

JOB

Chapter 21

Job Replies: The Wicked Do Prosper

Then Job answered and said: 2 “Keep listening to my words, and let this be your comfort. 3 Bear with me, and I will speak, and after I have spoken, mock on. 4 As for me, is my complaint against man? Why should I not be impatient? 5 Look at me and be appalled, and lay your hand over your mouth. 6 When I remember, I am dismayed, and shuddering seizes my flesh. 7 Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power? 8 Their offspring are established in their presence, and their descendants before their eyes. 9 Their houses are safe from fear, and no rod of God is upon them. 10 Their bull breeds without fail; their cow calves and does not miscarry. 11 They send out their little boys like a flock, and their children dance. 12 They sing to the tambourine and the lyre and rejoice to the sound of the pipe. 13 They spend their days in prosperity, and in peace they go down to Sheol. 14 They say to God, ‘Depart from us! We do not desire the knowledge of your ways. 15 What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit do we get if we pray to him?’ 16 Behold, is not their prosperity in their hand? The counsel of the wicked is far from me. 17 “How often is it that the lamp of the wicked is put out? That their calamity comes upon them? That God distributes pains in his anger? 18 That they are like straw before the wind, and like chaff that the storm carries away? 19 You say, ‘God stores up their iniquity for their children.’ Let him pay it out to them, that they may know it. 20 Let their own eyes see their destruction, and let them drink of the wrath of the Almighty. 21 For what do they care for their houses after them, when the number of their months is cut off? 22 Will any teach God knowledge, seeing that he judges those who are on high? 23 One dies in his full vigor, being wholly at ease and secure, 24 his pails full of milk and the marrow of his bones moist. 25 Another dies in bitterness of soul, never having tasted of prosperity. 26 They lie down alike in the dust, and the worms cover them. 27 “Behold, I know your thoughts and your schemes to wrong me. 28 For you say, ‘Where is the house of the prince? Where is the tent in which the wicked lived?’ 29 Have you not asked those who travel the roads, and do you not accept their testimony 30 that the evil man is spared in the day of calamity, that he is rescued in the day of wrath? 31 Who declares his way to his face, and who repays him for what he has done? 32 When he is carried to the grave, watch is kept over his tomb. 33 The clods of the valley are sweet to him; all mankind follows after him, and those who go before him are innumerable. 34 How then will you comfort me with empty nothings? There is nothing left of your answers but falsehood.”

21:2 *be your comfort*. Instead of bringing him “the comforts of God,” as they professed (15:11), his friends turned out to be miserable comforters. The only consolation they can offer is to listen while he unburdens himself of complaints. (TLSB)

21:4 *Is my complaint directed to man?* No, says Job, I am complaining to God, because he is responsible for my condition—at least Job so perceived it. (CSB)

21:5–6 *lay your hand over your mouth*. Cover your mouth in awe, a common gesture of someone in shock. Mystery of God’s inscrutable ways produces dismay and “shuddering.” (TLSB)

21:5 *Look at me*. Job addresses his three friends. (CSB)

21:6 *I am dismayed.* To contemplate the morally upside-down situation in which the wicked flourish. (CSB)

21:7–15 Job’s counselors have elaborated on the fate of the wicked (see 8:11–19; 15:20–35; 18:5–21; ch. 20), but Job insists that experience shows just the reverse of what his friends have said. The wicked, who want to know nothing of God’s ways and who even consider prayer a useless exercise (vv. 14–15), flourish in all they do. Far from dying prematurely, as Zophar assumed concerning them (see 20:11), they live long and increase in power (v. 7). Bildad’s claim that the wicked have no offspring or descendants (see 18:19) Job flatly denies (vv. 8, 11). (CSB)

21:7 *grow mighty in power* – The word translated “power” also suggests “wealth.” (PBC)

21:9 *rod of God.* Discipline was commonly applied with a stick. Punishment Job feels (9:34) does not fall upon the wicked. (TLSB)

21:13 *peace.* The Hebrew root underlying this word is translated “those who live quietly” in Ps 35:20. (CSB)

Or, “they die in an instant,” without lingering agony of disease or disaster. (CSB)

21:16 Job disavows the unholy counsel of the wicked and knows that God is in control (see v. 17), but such knowledge makes God all the more of an enigma to him. (CSB)

21:17 *lamp of the wicked is put out.* A healthy life; “put out” refers to premature death. Job, however, is saying that this does not characterize the lives of the wicked. (TLSB)

21:18 *straw ... chaff.* A simile of the wretchedness of the wicked. Chaff is carried away by the lightest wind, and its removal brings about cleansing by extracting what is utterly useless. (CSB)

21:19 *Let him pay it out to them, that they may know it.* Refers to punishment for iniquity. Job maintains that the wicked, not their children, should suffer for their own crimes and face their own judgment. (TLSB)

21:20 *drink ... wrath of the Almighty.* Experiencing God’s judgment is often compared to becoming drunk on strong wine. (CSB)

21:22 *will any teach God knowledge?* See Isa 40:14. On the contrary, God is the one who does the teaching (see 35:11; 36:22; chs. 38–41). (CSB)

21:23–26 *One.* First of two types of people who are not classified as good and bad, righteous and wicked, but as fortunate and unfortunate, regardless of moral character (cf vv 23–24, 25–26). Life is complicated and does not disclose clear patterns of reward and punishment. From the well-nourished rich man in vv 23–24, whose body is filled with vigor, strength, and health, to the bitter, poor person in v 25, death always has the final say, and it says the same thing to all people, regardless of their moral condition. (TLSB)

21:28 *prince ... wicked.* Two descriptions are tied together: the prince has risen to his exalted position by extortion and violence. (TLSB)

21:30 *evil man is spared in the day of calamity.* Travelers of v 29 have seen the houses of the wicked still standing after a natural disaster. While Job offers no other evidence for his belief, the general principle is undeniable. (TLSB)

21:32 *watch is kept over his tomb.* Endowments are prepared by the rich, which may include employed servants to ensure the proper care of their tomb. (TLSB)

21:33 *clods.* Lumps or masses of earth or clay. In this case, clods are “sweet” because the wicked rest in peace in their great grave that honors them. (TLSB)

Ch 21 Job’s friends ignore the observable fact that many among the wicked prosper and live seemingly easy lives. By truthfully describing life on earth, Job is reminded to look beyond this life for his hope and righteousness. We, too, must look beyond the injustice we observe and continually confess that our outward predicament does not define God’s attitude toward us. While the houses of the wicked remain after earthly storms, the spiritual houses of those in Christ endure forever against sin, the world, and the devil because they are built on the rock that is Christ (Mt 7:24–27). • Dear Lord Jesus Christ, assure us that nothing will ever take us from Your hands (Jn 10:28), that even our death will be precious to You (Ps 116:15), and that we, like Your servant Job, will see You with our own eyes when our bodies are raised from the grave (19:26–27). Amen. (TLSB)