

Deuteronomy 32:24

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction: I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust.

Analysis

They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction—Moses catalogs covenant curses that will befall apostate Israel. The Hebrew *mezei ra'av* (מֵזֵי רָעַב, 'burnt with hunger') describes famine's wasting effects, while *lechumei reshef* (לִחְמֵי רֶשֶׁף, 'devoured with burning heat') may refer to plague, fever, or devastating pestilence. *Qetev meriri* (קֶטֶב מְרִירִי, 'bitter destruction') uses a term suggesting poisonous ruin, complete devastation.

The second half intensifies: **I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust.** The phrase *shen behemot* (שֵׁן־בְּהֵמוֹת, 'teeth of beasts') represents wild animals attacking humanity—creation turning against covenant-breakers. *Chamat zochalei afar* (חֲמַת זֹחֲלֵי עָפָר, 'poison of serpents of the dust') evokes the serpent's curse in Eden (Genesis 3:14), where rebellion brought death into the world. These covenant curses reverse creation blessing—instead of subduing the earth, rebellious Israel suffers nature's assault. The imagery fulfills during Babylonian exile (Lamentations 5:9-10; Ezekiel 14:21) and warns all generations that breaking covenant with the Creator brings cosmic disorder.

Historical Context

The Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32:1-43) was composed circa 1406 BC as prophetic witness against future apostasy. God commanded Moses to write this

song (31:19) knowing Israel would forsake Him after entering Canaan. These specific judgments—famine, plague, wild beasts, venomous serpents—mirror covenant curses in Leviticus 26:16-26 and recur throughout Israel's history. The 722 BC Assyrian conquest of northern Israel and 586 BC Babylonian destruction of Judah demonstrated these curses' literal fulfillment. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Lamentations all reference these very judgments—hunger, plague, sword, and wild animals—as divine discipline for covenant unfaithfulness.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How do covenant curses reveal that sin has cosmic consequences, disrupting all creation's order?
2. What does God's use of natural calamities (famine, beasts, serpents) teach about His sovereignty over creation?

Interlinear Text

מִזֵּי י'	בָּעֵב	וּלְחֵמִי	בְּשֶׁף	וְלִטָּב
They shall be burnt	with hunger	and devoured	with burning heat	destruction
H4198	H7458	H3898	H7565	H6986
מְרִירִי י'	וּשְׁנֵי	בְּהֵמָה	אֲשַׁלַּח	עִם בָּם
and with bitter	the teeth	of beasts	I will also send	
H4815	H8127	H929	H7971	H0 H5973
חֲמָת	זִמְלֵי י'	עָפָר:		
upon them with the poison	of serpents	of the dust		
H2534	H2119	H6083		

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 26:22 (Parallel theme): I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your high ways shall be desolate.

Ezekiel 5:17 (Parallel theme): So will I send upon you famine and evil beasts, and they shall bereave thee; and pestilence and blood shall pass through thee; and I will bring the sword upon thee. I the LORD have spoken it.

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