

Micah 7:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of the LORD our God, and shall fear because of thee.

Analysis

They shall lick the dust like a serpent (yelechaku afar kannachash, יִלְחֲכוּ עָפָר כַּנָּחָשׁ, פְּנִיָּה). This vivid imagery draws from Genesis 3:14's curse on the serpent: "upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat." Licking dust symbolizes total humiliation and defeat—enemies reduced to crawling in submission like the cursed serpent. It reverses their former arrogance, showing complete subjugation.

They shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth (yirgezu mimisgroteihem kezochale eretz, יִרְגְּזוּ מִמִּסְגְּרוֹתֵיהֶם כְּזֹחַלֵי אֶרֶץ, Ragaz (רָגַז, "tremble/quake") indicates fear-induced trembling. Misgrot (מִסְגְּרוֹת, "holes/strongholds") are fortifications or hiding places where they sought security. Like worms emerging from soil when disturbed, nations will come out of their strongholds—not in confidence but in terrified submission. Zochalei eretz ("crawling things of earth") emphasizes their degradation.

They shall be afraid of the LORD our God, and shall fear because of thee (yipchadu el-YHWH Eloheinu veyir'u mimmenekha, יִפְחָדוּ אֶל־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וַיִּירָאוּ מִמֶּנִּי, Pachad (פָּחַד, "be afraid/terrified") and yare (יָרָא, "fear/revere") describe overwhelming dread before God's majesty. This fulfills prophecies that nations will ultimately acknowledge YHWH and Israel's God-given status (Isaiah 45:14, 60:14; Zechariah 8:23). Christ brings this reality—Philippians 2:10-11 promises every knee will bow and every tongue confess His lordship.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern imagery frequently depicted defeated enemies as groveling in the dust before victorious kings. Micah employs this convention to describe God's ultimate triumph over Israel's oppressors. Partial fulfillment occurred when empires that conquered Israel (Assyria, Babylon) themselves fell and feared YHWH's judgment. Greater fulfillment came through Christ's victory over sin, death, and Satan (Colossians 2:15). The serpent's ultimate defeat was secured at the cross (Genesis 3:15; Romans 16:20). Final fulfillment awaits Christ's return when all enemies are put under His feet (1 Corinthians 15:25; Revelation 20:10).

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does the serpent imagery connect Genesis 3's curse to God's ultimate victory over evil?
2. What does it mean that even God's enemies will ultimately 'fear' Him—is this salvific fear or terror of judgment?
3. How should Christ's assured victory over all enemies shape our confidence when facing opposition or spiritual warfare?

Interlinear Text

יִלְחֹכּוּ	עָפָר	כַּנָּח שׁ	כְּזֶמְלִי	אֶרֶץ	יִהְיוּ וְיִזְזוּ
They shall lick	the dust	like a serpent	like worms	of the earth	they shall move
H3897	H6083	H5175	H2119	H776	H7264
מִמְסַגְרֵיהֶם	אֶל	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵינוּ	יִפְחָדוּ	
out of their holes	H413	of the LORD	our God	they shall be afraid	
H4526		H3068	H430	H6342	
וְיִרְאוּ	מִמֶּנּוּ				
and shall fear	H4480				
H3372					

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 49:23 (References Lord): And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

Psalms 72:9 (Parallel theme): They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust.

Psalms 18:45 (Parallel theme): The strangers shall fade away, and be afraid out of their close places.