

Introduction: Bildad’s Last Word – How Can Man Be in the Right before God? (ch 25)

25 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said:

² *“Dominion and fear are with God;^[a]
he makes peace in his high heaven.*

³ *Is there any number to his armies?*

Upon whom does his light not arise?

⁴ *How then can man be in the right before God?*

How can he who is born of woman be pure?

⁵ *Behold, even the moon is not bright,
and the stars are not pure in his eyes;*

⁶ *how much less man, who is a maggot,
and the son of man, who is a worm!”*

How can a man be in the right before God?

Bildad’s question in verse 4 is a direct quote
of what Job had said in chapter 9!

In chapter 9, this was Job’s question!!

(In fact, it was the sermon title of the sermon on Job’s response to Bildad’s first speech!)

And in chapter 9 Job had concluded

that there was no way for a man to be vindicated before God.

After all, if God is a just judge

(and it would be blasphemy to say otherwise!),
then every complaint against God must fail.

Eliphaz had said something like this in his first and second speeches (chapters 4 and 15).

“What is man that he can be pure?

Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?

Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones,

and the heavens are not pure in his sight;

how much less one who is abominable and corrupt,

a man who drinks injustice like water.” (15:14-16)

Now Bildad starts down the same path.

How can man be in the right before God?

How can man be justified – how can man be vindicated before God?!

After all, Bildad says,

Man is a maggot!

The son of man is a worm!

Worms and maggots are all about death and decay.

I recently heard about a certain kind of cheese that has worms in it.

So long as the worms are alive, the cheese is good to eat –
but when the worms start to die,
then you know that the cheese has gone bad.
The fact that most of you were really repulsed by that description
shows me that you (like most people) *really* don't like worms.

The presence of worms and maggots is a reminder of the nearness of death and decay.

So what do you think about Bildad's statement that man is a maggot?
That the son of man is a worm?

David Clines thinks that Bildad is just wrong.

Clines says, "no God worth the name will want to rule by terror,
nor to be the god of a race of maggots..."

And humans know too that they are not worms and maggots:
the Bildad who addresses Job in this speech, with sarcasm and self-assurance,
is no maggot either,
but a powerful and self-determining man who thinks that he must damn humanity
in order to defend God." (640-641)

Perhaps if Bildad was the only person in the Bible who ever referred to man as a worm
we might agree with Clines;
but Bildad is in pretty good company.

David writes in Psalm 22, the psalm that Jesus himself takes up on the cross –
"But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised by the people." (Psalm 22:6)
Likewise, Isaiah 41:14 says,
"Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel"

Isaiah says that Israel is a race of worms.
And David says in Psalm 22 that he is a worm – and not a man.

And Jesus became all that Israel was supposed to be.
Jesus became all that David was supposed to be.

Jesus became a worm.
The son of man did not glorify himself,
but humbled himself – and took the form of a slave –
he became a worm, so that we might pass from death to life.

The problem with Bildad is *not* that he calls man a worm!
The problem with Bildad is that he does not think that a man can be in the right before God!

Man *can* be justified – he *can* be vindicated!
The innocent, suffering Servant will bring his righteous complaint before God

and be vindicated!
Because Jesus is the righteous one –
because he is the innocent suffering servant –
therefore God has vindicated Jesus.
And because God has vindicated Jesus,
he has justified all those who have faith in him!

We sing about the righteousness of God and his steadfast love and faithfulness in Psalm 36.

Psalm 36
Revelation 12

Revelation 12 connects with the same picture of the universe that we will see in Job 26.

Vern Poythress rightly says that the book of Revelation
is not so much a code to be deciphered –
but a picture book that paints in dramatic color
the basic realities of the Christian life.

There's a woman who is safe in the wilderness –
the dragon cannot get at her –
her son rules the nations from the throne of God –
and the dragon cannot get at him –
but the rest of her children –
the ones who keep the commandments of God
and hold to the testimony of Jesus –
well, *they* are the ones the dragon is trying to destroy!

The devil cannot defeat Jesus.
Therefore, also, the devil cannot defeat the church –
“the gates of hell will not prevail against her”!

But we should expect that the devil would try to make our lives miserable.
He prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour –
but fear not – because Jesus, the suffering servant – has triumphed,
and so we know that if we endure,
we will receive the crown of righteousness in the end!

Job's Wisdom – How to Think about the Universe as a Wise Man (ch 26-28)

a. What Power? What Wisdom? and Whose Words? (v1-4)

26 *Then Job answered and said:*

² *“How you have helped him who has no power!
How you have saved the arm that has no strength!*

³ *How you have counseled him who has no wisdom,
and plentifully declared sound knowledge!*

⁴ *With whose help have you uttered words,
and whose breath has come out from you?*

Some have argued that chapters 24-28 are jumbled and need to be reordered.

They point to the shortness of Bildad's third speech,
and they wonder what happened to Zophar's third speech.

But I see no jumble.

The only thing that seems odd is the statement in 27:1

“And Job again took up his discourse and said” –
but if Zophar has been silenced,

then it is not surprising that Job paused after rebuking Bildad –
and when Zophar didn't say anything, “he again took up his discourse.”

But there is a clear pattern to chapters 26-28.

In verses 2-4 of chapter 26, Job speaks of power, wisdom, and words.

This becomes the structure of chapters 26-28.

In Job 6, in his first answer to Eliphaz,

Job had asked, “What is my strength, that I should wait?

And what is my end, that I should be patient?...

Have I any help in me, when resource is driven from me?” (6:11, 13)

Likewise, at the end of chapter 6, he had added,

“Do you think that you can reprove words,
when the speech of a despairing man is wind?” (6:26)

In other words, at the beginning of the wisdom debate,

Job had said that he had no power – no words.

And now after three rounds of debate,

Job concludes that his friends have failed to help the one who lacks power;
they have failed to give wise counsel the one who lacks wisdom;
and they have failed to speak with the breath of God.

Now in chapters 26-28, Job will remedy their deficiency.

He starts by describing the power of God over the world (26:5-14),

He then speaks of how his bitter breath is sweeter than theirs! (ch 27)

And then he concludes by telling *them* how to find wisdom (ch 28).

In verses 5-14, Job describes the power of God revealed in the created order.

He thinks in terms of the three basic realms of creations (from Genesis 1):

the heavens, the earth, and the seas.

But, of course, with the coming of death into the world – there is now a fourth realm:
the underworld!

1. The Power of God Revealed in the Creation (26:5-14)

a. “Under the Waters” – the Realm of the Dead (v5-6)

⁵ *The dead tremble*

under the waters and their inhabitants.

⁶ *Sheol is naked before God,*^[b]

and Abaddon has no covering.

As he describes the realm of the dead in verses 5-6,

Job agrees with Bildad regarding God's "fearful dominion" (25:2).

The realm of the dead – Sheol (the grave) and Abaddon (destruction) –
is "under the waters and their inhabitants."

For a moment you need to set aside your modern picture of the universe.

Ancient peoples had no concept of "outer space" –
and so God revealed true knowledge about the world to them
in the language and categories that made sense to them.

The biblical picture of the world is that of the dry land established upon the seas,
with a big blue dome over the earth that holds back the "waters above."

After all, why do we talk about "space ships"?

Ships sail on water!

But for thousands of years we talked about the "cosmic sea" –
water is blue – the sky is blue –
and so there must be water up there!

Indeed, Genesis 1 talks about how God formed a "firmament"
to separate the "waters above" from the "waters beneath."

When God opened the "windows of heaven" in the Flood,
water came pouring down.

(And according to Psalm 148, those waters are still there –
as the Psalmist calls on those "waters above" to praise the LORD.)

Here, Job speaks of the realm of the dead as being *beneath* the waters.

But no matter how far you go from God,
you cannot escape his sight.

