

Job Chapter 27

In our last Job class, we covered chapters 25 and 26. Chapter 25 is Bildad's final recorded argument, and it is only six short verses. In verse 2, Bildad states that "dominion and fear are with God," which establishes the foundation of his argument in this chapter. His argument is about God's authority, so that he may contrast it with man's weakness. The remainder of verse 2 and verse 3 are intended to establish God's dominion and authority:

- He makes peace in the high heaven
- Is there any number to his armies?
- Upon whom does his light not arise?

Bildad then contrasts man's weakness to God's authority in verses 4-6, specifically:

- How can man be right before God?
- How can he be pure?
- Much lower than the heavenly bodies, man is just a maggot and a worm

The implications are that in Bildad's view, a man (specifically, Job) has no right to defend his own righteousness to God. Aligning with Eliphaz's arguments in chapter 22, if man attempts this, Bildad implies that it will be a worthless endeavor.

Job responds in chapter 26 by calling into question "with whose help have you uttered words, and whose breath has come out from you?" Consider these challenges in view of Job's defense in chapter 27:2-4: "As God lives, who has taken away my right, and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter, as long as my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit." Seeing Job declare that God's spirit was in his breath, his challenge to his friends is intended to defeat Bildad's argument. His friends believe they have wisdom to instruct Job, yet where do they think that wisdom came from? If men are just maggots and worms, as Bildad argued, then how are they able to instruct each other and for what purpose? Job rather expands on how God, although mighty in power and wisdom, reveals only "the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear from him" (verse 14). That God made man and has entrusted man with wisdom – however small a portion – necessarily implies that man is valuable to God. To argue otherwise cannot come from God's spirit.

Job's statement in verse 14 is ironic in view of the final chapters of the book. When God answers Job, he thunders in his power. He literally appears to Job wrapped in a raging storm. It is also ironic that Job perceives his friends' lack perspective on God's intentions, while he himself misinterprets them as they pertain to his welfare.

We also spent a few moments in class discussing a tangential observation for the purpose of reinforcing the importance of both historical and literary context. I have read and heard well-intentioned people use this chapter as evidence of the scientific accuracy of the bible. For example:

- "Hangs the earth on nothing"
- "Binds up waters in thick clouds"
- "Inscribed a circle on the face of the waters at the boundary between light and darkness"

Although Job 26 reveals some things about ancient Jewish cosmology, I would not advise going to this chapter to try to argue for how the Bible predicted modern science. My main reason is that I see no

evidence that the chapter was intended to prophecy about what modern secular science would later catch up to.

Consider also that modern secular beliefs on cosmology and origins science are almost certainly wrong, even if viewed only through a secular lens. Science, as an activity, actually depends on an ever-changing understanding of the universe, and scientists building on each other's research. If we then interpret the bible through a modern scientific lens, what happens when modern science becomes outdated? We will have shown ourselves to be insecure handlers of God's truth, desperate to reconcile it with a shifting secular standard.

Also, there is no evidence that ancient Jews understood cosmology as well as or better than we do. Their recorded beliefs are more primitive than our own. Accordingly, one must abandon both historical and literary context to interpret that in this chapter Job is affirming a globular earth suspended in space revolving around the sun while it spins on its axis.

However, that Job and other ancient and even inspired writers may have had an inaccurate scientific understanding of the cosmos does not invalidate the bible at all. If I seriously doubt my own accurate knowledge of the cosmos in view of the unexplained mysteries of quantum physics, what reason do I have to invalidate the spiritual testimony of such men on account of their inaccurate scientific beliefs? Where I stand now is: I believe God is not – and has never been – terribly concerned with man having an accurate scientific knowledge of how he created this universe and how he sustains it. I believe the bible was not intended to be a science text, and that if God wanted to give us a science book, then he would have. Rather, I think Job is right on in verse 14: what man can observe from the cosmos is just a whisper of God's capabilities. As Job observed nature, he got a sense of God's power and wisdom. But exactly how that all works was a mystery to Job, and much of it remains a mystery to us. For every cosmological question explained by science, several new mysteries present themselves. Do not be fooled by anyone claiming to have all the answers. "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible." (Hebrews 11:3).

Moving on!

Chapter 27, verse 1 is written in such a way as to suggest there was perhaps a break here. Maybe Job was expecting a response and got none. Maybe there was more spoken by someone else that was not recorded. Or maybe there was just a pause for some reason – maybe people were agitated and nothing of value was stated during the disruption. All of that is just speculation – all we know for sure is "Job again took up his discourse."

We have referred twice already to verses 2-4. I will just add that verses 2-6 are also ironic (irony being a common occurrence in this book). What motivates Job to speak these verses are that Job's friends are trying to get him to repent, but "repenting" would be – as Job sees it – the transgression. It would mean becoming false and compromising his integrity.

Job continues with this idea in verses 7-10. All this time, Job's friends have been promising God's comfort and security on the condition that Job repents. But Job, holding to his integrity, subverts their offer of comfort and affirms that if he concedes his argument, then God would cut him off and take away his life. Such are the ways for the enemies of Job, but not for Job himself – he will not put himself in a position of deserving punishment.

In verses 11-12, Job says: "I will teach you concerning the hand of God; what is with the Almighty I will not conceal. Behold, all of you have seen it yourselves; why then have you become altogether vain?" I believe Job is alluding to his present suffering. He himself is evidence of how God thinks and acts, at least as he interprets it. If Job was looking for comfort and validation from his friends, he could have faked repentance. That he does the opposite – insisting that his integrity remains intact – should be evidence of his sincerity. According to Job, that his friends fail to acknowledge this is evidence of their emptiness.

Side thought: how devastating might it have been to the faith of Job's friends if Job were to have faked repentance and then continued suffering? Could it be that Job perceived he was needing to bear the weight of his friends' faith in God, while the entire time they scorned him and goaded him to a resolution that would have shaken their own faith?

Verse 13-23 are very interesting. If this is Job speaking, then he completely contradicts everything he just argued in chapter 24. The point of chapter 24 is to show that God does not rescue the poor person from the hand of his oppressor. These verses teach literally the opposite. It is therefore difficult for me to believe this is in fact Job speaking, though I do not rule it out entirely. I will propose three other plausible explanations:

- There was considerable difficulty translating this section, and the translators leaned too heavily on how they interpreted the passage. I have no evidence of this, other than the difficulty in reconciling it to chapter 24.
- It is one of Job's friends speaking; and perhaps Zophar's third argument. It was not clear in the surviving copies that the speaker shifted.
- It is part of an interlude, to be spoken by the narrator. This is a compelling option because chapter 28 is commonly understood as the narrator's interlude. It may be that chapter 27, verse 13 is where the interlude actually begins. The interlude serves several purposes:
 - It applies, summarizes, or clarifies what we have studied to this point.
 - It begins the climax of the book.

I do not have a strong preference to any of the options proposed above, but I would love to get your thoughts!

I believe Job chapter 28 is a narrator's interlude, so I will teach it with that in mind. However, I am open to other interpretations. Job will then "again pick up his discourse" in chapter 29, summarizing his defense through chapter 31. Then we are going to get Elihu's input in chapters 32-37. Then finally, God will answer in chapters 38-42, leading to the conclusion of the matter in chapter 42.