

## **Eighteen**

### **GOD'S WONDROUS COMMAND OF THE CREATION**

So now to God's personally conducted tour of Job through the wonders and mysteries of creation.

#### **THE ORIGINS OF THE EARTH**

God takes Job straight to the mystery of the act of creation itself, which even our scientists are still trying to fathom, and probably never will, as they look back through their radio telescopes across the light years to where the 'big bang' happened—if that is the way it was:

- 38:4 Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?  
    Tell me, if you have understanding.  
5 Who determined its measurements—surely you know!  
    Or who stretched the line upon it?  
6 On what were its bases sunk,  
    or who laid its cornerstone  
7 when the morning stars sang together  
    and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

Have you ever seen that illustration by William Blake, where God is reaching down through the clouds with a compass, measuring out the span of the earth? This is where he got it from, and it is a striking illustration. Think of the things we are now discovering about our universe, in terms of its measurements, and what holds everything in place. The force of gravity itself is a great mystery. No one knows really what it is. And light: is it a wave, or is it a particle, or is it both? And how is that related to time and space and everything else, as in the theory of relativity? We are only on the edges of all of this. We can never know it all. We make our intelligent guesses. We were not present at the creation of the universe. All the 'heavenly beings' were watching, and rejoicing at what they saw, but no doubt it was all beyond them too. There is so much about it all that we will never know, and certainly it is something beyond what we could ever do.

God says: This is what I know, because this is what I have done, and maybe you don't know it, but then, you don't have to. But let Me just tell you that I do.

#### **THE BOUNDS OF THE SEA**

- 38:8 Or who shut in the sea with doors  
    when it burst out from the womb?—  
9 when I made the clouds its garment,  
    and thick darkness its swaddling band,  
10 and prescribed bounds for it,  
    and set bars and doors,  
11 and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther,  
    and here shall your proud waves be stopped?'

Have you ever been on the beach in a fierce storm? It can be even more scary when you are out at sea in a storm, surrounded by the waves, and completely at their mercy. We can imagine the ancient peoples, like ourselves, looking at the sea when it is raging, could easily have thought: 'What would happen if it came up over the land?'

Our children have asked us if we would be safe where we lived if a tidal wave came up over Adelaide! Often we take it for granted that the sea ends at a particular point and the land begins there. As set out here, those bounds have been set by God. King Canute was prevailed upon to set his throne up on the beach, and command the tide not to come in: 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther!' But he and his nobles got their feet wet, and it was clear that the king did not have command over the sea. But that is what God does, and the sea obeys. That contrast is what is being pointed out here. The bounds of the sea are not something that we have set, and it is not something that we could ever control if it broke out of those bounds. That is something that is set by God, and is under His control.

We know the story of the Flood from Genesis, where God held back those controls, and the waters came up from below and down from above, and the earth was covered. We still have that happening on small scales around the world now, and there is very little we can do to stop floods from happening.

### THE DAWN OF THE DAY

38:12 Have you commanded the morning since your days began,  
and caused the dawn to know its place,  
13 so that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth,  
and the wicked be shaken out of it?  
14 It is changed like clay under the seal,  
and it is dyed like a garment.  
15 Light is withheld from the wicked,  
and their uplifted arm is broken.

One of most magic times of the day must be the dawn of the morning. Some of us hardly ever see it—but think of what we are missing! Those times when we have been up to see it, we know that it is a magic time. At Coober Pedy, in the northern deserts of South Australia, we used to have a dawn service on Easter morning, on top of the hill, to greet the resurrection morning in that way. Many of us will have had similar experiences.

Here God says: 'Are you the one who told the sun to come up? No—but I do that every morning. I cause that dawn to come.'

There is a beautiful description here of the coming of light across the earth: 'It is changed like clay under the seal, and it is dyed like a garment.' The shadows in the morning sun, and in the evening too, are quite fantastic. Every little corrugation in the earth is highlighted by the shadows. 'It is dyed like a garment' may be referring to suddenly the colour coming into everything as the sun spreads its rays over the surface of the earth. The original Hebrew says: 'they stand forth' like a garment. That reminds me of the folds in the hills that get highlighted by the slanting sun. One of the special things that always amazes me when we drive past them are the lower Flinders Ranges, near Port Augusta, looking from the highway, near Horrocks Pass, where the hills are just like folds of a garment, and in the evening sun particularly, or in the morning sun, you see them as if they have been just draped over the countryside, intensified by the shadows.

That is what God is reminding Job of there. That is something that God does every day, that we could never do. Why would we ever want to do that? God is doing a very good job of it Himself.

It is not just the bringing up of the sun, but also the controlling of the wickedness on the earth, the moral control of the wicked. The wicked mostly get about their dirty work under cover of darkness, but when the sun comes up they have



‘Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?’ How could we ever comprehend the expanse of the earth? Yet it is comprehended by its Creator.

### LIGHT AND DARKNESS

38:19 Where is the way to the dwelling of light,  
and where is the place of darkness,  
20 that you may take it to its territory  
and that you may discern the paths to its home?  
21 Surely you know, for you were born then,  
and the number of your days is great!

This may be a picture of where God packs away the darkness during the day time, and brings it out again in the morning! This is all beautiful poetic language, and does not necessarily imply that this is what the ancients thought actually happened.

Light and darkness are some of the most fundamental mysteries of our life, are they not? Whether we take them literally, or metaphorically. Yet God packs away the darkness, brings it out again, and brings the light out. Even if we want to take it at a purely scientific level: we still do not understand what light is. There are times when it obeys the laws that seem to apply to particles, and then there are times when it seems to obey the laws that apply to waves. So is it waves, or is it particles, or is it both, or is it something which includes neither, that we have not understood yet? Scientists are still trying to nut that out. The honest scientists stand in awe of it.

‘Where is the way to the dwelling of light?’ How could you bring out light? But God is the One who said, ‘Let there be—light’. The very first word of creation that was spoken. One of the basic building blocks of the universe. We have only just realised last century, through the genius of Einstein, that  $e=mc^2$ : that mass and energy and the speed of light are all tied up together, that energy and mass are basically the same thing, but it depends on how fast they are travelling, and so on. The speed of light—what is that? How does that affect the way everything is made? That, too, is a deep mystery. God knows it, but Job does not. Neither Job nor we were there when God said, ‘Let there be light’.

### THE WEATHER

38:22 Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,  
or have you seen the storehouses of the hail,  
23 which I have reserved for the time of trouble,  
for the day of battle and war?

God has these great storehouses, where He stacks away His snow! We store grain, and gold, and silver, and those sorts of things—He stores snow and hail! And then He brings them out when He needs them. There is reference here to hail as one of God’s weapons in war. In the Book of Joshua chapter 10, talking about the conquest of the promised land, when Joshua was fighting at Gibeon, they routed the enemy, and the enemy was retreating over a particular area, and suddenly a hailstorm fell on them. The comment is made: ‘There were more that died from the hailstorm than the men of Israel killed with the sword.’ We think we are going great guns with our mighty military battles, but it is God who determines the outcome of battles, and just one kink in the weather can change all that, and say what is going to happen one way or the other. For sure, Joshua had a fairly effective battle-plan, and that had worked, but it was the hailstones that really did the job. They still do: months after a ‘freak’ hailstorm in Sydney, rooves were still awaiting repairs, and cars still needed panel

beating. The tomato-growing glasshouse owners up past Bolivar are in fear and trembling of the hailstones. One hailstorm can wipe out a crop. We also know how God used hail as one of the plagues in Egypt, where the countryside was devastated by hail. Is it not a relief that most of the time that does not happen, and that the seasons and the climate stay on a fairly even keel, under God's hand, in service of us?

38:24 What is the way to the place where the light is distributed,  
or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?

The 'light' here may be referring to the lightning. The 'east wind' came in from the desert: it was a hot, sultry sort of wind. So this may be talking about the thunderstorms. We have sat outside on hot desert nights at Coober Pedy and watched incomparable displays of constantly flashing lightning filling the sky—much better than television! The whole matter of electricity in the universe is another great mystery. But God distributes that.

38:25 Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain,  
and a way for the thunderbolt,  
26 to bring rain on a land where no one lives,  
on the desert, which is empty of human life,  
27 to satisfy the waste and desolate land,  
and to make the ground put forth grass?

What that tells us, first of all, is that, when the rain falls, it is a channelled or an ordered thing. It talks here of having a channel for the torrents of rain; a little later it speaks of God tipping up the water-skins—the clouds—to empty them out. We might think that these 'primitive' people had naive notions about how the weather worked, and that we know much better now, with our Bureau of Meteorology! I think the Hebrews, and the ancients, and the people who wrote this sort of thing understood about as much as we do, and were probably in closer touch with it than we are now. We should not write them down as naive. They knew what poetry is, perhaps better than we do. So they knew there is not God up there tilting the water-skins. But it is a wonderful way of describing how the clouds empty themselves and dump their contents on the earth. They could see that God had not actually set up a conduit for the rain to come down, but they knew that when the rain falls it is by God's ordering.

