

Job 9:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent.

Analysis

Job describes divine indifference to suffering: 'If the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent.' The 'scourge' (shot, שִׁבְעָה) denotes whip or disaster. 'Slay suddenly' (petaom yamit, פְּתַאֲמָם יָמִית) describes unexpected death. Job accuses God of 'laughing' (laag, לָעַג, mocking) at innocent sufferers' 'trial' (massah, מֵשָׁה, testing). This is Job's most bitter accusation—God actively mocks suffering innocents.

Job speaks from deep pain, projecting cruelty onto God. His theology errs here—God doesn't mock sufferers. But Job's perception reveals suffering's power to distort our view of divine character. When God seems absent in tragedy, silence feels like mockery. Job interprets divine inaction as malicious satisfaction rather than inscrutable purpose. The accusation is false, but the pain producing it is real.

The cross definitively refutes Job's accusation. Far from laughing at the innocent's trial, God sent His Son to endure it. Christ was the ultimate innocent Sufferer, and God didn't laugh but wept (John 11:35). The Father's silence during Christ's cry 'Why hast thou forsaken me?' wasn't mockery but the cost of atonement. God doesn't laugh at innocent suffering—He bore it.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern deities were often portrayed as capricious and cruel, taking pleasure in human suffering. Job's accusation reflects how extreme pain can make

even YHWH (the covenant God) seem like pagan deities—arbitrary and malicious. His lament shows faith stretched to breaking point.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How do we maintain correct theology about God's character when suffering tempts us to project cruelty onto Him?
2. What does Job's false accusation teach about the pastoral importance of distinguishing between pain-driven perception and reality?
3. In what ways does the cross definitively answer the accusation that God mocks innocent suffering?

Interlinear Text

אֵ	שׁ	וּ	יְמִ	תְּ	פָתָ	לְמַ	נְקִ	לֹ
H518	If the scourge	slay	suddenly	at the trial	of the innocent	he will laugh		
	H7752	H4191	H6597	H4531	H5355	H3932		

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