

Bildad Misunderstands God's Judgement

Printed Text • Job 8:1–10, 20–22

Devotional Reading • Job 37:5–7

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will UNDERSTAND Bildad's response to Job's suffering, DISCERN carefully when others misinterpret God's ways, and GROW closer to God and live faithfully in God's just ways.

In Focus

Angela had been battling cancer for over six months. After so many sessions of chemotherapy, she was a shell of her former self. Her husband, Tim, could barely hold himself together as he watched his wife suffer. He often looked at her and wondered how she continued to be optimistic and keep her faith in God. She still prayed and thanked God every day. Since the diagnosis, they had not missed one Sunday morning church service. Tim endured it, although the hope and optimism that he experienced from Angela and the people at church grated on him. How could God do this to my wife? he asked himself.

One day while driving home, Angela began quietly humming a praise and worship song they had heard in church. Tim couldn't take it anymore. Frustrated, he asked her, "How can you sing a song like that in a time like this? Why praise a God who does this to you?"

Angela was shocked by his question but then calmly collected herself. "Songs like that were made for times like this," she responded. "I know I've followed the Lord as best I can. I know I've seen His blessings in my life. I'm not fond of this cancer, but if that's how God chooses to take me home, so be it. I've still seen Him do plenty of good, and I'm still going to praise Him for it."

How do you respond when you don't understand God's plan?

Keep In Mind

"Then answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said, How long wilt thou speak these things? and how long shall the words of thy mouth be like a strong wind?" (Job 8:1–2, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. Pervert (Job 8:3) 'avath (Heb.) — To falsify, bend, subvert, or make crooked

B. Evil doer (v. 20) hanep (Heb.) — A hypocrite

Say It Correctly

Theodicy. thee-ODD-ih-see

Bildad. BILL-dad

KJV

Job 8:1 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;
5 If thou wouldest 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.
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?
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.

NLT

Job 8:1 Then Bildad the Shuhite replied to Job:
2 "How long will you go on like this?
You sound like a blustering wind.
3 Does God twist justice?
Does the Almighty twist what is right?
4 Your children must have sinned against him,
so their punishment was well deserved.
5 But if you pray to God
and seek the favor of the Almighty,
6 and if you are pure and live with integrity,
he will surely rise up and restore your happy home.
7 And though you started with little,
you will end with much.
8 "Just ask the previous generation.
Pay attention to the experience of our ancestors.
9 For we were born but yesterday and know nothing.
Our days on earth are as fleeting as a shadow.
10 But those who came before us will teach you.
They will teach you the wisdom of old.
20 "But look, God will not reject a person of integrity,
nor will he lend a hand to the wicked.
21 He will once again fill your mouth with laughter
and your lips with shouts of joy.
22 Those who hate you will be clothed with shame,
and the home of the wicked will be destroyed."

The People, Places, and Times

Theodicy. Why do bad things happen to good people? Does God not care enough to help people? If He cares, why can't He stop the bad things? Is God not just? Does He not have enough power to uphold His justice? These questions have long plagued humanity. When discussed in philosophical or theological circles, the topic is called theodicy (from Greek *theos*, God and *dike*, justice).

Some cultures in Job's time believed their gods simply did not care about the doings of lowly mortals. Others held that people would often anger a god without knowing it, but the proper catchall atonement sacrifice would appease them. Job insists that Yahweh cares for His people and has revealed Himself to His people. We can honestly examine our minds and our actions and know for certain if we have sinned against God. Job is confident that his friend is wrong, but he still does not understand God's actions fully.

Background

Job was a man of great wealth who suddenly found himself losing everything, even his children. This sudden loss was perplexing to Job because he had always been upright and blameless, a God-fearing man (Job 1:1). He continued to worship and praise God even after such a great loss (Job 1:20–22). Rather than blame God for his suffering, Job simply mourns and seeks the counsel of friends. But his friends just couldn't figure out what Job might have done that was so terrible that God had brought all this suffering down on him.

At-A-Glance

1. God Is Perfectly Just (Job 8:1–3)
2. A Just God Will Punish Sin (v. 4)
3. A Just God Will Bless the Obedient (vv. 5–10)
4. A Just God Will Restore the Repentant (vv. 20–22)

In Depth

1. God Is Perfectly Just (Job 8:1–3)

Chapter 8 opens with Job's friend Bildad expressing exasperation at Job's insistence of his innocence (Job 6:24) and questioning God's justice (Job 6:29). Bildad pleads with Job to acknowledge that God is perfectly just and would never do anything that is unjust (v. 1–3). To this point Bildad is absolutely correct in his arguments. God is perfectly just in all He does.

This truth is affirmed dozens of times in Scripture. Although Job did not have a Bible, he apparently had been taught by his forefathers that this just God rewarded those who are faithful and obedient with many blessings, large families, land and wealth. Since Job had all those things, he thought he had favor with God. We can empathize with Job for questioning how a just God could have taken all those blessings away! God's justice is difficult to see or comprehend when we feel that we have been wronged and when we suffer loss. Job turned to his friends at this difficult time.

Where do you turn when things go wrong?

2. A Just God Will Punish Sin (v. 4)

As was common in Old Testament times, Job's friends all seemed to firmly believe a certain theology which we now call retribution theology. This theology, which is partially upheld in Scripture (Deuteronomy 30:16–18; Proverbs 3:33, 13:25; Psalm 35:17), holds that God deals with people immediately based on their behaviors. If you obey God, you will be blessed. If you sin, you will suffer. Sin was the only logical explanation for all suffering. Job agonized over what he had done to deserve his suffering. His friends weren't much help. They insisted he must have done something really terrible. Bildad didn't stop there. In verse 4 he says that even Job's children must have sinned and got what they deserved! Imagine how Job must have felt hearing that!

Was Bildad being helpful to his hurting friend? Was Job right in thinking that God was punishing him and his children for their sin?

3. A Just God Will Bless the Obedient (vv. 5–10)

Bildad reminds Job that God will restore Job to his former blessed state if he will return to his life of integrity and purity. Retributive theology says that God's justice is immediate, and goes both ways. If you are suffering, you must have sinned. If you stop sinning and return to God, you will be blessed again. For Bildad, the explanation of Job's suffering was simple, and the solution was just as simple. Job must have sinned, and Job needed to turn away from his sin and turn back to God.

Do you understand from Scripture that God's justice is immediate yet reversible?

4. A Just God Will Restore the Repentant (vv. 20–22)

Bildad continues his argument that Job just needs to repent and return to God, and God will immediately restore his good fortunes. By reading the rest of the book of Job, we find that this is exactly what happened! Even though Job's initial suffering is not from sin, Job does eventually sin by haughtily demanding an explanation from God. When he repents of this and submits himself to God's wisdom, he is blessed. Does this story teach us that God is truly a God of retributive and immediate justice? This is the challenge of Job. From Job we learn that God means what He says, that the wages of sin is death, but obedience leads to blessings. But it does not explain all suffering. Sometimes bad things happen to good people and we never learn why. God never told Job why He had allowed the man to suffer.

How often do we cry out, "Why me, Lord?" How should we respond to suffering or what we perceive as injustice?

Search the Scriptures

1. Read Job 8:4, John 9:1–3, and Romans 6:23. What singular message do we take away from these verses?
2. Discuss how the penalty of sin has not changed, but the way God deals with the sinner has.
3. Read Job 8:20–21 and Romans 3:21–26. How does the promise of Job's restoration, and the gift of salvation by faith demonstrate God's justice?

Discuss the Meaning

It is easy to fall into thinking that God blesses us because we're good and punishment comes for some specific sin. However, this understanding does not allow for God's grace. Because of Jesus' completed work of redemption, namely His paying the price for our sins (death), we now live in the age of grace. The wages of sin is still death, but by grace through faith, we can all receive the gift of eternal life.

How does this knowledge affect your attitude toward sin?