Look where God makes it fall! He makes it fall on the just and the unjust, as Jesus told us (Matthew 5:45). He makes His sun shine that way, too. But He also makes it fall on the place where there is no one, just or unjust—where there is only desert! He makes it fall there as well, because He cares about the desert! It is true: out in the desert, in the centre of Australia, there can be tremendous rain storms that no one ever sees. When they fall, wonderful things happen to the desert. There was one time when we drove up through the Pitjantjatjara Lands to Uluru ('Ayers Rock'): it was after there had been rain, and the whole countryside was a carpet of wildflowers. Hardly anyone there to see them, but there they all were anyway! There was someone who lived on a station property out from Coober Pedy for about twenty years, and there were one or two species of wildflower that he had only ever seen once in that time, even though there had been rain at different times haphazardly during that period. It seems there are some wildflower seeds just under the ground waiting for, say, rain in the second week of July. When rain comes in the second week of July, up they come, saying: 'It's my turn now!' But if it does not come until August, they say: 'Well, we've missed out this year: even though the rain has come, we will wait until



time. That is when you realise that people who live under the stars would every night have marvels unveiled to them.

God says to Job: 'Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on the earth?' He may not be saying that the stars necessarily have any influence on the earth, in the way many people believe. He may simply be saying: 'Do you know how to set all of that up? Do you know the laws that govern the earth and the stars and the universe? Can you operate those laws yourself?' It is God who calls them all out, and tells them where to go.

### COMMANDING THE ELEMENTS

- 38:34 Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,  
so that a flood of waters may cover you?  
35 Can you send forth lightnings,  
so that they may go and say to you, 'Here we are'?  
36 Who has put wisdom in the inward parts,  
or given understanding to the mind?  
37 Who has the wisdom to number the clouds?  
Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens,  
38 when the dust runs into a mass  
and the clods cling together?

One of the things that is most important to us is the weather. It is a constant topic of conversation, and something that you can talk about with a complete stranger: if there is nothing else you can talk about, you can talk about the weather. The news on television is the most-watched program, and the weather at the end of the news is more watched than the news: we sometimes just turn it on for the weather, because we want to know what the weather is going to be. There is a whole thing about that: if we can know what the weather is going to be, then we can have some control of our uncertain destinies. That may be why we put a lot of money into the Bureau of Meteorology. It is important to know what the weather is going to be, for all sorts of reasons, but there can be almost mystical overtones to it, of wanting to know, wanting to somehow have control, over our future. In 'primitive' societies, there is the local rainmaker, who knows how to do the rain dance, to control the rain, whether effectively or not. It is good to have the Bureau of Meteorology on the job, and for the most part they get it reasonably right. But I also like it when they slip up and say: 'We didn't know that this was going to happen, but there it is!' We do not have the final word over what happens to the clouds, and over what happens to the high pressure and low pressure systems. Suddenly there can be a cold front coming in from nowhere, or a tropical rainstorm coming down from the north, which is quite unpredicted. But God says: 'That is all my business—that is what I do'.

I like that bit about the lightning, as if Job could stand there and say: 'OK, lightning: everybody out!' And all the lightnings run out and stand in a row and say: 'Here we are, Job! Where do you want us to go?' No way!

God is not saying this to put Job down, by saying: 'See? I can do it, and you can't!' He is saying: 'Just face facts: you don't do this, and you can't do this, but *I can*, and *I do*. So be reassured.' It reminds us of Deuteronomy 29:29:

The secret things belong to the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

God tells us everything we need to know, to do what we are supposed to be doing. Often it is because we don't want to do what we are supposed to be doing, that we want to know some other things, to get around that. But God says: 'No: there are secret things, that I am in control of, in my universe, and you do not have to worry about those—because you are not God! You are someone that I have made, that is a wonderful creature, and to whom I have given great powers and great responsibilities in the creation. But there are still things that I am looking after that you do not need to be concerned about. That is good to know, so that you can just get on with the things that I have given you to do.'

Also, I guess, just having these things drawn to our attention, let us know that God is Someone who is not us, and who, in a sense, is far beyond us. Job and the other comforters knew that. But it is something that we need to be reminded of, and that we need to grow into as well.

Once I was having a great discussion about prayer with a group of year seven students at the local church primary school. They would come over to the church building each week for a prayer service, and, at the end of it they would all kneel down, and were supposed to be saying some quiet prayers of their own and then the organ would start up, and they would go out. One of the children in Year 7 said: 'You know when we all kneel down and say our prayers: how can God hear all of those different prayers?' I guess it was thought that, when we are all saying them together, He has only one lot of prayers to attend to, but when suddenly two hundred children all start praying different prayers, what has He got? Some kind of Communications Room, with all the messages coming in and being sorted out? They could not imagine how this could work. And I said: 'Well, maybe that tells us a little bit about the love of God, that it is so much bigger than our love. When you love someone, you listen to what they are saying, and pay attention to it. God's love is so great that He can do that with every single one of us.' That is when we start to realise, and are able to say to Him: It is good that You are God, and we are not! Because You are doing a great job of it.

Note God's attention to detail, also. He is talking about the clouds, the fantastic shapes that they take, the floods that come upon the earth, the lightnings, the mist, and the rain. Then, as if with a zoom lens, He comes down to where the rain is falling: 'when the dust runs into a mass and the clods cling together'. This detail is rather like the description of the rain in Psalm 65 (in the old Book of Common Prayer version): 'Thou waterest her furrows, thou sendest rain into the little valleys thereof: thou makest it soft with the drops of rain, and blessest the increase of it.' We all know of the times when rain first falls on the dry ground, and the fresh smell that comes from that, then the pattering down of the drops to make it muddy, and then the little pools, and the running of the water over the surface of the ground.

These wonders of creation begin to leave us breathless! Note that God does not say anything about the sun, or the moon, or the sky: we are touching only the fringes of His creation here; but He is giving Job, and us, just a glimpse enough to see something of His majesty, His sovereignty, His dependability, and His wonder.

### **CREATION AND COVENANT**

God is not showing all this to Job simply to impress him, or overawe him. There has always been a close connection between God's creation and God's covenant. God is a relational God. As 1 John 4: 8 and 16 says, 'God is love'. God's covenant is His relational bond with all that He has made, especially with humanity, and particularly



with His people<sup>1</sup>. There are other places where God's sovereignty and faithfulness with regard to creation is used to underscore the sureness of God's covenant, and all that it sets out to achieve. One classic passage is the promise of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31. The whole chapter has to do with the restoration of God's people after suffering and exile. In verses 31–34, the promise of the new covenant is made—of inner knowledge and direct relationship in unbreakable loyalty, and of complete forgiveness of sins:

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

These are things that we all need to know and participate in, including Job. But how are we to be sure of this wonderful outcome? The prophet continues in verses 35–37:

Thus says the LORD,  
who gives the sun for light by day  
and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night,  
who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—  
the LORD of hosts is his name:  
If this fixed order were ever to cease  
from my presence, says the LORD,  
then also the offspring of Israel would cease  
to be a nation before me forever.

Thus says the LORD:  
If the heavens above can be measured,  
and the foundations of the earth below can be explored,  
then I will reject all the offspring of Israel  
because of all they have done, says the LORD.

Is this not exactly what God is showing to Job? And is not this also the message of deep reassurance that is coming to him?

*Heavenly Father, we thank You that You have placed us in this glorious creation, and that You have given thought to every feature of it, and that there are things about it, so many things, vast tracts, that we have no knowledge of, and that we need to have little knowledge of, because they are in Your hands. We pray that seeing all these things in Your hand may reassure us that You have things in hand as far as our lives also are concerned, and that we can get on with the things that You have shown us to do. We thank You that the place where You have put us is a place of high and noble dignity. We pray that, being drawn out by the things that You show us and reveal to us, that we may truly take our place among the wonders of all the things that You have made, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> See further in Geoffrey C. Bingham, *Love's Most Glorious Covenant*, Redeemer Baptist Press, Castle Hill NSW, Australia, 1997.



This is the mountain goat. I remember going along the Murray River once on a houseboat, when there were some goats on a cliff on the bank, and they jumped down onto little ledges halfway down the cliff, and then jumped up again. You think: How do they do that? What are they landing on? How do they see it? They are so sure-footed.

This is talking about something different from that: the actual processes of birth in a wild animal. This is something that we are only now, with all our scientific knowledge, starting to unravel. Only a few years ago was produced what is now a very famous film called 'The Birth of the Red Kangaroo'. Produced at Adelaide University, it showed the process of birth in the red kangaroo that no one had ever known or seen before. Unlike other animals, the kangaroo comes out of the womb almost in embryo form, and it clutches its way up to the pouch—completely exposed, this little worm of a thing—and then it gets into the pouch, and starts to suckle, and finishes its development there: its limbs form properly, and its hair grows, until, as a joey, it pokes its head out, and eventually can get out of the pouch. That is an amazing process. Every creature has its own birthing process, and each one is different. For how many months is an elephant pregnant? This is different from the way ants reproduce, or birds, or crocodiles, or snakes. That is an amazing thing—just that knowledge of how animals reproduce. God is asking Job: 'Do you know how that works? Can you make it happen? I oversee every one of those processes. I set them up in the first place.'

39:5 Who has let the wild ass go free?  
Who has loosed the bonds of the swift ass,  
6 to which I have given the steppe for its home,  
the salt land for its dwelling place?"  
7 It scorns the tumult of the city;  
it does not hear the shouts of the driver.  
8 It ranges the mountains as its pasture,  
and it searches after every green thing.

This is speaking again of the wild, uninhabitable places: God has His animals even out there. These are animals that we never end up controlling. They are just wild. But God runs them on His 'station'! As God says in Psalm 50:10: 'every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills'—'you have your little farms, and your sheep stations and cattle stations, and so on; you have your pet dog or your pet cat; but I have all the animals, in the forest, in the mountains, and on the plain'. The wild ass can never be tamed, and does not want to be. God provides for it 'every green thing'.

39:9 Is the wild ox willing to serve you?  
Will it spend the night at your crib?  
10 Can you tie it in the furrow with ropes,  
or will it harrow the valleys after you?  
11 Will you depend on it because its strength is great,  
and will you hand over your labour to it?  
12 Do you have faith in it that it will return,  
and bring your grain to your threshing floor?

We have tamed a number of species of ox. They were the main work power in the ancient world, and in many places still are, by which agriculture is conducted. In those days there was a wild ox (now thought to have been extinct since 1627): a great big creature. No way could it have ever been tamed—it would have been great if that



- it does not turn back from the sword.  
23 Upon it rattle the quiver,  
the flashing spear, and the javelin.  
24 With fierceness and rage it swallows the ground;  
it cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet.  
25 When the trumpet sounds, it says 'Aha!'  
From a distance it smells the battle,  
the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.

I have a friend who is a keen horse-rider, and has done some rodeo riding on the bucking broncos. He has always wanted someone to paint him an action picture of the scene. He is not an artist himself, but he knows exactly what he wants, and has the picture sharply in his mind's eye: the red dust, the stamping hooves, the arched back, the clinging rider, the flying mane and tail, the flaring nostrils, and most of all, the look in the horse's eye!

The horse must be one of God's most magnificent creations. Jonathan Swift certainly thought so when, in his extended novel *Gulliver's Travels*, he ended up preferring the proud and noble race of horse animals to the company of human beings. Horses have been some of our closest and most useful animal companions. God does not seem to be making any point here in describing the horse, except to delight in its sheer strength, terror, majesty, eager fearlessness, unstoppable courage, and speed. God made the horse! He shows it to Job and says: 'There! What do you think of that!?'

### THE SOARING BIRDS OF PREY

- 39:26 Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars,  
and spreads its wings toward the south?  
27 Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up  
and makes its nest on high?  
28 It lives on the rock and makes its home  
in the fastness of the rocky crag.  
29 From there it spies the prey;  
its eyes see it from far away.  
30 Its young ones suck up blood;  
and where the slain are, there it is.

Many years ago I saw a Disney wildlife film version of the *Grand Canyon Suite*: the glories of the USA's Grand Canyon and its wild inhabitants set to magnificent music. After seeing that, I thought that if I ever had an opportunity for another life on earth, I would like to be a golden eagle over the Grand Canyon. That is, until we moved to Meningie, on the shores of Lake Albert in South Australia, near the mouth of the River Murray and that long stretch of water called the Coorong, and I saw the pelicans. Sometimes they would be circling to thousands of feet on thermals over the town, wings extended motionlessly, exalting in the sheer joy and wonder of it all. Other times they would come swooping down across the surface of the lake, so close that the water almost ruffled their tummy feathers, every now and then rising a few centimetres, enough to give their wings a flip to keep up the momentum, before dropping back down again. Or they would sit pensively, floating on the water, or moving noiselessly through it, sometimes in groups herding the fish before them, then all going beaks down into the water together for a good feed. That was when I forgot about the eagles and the Grand Canyon, and decided that, given the chance, I would much prefer to be a pelican over the Coorong!

God's 'wildlife documentary' for Job's benefit culminates in these magnificent birds of prey, soaring to the heights, and making their nests way beyond human reach. There is reference here also to the blood of their victims—a theme that commonly occurs in the Bible in apocalyptic writing (e.g. Ezekiel 39:17, Revelation 19:17–18), where the birds are called upon to devour the remains of God's enemies in the aftermath of the final battle when His great victory has been won. Jesus himself referred to this in Matthew 24:28: 'Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures [some translations: 'eagles'] will gather.' In all these things, God's sovereignty is secure, and His good purposes are sure. This is what Job is being shown