

Job 8:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

(For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow:)

Analysis

Bildad argues human brevity requires dependence on ancestral wisdom: 'For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow.' The phrase 'of yesterday' (temol, 'יִמְלֹא) literally means 'yesterday'—humanity's brief individual lifespan provides insufficient time to discover truth independently. The admission 'we know nothing' is startlingly honest but serves Bildad's argument: individual ignorance necessitates trust in collective wisdom.

The shadow metaphor (tsel, 'צֵל) appears throughout wisdom literature (Psalm 102:11, 144:4, Ecclesiastes 6:12) denoting transience. Our fleeting existence cannot generate adequate understanding; we must depend on accumulated tradition. Bildad's logic is sound regarding human limitation but flawed regarding where ultimate authority resides. He substitutes human tradition for divine revelation.

The Reformed tradition affirms both human finitude and Scripture's sufficiency. We are indeed brief and ignorant (Psalm 90), but God has spoken authoritatively through His Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Tradition serves Scripture, not vice versa. Bildad's error lies in elevating consensus over revelation, assuming that what the fathers taught must be correct simply because they taught it.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern respect for elders and ancestors reflected practical wisdom —accumulated experience exceeds individual knowledge. However, this could calcify into traditionalism that resists new truth. Israel's prophets repeatedly challenged traditional consensus (Jeremiah 5:31, 8:8-9), demonstrating that antiquity doesn't guarantee accuracy.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 – Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How do we balance healthy respect for tradition with openness to correction by Scripture?
2. What does human transience teach us about where to ground our theological confidence?
3. In what ways does the Holy Spirit's illumination enable us to understand Scripture beyond mere repetition of traditional interpretations?

Interlinear Text

אֶת־יָמֵינוּ	עַל־	אָרֶץ:
nothing because our days	H5921	upon earth

Additional Cross-References

1 Chronicles 29:15 (Parallel theme): For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding.

Psalms 144:4 (Parallel theme): Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away.

Job 14:2 (Parallel theme): He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.

Psalms 102:11 (Parallel theme): My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass.

Job 7:6 (Parallel theme): My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope.

Genesis 47:9 (Parallel theme): And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.

Psalms 39:5 (Parallel theme): Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah.

Psalms 90:4 (Parallel theme): For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.