

### The Counsel of Bildad the Shuhite

#### Job 8

**Job 8** – *“Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said: <sup>2</sup> ‘How long will you speak these things, and the words of your mouth be like a strong wind? <sup>3</sup> Does God subvert judgment? Or does the Almighty pervert justice? <sup>4</sup> If your sons have sinned against Him, He has cast them away for their transgression. <sup>5</sup> If you would earnestly seek God and make your supplication to the Almighty, <sup>6</sup> if you were pure and upright, surely now He would awake for you, and prosper your rightful dwelling place. <sup>7</sup> Though your beginning was small, yet your latter end would increase abundantly.*

*<sup>8</sup> ‘For inquire, please, of the former age, and consider the things discovered by their fathers; <sup>9</sup> For we were born yesterday, and know nothing, because our days on earth are a shadow. <sup>10</sup> Will they not teach you and tell you, and utter words from their heart? <sup>11</sup> ‘Can the papyrus grow up without a marsh? Can the reeds flourish without water? <sup>12</sup> While it is yet green and not cut down, it withers before any other plant. <sup>13</sup> So are the paths of all who forget God. And the hope of the hypocrite shall perish, whose confidence shall be cut off, and whose trust is a spider’s web. <sup>15</sup> He leans on his house, but it does not stand. He holds it fast, but it does not endure. <sup>16</sup> He grows green in the sun, and his branches spread out in his garden. <sup>17</sup> His roots wrap around the rock heap, and look for a place in the stones. <sup>18</sup> If he is destroyed from his place, then it will deny him, saying, ‘I have not seen you.’*

*<sup>19</sup> ‘Behold, this is the joy of His way, and out of the earth others will grow.*

*<sup>20</sup> Behold, God will not cast away the blameless, nor will He uphold the evildoers. <sup>21</sup> He will yet fill your mouth with laughing, and your lips with rejoicing. <sup>22</sup> Those who hate you will be clothed with shame, and the dwelling place of the wicked will come to nothing.”*

#### Background Notes

What do you know about Bildad the Shuhite, Job’s second counselor? I’m sure you’ve heard the lame joke that Bildad the “Shuhite” was one of the shortest men in the Bible. After all, Bildad the “Shoe-height” was only the height of a shoe!

Joking aside, Bildad the Shuhite was most likely a descendent of Abraham. After Abraham’s wife Sarah died (Genesis 23), Abraham remarried and had six more sons. *“Abraham again took a wife, and her name was Keturah. And she bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah” (Genesis 25:1-2).* Shuah was one of these six sons, so Bildad the Shuhite was a descendant of Shuah - and thus a descendant of Abraham.

By the way, the idea that **all** Arabs descended from Abraham through Ishmael is not correct. Many Arab tribes descended from the six sons of Abraham and Keturah. Thus we see that Bildad was an Arab.

When we compare Bildad's speech to Job with Eliphaz's speech to Job, we find that Bildad was not quite as gentle as Eliphaz. Bildad was more impatient and insensitive, but his argument is the same: "Job - you must have sinned, because you're suffering - and all suffering is the result of sin."

Bildad's first speech contains three incorrect ways to determine truth.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Good motives do not determine what is true.

As we analyze Bildad's speech, we see that his **motives** were right, but his **premise** was wrong. Bildad had good motives. He wanted to defend God's righteousness and integrity. In Job 7, Job was questioning God's ways, and Bildad wanted to defend God's ways. So Bildad implied that all of Job's words were like wind: "*How long will you speak these things, and the words of your mouth be like a strong wind?*" By wind, he meant "empty" words, or maybe even destructive words. How dare Job question God's ways? "*Does God subvert judgment? Or does the Almighty pervert justice?*"

Bildad's motives were right and good, but he started with the wrong premise – and good motives alone do not determine what is true! Bildad and Eliphaz both held the same wrong assumption. Bildad was convinced that Job's family had sinned, and they had gotten what they deserved (v4). And now Job himself was suffering because of **his** sin.

But there was still hope for Job! If he would confess his sin, then the Lord would restore him to his righteous estate: "*Your sons have sinned against Him; He has cast them away for their transgression. If you would earnestly seek God and make your supplication to the Almighty, if you were pure and upright, surely now He would awake for you and prosper your rightful dwelling place. Though your beginning was small, yet your latter end would increase abundantly*" (v4-7).

So Bildad's argument sounds good and logical, and certainly his motivation to defend God's righteousness was good - but his was starting with the wrong assumption. The lesson is obvious: good motives don't determine the truth. Truth is determined by what God reveals to be true. That was true in Job's day and it is true today.

Two illustrations:

- How should marriage be defined? Secular sociologists might have good motives by not wanting to "discriminate" or "exclude" - but God has revealed that marriage is the union of one man and one women.
- Did the universe and all life come about from nothing, through blind chance and biological evolution? Or was a Creator involved? God's Word reveals the truth. Secular scientists may have good motives when they claim the "scientific method proves evolution" - but they're incorrect – because good motives don't determine what is true!

## 2. Tradition doesn't determine what is true.

For his authority in arriving at his premise, Bildad appeals to tradition (v8-10). Eliphaz used his own personal experience as his authority, but Bildad uses the experience of past generations to back up the same incorrect premise that Job was suffering because he had sinned. After all, could all past generations be wrong in their conclusion that personal suffering is caused by personal sin? What's the answer?

The answer is that past tradition does not necessarily determine what is true. This applies to specific facts, as well as general principles. For example, the **tradition** that the apostle Peter was crucified upside down may be factual, but the **tradition** that Jesus descended into hell between his death and resurrection is not factual. The idea that Jesus "descended into hell" comes from the Apostle's Creed, and is based on an incorrect interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-19.

In reference to general principles, the tradition that "you reap what you sow" is a true principle because it's scriptural (Galatians 6:7). But the tradition that personal suffering is because of personal sin is not a true principle - no matter what past generations thought - because **it is not taught in the Bible**. Sometimes personal suffering is the result of personal sin - but personal suffering is not necessarily the result of personal sin. So let's be careful when we hear what past generations tell us. Much of it is good, but past tradition doesn't determine what is true. **The Bible is the final Word.**

## 3. Trustworthy statements don't determine what is true.

Bildad brought three illustrations into his argument, and he drew what he claimed to be "trustworthy statements" from these illustrations:

- In verses 11-13 Bildad used the illustration of the papyrus plant that will dry up if it doesn't have water, and his trustworthy statement is that without God, man withers up and dies without hope. That's a good illustration, and it's a trustworthy statement, but Bildad was wrong to apply it to Job. It was not true that Job had cut off from God. -
- In verses 14-15 Bildad used the illustration of a spider's web to imply that Job was depending on his possessions rather than depending on God for stability and security in life. Once again, it's a great illustration, and it certainly is a trustworthy statement. If you depend on your possessions for security, it's like grasping at a spider's web to support you. But it was not true about Job. Job was **not** trusting in his possessions.
- In verses 16-19 Bildad used the illustration of a flourishing, well-rooted plant that is pulled up and replaced with another plant. Bildad implied that Job had been like that flourishing plant, but now was being uprooted, and his only joy was to know that he would be replaced. Again, this is an appropriate illustration. It would have been a trustworthy statement if Job had indeed forsaken the Lord - but Job was not forsaking the Lord!

To be valid, good illustrations and trustworthy statements must *fit the case!* Trustworthy statements don't determine what is true.

So we've seen three wrong ways to determine what is true. The first speech of Bildad contains three incorrect ways to determine what is true.

## Practical Application

### Don't counsel like Bildad!

*"Behold, God will not cast away the blameless, nor will He uphold the evildoers. He will yet fill your mouth with laughing, and your lips with rejoicing. Those who hate you will be clothed with shame, and the dwelling place of the wicked will come to nothing" (v20-22).*

At first glance this seems like good counsel, doesn't it? Be encouraged, Job! In the end you will have joy! Wicked people and your enemies will be removed. But upon closer examination, we find that it is bad counsel. Why? It was based on the wrong concept that joy and vindication would only come if Job renounced his sin, and returned to a life of integrity.

What devastating counsel! Bildad was judging Job. He was wrong in his premise, and he was wrong in his conclusions.

How devastating it must have been for Job to be told that his children had probably died because they had sinned. *"If your sons have sinned against Him; He has cast them away for their transgression."* How inappropriate to "counsel" in that way! Even if that were true, it's not helpful to tell suffering people that their children were killed because they sinned!

And it's probably not a good idea to start your counseling session like Bildad did, by telling your suffering friend that they are just "full of hot air"! That's essentially what Bildad said: *"How long will you speak these things, and the words of your mouth be like a strong wind?" (v2).*

Counsel to a suffering person should be as kind and gentle as possible. Don't counsel like Bildad!