

Lamentations 3:35

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High,

Analysis

Continuing the list of disapproved actions: "**To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High.**" The Hebrew le-hattot mishpat gaver neged penei Elyon addresses perversion of justice. The verb natah (נָתַן, "turn aside, pervert") suggests bending or twisting what should be straight. Mishpat (מִשְׁפָט) means justice, judgment, or legal rights.

The term gaver (גְּבָר, "man, strong man") refers to an individual person—emphasizing that every human has rights that should be honored. The phrase "before the face of the most High" (neged penei Elyon) is striking. Elyon (אֱלֹהִים, "Most High") is one of God's ancient names (Genesis 14:18-20). To pervert justice happens "before His face"—in His presence, under His observation.

This verse addresses a crucial concern: Did Babylon's unjust treatment of Judah escape God's notice? The implicit answer: No. Though God used Babylon to discipline Judah, He observed every injustice and would hold oppressors accountable. This principle operates throughout Scripture—God defends the oppressed even when using oppression as discipline (Exodus 22:21-24, Psalm 103:6). It points forward to Christ, the perfectly just judge (Acts 17:31, 2 Timothy 4:8).

Historical Context

Justice perverted "before the face of the Most High" had special resonance for exilic Israel. In Jerusalem, the temple represented God's dwelling—justice was to be rendered in His presence. Deuteronomy 16:18-20 commanded judges to make just judgments.

But Israel's leaders had systematically perverted justice. Isaiah 1:21-23 laments how the faithful city became corrupt. Jeremiah 22:13-17 condemns King Jehoiakim for building his palace through unrighteousness and oppression.

Now in exile, Israel experienced what they had inflicted. Babylonian justice favored the powerful; captives had no legal recourse or protections. Yet Lamentations asserts that though this injustice served God's disciplinary purposes, He neither approved nor ignored it. Daniel 5 shows God eventually judging Babylon for its sins. Perverting justice may succeed temporarily, but it occurs "before the face of the Most High" who misses nothing.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does the phrase 'before the face of the Most High' remind us that no injustice escapes God's notice, even when He seems silent?
2. What is the relationship between God using unjust instruments (like Babylon) to accomplish His purposes and His disapproval of injustice?
3. In what ways did Christ experience the ultimate perversion of justice (false trials, false witnesses, unjust condemnation)?
4. How should believers pursue justice in society while trusting God's sovereignty even when justice is perverted?

Interlinear Text

לְפָטוֹת מִשְׁפָט בָּרָא יְהֹוָה פָּנָה עַל־יְהֹוָה:
To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High
H5186 H4941 H1397 H5048 H6440 H5945

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