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JOB 21: 1 Then Job answered,

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Job expresses himself as puzzled by the dispensations of Divine Providence, because of the unequal distribution of temporal goods; he shows that wicked men often live long, prosper in their families, in their flocks, and in all their substance, and yet live in defiance of God and sacred things, vv. 1-16. At other times their prosperity is suddenly blasted, and they and their families come to ruin, Job 21:17-21. God, however, is too wise to err; and he deals out various lots to all according to his wisdom: some come sooner, others later, to the grave: the strong and the weak, the prince and the peasant, come to a similar end in this life; but the wicked are reserved for a day of wrath, Job 21:22-33. He charges his friends with falsehood in their pretended attempts to comfort him, Job 21:34.

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JOB 21: 2 "Listen diligently to my speech. Let this be your consolation.

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Verse 2

Let this be your consolations - זאת תנחומתיכם ותהי uthehi zoth tanchumotheychem may be translated, "And let this be your retractations." Let what I am about to say induce you to retract what you have said, and to recall your false judgments. נחם nacham signifies, not only to comfort, but to change one's mind, to repent; hence the Vulgate translates et agite paenitentiam, "and repent," which Coverdale follows in his version, and amende yourselves. Some suppose the verse to be understood ironically: I am now about to give you consolations for those you have given me. When I have done, then turn them into mockery if you please.

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JOB 21: 3 Allow me, and I also will speak; After I have spoken, mock on.

JOB 21: 4 As for me, is my complaint to man? Why shouldn't I be impatient?

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Verse 4

As for me - האנכי heanochi, "Alas for me!" Is it not with a man that I speak? And, if this be the case, why should not my spirit be troubled? I do not reply against my Maker: I suffer much from God and man; why then may I not have the privilege of complaining to creatures like myself?

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JOB 21: 5 Look at me, and be astonished. Lay your hand on your mouth.

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Verse 5

Mark me, and be astonished - Consider and compare the state in which I was once, with that in which I am now; and be astonished at the judgments and dispensations of God. You will then be confounded; you will put your hands upon your mouths, and keep silent. Putting the hand on the

mouth, or the finger on the lips, was the token of silence. The Egyptian god Harpocrates, who was the god of silence, is represented with his finger compressing his upper lip.

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JOB 21: 6 When I remember, I am troubled. Horror takes hold of my flesh.

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Verse 6

I am afraid - I am about to speak of the mysterious workings of Providence; and I tremble at the thought of entering into a detail on such a subject; my very flesh trembles.

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JOB 21: 7 “Why do the wicked live, become old, yes, and grow mighty in power?

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Verse 7

Wherefore do the wicked live - You have frequently asserted that the wicked are invariably punished in this life; and that the righteous are ever distinguished by the strongest marks of God's providential kindness; how then does it come that many wicked men live long and prosperously, and at last die in peace, without any evidence whatever of God's displeasure? This is a fact that is occurring daily; none can deny it; how then will you reconcile it with your maxims?

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JOB 21: 8 Their child is established with them in their sight, their offspring before their eyes.

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Verse 8

Their seed is established - They see their own children grow up, and become settled in the land; and behold their children's children also; so that their generations are not cut off. Even the posterity of the wicked continue.

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JOB 21: 9 Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them.

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Verse 9

Neither is the rod of God upon them - They are not afflicted as other men.

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JOB 21: 10 Their bulls breed without fail. Their cows calve, and don't miscarry.

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Verse 10

Their bull gendereth - עבר ibbar, passes over, i.e., on the cow, referring to the actions of the bull when coupling with the female. Their flocks multiply greatly, they bring forth in time, and none of them is barren.

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JOB 21: 11 They send out their little ones like a flock. Their children dance.

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#### Verse 11

They send forth their little ones - It is not very clear whether this refers to the young of the flocks or to their children. The first clause may mean the former, the next clause the latter; while the young of their cattle are in flocks, their numerous children are healthy and vigorous, and dance for joy.

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JOB 21: 12 They sing to the tambourine and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the pipe.

