

## «YOU KNOW! FOR YOU WERE BORN THEN» (Jb 38:1–38)

### Some Remarks of Composition and Meaning

*Summary:* In Jb 38:1-42,6 God's answer occurs as a complete overturning of Job's expectations, frustrating Job's initial desire for an explicit reply. In fact, the words God address to Job seem apparently to avoid the problem of innocent suffering in general and Job's case in particular. God seems also to escape the simplistic replies of Job's friends, who have limited themselves to defend the traditional and mechanical application of the law of reward and retribution. Instead, God takes challenges Job directly to consider his case in the light of the total cosmic design of his creator. Rather than indulging Job's obsession with his own integrity, he compels Job to come to terms with God's integrity as Creator of an astounding and complex world and from there to achieve an understanding of the limited knowledge about himself and the sense of his own life. It is in this context, that we will consider Jb 38:1-38 as a unity centered in the integrity and power of God as a Creator.

*Sommario:* In Jb 38,1-42,6 la risposta di Dio si presenta come un completo ribaltamento delle aspettative di Giobbe, frustrando il suo desiderio iniziale di una risposta esplicita da parte di Dio. In effetti, le parole che Dio offre a Giobbe sembrano evitare il problema del dolore del innocente in generale, e nel caso di Giobbe in particolare. Dio sembra anche sfuggire alle risposte semplicistiche degli amici di Giobbe, che si sono limitati a difendere l'applicazione tradizionale e meccanica della legge di ricompensa e punizione. Invece, Dio sfida Giobbe direttamente a prendere in considerazione il suo caso alla luce del suo designio cosmico di Creatore. Piuttosto che indulgere l'ossessione di Giobbe con la sua integrità, lo costringe a riconoscere l'integrità di Dio come creatore di un mondo enigmatico e complesso e da lì raggiungere una comprensione della sua limitata conoscenza di se stesso e del senso della sua propria vita. È in questo contesto, che considereremo Gb 38:1-38 come unità centrata nell'integrità e nella potenza che Dio ha come Creatore.

The large section of Jb 38:1–42:6 (known as the Yhwh Speeches) surprises us by the fact that God is the leading subject of the whole speech. Usually, in Biblical Wisdom Literature, is the human being who speaks and looks persistently to find an understanding in all events and behind them, God. Job can be looked on as one of these human beings that, from the depths of his incomprehensible life, has insistently asked for an understanding or a word from God. He also experienced that there are moments in life that no other human being can give us

a single word which is able to offer a true intelligence and purpose to the enigmas and the absurdities of life.

The predictability of Job's behavior as a believer – to ask a word from God – contrasts with the astounding images that emerge from God words, so unexpected and perplexing, as were also Job's sufferings. Some scholars hold that God's answer occurs as a complete overturning of Job's expectations, frustrating Job's initial desire for an explicit reply. In fact, the words God address to Job seem apparently to avoid the problem of innocent suffering in general and Job's case in particular. God seems also to escape the simplistic replies of Job's friends, who have limited themselves to defend the traditional and mechanical application of the law of reward and retribution. Instead, God takes challenges Job directly to consider his case in the light of the total cosmic design of his creator.<sup>1</sup> God's words seem to operate from the assumption that this is an issue of knowledge; together with the meaning of life and God's ways (*Do you know...?* 38:4-5.18.21.33; 39:1.2). The accent God places on knowledge of creation can be seen as the strategy he uses. Rather than indulging Job's obsession with his own integrity, he compels Job to come to terms with God's integrity as Creator of an astounding and complex world and from there to achieve an understanding of the limited knowledge about himself and the sense of his own life.<sup>2</sup>

It is in this context, that we will consider Jb 38:1-38 as a unity centered in the integrity and power of God has as a Creator. However, an analysis of the composition is required for an understanding the way God assigns such integrity and power. The beginning of this unity is well marked by the clear enunciation of God as the one who decides to take the initiative in answering Job (38:1). The end in 38:38 is signaled by a change in God's questions, turning from the cosmological universe to the animal kingdom, bringing together different aspects of this hidden wisdom in creatures of the wild (38:39).<sup>3</sup> The present work focuses its attention on the composition of the unit 38:1-38, which I consider a *sequence* composed of two passages (38:4-20; 38: 22-38), with an introduction (38:1-3) and a center (38:21). God begins his answer to Job challenging him to show his knowledge (Jb 38:1-3). Apparently, reaching no immediate response from Job, God continues with a series of questions, all centred in cosmological features (38:4-38).

<sup>1</sup> See N.C. HABEL, *The Book of Job* (London 1985) 533-534.

<sup>2</sup> See E. GOOD, *In Turns of the Tempest: A Reading of Job with a Translation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); D. PENCHANSKY, *The Betrayal of God: Ideological Conflict in Job* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990); J.A. CLINES, "Deconstruction the Book of Job", in *What Does Eve do to Help? And other Readily Questions to the Old Testament* (JSOTSup 94; Sheffield 1990) 118.

<sup>3</sup> See other authors that share this division of the Divine speeches, see N. HABEL, *The Book of Job*, 527; J.E. MILLER, «Structure and Meaning of the Animal Discourse in the Theophany of Job (38,39–39,30)», ZAW 103 (1991) 418-421; C. NEWSOM, «The Book of Job», 605-612.

<b>YOU</b> will let me <b>KNOW</b>	38:1-3
Where were you when I founded <b>THE EARTH</b> ? if <b>YOU KNOW!</b>	38:4-11
<b>Have you</b> in your days commanded the morning that you might grasp <b>THE EARTH</b> by its edges?	38:12-20
<sup>21</sup> <b>YOU KNOW!</b> For you were born then...	38:21
<b>Have you</b> entered the storehouses of the snow? by which way east wind scattered over <b>THE EARTH</b> ?	38:22-30
<b>DO YOU KNOW</b> the laws of heavens? Could you place its rule <b>ON EARTH</b> ?	38:31-38

## COMPOSITION

### *INTRODUCTION: YOU WILL LET ME KNOW!*

The introduction is composed of three segments (1-3). The first segment (1) begins immediately announcing *yhwh* as the subject of the whole speech, and announcing his purpose (*'ny*) to answer Job. The explicit use of the name *yhwh* contrasts with the whole interior part of the book, where are found the other names for describing the deity (*'ēl*; *'ēl-šadday*; *'ēlo<sup>a</sup>h*). The verb *'ny* (to answer) appears in parallel with the verb *'mr* (to say), reaching the double purpose expressed with the verb *š'l* (to ask) and the verb *yd'* (to know), used in the subsequent segments (3-4). This parallelism does not only underline God as the subject of the verbs *to answer* and *to speak*, but it sets up an unexpected opposition with the interior part of the book, where Job has constantly spoken and answered.

The second segment (2) is introduced with the interrogative pronoun *mî*, moving now from the introductory words to the project of answering Job. With this interrogative pronoun the reader is surprised with the fact that it is Job who must answer and speak, not God. The third segment (3) begins with the imperative form of the verb *'zr* (to gird) announcing the direct debate about to happen between God and Job. The use of the word *geber* (strong man, warrior) suggests that God considers Job as a man able for this dispute. The use of the root *yd'* (to know) links the two segments (2-3) in an opposition of understanding: though God assumes that Job has no words of knowledge (2) he challenges Job to show his knowledge to him (3).

