

Job 24:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He is swift as the waters; their portion is cursed in the earth:
he beholdeth not the way of the vineyards.

Analysis

He is swift as the waters—Scholarly debate surrounds verses 18-24: is Job describing the wicked's deserved judgment (shifting to his friends' retribution theology), or citing their arguments sarcastically? The Hebrew qal-hu al-pene mayim (קל-הוא על-פניהם) depicts something light/swift upon water's surface—either fleeting prosperity or swift judgment sweeping away like a flash flood. Context suggests Job may be quoting conventional wisdom about inevitable divine retribution.

Their portion is cursed in the earth: he beholdeth not the way of the vineyards—The "portion" (chelqah, חֶלֶק) refers to inherited land, fundamental to Ancient Near Eastern identity and prosperity. If cursed, the wicked cannot enjoy agricultural blessing ("the way of the vineyards"). This echoes Deuteronomy 28's covenant curses. Yet Job's broader argument in chapter 24 contradicts this—he's observed the wicked prospering, not cursed. This creates interpretive tension: does Job momentarily concede divine justice operates (though invisibly), or is he sarcastically rehearsing platitudes his friends repeat?

Historical Context

Verses 18-24 shift tone dramatically from verses 1-17, creating scholarly debate. Some interpreters see Job quoting his friends' retribution theology to refute it; others see Job acknowledging that judgment eventually comes, though delayed.

The vineyard imagery reflects agricultural economy where land inheritance signified covenant blessing (Numbers 36:7-9).

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How do you reconcile Job's observation that the wicked prosper (vv. 1-17) with traditional teaching that God judges sin?
2. What does 'their portion is cursed' teach about the ultimate futility of prosperity gained through wickedness?
3. How patient should we be in waiting for God's justice to manifest against evildoers?

Interlinear Text

רֹאשׁוֹת מִתְּקִילָּה לְמִם יְמִינֵי פְּנֵי עַל הַוְאָן קָרְבָּנָת מִתְּקִילָּה
He is swift H1931 as the waters H6440 is cursed H7043 their portion H2513

בָּאָרֶץ בְּאָרֶץ לֹא בְּמַדְבֵּן כְּמִימִן
in the earth H3808 he beholdeth H6437 not the way H1870 of the vineyards H3754

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