Job 18 • A Discourse on the Wicked

Introduction

Bildad employs what may be termed “Forrest Gump Theology” as “Wicked is as wicked does”. He first establishes what he believes are the universal consequences for wickedness and further stipulates wherever any of these traits are found as irrefutable proof that someone is wicked in God’s eyes. This is one of the chief reasons the book of Job was given at such an early point in history, even before the Torah to come through Moses, as there was a severe misunderstanding in how things actually worked spiritually. It’s not just that they had a false understanding where both God and Satan were concerned but possessed no tolerance for trials and testing. They misunderstood God as immediate judge and jury in every single instance.

Read verses 1-4

Q: How did Bildad begin his previous response to Job? How does this parallel v.2?

“How long will you say these things, And the words of your mouth be a mighty wind?” — Job 8:2

Q: What is Bildad probably responding to in v.3?

A: At this time it was believed that the primary characteristic which distinguished a human being from all others in the animal kingdom was wisdom. Job’s repeated position that his friends lacked wisdom was therefore interpreted by them as a personal insult that meant Job thought they were as stupid as the beasts.

Q: Why does Bildad think Job is insulting and ridiculing in his responses?

A: According to v.4, Bildad assigns the source to Job’s personal anger.

Point: Some, like Bildad, interpret all anger as invalidating any response, even though there is such a thing as “righteous anger” or just plain passion.

Q: To what degree does Bildad believe Job’s anger has undermined his view of what is taking place?

A: In v.4, Bildad is essentially asking if Job is so self-deceived that he thinks the whole natural order of the world will reorder itself just to make him right. In modern English it is like saying, “So you’re right and the whole universe is wrong, eh?”

Application: Like someone whose primary goal is to win an argument, Bildad will keep returning to that which Job has already rejected until Bildad wins the debate, believing Job has merely allowed his emotions to carry him astray.

Read verses 5-13

Observation: While God certainly intervenes at times to administer justice which we commonly call “divine retribution”, He has also built into the universe a natural order of things which do not require His automatic involvement, the theological term for such being “dynamistic retribution”. For instance, the law of gravity is dynamistic and does not require God’s direct involvement when anything falls. It will help us understand this and other sections in Job if we realize that Bildad and his friends think that everything is the result of divine retribution and automatically involves God’s direct intervention even if it is something that is the result of dynamistic retribution.

Q: To what spiritual state does Bildad reveal he assigns to the source of Job’s anger?

A: According to the main subject of this overall response, Bildad believes Job is not merely mistaken or ignorant, but wicked, a condition which is willfully undertaken.
12His strength is famished,
And calamity is ready at his side.
13His skin is devoured by disease,
The firstborn of death devours his limbs.

Q: What are the 4 uses of light in v.5-6?

- (v.5) “...the light of the wicked goes out...”
- (v.5) “...the flame of his fire gives no light.”
- (v.6) “The light in his tent is darkened...”
- (v.6) “...his lamp goes out above him.”

Q: What are the two main meanings of these metaphors as employed throughout Scripture?

A: Giving no light is to lack God’s wisdom, and a light extinguished is the onset of physical death. The wicked have no spiritual light to guide them and the end result will be literal death both in this life and the one to come.

Q: What are the consequences of wickedness in this life according to v.7?

A: That which the wicked has chosen to follow defines his path (“stride is shortened”), and his choices define the consequences (“his own schemes bring him down”).

Point: It is interesting that Bildad begins with an example which does not require divine intervention but with personal choice defining the automatic effects of the pursuit of wickedness.

Q: What are the 6 synonyms for “trap” employed in v.8-10?

1. (v.8) “nets”
2. (v.8) “webbing” – These first two refer to a thin mesh stretched over a pit dug to capture game.
3. (v.9) “snare”
4. (v.9) “trap” – These two are devices designed to close around the victim’s limbs or throat.
5. (v.10) “noose”
6. (v.10) “trap” – This not the same Hebrew word in the previous verse for “trap”. These two items use rope, the noose to hang from above and this one most likely to be laid on the ground and disguised so the victim will step into it.

This describes the inevitable, altered path of the wicked so that they cannot possibly escape the traps laid out by God on their chosen path.

Q: What are the 6 corresponding personal consequences of these traps according to v.11-13?

- (v.11) “...terrors frighten him...”
- (v.11) “...terrors...harry him at every step...”
- (v.12) “...strength is famished...”
- (v.12) “...calamity is ready at his side...”
- (v.13) “...skin is devoured by disease...”
- (v.13) “...firstborn of death devours his legs.”

In other words, Bildad is saying that when the wicked are in denial that these things are happening to them as a consequence of their wickedness, that wickedness must be the source of Job’s problems because he is experiencing yet denying the very same things.

Application: Worldly wisdom says if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it must be a duck — or in this case Job is experiencing the same consequences as the wicked and therefore must be wicked. This is not always the case.
14“He is torn from the security of his tent, and they march him before the king of terrors.
15There dwells in his tent nothing of his; Brimstone is scattered on his habitation.
16His roots are dried below, and his branch is cut off above.
17Memory of him perishes from the earth, and he has no name abroad.
18He is driven from light into darkness, and chased from the inhabited world.
19He has no offspring or posterity among his people, nor any survivor where he sojourned.
20Those in the west are appalled at his fate, and those in the east are seized with horror.
21Surely such are the dwellings of the wicked, and this is the place of him who does not know God.”

Read verses 14-21

Q: To what are the further consequences of v.14-15 describing where the wicked are concerned?

A: Verse 14 is describing the wicked as being arrested and force-marched to their deaths—consequences at the hand of earthly justice, and v.15 alludes to Sodom and Gomorrah whose consequences came at the hand of God’s divine intervention.

Application: How well do you agree with Bildad’s assertion that the wicked are harassed and pursued incessantly by both God and man?

Q: How does v.21 summarize the common cause of each of the consequences for a wicked lifestyle listed in v.16-20?

A: The wicked “does not know God”. This is Bildad’s abrupt assessment of Job’s true spiritual condition and the reason he has no godly understanding and his replies are all just empty words.

Q: What, exactly, are these visible proofs of the presence of wickedness?

1. (v.16) The simultaneous corruption of both that which can be seen—“the branch is cut off above”, and the unseen—“roots are dried below”. The wicked are not merely compared to an unfruitful tree but one that is on the verge of dying.
2. (v.17 & 19) “Memory of him perishes”, “no name abroad”, “no offspring or posterity” and “nor any survivor” all describe what the ancient world considered its greatest legacy in their name and deeds being carried in the memories and stories of their offspring. The wicked have no worthwhile or lasting legacy.
3. (v.18) The wicked are “chased” and “driven” away so as to exist in an aberrational lifestyle.
4. (v.20) The wicked become a visible testimony to the entire world serving to shock everyone as to the consequences experienced for such a choice.

Application: Bad comforters and the biblically undiscerning interpret any consequences similar to those experienced by a sinner as proof of the presence of sin.

Point: This is exactly the substance of the false Faith-Prosperity gospel which sees bad health and poverty as the consequences of sin and a lack of faith. They see the main proof of one’s Christianity as measured by health and wealth and any kind of suffering as a judgment from God with no possibility of anything else.

Overall Application

• Does the biblical mandate that we console, exhort and edify sometimes get replaced by our own agenda to win a debate? How well do we examine ourselves in such situations?
• Is the presence of any anger proof someone is wrong?
• Do we sometimes look no further than the surface of things? Have you ever later found out your assumptions about someone were wrong?
• Have you ever assumed the presence of sin even though you have not witnessed an actual act of sin?