

Jeremiah 22:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the LORD.

Analysis

He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? The Hebrew verb יְדָעַ (yada, 'to know') signifies far more than intellectual awareness—it denotes intimate, covenantal relationship expressed through obedient action. Jeremiah contrasts righteous King Josiah with his wicked son Jehoiakim: true knowledge of Yahweh manifests in justice for the vulnerable (dal, 'poor'; evyon, 'needy'). This verse demolishes any dichotomy between 'knowing God' and practicing social righteousness.

The phrase **then it was well with him** (בָּרוּךְ, tov) echoes covenant blessings—prosperity flows from righteousness, not exploitation. Josiah's reign demonstrated that authentic theology produces ethical fruit. Jesus later embodied this principle, declaring that loving God and neighbor are inseparable (Matthew 22:37-40). The prophetic indictment remains: religious profession without justice is spiritual fraud.

Historical Context

King Josiah (640-609 BC) led Judah's last great reformation, rediscovering the Book of the Law and purging idolatry (2 Kings 22-23). His son Jehoiakim (609-598 BC) reversed these reforms, exploiting the poor to fund lavish building projects. Jeremiah contrasts father and son to expose Judah's covenant rebellion.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does your 'knowledge' of God manifest in tangible concern for the poor and marginalized?
2. What modern equivalents exist to Jehoiakim's religious profession divorced from social justice?
3. In what ways might prosperity tempt you toward exploitation rather than generosity?

Interlinear Text

בָּלֹא	סִבְבָּסִים	וְזֶה	אָבִי	וְזֶה	עַתָּה	וְזֶה	לְבִנְיָםִן	וְזֶה	לְבִנְיָםִן	וְזֶה	לְבִנְיָםִן
He judged	the cause	of the poor	and needy		H227	then it was well					H3808
H1777	H1779	H6041	H34			H2896					

וְאֵת	וְאֵת	וְאֵת	וְאֵת	וְאֵת	וְאֵת	וְאֵת	וְאֵת	וְאֵת	וְאֵת	וְאֵת	וְאֵת
with him was not this to know											
H1931	H1847		H853			H5002					H3068

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 9:24 (Judgment): But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

Isaiah 1:17 (Judgment): Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

Titus 1:16 (Parallel theme): They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

Jeremiah 9:16 (Parallel theme): I will scatter them also among the heathen, whom neither they nor their fathers have known: and I will send a sword after them, till I have consumed them.

John 17:3 (Parallel theme): And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

Psalms 109:31 (Parallel theme): For he shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul.

Psalms 9:10 (References Lord): And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.

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.

1 Chronicles 28:9 (References Lord): And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.

Jeremiah 9:3 (References Lord): And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the LORD.