

Job 20 • Distinguishing the Righteous from the Wicked

Introduction

Zophar seems less able to speak anything new, so it is no surprise this will be the last time he speaks. Basically, that which Zophar presents here might be labelled as the life cycle of the wicked but it actually exposes his own concept of righteousness. Zophar crosses the line of rudeness and not only becomes toxic in his treatment of Job, but actually borders on prophecy with his predictions of Job's violent death, the destruction of his house, and the rising up of heaven and earth as a witness against him for Job's wicked and hypocritical lifestyle. It is yet another example of someone who because they have determined God is angry with a fellow believer that they are somehow called to be a conduit of that anger for the sinner's own good.

¹Then Zophar the Naamathite answered,

²"Therefore my disquieting thoughts make me respond,
Even because of my inward agitation.
³I listened to the reproof which insults me,
And the spirit of my understanding makes me answer.

⁴"Do you know this from of old,
From the establishment of man on earth,
⁵That the triumphing of the wicked is short,
And the joy of the godless momentary?
⁶Though his loftiness reaches the heavens,
And his head touches the clouds,
⁷He perishes forever like his refuse;
Those who have seen him will say,
'Where is he?'
⁸He flies away like a dream, and they cannot find him;
Even like a vision of the night he is chased away.
⁹The eye which saw him sees him no longer,
And his place no longer beholds him.
¹⁰His sons favor the poor,
And his hands give back his wealth.
¹¹His bones are full of his youthful vigor,
But it lies down with him in the dust.

Read verses 1-3

Q: What is the source of Zophar's knowledge of what is taking place and therefore his motivation for the approach he takes?

- (v.2) "my disquieting thoughts"
- (v.2) "my inward agitation"
- (v.3) "the reproof [from Job] which insults me"
- (v.3) "the spirit of my understanding"

By Zophar's own testimony he is acting from his own thoughts and feelings with no direction from God.

Application: When a Christian believes that everything he **feels** and **thinks** are God's **thoughts** and **feelings**, **self-deception** has taken root from the outset.

Read verses 4-11

Q: The main topic of this section is encapsulated in v.4-5. How is this expressed?

- "...the triumphing of the wicked is short..."
- "...the joy of the godless is momentary..."

Point: Zophar is speaking about temporal things as experienced in the course of this life, but even if the wicked are given a lifetime of fame and fortune, it is still a brief and fleeting experience when compared to what is to come in eternity.

Q: What is Zophar therefore assigning to Job in v.4-5?

A: That he is experiencing God's retributive justice, something deserved because of Job's wicked lifestyle.

Q: How is v.6 a poetic way of describing the pride of the wicked?

A: Both "his loftiness" and "his head", which are pictured "in the heavens" and as touching "the clouds" are metaphors for the excessive pride of the wicked.

Q: How are v.7-9 using different illustrations to convey a common theme?

A: The illustrations of the temporal dung, fleeting dream, a night vision chased away, and the eye and place no longer seeing him are highlighted by the results "he perishes", "where is he", "they cannot find him", "chased away", and "sees him no longer".

Point: It is interesting that God may be implied but is not specifically mentioned here. This might be interpreted as coming from someone more concerned about his standing and legacy among men than with God.

Q: What is being suggested in v.10?

A: That whatever might remain of the wicked's possessions after he is removed from this life may fall to his children to use for the good deeds he lacked. In other words, whatever legacy he leaves behind is corrupted as well.

¹²“Though evil is sweet in his mouth
And he hides it under his tongue,
¹³Though he desires it and will not let it
go,
But holds it in his mouth,
¹⁴Yet his food in his stomach is changed
To the venom of cobras within him.
¹⁵He swallows riches,
But will vomit them up;
God will expel them from his belly.
¹⁶He sucks the poison of cobras;
The viper’s tongue slays him.
¹⁷He does not look at the streams,
The rivers flowing with honey and
curds.
¹⁸He returns what he has attained
And cannot swallow it;
As to the riches of his trading,
He cannot even enjoy them.
¹⁹For he has oppressed and forsaken
the poor;
He has seized a house which he has not
built.

Q: Zophar concludes with v.11 the assertion that the wicked die young. Is this always the case?

A: No.

Application: Zophar is an example of someone who becomes so intent on **proving his point** that he begins to embellish his facts so that a **generality** is presented as an unalterable **absolute**.

Read verses 12-19

Q: What do v.12-18 have in common?

A: They all involve eating or drinking, but with disagreeable results for the wicked.

Q: Why is this a sign of wealth and prosperity?

