

Bildad Misunderstands God's Justice

Job 8

February 20, 2022

Quite honestly, I come to this Bible Study lesson not feeling particularly inspired. Bildad the Shuhite isn't one of my favorite Bible characters. For most of the book of *Job*, people are just sitting around talking. When I was young, I was partial toward more exciting reading – adventure book like *Treasure Island* and such. With things happening. I just wasn't mature enough to appreciate a book like *Job*. I guess that's still the case. Also, we don't want to read about suffering, because we don't want to suffer. The book of *Job* brings up a lot of questions about our thoughts and essential beliefs about God. It's uncomfortable and challenging.

But, *Job* addresses a very real and important issue. “Why do bad things happen to good people?” This was a very important question in Israel and Judah prior to the exile. In the late years of the Kingdom of Judah, the written Law became important with the discovery of *Deuteronomy*, thought to be the book discovered in the time of Hilkiah, the High Priest in the time of Josiah. (He's one of Ezra's ancestors, you might recall.) *Deuteronomy* articulates a view that there is One God, and that that God demands ethical, righteous, behavior. The Israelites agreed to this behavior as part of their Covenant with God. *Deuteronomy* states very clearly that righteous behavior, understood as keeping God's laws, will result in blessings. Disobedience will result in curses, even death. This is very clearly laid out in *Deuteronomy* in 11:26-28 (summary), 7:12-15, 11:13-17 (blessings) and 6:10-15, 8:19-20 (curses) and all of Chapter 28 (blessings and curses in considerable detail. There's lots of other similar passages in the Torah and later.

This “Deuteronomic” understanding of Israel's relationship to God informed the Jewish authorities of Jesus's day. If someone was poor, blind, a leper, or in some other way afflicted, it was inferred that this was punishment for sin. For example, of the man born blind, Jesus was asked, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (*John 9:2*) Similarly, wealth, prestige, and good health were thought to be indications of righteousness. We see this viewpoint widely in the Old Testament scriptures. The problem is that it just isn't the whole truth. Righteous individuals have bad things happen for no discernable reason. Bad individuals often profit from their evil deeds and live what appears to be lives of acclaim, plenty, and luxury. We can see, especially today, people defending whatever they do as “good,” rationalizing almost anything. So, how does that fit in with “do good and good things will happen”?

Of course, the same issues were noticed in the pagan world which Israel, to some extent, shared with neighboring civilizations. Other cultures had stories that are much like the prologue (*Job* 1-2) and epilog (*Job* 42) where there is a discussion between God and Satan concerning whether there were any truly righteous persons. An Indian story has a similar dialog between the gods Vasishtha and Shiva Ruten, whether a particular man was truly righteous. They made a wager. Shiva then subjected the man, Hariscandra to a series of trials, but failed to subvert him.

In the pagan world, however, evil deities were available to serve as the presumed source of evil things happening in the world. But, how is that compatible with Monotheism, and the belief in a one good God? There's a problem there. If God is singular and all-powerful, and good, how can evil things be allowed within the Creation? Yet, they happen. The writings in *Job* are decidedly monotheistic. No doubt is given to that issue. Job and his friends agree on that. They also believe in a good God, a god of Justice. If that is so, how is it that Job sits there, deprived of family (sons and daughters dead)? His wife has said, "Curse God and die." (*Job* 2:9) He is afflicted with sores and disease. Job considers himself righteous; he cannot see that he has ever transgressed God's way. So, why has all this happened?

Job has three friends who come to comfort him in his distress. The site seems to be Edom, a country known at the time as having wise men. Bildad is from a nomadic background in northwest Arabia, as far as scholars can tell. He can't point to sin in Job himself, but is convinced that Job's condition is the result of some sin that Job won't confess. Which is even worse, a friend who will not believe you in your innocence. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar each give their views of the situation, counseling Job to confess his sin and regain the favor of God. Job answers each, defending his righteousness, and appealing for Justice. This goes through three rounds of poetic writing from *Job* 3 to 31. Then a fourth commentator, Elihu, appears and has a different view, but condemns Job's self-righteousness (*Job* 32-37). This may be a later insertion. In Chapter 38-41, God answers Job. The scripture passage given to us is representative of the argument the friends make, that Job needs to repent. I think we can understand Job's sense of injustice. Even as Christians having received Jesus's message, and knowing of God's grace, we can still feel like, "Where is God?" when bad things happen.

8 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered:

**² "How long will you say these things,
and the words of your mouth be a great wind?"**

³ Does God pervert justice?

Or does the Almighty^[a] pervert the right?

4 If your children sinned against him,
he delivered them into the power of their transgression.

5 If you will seek God
and make supplication to the Almighty,^[b]

6 if you are pure and upright,
surely then he will rouse himself for you
and restore to you your rightful place.

7 Though your beginning was small,
your latter days will be very great.

8 “For inquire now of bygone generations,
and consider what their ancestors have found;

9 for we are but of yesterday, and we know nothing,
for our days on earth are but a shadow.

10 Will they not teach you and tell you
and utter words out of their understanding?

11 “Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh?
Can reeds flourish where there is no water?

12 While yet in flower and not cut down,
they wither before any other plant.

13 Such are the paths of all who forget God;
the hope of the godless shall perish.

14 Their confidence is gossamer,
a spider’s house their trust.

15 If one leans against its house, it will not stand;
if one lays hold of it, it will not endure.

16 The wicked thrive^[c] before the sun,
and their shoots spread over the garden.

17 Their roots twine around the stoneheap;
they live among the rocks.^[d]

18 If they are destroyed from their place,
then it will deny them, saying, ‘I have never seen you.’

19 See, these are their happy ways,^[e]
and out of the earth still others will spring.

20 “See, God will not reject a blameless person,
nor take the hand of evildoers.

**21 He will yet fill your mouth with laughter,
and your lips with shouts of joy.**

**22 Those who hate you will be clothed with shame,
and the tent of the wicked will be no more.”**

- a. [Job 8:3](#) Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
- b. [Job 8:5](#) Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
- c. [Job 8:16](#) Heb *He thrives*
- d. [Job 8:17](#) Gk Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain
- e. [Job 8:19](#) Meaning of Heb uncertain

The “poetic” main contents of *Job* (Chapters 3-41) are thought to have perhaps been written during the exile, after Josiah’s reforms. A date 580-540 B.C. has been suggested based on an analysis of the language, vocabulary, and ideas in contemporary sources (Paul Scherer, *Exegesis on Job. Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 3, p. 890). The narrative sections may be older. Thus, *Job* represents a minority voice that questions the Deuteronomic view. It precedes the idea of the suffering servant of the LORD portrayed by Isaiah of the Exile (*Isaiah* 40-66). Yet, in *Job*, we have one of the most treasured scripture passages of the entire Old Testament:

Job 19: ²⁵ For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; ²⁶ and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in the flesh I shall see God, ²⁷ whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. (NRSV)

However Job understands his present situation, he has a confidence that he will be redeemed, that God still will care for him. This is a moment of clarity that Job sees in the midst of his troubles. There are still condemnations and chastisements remaining that he must endure. He does, ultimately, receive an answer from God Almighty Himself (Chapters 38-41).

Now, getting back to the lesson book, the title of this lesson is “Bildad Misunderstands God’s Justice.” It strikes me that Bildad, and Job’s other friends, really were trying to be helpful to Job. They understood God, what God required, and how God would reward the righteous and punish the wicked, from the perspective of their time. Job questions that understanding. Why he is suffering? He doesn’t have an answer for it. He can’t accept the conventional wisdom. His friends plead with him to accept his guilt, repent, and then God will surely show mercy (See vs. 21 and 22 of our reading). Does Job have too much pride to do that? Would he be wrong to confess that he must have sinned; would God please forgive him for that sin? Job can’t bring himself to do that. He won’t confess to sin he

can't believe he has committed. Job has a hard time seeing Justice in what has happened to him. Nobody in this story really understands "God's Justice."

How sure are we that we understand "God's Justice" today? We now have Jesus's words of love and mercy. We have abundant instruction in Jesus's words given us through the gospels. His words are elaborated on in the later writings of the New testament. The entire library of the Old Testament also provides sufficient instruction on how God expects us to live. But that doesn't give us a full understanding of everything, all the things we see as evil, and others we see as good, that happen in the world. Sometimes we can identify an evil act behind the catastrophes that occur. That might range from an extra drink before driving to the machinations of a Hitler or a Stalin. But sometimes bad things happen for no discernable reason at all. Those things strike us as "unjust." We expect a God who is supreme to make sure things come out even, and that's not the world we live in. Maybe it's our own expectations of "justice" that are the problem. Further, we are not perfect, and do sin or make mistakes, sometimes without knowing or recognizing the sinfulness. We rationalize.

Throughout the Old Testament (the Hebrew scriptures) and the New Testament, God never gives us a full and "satisfactory" explanation for the way the world, the universe, works. Mankind has tried to figure it all out themselves. But the basic fabric of the Universe is still beyond comprehension. Things seem to be governed by chance. Is that a necessary part of the Universe, a universe in which God both remains in control and loves us? The atheist, unable to reconcile reality with the existence of a good God, has a view of justice that therefore rejects that there even is a God, and perhaps even justice. As Christians, we are better off. We can see the good in the Creation, and know that God shares the bad with us, even to the cross. We have to be satisfied with not knowing. In fact, God's ways and reasons are beyond our comprehension. As Job replies to God, (Job 42:2,3):

**² "I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
³ 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.**

Prayer: Compassionate God, we thank you for the gift of your presence when life threatens to overwhelm us. When life turns hard, we gain strength by remembering

your love for us. When we feel hopeless, help us to step forward in faith. Bless our efforts to bring comfort to others. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.