

CHAPTER 26

This is Job's short reply to Bildad's short discourse, in which he is so far from contradicting him that he confirms what he had said, and out-does him in magnifying God and setting forth his power, to show what reason he had still to say, as he did (~~383~~ Job 13:2), "What you know, the same do I know also."

I. He shows that Bildad's discourse was foreign to the matter he was discoursing of — though very true and good, yet not to the purpose (v. 2-4).

II. That it was needless to the person he was discoursing with; for he knew it, and believed it, and could speak of it as well as he and better, and could add to the proofs which he had produced of God's power and greatness, which he does in the rest of his discourse (v. 5-13), concluding that, when they had both said what they could, all came short of the merit of the subject and it was still far from being exhausted (v. 14).

~~383~~ JOB 26:1-4

JOB'S REPROOF OF BILDAD

One would not have thought that Job, when he was in so much pain and misery, could banter his friend as he does here and make himself merry with the impertinency of his discourse. Bildad thought that he had made a fine speech, that the matter was so weighty, and the language so fine, that he had gained the reputation both of an oracle and of an orator; but Job peevishly enough shows that his performance was not so valuable as he thought it and ridicules him for it. He shows,

I. That there was no great matter to be found in it (v. 3): *How hast thou plentifully declared the thing as it is?* This is spoken ironically, upbraiding Bildad with the good conceit he himself had of what he had said.

1. He thought he had spoken very clearly, had *declared the thing as it is*. He was very fond (as we are all apt to be) of his own notions, and thought they only were right, and true, and intelligible, and all other notions of the

thing were false, mistaken, and confused; whereas, when we speak of the glory of God, we cannot declare the thing as it is, for we see it through a glass darkly, or but by reflection, and shall not see him as he is till we come to heaven. Here *we cannot order our speech concerning him,* ^{<37>} Job 37:19.

2. He thought he had spoken very fully, though in few words, that he had plentifully declared it, and, alas! it was but poorly and scantily that he declared it, in comparison with the vast compass and copiousness of the subject.

II. That there was no great use to be made of it. *Cui bono — What good hast thou done by all that thou hast said? How hast thou, with all this mighty flourish, helped him that is without power? v. 2. How hast thou, with thy grave dictates, counselled him that has no wisdom? v. 3.* Job would convince him,

1. That he had done God no service by it, nor made him in the least beholden to him. It is indeed our duty, and will be our honour, to speak on God's behalf; but we must not think that he needs our service, or is indebted to us for it, nor will he accept it if it come from a spirit of contention and contradiction, and not from a sincere regard to God's glory.

2. That he had done his cause no service by it. He thought his friends were mightily beholden to him for helping them, at a dead lift, to make their part good against Job, when they were quite at a loss, and had no strength, no wisdom. Even weak disputants, when warm, are apt to think truth more beholden to them than it really is.

3. That he had done him no service by it. He pretended to convince, instruct, and comfort, Job; but, alas! what he had said was so little to the purpose that it would not avail to rectify any mistakes, nor to assist him either in bearing his afflictions or in getting good by them: *“To whom has thou uttered words? v. 4. Was it to me that thou didst direct thy discourse? And dost thou take me for such a child as to need these instructions? Or dost thou think them proper for one in my condition?”* Every thing that is true and good is not suitable and seasonable. To one that was humbled, and broken, and grieved in spirit, as Job was, he ought to have preached of the grace and mercy of God, rather than of his greatness and majesty, to have laid before him the consolations rather than the terrors of the Almighty. Christ knows how to speak what is proper for the weary

(~~2804~~ Isaiah 50:4), and his ministers should learn rightly to divide the word of truth, and not make those sad whom God would not have made sad, as Bildad did; and therefore Job asks him, *Whose spirit came from thee?* that is, “What troubled soul would ever be revived, and relieved, and brought to itself, by such discourses as these?” Thus are we often disappointed in our expectations from our friends who should comfort us, but the Comforter, who is the Holy Ghost, never mistakes in his operations nor misses of his end.

~~2815~~ JOB 26:5-14

THE WISDOM AND POWER OF GOD

The truth received a great deal of light from the dispute between Job and his friends concerning those points about which they differed; but now they are upon a subject in which they were all agreed, the infinite glory and power of God. How does truth triumph, and how brightly does it shine, when there appears no other strife between the contenders than which shall speak most highly and honourably of God and be most copious in showing forth his praise! It were well if all disputes about matters of religion might end thus, in *glorifying God* as Lord of all, and our Lord, *with one mind and one mouth* (~~2816~~ Romans 15:6); for to that we have all attained, in that we are all agreed.

I. Many illustrious instances are here given of the wisdom and power of God in the creation and preservation of the world.

1. If we look about us, to the earth and waters here below, we shall see striking instances of omnipotence, which we may gather out of these verses.

(1.) *He hangs the earth upon nothing*, v. 7. The vast terraqueous globe neither rests upon any pillars nor hangs upon any axle-tree, and yet, by the almighty power of God, is firmly fixed in its place, poised with its own weight. The art of man could not hang a feather upon nothing, yet the divine wisdom hangs the whole earth so. It is *ponderibus librata suis* — *poised by its own weight*, so says the poet; it is *upheld by the word of God's power*, so says the apostle. What is hung upon nothing may serve us

to set our feet on, and bear the weight of our bodies, but it will never serve us to set our hearts on, nor bear the weight of our souls.

(2.) He *sets bounds to the waters of the sea*, and compasses them in (v. 10), that they may not *return to cover the earth*; and these bounds shall continue unmoved, unshaken, unworn, *till the day and night come to an end*, when time shall be no more. Herein appears the dominion which Providence has over the raging waters of the sea, and so it is an instance of his power, ^{<4152>}Jeremiah 5:22. We see too the care which Providence takes of the poor sinful inhabitants of the earth, who, though obnoxious to his justice and lying at his mercy, are thus preserved from being overwhelmed, as they were once by the waters of a flood, and will continue to be so, because they are reserved unto fire.

(3.) He *forms dead things under the waters*. *Rephaim* — *giants, are formed under the waters*, that is, vast creatures, of prodigious bulk, as whales, giant-like creatures, among the innumerable inhabitants of the water. So bishop Patrick.

(4.) By mighty storms and tempests he shakes the mountains, which are here called *the pillars of heaven* (v. 11), and even *divides the sea, and smites through its proud waves*, v. 12. At the presence of the Lord the *sea flies* and the *mountains skip*, ^{<4153>}Psalm 114:3, 4. See ^{<4154>}Habakkuk 3:6, etc. A storm furrows the waters, and does, as it were, divide them; and then a calm smites through the waves, and lays them flat again. See ^{<4155>}Psalm 89:9, 10. Those who think Job lived at, or after, the time of Moses, apply this to the dividing of the Red Sea before the children of Israel, and the drowning of the Egyptians in it. *By his understanding he smiteth through Rahab*; so the word is, and Rahab is often put for Egypt; as ^{<4156>}Psalm 87:4; ^{<4157>}Isaiah 51:9.

2. If we consider hell beneath, though it is out of our sight, yet we may conceive the instances of God's power there. By *hell and destruction* (v. 6) we may understand the grave, and those who are buried in it, that they are under the eye of God, though laid out of our sight, which may strengthen our belief of the resurrection of the dead. God knows where to find, and whence to fetch, all the scattered atoms of the consumed body. We may also consider them as referring to the place of the damned, where the separate souls of the wicked are in misery and torment. That is hell and destruction, which are said to be *before the Lord* (^{<4158>}Proverbs 15:11), and here to be *naked before him*, to which it is probable there is an allusion,

^{<640>}Revelation 14:10, where sinners are to be tormented *in the presence of the holy angels* (who attended the Shechinah) and *in the presence of the Lamb*. And this may give light to v. 5, which some ancient versions read thus (and I think more agreeably to the signification of the word *Rephaim*): *Behold, the giants groan under the waters, and those that dwell with them*; and then follows, *Hell is naked before him*, typified by the drowning of the giants of the old world; so the learned Mr. Joseph Mede understands it, and with it illustrates ^{<3116>}Proverbs 21:16, where hell is called *the congregation of the dead*; and it is the same word which is here used, and which he would there have rendered *the congregation of the giants*, in allusion to the drowning of the sinners of the old world. And is there any thing in which the majesty of God appears more dreadful than in the eternal ruin of the ungodly and the groans of the inhabitants of the land of darkness? Those that will not with angels fear and worship shall for ever with devils fear and tremble; and God therein will be glorified.

3. If we look up to heaven above, we shall see instances of God's sovereignty and power.

(1.) *He stretches out the north over the empty place*, v. 7. So he did at first, when *he stretched out the heavens like a curtain* (^{<3946>}Psalm 104:2); and he still continues to keep them stretched out, and will do so till the general conflagration, when they shall be *rolled together as a scroll*, ^{<6614>}Revelation 6:14. He mentions the north because his country (as ours) lay in the northern hemisphere; and the air is the empty place over which it is stretched out. See ^{<3912>}Psalm 89:12. What an empty place is this world in comparison with the other!

(2.) He keeps the waters that are said to be *above the firmament* from pouring down upon the earth, as once they did (v. 8): *He binds up the waters in his thick clouds*, as if they were tied closely in a bag, till there is occasion to use them; and, notwithstanding the vast weight of water so raised and laid up, yet *the cloud is not rent under them*, for then they would burst and pour out as a spout; but they do, as it were, distil through the cloud, and so come drop by drop, in mercy to the earth, in small rain, or great rain, as he pleases.

(3.) He conceals the glory of the upper world, the dazzling lustre of which we poor mortals could not bear (v. 9): *He holds back the face of his throne*, that light in which he dwells, *and spreads a cloud upon it*, through which *he judges*, ^{<3213>}Job 22:13. God will have us to live by faith, not by

sense; for this is agreeable to a state of probation. It were not a fair trial if the face of God's throne were visible now as it will be in the great day.

*Lest his high throne, above expression bright,
With deadly glory should oppress our sight,
To break the dazzling force he draws a screen
Of sable shades, and spreads his clouds between.*
— Sir R. Blackmore

(4.) The bright ornaments of heaven are the work of his hands (v. 13): *By his Spirit*, the eternal Spirit that moved upon the face of the waters, *the breath of his mouth* (¹³¹⁶Psalm 33:6), *he has garnished the heavens*, not only made them, but beautified them, has curiously bespangled them with stars by night and painted them with the light of the sun by day. God, having made man to look upward (*Os homini sublime dedit — To man he gave an erect countenance*), has *therefore* garnished the heavens, to invite him to look upward, that, by pleasing his eye with the dazzling light of the sun and the sparkling light of the stars, their number, order, and various magnitudes, which, as so many golden studs, beautify the canopy drawn over our heads, he may be led to admire the great Creator, the Father and fountain of lights, and to say, “If the pavement be so richly inlaid, what must the palace be! If the visible heavens be so glorious, what are those that are out of sight!” From the beauteous garniture of the ante-chamber we may infer the precious furniture of the presence-chamber. If stars be so bright, what are angels! What is meant here by *the crooked serpent* which his hands have formed is not certain. Some make it part of the garnishing of the heavens, the milky-way, say some; some particular constellation, so called, say others. It is the same word that is used for leviathan (²³⁷¹Isaiah 27:1), and probably may be meant of the whale or crocodile, in which appears much of the power of the Creator; and why may not Job conclude with that inference, when God himself does so? Job 41.

II. He concludes, at last, with an awful *et caetera* (v. 14): *Lo, these are parts of his ways*, the out-goings of his wisdom and power, the ways in which he walks and by which he makes himself known to the children of men. Here,

1. He acknowledges, with adoration, the discoveries that were made of God. These things which he himself had said, and which Bildad had said, are his ways, and this is heard of him; this is something of God. But,

2. He admires the depth of that which is undiscovered. This that we have said is but part of his ways, a small part. What we know of God is nothing in comparison with what is in God and what God is. After all the discoveries which God has made to us, and all the enquiries we have made after God, still we are much in the dark concerning him, and must conclude, *Lo, these are but parts of his ways*. Something we hear of him by his works and by his word; but, alas! *how little a portion is heard of him?* heard by us, heard from us! We know but in part; we prophesy but in part. When we have said all we can, concerning God, we must even do as St. Paul does (^{<5113>}Romans 11:33); despairing to find the bottom, we must sit down at the brink, and adore the depth: *O the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God!* It is but a little portion that we hear and know of God in our present state. He is infinite and incomprehensible; our understandings and capacities are weak and shallow, and the full discoveries of the divine glory are reserved for the future state. Even *the thunder of his power* (that is, his powerful thunder), one of the lowest of his ways here in our own region, we cannot understand. See ^{<8304>}Job 37:4, 5. Much less can we understand the utmost force and extent of his power, the terrible efforts and operations of it, and particularly *the power of his anger*, ^{<9011>}Psalms 90:11. God is great, and we know him not.