

Isaiah 14:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the LORD of hosts.

Analysis

'I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the LORD of hosts.' The great city becomes swampland inhabited by birds (bittern—a type of heron; could also be hedgehog or porcupine depending on translation). 'Pools of water' suggests environmental reversal—the irrigated, cultivated land returns to marsh. The metaphor 'sweep it with the besom (broom) of destruction' indicates thorough cleaning out, total removal. This is de-creation—reversing human development, returning to primordial chaos. The once-magnificent city becomes uninhabitable waste, home only to animals. This fate awaited cities under divine judgment (Isaiah 34:11-15; Zephaniah 2:13-15).

Historical Context

Babylon was built near the Euphrates River on low-lying alluvial plain requiring irrigation management. When human maintenance ceased, the area could revert to marshland. After Babylon's decline, the region did become less populated, with sections returning to wetland. Ancient visitors reported ruins covered with reeds and inhabited by wildlife. The prophecy's fulfillment was so complete that Babylon's exact location was disputed until modern archaeology. The imagery of broom sweeping captures thoroughness: God removes all traces of human pride and accomplishment, demonstrating that without His blessing, human achievement reverts to wilderness.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. What does the reversal of human cultivation (city to swamp) teach about the dependence of all human achievements on God's sustaining grace?
2. How should Babylon's fate shape our perspective on building lasting vs. temporary kingdoms?

Interlinear Text

וְשָׁמַת יְהִי לְמֹכֶשׁ לְבָבֶן וְאַגְמִינִי מִים
I will also make it a possession for the bittern and pools of water
H7760 H4180 H7090 H98 H4325

וְסַעֲטָאת יְהִי בְּמַטָּאת אֶת־פְּשָׁמֵד נָאָה אֶבְאוֹת: הָיָה
and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction saith the LORD of hosts
H2894 H4292 H8045 H5002 H3068 H6635

Additional Cross-References

Zephaniah 2:14 (Parallel theme): And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations: both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be in the thresholds: for he shall uncover the cedar work.

Revelation 14:8 (Parallel theme): And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

1 Kings 14:10 (Parallel theme): Therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam him that pisseth against the wall, and

him that is shut up and left in Israel, and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone.

Revelation 18:2 (Parallel theme): And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

2 Kings 21:13 (Parallel theme): And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab: and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down.

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