
JOB 24: 1 "Why aren't times laid up by the Almighty? Why don't those who know him see his days?"

Job asserts that there are various transgressors whose wickedness is not visited on them in this life; and particularizes the unjust and oppressive, Job 24:1-6; those who are cruel to the poor, Job 24:7-13; the murderer, Job 24:14; the adulterer, Job 24:15; thieves and plunderers, Job 24:16, Job 24:17. Nevertheless they have an accursed portion, and shall die, and their memory perish, Job 24:18-20. He speaks of the abuse of power, and of the punishment of oppressors, Job 24:21-24; and asserts that what he has said on these subjects cannot be contradicted, Job 24:25.

Verse 1

Why, seeing times are not hidden from the Almighty - Mr. Good translates: "Wherefore are not doomsdays kept by the Almighty, so that his offenders may eye their periods?" Doomsdays are here used in the same sense as term times; and the wish is, that God would appoint such times that the falsely accused might look forward to them with comfort; knowing that, on their arrival, they should have a fair hearing, and their innocence be publicly declared; and their detractors, and the unjust in general, meet with their deserts. But God reserves the knowledge of these things to himself. "The holy patriarch," says Mr. Good, "has uniformly admitted that in the aggregate scale of Providence the just are rewarded and the wicked punished for their respective deeds, in some period or other of their lives. But he has contended in various places, and especially in Job 21:7-13, that the exceptions to this general rule are numerous: so numerous, as to be sufficient to render the whole scheme of providential interposition perfectly mysterious and incomprehensible, Job 23:8-12; so in the passage before us: if the retribution ye speak of be universal, and which I am ready to admit to a certain extent to be true and unquestionable, I not only ask, Why do the just ever suffer in the midst of their righteousness? but, Why do not the wicked see such retribution displayed before their eyes by stated judgments, so that they may at one and the same time know and tremble?"

JOB 24: 2 There are people who remove the landmarks. They violently take away flocks, and feed them.

Verse 2

Some remove the landmarks - Stones or posts were originally set up to ascertain the bounds of particular estates: and this was necessary in open countries, before hedges and fences were formed. Wicked and covetous men often removed the landmarks or termini, and set them in on their neighbors' ground, that, by contracting their boundaries, they might enlarge their own. The law of Moses denounces curses on those who remove their neighbors' landmarks. See Deu 19:14; Deu 27:17, and the note on the former place, where the subject is considered at large.

They violently take away flocks, and feed thereof - Mr. Good translates ירעו yiru, they destroy, deriving the word, not from רעה raah, to feed, but from רע ra, to rend, to destroy. The Septuagint had read רעה roch, a shepherd; and therefore have translated ποιμνιον συν ποιμενι ἀρπασαντες, "violently carrying off both the flock and the shepherd."

JOB 24: 3 They drive away the donkey of the fatherless, and they take the widow's ox for a pledge.

JOB 24: 4 They turn the needy out of the way. The poor of the earth all hide themselves.

Verse 4

They turn the needy out of the way - They will not permit them to go by the accustomed paths; they oblige them to take circuitous routes. When the Marquis of H. was made ranger of Richmond Park, he thought it his duty to shut up a pathway which had existed for a long time; and those who presumed, after this shutting up, to break the fence, and take that path as formerly, were prosecuted. A cobbler near the place entered an action against the marquis: the cause was tried, the marquis cast, and the path ordered to be opened, on the ground that it had, time out of mind, been a public undisputed path. When one asked the cobbler, "How he could have the boldness to go to law with the Marquis of H.?" he answered, "Because I did not like to leave the world worse than I found it." All tolerated oppression and voluntary forfeiture of ancient rights, are injurious to society at large, and they who wink at them leave the world worse than they found it.

JOB 24: 5 Behold, as wild donkeys in the desert, they go out to their work, seeking diligently for food. The wilderness yields them bread for their children.

