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suffering is punishment for one’s personal sin), by preaching to them a sermon on the seeming prosperity of the wicked (Job 21:1-16). If the wicked prosper, then the argument and conclusion of Job’s friends (and Satan) must be wrong.

Still, many today have not learned the lesson. In what do we have our faith: in the things of this world, or in the God who created the things of this world (1 John 2:15-17)? What is most important; that is, what has priority in life? Jesus commanded: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mat. 6:33). Paul wrote: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:1, 2), and, “But godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6), as well as, “For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Tim. 4:8).

Job understood well that the wicked will meet their fate: “That the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath. Who shall declare his way to his face? and who shall repay him what he hath done? Yet shall he be brought to the grave, and shall remain in the tomb” (Job 21:30-32). The inspired Word states: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). This includes wicked, prosperous men.

So, as the psalmist asked, how can we avoid fretting over the prosperity of the wicked, and as Job appealed to his friends, why do the wicked prosper? We must remember, “A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked” (Psa. 37:16). “But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him” (Psa. 37:39-40). The foolishness of envying the wicked brings remorse (Psa. 73:21-22).

What will give hope now, and at the Judgment: material prosperity or spiritual blessedness? Do we want to face God as a prospering wicked person, or as a faithful child of God? The psalmist learned it is good to draw near to God, and to declare God’s works – instead of envying the wicked (Psa. 73:28), and declared: “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory” (Psa. 73:24).

Job’s friends missed it. Satan used their misconceptions to attack Christ. Job’s response nailed it. We must understand that, although the wicked may seem to prosper now, and the righteous may suffer, the wicked will be punished in everlasting Hell, but eternal Heaven will be the reward of the faithful, and Heaven will surely be worth it all.

*Words cannot begin to express our appreciation to the elders of the Forest Hill congregation and to the Memphis School of Preaching for their continued love and support in holding up our hands in seeking and saving the lost. We are thankful to our Heavenly Father for the blessings that He has bestowed upon us since we arrived in Paris, Texas, to labor with the Bonham Street congregation. We have had seven baptisms, and several restorations, and we just completed a very successful VBS, not only in attendance, but also in planting the Seed. None of this would be possible if we had not had the training of faithful gospel preachers and teachers at MSOP. We thank God every day for the opportunity that has come our way!* Wilkin Tom O’Neal (MSOP 1996)

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## Wherefore Do The Wicked Live, Become Old, Yea, Are Mighty In Power?

Bobby Liddell

This question, from Job 21:7, is important, with important implications. The man, who asked the question was a real man, with real problems. He was also a godly man, who suffered as none other (Job 1:1ff). The reason for his suffering became the focus of discussion, and the answer was that with which his friends and even Job himself struggled. Thus, the book of Job records the conflict of worldly wisdom and God’s revealed will in dealing with the problem of why must good men endure pain and suffering, and why do wicked men prosper. This conflict, in the minds of men, continues. Is all suffering because of one’s personal sin? Why do the wicked prosper, and the godly suffer?

Job’s friends concluded that his problems were not, in fact, a test of Job’s character and faith, but were, obviously, visible, timely punishment for Job’s sin. Their observation was that suffering is the lot of the wicked, and theirs alone. Therefore, righteous men escape this pitiable plight, while those who sin suffer now, and those who suffer in this life do so because of sin. Thus, Job’s suffering was proof of his sinfulness. Even Jesus’ disciples had this false idea: “And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind” (John 9:1-2)? The erroneous conclusions of Job’s friends engendered their misbegotten theology and fostered their erroneous argument that the wicked suffer, in this life, because of their sins; thus, Job’s sufferings were (and had to be) a result of his sin. To them, the answer was simple. Job needed to repent in order to allay his suffering. Job answered with the factual evidence that sometimes the wicked prosper; thus, his friends’ conclusions were false (Job 21).

### Why Do The Wicked Live?

The Bible records numerous instances of quick, conclusive punishment, sent from God, upon the wicked, expressly because of their sins (Num. 16:28-35; Acts 12:20-23; 2 Kin. 9:30-37; Luke 12:16-21; et al.). There are other instances, yet, hear what Jesus taught.

There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish (Luke 13:1-5).

So, although we might point to notable, immediate punishments exacted, by God, upon the wicked, such is not always the case. The truth is that the wicked often do well, live in luxury, live long, and die peacefully in their old age, surrounded by friends and family, and they leave behind a fortune for those who follow. The wickedest man in town might live in the mansion on the hill, drive the finest cars, dress in the latest styles, eat the best food, have an attractive mate, and have lovely, talented, healthy, happy children who attend the best schools. Doors open for them socially, financially, and politically. The world looks at the wicked man’s prosperity and thinks, “I want to be like him.” Even church members may envy the wicked – who prosper, and wonder how they can have what the wicked man has, or on the more troubling side, why they do not have what he has (Pro. 23:17; Psa. 37:1).

Why does God allow the wicked to live, become old, and grow mighty in power (Job 21:7)? We may not ever understand all the reasons. It could be because God spares them, for He desires their repentance, that they might use their influence for good (Luke 19:1-10). It might be that God is longsuffering in order to give them ample opportunity to learn the folly of worldliness and to turn to Him (Ecc. 12:13-14; cf. Rom. 9:22). (Continued on Page 2)

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Or, it could be that He wills to use them for His purposes (cf. Dan. 3:15; 4:34-37). It might well be that God uses the apparent prosperity of the wicked to test the righteous, and to teach godly men and women to look to His Word, not worldly wisdom, for guidance, and to trust in Him, not in uncertain riches (Mark 10:24; 1 Tim. 6:17). That being the case, many have not fared well with this test.

#### *Why Do The Wicked Become Old?*

Job's friends declared that the righteous would be blessed, and the wicked would not continue, but would be cut off (Job 4:7). The truth is that the wicked often live to old age, and sometimes the righteous die young. Of the man who, according to the Divine Record, lived longer than any other, attaining the age of 969, there is nothing said, but that he lived that long, and the indication is that he may have died in the flood (Gen. 5:27). Wicked men eat, drink, and make merry. Often, they do all the wrong things, in all the wrong ways, for all the wrong reasons, and still live quiet, peaceable, long lives. They fulfill their lusts, satisfy their sensual desires, and die with smiles on their faces. Not only do they live, they are "lively," and grow old, living in sin! The idea is that they endure, and that their wealth endures, and even increases as time goes by.

Thus, Job argues that the wicked do not suffer loss—as Job had.

They do not lose their children—as Job did.

They do not lose their wealth—like Job lost his.

They do not lose their health—as had Job.

They grow old, surrounded by a beautiful, happy, healthy family, and they possess ever-increasing, fine flocks and herds, while they continue in robust vigor, and uninterrupted peace. The point Job pursued is this: if suffering is always an incontrovertible indicator of God's punishment of the sinner, how is it that sometimes sinners escape that fate?

How does Satan fit into this picture? Satan makes sin look appealing and profitable (Gen. 3), for he is a liar, and the father of lies (John 8:44). Likewise, he appeals to our emotions, clouding our minds, and distorting the true facts (Heb. 3:13). According to him, wicked people live to a ripe, old age, so enjoy life, and do not worry about God. Job was not arguing Satan's case, in agreement with his evil purposes, and to encourage sinful living, but Job was sarcastically pointing to the facts that his friends had ignored. Why do good people suffer? Sin may bring suffering, and all suffering has been caused by sin (Gen. 3), but some good people suffer innocently. Job's friends told him that he suffered because of his sins (Job 4:8-9), that his children died because of their sins (Job 8:3-4), and that Job's plight was really easier than his iniquity deserved (Job 11:6).

One of the most attractive aspects of sin is that some seem to prosper while sinning, in spite of sinning, even because of sinning. Job uses this fact, again in a sarcastic way, to answer his friends. They have accused him of being a wicked person; therefore, their conclusion is that is the reason he has suffered. His response is to point to the wicked and note their seeming "blessings."

In our day, the mistaken idea that some have about Christianity is that the child of God will never suffer loss, damage, financial reversal, or personal tragedy, either to himself, or to those whom he loves. The other side of that coin is the misconception that the wicked person will face daily punishment for his sins as evidenced by the endless tragedy

that comes into his life. I was teaching a Bible class, and we came to the problem of suffering. One sister adamantly affirmed that if one suffered, the reason was that he had sinned. She noted that if one was sick, he had sinned, and if one's house burned, it was because of his sin, and was punishment, from God. I directed her to biblical answers, none of which she accepted. As a matter of fact, she became very noticeably upset. The next week, the good sister was absent, because she had the flu! I could hardly wait for her to return so I could ask her what sin she had committed.

#### *Why Do The Wicked Become Mighty In Power?*

The wicked often "are mighty in power"; that is, they grow powerful in wealth, and find comfort therein. Job's friends had asserted that the righteous have God's blessings, and His providential protection, while the wicked receive God's punishment in this life. To them, Job was the poster boy for God's righteous reaction to sin. How is it then that wicked men prosper in this world? Many times, for them, there is not the least hint, in this world, that God has looked upon them with disfavor. This irrefutable truth, presented by Job, disproved the faulty reasoning of the friends.

The question continues to this day: "How can the God of all holiness allow the unholy to be 'rewarded' with temporal blessings" (cf. Mat. 5:45)? That one who transgresses God's law, refuses God's grace, ignores His will, rebels against His authority, forsakes His offer of forgiveness, and even denies God's existence, could have the best this world has to offer, and escape the problems and pains that others face, seems to be against all for which God stands. Likewise, that one who keeps God's law, rejoices in His grace, obeys His will, submits to God's authority, seeks His forgiveness, and proclaims His powerful presence, should have troubles, opposition, persecution, loss, tears, sorrow, sickness, pain, poverty, and suffering, surely seems to be contrary to God's promise to His children. The wicked often seem to enjoy life, the good life, and it just gets better for them, but righteous Job, driven by the horrible condition in which he suffered every waking moment, longed for death and cursed the day he was born (Job 3). Why?

A real problem with finite, mortal man's assessment of the justice of the infinite, eternal God is that we are bounded by time, restricted in knowledge, and limited in vision. Therefore, as we view the prosperity of the wicked; we do so according to our imperfect evaluation of their appearance in the present, without our having the ability to know the events of tomorrow (or even what goes on behind closed doors, or within the heart). As we look upon the outward appearance, it seems, now, that they really are prospering (cf. John 7:24). How can that be? The truth is that God does not always recompense the wicked immediately, but reserves judgment for some, and promises sure punishment for all the wicked in the future (2 The. 1:7-9). The wise man penned:

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God (Ecc. 8:11-13).

Note the points Job made about the wicked.

Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. Their bull gendereth, and faileth not; their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf. They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him (Job 21:8-15)?

Job considered the contrast, in that:

One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. His breasts are full of milk, and his bones are moistened with marrow. And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure. They shall lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall cover them (Job 21:23-26).

#### *The Bearing Of Psalms 37 And 73 Upon Our Study*

According to the lament of the inspired psalmists (David [Psa. 37] and Asaph [Psa. 73]), the wicked seem to prosper (Psa. 37:7; Psa. 37:35). At the outset, the discussion follows this course: the wicked do not suffer, or have trouble (Psa. 73:5-6), but they, instead, wear pride as a necklace (Psa. 73:6). In fact, they have all for which they could wish, and more (Psa. 73:7), for they "prosper in the world; they increase in riches" (Psa. 73:12). The wicked speak evil (Psa. 73:8-10), for they speak against the righteous—to oppress them (Psa. 73:8), and they speak evil against God (Psa. 73:9). Yet, in spite of their arrogant, ungodly, unrighteous blasphemy, they get a "full cup" (Psa. 73:10).

How could this be? Why should ungodly people prosper? Especially, when those who are godly suffer? The psalmist gives the hyperbolic situation of the wicked, as if it were a resume for successful living, fashioned after what the Devil would want God's people to believe. Satan would have us to think that sin brings the "good life," for, after all, trying to live right does not prevent one's facing the problems and pains that bring suffering. So, the question comes: "How can ungodly people, who rebel against God do so well?"

Like too many others, when the psalmist looked at the prosperity of the wicked, he almost lost his faith (Psa. 73:1-3). Prosperity refers to a peaceful, contented state, safe and sound, and without trouble. He envied the wicked; that is, he had jealous anger when he considered the seeming prosperity of the foolish (those who are proud and boastful, and who glory in themselves). The reflexive form means "to heat oneself with anger." Why did he become so angry? His view was out of focus. He had seen the wicked prosper and had forgotten the real purpose of life—and he had forgotten that, in spite of how things may appear, our Holy God is in control. Like Peter, when we look at our surroundings, it may well cause our faith to falter, but when we keep our eyes on Jesus, our faith is strengthened (Mat. 14:22ff).

When we look at the seeming prosperity of the wicked, from the worldly point of view, it becomes easy to envy the sinner's situation, especially when the child of God suffers hardship, setback, trial, and affliction. We may find that

we envy the sinner's wealth, or health, or position, but envy and faith oppose one another. Envy makes one bitter; he feels sorry for himself, and becomes angry. Envy destroys one from the inside. One who entertains envy soon comes to the point of asking, "If the wicked prosper without serving God, then why should I serve God? Why should anyone serve God?"

One may wonder if godly living is in vain. If living for God brings suffering, and living for the things of this world brings success, why live for God? He may find himself wishing that he had chosen the path of the wicked, because of their seeming prosperity. Consider the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Both men died (Luke 16:22). If that were the end of their existence, and the end of the story, we could correctly conclude that the wicked, rich man won.

This passage helps us to know that the here and now is not all there is to life, and that seeming prosperity now, on earth, does not equal true prosperity. Not only was the rich man, who was now the one begging, doomed for eternity, but his evil influence, no doubt, would lead his five brethren into the same torment (Luke 16:24-31). The Christ succinctly stated the truth: "And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

Where did the psalmist find the answer to the same question posed by Job? When he went into the sanctuary of God. God had the answer all the time. The psalmist learned the wicked are on slippery ground (Psa. 73:18), face desolation in a moment, and live in terror (Psa. 73:19). They are soon cut down (Psa. 37:2), for they prosper and pass away (Psa. 37:35-36). "Here and now" are all the wicked have. They destroy themselves (Psa. 37:15). They perish (Psa. 37:20). Even if he prospers for a lifetime, the wicked man will perish.

The wicked have not tricked God, for God sees, and the Lord will laugh at the wicked (Psa. 37:13); that is, God will mock and scorn him, not for a lack of compassion, but because of His knowledge of the vanity of the evildoer, and his ultimate end. God knows the heart (Psa. 73:11), even when the wicked convince themselves He does not. When they awaken, they will find that God despises the imagination of their hearts (Psa. 73:20).

So, what should God's people do? Trust in the Lord (Psa. 37:3), and do not fret, or worry. Do good (Psa. 37:3), get busy, and do what is right in spite of who does wrong, who prospers, and who suffers. Delight in the Lord (Psa. 37:4), and find happiness in God, and He will answer our prayers. Commit to God (Psa. 37:5-6). Rest in the Lord (Psa. 37:7). Wait patiently (Psa. 37:7), even when suffering in waiting longingly. Cease from anger, forsake wrath, and do not indulge in it (Psa. 37:8). Fret not in any wise to do evil (Psa. 37:8). Turn loose of things and hold onto God (Psa. 73:23). Look to God for guidance (Psa. 73:24). Take comfort that when all else fails, God will be there (Psa. 73:25-26), knowing that God's people will not be ashamed (disappointed), but will be satisfied (Psa. 37:19).

#### *Conclusion*

The idea that righteous men do not suffer was really an attack by Satan upon the deity and holiness of Christ. If Christ were innocent, why did He suffer, and die (cf. Isa. 53; Heb. 2:9; Heb. 10:9-10; Heb. 10:12; Phi. 2:5-8; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22; et al.)? Job responded to the false assertions of his friends (that suffering proves the sufferer has sinned; that is, that all

*(Continued on Page 4)*