

Job Chapter 20

Verses 1-19: Zophar's second speech focuses on two key ideas: the prosperity of the wicked is short, and his doom is sure.

"Zophar" describes the fate of the wicked in his second speech: they have their "short" times of "triumphing". There may be "passing pleasures of sin" (Heb. 11:25), but judgement is coming. Job's spiritual experience did not line up with Zophar's rigid expectations, so Job was branded a "wicked man".

Zophar spoiled it all again for Job with his second and last speech (compare 11:1-20), in which he admonished Job again to consider the fate of the wicked.

Job 20:1 "Then answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said,"

Zophar retorts with yet greater vehemence than before, and assumes a more ornate and elaborate style, still reiterating the former burden of the speedy doom of the wicked man.

Job 20:2 "Therefore do my thoughts cause me to answer, and for [this] I make haste."

For this thy severe sentence and denunciation of God's judgments against us (Job 19:29), which much more justly belongs to thyself and is actually executed upon thee. And because of thy reproaches, as it followeth (Job 20:3).

"My thoughts cause me to answer": "I thought to have troubled myself and thee with no further discourses, considering how to take exception and incorrigible thou art; but my thoughts or consideration of thy reproachful words force me to break silence, and to answer thee as the matter requires.

"For this I make haste": I speak sooner than I intended, because I am not able to contain myself longer, and fear lest I should forget what is in my mind. Possibly he interrupted Job when he was proceeding further in his discourse; or he prevented some of his brethren who made an offer to speak.

You would have thought that there would be no reply to the statement Job made in the last chapter. He obviously believed and even expressed it with his mouth. It appears that Zophar did not hear what Job said. If he did hear, he did not believe Job was telling the truth.

Job 20:3 "I have heard the check of my reproach, and the spirit of my understanding causeth me to answer."

Rather, I have heard, or, I hear the reproof of my shame. That is, a reproof that puts me to shame, or is intended to do so.

"The spirit of my understanding causeth me to answer": Or, more literally, "Out of my understanding my spirit answereth me, or causeth me to answer". He professes to be moved by an impulse within, which he cannot but obey.

Job had reproved him along with his other friends. Zophar thought he was compelled to answer.

Verses 4-8: Contrary to Zophar's confident assertion, sometimes wicked people live long lives. For example, Noah endured the wickedness of his neighbors for 120 years while he preached and built the Ark (Gen. 6:3), and God gave the Canaanites four centuries before He judged them as a nation.

Job 20:4 "Knowest thou [not] this of old, since man was placed upon earth,"

This which I am now about to say.

"Thou": I say, who pretends to such an exact and universal knowledge of men and things, be ignorant of so notorious a thing. Which wicked men sensibly feel, and good men diligently observe, and all men are forced to acknowledge, one time or another?

"Of old": I.e. from the experience of all former ages.

"Since man was placed upon earth": I.e. since the world was made, and there were any men to observe God's government of it.

Verses 5-6: "Wicked ... hypocrite ... triumphing": The application of Zophar's words about this wicked, hypocritical, proud person were aimed at Job. He would, like others so wicked, suffer the consequences of his sins (verses 7-29).

Job 20:5 "That the triumphing of the wicked [is] short, and the joy of the hypocrite [but] for a moment?"

He affirms that the destruction of the wicked is not only certain, but speedy. (Compare Psalm 103:16 and Job 7:8; Job 7:10).

"The joy of the hypocrite": This he adds by way of reflection upon Job, who though he did clear himself from gross wickedness, yet might be guilty of deep hypocrisy.

Here it means that the occasion which the wicked had for rejoicing would be brief. It would be "but for a moment", and he then would be overwhelmed with calamity or cut off by death.

Zophar implied that there had been a tradition set in the beginning that the wicked would not triumph for long. He believed Job was a hypocrite.

Job 20:6 "Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds;"

Though, in worldly grandeur and glory, he should arrive to such a pitch as the Assyrian monarch was ambitious of, as to ascend into heaven, exalt his throne above the stars of God, and be like the Most High. Or be comparable to such a tree, by which the greatness of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom is expressed, the height whereof reached unto heaven (Isa. 14:12).

"And his head reach unto the clouds": Being lifted up with pride, because of his greatness, and looking with contempt and scorn on others. The Septuagint version is, "if his gifts ascend up to heaven", etc. which well agrees with a hypocrite possessed of great gifts, and proud of them. As Capernaum was highly favored with external things, as the presence of Christ, his ministry and miracles, and so said to be exalted unto heaven. Yet, because of its impenitence and unbelief, should be brought down to hell (Matt. 11:23).