Verse 5

Rising betimes for a prey - The general sense here seems plain enough. There are some who live a lawless roaming life: make a predatory life their employment; for this purpose, frequent the wilderness, where they seize on and appropriate whatsoever they find, and by this method they and their families are supported. Mr. Good says: "The sense has never yet been understood by any commentator;" and hence he proposes a different division of the words, placing ערבֵה arabah, the desert or wilderness, in the first hemistich, thus: - "Rising early for the pillage of the wilderness; The bread of themselves and of their children."

Others think that the words are spoken solely of the poor under the hand of oppression, who are driven away from their homes, and obliged to seek such support as the wilderness can afford. Such was originally the state of the Bedouins, and of the wandering Arab hordes in general: the oppression of the tyrannous governors obliged them to seek refuge in the deserts, where they still live in a roaming predatory life.

JOB 24: 6 They cut their provender in the field. They glean the vineyard of the wicked.

Verse 6

They reap every one his corn in the field - This is perfectly characteristic. These wandering hordes often make sudden irruptions, and carry off the harvest of grain, olives, vines, etc., and plunge with it into the wilderness, where none can follow them. The Chaldee gives the same sense: "They reap in a field that is not their own, and cut off the vineyard of the wicked."

JOB 24: 7 They lie all night naked without clothing, and have no covering in the cold.

Verse 7

They cause the naked to lodge without clothing - Or rather, They spend the night naked, without clothing; and without a covering from the cold: another characteristic of the wandering Arabs. They are ill-fed, ill-clothed. and often miserable off, even for tents. They can have little household stuff: as they are plunderers, they are often obliged to fly for their lives, and cannot encumber themselves with what is not absolutely needful.

JOB 24: 8 They are wet with the showers of the mountains, and embrace the rock for lack of a shelter.

Verse 8

They are wet with the showers of the mountains - Mr. Good thinks that torrents, not showers, is the proper translation of the original זרם zerem; but I think showers of the mountain strictly proper. I have seen many of these in mountainous countries, where the tails of water-spouts have been intercepted and broken, and the outpouring of them would be incredible to those who have never witnessed similar phenomena. The rain fell in torrents, and produced torrents on the land, carrying away earth and stones and every thing before them, scooping out great gullies in the sides of the mountains. Mountain torrents are not produced but by such extraordinary outpourings of rain, formed either by water-spouts, or by vast masses of clouds intercepted and broken to pieces by the mountain tops.

And embrace the rock for want of a shelter - In such cases as that related above, the firm rock is the only shelter which can be found, or safely trusted.

JOB 24: 9 There are those who pluck the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge of the poor,

Verse 9

They pluck the fatherless from the breast - They forcibly take young children in order that they may bring them up in a state of slavery. This verse is the commencement of a new paragraph, and points out the arbitrary dealings of oppressors, under despotic governors.

Take a pledge of the poor - Oppressive landlords who let out their grounds at an exorbitant rent, which the poor laborers, though using the utmost diligence, are unable at all times to pay; and then the unfeeling wretch sells them up, as the phrase here is, or takes their cow, their horse, their cart, or their bed, in pledge, that the money shall be paid in such a time. This is one of the crying sins of some countries of Europe.

JOB 24: 10 So that they go around naked without clothing. Being hungry, they carry the sheaves.

Verse 10

They cause him to go naked - These cruel, hard-hearted oppressors seize the cloth made for the family wear, or the wool and flax out of which such clothes should be made.

And they take away the sheaf - Seize the grain as soon as it is reaped, that they may pay themselves the exorbitant rent at which they have leased out their land: and thus the sheaf - the thraves and ricks, by which they should have been supported, are taken away from the hungry.

JOB 24: 11 They make oil within the walls of these men. They tread wine presses, and suffer thirst.

Verse 11

Make oil within their walls - Thus stripped of all that on which they depended for clothing and food, they are obliged to become vassals to their lord, labor in the fields on scanty fare, or tread their wine-presses, from the produce of which they are not permitted to quench their thirst.

JOB 24: 12 From out of the populous city, men groan. The soul of the wounded cries out, yet God doesn't regard the folly.

