

Jeremiah 41:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it was so, when they came into the midst of the city, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah slew them, and cast them into the midst of the pit, he, and the men that were with him.

Analysis

The chilling detail that Ishmael 'cast them into the midst of the pit, he, and the men that were with him' emphasizes both the act and the corporate guilt—Ishmael didn't act alone but led others into his wickedness. The phrase 'into the midst of the pit' (literally 'into the hand/midst of the pit') suggests bodies were thrown into a cistern, likely the same one where he disposed of Gedaliah and others (v.9 clarifies this). This verse serves as summary transition, establishing that Ishmael systemically murdered the pilgrims before the next verse introduces the ten survivors who bought their lives. The repetition 'he, and the men that were with him' reinforces collective responsibility—Ishmael's ten companions share guilt for these murders. This pattern of corporate participation in evil recurs throughout Scripture: Achan's family shared his judgment (Joshua 7), Korah's household perished with him (Numbers 16), Jezebel's wickedness corrupted Israel broadly (1 Kings 16-22). The passage warns that associating with evil leadership draws people into shared guilt and judgment. Paul later commands, 'have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them' (Ephesians 5:11).

Historical Context

The reference to the 'pit' (bor) that would be identified in verse 9 as 'the pit which Asa had made for fear of Baasha king of Israel' provides archaeological and historical specificity. King Asa (911-870 BC) fortified Mizpah against northern Kingdom attack during Israel's divided monarchy period (1 Kings 15:22, 2

Chronicles 16:6). Large cisterns were defensive infrastructure, storing water for sieges. That this specific cistern was associated with Asa (three centuries earlier) shows how historical memory preserved details of defensive works. Using a defensively-constructed cistern for mass murder represents perverse corruption of protective infrastructure into instrument of death. The ten men accompanying Ishmael likely included some of the original group mentioned in 41:1 as 'the princes of the king,' suggesting aristocratic accomplices. Their participation shows how nobility can become morally degraded when political ideology supersedes covenant faithfulness. Historical parallels to other revolutionary violence show how ideology consistently corrupts participants' moral sense, making heinous acts seem justified.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does the corporate nature of Ishmael's crimes warn against complicity with evil leadership through association and inaction?
2. What does the perversion of defensive infrastructure (Asa's cistern) into an instrument of mass murder teach about how good things can be corrupted for evil?
3. In what ways should believers examine whether our participation in or tacit approval of group actions draws us into corporate guilt?

Interlinear Text

וַיְהִי י' H1961	כְּבֹאֲמָם H935	אֶל H413	תּוֹךְ H8432	הָעִיר H5892	וַיִּשְׁחָטוּם H7819
And it was so	when they came	into the midst	of the city	slew	
וַיִּשְׁמַע אֶל H3458	בֶּן H1121	נִתְנָה H5418	אֶל H413	תּוֹךְ H8432	הַבּוֹר H1931
that Ishmael	the son	of Nethaniah	into the midst	of the pit	
אֶתְּוֹ H854	אֲשֶׁר H834	וְהָאֲנָשִׁים H376			

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 59:7 (Parallel theme): Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths.

Psalms 55:23 (Parallel theme): But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; but I will trust in thee.

Ezekiel 22:27 (Parallel theme): Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain.