

**Job 21**  
**July 12, 2026**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: Have you ever noticed that some of the most successful, happy people you know seem to live without any regard for God—while faithful believers struggle?”

**Transition:** In today’s text, Job observes that the wicked grow old, increase in power, see their children flourish, live in safety, and spend their years in prosperity before dying peacefully ([Job 21:7–15](#))—yet they openly reject God, declaring they have no desire to know his ways and questioning what benefit comes from serving him ([Job 21:7–15](#)).

Throughout Scripture, believers encounter this same puzzle. The psalmist confesses envy of the arrogant when witnessing the prosperity of the wicked, noting they have no struggles and their bodies are healthy and strong ([Ps 73:3–12](#)). Jeremiah asks God directly why the way of the wicked prospers and why all the faithless live at ease ([Jer 12:1–2](#)). Ecclesiastes identifies this as meaningless: righteous people receive what the wicked deserve, and wicked people receive what the righteous deserve ([Eccles 8:14](#)).

Most of us have most likely encountered successful, seemingly content individuals who show no interest in faith—and many of us have also known devout believers facing hardship. Job acknowledges that tension rather than dismissing it! It positions [Job 21](#) not as an ancient curiosity but as a conversation about real spiritual confusion that believers still encounter today. Let’s begin.

**BOOK:**

**21** Then Job replied:

<sup>2</sup> “Listen carefully to my words;  
let this be the consolation you give me.

<sup>3</sup> Bear with me while I speak,  
and after I have spoken, mock on.

<sup>4</sup> “Is my complaint directed to man?  
Why should I not be impatient?

<sup>5</sup> Look at me and be astonished;  
clap your hand over your mouth.

<sup>6</sup> When I think about this, I am terrified;  
trembling seizes my body.

<sup>7</sup> Why do the wicked live on,  
growing old and increasing in power?

<sup>8</sup> They see their children established around them,  
their offspring before their eyes.

<sup>9</sup> Their homes are safe and free from fear;  
the rod of God is not upon them.

10 Their bulls never fail to breed;  
their cows calve and do not miscarry.  
11 They send forth their children as a flock;  
their little ones dance about.  
12 They sing to the music of tambourine and harp;  
they make merry to the sound of the flute.  
13 They spend their years in prosperity  
and go down to the grave (Sheol) in peace. (Or “in an instant”)  
14 Yet they say to God, ‘Leave us alone!  
We have no desire to know your ways.  
15 Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him?  
What would we gain by praying to him?’  
16 But their prosperity is not in their own hands,  
so I stand aloof from the counsel of the wicked.  
17 “Yet how often is the lamp of the wicked snuffed out?  
How often does calamity come upon them,  
the fate God allots in his anger?  
18 How often are they like straw before the wind,  
like chaff swept away by a gale?  
19 It is said, ‘God stores up a man’s punishment for his sons.’  
Let him repay the man himself, so that he will know it!  
20 Let his own eyes see his destruction;  
let him drink of the wrath of the Almighty.  
21 For what does he care about the family he leaves behind  
when his allotted months come to an end?  
22 “Can anyone teach knowledge to God,  
since he judges even the highest?  
23 One man dies in full vigor,  
completely secure and at ease,  
24 his body well nourished,  
his bones rich with marrow.  
25 Another man dies in bitterness of soul,  
never having enjoyed anything good.  
26 Side by side they lie in the dust,  
and worms cover them both.  
27 “I know full well what you are thinking,  
the schemes by which you would wrong me.  
28 You say, ‘Where now is the great man’s house,  
the tents where wicked men lived?’  
29 Have you never questioned those who travel?  
Have you paid no regard to their accounts—  
30 that the evil man is spared from the day of calamity,  
that he is delivered from the day of wrath?  
31 Who denounces his conduct to his face?  
Who repays him for what he has done?  
32 He is carried to the grave,

and watch is kept over his tomb.

<sup>33</sup> The soil in the valley is sweet to him;  
all men follow after him, and a countless throng goes before him.

<sup>34</sup> “So how can you console me with your nonsense?  
Nothing is left of your answers but falsehood!”

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

### **LOOK:**

#### **Resist Simplistic Theology About Suffering**

Job rejects his friends’ consolation as “nonsense” and “falsehood,” ([Job 21:30–34](#)) exposing how easy answers about suffering can become spiritually harmful. Many believers encounter a version of retributive theology—the assumption that righteousness guarantees prosperity and wickedness guarantees suffering. [Job 21](#) demands honesty: sometimes the wicked flourish while the faithful struggle. Rather than forcing suffering into neat theological categories, Christians must acknowledge that some people die “completely secure and at ease” while others die “in bitterness of soul, never having enjoyed anything good,” and both outcomes demand humility before God’s inscrutability. When comforting suffering believers, resist pat answers; instead, sit with their pain and acknowledge that God’s justice operates on a timeline and according to purposes we cannot fully comprehend.

#### **Examine Your Assumptions About Divine Justice**

Job observes that the wicked “live on, growing old and increasing in power,” see “their children established around them,” and their “homes are safe and free from fear,” ([Job 21:4–26](#)) yet they say to God, “Leave us alone! We have no desire to know your ways. Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? What would we gain by praying to him?” ([Job 21:4–26](#)) This challenges us to examine whether we secretly believe faith is transactional—that obedience guarantees blessing. [Job 21](#) invites us to surrender the demand that God operate according to our moral calculus and instead trust His character even when His actions remain opaque.

### **Close in Prayer**

## **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

***Wiersbe, W.W. (1996). Be Patient. (pp. 81-86) Victor Books***

### **2. The actual end of the wicked man (Job 21:1–34)**

After appealing once more for their understanding and sympathy (Job 21:1–6), Job replied to Zophar's statements and refuted each of them. Job stated that, from his point of view, it appears that the wicked have long lives (vv. 7–16), they are not often sent calamity (vv. 17–21), and the death of the wicked is no different from the death of other men (vv. 22–34). Point by point, Job took Zophar's speech and shredded it into bits.

But first, listen to Job's appeal to his friends that they try to understand how he feels. "If you really want to console me, just keep quiet and listen" (v. 2, paraphrase). The Greek philosopher Zeno said, "The reason why we have two ears and only one mouth is that we may listen the more and talk the less." The friends thought their words would encourage Job, but he said that their silence would encourage him even more (13:3).

Job pointed out that his complaint was not against men but against God. Men had not caused his afflictions, and men could not take them away. If he was impatient, it was because God had not answered him (v. 3). The longer God waited, the worse Job's situation became. "Look at me and be astonished; clap your hand over your mouth" (21:5, NIV).

As Job contemplated what he was about to say, it stirred him to the depths (v. 6). This was no speech from "off the top of his head," for it had to do with the basic facts of life and death. If Job's friends were in his situation, they would see things differently and *say* things differently. *The life of the wicked may be long (Job 21:7–16)*. In contrast to Zophar's text (20:5), Job said, "Why do the wicked still live, continue on, also become very powerful?" (21:7, NASB) They have security on every side: their children and homes are safe (vv. 8–9, 11–12), their business prospers (v. 10), and they have long lives in which to enjoy their prosperity (v. 13). They also have many descendants who share the family wealth and enjoy it. The death of the wicked is sudden; they don't linger in agony and long for deliverance. Of course, Job's situation was just the opposite: His family had been destroyed, his wealth was gone, and he was suffering greatly as he waited for death to come.

