

## The Hebrew Corner

It is in the nature of God to protect the helpless. Two groups of people get God's special attention in the pages of the Tanach. The fatherless and widows are mentioned often, and God makes it clear that he gives his protection to them continually.

There is a passage in the book of Job in which Job is reflecting on the blessings that God has given him in the past, and how he walked in righteousness. Here we encounter the following verse (Job 29:13):

“The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.”

The Hebrew word in this passage that is translated widow is *almanah* (אלמנה, ahl-mah-NAH). Here Job attributes blessings he received as accompanying his treatment of widows and other disadvantaged.

In a later passage, in which Job declares his innocence from mistreating the helpless, we encounter the following verses (Job 31:21,22):

“If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate: Then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone.”

The word in this passage translated as fatherless is *yatom*

(יתום, yah-TOHM). The Hebrew lexicon Brown-Driver-Briggs notes that in the usage of this word in the Tanach there is no clear sense that both parents are dead, so the usual rendering of this word is fatherless and not orphan.

Thus in the book of the Tanach that many scholars believe to be the oldest book, perhaps written at the time of the patriarchs, there is a clear indication that the fatherless and widows are to be protected and cared for.

In the book of Deuteronomy, we see specific instruction given as to how the fatherless and widows are to be treated. They are to be fed (Deuteronomy 14:29):

“And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest.”

Here blessings are associated with feeding the fatherless and widows. The appointed feasts are to be observed with the fatherless and widows, as shown in the following passage (Deuteronomy 16:14):

“And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates.”

The fatherless and widows are to be treated justly in legal disputes and dealings (Deuteronomy 24:17):

“Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge.”

The word translated judgment is mishpat (משפט, mihsh-PAHT), which is from the root shaphat (שפט, shah-FAHT), meaning to judge or govern.

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God promises blessings to those who follow his instructions concerning the fatherless and widows (Jeremiah 7:6,7):

“If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.”

On the other hand, God deals harshly with those who mistreat the fatherless and widows, as indicated in the following verse (Deuteronomy 27:19):

“Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen.”

In fact the lack of compassion toward them is listed as one of the main reasons for the driving out and dispersal of the people of Israel among the nations (Zechariah 7:8-14):

“And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother: And oppress not the widow; nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor, and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart. But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts. Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts: But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate.”

May we all live in such a way to please God, by protecting and providing for those in need. Have a blessed, shalom-filled month!