

A NOTE ON GEN. 1:2 AND JOB 38:8-11

By Ashby L. Camp

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Some creationists argue that Gen. 1:1 is a statement that in the beginning God created two specific things: the heavens, including the heavenly bodies, and planet earth. According to this view, the earth was in darkness in Gen. 1:2 because a thick, global cloud cover did not permit light from the heavenly bodies to reach the earth's surface. Some unspecified time after the beginning, God did the creative work described in Gen. 1:3-31, which included clearing of the cloud cover on Day 4 so as to make visible on earth the heavenly bodies that were created in the beginning. This time gap between the beginning and the six days of creation is thought to make it easier to accommodate some conclusions of modern science.¹

Many of the problems with this interpretation have been pointed out elsewhere.² This note focuses on an argument that is used to support the interpretation, namely that Job 38:8-11 indicates that the darkness of Gen. 1:2 was the result of cloud cover. The argument may be summarized as follows:

1. Job 38:8-11 alludes to Gen. 1:2.
2. The sea in Job 38:8-11 is in darkness because of cloud cover.
3. Therefore, the deep in Gen. 1:2 is in darkness because of cloud cover.

The problem is that Job 38:8-11 does not allude to Gen. 1:2. Other than a common conjunction and preposition, not a single word from Gen. 1:2 appears in Job 38:8-11. Even the word translated "darkness" in Gen. 1:2 (חֹֿסֶֿעַק) is different from the word translated "thick darkness" in Job 38:9 (אֶֿרָֿאֶֿל). So clearly the claim that Job 38:8-11 alludes to Gen. 1:2 must be based on something other than verbal similarity.

An appeal to conceptual similarity fares no better. The description in Gen. 1:2 is of an earth that is covered entirely by the waters of the deep. The picture in Job 38:8-11 is of an earth in which the waters have been confined to the place set for them by God. This is clear in vv. 8a, 10, and 11. God says (ESV): (8) "Or who **shut the sea with doors** when it burst out from the womb, (9) when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, (10) and **prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors**, (11) and said '**Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed**'?"³

¹ Perhaps the best known proponent of this view is Gorman Gray, *The Age of the Universe: What Are the Biblical Limits* (Washougal, WA: Morning Star Publications, 1997).

² For a recent example, see Don Batten, "Soft-gap sophistry" at http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs2004/0308soft_gap.asp (to be published in *Creation* 26(3) June-August 2004).

Since the waters in Gen. 1:2 are not confined and the waters in Job 38:8-11 are confined, Job 38:8-11 is not referring to the state described in Gen. 1:2. Rather, it is referring to the events of Gen. 1:9-10 where God created the seas by gathering together into the place he determined the water that was covering the land.⁴

This is confirmed by the reference in Job 38:8 to "the sea." The waters of the deep were not named "the seas" until God confined them in Gen. 1:9-10. The "seas" are by definition confined waters; they exist in distinction from dry land (as darkness is named "night" only in distinction from "day"). The fact Job 38:8 refers to "sea" (singular) and Gen. 1:10 refers to "seas" (plural) does not negate the connection. The "seas" are spoken of collectively as "the sea" (see, e.g., Gen. 1:26, 28).

Given that Job 38:8-11 pictures an earth with confined waters (seas), and given that the sea, not the earth, is said in Job 38:9 to have been provided clouds as a garment and thick darkness as a swaddling band, Job 38:8-11 clearly is not speaking of a global cloud cover. So it cannot be the alleged cloud cover of Gen. 1:2, which would have to be global to keep the earth in darkness. And given that the garment and swaddling band were given by God *when* the waters were confined, Job 38:8-11 clearly is not speaking of a darkness that existed before Gen. 1:9-10 and thus is not speaking of the darkness in Gen. 1:2.

So what is one to make of God giving to the sea when he created it clouds as a garment and thick darkness as a swaddling band? The key is to appreciate that, unlike Gen. 1:9-10, Job 38:8-11 is a poetic text. Just as bars and doors represent the sea's containment, clouds and thick darkness represent the inscrutability with which God endowed the sea at creation. The obscuring effect of such darkness is evident, for example, in Job 22:13-14 where Eliphaz charges Job with claiming that the thick darkness that enshrouds God prohibits his knowing what is occurring on earth. The sea was (and is) what we might call, in parallel imagery, a "black box," a mysterious realm that is beyond human observation.

This endowment of inscrutability is labeled a "swaddling band" to make the point of God's dominion over what was represented in ancient cosmogonies as a powerful and

³ See also KJV, ASV, RSV, NAS, NIV, NKJV, and NRSV.

⁴ Robert L. Alden, for example, says of Job 38:8-11:

Genesis 1:9 records the gathering of the water to one place and the appearance of dry land. In a general way the pericope after the creation itself deals with the confinement of the seas. In graphic but poetic terms, vv. 8-11 deal with oceans and all their power and mystery. For desert people who were not seafaring the limitless expanse of water was not inviting but fearful. Few Old Testament characters had anything to do with sailing, fishing, or swimming. The sea was something God held back from overflowing the land.

Robert L. Alden, *Job*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 371.

hostile force. The sea is pictured as being wrapped up like a baby. God wraps this chaos monster in baby clothes, puts it in a playpen, and tells it to stay in place.⁵

⁵ See, for example, Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 538.