

What Is the Hope of the Godless?

...the hope of the godless when God cuts him off.... Job 27.8

Job's Instruction about God and the Wicked

“Let me tell you about God, the wicked, and what happens to them. It's not like you said that it is. Normally there is no immediate retribution, no lightning bolts from heaven. But that does not mean that the outcome for the wicked is good.”

What Job says happens to the wicked: vv. 13-23:

If he has lots of children, the sword takes them—killed in battle. His offspring, his seed will starve. Pestilence takes his survivors, and because of his wickedness, his wives don't weep for him.

His affluence of silver and clothing, both signs of being rich, go to others. No matter the construction of his dwelling, it is no more safe than a moth's, no more lasting than the temporary dwellings of the workmen in the field.

He goes to bed rich, wakes up poor.

Panic drowns him, a whirlwind carries him off. The scorching, dry, devastating east wind lifts him up and carries him away as it does the early crops. There is no relief, no respite no matter how hard he tries. In the end, it mocks him.

So much for the idea that the wicked always get away with everything in this life. They may for a short time, but not in the long run. And their destruction is sure.

What Job is telling his friends, and us, is a balanced perspective of life. This is common in the wisdom sections of the Bible.

Remembering *Job* as Wisdom Literature

- how to live well in a fallen world;
- how to live wisely with wickedness surrounding you
- how to understand the end of the wicked
 - Psalm 1—the righteous person does not walk in the counsel of the wick, stand with sinners, nor sit with the scorners. The way of the wicked perishes. The way of the righteous is known to the God who preserves him.
 - **Psalm 73**—by Asaph, one of the Levites in the time of David

v. 1, the acknowledgement that God is good to his people

vv. 2-3, BUT...the envy of a believer in light of the wicked prospering; the absence of immediate retribution. Not the equating the arrogant with the wicked.

vv. 4-12—the success and arrogance of the wicked in this life

vv. 13-14—Asaph's response to the success of the wicked—envy; being pure is a waste of time and effort—look at how I have been stricken and rebuked on a daily basis. No good deed goes unpunished!

v. 15—hesitation! If I speak this out loud, I will drag others down with me. Asaph recognizes his heart problem.

vv. 16-17: the intellectual wisdom struggle, and the breakthrough: working through issues is not easy—wearisome, a struggle. BUT: one trip to the Tabernacle made the difference; going into the sanctuary.

What happens in the tabernacle, the sanctuary? Sacrifice! Sacrifice for sin—the atonement for God’s people. It is in the sanctuary that Asaph sees the difference between the righteous and the wicked. The righteous have sins atoned, the wicked do not. The righteous receive forgiveness, the wicked do not. He now sees that the outcome of the two groups is very different.

vv. 18-20: God sets the wicked on slippery places—their footing in life is unstable, uncertain. As Job has already told us, God causes the wicked to suffer ruin. Terrors overtake them and sweep them away. They are despised like phantoms—their very image is disgusting to God.

vv. 21-22: Asaph’s confession continues—he was brutish, like a beast before God, not a rational being made in the image of God. This is what envy of the wicked does; this is what happens when our soul is bitter towards God when we look not to his blessings, but the temporary success of the wicked.

As Job observed, the wicked prosper only to lose what they have, leaving it to others. All that they gain, they lose—it is left behind when destruction comes.

So what has Asaph learned? Where is his heart now?

vv. 23-26:

1. Continually with God—always in his presence, never alone!
2. God holds his right hand, comforting, leading
3. God guides him in the everyday things of this life with his perfect counsel
4. And when it’s all over, there is the reception in the heavenly glory

His continued reflection: there is no one in heaven besides the God who leads, guides, holds, comforts and welcomes. More than just in heaven, here in this life, God is the desire of his very soul! He is aware that discouragement comes—that is how he got to where he was when he went into the sanctuary.

Yet when his heart fails, that is when he comes to know that God is the rock of his heart—the strength, the firmness. And when he sees the prosperity of the wicked, that is when he comes to understand that their portion is fleeting—God is his portion forever.

vv. 27-28: those who are not in fellowship with God—the wicked, the arrogant—perish. Their end may not come just yet, but it will come. The unfaithful will be cut off. The righteous will not be.

Asaph has made the intentional decisions to look to the God of heaven and earth as his refuge in the course of life. And he does so with the result of giving God the glory—telling of all his wonderful works.

So what does Job’s instruction about God and the wicked, and Asaph’s discovery have to do with us today?

The wicked have no hope, no positive expectation in the long run. Their success is very temporary, and then God cuts them off. Who are the wicked? Those who take no delight in God or in fellowship with him. Those who think that they do not need any relationship with their Creator and Sustainer, and never call upon him, thinking that they are self-sufficient.

They aren't. And in the end, a dry, scorching, devastating east wind sweeps them away. They are the chaff of Psalm 1 that the wind drives away.

Asaph has presented a wonderful transformation for us—from envying the wicked, to intentionally worshiping God. The difference was when he understood redemption and relationship.

The things of this world are transient, Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 4.18. Transient, temporary, fleeting. Things like wealth, property, fame; and also affliction, suffering, sorrow, tears. All of that passes away, as do those who continue to refuse their Creator, to rebel against him.

But there are some things that are eternal—that weight of glory that he has prepared for us who are redeemed and now fellowship with him, and worship him.

There seems to be 4 responses to the success of the wicked:

- Let's keep on doing what we are doing. God neither sees nor cares. Let's get all that we can out of life.
- Resignation—this is how it always is, evil prevails, nothing can be done about it.
- Asaph's initial response—envy, and the temptation to compromise. If they can get ahead, maybe I can also.
- And then there is Job's, and Asaph's second response—the wicked only succeed temporarily. It is my relationship with God that is durable, because he is eternal, sovereign, redeeming. Evil will not win out.

Where do you stand? Which response is yours?

The fourth is the only viable option, really.

There is a day when the Creator, the Redeemer, the Judge of all the earth will settle accounts. Those who are his redeemed, who have turned to him in trust and repentance, who have found grace, will be brought home.

All the rest will be swept away when he comes again.