

Joel 3:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the children of Judah, and they shall sell them to the Sabeans, to a people far off: for the LORD hath spoken it.

Analysis

And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the children of Judah—the tables are completely turned. The verb *makar* (מָכַר, "sell"), used in verse 6 for the nations selling Judah's children, now describes God selling the nations' children to Judah. This is precise, poetic justice—the punishment mirrors the crime exactly. Those who commodified and trafficked God's covenant children will experience the same horror inflicted on their own families. The Hebrew *benekhem uvnotekem* (your sons and your daughters) echoes verse 6's language, emphasizing the reversal.

And they shall sell them to the Sabeans, to a people far off—the Sabeans (Hebrew *Sheva'im*, שְׁבָאִים) were South Arabian traders from Sheba (modern Yemen), famous for dealing in gold, spices, and slaves (1 Kings 10:1-13; Job 6:19; Isaiah 60:6). The phrase "a people far off" (*goy rachok*, גּוֹי רָחוֹק) mirrors verse 6's strategy of removing captives far from their homeland. As the Phoenicians sold Judeans to distant Greeks, so Judeans will sell Phoenician/Philistine captives to distant Sabeans. The geographic reversal is complete—Mediterranean peoples sold to Arabia, as far in the opposite direction as Greece. This demonstrates the precision of divine retribution.

For the LORD hath spoken it (Hebrew *ki YHWH dibber*, כִּי יְהוָה דִּבֶּר)—this formula of prophetic certainty appears throughout Scripture, sealing prophecy as absolutely certain. When Yahweh speaks, it will inevitably come to pass (Isaiah

55:11; Numbers 23:19). The verb *dibber* (דִּבֶּר) emphasizes authoritative speech. God's word doesn't merely express intention; it creates reality. This final clause reminds hearers that these aren't Joel's vindictive fantasies but God's sovereign decree. History confirms the prophecy—Phoenicia and Philistia disappeared, while Judah, though dispersed, survived and was regathered. God's word stands forever (Isaiah 40:8; 1 Peter 1:25).

Historical Context

The Sabeans controlled lucrative incense and spice trade routes from southern Arabia through the desert to Mediterranean markets. Their wealth and distance made them ideal buyers for slaves—similar to how American plantation owners bought slaves transported from Africa. The prophecy's fulfillment is documented in post-exilic history when Jewish communities gained influence under Persian and later Greek rule. More broadly, Phoenicia's power waned after Assyrian and Babylonian conquests, culminating in Tyre's destruction by Alexander (332 BC). The Philistines were absorbed into other peoples and disappeared from history. Meanwhile, despite multiple exiles, the Jewish people survived—a miraculous testimony to God's covenant faithfulness.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does the precision of God's retributive justice—the punishment exactly mirroring the crime—demonstrate His perfect righteousness?
2. What does the formula "for the LORD hath spoken it" teach about the certainty and authority of biblical prophecy?
3. How should the historical fulfillment of Joel's prophecies strengthen faith in God's yet-unfulfilled promises regarding Christ's return and final judgment?

Interlinear Text

וּמָכַר וּם	אֶת	בְּנֵי י	אֶת	בְּנוֹתֶיךָ ׀	בְּיָד
And I will sell	H853	of the children	H853	and your daughters	into the hand
H4376		H1121		H1323	H3027
בְּנֵי י	יְהוּדָה	וּמָכַר וּם	לְשָׁבְאִי ׀	אֶל	גּוֹי
of the children	of Judah	And I will sell	them to the Sabeans	H413	to a people
H1121	H3063	H4376	H7615		H1471
כָּח וּקַ	כִּי י	יְהוָה	דִּבֶּר:		
far off	H3588	for the LORD	hath spoken		
H7350		H3068	H1696		

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 60:14 (References Lord): The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

Job 1:15 (Parallel theme): And the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

Judges 2:14 (References Lord): And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.