chart or compass upon an unknown ocean. The greatest minds, if not guided by the word of God in their research, become bewildered in their attempts to trace the relations of science and revelation. Because the Creator and His works are so far beyond their comprehension that they are unable to explain them by natural laws, they regard Bible history as unreliable. Those who doubt the reliability of the records of the Old and New Testaments, will be led to go a step further, and doubt the existence of God; and then, having lost their anchor, they are left to beat about upon the rocks of infidelity.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 113.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Look at the Ellen G. White statement in Friday’s study. What evidence do we see that what she warned about is actually happening, especially in the area of science? What are some things that science, at least as now practiced, teaches that are in blatant contradiction to God’s Word?
- 2 Alfred North Whitehead, an influential mathematician and author who lived in the previous century, said the following: “Fifty-seven years ago it was when I was a young man in the University of Cambridge. I was taught science and mathematics by brilliant men and I did well in them; since the turn of the century I have lived to see every one of the basic assumptions of both set aside. . . . And yet, in the face of that, the discoverers of the new hypotheses in science are declaring, ‘Now at last, we have certitude.’ ”—A. N. Whitehead, *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead*. What should this tell us about how careful we need to be in accepting what the world’s “great men” teach us, especially when what they teach blatantly contradicts God’s Word?
- 3 What are some of the marvels of Creation that modern science has revealed to us that people in the time of Job (or even just two hundred years ago) couldn’t possibly have understood? How do these things reveal to us even more the amazing creative power of our Lord?