A: In ancient times a wealthy person not only does not need to daily scrounge and forage for their next meal, but can leisurely enjoy all the best delicacies prepared by his staff. It was one of the most visible signs of wealth and standing.

Q: What is textually significant in v.12-14 when it ultimately turns into “the venom of cobras”?

A: The literal deception of what is sweet in the mouth becoming poisonous in the belly is a metaphor for self-deception. The snake in biblical usage is most often associated with the deception of Satan the snake in the Garden of Eden.

Q: How might v.15 be expressed in the New Testament?

For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

— 1 Timothy 6:10

Q: Returning to the theme of snakes in v.16, what is the progressive usage of the serpent in Scripture?

- Deception in the Garden of Eden.
- The attack of the fiery serpents in the wilderness. (Num. 21:6)
- The false worship of Moses’ Nehushtan, which required its destruction. (2 Ki. 18:4)
- And “the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (Rev. 12:9) who is ultimately thrown into the Lake of Fire.

Q: And to what does v.19 attribute as the evils perpetrated by the wicked for which all these things have come to them?

A: These are common biblical expressions not just of the ill-treatment of one’s neighbor, but the evidence of the complete lack of love for same.

Application: Zophar has not witnessed Job’s **ill-treatment** of anyone, but this does not stop him from projecting **sin** where **sin** has yet to be found. He doesn’t just assume the presence of **sin** but assigns specific **sin**.

20“Because he knew no quiet within him,
He does not retain anything he desires.
21Nothing remains for him to devour,
Therefore his prosperity does not endure.
22In the fullness of his plenty he will be cramped;
The hand of everyone who suffers will come against him.
23When he fills his belly,
God will send His fierce anger on him
And will rain it on him while he is eating.
24He may flee from the iron weapon,
But the bronze bow will pierce him.
25It is drawn forth and comes out of his back,
Even the glittering point from his gall.
Terrors come upon him,
26Complete darkness is held in reserve for his treasures,
And unfanned fire will devour him;
It will consume the survivor in his tent.
27The heavens will reveal his iniquity,
And the earth will rise up against him.
28The increase of his house will depart;
His possessions will flow away in the day of His anger.
29This is the wicked man’s portion from God,
Even the heritage decreed to him by God.”

Read verses 20-29

Q: How has the emphasis changed from the last section?

A: It has moved from the ill-effects on personal relationships to possessions. Both are similar in the format framing them.

Q: What is the common message in v.20-28?

A: Riches are fleeting and the wicked oppressor will be suddenly thrust into poverty and starvation.

Q: Is this always the case?

A: This may be the threat that Zophar and friends believe to be true, but it has never been an absolute divinely enforced by God, and is not an axiom which Jesus taught.

“Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.’”

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’

“So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

— Luke 12:18-21

Point: Jesus provides a scenario where a whole lifetime can become obsessed with the wrong things without visible consequences until the ultimate ones to come in eternity.

Q: Zophar originally admitted he was acting from his own thoughts and feelings. How is this again shown in his threat to Job of how he will be spiritually exposed in v.27?

A: The word for “heavens” is describing the visible sky. Zophar is making the claim that the physical world will judge and expose Job’s iniquity.

Point: As false personalities get more extreme in their effort to be right, they themselves twist basic truths and embellish facts in God’s name, the very definition of the working of iniquity—to twist something to suit one’s self.

Q: As Zophar concludes this final section in v.28-29, how would this imagery “flow away” have been particularly powerful to the desert people of Job’s day?

A: Water usually means life until an excess becomes a flash flood of destruction. A good thing in excess becomes evil.

Q: What is completely missing from Zophar’s speech?

A: Any reference to repentance or mercy.

Q: What does Zophar seem to indicate is the final and perhaps worst tragedy?

A: The loss of possessions.

Q: What has Job often contended is the worst tragedy which is also missing from Zophar’s response?

A: Separation from fellowship with God.

Application: Zophar **transfers** what he fears most—loss of **relationships** and **possessions** in this life, while **projecting** them onto Job. He does not see Job’s **concern** for his own **concerns**.

Overall Application

- *Do you sometimes assume that your feelings and thoughts are the same as God's? Is there a remedy for this? [Hint: Prayer]*
- *Have you ever presented a general truth or trend as the immutable truth of God? What does this say about our intentions?*
- *Have you ever assumed the presence of sin even though you have not witnessed it?*
- *Have you ever found yourself defending earthly things rather than spiritual things?*

Job 20 • Distinguishing the Righteous from the Wicked, Page 4 of 4