

Job 8:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow without water?

Analysis

Bildad employs nature imagery to illustrate the ungodly's fate: 'Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow without water?' The 'rush' (gome, נָחַל) refers to papyrus reeds requiring wetland habitat. The 'flag' (achu, אֶחָ) is marsh grass or sedge. Both plants absolutely require their proper environment—remove the water, and they immediately wither. Bildad's analogy is clear: remove God's blessing from the hypocrite, and he similarly perishes.

The rhetorical questions expect negative answers—no, these plants cannot survive without their required elements. Similarly, Bildad argues, those lacking genuine piety cannot endure when trial comes. The imagery is agriculturally accurate and theologically true in general principle. However, Bildad misapplies it to Job, assuming Job's suffering proves he's like waterless reed—appearing green but actually rootless.

Jesus uses similar imagery: some seed falls on rocky ground, springing up quickly but withering when sun rises (Matthew 13:5-6, 20-21). The difference is pastoral application: Jesus warns against shallow faith, while Bildad presumes to diagnose Job's heart. The Reformed doctrine of perseverance affirms that genuine faith endures trial, but only God infallibly distinguishes true faith from false.

Historical Context

Papyrus grew abundantly in Nile delta marshes and other wetlands. Ancient Egyptians used it for writing material, boats, and baskets (Exodus 2:3). Bildad's audience would immediately grasp the image—papyrus outside its marsh habitat dies within hours. The metaphor's agricultural precision makes its misapplication to Job more tragic.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How do we distinguish between true doctrine (the godless cannot endure) and its wrong application (therefore Job must be godless)?
2. What does Bildad's nature imagery teach about the relationship between environment (God's grace) and thriving (spiritual life)?
3. In what ways does the doctrine of perseverance comfort genuine believers while warning false professors?

Interlinear Text

קִינָה	גִּמָּא	בִּלְא	בְּצֵה	יִשְׁנָה	אֶחָד	בְּלִי	מַיִם:
grow up	Can the rush	H3808	without mire	can	the flag	without	water
H1342	H1573		H1207	H7685	H260	H1097	H4325

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