

Jeremiah 51:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

With thee also will I break in pieces man and woman; and with thee will I break in pieces old and young; and with thee will I break in pieces the young man and the maid;

Analysis

With thee also will I break in pieces man and woman; and with thee will I break in pieces old and young; and with thee will I break in pieces the young man and the maid—This verse begins a relentless catalog of categories God will shatter using Babylon (the "thee") as His battle-axe (v. 20). The Hebrew verb naphats (נָפַת, "break in pieces") appears twelve times in verses 20-23, creating a rhythmic, hammer-like effect that mirrors the destruction being described.

The comprehensive pairings—man/woman, old/young, young man/maid—emphasize totality: no demographic is exempt when God executes judgment. This divine use of Babylon as an instrument paradoxically precedes Babylon's own destruction (v. 24), demonstrating God's sovereign ability to employ evil nations as tools of judgment before judging them for their wickedness. The same principle appears in Isaiah 10:5-19 with Assyria as "the rod of mine anger."

Theologically, this passage reveals:

1. God can use wicked instruments to accomplish righteous purposes
2. being God's tool of judgment doesn't exempt a nation from its own judgment
3. divine judgment is comprehensive and impartial, affecting all classes and ages

4. God's justice operates on a scale beyond individual lives, encompassing whole civilizations.

Historical Context

Jeremiah delivered this oracle during Babylon's zenith (605-562 BCE under Nebuchadnezzar), when Babylon functioned as God's chosen instrument to judge Judah (Jeremiah 25:9, 27:6) and surrounding nations. The Babylonian Empire systematically conquered the ancient Near East, breaking in pieces kingdoms from Egypt to Elam.

Yet even as Babylon executed God's judgments, its brutality, pride, and idolatry accumulated divine wrath. The catalog of destruction in verses 22-23 describes what Babylon inflicted on others—particularly Jerusalem in 586 BCE, when Nebuchadnezzar's forces destroyed the temple, killed young and old, and deported survivors (2 Kings 25; Lamentations). The prophecy announces that Babylon will experience similar comprehensive devastation—fulfilled when Cyrus conquered in 539 BCE.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's use of Babylon as a judgment tool, followed by Babylon's own judgment, demonstrate divine justice?
2. What does the comprehensive nature of judgment (all ages, genders, roles) teach about the seriousness of corporate sin?
3. How should Christians understand God's sovereignty over nations that don't acknowledge Him?

Interlinear Text

וְאַשְׁתָּה
With thee also will I break in pieces
H5310

בָּבָשׂ אֲשֶׁר
man and woman
H376 H802

וְאַשְׁתָּה
With thee also will I break in pieces
H5310

בָּבָשׂ יֵלֵךְ | בָּבָשׂ
old and young
H2205 H5288

וְאַשְׁתָּה
With thee also will I break in pieces
H5310

בָּבָשׂ וְבָבָשׂ
the young man and the maid
H970 H1330

Additional Cross-References

2 Chronicles 36:17 (Parallel theme): Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand.

Isaiah 13:18 (Parallel theme): Their bows also shall dash the young men to pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye shall not spare children.

Jeremiah 6:11 (Parallel theme): Therefore I am full of the fury of the LORD; I am weary with holding in: I will pour it out upon the children abroad, and upon the assembly of young men together: for even the husband with the wife shall be taken, the aged with him that is full of days.

Deuteronomy 32:25 (Parallel theme): The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of gray hairs.

Ezekiel 9:6 (Parallel theme): Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house.

Lamentations 2:11 (Parallel theme): Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people; because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city.

1 Samuel 15:3 (Parallel theme): Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and sucking, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

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