

CHAPTER 20

One would have thought that such an excellent confession of faith as Job made, in the close of the foregoing chapter, would satisfy his friends, or at least mollify them; but they do not seem to have taken any notice of it, and therefore Zophar here takes his turn, enters the lists with Job, and attacks him with as much vehemence as before.

I. His preface is short, but hot (v. 2, 3).

II. His discourse is long, and all upon one subject, the very same that Bildad was large upon (Job 18), the certain misery of wicked people and the ruin that awaits them.

1. He asserts, in general, that the prosperity of a wicked person is short, and his ruin sure (v. 4-9).

2. He proves the misery of his condition by many instances — that he should have a diseased body, a troubled conscience, a ruined estate, a beggared family, an infamous name and that he himself should perish under the weight of divine wrath: all this is most curiously described here in lofty expressions and lively similitudes; and it often proves true in this world, and always in another, without repentance (v. 10-29). But the great mistake was, and (as bishop Patrick expresses it) all the flaw in his discourse (which was common to him with the rest), that he imagined God never varied from this method, and therefore Job was, without doubt, a very bad man, though it did not appear that he was, any other way than by his infelicity.

◀180▶ JOB 20:1-9

SECOND ADDRESS OF ZOPHAR

Here,

I. Zophar begins very passionately, and seems to be in a great heat at what Job had said. Being resolved to condemn Job for a bad man, he was much displeased that he talked so like a good man, and, as it should seem, broke in upon him, and began abruptly (v. 2): *Therefore do my thoughts cause*

me to answer. He takes no notice of what Job had said to move their pity, or to evidence his own integrity, but fastens upon the reproof he gave them in the close of his discourse, counts that a reproach, and thinks himself *therefore* obliged to answer, because Job had bidden them be afraid of the sword, that he might not seem to be frightened by his menaces. The best counsel is too often ill taken from an antagonist, and therefore usually may be well spared. Zophar seemed more in haste to speak than became a wise man; but he excuses his haste with two things: —

1. That Job had given him strong provocation (v. 3): “*I have heard the check of my reproach, and cannot bear to hear it any longer.*” Job’s friends, I doubt, had spirits too high to deal with a man in his low condition; and high spirits are impatient of contradiction, and think themselves affronted if all about them do not say as they say; they cannot bear a check but they call it *the check of their reproach*, and then they are bound in honour to return it, if not to draw upon him that gave it.

2. That his own heart gave him a strong instigation. His thoughts caused him to answer (v. 2), for *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*; but he fathers the instigation (v. 3) upon *the spirit of his understanding*: that indeed should cause us to answer; we should rightly apprehend a thing and duly consider it before we speak of it; but whether it did so here or no is a question. Men often mistake the dictates of their passion for the dictates of their reason, and therefore think they do well to be angry.

II. Zophar proceeds very plainly to show the ruin and destruction of wicked people, insinuating that because Job was destroyed and ruined he was certainly a wicked man and a hypocrite. Observe,

1. How this doctrine is introduced, v. 4, where he appeals,

(1.) To Job’s own knowledge and conviction: “*Knowest thou not this? Canst thou be ignorant of a truth so plain? Or canst thou doubt of a truth which has been confirmed by the suffrages of all mankind?*” Those know little who do not know that the wages of sin is death.

(2.) To the experience of all ages. It was known of old, since man was placed upon the earth; that is, ever since man was made he has had this truth written in his heart, that the sin of sinners will be their ruin; and ever since there were instances of wickedness (which there were soon after man

was placed on the earth) there were instances of the punishments of it, witness the exclusions of Adam and Cain. When sin entered into the world death entered with it: all the world knows that evil pursues sinners, whom *vengeance suffers not to live* (~~408~~ Acts 28:4), and subscribes to that (~~291~~ Isaiah 3:11), *Woe to the wicked; it shall be ill with him, sooner or later.*

2. How it is laid down (v. 5): *The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment.* Observe,

(1.) He asserts the misery, not only of those who are openly wicked and profane, but of hypocrites, who secretly practice wickedness under a show and profession of religion, because such a wicked man he looked upon Job to be; and it is true that a form of godliness, if it be made use of for a cloak of maliciousness, does but make bad worse. Dissembled piety is double iniquity, and the ruin that attends it will be accordingly. The hottest place in hell will be the portion of hypocrites, as our Saviour intimates, ~~428~~ Matthew 24:51.

