

## Nine

### BILDAD —II

What we have found about Bildad is that he has a cast-iron system, a doctrinal straitjacket, that he starts in, and finishes in, and never sees his way clear to break out of. He upholds the justice of Almighty God—he has a fine, unshakeable belief in that—but for Bildad it is not so much a personal relationship as a rigid, logical doctrinal system. You do something wrong, you have consequences that follow; you do things right, you have consequences that follow from that. It is all a bit automatic, rather than the kind of personal relationship with God—a coming before God—that Job is searching for. It also makes the whole system dependent on what we do, rather than on the free and sovereign action of God. When there are things that do not fit with Bildad's doctrinal system—when Job confronts him with those, in his own situation and in what he says—all Bildad can do is close up, and become insistent on the rightness of his own doctrinal stance.

Let us remind ourselves of what Bildad said in 8:11–13:

Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh?  
Can reeds flourish where there is no water?  
While yet in flower and not cut down,  
they wither before any other plant.  
Such are the paths of all who forget God;  
the hope of the godless shall perish.

Remember how we said that we cannot discount all that these comforters say. They are men of God, and good theologians. What Bildad says here is much the same as we find, for instance, in Psalm 1: those who trust in the Lord will be like a tree planted by a stream of water, but those who are not trusting in the Lord will be like a shrub out in the desert, with nothing to feed it. That is fine. But when that becomes detached from God, and applied, rigidly, to every situation, then it has lost its source. So in 8:20–22 Bildad says—and here he is trying to put the best construction on this for Job, to be positive towards him; for the moment he uses this doctrine to encourage Job: he believes he is innocent, and likes to think the best of him—and so he says, This system that I am setting forth will reward you, if you do the right thing:

See, God will not reject a blameless person,  
nor take the hand of evildoers.  
He will yet fill your mouth with laughter,  
and your lips with shouts of joy.  
Those who hate you will be clothed with shame,  
and the tent of the wicked will be no more.

Job sees through that. He is not satisfied with that tidy system—whether it is going to reward him or not. In chapters 9 and 10, he wants God to deal personally with him. Perhaps Job would even rather be condemned by a warm, true and living God, than be rewarded by some kind of cold impersonal vending-machine system, however much it may favour him.

### **COLD COMFORT**

We can remind ourselves just how much 'comfort' Job was getting from these helpers in what they are trying to say if we look again at 16:1:

I have heard many such things;  
miserable comforters are you all.

Job is not getting much solace from his so-called 'comforters', because he can see further than they can. This is especially true in the case of Bildad. In 17:2 Job says:

Surely there are mockers around me,  
and my eye dwells on their provocation.

He says to God:

Lay down a pledge for me with yourself;  
who is there that will give surety for me?  
Since you have closed their minds to understanding,  
therefore you will not let them triumph (17:3-4)

Job is saying, 'Poor old Bildad: he has a closed system—and a closed mind!' But Job attributes even that to the action of God. Bildad wants to be comfortable in that, so Job says, 'OK, God, You've closed his mind, he can't see any further. I can see further than he can right now. That is where You have locked him into for the moment. So I know that their advice is not going to prevail. You are bigger than that, and I can see that You will not let what they are saying come to pass.'

He even goes so far as to say in 17:5:

Those who denounce friends for reward—  
the eyes of their children will fail.

Perhaps there are other motives going on in the comforters, or something as bad as that. But Job's friends offer him no hope.

### **BILDAD GETS CROSS**

In chapter 18, Bildad has his second speech. He is quite upset, but he sticks to his digs:

**18:1** Then Bildad the Shuhite answered:  
2 'How long will you hunt for words?  
Consider, and then we shall speak.  
3 Why are we counted as cattle?  
Why are we stupid in your sight?  
4 You who tear yourself in your anger—  
shall the earth be forsaken because of you,  
or the rock be removed out of its place?

