

Job 24:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They pluck the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge of the poor.

Analysis

They pluck the fatherless from the breast (יִגְזְלוּ מִשָּׁד יָתוֹם, yigzelú mishád yatóm)—The verb gazal (גָּזַל) means to tear away violently or rob, the same word used in verse 2 for seizing flocks. The shad (שָׁד, breast) indicates a nursing infant. This horrific image depicts creditors seizing even nursing babies as payment for debt—the ultimate cruelty, separating mother and child at the most vulnerable life stage. Whether literal or hyperbolic, it represents the complete ruthlessness of oppression that respects no human bond.

And take a pledge of the poor (וְעַל-אֲנִי יִחַבְלוּ, ve'al-aní yachbélu)—The verb chabal (חָבַל) means to take as security or pledge. The preposition 'al (עַל) can mean 'upon' or 'against,' suggesting the pledge falls upon or oppresses the poor person. Mosaic law prohibited taking necessities as pledge—millstones (Deuteronomy 24:6), cloaks overnight (Exodus 22:26-27). Here the pledge taken is human—children themselves become collateral. This practice, though condemned, occurred in Israel (2 Kings 4:1, Nehemiah 5:5). Leviticus 25:39-43 specifically forbids treating Israelites as slaves, yet debt-slavery persisted when covenant law was ignored.

Historical Context

Debt-bondage was widespread in the ancient Near East. Children could be sold to pay family debts, becoming servants until jubilee year (Leviticus 25:39-43) or until debt was repaid. The Mosaic law attempted to limit this practice, but Job describes its abuse—creditors seizing children as collateral, tearing nursing infants from

mothers. This violated both the letter and spirit of covenant law. Nehemiah later confronted this exact abuse (Nehemiah 5:1-13), forcing creditors to return seized property and children.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does this verse expose the cruelty of economic systems that treat humans, especially children, as commodities?
2. What modern equivalents exist—child labor, human trafficking, family separation due to incarceration or deportation?
3. How can believers work to ensure that economic pressures never justify separating families or exploiting children?

Interlinear Text

יִחַבְּלוּ	עַנֵּי	יָתוֹם	וְעַל	מִשֵּׁךְ	לִגְזֹל
and take a pledge	of the poor	the fatherless	H5921	from the breast	They pluck
H2254	H6041	H3490		H7699	H1497

Additional Cross-References

Nehemiah 5:5 (Parallel theme): Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards.