

# STUDY GUIDE – December 7

## *Three Perspectives on the Fate of the Wicked and the Righteous*

Job 20–21 • Ecclesiastes 8:10–17

### 1. Setting the Stage

Today's texts give us **three different viewpoints** on the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous:

1. **Zophar (Job 20)** — simplistic, works-based theology
2. **Job (Job 21)** — an honest wrestle with what he sees in the world
3. **Ecclesiastes (Ecc. 8)** — wisdom acknowledges both mystery and sovereignty

Together they form a crucial biblical conversation about **God's justice, human suffering, and how believers interpret what they see under the sun.**

### 2. Zophar's Accusation (Job 20)

Zophar has reached the end of patience with Job. Unlike previous speeches, **he doesn't call Job to repent** — he simply pronounces judgment.

#### A. Zophar's Feelings Are Hurt (20:1–3)

- He interprets Job's disagreement as personal insult.
- His reactions flow from pride, not spiritual discernment.

#### B. Zophar's Claim #1 — “The Wicked Don't Prosper for Long.” (vv. 4–11)

Zophar insists the wicked are always cut down quickly.

**Job's rebuttal:** That simply isn't true in observable life (21:7–16).

#### C. Zophar's Claim #2 — “Wickedness Is Briefly Sweet but Ultimately Poisonous.” (vv. 12–23)

The “food” imagery:

- Evil tastes sweet at first

- But becomes venom in the belly
- Riches gained wickedly bring no lasting joy
- The wicked are never content

**Job's rebuttal:** But wicked people often continue prospering their whole lives (21:10–13).

### **D. Zophar's Claim #3 — “There Is No Escape for the Wicked.” (vv. 24–29)**

Borrowing Job's own siege imagery, Zophar insists Job is trapped under God's wrath.

**Job's rebuttal:** Many wicked die honored, surrounded by loved ones (21:32–34).

#### **Bottom line:**

Zophar's theology is **too small**, based on **observation** and **human logic**, not on the **character of God**.

## **3. Job's Response (Job 21)**

Job is not claiming the wicked *should* get away with evil—he's saying **they often do**, at least in this life.

### **A. What Job Observes**

- Wicked people live long, carefree lives (21:7–13)
- Their families flourish
- Their businesses succeed
- They die in peace
- They openly reject God (21:14–15)

### **B. Job's Point**

If prosperity = righteousness and suffering = wickedness, then the world makes no sense.

Job challenges the shallow worldview of his friends:

**“How then will you comfort me with empty nothings?”**

— Job 21:34

Job's speech is not rebellion but **faith wrestling with reality**.

## 4. The Wisdom Perspective (Ecclesiastes 8:10–17)

Ecclesiastes echoes Job's observations:

- The wicked are often honored in life *and* in burial
- The righteous sometimes suffer unjustly
- Human beings cannot fully trace out God's purposes
- Joy is a gift; humility is wisdom
- The fear of the Lord is the only sure ground

This text prepares us to accept **mystery** without losing **trust**.

## 5. The Key Missing Element: Common Grace

Both Job and Zophar struggle because they lack a category for **common grace** — God's general kindness toward all humanity, even toward His enemies.

### A. What Common Grace Means

- God gives sun and rain to just and unjust (Matt. 5:45)
- He shows patience toward vessels of wrath (Rom. 9:21–24)
- Prosperity in this life is not proof of righteousness
- Suffering in this life is not proof of wickedness
- God's goodness in earthly blessings does **not** equal saving grace

### B. Why It Matters in Job 20–21

- The wicked prosper because God is patient
- The righteous suffer because God is purposeful
- Neither contradicts His justice or His sovereignty

### C. What Common Grace Does NOT Do

- It does *not* save

- It does *not* produce repentance
- It does *not* replace God's final judgment

As the pastor said:

**Saving grace reveals God's holiness, our sin, and Christ's sufficiency.**

**Common grace simply reveals God's kindness.**

## 6. Lessons for the Believer

### 1. Don't be surprised when God's ways confuse you.

We don't see the end from the beginning; God does.

### 2. It's not sinful to be troubled—unless we attack God's character.

Bring confusion to God, not accusations (Psalm 55:22).

### 3. Times of suffering are times of temptation.

Satan uses trials to press us toward distrust—just as he tried to do with Job.

### 4. Trouble cannot ultimately defeat God's people.

We may feel overwhelmed, but we are never abandoned.

We are **more than conquerors** through Christ (Romans 8).

### 5. Keep your eyes fixed on the God who saves.

Like the psalmist (Psalm 43:5), preach to your soul:

**"Hope in God; I will again praise Him."**

## 7. Reflection & Application

### A. Questions for Heart Examination

1. Where do I tend to equate prosperity with God's approval?
2. Do I interpret suffering through fear rather than through God's character?
3. How has God shown *common grace* in my life?
4. How has God shown *saving grace* in my life?
5. When I am confused, do I run toward God or away from Him?

## **B. Personal Encouragement**

- God sees.
- God knows.
- God is never unjust.
- God never abandons His people.
- God is doing more than we can possibly trace.

## **8. Scripture Reference List**

### **Primary Texts**

- Job 20–21
- Ecclesiastes 8:10–17

### **Supporting Texts**

- Matthew 5:45 — common grace
- Romans 9:21–24 — God's sovereign patience
- Romans 12:2 — renewed mind
- Romans 8:29, 37 — Christlike conformity & conquering hope
- Genesis 3 — the original rejection of God
- Proverbs 20:17 — sweetness of deceit that turns bitter
- Psalm 55:22 — cast your burden on the Lord
- Psalm 43:5 — hope in God