

CHAPTER 39

God proceeds here to show Job what little reason he had to charge him with unkindness who was so compassionate to the inferior creatures and took such a tender care of them, or to boast of himself, and his own good deeds before God, which were nothing to the divine mercies. He shows him also what great reason he had to be humble who knew so little of the nature of the creatures about him and had so little influence upon them, and to submit to that God on whom they all depend. He discourses particularly,

- I.** Concerning the wild goats and hinds (v. 1-4).
- II.** Concerning the wild ass (v. 5-8).
- III.** Concerning the unicorn (v. 9-12).
- IV.** Concerning the horse (v. 19-25).
- VII.** Concerning the hawk and the eagle (v. 26-30).

~~391~~ JOB 39:1-12

MAN'S IGNORANCE OF THE ANIMAL CREATION

God here shows Job what little acquaintance he had with the untamed creatures that run wild in the deserts and live at large, but are the care of the divine Providence. As,

I. The *wild goats* and the *hinds*. That which is taken notice of concerning them is the bringing forth and bringing up of their young ones. For, as every individual is fed, so every species of animals is preserved, by the care of the divine Providence, and, for aught we know, none extinct to this day. Observe here,

1. Concerning the production of their young,

(1.) Man is wholly ignorant of the time when they bring forth, v. 1, 2. Shall we pretend to tell what is in the womb of Providence, or what a day

will bring forth, who know not the time of the pregnancy of a hind or a wild goat?

(2.) Though they bring forth their young with a great deal of difficulty and sorrow, and have no assistance from man, yet, by the good providence of God, their young ones are safely produced, and their sorrows cast out and forgotten, v. 3. Some think it is intimated (~~1200~~ Psalm 29:9) that God by thunder helps the hinds in calving. Let it be observed, for the comfort of women in labour, that God helps even the hinds to bring forth their young; and shall he not much more succour them, and save them in child-bearing, who are his children in covenant with him?

2. Concerning the growth of their young, (v. 4): *They are in good liking*; though they are brought forth in sorrow, after their dams have suckled them awhile they shift for themselves in the corn-fields, and are no more burdensome to them, which is an example to children, when they have grown up, not to be always hanging upon their parents and craving from them, but to put forth themselves to get their own livelihood and to requite their parents.

II. The *wild ass*, a creature we frequently read of in Scripture, some say untameable. Man is said to be born as the wild ass's colt, so hard to be governed. Two things Providence has allotted to the wild ass: —

1. An unbounded liberty (v. 5): *Who but God has sent out the wild ass free?* He has given a disposition to it, and therefore a dispensation for it. The tame ass is bound to labour; the wild ass has no bonds on him. Note, Freedom from service, and liberty to range at pleasure, are but the privileges of a wild ass. It is a pity that any of the children of men should covet such a liberty, or value themselves on it. It is better to labour and be good for something than ramble and be good for nothing. But if, among men, Providence sets some at liberty and suffers them to live at ease, while others are doomed to servitude, we must not marvel at the matter: it is so among the brute-creatures.

2. An unenclosed lodging (v. 6): *Whose house I have made the wilderness*, where he has room enough to traverse his ways, and snuff up the wind at his pleasure, as the wild ass is said to do (~~2424~~ Jeremiah 2:24), as if he had to live upon the air, for it is *the barren land* that is *his dwelling*. Observe, The tame ass, that labours, and is serviceable to man, has his master's crib to go to both for shelter and food, and lives in a fruitful land: but the wild

ass, that will have his liberty, must have it in a barren land. He that will not labour, let him not eat. He that will shall eat the labour of his hands, and have also to give to him that needs. Jacob, the shepherd, has good red pottage to spare, when Esau, a sportsman, is ready to perish for hunger. A further description of the liberty and livelihood of the wild ass we have, v. 7, 8.

(1.) He has no owner, nor will he be in subjection: *He scorns the multitude of the city.* If they attempt to take him, and in order to that surround him with a multitude, he will soon get clear of them, and *the crying of the driver* is nothing to him. He laughs at those that live in the tumult and bustle of cities (so bishop Patrick), thinking himself happier in the wilderness; and opinion is the rate of things.

(2.) Having no owner, he has no feeder, nor is any provision made for him, but he must shift for himself: *The range of the mountains is his pasture,* and a bare pasture it is; there he *searches after here and there a green thing,* as he can find it and pick it up; whereas the labouring asses have green things in plenty, without their searching for them. From the untameableness of this and other creatures we may infer how unfit we are to give law to Providence, who cannot give law even to a wild ass's colt.

III. The unicorn — *rhem*, a strong creature (⁴⁰²²Numbers 23:22), a stately proud creature, ⁴⁰³⁰Psalms 112:10. He is able to serve, but not willing; and God here challenges Job to force him to it. Job expected every thing should be just as he would have it. “Since thou dost pretend” (says God) “to bring every thing beneath thy sway, begin with the unicorn, and try thy skill upon him. Now that thy oxen and asses are all gone, try whether he will be willing to serve thee in their stead (v. 9) and whether he will be content with the provision thou usedst to make for them: *Will he abide by thy crib?* No;”

1. “Thou canst not tame him, nor *bind him with his band,* nor set him to *draw the harrow,*” v. 10. There are creatures that are willing to serve man, that seem to take a pleasure in serving him, and to have a love for their masters; but there are such as will never be brought to serve him, which is the effect of sin. Man has revolted from his subjection to his Maker, and is therefore justly punished with the revolt of the inferior creatures from their subjection to him; and yet, as an instance of God's good-will to man, there are some that are still serviceable to him. Though the wild bull (which

some think is meant here by the unicorn) will not serve him, nor submit to his hand in the furrows, yet there are tame bullocks that will, and other animals that are not *ferae naturae* — *of a wild nature*, in whom man may have a property, for whom he provides, and to whose service he is entitled. *Lord, what is man, that thou art thus mindful of him?*

2. “Thou darest not trust him; though *his strength is great*, yet thou wilt not *leave thy labour to him*, as thou dost with thy asses or oxen, which a little child may lead or drive, leaving to them all the pains. Thou wilt never depend upon the wild bull, as likely to come to thy harvest-work, much less to go through it, to *bring home thy seed and gather it into thy barn*,” v. 11, 12. And, because he will not serve about the corn, he is not so well fed as the tame ox, whose mouth was not to be muzzled in treading out the corn; but *therefore* he will not draw the plough, because he that made him never designed him for it. A disposition to labour is as much the gift of God as an ability for it; and it is a great mercy if, where God gives strength for service, he gives a heart; it is what we should pray for, and reason ourselves into, which the brutes cannot do; for, as among beasts, so among men, those may justly be reckoned wild and abandoned to the deserts who have no mind either to take pains or to do good.

~~893~~ JOB 39:13-18

DESCRIPTION OF THE OSTRICH

The ostrich is a wonderful animal, a very large bird, but it never flies. Some have called it *a winged camel*. God here gives an account of it, and observes,

I. Something that it has in common with the peacock, that is, beautiful feathers (v. 13): *Gavest thou proud wings unto the peacocks?* so some read it. Fine feathers make proud birds. The peacock is an emblem of pride; when he struts, and shows his fine feathers, Solomon in all his glory is not arrayed like him. The ostrich too has goodly feathers, and yet is a foolish bird; for wisdom does not always go along with beauty and gaiety. Other birds do not envy the peacock or the ostrich their gaudy colours, nor complain for want of them; why then should we repine if we see others wear better clothes than we can afford to wear? God gives his gifts variously, and those gifts are not always the most valuable that make the

finest show. Who would not rather have the voice of the nightingale than the tail of the peacock, the eye of the eagle and her soaring wing, and the natural affection of the stork, than the beautiful wings and feathers of the ostrich, which can never rise above the earth, and is without natural affection?

II. Something that is peculiar to itself,

1. Carelessness of her young. It is well that this is peculiar to herself, for it is a very bad character. Observe,

(1.) How she exposes her eggs; she does not retire to some private place, and make a nest there, as the sparrows and swallows do (~~BBB~~ Psalm 84:3), and there lay eggs and hatch her young. Most birds, as well as other animals, are strangely guided by natural instinct in providing for the preservation of their young. But the ostrich is a monster in nature, for she drops her eggs any where upon the ground and takes no care to hatch them. If the sand and the sun will hatch them, well and good; they may for her, for she will not warm them, v. 14. Nay, she takes no care to preserve them: *The foot of the traveller may crush them, and the wild beast break them*, v. 15. But how then are any young ones brought forth, and whence is it that the species has not perished? We must suppose either that God, by a special providence, with the heat of the sun and the sand (so some think), hatches the neglected eggs of the ostrich, as he feeds the neglected young ones of the raven, or that, though the ostrich *often* leaves her eggs thus, yet not *always*.

(2.) The reason why she does thus expose her eggs. It is,

[1.] For want of natural affection (v. 16): *She is hardened against her young ones*. To be hardened against any is unamiable, even in a brute-creature, much more in a rational creature that boasts of humanity, especially to be hardened against young ones, that cannot help themselves and therefore merit compassion, that give no provocation and therefore merit no hard usage: but it is worst of all for her to be hardened against her own young ones, as though they were not hers, whereas really they are parts of herself. Her labour in laying her eggs is in vain and all lost, because she has not that fear and tender concern for them that she should have. Those are most likely to lose their labour that are least in fear of losing it.

[2.] For want of wisdom (v. 17): *God has deprived her of wisdom.* This intimates that the art which other animals have to nourish and preserve their young is God's gift, and that, where it exists not, God denies it, that by the folly of the ostrich, as well as by the wisdom of the ant, we may learn to be wise; for, *First*, As careless as the ostrich is of her eggs so careless many people are of their own souls; they make no provision for them, no proper nest in which they may be safe, leave them exposed to Satan and his temptations, which is a certain evidence that they are deprived of wisdom. *Secondly*, So careless are many parents of their children; some of their bodies, not providing for their own house, their own bowels, and therefore worse than infidels, and as bad as the ostrich; but many more are thus careless of their children's souls, take no care of their education, send them abroad into the world untaught, unarmed, forgetting what corruption there is in the world through lust, which will certainly crush them. Thus their labour in rearing them comes to be in vain; it were better for their country that they had never been born. *Thirdly*, So careless are too many ministers of their people, with whom they should reside; but they leave them in the earth, and forget how busy Satan is to sow tares while men sleep. They overlook those whom they should oversee, and are really hardened against them.

2. Care of herself. She leaves her eggs in danger, but, if she herself be in danger, no creature shall strive more to get out of the way of it than the ostrich, v. 18. Then she lifts up her wings on high (the strength of which then stands her in better stead than their beauty), and, with the help of them, runs so fast that a horseman at full speed cannot overtake her: *She scorneth the horse and his rider.* Those that are least under the law of natural affection often contend most for the law of self-preservation. Let not the rider be proud of the swiftness of his horse when such an animal as the ostrich shall out-run him.

~~830~~ JOB 39:19-25

DESCRIPTION OF THE WAR-HORSE

God, having displayed his own power in those creatures that are strong and despise man, here shows it in one scarcely inferior to any of them in strength, and yet very tame and serviceable to man, and that is the horse,

especially *the horse that is prepared against the day of battle* and is serviceable to man at a time when he has more than ordinary occasion for his service. It seems, there was, in Job's country, a noble generous breed of horses. Job, it is probable, kept many, though they are not mentioned among his possessions, cattle for use in husbandry being there valued more than those for state and war, which alone horses were then reserved for, and they were not then put to such mean services as with us they are commonly put to. Concerning the great horse, that stately beast, it is here observed,

1. That he has a great deal of strength and spirit (v. 19): *Hast thou given the horse strength?* He uses his strength for man, but has it not from him: God gave it to him, who is the fountain of all the powers of nature, and yet he himself *delights not in the strength of the horse* (⁴⁹⁷⁰Psalm 147:10), but has told us that *a horse is a vain thing for safety*, (⁴⁹⁸⁷Psalm 33:17. For running, drawing, and carrying, no creature that is ordinarily in the service of man has so much strength as the horse has, nor is of so stout and bold a spirit, not to be made afraid as a grasshopper, but daring and forward to face danger. It is a mercy to man to have such a servant, which, though very strong, submits to the management of a child, and rebels not against his owner. But let not the strength of a horse be trusted to, (⁴⁹⁴⁸Hosea 14:3; ⁴⁹⁰⁶Psalm 20:7; ⁴⁹³¹Isaiah 31:1, 3.

2. That his neck and nostrils look great. His neck is *clothed with thunder*, with a large and flowing mane, which makes him formidable and is an ornament to him. *The glory of his nostrils*, when he snorts, flings up his head, and throws foam about, *is terrible*, v. 20. Perhaps there might be at that time, and in that country, a more stately breed of horses than any we have now.

3. That he is very fierce and furious in battle, and charges with an undaunted courage, though he pushes on in imminent danger of his life.

(1.) See how frolicsome he is (v. 21): *He paws in the valley*, scarcely knowing what ground he stands upon. He is proud of his strength, and he has much more reason to be so as using his strength in the service of man, and under his direction, than the wild ass that uses it in contempt of man, and in a revolt from him v. 8.

(2.) See how forward he is to engage: *He goes on to meet the armed men*, animated, not by the goodness of the cause, or the prospect of honour, but

only by *the sound of the trumpet, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting* of the soldiers, which are as bellows to the fire of his innate courage, and make him spring forward with the utmost eagerness, as if he cried, *Ha! ha!* v. 25. How wonderfully are the brute-creatures fitted for and inclined to the services for which they were designed.

