

Out of the Whirlwind



SABBATH—DECEMBER 3

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Job 38–39; John 1:29; Matthew 16:13; 1 Corinthians 1:18–27; Job 40:1–4; Job 42:1–6; Luke 5:1–8.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you know’ ” (Job 38:4, NIrV).

JOB AND EACH OF HIS FRIENDS might be different from one another. But they are all the same in one thing. Each man has a lot to say about God—or what he understands God is like. Much of what they say we can agree on. How about this idea, for example: “ ‘But ask the animals what God does. They will teach you. Or ask the birds of the air. They will tell you. Or speak to the earth. It will teach you. Or let the fish of the ocean educate you. Are there any of those creatures that don’t [do not] know what the powerful hand of the LORD has done? He holds the life of every creature in his hand. He controls the breath of every human being’ ” (Job 12:7–10, NIrV). Or this idea: “ ‘Does God ever treat people unfairly? Does the Mighty [Strong] One [God] make what is wrong appear to be right?’ ” (Job 8:3, NIrV)?

The theme of the book is Job’s suffering. But the important point of discussion is God. Except for the first two chapters, the Lord remains hidden. God stays in the background as the book continues.

But all that is about to change. God now will speak for Himself.

OUT OF THE WHIRLWIND (Job 38:1)

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

Suddenly and unexpectedly, the Lord now appears in the book of Job. God speaks for the first time since Job 2:6: “The LORD said to Satan, ‘All right. I am handing him [Job] over to you. But you must spare his life.’” (NirV).

Nothing really prepares the reader for this sudden appearance of God. Job 37 ends with Elihu’s speech. And then, “the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind” (Job 38:1).

The word *whirlwind* comes from a Hebrew word that means “storm” or “tempest [a violent storm].” It has been used in connection with the appearance of God to humans (read Isaiah 29:6; Zechariah 9:14). It is also the word used to describe 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).

The appearance of God to humans is called a theophany. The word *theophany* comes from two Greek words: “theo” (meaning God) and “phainen” (to show). So theophany is the appearance of God to a person. We do not have any clear description from this chapter in Job of Job’s theophany with God. So we do not know what God looks like here or how He appears to Job. But it is clear that God is not speaking to Job in a “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12). Instead, the Lord shows Himself in a very powerful way. It certainly gets Job’s attention.

Read Genesis 15:1–6; Genesis 32:24–32; and John 1:29. What do these verses teach us about how near God can be to us?

The Bible teaches us the great and important truth that our God is not a far-off God who created our world and then left us to ourselves. Instead, He is a God who is very close to us. No matter our sorrows, our troubles, or whatever we face in this life, we can have the sure knowledge that God is near and that we can trust Him.

It is one thing to believe that God is near us. But do we feel we are near Him? How can you learn to come close to God and to receive hope and comfort from this relationship?



“The LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind” (Job 38:1).

GOD'S QUESTION (Job 38:2)

After what must seem to Job like a very long silence, God finally speaks to him. But what God first says might not be what Job wants to hear.

Read Job 38:2. What is the first question that God asks Job? And what is suggested in that question?

All through the Bible we find God asking humans questions. God does not ask questions because He does not know the answers. Instead, as a good teacher often does, God asks questions because they are a good way to get us to think about our situation. He also asks questions to cause us to face ourselves, help us work through issues, and come to a proper understanding. So the questions that God asks are not to teach Him something that He already does not understand. Rather, His questions often are asked in order to help people learn things that perhaps they need to understand better. God's questions are a tool to help reach people with truth.

Read the questions from God found in Genesis 3:11; Genesis 4:9; 1 Kings 19:9; Acts 9:4; and Matthew 16:13. What do you think God's purpose is in asking those questions? What point is He making?



The questions God asks are not to teach the Lord something He does not understand. Rather, His questions are asked to help people think about things they need to understand better.

Job has a lot to say about God. And the Lord clearly wants Job to understand that there is a lot he does not know or understand about his Creator. In many ways, God's opening question to Job is the same as some of the words that his friends say to him earlier (read Job 8:1, 2; Job 11:1–3; Job 15:1–3).

Suppose God were to ask you a question about the state of your spiritual 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 (Job 38:4–41)

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

If Job expects a careful explanation about why all these terrible events have happened to him, he does not get it. Instead, what he gets is a flow of rhetorical¹ questions that show how the Lord's creative power is greater than Job's limited understanding. Job in comparison is short-lived and ignorant (knowing little).

