



## Job - Chapter Twenty Four

- II [Job 3:1-42:6 - Dialogue: Job, His Suffering, and His Standing before God \(continues\)](#)
- II.b [Job 4:1-25:6 - The Friends and Job: Can Job be Right Before God? \(continues\)](#)
- II.b.iii [Job 22:1-25:6 - The Third Cycle \(continues\)](#)
- II.b.iii.2 [Job 23:1-24:25 - Job: God is Hidden \(continues/concludes\)](#)

### Summary of Chapter Twenty Four

Job has persisted in arguing against his friends' assertion that the wicked are judged transparently and immediately on earth, but he also clings to his belief in the justice of God as the ground for his lament and hope for vindication.

In this part of his speech, Job wishes that God's governing of the world would be more apparent (v.1). He offers a further description of the acts of the wicked (vv.2-4, v.9, vv.13-17, and v.21), the consequences on their victims (vv.5-12), the seeming blindness of his friends to this reality (vv.18-20), and the lack of any apparent judgement (vv.22-25). Job does not address God in this response nor does he seem necessarily to be responding directly to his friends as much as he is speaking exhaustively in their presence.

### II.b.iii.2.b [Job 24:1-25 - Job Complains of Violence on the Earth](#)

Refer to the chapter summary above.

- <sup>1</sup> 'Why are times not kept by the Almighty,  
and why do those who know him never see his days?

## Job 24:1

Job asks a question that represents two perspectives: **Why** is it that the wicked do not seem to experience **times** of judgement and that the righteous **never see his days**? ‘The day of the Lord’ is a common phrase in the OT that refers to the coming judgement of the Lord on the nations; refer to Joel 2:1-17 and the comment made on Amos 5:18-20. However, it also represents the full revealing of God’s glory and the restored beauty of his people. A ‘day of the Lord’ is an occasion on which God the Almighty shows his hand and should not be viewed as a single future event such as that indicated by the apostle: *<<But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgement and destruction of the godless>>* (2 Peter 3:7). When this day will come remains unknown to all but God: *<<But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father>>* (Mark 13:32), and: *<<He replied, ‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority’>>* (Acts 1:7).

The sense of this difficult verse seems to be, “Since God knows and will judge everything, why are the godly kept in the dark about his ways?” This had special application to the question as to why God allows the seeming prosperity of the wicked as discussed in the following verses. The NIV translates this verse: *<<Why does the Almighty not set times for judgment? Why must those who know him look in vain for such days?>>* The New Living Translation has: *<<Why doesn’t the Almighty bring the wicked to judgment? Why must the godly wait for him in vain?>>*.

- 2 The wicked remove landmarks;  
they seize flocks and pasture them.
- 3 They drive away the donkey of the orphan;  
they take the widow’s ox for a pledge.
- 4 They thrust the needy off the road;  
the poor of the earth all hide themselves.
- 5 Like wild asses in the desert  
they go out to their toil,  
scavenging in the waste-land  
food for their young.
- 6 They reap in a field not their own  
and they glean in the vineyard of the wicked.

7 They lie all night naked, without clothing,  
and have no covering in the cold.

8 They are wet with the rain of the mountains,  
and cling to the rock for want of shelter.

9 'There are those who snatch the orphan child from the breast,  
and take as a pledge the infant of the poor.

10 They go about naked, without clothing;  
though hungry, they carry the sheaves;

11 between their terraces they press out oil;  
they tread the wine presses, but suffer thirst.

12 From the city the dying groan,  
and the throat of the wounded cries for help;  
yet God pays no attention to their prayer.

#### Job 24:2-12

Here Job described the mostly financial sins of the wicked, rooted in greed and cruelty: <<*The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain. This also is vanity*>> (Ecclesiastes 5:10), and: <<*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains*>> (1 Timothy 6:10). In Job 22:5-11 Eliphaz said that Job's calamity came upon him because he acted this way towards others and his riches were therefore gained by greed and wickedness. Job agreed with Eliphaz that this is how wicked people act, without agreeing with him that he himself acted this way. Job's description of the injustices of the wicked (vv.2-4) and the effects on their victims (vv.5-12) appears to emphasise the severity and visibility of these things, which ought to be evident to observers on earth as well as to God. The conclusion in v.12, that God ignores these evils, is precisely opposite the conclusion drawn in a passage with similar concerns: <<*For the Lord will not reject for ever. Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone. When all the prisoners of the land are crushed under foot, when human rights are perverted in the presence of the Most High, when one's case is subverted – does the Lord not see it?*>> (Lamentations 3:31-36).

They reap in a field not their own and they glean in the vineyard of the wicked.  
It was common for foreign invaders to come in and steal the crops that do not

belong to them and Job here relates this to the way the evil prey on the weak even in their own communities. It was God's will that the gleanings at harvest should be left for the poor: <<*When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God*>> (Leviticus 19:9-10). Naomi provides wise advice to Ruth how she should protect herself when she goes into another's field to glean from the remaining crop: <<*Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, 'It is better, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, otherwise you might be bothered in another field'*>> (Ruth 2:22).

The second line of v.9 has the Hebrew word 'al, translated 'against' in many English versions. Some interpreters, including those who produced the NRSVA, have suggested that it should be understood instead as 'infant' or 'child' (Hebrew 'ul), with the sense that they 'take as a pledge the infant of the poor,' because it would be more consistent with the focus on the orphan child in the first line. However, the translation 'against' does not exclude the possibility that the second line may refer to a child being taken as a pledge; neither does it require it as the sole referent. Still, v.3 and vv.10-12 seem to suggest that what was taken in pledge was the means by which the poor family could have been clothed and fed, which, of course, would be equivalent in its effects to taking a child from a nursing mother.

- 13 'There are those who rebel against the light,  
who are not acquainted with its ways,  
and do not stay in its paths.
- 14 The murderer rises at dusk  
to kill the poor and needy,  
and in the night is like a thief.
- 15 The eye of the adulterer also waits for the twilight,  
saying, "No eye will see me";  
and he disguises his face.
- 16 In the dark they dig through houses;  
by day they shut themselves up;  
they do not know the light.
- 17 For deep darkness is morning to all of them;

for they are friends with the terrors of deep darkness.

### Job 24:13-17

These verses are linked together by a play on the senses of the word 'light' and its related vocabulary. Job begins by describing those who rebel against the light as those who oppose wisdom and righteousness – not knowing its ways or walking in its paths.

Job then describes how this manner of life is revealed in the light of day and the dark of night: the murderer gets up before it is light to pursue injustice and continues to prowl around at night (v.14); the adulterer assumes that in the twilight his actions will go unseen (v.15); thus they each bring ruinous effects on other households at night, while seeking to guard themselves during the day (v.16). Job implies that their reversal of the typical times of sleep and labour, i.e. deep darkness is morning, is itself a manifestation of the fact that they do not know the light and instead have chosen foolishly to become friends with the terrors of deep darkness (vv.16-17).

In powerful poetic images, Job describes the kind of sin that happens under the cover of darkness. Darkness is used as a cloak for the murderer, the thief, and the adulterer. It was almost as if Job anticipated the later instruction from the apostle Paul: *<<the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires>>* (Romans 13:12-14), and, of course, those of Jesus himself: *<<And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God>>* (John 3:19-21).

18 'Swift are they on the face of the waters;  
their portion in the land is cursed;  
no treader turns towards their vineyards.

19 Drought and heat snatch away the snow-waters;  
so does Sheol those who have sinned.

20 The womb forgets them;  
the worm finds them sweet;

they are no longer remembered;  
so wickedness is broken like a tree.

### Job 24:18-20

The function of these three verses in Job's speech is difficult to determine. The statements seem to be more consistent with the viewpoint of the friends than of Job. It is for this reason that v.18 begins with 'You say,' which is omitted from the NRSVA as is not explicit in the Hebrew but is inferred from the content and possible purpose of these verses. If this is Job's purpose then he is once again restating the type of assertions that his friends have made. He does so to show that such statements seem to wilfully ignore the actual state of affairs on earth; for another example, refer to Job 21:28, where <<*For you say*>> is explicit in the Hebrew. Another possible interpretation is to take the statements following v.18a as Job's description of what he wishes would come to pass: <<*their portion in the land is cursed*>> (v.18b). If Job's intention is to express the wish that judgement would be more apparent then he is possibly taking up the theme of the questions that opened the section; refer to v.1.

