

How Do We Know We Are In Sin?

September 30, 2018 - Job 26-27 - Read Online at epmkg.com/job26-27

Job's Third Reply to Bildad. 26:1-14.

Job pursues more impressively and to better purpose the theme attempted by Bildad—God's wondrously wise ways (cf. 9:4-10; 12:13-25).

2-4. The patriarch indulges his bent for sarcasm as he turns in disdain from Bildad's useless recitation. **From whom hast thou declared words** (4a. On *.ēṭ*, "from," cf. Akk. *ittu*; on this use of *.ēṭ*, with *higgi ʾd*, cf. Mic 3:8). Bildad's ideas were but echoes of Eliphaz', and his use of them to condemn Job was more likely inspired by Satan than by God.

5-14. **They that are deceased tremble Beneath the waters and the inhabitants thereof** (v. 5, ASV). More remarkable than the awe God instills in beings near his heavenly throne (25:2) is the consternation his wisdom and dominion bring to the shades in Sheol (26:5, 6). Whether Job's cosmology actually agreed with ancient concepts or is merely figuratively expressed, it is not presented as necessarily normative revelation. In his survey of the evidences of God's greatness, the speaker now passes from the underworld to this world (vv. 7-13). Though verse 7 might envisage creative action, this section as a whole pictures God's general providential rule of nature. **The north over empty space** (v. 7a, ASV), refers to the northern heavens. **He incloseth the face of his throne** (v. 9a, ASV) means, He veils the heaven with clouds. The qualification in 26:10b is not temporal (AV) but spatial (ASV). **The pillars of heaven** (v. 11), are mountains, their peaks hidden in clouds. **He smiteth through Rahab** (v. 12b, ASV) ... **His hand hath pierced the fleeing serpent** (v. 13b, ASV marg.). God controls the upper and lower waters to procure favorable climatic order. For the mythological imagery, cf. Isa 27:1; Ugaritic text, Gordon **UH 67, I, 1ff. Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways: And how small a whisper do we hear of him!** (v. 14a,b, ASV; cf. ch. 28) If Job's friends had recognized the limitations of their knowledge, they would have avoided their misinterpretations. Job's praise of the perfection of God's knowledge contradicts their identification of him with ungodly men.

e) Job's Instruction of the Silenced Friends. 27:1–28:28.

Since Zophar fails to speak, Job continues, now addressing all the friends (cf. plurals in 27:11, 12). Aware of his mastery, he assumes the role of teacher (27:11). After once

again declaiming his righteousness, with a strong oath (27:1-7), he contrasts his own experience with that of the wicked (27:8-23). Chapter 28 is an artistic introduction to the way of wisdom. Modern critics have argued forcefully that the text from 27:7 on has suffered disarrangement. They contend that the sentiments expressed contradict Job's previous remarks, or, in the case of chapter 28, are incompatible with the sequel. It seems possible, however, to defend the originality of the present textual arrangement, and the following exposition is based upon it.

27:1-7. **As God liveth, who hath taken away my right** (v. 2a, ASV). This oath remarkably epitomizes Job's spiritual dilemma. On the one hand, it proclaims God the God of truth, and on the other, charges that his treatment of Job is unjust. **Surely my lips do not speak unrighteousness** (v. 4a, ASV, marg.). This is not a vow (AV); it is a declaration that Job's unshakable claim to integrity (vv. 5, 6) is true to conscience and fact. **Let mine enemy be as the wicked** (v. 7a). The reader of the Prologue appreciates how diabolical was the accusation that Job's piety was not genuine.

