

Jeremiah 50:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Cut off the sower from Babylon, and him that handleth the sickle in the time of harvest: for fear of the oppressing sword they shall turn every one to his people, and they shall flee every one to his own land.

Analysis

Cut off the sower from Babylon, and him that handleth the sickle in the time of harvest—agricultural imagery depicts total economic devastation. The zore'a (עֹמֶר, sower) who plants and the reaper with the maggil (לְמַגֵּל, sickle) represent the entire agricultural cycle from planting to harvest. Cutting them off means no food production, economic collapse, famine. This fulfills covenant curses (Deuteronomy 28:33, 51)—enemies will consume the fruit of your labor.

For fear of the oppressing sword they shall turn every one to his people, and they shall flee every one to his own land—the cosmopolitan empire disintegrates. The 'oppressing sword' (cherev hayonah, חֶרֶב הַיּוֹנָה) causes mass exodus. Babylon was multi-ethnic, with conquered peoples and mercenary soldiers from many nations. Under pressure, these foreigners abandon Babylon, fleeing to their homelands. The reversal is complete: Babylon had forcibly gathered nations into her empire; now those nations scatter in panic. This illustrates that empires built on conquest and forced unity collapse when the coercive power fails. Only covenant unity based on God's grace endures.

Historical Context

The Babylonian Empire included diverse peoples—Arameans, Egyptians, Arabs, Greeks, and others. When Cyrus conquered Babylon, many of these groups did indeed return to their homelands or shift allegiance to Persia. The Cyrus Cylinder records his policy of allowing captive peoples to return home—including the Jewish exiles who returned to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1). The agricultural devastation was also literal; warfare disrupted farming, and Babylon's irrigation-dependent agriculture required stable governance to maintain.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What does the flight of foreigners from Babylon teach about the fragility of unity based on power rather than covenant relationship?
2. How does the cutting off of sowers and reapers illustrate that God's judgment touches every aspect of life, not just military defeat?
3. In what ways does this verse foreshadow the principle that what is built by the sword perishes by the sword (Matthew 26:52)?

Interlinear Text

כָּרְתָּה	עַזְוֹר	לְמִבְּבָבָךְ	שְׁתִּיכְפַּע	לְמִבְּבָבָךְ	תְּמִימָה	לְמִבְּבָבָךְ	תְּמִימָה
Cut off	the sower	from Babylon	and him that handleth	the sickle	in the time		
H3772	H2232	H894	H8610	H4038	H6256		
רִאשָׁת	מִפְנֵי	כִּרְבָּנָה	הַבְּזִקָּה	וְאַל	עַמּוֹ		
of harvest	for fear	sword	of the oppressing	every one	to his people		
H7105	H6440	H2719	H3238	H376	H5971		
וְאַל	לְאָרֶץ	וְאַל	וְאַל	וְאַל			
	וְאַל	וְאַל	וְאַל	וְאַל			
they shall turn	every one	to his own land	and they shall flee				
H6437	H376	H776	H5127				

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 13:14 (Parallel theme): And it shall be as the chased roe, and as a sheep that no man taketh up: they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee every one into his own land.

Jeremiah 51:9 (References Babylon): We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and let us go every one into his own country: for her judgment reacheth unto heaven, and is lifted up even to the skies.

Jeremiah 46:16 (Word): He made many to fall, yea, one fell upon another: and they said, Arise, and let us go again to our own people, and to the land of our nativity, from the oppressing sword.

Joel 1:11 (Parallel theme): Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen; howl, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished.