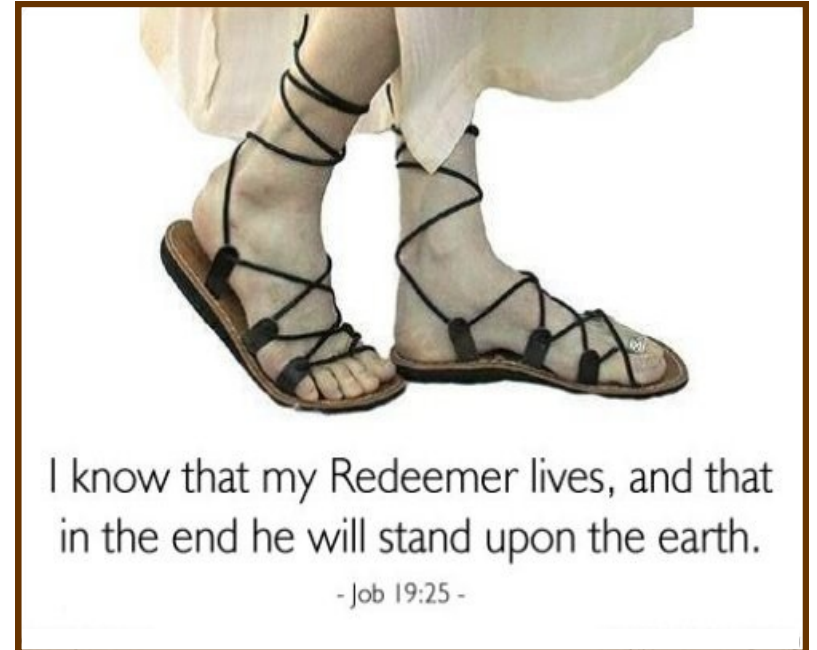


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# *Job*

## *Chapter Eight:*



I know that my Redeemer lives, and that  
in the end he will stand upon the earth.

- Job 19:25 -

## *The Discourse of Bildad*

*The commentary on the Book of Job, is by Saint Thomas Aquinas and was translated by Brian Mulladay and edited by Rev. Joseph Kenny, O.P. The book shows how human affairs are ruled by divine providence using probable arguments.*

## CHAPTER EIGHT THE DISCOURSE OF BILDAD: THE ALLEGORY OF THE RUSH

### **The First Lesson: God is Just**

1 Bildad of Shuah spoke next: 2 How long will you go on talking like that? And prolong the high spirit of the speech of your mouth? 3 Can God deceive judgment or the Almighty falsify justice? 4 Even if your sons sinned against him and he delivered them into the hands of their iniquity 5 yet if at dawn, you will rise to God, 6 and you will plead with the Almighty, 6 if you will proceed pure and honest, at once He will awake to you, he will give you back the peaceful dwelling of your justice. 7 As your prosperity was small, so your future prosperity will be greater.

In the discourse which Job just finished, he had responded to the speech of Eliphaz. He showed Eliphaz was mistaken in a deep and efficacious way. But Bildad of Shuah, who agreed with the same opinion of Eliphaz, did not understand the profundity of Blessed Job and so he speaks against the answer of Blessed Job like men usually speak against the opinions they do not understand. For men who do not understand the minds of others speaking are usually deficient in two ways. One of these is because they do not know when the speaker arrives at the conclusion he proposes. Another is because they are not able to understand the order of the discourse of the speaker. This is clearly shown in the speech of Bildad when the text says, "Bildad spoke next, 'How long will you go on talking like that?'" For Job seemed to him to talk too long because he did not consider or understand the conclusion Job wished to draw in his discourse. Similarly, he did not grasp the order of the things which Job had said, namely, how they had been connected to one another. So he continues, "and prolong the high spirit of the speech of your mouth?" For he concluded that because Job had explained many things whose order he did not understand that his words were haphazard like a man who has no ability to reason, saying various things without rational order, spurred on by the impulse of his spirit.

***"Do not delay in turning back to the Lord."***

***(Sirach 5:8)***

Consequently he shows what conclusion he intends to draw from all he said already saying, "God does not spurn a simple man," for he will not place him far from him so that he does not sustain one who clings to him in simplicity of heart. "Nor does he lend his hand to the wicked," i.e. he will not help them so their prosperity is confirmed. Yet Job could say, "Whatever you may say and you want to prove with analogies I have experienced the contrary. For when I was simple, I suffered adversity and my evil adversaries prevailed against me." Bildad wishes to disprove this saying, "Until your mouth be filled with laughter and from your lips break forth a cry of joy," as if to say: What I have told you is so true that you will experience it, in yourself, but only if you will be simple in such a way that your happiness which will follow from your prosperity will be characterized by breaking forth in laughter and jubilation. These usually accompany great rejoicing. Also the contrary is true, for, "Those who hate you will be covered with shame," for they will be openly confounded in various ways so that in this way they will wear confusion like a garment. So that this would not seem impossible to someone because of the present prosperity in which they seemed to flourish, he continues, "and the tent of the wicked will not endure." For the tent in which most of the men of the East customarily here and have their chattel and possessions can be understood to mean all those things which pertain to the prosperity of this present life. Consider that Bildad mentions the hypocrite and the simple man because he thought that Job was not truly holy, but a hypocrite. But if he will begin to be simple, he promises him prosperity in the future.

### ***END OF JOB CHAPTER 8***

Also, since, as was said, Bildad did not understand the intention of Job, he takes his words in an entirely different way than intended and tries to deduce that they were not fitting. For in what he said, Job wanted to disprove the proposition of Eliphaz who thought that adversities in this world happened because of the sins of men and that if the sinners afflicted by God were converted, they would return to their former state of prosperity. So he spoke against both these ideas. Against the first he said, "Would that my sins and the calamity which I suffer were weighed in a balance!" (6:2) Against the second he said, "I have despaired; I will not live longer to any purpose," (7:16) and many other things like this as is clear in the verses above. When Job said these things, he intended to prove that punishment for sinners and rewards for justice should be hoped for from God in this life. But Bildad did not know about the other life. So he took these words as though Job meant that God does not punish sins or reward good deeds, which seems contrary to divine justice. So Bildad makes his first proposition when he says, "Can God deceive judgment, or the Almighty falsify justice?" as if to say: This follows from your words if God punishes man in this world, though sinless or beyond the desert of his sins, or if he does not repay those turning back to him with good things. Note that justice is corrupted in two ways: by the cunning of an astute man and by the violence of a powerful man. There are, however, both perfect wisdom and omnipotence in God. Yet the name wisdom in God does not mean he overturns judgment like an astute man, nor does omnipotence in God mean that he subverts what is just like a violent man.

There were two things which seemed to keep Job from being restored to his former prosperity even if he were converted to God as Eliphaz advised. One of these was the fact that the children which he lost were dead and he could not expect them to be brought back to life by his conversion. So Bildad says, "Even if your sons sinned against him, and he delivered them into the hands of iniquity," as if to say: When you have converted to God, you will regain those things which you lost by your sins. Your sons however were not punished by death because of your sins, but because of their own sins. So the fact that your sons will not be restored to life after you have converted is not against the argument of Eliphaz who said that you will be restored to your prosperity by conversion. Note here that because he believed the punishments of this present life are a recompense for sins and the foremost of these present punishments is death, man will be perfectly punished for sin when he is brought to death because of sin. He clearly says this, "and he delivered them up to the hands of their iniquity," as if into the power of their own sins so that they might be led to the ultimate punishment for their sins without any lifeline.

The other thing which seemed to keep Job from returning to his former prosperity was the fact that he had already finished the greater part of his life and little remained for him, as Job said before. So it did not seem that his former prosperity could be restored sufficiently in that little time, even if he were converted back to God. Thus Bildad promises him that after his conversion a compensation will be made of the quantity of time so that he would obtain goods which were greater than he had before because he was going to have them for such a short time. So Bildad first describes the manner of conversion to him for which three things are required. The first is that the sinner rise from his sin without delay. So he says, "Yet if at dawn," i.e. at the right time, "you will rise to God," i.e. leave your sins as Sirach says, "Do not delay in turning back to the Lord." (5:8) The second is that man make satisfaction for his sins. For this he says, "and you will plead with the Almighty." Prayer seems like the first among the works of satisfaction. The third is that man persevere in taking care that he does not relapse into sin. So he says, "if you proceed pure and honest," avoiding uncleanness of the flesh in yourself and the injustices by which your neighbor is injured. So after he has described the perfect conversion, he adds the promise of prosperity saying, "At once, God will awake to you," For God seems to sleep when he permits the just to be afflicted; but he seems to awaken when he defends them according to the text, "Awake, why are you sleeping, O Lord?" (Psalm 43:23) He expresses the effect of this awakening saying, "he will give you back the peaceful dwelling of your justice," as if to say: Your house and your family were disturbed at the time of your sin, but in the time of your justice, they will have peace. He promises again an excess of prosperity so that Job could not complain about the shortness of the time, saying, "as your past prosperity was small," in comparison with the goods which will follow, "so your future prosperity will be greater," such that the great prosperity will repay you for the time which you spent in adversity.

