

# BILDAD MISSPEAKS GOD'S JUSTICE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Job 8:1-10, 20-22

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Job 8

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Job 8:1-10, 20-22

## I. Condemnation

### Job 8:1-4

**1 Then answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said,**

**2 How long wilt thou speak these things? and how long shall the words of thy mouth be like a strong wind?**

**3 Doth God pervert judgment? or doth the Almighty pervert justice?**

**4 If thy children have sinned against him, and he have cast them away for their transgression;**

1. This is the first instance where *Bildad* speaks. His origins are mysterious, and there is little information to gather from the biblical text. Bildad's designation as *the Shuhite* was possibly a tribal name from an ancient ancestor.

2. Bildad's speech follows a lengthy lament spoken by Job (Job 6–7). *These things* spoken by Job consisted of his bemoaning the unjust nature of his suffering. Job did not question God's sovereignty but questioned the wisdom of his friends (6:11-30). Job's speech culminates in a pointed protest against God (7:11-21).

Bildad did not waste time expressing his disapproval of Job's lament. By describing Job's words as *a strong wind*, Bildad used Job's own word against him (see Job 6:26). To Bildad, Job's words, while desperate, were meaningless and empty. That Job

reeled over his multitude of losses (most significantly the death of his children), should give us a sense of how hurtful Bildad's reply must have felt to Job. Bildad was, after all, one of Job's closest friends.

3. The structure of this verse is such that the two questions are, essentially, the same. Such is an example of literary parallelism, common in Old Testament wisdom literature.

The Hebrew verb translated *pervert* means to bend, falsify, or make crooked. The primary thrust of Bildad's argument was rooted in his observation of the nature and character of *God the Almighty*. God does not bend or falsify *judgment*. Elihu, another friend of Job, later echoed Bildad's sentiments, affirming, "Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment" (Job 34:12).

4. Bildad used Job's deceased *children* to illustrate his assumptions about the manner of God's justice. Previously, the actions of his children greatly concerned Job. Job "offered burnt offerings" because they may "*have sinned*, and cursed God in their hearts" (Job 1:5). What Bildad proposed provides an example of retributive justice.

Retributive justice argues that God blesses the righteous and, conversely, curses the wicked. Bildad supposed that Job's children sinned and so their deaths were the result of their wickedness. This concept

finds similarities in the Law of Moses. The promise of blessings came with obedience to God's law, while the promise of curses accompanied disobedience to God's law (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). Bildad's assumptions appear accurate; God blesses obedience and punishes disobedience.

Bildad erred by assuming that Job's hardships were the inevitable outcome of sin. Bildad's strong desire to speak on behalf of God led him to make sweeping assertions. Such assertions carry little value, as the author of Ecclesiastes describes: "The righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them" (Ecclesiastes 9:1).

The existence (or nonexistence) of physical and material blessings does not correlate to a person's spiritual vitality. A righteous individual may inexplicably experience hardship and suffering. This does not imply God's absence or the wickedness of the individual.

Ultimately, it was not up to Job or Bildad to explain Job's hardship and suffering. Instead, their interaction highlights that a silent presence often can provide the best comfort to those who are suffering. Bildad could have better served his friend through the comfort of silence and presence.

## II. Exhortation

### Job 8:5-7

**5 If thou wouldst seek unto God betimes, and make thy supplication to the Almighty;**

**6 If thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous.**

**7 Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase.**

5. Bildad transitioned from condemnation to exhortation. Bildad concluded

that Job was less sinful than others because the Lord spared Job's life, at least for the time being. In this perspective, unless Job made *supplication* to the mercy of *the Almighty*, there was no guarantee that his life would be spared.

6. The theme of God's awakening occurs in the psalms, where the psalmist pleaded for God to "stir up" and "awake" in order to defend the psalmist (Psalm 35:23). Similarly, the prophet Isaiah called for God to "awake" for the sake of restoring Israel (Isaiah 51:9). In these occurrences, God is called to action for the sake of His people.

In a similar way, Bildad promised that God *would awake* to restore a truly righteous Job. God's awakening does not imply that God is unaware or unavailable; the psalmist provides a reminder of the ever-present nature of God as one who does not "slumber" or "sleep" (Psalm 121:3-4).

7. At the onset of Job's story, he is said to be "the greatest of all the men of the east" (Job 1:3). Bildad argued that if Job sought God and returned to righteousness, then he would experience an *increase* in prosperity and his previous life would seem *small* in comparison.

