

## **Do The Wicked Suffer Job 20-21**

As we enter chapters 20 & 21 we find the last of this second round of conversations. Once again it is Zophar, the youngest of Job's friends, turn to speak. What unfolds is a theological conflict. Up to this point we have seen glimpses of retribution theology from each of Job's friends as well as a few rebuttals from Job. However, in these chapters Zophar doubles down as does Job and both do so with specifics.

### Ch. 20 – Zophar's Second Speech

#### **I. Why Zophar Speaks (v.1-3)**

We are going to spend some time looking at the content of both Zophar's argument and Job's rebuttal but I think it is important that we first understand why Zophar speaks. Once again we must remember that these three men stated that their purpose in visiting Job was to provide comfort and sympathy. However, Zophar's own words at the beginning of his second speech tell us a different story. Notice what he says:

"My thoughts answer me, because of my haste within me."

Haste implies urgency and Zophar is telling us that his thoughts and emotions are coming upon him like rapid fire – they are urging him to respond with urgency. In other words, Zophar is saying that he has a lot bottled up inside and he can stay quiet no longer.

"I hear censure that insults me, and out of my understanding a spirit answers me."

Censure implies a reprimand. Zophar and his companions have been reprimanded by Job and in Zophar's mind, this is an insult. It has stirred up his spirit – his spirit is compelling him to speak and he is going to do so because he understands the situation – he has certain knowledge that Job needs to hear.

There is a lot of arrogance in Zophar's approach. According to him, he has all the answers Job needs. There is no petition to God. If God plays a part here, Zophar implies that God will speak through him.

As we find ourselves in situations where we are to provide counsel, we must be very leery of doing so from an arrogant position. Most certainly our words must not be driven by perceived insults or a hurt ego but instead must come from a position of patient love and care for another individual.

#### **II. The Way of The Wicked (v.4-18)**

Job has just finished his desperate plea in Ch. 19 – He cries out for a redeemer and boldly proclaims that he will see this redeemer face to face one day. It is a stirring speech but apparently it has not moved Zophar at all. There is no mention of it. Instead, Zophar doubles down on what he and his friends have already told Job. In his mind, he has a clear knowledge of Job and his situation and Job needs to hear it!

v.4 – "Do you not know this from old, since man was placed on the Earth?"

Where have you been Job? This is common knowledge. This is the way it has always been and always will be. Tradition tells us that. Experience tells us that. All of your friends have told you that repeatedly but you refuse to listen.

Six things happen to the wicked man.

1. His life is short and his triumph and joy are fleeting (v.5-6)
2. Everything he has will be lost, including his position in life (v.7)
3. His life is a slippery slope that leads to destruction (v.8)
4. His family will distance themselves from him (v.9)
5. His children are going to pay for his mistakes (v.10)
6. His life will cost him and he will return to the dust. (v.11)

All of these things clearly fall upon the wicked man Job. Why don't you understand this? Have you not been paying attention?

These are clearly undesirable things and yet the wicked man cannot get enough of sin. The wicked man loves evil and sin!

v.12-13 –Wicked people love sin in the same way that people love food. They enjoy every bite and savor it. They don't want it to be over.

There is some truth in this right? Sin can be enjoyed. There is the old adage, if it feels good do it. People can enjoy sin and often return to it because they enjoy it. But what does it do? It rots your bones!

v.14. – The food is turned in his stomach – it is the venom of cobras within him.

v.16 – He will suck the poison of cobras. What? Who would do that?

- Think about those with an addiction – “I can give this up anytime I want” and yet they keep coming back. An alcoholic can see that his addiction is destroying his family and yet he keeps going back. This is what Zophar is saying.

v.17 – He will not turn to good things, but his addiction to sin will control him.

Zophar is telling Job that no one desires the things that happen to the wicked. They don't wish them upon themselves and yet they openly walk into them because their desire for sin is so strong.

Sin is addictive – it is often a slow fade – but it is the wrong path that will lead to death.

There is a lot of truth in these words of Zophar and yet they don't apply to Job. Let's keep going and we will see just how disconnected Zophar is.

### III. A Specific Guess (v.19)

During multiple conversations with his friends, Job has been accused of being wicked. Job has even acknowledged that perhaps there is some unknown sin in his life but he has also resented the fact that his friends have thrown nothing but generalities at him. Instead, Job has asked for specifics as if to say to his friends, "If I'm so wicked, what is my sin? Name it!"

In verse 19, Zophar attempts to do just that. It is the first time that we see a specific sin named in relation to Job.

"For he has crushed and abandoned the poor; he has seized a house that he did not build."

Zophar is insinuating that Job's wealth and prosperity has come by way of taking advantage of the poor. All he had built was not really his, it was taken from others. Job sought after all those things and was willing to do whatever to gain them, even at the expense of others.

There is just one problem. There is no proof of that. Zophar is clearly grasping at straws. (Perhaps he was a bit jealous of all that Job had acquired in his life?) Clearly, the descriptions we are given of Job in chapters 1 and 2 do not support Zophar's claim at all.

### IV. Shock Therapy (v.20-29)

Zophar finishes his speech with an attempt to shock Job into repentance. He describes the life of a wicked man on the run.

