

Job 34:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked? and to princes, Ye are ungodly?

Analysis

Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked? and to princes, Ye are ungodly?

Elihu employs an argument from the lesser to the greater (qal va-chomer). If it's inappropriate (lo' yikhon, לֹא־יִכּוֹן, "not fitting/proper") to call an earthly king beliya'al (לְבַיְיָאֵל, wicked, worthless), how much more inappropriate to accuse God of injustice? "Thou art wicked" (beliya'al, לְבַיְיָאֵל) is stronger than ordinary wickedness—it connotes worthlessness, lawlessness, destruction. "Ungodly" (rasha, רָשָׁע) means wicked, guilty, criminal—one who violates moral law.

Ancient Near Eastern protocol absolutely forbade such accusations against royalty, who ruled with divine sanction and could execute accusers. Elihu's logic: if human kings deserve respect despite potential flaws, how much more does the perfect divine King deserve deference? The argument contains truth—God's character is beyond reproach (Deuteronomy 32:4, "His work is perfect"). Yet Elihu misapplies it by assuming Job accused God of wickedness, when Job actually pleaded for explanation while maintaining faith (13:15, "though he slay me, yet will I trust in him"). The verse reveals the distinction between questioning God's purposes (legitimate, as Moses, David, and Habakkuk did) and denying His character (illegitimate). Paradoxically, God invites His people to reason with Him (Isaiah 1:18), to bring complaints (Psalms of lament), and to seek understanding—but always within the framework of trusting His essential goodness and justice.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern kings claimed divine authority; criticizing them was treasonous and potentially fatal (2 Samuel 16:5-9, Shimei cursing David; Acts 23:5, Paul rebuking high priest). The concept of speaking against rulers appears throughout Scripture with varying applications—respect for authority is commanded (Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:17), yet prophets denounced wicked kings when God authorized them (1 Samuel 15:22-23, Nathan confronting David). The book of Job explores how to maintain faith while suffering inexplicably, showing that honest questions differ from blasphemous accusations.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How can we bring honest questions to God without crossing into accusing Him of evil?
2. What's the difference between the laments Scripture records (Psalms 22, 88, Habakkuk) and actual blasphemy?
3. How does recognizing God's perfect character provide anchor points when His ways seem inscrutable?

Interlinear Text

הֲאֵם ר	לִמֶּלֶךְ	בְּלִי עַל	כִּשְׁ ע	אֶל	נְדִיבִים:
Is it fit to say	to a king	Thou art wicked	Ye are ungodly	H413	and to princes
H559	H4428	H1100	H7563		H5081

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 22:28 (Evil): Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people.

Proverbs 17:26 (Parallel theme): Also to punish the just is not good, nor to strike princes for equity.

Romans 13:7 (Parallel theme): Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

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