

Nahum 3:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven:
the cankerworm spoileth, and flieth away.

Analysis

Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven (hirbeit rokheleykh mikkokhevei hashamayim, הִרְבֵּית רָכְלֵיךְ מִכּוּכְבֵּי הַשָּׁמַיִם)—Nineveh increased (rabah, רָכְבָּה) its traders (rokhel, רָכֵל, merchants/traders) beyond counting, compared to stars (kokhav, כּוֹכֵב) of heaven. This describes Nineveh's vast commercial empire—trade routes, merchants, economic networks extending throughout the known world. The city wasn't just military power but commercial hub.

The cankerworm spoileth, and flieth away (yelek pashat vaya'oph)—the locust (yelek, יְלֵךְ, a type of locust) strips bare (pashat, פָּשַׁת) and flies away (uph, עַזְבָּה). The image shifts to locusts: merchants numerous as locusts will strip the land and flee like a locust swarm. Locusts arrive suddenly, devour everything, and vanish just as quickly. Similarly, Nineveh's commercial network will collapse instantly—merchants fleeing with whatever they can carry, leaving the city stripped bare. What seemed like permanent prosperity proves as transient as a locust swarm.

Historical Context

Nineveh was the hub of extensive trade networks spanning from Egypt to Persia, from Anatolia to Arabia. The city's wealth came not just from military plunder but from controlling trade routes and extracting tariffs. Merchants from throughout the empire congregated there. Yet Nahum prophesies this commercial empire will vanish like locusts. In 612 BC, when Nineveh fell, its trade networks collapsed

immediately. Merchants fled or were killed, goods were plundered, trade routes shifted to Babylon. Within years, Nineveh's commercial dominance was completely gone, the city abandoned. The locust imagery proved accurate—a vast network that seemed permanent vanished almost overnight.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the comparison of merchants to locusts illustrate the temporary and ultimately destructive nature of wealth built on exploitation?
2. What does this verse teach about the fragility of commercial empires and economic systems built on injustice?
3. How should believers maintain proper perspective on material prosperity and commercial success in light of their transience?

Interlinear Text

הַרְבֵּית פְּשָׁתְּ יְמִינְךָ בְּלִבְנֵי מַכְכִּיבָּן
 Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven the cankerworm
 H7235 H7402 H3556 H8064 H3218

פָּשַׁת יְמִינְךָ
spoileth and flieth away
H6584 H5774