“ ‘Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?’ ” the Lord begins (Job 38:4, NKJV). God repeats some of the earliest scenes in Genesis—for example, the beginnings of the earth, the sea, light, and darkness. Then God says ironically² to Job, “ ‘I am sure you know! After all, you already were born! You have lived so many years!’ ” (read Job 38:21, NIV).

The Lord then points to wonders and mysteries of Creation, again with a series of rhetorical (for effect) questions. These questions cover the foundations of the earth and the mysteries of the weather and even of the stars themselves. “ ‘Can you tie up the beautiful Pleiades?³ Can you untie the ropes that hold Orion⁴ together?’ ” (Job 38:31, NIV). God then points Job back to the earth, to everything from human understanding (Job 38:36) to the lives of wild animals (Job 38:39–41). It is a theme that is explained in more detail all through Job 39. Had the book been written today, the Lord might have asked, “ ‘Who ties together the quarks⁵ in protons⁶ and neutrons?’ ”⁷ “ ‘Where were you when I first measured out a Planck mass?’ ”⁸ “ ‘Is it by your wisdom that gravity bends space and time?’ ”

The answer to all these questions is the same: *of course not!* Job was not there for any of those events. He has little knowledge about any of the wonders. God's point is to show Job that he might have some wisdom and knowledge and that he spoke “right” (Job 42:7) about God, which is something these other men do not do. But Job still knows so little. And his lack of knowledge is shown by how little he truly knows about the mysteries of the created world.

If Job knows so little about the Creation, how much could he understand about the Creator? What a powerful difference between the Creator and the humans He created. God shows how different He is from Job—how different He is from any of us (except Jesus). How very little and unimportant we are in comparison with God! But look at what this God has done to save us and how He has offered us the hope of eternal fellowship with Him!

DEFINITIONS

1. rhetorical (questions)—asked to make a statement or a point for effect rather than to get an answer.

2. ironically—using words that mean the opposite of what you really think in a humorous (funny) way to make a point.

3. Pleiades—a very noticeable cluster (bunch) of stars.

4. Orion—a group of stars in the sky that looks like a hunter with a line of three bright stars for a belt.

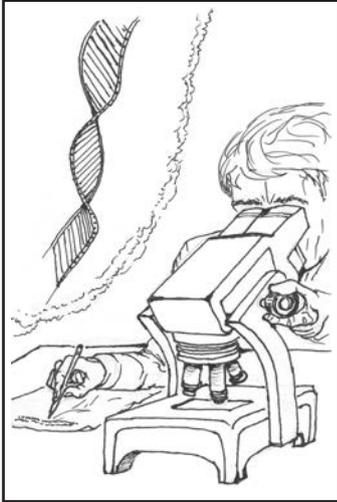
5. quarks—in physics, any one of several types of very small particles that make up matter.

6. protons—in physics, a very small particle of matter that is part of the nucleus of an atom and that has a positive electrical charge.

7. neutrons—in physics, a very small particle of matter that has no electrical charge and is a part of the nucleus of all atoms except hydrogen atoms.

8. Planck mass—a unit of measurement for mass used in physics. Physics is a science that deals with matter and energy and the way they act on each other in heat, light, electricity, and sound. The Planck mass was named after Max Karl Ernst Ludwig Planck (1858–1947). Planck was a German physicist. A physicist is a scientist who studies or specializes in physics.

THE WISDOM OF THE WISE (1 Corinthians 3:19)



“Human science cannot search out the secrets of the Most High God.”

DEFINITIONS

9. axis—the imaginary straight line that something such as the earth turns around.

From our point of view today, it is easy to study the questions that God asks Job and realize how little a man like Job, who lived thousands of years ago, could understand about the created world. It was not until the A.D. 1500s that humans (at least some of them) finally understood that the sun moves in the sky because the earth spins on its axis.⁹

Thanks mostly to modern science, we have knowledge of the natural world that people in Bible times did not have. Even with all this knowledge that we have received, we humans still are limited in our understanding of the natural world and its beginnings.

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

It is true that science has shown to us things that were once hidden from our understanding. But there is still so much more for us to learn. In many ways, far from removing the wonders and mystery of God’s creation, science has made it even more interesting. Science has shown how deep and wonderful the natural world is in ways that people who lived before us knew nothing about.

“The LORD our God keeps certain things hidden. But he makes other things known to us and our children forever” (Deuteronomy 29:29, NIV). Just how God created the world He has never shown to men. Human science cannot search out the secrets of the Most High God. We cannot ever understand God’s life and power.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs [Forefathers and Leaders] and Prophets [Special Messengers]*, page 113.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:19 and 1 Corinthians 1:18–27. What warning should we take from these verses about the great limits of human knowledge?

