

Deuteronomy 28:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it.

Analysis

The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he have consumed thee from off the land—The Hebrew yadvek Yahweh bekha et-hadaver (יָדַבֵּק יְהוָה בְּךָ אֶת־הַדֶּבֶר, the LORD will cause pestilence to cling to you) uses the verb davak (cling/cleave), the same word describing covenant loyalty (Deuteronomy 10:20; 11:22; 13:4) and marital union (Genesis 2:24). Ironically, what should 'cling' to Israel is Yahweh Himself through covenant faithfulness; instead, dever (pestilence/plague) clings relentlessly. The term dever often represents epidemic disease, appearing frequently in judgment contexts (Exodus 9:3; Jeremiah 14:12; Ezekiel 14:19).

The phrase ad kaloto otkha me'al ha'adamah (עַד כָּלְתּוֹ אֹתְךָ מֵעַל הָאָדָמָה, until it consumes you from upon the land) indicates total removal from covenant inheritance. The land—central to Abrahamic promises—becomes a place of death rather than life. This reverses the Exodus deliverance where God brought Israel out of Egypt into Canaan; now plague removes them from the Promised Land. The irony is profound: the land promised for inheritance becomes impossible to inhabit under covenant curse. Only obedience makes land possession sustainable.

Historical Context

Pestilence repeatedly struck Israel during periods of covenant violation: the plague after David's census killed 70,000 (2 Samuel 24:15); plagues accompanied

Assyrian and Babylonian invasions (Jeremiah 21:6-9; 27:8, 13; Ezekiel 5:12). Ancient Near Eastern sieges often brought epidemic disease due to crowding, starvation, and poor sanitation—conditions described later in Deuteronomy 28. The clinging, persistent nature of plague meant it didn't strike once and leave, but remained endemic, progressively weakening the population until territorial possession became impossible. Archaeological evidence shows population decline in 8th-6th century BC Israel/Judah, consistent with plague, warfare, and eventual exile.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does the ironic use of 'cling' (davak)—meant for covenant loyalty—highlight the tragedy of pestilence replacing God's presence?
2. What does it mean that the Promised Land becomes uninhabitable under covenant curse—can we possess God's promises while violating His covenant?

Interlinear Text

קִדָּב	יְהוָה	אֶת	בָּבֶל	הֵדָבָר	עַד
cleave	The LORD			shall make the pestilence	
H1692	H3068	H0	H853	H1698	H5704
	כָּלֹת	אֶתְךָ	מֵעַל	הָאָדָמָה	אֲשֶׁר
unto thee until he have consumed				thee from off the land	
	H3615	H853	H5921	H127	H834
אֵתְּהָ	בָּא	שָׁמָּה	לְרִשְׁתָּהּ:		
	whither thou goest		to possess		
H859	H935	H8033	H3423		

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 26:25 (Parallel theme): And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy.

Jeremiah 24:10 (Parallel theme): And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers.

Jeremiah 15:2 (References Lord): And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? then thou shalt tell them, Thus saith the LORD; Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity.

Numbers 14:12 (Parallel theme): I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.

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