

## The Exiled Nation (585-535 BCE)

### *Job and the Problem of Suffering*

Readings: *Job 8:1-10:22*

#### ***Reflections:***

- Bildad's name and home land is a mystery to scholars. There are some loose connections that might be made to other ancient names but no apparent clear meaning can be discerned. His home would seem to be near the Euphrates, Shuah (See Genesis 25:2).
- Bildad's focus is completely on the justice of God. In other words, Job is just getting what he deserves. Again what the speaker wants to say as an encouragement becomes ultimately incredibly disheartening and discouraging as it creates a world where all suffering is ultimately the fault of the person suffering it.
- "...if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your rightful place. Your beginnings will seem humble, so prosperous will your future be." Here we see another clear sign of a religious mindset, particularly a magical one. "If I am perfect, then God will make me prosperous. It is a form of prosperity thinking that again turns God into Santa Claus. If you are good (do the right religious things), you will get lots of presents. If you are bad (aren't doing or believing the right things), you get on his bad list. God is like a light switch. He is either on or off. Your spiritual condition determines if you are blessed or cursed. Now, having said that, note the connection between perfection and prosperity. This view of God is common and creates a massive performance mindset that is obsessed with legalism and completely graceless. Many a church has been ruled by this approach to God.
- Bildad then appeals to the wisdom of the ancients. "Ask the former generations and find out what the fathers learned, for we were born only yesterday and know nothing..." Again, there are subtle but clear put downs in trusting anything but a common sense approach to spirituality and life. This is a majority rules sort of approach to spirituality. If the most people in the past have believed something, then it must be right. In fact, humans have a bent towards being religious and judgmental and unable to get God's grace. Therefore, if we look at truth from "what everyone thinks" or "what people have always believed" we will end up simply being sucked into a religious worldview where everything is black and white and good people get rich and are blessed and bad people

are poor and suffering to teach them a lesson. Our religious mindset always moves away from relational perspectives and exceptions to a binary approach to God.

- Bildad affirms the wisdom of the ancients: God gives people immediate blind justice. If you are blameless you will be rejected, if you are an evildoer then look out! (Job 8:20). A comforting world if you are healthy and rich but deadly if you have problems.
- Job doesn't disagree with Bildad directly but points out that in fact no one can be righteous before God and therefore everyone is left without hope. Job begins by declaring that no one can confront God or win an argument with God. God is all powerful as the creator of the universe. Although invisible and unable to be humanly perceived he is all powerful.
- Note: "the cohorts of Rahab" are not the friends of Rahab the prostitute. Rahab is a reference to the Babylonian Creation Epic where Rahab is the name for a creature of the deep sea (also called Leviathan in the Canaanite myths). This makes sense as Job has been talking about the creative power of God. The great creature of the sea (the most feared creature of the ancients) cowers at his feet (could also be translated as "crushed under his feet").
- Job concludes that because of God's power and perfection, he has no ability to question him. But this does not leave Job with hope. "Although I am blameless, I have no concern for myself, I despise my own life. It is all the same: that is why I say 'He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.'"
- Job, in declaring his hopeless condition asks a profound question: "If only there were someone to arbitrate between us...Then I would speak up without fear of him, but as it now stands with me, I cannot." Job needs a mediator with God and then relationship is restored. A world without Jesus is hopeless. With Jesus, our mediator, grace and relationship are restored.
- Job then goes on to complain to God about his hopeless condition. Although he is blameless, he is destined to suffer and die. All he asks of is one final moment of joy before dying and disappearing for good. Job doesn't understand why God is causing him to suffer so but he declares that he has no basis to question God or expect any answer. His speech ends in despair: "I go to the place of no return, to the land of gloom and deep shadow, to the land of deepest night, to deep shadow and disorder, where the light is like darkness." Hopelessness.
- This whole section reminds us of how wonderful the message of Jesus is: God has sent a mediator; he has sent one to meet us in our suffering. God is not abandoning us to the grave but has brought with Jesus the power of the resurrection to rescue us from sin and death.