

WHEN THE WONDER FADES

Job 38

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Have you ever watched a bald eagle catch a rising thermal and glide totally out of sight without ever flapping a wing? How did he learn to do that? Those who have watched it call it one of the most awe-inspiring events that one could possibly behold.

It makes you wonder.

Ever sit and observe a garden spider construct its web from scratch? You can't help but know that an amazingly creative God has given it the incredible instinct to spiral inward in an intricate pattern that is duplicated perfectly each time it builds a new web.

Ever sit in the absolute, total darkness of a cave? So dark that you can feel it. So dark that you are afraid to move even a foot for fear of falling. So dark, yet you listen to the high pitched chirping of bats as they effortlessly negotiate the cavernous spaces – their echo – location capabilities so finely tuned that they are able to tell where they are in the cave and return each dawn to the same roosting spot.

It makes you wonder.

Ever laid on your back for hours into the night in West Texas, where no city lights adulterate the sky? Watching the full measure of the glory of the heavens as the stars shine with such brilliance as to shout. The Milky Way is so spectacular and seems a solid river of light gently flowing from horizon to horizon. It makes you stand in awe of God's personal love. Comparing yourself to the expanding universe, yet God knows you personally and wants you to know Him. Wow!

It makes you wonder.

Ever hiked the Rocky Mountains with a backpack and absorb the evergreen-laden air and felt the crisp freshness of the dawn as the sun slowly revealed its face over the peak? Standing at the edge of the year-round snow field on the peak in the middle of July and seeing the beautiful verdant valley below, laced with streams meandering across the meadow.

It makes you wonder.

Ever hear a baby's rhythmic giggle the very first time he discovers the wet nose of a playful pup?

It makes you wonder.

Job 38

Job was experiencing the dark night of his soul. Job's theology was crumbling before his very eyes. He had lost everything – his family, his wealth, his health. Yet he had no sin that might contribute to his demise. So he looks to heaven and asks, "Why?" He wanted some answers from God. Why had he suffered when he had been a righteous man? Job felt, given the unearned hardships of his life, that God owed him some very good answers.

In the Book of Job, a lot of people have been speaking. Job and his friends have filled the pages with rampant verbosity. But now it's time for God to speak. He breaks the tedious tirades of the other characters of the book and answers Job Himself. You've been waiting for it, if you've read the Book of Job. You feel the tedium and the tension, the anguish and the anger, the doggedness and the despair of the Jobian drama. You are ready for God to explain it all.

At last – finally – across the text and into the drama – God enters.

We are ready for God to speak. So He begins.

"Okay, Job, you want some answers, big boy? I'll give you some answers."

He comes in the whirlwind, sending the tumbleweeds end over end in its wake.

A burning bush, a ladder of angels, a still small voice, a wheel in a wheel, a lofty throne, a solar eclipse, a sheet filled with animals, a trumpet sound — all announce the coming of the Lord. God, to our disappointment, seldom, if ever, comes the same way twice. It's hard to put God in a box – He always escapes. God does not come in the orderly courtroom setting that Job desires. Instead, He comes in the chaos of a whirlwind.

God comes. He does not condemn Job for sin. Instead, He chides him for his barrage of empty words about a subject beyond his knowledge.

Job is bombarded by suffering beyond his comprehension or control. Job sends a screen of verbal scattershot to defend himself. His faith, much like mine, is too small to cover the contingency of the innocent suffering.

Job has challenged God. Now it is God's turn to challenge Job. "Job, brace yourself like a man – I will question you, and you shall answer me" Sixty-four questions in all, arranged around three themes.

I. JOB, DO YOU KNOW THE SOURCES FROM WHICH CREATION BEGAN?

Job 38:4-21

Job, where were you when I was pouring the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you know as much as you think you know. You know so much about the earth – did you figure its measurements? Did you stretch the line on it? On what does the earth suspend? Who laid the cornerstone of the earth – you know, Job – when the morning stars sang together and all of God's Sons shouted for joy?

Who, Job, enclosed the sea with doors? When the sea burst forth from its womb, who made the clouds and thick darkness a garment for the sea?

Job, when – I ask when – is the last time *you* commanded the morning to appear? Have you ever in your life caused the dawn to rise in the east?

Have you found the springs that are the source for the sea? Have you walked in the recesses of the deep?

