

Jeremiah 38:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand.

Analysis

But if thou wilt not go forth—The conditional introduces the alternative future: disobedience guarantees destruction. God's word through Jeremiah presented Zedekiah with clear binary options, removing any middle ground or negotiated compromise. This reflects covenant theology: blessing follows obedience, curse follows rebellion (Deuteronomy 28).

This city shall be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire—The Hebrew saraph (שָׁרֶף, "to burn") proved grimly prophetic. Nebuchadnezzar's forces did exactly this in 586 BC (2 Kings 25:8-9), destroying Solomon's temple and Jerusalem's walls. The prophecy's specificity—not just defeat but burning—demonstrated its divine origin. Zedekiah's refusal to surrender would make him personally responsible (thou shalt cause, v. 23) for Jerusalem's immolation.

Historical Context

Archaeological evidence confirms massive destruction layers from 586 BC across Jerusalem, including burn layers and Babylonian arrowheads. The temple's destruction fulfilled prophecies from Jeremiah (7:14, 26:6) and other prophets. This catastrophe ended the Davidic monarchy and triggered the Babylonian exile.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does God's clear presentation of consequences demonstrate both His justice and mercy?
2. What does the specificity of fulfilled prophecy (burning with fire) reveal about Scripture's reliability?
3. Why do humans often choose the path leading to certain destruction rather than humble obedience?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵלָי לֹא תֵצֵא אֶל שָׂרֵי לְרַב מִלְּבָבֶךָ
H518 H3808 But if thou wilt not go forth H413 H8269 to the king of Babylon's
H3318 H4428 H894

מִתְּבִנְתְּךָ יְרֵא כְּלָמָד מִתְּבִנְתְּךָ כְּפָשָׁד יְמִינָךְ
be given then shall this city H2063 into the hand of the Chaldeans
H5414 H5892 H3027 H3778

וְשָׁבֵף וְבָא שׁ לֹא אֵצֵת הַבְּאֵשׁ תִּמְלִל ט
and they shall burn it with fire H859 H3808 and thou shalt not escape out
H8313 H784 H4422

מִתְּבִנְתְּךָ
into the hand
H3027

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 38:3 (Kingdom): Thus saith the LORD, This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it.

Jeremiah 39:3 (Kingdom): And all the princes of the king of Babylon came in, and sat in the middle gate, even Nergal-sharezer, Samgar-nebo, Sarsechim, Rab-saris, Nergal-sharezer, Rab-mag, with all the residue of the princes of the king of Babylon.

Jeremiah 38:23 (Kingdom): So they shall bring out all thy wives and thy children to the Chaldeans: and thou shalt not escape out of their hand, but shalt be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon: and thou shalt cause this city to be burned with fire.

Jeremiah 37:8 (Parallel theme): And the Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire.

Ezekiel 12:13 (References Babylon): My net also will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare: and I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there.

2 Kings 24:12 (Kingdom): And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers: and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign.