

Ezekiel 4:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

That they may want bread and water, and be astonished one with another, and consume away for their iniquity.

Analysis

That they may want bread and water, and be astonished one with another, and consume away for their iniquity. This devastating conclusion explains God's purpose in the famine: experiencing comprehensive lack will expose their iniquity's true consequences. "Want" (yachseru, יָחַשְׂרָע) means to lack, be without, or suffer deficiency. "Be astonished one with another" (venashshamu ish ve'achiv, וְנִשְׁחַם אִישׁ וְאֶחָיו) depicts mutual horror—people staring at each other in stunned disbelief at their collective degradation.

"Consume away" (namaqqu, נָמַקְעַ) means to rot, waste away, or pine—describing the slow, agonizing death from starvation and disease. The final phrase "for their iniquity" (ba'avonam, בְּעֻוָּנָם) makes causation explicit: this suffering isn't random misfortune but direct consequence of sin. The Hebrew avon denotes both guilt and its punishment—sin contains its judgment within itself; rebellion against God intrinsically produces death and dissolution.

This verse reveals sin's full trajectory—what begins as spiritual adultery (idolatry) ends in physical and social disintegration. The mutual astonishment highlights broken community: instead of supporting one another, people stare helplessly at shared destruction. Theologically, this illustrates that sin doesn't merely offend God externally but corrupts reality itself, unraveling creation's order. Only Christ's substitutionary atonement breaks sin's death-trajectory, offering life where iniquity would bring consumption (Romans 6:23; 8:1-2).

Historical Context

The siege's conclusion fulfilled this prophecy horrifically. When Babylon finally breached Jerusalem's walls in July 586 BC, the starving population could offer no resistance. Lamentations describes the scene: "Our skin is hot as an oven with the burning heat of famine...Women are raped in Zion...Princes are hung up by their hands...Young men are compelled to grind at the mill" (Lamentations 5:10-13).

The phrase "consume away for their iniquity" directly echoes Leviticus 26:39: "Those of you who are left shall rot away in your enemies' lands because of their iniquity, and also because of the iniquities of their fathers." The exile witnessed the precise fulfillment of covenant curses warned 800+ years earlier. This demonstrates God's faithfulness to His word across generations—neither promises nor threats are empty rhetoric.

The mutual astonishment among the people reflects their collective awakening to reality. For years they had rationalized their situation, blamed others, or trusted false prophets. But when actual famine came, denial became impossible. The horror of staring at fellow citizens wasting away forced recognition: their iniquity had brought this. This recognition, though painful, was necessary for eventual repentance and restoration.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does 'consuming away for their iniquity' reveal the intrinsic connection between sin and death?
2. What does the mutual astonishment teach about how judgment exposes collective denial and false security?

3. In what ways does Christ's bearing of our iniquity reverse the 'consuming away' that sin naturally produces?

Interlinear Text

אִישׁ יְבָשָׂת מִזְבֵּחַ וְלֹמֶד עַל
H4616 That they may want bread and water and be astonished one
H2637 H3899 H4325 H8074 H376

בְּעִזּוֹתָם: וְלֹמֶד לְאַחֲרֵי יְאָחָר
with another and consume away for their iniquity
H251 H4743 H5771

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 24:23 (Parallel theme): And your tires shall be upon your heads, and your shoes upon your feet: ye shall not mourn nor weep; but ye shall pine away for your iniquities, and mourn one toward another.

Leviticus 26:39 (Sin): And they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; and also in the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them.

Ezekiel 33:10 (Sin): Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?