

Jeremiah 18:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

To make their land desolate, and a perpetual hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head.

Analysis

The result of leaving God's path: "To make their land desolate, and a perpetual hissing." Desolation describes both physical devastation from invasion and spiritual emptiness from covenant violation. "Perpetual hissing" (shreqah, שְׁרִקָּה, astonishment/derision) indicates lasting infamy—future generations will point to Judah's ruins as an object lesson. "Every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head"—wagging the head expresses contempt, mockery, or horror.

The theological principle: sin brings shame and ruin, not just to individuals but to entire communities. Judah's rebellion will result in national disgrace visible to surrounding nations. This fulfills covenant curses (Deut 28:37, 1 Kgs 9:7-8)—Israel would become a byword and mockery among peoples. What was meant to be a showcase of God's blessing becomes an exhibit of judgment.

This warning applies to Christian witness. When believers or churches abandon biblical truth and practice, they bring reproach on Christ's name. The watching world mocks Christian hypocrisy and failure. Conversely, faithful covenant-keeping adorns the gospel and commends it to others (Tit 2:10). The Reformed emphasis on cultural transformation recognizes that Christian faithfulness or unfaithfulness affects entire societies.

Historical Context

Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC fulfilled this prophecy precisely. The magnificent temple Solomon built became rubble, the fortified city walls crumbled, and the people were led into exile. For centuries afterward, travelers passing through saw the desolate ruins, remembering how covenant violation brought catastrophic judgment. Archaeological excavations reveal extensive destruction layers from this period, confirming the prophetic word.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does awareness that your unfaithfulness affects not just you but your witness to others motivate obedience?
2. What desolation and mockery result from abandoning God's paths in your personal life or church?
3. How can you avoid bringing reproach on Christ's name through inconsistency between profession and practice?

Interlinear Text

כִּילְעֹזֶל מְשֻׁרְקָת לְשֻׁמְתָּה אֶרְצָם לְשָׁם

To make their land desolate

H7760

H776

desolate

H8047

שְׁרֻוקְתָּה לְשֻׁמְתָּה

hissing

H8292

עֹזֶל מְשֻׁרְקָת

and a perpetual

H3605

עֹזֶב רַבְעָבָה

every one that passeth

H5674

עַל יְמֵינָה

H5921

thereby shall be astonished

H8074

עַל מִשְׁמָרָה

H8074

וְיַזְרְעֵל

and wag

H5110

בְּרַאשָׁוֹן

his head

H7218

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 22:7 (Parallel theme): All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,

Jeremiah 25:9 (Sin): Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations.

Jeremiah 19:8 (Sin): And I will make this city desolate, and an hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished and hiss because of all the plagues thereof.

Jeremiah 49:13 (Parallel theme): For I have sworn by myself, saith the LORD, that Bozrah shall become a desolation, a reproach, a waste, and a curse; and all the cities thereof shall be perpetual wastes.

Jeremiah 50:13 (Parallel theme): Because of the wrath of the LORD it shall not be inhabited, but it shall be wholly desolate: every one that goeth by Babylon shall be astonished, and hiss at all her plagues.

Matthew 27:39 (Parallel theme): And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,

1 Kings 9:8 (Parallel theme): And at this house, which is high, every one that passeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss; and they shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and to this house?

Micah 6:16 (Sin): For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels; that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof an hissing: therefore ye shall bear the reproach of my people.

Isaiah 37:22 (Parallel theme): This is the word which the LORD hath spoken concerning him; The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee.

Mark 15:29 (Parallel theme): And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days,