

Jeremiah 21:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast: they shall die of a great pestilence.

Analysis

And I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast: they shall die of a great pestilence—God declares He will personally strike (hikketi, הִקַּחְתִּי, from nakah, נִכְחָה) Jerusalem's population. The comprehensive nature ('both man and beast,' me'adam ve'ad behemah, מְאַדָּם וְעַד-בָּהֶם) echoes the plague language of Exodus, but now directed at God's own people rather than Egypt. **They shall die of a great pestilence** (dever gadol, דֵּבֶר גָּדוֹל, great plague/pestilence) refers to epidemic disease, one of three judgment forms consistently prophesied: sword, famine, and pestilence (Jeremiah 14:12, 21:9, 24:10).

The inclusion of animals emphasizes total devastation—not merely human casualties but ecological collapse. This fulfills covenant curses of Leviticus 26:22, Deuteronomy 28:21. The 'great pestilence' resulted from siege conditions: starvation, contaminated water, disease from unburied corpses, and lack of sanitation in the crowded, besieged city. Lamentations 4:9-10 describes the horror: 'Better are those slain with the sword than those slain with hunger... compassionate women have boiled their own children.' The tragedy is that this suffering was preventable—God had offered terms of survival through surrender (Jeremiah 21:8-9), but Judah's leaders rejected God's word. The judgment shows that rebellion against God brings death and destruction, while repentance and obedience bring life (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

Historical Context

The siege of Jerusalem (588-586 BC) created catastrophic conditions documented in biblical and archaeological sources. Lamentations provides eyewitness accounts of starvation (Lamentations 2:11-12, 4:4-5), cannibalism (Lamentations 4:10), and disease. Second Kings 25:3 states 'the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land.' Josephus (Jewish Antiquities 10.7.3) describes similar conditions during the Roman siege in 70 AD, likely reflecting traditions about the Babylonian siege. Excavations at Jerusalem's Stepped Stone Structure and City of David reveal burnt layers, arrowheads, and mass burial sites from this period. The 'pestilence' would have included dysentery, typhoid, and other diseases spread by poor sanitation, contaminated water, and malnutrition. Ancient siege warfare deliberately created these conditions to break a city's will to resist. The fulfillment of Jeremiah's specific prophecy of sword, famine, and pestilence vindicated his authenticity as God's prophet.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does the comprehensiveness of this judgment ('both man and beast') reflect the totality of covenant violation and its consequences?
2. What does God's use of 'sword, famine, and pestilence' teach about the organic connection between sin and suffering in a fallen world?

Interlinear Text

בְּאֵד מִאֵת הַזֹּאת בְּעַיר יֹשְׁבִּי אֶת וְהַפִּתִּי
And I will smite H853 the inhabitants H3427 of this city H5892
H5221 H120 H2063 H853
בְּאֵד מִאֵת הַזֹּאת בְּעַיר יֹשְׁבִּי אֶת וְהַפִּתִּי
and beast H853 pestilence H1698 of a great H1419 they shall die H4191
H929 H120 H1419 H4191

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 6:11 (Parallel theme): Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate,

Jeremiah 33:12 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Again in this place, which is desolate without man and without beast, and in all the cities thereof, shall be an habitation of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down.

Jeremiah 32:24 (Parallel theme): Behold the mounts, they are come unto the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans, that fight against it, because of the sword, and of the famine, and of the pestilence: and what thou hast spoken is come to pass; and, behold, thou seest it.

Ezekiel 14:17 (Parallel theme): Or if I bring a sword upon that land, and say, Sword, go through the land; so that I cut off man and beast from it:

Ezekiel 14:13 (Parallel theme): Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it:

Ezekiel 14:19 (Parallel theme): Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my fury upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast:

Ezekiel 14:21 (Parallel theme): For thus saith the Lord GOD; How much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast?

Hosea 4:3 (Parallel theme): Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away.

Zephaniah 1:3 (Parallel theme): I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD.

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