

Ezekiel 31:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They also went down into hell with him unto them that be slain with the sword; and they that were his arm, that dwelt under his shadow in the midst of the heathen.

Analysis

They also went down into hell with him unto them that be slain with the sword—Assyria's allies and vassals (הֵם, hēm, 'they') descended to שְׁאוֹל (shě'ôl, 'Sheol') הַלָּלֵה־חֶרֶב (hălālê-ḥereb, 'slain of the sword') along with her. When empires fall, their dependents fall too.

And they that were his arm, that dwelt under his shadow in the midst of the heathen—זְרוֹעוֹ (zě'rô'ô, 'his arm')—military allies; צֶלְלוֹ (šillô, 'his shadow')—vassal states seeking protection. Both perished with Assyria. This warns nations trusting Egypt: when she falls, you fall with her. Dependence on human power is shared doom. Only those trusting God's shadow (Psalm 91:1) find lasting protection; earthly empires' shadows vanish when they fall.

Historical Context

When Assyria fell (612 BC), vassal states were conquered by Babylon: Elam, parts of Media, Syrian states, etc. 'His arm' (military allies) and 'his shadow' (protected vassals) indeed descended with Assyria. Similarly, when Egypt fell to Babylon (568/567 BC), allied states suffered. The pattern holds throughout history: when superpowers collapse, dependent nations collapse with them.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What does allies descending to Sheol with empires teach about misplaced trust?
2. How does 'dwelling under his shadow' contrast with dwelling under God's shadow (Psalm 91)?
3. What modern alliances might prove similarly fatal when 'shadows' vanish?

Interlinear Text

גַּם	יְהִי	אֶת	וְיֵרֵד	אֶל	שָׁא וְלֹהֶ
H1571	H1992	H854	They also went down	into hell	H413
			H3381	H7585	
	חֲלָלִי	בְּ	חֶבֶר	וְזָרַע	וְ
with him unto them that be slain	with the sword	and they that were his arm			
H2491	H2719	H2220			
יָשָׁב	בְּצֶלֶל	בֵּית	גִּוִּיִּם:		
that dwelt	under his shadow	in the midst	of the heathen		
H3427	H6738	H8432	H1471		

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 9:17 (Parallel theme): The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.

Ezekiel 31:6 (Parallel theme): All the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs, and under his branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young, and under his shadow dwelt all great nations.

Ezekiel 31:3 (Parallel theme): Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of an high stature; and his top was among the thick boughs.

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