

Nehemiah 1:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

Analysis

And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

The report reveals devastating conditions. 'Great affliction' (ra'ah gedolah, רָעָה גְדוֹלָה) indicates severe distress and calamity. 'Reproach' (cherpah, חֶרְפָּה) suggests shame, disgrace, and mockery—the covenant people suffering humiliation before pagans who interpreted their weakness as their God's weakness. The province (medinah, מְדִינָה) refers to Judah as a Persian administrative district, emphasizing their subjugated status.

The broken wall and burned gates left Jerusalem defenseless and dishonored. Walls provided security from enemies, dignity for inhabitants, and testimony to observers. Their destruction likely resulted from events around 446 BC when opponents successfully stopped rebuilding efforts (Ezra 4:7-23). The phrase 'burned with fire' indicates deliberate, thorough destruction—not mere decay but hostile action. Theologically, this represented more than physical ruin; the holy city's disgrace reflected poorly on Yahweh's reputation among nations. The city bearing God's name lying in ruins created theological crisis demanding resolution.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cities derived security, commerce, and status from their walls. Fortifications demonstrated power and provided protection from raiders and invading armies. Jerusalem's broken walls left the population vulnerable to attack and economic exploitation. The mention of burned gates suggests relatively recent destruction—timber would have decomposed if from the Babylonian destruction of 586 BC, over 140 years prior.

The 'reproach' reflects how ancient peoples viewed national deities through their peoples' fortunes. If Israel suffered, observers concluded Yahweh was weak. This dynamic appears throughout the prophets (Ezekiel 36:20-23) where God acts for His name's sake. The struggle of the post-exilic community, despite divine promises of restoration, created dissonance requiring faith in God's ultimate purposes despite present circumstances.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the church's current state (whether strong or weak, faithful or compromised) affect the world's perception of Christ?
2. What 'walls' in your life or community are broken down, leaving you spiritually vulnerable and without effective witness?
3. How do you maintain faith in God's promises when obedience leads to continued hardship rather than immediate blessing?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמְרוּ	לִי	נִשְׁאַר וְ	אֲשֶׁר	נִשְׁאַר וְ	מִן	הַשְּׁבִי	שׁ מְ
And they said	H0	that are left	H834	that are left	H4480	of the captivity	H8033
H559		H7604		H7604		H7628	
בְּמִדְיָן הָ	בְּרָעָה הָ	גְּדֹלָה הָ	וּבְחֶרֶף הָ	יְחוּמָּה תְּ	יְרוּשָׁלַם		
there in the province	affliction	are in great	and reproach	the wall	of Jerusalem		
H4082	H7451	H1419	H2781	H2346	H3389		
מִכָּכָה צָתָה	וַיִּשְׂעֶר יָהּ	נִצָּתָה וְ	בְּאֵשׁ:				
also is broken down	and the gates	thereof are burned	with fire				
H6555	H8179	H3341	H784				

Additional Cross-References

Nehemiah 2:17 (References Jerusalem): Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.

2 Kings 25:10 (References Jerusalem): And all the army of the Chaldees, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about.

Nehemiah 2:3 (Parallel theme): And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?

Nehemiah 7:6 (References Jerusalem): These are the children of the province, that went up out of the captivity, of those that had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and came again to Jerusalem and to Judah, every one unto his city;

Nehemiah 2:13 (References Jerusalem): And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire.

Ezra 5:8 (Parallel theme): Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org