

Jeremiah 22:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And many nations shall pass by this city, and they shall say every man to his neighbour, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this great city?

Analysis

And many nations shall pass by this city—the Hebrew *goyim rabbim* (גוֹיִם רַבִּים, 'many nations') indicates that Jerusalem's desolation will become an international spectacle. Where nations once came to admire Solomon's wisdom and temple splendor (1 Kings 10:24), they will now pass by ruins with astonishment. The verb *avru* (עָבְרוּ, 'pass by') suggests travelers on main routes observing the wreckage. **And they shall say every man to his neighbour** (ve'amru ish el-re'ehu, וְאָמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל-רֵעֵהוּ)—the dialogue formula shows this will provoke theological discussion even among pagans.

Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this great city? (al-meh asah YHWH kakah la'ir hagedolah hazot, עַל-מֶה עָשָׂה יְהוָה כָּכָה לְעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה הַזֹּאת, YHWH kakah la'ir hagedolah hazot, עַל-מֶה עָשָׂה יְהוָה כָּכָה לְעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה הַזֹּאת)—they specifically attribute Jerusalem's fall to YHWH, not to Marduk or Babylonian might. Even pagans recognize that Jerusalem's God judged His own city. The term **this great city** is ironic: its greatness made the desolation more shocking. This echoes Deuteronomy 29:24-25, where Moses prophesied that future generations would ask this exact question. The pattern appears with Sodom (Genesis 19:24-25) and later with Babylon itself (Revelation 18:9-10). Ruins become testimony to divine judgment.

Historical Context

This prophecy received dramatic fulfillment. Babylon destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC, leaving it in ruins that shocked the ancient world. Lamentations 2:15 records travelers' reactions: 'All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?' Jerusalem, once admired for temple splendor and Davidic glory, became an object lesson in divine judgment. The theological question—'Why did YHWH do this?'—presumes that Israel's God, not Babylonian deities, controlled the outcome. This is crucial: even pagans recognized the fall as covenant judgment, not military superiority. Later, Nehemiah 2:13-17 describes ruins still visible 142 years after destruction. Jesus prophesied similar desolation for the second temple (Matthew 24:1-2), fulfilled in AD 70. The pattern teaches that covenant unfaithfulness brings visible, undeniable judgment that testifies to God's reality even among unbelievers.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. What does the international recognition of God's judgment ('Wherefore hath the LORD done thus') teach about how divine discipline testifies to God's reality even among pagans?
2. How does the contrast between Jerusalem as 'great city' and ruined spectacle illustrate the reversal that comes from squandering covenant privilege?
3. What does this verse reveal about God's willingness to use His people's visible failure as testimony to His justice and the seriousness of covenant obligations?

Interlinear Text

וְעָבְרוּ גוֹיִם רַבִּים עַל לְעִיר הַזֹּאת וְאָמְרוּ
shall pass **nations** **And many** H5921 **by this city** H2063 **and they shall say**
H5674 H1471 H7227 H5892 H559

אֵשׁ אֶל רֵיעֵהוּ עַל מָה עָשָׂה יְהוָה
every man H413 **to his neighbour** H5921 H4100 **done** **Wherefore hath the LORD**
H376 H7453 H6213 H3068

כָּה לְעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה הַזֹּאת:
H3602 **by this city** **thus unto this great** H2063
H5892 H1419

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