

Deuteronomy 24:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge:

Analysis

Protecting vulnerable: 'Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge.' Three vulnerable groups—immigrants ('stranger'), orphans ('fatherless'), widows—require protection. 'Pervert judgment' (טַעַף הַמִּשְׁפָּט, tateh mishpat) means 'twist justice'—withholding legal rights. Taking widow's garment as pledge (collateral for debt) leaves her exposed/humiliated. These powerless people lack advocates; God advocates for them. The law ensures justice isn't privilege of powerful but right of all, especially vulnerable. This reflects God's character: 'Father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows' (Psalm 68:5). Oppressing them invites divine judgment.

Historical Context

Ancient societies offered little protection for vulnerable. Widows, orphans, and foreigners lacked tribal/family protection, making them easy exploitation targets. Prophets repeatedly condemned Israel for oppressing these groups (Isaiah 1:17; 10:1-2; Jeremiah 7:6; Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5). Job defended himself by claiming he protected them (Job 29:12-13; 31:16-21). James defines 'pure religion' as caring for 'widows and orphans in their affliction' (James 1:27). Early church developed charity systems protecting vulnerable (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 5:3-16). Caring for powerless demonstrates godliness.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. Who are today's equivalents of 'stranger, fatherless, widow'—the vulnerable lacking advocates?
2. How do churches ensure justice and care for vulnerable rather than only serving powerful/wealthy?
3. What does God's special concern for vulnerable teach about His character and our obligation?

Interlinear Text

ל א H3808	תָּטֶה H5186	מִשְׁפָּט H4941	גֵּר H1616	יָתוֹם H3490
	Thou shalt not pervert	the judgment	of the stranger	nor of the fatherless
וְלֹא H3808	תִּקַּח H2254	בְּגָד H899	אֶלְמָנָה H490	
	nor take	raiment	a widow's	

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 16:19 (Judgment): Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous.

Exodus 23:6 (Judgment): Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause.

Deuteronomy 27:19 (Judgment): Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Isaiah 1:23 (Judgment): Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

Jeremiah 5:28 (Judgment): They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge.

Exodus 23:2 (Judgment): Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment:

Exodus 23:9 (Parallel theme): Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 1:17 (Judgment): Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it.

Micah 7:3 (Judgment): That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward; and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrap it up.