But the saddest thing about the wicked is the way they leave God out of their lives *and still prosper* (vv. 14–15). They want nothing to do with the Lord; in fact, they say to Him, "Get away from us! Leave us alone!" They refuse to pray to the Lord, obey Him, or give Him credit for their success. This is the philosophy of most unsaved people today; you might call it "practical atheism" (see Ps. 10). God is not in their thoughts, let alone in their plans (James 4:13–17). They are self-sufficient as they do what they want to do, and they do it "their way." Jesus described such a person in Luke 12:13–21.

Job hastened to say that this was not *his* philosophy of life. "But I refuse even to deal with people like that" (Job 21:16, TLB). The wicked take credit for their wealth, but Job acknowledged that everything comes from God (1:21). How, then, can Job's three friends classify him with the wicked?

Before considering Job's second point, we must face the disturbing fact that too many professed Christians actually admire and envy the lifestyle of the rich and famous. In one of his books, Dr. Kenneth Chafin tells about a pastor and deacon who were visiting prospects and stopped at a beautiful suburban home. The lawn looked like it was manicured, and two expensive cars sat in the driveway. Furthermore, the pastor and deacon could see the man of the house comfortably seated in his spacious living room, watching television. Everything about the place reeked of affluence. The deacon turned to his pastor and asked, "What kind of good news do we have for this fellow?"

In over forty years of ministry, I have performed many weddings and watched many young Christian couples get started in their homes. What a joy it has been to see homes where couples set the right priorities and resist the temptation to "follow the crowd" and live for material possessions. Unfortunately, some have lost their spiritual vision and succeeded in this world—without acknowledging the Lord. Alas, they have their reward.

*The wicked do not often experience calamity? (Job 21:17–21).* "Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out," Bildad affirmed (18:5); but Job asked, "How often does that happen?" How often do you actually see God's anger displayed against the godless people of the world? "How often are they like straw before the wind, like chaff swept away by a gale?" (21:18, NIV) The wicked seem to be secure in this world, while the righteous suffer (but see Ps. 73).

But if God doesn't judge the wicked, He will judge their children (Job 21:19). Zophar had argued that point (20:10), and so had Eliphaz (5:4). Of course, both of them were aiming at Job, who had lost all of his children. "But what kind of judgment is that?" asked Job. "If a man lives in sin, let him suffer for his sin. After he dies, why should he care about what happens to his family? In Sheol, he will never know what is happening on earth."

Scripture makes it clear that the fathers are not punished for the sins of the children or the children for the sins of the fathers (Jer. 31:29–30; Ezek. 18:1ff). Certainly parents may be deeply hurt by the sins of their children, and children may suffer from the *consequences* of their parents' sins, but the judgment of God is always just (Deut. 24:16). It was cruel for the three friends to suggest that Job's sins had caused the death of his children.

Zophar had said that the life of a wicked man was brief, but Job refuted him by affirming that wicked people often live a long time. Zophar claimed that the pleasures of the wicked were temporary because God's judgment suddenly fell upon them, but Job asked, "How often have you seen that happen?" Now Job answers Zophar's third argument that the death of the wicked is painful.

*The wicked die just like other people (Job 21:22–34).* Life and death are in the hands of God, so what is mere man that he should teach God or claim to be able to explain God's ways? (v. 22) God will ask Job a similar question when He finally appears and gives Job his long-awaited opportunity to defend himself. Instead of Job questioning God, it will be God who questions Job and humbles Job with His questions!

Observation tells Job that some people die when they are in the fullness of life and apparently in excellent health, while others die after long and painful illnesses. Some people enjoy a long and happy life while others spend their days in misery, *but death is the same for all of them*. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as “infant death” or “tragic death” or “unexpected death” because *death is death no matter when or how it comes*. The rich man dies, the poor man dies; the believer dies, the unbeliever dies; and “side by side they lie in the dust, and worms cover them both” (v. 26, NIV). Of course, Job is talking about the *physical* side of death and not the *spiritual*. When death comes, it obviously makes a great deal of difference *in the next life* whether or not the person had faith in Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:27).

