

Job Chapter 39

Job 39:1 "Knowest thou the time when the wild goats of the rock bring forth? [or] canst thou mark when the hinds do calve?"

Which creatures are so called, because they dwell among the rocks and run upon them. And though their heads are loaded with a vast burden of horns upon them, yet can so poise themselves, as with the greatest swiftness, to leap from mountain to mountain, as Pliny says. And if they bring forth their young in the rocks, as Olympiodorus asserts, and which is not improbable. It is not to be wondered, that the time of their bringing forth should not be known by men, to whom the rocks they run upon are inaccessible.

"Or canst thou mark the time when the hinds do calve? That is, precisely and exactly, and so as to direct, order, and manage, and bring it about, as the Lord does. And it is wonderful that they should calve, and not cast their young before their time, when they are continually in flight and fright of men or wild beasts. And are almost always running and leaping about; and often scared with thunder, which hastens birth (Psalm 29:9). Otherwise the time of their bringing forth in general is known by men, as will be observed (in Job 39:2).

We see that this is an extension of the last lesson. All of these Words from God are to show that the mysteries of nature are beyond the comprehension of man. God in all His wisdom and understanding created all things. Man is not intended to understand the mysteries of God. The greatest mystery of all is the origin of life itself. The particular wild goat above, is unusually secluded. They live in the very rockiest places, and far away from civilization. Of course, man does not know when they will have their newborn. The hinds above, are speaking of the female goats.

Job 39:2 "Canst thou number the months [that] they fulfil? Or knowest thou the time when they bring forth?"

With an animal as wild as the ibex, these secrets of nature would be difficult to observe and note down. In Job's time, probably no one had made such subjects an object of inquiry.

"Or knowest thou the time when they bring forth?" This would be less difficult to observe. The breeding-time of most wild animals is known in the country which produces them.

Animals do not carry their babies the same amount of time that a human mother carries hers before birth. In the time of Job, people had not gone to the trouble to find out how long a particular animal carried their young before birth.

Job 39:3 "They bow themselves, they bring forth their young ones, they cast out their sorrows."

Being taught by a Divine instinct to dispose themselves in such a posture as may be fittest for their safe and easy bringing forth.

"They bring forth their young ones": To wit, with great pain, being almost torn or rent asunder with the birth, as the word signifies. Or, without any of that help which tame beasts often have.

"They cast out their sorrows": I.e. their young ones, and their sorrows together. Or, though (which particle is often understood), they remit or put away their sorrows. I.e. though instead of cherishing and furthering their sorrows, which for their own ease and safety they should do, they foolishly hinder them, and so increase their own danger. Yet by God's good providence to them they are enabled to bring forth, as was now said.

This is speaking of the manner of the birth. It is a natural thing for an animal to give birth.

Job 39:4 "Their young ones are in good liking, they grow up with corn; they go forth, and return not unto them."

Plump, fat, and sleek, as fawns are.

"They grow up with corn": By which they grow, or without in the field, as the word also signifies; and their growth and increase is very quick, as Aristotle observes.

"They go forth, and return not unto them": They go forth into the fields, and shift and provide for themselves, and trouble their dams no more. And return not to them, nor are they known by them.

This is speaking of these animals being born in good health. They do not stay with their mothers very long. The Lord provides for them.

Job 39:5 "Who hath sent out the wild ass free? or who hath loosed the bands of the wild ass?"

"Wild ass": A species of donkey.

Job 39:6 "Whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings."

Appointed that to be his place of residence, as being agreeable to his nature, at a distance from men, and in the less danger of being brought into subjection by them. Such were the deserts of Arabia; where, as Xenophon relates, were many of these creatures, and which he represents as very swift: and Leo Africanus says, great numbers of them are found in deserts, and on the borders of deserts; hence said to be used to the wilderness (Jer. 2:24).

"And the barren land his dwellings": Not entirely barren, for then it could not live there; but comparatively, with respect to land that is fruitful. Or "salt land"; for, as Pliny says, every place where salt is, is barren.

We saw in the last lesson, how God sent rain to the barren land and to the wilderness and made the vegetation to grow. Now we see that those things were provisions for the wild ass and other wild animals like them. God provided for every living thing upon the earth.

