

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 dismaying to all them about him.

Analysis

They shall howl, saying, How is it broken down! (הִילִילוּ אֵיךְ חָתָה)—The command/prediction to 'howl' (yalal, יָלַל—wail, lament loudly) introduces a funeral dirge. The question 'How is it broken down?' (ek chattah, אֵיךְ חָתָה) expresses shock and dismay—the word chatah (חָתָה) 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 הִפְנָה-עֲרָף בּוֹשׁ מוֹאָב). Turning the back (panah oref, פָּנָה עֲרָף) means fleeing in defeat, showing the back to the enemy rather than facing them—military rout. The word bosh (בוֹשׁ) means shame, disgrace, humiliation. **So shall Moab be a derision and a dismaying to all them about him** (וְהָיָה מוֹאָב לְשִׁחֻק וּלְמַחְתָּה לְכָל-סְבִיבָיו). The same word for derision (sechoq, שִׁחֻק) that Moab used against Israel (v. 27) is now applied to them—poetic justice. They become an object of mockery and terror (mechittah, מַחְתָּה—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

אֵי יִרְ	חַ תָּה	הֵיל יִלוּ	אֵי יִרְ	הִפְנָה	עַרְף
H349			H349		
saying	How is it broken down	They shall howl	turned	the back	
	H2865	H3213	H6437	H6203	
מוֹאָב	בִּשְׁמֹתָ	וְהָיָה	מוֹאָב	לְשֹׁחַ קִ	וְלִמְחַתָּה
H4124	H954	H1961	H4124	H7814	H4288
how hath Moab	with shame	how hath Moab	be a derision	and a	dismaying
לְכָל	סְבִיבָיו:				
H3605					
to all them about					
	H5439				