

JOB

Chapter 20

Zophar Speaks: The Wicked Will Suffer

Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said: 2 “Therefore my thoughts answer me, because of my haste within me. 3 I hear censure that insults me, and out of my understanding a spirit answers me. 4 Do you not know this from of old, since man was placed on earth, 5 that the exulting of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless but for a moment? 6 Though his height mount up to the heavens, and his head reach to the clouds, 7 he will perish forever like his own dung; those who have seen him will say, ‘Where is he?’ 8 He will fly away like a dream and not be found; he will be chased away like a vision of the night. 9 The eye that saw him will see him no more, nor will his place any more behold him. 10 His children will seek the favor of the poor, and his hands will give back his wealth. 11 His bones are full of his youthful vigor, but it will lie down with him in the dust. 12 “Though evil is sweet in his mouth, though he hides it under his tongue, 13 though he is loath to let it go and holds it in his mouth, 14 yet his food is turned in his stomach; it is the venom of cobras within him. 15 He swallows down riches and vomits them up again; God casts them out of his belly. 16 He will suck the poison of cobras; the tongue of a viper will kill him. 17 He will not look upon the rivers, the streams flowing with honey and curds. 18 He will give back the fruit of his toil and will not swallow it down; from the profit of his trading he will get no enjoyment. 19 For he has crushed and abandoned the poor; he has seized a house that he did not build. 20 “Because he knew no contentment in his belly, he will not let anything in which he delights escape him. 21 There was nothing left after he had eaten; therefore his prosperity will not endure. 22 In the fullness of his sufficiency he will be in distress; the hand of everyone in misery will come against him. 23 To fill his belly to the full, God will send his burning anger against him and rain it upon him into his body. 24 He will flee from an iron weapon; a bronze arrow will strike him through. 25 It is drawn forth and comes out of his body; the glittering point comes out of his gallbladder; terrors come upon him. 26 Utter darkness is laid up for his treasures; a fire not fanned will devour him; what is left in his tent will be consumed. 27 The heavens will reveal his iniquity, and the earth will rise up against him. 28 The possessions of his house will be carried away, dragged off in the day of God's wrath. 29 This is the wicked man's portion from God, the heritage decreed for him by God.”

20:1–29 Yet another poem on the fate of the wicked as held by the “orthodox” theology of Job’s friends (see 8:11–19; 15:20–35; 18:5–21). (CSB)

20:2–3 Zophar takes Job’s words, especially his closing words in 19:28–29, as a personal affront. Job has dared to assert that on Zophar’s theory of retribution Zophar himself is due for punishment. (CSB)

20:2 *haste within me.* Zophar expresses deep agitation at Job’s discrediting his wisdom. He is defensive, and so he retorts. (TLSB)

20:3 *spirit answers me.* He claims to have received a special revelation, either from his “understanding” (reason) or a divine source. (TLSB)

20:4–11 Zophar is proud that he is a healthy and prosperous man, for, in his view, that in itself is proof of his goodness and righteousness. But the joy and vigor of the wicked will always be brief and elusive. (CSB)

20:4 *do you not know* – By these words Zophar suggests that Job really had no case at all. He was very condescending in his attitude toward Job. (PBC)

20:5 Zophar concedes that the wicked may indeed prosper, having something to shout or sing about, but this cause for celebration is short-lived. (TLSB)

20:7 *dung*. A symbol of what is temporary and worthless (see 1Ki 14:10). (CSB)

20:8 *he will be chased away like a vision of the night*. As the morning light chases away a night vision, so the memory of the evildoer will be chased quickly away. Cf 4:13. (TLSB)

20:10, 19 Oppression of the poor is the mark of the truly wicked (see, e.g., Am 2:6–8; 8:4–8). On this subject, Job had no quarrel with Zophar (see 31:16–23). (CSB)

20:12–15 An evil man’s wicked deeds are like tasty food that pleases his palate but turns sour in his stomach. (CSB)

20:15 *swallows down riches*. After taking what belonged to the poor. (CSB)

20:16–18 Suddenly struck down as if bitten by “a viper,” the wicked will no longer feast their eyes on their prosperity. They will not enjoy the results of their labor to the full; they will not participate in celebrating earth’s blessings. The wicked are described literally as not being able to swallow, referring to the ill-gotten gain as convulsing them or causing them to vomit up their gains. They cannot enjoy them. (TLSB)

20:18 *he will get no enjoyment*. A common theme in wisdom literature (see, e.g., Ecc 2:18–23). – This means that he shall give back the profit of his labor. He shall not be permitted to enjoy it or to consume it. (CSB)

20:20–25 Although a wicked man may fill his belly, when God vents his anger against him there will be nothing for him to eat. (CSB)

20:22 *hand of everyone in misery*. Hands of all the destitute—not just those the wicked have made destitute—will come upon the evildoers to avenge the injustice done to the needy. The full force of misery will “come against” them in the military sense, as in an attack. (TLSB)

20:23 *To fill his belly to the full*. For once, the wicked may have enough and more than enough. They may have thought they knew the satisfaction of greed, but the wicked will not know what full satisfaction is until they are filled with the wrath of God! (TLSB)

20:24 *iron*. Some have contended that the Book of Job must have been written late, since he mentions iron implements and the iron age does not begin until c 1300 BC. However, a smelted iron blade has been discovered at Tell Asmar, Iraq, and dated to c 2800 BC. Also, the Egyptians are known to have used iron tools beginning c 2500 BC. (TLSB)

20:25 *gallbladder*. Physical injury likened to an arrow through the gallbladder means certain death and also points to divine justice. Punishment reaches to the core of the wicked person's corruption. (TLSB)

20:26 *Utter darkness*. Recurring symbol of death and destruction (3:4–5; 12:25; 15:22–23; 18:18); represents the gloomy domain of the underworld (10:21–22; 17:13). The wicked belong to the darkness for they have rebelled against the light (24:13–17). (TLSB)

20:27 *eavens ... earth*. Heaven and earth function as enduring witnesses (e.g., Dt 32:1). Two witnesses are the legal minimum required for a verdict. Cf Dt 19:15. (TLSB)

20:28 *possessions...carried away*. Caused by intermittent streams that can overflow and cause extensive damage during the rainy season (see 6:15–16). (CSB)

day of God's wrath. Final public judgment, the decisive day of retribution against the evildoer. (TLSB)

20:29 Like Bildad in 18:21, Zophar concludes his speech with a summary statement in which he claims that all he has said is in accord with God's plans for judging sinners. (CSB)

this is the wicked man's portion. Repeated almost verbatim by Job in 27:13. (CSB)

Ch 20 Zophar elaborates his list of calamities for the wicked. In doing this, however, he assumes that the truly righteous are somehow exempt from external miseries and must enjoy prosperity now ("theology of glory"; see p 837). Such misunderstanding tempts us to lose our proper motivation for clinging to the Lord. Our goal is not this earth, which is fading, but "the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Php 3:14). • "Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed" (1Pt 4:13). Amen. (TLSB)