

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?

Doing God's Business: Part 2

I met with church leaders in the project's region, and we laid plans to train and equip 1,000 laypersons to share the gospel in their homeland. Although evangelism in this country is technically illegal, God opened doors.

When we arrived, we thought that some of the 1,000 people who had signed up wouldn't come. But 1,300 people came! Some knew that they wouldn't receive the materials, but they wanted to come and learn anyway. What an amazing bunch of laypersons we have there!

We couldn't import evangelistic materials or DVD players for the lay evangelists, so we had to buy or produce these items within the country. Each person is allowed to buy only one DVD player, and we had to be sure that they didn't all go out to buy the DVD players at the same time or in the same place. We bought paper and printing materials on the black market to print the scripts that go with the DVDs we gave to the volunteers. All of this had to be done secretly, and we can't talk about how God made it happen—but He did!

We trained and equipped the lay members and sent them back home to start working. One hundred of these lay members are now working full-time, like Global Mission pioneers, to teach and baptize and establish new church plants. They have been secretly moved to areas within the country where we have no churches. There they teach their new neighbors about God's love and plant new churches.

In the first six months of the program, the believers in this country have studied with thousands of eager people. More than 650 people have been baptized, and six new churches have been planted. And these dear people are just getting started!

I'm amazed at what God is doing through my family and me and others who are dedicated to serving God however He leads. We are God's hands, stewards of His resources. He's using us to further His work in a place I never could have dreamed possible.

Every believer is a steward of God's resources, and He will bless each of us as we turn our lives and resources over to Him.

This testimony is from a Seventh-day Adventist businessman in Portugal.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Job 42:1–6*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand how God’s seemingly unrelated long list of questions relating to Creation ultimately provides an answer to Job.

Feel: Perceive some of Job’s utter self-aborrence as he realizes how wrong he has been in this quest.

Do: Relinquish his or her conceptions of who God is and how He needs to solve his or her problems.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Rhetorical Questions

A Is there anything that God’s questions in Job 38 and 39 can teach us about Job’s suffering? If so, what?

B What is the importance of the acceptance of the biblical doctrine of Creation in terms of our Christian worldview?

II. Feel: Self-aborrence

A Was there really a reason for Job to repent in dust and ashes? After all, he was the righteous one. Explain.

B How does Job’s repentance eventually lead him to find even more than just an answer to his questions?

III. Do: Relinquish Our Wrong Ideas of God

A What is your reaction after reading God’s long list of questions? Did He miss the point? Explain.

B How can we relinquish our cherished (but sometimes wrong) ideas about who God is?

► **Summary:** There is a good amount of surprise as one begins to read God’s answer out of the whirlwind to Job. Instead of a divinely ordained “they are wrong, and you are right,” everybody is eventually wrong, because in the face of the Almighty, all our ideas of Him fade into insignificance, and He who created the worlds often gives surprising answers to our misdirected questions.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Job 39:5, 6 and John 1:29*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Where Elihu’s speech promised to be different and is then utterly disappointing, God’s speech is startlingly different in that it does not answer the question that has been debated for the last 35 chapters. Instead, Yahweh’s long list of rhetorical questions opens a beautiful window onto a Creator-God who is intimately involved in the smallest and greatest miracles taking place every moment in the universe. Being in the presence of such a God can lead to the recognition of our own sinful state.

Just for Teachers: Someone once said, “Judge a man by his questions rather than by his answers.” Sometimes a Sabbath School lesson can turn out to be a second sermon. Sometimes, as Sabbath School teachers, we lack the ability to ask good questions. Sometimes we are in danger of being content with just listening to ourselves. Good questions call us to reflection and make us dig deeper into God’s Word. God’s long list of questions in the book of Job does just that. Let’s ask good questions!

Opening Discussion: Karl Barth (1886–1968), a Swiss Reformed theologian, greatly influenced Protestant theology during the twentieth century. He was trained in the German Protestant liberalism of the day. When he returned to Switzerland after his studies, he pastored a small church in the village of Safenwil, close to Basel. His members mainly consisted of blue-collar workers. He soon realized that his theological training had by no means prepared him to meet the spiritual needs of his congregation. In a reaction to that liberal theology, he decided to read anew through the Bible without the philosophical constraints of his training and came to the conclusion that there indeed was a risen Jesus Christ who was revealed in the Scriptures. He called for a return to the Bible and the Reformation, and his theology was later coined as neoorthodoxy.

While we as Seventh-day Adventists would not necessarily agree with everything Barth said, his life story is an inspiring testimony to the transforming power of God’s Word. One of Barth’s characteristic phrases was his understanding of God as the “wholly other,” which points to God’s complete distinctiveness from everything else. He meant that God is different from all our expectations, even from our well-formulated ideas about Him, and that He often surprises us when He appears. This surprise

happens when God starts to speak in Job 38. He is, once more, the “wholly other” and surprises us with His questions. What would you have expected God to say in reply to Job and his friends?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Often our images of God are heavily influenced by what we see in the people who claim to represent Him. Sometimes they present a distorted version of who God is and claim their perspective to be the authorized one. It is best to let God reveal Himself as He does in Job 38 and 39 and not make ourselves His self-appointed spokespeople. Within a church context, we need to be aware that all we say and do portrays a picture of God to those around us.