Job 20:7 "[Yet] he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where [is] he?"

Not only in this world, but in the world to come, both in his outward substance here, and in his body in the grave, and in his soul to all eternity. And that in the most shameful and disgraceful manner; he shall perish in his own corruption, and like his own dung inevitably, which is never returned to its place again. Dead bodies were reckoned by the ancients as dung, and the carcasses of men are rather to be cast out like dung; and the Arabians used to bury in dunghills even their kings; to which some think the allusion is.

"They which have seen him shall say, where is he?" Such as formerly gazed at him, in his prosperity, with wonder and amazement at his grandeur and greatness. Now being removed from his outward splendor, or from the world, by death, ask where he is, not being able to see him in his former luster, nor in the land of the living (see Job 14:10).

Job had reached a very high position of prosperity before all of the calamity came upon him. It appears, that Zophar was jealous of that high esteem, and had hoped that Job would fall. It did not matter how highly he was thought of, Zophar said he would fall as low as Job had, sitting in the heap of ashes. He said he would fall so low that no one could find him. Some might ask, where he had gone.

Job 20:8 "He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night."

Either as a dream which is forgotten, as Nebuchadnezzar's was, and cannot be recovered. Or as the matter and substance of a dream, which, though remembered, is a mere illusion. As when a hungry or thirsty man dreams he eats or drinks, but, awaking, finds himself empty, and not at all refreshed. What he fancied is fled and gone, and indeed never had any existence but in his imagination (Isa. 29:8).

"Yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night": Either the same as a nocturnal dream, or what a man fancies he sees in his dream. Or like a mere specter or apparition, which is a mere phantom, and, when followed and pursued, vanishes and disappears. So such a man before described is chased out of the world, and is seen in it no more (see Job 18:18).

He was speaking here of a dream not being real, and it being gone when morning came. A vision is very similar. He said Job would vanish, as if he had not been there in the first place.

Job 20:9 "The eye also [which] saw him shall [see him] no more; neither shall his place any more behold him."

In this world, concerned in the affairs of life, and busy in worldly employments, and especially in the grandeur he sometimes was, if not removed by death. But the former sense seems most agreeable by what follows.

"Neither shall his place any more behold him": The men of his place, as Ben Gersom, those that lived in the same place he did. Or he shall not be seen, and known, and acknowledged any more as the master, owner, and proprietor of the house he formerly dwelt in. This seems to be taken from Job's own words in (Job 7:10). The above Jewish commentator interprets this verse of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, whom Moses and the Israelites would see no more (Exodus 10:29).

This was a threat to Job that he would die and not be seen any more of his people.

Job 20:10 "His children shall seek to please the poor, and his hands shall restore their goods."

That is, shall seek their favor by making good what had been taken from them, or otherwise; or it may be rendered, the poor shall oppress his children.

"And his hands shall restore their goods": (compare verses 15 and 18). He himself will be so crushed and broken in spirit that he will give back with his own hands the goods whereof he has deprived the poor. The restitution, i.e., will be made, in many cases, not by the oppressor's children, but by the oppressor himself.

Job's children were dead, so this was a useless threat from Zophar.

Job 20:11 "His bones are full [of the sin] of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust."

"He shall return to the days of his youth," and (Psalm 89:46): "The days of his youth hast thou shortened." "Though he is in the full vigor of life, yet it shall lie down with him in the dust." The wicked die young.

It is so interesting, to me, that Zophar and Job's other so called friends kept speaking of Job's sins in general, but not specifically. They did not specifically know of the sins they spoke of

themselves. Now Zophar was trying to reach back to Job's youth for sins that he committed. Job had long since been forgiven for those sins.

Verses 12-19: These verses represent the heart of Zophar's perceptions about Job's life and circumstances. Yet his conclusions were wrong because his perceptions were false, Job was not a "wicked man" (20-29). Regardless of what others perceive, the godly can always stand firm in the truth.

In verses 12-22: Evil in a life takes away all the enjoyment, implying that Job had no joy because of sin, such as that (in verse 19).

Job 20:12 "Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, [though] he hide it under his tongue;"

I.e. to his taste, though it greatly please him for the present.

"Though he hide it under his tongue": As an epicure doth a sweet morsel, which he is hesitant to swallow, and therefore keeps and rolls it about his mouth that he may longer enjoy the pleasure of it": Though he be highly pleased with his lusts, and cleave to them in hearty love, and resolve to hold them fast, and improve them to the greatest delight and advantage.

Job 20:13 "[Though] he spare it, and forsake it not; but keep it still within his mouth:"

I.e. will not part with it; or gratify and obey it, instead of subduing and mortifying it.

