

Job 31:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate:

Analysis

If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless (אם-הנִיפֹתֵי עַל-יָתָם יָדִי) im-hanifoti al-yatom yadi)—nuf (עָנָה, lift up/wave) suggests threatening gestures or violence. **When I saw my help in the gate** (כִּי-אָרְאָה בַּשְׁעָרָה עַזְבָּתִי) ki-er'eh va-sha'ar ezrati)—sha'ar (שער, gate) was where legal proceedings occurred. Ezrah (עַזְבָּתִי, help/support) indicates Job's influential position.

This condemns exploitation through legal corruption—using influence in the gate to oppress those without advocates. The orphan represents powerlessness; the gate represents power structures. Job declares he never weaponized his civic influence against the vulnerable. This anticipates Jesus's woe against scribes who "devour widows' houses" (Mark 12:40) and James's denunciation of favoring the rich in assembly (James 2:1-9). Proverbs 31:8-9 commands the opposite: "Open thy mouth for the dumb... plead the cause of the poor and needy."

Historical Context

The gate was ancient Israel's courthouse where elders adjudicated disputes (Deuteronomy 21:19, 22:15, Ruth 4:1-11). Those with property and social standing had 'help in the gate'—allies who would side with them. Orphans lacked such advocates, making them easy targets for legal exploitation. Amos denounced those who 'turn aside the poor in the gate from their right' (Amos 5:12). Job's integrity meant he used his influence to protect, not exploit, the powerless.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How might you be 'lifting your hand against the fatherless' through systemic participation in unjust structures?
2. Do you use your influence 'in the gate' (workplace, church, community) to advocate for the powerless or advance self-interest?
3. What does Job's example teach about Christians' responsibility to oppose legal and institutional injustice?

Interlinear Text

אָמַן	בְּנֵי	פָּנִים	וְתַּחַת	עַל	זֶה	וְתַּחַת	זֶה	אָרְאָה	הִנֵּה
H518	If I have lifted up	H5921	against the fatherless	H3490	my hand	H3027	I	H3588	when I saw
H5130							H7200		
בְּזַבְעָתִים	בְּשַׁעַר								
in the gate	my help								
H8179	H5833								

Additional Cross-References

Job 22:9 (Parallel theme): Thou hast sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless have been broken.

Job 29:12 (Parallel theme): Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him.