(2.) He grants that wicked men may for a time prosper, may be secure and easy, and very merry. You may see them in triumph and joy, triumphing and rejoicing in their wealth and power, their grandeur and success, triumphing and rejoicing over their poor honest neighbours whom they vex and oppress: they feel no evil, they fear none. Job's friends were loth to own, at first, that wicked people might prosper at all (~~304~~ Job 4:9), until Job proved it plainly (~~302~~ Job 9:24, 12:6), and now Zophar yields it; but,

(3.) He lays it down for a certain truth that they will not prosper long. Their joy is but for a moment, and will quickly end in endless sorrow. Though he be ever so great, and rich, and jovial, the hypocrite will be humbled, and mortified, and made miserable.

3. How it is illustrated, v. 6-9.

(1.) He supposes his prosperity to be very high, as high as you can imagine, v. 6. It is not his wisdom and virtue, but his worldly wealth or greatness, that he accounts *his excellency*, and values himself upon. We will suppose that *to mount up to the heavens*, and, since his spirit always rises with his condition, you may suppose that with it *his head reaches to the clouds*. He is every way advanced; the world has done the utmost it can for him. He looks down upon all about him with disdain, while they look up to him with admiration, envy, or fear. We will suppose him to bid

fair for a universal monarchy. And, though he cannot but have made himself many enemies before he arrived to this pitch of prosperity, yet he thinks himself as much out of the reach of their darts as if he were in the clouds.

(2.) He is confident that his ruin will accordingly be very great, and his fall the more dreadful for his having risen so high: *He shall perish for ever*, v. 7. His pride and security were the certain presages of his misery. This will certainly be true of all impenitent sinners in the other world; they shall be undone, for ever undone. But Zophar means his ruin in this world; and indeed sometimes notorious sinners are remarkably cut off by present judgments; they have reason enough to fear what Zophar here threatens even the triumphant sinner with.

[1.] A shameful destruction: *He shall perish like his own dung* or dunghill, so loathsome is he to God and all good men, and so willing will the world be to part with him, ~~3319~~ Psalm 119:119; ~~2624~~ Isaiah 66:24.

[2.] A surprising destruction. He will be brought into desolation in a moment (~~1739~~ Psalm 73:19), so that those about him, that saw him but just now, will ask, “*Where is he?* Could he that made so great a figure vanish and expire so suddenly?”

[3.] A swift destruction, v. 8. *He shall fly away* upon the wings of his own terrors, and be *chased away* by the just imprecations of all about him, who would gladly get rid of him.

[4.] An utter destruction. It will be total; he shall go away *like a dream*, or *vision of the night*, which was a mere phantasm, and, whatever in it pleased the fancy, it is quite gone, and nothing of it remains but what serves us to laugh at the folly of. It will be final (v. 9): *The eye that saw him*, and was ready to adore him, *shall see him no more*, and the place he filled shall no more behold him, having given him an eternal farewell when he went to his own place, as Judas, ~~4025~~ Acts 1:25.

Ⓢ JOB 20:10-22

MISERY OF THE WICKED

The instances here given of the miserable condition of the wicked man in this world are expressed with great fulness and fluency of language, and the same thing returned to again and repeated in other words. Let us therefore reduce the particulars to their proper heads, and observe,

I. What his wickedness is for which he is punished.

1. The lusts of the flesh, here called *the sins of his youth* (v. 11); for those are the sins which, at that age, people are most tempted to. The forbidden pleasures of sense are said to be *sweet in his mouth* (v. 12); he indulges himself in all the gratifications of the carnal appetite, and takes an inordinate complacency in them, as yielding the most agreeable delights. That is the satisfaction which *he hides under his tongue*, and rolls there, as the most dainty delicate thing that can be. *He keeps it still within his mouth* (v. 13); let him have that, and he desires no more; he will never part with that for the spiritual and divine pleasures of religion, which he has no relish or nor affection for. His keeping it still in his mouth denotes his obstinately persisting in his sin (*he spares it* when he should kill and mortify it, *and forsakes it not*, but holds it fast, and goes on frowardly in it), and also his re-acting of his sin by revolving it and remembering it with pleasure, as that adulterous woman ([Ⓢ]Ezekiel 23:19) who *multiplied her whoredoms by calling to remembrance the days of her youth*; so does this wicked man here. Or his hiding it and keeping it under his tongue denotes his industrious concealment of his beloved lust. Being a hypocrite, his haunts of sin are secret, that he may save the credit of his profession; but he who knows what is in the heart knows what is under the tongue too, and will discover it shortly.

2. The love of the world and the wealth of it. It is in worldly wealth that he places his happiness, and therefore he sets his heart upon it. See here,

(1.) How greedy he is of it (v. 15): *He has swallowed down riches* as eagerly as ever a hungry man swallowed down meat; and is still crying, “Give, give.” It is that which he desired (v. 20); it was, in his eye, the best gift, and that which he coveted earnestly.

(2.) What pains he takes for it: It is *that which he laboured for* (v. 18), not by honest diligence in a lawful calling, but by an unwearied prosecution of all ways and methods, *per fas, per nefas* — *right or wrong*, to be rich. We must *labour*, not *to be rich* (³²⁰⁴Proverbs 23:4), but to be charitable, *that we may have to give* (⁴⁰⁰³Ephesians 4:28), not to spend.

(3.) What great things he promises himself from it, intimated in *the rivers, the floods, the brooks of honey and butter* (v. 17); his being disappointed of them supposes that he had flattered himself with the hopes of them: he expected rivers of sensual delights.

3. Violence and oppression, and injustice in his poor neighbours, v. 19. This was the sin of the giants of the old world, and a sin that, as much as any, brings God's judgments upon nations and families. It is charged upon this wicked man,

(1.) That *he has forsaken the poor*, taken no care of them, shown no kindness to them, nor made any provision for them. At first perhaps, for a pretence, he gave alms like the Pharisees, to gain a reputation; but, when he had served his turn by this practice, he left it off, and forsook the poor, whom before he seemed to be concerned for. Those who do good, but not from a good principle, though they may abound in it, will not abide in it.

(2.) That he has *oppressed* them, crushed them, taken all advantages against them to do them a mischief. To enrich himself, he has robbed the spital, and made the poor poorer.

(3.) That he has *violently taken away their houses*, which he had no right to, as Ahab took Naboth's vineyard, not by secret fraud, by forgery, perjury, or some trick in law, but avowedly, and by open violence.

II. What his punishment is for this wickedness.

1. He shall be disappointed in his expectations, and shall not find that satisfaction in his worldly wealth which he vainly promised himself (v. 17): *He shall never see the rivers, the floods, the brooks of honey and butter*, with which he hoped to glut himself. The world is not that to those who love it, and court it, and admire it, which they fancy it will be. The enjoyment sinks far below the raised expectation.

2. He shall be diseased and distempered in his body; and how little comfort a man has in riches if he has not health! Sickness and pain,

especially if they be in extremity, embitter all his enjoyments. This wicked man has all the delights of sense wound up to the height of pleasurable; but what real happiness can he enjoy when *his bones are full of the sins of his youth* (v. 11), that is, of the effects of those sins? By his drunkenness and gluttony, his uncleanness and wantonness, when he was young, he contracted those diseases which are painful to him long after, and perhaps make his life very miserable, and, as Solomon speaks, consume his flesh and his body, ^{<3515>}Proverbs 5:11. Perhaps he was given to fight when he was young, and then made nothing of a cut or a bruise in a fray; but he feels it in his bones long after. But can he get no ease, no relief? No, he is likely to carry his pains and diseases with him to the grave, or rather they are likely to carry him thither, and so the sins of his youth shall *lie down with him in the dust*; the very putrefying of his body in the grave is to him the effect of sin (^{<3249>}Job 24:19), so that his iniquity is upon his bones there, ^{<3527>}Ezekiel 32:27. The sin of sinners follows them to the other side death.

3. He shall be disquieted and troubled in his mind: *Surely he shall not feel quietness in his belly*, v. 20. He has not that ease in his own mind that people think he has, but is in continual agitation. The ill-gotten wealth which he has swallowed down makes him sick, and, like undigested meat, is always upbraiding him. Let none expect to enjoy that comfortably which they have gotten unjustly. The unquietness of his mind arises,

(1.) From his conscience looking back, and filling him with the fear of the wrath of God against him for his wickedness. Even that wickedness which was sweet in the commission, and was rolled under the tongue as a delicate morsel, becomes bitter in the reflection, and, when it is reviewed, fills him with horror and vexation. *In his bowels it is turned* (v. 14) like John's book, *in his mouth as sweet as honey*, but, *when he had eaten it, his belly was bitter*, ^{<3610>}Revelation 10:10. Such a thing is sin; it is turned into *the gall of asps*, than which nothing is more bitter, *the poison of asps* (v. 16), than which nothing more fatal, and so it will be to him; what he sucked so sweetly, and with so much pleasure, will prove to him the poison of asps; so will all unlawful gains be. The fawning tongue will prove the viper's tongue. All the charming graces that are thought to be in sin will, when conscience is awakened, turn into so many raging furies.

(2.) From his cares, looking forward, v. 22. *In the fulness of his sufficiency*, when he thinks himself most happy, and most sure of the

continuance of his happiness, *he shall be in straits*, that is, he shall think himself so, through the anxieties and perplexities of his own mind, as that rich man who, when his ground brought forth plentifully, cried out, *What shall I do?* ^{<2077>}Luke 12:17.

4. He shall be dispossessed of his estate; that shall sink and dwindle away to nothing, so that *he shall not rejoice therein*, v. 18. He shall not only never rejoice truly, but not long rejoice at all.

(1.) What he has unjustly swallowed he shall be compelled to disgorge (v. 15): *He swallowed down riches*, and then thought himself sure of them, and that they were as much his own as the meat he had eaten; but he was deceived: *he shall vomit them up again*; his own conscience perhaps may make him so uneasy in the keeping of what he has gotten that, for the quiet of his own mind, he shall make restitution, and that not with the pleasure of a virtue, but the pain of a vomit, and with the utmost reluctancy. Or, if he do not himself refund what he has violently taken away, God will, by his providence, force him to it, and bring it about, one way or other, that ill-gotten goods shall return to the right owners: *God shall cast them out of his belly*, while yet the love of the sin is not cast out of his heart. So loud shall the clamours of the poor, whom he has impoverished, be against him, that he shall be forced to send his children to them to soothe them and beg their pardon (v. 10): *His children shall seek to please the poor*, while his own hands shall restore them their goods with shame (v. 18): *That which he laboured for*, by all the arts of oppression, *shall he restore*, and shall not so swallow it down as to digest it; it shall not stay with him, but *according to his shame shall the restitution be*; having gotten a great deal unjustly, he shall restore a great deal, so that when every one has his own he will have but little left for himself. To be made to restore what was unjustly gotten, by the sanctifying grace of God, as Zaccheus was, is a great mercy; he voluntarily and cheerfully restored four-fold, and yet had a great deal left to *give to the poor*, ^{<2098>}Luke 19:8. But to be forced to restore, as Judas was, merely by the horrors of a despairing conscience, has none of that benefit and comfort attending it, for he *threw down the pieces of silver and went and hanged himself*.

(2.) He shall be stripped of all he has and become a beggar. He that spoiled others shall himself be spoiled (^{<2301>}Isaiah 33:1); for *every hand of the wicked shall be upon him*. The innocent, whom he has wronged, sit down by their loss, saying, as David, *Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked*,

but my hand shall not be upon him, ^{<0213>}1 Samuel 24:13. But though they have forgiven him, though they will make no reprisals, divine justice will, and often makes the wicked to avenge the quarrel of the righteous, and squeezes and crushes one bad man by the hand of another upon him. Thus, when he is plucked on all sides, *he shall not save of that which he desired* (v. 20), not only he shall not save it all, but he shall save nothing of it. *There shall none of his meat* (which he coveted so much, and fed upon with so much pleasure) *be left,* v. 21. All his neighbours and relations shall look upon him to be in such bad circumstances that, when he is dead, no man shall look for his goods, none of his kindred shall expect to be a penny the better for him, nor be willing to take out letters of administration for what he leaves behind him. In all this Zophar reflects upon Job, who had lost all and was reduced to the last extremity.

^{<0213>}JOB 20:23-29

MISERY OF THE WICKED

Zophar, having described the many embarrassments and vexations which commonly attend the wicked practices of oppressors and cruel men, here comes to show their utter ruin at last.

I. Their ruin will take its rise from God's wrath and vengeance, v. 23. The hand of the wicked was upon him (v. 22), *every hand of the wicked*. His hand was against every one, and therefore every man's hand will be against him. Yet, in grappling with these, he might go near to make his part good; but his heart cannot endure, nor his hands be strong, when *God shall deal with him* (^{<0214>}Ezekiel 22:14), *when God shall cast the fury of his wrath upon him and rain it upon him*. Every word here speaks terror. It is not only the justice of God that is engaged against him, but his wrath, the deep resentment of provocations given to himself; it is *the fury of his wrath*, incensed to the highest degree; it is cast upon him with force and fierceness; it is rained upon him in abundance; it comes on his head like the fire and brimstone upon Sodom, to which the psalmist also refers, ^{<0215>}Psalm 11:6. *On the wicked God shall rain fire and brimstone*. There is no fence against this, but in Christ, who is the only covert from the storm and tempest, ^{<0216>}Isaiah 32:2. This wrath shall be cast upon him *when he is about to fill his belly*, just going to glut himself with what he has gotten

and promising himself abundant satisfaction in it. Then, when he is eating, shall this tempest surprise him, when he is secure and easy, and in apprehension of no danger; as the ruin of the old world and Sodom came when they were in the depth of their security and the height of their sensuality, as Christ observes, ^{<4726>}Luke 17:26, etc. Perhaps Zophar here reflects on the death of Job's children when they were eating and drinking.

II. Their ruin will be inevitable, and there will be no possibility of escaping it (v. 24): *He shall flee from the iron weapon*. Flight argues guilt. He will not humble himself under the judgments of God, nor seek means to make his peace with him. All his care is to escape the vengeance that pursues him, but in vain: if he escape the sword, yet *the bow of steel shall strike him through*. God has weapons of all sorts; he has both *whet his sword and bent his bow* (^{<4727>}Psalm 7:12, 13); he can deal with his enemies *cominus vel eminus* — *at hand or afar off*. He has a sword for those that think to fight it out with him by their strength, and a bow for those that think to avoid him by their craft. See ^{<2447>}Isaiah 24:17, 18; ^{<2488>}Jeremiah 48:43, 44. He that is marked for ruin, though he may escape one judgment, will find another ready for him.

