

In 38:1-38 God spoke of His control over inanimate nature (the earth, seas, stars, etc.). In Job 38:39 and following, God will speak about His control over animate creation (living creatures).

Before we look at Job 38:39ff. we need to understand how ancient near eastern people viewed life and the world at the time when Job was written.

We live in a world of vanishing species and wilderness habitats that are being changed by the encroachment of civilization. Wild places, untouched by humans, are harder and harder to find, so we look at the wilderness quite differently than they did in the times of Job. We treasure it and want to preserve it, and rightfully so.

The ancient world was not like this. Wilderness was everywhere. In fact, the wild places were usually right outside the front door. People didn't live in places where lions and wolves were rare to see. Nature threatened people's lives, the lives of their family, their livelihood (livestock) and their home. Nature was uncontrollable and dangerous. They believed that nature was to be tamed and civilization (which brought order to the world) was to be expanded.

For example, in ancient Mesopotamia they believed that kingship and civilization came down from the gods and were gifts from heaven that pushed back the savagery of the wilderness, enabling the human race to thrive. Egypt had similar ideas; it divided the world into two categories – a place of civilization and life and a place of death. In this world view, all life thrives when it follows the precepts of order. Established structures in society were things that everyone should adhere to and those who didn't adhere to them brought about chaos and destruction. Domestication and submission to order was the way of wisdom. Violent creatures were outside of order. They represented evil and chaos.

When we look at the speech of God in Job 38 and following, we will see something quite different. God does not speak of creation as exclusively anthropocentric. Of course, man is still the apex of God's creation and bears the image of God, he is still to rule over the earth and "subdue it", but God does not see the wild as something that is chaotic and out of control. He sees it as something that is entirely dependent upon Him for life, as something that He manages and even something He cares for. Job 38:25-27 expresses this perfectly: "Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain, and a path for the thunderstorm, to water a land where no one lives, an uninhabited desert, to satisfy a desolate wasteland to make it sprout with grass?" This speaks of God's power, but notice that He sends His rain to a place where no human dwells to make it sprout grass. In other words, He is not doing this for the sake of people. He is doing it for the sake of the life that is in the wilderness. He cares about the wild places. He manages the wild places.

Why is God telling Job this?

First, we need to recall what Job's crises really was. Job had many things happen to him, but his greatest difficulty was in feeling that the world as he had understood it was in upheaval. In his mind he could not fathom why he would be suffering. The righteous were supposed to be blessed by God! Now he felt that he was suffering, nothing was predictable. God appeared to be punishing the righteous and blessing the wicked. There was nothing consistent that Job could rely upon. For that reason, he just wanted to leave this world and await the resurrection.

God will show Job that the things that men see as chaotic, or wild, or untamable (the sea, the wilderness, wild creatures, etc.) are under His control and constant care. Job needed to rethink his view

of God and the meaning behind the trials he was going through. He needed to recant from his understanding that God was not acting justly.

38:39 Do you hunt the prey for the lioness and satisfy the hunger of the lions

38:40 when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in a thicket?

38:41 Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food?

God begins with the lion. Lions were viewed as untamable, dangerous, and threatening to life. They should either be avoided or destroyed.

For example, in Job 4:10-11 Eliphaz likens the destruction of wicked men to the lion that is destroyed in spite of his strength: "The lions may roar and growl, yet the teeth of the great lions are broken. The lion perishes for lack of prey and the cubs of the lioness are scattered." Eliphaz views the lion as an evil— he wants its teeth broken, its cubs separated from its mother, and it to perish from the lack of prey.

Lions were also often used to describe fearsome enemies. Numbers 23:24 says, "Behold, a people rises like a lioness, And as a lion it lifts itself; It will not lie down until it devours the prey, And drinks the blood of the slain." Likewise, Psalm 7:1-2: "O LORD my God, in You I have taken refuge; Save me from all those who pursue me, and deliver me, Or he will tear my soul like a lion, Dragging me away, while there is none to deliver."

God, however, says that He is the one who feeds the lions and keeps them alive. God not only created the lion; He cares for it so that it thrives. The lion, as dangerous as it is, fulfills the plan of God and is cared for by God Himself.