"Sheol is naked before him" –
even in the grave you cannot elude him

b. "Over the Void" – the Realm of God's Throne (v7-9)

⁷ *He stretches out the north over the void
and hangs the earth on nothing.*

⁸ *He binds up the waters in his thick clouds,
and the cloud is not split open under them.*

⁹ *He covers the face of the full moon^[c]
and spreads over it his cloud.*

In verses 7-9, then, Job reaches out in thought to the opposite extreme –
the heavens above.

The prophets often speak of God "stretching out the heavens" like a tent.

Verse 11 will speak of ‘the pillars of heaven’ –
as though there are “poles” holding up the tent of the heavens.
But here Job speaks of how the “north” is stretched out over the void –
the word here is “tohu” –
the same word used in Genesis 1 to speak of how in the beginning
the earth was “formless and void” (tohu vbohu).
The north is stretched out over the formless – over the emptiness.
The earth hangs on nothing.

The word for “hang” is the ordinary Hebrew word for hanging –
most often used to refer to someone who is hanged on a tree.

Here he says that he hangs the earth on nothing.
Literally, “on that which lacks what-ness.”

Whether you are thinking in ancient terms –
where the earth is suspended amidst the cosmic sea –
or whether you are thinking in modern terms –
where the earth is suspended in outer space –

this is an apt way of saying it.

Verse 9 says “he covers the face of the throne and spreads over it his cloud.”
I don’t understand why they translate this “full moon.”
Isaiah 66:1 says, “Heaven is my throne and the earth my footstool”
It makes perfect sense to say that God covers the face of the heavens
by spreading out the clouds.

Now – why is this important?
It’s important because this older way of looking at the universe
communicates something that we need to remember.
Our modern, scientific model of the universe doesn’t need God.
If you believe in evolution, then evolutionary mechanisms explain all change over time.
But even if you are a six, twenty-four-hour-day creationist,
you are just as likely to explain all change over time *since then*
in a naturalistic manner.

Job describes the world in terms of the way God’s power is experienced by his creatures.
As he says in verses 10-13,

c. “The Face of the Waters” – Between Light and Darkness (v10-13)

¹⁰ *He has inscribed a circle on the face of the waters
at the boundary between light and darkness.*

¹¹ *The pillars of heaven tremble
and are astounded at his rebuke.*

¹² *By his power he stilled the sea;*

by his understanding he shattered Rahab.
¹³ *By his wind the heavens were made fair;
his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.*

In verses 10-13 he then turns to the waters beneath –
in verse 10, Job says that God has inscribed a circle on the face of the waters –
referring to the utmost horizon (the “ends of the earth”) –
which is the boundary between light and darkness.

Think of the phrase “the outer darkness” beyond the circle of light.

Then in verse 12 we hear how God stilled the sea “by his power”
and shattered Rahab “by his understanding” –
thereby connecting the power and the word of God.
And in verse 13 word and power are connected in the opposite order,
“by his wind [ruach – spirit/breath] the heavens were made fair;
his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.”

Now, who is this “Rahab”?

This is *not* Rahab the prostitute from the book of Joshua (different spelling).

Rahab was an ancient sea monster (like Leviathan).
Isaiah 51:9 speaks of Rahab as the ancient sea monster that God cut in pieces
(which is closely connected *also* with the Exodus – since Egypt is named
“Rahab who sits still” in Isaiah 30:7)
Psalm 89 makes the same connection with Egypt.

By his word and power God formed the world.
By his word and power God brought Israel out of Egypt.
Isaiah and the Psalms use this to suggest that therefore
by his word and power God will bring Israel back from Exile.

So what is Job doing with these images?

Listen to verse 14:

d. “The Outskirts of His Ways” – God’s Power Is Beyond Comprehension (v14)
¹⁴ *Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways,
and how small a whisper do we hear of him!
But the thunder of his power who can understand?”*

We often think that in *our* day, secularism has made it more difficult to see God in nature.
But, after giving this glorious vision of God’s mighty power in creation,
Job says that even he only heard a small whisper of God.
We do not see the mighty deeds of old.
We hear only whispers.
And the thunder of his power who can understand?

