

Nahum 3:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

All thy strong holds shall be like fig trees with the firstripe figs: if they be shaken, they shall even fall into the mouth of the eater.

Analysis

All thy strong holds shall be like fig trees with the firstripe figs (kol-mibtzerekha te'enim im-bikkurim, תְּאַנִּים עַמְבָּכוּרִים—Nineveh's fortifications (mivtzar, מִבְצָר, strongholds) are compared to fig trees (te'en, תְּאֵן) with early ripe figs (bikkur, בִּקְעָר). First-ripe figs were delicacies, eagerly anticipated because they ripened before the main crop.

If they be shaken, they shall even fall into the mouth of the eater (im-yinnoa'u venaphlu al-pi okhel)—when shaken (nua, נְעָז), they fall directly into the eater's mouth. The image depicts effortless conquest: Nineveh's supposedly impregnable defenses will fall as easily as ripe figs drop when the tree is shaken. No struggle, no prolonged siege—just easy plucking. This mocks Nineveh's confidence in fortifications. What seemed strong and secure is actually ripe for picking, ready to fall at the slightest shake.

Historical Context

Nineveh's fortifications were legendary—walls reportedly 50 feet thick and 100 feet high, protecting about 1,800 acres. The city seemed impregnable. Yet Nahum prophesied these defenses would prove useless, falling easily like ripe figs. In 612 BC, after a three-month siege, Nineveh fell to Babylon and Media. Ancient sources suggest flooding weakened the walls, making breach easier than expected. What seemed like the ancient world's strongest fortress fell relatively quickly once

attacked. The fig tree imagery proved accurate—when shaken by divine judgment, Nineveh's fortifications provided no protection. Archaeological evidence reveals the violence and completeness of the city's destruction.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does the image of fortifications as ripe figs ready to fall demonstrate the futility of trusting in military defenses apart from God?
2. What does this verse teach about the ease with which God can overthrow seemingly impregnable human powers?
3. How should believers maintain perspective on apparently overwhelming obstacles or powerful opponents in light of God's sovereignty?

Interlinear Text

לְכַלְלָה
H3605 All thy strong holds H4013

מִבְצָב יְהֻנָּה
H5973 shall be like fig trees H8384

עַמְּנָנָה
H1061 with the firstripe figs H518

אָכְלָן
H398 of the eater
וְיִתְפָּלֵל
H6310 into the mouth
וְיִשְׁאַל
H5921 if they be shaken
וְיִשְׁאַל
H5307 they shall even fall

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 6:13 (Parallel theme): And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

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