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#### Verse 12

They take the timbrel and harp - ישאו yisu, they rise up or lift themselves up, probably alluding to the rural exercise of dancing. תוף toph, which we translate timbrel, means a sort of drum, such as the tom-tom of the Asiatics. כנור kinnor may mean something of the harp kind. עוגב ugab, organ, means nothing like the instrument now called the organ, though thus translated both by the Septuagint and Vulgate; it probably means the syrinx, composed of several unequal pipes, close at the bottom, which when blown into at the top, gives a very shrill and lively sound. To these instruments the youth are represented as dancing joyfully. Mr. Good translates: "They trip merrily to the sound of the pipe." And illustrates his translation with the following verse: - "Now pursuing, now retreating, Now in circling troops they meet;

To brisk notes in cadence beating, Glance their many twinkling feet."

The original is intended to convey the true notion of the gambols of the rustic nymphs and swains on festival occasions, and let it be observed that this is spoken of the children of those who say unto God, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?" Job 21:14, Job 21:15. Is it any wonder that the children of such parents should be living to the flesh, and serving the lusts of the flesh? for neither they nor their parents know God, nor pray unto him.

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JOB 21: 13 They spend their days in prosperity. In an instant they go down to Sheol.

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#### Verse 13

They spend their days in wealth - There is a various reading here of some importance. In the text we have יבלו yeballu, they grow old, or wear out as with old age, terent vetustate; and in the margin, יכלו yechallu, they consume; and the Masora states that this is one of the eleven words which are written with ב beth and must be read with כ caph. Several editions have the former word in the text,

and the latter in the margin; the former being what is called the kethib, the latter keri. יבִּלּוּ yeballu, they grow old, or wear out, is the reading of the Antwerp, Paris, and London Polyglots; יַעֲחַלּוּ yechallu, they accomplish or spend, is the reading of the Complutensian Polyglot, thirteen of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS., the Septuagint, Chaldee, Syriac, and Arabic. The Vulgate has ducunt, "they lead or spend," from which our translation is borrowed. I incline to the former, as Job's argument derives considerable strength from this circumstance; they not only spend their days in faring sumptuously every day; but they even wear out so as to grow old in it; they are not cut off by any sudden judgment of God. This is fact; therefore your doctrine, that the wicked are cut off suddenly and have but a short time, is far from the truth.

In a moment go down to the grave - They wear out their years in pleasure; grow old in their gay and giddy life; and die, as in a moment, without previous sickness; or, as Mr. Good has it, They quietly descend into the grave.

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JOB 21: 14 They tell God, 'Depart from us, for we don't want to know about your ways.

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Verse 14

They say unto God - This is the language of their conduct, though not directly of their lips.

Depart from us - Let us alone; we do not trouble thee. Thy ways are painful; we do not like cross-bearing. Thy ways are spiritual; we wish to live after the flesh. We have learned to do our own will; we do not wish to study thine.

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JOB 21: 15 What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? What profit should we have, if we pray to him?'

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Verse 15

What is the Almighty - What allegiance do we owe to him? We feel no obligation to obey him; and what profit can we derive from prayer? We are as happy as flesh and blood can make us: our kingdom is of this world; we wish for no other portion than that which we have. Those who have never prayed as they ought know nothing of the benefits of prayer.

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JOB 21: 16 Behold, their prosperity is not in their hand. The counsel of the wicked is far from me.

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Verse 16

Their good is not in their hand - With all their boasting and self-dependence, God only lends them his bounty; and though it appears to be their own, yet it is at his disposal. Some of the wicked he permits to live and die in affluence, provided it be acquired in the ordinary way of his providence, by trade, commerce, etc. Others he permits to possess it for a while only, and then strips them of their illegally procured property.

The counsel of the wicked is far from me - Some understand the words thus: "Far be it from me to advocate the cause of the wicked." I have nothing in common with them, and am not their apologist. I state a fact: they are often found in continual prosperity. I state another fact: they are often found in wretchedness and misery.

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JOB 21: 17 "How often is it that the lamp of the wicked is put out, that their calamity comes on them, that God distributes sorrows in his anger?"

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#### Verse 17

How oft is the candle of the wicked put out? - The candle or lamp is often used, both as the emblem of prosperity and of posterity. Oftentimes the rejoicing of the wicked is short; and, not unfrequently, his seed is cut off from the earth. The root is dried up, and the branch is withered.

God distributeth sorrows in his anger - He must be incensed against those who refuse to know, serve, and pray unto him. In his anger, therefore, he portions out to each his due share of misery, vexation, and wo.

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JOB 21: 18 How often is it that they are as stubble before the wind, as chaff that the storm carries away?"

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#### Verse 18

They are as stubble before the wind - "His fan is in his hand; he will thoroughly cleanse his floor, and the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, but shall be like the chaff which the wind driveth away." Were not this a common thought, I should have supposed that the author of this book borrowed it from Psa 1:4. The original signifies that they shall be carried away by a furious storm; and borne off as booty is by the swift-riding robbers of the desert, who make a sudden irruption, and then set off at full speed with their prey.

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JOB 21: 19 You say, 'God lays up his iniquity for his children.' Let him recompense it to himself, that he may know it.

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#### Verse 19

God layeth up his iniquity for his children - This is according to the declaration of God, Exo 20:5: "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." This always supposes that the children, who are thus visited, have copied their parents' example; or that ill-gotten property is found in their hands, which has descended to them from their wicked fathers; and of this God, in his judgments, strips them. It is, however, very natural to suppose that children brought up without the fear of God will walk in the sight of their own eyes, and according to the imaginations of their own hearts.

He rewardeth him, and he shall know it - He shall so visit his transgressions upon him, that he shall at last discern that it is God who hath done it. And thus they will find that there would have been profit in serving him, and safety in praying unto him. But this they have neglected, and now it is too late.

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JOB 21: 20 Let his own eyes see his destruction. Let him drink of the wrath of the Almighty.

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Verse 20

His eyes shall see his destruction - He shall perceive its approach, and have the double punishment of fearing and feeling; feeling a Thousand deaths in fearing One.

He shall drink of the wrath - The cup of God's wrath, the cup of trembling, etc., is frequently expressed or referred to in the sacred writings, Deu 32:33; Isa 51:17-22; Jer 25:15; Rev 14:8. It appears to be a metaphor taken from those cups of poison which certain criminals were obliged to drink. A cup of the juice of hemlock was the wrath or punishment assigned by the Athenian magistrates to the philosopher Socrates.

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JOB 21: 21 For what does he care for his house after him, when the number of his months is cut off?

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Verse 21

For what pleasure hath he in his house after him - What may happen to his posterity he neither knows nor cares for, as he is now numbered with the dead, and numbered with them before he had lived out half his years. Some have translated the verse thus: "Behold how speedily God destroys the house of the wicked after him! How he shortens the number of his months!"

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JOB 21: 22 "Shall any teach God knowledge, since he judges those who are high?"

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Verse 22

Shall any teach God knowledge? - Who among the sons of men can pretend to teach God how to govern the world, who himself teaches those that are high - the heavenly inhabitants, that excel us infinitely both in knowledge and wisdom? Neither angels nor men can comprehend the reasons of the Divine providence. It is a depth known only to God.

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JOB 21: 23 One dies in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet.

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Verse 23

One dieth in his full strength - In this and the three following verses Job shows that the inequality of fortune, goods, health, strength, etc., decides nothing either for or against persons in reference to the approbation or disapprobation of God, as these various lots are no indications of their wickedness or innocence. One has a sudden, another a lingering death; but by none of these can their eternal states be determined.

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JOB 21: 24 His pails are full of milk. The marrow of his bones is moistened.

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#### Verse 24

His breasts are full of milk - The word עטיניו atinaiv, which occurs nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible, is most likely an Arabic term, but probably so provincial as to be now lost. (Arabic) atana signifies to macerate hides so as to take off the hair: hence Mr. Good thinks it means here, that sleekness of skin which is the effect of fatness both in man and beast. But as the radical idea signifies to stink, as leather does which is thus macerated, I cannot see how this meaning can apply here. Under the root עטן atan, Mr. Parkhurst gives the following definitions: "עטן occurs, not as a verb, but as a noun masculine plural, in construction, עטיני atiney, the bowels, intestines; once Job 21:24, עטיניו atinaiv, his bowels or intestines, are full of, or abound with, חלב chalab, fat. So the lxx.: Τα δε εγκατα αυτου πληρη στεατος. The Vulgate: Viscera, ejus plena sent adipe, 'his intestines are full of fat.' May not עטינים atinim be a noun masculine plural from עטה atah, to involve, formed as גליונים gailyonim, mirrors, from גלה galah, to reveal? And may nor the intestines, including those fatty parts, the mesentery and omentum, be so called on account of their wonderful involutions?" I think this conjecture to be as likely as any that has yet been formed.

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JOB 21: 25 Another dies in bitterness of soul, and never tastes of good.

JOB 21: 26 They lie down alike in the dust. The worm covers them.

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#### Verse 26

They shall lie down alike in the dust - Death levels all distinctions, and the grave makes all equal. There may be a difference in the grave itself; but the human corpse is the same in all. Splendid monuments enshrine corruption; but the sod must lie close and heavy upon the putrefying carcass, to prevent it from becoming the bane of the living.

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JOB 21: 27 "Behold, I know your thoughts, the devices with which you would wrong me.

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#### Verse 27

I know your thoughts - Ye still think that, because I am grievously afflicted, I must therefore be a felonious transgressor.

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JOB 21: 28 For you say, 'Where is the house of the prince? Where is the tent in which the wicked lived?'

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Verse 28

For ye say, Where is the house of the prince? - In order to prove your point, ye ask, Where is the house of the tyrant and oppressor?

Are they not overthrown and destroyed? And is not this a proof that God does not permit the wicked to enjoy prosperity?

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JOB 21: 29 Haven't you asked wayfaring men? Don't you know their evidences,

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Verse 29

Have ye not asked them that go by the way? - This appears to be Job's answer. Consult travelers who have gone through different countries; and they will tell you that they have seen both examples - the wicked in great prosperity in some instances, while suddenly destroyed in others. See at the end of the chapter, Job 21:34 (note).

Do ye not know their tokens - Mr. Good translates the whole verse thus: "Surely thou canst never have inquired of men of travel; or thou couldst not have been ignorant of their tokens. Hadst thou made proper inquiries, thou wouldst have heard of their awful end in a thousand instances. And also of their prosperity." See at the end of this chapter, Job 21:34 (note).

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JOB 21: 30 that the evil man is reserved to the day of calamity, That they are led out to the day of wrath?

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Verse 30

That the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? - Though every one can tell that he has seen the wicked in prosperity, and even spend a long life in it; yet this is no proof that God loves him, or that he shall enjoy a prosperous lot in the next world. There, he shall meet with the day of wrath. There, the wicked shall be punished, and the just rewarded.

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JOB 21: 31 Who shall declare his way to his face? Who shall repay him what he has done?

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Verse 31

Who shall declare his way to his face? - But while the wicked is in power, who shall dare to tell him to his face what his true character is? or, who shall dare to repay him the evil he has done? As such a person cannot have his punishment in this life, he must have it in another; and for this the day of wrath - the day of judgment, is prepared.



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JOB 21: 32 Yet he will be borne to the grave. Men shall keep watch over the tomb.

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Verse 32

Yet shall he be brought to the grave - He shall die like other men; and the corruption of the grave shall prey upon him. Mr. Carlyle, in his specimens of Arabic poetry, Translations, p. 16, quotes this verse, which he translates and paraphrases, והוא לקברות יובל "He shall be brought to the grave," ועל גדוש יסקוד And shall watch upon the high-raised heap." It was the opinion of the pagan Arabs, that upon the death of any person, a bird, by them called Manah, issued from the brain, and haunted the sepulcher of the deceased, uttering a lamentable scream.

This notion, he adds, is evidently alluded to in Job 21:32. Thus Abusahel, on the death of his mistress: - "If her ghost's funereal screech

Through the earth my grave should reach,

On that voice I loved so well

My transported ghost would dwell."

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JOB 21: 33 The clods of the valley shall be sweet to him. All men shall draw after him, as there were innumerable before him.

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Verse 33

The clods of the valley shall be sweet unto him - Perhaps there is an allusion here to the Asiatic mode of interment for princes, saints, and nobles: a well-watered valley was chosen for the tomb, where a perpetual spring might be secured. This was intended to be the emblem of a resurrection, or of a future life; and to conceal as much as possible the disgrace of the rotting carcass.

Every man shall draw after him - There seem to be two allusions intended here:

1. To death, the common lot of all. Millions have gone before him to the tomb; and כל אדם col adam, all men, shall follow him: all past generations have died, all succeeding generations shall die also.
  2. To pompous funeral processions; multitudes preceding, and multitudes following, the corpse.
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JOB 21: 34 So how can you comfort me with nonsense, because in your answers there remains only falsehood?"

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Verse 34

How then comfort ye me in vain - Mr. Good translates: "How vainly then would ye make me retract!" See the note on Job 21:2. I cannot retract any thing I have said, as I have proved by fact and

testimony that your positions are false and unfounded. Your pretensions to comfort me are as hollow as the arguments you bring in support of your exceptionable doctrines.

This chapter may be called Job's triumph over the insinuated calumnies, and specious but false doctrines, of his opponents. The irritability of his temper no longer appears: from the time he got that glorious discovery of his Redeemer, and the Joyous hope of an eternal inheritance, Job 19:25, etc., we find no more murmurings, nor unsanctified complainings. He is now full master of himself; and reasons conclusively, because he reasons coolly. Impassioned transports no longer carry him away: his mind is serene; his heart, fixed; his hope, steady; and his faith, strong. Zophar the Naamathite is now, in his presence, as an infant in the gripe of a mighty giant. Another of these pretended friends but real enemies comes forward to renew the attack with virulent invective, malevolent insinuation, and unsupported assertion. Him, Job meets, and vanquishes by pious resignation and fervent prayer. Though, at different times after this, Job had his buffetings from his grand adversary, and some seasons of comparative darkness, yet his faith is unshaken, and he stands as a beaten anvil to the stroke. He effectually exculpates himself, and vindicates the dispensations of his Maker.

There appears to be something in the Job 21:29 which requires to be farther examined: Have ye not asked them that go by the way? And do ye not know their tokens? It is probable that this verse may allude to the custom of burying the dead by the way-side, and raising up specious and descriptive monuments over them. Job argues that the lot of outward prosperity fell alike to the just and to the unjust, and that the sepulchral monuments by the wayside were proofs of his assertion; for his friends, as well as himself and others, had noted them, and asked the history of such and such persons, from the nearest inhabitants of the place; and the answers, in a great variety of cases, had been: "That monument points out the place where a wicked man lies, who was all his lifetime in prosperity and affluence, yet oppressed the poor, and shut up the bowels of his compassion against the destitute; and this belongs to a man who lived only to serve his God, and to do good to man according to his power, yet had not a day of health, nor an hour of prosperity; God having given to the former his portion in this life, and reserved the recompense of the latter to a future state."

The Septuagint render the verse thus: - Ερωτησατε παραπορευμενους οδον, και τα σημεια αυτων ουκ απαλλοτριωσατε, "Inquire of those who pass by the way, and their signs [monuments] ye will not alienate." That is, When ye hear the history of these persons, ye will not then assert that the man who lived in prosperity was a genuine worshipper of the true God, and therefore was blessed with temporal good, and that he who lived in adversity was an enemy to God and was consequently cursed with the want of secular blessings. Of the former ye will hear a different account from those who dare now speak the truth, because the prosperous oppressor is no more; And of the latter ye shall learn that, though afflicted, destitute, and distressed, he was one of those who acknowledged God in all his ways, and never performed an act of religious service to him in hope of secular gain; sought his approbation only, and met death cheerfully, in the hope of being eternally with the Lord.

Neither good nor evil can be known by the occurrences of this life. Every thing argues the certainty of a future state, and the necessity of a day of judgment. They who are in the habit of marking casualties, especially if those whom they love not are the subjects of them, as tokens of Divine displeasure, only show an ignorance of God's dispensations, and a malevolence of mind that would fain arm itself with the celestial thunders, in order to transfix those whom they deem their enemies.