Even with all the knowledge humans have built up in the past few hundred years, the Creation remains full of wonders and mysteries, of which we can understand very little. 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 admire the power of our God?

REPENTING¹⁰ IN DUST AND ASHES

(Job 40:1–4; Job 42:1–6)

Read Job 40:1–4 and Job 42:1–6. What does Job say to God after God makes Himself known to Job?

Clearly Job is affected very strongly by what God has shown him. In fact, in Job 42:3, Job says, “You asked me, ‘Who do you think you [Job] are to disagree with my [God’s] plans?’” (NIRV). Job is repeating God’s first question to him. Job knows the answer now: it is Job himself who speaks about what he really does not know.

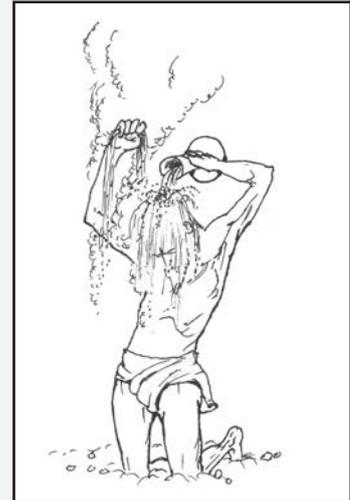
Notice, too, what Job says in Job 42:5. He only has heard about God before, but now he has seen God. And now Job has a better understanding of God. Job, too, sees himself for what he really is. That is why he feels as he does now. He “hates” his sinfulness and repents (feels sorrow for his sin) in dust and ashes.

Read Isaiah 6:1–5 and Luke 5:1–8. How are the feelings described there nearly the same as Job’s?

What we find in all these cases are examples of a key Bible truth. They make known the sinfulness of humans. Job does “what was right. He had respect for God and avoided evil” (Job 1:1, NIRV). Satan works hard to turn Job against God, but Job stays faithful through it all. We find here a solid, faithful believer in the Lord (Job).

And yet—what? As with Isaiah and Peter, a glimpse of the holiness and power of God is enough to make Job feel guilty, sensing his own sinfulness and smallness. Next to God, we are all fallen, sin-damaged beings. Our very nature itself brings us into conflict¹¹ with God. That is why, in the end, no one can save himself. No one can do enough good works to deserve any favor before God. That is why we all need grace¹²—even the “best” among us, those who, like Job, are upright and blameless and who fear God and avoid evil. We need a Savior. We 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. How do you think you would feel or act in His presence?



A glimpse of the holiness and power of God is enough to make Job hate his sinfulness and to repent in dust and ashes.

DEFINITIONS

10. repenting—feeling sorry for having sinned and turning away from sin with the help of the Holy Spirit.

11. conflict—a struggle; a strong disagreement between people or groups; also a fight; battle; war.

12. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “God has permitted a flood of light to be poured upon the world in both science and art. But when men of science deal with or think upon these subjects from a human point of view, they will come to wrong ideas. Suppose those who leave the Word of God [the Bible] try to explain God’s created works through scientific principles [important rules]. Then they would be drifting without chart or compass upon an unknown ocean. The greatest minds, if not guided by the Word of God in their research, become confused in their search to explain differences between science and God. Because the Creator and His works are so far beyond their limits of understanding, they are unable to explain the Creator and His works by natural laws. They think of Bible history as untrue. Those who doubt the records of the Old and New Testaments will be led to doubt that God is real. Then they will have lost their anchor. And they are left to crash upon the rocks of unfaithfulness.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 113.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Look at the Ellen G. White statement in Friday’s study. What proof do we have that what she warned about is really happening, especially in the area of science? What are some things that science teaches that rebel against God’s Word?
- ② Alfred North Whitehead, a well-known mathematician and author who lived in the 1800s, said the following: “Fifty-seven years ago 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 [early 1900s], I have lived to see every one of the principles of truth I was taught become set aside as false. . . . And yet, in the face of that, the discoverers of the new theories [unproved ideas] in science are saying, ‘Now at last, we have truth.’”—Adapted from 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? (This warning is especially true when their teachings conflict [do not agree] with God’s Word.)
- ③ What are some of the wonders of Creation that modern science has shown to us that people in the time of Job (or even just two hundred years ago) could not have understood? How do these things show us even more the wonderful creative power of our Lord?