He applies the comparison which he used before about the rushes to this opinion which he has related about the frailty of confidence. For his trust seems to be related to rushes in two ways. First like the verdant color of the rush, which fades quickly when the sun comes out and the moist earth is dried. He expresses this idea saying, "it seems moist," i.e. rushes," before the sun rises," which takes away its verdant color. "And at its rising," of rushes, "its buds blossom." For this plant seems to grow quickly and produce its own fruit. In the same way, the hypocrite seemed to prosper, because fortune smiles on him in the beginning, but when the sun, i.e., tribulation comes out, his prosperity quickly fails him. Second, confidence may be placed in the rush in other ways, i.e. either from being rooted bunched together with many others or from the firmness of the place where it grows when it is born in a rocky place. So he consequently says, "its roots," of the rushes, "were crowded together on a heap of stones," as the roots of many papyrus are intertwined together. He expresses the first idea with this. He expresses the second idea saying, "and it will dwell among stones." So even a hypocrite can have trust in his own stability, not only founded in his own prosperity, but also in the great number of his relatives and domestics or even because of the strength of the state or city in which he lives. But this trust proves vain to him as it does to the rush. For the text continues, "if someone will pull it," the rush, "from its place," the place, "will deny him and say, 'I do not know you.'" This means: The rush is so uprooted from a place that no trace appears in the place. Nor is the place disposed to receive the same rushes a second time. He next explains the reason for this, "For this is the joy of his path," or "of his life that others may be brought forth from the earth again," as if to say: The progress and life of the rush do not tend to abide in some place by natural desire towards this end nor is it preserved through this outcome, namely, that the same number of rushes replace them as were uprooted, but that other of the same species spring up again. So it is also when someone by death or in some other way is separated from the society of strong men. He passes almost immediately into oblivion as Psalm 30 says, "I was delivered into forgetfulness as though dead in their heart." (v.13) But society rejoices in those who replace him, as Qoheleth says, "Let another born in the kingdom he consumed by want. I have seen that all the living who walk under the sun, hasten to the young man who takes his place." (4:14) These two passages are introduced into the argument to show that though the wicked may prosper for a time, nevertheless it is not a firm prosperity in which they confide, but quickly pass away and should be accounted like nothing.

## The Second Lesson: God's Justice is Traditional Doctrine

He shows how the hope of the hypocrite perishes, as he continues, "His folly will not please him." Here we should consider that a hypocrite has a vain heart, indeed, for he neglects spiritual things and is only interested in things of time. He is satisfied as long as he succeeded well in temporal things according to his expectation. But if temporal things should be taken from him, then he must be displeased because he does not have a true and stable heart respecting God. He says therefore, "His folly does not please him," i.e. he will be displeased when adversity comes, because he does not have a right heart respecting God. His care which he had for temporal things will be completely deficient. To show this he continues, "His assurance is like a spider's web," which means that the things in which he confided will easily be broken like a spider's web. For he did not confide in God's help, but in the strength of his house, i.e. his great wealth, his many relatives and things like this. But these easily fail him. So he continues, "He will put his trust in the stability of his own house," for he placed the confidence of his stability in the prosperity of his own house, "and" yet "he will not stand firm," because when divine help is no longer given him, these goods too will fail. When someone anticipates that tragedy may happen to him in the future, he prepares something to fall back on for himself and his house against the adversities. But even this will not help him because he continues, "he will prop it up," with those remedies against adversities like supports are placed under a house which is in danger of falling, "and" yet "he will not rise up," neither he nor his house to the state of prosperity.

8 Question the generation that has passed; carefully investigate the memory of your father. 9 We are men of yesterday and we know nothing because our days on earth are like a shadow. 10 They themselves will teach you, and these are the words they will speak from the heart. 11 Do rushes flourish without moisture? Without water, can sedge grow? 12 Even at their freshest or not destroyed by a hand, they wither the fastest of all plants. 13 Such are the paths of all those who forget God and the hope of the hypocrite will perish. 14 His folly will not please him and his assurance is like a spider's web. 15 He will put his trust in the stability of his own house and he will not stand firm. He will prop it up, and he will not rise up. 16 It seems moist before the sun rises and at its rising its buds blossom. 17 Its roots were crowded together on a heap of stones and it will dwell among stones. 18 If someone will pull it from its place, it will deny him and say: I do not know you. 19 For this is the joy of his way (life), that others may be brought forth from the earth again. 20 God does not spurn a simple man nor does he lend his hand to the wicked. 21 Until your mouth will be filled with laughter and from your lips break forth a cry of joy. 22 Those who hate you will be covered with shame and the tent of the wicked will not endure.

In the preceding verses, Bildad of Shuah defended the same opinion Eliphaz the Temanite had proposed that men divinely punished in this present life for sin return to a state of prosperity after their conversion. He now intends to prove this in two ways: first from experience, second from analogy. Learning through experience is especially effective in particular things as far as proof and much more so the longer it has been observed and found without error. Those things which require long observation are especially verified by the memories of the ancients and so he has recourse to prove his proposition to the memories of the ancients. With reference to the ancients he says, "Question the generation that has passed." With reference to those immediately preceding him he says, "carefully investigate the memory of your fathers," that is those things which your fathers remember. The questioning of an earlier generation is done by considering what is written about the deeds of the ancients and what is reported about the ancients in tradition. Since many things both written and told about deeds of old are legends, he refers Job to the fathers who can speak about those things which they have actually seen so that no one can think him duped. He shows the necessity of this investigation when he continues, "We are men of yesterday," born almost yesterday, "and we know nothing," of ancient deeds because of this. He says this certainly to show the shortness of our life and so he continues, "because our days on earth are like a shadow." For a shadow passes swiftly, namely, immediately when an obstacle to light is removed. When a body is moved whose interruption of light makes a shadow, the former shadow passes and another takes its place. So man's days are continually passing by as long as one takes the place of the other. He shows the use he makes of the preceding investigation continuing, "They, themselves" who went before and the fathers who are consulted, "will teach you," the truth about the above questions. Either your fathers will teach you from words or the ancients will teach you by writing and tradition. "And these are the words they will speak from the heart." He adds this to show the truth of this teaching (about earthly restitution) as if to say: They will teach you nothing other than what they know in their hearts since there is no reason for them to deceive you.

He then introduces an analogy taken from material things to prove the proposition. He gives the example of two plants which grow in the earth. One of them demands moisture from the earth for its preservation, i.e. the bulrush or rushes. About this he says, "Do rushes flourish without moisture?" Also the other plant which requires an aqueous environment is the sedge. These are broad grasses pointed at their highest part which grow in watery places. So he continues, "Can sedge grow without water?" For the place is called a sedge bed where grass of this sort grows. He shows that the rush requires moisture and sedge-bed requires water because they dry out easily by the mere removal of the marsh or water, when there is no other cause of their dehydration. But there is a twofold cause of dehydration in plants things which grow on land. One is natural from old age; the other is violent, when they are forcefully uprooted. Yet when neither cause is present, rush and sedge dry up from the mere removal of marsh or water. This is the meaning of, "Even at their freshest," i.e. although still in their youth and vigor to exclude old age, "or not destroyed by a hand," to exclude violence," they wither fastest of all the plants," i.e. most easily of all the grasses.

He adapts this example to his purpose. Consider that he understood the clinging of man to God in this way to be the cause of earthly prosperity just as water is the cause of the verdant color of the grass. This is because he thought that the good of man consisted in earthly prosperity. It is clear, however, that the good of man consists in the fact that man clings to God. Thus he believed that because Job did not cling to God his earthly prosperity was failing. This is certainly true about spiritual happiness which is the true good of man, but it is not true of earthly prosperity which is reckoned among the least important goods, as it serves as an instrument to the true happiness of man. So he adds, "Such are the paths of all those who forget God, and the hope of the hypocrite will perish." Here consider he adds two corresponding examples to the two examples mentioned above. Sedge requires clear water to become green and dries out when this is lacking. Rushes require water hidden in moist earth and when this moisture is not present dries up. Likewise, there are some who perish in his opinion because they openly deny clinging to God in visible things. For instance, those who openly do deeds against God, which he represents as those "who forget God." For men who are not afraid to do evil openly seem to have completely put off reverence for God and not to remember him. But, there are some according to his opinion who perish because they do not cling to God in a hidden way. These are the hypocrites who pretend exteriorly to cling to God, but whose hearts cling to the earth. In speaking of the hypocrite, he talks about hope and of those forgetting God he speaks about paths, i.e. deeds, because the works of the latter are turned away from God, but the hope of the hypocrite is turned away from him.