

Poisonous Platitudes:
Zophar's 2nd Speech sweetness
Job 20

What does it take to make a lie palatable? What sweetens the falsehood so that we swallow it without discernment? It may be the intensity and sincerity of the one telling the fib. His authoritative evidence may cause us to trust him and his conclusions while he uses tainted evidence. Or, it may be something simpler than we think. Cunningly, he mixes just enough truth with his lie and relies upon our lack of discernment to make his "truth" palatable. Thus, taken in we do not realize what happened to us.

I imagine this to be the course used by the serpent when he deceived Eve in the Garden. While she drew her attention to the fruit on the tree, the serpent wily prepared his venomous morsel for her willing consumption. Believing the lie, she took and ate from the tree not understanding that she condemned mankind to walk in her path.

Zophar mixes truth with age-old traditions, traditions not grounded in truth. What he says sounds palatable. Yet, the venom that poisons the evil person also poisons his logic. This chapter presents three of Zophar's arguments designed to show that Job is an evil person needing to repent.

Argument 1: The Wicked Will Live a Short life (20:2-11).

"Therefore my thoughts answer me,
because of my haste within me.
³ I hear censure that insults me,
and out of my understanding a spirit answers me.
⁴ Do you not know this from of old,
since man was placed on earth,
⁵ that the exulting of the wicked is short,
and the joy of the godless but for a moment?
⁶ Though his height mount up to the heavens,
and his head reach to the clouds,
⁷ he will perish forever like his own dung;
those who have seen him will say, 'Where is he?'
⁸ He will fly away like a dream and not be found;
he will be chased away like a vision of the night.
⁹ The eye that saw him will see him no more,
nor will his place any more behold him.
¹⁰ His children will seek the favor of the poor,
and his hands will give back his wealth.
¹¹ His bones are full of his youthful vigor,
but it will lie down with him in the dust.

As iron sharpens items,
so a person sharpens his friends
— Solomon

Starting in 20:4, Zophar describes the shortness of an unrighteous man's life.

- Exulting of the wicked is short
- The joy of the godless but for a moment
- He will perish forever like his own dung
- Those who have seen him will say, 'Where is he?'
- He will fly away like a dream and not be found
- He will be chased away like a vision of the night
- The eye that saw him will see him no more
- Nor will his place any more behold him.
- His bones are full of his youthful vigor, but it will lie down with him in the dust.

But is Zophar correct? The unrighteous live a life of brevity. That is his premise. If we can find one exception to the rule, then maybe we can a second, a third, a fourth, and the count just keeps going like a rocket off its launch pad.

Here is where falsehood begins to appear. Zophar makes it appear as though the wicked receive their just due quickly while the righteous live long and prosperous lives. However, when we look at life around us, we notice that many wicked people live long lives. Yes, we also note that some righteous people live short lives. The wicked are not immediately punished for their sin. While their lives may seem short to them, their lives may seem long to the victims of unrighteousness.

Zophar mixes truth with falsehood. Because his thinking, his logic and his teachings were bound by tradition, he assumed they were true. We must be careful to investigate thoroughly and carefully the teachings that we receive from those that feed us "truth."

Argument 2: The Wicked Lose Everything Because They Oppressed the Poor (20:12-19).

"Though evil is sweet in his mouth,
 though he hides it under his tongue,
¹³though he is loath to let it go
 and holds it in his mouth,
¹⁴yet his food is turned in his stomach;
 it is the venom of cobras within him.
¹⁵He swallows down riches and vomits them up again;
 God casts them out of his belly.
¹⁶He will suck the poison of cobras;
 the tongue of a viper will kill him.
¹⁷He will not look upon the rivers,
 the streams flowing with honey and curds.
¹⁸He will give back the fruit of his toil
 and will not swallow it down;
 from the profit of his trading
 he will get no enjoyment.
¹⁹For he has crushed and abandoned the poor;
 he has seized a house that he did not build.

Zophar compares a man that gains wealth by stealth and oppression to a man bitten

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by vipers. Through his cunning the wicked person gains much wealth, but he loses that wealth as a poisoned man vomits the contents of his stomach. His victories and triumphs taste sweet for a moment, but eventually his stomach begins to reject those sweet delicacies. In the end, he vomits everything ([Proverbs 9:17](#)). What he thought he gained forever remained with him only momentarily.

As many people find themselves addicted to heroin, crack or meth, the wicked person is addicted to evil ([James 1:14-15](#)). With the love of riches being the source of his addiction ([1 Timothy 6:10](#)), those riches turn to poison in his stomach in his life ([20:14](#)). The love of riches only brings death to the thief.

While Zophar has alluded to the thievery practiced by evil doers, it is only in verse 19 that he specifically mentions a second sin. The unrighteous are guilty of the oppression of the poor. Throughout the Old Testament, the Scriptures teach that the poor have a special place in God's realm and heart. They are not to be taken advantage of or oppressed ([Lev 19:10; Deut 15:4; Ps 72:4, 12-14; Prov 31:8-9; Isa 10:1-2; Ezek 18:12; Amos 5:11](#)).

Is the wealth obtained by thievery always taken from the wicked and not given to their children? Do the children of the unrighteous suffer because of the sins of the father? Is this true for all cases. Do the children of the wicked end up begging from the poor? Do they become the poorest of the poor ([20:10](#))? While there is some truth in what Zophar says about divine retribution, life demonstrates to us that Zophar's conclusions are not true for every situation.

Many times the wicked prosper and live long lives. Many times they pass on that wealth to their children. Many times the children of the wicked continue in the family business and continue to prosper. In this life, divine retribution does not immediately. It may not always occur in this life. But this life lived in the physical realm does not comprise all of life.

Argument 3: The Wicked Will Be Destroyed – 20:20-29

"Because he knew no contentment in his belly,
he will not let anything in which he delights escape him.

²¹There was nothing left after he had eaten;
therefore his prosperity will not endure.

²²In the fullness of his sufficiency he will be in distress;
the hand of everyone in misery will come against him.

²³To fill his belly to the full,
God will send his burning anger against him
and rain it upon him into his body.

²⁴He will flee from an iron weapon;
a bronze arrow will strike him through.

²⁵It is drawn forth and comes out of his body;
the glittering point comes out of his gallbladder;
terrors come upon him.

²⁶Utter darkness is laid up for his treasures;
a fire not fanned will devour him;

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what is left in his tent will be consumed.

²⁷The heavens will reveal his iniquity,
and the earth will rise up against him.

²⁸The possessions of his house will be carried away,
dragged off in the day of God's wrath.

²⁹This is the wicked man's portion from God,
the heritage decreed for him by God."

"Job, you are among the wicked. We know this because you are suffering. It is your lot in life to endure the punishment you deserve. God and universe are getting their retribution now." According to Zophar, this is the wisdom of the ages and it is the tradition that he lived under.

Nevertheless, Zophar's argument is a poisonous mixed drink of truth and falsehood. God does not punish us immediately for our sin to the extent described by Zophar. He may punish the wicked during their lifetime, but He is not bound by our traditions to do so. He is not bound by our traditions to act according to our timetable.

On the other hand, it is true that God will punish the unrepentant at the end of their life ([Luke 16:19-31](#)). As Paul says in [Acts 17:30-31](#), God has set a day to judge all mankind by His Son Jesus Christ.

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