Swift are they on the face of the waters may represent a saying or idiom from the time of the writing, but the referent and meaning of the phrase are not clear. It may be that swift refers to the fleeting life of the wicked either described by the friends or desired by Job. It may be in a similar context to those referred to by Jude: <<*They are waterless clouds carried along by the winds; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the deepest darkness has been reserved for ever*>> (Jude 12b-13).

Their portion in the land is cursed. Job wondered why God did not judge the wicked as he should (v.1). Here, it is as if Job gave God advice on how he should judge the wicked; mainly, that he should do it in this life and not wait until the life beyond.

The worm finds them sweet; they are no longer remembered. Job was not against the idea of the wicked being punished after death; he simply did not want the punishment to begin there. He thought it should begin in this life and be continued afterwards.

So wickedness is broken like a tree. This has similarities to the vision given to Nebuchadnezzar that reflected his imminent downfall: <<*He cried aloud and said: "Cut down the tree and chop off its branches, strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from beneath it and the birds from its branches*>> (Daniel 4:14).

21 'They harm the childless woman,  
and do no good to the widow.

### Job 24:21

Job focuses on the barren, childless woman and the widow to recast once again the truth embedded within his friends' accusations; refer to Job 22:9. The care of widows, orphans, and sojourners is a central theme in the instruction of the law of Moses; refer to Exodus 22:21-27 and Deuteronomy 24:17-22. Such care is to be both a priority of faithfulness on the part of God's people and, if injustice in these areas went unaddressed, an indicator that Israel had forgotten her own history. Even though justice in these areas is supposed to be what God desires, the obvious existence of injustice seems unhindered by any sign of judgement. If what Job's friends assert to be true has any merit, judgement ought to be evident on those who exploit widows to their own gain.

22 Yet God prolongs the life of the mighty by his power;  
they rise up when they despair of life.

23 He gives them security, and they are supported;  
his eyes are upon their ways.

24 They are exalted a little while, and then are gone;  
they wither and fade like the mallow;  
they are cut off like the heads of grain.

25 If it is not so, who will prove me a liar,  
and show that there is nothing in what I say?'

### Job 24:22-25

Yet God prolongs the life of the mighty by his power. Job here considered that perhaps the fate of the wicked in the world beyond was retribution enough for the scales of divine justice. Yes, the wicked seem to prosper in this life for they rise up; yet at the same time no man is sure of life, i.e. they despair of life. In these verses Job sounds almost like Asaph in Psalm 73, who was troubled at the prosperity of the wicked until he went into the house of God and understood their end. Job does not counter the friends by a one-sided exaggeration of his own, claiming that God is hostile to the upright and an accomplice of the crooked. His position is more balanced but also more baffled. He simply cannot see how God's justice works out in his own case.

They despair of life. Although Scripture makes it clear that no one can guarantee how their life will be: <<*Your life shall hang in doubt before you; night and day you shall be in dread, with no assurance of your life*>> (Deuteronomy 28:66), and: <<*Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes*>> (James 4:14), they are also instructed not to worry about the future: <<*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?*>> (Matthew 6:25-27).

He gives them security, and they are supported; his eyes are upon their ways. Job reminded himself that God was not blind to the sins of the wicked, and even if they did seem to prosper well enough in this life, soon enough then they are gone and they wither and fade. The sense from Job is that God allows such prosperity to some of the wicked to increase their ultimate judgement. He does indeed give them security and they do rely on it; but they end up as dry heads of grain. Charles Spurgeon comments, “In the East, they generally reap their harvest by just taking off the tops of the ears of corn, and leaving the straw. Thus will the wicked be cut off.”

If it is not so, who will prove me a liar and show that there is nothing in what I say? Job challenges all men to contradict what he affirms - that the righteous may be greater sufferers and the wicked may for a while prosper, but that God will, in the end, overthrow the ungodly and establish the righteous.