

JOB

Lesson 15

Chapter 24, cont'd

- a. V. 12. The climax is reached with the groans of the dying.

God neither redresses the wrongs of the downtrodden nor restrains the wicked. God seems indifferent to it all. It is easy to say that the downtrodden must be wicked while others will get theirs later. Job cannot accept such a callow theology. The inactivity of God is no sign of his disfavor.

- b. Vv. 13-17. Job selects murderers, adulterers, and thieves because their crimes are committed under the cover of darkness. They love the dark and hate the light. The coming of darkness is their morning. The worst part is that think darkness will hide them from the eyes of God.

II. VV 18-24.

- a. First, let's determine as best we can what Job is saying in these verses. I say it that way because these verses are among the most difficult verses, if not in fact the most difficult verses, in the Book of Job. While the difficulties, compounded by textual problems, are and must be admitted, it is not impossible for

these words to have come from Job's lips. A possibility that a number of commentators deny. If, as I believe, they are Job's words, what is he saying.

- i. The strongest objection to attributing this passage to Job (not to the Book of Job) is that they seem to contradict all of Job's other speeches. Critics assert that this language sounds more like Job's friends arguments than it sounds like Job's responses. Did Job misstate his position or were they not his words?
- ii. What is in this response of Job? Chapter 23 opens this reply. In it Job concentrated his attention on the on the mystery of his own suffering. In chapter 24 he concentrated on the reverse of this mystery, *i.e.* the prosperity of the wicked and their immunity from punishment. How shall he vindicate himself against Eliphaz and his cohorts? His arguments have been that he is innocent and his sufferings are unmerited while his friends contended with increasingly strong language charging Job as being more self-delusive, hypocritical, and sinful. Moreover, it seems to Job that while his

friends are abusing him by word of mouth, God is pronouncing sentence against him by his action. Thus, before he can vindicate himself to his friends, he must prove his innocence before whom on commentator and called the Author of his affliction.” What this means is that in this dispute, Job considers God as both a party and the judge. Believing there is such a conflict, Job addresses them both, and it is this apparent conflict in Job's mind that leads to the conflict in Job's response. On the one hand Job, who see himself as innocent, cannot think of the God who pursues him with suffering as a just God. On the other hand, it is God's justice that will permit Job to approach God's throne where he will be acquitted. Job's desire is that God will be convinced of his innocence and he of God's justice. It is this difference that creates the conflict, or, if you please, the lack of harmony, between his views of God that Job is addressing. It is not just the darkness of affliction that causes Job the most intense suffering; it is also the darkness that enshrouded God to Job — the perceived

angry countenance of God that Job feels is turned toward him. Job accounts the present God as his enemy. Job's faith clings to the God of the future who will and must vindicate him when that God allows himself to be seen, but is not to be found at the present. Thus Job cannot get free from his present suffering and the future is veiled in darkness.

iii. Where does this leave Job? Do Job's words in this section contradict his prior words? It seems more likely in this section (and two similar sections later (26:5-14; 27:13-33)) that Job is looking beyond the prosperity of the wicked and ungodly in this life to their final destiny.

1. God does not punish the wicked immediately. In many instances he does not do so in this life. Job appears to have arrived at the same conclusion as David in Psalm 37 and Asaph in Psalm 73. Job's words in v. 24 are similar to David's in Psalm 37:35-36: "I have seen a wicked and ruthless man flourishing like a green tree in its native soil, but he soon passed away and was no more; thought I

looked for him, he could not be found.” Although Job complained of the apparent prosperity of the wicked, when he considered their final destiny he realized that their end would be destruction.

Likewise Asaph, speaking of the evildoers whom he was tempted to envy, concluded: “Then I understood their final destiny (Psalm 73:17). What was their destiny? Addressing God, Asaph declared, “Those who are far from our will perish; you will destroy all who are unfaithful to you” (Psalm 73:27).

2. 2. Let us now return to the text. In verses 18-25 of this chapter Job again mentions the cruel and vicious deeds of the wicked as they do violence to helpless women (v. 21). For a while they prosper and feel secure (v. 24). But their prosperity will not last forever. They are described as foam on the surface of the water and as melted snow. They will die and become a feast for worms. They are compared to broken trees. Although they may feel

secure in their lifestyles, God will call them to account. Given this, v. 23 is best understood that God is watching evildoers and will not let their deeds go unpunished.

b. But what about the alleged conflict between what Job had just said in vv. 1-17 and that which he now says?

i. How do those who find a conflict arrive at that conclusion? Taking away the fancy language they might use, they have concluded that Job did not say what they thought he should say. What they have done is to set themselves up as the judge of inspiration. Although they mention some textual problems (and there are some), in plain language their basic argument is that they know better than Job what he should have argued in this response. The reach that conclusion in one of three ways.

1. The words should be completely removed because they are a pious gloss fabricated to make Job sound more orthodox than he was.

2. The words are transferred to Bildad or Zophar because in their opinion the words sound more like one of the friends than like Job. They further suggest that Bildad's third place is very short and Zophar gave no third speech at all. Since these are shorter than normal, and Job's third response is much longer than usual, some of the friends' words must have made their way into Job's speech by text displacement. It apparently never occurred to them that Bildad had just one last arrow to fire and Zophar's quiver was already completely empty. Additionally, every prior speech identified the speaker by name. No argument is made that with the text displacement they claim or any other text displacement moved either the name of Bildad or Zophar into Job's lengthy third response.
3. The words originated with the friends but in this passage Job is quoting the friends in vv. 18-20 and is responding to them in vv. 21-24. At least one

commentator places all of vv. 18-24 in Job's quotation.

- ii. Isn't it strange that the claim's proponents cannot agree on something that is so plain and certain?
- c. Is there any response to the claims other than the ones already made?
 - i. Job has never maintained that the wicked never come to the bad end described by Eliphaz (5:2-7; 15:17-35;)'Bildad (8:8-19; 18:5-21), or Zophar (20:4-29).
 - ii. When Job asked, "How often is it that the lamp of the wicked is put out/" (21:17), the implied answer is not "Never." Instead his impression is that God treats good and bad alike. Among the prosperous are righteous and wicked. Disaster overtakes the vicious, but also the virtuous. In the end, death takes them all (21:23-26).

The bottom line is that Job did not respond to his friends by an exaggeration of his own, claiming that God is hostile to the upright and an accomplice of the wicked. He simply cannot see how God's justice works out in his own situation, which he recognizes is just one of many.

Job's position is more balanced, but it is also more baffled. Out of his confusion, if that be the right word, there is no reason that he should not address this problem again by using one poem about the apparent immunity of criminals from divine intervention (vv. 13-17), and another poem about the frustration of their enterprises by death or some other set-back (vv. 18-24). Even some of those that contend that some of vv. 18-24 are not Job's language admit that some of the language is compatible with what they accept as Job's position. The RSV inserts "you say" at the beginning of v. 18 even though it is not present in the Hebrew. Its purpose is to have Job quote the words as having been spoken by the friends and quoted by Job. On the other hand, the RSV let's Job have vv. vv. 21-24 as his response to vv. 18-20. Truly, the RSV carves with a sharp knife to separate the two!

- III. V. 25. Job concludes his response by challenging his friends to prove him wrong. The response to the challenge is a brief and weak speech by Bildad and silence by Zophar.

Chapter 25

C. D. iii. Bildad's answer – 25:1-6.

- I. We are about to “here the end of the whole matter” as the writer of Ecclesiastes says in Chapter 12. Bildad wears out after six verses; Zophar has nothing more to say. Job's friends have run out of steam as well as arguments. Bildad really has nothing more to say, but he says it anyway. Most of his argument is repetition from his prior confrontations.
- II. VV. 2-3.
 - a. In his last speech Bildad contrasts God's majesty and man's sinfulness. He does so in a manner to establish that God is in control. Not even the highest angels can challenge his rule, “he makes peace in his high heaven” (v. 2). With God's control there can be no rebellion or disturbance.
 - b. If God is in control in heaven, what man can challenge him on earth? God is in complete control. God is mighty in battle – no one can count his army. He is kind to man – he shines light

upon them all. “Let there be light” were God’s first recorded speech in the Bible. However, that same light enables God to see all people at all times (v. 3).

III. VV. 4-6.

- a. Since God is in absolute control and sees all, it is impossible for man to be right before God. It is impossible for man born of woman to be pure (v. 4).
- b. In the presence of God’s majesty, even the moon and the heavenly bodies pale and are not pure in his eyes. If these heavenly bodies pale before God, man must be a maggot and the son of woman a worm (vv. 5-6).

Chapter 26

2.D. iv – Job’s response – 26:1-14.

Job’s response in ch. 26 is one of the grandest recitations in the Book. It is excelled only by the Lord’s speeches. It is divided into two parts. First there is a sarcastic response to Bildad (vv. 2-4). Second there is a magnificent description of God’s power in creation (vv. 5-14). All of Job’s counselors spoke words praising God, but in these verses Job

praised God more eloquently than any of his friends. Only God himself surpassed Job in describing his power and majesty (ch. 38).

I. VV. 2-4.

- a. Vv. 2-3. The pronouns in these verses are singular. Job is addressing one person, Bildad, with biting sarcasm. Who can blame him given the friends speeches? Sarcasm is not necessarily wrong. God himself will speak to Job with extreme sarcasm. Job's three friends won't listen to a gentle answer, so they need strong words with some sting. Job obliges. He charges Bildad with proclaiming that he is a person with no power, no strength, and no wisdom. His arm, that in biblical days was generally a metaphor for strength, was weak. Bildad's counsel was useless and without wisdom; his insight was without help. Job's statements were surely made with tongue-in-cheek and rolling eyes!
- b. V. 4. Job asks a penetrating question: "With whose help have you uttered words, and whose breath has come out from you?" Was it God or Satan speaking through Bildad? Was his voice the voice of God or of Satan? Were his words

from heaven or hell? Recall that in ch. 1 Satan had challenged God that Job did not fear God for no reason, and that if he could just take away from Job everything that he had, Job would curse God to his face. Satan threw all of the weapons of hell at Job to cause him to curse God. When the loss of family, fortune, and health failed. Satan had one more challenge. If he could but reach out and touch Job's bone and flesh, Job would yet curse God. God granted permission. Satan attacked Job's body sores from his feet to his head. He then attacked Job through his wife. When that failed, he attacked Job through his friends. In reality these three friends were mouthpieces for Satan sent to subvert Job's faith.

- II. VV. 5-14. Since Bildad is ignorant of God, Job instructs him. The student (Job) knows more than the teacher (Bildad). Job starts with the underworld and expands until the entire universe is explored. Job momentarily pierces through the veil of his suffering to sing a sublime hymn to the power of God in creation. Job is up and down, but isn't that what it is like to be in the storm. Trials come in billows, wave upon wave. We see more from the

crest. Between waves there are troughs, interludes of strange peace. A lull in the midst of the fray; an eye in the midst of the storm.

- a. Vv. 5-6. Job describes God as the one who has complete power over the dead. When death beckons, all must yield. There is no difference between the slave and the King. Nothing or no one holds any secrets from God. Sheol is naked before him and Abbadon is uncovered. Abbadon means “destruction,” but some commentators suggest it refers to Satan. John used the word in Rev. 9:11 and although it sounds like Satan, it still literally means “destruction.” In either case, it is certainly a place where the inhabitants will seek cover to hide them from the eye of God.
- b. V. 7. Some language is from the creation account. The word for “empty space” in some translations is correctly translated “void” as in the ESV. It is the same word translated “void” in Gen. 1:2.
 - i. It is not clear that the reference to the “empty place” is a reference to an empty space in the north sky. Bro.

Homer Hailey suggests that none of this information was by inspiration but was by Job's observation of the world. He wrote, "God revealed spiritual truth, and left it to man to discover cosmological truth."

- ii. The following article from *Apologetics Press* provides an excellent discussion of the use of this verse.

Scientific Foreknowledge and the Bible

Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

Q.

I have heard it said that one of the most impressive proofs for the Bible's inspiration is its scientific foreknowledge. Yet I also have heard it said that certain passages often used as evidence of that foreknowledge have been misapplied. What is the truth of the matter?

A.

This question provides an excellent opportunity to do some badly needed teaching on the subject of the scientific foreknowledge found in the Bible. Unfortunately, some today advance the idea that biblical information and scientific data are two mutually exclusive, diametrically opposed spheres. Some even have gone so far as to suggest that while science deals with "fact," Scripture deals with "faith" (isn't that usually the belief of the "man on the street"?). Nothing could be further from the truth. The God Who created nature is the same God Who is the Author of the Bible (2

Timothy 3:16). Since God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), He will not give us two sources of information (science and the Bible) that contradict one another. Every human being has the right to expect the Bible, as an inspired revelation from God, to be accurate scientifically. While it does not purport to be a technical scientific treatise, it does speak accurately on whatever area it addresses. Inspiration guarantees no less.