Even though the wicked man attains worldly gain, it will not be enough. He will continue to chase after more and more. The ultimate result of this behavior will be distress. Eventually God's judgment will come after him and he will be on the run.

This is the picture we see in v. 24 as he is fleeing from "an iron weapon" – the strength of God. He will be caught. Now, Zophar could have just said that God will catch up with him but he wants to make that point very clear. To do so he paints the picture of the wicked man being pierced by an arrow and having it yanked out with his guts attached. It is a very dark and gruesome picture. Zophar wants it to be. He is trying to shock Job and get his attention. The wicked man will be completely consumed, his sin will be revealed, and all his possessions will be taken away at the result of God's wrath.

This whole speech, Zophar has drawn a parallel between Job and the wicked man. The implication is very clear – Job, you are wicked. You have taken advantage of the poor for your own gain. This list of things that happens to the wicked – they have happened to you (confirming your wickedness). God is hunting you down – you cannot escape – you must repent.

The problem – it isn't true. Job isn't wicked and he has something to say about Zophar's words.

## Ch. 21 – Job’s Challenge to Zophar

### I. Let Me Speak (v.1-6)

Job’s rebuttal begins with a reminder to Zophar that his main complaint isn’t with his three friends. He asks Zophar to genuinely listen. All this time it has been apparent that only bits and pieces are heard and the result is the quest for a good reply – there is no desire to genuinely hear the other party. Job wants to be heard.

It’s remarkable that he even seems to be quite polite about it. “Bear with me.” He even tells Zophar that after he is finished, Zophar can continue to mock him.

“Is my complaint against man? Why should I not be impatient?”

Job is simply saying, my beef isn’t with you. You came to provide comfort or at least that is what you said. However, all I have seen is quite the opposite. Can you not see what I am dealing with? What my situation is? If you could genuinely see as a friend surely you would not continue to throw barbs at me. Have I not made it clear that my complaint is with God? I want an audience with him – I want to be heard. So yes, I have been impatient because now I feel like I am being attacked by two parties and none of this makes any sense to me.

So, look at me. Are you not appalled? Is your breath not taken back? Shouldn’t my situation cause you to provide sympathy instead of insults? Don’t you realize how I constantly think back upon my losses – the agony of those moments? I can’t get them out of my mind and when I compare what I have experienced with what you have said –it doesn’t add up.

### II. I See The Wicked Prosper (v.7-16)

Job is going to push back on what Zophar has claimed in regard to the life of the wicked. Remember that Zophar described six things that happen to the wicked.

1. His life is short and his triumph and joy are fleeting (v.5-6)
2. Everything he has will be lost, including his position in life (v.7)
3. His life is a slippery slope that leads to destruction (v.8)
4. His family will distance themselves from him (v.9)
5. His children are going to pay for his mistakes (v.10)
6. His life will cost him and he will return to the dust. (v.11)

Job pushes back on some of this. The idea is you say these things and yet I see these things...

v.7 – I have seen the wicked reach old age and have good health.

v. 8 – You say the wicked lose it all, even their families and yet I see that the wicked have large happy families just like anyone else.

v.9 – You say (Eliphaz) that the houses and possessions of the wicked face the wrath of God and yet I see that they are completely safe. There is no fear and trepidation in them.

v.10-13 – You say that prosperity does not come to the wicked and yet I see that they often do prosper – they prosper in almost every conceivable way.

v.14-15 – All of this happens while they openly denounce God. They want no part of him and yet they appear to be very successful.

### **III. How Often Is Your Viewpoint True (v.17-26)**

Job's friends have declared that the wicked do not prosper and yet Job has argued that they do indeed prosper. Job's friends have a reply to that as well claiming that if they do prosper they will not do so for long. Here we find Job's response to that reply – How often does this take place?

In Job's eyes, punishment appears to be delayed. To Job this doesn't make sense.

v.19 – What sense does it make for the children of the wicked to pay for their parents sin?

According to Job, the wicked need to see it for themselves. That is the only way that justice makes sense.

v. 23-26 – Job's main point is that there appears to be no real difference to the experiences of the wicked and the righteous. Both appear to deal with the good and the bad. The idea that the righteous always prosper and that the evil always fail doesn't always ring true. Life appears to be more complicated than that. Ultimately death claims them both.

### **IV. Quit Believing A Lie (v.27-34)**

As Job closes, he essentially tells his friends to quit believing a lie to suit their own interests.

"I know your thoughts" – I know what you are after. Your thinking is so dishonest because you seek malice against me. Your logic is obvious – You declare the wicked suffer – you see me suffer – and therefore I am wicked.

You claim that the knowledge you have shared is universal. If you truly believed that you haven't been around much because any traveler could tell you otherwise – that what you claim isn't true in reality.

You came to comfort me but these words cannot provide comfort because they are lies.

Within these comments resides Job's belief that he is innocent and will eventually be proven to be.

## **Personal Implications**

1. As believers, our words should never be driven by insult or ego. Instead we should always strive to speak from a position of love.
2. Zophar is right, sin is addictive – BEWARE
3. Presumption should not drive counsel.
4. Our primary strategy should not be to shock others into repentance but to love others into repentance.
5. We are to strive for a heavenly home.