

Isaiah 29:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust.

Analysis

And thou shalt be brought down (וְשַׁפַּלְתָּ, veshafalt)—the verb שָׁפַל (shafal) means to be humbled, abased, brought low. Jerusalem's proud elevation, both geographically and spiritually, will be reversed. **And shalt speak out of the ground** (מֵעֶרֶץ תִּדְבֹּרִי, me'erets tedaberi)—like a ghost speaking from Sheol, the city's voice will come from the dust of ruins. **And thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground** compares Jerusalem to a necromancer's spirit-voice, a whisper from the realm of the dead.

The imagery is mortuary and eerie. Jerusalem, once elevated on Zion's heights, will be flattened so thoroughly that her speech emerges from dirt and rubble. The phrase **and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust** (וּמֵעָפָר אִמְרָתְךָ תִּצְפָּצֵף, ume'afar imratekh tetsfatsef) uses the verb צָפַף (tsafaf), meaning to chirp or peep like a bird—a pathetic, feeble sound. The once-mighty city reduced to ghostly whispers.

Historical Context

The destruction of cities in ancient warfare involved razing walls, burning buildings, and leaving sites in ruins. Defeated peoples were often depicted as humiliated, brought low. Isaiah's necromantic imagery was particularly shocking

because consulting familiar spirits (אֹב, ov) was forbidden in Israel (Leviticus 19:31, Deuteronomy 18:11). Jerusalem would be so destroyed she'd seem dead.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to be 'brought down' by God, and how is this different from worldly humiliation?
2. How does pride in religious heritage or spiritual position invite divine abasement?
3. When has God silenced your proud voice to teach you humility?

Interlinear Text

וְשַׁפַּלְתָּ	מֵאֶרֶץ	וְתִדְבֶּרְיִי	וּמִעָפָר	
And thou shalt be brought down	out of the ground	and shalt speak	out of the dust	
H8213	H776	H1696	H6083	
וְנִשְׁחַלְחַל	וְאִמְרֹתֶיךָ	וְהָיָה	כְּאִב	
shall be low	and thy speech	H1961	shall be as of one that hath a familiar spirit	
H7817	H565		H178	
וְשַׁפַּלְתָּ	וְקוֹלְךָ	וּמִעָפָר	וְאִמְרֹתֶיךָ	וְתִצְפֹּצֵף:
out of the ground	and thy voice	out of the dust	and thy speech	shall whisper
H776	H6963	H6083	H565	H6850

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 8:19 (Spirit): And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead?

Isaiah 3:8 (Parallel theme): For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen: because their tongue and their doings are against the LORD, to provoke the eyes of his glory.

Psalms 44:25 (Parallel theme): For our soul is bowed down to the dust: our belly cleaveth unto the earth.

Isaiah 51:23 (Parallel theme): But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over: and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over.

Lamentations 1:9 (Parallel theme): Her filthiness is in her skirts; she remembereth not her last end; therefore she came down wonderfully: she had no comforter. O LORD, behold my affliction: for the enemy hath magnified himself.