

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* (קַל-הוּא עַל-פְּנֵי-מַיִם) 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

קל	ה ואן	על	פני	מ ים	ל תקל ל	מלקת מ
He is swift	H1931	H5921	as the waters	H4325	is cursed	their portion
H7031			H6440		H7043	H2513
בא רץ	לא	פנה !	ד רך	פכמים:		
in the earth	H3808	he beholdeth	not the way	of the vineyards		
H776		H6437	H1870	H3754		

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