

Isaiah 30:28

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And his breath, as an overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity: and there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them to err.

Analysis

His breath, as an overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck (וְרוּחוֹ יָבִיחַל שׁוֹטֵף עַד־צַמָּר יַחְצֶה)—God's ruach (breath, spirit, wind) is like a nachal shotef (overflowing torrent) reaching ad-tsavvar (to the neck). The image: floodwaters rising to drowning level—just enough to kill. The verb yechetsah (divide, reach) suggests the waters 'cut through' or reach their target. **To sift the nations with the sieve of vanity**—The verb hanaphah (sift, winnow) with naphah shav (sieve of emptiness/vanity) describes judgment as winnowing process. Chaff (worthless nations) is separated from wheat (God's people).

And there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them to err—The resen (bridle, bit) in lechayayim (jaws/cheeks) of peoples controls them like animals. This bridle causes ta'eh (wandering, going astray, error). God actively directs rebellious nations into self-destructive paths. Romans 1:24, 26, 28 describes God 'giving them up' to depraved minds—a form of judgment where rebels get what they insist on. Isaiah's bridle imagery is harsher: God actively leads them astray as judicial punishment. This terrifying doctrine—divine hardening of hearts (Pharaoh, Exodus 7:3; Israel, Isaiah 6:10)—warns: persistent rebellion eventually meets confirmed judgment where God ensures the sinner's destruction.

Historical Context

Ancient warfare often involved redirecting rivers to flood enemy positions. Assyrian annals describe such tactics. God uses similar imagery—His breath becomes overwhelming flood. The 'sifting' and 'bridle' metaphors would be familiar from agriculture and animal husbandry. Applied to nations, they depict God's sovereign control over geopolitics—He winnows empires and directs kingdoms, often to their own destruction when they oppose His purposes.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does the image of God's breath as drowning flood illustrate the inescapability of divine judgment?
2. What does it mean that God puts a bridle on nations causing them to err—and how does this relate to Romans 1's 'giving them up'?
3. How should believers respond to this terrifying doctrine of divine hardening and judicial blinding?

Interlinear Text

וְרוּחוֹ	כַּנְּחָל	שׁוֹטֵף	עַד	צוֹ אֵר
And his breath	stream	as an overflowing	H5704	of the neck
H7307	H5158	H7857		H6677
יִהְיֶה	לְהִנָּף	גּוֹיִם	בְּנֵי פֶת	שֵׁי וָא
shall reach to the midst	to sift	the nations	with the sieve	of vanity
H2673	H5130	H1471	H5299	H7723
וְרֶסֶן	מִתְּעָה	עַל	לִפְתֵּי י	עַמִּים:
and there shall be a bridle	causing them to err	H5921	in the jaws	of the people
H7448	H8582		H3895	H5971

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 37:29 (Parallel theme): Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult, is come up into mine ears, therefore will I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.

Isaiah 8:8 (Parallel theme): And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.

Isaiah 11:4 (Parallel theme): But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.

2 Thessalonians 2:8 (Parallel theme): And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

Amos 9:9 (Parallel theme): For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth.

2 Kings 19:28 (Parallel theme): Because thy rage against me and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.

Luke 22:31 (Parallel theme): And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

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