Bildad is getting quite cross with Job here. He says, 'You haven't been listening to what I have been saying, and I have been telling it very clearly. Now just be quiet, and listen, and then say something sensible! What you have been trying to do is totally disrupt the foundations of the universe. Here am I, spelling it out exactly the

way it is, but you want everything to suit you.’ It is interesting that often we accuse others of the things we are most guilty of ourselves—we see that with Bildad too.

Bildad thinks that Job is regarding them as stupid. ‘All this anguish that you are going through’, he says—where Job has been saying, ‘The Lord is ripping me apart’—‘you are tearing yourself in your anger’. We have seen that Job is not an angry man. He was simply spelling out the way things were, and the way he was experiencing them. He was not trying to ‘have a go’ at God at all. Maybe Bildad has a bit of anger, and he is putting this onto Job.

### **A TRAP IS SET FOR THE WICKED**

Here Bildad really emphasises his position, and spells it out clearly:

18:5 Surely the light of the wicked is put out,  
and the flame of their fire does not shine.  
6 The light is dark in their tent,  
and the lamp above them is put out.  
7 Their strong steps are shortened,  
and their own schemes throw them down.  
8 For they are thrust into a net by their own feet,  
and they walk into a pitfall.  
9 A trap seizes them by the heel;  
a snare lays hold of them.  
10 A rope is hid for them in the ground,  
a trap for them in the path.  
11 Terrors frighten them on every side,  
and chase them at their heels.  
12 Their strength is consumed by hunger,  
and calamity is ready for their stumbling.  
13 By disease their skin is consumed,  
the firstborn of Death consumes their limbs.  
14 They are torn from the tent in which they trusted,  
and are brought to the king of terrors.  
15 In their tents nothing remains;  
sulfur is scattered upon their habitations.  
16 Their roots dry up beneath,  
and their branches wither above.  
17 Their memory perishes from the earth,  
and they have no name in the street.  
18 They are thrust from light into darkness,  
and driven out of the world.  
19 They have no offspring or descendant among their people,  
and no survivor where they used to live.  
20 They of the west are appalled at their fate,  
and horror seizes those of the east.  
21 Surely such are the dwellings of the ungodly,  
such is the place of those who do not know God.”

Again, wonderful poetry—Bildad is a fine poet. But we get the sense that it is unrelated, really, to anything that Job is going through. Bildad is stating it as an abstract principle, rather than saying, ‘Job, this is what is going to happen to *you*’, or even, ‘This is what God is going to do with you’. He simply says, ‘This is what will happen’. It is all very automatic and pre-ordained. The trap is set, and it will spring, and that’s it! This is the way it is going to be.

‘Surely the light of the wicked is put out, and the flame of their fire does not shine.’ It may be that they are going to be snuffed out in death, or it may be just a way of saying, ‘Nothing will go right for them—they won’t have light, they will be in darkness. Everything that they do will bring about their own doom. They will drop themselves in a hole; they will get trapped, they will be snared; they will be running all their lives, chased by terrors; they will come into calamity, hunger, disease (‘the first-born of Death’—disease is closely related to death, and does its bidding, because disease often leads to death). Anything they trust in they will be torn from, and they will be brought to the king of terrors (perhaps death itself). They will lose all their possessions; judgment will come, with brimstone scattered over their habitations. They will have no life; they will dry up and wither. No one will remember them; they will have no fame or reputation, and no offspring and no survivors. People will be appalled to see the terrible things that happen to the ungodly.’

That is what Bildad believes. He is quite insistent on all of that. He does not want to press it through to the implication that therefore Job is wicked, and must deserve all he has got. But Bildad still insists that he himself must be right—he can’t be wrong. If he had to admit that he was wrong, is it that he would then have to face the real personal God, and deal directly with Him, and that perhaps he could not handle that? Can any of us ‘handle’ that, ourselves?

### **GOD HAS CLOSED HIS NET**

Job, on the other hand, knows that he is dealing directly with the living personal God. In chapter 19, he begins by saying to his friends:

19:1 Then Job answered:  
2 ‘How long will you torment me,  
and break me in pieces with words?’

Bildad has not followed through the implications of what he has said. If he had, he would have said, ‘Look, Job, this has all happened to you, so you must be a godless person’. Bildad has not been prepared to do that. He just wants to state his principles. Job, however, does take it personally, as we would expect. The implications of what Bildad is saying are obvious to him, so he responds accordingly. He extends it to all three of them:

19:3 These ten times you have cast reproach upon me;  
are you not ashamed to wrong me?  
4 And even if it is true that I have erred,  
my error remains with me.

Job is fully aware of his own shortcomings. But in this matter Job considers that he has not wronged God, and that he is not out of kilter with Him.

19:5 If indeed you magnify yourselves against me,  
and make my humiliation an argument against me,  
6 know then that God has put me in the wrong,  
and closed his net around me.

That is something that even Bildad was not prepared to say. He had said, ‘You do this, and that will happen’. Job is saying, ‘Well, if that is true, it is *God* who is doing



people in hospital or nursing homes may feel, when they are unable to get the help that they need.

We saw even that Job's wife had said to him, 'Curse God, and die' (2:9–10). That must have been one of the deepest sufferings that he had to endure, not to have her heart with him in this:

19:17 My breath is repulsive to my wife;  
I am loathsome to my own family.  
18 Even young children despise me;  
when I rise, they talk against me.  
19 All my intimate friends abhor me,  
and those whom I loved have turned against me.  
20 My bones cling to my skin and to my flesh,  
and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.

In the next verse he brings it back to reality, back to personal issues:

19:21 Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends,  
for the hand of God has touched me!  
22 Why do you, like God, pursue me,  
never satisfied with my flesh?

Job feels that God is arrayed against him. These 'friends' are just putting more nails in the coffin. He says, 'Stand with me in this!'

### **REGULATED BY STRICT JUSTICE?**

In chapter 24, Job answers Bildad's case. He demolishes it, point by point. He points out where it does not match with things that really happen in this life. Bildad has said that every evil will receive a direct judgement from God, and that will be it. Against this, Job asks the question, 'Why are *not* times of judgment kept by God? You say they are, but I look around, and that is not always what I see':

24:1 Why are times not kept by the Almighty,  
and why do those who know him never see his days?

You are saying that everything is regulated according to strict justice, but I am going to show you now that there are those who are godless, who get away with it, for quite a time, and that there are those who are with God who strain to see the good days:

24:2 The wicked remove landmarks;  
they seize flocks and pasture them.  
3 They drive away the donkey of the orphan;  
they take the widow's ox for a pledge.  
4 They thrust the needy off the road;  
the poor of the earth all hide themselves.  
5 Like wild asses in the desert  
they go out to their toil,  
scavenging in the wasteland  
food for their young.  
6 They reap in a field not their own  
and they glean in the vineyard of the wicked.  
7 They lie all night naked, without clothing,  
and have no covering in the cold.

- 8 They are wet with the rain of the mountains,  
and cling to the rock for want of shelter.
- 9 There are those who snatch the orphan child from the breast,  
and take as a pledge the infant of the poor.
- 10 They go about naked, without clothing;  
though hungry, they carry the sheaves;
- 11 between their terraces they press out oil;  
they tread the wine presses, but suffer thirst.
- 12 From the city the dying groan,  
and the throat of the wounded cries for help;  
yet God pays no attention to their prayer.

This is talking about social injustice: how the rich and powerful get more rich and powerful, and the poor and helpless get more poor and helpless. That is something that has been going on in Australia now for a number of years, and it is still getting worse. There are those who can afford their big houses and their overseas trips, and there are those who are finding life more and more difficult. The way it is spoken of here is more akin to what has been going on for decades in under-developed countries, as the rich countries have been garnering all the world's resources to themselves, and ordering the world's economic system so that it suits their purposes, and ride rough-shod over those who do not have the same kind of power. We need to be aware of that, and open our eyes to it. Job here spells it out very clearly.

