

Jeremiah 22:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar? did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him?

Analysis

God contrasts wicked King Jehoiakim with his father Josiah: 'Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the LORD' (vv. 15-16). This revolutionary statement equates knowing God with doing justice, especially for the poor and needy. Knowing God is not merely intellectual assent to doctrines or emotional religious experience—it is demonstrated through righteous living and compassionate treatment of the vulnerable.

The phrase 'was not this to know me?' defines knowledge of God as practical righteousness rather than mystical experience. James echoes this: 'faith without works is dead' (James 2:26). John writes, 'He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar' (1 John 2:4). True knowledge of God transforms behavior, particularly toward those who cannot repay—the poor, needy, widow, orphan, and stranger whom God repeatedly commands His people to protect and provide for.

Jehoiakim represents false religion: maintaining external forms while oppressing the poor and pursuing selfish ambition. Josiah represents true religion: seeking God's kingdom and justice, with personal prosperity following as blessing rather than being pursued as primary goal (Matthew 6:33). This passage judges much

contemporary Christianity that divorces personal piety from social justice or emphasizes mystical experience while tolerating injustice.

Historical Context

Josiah (640-609 BC) was Judah's last good king, remembered for discovering the book of the law and instituting reforms (2 Kings 22-23). His son Jehoiakim (609-598 BC) reversed these reforms, oppressed the people to fund his building projects, and murdered the prophet Uriah (26:20-23). God contrasts these two kings to show what authentic versus counterfeit faith looks like: Josiah knew God and it showed in his justice; Jehoiakim claimed to serve God but his oppression proved he didn't truly know God.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does this passage challenge the notion that knowing God is primarily about correct doctrine or emotional experience?
2. What would it look like practically to 'judge the cause of the poor and needy' as evidence of knowing God?
3. In what ways might we claim to know God while our treatment of vulnerable people contradicts that claim?

Interlinear Text

בָּא	רַזְעַל	בָּא	רַזְעַל	בָּא	רַזְעַל
Shalt thou reign	H3588	H859	because thou closest	thyself in cedar	H730
H4427			H8474		
did not thy father	H1	H3808	eat	and drink	and do
			H398	H8354	H6213
וְאַתָּה	וְאַתָּה	וְאַתָּה	וְאַתָּה	וְאַתָּה	וְאַתָּה
and then it was well	H227	H2896	and	well	and
			H0		

Additional Cross-References

2 Kings 23:25 (Kingdom): And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.

Isaiah 3:10 (Righteousness): Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.

Proverbs 25:5 (Righteousness): Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness.

Ecclesiastes 10:17 (Kingdom): Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

Proverbs 29:4 (Judgment): The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts overthroweth it.

2 Kings 22:2 (Parallel theme): And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.

Proverbs 21:3 (Righteousness): To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

Jeremiah 21:12 (Judgment): O house of David, thus saith the LORD; Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest my fury go out like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

Jeremiah 42:6 (Parallel theme): Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the LORD our God.

1 Kings 10:9 (Righteousness): Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice.

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