(3.) See how fearless he is, how he despises death and the most threatening dangers, (v. 22): *He mocks at fear*, and makes a jest of it; slash at him with a sword, rattle the quiver, brandish the spear, to drive him back, he will not retreat, but press forward, and even inspires courage into his rider.

(4.) See how furious he is. He curvets and prances, and runs on with so much violence and heat against the enemy that one would think he even *swallowed the ground with fierceness and rage*, v. 24. High mettle is the praise of a horse rather than of a man, whom fierceness and rage ill become. This description of the war-horse will help to explain that character which is given of presumptuous sinners, ^{<24R6>}Jeremiah 8:6. *Every one turneth to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle*. When a man's heart is fully set in him to do evil, and he is carried on in a wicked way by the violence of inordinate appetites and passions, there is no making him afraid of the wrath of God and the fatal consequences of sin. Let his own conscience set before him the curse of the law, the death that is the wages of sin, and all the terrors of the Almighty in battle-array; he mocks at this fear, and is not affrighted, neither turns he back from the flaming sword of the cherubim. Let ministers lift up their voice like a trumpet, to proclaim the wrath of God against him, *he believes not that it is the sound of the trumpet*, nor that God and his heralds are in earnest with him; but what will be in the end hereof it is easy to foresee.

^{<38R6>}JOB 39:26-30

DESCRIPTION OF THE HAWK AND EAGLE

The birds of the air are proofs of the wonderful power and providences of God, as well as the beasts of the earth; God here refers particularly to two stately ones: —

1. The *hawk*, a noble bird of great strength and sagacity, and yet a bird of prey, v. 26. This bird is here taken notice of for her flight, which is swift and strong, and especially for the course she steers *towards the south*, whither she follows the sun in winter, out of the colder countries in the north, especially when she is to cast her plumes and renew them. This is her wisdom, and it was God that gave her this wisdom, not man. Perhaps the extraordinary wisdom of the hawk's flight after her prey was not used then for men's diversion and recreation, as it has been since. It is a pity that the reclaimed hawk, which is taught to fly at man's command and to make him sport, should at any time be abused to the dishonour of God, since it is from God that she receives that wisdom which makes her flight entertaining and serviceable.

2. The *eagle*, a royal bird, and yet a bird of prey too, the permission of which, nay, the giving of power to which, may help to reconcile us to the prosperity of oppressors among men. The eagle is here taken notice of,

(1.) For the height of her flight. No bird soars so high, has so strong a wind, nor can so well bear the light of the sun. Now, "*Doth she mount at thy command?* v. 27. Is it by any strength she has from thee? or dost thou direct her flight? No; it is by the natural power and instinct God has given her that she will soar out of thy sight, much more out of thy call."

(2.) For the strength of her nest. Her house is her castle and strong-hold; she makes it *on high* and *on the rock, the crag of the rock* (v. 28), which sets her and her young out of the reach of danger. Secure sinners think themselves as safe in their sins as the eagle in her nest on high, in the *clefts of the rock; but I will bring thee down thence, saith the Lord,* ²⁴⁰⁶Jeremiah 49:16. The higher bad men sit above the resentments of the earth the nearer they ought to think themselves to the vengeance of Heaven.

(3.) For her quicksightedness (v. 29): *Her eyes behold afar off*, not upwards, but downwards, in quest of her prey. In this she is an emblem of a hypocrite, who, while, in the profession of religion, he seems to rise towards heaven, keeps his eye and heart upon the prey on earth, some temporal advantage, some widow's house or other that he hopes to devour, under pretence of devotion.

(4.) For the way she has of maintaining herself and her young. She preys upon living animals, which she seizes and tears to pieces, and thence

carries to her young ones, which are taught to *suck up blood*; they do it by instinct, and know no better; but for men that have reason and conscience to thirst after blood is what could scarcely be believed if there had not been in every age wretched instances of it. She also preys upon the dead bodies of men: *Where the slain are, there is she*, These birds of prey (in another sense than the horse, v. 25) *smell the battle afar off*. Therefore, when a great slaughter is to be made among the enemies of the church, the fowls are invited to *the supper of the great God, to eat the flesh of kings and captains*, ^{<6817>}Revelation 19:17, 18. Our Saviour refers to this instinct of the eagle, ^{<1228>}Matthew 24:28. *Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together*. Every creature will make towards that which is its proper food; for he that provides the creatures their food has implanted in them that inclination. These and many such instances of natural power and sagacity in the inferior creatures, which we cannot account for, oblige us to confess our own weakness and ignorance and to give glory to God as the fountain of all being, power, wisdom, and perfection.