

Deuteronomy 31:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed: for I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swear.

Analysis

And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness—when covenant curses arrived, the song would explain causation: suffering resulted from covenant violation. **For it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed**—the song's memorability ensured it would persist through generations. **For I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swear**—God knew Israel's rebellious intentions before they acted on them, even before entering the land where temptation would peak.

The song's witness function was both condemning and merciful. It would explain suffering (you broke covenant) while pointing toward restoration (God remains faithful). The phrase 'I know their imagination' reveals God's omniscience regarding not just actions but intentions and thoughts (Psalm 94:11, 139:2). This foreknowledge didn't cause rebellion but demonstrated that judgment would be just—God knew their hearts fully. Yet His knowing their future failure didn't prevent His leading them forward, showing divine patience and redemptive purpose despite human unfaithfulness.

Historical Context

Spoken circa 1406 BC, implemented immediately (31:22), and fulfilled throughout Israel's history. When the Babylonian exile came, Israelites in captivity could sing this song and understand their situation—not random tragedy but covenant consequences. The song provided interpretive framework for suffering, preventing either denial (blaming circumstances) or despair (losing hope). This pattern continues: Scripture memorized before crisis provides divine perspective during crisis, interpreting events through God's eyes rather than human confusion.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does God's foreknowledge of rebellion demonstrate omniscience while preserving human moral responsibility?
2. Why is it crucial to learn Scripture before crisis, when memory and perspective function best?
3. How does the song's dual function (witness against sin, hope for restoration) balance justice and mercy?