Liberating Lesson

The book of Job does not explain the reason for all suffering. Nor does Jesus' explanation of why the man was born blind in John 9:3. What Jesus seems to be telling us is that sometimes we just won't understand, yet we have to trust that all things will somehow work to His glory and our good. While we are tempted to seek answers for the reason for suffering, what things should we ask of God instead when faced with suffering or injustice?

Application for Activation

While reading the book of Job, we immediately feel empathy for Job. When we see someone sick or hurting, as Christians we want to comfort them and help them. But we don't always know what to say or do. We can learn a lot from Job's three friends. They started out doing the thing that is often needed most. They spent seven days with him, not saying a word (Job 2:11-13). This may be the greatest lesson we can learn from this wisdom book of Job. Often this is what is needed most by those who are suffering. They just need a friend who will sit with them, mourn with them, comfort them. This week look for a chance to just give love, consolation, and physical comfort such as a warm meal, rather than unwelcomed advice, judgment, and opinions.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Job 8:1-10, 20-22

Speaking the truth is important, but saying it in love is most important. Criticism should always be given to help the other person, not harm them. In this chapter, Job's friend Bildad, a traditionalist, did

not understand that. Not only did he offer lousy advice to his suffering companion, but he did it in the most unloving way possible. He reacts in anger to what he considers complete irreverence on Job's part. He takes hold of the general trend of Job's arguments and attempts to contradict the conclusions to which Job had come.

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?

Job has just finished responding to the rebuke of Eliphaz, one of his friends. Job had asserted that right was on his side (6:29–30). Job also had bitterly charged that the life of man is cruelly shaped by the unbearable pressures brought upon him by an unrelenting and inescapable God (7:1–7, 17–18). Bildad, another friend of Job, now speaks. He confronts Job for his denunciation of Eliphaz, who had previously scolded Job. Whereas Eliphaz had shown a little kindness in his remarks, Bildad is not afraid to be blunt and dismisses Job's defense as a "strong wind" that is, only noise and empty content. We might say Bildad thinks Job is just full of hot air. The tactlessness of Bildad is astounding. With none of the courtliness characteristic of Eliphaz, Bildad leaps into the fray. He has been driven into a fury by Job's denial of God's justice. There is not a word of apology or any touch of friendly sympathy. He does not attempt to soothe and calm a suffering friend.

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

Like Eliphaz, Bildad shows no compassion whatsoever for his friend. He simply ignores Job's plea for understanding and sympathy. High on Bildad's order of priorities is to defend God's just character. Bildad detected in Job's outburst a criticism of God's handling of affairs, and he is incensed. Bildad appeals to tradition to defend his position. Bildad cares more for doctrine and theology than he does for Job. He feels his theology threatened, but fails to see Job is the one actually in danger—his integrity, self-esteem, and personhood. Bildad's question conveys surprise and dismay: How could it ever be thought that the Almighty could pervert justice? The Hebrew word 'avath (aw-VATH) means to falsify, bend, subvert, or make crooked. Bildad's main argument is that God never twists or bends justice, never makes its path crooked (8:3). In sum, Bildad implies that God allows no one to suffer who does not deserve it. God and injustice are incompatible terms.

The moral universe, in Bildad's theology, is founded upon the principle of retribution. Bildad does not accept Job's claims of innocence. "There is no smoke without fire" is Bildad's working hypothesis. Job's miserable condition speaks of a crime, and if Job only searched his conscience, he will discover what it is. Suffering is punishment, and the death of Job's children is proof of it! Bildad is a traditionalist, entirely wedded to the past, a moralist for whom everything is either black or white. For Bildad, everything is so utterly simple and straightforward: we get what we deserve. Sounding like the "prosperity gospel" of today, Bildad suggests those who prosper in this world do so because they are righteous. Those who suffer do so because they are wicked. There appear to be no exceptions to this simple rule. Nothing is further from the truth, and the inadequacy of such a view is evident in the world today. There are evil people who do very well in this world. The same problem bothered David to no end as he wrote, "For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Psalm 73:3).

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

Bildad's argument proceeds from the result to the cause: if there was premature death, there must have been prior sin. So wedded is he to the sufficiency of the doctrine of retribution as an explanation for all human fortune or misfortune that he even states the result in terms of the cause. So, as Bildad reasoned, God has "cast away," that is, abandoned Job's children to the power of their guilt. If that is the result, the cause is already apparent—they have sinned against God. The doctrine of retribution is

so fundamental to Bildad's worldview that he has perceived the death of Job's sons and daughters as God's punishment. Bildad assumes or expects Job himself to have drawn the same conclusion, and have seen in the death of his children further proof of the reliability of the doctrine of retribution.

Bildad brings up the matter of Job's children simply to remind him of the contrast between their fate and his. However, the initial narrative does not in any way suggest or insinuate that the fate of Job's sons and daughters was the result of their behavior (Job 1–2); for Job, his children's fate and his own are equally inexplicable. Although Bildad nowhere in this speech expressly says that Job is a sinner, the inference is clear. A consequence of Bildad's equation of justice with divine power is that he can tell Job in complete seriousness and with absolute certainty that even though Job is suffering, he is experiencing divine mercy: he is still alive. He must therefore have sinned less than his children, who are dead. It is difficult to imagine a less comforting or more insensitive response to Job's plight.

5 If thou wouldest 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.

Nevertheless, Bildad will argue, all hope is not lost for Job if he does two things. First, he must seek the face of God and call unto the Almighty (v. 5). The word "betimes" means "sometimes" or "early" and translates the Hebrew word *shachar* (shaw-KHAR) that refers to "dawn," thus suggesting getting up early for a task with the implication of earnestness. Here, Bildad picks up Job's word in 7:21. Whereas Job had spoken of God seeking him, Bildad says it would be more fitting if Job would seek God. Job should go early to seek God, and with earnestness. If Job were to rise up early and plead for mercy, God "would awake" that is, rouse Himself as He would the dawn (Psalm 57:9) and restore Job to his former condition.

Second, he must be pure and upright (v. 6). Bildad seems to be asking Job to demonstrate virtues that God already affirmed (1:8; 2:3). While Bildad does not explicitly deny that Job possesses these qualities, he seems far less certain than God seemed that Job is who he claims to be. If Job meets this double condition, linking devoutness and moral purity, Bildad's dogma of retribution, in the positive sense now, assures him that God cannot fail to respond to Job's behavior with signs of favor.

Bildad contends for an unbending doctrine of retribution, which makes the sinner the victim of his or her guilt (v. 4), which then chains God also, and compels Him to respond with favor to any human merit (v. 6). We must learn a lesson from the utterances of Bildad that a rigid application of a truth—to the exclusion of any possible exceptions or broader analyses of the situation—is a dangerous and cruel line to take. Bildad is a man who has got hold of half of the truth and has made it into the whole truth. It is always a mistake to do that, and always damaging.

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

In verse 7, Bildad, in the same manner as Eliphaz (5:19–26), holds out before Job hopes of a prosperous future. However, unlike Eliphaz, Bildad does not elaborate the details of such a future. Rather he devotes a larger portion of his speech to an elaboration of the fate of the wicked (vv. 11–19) by way of warning to Job. Nevertheless, he offers Job a hope that he believes to be real. Bildad speaks more truly than he knows, for God will bless Job's end more than his beginning (42:12).

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?

Bildad appeals to ancient tradition to prove his assertion that God always acts justly (vv. 8–10). His rationale for appealing to the original generation of the fathers is the ephemeral nature of mortals (7:1–3, 9) and the capacity of the fathers to instruct in wisdom from the depth of their knowledge. In this regard one may think of people like Enoch and Noah who lived extremely long lives and acquired a lot of wisdom. The reason for the relative ignorance of present generation is the relative brevity of life in Bildad's day (Job 14:1–2). Wickedness inherits its own reward (Job 8:9–13; cf. Eliphaz's perception in 4:8: "You reap what you sow"). Bildad contends that his teaching was in harmony with traditional teaching and human experience. Eliphaz based his thinking on observation and experience, but Bildad is a traditionalist who looks for wisdom in the past. "What do the ancients say about it?" was his key question.

To be sure, we can learn from the past. In an age which idolizes the latest fashions, an appeal to tradition is no bad thing. To say "it has always been this way," can often be a means of introducing sanity into an otherwise disorientated, confused jungle of ideas. The case for the supremacy of tradition could not be more crisply put. However, it is important to see the past something to learn from—a rudder to guide us and not an anchor to hold us back, a launching pad, and not a parking lot.

Truth about human existence, according to Bildad, is to be learned, specifically from others. The truth is knowledge, not experience. As creatures of yesterday whose whole lifespan can be likened to a fleeting "shadow," humans cannot hope to acquire for themselves the wisdom and experience accumulated over the ages. In a positive sense the Hebrew word, *sel* (TSALE) translated "shadow" conveys the ideas of shade, protection, and defense. However, the word serves as a negative metaphor when it is viewed as ephemeral and fleeting. Man's life is compared to a shadow, for it has no permanence and flees quickly away (1 Chronicles 29:15). Shadow also describes the failing condition of one who is enduring a sickness (Job 17:7).

Comparisons of life's brief span to a shadow are made elsewhere are common in the Old Testament (1 Chronicles 29:15; Psalm 102:11; Ecclesiastes 6:12; 8:13). While former generations have passed away, their accumulated wisdom remains, and to that old wisdom Bildad made his appeal. Job and Bildad share the same sense of the extreme brevity of life (cf. 7:7, 16). Still, while it wrings from Job an elemental cry to God, Bildad experiences it intellectually, as a ground for adherence to traditional wisdom.

Bildad's respect for the wisdom of the past is admirable, as is his conviction that God does not pervert justice (v. 3). The way he allows the doctrine of retribution to fill the whole horizon both of human wisdom and divine justice, though, makes him both unappealing and unconvincing. He insists on absolutizing the doctrine so much that he must be both unjust and unkind to Job.

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.

Bildad's recapitulation of his teaching drawn for ancient tradition embraces God's attitude toward the blameless and evil doers—God will not abandon the blameless in times of disaster, and evil doers will not be sustained by their sin. Bildad thinks he heard Job say that God perverts justice (v. 3). It seemed that Job has problems concerning divine justice; but he has not yet blatantly accused God of being unjust, though he has come close to it (6:20). Job finds it difficult, if not impossible, to understand God's justice. Although Job does not claim perfection (6:21), he considers himself a "perfect" or blameless man (Heb. *tam*, TAWM). This is also God's view of him in the prologue (1:8; 2:3), but Bildad is sure that God has rejected Job. Since God accepts blameless men (8:20), Job

cannot be one. So, he must be an “evil doer” (Heb. hanep, ha-NEP), a hypocrite. The situation, however, can be remedied: if only he would turn to God, Job’s lips might laugh again.

Bildad ends his discourse with a strong word of assurance directed to Job personally (vv. 21–22). He does not preface this happy conclusion that he predicts for Job’s suffering with conditions (see v. 5). He allows the promise of salvation itself to carry its own reminder of the necessary condition—if such a reminder is necessary. His final message to Job is an affirming restitution promise analogous to the closing of Eliphaz (5:19–26). Job can expect to rejoice and celebrate the fall of his foes.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Job Suffers Sinlessly
(Job 1:8-11, 13-22)

TUESDAY

Habakkuk Struggles to See Justice
(Habakkuk 1:12-17)

WEDNESDAY

Suffering for Doing Right
(1 Peter 2:20-25)

THURSDAY

God Is in the Storm
(Psalm 29)

FRIDAY

Remove This Cup from Me
(Mark 14:32-42)

SATURDAY

God Speaks from the Whirlwind
(Job 38:1-11)

SUNDAY

God's Justice Is Unfathomable
(Job 8:1-10, 20-22)