

Jeremiah 22:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation.

Analysis

But if ye will not hear these words—the Hebrew *im lo tishme'u* (אִם לَا תִשְׁמַע) recalls the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4), making disobedience not mere political failure but covenant apostasy. To 'not hear' is to refuse covenant loyalty, the fundamental breach of Israel's relationship with YHWH. **I swear by myself, saith the LORD** (*bi nishba'ti ne'um-YHWH*, בְּנִשְׁבָעַתִּי נְאָמֵן-יְהָוָה)—this is the most solemn oath possible. Hebrews 6:13 explains, 'For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself.' God stakes His own character on the certainty of judgment. This self-oath appears rarely: to Abraham (Genesis 22:16), regarding Eli's house (1 Samuel 3:14), and here.

That this house shall become a desolation (*ki-lechorbah yihyeh habayit hazeh*, קַיְלְחָרְבָה יִהְיֶה הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה)—'this house' is the royal palace, but by extension the entire Davidic establishment. The word *chorbah* (חרָבָה) denotes complete ruin, abandonment, a heap of rubble. Isaiah used the same term for Babylon's coming destruction (Isaiah 13:22). The certainty is absolute: divine oath guarantees it. This fulfilled literally in 586 BC when Nebuchadnezzar burned the royal palace (2 Kings 25:9).

Historical Context

This divine oath, sworn 'by myself,' is theologically momentous. In ancient Near Eastern treaties, oaths were sworn by deity to guarantee covenant terms. Here God swears by Himself because there is no higher authority. The prophecy's

fulfillment came exactly as sworn: Nebuchadnezzar's forces destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC, burning both temple and palace (2 Kings 25:8-9). Archaeological excavations in the City of David have uncovered massive destruction layers from this period, with ash, arrowheads, and collapsed structures testifying to the Babylonian conquest. The 'desolation' was so complete that Nehemiah, returning 142 years later, found Jerusalem still largely in ruins (Nehemiah 2:13-17). The oath's fulfillment vindicated Jeremiah's authenticity as prophet and demonstrated that God's word, once sworn, is irrevocable. It also established the principle that covenant unfaithfulness brings certain judgment, regardless of presumed privileges like Davidic lineage or temple presence.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What does God's self-oath reveal about the absolute certainty of His word and the seriousness of covenant disobedience?
2. How does the phrase 'if ye will not hear' connect to the Shema and frame obedience as the essence of covenant relationship?
3. What comfort and warning does this oath provide regarding God's character: that He cannot lie, but also will not tolerate persistent rebellion?

Interlinear Text

בְּ אֵת אָמַרְתָּ לֹא תִשְׁמַע אֶת מִלְּמֹדֶת
H518 H3808 But if ye will not hear H8085 H853 these words H1697 H428 H0

נָשַׁב עַתִּי בְּנָאָמָן יְהִי הַלְּמָדָה
I swear by myself saith the LORD H3588 shall become a desolation H1961 H1697 H2723 H3068

בְּנֵי יִהְיֶה
that this house H2088 H1004

Additional Cross-References

Amos 6:8 (References Lord): The Lord GOD hath sworn by himself, saith the LORD the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein.

Hebrews 6:13 (Parallel theme): For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself,

Jeremiah 17:27 (Parallel theme): But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.

Genesis 22:16 (References Lord): And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:

Isaiah 1:20 (Word): But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

Jeremiah 39:8 (Parallel theme): And the Chaldeans burned the king's house, and the houses of the people, with fire, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem.

