

JOB 21

“BUT THE WICKED DO OFTEN PROSPER!”

Job again took up the discourse in this chapter, and made another appeal against the false reasoning of his friends. He contended that the wicked sometimes do prosper in this life; and therefore, it is not less to be expected that the righteous will sometimes suffer. In this reply to Zophar, Job complained less of his own miseries than he had done in his former discourses; and he came closer to the general question that was in dispute between him and his friends – namely, whether outward prosperity and the continuance of it are a mark of the true Church and her true members. If those things were indeed such a mark, the mere ruin of a person’s prosperity would be sufficient to prove him a hypocrite – even if no other evidence supported the charge. This was the assertion of the three friends, but Job denied it. Therefore, he endeavored to convince them otherwise, and to rectify their mistake. He acknowledged that God sometimes does make an example to others out of wicked men, by some visible remarkable judgment upon them in this life; but he denied that He *always* does so. In fact, Job insisted that He commonly does otherwise – allowing even the worst of sinners to live all their days in prosperity, and to go out of the world without any visible mark of His wrath upon them. Why? Because this is the day of God’s patience; and in some way or another, He makes use of the prosperity of the wicked to serve His own wise purposes, while it ripens them for ruin. But the chief reason is because He desires it to be made clear that there is a life beyond this earthly existence. Prospering sinners make light of God and religion – as if they have no need to look after another world, because they have so much of this one. But religion is not a vain thing, and Job showed the folly of such worldly persons.

The man of Uz gave a detailed description of prosperous sinners, and every age of the Church provides numberless living examples to show that his account was not exaggerated. He spoke of how they are unvisited by affliction. The rod of God, as a kind and loving Father, is not felt by them. And what a melancholy picture is given of their ungodly homes! They fail to raise their children in the ways of the Lord. Even today, there are many worldly and graceless parents who take no regard for their children’s everlasting well-being. They may educate them in the timbrel and the harp; but there is not a word of Scripture, nor the sweet sounds of the Gospel of Jesus, so that their little ones may be brought up in the knowledge of them! And notice the striking terms in which Job describes the result of all this: they spend their days in wealth, and go down

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Job attempts to gain his friends’ affections and attention – verses 1-6
- ❖ He describes the prosperity of the wicked, and their hardness in it – verses 7-16
- ❖ He foretells their ruin, after a long reprieve – verses 17-21
- ❖ He observes variety in the ways of God’s Providence toward men – verses 22-26
- ❖ He shows that the ruin of the wicked is often reserved for eternity – verses 27-34

to the grave in a moment. Who can look around and contemplate what is daily going on in the world before our eyes, and still require further evidence of the truth of Job's words now?

Job described the prosperity of wicked people; and then, in verses 17-26, he opposed what his friends had said about the certain ruin of such wicked persons in this life. He reconciled this to the holiness and justice of God, and he attributed the difference which Providence makes between one wicked man and another to the wisdom of God. He is Judge of all the earth, and He will indeed do right.

Even while the ungodly prosper in the height of their pomp and power, there is only a step between them and ruin. How beautifully Job described the fleeting, vaporish continuance of their prosperity, under the similitude of a candle which is easily blown out! And is this worthy to be called prosperity – when even the most carnal gratifications of the ungodly are thus exposed to such sudden and everlasting danger, every moment?

Job also opposed his friends' opinion that the wicked – and *only* the wicked – are sure to fall into visible and remarkable ruin, for it was upon this principle that they condemned him as wicked. He asserted that the punishment of sinners is designed more for the other world than for this one (Jude 14-15). The sinner may live in a great deal of power, and he may even have a splendid funeral; but death closes his prosperity. That which makes a person die with true courage is to remember, by faith, that Jesus died and was laid in the grave – not only *before* us, but also *for* us! He has gone before us and died for us, but now He is alive and lives for us; and that is true consolation in the hour of death.

Although Job foresaw that his three friends would not be convinced by him, yet he set it down as an unquestionable truth that the prosperity of the wicked becomes a sure argument that there is a day of reckoning that will follow. Just as surely as the sinner prospers in his iniquity, notwithstanding the fact that the eye of God is upon him all along; so also, there shall certainly come a time when his miseries shall overtake him, when the day of retribution shall come. Thus Job left them to infer that the afflictions of the afflicted shall be recompensed also, and the outcome of their sorrows shall be that they shall have peace at last. We cannot help admiring the reasoning of Job in times so long before the Gospel was fully revealed; for we find that his belief bears such a striking conformity to all that the blessed religion of the Lord Jesus has assured and established, concerning the final end of the righteous and of sinners (Rom. 2:7-10).

Lord, we repent of times when we have been envious of the prosperity of the ungodly in this world, as Asaph was (Ps. 73:3). We pray for grace to experience the faithfulness of Your promises of solid, satisfying, and substantial mercies during our lifetime, and also in the heavenly world to come! Amen.