8-23. **For what is the hope of the godless when God cuts him off?** (v. 8a, RSV) No longer driven to reactionary extremes by the pressure of debate, Job achieves a more penetratingly spiritual analysis of the ungodly. They are without God in the world. That means not only that they will suffer eternal perdition (v. 8), but that they have no divine refuge amid present trouble (vv. 9, 10; cf. 22b). **Why then are ye become altogether vain?** (v. 12b, ASV) The friends should have recognized by Job's persistent crying to God that their identification of him with the godless was false (cf. 35:9ff.). **This is the portion of a wicked man with God** (v. 13a; cf. 20:29; 31:2). The prosperity of an ungodly family (vv. 14-18) is not passed down through successive generations. As for a wicked individual, prosperity is not his final destiny (vv. 19-23). Job so far modifies his former statement as to agree with his silenced opponents that the prosperity of the wicked is not the dominant trend in the world. But he still recognizes that the wicked may prosper for a season. And any such exception is fatal to the logic of the theory that condemned him.¹

26:1-4. In stunning irony, **Job** mocked Bildad's futile attempt to help him. Bildad had treated Job as if he were **powerless ... feeble** (cf. 18:7), and **without wisdom** (cf. 18:2). But Bildad, Job asserted, had not supported him, or strengthened him, or given him any helpful **advice** or **insight** at all. About all Bildad could think about was what happens to the wicked (8:8-19; 18:5-21) and about man's debased condition (25:4-6). No one **helped** Bildad with his **words**, which obviously were of no value. He and his cohorts were "worthless physicians" (13:4) and "miserable comforters" (16:2).

¹ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: Old Testament* (Job 26:1-27:8). Chicago: Moody Press.

26:5–6. Some commentators ascribe verses 5–14 to Bildad, to make his third speech longer, or to Zophar to give him a third verbal assault. However, it was typical of Job to outdo his disputers in statements about God’s transcendence. Did Bildad think he knew something of the majesty of the Almighty? (25:2–3) Then he ought to listen to what Job knew of the Lord’s supremacy!

God is over **death** (26:5–6), outer space and the earth (v. 7), the clouds (vv. 8–9), light and darkness (v. 10), things on the earth (mountains and the sea, vv. 11–12), and the sky (v. 13).

Before God **the dead** are lying in **anguish** (an indication of conscious torment; cf. Luke 16:24) **beneath the waters**, where the dead were envisioned to be, and in *še’ôl* (“sheol”) or **Destruction** (“Abaddon,” a synonym of sheol; cf. Job 28:22; 31:12).

The word “dead” (“departed spirits,” *nasb*) translates the Hebrew word *repā’îm*, which sometimes is used of a people known as the “Rephaites” and sometimes is used to refer to the dead. The Rephaites were tall like the Anakim (Deut. 2:20–21). At least four giant Rephaites are mentioned by name in the Old Testament: Og (Deut. 3:11; cf. Josh. 12:4; 13:12); Ishbi-Benob (a descendant of Rapha; 2 Sam. 21:16); Saph (2 Sam. 21:18; spelled Sippai in 1 Chron. 20:4); and Goliath (2 Sam. 21:19). Second Samuel 21:20 refers to another tall Rephaite, who is unnamed. Rephaites are mentioned in Genesis 14:5; 15:20; Deuteronomy 2:11; 3:13; and Joshua 17:15.

In Ugaritic, Rephaites were the chief gods or aristocratic warriors, apparently called that because both groups were seemingly giant-like in their power. When *repā’îm* in Ugaritic was used of the dead it seemed to suggest “the elite among the dead.” In Hebrew it may suggest the elite among the dead (cf. Isa. 14:9, “those who were leaders in the world”) or it may simply be a synonym of other common words for the dead. *Repā’îm* occurs in Psalm 88:10b, “those who are dead”; Proverbs 2:18, “the spirits of the dead”; 9:18, “the dead”; 21:16, “the dead”; Isaiah 14:9, “the spirits of the departed”; 26:14, “departed spirits”; 26:19c, “dead.” Job’s point in Job 26:5 seems to be that even the elite dead are in anguish because God knows and sees them.

26:7–10. God sustains the **skies** (cf. v. 13) **over empty space** and supports **the earth on nothing**—statements amazingly in accord with facts not known or agreed on by scientists till a few hundred years ago. In the **clouds** in the sky God gathers up water (evaporation), and He can cover **the ... moon** with **clouds**. At the **horizon ... light and darkness** seem to separate. The horizon is circular, for the verb **marks out** translates the word *hūq*, “to draw a circle,” and suggests the curvature of the earth. This too accords with the facts known by scientists only in recent times.