Job 39:7 "He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver."

That is, he sets all this at defiance; he is not intimidated by it. He finds his home far away from the city in the wild freedom of the wilderness.

"Neither regardeth he the crying of the driver": Or "hears": he neither feels his blows, nor hears his words; urging him to move faster and make quicker dispatch, as the tame ass does. He being neither ridden nor driven, nor drawing a cart or plough.

This is speaking of the wild ass not wanting to be tamed by the man who dwells in the city. The ass many times, was used in the manner of some horses. They were ridden by the princes of many lands. The wild ass does not want to be driven and is hard to tame.

Job 39:8 "The range of the mountains [is] his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing."

By "mountains" we must here understand rocky ranges like the Sinjar and the mountains of Beloochistan, or again those of the Sinaitic peninsula. Wild asses do not frequent the regions which we commonly call mountainous.

"And he searcheth after every green thing": I.e. he seeks out the small patches of pasture which are to be found in such rocky regions.

He lives as far away from people as he can, and he eats the grass of the fields.

Job 39:9 "Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib?"

Canst thou tame him, and bring him into subjection to thy command?

"Or abide by thy crib?" Manger or stall, as the tame or common ox will. Who, when it has done its labor, is glad to be led to its stall and feed, and then lie down and rest, and there abide (see Isa. 1:3); but not so the wild ox.

The word that was translated unicorn here, just denotes an animal with horns. This again, is speaking of a wild animal that would not easily be domesticated.

Job 39:10 "Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? or will he harrow the valleys after thee?"

That is, "as thou bindest the ox?" Canst thou make him plough for thee?

"Or will he harrow the valleys after thee?" Another common employment of oxen.

Man might try to make him like an ox to plow the fields, but he really was not created of God for such a task and would probably not be very good at it.

Job 39:11 " Wilt thou trust him, because his strength [is] great? or wilt thou leave thy labor to him?"

Namely, for the doing of these works.

"Because his strength is great?" Because he is very able to do them. Wilt thou, by thy power, make him willing, or force him to put forth his strength in thy service?"

"Wilt thou leave thy labor": Thy work of ploughing and harrowing. Or the fruit of thy labor, namely, the fruits of the earth, procured by God's blessing upon thy industry.

"To him?" Wilt thou leave them to him to be brought home into thy barns? As the next verse explains it.

This is still speaking of the horned animal called a unicorn here. This animal seemed to be of tremendous strength. He would have been unmanageable as a farm animal however.

Job 39:12 "Wilt thou believe him, that he will bring home thy seed, and gather [it into] thy barn?"

Draw in the cart, and bring home the ripe sheaves of corn, as the tame ox does? No; thou knowest him too well to believe he will bring it home in safety.

"And gather it into thy barn": To be trodden out, which used to be done by oxen in those times. If therefore Job could not manage such unruly creatures as the wild ass and the wild ox, and make them serviceable to him, how unfit must he be to govern the world, or to direct in the affairs of Providence?

This is saying that he would not have been trustworthy to pull the wagon and bring in the harvest. An animal with great strength is of no use to the farmer if he cannot manage him. God made other animals for this purpose.

Verses 13-18: In His description of the "ostrich", God emphasized that He distributes different traits to various animals, giving wisdom to some and withholding it from others. The Lord is the source of wisdom within all creation.

"Goodly winds": The silly ostrich that leaves her eggs on the ground lacks sense. God has not given her wisdom. She is almost a picture of Job, who is a mixture of foolishness and strength (verse 18).

Job 39:13 "[Gavest thou] the goodly wings unto the peacocks? Or wings and feathers unto the ostrich?"

Rather "ostriches", as the Vulgate Latin version render it. Some render it, "the wing of those that exult is joyful", so Montanus; that is, of the ostriches; who, in confidence of their wings, exult and glory over the horse and his rider (Job 39:18). For peacocks are not remarkable for their wings, but for their tails; whereas the wings of the ostrich are as sails unto them, as several writers observe; Moreover, what is said in the following verses is only true of the ostrich, and that only is spoken of here and there, as it follows;

“Or wings and feathers unto the ostrich”: Or whose wings and feathers are like the storks; and so Bochart renders the words, truly they have "the wing and feather of the stork"; the colors of which are black and white, from whence it has its name in Greek.