Many people—including some Christian believers—hesitate to speak about death in general or their own death in particular. They have hospitalization and life insurance, but they prefer to avoid the subject and act as though death were not coming. “The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else,” wrote sociologist Ernest Becker. “It is a mainspring of human activity—activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man” (*The Denial of Death*, Free Press p. ix). “Behold, I know your thoughts,” Job told his friends (Job 21:27). He could tell that his speech had not convinced them, and he knew just what they were going to say when he finished speaking—exactly what they had said before! In verse 28 he quoted two of their statements that he had already refuted (see 18:13–21 and 20:20–29), but he expected to hear similar statements again.

Job asked his friends if they had ever investigated the situation in places other than their own homeland. As Dorothy Sayers wrote, “There’s nothing you can’t prove if your outlook is only sufficiently limited.” He asked them, “Have you never questioned those who travel?” (21:29, NIV) People who travel are usually not provincial in their outlook but have wide experience in the things of the world. With all of their wisdom, Job’s three friends might still be narrow in their outlook because they haven’t seen what life is like in other places. If Job’s friends inquired of well-traveled people, they would learn that in every part of the world, wicked people seem to escape the calamities that fall on the righteous.

Then Job became very personal and asked his friends, “If you really believe that the wicked are destined for an early death, *have you ever warned them?* Have you ever denounced them to their face?” (v. 31, paraphrase) If his friends had replied, “No, we have never talked to the wicked about their future,” then Job could have said, “Then why are you warning *a righteous man* about his future?” How inconsistent can you get?

Job’s closing words in 21:34 let the three friends know that he had no confidence in what they said. Their comfort was in vain (“nonsense,” NIV), and their answers were nothing but falsehood. The Hebrew word translated “falsehood” means “a deliberate violation of God’s Law, an act of treachery.” It is often translated “trespass.” When the three friends attacked Job, they were breaking faith and trespassing against God. Instead of helping Job, they were leading him astray.

I have a friend who prays daily, “Lord, help me today not to add to anybody’s burdens.”

It's too bad Bildad and Zophar and Eliphaz didn't pray that prayer! Perhaps all of us should start praying it!

**Zuck, R. B. (1985). *Job*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 743-745) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

## **6. Job's second reply to Zophar (chap. 21)**

In this speech Job responded to the view of the three arguers ("you" in vv. 2, 27–29, 34 is plural, and the verbs in vv. 2–3a, 5, 29, 34 are plural) about the destruction of the wicked. Unlike his other talks, here he said nothing directly to God. Many of his remarks in verses 7–33 are direct refutations of Zophar's words in chapter 20 (see Zuck, *Job*, p. 98, for a list of these contrasts).

### **a. Request for silence (21:1–6)**

21:1–3. If his troublesome counselors would only **listen** to what **Job** was saying, then they would console him (**consolation** renders the same Heb. word Eliphaz used in 15:11; in both verses the Heb. is plural). This is an important reminder that sufferers want a listening ear, not a condemning mouth. Then, he added sarcastically, Zophar could **mock on** (this verb is singular, whereas as stated earlier, the verbs in 21:2–3a are plural).

21:4–6. Since Job was complaining to God, not to them, why did he **not** have the right to **be impatient?** (cf. 4:2; 6:2–3) They ought to be amazed at his terrible appearance (he wanted them to **look at** him as well as listen) as they were at first (2:12). According to Bildad, people everywhere were horrified at what happens to a wicked person (18:20), so why could they not show at least a little concern about *his* situation, since they thought he was such a sinner? In fact they should be silent, putting their hands on their mouths (cf. 29:9; 40:4). Even Job's thinking about his own deplorable situation disturbed him emotionally (he felt **terrified**; cf. 4:5, "dismayed"; 22:10; 23:15–16) and physically (his **body** trembled).

