

Joel 3:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Behold, I will raise them out of the place whither ye have sold them, and will return your recompence upon your own head:

Analysis

Behold, I will raise them out of the place whither ye have sold them—God's reversal begins with hineni (הִנֵּנִי, "behold, I"), emphasizing His personal, active intervention. The verb me'ir (עִיר, "raise/stir up") from 'ur (עָוֹר) means to awaken, arouse, or stir into action—the same verb used for God raising up deliverers and stirring people to return from exile (Isaiah 41:2, 25; Ezra 1:1). God promises to reverse the nations' evil work, restoring captives from however far they were scattered. This demonstrates sovereign providence—what humans intend for evil, God turns to His purposes (Genesis 50:20).

And will return your recompence upon your own head (Hebrew vahashivoti gemulkhem beroshekem, בְּרוּשָׁקֶם בְּמַלְכֶּם—*the verb shuv* in hiphil form means to cause to return or bring back. *Gemul* (גָּמָל) means recompense, dealing, or what one deserves—it can be positive (reward) or negative (retribution). Here it clearly means retribution. The phrase beroshekem (upon your head) indicates that consequences boomerang back on perpetrators. This is the lex talionis principle writ large—measure for measure justice (Exodus 21:23-25; Deuteronomy 19:19-21). As Obadiah 15 declares: "As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head."

The Reformed doctrine of God's justice affirms that sin contains its own punishment—the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Nations that traffic in human slavery will themselves be enslaved (verse 8). Those who scatter God's people will themselves be scattered. Those who presume to judge will be judged.

This principle finds ultimate expression at the final judgment when Christ returns "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel" (2 Thessalonians 1:8). Yet remarkably, for believers, Christ took our recompense upon His own head at Calvary, bearing the judgment we deserved (Isaiah 53:4-6; 1 Peter 2:24).

Historical Context

God's promise to reverse captivity found multiple fulfillments. The Persian conquest of Babylon (539 BC) enabled Jewish return from exile. Later, Greek and Roman conquests overthrew Phoenician and Philistine power—Tyre fell to Alexander (332 BC), Gaza was destroyed, and the Philistines ceased to exist as a distinct people. In AD 70 and 135, Rome scattered Jews worldwide, but in 1948, Israel was reestablished as a nation—a stunning reversal of 1,900 years of dispersion. Yet full restoration awaits Christ's return when "all Israel shall be saved" (Romans 11:26) and the nations face final judgment.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does God's promise to reverse human trafficking and enslavement demonstrate His justice and covenant faithfulness?
2. What does the principle of recompense returning "upon your own head" teach about the self-destructive nature of sin?
3. How should believers balance confidence in God's eventual justice with the command to love enemies and pray for persecutors?

Interlinear Text

מִכְרָתִ מ	אֲשֶׁר	בְּפָקָד	מִן	מִעֵד	מִן	הַבָּנִים	וּמְ
H4376	whither ye have sold	H834		H4480	them out of the place	H4725	
H5782							
H2005	Behold I will raise						
בְּרָאשָׁכֶם:	גַּמְלָכִ מ	וְנִשְׁבַּתִּ	שְׁפָה	אַתָּ מ	וְנִשְׁבַּתִּ	תְּמִימָה	וְנִשְׁבַּתִּ
H7218		H1576		H7725	them and will return	H8033	your recompence
H853							

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 23:8 (Parallel theme): But, The LORD liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land.

2 Thessalonians 1:6 (Parallel theme): Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;

Jeremiah 30:10 (Parallel theme): Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid.

Jeremiah 30:16 (Parallel theme): Therefore all they that devour thee shall be devoured; and all thine adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity; and they that spoil thee shall be a spoil, and all that prey upon thee will I give for a prey.