This verse reveals one of the great ironies in the book of Job. Bildad's words were unknowingly prophetic in describing Job's future. Eventually, Job was granted more children and more wealth, but not because of Bildad's advice.

## III. Reflection

### Job 8:8-10

**8 For enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers:**

**9 (For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow:)**

**10 Shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter words out of their heart?**

8. Recognizing the limitations of his experience, Bildad appealed to the tradition of *the former age*. Perhaps Bildad anticipated that *a search of their fathers* would confirm his view of God's justice, thus making clear Job's next steps.

Bildad's error, though, came in assuming that the tradition they have inherited was normative. It is one thing to accept tradition with a critical eye; it is something else altogether to use it to draw uncritical, sweeping generalizations. The latter is what Bildad seemed to do to bolster his claims about the nature of God's justice.

9-10. The appeal to the past is rooted in life's tenuous nature, as *our days* are but *a shadow*. Previously, Job cried out, "Teach me . . . and cause me to understand" (Job 6:24). In response, Bildad pointed to the teachings of the ancestors and the *words out of their heart*.

Like Bildad, when faced with a crisis, we might be tempted to provide comfort by appealing to past experiences, whether personal or anecdotal. The impulse to do so might arise from our feelings of discomfort and inadequacy during the crisis, especially if we struggle with what to do or say in response.

#### IV. Projection

##### Job 8:20-22

**20 Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he help the evil doers:**

**21 Till he fill thy mouth with laughing, and thy lips with rejoicing.**

**22 They that hate thee shall be clothed with shame; and the dwelling place of the wicked shall come to nought.**

20. Bildad continued to project assumptions of God's justice. The Hebrew word translated *perfect* here is also translated that way in Job 1:1, which estab-

lishes that Job was indeed "perfect and upright" (Job 1:1). But Bildad seems to have been looking at Job's tragedies to conclude the opposite. Thus Bildad has constructed a syllogism as follows:

Major Premise: God does not cast away those who are perfect.

Specific Premise: God has cast Job away (as evidenced by Job's troubles).

Conclusion: Job is not perfect and, therefore, needs to repent.

The problem lies in the specific premise, which everyone assumed to be true. But the narrative of the first two chapters of this book—unknown to Job and his friends—informs us otherwise.

The flip side of the idea is found in the tradition of biblical wisdom literature that describes the righteous experiencing God's blessings. These individuals are like a flourishing plant, "green before the sun" (Job 8:16; compare Psalm 1:3).

When compared to Bildad's assumptions, a fuller understanding of Scripture creates a big problem for those determined to maintain a rigid understanding of how God works.

21. What greater satisfaction could Job experience than for God to *fill his mouth with laughing* and his *lips with rejoicing* after recovering from such prolonged lament, personal loss, and intense pain? But Bildad's implied solution—that Job needs to repent—follows from defective reasoning.

22. The false logic continued as Bildad again unknowingly spoke prophetic words. Yet this time Bildad's words addressed his own future situation before God—Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar are the ones *clothed with shame* (see Job 42:7-9).

God's ultimate response was to affirm His own sovereignty (Job 38–41). In a general sense, this corrected Bildad's faulty assumptions.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

## BILDAD MIS SPEAKS GOD'S JUSTICE

### Into the Lesson

Consider the last time you played the game "Two Truths and a Lie." How did you determine which statement was false?

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Why is it sometimes challenging to discern lies from the truth?

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### Into the Word

Read Job 8:1-10, 20-22. Identify elements of truth, if any, in Bildad's words.

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Identify incorrect information or false presuppositions.

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Create a short phrase that sums up what Bildad is saying in the group's text segment.

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Think of at least two examples from the Bible (specific verses or broader stories) that refute Bildad's position. Use your examples as a basis to create a new short phrase to counter Bildad's words.

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### Into Life

Pair off to role-play this situation: one person will represent a person experiencing great loss and the other a trusted friend who is doing their best to provide comfort. Imitate Bildad's approach in the texts and then alter it. Then answer the following questions:

What did you find most useful in this exercise?

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What did you find to be the most intimidating?

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What "God-talk" errors did you make that were similar to that of Bildad, if any?

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Did anyone quote Romans 8:28 or other passages? If so, was that a useful thing to do?

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What role did silence play, if any? (See Job 2:13.)

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### THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Our loving presence is the greatest ministry we have to offer those who are suffering.