III. It will be a total terrible ruin. When the dart that has struck him through (for when God shoots he is sure to hit his mark, when he strikes he strikes home) comes to be *drawn out of his body*, when *the glittering sword* (the *lightning*, so the word is), the flaming sword, the sword that is bathed in heaven (^{<2445>}Isaiah 34:5), *comes out of his gall*, O what *terrors are upon him!* How strong are the convulsions, how violent are the dying agonies! How terrible are the arrests of death to a wicked man!

IV. Sometimes it is a ruin that comes upon him insensibly, v. 26.

1. The darkness he is wrapped up in is a hidden darkness: it is *all darkness*, utter darkness, without the least mixture of light, and it is *hid in his secret place*, whither he has retreated and where he hopes to shelter himself; he never retires into his own conscience but he finds himself in the dark and utterly at a loss.

2. The fire he is consumed by is *a fire not blown*, kindled without noise, a consumption which every body sees the effect of, but nobody sees the cause of. It is plain that the gourd is withered, but the worm at the root, that causes it to wither, is out of sight. He is wasted by a soft gentle fire — surely, but very slowly. When the fuel is very combustible, the fire needs

no blowing, and that is his case; he is ripe for ruin. *The proud, and those that do wickedly, shall be stubble,* ^{390E}Malachi 4:1. *An unquenchable fire shall consume him* (so some read it), and that is certainly true of hell-fire.

V. It is a ruin, not only to himself, but to his family: *It shall go ill with him that is left in his tabernacle,* for the curse shall reach him, and he shall be cut off perhaps by the same grievous disease. There is an entail of wrath upon the family, which will destroy both his heirs and his inheritance, v. 28.

1. His posterity will be rooted out: *The increase of his house shall depart,* shall either be cut off by untimely deaths or forced to run their country. Numerous and growing families, if wicked and vile, are soon reduced, dispersed, and extirpated, by the judgments of God.

2. His estate will be sunk. *His goods shall flow away* from his family as fast as ever they flowed into it, when *the day of God's wrath* comes, for which, all the while his estate was in the getting by fraud and oppression, he was treasuring up wrath.

VI. It is a ruin which will manifestly appear to be just and righteous, and what he has brought upon himself by his own wickedness; for (v. 27) *the heaven shall reveal his iniquity*, that is, the God of heaven, who sees all the secret wickedness of the wicked, will, by some means or other, let all the world know what a base man he has been, that they may own the justice of God in all that is brought upon him. *The earth also shall rise up against him*, both to discover his wickedness and to avenge it. *The earth shall disclose her blood,* ^{392E}Isaiah 26:21. *The earth will rise up against him* (as the stomach rises against that which is loathsome), and will no longer keep him. *The heaven reveals his iniquity*, and therefore will not receive him. Whither then must he go but to hell? If the God of heaven and earth be his enemy, neither heaven nor earth will show him any kindness, but all the hosts of both are and will be at war with him.

VII. Zophar concludes like an orator (v. 29): *This is the portion of a wicked man from God;* it is allotted him, it is designed him, as his portion. He will have it at last, as a child has his portion, and he will have it for a perpetuity; it is what he must abide by: *This is the heritage of his decree from God;* it is the settled rule of his judgment, and fair warning is given of it. *O wicked man! thou shalt surely die,* ^{393E}Ezekiel 33:8. Though impenitent sinners do not always fall under such temporal judgments as

are here described (therein Zophar was mistaken), yet the wrath of God abides upon them, and they are made miserable by spiritual judgments, which are much worse, their consciences being either, on the one hand, a terror to them, and then they are in continual amazement, or, on the other hand, seared and silenced, and then they are given up to a reprobate sense and bound over to eternal ruin. Never was any doctrine better explained, or worse applied, than this by Zophar, who intended by all this to prove Job a hypocrite. Let us receive the good explication, and make a better application, for warning to ourselves to stand in awe and not to sin.