Even for Job with his ancient view of the world,
the revelation of God in nature can sound like a whisper.

Notice again the connection between the language of power and the language of speaking.
In the beginning, God spoke, and all things were brought into being.
In the Exodus, God spoke, and Pharaoh and his armies were brought to nothing.

But that was so long ago –
and we feel so far away.

This well describes Israel's experience of the Exile.
We have heard of God's mighty deeds –
but we don't see them –
“how small a whisper do we hear of him!”

Do you feel like God's mighty deeds were long ago and far away?
Do you feel like you only hear a “small whisper” of him?

You're in good company.
Most of the authors of the Bible were in your shoes!

At the end of chapter 27 it appears that Job pauses for a moment,
as if to let Zophar have a chance to speak.
But Zophar says nothing.

And so, Job turns to his second point.
Job has spoken of the power of God –
the mighty deeds of long ago –
the mighty deeds of Creation and Exodus,
of which we now only hear a whisper.

But even if I only hear a whisper,
Job says, as long as I have breath –
as long as the spirit of God is in my nostrils,
I will speak the truth.

But speaking the truth can be complicated!

2. The Breath of God: Speaking Truth about God and Man (ch 27)

a. God Is Just and I Am Righteous (v2-6)

27 And Job again took up his discourse, and said:

² *“As God lives, who has taken away my right,
and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter,*

³ *as long as my breath is in me,
and the spirit of God is in my nostrils,*

⁴ *my lips will not speak falsehood,
and my tongue will not utter deceit.*
⁵ *Far be it from me to say that you are right;
till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.*
⁶ *I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go;
my heart does not reproach me for any of my days.*

In verse 5, Job switches into the second person plural,
as if to say that chapter 26 was his reply to Bildad –
but chapters 27-28 will be his reply to all three of his friends.

In verse two, Job says two difficult things.
Both verbs in this verse are in the causative – the hifil – stem.

First, he says that God has “taken away my right.”
The word translated “right” is the Hebrew “mishpat”
which means a ‘legal case’ or ‘justice.’
The word is used 23 times in Job.
It was used first by Bildad,
who insisted that God does not pervert justice (he does not pervert “Mishpat”).
Job has used it a couple of times when referring to “my case” before God.

It might be better, then, to translate this
God has “turned aside my case,”
because the point is that God has refused to “take the case” as it were.

We need to be very clear here, because Job is *not* saying that God has been unjust.
Rather, Job is saying that God has denied him his day in court.

Job plainly does not understand *why* God has denied him his day in court,
but it is clear to him *that* God has done this.

Second, Job says that God has “embittered” his soul.
We saw last time that Job said that his complaint was ‘bitter’ in the sense of rebellious.
Is it right for Job to say that the Almighty has “embittered my soul”?

In both parts of verse 2, Job is *very clear* that *God* is the agent.
God has caused my case to be turned away.
God has embittered my soul.

(Remember how Naomi said “call me Mara” (bitter) when she returned from Moab?
Naomi’s phrase, “for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me,”
is almost exactly the same as Job’s words here.)

When you believe that God is Almighty –
that God is God, and you are not –

then you recognize that *it is God* who has put you in this situation!

After all, that's *exactly* what has happened to Job!

God has selected Job for this trial –

“have you considered my servant Job?”

But notice what this does for Job:

He says that the Almighty is the one who has embittered his soul –

and yet he says that as long as he has breath

he will not speak falsehood.

Job will not budge from his protestations of innocence.

But neither will he “curse God and die” –

as his wife had suggested at first.

The rest of chapter 27 then can sound a bit like his friends.

But that is because Job *agrees* with his friends in many ways –

he has merely resisted the application of their wisdom to himself!

And so he says in verses 7-12:

b. God Will Cut off the Wicked – as You Know (v7-23)

⁷ “Let my enemy be as the wicked,
and let him who rises up against me be as the unrighteous.

⁸ For what is the hope of the godless when God cuts him off,
when God takes away his life?

