

Nahum 3:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

There shall the fire devour thee; the sword shall cut thee off, it shall eat thee up like the cankerworm: make thyself many as the cankerworm, make thyself many as the locusts.

Analysis

Dual Imagery of Destruction: This verse employs two destructive forces—fire and sword—representing complete and inescapable judgment from multiple directions. The Hebrew "devour" (akal) literally means "to eat" or "consume," suggesting total annihilation, while "cut off" (karath) implies severing or destroying, often used in covenant-breaking contexts to indicate permanent removal.

Locust Imagery: The "cankerworm" (yelek) refers to a developmental stage of the locust, specifically the hopping locust or young locust before wings fully develop. The command to "make thyself many" is deeply ironic—Nineveh could multiply its population and military forces as extensively as a locust swarm, yet they would still be devoured and destroyed like crops before locusts. Locusts were symbols of both devastating plague (consuming everything in their path) and overwhelming numbers that darken the sky. The prophet uses this imagery to communicate that numerical superiority or population density offers no protection against divine judgment. The repetition of the locust imagery emphasizes the certainty and totality of the coming destruction, regardless of Nineveh's apparent military strength, massive population, or fortified defenses.

Historical Context

Nahum prophesied between 663-612 BC, after Assyria's conquest of Thebes (No-Amon) in 663 BC but before Nineveh's fall in 612 BC. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, one of the ancient world's most brutal military powers. The Assyrians were notorious for extreme cruelty, including impalement, flaying, and mass deportations. For over 200 years, they terrorized the Near East, destroying the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. Nineveh was considered impregnable, protected by massive walls and the Tigris River. The city's population may have exceeded 120,000. In 612 BC, a coalition of Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians besieged and destroyed Nineveh so thoroughly that its location was lost for centuries, discovered only in the 1840s through archaeological excavations.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What is the significance of God using both fire and sword as instruments of judgment against Nineveh?
2. How does the locust imagery illustrate the principle that numerical strength cannot prevent divine judgment?
3. Why does God ironically command Nineveh to multiply when destruction is certain?
4. What does Nineveh's complete destruction teach about the temporary nature of earthly empires built on violence?
5. How should believers balance the justice of God displayed in Nahum with His mercy shown in Jonah's earlier ministry to Nineveh?

Interlinear Text

מִשְׁאָלָה תְּאַכֵּל גַּם אֵשׁ תְּכִרֵית גַּם רַב
H8033 devour There shall the fire shall cut thee off thee the sword
H398 H784 H3772 H2719

מִשְׁאָלָה תְּאַכֵּל גַּם לְקָרְבָּן תְּהַכֵּבֶד
devour as the cankerworm make thyself many as the cankerworm
H398 H3218 H3513 H3218

תְּהַכֵּבֶד
make thyself many
H3513

פָּאָרְבָּה
as the locusts
H697

Additional Cross-References

Joel 1:4 (Parallel theme): That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpiller eaten.

Nahum 2:13 (Word): Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions: and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard.

Nahum 3:13 (Parallel theme): Behold, thy people in the midst of thee are women: the gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thine enemies: the fire shall devour thy bars.