Additionally, it is possible that the Scriptures, whenever they happen to touch upon a matter that relates to some phase of the material/physical Universe, even have **anticipated** scientific facts that man, by means of his own intellectual curiosity, would not discover for decades, centuries, or millennia. God's revelation of truth is not limited by man's development of knowledge, however slow or rapid that development may be. Scientific foreknowledge may be defined as the statement of a scientific fact at a certain time and place by someone who could not possibly know of that fact without receiving special (supernatural) revelation. This definition contains no specific implication as to the cognizance of the person receiving the revelation. That is to say, we do not necessarily have to expect that the inspired person understood what he was saying. Yet the revelation in God's Word of certain facts known only to modern science through the use of advanced analytical methods employing sophisticated equipment is a sure sign of the presence of scientific foreknowledge in the Scriptures. Jean S. Morton observed:

Many scientific facts, which prove the infallibility of Scripture, are tucked away in its pages. These proofs are given in nonscientific language; nevertheless, they substantiate the claims of the authenticity of the Holy Scriptures.... In some cases, scientific concepts have

been known through the ages, but these concepts are mentioned in a unique manner in Scripture. In other cases, scientific topics have been mentioned hundreds or even thousands of years before man discovered them (1978, p. 10).

While there are many exciting areas that provide impressive proof for the inspiration of God's Word (prophecy, historical accuracy, internal consistency, etc.), the scientific accuracy of the Bible should not be overlooked as bringing its own weighty testimony to bear on this important topic. In fact, I have written on this very matter previously (Thompson, 1981, 1985). The present discussion is not intended to offer specific examples of scientific foreknowledge; the sources referenced above will direct the reader to such examples. Rather, this article focuses on the misuse, or misapplication, of passages that in the past have been thought by some to possess scientific foreknowledge, yet which, under closer scrutiny, do not meet the criteria for such. The question before us asks for clarification on the existence, and proper use, of scientific foreknowledge.

The matter of prescientific knowledge in the Bible has been characterized by extremes at both ends of the spectrum. Some have argued irrationally for scientific anticipation practically everywhere in the Bible. One writer suggested that the Bible anticipated: automobiles (Joel 2:3-4); airplanes (Isaiah 31:56); submarines (Revelation 9:1-11); radio (Ecclesiastes 10:20); and television (Revelation 11:3-12) [Beirnes, 1951, pp. 31-32]. On the other hand, there are those who contend that there are virtually no examples of real scientific foreknowledge in the sacred writings (Ramm, 1954; England, 1983, pp. 144-145). Bernard Ramm even has gone so far as to state that "the Spirit of God did not convey the inner constitution of things to the authors of the Bible,

but...the infallibly inspired theological truth is conveyed in the cultural terms of the cultural period of the writer” (p. 86). Interestingly, Dr. Ramm was unable to explain how a “theological truth” could be conveyed through a **scientifically erroneous** cultural medium! The question must be asked: Does God use error to convey spiritual truth?

Obviously, the truth of the matter lies somewhere between these two extremes. The careful student of God’s Word never will want to portray, either purposely or inadvertently, passages in the Bible as saying more (or less) than those passages were intended to say. If there is good evidence for scientific foreknowledge in the Bible, let us present that evidence at face value. If, on the other hand, we must “reinterpret” passages, or impose on them a strained interpretation that forces them to disgorge prescientific knowledge, then let us reexamine our interpretation so that such is not necessary.

Through the years, for example, various authors have sought to establish scientific foreknowledge in the passage found in Job 26:7 where Job, in speaking of God, observed that “He stretcheth out the north over the empty space, and hangeth the earth upon nothing.” Two items from the passage are alleged to be prescientific in nature. First, appeals have been made to the fact that supposedly one can observe an “empty space” in the northern skies—a space where there are no stars, thereby corroborating Job’s statement that there is an “empty space” in the north. Second, some have suggested that since Job’s phrase, “hangeth the earth upon nothing” is literally true, this is an example of scientific foreknowledge because, as everyone now knows, the Earth is suspended freely in space.

In the past, on occasion I used this verse as an example of scientific foreknowledge in the Bible, but I do so no longer because of the problems associated with such an interpretation. For example, if we attempt to convince people that this verse is to be taken literally, how do we then handle (consistently) statements in the same chapter that quite obviously are figurative (like verse 11: “The pillars of heaven tremble, and are astonished at his reproof”)? Furthermore, how would someone go about determining that there is an “empty space” in the “north”? If a person stood in his back yard and pointed toward geographical north during the month of January, and then were to repeat that action again in July, he would be pointing toward two completely different regions of space (since the revolution of the Earth around the Sun results in the Earth’s being on opposite sides of the Sun at those two times). Plus, during those two months the Earth is tilted differently on its rotational axis. And last, the simple fact remains that “billions of stars and galaxies extend outward in **all** directions” (DeYoung, 1989, p. 95).

