

Deuteronomy 24:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge:

Analysis

And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge. Special protection applies to poor debtors - creditors cannot retain overnight something the poor person needs. This likely refers to the cloak mentioned in verse 13, which served as both daytime garment and nighttime blanket.

The prohibition thou shalt not sleep with his pledge creates vivid imagery - the creditor comfortably sleeping while holding the pledge, while the poor debtor shivers without his cloak. God forbids such callous disregard for the poor's suffering.

This demonstrates that economic transactions must account for power imbalances. Special protections apply when dealing with the poor, who lack resources to protect themselves from exploitation. Justice requires considering the vulnerable party's position.

Reformed theology affirms preferential concern for the poor - not that God loves them more, but that their vulnerability requires additional protective measures to ensure justice.

Historical Context

The outer cloak was essential for warmth, especially for the poor who lacked other bedding. Retaining it overnight would leave the debtor exposed to cold, potentially life-threatening in winter.

Exodus 22:26-27 similarly commands returning cloaks before sunset, demonstrating God's consistent concern for the poor's basic needs despite creditor rights.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What does prohibition against sleeping with the pledge teach about callousness to suffering?
2. How should economic transactions account for power imbalances?
3. Why do the poor require special protective measures to ensure justice?
4. What does preferential concern for the poor reveal about God's character?
5. How might contemporary lending practices show similar concern for borrowers' basic needs?

Interlinear Text

וְאִם	אֵשׁ	וְאֵת	לֹא	תַּשְׁכַּח	בְּעֵבֶד:
H518	And if the man	be poor	H1931	thou shalt not sleep	with his pledge
H376		H6041	H3808	H7901	H5667

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 24:17 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge: