

Lamentations 3:37

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?

Analysis

A rhetorical question asserting divine sovereignty: "**Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?**" The Hebrew *mi zeh amar vatehi Adonai lo tsivvah* (מי זה אמר ותהי אדון לא צעה) establishes that nothing occurs apart from God's sovereign decree. The question expects the answer: "No one." Human words have no power to bring events to pass unless God commands it.

This verse follows directly from verses 33-36, which established what God does not approve. Now comes the complementary truth: nevertheless, God remains sovereignly in control of all that occurs. This resolves potential tension—God doesn't approve all that happens, yet nothing happens without His permission or decree. The distinction between God's decretive will (what He ordains to occur) and His preceptive will (what He commands as right) is crucial here.

Theologically, this affirms absolute divine sovereignty over history. No Babylonian commander, no false prophet, no human authority can speak and bring something to pass unless the Lord commands it. This provides comfort in suffering—our affliction isn't random or outside God's control. It also brings sobriety—we cannot manipulate outcomes through our words or plans apart from God's will. Proverbs 19:21 states: "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand." James 4:13-15 similarly teaches that all our plans depend on God's will.

Historical Context

This question would have resonated powerfully with exilic Israel. Babylon's kings claimed absolute authority—Nebuchadnezzar's pride led him to declare, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?" (Daniel 4:30). Persian kings would later claim their word was law that couldn't be altered (Daniel 6:8). Yet Lamentations insists that even imperial decrees occur only as God permits.

The principle appears throughout Scripture. Pharaoh claimed authority over Israel, but God brought plagues and deliverance (Exodus). Sennacherib threatened Jerusalem, but God destroyed his army (2 Kings 19). Babylon seemed invincible, but Daniel 5 shows God's hand writing judgment. Human rulers speak and plan, but God's counsel alone stands.

This doctrine also addresses false prophecy. Prophets claimed to speak for God, promising peace when destruction loomed (Jeremiah 23:16-17). But their words didn't come to pass because "the Lord commandeth it not." True prophecy always fulfills because it reveals God's decreed will (Deuteronomy 18:22, Isaiah 46:9-11). The exile proved which prophets spoke for God—Jeremiah's warnings came true; the optimists were exposed as frauds.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does this verse's assertion of absolute divine sovereignty provide comfort rather than fatalism when facing suffering?
2. What is the difference between God's decretive will (what He ordains) and His preceptive will (what He commands as right)?
3. How should understanding that no one can speak and bring events to pass unless God commands it affect our prayer lives and plans?

4. In what ways does Romans 8:28 build on this truth, assuring that God works all things together for good for those who love Him?

Interlinear Text

וְהַמִּתְּבָאֵר	אָמַר	וְיֹתֵר	אָדָן
H4310	H2088	Who is he that saith	H1961
		H559	and it cometh to pass when the Lord
			H136
צִוָּה:			
H3808	commandeth		
	H6680		

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 46:10 (Parallel theme): Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

Proverbs 16:9 (References Lord): A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.

Proverbs 19:21 (References Lord): There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.

Proverbs 21:30 (References Lord): There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD.

Daniel 4:35 (Parallel theme): And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

Ephesians 1:11 (Parallel theme): In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

Romans 9:15 (Parallel theme): For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