Have you seen the location of the gates of death? Tell me, Job, if you know!

Job, where does light come from? And how do you get there?

But of course you know all of this! For you were born before it was all created, and you are so experienced.

II. THE SECOND SERIES OF QUESTIONS CAN BE SUMMED UP LIKE THIS – JOB, DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE SYSTEMS UPON WHICH THE EARTH DEPENDS?

Job 38:22-38

Job, do you understand the snow? Have you walked in the great storehouse where all the snow is kept or how about the storehouse for hail? You have been there – I'm sure of that.

Does the rain have a father? Or where does the dew come from? Who is the mother of ice and frost?

Can you hold back the stars? Can you restrain Orion or the Pleiades? Can you ensure the proper sequence of seasons? Or guide the constellation of the Bear with her satellites across the heavens?

The mystery of the control of creation is illustrated by a panel of economists who gave their answer to the moderator's final question on a television program. "What is the greatest influence upon the world economy?"

What do you think was the unanimous answer? Wall Street? Interest rates? Labor unions?

Weather.

God is in control of all systems. We cannot control them.

It makes you wonder.

III. THE THIRD SERIES OF QUESTIONS REVOLVE AROUND THE INQUIRY: DO YOU APPRECIATE THE SPECIALTIES BY WHICH THE ANIMALS ARE DISTINGUISHED?

Job 39

Job, have you watched a mountain goat give birth? Have you observed the calving of a deer? Do you know how many months of pregnancy they have?

Did you make the ostrich dumb, devoid of good mothering instincts? Did you cause her to just lay her eggs on the top of the ground and just leave them where other animals will eat them? But when she runs, she passes the swiftest horse and rider! Did you make the ostrich with her curious combination of strengths and weaknesses?

Did you give the horse his might? Did you clothe his neck with a mane? Did you make him leap like the locust? His majestic snorting is terrible. He paws in the valley and rejoices in his strength.

Is it because of your understanding that the hawk soars? Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up? And makes her nest?

Job 40:1

Well Job, you fault-finder, do you wish to continue your debate with the Almighty?

Job folds his cards. “Lord, I am nothing. How could I ever find the answers? I have said too much already.”

You see God’s point. “Job, if you know that I am creator of the world with all of its wonder and mystery – can’t you trust me without pulling back the curtain completely?”

When we cease to wonder and marvel at the universe around us as testimony to the existence of God, some really bad things happen.

The universe is:

extremely complex
extremely marvelous
happened by accident?

You’ve got to be kidding.

Crossing a valley, suppose you come upon a stratified stone – layer upon layer. You could imagine how deposits over the years had led to its repetitive pattern. Suppose, walking further, you were to come upon Mt. Rushmore where the faces of four humans appear upon a granite cliff. You would conclude that unlike the layered stone brought about by random, natural forces – you would insist that this sight of faces was no chance happening, no freak of nature. You would insist that it was the result of purposed intelligence, not natural erosion. No matter if –

• You knew nothing of who their faces were – Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Roosevelt.

- You had never seen or heard of any possible process of carving huge faces in granite. No one in her senses could buy that this was just one possible shape or combination brought by erosion. You know the work of intelligence when you see it.

How, I ask, can anyone, bright or dull, look at the wonders of this world – human eye, birth, a mountain scene aflame with fall colors – and not believe in an intelligent planner, a God?

All this just chance? Takes too much faith.

As an example, let me transport you to a sophisticated lecture hall at Cambridge University where Dr. John Polkinghorne, president of Queens College, Cambridge, was lecturing. His book, *The Quantum World*, has been hailed by *Physics Bulletin* as one of the finest in its genre. Polkinghorne eloquently argued that the existence of God is shown by our finely tuned and intelligible universe, with exactitude demanded in every detail that atheist thinkers are hard pressed to explain.

In the early expansion of the universe there has to be a close balance between the expansive energy (driving things apart) and the force of gravity (pulling things together). If expansion dominated then matter would fly apart too rapidly for condensation into galaxies and stars to take place. Nothing interesting could happen in so thinly spread a world. On the other hand, if gravity dominated, the world would collapse in on itself again before there was time for the processes of life to get going.

For us to be possible requires a [precise] balance between the effects of expansion and contraction which, at a very early epoch in the universe's history (the Planck time), has to differ from equality by not more than 1 in 10^{60} power. The numerate will marvel at such a degree of accuracy. It is the same as aiming at a target an inch wide on the other side of the observable universe, twenty thousand million light years away, and hitting the mark! (*Can Man Live Without God?*)

You have to wonder at God's majesty. How could He possibly do it?

A scientist was asked to describe his research project in 150 words. For his answer, the scientist wrote 50 times the 3 word sentence, "I don't know."

When we lose our childlike wonder of the universe, there are consequences to our reduction of the mystery of God.

A. All life is reduced into merely the material, the physical, the biological.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. pleaded with the nation to turn its back upon past hatred. In his acceptance of the Nobel Prize for Peace, Dr. King said, "I refuse to believe the notion that man is mere flotsam and jetsam in the river of life...unable to respond to the eternal oughtness that forever confronts him."

Dr. King clearly invokes a transcendent value to human life. In contrast, a materialist is forced to a theory of randomness and cannot avoid this reduction of man to flotsam and jetsam. Where there is the loss of wonder there is a natural tug toward a reductionistic view of everything aesthetic or virtuous. For that matter, all of life boils down to the rags of matter in chemical or physical reaction, and the strongest “reactions” win. Man becomes another blip on the radar screen of time. The noblest is reduced to the lowest, and love is merely glandular. What a tragic philosophy the anti-theist begets, for the higher up he scales the pinnacle of evolution the more he is reminded of his utter insignificance. (*Can Man Live Without God?*)

B. When the wonder fades, we’ll lose our gratitude for there is no one to be grateful to. As the universe is “just there,” so we in the universe are “just here.” This is an intriguing phenomenon in the West. All over the world hundreds of millions of people wake up each morning grateful to God for life and strength. As you travel around, you see heads bowed before a meal or even in the eye of a storm, thirty-seven thousand feet above the ground, reverently recognizing His sovereignty.

We are living dangerously on this great continent, imagining that by our own power, our own will, and our own ingenious capacities we have built history’s most modern nation. We think we ourselves have pulled ourselves up by our own economic and technological bootstraps. God says the nations are but a drop in the bucket and that it would be very easy for our national glory to be suddenly a thing of the past. All it would take is one giant catastrophe to bring any nation to its knees.

“I suppose it is like this,” says G. K. Chesterton. “If my children wake up on Christmas morning and have somebody to thank for putting candy in their stocking, have I no one to thank for putting two feet in mine?” Gratitude is a natural outworking of wonder, and wonder is cognizant of God Himself. (*Can Man Live Without God?*)

C. Slide to emptiness

This leads me to the third consequence when wonder has been lost. Not only is there a reductionism and a loss of gratitude, but there is also an inevitable slide into emptiness. I think particularly of our present generation, which enjoys more sophisticated toys than ever before, yet each toy has a shorter thrill-span than the previous one. We are constantly wearied of our new inventions, and the expression “built-in obsolescence” has taken on a new twist, applying not only to the gadgets but to life itself.

H. L. Mencken said, “The problem with life is not that it’s a tragedy, but that it’s a bore.” A child who is filled with wonder is also filled with a sense of enchantment, a sense of significance, a sense of meaning. When wonder ceases, boredom and emptiness begin to stalk existence. (*Can Man Live Without God?*)

D. Chaos of confused culture

No designer. No God. No boundaries. When I make myself big and God small, I might even think I could choose my own gender or species.

Ever felt the slick skin of a snake as it maneuvers through your fingers? No arms. No legs. Just raw muscle in motion. Graceful and sly.

It makes you wonder.

Every smelt the earth after a late August thundershower? The aroma of relief sent up from the parched, dry land – almost as a sacrifice for God to savor.

Ever watched a caterpillar build itself a cocoon – then, as amazingly as the magician emerges from his trunk of magic, a butterfly escapes.

How does the ugly become beautiful?
The common magnificent?
The crawling, a creature of flight?

It makes you wonder.

But if the wonder fades – if you forget about God and only look to the simplistic – ever changing and unreliable – answers of the scientist – there are terrible consequences.

This is my Father's world,
and to my listening ears
all nature sings, and round me rings
the music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world,
the birds their carols raise,
the morning light, the lily white,
declare the Maker's praise.
This is my Father's world,
He shines in all that's fair,
in the rustling grass, I hear Him pass,
He speaks to me everywhere.