26:11–14. Not only is God awesome in His control over space and the earth in space. He also is majestic on the earth. He causes earthquakes and **sea** storms, which He then calms.

The pillars of the heavens figuratively refer to mountains that seem to support the sky (cf. 9:6). The raging sea is pictured as a sea god named **Rahab** (cf. comments on 9:13), whom God defeated. **The gliding serpent** may be another description of this sea god, also known as Leviathan (Isa. 27:1). God is over the sea, and He is also superior to all mythological representations of evil.

By the wind, God's **breath**, He clears the sky of clouds after a storm. This reveals **His power** and **wisdom** (cf. Job 9:4).

All these evidences of God's power over nature (of things below, above, and on the earth) are only meager indications (**the outer fringe**) of what He does. People are so distant from God that they **hear** only a **whisper** (cf. 4:12) and obviously then cannot possibly fully comprehend all God's activities in His **power**.

b. Job's description of the fate of the wicked (chap. 27)

27:1–6. Before addressing the plight of the wicked (vv. 7–23) **Job** again affirmed his innocence (vv. 1–6) perhaps in an effort to show that he was not one of the godless. Repeatedly Job had accused **God** of injustice (6:4; 7:20; 10:2–3; 13:24; 16:12–13; 19:7; 23:14) and of giving him inner **bitterness** (3:20; 7:11; 10:1; 23:2). Even so, Job again affirmed his innocence as he had done before in responses to Eliphaz (6:10, 29–30; 16:17; 23:10–12), Bildad (9:21–22; 10:7), and Zophar (12:4; 13:18–19). He said that **as long as** he lived (27:3, 6), with God's **breath** in him (cf. 10:12; 12:10; 34:14–15), he would not **admit** to wrongdoing; he simply could not accept his friends' (**you** is pl. in 27:5, 11–12) viewpoint, or **deny** (cf. **denied** in v. 2) his **integrity** which his wife had urged him to do (2:9). Even with all his friends' badgering, Job was confident that he would retain his **righteousness** and that his **conscience** would **not reproach** (*hāraq*, “speak sharp, accusing things against”) him.

27:7–12. Imprecating his **enemies** (did Job have in mind his fellows at the ash pile?), he then asked four questions that pointed to the hopeless condition of **the godless** person (*‘awāl*, “an unrighteous person”; cf. 18:21; 29:17; 31:3). When dying (**when God takes away his life**; cf. God as the source of life, 10:12), he will call on **God**, but since he prays only when in **distress** God will not answer him.

Job said he, in contrast with the wicked, could even instruct his compatriots about God's **ways** (thus reversing what Eliphaz said in 22:22). Since they had **seen** evidences of God's works, they were wrong to continue their false and empty (**meaningless**, *hebel*, 7:16; 9:29, “in vain”; 21:34, “nonsense”; 35:16, “empty”) accusations, claiming **God** was punishing an innocent person.

27:13–23. Many scholars assign these words to Zophar because this would give him a third speech and because the words seem more consistent with him than with Job.

However, Job had already spoken of the fate of the wicked (24:18–24). He never denied the ultimate punishment of God’s enemies, but he *did* deny their immediate judgment, contrary to Zophar’s claim (20:5; 21:7). If Zophar could speak of **the fate of the wicked** and their **heritage** (20:29), so could Job. A vile person’s family members are subject to death by warfare (**the sword**), starvation, or **the plague**. He will also lose his possessions. Though he may be “filthy rich,” with vast amounts of **silver** and many **clothes**, they will pass into the hands of others. His **house** will be as empty as a deserted **cocoon**, as unstable as a temporary shelter **made by a farmer** for guarding his crops. His wealth will be **gone** suddenly, and will quickly be carried off by a storm, the strong sirocco **east wind**. It will make fun of him (clap **its hands** and hiss) while he tries to escape its merciless **power**.²

Response to Bildad

26:1–14

Job responds to Bildad by (1) rebuking his attitude; and (2) presenting his own portrait of the greatness of God.

A. Bildad’s Weakness (26:1–4)

Bildad had argued that man, including Job, was puny and vile; Job responded by indicating that Bildad was the puny one. Job sarcastically expresses his admiration of Bildad’s speech, and gratitude for the help it has been to him. The patriarch makes four accusations.

First, Bildad’s brief speech had been no help to Job. If the patriarch was so weak and puny, why had not this friend “saved the arm without strength,” i.e., supported, or helped Job. Second, Bildad had offered Job no wisdom or given any helpful insight regarding his plight. If Job was so stupid, why had not Bildad educated him? (26:2–3).

Third, Bildad had addressed his speech to one who was superior to him in wisdom: “To whom have you uttered words?” (12:3). Fourth, Bildad had spoken under his own inspiration, not that of the Holy Spirit, nor even that of the wise men of old. Bildad had been unable to help Job, and no one had helped him with his speech. Bildad was only speaking off the top of his head (26:4).

B. God’s Greatness in the Underworld (26:5–6)

² Zuck, R. B. (1985). Job. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 749–750). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Bildad had stated that God was majestic; Job responded with statements about God's majesty that were far more majestic than Bildad's. God's power manifests itself in the underworld of departed spirits, and in the upper world of the earth and heavens.

Bildad had referred to the power of God as "making peace on high," i.e., in the heavens (25:2). Yet Job affirms that God's power is felt even in Sheol. The Rephaim (departed spirits) reside in Sheol. The word seems to mean "the elite among the dead." That place of departed spirits is represented poetically as lying deep down under the waters of the sea, i.e., far removed from the scenes of earth. The dark and dreary Sheol is naked before the eyes of God. Abaddon⁶ or Destruction (cf. 28:22) here is a synonym for Sheol (26:5-6).

C. God's Greatness in the Heavens (26:7-10)

In the heavens Job sees three evidences of the majesty of the Lord. First, God stretches out the brilliant constellations of the northern heavens as one would stretch out a tent on a pole. The heavens are stretched out "over empty space," i.e., the massive void between earth and heaven. He "hangs the earth on nothing." The earth is supported by nothing material. Therefore it must be supported by God himself (26:7).

Second, men bind up water in skins or bottles; God "binds up the waters in his thick clouds." Job was amazed at the thought that the clouds are floating reservoirs, which do not burst under the weight of torrential waters which they contain. God's power alone can account for this amazing thing. God can even use the clouds to obscure the full moon (26:8-9).

Third, God has "drawn a circle on the surface of the waters." The reference most likely is to the horizon which appears to be circular. The sun rises over the eastern horizon, moves across the arch of the heavens, and sets beyond the western horizon. Beyond this invisible circle lies the utter darkness of space (26:10).

D. God's Greatness in the Earth (26:11-14)

On earth Job sees three more evidences of God's majesty. First, the "pillars of heaven," i.e., the lofty mountains that reach into the clouds, "tremble" at the rebuke of the Lord. The reference is probably to thunder which in poetic literature is depicted as the voice of God. Another view is that when earthquakes shake the earth the mountains tremble with terror at his majesty (26:11).

Second, God stills the tempestuous sea. In Semitic thought the raging sea was personified and called Rahab (cf. 9:13). The God of the Bible smites this raging monster, i.e., he brings calm to the turbulent waters (26:12).

Third, by the breath of his mouth the Lord clears away the dreary skies so as to reveal the brightness of the heavens. Like a great dragon, the storm clouds swallowed up, as it

were, the heavenly bodies. God, however, pierces and slays that swift serpent (26:13). In both this verse and the preceding there may be an allusion to the monsters which were deities in Canaanite theology. If so, the thought is that Yahweh is superior to all the imaginary gods of the heathen.

The power of God is surely illustrated in the mighty works described above. Yet what men can see of him in these works is but the “fringes” of his real operations. What men may hear of God is but a faint whisper. No man can comprehend the full unfolding of the thunderous power of the Almighty! (26:14). That Job’s awareness of God’s awesome power exceeded that of Bildad is clear from these words.

A Defense of his Innocence

27:1-23

Job paused to permit Zophar to speak, but this blustering friend had exhausted his wisdom on the subject at hand. Therefore, Job resumes his own discourse. Here he addresses all three companions.

A. Proclamation of Innocence (27:1-6)

With the solemnity of an oath by God, Job declares that he speaks in sincerity when affirming his innocence. “As God lives” was a traditional oath formula which indicated that what was about to be said was as certain as God’s existence. Job senses the irony of swearing by God while at the same time accusing the Lord of gross injustice. By afflicting him, God has taken away Job’s “right,” i.e., his right standing before the Lord. By refusing to hear Job’s case God had “embittered” his soul. From these words it is obvious that Job’s mind has not changed. He still believes in God for he swears by him; but he charges God with injustice. An appeal to God stands side by side with an accusation against him (27:1-2).

As long as there was life (lit., breath) in his emaciated body, Job insisted that he would speak only the truth. He, therefore, could not concede that the friends were right in charging him with gross sin. Until his death Job declares that he would not “put away my integrity,” i.e., refrain from asserting his innocence. Throughout his days he had held fast to righteousness, and he would not now let it go. His “heart,” i.e., conscience, did not reproach him for his claims. This strongly worded oath of innocence is consistent with Job’s earlier protestations of innocence (27:3-6).

B. Imprecation Regarding his Enemies (27:7-11)

In the remaining verses of chapter 27 Job recounts the fate of the wicked man. He expresses the desire that his enemies share the fate of that wicked man. This is another

way in which he affirms his own innocence. He did not consider himself among the wicked or guilty. In ancient justice one who made a false accusation against another had to suffer the penalty of the crime wrongly charged. The implication is that the three friends had falsely accused Job and thus deserved to suffer the punishment which they imagined that he should suffer (27:7).

In a series of three questions Job points out the dreary and desolate condition of the mind of the wicked person in affliction. The godless person has (1) no hope in the hour of death, (2) no answer when he cries for help in time of distress, and (3) no recourse to God throughout his life. The point is that the wicked have no place to turn when they need higher help. Since he had no fellowship with God, the wicked person cannot appeal to him. If Job was discouraged because of the silence of the heavens, at least he had someone to whom he could run in his plight. This fact alone would prove that he was not to be numbered among the wicked (27:8–10).

Eliphaz had urged Job to receive instruction from God (cf. 22:21–27). Job now reverses this suggestion. He will instruct the three friends—the second person pronoun is plural—regarding God’s power as it is revealed in his dealings with the wicked. Nonetheless, what he would tell them would only be reminders of what they already knew about God (27:10–11).

C. The Portion of the Wicked (27:12–23)

Job next begins to discourse on the fate of the wicked. The utter destruction of the wicked is exhibited in five pictures. First, the wicked person loses his children. Though they be numerous, his children would be killed in war or would suffer in famine. Those who survived these fates would die of plague. The urgency of their burial would be such that customary funeral rites would be suspended (27:12–15). These words seem to contradict what Job asserted about the children of the wicked in 21:8–9. The earlier passage refutes the notion that the loss of children are proof of wickedness; this passage points to the ultimate fate of the wicked.

Second, the wicked person loses his wealth. Though he may pile up silver like dust and garments like clay, i.e., in plentiful amounts, he would not, however, be able to enjoy these material things. In the end his wealth would pass into the hands of the righteous and the innocent, who in this book are often equated with the poor (27:16–17). The ungodly are swept away. The righteous remain and enter into their possessions. The meek inherit the earth (Ps 37:29, 34).

Third, the wicked person loses his home. His house would prove to be as unstable as a moth’s cocoon or the temporary shelter erected by farmers as guard posts during the harvest. One day the wicked person is rich, but the next day he wakes up to poverty or

worse. He “opens his eyes and he is not,” i.e., he awakes just in time to view the coming destruction before being swept away (27:18–19).

Fourth, the wicked person himself would also be swept away. Overnight he would be overtaken by a terrifying flood. A windstorm off the eastern desert—known to natives as the sirocco—would snatch him away. This tempest would “hurl” at him its destructive arrows. Any attempt to escape would be futile (27:20–22).

Fifth, the fall of the wicked would produce glee in the hearts of those who hear of it. They would express their scorn and derision by hissing, or whistling (27:23).³

³ Smith, J. E. (1996). *The wisdom literature and Psalms* (Job 26:1–27:23). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.