

Deuteronomy 28:48

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee.

Analysis

Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies—the Hebrew ‘āḇaḏ (עָבַד) means not mere labor but enslaved servitude. Israel would trade **the yoke of God's law** (which is freedom) for **a yoke of iron** (בֶּרֶךְ לִבְרֶזֶל, bə‘ōl barzel)—unbreakable, crushing bondage. The prophesied conditions—**hunger, thirst, nakedness, want of all things**—became horrifyingly literal under Assyrian (722 BC), Babylonian (586 BC), and Roman (AD 70) sieges.

The covenant reversal is complete: God's people who were delivered from slavery would be delivered to slavery. This verse introduces the most severe curses (vv. 48-68), where the blessings of verses 1-14 are systematically inverted. The iron yoke contrasts with Jeremiah's wooden yoke (Jeremiah 27-28)—Babylon's bondage could not be broken.

Historical Context

Written circa 1406 BC as Moses prepared Israel for Canaan entry, this section prophesies exile and dispersion with stunning specificity. The 'iron yoke' became literal under multiple empires—Assyria destroyed the Northern Kingdom, Babylon razed Jerusalem, and Rome scattered the Jews worldwide after AD 70.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What 'iron yokes' do we create for ourselves when we reject God's gracious law?
2. How does serving God lead to true freedom, while serving sin leads to cruel bondage?
3. In what ways does this passage reveal the seriousness with which God takes covenant faithfulness?

Interlinear Text

וְעַבַּדְתָּ	אֶת	אֹיְבֶיךָ	אֲשֶׁר	יִשְׁלַח נֹו
Therefore shalt thou serve	H853	thine enemies	H834	shall send
H5647		H341		H7971
יְהוָה	בְּךָ	בְּרָעָב	וּבְצָמָא	וּבְעִירָם
which the LORD	H0	against thee in hunger	and in thirst	and in nakedness
H3068		H7458	H6772	H5903
וּבְחִסָּר	כָּל	וְנָתַן	עַל	עַל
and in want	H3605	of all things and he shall put	a yoke	of iron
H2640		H5414	H5923	H1270
צַמָּא	עַד	הַשְׁמִיד וְ	אֶתְךָ:	
upon thy neck	H5704	until he have destroyed	H853	
H6677		H8045		

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 44:22 (References Lord): So that the LORD could no longer bear, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations which ye have committed; therefore is your land a desolation, and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day.

Jeremiah 44:27 (Parallel theme): Behold, I will watch over them for evil, and not for good: and all the men of Judah that are in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by the famine, until there be an end of them.

Ezekiel 17:12 (Parallel theme): Say now to the rebellious house, Know ye not what these things mean? tell them, Behold, the king of Babylon is come to Jerusalem, and hath taken the king thereof, and the princes thereof, and led them with him to Babylon;

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