

Awe & Wonder

Faith and mystery Job 38

30 Aug 2026

Reading Job 38:1- 21

We were really looking forward to a few days away after several tough months of health issues especially for my wife. We had chosen a beautiful cabin in bushy hills overlooking a gorgeous Coromandel beach and offering expansive and magnificent views out to the New Mercury Islands and the Pacific ocean. We arrived – and like a couple of excited youngsters unpacked and settled in pinching ourselves in disbelief that we would be spending the next few days sitting on the deck taking in the view.

This was not to be. The January cyclone struck with winds over 100ks and rain like never before. Visibility was nil and the news started tumbling in that there were devastating slips and road closures all around us cutting our area off; and then a power outage ! Upon the first confirmed report that there was a way out, we threw our gear back into the car and drove cautiously but safely home,

Our experience whilst nothing comparable to what others had to face in this weather bomb, was nevertheless confronting. The power of the elements unleashed in a cyclone is quite frightening and one is reduced to the humble realisation that for all our posturing as powerful controllers of our lives and circumstances, we are but blips in the face of the forces of nature.

And so when God finally breaks the silence following Job's long period of questions and queries about his plight, Job is thrown right into the realm of the unfathomable mysteries of nature to consider the unfathomable mysteries of his life – and the rhetorical question is at large - “ *well who **does** know why these things happen ?*” The answer of course is *God*. And there can be no other answer because if the deep wisdom of God was to be made known to us fully then the quality of our trust in God would be compromised. Our awe of God would be diluted because we would know more than we ought. How can we possibly know all that God knows ?

The passage asks - Where are the foundations of the earth ? Who knows its dimensions and how it is supported ? Do you know how deep the sea is or if there is any end to the darkness in the skies ? Is there anything at all that you know about the constellations in the heavens ? Can you control or change the seasons and movements of the planets ?

Such was the challenge too, to the logic of Job's friends who were confident that the mysterious sufferings of Job were to them obviously because he was a secret sinner. The response of God is exceptionally straightforward, - that the answer to the great mysteries that we face are not to be found in human logic. God is sovereign and holds answers in divine wisdom that will never be bound by human logic. In the eye of the mystery we can do no better than to simply trust in God and seek the strength to faithfully believe that God's wisdom and purposes are beyond our understanding.¹

Verse 19 asks “*Where does light come from, and where does darkness go?*” (alternative - “*Show me where light dwells and where darkness*

¹ See too Psalm 104

resides ?”). What do we really know about the deep darkness that is in the spaces between the galaxies. It is fascinating to wonder whether even today with all the advances of science over thousands of years since Job’s time, those questions are answered. What really is out there in the depths of the darkness ? The modern science of quantum physics and astronomy have pressed into theories of the origins of the universe – most predominantly the “big bang” theory and have found black holes in deep space, and probing into these mysterious spaces of black nothingness there has been discovered what is being called *dark matter*. Dark matter is invisible but it is thought to have extraordinary gravitational power by which constellations are held together. Dark matter in outer space is thought to comprise primarily of a mass of some type of not-yet-characterized subatomic particles. We have never seen, tested or proven the existence of such material but what we know is that whenever we break through a new frontier of knowledge, that always results in us being aware that there is yet more to know and that what we have found is only a scratch on the surface. There is the saying - *the more we know the less we know* and it seems that since Job’s time to the present, that has proven persistently to be true.

The question posed to Job is still a question for today “*Show me where light dwells and where darkness resides ?*”

There is a nuance of God being satirical in verse 21,

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

In our time today we should see God’s teasing assertion that Job knows everything as a salutary reminder to us to be humble before the sovereign and almighty God and creator of all, because even today as our journeys of discovery take us further and deeper into knowledge we

have to fall back on the truth that even so, *the more we know the less we know* !

But to turn our probe for knowledge 180 degrees the other way from pressing into outer space to press into inner space, the results are exactly the same – *the more we know the less we know*.

In the 18th century the body cell was discovered as a basic element of living tissue. Since then the cell has been found to contain a media we call plasma and plasma has been found to contain molecules and mitochondria and mitochondria have been found to contain chromosomes and chromosomes have been found to contain Amino acids and Amino acids have been found to connect ribbons of DNA in unique formations. DNA has been found to be comprised of atoms arranged in intricate combinations that create the pattern for every distinctive detail of every living thing. We have come to realise that the content of one microscopic cell makes the achievements of Silicon Valley seem like preschool. The sequencing of atoms in the strands of DNA are wonderfully organised and held in formation by yet even smaller energy agents called quarks. These, like the dark matter of space, are too small to measure – smaller than electrons, but the energy which they contain is thought to be the glue that keeps the atoms of DNA in the innermost realms in the perfect order that they are meant to be, just like the energy in the dark matter that holds galaxies of the outer realms in their perfect formation.

For both outer space a way out there in the furthest reaches of the endless dark, and for inner space a way in there, in the furthest reaches of the cell of the tiniest cell, there are it seems particles that are too small to measure, - the *dark matter* and the *quarks*, that contain phenomenal energy that brilliantly sustains the stability of everything

around us that we see and enjoy every day as nature. Who knows how all this happens ?

The father of modern physics, Isaac Newton (early 18th C) saw God as the masterful creator whose existence could not be denied in the face of the grandeur of all creation. He wrote -

This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent Being..... This Being governs all things, not as the soul of the world, but as Lord over all; The Supreme God is a Being eternal, infinite, [and] absolutely perfect.²

I suspect Newton would have been comfortable with the saying *the more we know the less we know*.

Albert Einstein who died in 1955, believed in God against the burgeoning atheism of the modern science era, and is remembered as saying.....

" The more I study science, the more I believe in God"

and

*"The deeper one penetrates into nature's secrets, the greater becomes one's respect for God."*³

² Principia, Book III; cited in Newton's Philosophy of Nature: Selections from his writings, p. 42

³ See too: "Every one who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a Spirit is manifest in the laws of the universe – a Spirit vastly superior to that of man, and one in the face of which we with our modest powers must feel humble. In this way the pursuit of science leads to a religious feeling of a special sort, which is indeed quite different from the religiosity of someone more naive."

And Werner Heisenberg ⁴ of Germany thought by many to be the father of modern quantum physics is believed to have said -

The first gulp from the glass of natural sciences will turn you into an atheist, but at the bottom of the glass God is waiting for you.”

The mysteries both in nature and in the events of our lives will always be there and their very purpose might be to keep us humble enough to accept the existence of God like some of these scientists and even to lead us to surrender to God’s Sovereignty in all things.

There is a delightful portion in today’s reading that - *as light approaches the earth takes shape like clay pressed beneath a seal: it is robed in brilliant colours features (they stand out like those of a garment).* (vs 14)⁵

As dawn gives way to the light of the day – what is revealed to our awakening eyes is a new day that the Lord has made and the reminders of God’s signature in the landscape emerging in the rising sun, the sounds of the birds, the glistening of the dew, the colours of the flowers in a spring morning, the clouds scurrying over the horizon, the blue sky and the rustling of leaves.

(Einstein 1936, as cited in Dukas and Hoffmann, *Albert Einstein: The Human Side*, Princeton University Press, 1979, 33).

⁴ 1901-76

⁵ Job 38:14 NIV(UK)

Nature and its mysteries and the mysteries of our lives, if we are humble, can be seen to bear the signature of God's presence like the seal on a precious document. The wax or clay of a seal is just a blob until the master's mould is pressed into it and then it reveals the identity of the master in the detail left by the impression. This is a beautiful metaphor for trusting that the hand of God is pressing into our lives in whatever circumstances.

In the eucharist we bow before the wisdom of God in Christ Jesus and invite the imprint of God's presence in our lives to be firmly and more clearly pressed into our faith to deepen our trust and deepen our strength in the companionship of the Risen Christ of all mysteries.

Stan Thorburn

