

Job 31:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Is not destruction to the wicked? and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity?

Analysis

Is not destruction to the wicked? (הַלֹּא־עֵד לְעֹל, halo-ed le'awwal)—Ed (destruction, calamity, disaster) is the expected fate of the awwal (wicked, unrighteous, perverse). Job appeals to the doctrine of retribution that his friends have wielded against him—but he turns it into self-examination rather than self-defense.

A strange punishment to the workers of iniquity (וְנֶכֶר לְפִעְלֵי אָוֶן, veneker lefo'alei aven)—Neker means something foreign, strange, or extraordinary—an exceptional calamity befitting exceptional evil. Po'alei aven (workers of iniquity) describes those whose active labor produces wickedness (Psalm 5:5, 14:4). Job introduces his oath of innocence (chapter 31) by acknowledging that IF he were such a worker, God's strange judgment would be justified. This conditional framework turns the friends' accusations into testable hypotheses.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern oath formulas often began with conditional statements ('If I have done X...') followed by self-imprecations ('then may Y happen to me'). Job employs this legal form throughout chapter 31, essentially placing himself under oath before God. The concept of measure-for-measure justice (lex talionis) was foundational to biblical law, making Job's appeal to retributive justice culturally resonant.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does Job's acknowledgment of God's justice against 'workers of iniquity' strengthen rather than weaken his case?
2. What does the word 'strange' (extraordinary) reveal about the severity of punishment Job believes true iniquity deserves?
3. How does this verse prepare for Job's detailed oath of innocence in the verses that follow?

Interlinear Text

הָלֹא	אֵי יָד	לְעֹוֹלָם	וְיָ כֶּרֶךְ	לְפָעַלִּי
H3808	Is not destruction	to the wicked	and a strange	punishment to the workers
	H343	H5767	H5235	H6466
אַיִן:				
of iniquity				
H205				

Additional Cross-References

Job 21:30 (Evil): That the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath.

Job 34:22 (Sin): There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.