

Jeremiah 47:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Baldness is come upon Gaza; Ashkelon is cut off with the remnant of their valley: how long wilt thou cut thyself?

Analysis

Baldness is come upon Gaza; Ashkelon is cut off with the remnant of their valley: how long wilt thou cut thyself? This verse depicts mourning rituals among the Philistines facing Babylonian conquest. "Baldness" (qorchah, קֹרְחָה) refers to shaving the head as a sign of grief—a practice forbidden to Israelites (Leviticus 21:5, Deuteronomy 14:1) but common among pagan nations. That "baldness is come upon Gaza" means the city has entered deep mourning, recognizing impending or accomplished destruction.

"Ashkelon is cut off" (nidmeta Ashkelon, נִדְמֵתָ אֲשֶׁקֶלֶן) uses the verb דָּמָה (damah) meaning to be silent, destroyed, or brought to nothing. This coastal Philistine city faces annihilation. "The remnant of their valley" (or "the remnant of the Anakim," depending on textual reading) indicates that even survivors face devastation—complete conquest leaves no secure refuge.

"How long wilt thou cut thyself?" addresses the Philistines' self-laceration in mourning (titgodadi, תִּתְּגֹדָדִי, from gadad, גָּדַד, to cut or gash oneself). This pagan mourning practice (also forbidden to Israel, Deuteronomy 14:1) involved cutting one's skin to express grief. Jeremiah's rhetorical question doesn't offer comfort but highlights the futility of such practices—no amount of ritual mourning can avert God's decreed judgment. The mourning itself becomes evidence of helplessness before divine wrath.

Historical Context

Gaza and Ashkelon were two of the five major Philistine cities (the Pentapolis), along with Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath. Archaeological evidence confirms Babylonian military campaigns against Philistine territories in the late 7th and early 6th centuries BCE. Nebuchadnezzar's chronicles record campaigns against cities in the coastal region during his systematic conquest of the Levant before and after the fall of Jerusalem (586 BCE).

The Philistines, Israel's ancient enemies, had occupied the coastal plain since the 12th century BCE. By Jeremiah's time, they had been weakened by Assyrian and Egyptian campaigns but remained significant city-states. Their inclusion in Jeremiah's oracles against the nations (chapters 46-51) demonstrates that God's judgment extends to all peoples—both Israel and the surrounding nations face accountability for their sins.

The reference to cutting oneself and shaving heads reflects documented Canaanite and Philistine mourning practices. Archaeological finds include dedicatory inscriptions and artistic depictions showing mourners with shaved heads and ritual wounds. These practices sought to appease deities or demonstrate extreme grief, but proved powerless against the sovereign God's decreed judgment executed through Babylon's armies.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's judgment on Israel's ancient enemies demonstrate His sovereignty over all nations, not just His covenant people?
2. In what ways do people today engage in futile religious rituals hoping to avert consequences of sin rather than repenting?

3. What does the failure of pagan mourning practices teach about the difference between genuine repentance and merely external religious observance?

Interlinear Text

בָּ אָה	קִרְחָה	אֶל	עַל הַ	נְדָמָה הַ	אַשְׁקֶל וְ	שְׂאֵר יֵת
is come	Baldness	H413	upon Gaza	is cut off	Ashkelon	with the remnant
H935	H7144		H5804	H1820	H831	H7611
עֲמָקָם	עַד	מִתְּ	תִתְגַּדְּדִי:			
of their valley	H5704	H4970	how long wilt thou cut			
H6010			H1413			

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 48:37 (Parallel theme): For every head shall be bald, and every beard clipped: upon all the hands shall be cuttings, and upon the loins sackcloth.

Jeremiah 25:20 (Parallel theme): And all the mingled people, and all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the land of the Philistines, and Ashkelon, and Azzah, and Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod,

Jeremiah 41:5 (Parallel theme): That there came certain from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, even fourscore men, having their beards shaven, and their clothes rent, and having cut themselves, with offerings and incense in their hand, to bring them to the house of the LORD.

Micah 1:16 (Parallel theme): Make thee bald, and poll thee for thy delicate children; enlarge thy baldness as the eagle; for they are gone into captivity from thee.