

Jeremiah 34:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life: and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth.

Analysis

I will even give them into the hand of their enemies... and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth. The punishment mirrors the covenant ceremony—as they tore animals apart, so God will deliver them to be torn apart. The Hebrew *nevelatam* ("their dead bodies/corpses") emphasizes disgrace; unburied bodies, food for scavengers, represented ultimate covenant curse (Deuteronomy 28:26). Ancient Near Eastern thought considered proper burial essential for afterlife rest; denial of burial was worse than death itself.

This judgment employs **lex talionis** (law of retaliation)—the punishment fits the crime. They broke covenant sworn over torn animal bodies; God will make their bodies like those animals. They treated Hebrew brothers as animals to be exploited; God treats them as carrion for literal animals. The prophetic pattern consistently shows God's judgments as poetically fitting—the punishment reveals the crime's inherent nature. They dehumanized covenant brothers; judgment dehumanizes them.

The birds and beasts consuming corpses appear repeatedly in Scripture as covenant curse imagery (1 Samuel 17:44-46; 1 Kings 14:11; Psalm 79:2; Ezekiel 29:5; Revelation 19:17-21). This motif climaxes in Revelation's apocalyptic birds gorging on God's enemies at Christ's return. The covenant curses aren't arbitrary

divine vindictiveness—they're the natural outworking of rebellion against the Life-Giver. Rejecting the covenant of life brings death; refusing the God of humanity brings dehumanization.

Historical Context

This prophecy was fulfilled literally. 2 Kings 25:18-21 records Babylon's execution of Judean leaders at Riblah; Lamentations 4:9-10 describes Jerusalem's siege horrors, including bodies left unburied. Josephus (Wars 5.12.3-4) describes similar scenes during Rome's 70 CE destruction—covenant-breaking Israel repeatedly experienced these curses across centuries. Archaeological excavations at Lachish and other Judean sites reveal mass burials and siege destruction layers from this period, confirming the biblical account's historical accuracy.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does understanding that God's judgments fit the crime (measure for measure) reveal His justice rather than arbitrary wrath?
2. In what ways does exploiting others' humanity ultimately dehumanize the exploiter?
3. Why is denying Christ's covenant (the gospel) ultimately self-dehumanizing rather than just legally punishable?

Interlinear Text

וְנָתַתִּי י	אוֹתָם	וּבִי ד	אֹיְבֵיהֶם	וּבִי ד
I will even give	H853	and into the hand	of their enemies	and into the hand
H5414		H3027	H341	H3027
מִבְּקֹשִׁי י	נַפְשָׁם	וְהָיָה ה	נִבְלָתָם	לִמְאָכָל
of them that seek	their life	H1961	and their dead bodies	shall be for meat
H1245	H5315		H5038	H3978
לַע וְ	הַשָּׁמַיִם	וּלְבֶהֱמָת	הָאָרֶץ:	
unto the fowls	of the heaven	and to the beasts	of the earth	
H5775	H8064	H929	H776	

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 7:33 (Parallel theme): And the carcasses of this people shall be meat for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth; and none shall fray them away.

Jeremiah 16:4 (Parallel theme): They shall die of grievous deaths; they shall not be lamented; neither shall they be buried; but they shall be as dung upon the face of the earth: and they shall be consumed by the sword, and by famine; and their carcasses shall be meat for the fowls of heaven, and for the beasts of the earth.

Jeremiah 19:7 (Parallel theme): And I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place; and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hands of them that seek their lives: and their carcasses will I give to be meat for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth.

Jeremiah 11:21 (Parallel theme): Therefore thus saith the LORD of the men of Anathoth, that seek thy life, saying, Prophesy not in the name of the LORD, that thou die not by our hand:

1 Kings 16:4 (Parallel theme): Him that dieth of Baasha in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth of his in the fields shall the fowls of the air eat.

Jeremiah 21:7 (Parallel theme): 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 22:25 (Parallel theme): And I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life, and into the hand of them whose face thou fearest, even into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans.

1 Kings 14:11 (Parallel theme): Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat: for the LORD hath spoken it.

1 Samuel 17:46 (Parallel theme): This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

1 Samuel 17:44 (Parallel theme): And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field.