

Ask Away – January 11

- 1) **In the last part of chapter twenty-four, it sounds like Job changes his mind about the fate of wicked. What’s going on there? (Job 24:18–24).**

It’s important to remember that Job never claimed that the wicked *always* prosper or *never* come to a bad end. Job simply wanted his friends to realize that their simplistic view of prosperity for doing right and suffering for doing wrong wasn’t consistent with the real world. Sometimes the righteous suffer, sometimes the wicked prosper, and many times the weak and poor are exploited by the rich and powerful (Job 24:1–17). What Job wanted most was to see the wicked punished *in this life*, in the here-and-now; a very understandable desire! And sometimes God *does* bring judgment on the wicked in this life. Perhaps that’s what Job was acknowledging at the end of the chapter: “God, in his power, drags away the rich. They may rise high, but they have no assurance of life. They may be allowed to live in security, but God is always watching them” (Job 24:22–23 NLT). If this is correct, then Job 24:18–24 is a bookend to Job 24:1, where Job asks, “Why doesn’t the Almighty bring the wicked to judgment?” These last verses show that Job retained a balanced view. He recognized that sometimes his friends were right—sometimes God does punish the wicked in this life.¹

¹ As you can imagine, there are many explanations for Job 24:18–24—everything from scribal addition to saying that Job is confused and incoherent. Some think Job is quoting his friends (not giving his own view) and some think the friend’s words have somehow been wrongly attributed to Job. Personally, I think Andersen is right when he says, “Job does not counter the friends by a one-sided exaggeration of his own, claiming that God is hostile to the upright and an accomplice of the crooked. His position is more balanced, but more baffled. He simply cannot see how God’s justice works out in his own case, which he realizes is only one of many. There is therefore no reason why he should not flaunt this problem again by throwing together one poem about the immunity of criminals from divine intervention (verses 13–17) and another about the frustration of their enterprises by death or some other set-back (verses 18–24).” Francis I. Andersen, “Job: An Introduction and Commentary,” *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* Vol. 14 (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976) 230.