

Obadiah 1:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel shall possess that of the Canaanites, even unto Zarephath; and the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south.

Analysis

And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel shall possess that of the Canaanites, even unto Zarephath—the exiled northern tribes ("this host") will return and expand territory northward to Zarephath (modern Lebanon, site of Elijah's ministry to the widow—1 Kings 17:8-24). The word גָּלֻחָה (galut, "captivity" or "exile") emphasizes those scattered by Assyrian conquest (722 BC) will return and expand beyond original borders.

And the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south, וְגָלַת יְרוּשָׁלָם אֲשֶׁר בְּסִפְרָד יָרַשׁ אֶת עַרְיוֹן הַגָּתָב (vegalut Yerushalaim asher biSfarad yirshu et arei ha-Negev)—Judean exiles from Sepharad (possibly Sardis in Asia Minor, or Spain in later tradition) will return and possess southern cities. The comprehensive promise: both northern and southern exiles return, and both expand beyond pre-exilic borders.

This prophecy encouraged post-exilic Jews that God would restore and expand their inheritance. The return from Babylon (538 BC onward) began this, though it remained partial. The Maccabean expansion approached fuller realization. Yet the complete fulfillment is spiritual and eschatological: all God's people—Jew and Gentile united in Christ—will inherit the renewed creation. Ephesians 1:11 declares believers "have obtained an inheritance" in Christ; Revelation 21-22

describes the New Jerusalem where God's people dwell forever in the restored paradise exceeding Eden's glory.

Historical Context

The specific locations—Zarephath (Phoenician coast), Sepharad (disputed, possibly Asia Minor)—indicate widespread dispersion. God promises that from the furthest exile points, His people will return and expand. Historically, Jewish communities existed throughout the Mediterranean and Near East, and some members returned to Judea across centuries. Yet the prophecy points beyond physical return to spiritual restoration. Christ gathers His elect from the four winds (Matthew 24:31), from every nation and language (Revelation 7:9), into the eternal inheritance secured by His blood. The church is the assembly of exiles returning home to the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-24).

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does God's promise to restore exiles from distant lands demonstrate His faithfulness to seemingly impossible covenant commitments?
2. In what ways does the church's composition (people from every nation) fulfill Old Testament promises about gathering dispersed exiles?
3. How should believers' identity as exiles journeying toward the heavenly Jerusalem (1 Peter 1:1, 2:11) shape priorities and values in this present world?

Interlinear Text

אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁרָאֵל	וְיִגְלַת	בְּחַלְבָּה	בְּחַלְבָּה	בְּהַזְּבָן	לְבָנָי	בְּהַזְּבָן	וְבְּבָנָי	אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁרָאֵל	וְיִגְלַת
And the captivity	of this host	H1546	H2426	H2088	of the children	H1121	of Israel	H3478	H834
shall possess that of the Canaanites	פְּנַעֲלִים	H3669	עַד	H5704	אֵלֶּה תְּרַפֵּת	H6886	even unto Zarephath	And the captivity	H1546
of Jerusalem	רִיחָלָה יְרוּשָׁלָם	H3389	H834	H5614	בְּסָפָרָד	H3423	shall possess	H853	the cities
of the south	הַנֶּגֶב	H5045			אֲשֶׁר רַבְּנָה	H5892	אֲתָּה יְרַשָּׁה		

Additional Cross-References

Luke 4:26 (Parallel theme): But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.

Jeremiah 32:44 (References Jerusalem): Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe evidences, and seal them, and take witnesses in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the mountains, and in the cities of the valley, and in the cities of the south: for I will cause their captivity to return, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah 33:13 (References Jerusalem): In the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the vale, and in the cities of the south, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks pass again under the hands of him that telleth them, saith the LORD.