An ostrich does not soar away into the heavens like an eagle does. They are fowl that stay very near the earth. In fact, they move around by walking, and not by flying. God had made each thing for the purpose He intended it, and He equipped it with whatever it needed to fulfill His purpose.

Job 39:14 "Which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in dust,"

The best authorities tell us that in tropical countries ostriches, having scratched a hole in the sand, and deposited their eggs in it, cover the eggs over with a layer of sand, sometimes as much as a foot in thickness. And, leaving them during the daytime to be kept warm by the heat of the sun, only incubate at night. It is evidently this habit of the bird that is here alluded to. That in cooler countries ostriches do not do this is not to the point. The habit was known in Job's time, and was so noticeable as to characterize the bird to a large extent.

This was speaking of the ostrich of that part of the country where Job lived. The mother ostrich dug a hole in the sand and deposited her eggs there. She covered the nest with sand, and the hot sun kept the eggs warm for her.

Job 39:15 "And forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them."

Where the eggs are covered by a layer of sand a foot thick, this danger is not incurred. But when the eggs are numerous, and they are sometimes as many as thirty, they are apt to be very poorly covered, and the results follow which are described in the text.

Actually, she separated herself from the eggs, as if she was no longer interested in them. She felt they were safe from harm in the hole she built and covered them with sand.

Job 39:16 "She is hardened against her young ones, as though [they were] not hers: her labor is in vain without fear;"

Actually, the mother and the father ostrich incubate the eggs at night. The eggs get plenty of warmth from the sun in the desert sand in the daytime. This is a deduction from what has preceded, and discloses no new fact. Recent careful observation of the habits of the ostrich indicates that the parental instinct is not wanting, though it may be weaker than in most birds.

Both the male and the female incubate at night, and, when the nest is approached by the hunter, the parent bird or birds will leave it, and try to draw him away from it by running on in front of him, or feigning to attack him, much as Peewits (Lapwings), do.

"Her labor is in vain without fear": Or, though her labor is in vain, she is without fear (see the Revised Version). I.e. though she is often disappointed of her immediate hope of offspring, through her eggs being crushed and destroyed, yet she grows no wiser, she does not fear for the future.

Job 39:17 "Because God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding."

That is, he has not imparted to her the wisdom which has been conferred on other animals. The meaning is, that all this remarkable arrangement, which distinguished the ostrich so much from other animals was to be traced to God. It was not the result of chance; it could not be pretended that it was by a human arrangement, but it was the result of divine appointment. Even in this apparent destitution of wisdom, there were reasons which had led to this appointment, and the care and good providence of God could be seen in the preservation of the animal. Particularly, though apparently so weak, and timid, and unwise, the ostrich had a noble hearing (Job 39:18).

The mother ostrich does not worry at the loss of an egg, because she is not very intelligent. She probably does not even realize an egg is gone.

Job 39:18 "What time she lifteth up herself on high, she scorneth the horse and his rider."

It is sometimes eight foot high; when alarmed with approaching danger she raises up herself, being sitting on the ground, and erects her wings for flight, or rather running.

"She scorneth the horse and his rider": Being then, as Pliny says, higher than a man on horseback, and superior to a horse in swiftness. And though horsemen have been able to take wild asses and goats, very swift creatures, yet never ostriches.

The ostrich is large and when a horse and rider get near, the ostrich stands upright (usually taller than a horse), and flaps her wings while she chases the horse.

Verses 19-25: Here is a magnificent, vivid picture of the war horse.

Job 39:19 "Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder?"

Not only to bear burdens and draw carriages, but for war; for it is the war horse that is here spoken of, as what follows shows, and his strength denotes. Not strength of body only, but fortitude and courage; for which, as well as the other, the horse is eminent, and both are the gift of God, and not of men.

“Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder?” Many objections have been taken to this expression; and endeavors have been made to show that the word used (תמען), does not mean "thunder," but "a tremulous motion," "quivering muscles and a tossing mane," or else "scorn," or "indignation." But as תען always means "thunder" (Job 26:14; 39:25; Psalms 77:19; 81:8; 145:7; Isa. 29:6), it seems unlikely that תמען means anything else.

Man did not give the horse strength, God did. This is the beginning of a picture of a horse about to go to battle. His neck is high and jutting forth in pride.

Job 39:20 "Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? the glory of his nostrils [is] terrible."

Which is frightened at every noise, and at any approach of men, but not so the horse. Or canst thou move him, or cause him to skip and jump, or rather leap like a grasshopper? That is, hast thou given, or canst thou give him the faculty of leaping over hedges and ditches, for which the horse is famous? So Neptune's war horses are said to be good leapers.

"The glory of his nostrils is terrible": Which may be understood of his sneezing, snorting, pawing, and neighing, when his nostrils are broad, spread, and enlarged. And especially when enraged and in battle, when he foams and fumes, and his breath comes out of his nostrils like smoke, and is very terrible.

This is speaking of a horse flaring his nostrils and snorting. This has been known to frighten the bravest of men. He is not afraid at all.

Job 39:21 "He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in [his] strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men."

Where armies are usually pitched and set in battle array, and especially the cavalry, for which the valley is most convenient. And here the horse is impatient of engaging, cannot stand still, but rises up with his fore feet and paws and prances. And, as the word signifies, digs the earth and makes it hollow, by a continual striking upon it; so generally, horses are commonly described in this manner.

"And rejoiceth in his strength": Of which he is sensible, and glories in it. Marches to the battle with pride and stateliness, defying, as it were, the enemy, and as if sure of victory, of which he has knowledge when obtained.

"He goeth on to meet the armed men": Without any fear or dread of them, as follows.

This is probably the reason men use horses to ride in battle. He is not aware of any danger in battle. They are not able to reason that they might be going to their own death.

Job 39:22 "He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword."

"The cavalry of modern times will rush undismayed upon the line of opposing bayonets". "We do not believe that a body of infantry ever existed that, with the bayonet alone, unsupported by fire, could have checked the determined charge of good horsemen"

This is speaking of the horse, and not the man on the horse. The horse cannot reason, and therefore does not realize there is any danger against drawn swords.

Job 39:23 "The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield."

The quiver is what arrows are put into and carried in, and seems here to be put for arrows, which being shot by the enemy come whizzing about him, but do not intimidate him. Unless this is to be understood of arrows rattling in the quiver when carried by the rider "upon him", so some render the last word.

"The glittering spear and the shield": The lance or javelin, as Mr. Broughton renders it, and others. That is, he does not turn back from these, nor is he frightened at them when they are pointed or flung at him. So Aelianus speaks of the Persians training their horses and getting them used to noises, that in battle they might not be frightened at the clashing of arms, or swords and shields against each other. In like manner as war horses were trained, not to start at the firing of a gun, or the explosion of a cannon.

This was just explaining that the quiver was on the side of the neck of the horse. The spear and shield were also touching the body of the horse. He had no excitement from this. Horses trained for battle were used to these things. Their owners had trained them with these, as well as their riding them.

Job 39:24 "He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage: neither believeth he that [it is] the sound of the trumpet."

Being so eager for the battle, and so full of fierceness and rage, he bounds the plain with such swiftness that he seems rather to swallow up the ground than to run upon it.

"Neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet": For joy at hearing it; or he will not trust to his ears, but will see with his eyes whether the battle is ready, and therefore pushes forward. Mr. Broughton and others read it, "he will not stand still at the noise of the trumpet"; and the word signifies firm and stable, as well as to believe. When he hears the trumpet sound, the alarm of war, as a preparation for the battle, he knows not how to stand; there is hardly any holding him, but he rushes into the battle at once (Jer. 8:6).

This was speaking of the rushing of the horse to battle, as if he were swallowing up the ground in front of him. When the trumpet sounded he charged forward to battle.

Job 39:25 "He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting."

An expression of joy and alacrity, declared by his proud neighing. Whereby he doth in some sort answer the sound of the trumpets, in way of scorn and challenge.

"He smelleth": I.e. he perceives, as this phrase is used (Judges 16:9).

"Afar off": At some distance, either of place, or rather of time, as the word is most frequently used. He perceives by the motion of the soldiers, and the clattering of the arms, that the battle is at hand, which is very welcome to him.

"The thunder of the captains, and the shouting": By which he understands, either the military orations which the captains make and deliver with a loud voice to animate their soldiers to the battle. Or rather the loud and joyful clamor begun by the commanders, and followed by the soldiers, when they are ready to join battle, that thereby they may both daunt their enemies, and encourage themselves.

The horse seemed to sense the excitement of the captain who was riding him. When the captain shouted it excited the horse even further.

Job 39:26 "Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom, [and] stretch her wings toward the south?"

The hawk's strength of wing is extraordinary, and one of the greatest of natural marvels. Can Job claim to have contrived it? Many as have been the attempts made, human ingenuity has not yet devised anything that can fly at that time.

"And stretch her wings toward the south?" Migrate, i.e., when winter approaches, to the warmer southern regions. Few things in nature are more remarkable than the instinct of migratory birds.

No it does not. No man gave the hawk strength to fly. Man used the hawk, but God empowered the hawk.

Job 39:27 "Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high?"

Fly directly upward till she be out of thy sight, which no other bird can do.

"And make her nest on high": In the highest and inaccessible rocks (compare Jer. 49:16; Obad. 1:4).

This explanation of the source of strength for all animals and birds ends with the eagle. Many countries, including the United States, use the eagle as a symbol of strength on their coinage. When you think of an eagle, you automatically think of the king of the birds. The eagle nearly always makes its nest high in the rocks.

Job 39:28 "She dwelleth and abideth on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong place."

Where she and her young are safe: Eagles make their nests in rocks, even in the precipices of them, and here on the tooth, edge, or precipice of the rock, which is inaccessible, and so like a strong fortified place.

This is a vantage point above anything else around. The rocks are usually jagged and very high in the side of a mountain or crag.

Job 39:29 "From thence she seeketh the prey, [and] her eyes behold afar off."

Her sight is exceeding sharp and strong, so that she is able to look upon the sun with open eyes. And to behold the smallest prey upon the earth or sea, when she is mounted out of our sight. Which when she spies, she flies to it with incredible swiftness, even like an arrow out of a bow.

Job 39:30 "Her young ones also suck up blood: and where the slain [are], there [is] she."

Eleven of God's creatures, six beasts and five birds, are presented for Job to explain. God cycled through all of these subjects, and when He finished, Job had not answered one question.

The eagle has eyes that can see at great distances. This elevated area gives the eagle full view of the surrounding area, so it can spot its prey at great distances. The blood speaks of a freshly dead animal that the eagle had brought to its babies. It eats the blood with the meat. Each animal and bird has its own purpose on the earth. Their purpose is what God created them for.

Job Chapter 39 Questions

1. What is the purpose of this chapter and the chapter just preceding this one?
2. Man is not intended to understand the _____ of God.
3. What do we learn from that verse?
4. What is verse 3 speaking of?
5. Who provides for the young goat?
6. Why does God send rain to the barren land?
7. The _____ was sometimes used as a horse.
8. The wild ass does not want to be ridden and is _____ to tame.
9. What does he feed on?
10. What does "unicorn" in verse 9 mean?
11. Would he make a good plow animal?

12. An animal of great strength is of no use to a farmer, if he can't _____ him.
13. How does an ostrich, or a peacock, differ from other fowl?
14. What warmed the eggs she had left in the sand?
15. An ostrich might have as many as ____ eggs.
16. When do the mother and father ostrich incubate their eggs?
17. Why does the ostrich not act concerned, when something destroys one of her eggs?
18. How large is an ostrich?
19. Verse 19 says the horse's neck is clothed with _____.
20. What is verse 20 speaking of?
21. Why did men choose horses to ride on in battle?
22. What is meant by him "swallowing the ground"?
23. When the trumpet sounds, the horse _____.
24. The explanation of the source of all strength ends with the _____.