

Jeremiah 51:38

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They shall roar together like lions: they shall yell as lions' whelps.

Analysis

They shall roar together like lions: they shall yell as lions' whelps. This verse shifts imagery from Babylon's desolation (v. 37) to the behavior of Babylonians before judgment falls. The lion imagery has dual significance: it depicts Babylon's former strength and ferocity, but contextually suggests futile defiance or drunken revelry before sudden destruction. **Roar together** translates yakhad yiš'agu ka-kephirim (יחד ישׁאגוּ קָפְרִים)—ša'ag denotes the roar of a lion, expressing power, confidence, or aggression. Kephirim refers to young lions in their prime strength.

They shall yell as lions' whelps uses na'aru (נָעָרָו, yell/growl/shake) and gure arayot (גָּרָרִי אֲרָיוֹת, lion cubs/whelps). The parallel structure suggests both adult lions and cubs roaring—comprehensive ferocity or collective noise. However, the following verse (39) indicates this 'roaring' occurs during drunken feasting, suggesting the sound represents prideful celebration rather than genuine strength. Lions often symbolize Babylon in Scripture (Jeremiah 4:7, 50:17, Daniel 7:4), but here the imagery is ironic: their roaring ends in drunken stupor and death (v. 39).

This connects to Daniel 5, where Belshazzar's feast featured drunken revelry ('roaring') immediately before Babylon's conquest. Their 'lion-like' roaring became the death rattle of a doomed empire. True strength belongs to the 'Lion of Judah' (Revelation 5:5), not earthly empires.

Historical Context

Historical accounts of Babylon's fall (539 BC) confirm that the city was celebrating a religious festival when Cyrus's forces entered. Herodotus and other sources describe drinking and revelry, making the military unprepared for attack. Daniel 5 provides biblical narrative of Belshazzar's feast—drunken celebration using sacred vessels from Jerusalem's temple, immediately before the handwriting on the wall announced judgment. The 'roaring like lions' captures Babylon's self-confident pride even as judgment approached. The lion was Babylon's symbol—depicted on the Ishtar Gate and in iconography. But their roar could not prevent God's appointed judgment. The irony is profound: they roared like lions but were slaughtered like lambs (v. 40). This fulfills the pattern throughout Scripture that pride precedes destruction and God humbles the arrogant (Isaiah 2:12, 1 Peter 5:5-6).

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the irony of Babylon 'roaring like lions' while facing imminent judgment illustrate the blindness of pride?
2. What does the connection between this verse and Daniel 5's feast teach about the danger of self-confident celebration when God's judgment is near?
3. In what ways might individuals or nations today 'roar like lions' in proud defiance while standing under divine judgment?

Interlinear Text

אֶבְיוֹת: גָּגָר ۱ נְגָר ۱ יְנָחָד ۱
together like lions They shall roar they shall yell whelps as lions
H3162 H3715 H7580 H5286 H1484 H738

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 2:15 (Parallel theme): The young lions roared upon him, and yelled, and they made his land waste: his cities are burned without inhabitant.

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