

Numbers 5:24

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he shall cause the woman to drink the bitter water that causeth the curse: and the water that causeth the curse shall enter into her, and become bitter.

Analysis

The bitter water that causes the curse represents the instrument of divine judgment. The water itself is not magical but serves as the vehicle through which God manifests His verdict. Bitterness often symbolizes suffering and judgment in Scripture. The woman must drink what tastes bitter and may bring bitter consequences. This reflects the principle that sin, while it may seem sweet at first, ultimately becomes bitter. The Reformed understanding emphasizes that all judgment belongs to God—the water merely reveals what God has determined.

Historical Context

Bitter substances were associated with suffering and punishment throughout the Old Testament. The bitter herbs of Passover recalled Egypt's affliction. Here, the bitter water becomes an agent of testing and potential curse if the woman is guilty of the bitter betrayal of adultery.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does the bitterness of the water symbolize the bitter consequences of sin?
2. What does the use of physical elements in divine judgment teach about God's sovereignty over creation?
3. In what ways does the transition from sweet temptation to bitter consequence describe the pattern of all sin?

Interlinear Text

את	וְהַשְׁקָה	את	הַשְׁקָה	הַמְּלָאָכִים	הַמְּלָאָכִים
to drink	H853	And he shall cause the woman	H853	and the water	
H8248		H802		H4325	
לִמְרִים:		בְּמַאֲכָר יִמְלָא		בְּהַמְּלָאָכִים	
into her and become bitter	H4751	that causeth the curse	H779	shall enter	H0
					H4325
לִמְרִים:					
that causeth the curse	H779	into her and become bitter	H4751		

Additional Cross-References

Malachi 3:5 (Parallel theme): And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.