### **b. The prosperity of the wicked (21:7–16)**

21:7–16. How could the contenders' viewpoint, especially Zophar's, be right about the brevity of the wicked's enjoyment of life (15:29, 32–34; 18:5; 20:5, 8, 22) when Job knew that **the wicked live on** into ripe **old** age (cf. 20:10), **their children** with **them**, **their** houses secure (cf. 20:28), seemingly with no judgment from God? (cf. 20:23, 28–29) The livestock of many sinners prospers, the wicked enjoy **music**, and even die easily. Besides, they cynically flaunt **God**, even wondering what they **would ... gain by praying to Him**. This is strongly redolent of Satan's accusation that Job was seeking personal gain by worshiping God (1:9–11), but of course Job knew nothing of Satan's affront. Job, however, knew that **their prosperity** did not come, ultimately, from **their own hands**; it was provided by God, whom they scorned! Therefore Job was not about to walk in the way of **the wicked** (cf. comments on 22:16–18).

Justice then is not always meted out in this life. Often the godless prosper and the godly perish. "Stern judgment in the life to come is the only possible corrective for this apparent triumph of wickedness. Postmortem retribution is clearly taught in both Testaments—compare Psalm 9:17;

Isaiah 5:14–15; 30:33; Ezekiel 32:22–25; Matthew 7:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:8–9—although more clearly in later times than in the age of Job” (Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *The Book of Job: God’s Answer to the Problem of Underserved Suffering*, p. 77).

**c. The death of the wicked (21:17–26)**

21:17–21. To Bildad’s claim that “the lamp of the wicked is snuffed out” (18:5) in death and that calamity and disaster are ready to overtake him (18:12), Job asked, **how often** (asked three times in 21:17–18) do these things really happen? This so-called **fate** allotted by God’s **anger** (cf. 20:28; 21:30) to **the wicked**, as Zophar asserted (20:23, 29), hardly fits the facts. Sinners are seldom blown away suddenly and easily **like straw** or **chaff**.

Suppose his associates were to respond to Job that punishment for people he mentioned will come on their *children*. Job objected to that attempted way out by stating that a wicked person ought to suffer for his **own** sins under God’s **wrath** for once he is dead, he could not **care** about any judgment on his **family** (cf. 20:10).

21:22–26. God’s judging of the wicked does not follow the limited theology of Job’s friends. God does not, as they suggested, often cut off the wicked (20:5) and judge their children instead. In His inscrutable ways He may allow **one man** to live on in prosperity and good health (Job’s references to **vigor**, 21:23, and **bones**, v. 24, respond to Zophar’s words in 20:11) and He may allow another man to be deprived and thus bitter. And yet in death they are alike, **in the dust** consumed by **worms** (cf. 17:14; 24:20; also cf. Ecc. 9:2–3). Wealth or health are not ways by which to judge a person’s character. One may be wicked, and die either young or old; or he may be godly, and die either young or old. These facts obviously conform more to reality than did the rigid view of Job’s three prattling prosecutors.

**d. The death of the wicked in prosperity (21:27–34)**

21:27–33. Job said he was aware of how they might try to answer him. They would ask Job to point out **where ... wicked** wealthy people were living (cf. 8:22; 18:21; 20:28). Job answered this anticipated question with another question: Had the three contestants **never questioned** travelers? Many people who travel have money and yet many of them, though **evil**, do not face **calamity** or **wrath**. No one dares denounce or confront wicked, influential people or requite them. Such a popular person lives on, and even has an honorable burial, with people guarding **his tomb** after a crowd follows his casket in the funeral procession.

21:34. Their consoling (cf. v. 2), Job evaluated, was only **nonsense** (*hebel*, “empty, futile, useless”; cf. “no meaning” in 7:16 and comments on Ecc. 1:2) and were evidence of their being faithless (*mā’al*, “unfaithful, treacherous”). Job simply could not buy their explanation of suffering; in fact their viewpoint meant they were unfaithful to him, their longtime friend.

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Job21). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**