

Jeremiah 49:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Howl, O Heshbon, for Ai is spoiled: cry, ye daughters of Rabbah, gird you with sackcloth; lament, and run to and fro by the hedges; for their king shall go into captivity, and his priests and his princes together.

Analysis

Howl, O Heshbon, for Ai is spoiled: cry, ye daughters of Rabbah. God commands Ammonite cities to lament their coming destruction. 'Howl' (yalal, יָלַל) is a cry of anguish, wailing in grief—often associated with funeral mourning. Heshbon, originally an Amorite city conquered by Israel, had apparently fallen under Ammonite control. 'Ai is spoiled' (shuddad, שֻׁדָּד, devastated/destroyed) refers either to an Ammonite town named Ai or uses 'Ai' generically meaning 'ruin.' The 'daughters of Rabbah' are the dependent villages surrounding the capital.

Gird you with sackcloth; lament, and run to and fro by the hedges. Three mourning rituals are commanded:

1. wearing saq (שֹׂא, sackcloth)—coarse garment of grief
2. lamenting (saphed, סָפַד)—formal mourning wailing,
3. running 'to and fro by the hedges' (shavash ba-gedarot)—frantic, confused wandering among enclosures, possibly seeking hiding places or expressing disoriented panic.

These are actions of those facing inescapable doom.

For their king shall go into captivity, and his priests and his princes

together. The phrase 'their king' (malkam, מַלְכָּם) is deliberately ambiguous—it could mean (1) their human king, or (2) Milcom/Molech, the Ammonite deity (1 Kings 11:5, 33). Likely both meanings apply: both political and religious leadership will be exiled. The comprehensive judgment includes rulers ('princes'), religious leaders ('priests'), and the god they worshiped. This fulfills the pattern: gods cannot save their worshipers (Isaiah 46:1-2).

Historical Context

Heshbon was originally Moabite, conquered by Sihon the Amorite (Numbers 21:26), then taken by Israel and assigned to Reuben/Gad (Numbers 32:37, Joshua 13:17). Its shifting control reflects the contested border region between Israel, Moab, and Ammon. When Babylon invaded, Ammonite leadership was indeed captured—their king and nobles were exiled. The reference to 'their king' (possibly Milcom) going into captivity echoes Isaiah 46:1-2, where Babylonian gods Bel and Nebo are carried into exile. Archaeological excavations at Rabbah (modern Amman) show destruction layers from the 6th century BC consistent with Babylonian conquest.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What does the command for Ammon's cities to 'howl' and 'lament' teach about the certainty and severity of God's judgment on those who oppose His people?
2. How does the exile of both Ammon's human king and their god Milcom demonstrate the impotence of false gods and worldly power?
3. In what ways should Christians soberly recognize that neither political power nor false religion can ultimately protect those who reject the true God?

Interlinear Text

הִיל יְלִי	חֶשְׁבֹּן וְ	כִּי	שָׁדְדָה	עַי	צַעֲקָנָה	בְּנוֹת
Howl	O Heshbon	H3588	is spoiled	for Ai	cry	ye daughters
H3213	H2809		H7703	H5857	H6817	H1323
וְהִתְשׁוּטְ	טָנָה	סֵפֶּה דָנָה	שָׁקִים	חֲגִי רָנָה	רָבָה	
and run to and fro		lament	you with sackcloth	gird	of Rabbah	
H7751		H5594	H8242	H2296	H7237	
כֹּהֲנֵי יוֹ	יְלִי	בְּגוֹלָה	מַלְכָּם	כִּי	בְּגִדֵּר וְ	
and his priests		into captivity	for their king		by the hedges	
H3548	H1980	H1473	H4428	H3588	H1448	
וְיָחִידָיו:	וְשָׂרֵי יוֹ					
together	and his princes					
H3162	H8269					

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 48:7 (Parallel theme): For because thou hast trusted in thy works and in thy treasures, thou shalt also be taken: and Chemosh shall go forth into captivity with his priests and his princes together.

Isaiah 15:2 (Parallel theme): He is gone up to Bajith, and to Dibon, the high places, to weep: Moab shall howl over Nebo, and over Medeba: on all their heads shall be baldness, and every beard cut off.

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 4:8 (Parallel theme): For this gird you with sackcloth, lament and howl: for the fierce anger of the LORD is not turned back from us.

Jeremiah 46:25 (Kingdom): The LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saith; Behold, I will punish the multitude of No, and Pharaoh, and Egypt, with their gods, and their kings; even Pharaoh, and all them that trust in him:

1 Kings 11:5 (Parallel theme): For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.

1 Kings 11:33 (Parallel theme): Because that they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do that which is right in mine eyes, and to keep my statutes and my judgments, as did David his father.

2 Kings 23:13 (Kingdom): And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the king defile.