

Hosea 13:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword: their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up.

Analysis

Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword: their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up. This verse pronounces one of Scripture's most severe judgments against Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. The Hebrew verb for "become desolate" (asham, אָשָׁם) carries connotations of bearing guilt and suffering its consequences—Samaria's desolation flows directly from her guilt before God.

The cause is explicit: "she hath rebelled against her God." The Hebrew marah (מָרָה, "rebelled") describes willful, obstinate defiance against legitimate authority. Israel's covenant relationship with Yahweh made their idolatry not merely religious error but covenant betrayal—spiritual adultery. The horrific imagery of war atrocities (infants dashed, pregnant women killed) reflects the brutal realities of ancient Near Eastern warfare, particularly Assyrian military practices documented in their own annals.

While disturbing, this language serves multiple purposes:

1. it reveals the devastating consequences of corporate sin and covenant breaking
2. it demonstrates that God takes rebellion with ultimate seriousness

3. it fulfills covenant curses promised in Deuteronomy 28:52-57 for disobedience,
4. it shows that God's judgments, though severe, are neither arbitrary nor unjust but flow from violated covenant relationships.

The verse ultimately points to humanity's desperate need for a Savior who would bear judgment in our place.

Historical Context

Samaria served as the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel from approximately 880 BC until its fall in 722 BC. The city was strategically located on a hill, making it defensible, and became the political and religious center of the ten northern tribes after the kingdom divided following Solomon's death. Under kings like Ahab and Jeroboam II, Samaria became synonymous with idolatry, Baal worship, and social injustice—the very sins Hosea prophesied against.

The Assyrian Empire under Shalmaneser V besieged Samaria around 725-722 BC, with Sargon II completing the conquest. Assyrian records confirm their brutal military tactics, including the very atrocities mentioned in this verse. The Assyrians deported the population (2 Kings 17:6), resettled foreigners in the land, and effectively ended the northern kingdom's existence. Archaeological excavations at Samaria have revealed evidence of the siege and destruction, including arrowheads, burned layers, and the abrupt end of Israelite material culture. This historical fulfillment demonstrates the reliability of biblical prophecy and the sobering reality that God's covenant judgments are not empty threats but certain consequences for persistent rebellion.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How should we understand God's character in light of such severe judgments, and how does this relate to His holiness, justice, and hatred of sin?
2. What does Israel's progression from covenant blessing to such devastating judgment teach us about the cumulative effects of unrepented sin?
3. How do these covenant curses help us appreciate the magnitude of Christ bearing God's wrath on our behalf at the cross?
4. In what ways might we be guilty of 'rebellious against our God' while maintaining outward religious observance, as Israel did?
5. How can we respond redemptively to difficult biblical passages while maintaining both God's justice and His love?

Interlinear Text

תִּאֲשָׁם	שָׁמֶר וִן	כִּי	מָרְדָּה	בְּאַלֶּה יָהּ
shall become desolate	Samaria	H3588	for she hath rebelled	against her God
H816	H8111		H4784	H430
בְּחֶרֶב	יִפְּלוּ	עַלְלֵיהֶם	יִרְטָשׁוּ	
by the sword	they shall fall	their infants	shall be dashed in pieces	
H2719	H5307	H5768	H7376	
וְהָרִיתֵי יוֹ	יִבָּקְעוּ:			
and their women with child	shall be ripped up			
H2030	H1234			

Additional Cross-References

2 Kings 8:12 (Word): And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child.

2 Kings 15:16 (Parallel theme): Then Menahem smote Tiphseh, and all that were therein, and the coasts thereof from Tirzah: because they opened not to him, therefore he smote it; and all the women therein that were with child he ripped up.

Isaiah 13:16 (Parallel theme): Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished.

Amos 1:13 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of the children of Ammon, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have ripped up the women with child of Gilead, that they might enlarge their border:

Nahum 3:10 (Parallel theme): Yet was she carried away, she went into captivity: her young children also were dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets: and they cast lots for her honourable men, and all her great men were bound in chains.