



Job - Chapter Eighteen

II Job 3:1-42:6 - Dialogue: Job, His Suffering, and His Standing before God (continues)

II.b Job 4:1-25:6 - The Friends and Job: Can Job be Right Before God? (continues)

II.b.ii Job 15:1-21:34 - The Second Cycle (continues)

Summary of Chapter Eighteen

Like Eliphaz, Bildad omits any of the appeals to Job in his first response in Job 8:5-7 and opens by venting his frustration (vv.2-4): Who is Job to maintain his position and criticise the words of his friends? The remainder of Bildad's response is an unyielding description of the end of the wicked that appears to be motivated as much by his reactive irritation as by any further desire to correct Job (vv.5-21).

II.b.ii.3 Job 18:1-21 - Bildad Speaks: God Punishes the Wicked

Refer to the chapter summary above.

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?

Job 18:1-3

How long will you hunt for words? Bildad basically returned Job's words from Job 16:3. It seems that they were all getting tired of hearing each other talk, yet the matter was far from resolved.

Consider, and then we shall speak. Why are we counted as cattle? Why are we stupid in your sight? Bildad continued to trade insults with Job. They accused each other of being dense and stupid as a brute beast: <<*I was stupid and ignorant; I was like a brute beast towards you*>> (Psalm 73:22).

- 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?

Job 18:4

You who tear yourself in your anger. Bildad told Job, “Just look at yourself. You are tearing yourself to pieces in anger. Your condition is all the evidence anyone needs to see that you are in sin and need to repent.” Job had earlier stated that: <<*I will take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in my hand*>> (Job 13:14). However, he said all this in humility, not in anger.

Shall the earth be forsaken because of you, or the rock be removed out of its place? Bildad felt that Job wanted to overturn unchangeable laws of life; mainly the laws of cause and effect that state Job has caused his own crisis by his sin and refusal to repent. Adam Clarke attempted to capture Bildad's thought: “To say the least, afflictions are the common lot of men. Must God work a miracle in providence, in order to exempt you from the operation of natural causes? Do you wish to engross all the attention and care of providence to yourself alone? What pride and insolence!”

- 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.

Job 18:5-6

Bildad is likely responding to Job with the repeated images of the light of the wicked, i.e. flame, and lamp going dark, that is, does not shine or does put out, to make the point that Job ought to take the ‘darkness’ (refer to Job 17:12-13) as precisely such a warning; refer to also v.18.

Surely the light of the wicked is put out. Bildad wanted to teach Job about the life and fate of the wicked and in doing so he hoped that Job would get the idea that he was among the wicked that Bildad described: <<*The light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked goes out*>> (Proverbs 13:9).

The light is dark in their tent. At the end of Job's previous speech in Job 17:10-16 he described the darkness of his life and prospects, all in the gloomy context of the grave as a welcome home. Bildad wanted Job to see that this dark outlook on life meant that he was among the wicked.

- 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.

Job 18:7-10

Their strong steps are shortened. Bildad here described the wicked man as someone weak in his steps, unable or unwilling to continue the journey of life. He felt this accurately described Job and set him among the wicked men.

Bildad uses the vocabulary of a trap, i.e. net, snare, and rope in these verses to argue that what Job describes as God breaking him apart (refer to Job 16:7-14) is better described as Job suffering the consequences of his own sin, i.e. their own schemes throw them down.

Six different names of hunting devices are used in these verses. Precise identification of all these items of equipment is still not possible, as a comparison of current translations quickly shows. Similar terms appear in other Scriptures: <<*For without cause they hid their net for me; without cause they dug a pit for my life*>> (Psalm 35:7), <<*They set a net for my steps; my soul was bowed down. They dug a pit in my path, but they have fallen into it themselves*>> (Psalm 57:6), <<*From on high he sent fire; it went deep into my bones; he spread a net for my feet; he turned me back; he has left me stunned, faint all day long*>> (Lamentations 1:13), <<*The faithful have disappeared from the land, and there is no one left who is upright; they all lie in wait for blood, and they hunt each other with nets*>> (Micah 7:2), and:

<<*The enemy brings all of them up with a hook; he drags them out with his net, he gathers them in his seine; so he rejoices and exults*>> (Habakkuk 1:15).

- 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;
sulphur is scattered upon their habitations.
- 16 Their roots dry up beneath,
and their branches wither above.

Job 18:11-16

Terrors frighten them on every side. Again, Bildad takes previous statements of Job and turns them back upon him. Job spoke in his previous speech about how he felt attacked and assaulted by God on every side; refer to Job 16:9-14. Bildad regarded this as proof of Job's wickedness.

By disease their skin is consumed. Part of Job's medical crisis was skin disease: <<*So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes*>> (Job 2:7-8), <<*My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt; my skin hardens, then breaks out again*>> (Job 7:5), and: <<*My skin turns black and falls from me, and my bones burn with heat*>> (Job 30:30). Bildad says, "The wicked have terrible problems with their skin. That means you are among the wicked, Job."

The vocabulary of these verses has led some interpreters to explain the references to the firstborn of Death and the king of terrors as allusions to figures in either Babylonian or Ugaritic mythology. While it is difficult to discern whether such an allusion is intended, it is clear that Bildad is personifying the process and finality of death: calamity is wearing the wicked person down, i.e. Job, which will lead ultimately to the finality of death itself. When Bildad uses the phrase the firstborn

of Death he may be intentionally picking up the familial references from Job's response and turning them against him; refer to Job 17:14.

They are torn from the tent in which they trusted. Bildad made the simple calculation that the wicked suffer such great crises. Job suffered in a great crisis, therefore Job must be among the wicked and the sooner Job realised it the better.

Sulphur is scattered upon their habitations. This may either refer to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah or to an ancient custom of fumigating houses with brimstone in order to purify them from defilement.

- 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.'

Job 18:17-21

Bildad refers throughout this section to the destruction of both the house, e.g. tent (vv.14-15), habitations (v.15), dwellings, and place; and the household, i.e. memory, name, offspring, descendant, and survivor of the wicked in order to assert that Job's circumstances show he is one who does not know God.

Their memory perishes from the earth. In his previous speech, Job pleads for the earth to cry out on his behalf, testifying of his innocence before God; refer to Job 16:18-19. Here Bildad told Job that there was no possibility of this if he should die in his wicked state. If so, he would simply be among those whose memory perishes from the earth.

They have no offspring or descendant among their people. This was an especially cruel statement to one who had lost all ten of his children including seven sons: <<*There were born to him seven sons and three daughters*>> (Job 1:2) in an apparent tragic accident from Job's perspective: <<*While he was still speaking, another came and said, 'Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, and suddenly a great wind came*

*across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; I alone have escaped to tell you'>> (Job 1:18-19). Bildad felt that such cruelty was necessary to wake Job up from his self-deception. Bildad gives a transparent allegory which is singularly cruel in its obvious reference to Job's bereavement. The last state, having no offspring, descendant or survivor, is the worst. Bildad has listed the things most dreaded by an Israelite in life and in death as the tokens of rejection by God: <<**The righteous shall be kept safe for ever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off**>> (Psalm 37:28b), <<**May the descendants of evildoers nevermore be named!**>> (Isaiah 14:20b), and: <<**Thus says the Lord: Record this man as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days; for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David, and ruling again in Judah**>> (Jeremiah 22:30).*

Such is the place of those who do not know God. Bildad carried his attack yet further. Not only was Job among the wicked, he was also one who does not know God. This was a cruel and false statement to make against a man who was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil; refer to Job 1:1.