Moreover, there are alternative explanations of Job’s statements that seem to fit better with the overall sense of the passage. First, some scholars have suggested that Job actually was contrasting the power of Jehovah with the impotence of Canaanite deities. J.E. Hartley noted that:

In Canaanite mythology the north was considered to be the place for the meeting of the assembly of the gods. The gods assembled on Mount *Sapan* [*sapan* is Hebrew for “north” —BT].... Here Baal reigned supreme.

Job says that God stretches out the north over the void (26: 7). This statement shows that God created even the...mountain of the gods from nothing. No evil power or god or divine assembly, therefore, has any

existence co-eternal with God or any power or existence outside of God's creative power (cf Ps 89:12) [1980, pp. 774-775].

Thus the passage would show that Job, a wise man of antiquity who had a close relationship with God, knew how to deal a death blow to pagan claims of mythological gods who allegedly inhabited the "north." Where these gods were supposed to have lived, there was nothing. Hence, even they did not exist! This understanding harmonizes well with the view that the phrase "and hangeth the earth upon nothing" refutes the pagan notions that the Earth rested upon the back of a turtle or an elephant.

Second, it has been suggested that Job is describing the sky in a poetical fashion similar to Psalm 104:2: "Who coverest thyself with light as a garment; Who stretchest out the heaven like a curtain." If so, then Job is saying that this northern covering (i.e., the sky) is draped over nothing (viz., there is nothing physical to support it). Thus, "the north is stretched out and sustained by the mere power of God" (Barnes, 1949, p. 40). This agrees with the latter half of the verse, which says that the Earth, too, is suspended without support. While it is true that the Earth does "hang upon nothing," proper exegesis (and considering the context of the remainder of the chapter) seemingly will not allow the statements to be viewed necessarily as scientific foreknowledge concerning such things as holes in the northern skies or Newton's law of gravity that explains how the Earth hangs upon nothing.

In fairness, let me point out that certain authors (e.g., Morris, 1988, pp. 39-40) have suggested alternative interpretations for Job 26:7 that allow for possible scientific foreknowledge while avoiding some of the problems mentioned above. Consistency with literal-versus-figurative

interpretation in the same chapter, however, appears to me to remain a problem. Other authors (e.g., Jackson, 1983, pp. 123-125) believe that a partial answer to problematic passages may lie in the fact that while inspiration guided the actual writing of the book of Job, Job himself was uninspired and spoke only for himself, not necessarily for the Lord.

The honest Christian wants to defend the Scriptures with every legitimate weapon in the apologetic arsenal. However, we do the cause of Christ a disservice when we employ arguments that are extremely weak at best, and patently wrong at worst. When a mistake has been made, it should be admitted, corrected, and avoided in the future. It also should provide a valuable teaching tool on how to better examine the Scriptures in light of the context of each passage under consideration. Yes, the Scriptures **do** contain good examples of scientific foreknowledge. And yes, there have been some “misapplications” or abuses of certain passages. Let us remember two things as we strive to defend the Bible: (1) because a mistake may have been made in this area in the past does not nullify the many correct examples of scientific foreknowledge that do exist; and (2) if we are to err, let us err on the side of caution; there are too many good examples of scientific foreknowledge in the Bible for us to employ weak or spurious arguments in our defense of God’s Word.

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- c. I will leave it to you to determine which position you prefer, but the *Apologetics Press* article is persuasive to me.
- III. V. 8. Clouds are full of water but do not burst under the weight.
- IV. V. 9. The bright light of the moon is under his authority.
- V. V. 10. He inscribed a circle on the surface of the water that acted

as a cosmic caliper to set a boundary.

- VI. V. 11. The pillars of heaven (mountains that seem to support the sky) tremble.
- VII. V. 12. He masters the sea and regulates its movements.
- VIII. V. 13. He clears the sky after the rain.
- IX. V. 14. All that has been heard are but the fringes of his ways, and yet little is said of him. He is heard by his mighty thunder.
 - a. Mark 6:56 speaks of the hem of Jesus garment. Job had neither the Christ nor his garment, but he had the universe created by him and for him (Col. 1:16). If he could not see God, he could see the tassels of his robe.

Orthodox Jews wore fringes on their garments (Num 15:38). All the marvels of creation were fringes on the robe of God. How great must this God be! He suspended the globe of the earth as a bauble on his bracelet. He puts on the dawn as we put on old pants to more. The seven seas are coins in his pocket.