

Ezekiel 12:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall be desolate; and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

Analysis

God continues: 'And the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall be desolate; and ye shall know that I am the LORD.' This announces comprehensive destruction—inhabited cities will become waste, productive land will become desolate. The Hebrew *charav* (חָרַב, 'laid waste') indicates violent destruction, while *shemamah* (שְׁמָמָה, 'desolate') suggests uninhabited emptiness.

The purpose clause 'ye shall know that I am the LORD' ties even devastating judgment to God's self-revelation. Knowledge of Yahweh—His sovereignty, holiness, justice, and covenant faithfulness—is the ultimate purpose. Even destruction serves pedagogical ends, teaching through consequences what mercy couldn't teach through blessing. This demonstrates that God's glory and the knowledge of Him are reality's ultimate goals.

From a Reformed perspective, this verse illustrates that God's self-glorification through both blessing and judgment is proper ordering of reality, not divine egotism. As Creator, God is reality's center; proper knowledge of Him is humanity's chief end (Westminster Shorter Catechism Q1). Judgment that produces this knowledge, though painful, serves ultimate good by aligning people with truth.

Historical Context

Archaeological evidence confirms Judean cities' destruction circa 586 BC. Excavations at sites like Lachish, Beth-Shemesh, and Ramat Rahel show destruction layers from this period—burned buildings, arrowheads, evidence of violent conquest. The land remained sparsely populated during the exile, with significant depopulation not reversed until Persian period return.

The 'knowledge of God' theme connects to Hosea's indictment: 'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge' (Hosea 4:6). Israel's covenant calling was to know God and make Him known. Their failure necessitated judgment that would teach, through devastating consequences, what prophetic warning couldn't teach. Post-exilic Judaism did indeed gain deeper knowledge of God through suffering—becoming militantly monotheistic and torah-centered.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does the recognition that even judgment serves to reveal God's character transform your understanding of suffering?
2. What does archaeological confirmation of biblical judgments teach about Scripture's historical reliability?
3. In what ways have you gained knowledge of God through difficult experiences rather than through blessing alone?

Interlinear Text

וְהָעָרִים יִם	הַנְּשׁוּבוֹת	תִּתְּכַר בְּנֶה	וְהָאָרֶץ	שָׁמָּה הִיא
And the cities	that are inhabited	shall be laid waste	and the land	shall be desolate
H5892	H3427	H2717	H776	H8077
תְּהִי הִיא	וַיֵּדְעוּ מִן	כִּי	אֲנִי יְהוָה	
H1961	and ye shall know	H3588	H589	that I am the LORD
	H3045		H3068	

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 4:7 (Parallel theme): The lion is come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way; he is gone forth from his place to make thy land desolate; and thy cities shall be laid waste, without an inhabitant.

Isaiah 3:26 (Parallel theme): And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground.

Jeremiah 25:9 (References Lord): Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations.