

Job 36:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge.

Analysis

But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword—The conditional אִם לֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ (im-lo yishme'u, "if not they hear/obey") presents a stark choice: heed discipline or face destruction. The phrase בְּשֵׁלַח יָאָוְרוּ (veshellach ya'avoru, "by the sword they shall pass away") uses שֵׁלַח (shelach, "weapon/missile") for violent death. **And they shall die without knowledge** employs וַיָּגִיעוּ בְּבִלְיָדָא' (veyigve'u bivli-da'at), meaning "expire in lack of knowledge"—dying in ignorance of the truth God tried to teach through affliction.

This verse presents suffering's two possible outcomes:

1. Repentance leading to life (vv.10-11), or
2. Hardened rebellion leading to death.

The "knowledge" they lack isn't information but experiential wisdom—they never learned what God wanted to teach through discipline. This echoes Proverbs 29:1: "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Pharaoh exemplifies this tragedy—repeated plagues should have taught him Yahweh's supremacy, but hardened resistance led to destruction in the Red Sea (Exodus 14:28).

Historical Context

Ancient warfare made violent death common—"perish by the sword" was a frequent fate. Elihu employs this imagery for ultimate divine judgment against

those who refuse correction. The concept of dying "without knowledge" reflects wisdom literature's core conviction that fearing God and obeying His instruction constitute true wisdom, while rejecting discipline guarantees destruction. This binary outcome—life through obedience or death through rebellion—structures Deuteronomy 30:15-20 and reappears in Jesus's parables about responding to God's invitation (Matthew 22:1-14, Luke 14:15-24).

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What warnings or discipline from God might you be resisting that could lead to greater consequences if ignored?
2. How does the phrase 'die without knowledge' challenge our culture's emphasis on information over wisdom?
3. What does it mean practically to 'obey' God's corrective discipline in your current circumstances?

Interlinear Text

וְאִם	לֹא	שְׁמָעוּ	בְּשֵׁךְ	לַחֶרֶט	וְיָגָעוּ	וְיָגָעוּ
H518	H3808	H8085	H7973	H5674	H1478	
		But if they obey	by the sword	not they shall perish	and they shall die	
בְּבִלְיָ	דַּעַת:					
H1097	H1847					
	without knowledge					

Additional Cross-References

Job 4:21 (Parallel theme): Doth not their excellency which is in them go away? they die, even without wisdom.

Isaiah 3:11 (Parallel theme): Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him.

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