

Deuteronomy 29:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And that the whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein, like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath:

Analysis

And that the whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein (גַּפְרִית מֵלֵח שָׁרֶפֶה כָּל-)—The triad gofrit ("brimstone/sulfur"), melach ("salt"), and serefah ("burning") describes complete ecological collapse. Salt symbolizes permanent desolation—Abimelech sowed Shechem with salt after destroying it (Judges 9:45), rendering land agriculturally sterile. Sulfur and burning suggest volcanic devastation or scorched earth warfare.

The threefold negation intensifies the curse: lo tizara' ("not sown"), lo tatzmiyah ("not sprouting"), lo ya'aleh vah kol esev ("no grass grows in it"). Total agricultural failure reverses Eden's fertility and Canaan's promised abundance ("flowing with milk and honey"). The land vomits out covenant breakers (Leviticus 18:25, 28).

Like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger (כְּמַהֲפֵכַת סָדָם) —Mahpekhah ("overthrow") references Genesis 19's cataclysm. Moses adds Admah and Zeboim (Genesis 10:19, Hosea 11:8) to the infamous pair, emphasizing comprehensive destruction. The comparison warns: covenant apostasy merits Sodom-level judgment. Isaiah

(1:9-10), Jeremiah (23:14, 49:18, 50:40), Amos (4:11), and Zephaniah (2:9) repeatedly invoke this comparison.

Historical Context

Sodom's destruction occurred in Abraham's era (circa 2000-1900 BCE), probably in the southern Dead Sea region. Ancient sources describe the area's sulfurous geology and salt deposits. Israel's covenant curses employ familiar historical reference points—Egypt (oppression), Sodom (judgment)—to make abstract warnings concrete. The Dead Sea area's perpetual barrenness served as ongoing visual reminder of divine judgment. When Babylon devastated Judah in 586 BCE, parts of the land experienced severe depopulation and agricultural collapse for decades, though not permanent Sodom-level devastation.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does ecological judgment reflect creation's curse when humanity rebels (Romans 8:20-22)?
2. What does the Sodom comparison teach about degrees of divine judgment for covenant privilege?

Interlinear Text

גָּפָר יְתָ	שְׁרָפָה	יְמָלֵחָה	כָּל	אֶרְצָה	לְאַ
thereof is brimstone	and salt	and burning	H3605	And that the whole land	H3808
H1614	H4417	H8316		H776	
תִּזְרַע	וְלֹא	תָּצַם חַ	וְלֹא	יַעַל הַ	עַשְׁבָּה
that it is not sown	nor beareth	H3808	growth	H0	nor any grass
H2232	H6779		H5927		H6212
כְּמַהֲפֵכָת	סָדָם	יְעַמְּרָה	אַדְמָה	אַזְבֵּן	
therein like the overthrow	of Sodom	and Gomorrah	Admah	and Zeboim	
H4114	H5467	H6017	H126	H6636	
אָשָׁר	בָּפְנֵי	יְהִי הָ	בָּאָפָן	וּבְחַמְתָּו:	
overthrew	which the LORD	in his anger	and in his wrath		
H834	H2015	H3068	H639	H2534	

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 17:6 (Parallel theme): For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.

Zephaniah 2:9 (References Lord): Therefore as I live, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them.

Isaiah 34:9 (Parallel theme): And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch.

Jeremiah 20:16 (References Lord): And let that man be as the cities which the LORD overthrew, and repented not: and let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noontide;

Genesis 14:2 (Parallel theme): That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar.

Luke 17:29 (Parallel theme): But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.

Ezekiel 47:11 (Parallel theme): But the miry places thereof and the marshes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt.

Judges 9:45 (Parallel theme): And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt.

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