

Job 24:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Behold, as wild asses in the desert, go they forth to their work; rising betimes for a prey: the wilderness yieldeth food for them and for their children.

Analysis

As wild asses in the desert, go they forth to their work (כְּעֲרֹדִים בַּמִּדְבָּר, ke'aródim bammidbar)—Job shifts from oppressors to their victims. The arod (עֲרֹד) is the onager or wild donkey, a creature living in harsh desert conditions, constantly foraging for survival (Jeremiah 2:24, Hosea 8:9). The comparison emphasizes the dehumanizing effect of poverty—the oppressed are reduced to animal-like existence, driven purely by survival instinct. Their 'work' (פֶּעַל, pa'al) isn't dignified labor but desperate scavenging.

Rising betimes for a prey: the wilderness yieldeth food for them and for their children—'Rising betimes' translates mishcharím (מִשְׁחָרִים), meaning early rising, pre-dawn labor. The poor hunt for 'prey' (teref, טֶרֶף—food torn or hunted), the same word used for what predators kill. The 'wilderness' (עֲרָבָה, araba) yields meager sustenance—their children eat what the desert provides. This powerful image shows poverty's generational curse: children inherit their parents' desperate existence. Jesus later taught His disciples about God feeding the birds (Matthew 6:26), but Job's point is that humans shouldn't be reduced to such precarious provision.

Historical Context

Desert nomadism was the lowest social status in ancient Near Eastern culture—agriculturalists and city-dwellers looked down on those who roamed wastelands.

Job's description suggests the poor are driven from productive farmland into marginal desert areas, forced to live like animals. This happened repeatedly in Israelite history when the powerful seized land (1 Kings 21, Isaiah 5:8, Micah 2:1-2). The situation Job describes violates God's vision for Israel where each family lives securely under their own vine and fig tree (1 Kings 4:25, Micah 4:4).

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does this verse challenge comfortable assumptions that people choose their economic circumstances?
2. What does Job's empathy for the poor reveal about authentic righteousness versus self-absorbed piety?
3. How can believers work to restore human dignity to those reduced to survival mode by systemic poverty?

Interlinear Text

הָאֵל	פָּרָא יִמֹן	בְּמִדְבָּר	יֵצְאוּ	בְּפִעֲלָם	מִשְׁחֵרֵי יָדָם
H2005	Behold as wild asses	in the desert	go they forth	to their work	rising betimes
	H6501	H4057	H3318	H6467	H7836
לֶטֶר רֶפֶא	עֲרֵבָה הִיא	לֹא	לָהֶם	לְנַעֲרֵיהֶם:	
for a prey	the wilderness	H0	yieldeth food	for them and for their children	
H2964	H6160		H3899	H5288	

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 104:23 (Parallel theme): Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening.

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