

Isaiah 33:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the people shall be as the burnings of lime: as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire.

Analysis

And the people shall be as the burnings of lime (וְהָיוּ עַמִּים מִשְׂרָפוֹת שֵׁיד, vehayu ammim misrefot sid)—peoples (עַמִּים, ammim) will be like מִשְׂרָפוֹת (misrefot, burnings, kilns) of שֵׁיד (sid, lime). **As thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire** (קִוצִים כְּסוּחִים בָּאֵשׁ יִצְטְטוּ, qotsim kesuchim ba'esh yitsattu)—like קִוצִים (qotsim, thorns) cut down (כָּסַח, kasach), in fire (אֵשׁ, esh) they'll be kindled (יָצַט, yatsat).

Double metaphor intensifies judgment's totality. Lime kilns required intense heat—limestone heated to 900°C+ to produce quicklime. Complete combustion, nothing remaining. Thorns cut and burned depict swift, complete destruction—dried thorns ignite instantly, burn fiercely, leave only ash. Hebrews 6:8 warns: 'that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.' Matthew 3:12: 'he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'

Historical Context

Lime production was common in ancient Near East—burning limestone for mortar, plaster. Everyone understood the metaphor: complete, irreversible transformation by fire. Thorns were gathered, dried, and burned as fuel or cleared from fields. Assyria's fate: total destruction, reduced to ash. This wasn't gradual decline but catastrophic judgment—overnight army destruction (701 BC), eventual empire collapse (612 BC). God's judgment is thorough.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What does the lime kiln metaphor teach about judgment's intensity and irreversibility?
2. How does the image of cut thorns burning swiftly warn against fruitless lives?
3. What 'thorns' in your life—sins, habits, attitudes—need to be cut down and burned before God's judgment does it?

Interlinear Text

וְהָיָה	עַמֵּי יִם	מִשְׁרָפֹת	שֵׁן יָד	קִוְצֵי יִם	כְּסֻחֵי יִם
H1961	And the people	shall be as the burnings	of lime	as thorns	cut up
	H5971	H4955	H7875	H6975	H3683
בְּאֵשׁ	יִצְתּוּ:				
in the fire	shall they be burned				
H784	H3341				

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 27:4 (Parallel theme): Fury is not in me: who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together.