

Job 20:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head
reach unto the clouds;

Analysis

Zophar's Second Speech on the Wicked: This verse introduces Zophar's description of the temporary prosperity and ultimate downfall of the wicked (Job 20:4-29). Zophar, the most dogmatic of Job's three friends, argues that wickedness may produce momentary success but inevitably ends in ruin. The Hebrew "im-ya'aleh lashamayim sido" (אִם־יָעַלְהָ לְשָׁמָיִם שִׁיאָו) means "though his height/pride ascends to the heavens." The noun "si'o" (שִׁיאָו) can mean "height," "pride," or "excellence," suggesting arrogant self-exaltation.

The Imagery of Cosmic Pride: The phrase "vero'sho la'av yaggia" (וְרֹאשׁוֹ לֹעֵב יָגִיעַ) means "and his head reaches to the clouds." This vivid imagery evokes several biblical themes: the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:4, reaching to heaven in pride), the King of Babylon (Isaiah 14:13-14, "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds"), and the pride that precedes destruction (Proverbs 16:18). The clouds (לֹעֵב, av) represent the upper atmosphere, the boundary between earth and heaven, symbolizing the wicked person's attempt to transcend human limitations and approach divine status.

Theological Problem—The Prosperity of the Wicked: Zophar's argument addresses a perennial theological problem: why do the wicked prosper? His answer—that their success is fleeting and illusory—follows traditional wisdom theology found in Psalm 37:35-36, 73:18-20, and Proverbs 24:19-20. However, the book of Job ultimately challenges this simplistic formula. Zophar assumes Job's suffering proves hidden wickedness, but God later vindicates Job and rebukes the

friends for not speaking rightly about Him (Job 42:7-8). The irony is that while Zophar's general principle (pride precedes a fall) is true, his application to Job is false. The book teaches that suffering isn't always punishment for sin, and prosperity isn't always reward for righteousness—God's ways transcend mechanical retribution theology.

Historical Context

The book of Job is notoriously difficult to date, with scholarly estimates ranging from the patriarchal period (c. 2000 BC) to the post-exilic period (c. 500 BC). The setting is Uz, likely in Edom or northern Arabia, suggesting a non-Israelite context. Job himself is portrayed as a righteous Gentile, similar to Melchizedek, who worships the true God (often called El Shaddai in Job) outside the Mosaic covenant framework.

Zophar represents traditional Ancient Near Eastern wisdom theology, which emphasized divine retribution: the righteous prosper, the wicked suffer. This theology appears in Egyptian wisdom literature (The Instruction of Amenemope) and Mesopotamian texts. However, crisis literature like the Babylonian "Ludlul Bel Nemeqi" ("I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom") and "The Babylonian Theodicy" show that ancient peoples also grappled with suffering's meaning when it didn't fit neat formulas.

The debate between Job and his friends reflects a theological crisis: traditional wisdom appears inadequate to explain Job's undeserved suffering. Job knows he's innocent (Job 27:5-6), God knows he's innocent (Job 1:8, 2:3), yet Zophar insists that such catastrophic suffering must indicate hidden sin. This mirrors later Jewish struggles with theodicy, particularly during the Babylonian exile (Jeremiah's laments, Ezekiel's discussions of corporate vs. individual responsibility in Ezekiel 18). The book's conclusion reveals that God's governance of the universe transcends human comprehension of justice—a theme Jesus echoes when disciples assume a man's blindness resulted from sin (John 9:1-3).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does Zophar's imagery of pride reaching to the heavens connect to broader biblical themes about human arrogance and its consequences?
2. What are the limitations of retribution theology (the assumption that suffering always indicates sin and prosperity indicates righteousness)?
3. In what ways does the book of Job challenge simplistic explanations for suffering while still affirming God's justice and sovereignty?
4. How can we hold together the biblical truth that pride leads to destruction with the reality that the wicked sometimes prosper and the righteous sometimes suffer?
5. What does this passage teach about the danger of applying general theological principles to specific situations without divine wisdom and humility?

Interlinear Text

אָמַר יְהֹוָה לְשֹׁמֶן יְמִינָה שְׁוֹרֵן רָאשָׁן

H518 **mount up** H8064 **to the heavens** H7863 **Though his excellency** H7218 **and his head**

H5927 H5060

לְעַל בְּגִיעָן

unto the clouds **reach**

H5645 H5060

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 11:4 (Parallel theme): And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

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