

Lamentations 3:33

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

Analysis

A crucial theological statement: "**For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.**" The Hebrew ki lo innah mi-libbo (כִּי לֹא עָנָה מִלֵּבָד) literally means "for not from his heart does he afflict." The term lev (לב, "heart") represents the center of will, desire, and emotion. This verse reveals that affliction is not God's primary desire or pleasure.

The parallel phrase "nor grieve the children of men" uses vayageh benei-ish (וַיַּגְּהֵן בְּנֵי-אָשָׁר). The verb yagah (יָגַהּ) means to cause grief or sorrow. The term "children of men" (benei-ish) emphasizes human mortality and frailty. God takes no delight in causing pain to His fragile creatures.

This verse must be balanced with others showing God does indeed afflict when necessary (verse 32, Deuteronomy 28, Hebrews 12:6). The resolution: God afflicts not willingly as an end in itself, but purposefully as means to redemption. Ezekiel 18:32 and 33:11 declare God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Divine judgment serves redemptive purposes, not sadistic pleasure. This distinguishes the biblical God from capricious pagan deities who tormented humans for entertainment.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern religious texts often portrayed gods as volatile, easily offended, and finding pleasure in human suffering. The Epic of Gilgamesh describes gods sending floods from anger and caprice. Against this backdrop,

Lamentations 3:33's declaration that Yahweh does not willingly afflict stands out dramatically.

The covenant God of Israel operates from holy love, not arbitrary whim. When He disciplines, it serves corrective purposes (Deuteronomy 8:5, Proverbs 3:11-12). The prophets consistently presented judgment as God's "strange work" and "alien task" (Isaiah 28:21)—necessary but not preferred.

The exile experience forced Israel to grapple with this tension: if God doesn't willingly afflict, why such severe judgment? The answer emerges through Lamentations—God's heart grieves over necessary discipline (Hosea 11:8-9), yet His holiness cannot overlook persistent rebellion. This prepared Israel to understand that God would ultimately place judgment on His own Son rather than His people (Isaiah 53:4-6, 10).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does knowing God doesn't afflict 'from His heart' change our perception of divine discipline and suffering?
2. What is the difference between God not afflicting 'willingly' versus not afflicting at all, and what does this reveal about the necessity of judgment?
3. How do Hebrews 12:5-11 and this verse work together to show discipline as an expression of love rather than divine sadism?
4. In what ways does the cross demonstrate both that God doesn't delight in affliction and that He will nevertheless judge sin fully?

Interlinear Text

אֲישׁוֹן אֲנָכִי לֹא עָבָה מְלֵבָן וְגַם הַבָּנִים בְּנֵי אֲישׁוֹן
H3588 H3808 For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men
H6031 H3820 H3013 H1121 H376

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 33:11 (Parallel theme): Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

Ezekiel 18:32 (Parallel theme): For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.

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