39:1 Do you know when the mountain goats (the ibex) give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn?

39:2 Do you count the months till they bear? Do you know the time they give birth?

39:3 They crouch down and bring forth their young; their labor pains are ended.

39:4 Their young thrive and grow strong in the wilds; they leave and do not return.

God cares for the predator (38:39-41), but He also cares for the prey even in their most vulnerable state -- when pregnant and bearing young.

[Man understands the habits of domestic animals fully, but the question in verses 1 and 2] relates to the animals that roamed at large on inaccessible cliffs; that were buried in deep forests; that were far from the dwellings and observation of people; and the meaning is, that there were many facts in regard to such points of Natural History which Job could not explain. God knew all their instincts and habits, and on the inaccessible cliffs, in the deep dell, in the dark forest, He was with them, and they were the objects of His care. He not only regarded the condition of the domestic animals . . . but He regarded also the wild, wandering beast of the mountain. . . (Barnes).

If man is in danger from lions, wolves, and other predators that roamed the wilderness, how much more are more helpless creatures and their young! The wild goats and deer give birth without any care and protection of a shepherd. "They do it when God only guards them; when they are in the wilderness or on the rocks far away from the abodes of man. The leading thought in all this seems to be, that the

tender care of God was over His creatures, in the most perilous and delicate state, and that all this was exercised where man could have no access to them, and could not even observe them” (Barnes).

They do not need the help and care of man, or man’s civilization to bring order to their environment, because God cares for them.

39:5 Who let the wild donkey go free? Who untied his ropes?

39:6 I gave him the wasteland as his home, the salt flats as his habitat.

39:7 He laughs at the commotion in the town; he does not hear a driver's shout.

39:8 He ranges the hills for his pasture and searches for any green thing.

39:9 Will the wild ox consent to serve you? Will he stay by your manger at night?

39:10 Can you hold him to the furrow with a harness? Will he till the valleys behind you?

39:11 Will you rely on him for his great strength? Will you leave your heavy work to him?

39:12 Can you trust him to bring in your grain and gather it to your threshing floor?

In verse 5-12 God mentions two animals that are often domesticated, the donkey and the ox. But here God is speaking of donkeys and oxen that do not serve humans. Men value civilization; God frees His creatures from it.

The wild donkey looks at human civilization and laughs at it (39:7). His domesticated counterparts labor under the hand of man, but he enjoys his freedom (39:7b, 8). He doesn’t listen to someone bossing him around (39:7b), but is happy roaming about the hills, doing whatever he wants. Even though his living conditions are wastelands and salt flats, he survives without a care.

The wild ox doesn’t want to be in civilization or serve men either. He would never spend the night by a manger if he was free in the wild (39:9). He will not work for man willingly; man has no power over him (39:10-12). A wild ox can’t be relied upon. He won’t pull a plow straight; he won’t help with heavy work; he won’t bring in the grain or turn a grinding stone (39:10-12).

From the ancient near eastern perspective, life can only flourish where there is civilization. Remember, the Mesopotamians thought kingship and civilization came down from heaven and wherever there is civilization, life flourishes. Wherever it does not exist, there is chaos and death. But here is an example of animals that broke free from civilization that are doing just fine. They live in the wilderness without any human rules, protection, or care, and they thrive. More than that, they are happy without civilization.

39:13 The wings of the ostrich flap joyfully, but they cannot compare with the pinions and feathers of the stork.

39:14 She lays her eggs on the ground and lets them warm in the sand,

39:15 unmindful that a foot may crush them, that some wild animal may trample them.

39:16 She treats her young harshly, as if they were not hers; she cares not that her labor was in vain,

39:17 for God did not endow her with wisdom or give her a share of good sense.

39:18 Yet when she spreads her feathers to run, she laughs at horse and rider.

The next animal is the ostrich. What the text says about the ostrich may be kind of meaningless to us, but it is important due to the connection made with wisdom (in this case, its lack of wisdom; 39:17).

The ostrich, seemingly carelessly lays her eggs on the ground in a very visible and vulnerable place, yet she doesn't worry about the fact that someone could step on them and crush them. Furthermore, it appears that she treats her young harshly. In these ways, she seems unconcerned about her offspring, not worrying that her toil may be in vain (39:16). In a word, God didn't give the ostrich wisdom (39:14-16). But when she rouses herself and runs, passing both horses and riders, she laughs. Even without wisdom she thrives, she is strong, she is independent.

The ostrich doesn't care anything about civilization. She is happy in her strength and in her freedom; she is doing just fine without wisdom. That would be an astonishing thought to the ancient sage, but man cannot comprehend God's wisdom. God can allow life to thrive in the complete absence of inborn wisdom.

39:19 Do you give the horse his strength or clothe his neck with a flowing mane?

39:20 Do you make him leap like a locust, striking terror with his proud snorting?

39:21 He paws fiercely, rejoicing in his strength, and charges into the fray.

39:22 He laughs at fear, afraid of nothing; he does not shy away from the sword.

39:23 The quiver rattles against his side, along with the flashing spear and lance.

39:24 In frenzied excitement he eats up the ground; he cannot stand still when the trumpet sounds.

39:25 At the blast of the trumpet he snorts, 'Aha!' He catches the scent of battle from afar, the shout of commanders and the battle cry.

In verses 19-25 the emphasis changes. The description is that of a war horse as it is about to go into battle. Of course, the war-horse is domesticated, but it was a terrifying instrument of war. A single rider with a lance could chase away many infantrymen. But the point is that it is not man that gives the horse its strength or his ability to leap like a locust (39:20). God gives the horse the strength, courage, and agility that it has. Man's "civilization" (domestication) of animate creation does not create the God-given characteristics basic to the animal's nature; even domesticated animals are ruled by God.

39:26 Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom and spread his wings toward the south?

39:27 Does the eagle soar at your command and build his nest on high?

39:28 He dwells on a cliff and stays there at night; a rocky crag is his stronghold.

39:29 From there he seeks out his food; his eyes detect it from afar.

39:30 His young ones feast on blood, and where the slain are, there is he."

Birds of prey dominate the skies and are venerated for their beauty and power. They are proficient hunters. Their eyes see their prey from afar. But the hawk and the eagle do not receive their wisdom or abilities from man (39:26, 27). Man does not tell them what to do (39:27). Like the other creatures in the wild, they live far from human habitation. They are "uncivilized" (39:28). Yet they are magnificently equipped by God and are part of the glory of God's good earth.

In sum, the world is much more complex than Job and his three friends allowed for. If you recall, we spoke of three types of wisdom found in the Bible (see notes on Job 28): (1) the wisdom of the craftsman, (2) common sense wisdom (like that found in the Book of Proverbs), and (3) the hidden wisdom of God that can only be understood if God reveals it. Job and his friends thought that the whole world could be summed up in the precepts found in the second type of wisdom: Do good and you will thrive; do evil and you will be destroyed. But this type of wisdom does not explain everything about how

God manages the world. It shows itself in the moral and theological principles that govern human life, but it does not explain everything. God maintains a different kind of order that comes from hidden wisdom which may appear paradoxical or counterintuitive to man.

The whole animal kingdom can thrive without type 2 wisdom. They can live in “chaos”; their lives are violent; they live in great danger. Some have no wisdom at all, and yet, they thrive and live, simply because God cares for them.

God has answered something very important about the problem of evil. If God is all-powerful and all good, then why is there so much violence, wrongdoing, and bloodshed? The presence of evil suggests that God is not in control. There is too much disorder.

God’s answer is that even though there is chaos in the world, God controls the violent, untamed, and wild places every moment of every day. He feeds the lions and the eagles, yet at the same time He protects the deer and their offspring. He allows the ostrich and the wild donkey to run free and enjoy their lives apart from man. God is not unfamiliar with the chaos of the world; we can trust Him to manage it.

This argument alone is enough for Job. Here is his response: **"I am unworthy-- how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer-- twice, but I will say no more"**(Job 40:3-5). But God is not done. In chapters 40-41 God addresses Job’s charge that God is unjust.

40:7 "Now gird up your loins like a man; I will ask you, and you instruct Me.

40:8 "Will you really annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?"

D.A. Carson does such a good job explaining this passage, I quote him at length:

The reason he calls Job on the carpet is *not* because of Job’s justification of himself, but because of *Job’s willingness to condemn God in order to justify himself*. In other words, God does not here “answer” Job’s questions about the problem of evil and suffering, but he makes it unambiguously clear what answers are not acceptable in God’s universe.

The rest of chapter 40 and all of chapter 41 find God asking more rhetorical questions. Can Job capture and subdue the behemoth (40:15ff.) and leviathan (41:1ff.)? These two beasts may be the hippopotamus and the crocodile, respectively, but they probably *also represent primordial cosmic powers that sometimes break out against God*. [I assume Carson means that they represent evil— expressed through Satan, the world system, and humanity - that breaks out in rebellion against God]. The argument, then, is that if Job is to charge God with injustice, he must do so from the secure stance of his own superior justice; and if he cannot subdue these beasts, let alone the cosmic forces they represent, he does not enjoy such a stance, and is therefore displaying extraordinary arrogance to call God’s justice into question.

Job’s response must be quoted in full (42:2-6), along with two or three explanatory asides: **“I know that you can do all things,”** Job tells God, **“no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?’ [42:3; cf. 38:2]. Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me’ [42:4; cf. 38:3; 40:7]. My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you** [i.e., Job has come to have a far clearer

understanding of God than he had before]. **Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”**

What shall we make of this exchange between God and Job? . . .

The burden of God’s response to Job is twofold. The first emphasis we have already noted: Job has “darkened God’s counsel” by trying to justify himself at the expense of condemning God; and Job is in no position to do that. . . . The second emphasis is implicit: if there are so many things that Job does not understand, why should he so petulantly and persistently demand that he understand his own suffering? There are some things you will not understand, for you are not God.

That is why Job’s answer is so appropriate. He does not say, “Ah, at last I understand!” but rather, “I repent.” He does not repent of sins that have allegedly brought on the suffering; he repents of his arrogance in impugning God’s justice, he repents of his attitude whereby he simply demands an answer, as if such were owed him. He repents of not having known God better: “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore ... I repent” (42:5-6). . .

Job teaches us that, at least in this world, there will always remain some mysteries to suffering. He also teaches us to exercise faith—not blind, thoughtless submission to an impersonal status quo, but faith in the God who has graciously revealed himself to us.

(D.A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord?: Perspectives on Suffering and Evil*, 172-174 [quoted in part])

NOTE: Behemoth and Leviathan

Some commentators believe that Behemoth is an elephant, or more recently, a hippopotamus and Leviathan is a crocodile, whale or shark. Another group of interpreters see these as dinosaurs, now extinct. Others see these as figurative of the demonic world (Calvin).

Many expositors are inclined to identify leviathan as a strictly “mythological” entity. However, it is clear that in some Old Testament contexts, the creature is also a symbol for anti-God forces (cf. Isa. 27:1). Thus, some see it as representative of the powers that oppose God. Needless to say, the identity of Behemoth and Leviathan is not clear.

It seems that these are literal animals (probably the hippopotamus and crocodile). At least, in Psalm 104:25-27 Leviathan is listed among the animals that receive their food from God. The Book of Job, however, describes them in a poetic fashion. For example, Behemoth is said to have bones of tubes of bronze [Job 40:18], and Leviathan as breathing fire [Job 41:19], etc.) – images that picture strength and violent rage. Similar expressions are used of God in 2 Samuel 22:9-10: “Smoke went up out of His nostrils, Fire from His mouth devoured; Coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down with thick darkness under His feet.” These figures of speech convey mental conceptions; they are not intended to be taken literally. In 2 Samuel, the aim is to vividly express the manifestation of the wrath of God, not to have us think that God literally has smoke that comes from His nose and fire from His mouth.

At the same time, because Behemoth and Leviathan are so powerful and feared, they become “visuals” of powers hostile to God (Psa. 74:14). Isaiah 26:21 -27:1 illustrates this. It says, “behold, the LORD is

about to come out from His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; and the earth will reveal her bloodshed and will no longer cover her slain. In that day the LORD will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, with His fierce and great and mighty sword, even Leviathan the twisted serpent; and He will kill the dragon who lives in the sea." God is going to punish the inhabitants of the earth. Leviathan portrays their evil that God will put to an end.