

Nahum 3:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the wellfavoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts.

Analysis

Nahum depicts Nineveh as a prostitute: 'Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the wellfavoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts' (merov zenunei zonah tovath chen ba'alath keshaphim). Sexual imagery describes political-military seduction—Nineveh made alliances, then betrayed them. 'Wellfavoured' (tovath chen) means attractive, charming—Assyria presented itself as desirable ally. 'Mistress of witchcrafts' (ba'alath keshaphim) suggests both literal sorcery (common in Mesopotamian religion) and metaphorical deception. The verse continues: 'that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts' (hamokheret goyim bizenuteyha umishpachoth bikheshapheyha). Nineveh 'sold' nations—enslaving peoples, making them commodities. This extended metaphor exposes Nineveh's fundamental corruption: using attraction and deception to dominate and destroy. Like a prostitute who seduces then destroys, Assyria made alliances then betrayed them, used nations then discarded them. This demonstrates how sin corrupts at the deepest level, turning what should be relationships of trust and mutual benefit into exploitation and destruction.

Historical Context

Assyrian diplomatic and military strategy often involved making treaties with smaller nations, extracting tribute, then breaking agreements and conquering the ally. This pattern of seduction and betrayal characterized Assyrian imperial policy. Nations that trusted Assyrian promises found themselves conquered and destroyed. The prostitution metaphor would resonate with ancient audiences familiar with this pattern. Nineveh's 'witchcrafts' also had literal dimension—Mesopotamian religion heavily featured divination, sorcery, and occult practices. The Assyrian state religion involved extensive magical rituals and occult consultation. Nahum condemns both the literal sorcery and the metaphorical 'enchantment' by which Assyria deceived and enslaved nations.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does the prostitution metaphor illustrate the way sin corrupts relationships, turning mutual benefit into exploitation?
2. What modern equivalents exist to Nineveh's 'witchcrafts'—deceptive practices that enslave and destroy?
3. How should Christians discern between legitimate cooperation and being 'sold' through deceptive alliances?

Interlinear Text

מֵרַב	בְּזִנוֹן יְה	זֹאֵה	ט וְבֵת	י	
Because of the multitude	of the whoredoms	harlot	of the wellfavoured		H2580
H7230	H2183	H2181	H2896		
בַּעַלָּה	בְּכַשְׁפִּיָּה:	הַמְכֵּךְ	גוֹיִם	בְּזִנוֹן יְה	וּמִשְׁפָּחָהּ
the mistress	of witchcrafts	that selleth	nations	of the whoredoms	and families
H1172	H3785	H4376	H1471	H2183	H4940
בְּכַשְׁפִּיָּה:					
of witchcrafts					
H3785					

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 47:9 (Parallel theme): But these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood: they shall come upon thee in their perfection for the multitude of thy sorceries, and for the great abundance of thine enchantments.