

Isaiah 14:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners?

Analysis

'That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners?' The observers recite the king's crimes: turning the world into wilderness (devastation, depopulation), destroying cities (not just conquering but ruining), never releasing prisoners (perpetual captivity, no mercy). These accusations indict tyranny's methods: environmental destruction, urban devastation, refusal of mercy. The final charge—not opening prisoners' house—may allude to refusing to let exiles return home, particularly relevant for Israel's experience. Cyrus, by contrast, opened prisoners' houses, allowing peoples to return (including Jews, Ezra 1:1-4). The Babylonian king's refusal of mercy becomes evidence in judgment.

Historical Context

Assyrian and Babylonian policies did exactly this: depopulating regions through mass deportation (turning them into 'wilderness'), destroying cities that rebelled (archaeological evidence confirms), and keeping populations in permanent exile. The reference to not opening prisoners' houses may specifically indicate not allowing exiled peoples to return home, contrary to ancient Near Eastern norms where conquerors sometimes permitted this after sufficient time. Cyrus's policy of allowing returns was unusual and fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy. The charge sheet against Babylon includes both their treatment of conquered peoples and their violation of mercy and justice.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How do modern forms of empire-building replicate the same destruction, oppression, and refusal of mercy?
2. What does the charge of not releasing prisoners teach about the value God places on freedom and mercy?

Interlinear Text

אָסַיךְ	יְה	שׁ	מַ	לְ	תִּיבְרַ	פְּמַדְבָּרְ	וְעַבְדָּיְהָ	בְּנָסְרָה	בְּנָסְרָה	אָסַיךְ	יְה
That made	the world	as a wilderness		the cities		and destroyed		of his prisoners			
H7760	H8398	H4057		H5892		H2040		H615			
אַ	תְּ	פְּ	תְּ	בִּתְהָ							
H3808	thereof that opened		not the house								
	H6605		H1004								

Additional Cross-References

Joel 2:3 (Parallel theme): A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them.