

Deuteronomy 4:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed.

Analysis

I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land...

Moses employs the ancient Near Eastern covenant lawsuit formula, summoning hashamayim vеха'arets (הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ, 'heaven and earth') as witnesses against Israel. Unlike human witnesses who die, creation endures as permanent testimony to covenant obligations. This imagery recurs in prophetic literature (Isaiah 1:2; Micah 6:1-2) when God brings charges against His unfaithful people.

The emphatic Hebrew construction avod to'vedun (אָבֹד תֵּאבְדֻן, 'utterly perish') doubles the verb for intensity—destruction will be complete, not partial. The irony is devastating: the land they are about to possess (larishta, לְרִשְׁתָּהּ) will vomit them out through covenant violation. Gift becomes curse when recipients despise the Giver.

Moses' certainty about future apostasy reflects prophetic foresight, not pessimism. He knows human nature and speaks what God has revealed. Yet even this severe warning serves grace—Israel cannot later claim ignorance. The covenant curse, clearly articulated beforehand, demonstrates God's justice in eventual judgment and preserves the possibility of repentance before disaster strikes.

Historical Context

Moses invokes heaven and earth as covenant witnesses, a common Ancient Near Eastern treaty formula. Speaking on the plains of Moab around 1406 BC, Moses warns that covenant violation would result in exile from the land they were about to possess, a warning that tragically materialized centuries later.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does the permanence of creation as covenant witness emphasize the seriousness of our commitments before God?
2. In what ways do clear warnings about consequences for sin demonstrate God's grace rather than merely His severity?

Interlinear Text

הָעִידֹתִי	בְּכֶם	יָמִים	אֶת	הַשָּׁמַיִם	וְאֶת	הָאֲרֶץ	כִּי
I call	H0	against you this day	H853	heaven	H853	and earth	H3588
H5749		H3117		H8064		H776	
תֵּאבְדוּן	תֵּאבְדוּן	מִהֵר	יָמַעַל	הָאֲרֶץ	אֲשֶׁר	אֶת־	
perish	perish	that ye shall soon	H5921	and earth	H834	H859	
H6	H6	H4118		H776			
עָלֶיךָ יָם	אֶת	הַיַּרְדֵּי	שֶׁמָּה	לְרִשְׁתָּהּ	הָאֲרֶץ	לֹא	
whereunto ye go over	H853	Jordan	H8033	to possess	H3808		
H5674		H3383		H3423			
תִּשְׁמְדוּן׃	יָמִים	עַל־יָהּ	כִּי	תִשְׁמְדוּן׃			
it ye shall not prolong	against you this day	H5921	H3588	be destroyed			
H748	H3117			H8045			
תִּשְׁמְדוּן׃							
be destroyed							
H8045							

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 32:1 (Parallel theme): Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.

Micah 6:2 (Parallel theme): Hear ye, O mountains, the LORD'S controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the LORD hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel.

Isaiah 1:2 (Parallel theme): Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.

Jeremiah 2:12 (Parallel theme): Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD.

Joshua 23:16 (Parallel theme): When ye have transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed yourselves to them; then shall the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you.

Jeremiah 22:29 (Parallel theme): O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD.

Deuteronomy 31:28 (Parallel theme): Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them.

Jeremiah 6:19 (Parallel theme): Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it.

Luke 21:24 (Parallel theme): And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

Leviticus 18:28 (Parallel theme): That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you.