

Job 24:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They drive away the ass of the fatherless, they take the widow's ox for a pledge.

Analysis

They drive away the ass of the fatherless—The Hebrew yatom (יָתָם, fatherless) and almanah (אַלְמָנָה, widow) represent society's most vulnerable members, those without male protection in patriarchal culture. The donkey was essential for the poor person's livelihood—used for transportation, farming, and carrying goods. Seizing it condemned the fatherless to destitution. Exodus 22:22-24 explicitly forbids afflicting widows and orphans, promising divine wrath against violators.

They take the widow's ox for a pledge (יָחֶבֶל, yachbelú) uses the verb chabal, meaning to take as security or collateral. Mosaic law regulated pledges carefully: creditors couldn't enter homes to seize pledges (Deuteronomy 24:10-11), couldn't keep a poor person's cloak overnight (Exodus 22:26-27), and specifically prohibited taking millstones—tools necessary for daily bread (Deuteronomy 24:6). Taking a widow's ox as pledge violated all these principles—it was her means of plowing, threshing, and survival. This wasn't legitimate lending but legal extortion, using the law as oppression's instrument.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern law codes (Hammurabi, Hittite) regulated debt and pledges, but Israel's covenant law uniquely prioritized protecting the vulnerable. Widows and orphans lacked legal advocates in patriarchal society—their exploitation was endemic unless covenant community enforced protective law. Job's complaint

exposes the gap between law's existence and its enforcement, a problem Jesus later condemned in Pharisaic practice (Mark 12:40—devouring widows' houses).

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does your church or community protect modern equivalents of widows and orphans—single mothers, refugees, the elderly?
2. What does it mean that God 'hears the cry' of the exploited (Exodus 22:23) even when human courts fail?
3. How can believers ensure financial transactions don't exploit vulnerable people who lack negotiating power?

Interlinear Text

אֲלָמָנָה:	שׁ	וּר	נִ	חַבֵּל	וְ	יְתַזֵּם	יְמִ	יְנַפֵּת	גָּזָ	שׁ	וּר	אֲלָמָנָה:
the ass	of the fatherless		They drive away		for a pledge		ox		the widow's			
H2543	H3490		H5090		H2254		H7794		H490			

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 24:6 (Parallel theme): No man shall take the nether or the upper millstone to pledge: for he taketh a man's life to pledge.