

Job 34:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways.

Analysis

For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways. Elihu articulates strict retribution theology: God repays everyone exactly according to their deeds. The Hebrew *po'al* (פועל, "work") refers to actions or conduct, while *shalam* (שלם, "render") means to recompense, repay, or restore completely. The phrase "according to his ways" (ke-orach ish, כְּאֹרֶחַ אִישׁ) emphasizes precise correspondence between conduct and consequences. *Matsa* (מצא, "find") suggests inevitable discovery—everyone will encounter the results their behavior deserves.

This principle contains biblical truth (Galatians 6:7, "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"), yet Elihu misapplies it by assuming immediate, visible retribution in every case. The book of Job exists precisely because reality is more complex—the righteous sometimes suffer while the wicked prosper (Job 21:7-13), not because divine justice fails but because it operates on timescales and principles exceeding human perception. Perfect justice awaits final judgment (Revelation 20:12-13), not always earthly life. Elihu's error is not his doctrine of divine justice but his assumption that Job's suffering must prove Job's sin. Paradoxically, this verse ultimately validates Job—God does render according to works, and Job's faithful endurance through suffering will be rewarded (42:12-17). Christ transforms this principle: He received what our works deserved, so believers receive what His works deserve (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Historical Context

Retribution theology dominated ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, as seen in Proverbs. Deuteronomy 28 outlined covenant blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, establishing a framework Elihu invokes. However, wisdom literature itself (Ecclesiastes, Psalms like 73) acknowledges exceptions and mysteries. Job challenges simplistic applications of retribution theology while affirming God's ultimate justice.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How do you reconcile God's promise of ultimate justice with the reality that righteous people often suffer in this life?
2. What comfort does the doctrine of final judgment provide when earthly justice fails?
3. How does understanding Christ's substitutionary atonement transform the principle that God repays according to works?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	פֶּעַל	אֶדָם	יִשְׁלֹם	לִי	וְכַאֲרֵךְ
H3588	For the work	of a man	shall he render	H0	according to his ways
	H6467	H120	H7999		H734
וְיִשְׁאָל		וְיִמְצָאֵם			
unto him and cause every man		to find			
H376		H4672			

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 5:10 (Parallel theme): For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

Revelation 22:12 (Parallel theme): And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

Romans 2:6 (Parallel theme): Who will render to every man according to his deeds:

Psalms 62:12 (Parallel theme): Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work.

Jeremiah 32:19 (Parallel theme): Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings:

Matthew 16:27 (Parallel theme): For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

Proverbs 24:12 (Parallel theme): If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?

1 Peter 1:17 (Parallel theme): And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:

Proverbs 1:31 (Parallel theme): Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.

Job 33:26 (Parallel theme): He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness.