

What Can We Really Know About God?

Job 26:1 – 14

Nutshell: Job suggests that our ignorance of the fulness of God's workings in the physical realm suggests a deeper ignorance in the spiritual realm. In this, he admits losing confidence in his spiritual knowledge, especially concerning the nature of God. But how much does God mean for us to know about Him? How confident are you?

Review

I. Job is the ABCs, or kindergarten, of the Bible. It lays out the **basics** of the God-man relationship. Yet it's a kindergarten where you come out with a Ph.D.

II. The Story so far

A. God told Satan that Job was THE best, 1:8

Kid-speak: Who is Satan? He's an angel God made who decided that he hated God.

1. Satan objected: "Only for blessings," 1:10
2. God said Satan could take them away, 1:12
3. Job lost all children and possessions, 1:13-19
4. But he worshiped without protest, 1:20-21

B. God bragged on Job again, 2:3

1. Satan objected, "Skin for skin," 2:4-5
2. God said Satan could touch him, 2:6
3. Satan gave Job agonizing boils, 2:7-9; 30:18, 30
4. Job still didn't sin, 2:10

Kid-speak: Why does Satan want to hurt us? That's his way to make us not trust God anymore.

C. After 7 days, Job cursed his birth, 3:1-26.

D. Most of Job is an argument cycle, chaps. 4-31.

Argument Cycle 1

1. Eliphaz trusted *personal revelation*, 4:12,
2. Bildad trusted *tradition*, 8:8,
3. Zophar trusted *mystery*, 11:7
4. *Each man had a deficient view of God, 42:7*
5. Job answered each one: chs. 4-14

E. They increasingly hinted that only sin could have brought on these afflictions

F. *Job has increasingly accepted that premise*

1. Thus, he begins accusing God for wrongful punishment, 40:8; 9:15; 10:2-7.
2. *What Satan couldn't do, the friends did!* Consider your power as a friend.

Argument Cycle 2

G. The 3 friends speak again. Job answers each one, six more speeches, chaps. 15-21

Argument Cycle 3

H. One last cycle, minus Zophar, 22-25

- I. Finally, Job insists on his uprightness, 26-31
↓ The 3 friends bluffed no confession of sin, 32:1
- J. Enter the human hero of the book (a type of Christ: truth incarnate), **Elihu**, ch 32-37
 1. God corrects Job, 38:2; 40:2, 8, and his 3 other friends, 42:7, but never Elihu
 2. God agreed with Elihu, 32:2; 40:8
 3. Elihu's *last* speech, chap 37, becomes God's *whole* speech: Creation, 38-41. God tag-teamed w/ Elihu.

Kid-speak: Job and his three friends talked on and on, but did they figure out what was going on? No. It took another person, Elihu, to straighten them out.

K. Job will *sulk* in 40:4-5, then *repent* in 42:1-6

Theme of Job: How can *I* be right in God's eyes (justification) if *He* is not right in my eyes (sanctification)?

III. Themes in Job:

- A. God's sovereignty: the main lesson Job learned: God is in charge, Job 42:2
- B. God's righteousness. His *sovereignty* ↑ is not arbitrary.

Kid-speak: Was God right to let all the bad things happen to Job? Yup. God is always right. But did it feel right to Job? NOPE.

- C. The necessity of Trials, Ps 119:67, 71. Trials show me my fallen nature. Better trust God.
- D. Death. Christ's abandonment on the cross is especially previewed.
- E. God's faithfulness. He didn't quit until Job was restored.
- F. God's justice is what Job mainly argued vs.; but God *does* begin to requite the wicked here on earth, Job, 34:10, 20

IV. Argument Cycle Recap, chaps 3-31

- Chap 3, Job curses his birth
- Ch 4-5, **Eliphaz**: make things right with God

Kid-speak: Job started saying that God was wrong for hurting him. Was Job being very smart? Nope.

V. Job's Final Response to the Three Friends

- A. Job will now give a lengthy speech, defending his integrity, chaps. 26-31.
 - 1. This will effectively cut off his friends' speeches. They counted on bluffing him into confessing the grave sin/sins that had supposedly invited God's anger.
 - 2. But Job was not bluffed. Quite the opposite, chapters 26-31 will be a manifesto of his own righteousness!
 - 3. Job has recklessly traded away God's goodness. God cannot be good if He is unjust, but Job has plainly accused God of acting unjustly, 19:6-7; 23:7-8; 27:2; 40:8.
- B. What Job will say in this section
 - 1. Chap 26, God's perspective is much wider than ours. Since He commands operations that seem to defy our reason, how can we expect **Him** to conform to the norms He set for **us**?
 - 2. Chap 27, God preserves His integrity as judge by bringing punishment in the *second generation* of those who continue to hate Him.

Ch 6-7, **Job**: My *pain* is talking. "God, hear me."

Ch 8, **Bildad**: only the wicked get swept away

Ch 9-10, **Job**: God deserted me. "Why, God?"

Ch 11, **Zophar**: God is *unfathomable*

Ch 12-14, **Job**: God lets the wicked rule. "God, I won't regrow if you chop me down."

- +1. Job thought God was tired of his collected sins. Job awaited the *afterlife* for God's favor to resume, Job 14:14-17.

- 2. ↑ The only way Job could put it together

Ch 15, **Eliphaz**: You're just another failed sinner

Ch 16-17, **Job**: "God, You plucked me." My Witness is in Heaven. "You blinded them."

Ch 18, **Bildad**: The wicked (= Job) are consumed

Ch 19, **Job**: Earth will tell my injustice, yet I know I'll rise and see Messiah (No prayer)

Ch 20, **Zophar**: The wicked only *seem* sturdy

Ch 21, **Job**: God *doesn't* judge bad men (~~Prayer~~)

Ch 22, **Eliphaz**: You cheated of the poor. (!) But repent and you'll be fully restored.

Ch 23, **Job**: God has changed course. (~~Prayer~~)

Ch 24, **Job**: God *helps* the wicked hurt the poor

Ch 18, **Bildad**: Man (Job) can't be righteous before God.

3. Chap 28, God's wisdom is inscrutable to us. The *version* of wisdom He gives us is to simply respect Him and avoid what He forbids. (Compare "the beginning of wisdom," Prov 9:10.)
4. Chap 29, I wish it were like before, when my fear of God allowed me to do good to all, being honored by all!
5. Chap 30, But now I am despised even by the despised of the land. Now they come at me. God, You've become cruel, casting me to the wind. Like the rest of the abandoned afflicted, I'm ignored, though I helped so many of them.
6. Chap 31, I'm fully willing to bear a punishment befitting any crimes I've done. But here's my list. It's complete. It only vindicates me.

Kid-speak: Now we're on Job's last talk to his friends. He's going to say that he hadn't done anything wrong. Was he right about that? Yes. But does that mean God couldn't let him be sick? No.

C. Some strange factors about these speeches

1. We pegged Zophar with the 'Mysterious God' heresy, 11:7: whatever seems inconsistent in God is covered by our inability to figure Him out. He's just mysterious! But now that seems to be just what Job is saying in chapter 26! In fact, he out-Zophars Zophar!
2. Job will go even further in chap 28, saying that wisdom, the tool by which God operates, is really not available to us. We only have the 'rules' version, 28:28. Job, then, would even rob his previous self of true wisdom! (*True* wisdom does not require *inexhaustible* wisdom, Eph 5:15; Col 1:9.)
3. Job has argued that God did not consistently judge the wicked during their lifetimes, 21:7. In 21:8, Job said that the wicked enjoyed their children, but this was their young children living at home. But Job has said that God does judge the wicked, 21:30. Especially, He will judge their progeny who continue in the parents' wickedness, 21:19.

Kid-speak: Job said that God let bad people get away with being bad. But will God let bad people get away with it? No.

VI. OUTLINE of Job's Words in Chapter 26

A. A particular retort to Bildad, v 2-4.

1. Bildad was the last to speak. "You" in v 2-4 are singular. Job is addressing Bildad.
2. Job seems tired of his friends' evasions. He is utterly sarcastic towards Bildad.
3. Job's main point concerns Bildad's credentials. Whom had he helped?
 - a. And Job seeks out *anyone* whom Bildad may have actually helped, v 4.
 - b. The first three lines (v 2-3a) relate very well to Job himself. How had Bildad helped him with all his excellent advice? Has he even *intended* to help Job? Or is he mainly *venting*, based on his own fears?
 - c. But the first three lines (v 2-3a) could just as easily be questions about Bildad's 'ministry' in general, in keeping with the last three lines (v 3b-4)

- B. Without waiting for a character reference from Bildad, Job contends that Bildad’s teaching circuit is beside the point anyway. All the firm knowledge Bildad claimed was of a God whose ways are quite beyond us. v 5-14.
1. (Zophar had already conceded God’s mystery, 11:7. How could Bildad disagree now?)
 2. Job visits six areas where we are fundamentally ignorant:
 - a. The afterworld, v 5-6.
 - b. Geography and astronomy, v 7.
 - c. Meteorology (the atmosphere and weather), v 8-9; intersected with
 - d. Oceanography/ astronomy- tides, v 10.
 - e. Storms, v 11-12.
 - f. Astronomy/ constellations, v 13
 - g. Wrap-up: God only shows us the tip of his little finger by these mysteries, v 14.
 3. Job’s point: Ya’ll have whiffed in condemning me; but anyway, what is the little we know about God’s workings compared with the vast realms where we draw a blank?
 - a. Ya’ll err to be so certain.
 - b. My newly discovered inability to piece it all together better reflects reality. Get on board.
 4. On the face of it, this seems to accord more respect to God. But does it?

Kid-speak: Job said that we don’t understand how the world works. Is that true? Yes. But does that mean we can’t know *anything* about how God works? No!

VII. Job 26 Walkthrough

- A. Job’s Questions to Bildad, v 1-4.
1. V 2, Have you helped “no vigor,” meaning someone without it.
 - a. Where there was no vigor, how did you supply the vigor?
 - b. Bildad, now majoring in critique, has lost sight of *restoration*.
 2. V 2b, Have you saved the arm with no strength?
 - a. No longer “how,” but “have you even done it?” Though this might be considered a logical extension of v 2a, supplying “how.”
 - b. Someone who lost his own ability to aid himself, did you come to his assistance?
 - c. Job clearly implies that Bildad had not done so with him.
 3. V 3a, Have you counseled “no wisdom,” meaning someone without it.
 - a. Is your method to supply lacking wisdom *or* to see failings and find fault?
 - b. Maybe you don’t counsel because you have no wisdom to offer.
 4. V 3b, Or declared sound counsel in abundance; a grammatical continuation of v 3a.
 - a. If you have wisdom, you should be dispensing it all around. It’s certainly needed!
 - b. My situation veritably shouts for deep counsel! But you treat it quite childishly, in a reactionary way. No real insight.
 5. V 4a, For whom have you laid out speeches?
 - a. Such grand wisdom as yours must have been shared far and wide!
 - b. But what you have laid out here is sterile moralizing.

6. V 4b, And whose *living* breath originated with you?
 - a. Such deep wisdom would revive the fading spirit and awaken awareness anew!
 - b. I don't suppose you can tell us where you've accomplished this?

Kid-speak: Job said that Bildad wasn't this great teacher that he thought he was, and he hadn't helped Job at all.

B. Knowledge that is hidden from us, v 5-14.

1. V 5, Job immediately crosses over to 'the other side' before visiting our ignorance on this side of the grave.
 - a. The dead have a whole new existence. They depart this life and are 'born' into the other world underneath this one (and therefore below the seas).
 - b. That's their new home. But concerning it...
2. V 6, God reads it like an open book.
 - a. Surely that sets us among the basically ignorant. Our own future home is an utter mystery to us!
 - b. Those who dwell there have had two homes. Surely they now have new perceptions about this one! But we have no access to their insights.
 - c. Now that the afterlife shows our general ignorance, on this this world:
3. V 7, God is the one stretching out the north like a tent.
 - a. But He hasn't shown us how He handles either the region of the north or the northern sky.
 - b. But go a little further, and there's earth, hanging stably, but resting on nothing!
 - c. Yet here we are, trying to stretch out and hang weighty arguments. Sorry, I can't suppress the laughter! "Weighty?"
4. V 8, Rainclouds- now there's a neat trick!
 - a. All full of water, but like a gardener with a watering bucket, not a drop until God tips it.
 - b. And here we try to water one another's parched souls. Did it all spill before we poured? Or was there a hole in the bucket before we even started?

Kid-speak: How does a raincloud carry rain without spilling it? Is it in a big plastic bag or something? No. It's pretty amazing how God made rainclouds, huh?

5. V 9, Or sleeping clouds! Like the ones He hastily, perfectly sows as a blanket for the sleeping moon. Do we know when to put illumination to sleep for an ultimately greater enlightenment?
6. V 10, The seas' movements determine so much that happens on earth! God has ocean tides set like a timepiece, reliable as day and night. Yet we imagine we can gauge the force of our words in moving the soul of another!
7. V 11, Whatever upholds the sky, how does it not crack under His angry, earth-shaking thunder? Are our best rebukes nearly so surgical?
8. V 12, God churns the sea like fire boils water, but He is able to target the tumult to overthrow His enemies.

- a. Rahav refers to a prominent enemy of Israel, Ps 87:4
 - b. In Isa 51:9-10, Rahav and Egypt seem to be connected. Here Rahav is also linked with the tannin, originally associated with water monsters, Gen 1:21.
 - c. A beach full of massive sea creature corpses after a storm may have provided this imagery.
 - d. In the same way, God crashes violently, seemingly randomly, but these ‘arrows’ somehow especially find His enemies.
 - e. Do we succeed in limiting *our* tongues’ destructions to our intended audience?
9. V 13, The Spirit designed the night sky like a deep pool, reflecting God’s own beauty. In it is pictured the eternal story, including the eventual vanquishing of the Serpent. Do our narratives reflect that beauty, power, and redemption?
- a. The Gospel in the stars is fairly irrefutable (not necessarily this or that explication of it), Rev 12:1-4. Those are all known stars and constellations.
 - b. Gen 1:14 says the stars are first for “signs,” same word in Isa 7:14. Why would God waste so vast a mural on any but the most important subject?

Kid-speak: Is the story of Jesus in the stars. Yes. But it’s hard to read, because we’ve forgotten how to look at the sky at night.

10. V 14, All these colossus-sized works only begin to tell the story.
- a. If God went up a notch, He would be beyond our sensory and comprehension ranges.
 - b. So why are you pretending to grasp what God is doing to me here?

VIII. The Overall Ignorance of Science

- A. Job is right about our overall ignorance in physical matters.
 - 1. Science, as if on schedule, corrects itself from generation to generation.
 - 2. One rock overturned leads to a vast, unexplored cavern.
- B. It is not unreasonable to hypothesize that spiritual knowledge would be even further beyond us. Many accept this as a given. But is it true?

IX. True, Full, Spiritual Knowledge is Available

- A. Now we begin to see why the story of redemption is ‘just’ the story of people, starting in Genesis.
 - 1. God intends redemption to be our real point of contact with Him. Therefore, He intends to make its workings ‘entirely’ available to us (not meaning to know as He knows; that could never be true in any area).
 - 2. He made us in His image
 - a. If that image were physical, maybe we’d know the physical world better!
 - b. But God’s image is in our spirits/ souls. Thus, we can grasp all the He says in that realm.
- B. **Jn 15:15**. Was Jesus in on everything? The exceptions seem to be exceedingly limited, Mk 13:32. Yet here He says that He passed all He knew on to *us*.

1. God's knowledge and wisdom in putting together people, planets, and protons is one thing. We don't have to know those things to know *Him*.
2. But He has purposely designed Scriptures and Christ to bring us right into His counsel chambers. Not before-the-fact (Rom 11:34-35), but after-the-fact, 1 Cor 2:16.

Kid-speak: Jesus said that everything the Father taught *Him*, He taught *us*. Wow, that covers just about everything, doesn't it! Is it worth it to spend your whole life learning the Bible? Yes!

C. Deut 29:29 is the theme statement of the Accessibility of Scriptures.

1. There are two kinds of knowledge in the universe. Because God alone is omniscient, there will always be knowledge that God alone can fathom. That's "secret" knowledge.
2. But once it becomes "revealed"- once He speaks, it is the height of folly and arrogance to call that knowledge secret! Yet that seems to be standard operating procedure for many (most).
3. Revealed knowledge = Scripture. God's intent in writing it, then, is for it to be comprehended. All of it.
 - a. Did Paul comprehend all of it? It's hard to imagine any portion remaining a mystery to him. Again, when he speaks of mysteries, he's speaking of the "secret" category, not Scriptures.

Kid-speak: Deut 29:29 says that there's stuff that only *God* knows, but everything He put in the Bible is for *us* to know. So what if somebody points to something in the Bible and says, "We can't understand that." Are they right? Nooop.

- b. But the complete comprehension of Scriptures neither enables us nor motivates us to comply.
- c. There *is* an enablement and motivating power to comply with Scriptures. It comes from being **born again**. But even with it, we easily sift down into a knowledge without love, Rev 2:4.
4. We are intended to know, but the knowledge is a tool UNTO wisdom, joy, and righteousness.
5. Crucially, though, we can't skip the knowledge and just have, say, love.
 - a. Yet for many, this is our whole goal! For them, knowledge obstructs love!
 - b. Whatever amount of love may be accessible without knowledge, it will always be a baby love, Heb 5:12-14. Pitiful, an adult cooing in a cradle; but, more accurately, monstrous.
 - c. But, again, this seems to be the general goal in Evangelicalism, does it not?
 - d. From one perspective, a misreading of 1 Cor 13. Yes, love is king, but love doesn't antiquate knowledge, it leads to full knowledge, v 12. So when your brain gets tired, don't say, "Ah well, knowledge doesn't matter. I've got love."
6. It an adult level of knowledge *your* goal?

X. Critique of Job

- A. Job wouldn't like it (at this point), but he got it wrong. His *facts* were spot on, both about Bildad and about our ignorance of the physical world.
- B. But his *inference* is wrong. We are not left guessing who God is, how He operates, or how we properly relate to Him.
 - 1. Job himself had all the knowledge he needed. He had just misinterpreted it, falling into self-righteousness.
 - 2. Job's wrong *inference* came from accepting the false premise that God was punishing him.
 - 3. Ah, how one wrong premise, be it one degree off, can lead us where we can no longer even see the original path!
 - 4. Underscoring the necessity of full Scriptural knowledge. Fortunately for us, the book of Job is now included in that knowledge.

Kid-speak: Poor Job had lost his hope. Can that happen to us sometimes? Yes.

Wrap-up: Job 26 is a case study in misused facts. In fact (ha ha), everybody has facts. Because of our personal and environmental limitations, it can be hard even getting at the facts. But once we get them in order, we still have to interpret them. That is wisdom #1: What do these facts say with no interpretation? Or can they even be viewed 'in the raw'?

Bible facts/ data are the most important ones, of course.

- 1) God intends to be held to them (Deut 29:29).
- 2) Holding Him to them is an act of faith that *this is His chosen means of speaking*.
- 3) But then, rightly interpreted Bible data has to be ordered, 2 Tim 2:15, "straightly cut."
"Cut" implies apportionment. Apportionment implies a relationship between one portion and another.
 - a) The portions can be sentences or paragraphs.
 - b) Or the portions can be subject matters.

Matt 23:23 is an example of ordered subjects.

Ask our main question with this grid: Can all Bible subjects be ordered? Or, like most (?) Christians, are we content to sift through the Bible like it was a collection of shells scattered on a beach, sifting along for momentary inspiration?

(And do we have to miss out on inspiration by insisting on the Bible saying what it says, the way it says it?)