

Job 9:29

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If I be wicked, why then labour I in vain?

Analysis

If I be wicked, why then labour I in vain? אָנוֹכִי אֶרְשַׁע לְפָנֶיךָ הָבֵל אִינְעַ (anokhi ersha lamah-zeh hevel iga)—Job's logic is devastating: if God has already condemned me as wicked (rasha, רָשָׁע), why should I continue striving for righteousness? The phrase 'labour I in vain' uses hevel (הָבֵל, 'vanity' or 'breath') from Ecclesiastes—meaningless, futile effort. The verb 'labour' (yaga, עֲגַע) means to toil, work to exhaustion, struggle.

Job poses the moral hazard inherent in his situation: if righteousness brings no vindication and suffering comes regardless of behavior, what motivation remains for godliness? This isn't abandoning righteousness but exposing the friends' theology's bankruptcy. If suffering always indicates sin (as they claim), and the innocent suffer anyway (as Job experiences), then morality becomes meaningless. This question anticipates Paul's argument in Romans: justification must be by faith, not works, because no one can achieve righteousness sufficient for vindication (Romans 3:20-24). Job glimpses the need for a righteousness outside himself.

Historical Context

The retribution theology Job's friends espouse—righteousness brings prosperity, sin brings suffering—dominated ancient Near Eastern thought. Job's question exposes this system's moral bankruptcy: if the innocent suffer anyway, why pursue righteousness? This philosophical crisis drove Israel toward understanding grace, substitution, and future resurrection rather than strict earthly retribution. The book of Job prepared Israel for the gospel by demolishing works-righteousness.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does Job's question expose the inadequacy of any righteousness-by-works system?
2. What motivates your pursuit of holiness—desire for blessing, fear of punishment, or love for God?

Interlinear Text

אִנּוּ: אָרֶשׁ עַתָּדְךָ יְהוָה לְמַה בְּלִי יְהוָה אָרֶשׁ עַתָּדְךָ יְהוָה
H595 If I be wicked H4100 H2088 I in vain why then labour
H7561 H1892 H3021

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org