

Job 29:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out.

Analysis

I was a father to the poor (abi אבִי, father; evyon אֶבְיוֹן, poor, needy, destitute)—Job assumed paternal responsibility for the destitute. Evyon describes the desperately poor, those lacking basic necessities. Job didn't merely give alms but adopted the needy into his care with a father's ongoing commitment. This metaphor appears in Isaiah 22:21 and later in Job 29:16's legal advocacy. **And the cause which I knew not I searched out** (riv רִיב, legal case/dispute; yada יָדָע, to know; chaqar חָקַר, to search, investigate thoroughly)—Job actively investigated cases brought before him rather than judging superficially.

The verb chaqar implies deep, thorough examination—the same word describes searching out wisdom (Job 8:8) or God's unfathomable ways (Job 11:7). Job didn't passively receive complaints but proactively investigated to ensure justice. This diligence protected the powerless from being exploited by more articulate or connected opponents. Job's judicial ethics anticipate Deuteronomy 1:16-17's command to judge fairly regardless of persons. The tragedy deepens when we realize Job now seeks a hearing from God but feels his case goes unheard (Job 23:3-9). The righteous judge who carefully heard the poor cannot get a hearing from the divine Judge—or so it seems until God finally answers from the whirlwind.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern legal systems relied on respected elders adjudicating disputes at city gates (Ruth 4:1-11, Amos 5:15). Without professional advocates,

the poor struggled to present cases effectively. Powerful litigants could overwhelm the inarticulate with superior rhetoric or intimidation. Job's thorough investigation of unfamiliar cases ensured the powerless received justice. This reflects the biblical mandate that judges show no partiality (Exodus 23:2-3, Leviticus 19:15, Deuteronomy 16:19). Job's personal investigation demonstrates that justice requires active pursuit, not passive neutrality.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. Do you actively seek to understand situations from the perspective of those with less power or voice?
2. How does Job's thorough investigation of unknown cases challenge our tendency toward quick, superficial judgments?
3. What does Job's role as 'father to the poor' teach about God's expectation that we care for the vulnerable as He does?

Interlinear Text

אָ	אָ	לְאֲבִיוֹן	וְרָ	לֹא	יָדַעְתִּי
I was a father	H595	to the poor	and the cause	H3808	which I knew
H1		H34	H7379		H3045

אֶחְקֹרָהּ:
not I searched out
H2713

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 29:7 (Parallel theme): The righteous considereth the cause of the poor: but the wicked regardeth not to know it.

Psalms 68:5 (Parallel theme): A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.

Job 31:18 (Parallel theme): (For from my youth he was brought up with me, as with a father, and I have guided her from my mother's womb;)

Proverbs 25:2 (Parallel theme): It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.

Esther 2:7 (Parallel theme): And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter.

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