

# Broken Like A Tree

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In my reading last week I came across one of those passages that we find so often that speaks to our culture today as well as to the one in which it was written, over four thousand years ago. Job is speaking, in chapter 24, of the seeming success of evil in the world. He notes however, in verse 19, that Sheol (the grave) snatches away those who have sinned. In verse 20, the result is, "...the worm finds them sweet; they are no longer remembered, so wickedness is broken like a tree." That caught my attention.

Being one who enjoys wandering in the forest I have seen any number of broken trees. Sometimes when a tree is broken it exposes the inner rot and hollowness of the trunk that was unsuspected and hidden from view. I wonder if this might be the ones in verses 9-11 who make fashionable clothing with child slavery, promote abortion by promising freedom, or take advantage of their workers so that they can store up wealth. These hide their sins with wealth, position, and sweet sounding speeches.

Sometimes trees are broken, however, that are seemingly strong and healthy. They are broken because the forces of wind, lightning, and avalanche are so much stronger than the tree so as to be without compare. I wonder if these might be the ones in verse 13 who rebel against the light and yet do not know its ways. They just have no idea what they're up against. The adulterer in verse 15 thinks his sin is hidden. In verse 9 they lend money to those who cannot repay it, no doubt to steal their land and possessions as verse 2 describes. In verse 21 they take advantage of those who have no one to defend them. They

give no account to the fact that God's eye is upon them and their ways. They may be exalted for awhile, but verse 24 says they will be cut off like heads of grain. They are brought low and gathered up like all the others.

The third way that I have seen trees broken is when they are alone. Whether it is because surrounding vegetation has been timbered, or cleared, or died off, they are standing alone. No other trees are near to break the wind's force. No other roots to tie into to give strength are available. And the wind comes and the whole tree is simply uprooted. Maybe it is those of verses 17-18 who think they have good friends in the darkness, who are really alone and don't know it. Or they are admired by others for their qualities which make them appear they need no help from anyone when the truth is that any tree can stand straight in a gentle breeze. The wrath of our God is a storm, however, and that is when the wicked will know their weakness. As Job said, "...wickedness is broken like a tree."