

Proverbs 31:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.

Analysis

Judge righteously—The Hebrew tzedek (צֶדֶק, righteousness/justice) demands covenant faithfulness in legal matters. **Plead the cause of the poor and needy** uses din (דִּין, to judge/vindicate) and specifies ani (אֲנִי, afflicted/poor) and evyon (עֲבֹיֹן, needy). This parallelism emphasizes both right judgment and active defense of the economically vulnerable.

This verse concludes King Lemuel's mother's instruction before the eshet chayil poem. The noble character described in verses 10-31 is rooted in justice—economic skill without compassion for the poor perverts wisdom. James 2:1-9 echoes this: faith demonstrated through impartial justice. Christ the King exemplifies perfect advocacy, judging righteously and pleading our cause before the Father (1 John 2:1).

Historical Context

Israelite judges held court at the city gate where elders heard cases. The poor often lacked resources to navigate legal processes, making righteous judges essential. Corruption was endemic (Amos 5:12), so Lemuel's instruction countered royal temptation to favor the wealthy.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does your influence—in business, church, or community—advance justice for those with no voice?
2. What systems of injustice might you be unknowingly benefiting from, and how can you 'plead the cause' of those harmed?
3. How does Christ's advocacy for us (our defense attorney before God) motivate advocacy for others?

Interlinear Text

פָּתַח	פִּי י	שָׁפֵט	צְדָקָה	וְדָל	עַל	אֲבִיּוֹן:
Open	thy mouth	judge	righteously	and plead	the cause of the poor	and needy
H6605	H6310	H8199	H6664	H1777	H6041	H34

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 1:17 (Judgment): Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

Leviticus 19:15 (Righteousness): Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.

Deuteronomy 1:16 (Righteousness): And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him.

Jeremiah 22:3 (Righteousness): Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.

Jeremiah 23:5 (Righteousness): Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

Daniel 4:27 (Righteousness): Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.

Isaiah 1:23 (Judgment): Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

Job 29:12 (Parallel theme): Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him.

Proverbs 20:8 (Judgment): A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes.

Proverbs 16:12 (Righteousness): It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness.