

Numbers 11:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.

Analysis

Moses' prayer reaches its climax: 'And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand.' This shocking request reveals the depth of Moses' despair—he preferred death to continued burden of leading rebellious Israel. Yet this wasn't merely despair but also faith: Moses believed death would be preferable to dishonoring God through inadequate leadership or to watching God judge the people.

The conditional 'if I have found favour in thy sight' shows Moses still sought God's will. He wasn't demanding death but requesting it as an alternative if the burden wouldn't otherwise be lifted. The phrase 'let me not see my wretchedness' (Hebrew *ra'ati*, רָאָתִי) could mean either 'my wretchedness' or 'their wretchedness'—Moses couldn't bear either his own misery or the people's impending judgment.

This prayer parallels other biblical figures who requested death under overwhelming burden: Elijah (1 Kings 19:4), Jonah (Jonah 4:3), and Job (Job 6:8-9). God's response to such prayers is typically not granting death but providing help and perspective. The request reveals both the reality of ministerial burden and the danger of focusing on circumstances rather than God's faithfulness. Christ alone legitimately said, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death' (Matthew 26:38), bearing the ultimate burden of humanity's sin.

Historical Context

Moses' death request must be understood in context of his mediatorial role. As the one who stood between God and Israel, Moses bore unique burden—seeing both God's holiness and the people's sin, experiencing the tension between divine justice and covenant mercy. Earlier, Moses had offered himself in Israel's place: 'Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book' (Exodus 32:32). Moses' willingness to suffer or die for Israel prefigured Christ's actual substitutionary death for His people.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. What does Moses' request for death reveal about the reality of ministerial burden and the importance of having honest conversations with God about our struggles?
2. How does God's response (providing elders to share the burden) rather than granting Moses' request demonstrate God's wisdom in answering prayers—often giving what we truly need rather than what we desperately want?

Interlinear Text

בְּרֵגֶל יְאָמַר כִּי כִּי אַתָּה עַשְׂתָּה לֵב אֶת

H518

H3602

H859

And if thou deal

H6213

בְּרֵגֶל

H0

me I pray thee out of hand

H2026

בְּאָמַר

H4994

בְּרֵגֶל בְּעֵינֶךָ יְבָנֶךָ אַל

me I pray thee out of hand

H2026

אָמַר

H518

מִצְא אֶתְתִּי

if I have found

H4672

עַד

H2580

בְּעֵינֶךָ

in thy sight

H5869

אֶרְאָה

בְּרֵגֶל

and let me not see my wretchedness

H7200

H7451

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 20:18 (Parallel theme): Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?

Jonah 4:3 (Parallel theme): Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

1 Kings 19:4 (Parallel theme): But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.

Exodus 32:32 (Prayer): Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.

Zephaniah 3:15 (Parallel theme): The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more.