

Isaiah 31:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For thus hath the LORD spoken unto me, Like as the lion and the young lion roaring on his prey, when a multitude of shepherds is called forth against him, he will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them: so shall the LORD of hosts come down to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof.

Analysis

For thus hath the LORD spoken unto me, Like as the lion and the young lion roaring on his prey (כִּי כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה אֵלַי כַּאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה הָאֲרִיָּה וְהַכֶּפִּיר עַל־טָרְפוֹ) (ki khoh amar YHWH elay ka'asher yehgeh ha'aryeh vehakfir al-tarpo)—like an אֲרִיָּה (aryeh, lion) and כֶּפִּיר (kefir, young lion) הָגָה (hagah, growling, roaring) over טָרֶף (teref, prey). **When a multitude of shepherds is called forth against him, he will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them** (אֲשֶׁר־אֲשֶׁר־יִקְרָא עָלָיו מִלֵּא רָעִים מִקּוֹלָם לֹא־יִחַת וּמִהֶמוֹנָם לֹא יַעֲנֶה) (asher-yiqare alaw melo ro'im miqolam lo-yechat umehemonam lo ya'aneh). **So shall the LORD of hosts come down to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof** (כֵּן יֵרֵד יְהוָה צָבָאוֹת לְצָבָא) (ken yered YHWH tseva'ot litsvo al-har Tsiyon ve'al-giv'atah).

A stunning reversal: after threatening judgment (vv. 1-3), Isaiah depicts Yahweh as a lion defending His kill—Jerusalem. A lion growling over prey won't be intimidated by shepherds trying to drive it off. Similarly, Yahweh Sabaoth will יָרֵד (yarad, come down) to צָבָא (tsava, fight, wage war) for Zion. The same verb 'come down' used of Judah going down to Egypt (v. 1) now describes God descending to battle for His city. The attackers (Assyrians) are mere shepherds; God is the lion, and Jerusalem is His prey—untouchable.

Historical Context

This metaphor describes the 701 BC deliverance when Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem. Despite overwhelming odds, God defended His city (Isaiah 37:36)—185,000 Assyrian soldiers died overnight. Like a lion refusing to surrender prey, Yahweh wouldn't abandon Jerusalem. Revelation 5:5 calls Christ 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah,' connecting this imagery to Messianic deliverance.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the lion-and-prey metaphor illustrate God's fierce protection of His own?
2. What does it mean that God 'comes down to fight' for His people—His active, warrior-like intervention?
3. When have you experienced God's lion-like defense against enemies or circumstances seeking to devour you?

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Zechariah 2:5 (References Lord): For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.

Zechariah 12:8 (References Lord): In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD before them.

Revelation 5:5 (Parallel theme): And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

Zechariah 14:3 (References Lord): Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.

Isaiah 10:16 (References Lord): Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire.

Isaiah 12:6 (Parallel theme): Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.

Jeremiah 50:44 (Parallel theme): Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the swelling of Jordan unto the habitation of the strong: but I will make them suddenly run away from her: and who is a chosen man, that I may appoint over her? for who is like me? and who will appoint me the time? and who is that shepherd that will stand before me?