

Jeremiah 52:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard left certain of the poor of the land for vinedressers and for husbandmen.

Analysis

But Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard left certain of the poor of the land (וּמִדַּלַּת הָאָרֶץ, umidallat ha'arets)—the Hebrew dallat means the impoverished, helpless, or insignificant. These were people without land, resources, or political influence, considered economically worthless to deport to Babylon. **For vinedressers and for husbandmen** (לְכֹרְמִים וְלִיִּגְבִּים, lekhormim uleyogevim)—as agricultural workers to maintain the land's productivity for Babylon's benefit. This fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy: 'The poor of the land' would remain while the elite were exiled (Jeremiah 39:10, 40:7).

This detail reveals God's providence and irony: the wealthy, powerful, and educated who trusted in their own strength were dragged to Babylon, while the despised poor who had nothing to lose remained in the land. This reversal anticipates Jesus's teaching that the last shall be first (Matthew 19:30) and Mary's Magnificat: 'He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree' (Luke 1:52). The poor who remained became the nucleus of the post-exilic community, eventually joined by returning exiles. Gedaliah was appointed governor over them (40:7-12), attempting to rebuild, though even this effort ended in tragedy (41:1-3). God's judgment includes mercy—even in devastation, He preserved a remnant.

Historical Context

Babylon's policy of selective deportation served strategic purposes: removing educated, skilled, and influential classes prevented organized rebellion while leaving agricultural workers maintained the land's economic productivity. Jeremiah 52:28-30 numbers the exiles at about 4,600 men (likely representing total families of 15,000-20,000 people), while the poor left behind may have numbered similar amounts. Archaeological evidence shows that while Jerusalem and fortified cities were destroyed, rural agricultural areas continued some occupation, though dramatically reduced. The 'poor of the land' included subsistence farmers, day laborers, and those who owned no property—people who had already suffered under Judah's unjust economic systems condemned by prophets (Jeremiah 5:26-28, 22:13-17). Ironically, these victims of Israel's social injustice became the survivors. The Babylonian period in Judah (586-539 BC) saw minimal urban occupation but continued agricultural production. Archaeological surveys indicate population dropped by about 75%, concentrated in rural areas. Gedaliah's brief governorship (Jeremiah 40-41) attempted to organize these survivors into a functioning province, encouraging refugees to return and harvest crops, but his assassination plunged the region into further chaos.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What does God's preservation of the poor while exiling the powerful teach about His values and priorities?
2. How does this verse fulfill prophetic warnings that those who trusted in wealth and power would lose everything?
3. In what ways does God's kingdom consistently reverse worldly hierarchies of importance and value?

Interlinear Text

וּמִדֵּל אוֹת	הָאָרֶץ	הַשָּׂא יָרָא	נְבוּזַרְאֲדָן	רַב
certain of the poor	of the land	left	But Nebuzaradan	the captain
H1803	H776	H7604	H5018	H7227
טִבְּחֵי יָם	לְכַרְמֵי יָם	וּלְיֹגְבִים:		
of the guard	for vinedressers	and for husbandmen		
H2876	H3755	H3009		

Additional Cross-References

2 Kings 25:12 (Parallel theme): But the captain of the guard left of the poor of the land to be vinedressers and husbandmen.