

Psalm 68:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.

Analysis

A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. This verse reveals God's heart for society's most vulnerable. In the ancient world, orphans and widows had no social safety net—without male family members to provide and protect, they faced exploitation, poverty, and abuse. The Law repeatedly commanded care for these groups (Exodus 22:22-24, Deuteronomy 10:18), but the psalm goes beyond legal requirement to reveal God's own character—He personally advocates for the defenseless.

'Father of the fatherless' (avi yetomim, אָבִי יְתוּמִים) describes God assuming the paternal role—He provides, protects, and establishes inheritance rights for those without earthly fathers. 'Judge of the widows' means God renders legal verdicts in their favor, acting as their defense attorney and ensuring justice. In ancient courts, widows had little voice; powerful men could seize their property or deny their claims. But God sits as judge on their behalf, and His verdicts cannot be overturned.

This verse operates from God's 'holy habitation'—His heavenly throne room where perfect justice reigns. While earthly courts might ignore the powerless, heaven's court is different. James 1:27 echoes this psalm: 'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.' Jesus embodied this by defending the marginalized, and the church is called to do likewise. Our concern for the vulnerable demonstrates whether we truly reflect God's character.

Historical Context

The socioeconomic reality of widows and orphans in ancient Israel was precarious. In a patriarchal, agrarian society, land ownership and economic productivity centered on male heads of household. When a man died, his widow and children could easily fall into destitution. Levirate marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5-10) attempted to address this by requiring a brother to marry his deceased brother's widow, preserving the family line and property.

However, this system didn't always function as intended (see Ruth's story, where Boaz acted as kinsman-redeemer but wasn't obligated to). The prophets repeatedly condemned Israel for neglecting widows and orphans (Isaiah 1:17, 23; Jeremiah 7:6; Zechariah 7:10), indicating widespread exploitation. Job defended his righteousness by citing his care for the fatherless (Job 29:12-13), recognizing this as fundamental to covenant faithfulness.

The legal codes of surrounding nations (Hammurabi's Code, Hittite laws) also addressed widows' and orphans' rights, showing universal recognition of their vulnerability. However, Israel's law was unique in grounding this protection in God's own character—He is a father to orphans. This wasn't merely social policy but theological truth. The early church took this seriously, establishing organized care for widows (Acts 6:1, 1 Timothy 5:3-16), recognizing that compassion for the vulnerable is intrinsic to gospel witness.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. Who are the modern 'fatherless and widows' in your community who need advocacy and care?

2. How does understanding God as 'father of the fatherless' comfort those who lack earthly family support?
3. In what ways can you practically act as God's agent in defending and providing for the vulnerable?
4. How does your treatment of society's powerless reflect (or fail to reflect) God's character?
5. What systems or practices in your community exploit the vulnerable, and how can you work for justice?

Interlinear Text

בָּמָעַ וְ	אֵלֶּה יְמִים	אַלְמָנָה וְתָ	וְתָזְמִים	אָבִ
A father	of the fatherless	and a judge	of the widows	is God
H1	H3490	H1781	H490	H430

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 10:14 (Parallel theme): Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand: the poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless.

Jeremiah 49:11 (Parallel theme): Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.

Psalms 146:9 (Parallel theme): The LORD preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.

Jeremiah 5:28 (Judgment): They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge.

Deuteronomy 10:18 (Judgment): He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment.

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.

Isaiah 57:15 (Holy): For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Psalms 72:4 (Judgment): He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor.

Psalms 10:18 (Judgment): To judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress.

2 Chronicles 6:2 (Parallel theme): But I have built an house of habitation for thee, and a place for thy dwelling for ever.

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