

Job 29:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth.

Analysis

The princes refrained talking (sarim שָׁרִים, princes/leaders; atsar עַצָּר, to restrain/stop)—Job's presence silenced even the ruling class. These sarim were nobility, regional governors, or tribal chieftains whose voices normally dominated public discourse. Their voluntary silence acknowledged Job's superior wisdom and authority. **And laid their hand on their mouth** (sham yad le-peh שָׁם יָד לְפֶה—a physical gesture appearing elsewhere in Scripture (Job 21:5, 40:4; Judges 18:19; Proverbs 30:32) signaling awe, submission, or the inability to respond adequately.

The hand-on-mouth gesture communicated that Job's words commanded such authority that interruption or contradiction would be inappropriate. This wasn't fearful suppression but voluntary deference to recognized wisdom. Proverbs 30:32 uses identical language: 'If thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth,' connecting the gesture to restraint from foolish speech. When God appears to Job in the whirlwind, Job himself makes this gesture: 'I will lay mine hand upon my mouth' (Job 40:4), recognizing divine wisdom's supremacy. The princes' silence before Job thus foreshadows Job's eventual silence before God—both recognizing a wisdom and authority transcending their own.

Historical Context

City gate assemblies in ancient Near Eastern culture provided forums for legal proceedings, commercial transactions, and civic governance. Leaders and princes would debate cases, render judgments, and discuss community matters. Job's

capacity to silence such discussions by his mere presence indicates extraordinary moral and intellectual authority. This culture valued eloquence and persuasive speech highly, making voluntary silence a powerful statement. The gesture of covering the mouth appears in ancient Near Eastern art and texts as a sign of respect or astonishment before deity or superior authority.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. What qualities produce wisdom so compelling that it silences opposition without argument?
2. How does the princes' voluntary silence before Job's wisdom compare to the mandatory silence creation owes its Creator?
3. When should we 'lay our hand on our mouth' rather than speak—what circumstances call for reverent silence?

Interlinear Text

לְפִיכֶם:	בְּמַלְיָם	עָזָר	וְ	רִים	יִשְׁתַּחֲוָה	אַכְּרָבָה
The princes	refrained	talking	their hand	and laid	on their mouth	
H8269	H6113	H4405	H3709	H7760		H6310

Additional Cross-References

Job 21:5 (Parallel theme): Mark me, and be astonished, and lay your hand upon your mouth.

Job 40:4 (Parallel theme): Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.

Proverbs 30:32 (Parallel theme): If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth.

Proverbs 10:19 (Parallel theme): In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.

James 1:19 (Parallel theme): Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: