

Proverbs 22:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For the LORD will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.

Analysis

This verse grounds the previous command in God's character as defender of the oppressed. 'The LORD will plead their cause' (יְרִיב יְהֹוָה רִיבָם/yariv YHWH rivam, literally 'the LORD will contend their case') presents God as the ultimate advocate for the powerless. When human courts fail, divine justice prevails. The second half warns: 'and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them' (וְקַבֵּע אֶת-קְבֻעֵיכֶם נֶפֶשׁ/veqava et-qove'ehem nafesh, literally 'plunder the life/soul of their plunderers'). God executes poetic justice—those who rob the poor will themselves be robbed of life. This principle appears throughout Scripture: 'He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker' (Proverbs 14:31); 'Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard' (Proverbs 21:13). Psalm 12:5 declares: 'For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD.' God's identification with the marginalized reaches its climax in Christ, who 'became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich' (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Historical Context

Israel's law established God as redeemer (גּוֹעֵל/go'el) of the oppressed. The kinsman-redeemer protected family members who fell into poverty or slavery (Leviticus 25:25-55). God declared Himself Israel's redeemer throughout their history—delivering them from Egyptian slavery (Exodus 6:6), Babylonian exile (Isaiah 43:14), and ultimately through Christ (Luke 1:68). When Israel's leaders failed to defend the poor, God raised up prophets to speak judgment. Nathan

confronted David over Uriah (2 Samuel 12:1-14). Elijah condemned Ahab for murdering Naboth and seizing his vineyard (1 Kings 21:17-24). God's judgment fell on nations that oppressed Israel (Isaiah 47:6; Zechariah 1:15). In the early church, James warned rich oppressors: 'Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries... are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth' (James 5:4). God hears the cries of the oppressed and executes justice.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 – Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does knowing God as defender of the poor shape your economic ethics and spending priorities?
2. What injustices are you aware of where you could serve as God's instrument to 'plead their cause'?
3. How does Christ's identification with the poor and marginalized challenge comfortable Christianity?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	הִנֵּה	יְרִיב	רִיבָּם	לְגַבְעִיהָם	אֶת	לְגַבְעִיהָם
H3588	For the LORD	will plead	their cause	and spoil	H853	and spoil
H3068		H7378	H7379	H6906		H6906

נְפָשָׁה:

the soul

H5315

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 12:5 (References Lord): For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.

Psalms 140:12 (References Lord): I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.

Proverbs 23:11 (Parallel theme): For their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee.

Jeremiah 51:36 (References Lord): Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will plead thy cause, and take vengeance for thee; and I will dry up her sea, and make her springs dry.

1 Samuel 25:39 (References Lord): And when David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, Blessed be the LORD, that hath pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and hath kept his servant from evil: for the LORD hath returned the wickedness of Nabal upon his own head. And David sent and communed with Abigail, to take her to him to wife.

Psalms 35:10 (References Lord): All my bones shall say, LORD, who is like unto thee, which deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him, yea, the poor and the needy from him that spoileth him?

Psalms 43:1 (Parallel theme): Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation: O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man.

Jeremiah 50:34 (References Lord): Their Redeemer is strong; the LORD of hosts is his name: he shall throughly plead their cause, that he may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon.

Malachi 3:5 (References Lord): And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.

Micah 7:9 (References Lord): I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.

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