

Jeremiah 48:39

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They shall howl, saying, How is it broken down! how hath Moab turned the back with shame! so shall Moab be a derision and a dismay to all them about him.

Analysis

They shall howl, saying, How is it broken down! (הִלְילוּ אֵיךְ חִתָּה)—The command/prediction to 'howl' (yalal, יָלַל—wail, lament loudly) introduces a funeral dirge. The question 'How is it broken down?' (ek chattah, אֵיךְ חִתָּה) expresses shock and dismay—the word chattah (חִתָּה) means to be shattered, dismayed, broken. This rhetorical question of stunned disbelief appears in other laments (Lamentations 1:1, 2:1, 4:1).

How hath Moab turned the back with shame! (אֵיךְ הִפְנֵה-עָרֵף בֹּשׁ מוֹאָב). Turning the back (panah oref, פָּנָה עָרֵף) means fleeing in defeat, showing the back to the enemy rather than facing them—military rout. The word bosh (בֹּשׁ) means shame, disgrace, humiliation. **So shall Moab be a derision and a dismay to all them about him** (וְיִהָיָה מוֹאָב לְשֹׁחֵן וְלִמְחִתָּה לְכָל-סְבִיבָיו). The same word for derision (sechoq, שְׁחֹק) that Moab used against Israel (v. 27) is now applied to them—poetic justice. They become an object of mockery and terror (mechittah, מִחִתָּה—terror, dismay) to surrounding nations.

Historical Context

This prophecy reverses Moab's position. They had mocked Israel's exile (v. 27), but now they experience the same fate. The phrase 'turned the back' describes military defeat—fleeing enemies in shame rather than standing firm. When Babylon conquered Moab (circa 582 BC), surrounding nations (Ammon, Edom, Arabia)

witnessed Moab's humiliation. The once-proud nation became a cautionary tale. This fulfilled the Abrahamic covenant principle: those who curse Israel will themselves be cursed (Genesis 12:3). Moab's name eventually disappeared from history, absorbed into larger empires—the ultimate derision.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does Moab becoming a 'derision' after mocking Israel illustrate the principle that we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7)?
2. What does it mean to 'turn the back with shame,' and how does this describe spiritual defeat as well as military defeat?
3. In what ways should awareness that God defends those who trust Him (even under discipline) shape how we treat others experiencing hardship?

Interlinear Text

עַד הַפְנֵה אֵין חִיל יְלוֹן
H349 saying How is it broken down They shall howl H349 turned the back
H2865 H3213 H6437 H6203

וְלֹמַחַת הַלְשׁוֹן כִּי מֹאֲבָן וְבָזֶשׁ הַיְלֵדָה
how hath Moab with shame H1961 how hath Moab be a derision and a dismaying
H4124 H954 H4124 H7814 H4288

לְכָל סְבִיבָיוֹן
H3605 to all them about H5439