

Job 27:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Terrors take hold on him as waters, a tempest stealeth him away in the night.

Analysis

Terrors take hold on him as waters—the noun בְּלָהֹת (ballahot, terrors/calamities) with the verb נִשְׁאַג (nasag, overtake/seize) depicts overwhelming dread. The simile "as waters" (כְּמַיִם, kamayim) suggests a flood drowning the victim—uncontrollable, inescapable destruction. **A tempest stealeth him away in the night** uses סֻפָּה (sufah, storm/whirlwind) with גָּנָב (ganav, steal away), emphasizing sudden, secret removal. Night (לִילָּה, laylah) suggests vulnerability and lack of warning—he cannot see the storm coming.

Job concludes his description of the wicked's end with vivid catastrophe imagery: overwhelming terror like drowning, sudden destruction like a nighttime storm. This poetic climax emphasizes divine judgment's inevitability and inescapability. The wicked may accumulate wealth (v. 16-17) and build houses (v. 18), but terror and tempest will ultimately sweep them away. Yet Job himself has experienced this terror—the Satan-sent "great wind" that killed his children (1:19) came suddenly. Job maintains that despite experiencing the wicked's described fate, he remains innocent.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern literature often depicted divine judgment as storm or flood—chaotic waters representing threat and destruction (see Psalm 18:4, 16; 69:1-2, 14-15). The storm theophany appears throughout Scripture as God's instrument of judgment (Psalm 83:15, Nahum 1:3). Job's audience, familiar with devastating

storms in the ancient Near East, would recognize this imagery's power. Nighttime storms were particularly terrifying without modern weather prediction or lighting.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does Job's description of divine judgment challenge comfortable assumptions about security and safety?
2. What is the relationship between fearing God (reverential awe) and the terror that comes upon the wicked?
3. How can we prepare spiritually for life's sudden storms, whether judgment or permitted testing?

Interlinear Text

תַּשְׁגַּג הַ	כַּפִּים	בְּלָה וְתָ	לְיַלָּה	גַּנְבֵּת	סִוףָּה:
take hold	on him as waters	Terrors	in the night	stealeth him away	a tempest
H5381	H4325	H1091	H3915	H1589	H5492

Additional Cross-References

Job 15:21 (Parallel theme): A dreadful sound is in his ears: in prosperity the destroyer shall come upon him.

Job 18:11 (Parallel theme): Terrors shall make him afraid on every side, and shall drive him to his feet.