. Wayya'an	-Yhwh	'et-'yyôb	(mim)hass <sup>ec</sup> ārāh
. Wayyô'mar			
:: <sup>2</sup> mî zeh	maḥšîk	'ēšâ	
: b <sup>e</sup> millîn	b <sup>e</sup> lî-dā'at		
:: <sup>3</sup> 'ēzor-nā'	k <sup>e</sup> geber	ḥālāšékā	
: w <sup>e</sup> 'eš'olkā	w <sup>e</sup> hōdî'ēnî		

. Then answered	Yhwh	to Job	(from) the tempest
. and said:			
:: <sup>2</sup> Who is this	who obscures	design	
: with words	without- <b>knowledge?</b>		
:: <sup>3</sup> Gird	like a <i>strong man</i>	your loins	
: and I will ask you,	and <b>you will let me know!</b>		

In synthesis, this introduction constitutes an important moment, through which the reader is informed about God's direct intervention, claiming his right to speak now and to raise his own questions. Job is only the man challenged to behave like a warrior that should show his knowledge to God despite words without knowledge.

#### *FIRST PASSAGE (38:4-20): WHERE WERE YOU?*

The first passage is composed of two parts (2-11; 12-20). They both present the first questions that God directs to Job, exposed through an ironic possibility of Job's presence in God's Creation and his eventual knowledge of the cosmic enigmas.

#### **First part (Jb 38:4-11)**

This part is composed of two subparts (38:4-7; 8-11). The first stresses the link between the capacity of Job to know with the possibility of Job to have been present and command creation (4-7). The second (8-11) affirms the exclusive power God has over the earth (sea) and heavens (clouds).

##### a. First subpart: *Who set its dimensions, do you know?* (38:4-7)

The subpart is composed of two pieces. The first piece (4) is formed of a single segment bimember (4) and starts with the interrogative particle 'ēpōh followed by the verb ḥāyītā. The specific use of second masculine singular of the verb focuses

the speech on a singular person (*you*): Job and not a human being in general, maintaining Job as the object of the speech, as it was made clear in the introduction. This segment places a question of existence through which is claimed an understanding, supposedly only available to whomever had existed at the moment of creation.

- <sup>4</sup> 'épōh - haggēd	hāyītā <b>'im-yāda'tā</b>	b <sup>e</sup> yosdī- binā	'ĀREŞ
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: <sup>5</sup> <b>mî-sām</b> : 'ô <b>mî-nātā</b>	m <sup>e</sup> maddé <b>hā</b> 'āléhā	<b>kî tēdā'</b> qqāw	
: <sup>6</sup> 'al-mā : 'ô <b>mî-yārā</b>	'ādāné <b>hā</b> pinnātā	hoṭbā'û 'eben	
+ <sup>7</sup> b <sup>e</sup> ron-yaḥad + wayyārî'û	kôkbê kol-b <sup>e</sup> nê	bōqer 'élōhîm	

- <sup>4</sup> Where - tell me,	were <b>you</b> <i>IF YOU KNOW</i>	when I founded understanding?	<b>-EARTH</b>
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: <sup>5</sup> Who set : <b>or who</b> stretched	<b>ITS</b> dimensions, over <b>IT</b>	<i>FOR YOU WILL KNOW,</i> a line?	
: <sup>6</sup> Upon what (are) : <b>or who</b> fixed	<b>ITS</b> bases <b>ITS</b> corner	sunk, -stone,	
+ <sup>7</sup> when sang-together stars of + and shouted-for-joy all-the-sons of		the morning, God?	

The second piece is composed of three segments, also bmembers (5-7). The two first segments (5-6) repeat the interrogative pronoun *mî*, opening the speech to every human being. The insistence on the pronominal suffix singular in the third person of the feminine is a clear allusion to the earth, already mentioned in the previous segment (4). The specific use of the verbs *śym* (to place), *nṭn* (to stretch) and *yrh* (to fix) depict the creator as an architect, surveyor and engineer. The last segment (7) is introduced with the preposition *b<sup>e</sup>* and the infinitive construct of the verb *rnn* (shout), pointing the celebration of the heavenly court at the completion of earth's construction as special moment of earth's creation. The parallelism between the two expressions – *kôkbê bōqer* (stars of the morning) and *kol-b<sup>e</sup>nê 'élōhîm* (all-the-sons of God) – suggest their common participation in this celebration, suggesting that if Job had been also present at this festive occasion, he would know understanding; which means he would know who God is as Creator.

b. Second subpart: *Who enclose the sea with doors?* (38:8-11)

+ <sup>8</sup> wayyāsek :: b <sup>e</sup> gîhō	<i>bidlātayîm</i> mērehem	yām yēšēʾ	
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+ <sup>9</sup> b <sup>e</sup> sûmî – waʾārāpel	ʾānān ḥātullātô	l <sup>e</sup> bûšô	
– <sup>10</sup> wāʾešbōr – wāʾāsîm	ʾālāyw b <sup>e</sup> rîʾh	ḥuqqî <i>ûd<sup>e</sup>lātāyîm</i>	
– <sup>11</sup> wāʾōmar : ʾad-po : ûpōʾ	tābôʾ -yāšît	w <sup>e</sup> lōʾtōsîp bigʾôn	gallékā
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+ <sup>8</sup> (Who) hedged :: when, bursting forth,	with <i>doors</i> from the womb	the sea it comes out?	
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+ <sup>9</sup> When <i>I</i> place – and dense-cloud	a cloud (for) its swaddling band,	for its garment, and <i>doors</i>	
– <sup>10</sup> and <i>I</i> prescribed – and <i>I</i> placed	on it a bar	my limit, and <i>doors</i>	
– <sup>11</sup> and <i>I</i> said: : “Thus far : here	you shall come breaks	and no farther; the pride	of your waves!”

The second subpart is also composed of two pieces: the first with a single segment bimember (8) and the second with three segments bimembers (9-11). The first segment of the first piece (9) moves the attention from the foundation of the earth to the power to control the immense reality of the sea. The segment opens with the verb *swk* (to hedge) in third person of the masculine singular, preceded by a consecutive *w<sup>e</sup>* which, despite the absence of the interrogative pronoun *mî*, seems to maintain the speech in its interrogative form. The word *d<sup>e</sup>lātayîm* (doors) assumes all the strength of the metaphor, as the way through which the sea can be controlled.

The second piece is composed of three segments (9-11). These segments form a single phrase linked by the conjunction *w<sup>e</sup>* and by the suffix of the first person singular. In the first segment (9) the accent is on the verb *šym* (to place) in the infinite construct. The suffix in the first person singular sustains God as the subject, who keeps leading the speech. Only God as the Creator had the power to place the cloud and the dense-cloud as garment or swaddling band of the sea. The second segment (10) sets two verbs in parallelism: *šbr* (to prescribe) e *ʾsm* (to place), suggesting a connection between the action of prescribing limits with the one of setting bar and doors. The word *d<sup>e</sup>lātayîm* (doors) reappears establishing a

link with the question of the first piece (8), evoking God the only one who had power to control the immense reality of the sea. The third segment (11) begins with the verb *'ōmar* (to say) showing how the God's power can operate through his word.

### Second part (38:12-20)

The second part is also composed of two other subparts: 38:12-15 and 38:16-20. The first subpart (12-15) is centered on the authority over morning and dawn and the second (16-20) focalized on the power to penetrate the furthest limits of the earth.

- a. First subpart: *Have you in your days command morning?* (38:12-15)

+ <sup>12</sup> h <sup>e</sup> miyyāmēkā	šiwwītā	bōqer
– yidda'tā <sup>h</sup>	šahar	m <sup>e</sup> qōmō
:: <sup>13</sup> le'ēhöz	b <sup>e</sup> kanpôt	hā'āreš
:: w <sup>e</sup> yinnā'ārû	<b>r<sup>e</sup>šā'im</b>	mimmennā
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: <sup>14</sup> tithappēk	k <sup>e</sup> hōmer	hôtām
: w <sup>e</sup> yityašš <sup>e</sup> bû	k <sup>e</sup> mô	l <sup>e</sup> bûš
– <sup>15</sup> w <sup>e</sup> yimmāna <sup>c</sup>	<b>mēršā'im</b>	'ôrām
– ûz <sup>e</sup> rô <sup>a</sup> <sup>c</sup>	rāmâ	tiššābēr
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+ <sup>12</sup> Have you in your days	command	morning
– or know	dawn	her place,
:: <sup>13</sup> that you might grasp	by its skirts	the earth
:: and shake	<b>the wicked</b>	from it?
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: <sup>14</sup> It will change	like clay	under a seal,
: and they will stand forth	like	a garment?
– <sup>15</sup> Thus are robbed	<b>the wicked</b>	of their light
– and the arm	upraised	is broken.

The first subpart is composed of two pieces (12-13; 14-15). The first piece (12-13) is formed of two segments bmembers (12-13) that form a single phrase. The first segment (12) opens with the interrogative *hā*, ensuring the interrogative speech. The second person masculine singular of the pronominal suffix of the substantive (*yāmēkā*) gets back the direct speech to Job, interrupted in 5-11 and now recovered to ask Job about the day he had ever commanded morning or knew the place of dawn. The second segment (13) is introduced with the infinite

construct of the verb *'hz* (to grasp), preceded by the preposition *le*, giving a sense of finality and transforming the segment in a propose clause. The two members are linked with a *w<sup>e</sup>*, combining the possibility of grasping the earth with the ability to shake the wicked from it; both suggested as an ironic consequence of the power that Job has ever commanded morning or known the place of dawn.

The second piece is also composed of two segments bimembers (14-15). The first segment (14) begins with the verb *hpk* (to change). The third feminine singular form of this verb makes a clear reference to the earth, mentioned in the previous segment (13), while the form of third masculine plural of the verb *yšb* (to stand forth) evokes the wicked, already, also mentioned in this previous segment. The next segment (15) is introduced with a *w<sup>e</sup>*, expressing consequence. This segment repeats the mention to the wicked (*r<sup>e</sup>šā'im*), connecting this segment with what has been asked in the previous segments. The verb *mn'* (to rob) is preceded by a consecutive *w<sup>e</sup>* associating the uncertainty of the consequences to the wicked or the upraised arms to the improbability of all that has been placed as a question to Job.

b. Second subpart: *Have you entered into the springs of the sea?* (38:16-20)

The second subpart (38:16-20) is composed of two pieces (16-17; 18-20). The first piece (16-17) begins each of the two segments with the interrogative particle *hā*, associated in the first segment to the verb *bw'* (16) and in the second segment to the verb *glh* (17), suggesting a parallelism between the action *to have entered* and *to have been revealed*, extended to the expressions: *springs of the sea* and *bottom of the deep* (15), *the gates of death* and *the gates of death's shadow* (16). The second segment (17) opens with the verb *glh* (to reveal) and ends also with a verb *r'h* (to see), suggesting inside them the parallelism between *the gates of death* and *the gates of death's-shadow*. The verbs and the parallelisms of these two segments suggest the ironic ability Job could have to uncover the hidden mystery of death's domain.

The second piece is composed of three segments (18-20). The first segment (18) begins with the hitpolel form of the verb *byn* (to enter), establishing an important parallelism with the verb *yd'* used in the second member. This parallelism suggests that the ability to understand supposes also certain knowledge. The second segment (19) offers the first mention of the light (*'ôr*). The two members of this segment (19) are linked by the conjunction *w<sup>e</sup>* setting an opposition between the two words *'ôr* and *hōšek*. The third segment (20) begins with the conjunction *kî* repeated in the second member also with a causal sense. This segment repeats the verb *byn* (to discern, understand) connecting the eventual understanding of the expanses of earth to the ability to discern the paths to its home.



+ <sup>16</sup> hābā'tā	'ad- <i>nībkē</i>	- <i>yām</i>
- ūb <sup>h</sup> ēqer	t <sup>h</sup> ôm	hithallāktā
+ <sup>17</sup> hāniglū	l <sup>h</sup> kā	ša'ārē-māwet
- w <sup>e</sup> ša'ārē	šalmāwet	tir'e <sup>h</sup>
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+ <sup>18</sup> hitbōnantā	'ad-rahābē	-'āreš
- haggēd	'im-yāda 'tā	kullāh
+ <sup>19</sup> 'ē-ze <sup>h</sup>	hadderek	yiškon-'ôr
- w <sup>e</sup> hōšek	'ē-ze <sup>h</sup>	m <sup>e</sup> qōmô
: <sup>20</sup> kī tiqqāhennū	'el	-g <sup>e</sup> bûlô
: w <sup>e</sup> kī-tābîn	n <sup>e</sup> tîbôt	bêtô

+ <sup>16</sup> <b>Have you entered</b>	into the <i>springs</i>	<i>of the sea</i>
- or in the bottom	<i>of deep</i>	walked?
+ <sup>17</sup> Have been revealed	to you	<i>the gates of death,</i>
- the gates	<i>of death-shadow</i>	have you seen?
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+ <sup>18</sup> <b>Have you understand</b>	the expanses	<i>of the earth,</i>
: tell me	<i>if you know</i>	all this?
+ <sup>19</sup> In which	path	abides- <i>light,</i>
- and <i>darkness,</i>	where (is)	its place
: <sup>20</sup> that you may take	it into	its boundary,
: and that you may discern	the paths	to its home?

### The passage

The passage (38:4-20) is composed of two parts (4-11; 12-20). The reference to the earth is repeated in both parts, together with the verbal root *yd'* (to know). In the first part (4-11) Job is challenged to declare whether he, like the primordial first man preceded creation, being therefore familiar with the design and construction of the earth (4a). The author makes this possibility depend on his ability to know understanding, as a capacity to know the inner truth of a matter (4b). The verbal root *yd'* reappears once more connecting the two ideas: if it is true that Job precedes creation, then he can know who set the dimensions of earth and its most substantial and inexplicable features (5). In synthesis, there is a knowledge and power that comes from precedence and presence.

The second part (12-20) repeats twice both the mention to the earth and the verb *yd'* (to know). In the first piece (12-15) the verb to know is connected with the ability to have commanded morning (12), which would provide the power to grasp the earth (13). In the second piece (16-20) the mention of earth reappears to

question Job's understanding, related to his ability to know all earthly features of creation (18).

<sup>4</sup> Where were <b>you</b> when I founded <b>THE EARTH</b> ?	Tell me if you <b>know understanding</b> ?
<sup>5</sup> <b>Who</b> set its dimensions, <b>for you will know</b>	or who stretched a line over it?
<sup>6</sup> Upon what (are) its bases sunk	or who set its corner-stone,
<sup>7</sup> when sang the morning stars,	and all the sons of God shouted-for-joy?
<sup>8</sup> <b>Who</b> enclosed THE SEA with doors	when, bursting forth, it comes out from the womb?
<sup>9</sup> When <i>I</i> wrapped with garments of cloud,	and swaddled (it) in dense-cloud
<sup>10</sup> and <i>I</i> prescribed for it my statutes,	and imposed a bar and gates,
<sup>11</sup> and <i>I</i> said: "Thus far you shall come and no farther; here breaks the pride of your waves?"	
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<sup>12</sup> <b>HAVE YOU</b> in your days command THE MORNING	or made DAWN <b>to know</b> her place,
<sup>13</sup> that you might grasp by its edges <b>THE EARTH</b>	and shake the wicked from it?
<sup>14</sup> It changes like clay under a seal	and they stand forth like a garment.
<sup>15</sup> Thus the wicked are robbed of their LIGHT	and the upraised arm is broken
<sup>16</sup> <b>HAVE YOU</b> entered into THE SPRINGS OF THE SEA	or walked in the bottom of the deep?
<sup>17</sup> Have the gates of Death been revealed to you,	the gates of the death-shadow, <b>HAVE YOU</b> seen?
<sup>18</sup> <b>HAVE YOU</b> understand the expanses of <b>THE EARTH</b> ?	Tell me if <b>you know</b> all this!
<sup>19</sup> In which path abides THE LIGHT,	and DARKNESS, where is her place
<sup>20</sup> that you may take each to its boundary,	and discern the path to its home?

The verb *yd'* (to know) is repeated in both parts of the passage (4-11; 12-20), emphasizing the knowledge as the main challenge made to Job: it appears immediately in the beginning of the passage (4), in a surprising link between the possibility to have been present at creation and the possibility to know understanding; and almost at the end where it is explained that to know all creation features includes to understand the expanses of earth (18). In both moments the verb *to know* and the mention of *earth* is clear, suggesting that before all that happened to him, Job is challenged to expose his possibility to know and understand earth in its cosmological most extraordinary features. He doesn't belong only to himself, rather to a wide cosmological setting.

### Biblical Context

#### *When the morning stars sang*

The image suggested in the expression *when the morning stars sang and the sons of God shouted for joy* (7) alludes to a celebration of the heavenly court at the completion of earth's construction. This celebration recalls the exultation of Wisdom over the inhabited earth which God created with her guidance as is

described in Pr 8:30-31 (*I was beside the master craftsman, delighting him day after day, ever at play in his presence, at play everywhere on his earth, delighting to be with the children of men*). Evoke also the anticipated rejoicing of God in his own creation remarked in Ps 104:31 (*Glory to Yahweh forever! May Yahweh find joy in his creatures!*).

We find also this idea of celebration during the various stages of building a construction. One example can be seen when the foundation of the Second Temple was laid. The construction was acclaimed with music and songs (*When the builders had laid the foundations of the Temple of Yahweh, the priests in their robes stood forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise Yahweh according to the ordinances of David king of Israel*. Ezra 3:10). The sons of God who celebrate this construction are presumably the entire entourage of the divine court.

In Jb 38:7 the parallelism suggests that the heavenly court is considered one with the stars.<sup>4</sup> The focus lies on the participation of the celestial court in the celebration of earth's creation in a similar manner to its participation in the divine decision to create human beings as is described in Gn 1:26. The challenge remains in the fact that Job, even though created in God's image and likeness, was never been able to participate in such a celebration.

#### *Bursting forth comes out from the womb*

The description of the sea as reality with doors that *bursting forth, it comes out from the womb* (8) is a reminder of the image of the breaking waters in the womb at birth. In fact, the use of the birth metaphor is common in ancient mythology to express the primordial origin of a phenomenon. In Ps 90:2 the psalmist speaks of the birth of the mountains when the earth was formed (*Before the mountains were born, before the earth and the world came to birth, from eternity to eternity you are God*).

However, while in Ps 90:2 the metaphor is given through the verb *yld* (to give birth), in Jb 38:8 it is the image of the womb (*rhm*) which leads to the metaphor. The same use of the womb as the primordial deep below earth, from which the sea emerged and which may erupt to flood the earth appears in Gn 7:11 (*On the seventeenth day of the month, that very day all the springs of the great deep burst through*) and in Gn 49:25 (*The God of your father who assists you, El Shadday who blesses you: blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep lying below, blessings of the breasts and womb*). This proximity between these two texts reaffirms the central idea of God's knowledge as the distinct Creator.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. N. HABEL, *The Book of Job*, 537-538.

*SECOND PASSAGE (38:22-38): HAVE YOU ENTERED?*

The passage is composed of two parts (38:22-30 and 38:31-38) centered in a series of inscrutable mysteries associated with the heavens, moving from the meteorological features (22-30) to the astral domain of the heavens (31-38).

**First part (38:22-30)**

+ <sup>22</sup> hēbā'tā	'el-' <b>ōsrôt</b>	ŠĀLEG	
:: w <sup>e</sup> ' <b>ōsrôt</b>	BĀRĀD	tir'e <sup>h</sup>	
: <sup>23</sup> 'āšer	-hāsaktî	'et-šār	
: l'yôm	q <sup>e</sup> rāb	ûmilhāmâ	
: <sup>24</sup> 'ê-ze <sup>h</sup>	hadderek	yēhāleq-	'ôr
: yāpēš	qādîm	'ālê-	' <b>āreš</b>
-----			
+ <sup>25</sup> mî-pillag	laššetep	T <sup>E</sup> 'ĀLĀ	
= w <sup>e</sup> derek	lahāzîz	qōlôt	
: <sup>26</sup> I <sup>e</sup> HAMṬÎR	'al-' <b>ereš</b>	<i>lō'</i> -' <i>īš</i>	
: midbār	<i>lō'</i> -' <i>ādām</i>	bô	
: <sup>27</sup> I <sup>e</sup> hasbî <sup>a</sup> c	šō'â	ûm <sup>e</sup> šō'â	
: ûl <sup>e</sup> hašmî <sup>a</sup> ḥ	mōšā'	deše'	
-----			
+ <sup>28</sup> hāyēš	-LAMMĀṬĀR	'āb	
= 'ô mî-hôlîd	'eglê	-ṭāl	
+ <sup>29</sup> mibbeṭen	mî yāšā	haqqārah	
= ûk <sup>e</sup> pōr	šāmayim	mî y <sup>e</sup> lādô	
: <sup>30</sup> kâ'eben	mayim	yithabbā'û	
: ûp <sup>e</sup> nê	t <sup>e</sup> hôm	yitlakkādû	

The first part is composed of three pieces (22-24; 25-27; 28-30) each with three segments bmembers. The first piece (22-24) begins with the interrogative particle *hā* associated to the verb *bw'* (to enter). The segment begins and ends with a verb (*hēbā'tā* and *tir'e<sup>h</sup>*), suggesting an interesting parallel between *to enter* and *to see*. The segment also presents inside a parallelism between *the storehouses of the snow* or *the storehouses of hail* as two commodities stored in vast celestial arsenals. The second segment (23) begins with the relative pronoun *'āšer* connecting this segment to the previous one, as a continuity of the phrase. This continuity serves to specify God's purpose for the commodities mentioned: they are for the *time of distress* and of *battle or war*. The third segment (24) also begins with the participle *'ê-ze<sup>h</sup>*, continuing the phrase begun in first segment

(22). The focus shifts from the purpose to the effects of the two specific commodities – light and wind – that have fixed courses that govern their movements. The third segment (24) also begins with the participle *'ê-ze<sup>h</sup>*, repeating the phrase begun in the first segment (22). The focus shifts from the purpose to the effects of two specific commodities – light and wind – that have a fixed course which governs their movements.

+ <sup>22</sup> Have you entered = or the storehouses	the storehouses of HAIL,	of the SNOW have you seen	
: <sup>23</sup> which I kept : for the day	for the time of battle	of distress, and war,	
: <sup>24</sup> by which : or scattered	way the east wind	is dispersed over	the lightning <b>the earth?</b>
-----			
+ <sup>25</sup> Who divides = and a way	a channel for the sound	for the WATERCOURSE of THUNDERBOLT,	
: <sup>26</sup> so that may fall RAIN : on a desert	<b>on earth</b> without human	without man, in it,	
: <sup>27</sup> to satisfy : and sprout forth	the wasted seeds	and wasteland, of grass?	
-----			
+ <sup>28</sup> Is there = or who	for the RAIN have begotten	a father the DEWDROPS?	
+ <sup>29</sup> From whose body = the frost	came forth of heaven,	the ice who gave birth to it	
: <sup>30</sup> when-like-stone, : and the surface	the water of the deep	is hidden congeals?	

The second piece (25-27) opens with a segment bimember (25) that starts with the interrogative pronoun *mî*, moving the direction of the speech to human beings in general. The two members of the segment are united by the conjunction *w<sup>e</sup>* and parallelism between the words *laššetep* (channel) and *derek* (way), both with a specific purpose: for the watercourse and for the sound of thunderbolt. The second (26) and third segment (27) are two subordinate phrases. Both manifest the final purpose of such marvelous features in the forms of infinitive construct of the verbs and the preposition *l<sup>e</sup>*: *l<sup>e</sup>hamîr* (to rain), *l<sup>e</sup>hasbî<sup>a</sup>* (to satisfy); *l<sup>e</sup>hašmî<sup>h</sup>* (to sprout forth). In the second segment (26) the text presents a parallelism synonymous with the images of the earth without man (*'išš*)» and desert without human (*'ādām*)», maintaining that God cares for fertility even in the most inhospitable regions of earth. The celestial waters are not for destructive but salutary purposes that make no distinction between different places of the

earth. Rather God's blessing of fresh grass is definitely a mark of his unsolicited goodness.

The third piece (28-30) begins repeating the interrogative participle *hă* associated to the particle *yěš* (28). The question focus the origins of rain, as it is suggested in the explicit mention to a father (*'āb*) and in the use of the verb *yld* (to beget). The second segment (29) repeats the verb *yld* (give birth) this time to refer the origins of the dewdrops. The phenomenon mentioned here are clearly the ice and the frost and the enigma of their origin. The enigma lies not only in its hidden origin, but in the extraordinary role they can play: gentle drops of moisture can be transformed into an ice sheet so hard and opaque that it can even hide the face of the portentous deep (30).

### Second part (38:31-38)

+ <sup>31</sup> <b>hatqaššēr</b>	ma'ādannôt	kîmâ
:: 'ô-mōškôt	k <sup>e</sup> sîl	t <sup>e</sup> pattē <sup>h</sup>
+ <sup>32</sup> <b>hătōšî'</b>	mazzārôt	b <sup>e</sup> 'ittô
:: w <sup>e</sup> 'ayîš	'al-bānehā	tanhēm
= <sup>33</sup> <b>hăyāda'tā</b>	huqqôt	šāmāyim
= 'im-tāšîm	mištārô	bā'āreš
-----		
+ <sup>34</sup> <b>hătārîm</b>	<b>lā'āb</b>	qôlekā
: w <sup>e</sup> šîp'at	-mayim	t <sup>e</sup> kassekkā
+ <sup>35</sup> <b>hătšallah</b>	b <sup>e</sup> rāqîm	w <sup>e</sup> yēlēkû
: w <sup>e</sup> yô'm <sup>e</sup> rû	l <sup>e</sup> kā	hinnēnû
-----		
+ <sup>36</sup> <b>mî-šāt</b>	baṭṭuhôt	<i>hokmā</i>
:: 'ô <b>mî-nātan</b>	lassekwî	<i>bînâ</i>
+ <sup>37</sup> <b>mî-y<sup>e</sup>sappēr</b>	<b>š<sup>e</sup>hāqîm</b>	<i>b<sup>e</sup>hokmā</i>
: w <sup>e</sup> niblê	šāmayim	mî yaškîb
:: <sup>38</sup> b <sup>e</sup> šequet	'āpār	lammûšāq
: ûr <sup>e</sup> gābîm	y <sup>e</sup> dubbāqû	

The second part is composed also of three pieces (31-33; 34-35; 36-38). The first piece (31-33) opens with the interrogative particle *hă* connected to the verb *qšr* (to fasten). This initial verb appears in a parallelism with the verb *ptḥ* (to open, untie) placed at the end of the second member of the segment. The second person of the masculine singular of both verbs brings the speech again to Job; now challenged to show his power over the stars (Pleiades and Orion) in their inscrutabilities and purposes. The second segment (32) maintains the same structure of the previous one: begins with the interrogative particle *hă* and has a

verb at the beginning and another at the end. The challenge now is extended to Job's ability to bring forth (*yš'*) and to guide (*nḥh*) these constellations in their courses. The next segment (33) starts also with the interrogative particle *hā*, maintaining the second masculine person of the verb *yd'* (to know). The two expressions *laws of heavens* and *rules of earth* commanded with the verbs *to know* and *to place* form a parallelism, through which God inquires about the eventuality of Job's knowledge of a cosmological totality. The suggestion is that to know the heavens is to comprehend the intricate role of the most obscure stars in the galaxy. More, the laws of the heavens represent the order and design God has stamped on the celestial realm, that have a corresponding order on earth. God challenges Job in his ability to know and to establish laws which maintain the proper equilibrium between eternal decrees of heaven and the events on earth.

+ <sup>31</sup> Can you fasten :: or the Orion's	the chains bands	of Pleiades, untie?
+ <sup>32</sup> Can you bring forth :: or the Great Bear	the constellations with her sons	in their seasons, guide?
= <sup>33</sup> Do you know = or you place	the laws its rule	of heavens on earth?
-----		
+ <sup>34</sup> Can you raise : for the abundance	<b>to the clouds</b> of water	your voice, to cover you?
+ <sup>35</sup> Will you send : or they will answer	flashes to you,	and they will go, 'Here we are'?
-----		
+ <sup>36</sup> Who endowed (them) :: and gave	with inner to the phenomenon	<i>wisdom</i> <i>understanding?</i>
+ <sup>37</sup> Who related : and the bottles	<b>every cloud</b> of heaven,	<b>with wisdom</b> who tilts?
:: <sup>38</sup> when grow : and clods (of earth)	into hardness close up?	the dust

The second piece (34-35) is formed with two segments. The first segment (34) keeps the interrogative particle *hā* associated to the verb *rwm* (to rise) in the second person of the masculine singular. The subject is still Job and the object is now the dark clouds. Job is now challenged to implement his knowledge of heaven's laws by commanding a thunderstorm to flood the earth. The second segment (35) keeps the second person of the masculine plural in the verb *w<sup>e</sup>yēlēkū* which extends this challenge to Job's power to send flashes, forcing the clouds to answer (*w<sup>e</sup>yō'm<sup>e</sup>rū*), showing their availability to him.