Verse 12

Men groan from out of the city - This is a new paragraph. After having shown the oppressions carried on in the country, he takes a view of those carried on in the town. Here the miseries are too numerous to be detailed. The poor in such places are often in the most wretched state; they are not only badly fed, and miserably clothed, but also most unwholesomely lodged. I was once appointed with a benevolent gentleman, J. S., Esq., to visit a district in St. Giles's London, to know the real state of the poor. We took the district in House Row, and found each dwelling full of people, dirt, and wretchedness. Neither old nor young had the appearance of health: some were sick, and others lying dead, in the same place! Several beds, if they might be called such, on the floor in the same apartment; and, in one single house, sixty souls! These were groaning under various evils; and the soul of the wounded, wounded in spirit, and afflicted in body, cried out to God and man for help! It would have required no subtle investigation to have traced all these miseries to the doors, the hands, the lips, and the hearts, of ruthless landlords; or to oppressive systems of public expenditure in the support of ruinous wars, and the stagnation of trade and destruction of commerce occasioned by them: to which must be added the enormous taxation to meet this expenditure.

Yet God layeth not folly to them - He does not impute their calamities to their own folly. Or, according to the Vulgate, *Et Deus inultum abire non patitur*; "And God will not leave (these disorders) unpunished." But the Hebrew may be translated *And God doth not attend to their prayers*. Job's object was to show, in opposition to the mistaken doctrine of his friends, that God did not hastily punish every evil work, nor reward every good one. That vice often went long

unpunished, and virtue unrewarded; and that we must not judge of a man's state either by his prosperity or adversity. Therefore, there might be cases in which the innocent oppressed poor were crying to God for a redress of their grievances, and were not immediately heard; and in which their oppressors were faring sumptuously every day, without any apparent mark of the Divine displeasure. These sentiments occur frequently.

JOB 24: 13 “These are of those who rebel against the light. They don't know its ways, nor stay in its paths.

Verse 13

They - rebel against the light - Speaking of wicked men. They rebel against the light of God in their consciences, and his light in his word. They are tyrants in grain, and care neither for God nor the poor. They know not the ways thereof - they will not learn their duty to God or man. Nor abide in the paths thereof - if brought at any time to a better mind, they speedily relapse; and are steady only in cruelty and mischief. This is the character of the oppressors of suffering humanity, and of sinners audacious and hardened. This whole verse Mr. Good translates in the following manner: -

They are indignant of the light;

They respect not its progress;

And will not return to its paths.

They hate good; they regard not its operation; they go out of the way of righteousness, and refuse to return.

JOB 24: 14 The murderer rises with the light. He kills the poor and needy. In the night he is like a thief.

Verse 14

The murderer rising with the light - Perhaps the words should be read as Mr. Good has done: -

With the daylight ariseth the murderer;

Poor and needy, he sheddeth blood.

This description is suitable to a highwayman; one who robs in daylight, and who has been impelled by poverty and distress to use this most unlawful and perilous mode to get bread; and for fear of being discovered or taken, commits murder, and thus adds crime to crime.

In the night is as a thief - Having been a highwayman in the daytime, he turns footpad or housebreaker by night; and thus goes on from sin to sin. There have been several instances like the case above, where poverty and distress have induced a man to go to the highway and rob, to repair the ruin of himself and family. I shall introduce an authentic story of this kind, which the reader may find at the end of this chapter.

JOB 24: 15 The eye also of the adulterer waits for the twilight, saying, 'No eye shall see me.' He disguises his face.

Verse 15

The eye also of the adulterer - This is another sin particularly of the city. The adulterer has made his assignation; he has marked the house of her into whose good graces he has insinuated himself, called digging through the house; he waits impatiently for the dusk; and then goes forth, having muffled or disguised his face, and spends a criminal night with the faithless wife of another man. The morning dawns: but it is to him as the shadow of death, lest he should be detected before he can reach his own home. And if one know him - if he happen to be recognized in coming out of the forbidden house; the terrors of death seize upon him, being afraid that the thing shall be brought to light, or that he shall be called to account, a sanguinary account, by the injured husband. This seems to be the general sense of the very natural picture which Job draws in the Job 24:15, Job 24:16, and Job 24:17.