⁹ Will God hear his cry
when distress comes upon him?

¹⁰ Will he take delight in the Almighty?
Will he call upon God at all times?

¹¹ I will teach you concerning the hand of God;
what is with the Almighty I will not conceal.

¹² Behold, all of you have seen it yourselves;
why then have you become altogether vain?

Eliphaz had said that Job has embraced the counsel of the wicked.

Job now suggests that if *he* was in fact guilty,

then he would not be teaching them concerning the hand of the Almighty.

God has cut me off – he has brought distress upon me –

and yet I call upon God.

I teach you concerning the hand of God –

and yet you refuse to see it!

Okay, fine, Job says, let me tell you about the wicked:

i. His Children Are for the Sword, Famine, and Pestilence (v13-15)

¹³ *“This is the portion of a wicked man with God,
and the heritage that oppressors receive from the Almighty:
¹⁴ If his children are multiplied, it is for the sword,
and his descendants have not enough bread.
¹⁵ Those who survive him the pestilence buries,
and his widows do not weep.*

Some people struggle with Job’s description of the wicked,
because it sounds so much like his friends.

After all, the “portion of the wicked” sounds exactly like what has happened to Job:
his children were multiplied for the sword –
and he now suffers from the pestilence.

There are those that think this must be the missing Zophar.
But I am unwilling to reconstruct the text according to ideas of what it ‘should have said.’

It would be better to say that since Zophar refuses to speak,
Job makes his speech for him.
I know what you would say in this case!

And Job agrees with his friends regarding the fate of the wicked.
Though they prosper for a time, they will go down to death in the end –
just like everyone else!

ii. His Wealth and Riches Will Vanish (v16-19)

¹⁶ *Though he heap up silver like dust,
and pile up clothing like clay,
¹⁷ he may pile it up, but the righteous will wear it,
and the innocent will divide the silver.
¹⁸ He builds his house like a moth's,
like a booth that a watchman makes.
¹⁹ He goes to bed rich, but will do so no more;
he opens his eyes, and his wealth is gone.*

I know this as well as you! Job says.
The difference between Job and his friends
is *not* that Job disagrees with the doctrine of retribution!
It is that Job disagrees that *he* is one of the wicked!

iii. The East Wind Will Sweep Him Away (v20-23)

²⁰ *Terrors overtake him like a flood;
in the night a whirlwind carries him off.
²¹ The east wind lifts him up and he is gone;
it sweeps him out of his place.
²² It^[d] hurls at him without pity;*

he flees from its^{le} power in headlong flight.
²³ *It claps its hands at him*
and hisses at him from its place.

The east wind – the same wind that smote the house of Job’s children and destroyed them –
is the wind that blows the wicked out of his place.

Job had said at the beginning of the chapter that so long as the spirit of God is in his nostrils
he would not speak falsehood.

He will speak the truth about the wicked.
He will speak the truth about himself.
Above all, he will speak the truth about God.

I hate to stop in the middle of Job’s speech –
but we don’t have time to finish chapter 28 today,
so we’ll come back to that next week!

3. The Wisdom of God: Do You Dig It? (ch 28)

I regret this because Job’s speech really only makes sense when you get to the end of chapter 28!

But since we have to stop at the end of chapter 27,
we should definitely sing Habakkuk 3 at this point!

Because Habakkuk 3 feels keenly the same point as Job.

“O LORD, I have heard the report of you,
and your work, O LORD, do I fear.

In the midst of years revive it,
in the midst of years make it known;
in wrath remember mercy.” (3:2)

Habakkuk remembers the *report* of the mighty works of God –
and recounts those mighty deeds of salvation history,
and *gives thanks* even in the midst of “rottenness.”

“Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the LORD;
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.” (v17-18)

Why does Habakkuk rejoice?

It’s not *because* he is miserable!

He rejoices – he gives thanks to God – he takes joy in the God of his salvation –
because Habakkuk sees by faith

the same Jesus whom we see by the same faith!

Sing Habakkuk 3