

A Guide To The Reader

Pastor recommends that to obtain maximum benefit from his comments you read in full from the Bible every reference whenever one appears. Otherwise the reading of the comments is simply a skimming over the surface. They are rather designed to make you stop and meditate and even look up further references as the Holy Spirit guides you. Do pray before you read that the Holy Spirit will be your Tutor and that the time you spend will be time spent with Him.

Job 20.

20.1-2. In the light of Job's reasonings and appeal to the comforters Zophar wades in where angels fear to tread. He does not recognize the Lord's hand at all. He scarcely seems to pause to admit any validity or significance in the root of the matter which Job claimed to have, and in fact did have. There does not seem to be any real pleading, as in the case of the other friends. It seems more like a tirade. Job subsequently repeats his reproach that these words (and others like them) are a mocking (21.3). Twice in the psalms we see regrettable haste. "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes" (Psalm 31.22). But it was not so and his rash conclusion was pardoned. Likewise in Psalm 116.11, "I said in my haste, All men are liars". It was spoken in affliction but was nevertheless out of order. In each of the above two examples the Lord was pleased to forgive and to restore. If we speak in haste we may find that people are less willing to forgive and forget than the Lord.

20.3. Zophar takes personally the answers and reasonings of Job. While in each of Job's replies he may be thought of as addressing all the comforters, the commencement of his replies may perhaps especially be thought of taking up, and sometimes rebuking, their individual arguments. The last time Zophar spoke, Job commenced his reply, "No doubt but that ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you...I am not inferior to you: yea, who knoweth not such things as these?" (12.2-3) and with flushed anger, maybe, Zophar interpreted this as a reproachful check upon his sentiments. His understanding is indeed quite different from Job's, and doubtless he is here eagerly anticipating his opportunity to respond.

20.4-5. If it were not for the implication throughout with regard to Job, much of what he says, though expressed fiercely, is good theology. The triumphing of the wicked is indeed short in ultimate terms and there is indeed an apportion of eternal doom to the unrepentant wicked, but it is not always and invariably or of necessity appointed in this life. The reason for that is that the iniquity of wickedness will appear the more it is allowed to ripen, heaping more coals of fire on the wicked person's own head the longer he continues in wickedness. These verses certainly come into the category of good theology. Job will simply reject them as not applicable to himself. Adam and Eve received short shrift for their rebellion though they were pardoned. Cain felt his punishment to be greater than he could bear though he was compelled to bear it. The triumph of the enjoyment of sin is so brief as, in retrospect, to be certainly not worth it. "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies" (Psalm 58.3).

20.6-7. When the tower of Babel was built (Genesis 11) “they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (Genesis 11.4). The catastrophic results are felt to this day and were not all that a distant memory, probably not as much as five hundred years, in the time of Job.

Probably the most high-profile fulfilment is of Jezebel in 2 Kings 9.37, “the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel; so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel”.

20.8-9. This is a vigorous way of describing an early death while in the prime of life. When Psalm 91.16 declares, “with long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation” it carries with it the promise of being kept clear of the wickednesses that would bring an early death. Zophar here vividly describes the wicked man’s life as soon over and soon forgotten, as a dream.

20.10. When Ham sinned against his father’s person in publishing Noah’s drunken nakedness in front of his brothers and probably in the hearing of his son, Canaan, we read In Genesis 9.24-25 “Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.” In other words the son is implicated in the sin of his father, possibly with even the same failings of character. And it is a bitter condemnation to a father to know that his son will suffer in consequence of his father’s sin. This is something of the force of this verse in Job. From the height of excellence the children shall descend to ignominy.

Quite the reverse is the inheritance of the Saviour’s children. How gracious is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of man, our Representative who, “knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth up from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that, he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet...” (John 13. 3-5ff). Their reward is the Saviour’s personal devotion throughout eternity.

20.11. David beseeches the Lord, “Remember not the sins of my youth” (Psalm 25.7). Job had already regretted that the comforters had made him “to possess the iniquities of my youth” (13.26). David sought pardon. Job had availed himself of the right use of burnt offerings for pardon. Jeremiah in a powerful passage says that salvation cannot be had from the hills, on the top of which were altars to idols, but that “truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel. For shame hath devoured the labour of our fathers from their youth...” Read Jeremiah 3.20-25.

Youth is a dangerous time, hence the many pleadings of Solomon in the early chapters of Proverbs. It is possible so to defile one’s life, or ruin it, before it is scarce begun. Maybe, as Job hints in 13.26, the sins of one’s youth remain a source of bitter regret. Certainly they may be forgiven and, if the Lord is gracious to us, may be the source of salvation by revealing to us the thoroughgoing nature of our inbred sin. Where there is no repentance, as verse 11 states, they shall accompany the perpetrator to the grave.

20.12-14. The particular sin which Zophar envisages that Job with all his possessions had enjoyed before their destruction is that they were obtained illegitimately. It must have been so, according to his theology, else they would not have been so summarily destroyed. In principle, the taste for a pet sin becomes sweeter and sweeter and becomes more and more of a craving. It is pictured as a tasty morsel which is savoured and revolved constantly in the mouth until it is finally gone. However, it is like the venom of a serpent when it passes from the mouth to the stomach and will inevitably bring in its wake swift destruction.

20.15-16. Here, Zophar becomes specific. That riches are the problem with Job is his accusation. What has happened is the fulfilment of the principle which he here sets forth that he has vomited up again the poisoned riches he accumulated, and it has left him so sick as to be dying. The principle of the consequences of sin, and the temptation to sin, is always and everywhere valid, whether the sin be ill-gotten gain or anything else. James writes (1.14-16) "every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren." It does not have to be riches. The principle is valid across the board of sinning. It is true, for example also, of alcohol abuse. "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder" (Proverbs 23.31-32).

20.17-18. The abundance that he longed to see, but gained wickedly, the wicked man will not live to see. "The brooks of honey and butter." What an idyllic scene! The abundance of wildflowers which the brooks provide feed the bees; and the lush grass the cattle whose milk provides the butter. Such a concise phrase! Upon his glad repentance Zacchaeus proposed glad restitution in the presence of the Saviour, eliciting His approbation (Luke 19.8). But the restitution spoken of here is compulsory, unwillingly acceded to.

20.19-20. The wicked man's pursuit of riches involved oppression of the poor and the seizure of his goods even to his very home. The most flagrant example of this in after times is the story of Ahab's annexing of Naboth's vineyard recorded in 1 Kings 21. 1-16. Doubtless his "belly quietness" was shattered (1 Kings 21.17-19) when Elijah appeared and pronounced his death, with the added corollary in the name of the LORD, "I will bring evil upon thee, and take away thy posterity" (1 Kings 21.21).

20.21. If the marginal reading of our Authorised Version be thought to be excellent, "there shall be none left for his meat" we certainly see that fulfilled in God's threatening to Ahab.

20.22-25. Even in the midst of the enjoyment of his abundance shall disaster strike. Belshazzar in the midst of his feast was terrified at the LORD's writing on the wall and his doom fell that very day (Daniel 5). Belshazzar was not even in a fit state to flee and the bow of steel did indeed strike him through. More than that, it was the end of his kingdom, not merely of his own personal corruptions. It would also be profitable to read Revelation 18 at this time. It is to be feared that despite Zophar's lurid description of the glittering sword coming out of the wicked man's gall it is not likely, unless the Lord is exceedingly gracious and to be certain there will be rare exceptions for the Saviour's glory, it is not likely that it will bring wicked men to repent in the midst of the enjoyment of their sins. It may prove to be a matter of casting "pearls before swine" (Matthew 7.6). It is foretold that as that great day of God

Almighty approaches (Revelation 16.14) “men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him the glory...and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds” (Revelation 16.9-11).

“In the fulness of his sufficiency he shall be in straits.” Ezekiel speaks of this same evil. “Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy” (Ezekiel 16.49).

20.26. It may not be dark round about, but it will be dark in the heart of the wicked man. Though the fire on the hearth is well contained and may need the attention of the bellows from time to time, yet the fire of conscience will spread “not blown,” that is, without man’s help, and consume him. God will do it. “Not blown” speaks of that which God does unbidden, without man’s help as second cause, and is of similar significance to the expression “without hands” (Daniel 2.34,45). If the “tabernacle” here means, as normal in the Book of Job as I think (but it is purely my opinion), the wicked man’s own body, the passage is describing his condition (so like Job’s own, and so unfairly, perhaps, insinuated against him here) as he ekes out some sort of an existence for the few days which remain – “it shall go ill with him that is left in his tabernacle”.

20.27-28. “Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire” (1 Corinthians 3.13). The justice of men will also declare it as in the cases of Achan (Joshua 7.1-26) and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5.1-11).

20.29. “Appointed” is a word frequently used in the Book of Job. Certainly these ancient men were sure that God appointed “a time to man upon the earth” (7.1); “wearisome nights” (7.3); “his bounds that he cannot pass” (14.5); “time” (14.14); “he performeth the thing that is appointed for me” (23.14); the eternal state (30.23). Job says, “thou wouldst appoint me a set time” (14.13). Men may make appointments (2.11) but it is the various appointments which God makes for men and women that are determinative. A wicked man will inherit as his portion a terrible end full of the wrath of God.