

Jeremiah 21:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth out, and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey.

Analysis

God offers the besieged inhabitants of Jerusalem a stark choice: 'He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth out, and falleth to the Chaldeans...shall live.' This counsel was deeply controversial, viewed as treason by Jerusalem's leaders. Surrender to Babylon seemed like abandoning God's promises to defend Jerusalem. Yet Jeremiah insists God is actually fighting against Jerusalem (v. 5), making resistance futile and surrender the path to life.

This teaching overturns conventional wisdom that equates faith with fighting to the last man. Sometimes faith means accepting God's discipline and submitting to His ordained instrument of judgment. The way to preserve life was paradoxically to 'fall to' the enemy. Jesus later taught similar paradox: 'Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it' (Matthew 16:25). True wisdom discerns what God is doing and aligns with His purposes rather than resisting them.

The phrase 'his life shall be unto him for a prey' means he will escape with his life as one escapes a battle with plunder—barely, but successfully. This was fulfilled: those who followed Jeremiah's counsel (including Daniel and other exiles) survived and eventually prospered in Babylon. Those who resisted faced death during

Jerusalem's fall. Knowing when to fight and when to submit to God's discipline requires spiritual discernment that comes only through knowing God's word.

Historical Context

This oracle came during the final Babylonian siege (588-586 BC). King Zedekiah ignored Jeremiah's counsel and tried to resist, resulting in catastrophic defeat. The city was destroyed, the temple burned, thousands died, and Zedekiah was captured, blinded, and imprisoned. Those who had heeded Jeremiah's 'treasonous' advice by surrendering to the Babylonians were spared and eventually returned to rebuild Jerusalem.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How can we discern when God calls us to fight versus when He calls us to submit to difficult circumstances?
2. What does this passage teach about the relationship between faith and wisdom in making difficult decisions?
3. In what ways might submitting to God's discipline (rather than resisting it) preserve our spiritual life?

Interlinear Text

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 38:2 (Word): Thus saith the LORD, He that remaineth in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live; for he shall have his life for a prey, and shall live.

Jeremiah 45:5 (Parallel theme): And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not: for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the LORD: but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest.

Jeremiah 39:18 (Word): For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah 14:12 (Word): When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence.

Jeremiah 21:7 (Word): And afterward, saith the LORD, I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah, and his servants, and the people, and such as are left in this city

from the pestilence, from the sword, and from the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those that seek their life: and he shall smite them with the edge of the sword; he shall not spare them, neither have pity, nor have mercy.

Jeremiah 27:13 (Word): Why will ye die, thou and thy people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, as the LORD hath spoken against the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon?

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