

Lamentations 3:36

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not.

Analysis

The series concludes: "**To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not.**" The Hebrew le-awet adam be-rivo Adonai lo ra'ah uses awat (אָוָת), meaning to make crooked, pervert, or subvert. Riv (רִיב) means lawsuit, dispute, or legal case. The phrase describes twisting someone's legal case against them—judicial corruption.

The climax comes with "the Lord approveth not" (Adonai lo ra'ah). The verb ra'ah (רָאָה) means to see, perceive, or approve. God doesn't approve or look favorably upon such actions. The covenant name Adonai (Lord, Master) emphasizes His authority to judge these matters.

This verse completes the thought begun in verse 34. God doesn't approve of:

1. crushing prisoners (verse 34)
2. perverting individual rights (verse 35), or
3. subverting legal cases (verse 36).

Though He permits such things for disciplinary purposes, He disapproves and will judge those who do them. This establishes crucial theological principles: God's permissive will differs from His approved will; divine sovereignty doesn't negate human responsibility. Christ embodies these principles—suffering unjust subversion while trusting the righteous Judge (1 Peter 2:23).

Historical Context

Legal subversion was endemic in both pre-exilic Judah and exilic Babylon. Micah 7:3 describes corrupt Judean judges: "The prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward." Amos 5:12 condemns those who afflict the just and take bribes.

In Babylon, exiles had no legal standing or protections. They were subject to arbitrary treatment without recourse. Daniel 6 illustrates how political enemies manipulated law to subvert Daniel's case. Though God delivered Daniel, the incident shows the pervasive injustice of imperial legal systems.

Yet Lamentations maintains that God observes all. He approved none of the judicial corruption—neither Judah's pre-exilic perversions nor Babylon's exilic subversions. This dual judgment demonstrates God's impartial holiness. James 2:1-9 later teaches that showing partiality in judgment sins against God's law. Perfect justice will come only in Christ's kingdom (Psalm 96:10, 13).

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How do verses 33-36 work together to show that God's discipline serves redemptive rather than vindictive purposes?
2. What comfort comes from knowing that though God permits unjust suffering as discipline, He 'approveth not' of the injustice itself?
3. How does Christ's experience of having His cause subverted demonstrate God's solidarity with the oppressed?
4. In what ways should believers work against judicial corruption while trusting God's ultimate justice?

Interlinear Text

כִּי אָדָם בְּרִיב וְאֶלְם לְעֹז תְּעַזֵּב
To subvert a man in his cause the Lord approveth
H5791 H120 H7379 H136 H3808 H7200

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 59:15 (References Lord): Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment.

Habakkuk 1:13 (Parallel theme): Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org