"Keep it still within his mouth": To suck out all the sweetness or benefit of it, though it is very delightful to him.

This was speaking of the sweetness of sin. It was also saying that Job had not only tasted of sin and found it sweet, but had actually savored the sin, and bragged to his friends about it.

Job 20:14 "[Yet] his meat in his bowels is turned, [it is] the gall of asps within him."

Still, a time comes when the self-complacency of the wicked man is shaken. He experiences a failure of health or spirits. Then, suddenly, it is as if the meat that he has swallowed had been turned to poison in his bowels, as if the gall of asps were within him.

"The gall of asps": I.e. exceeding bitter and pernicious. Gall is most bitter. The gall of serpents is full of poison, which from thence is conveyed to their mouths by veins, as Pliny observes. And the poison of asps is most dangerous, and within a few hours kills without remedy.

This was speaking of the sin being sweet in the mouth, and bitter in the stomach and bowels. This was speaking of a man (supposedly Job), who had sinned and later found the sin had been poison to his body.

Job 20:15 "He hath swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again: God shall cast them out of his belly."

He hath got possession of them, and thought them to be as much his own as the meat he had eaten. But he is deceived, he shall vomit them up again. He shall be compelled to restore them: his own conscience perhaps may make him so uneasy in the keeping of what he has gotten, that, for the quiet of his own mind, he shall make restitution. And that not with the pleasure of a virtue, but with the utmost reluctance, like the pain produced by a substance causing vomiting.

"God shall cast them out of his belly": If he does not himself voluntarily refund what he has violently taken away, God, by his providence, shall force him to do it. And bring it about, one way or other that his ill-gotten goods shall return to their rightful owners. If man's hand cannot reach him, God shall find him out.

It appears to me, that Zophar and Job's other friends had been jealous of Job's riches, and they were very pleased now that those riches had been taken away. They believed that God had taken them from Job.

Job 20:16 "He shall suck the poison of asps: the viper's tongue shall slay him."

What he sucked so sweetly, and with so much pleasure, shall, in the issue, prove most ungrateful and destructive. As the poison, or head (for the Hebrew rosh signifies both), and the poison lies in the head of asps would be to one that sucked it. Such is sin; such especially will all unlawful gains be. The fawning tongue will prove the viper's tongue. All the charming graces that are thought to be in sin will turn, when the conscience is awakened, into so many raging furies.

"And he shall vomit them up again": That is, make restoration of them, not freely, but forcedly, with great reluctance, much pain of mind and gripes of conscience.

"God shall cast them out of his belly": He shall oblige him to cast them up again, by working upon his heart, making his mind uneasy. Loading his conscience with guilt, so that he shall have no rest nor peace until he has done it. Though they are as meat in his belly within him, they shall not remain with him. Though they are in his house, in his coffers, or in his barns, they shall be fetched out from there.

Zophar was trying to crush the spirit of Job with all the violent threats he put forth. The threats were of a general nature, but Job knew they were pointed to him.

Job 20:17 "He shall not see the rivers, the floods, the brooks of honey and butter."

"He shall not see them with any pleasure. The most delightful things of this world, and the greatest affluence and plenty of them, shall afford him no enjoyment." Or, rather, he speaks metaphorically, and means, he shall not enjoy that abundant satisfaction and comfort, which he promised himself from his great riches. Or which good men, through God's blessing, commonly enjoy.

"The brooks of honey and butter": That abundant satisfaction and comfort, (often signified by these or suchlike metaphors (as Psalm 36:8; 46:4; Isa. 7:15, 22; 41:18). Either which he promised to himself from that great estate which he had gotten by deceit and oppression, or which good men through God's blessing may and commonly do enjoy.

The wicked man not only will suffer pain for the sins he committed, but will miss much of the beauty in the world because he will die early.

Job 20:18 "That which he labored for shall he restore, and shall not swallow [it] down: according to [his] substance [shall] the restitution [be], and he shall not rejoice [therein]."

Hebrew; labor. I.e. the goods which were gotten with labor; either, by the labor of others, or rather, by his own labor. Which may relate as well to the goods of others, which he got not without pains and difficulty. Or to his own goods honestly gotten by the sweat of his brow. And this is an aggravation of his misery, that he was forced to restore not only other men's goods which were in his hands, but his own also, to make reparation for their damages.

"Shall not swallow it down": To wit, so as to hold it. For otherwise he did swallow it, but withal did speedily vomit it up again (Job 20:15), which was as if he had not swallowed it. He shall not possess it long, nor to any considerable purpose.