JOB 24: 16 In the dark they dig through houses. They shut themselves up in the daytime. They don't know the light.

Verse 16

In the dark they dig through houses - Thieves in Bengal very frequently dig through the mud wall and under the clay floors of houses, and, entering unperceived, plunder them while the inhabitants are asleep. Mr. Good's version of this paragraph I shall lay before the reader: - Job 24:15 For the dark too watcheth the eye of the adulterer; Exclaiming, No eye shall behold me. Then putteth he the muffler on his face; Job 24:16 He wormeth into houses amidst the darkness. In the daytime they seal themselves up, They know not the light: Job 24:17 For, the dawn they reckon to themselves as the death-shade; The horrors of the death-shade as it returneth.

JOB 24: 17 For the morning is to all of them like thick darkness, for they know the terrors of the thick darkness.

JOB 24: 18 "They are foam on the surface of the waters. Their portion is cursed in the earth. They don't turn into the way of the vineyards.

Verse 18

He is swift as the waters - Literally, Light is he on the face of the waters: and cursed shall be their portion on the earth, which Mr. Good translates: -

Miserable is this man on the waters:

Deeply miserable the lot of those on dry land.

He beholdeth not the way of the vineyards - These no longer flourish or bring forth fruit. The labor of the vintage fails.

JOB 24: 19 Drought and heat consume the snow waters, so does Sheol those who have sinned.

Verse 19

Drought and heat consume the snow-waters - The public cisterns or large tanks which had been filled with water by the melting of the snow on the mountains, and which water was stored for the irrigation of their lands, had been entirely exhausted by the intensity of the heat, and the long continuance of drought.

So doth the grave those which have sinned - For this whole paragraph we have only two words in the original; viz., שְׂאוֹל חַטָּאֵי sheol chatau, "the pit, they have sinned;" which Mr. Good translates: - "They fall to their lowest depth." I believe the meaning to be, - even the deepest tanks, which held most water, and retained it longest, had become exhausted; so that expectation and succor were cut off from this as well as from every other quarter. I have elsewhere shown that שְׂאוֹל sheol signifies, not only hell and the grave, but any deep pit; and, also, that חָטָא chata signifies to miss the mark. Mr. Good, properly aware of these acceptations of the original words, has translated as above; and it is the only ground on which any consistent meaning can be given to the original.

JOB 24: 20 The womb shall forget him. The worm shall feed sweetly on him. He shall be no more remembered. Unrighteousness shall be broken as a tree.

Verse 20

The womb shall forget him - The mother that bare him shall have no affection for him, nor be afflicted at his death. But the word רַחֵם rechem signifies compassion, mercy. Mercy shall be unmindful of him. How dreadful such a state! When mercy itself forgets the sinner, his perdition slumbereth not. The worm shall feed sweetly on him - The Chaldee has, "The cruel, who have neglected to commiserate the poor, shall be sweet to the worms." He shall be brought into a state of the greatest degradation, and shall be no more remembered.

And wickedness shall be broken as a tree - He shall be as a rotten or decayed tree, easily broken to pieces. If it were clear that עוֹלָה avlah, here rendered wickedness, has the same sense as עֵלֶה aleh, a leaf, sucker, or shoot, then we might translate according to the ingenious version of Mr. Good; viz., But the shoot shall be broken off as a tree; which might, in this case, be supposed to refer to illicit commerce, the fruit of the womb becoming abortive.

JOB 24: 21 He devours the barren who don't bear. He shows no kindness to the widow.

Verse 21

He evil entreateth the barren - I believe the original word וְלֵה should be translated he feedeth, and so the Vulgate understood the word: Pavit enim sterilem. He has been kind to the barren woman; but he has done no good to the widow. He has shown no mercy to large families; he has been an enemy to the procreation of children. Though he may, for particular reasons, have provided for a barren woman; yet the widow he has not comforted, she being old or infirm, or such as might not suit his purpose.

JOB 24: 22 Yet God preserves the mighty by his power. He rises up who has no assurance of life.

Verse 22

He draweth also the mighty - Calmet gives the following version of the original: "He draws with him guards for his defense; he raises himself up, and does not feel assured of his life." In the midst even of his guards he is afraid; and dares not put confidence in any person. This is an admirable delineation of the inquietudes and terrors of a tyrant.

JOB 24: 23 God gives them security, and they rest in it. His eyes are on their ways.

Verse 23

Though it be given him to be in safety - The Vulgate gives this verse a singular turn: Dedit ei Deus locum paenitentiae, et ille abutitur eo in superbiam, "God gave him space for repentance, but he has abused it through pride." This is by no means conformable to the original. I think the words should be translated thus: "He gives them (i.e., the guards) to him for security, and he leans upon them; yet his eyes are upon their ways." Though he have taken the guards, mentioned in the preceding verse, for his personal defense, and for this purpose he uses them; yet he is full of diffidence, and he is continually watching them lest they should be plotting his destruction. The true picture of an Eastern tyrant. Without are fightings; within are fears.

JOB 24: 24 They are exalted; yet a little while, and they are gone. Yes, they are brought low, they are taken out of the way as all others, and are cut off as the tops of the ears of grain.

Verse 24

They are exalted for a little while - Such tyrants are exalted for a time, for God putteth down one and raiseth up another; but he turns his hand against them, and they are gone. They are removed by his justice as all of the same character have been and shall be; time and judgment shall mow them down as the grass, and crop them off as the ears of ripe corn. They may flourish for a time, and continue their oppressions; but they shall at last come to an untimely end. Few tyrants ever visit the eternal world sicca morte, but by a violent death. All Eastern history is full of this great fact.

JOB 24: 25 If it isn't so now, who will prove me a liar, and make my speech worth nothing?"

Verse 25

And if it be not so now - Job has proved by examples that the righteous are often oppressed; that the wicked often triumph over the just, that the impious are always wretched even in the midst of their greatest prosperity; and he defies his friends to show one flaw in his argument, or an error in his illustration of it; and that existing facts are farther proofs of what he has advanced.

In the preceding chapters we find Job's friends having continual recourse to this assertion, which it is the grand object of all their discourses to prove, viz., The righteous are so distinguished in the approbation of God, that they live always in prosperity, and die in peace. On the other hand, Job contends that the dispensations of Providence are by no means thus equal in this life; that experience shows that the righteous are often in adversity, and the wicked in power and prosperity. Job's friends had also endeavored to prove that if a reported good man fell into adversity, it was a proof that his character had been mistaken, that he was an internal sinner and hypocrite; and that God, by these manifest proofs of his disapprobation, unmasked him. Hence they charged Job with hypocrisy and secret sins, because he was now suffering adversity, and that his sins must be of the most heinous nature, because his afflictions were uncommonly great. This Job repels by appeals to numerous facts where there was nothing equivocal in the character; where the bad was demonstrably bad, and yet in prosperity; and the good demonstrably good, and yet in adversity. It is strange that none of these could hit on a middle way: viz., The wicked may be in prosperity, but he is ever miserable in his soul: the righteous may be in adversity, but he is ever happy in his God. In these respects, God's ways are always equal. On Job 24:14, I have referred to the case of unfortunate men who, falling into adversity, madly have recourse to plunder to restore their ruined circumstances. The following anecdote is told of the justly celebrated Dr. Sharp, archbishop of York, the grandfather of that highly benevolent, useful, learned, and eminent man, Granville Sharp, Esq., with whom I had for several years the honor of a personal acquaintance. "Never was any man, as well by the tenderness of his nature as by the impulse of religion, better disposed to succor the distressed, and relieve the necessities of the poor; to which merciful offices he had so strong an inclination that no reasonable solicitations were ever in danger of meeting with a repulse. Nay, he was more prone to seek out proper objects of his bounty, than to reject them when recommended; and so far was his charity from any suspicion of being extorted by importunity, that it appeared rather a delight than uneasiness to him to extend his liberality upon all proper occasions." For the same reason, a singular anecdote of the archbishop, related in the London Chronicle of Aug. 13, 1785, and always credited by his family, may be thought worth preserving. "It was his lordship's custom to have a saddle-horse attend his carriage, that in case of fatigue from sitting, he might take the refreshment of a ride. As he was thus going to his episcopal residence, and was got a mile or two before his carriage, a decent, well-looking young man came up with him; and, with a trembling hand and a faltering tongue presented a pistol to his lordship's breast, and demanded his money. The archbishop, with great composure, turned about; and, looking steadfastly at him, desired he would remove that dangerous weapon, and tell him fairly his condition. 'Sir! sir!' with great agitation, cried the youth; 'no words, 'tis not a time; your money instantly.' 'Hear me, young man,' said the archbishop; 'you see I am an old man, and my life is of very little consequence: yours seems far otherwise. I am named Sharp, and am archbishop of York; my carriage and servants are behind. Tell me what money you want, and who you are, and I will not injure you, but prove a friend. Here, take this; and now ingenuously tell me how much you want to make you independent of so destructive a business as you are now engaged in.' 'O sir,' replied the man, 'I detest the business as much as you. I am-but-but-at home

there are creditors who will not stay - fifty pounds, my lord, indeed would do what no tongue besides my own can tell.' 'Well, sir, I take it on your word; and, upon my honor, if you will, in a day or two, call on me at - , what I have now given you shall be made up that sum.' The highwayman looked at him, was silent, and went off; and, at the time appointed, actually waited on the archbishop, and assured his lordship his words had left impressions which nothing could ever destroy. "Nothing more transpired for a year and a half or more; when one morning a person knocked at his grace's gate, and with peculiar earnestness desired to see him. The archbishop ordered the stranger to be brought in. He entered the room where his lordship was, but had scarce advanced a few steps before his countenance changed, his knees tottered, and he sank almost breathless on the floor. On recovering, he requested an audience in private. The apartment being cleared, 'My lord,' said he, 'you cannot have forgotten the circumstances at such a time and place; gratitude will never suffer them to be obliterated from my mind. In me, my lord, you now behold that once most wretched of mankind; but now, by your inexpressible humanity, rendered equal, perhaps superior, in happiness to millions. O, my lord!' tears for a while preventing his utterance, 'tis you, 'tis you that have saved me, body and soul; 'tis you that have saved a dear and much-loved wife, and a little brood of children, whom I tendered dearer than my life. Here are the fifty pounds; but never shall I find language to testify what I feel. Your God is your witness; your deed itself is your glory; and may heaven and all its blessings be your present and everlasting reward! I was the younger son of a wealthy man; your lordship knows him; his name was - My marriage alienated his affection; and my brother withdrew his love, and left me to sorrow and penury. A month since my brother died a bachelor and intestate. What was his, is become mine; and by your astonishing goodness, I am now at once the most penitent, the most grateful, and happiest of my species.'" See Prince Hoar's life of Granville Sharp, Esq., page 13. I have no doubt there have been several cases of a similar kind, when the first step in delinquency was urged by necessity; but few of such wretched adventurers have met with an Archhishop Sharp. An early and pious education is the only means under God to prevent such dangerous steps, which generally lead to the most fearful catastrophe. Teach a child, that whom God loveth he chasteneth. Teach him, that God suffers men to hunger, and be in want, that he may try them if they will be faithful, and do them good in their latter end. Teach him, that he who patiently and meekly bears providential afflictions, shall be relieved and exalted in due time. Teach him, that it is no sin to die in the most abject poverty and affliction, brought on in the course of Divine providence, but that any attempts to alter his condition by robbery, knavery, cozening, and fraud, will be distinguished with heavy curses from the Almighty, and necessarily end in perdition and ruin. A child thus educated is not likely to abandon himself to unlawful courses.