Bible Commentary

When one begins to read chapter 38, one cannot but notice a certain disconnect between it and the previous chapters that record Elihu’s speech. Elihu claims at the end of his speeches that God is speaking out of the storm (*Job 37:1–13*) to correct Job, but when Yahweh really speaks, He bypasses all of Elihu’s rhetoric and responds to His servant Job. Elihu paints a picture of a distant God who only appears to correct and mete out justice, whereas Yahweh’s self-revelation is that of a personal God who is interested and involved in the smallest affairs of His universe, including the fate of Job.

I. Yahweh’s Speech (*Review Job 38, 39; and 40:1, 2 with the class.*)

Job 38:1 connects directly to Job 38:35, finally turning Job’s monologue into a dialogue with God. We have seen how the question of suffering is really about the character of God. The following two chapters provide a beautiful self-revelation of who God is. By sobering contrast, this revelation also answers God’s question, “‘Who is this?’” (*Job 38:2*). In God’s light, we see a realistic picture of ourselves.

By way of direct questions, God now focuses on His creation and humankind’s absence from the primordial event (*Job 38:4–7*). Then God moves through the different aspects of His dominion over heaven and earth, from the sea (*Job 38:8–11*) to the daily cycle (*Job 38:12–15*), even to the realms of death (*Job 38:17*), and beyond the earth to the elements (*Job 38:18–21*) and the heavens (*Job 38:31–38*). The beginning of chapter 39 moves to God’s care for the animal kingdom. God gives freedom, speed, strength, and so on, to His creation.

The final words of God’s first speech are in Job 40:2. He ends His

words with the rhetorical question: Is there anybody who can instruct “Shaddai”? using the divine name that mostly underlines His supreme sovereignty. He is the Almighty, and, by contrast, who is Job? God is using questions throughout, and Job is not able to answer. It is the method of the teacher, the instructor, who teaches *torah* (“instruction”) to his pupil. Job has to admit more than seventy times that he does not know, and his finite mind cannot grasp Yahweh’s infinite wisdom.

Consider This: Even with our scientific knowledge of the natural world, what would you have answered to God’s questions?

II. Intelligent Design *(Review Job 38 and 39 with the class.)*

Yahweh’s questions in Job 38 and 39 provide a breathtaking glimpse of the created cosmos. While they were not intended to be a proof for divine Creation (nobody needed proof in Job’s times), they nevertheless point to the presence of Intelligent Design (ID) in the universe.

ID refers to the argument that features of the universe are best explained by an intelligent cause rather than by the Darwinian model of natural selection. As a matter of fact, Darwin himself stated that “if it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down” (Darwin quoted by Jim Gibson, “Is There Design in Nature?”—accessed online: <https://grisdawordpress.com/2013/03/04/is-there-design-in-nature/>).

While ID has been called pseudoscientific, a growing number of scientists are engaging the topic. They also are referring to it as the argument of perfection or irreducible complexity, which states: “Living organisms exhibit features that have such complex interdependency of parts that an open-minded observer will recognize them as the product of an intelligent creator” (compare Gibson’s article above).

However, not all come to the conclusion that the intelligent designer is the God of the Bible but, rather, search for a naturalistic cause of design or, of course, for another philosophical avenue of explanation, such as pantheism, theosophy, New Age, and so on. Nevertheless, the recognition of design provides an important impetus for the search for the designer. God’s speech in the book of Job reminds us of the complex beauty of the divinely created order. Though, as Romans 1 and 2 demonstrate, natural revelation certainly points to the Creator-God, it does not provide a full picture of the Savior-God, which is necessary for our redemption.

Consider This: Why is it so important for us as Seventh-day Adventists to uphold the biblical account of recent creation of life on earth?

III. Repentance *(Review Job 40:3, 4 and 42:1–6 with the class.)*

One of the sobering side effects of seeing God is that we see ourselves more clearly as we are—as sinners. “The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 64. That was the experience of Job, and it led him into the arms of God and to a deeper understanding of who He is.

Consider This: Why was it necessary for Job to repent in sackcloth and ashes? After all, he had been the righteous one throughout.

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: God’s speech is so different from our expectations, yet so powerful in its practical application to every single problem we face. He could give the same answer to us as to Job, whatever our questions are.

Thought/Application Questions:

❶ Did God’s speech really provide no answer for Job, or did it actually? Explain.

❷ How could God’s speech in the book of Job provide an answer to our questions?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The book of nature is an incredible resource for our knowledge of God. It can also provide healing to our ailments and diseases.

Class/Individual Activity:

Invite class members to deliberately spend one hour in nature (rain or shine) every day next week. Ask them to journal their observations as to how their daily nature experience changed the way they lived through their week.
