

Isaiah 47:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Take the millstones, and grind meal: uncover thy locks, make bare the leg, uncover the thigh, pass over the rivers.

Analysis

Take the millstones, and grind meal: uncover thy locks, make bare the leg, uncover the thigh, pass over the rivers. God commands personified Babylon to assume the posture of abject slavery and humiliation. Grinding grain with hand-mills was the lowest slave labor (Exodus 11:5, Judges 16:21), typically assigned to captured women. The verb tachan (grind) sometimes carries sexual connotation in Hebrew, suggesting forced prostitution alongside forced labor.

"Uncover thy locks, make bare the leg, uncover the thigh" describes progressive stripping of garments, exposing what modesty demands remain covered. Ancient Near Eastern captives were often marched naked through victorious cities (2 Samuel 10:4, Nahum 3:5). This reversal is profound - Babylon, the empire that stripped nations bare, will herself be exposed. The command "pass over the rivers" indicates exile - precisely what Babylon inflicted on Israel - will befall the oppressor.

From a Reformed perspective, this verse demonstrates God's lex talionis (law of retaliation) operating at cosmic scale. Babylon's pride, exploitation, and violence boomerang back upon her. God's justice ensures oppressors receive the treatment they inflicted. Yet this principle also magnifies grace - in Christ, believers escape the just punishment our sins deserve because Christ bore our shame and exposure on the cross.

Historical Context

This prophecy depicts Babylon's fall to Cyrus the Persian (539 BC). Historical records describe how Cyrus's forces diverted the Euphrates River and entered Babylon through the dry riverbed, capturing the city virtually without battle. The Cyrus Cylinder confirms that Babylonian aristocracy was deposed and the empire's wealth plundered. The imagery of 'passing over the rivers' may reference Babylonian captives being deported across the Tigris and Euphrates into Persian territory, mirroring Israel's deportation decades earlier.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does Babylon's reversal of fortune demonstrate God's commitment to justice for the oppressed?
2. In what ways have you witnessed or experienced the principle that 'whatever a man sows, that he will also reap' (Galatians 6:7)?
3. How should awareness of divine justice's certainty shape both your pursuit of holiness and your gratitude for Christ bearing our deserved judgment?

Interlinear Text

קְרַב	רַם יָם	וְעַל קְרִבָּה	קְרַב מֵה	גַּלְעִיד	צְמַת הַר	חַשְׁפֵּי
Take	the millstones	and grind	meal	uncover	thy locks	make bare
H3947	H7347	H2912	H7058	H1540	H6777	H2834

בָּל	שָׁבֵל	גָּלֵי	וְקָרְבָּן	עַבְרִי	גְּרֹרוֹת
the leg	uncover	the thigh	pass over	the rivers	
H7640	H1540	H7785	H5674		H5104

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 24:41 (Parallel theme): Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Isaiah 20:4 (Parallel theme): So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.

Exodus 11:5 (Parallel theme): And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts.

Judges 16:21 (Parallel theme): But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house.

Job 31:10 (Parallel theme): Then let my wife grind unto another, and let others bow down upon her.

Luke 17:35 (Parallel theme): Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left.