

Jeremiah 27:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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?

Analysis

Why will ye die, thou and thy people—God's rhetorical question expresses both incredulity and pathos. The Hebrew lammah tamutu (למֹתָתְּ מָתַּ, why will you die?) echoes Ezekiel's similar plea: 'Why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth' (Ezekiel 18:31-32). God takes no delight in judgment; He urges His people to choose life. This reveals God's heart—not eager to punish but longing for repentance and obedience that brings blessing rather than curse.

By the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence—This triad (khorev, ra'av, dever; חֹרֵב רָאֵב דְּבָר) appears throughout Jeremiah as covenant curses from Deuteronomy 28:21-26. These were not random calamities but specified consequences for covenant breaking. **As the LORD hath spoken against the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon**—The judgment is not arbitrary but 'spoken' (predetermined and announced). God's word establishes reality; when He declares consequences, they inevitably follow unless repentance intervenes. The passage demonstrates that human choices have real consequences within God's sovereign purposes. Zedekiah could choose life through obedience or death through rebellion, but he could not avoid the consequences of his choice.

Historical Context

The siege of Jerusalem (588-586 BC) involved precisely these three judgments. Archaeological evidence and Lamentations describe horrific famine, with people eating their own children (Lamentations 4:10). Disease spread through the starving, crowded city. When Babylon finally breached the walls, sword-killed thousands. Jeremiah witnessed these horrors, having warned for decades that rebellion would bring exactly this outcome. The tragedy was entirely avoidable—Zedekiah could have surrendered at any point and been shown mercy (Jeremiah 38:17-18). His refusal to heed God's word through Jeremiah brought the very catastrophe the prophet had detailed: sword, famine, pestilence, destruction, and exile.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. Why does God ask 'Why will ye die?' rather than simply pronouncing judgment, and what does this reveal about His heart?
2. How does this passage demonstrate that God's warnings of judgment are acts of mercy, giving opportunity to repent?
3. What 'deaths' might we be choosing through disobedience, and how is God calling us to choose life instead?

Interlinear Text

ל פה	H4100	Why will ye die	H4191	תְּמִיתָה	H859	אַתָּה	H5971	עַמְּךָ	H2719	בְּכֶשֶׁב	H7458	בְּכֶשֶׁב	H2719	בְּכֶשֶׁב	H7458
וְבִבְּקָרָה	H1698	and by the pestilence	H834	כִּי	H1696	דָּבָר	H3068	יְהִי	H413	אֶל	H1471	הָגֵז	H413	אֶל	H1471
רָאשָׁךְ	H834	that will not serve	H3808	עַבְדָּךְ	H5647	אַתָּה	H853	לְךָ	H4428	מֶלֶךְ	H894	בְּבָבִלּוֹן		מֶלֶךְ	H894

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 18:31 (Parallel theme): Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

Jeremiah 27:8 (Kingdom): And it shall come to pass, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, saith the LORD, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand.

Proverbs 8:36 (Parallel theme): But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.