The third piece (36-38) is composed of three segments. The first (36) begins with the interrogative pronoun *mī* and the third masculine singular of the verb *šwt*

moving again to the subject of anyone being able to know the clouds in their inner wisdom. This segment presents also an important parallelism between the two words *ḥokmâ* and *bînâ* both placed at the end of each member of the segment. To endow the clouds with inner wisdom is comparable to giving to the phenomenon understanding. The next two segments (37-38) form a single phrase. The first segment (36) begins with the interrogative pronoun *mî* repeated in the second member. The segment establishes a parallelism between *every cloud* and *the bottles of heaven*, leaving the word *ḥokmâ* at the centre of the segment. This centrality affirms the wisdom dimension of the phenomenon as a hidden principle active in the design of the cosmos. The second segment (38) begins with the preposition *b<sup>e</sup>* giving a temporal sense to the infinitive construct of the verb *yšq*, relating this segment to the previous one (37). Once the rain falls on the dry dust it fuses into a mass of earth like molten metal.

### The passage

<p><sup>22</sup> <b>HAVE YOU</b> entered the storehouses of THE SNOW  <sup>23</sup> which I kept for the time of distress,  <sup>24</sup> by which way are dispersed <b>LIGHT</b>,</p>	<p>or the storehouses of hail, have you seen  for the day of battle and war,  or the east wind scattered over <b>THE EARTH</b>?</p>
<p><sup>25</sup> <b>Who</b> bores a channel for THE DOWNPOUR,  <sup>26</sup> so that <b>rain</b> may fall <b>ON EARTH</b> without man,  <sup>27</sup> to satisfy the wasted and wasteland,</p>	<p>and a way for the sound of thunderbolt?  on a desert without human in it,  and sprout forth seeds of grass?</p>
<p><sup>28</sup> Does the <b>rain</b> have a father,  <sup>29</sup> From whose womb came forth the ice,  <sup>30</sup> when-like-stone, the water is hidden</p>	<p>who begot the dewdrops?  the frost of heaven, which gave birth to it,  and the surface of the deep congeals?</p>
<p><sup>31</sup> <b>Can you</b> fasten the chains of the Pleiades,  <sup>32</sup> <b>Can you</b> guide the constellations in their seasons,  <sup>33</sup> <b>Do you know</b> the laws of HEAVENS?</p>	<p>or the Orion's bands untie?  or guide the Great Bear with her sons?  Could you place its rule <b>ON EARTH</b>?</p>
<p><sup>34</sup> <b>Can you</b> raise your voice to the <b>dark-clouds</b>,  <sup>35</sup> <b>Will you</b> send flashes and they will go,</p>	<p>for the abundance of water to cover you?  or they will answer, 'Here we are'?</p>
<p><sup>36</sup> <b>Who</b> endowed (them) with inner <b>wisdom</b>  <sup>37</sup> <b>Who</b> related every <b>cloud</b> with <b>wisdom</b>  <sup>38</sup> until the dust solidifies</p>	<p>and gave to the phenomenon <b>understanding</b>?  and the bottles of heaven, <b>who</b> tilts,  and clods close up?</p>

The passage is composed of two parts (22-30; 31-38), linguistic and thematically sustained by inscrutability of the meteorological and the astral domain of the heavens.<sup>5</sup> The subject of the speech is God who, through an insistent *you*, challenges Job to show his ability to dominate the cosmic order (31-35). Both parts persist in an explicit reference to the earth (24.26.33), continuing

<sup>5</sup> Cf. see N. HABEL, *The Book of Job*, 543-544; C. NEWSOM, «The Book of Job», 604-605.



the rhetorical questions that retain God as the only one able to perform such wonders and have such power.

Nevertheless, while in the first part the earth is seized as the space who welcomes the blessings or destructions from heavens (24.26), in the second part the earth is placed in a parallelism with heavens, insinuating the difficulty or even the impossibility for a human being, as Job, to dominate such totality. This impossibility appears marvelously expressed in the incapability of Job *to know laws of heavens and to place heaven's rules on earth*. This second part (31-38) also include a reference to an inner wisdom and understanding that sustains all this cosmic totality, suggesting that to be able to control them implies a deep participation in such wisdom and understanding (36-37). The challenges do not end in Job's capacity to control or to understand the meteorological or the astral domain of the heavens, but in his ability to participate in their inner wisdom and their inscrutability.

### **Biblical Context**

#### *The storehouses of the snow*

The image of storehouses, evoked by God, is common. In Dt 28:12 Moses uses this image in a context of promised blessings that would occur to those who obey God's commandments (<sup>12</sup> *The LORD will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand*). The same image reappears in Jr 10:13 (*When he thunders there is a roaring of waters in heaven; he raises clouds from the remotest parts of the earth, makes the lightning flash for the downpour, and brings the wind from his storehouse*). The context of Jeremiah's words is the one of a warning against Israel's following 'the way of the nations' and 'the customs of the peoples'. The character of the idols as 'made' or 'work' of human hands contrasts with God, who is not 'made' but is the one who 'made' all that is, the whole creation. The gods, who did not make the heaven and earth, sharply contrast with the God who did, indeed, make heaven and earth.<sup>6</sup> These two texts give us an understanding of the storehouses as a reality never seen but believed as a place from where God can bless or punish the earth (cf. also Sir 39:29; 43:14). They are still two places known only to God as the creator.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See. D.P. MILLER, *The Book of Jeremiah. Introduction, Commentary and Reflections* (The New Interpreter's Bible VI) 658-662.

<sup>77</sup> Because knowledge of such matters was regarded as utterly beyond the reach of human ability, it later becomes part of esoteric mysteries revealed to the apocalyptic seer (En 41:4; 60:11-21) [C. NEWSOM 604].

*To raise the voice*

God also challenge Job to show his knowledge of heaven's laws by commanding a thunderstorm to flood the earth. The action is described with the verb to raise the voice, as a way to manifest Job's power over the meteorological phenomenon. This challenge reminds us of the description of the power and function of God's voice in his control of the weather as it is described in Ps 29. In this psalm the reference to God's voice occurs seven times, with the number seven symbolizing fullness or completion. God's strength, which is represented by the sevenfold mention of the the voice, is all powerful. In v. 3 the disposition of the phrases and their contents (*The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; The God of glory thunders, The LORD is over many waters*) suggests 'the voice of the Lord' is the proper thunder.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the effects of the storm are to be understood not only as their way to be but, mainly, as testimony to God's sovereignty over all creation. This is confirmed in v. 7 where the psalm mentions the lightning flashes as one of the effect of a violent thunderstorm, relating these effects to those generally found in theophanies, portrayals of appearances of God (Ps 18:7-15; 77:16-18; 97:1-5). The sound of the thunder, known in ancient Near East as the loudest sound known, becomes the testimony to God's sovereignty over all. At light of Ps 29 God seems to challenge Job to something impossible: to show a power and sovereignty over all similar to his own.

*THE CENTER (38:21): YOU KNOW!*

+ <sup>21</sup> <b>yāda'tā</b>	kî-'āz	tiwwālēd
– ūmispar	yāmékā	rabbîm

+ <sup>21</sup> <b>You know,</b>	for you	were born then
– and the number	of your days	was great!

The center is composed of a single segment (21) that states a direct pronouncement to Job, seen as a particular and distinct moment characterized by the absence of any cosmological references. The verb *yd'* (to know) reappears, presiding over an ironic affirmation and not in the context of an interrogative clause, as happened once in each passage (4-20; 22-38). The knowledge Job could eventually have about who set the earth's dimensions (5) and about the laws of heavens (33) is definitely devastated with the assertion, introduced through the

<sup>8</sup> In fact, the Hebrew noun here translated 'voice' (*qôl*) is sometimes translated 'thunder' (Ex 19:19) [see J.C. MCCANN, *The Book of Psalms. Introduction, Commentary and Reflections* (The New Interpreter's Bible IV) 792].

causal *kî*, that he knows all the cosmological enigmas because he was born then (before creation). This assertion recovers God's words in the introduction of the speech (Jb 38:2-3). There, God challenged Job to let him know. Now, right at the center of the sequence, through a positive pronouncement, it is suggested that Job cannot let God know knowledge, because he *was not born before creation*; he did not participate in creation and debate with God its secrets.

### **THE ENSEMBLE OF THE SEQUENCE (38:1-38)**

#### *COMPOSITION*

The sequence (38:1-38) reveals a composition totally centered in a debate of knowing God's design of the cosmos. God is presented as the one who is going to answer, however through an insistent challenging to Job to let God know about his knowledge (38:3). This challenge is clearly placed in the introduction and developed across two passages (4-20; 22-38), both focused on specific knowledge of the eternal order of God's cosmic design.

In fact, in both passages (38:4-20; 22-38) God suggests to Job that this order is characterized by primordial measurement (38:5), established limits (38:10), assigned places (38:12.19), designated ways (38:19-20.24-25), fixed times (38:23) and celestial laws (38:33). God's design for the cosmos is described as a meticulously controlled network of structures and processes that rule the waters of chaos (38:8-11), expose and contain the wicked (38:13-15) and enable judgment in times of war (38:23). The proper cycles and seasons of this order govern the flow of divine blessings: light and darkness (38:19-20) rain and grasses (38:24-27).

It is in this context that, in the first passage (38:4-20), God begins challenging Job to declare whether he, like the primordial first man, preceded creation and was therefore familiar with the design and construction of the earth (38:4). The force of God's challenge is evident in his demand that Job demonstrate his knowledge of an equivalent primordial understanding (38:3). The challenge goes on in Job's ability to know and identify God as one who has such knowledge: the one who set's the earth's dimension (38:5) and enclosed the sea with doors (38:8); the only one who has the power to command the morning or made the dawn to know her place (38:12), he who has entered into the springs of the sea, walked in the bottom of the deep (38:16) or entered the storehouses of the snow (38:22).

<sup>1</sup> Then Yahweh answered Job (from) the tempest and said:

<sup>2</sup> **Who** is this who obscures design

with words without-**knowledge**?

<sup>3</sup> Gird your loins like a *strong man*;

I will ask you, and **you will let me know!**

<sup>4</sup> Where were **you** when I founded **THE EARTH**?

Tell me if you know **understanding**?

<sup>5</sup> **Who** set its dimensions, **do you know**

or who stretched a line over it?

<sup>6</sup> Upon what (are) its bases sunk

or who set its corner-stone,

<sup>7</sup> when sang the morning stars,

and all the sons of God shouted-for-joy?

<sup>8</sup> **Who** enclosed THE SEA with doors

when, bursting forth, it comes out from the **womb**?

<sup>9</sup> When I wrapped with garments of cloud,

and swaddled (it) in dense-cloud

<sup>10</sup> and I prescribed for it my statutes,

and imposed a bar and gates,

<sup>11</sup> and I said: "Thus far you shall come and no farther; here breaks the pride of your waves?"

<sup>12</sup> **HAVE YOU** in your days command THE MORNING

or made DAWN to know her place,

<sup>13</sup> that you might grasp **THE EARTH** by its edges

and shake the wicked from it?

<sup>14</sup> It changes like clay under a seal

and they stand forth like a garment.

<sup>15</sup> Thus the wicked are robbed of their **LIGHT**

and the upraised arm is broken

<sup>16</sup> **HAVE YOU** entered into THE SPRINGS OF THE SEA

or walked in the bottom of the deep?

<sup>17</sup> Have the gates of Death been revealed to you,

the gates of the death-shadow, **HAVE YOU** seen?

<sup>18</sup> **HAVE YOU** understand the expanses of **THE EARTH**?

Tell me if **you know** all this!

<sup>19</sup> In which path abides **THE LIGHT**,

and **DARKNESS**, where is her place

<sup>20</sup> that you may take each to its boundary,

and discern the path to its home?

<sup>21</sup> You know. For you were born then, and the number of your days was great!

<sup>22</sup> **HAVE YOU** entered the storehouses of THE SNOW

or the storehouses of hail, have you seen

<sup>23</sup> which I kept for the time of distress,

for the day of battle and war,

<sup>24</sup> by which way are dispersed **LIGHT**,

or the east wind scattered over **THE EARTH**?

<sup>25</sup> **Who** bores a channel for THE DOWNPOUR,

and a way for the sound of thunderbolt,

<sup>26</sup> so that **rain** may fall on earth without man,

on a desert without human in it,

<sup>27</sup> to satisfy the wasted and wasteland,

and sprout forth seeds of grass?

<sup>28</sup> Does the **rain** have a father,

who begot the dewdrops?

<sup>29</sup> From whose **body** came forth the ice,

the frost of heaven, which gave birth to it,

<sup>30</sup> when-like-stone, the water is hidden

and the surface of the deep congeals?

<sup>31</sup> **Can you** fasten the chains of the Pleiades,

or the Orion's bands untie?

<sup>32</sup> **Can you** guide the constellations in their seasons,

or guide the Great Bear with her sons?

<sup>33</sup> **Do you know** the laws of HEAVENS?

Could you place its rule on **EARTH**?

<sup>34</sup> **Can you** raise your voice to the dark-clouds,

for the abundance of water to cover you?

<sup>35</sup> **Will you** send flashes and they will go,

or they will answer, 'Here we are'?

<sup>36</sup> **Who** endowed (them) with inner **wisdom**

and gave to the phenomenon **understanding**?

<sup>37</sup> **Who** related every cloud with **wisdom**

and the bottles of heaven, **who** tilts,

<sup>38</sup> until the dust solidifies

and clods of **EARTH** close up?

The second passage (38:22-38) maintains the challenge to Job's knowledge in the direct question if he is able to know the laws of heavens, in order to place its rules on earth (38:33). The impossibility of this knowledge appears in the impossibility of having entered in the storehouses of the snow (38:22); of having bored a channel for the downpour and made a way for the sound of the thunderbolt (38:25); to fasten the chains of the Pleidas or untie the Orien's bands

(38:31), to raise his voice to the dark-clouds or endowed them with inner wisdom (38:34.36).

The sequence emerges constructed under a pattern of a supreme and exclusive knowledge: the knowledge God has as the Creator. Job as a human being, created in his image (Gn 1:28) can participate in this knowledge, only as gift and not as an appropriate and genuine power. As is ironically suggested at the center of the sequence (38:21), Job was not yet born; neither are the numbers of his days equal to God. He doesn't know and he cannot let God know.

<b>A</b>	<b>You</b> will let me KNOW (w <sup>e</sup> hōdī'ēnī)!	(38:3)
<b>B</b>	If <b>you</b> KNOW (im-yādā'tā)?	(38:4)
<b>C</b>	<b>You</b> KNOW (yāda'tā)!	(38:21)
<b>B'</b>	Do <b>you</b> KNOW (hāyāda'tā)?	(38:33)

*BIBLICAL CONTEXT*

*From the tempest*

The biblical narrator declares his belief that the deity, who disclosed himself to Job, *answer from the tempest* (38:1). The pattern is the theophanic way which is used to anticipate God's self-revelation to his people Israel. Since the earliest history, the storms were insistently associated with theophanies (Ex 19:9-20; Jg 5:4-5; Hb 3:5-6; Ps 18:8-16). In Ez 1:4 this expression indicates a revelation from heavens and a vision of God that assures to the exiled that God is not a prisoner of the Temple. He is able to be where his people are. In Zc 9:14 the same expression describes God's revelation and coming to Israel for his reestablishment.

Surprisingly, in Jb 38:1-2 God appears in his word, as he did to Abraham and Moses, making him audibly present. The transcendent reveals himself as the God Yhwh, placing Job among those great figures of Israel, who were honored with a personal visit from their God. This is why God's words should be taken not as a simple answer to a man questions and requests, but as a self-revelation from God: a gift and a blessing that through history have transformed and sustained those who believed in Him.

*To know understanding*

The singularity of the expression *to know understanding* (38:4) found only some similar parallels in Pr 4:1 *lāda‘at bînâ* (*to know intelligence / understanding*). Here the expression points to the intelligence as the condition to know the inner truth of wisdom. The sons are called to listen to their father's instruction as a sound teaching and instruction that gives life (Pr 4:1-4). The insistence is in the connection between *bînâ* (intelligence) and *hokmâ* (wisdom), assured through the parallelism between *to gain wisdom* (*q<sup>e</sup>nēh hokmâ*) and *to gain intelligence* (*q<sup>e</sup>nēh bînâ*) Pr 4:5;7). In Is 29:24 we find also a similar expression when the prophet says *those who go astray in spirit will know intelligence*. The literary context is also the one of wisdom and understanding. God is the subject of the speech and the one who accuses the people to approach God only in words and honors him only with lip-service while their hearts are far from him (Is 29:13). God has no other way except to deal dreadfully with his people, so that the wisdom of the wise men will perish and the understanding of their discerning men will be concealed (Is 29:14). The certainty of the prophet is in the fact that those who burrow to conceal their plans from God will be defeated (Is 29:15-17); the tyrant will be no more; the scoffer and those on the look-out for evil have been destroyed (Is 29:20-21). Then, no longer shall Jacob be disappointed, no more shall his face grow pale (Is 29:22). There is a hope: Israel will acknowledge the name of God as holy. Then, only then, Israel will experience that *those who go astray in spirit will know intelligence*.

This biblical context seems to enlighten the use of the expression used in Jb 38:4 (*to know intelligence / understanding*). In fact, there is a link between intelligence and wisdom that can be found despite human error. A link where to *know intelligence* can assume the possibility to participate in a special understanding; an ability to discern the mysteries of earth's design, even through Job's mistakes. This also permits us to foresee how the rhetorical approach of God's questions seem to suggest this eventual possibility. In this context, the connections between the creation moment and the extraordinary features of earth seem to suggest the divine and mysterious setting from where knowledge comes.

## INTERPRETATION

*Do you know who God is?*

The sequence signs a continuous exchange between a direct *you* and the interrogative *who*. This strategy reveals that the challenge to Job's knowledge needs to cross the knowledge of who is God, as the Creator and who knows the wisdom that sustains all of creation. Job supposes to know God, basing his believe on the traditional statements about him. This is very clear in the words he says to his friends (Jb 9:2-35; 12:13-25 / 22:2-30). It is in light of this blocked

theology that he tries to understand human life and find a sense for the disgrace that happens to him. How could God have unblock such distance where Job had close himself as a believer? God, in the thought of the wise men of Israel, chooses at this moment, the strategy that deeply traverses the experience of the limits of human knowledge. More than a cruel irony, God guides Job kindly through the wondrous and unpredictability of the cosmic phenomenon. Suggesting to Job the absolutely impossibility to have been present at the moment of creation, he shows to him how far away he will always be from the wisdom and control of all the enigmas of creation. This experience should help Job to realize how naive it is to have the complete knowledge and understanding of human life and the sense of his own existence. Job thought he knew God, but in fact the hardness of his life pressed him to come to a new knowledge of God: a knowledge that should face and handle the greatness of God as Creator and the Creation as a reality empowered by a hidden wisdom (38:36).

*Gird you like a strong man*

God asked Job to gird himself like a *geber* (38:3) suggesting that what he is about to tell him involves words that only a *strong man* (*geber*) should listen to. According to the semantic evolution of this Hebrew word, the strength implied is other than the physical one, it is the strength of the faith in God as creator and saviour; the strength of a human being that stands in a special relationship to God (cf. Nm 24:3.15).<sup>9</sup> It is like a great believer that Job should hear what God has to say (Ps 34:9; 40:5-9.12). In fact, dealing with the problem of a right relationship with God, Job is challenged to prove himself as a *geber* before God. The friends had made fun of him because he had called himself a priori a *geber* (15:7-10) and as such boasts of his wisdom, because wisdom and *geburah* (might) are with God alone (12:13). Job agrees that he is merely one born of a woman, and also that as a *geber* he participates in the final destiny of every man (14:1.10.12.14), and yet his situation is different from that of other men (9:2). In Elihu's words, Job is not what one would expect in a *geber*. His words seem not to emerge from a heart that fears God; he speaks without knowledge and his words are without insight

<sup>9</sup> This seems to be the oldest biblical example where Balaam is said to be a *geber* that he sees and hears the word of God because he has a the knowledge of the most High (Nm 24:2.15). In Pr 30:1 Agur is called a *geber* that has to state he is a stupid man since he does not have divine wisdom, and to prove the impossibility of gaining such wisdom he raises some questions that no man can answer. But he refers to God's words, which endure and to which one need add nothing of one's own. The true nature of a *geber* consists in his attaining wisdom by simple trusting in God (Pr 30:5); by his ability to establish an intimate relationship with God, trusts and fears God and does what God requires from him. This understanding is greatly developed in the Psalms, where this relation is sing as a new song, that expresses human delight in doing the will of God (cf. Ps 34:9; 40:5.9-12); the cry out to God day and night (Ps 88:5; 128:1.4) [H. KOSMALA, "גִּבּוֹר *geber*", in *TDOT* II, 378].

(34:35). The challenge God directs to Job to gird him as a *geber* leaves aside the two expectations: Job should be conscious that he is not a *geber* as he insists and should base his strength not in his human argumentation but in his true and audacious fear of God.

It is in this context, that God's words, said from the tempest, should also be taken not as a simple answer to Job or as a man's questions, but as a self-revelation from God; a gift and a blessing that through history have transformed and sustained many *geber*, whose greatness was just to have believed and established a special relationship with God (Nm 24:3.15; 2 Sm 23:1).

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