"According to his substance shall the restitution be": I.e. he shall be forced to part with all his estate to make compensation for his wrongs done to others.

"He shall not rejoice therein": I.e. he shall not enjoy what he hath gotten, because it shall be taken from him.

This was saying that the evil man would not even get to enjoy the things he had worked to get. Zophar said even that would be taken away from him. Zophar said that Job would have to give of his substance to those he had taken from in the past.

Job 20:19 "Because he hath oppressed [and] hath forsaken the poor; [because] he hath violently taken away a house which he builded not;"

These charges are now for the first time insinuated against Job. Later on, they are openly brought by Eliphaz (Job 22:5-9). Job denies them categorically (in Job 29:11-17). They seem to have been pure falsehoods, without an ounce of proof.

"Because he hath violently taken away a house which he builded not": Another falsehood, doubtless. Something like it was insinuated by Eliphaz (Job 15:28).

Zophar was listing sins that could have been the ones that Job had committed, as if Job had definitely committed them. He said that he had oppressed the poor and taken their house away from them.

Verses 20-29: Eloquent oratory is impressive only if it tells the truth. Zophar's commitment to the retribution principle led him to presumptuous, insulting and false claims. To see things from the perspective of the hurting; and most importantly, from God's perspective, is the way to truly encourage them.

Job 20:20 "Surely he shall not feel quietness in his belly, he shall not save of that which he desired."

He shall have no peace nor satisfaction in his mind, in all his gains, partly because of his perpetual fears and expectations of the wrath of God and man. Which his guilty conscience assures him he deserves, and partly because they shall be speedily taken away from him.

"He shall not save of that which he desired": That is, any part of his good and desirable things, but he shall forfeit and lose them all.

This appears to be saying that Job hungered more and more for the things that belonged to the poor. He was never satisfied. Zophar had made up that lie, so he added to it that Job would not be able to keep it because he had gotten it by deceit.

Job 20:21 "There shall none of his meat be left; therefore shall no man look for his goods."

For his own future use; but he shall be stripped of all.

"Therefore shall no man look for his goods": For there shall be none to look for them; or rather there shall be none to look for, it all being gone. A man in good circumstances of life, his heirs expect to enjoy much at his death, but when he is stripped of all, as Job was, his relations and friends are in no expectation of having anything at his death. And therefore do not think it worth their while to look. Or make an inquiry whether there is anything for them or not (see Job 20:28).

Zophar said that God would take all of it away from him, so he would have nothing left for other men to take.

Job 20:22 "In the fulness of his sufficiency he shall be in straits: every hand of the wicked shall come upon him."

I.e. the height of prosperity and abundance he shall be distressed and tormented, either by the horrors of an unquiet mind and guilty conscience, which makes him every moment expect Divine vengeance to fall upon his head. Or rather, because of the sudden and unexpected assault of other men combining against him, and spoiling all his goods, as it follows.

"Every hand of the wicked": Who lives by injury and the spoiling of others, and by God's providence are directed to fall upon him. Or, of the laborer, whose wages possibly he hath detained; or, of such as are in trouble or misery, as this word signifies (Job 3:20). Who may jointly invade him, either because their necessity temptations which drives them to spoil others. Or rather, because they were such as had been brought into their calamity by his oppressions, and therefore now take reparations from him.

Zophar said that even while he was still wealthy he would have no sufficiency, because the other wicked people would come and take what he had.

In verses 23-29: Zophar concluded that more than just losing the enjoyment of life by sin, the wicked fall under the fury of God determined for such wickedness.

Job 20:23 "[When] he is about to fill his belly, [God] shall cast the fury of his wrath upon him, and shall rain [it] upon him while he is eating."

That is, when he has enough to satisfy all his appetites, and shall design to indulge them in the pleasurable enjoyment of all his gains, and to spend his days in sensuality.

"God shall cast the fury of his wrath upon him": Some dreadful and destructive judgment.

"And shall rain it upon him": This phrase denotes both the author of his plagues, God, and the nature and quality of them, that they shall come upon him like rain, with great vehemence, so that he cannot prevent or avoid them."

While he is eating": As it fell upon thy sons (Job 1:18-19).

He said that God attacked Job before he could go out and oppress any more poor. Zophar said that God would rain down fire and brimstone upon Job for the evil he had done.

Job 20:24 "He shall flee from the iron weapon, [and] the bow of steel shall strike him through."

That is, from the sword or spear; and so shall think himself out of danger.

"The bow of steel": Which is of great strength, and therefore send forth the arrow with greater force.

"Shall strike him through": Shall mortally wound him. He shall flee from one danger, but another, still greater, shall overtake him.

These weapons turned against the evil man were of great strength. Of course Job had not taken flight anywhere, so this again was an untrue statement.

Job 20:25 "It is drawn, and cometh out of the body; yea, the glittering sword cometh out of his gall: terrors [are] upon him."

Rather, he draweth it forth and it cometh out of his body (see Revised Version).

"And cometh out of the body": That is, the arrow, or the glittering blade. It has penetrated the body, and passed through it. He shall be pierced through and through.

"The glittering sword": Hebrew bârâq - "the glittering;" and is given to the sword, because it is kept bright.

"Cometh out of his gall": Supposed to be the seat of life (see notes Job 16:13).

"Terrors are upon him": The terrors of death.

This was speaking of the bow being drawn as if it were prepared to shoot through the evil man. This was speaking of a fatal wound to the gall bladder of the wicked man.

Job 20:26 "All darkness [shall be] hid in his secret places: a fire not blown shall consume him; it shall go ill with him that is left in his tabernacle."

Literally, all darkness is reserved for his treasures, which some understand of his hidden earthly treasures, which no one shall ever find. Some of the retribution laid up for him by God, which will be such darkness as Job describes in (Job 10:21-22).

"A fire not blown shall consume him": I.e. "a fire lighted by no human hands," probably lightning or brimstone from heaven (Job his tent, or in his dwelling). His wife, his children, if he has any, and his domestics, shall be involved in the general ruin.

"It shall go ill with him that is left in his tabernacle": Not only it shall go ill with the wicked man himself, but with those he leaves behind him, that dwell in the house he formerly lived in, with his posterity. God sometimes punishing the iniquities of the fathers upon the children.

This darkness represented total separation from the Light of God. The fire mentioned here, was not a fire that man had started. It was possibly speaking of the fire of hell. In the case of Job, his wife was left and some of his servants. Zophar said it would not go well with them because they were living in Job's house.

Job 20:27 "The heaven shall reveal his iniquity; and the earth shall rise up against him."

God shall be a swift witness against him by extraordinary judgments. Still he reflects upon Job's case, and the fire from heaven.

"And the earth shall rise up against him": All creatures upon earth shall conspire to destroy him. If the God of heaven and earth be his enemy, neither heaven nor earth will show him any kindness. But all the hosts of both are, and will be, at war with him.

Job had asked for heaven and earth to witness for him. Zophar was saying that heaven and earth would be opposed to Job. He was trying to offset everything that Job had said.

Job 20:28 "The increase of his house shall depart, [and his goods] shall flow away in the day of his wrath."

His income, revenue, or his estate got by the labor, and employed for the use of his family.

"Shall depart": Shall be lost or taken away from him.

"Shall flow away": Like waters, swiftly and strongly, and so as to return no more.

"In the day of his wrath": That is, of God's wrath; when God shall come to execute judgment upon him. The abundance of his house, Heath renders it, shall roll away like the torrents in the day of his fury.

This was speaking after the fact. Job's children were already dead. There would be no increase of Job, except for a miracle of God. Job's goods had been taken in battle as well.

Job 20:29 "This [is] the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed unto him by God."

I.e. the lot, or possession "of a wicked man", that which God makes over to him as his own in the last resort, and which is all that he has to look for. In other words, "It is the heritage appointed unto him by God" (compare Job 27:13). As to some God, at the last, will assign an inheritance of good, so to others he will appoint an inheritance of evil.

Zophar was summarizing the things he had said in the last few verses that he thought would come to Job. He thought Job to be a very wicked man. The wicked man had no heritage. The thing Zophar was wrong about, was who the wicked man was.

Job Chapter 20 Questions

1. Who answered Job in this chapter?
2. I have heard the _____ of my reproach.
3. What did Zophar say had been since the beginning of the earth?
4. Zophar believed Job was a _____.
5. Why had Zophar spoken so harshly in verses 6 and 7 to Job?
6. The quickness of his departure is compared to what in verse 8?
7. What was verse 9 a threat of?
8. What sins of Job did Zophar bring up in verse 11?
9. Verse 12 and 13 was speaking of the sweetness of _____.
10. What had he done with his riches?
11. What were some of the things the wicked man would not live to see?

12. Why would the wicked man not get to enjoy what he had worked for?
13. The iron weapon, in verse 24, was speaking of what?
14. What was the gall speaking of in verse 25?
15. What was the fire in verse 26?
16. Who was left in Job's house?
17. Why did Zophar speak of heaven and earth in verse 27?
18. The increase of Job would have been his _____.
19. They were _____ at the time Zophar said this.
20. What was Zophar's opinion of Job?