The removal of landmarks means the seizing of other people's property, and the seizing of their flocks and pasture. Taking the widow's ox for a pledge: the poor are obliged to borrow from the rich, and then they have to pay high interest for that, and if a poor person only has one ox, and the money-lender says, 'What are you going to give me for security', and the poor person says, 'All I've got is my ox', and the money-lender says, 'Well, give me that', then suddenly all earning capacity is gone, because the poor person depends on that one ox to plough and put in crops. The poor are locked into a poverty cycle, where they cannot get out. So the poor are reduced to trying to get the pickings. They are thrust off the road: they are not given the main chance. They have to go like wild asses in the desert, they have to go picking for food for their children, trying to get what is left over from the rich. They do not have the right kind of covering or clothing. They are not properly housed: they have to live in caves, or shelter under mountains. The rich can be quite ruthless: they can even 'snatch the orphan child from the breast' as a pledge, perhaps to be taken into slavery. The poor go about naked and hungry. They have to do all the work for the land-owners and those who have the wealth, but they cannot participate in the benefits of it. They carry the sheaves, but they do not get their share to eat. They make the olive oil; they help make the wine, but they do not get to drink much of it themselves. It all goes to the rich. So 'the dying groan, the wounded cry for help, *and nothing seems to happen*', Job says. What is going on here? How does that fit with your armchair theology?

In verses 13–17, he speaks about the wicked, those who seem intent on evil: murderers and adulterers, those who work in the dark, and are more comfortable in the dark than in the light. If what they did in the dark came to light, it would not bear being seen. Darkness is also the time for break-ins and petty crime. When the sun goes down, that is when they get up to do their dark deeds:







that to work as He wishes to bring through His steadfast love, which is really what He is on about.

I am not trying to justify God, or just make an answer to Bildad and Job's problems: we do not want to set up another system. I am giving you some pointers here, where we can start to have a framework or a feel in our hearts for an understanding of these things.

### **BILDAD'S LAST STAND**

In 26:25 Job lays down the question: 'If it is not so, who will prove me a liar, and show that there is nothing in what I say?' This leads into Bildad's final speech. What Bildad says here is very short: it is the shortest chapter in the Book of Job. It is short because Bildad really has nothing more to say, and no help whatsoever to give to Job. He just reasserts his position:

25:1 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered:  
 2 'Dominion and fear are with God;  
     he makes peace in his high heaven.  
 3 Is there any number to his armies?  
     Upon whom does his light not arise?  
 4 How then can a mortal be righteous before God?  
     How can one born of woman be pure?  
 5 If even the moon is not bright  
     and the stars are not pure in his sight,  
 6 how much less a mortal, who is a maggot,  
     and a human being, who is a worm!'

Here end the words of Bildad. He is unremitting in his dogged insistence. He will not go as far as Eliphaz in condemning Job—he is not big enough to do that. But he will not admit that he might be wrong. So in the end he is forced to Eliphaz's position. Bildad ends up where Eliphaz started from: these are almost exactly the same words as in 5:17–19 and 15:14–16. From there, there is no other way to go but to join Eliphaz in condemning Job, and in saying that Job must be terribly wicked if God has brought all this upon him—God, who is so far removed, must have been deeply provoked for this to happen to Job. However, Bildad does not do that. He probably would not, because he is not big enough. He is a small-minded man. Eliphaz was misled, but he was prepared to take on the tragic role and bring the condemnation to bear on Job. As we saw, there was a lot of godliness about Eliphaz. But Bildad was a small man.

Have you heard the story about who is the smallest person in the Bible? I always used to think it was 'Knee-high-miah' (Nehemiah), until I came across Bildad the 'Shoe-height' (Shuhite)! That is what Bildad is: a small man. And that is why his final contribution, like himself, is short.