

Obadiah 1:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night, (how art thou cut off!) would they not have stolen till they had enough? if the grapegatherers came to thee, would they not leave some grapes?

Analysis

If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night, (how art thou cut off!) would they not have stolen till they had enough? God employs ironic comparison—even thieves leave something behind. The Hebrew גַּנָּבִים (gannavim, "thieves") and שְׂדֵדֵי לַיְלָה (shodedei laylah, "destroyers of night") would take only what they could carry or wanted. The parenthetical exclamation "how art thou cut off!" (אֵיךְ נִדְמֵיתָה, ekh nidmeytah) expresses astonishment at the thoroughness of Edom's destruction.

If the grapegatherers came to thee, would they not leave some grapes? (אֲמָ בְּצֻרִים בָּאוּ לָךְ לֹא יִשְׁאִירוּ עֲלֵלוֹת, im-botzrim ba'u lakh lo yash'iru olelot). Leviticus 19:10 and Deuteronomy 24:21 commanded grape harvesters to leave gleanings (עֲלֵלוֹת, olelot) for the poor and foreigners. Even harvesters practicing Torah justice would leave remnants. But Edom's judgment will be total—divine wrath leaves nothing. This principle appears throughout Scripture: God's judgments are thorough and complete (Jeremiah 49:9-10 applies this same imagery to Edom). The New Testament warns that final judgment will be comprehensive—separating wheat from chaff with nothing escaping (Matthew 3:12).

Historical Context

This verse emphasizes the unprecedented thoroughness of Edom's coming judgment. While human conquerors—whether thieves or armies—typically leave remnants (either from inability to take everything or from mercy/oversight), God's judgment on Edom would be exhaustive. Historically, this was fulfilled as Edom was gradually but completely displaced, absorbed, and obliterated. The Nabatean conquest left no independent Edomite nation; their forced conversion under the Maccabees erased their distinct identity; Rome's destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70) eliminated even their Idumean remnant. Archaeological evidence shows Edomite sites systematically abandoned and never reoccupied—silent testimony to judgment's totality.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does the completeness of God's judgment on unrepentant sin contrast with human justice that often leaves loopholes or remnants?
2. What does this verse teach about the certainty and thoroughness of divine judgment for those who persist in rebellion?
3. How should the knowledge that God's judgments are comprehensive (leaving no escape) motivate evangelism and personal holiness?

Interlinear Text

אִם	גִּנְבִּיִם	בָּאוּ	לְךָ	אִם	שׁ וְדֹדֶי	לַיְלָה	אֵי יָרָה
H518	If thieves	came	H0	H518	to thee if robbers	by night	H349
	H1590	H935			H7703	H3915	
	כִּדְמֵי יִתָּה	הֵל וְאֵ	יִגְנֹב וְ	וְיֵי	אִם		
	how art thou cut off	H3808	would they not have stolen	till they had enough	H518		
	H1820		H1589	H1767			
	בְּצִרִים	בָּאוּ	לְךָ	הֵל וְאֵ	יִשָּׂא יָרוּ		
	if the grapegatherers	came	H0	H3808	to thee would they not leave		
	H1219	H935			H7604		
	עַלְלוֹת:						
	some grapes						
	H5955						

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 49:9 (Parallel theme): If grapegatherers come to thee, would they not leave some gleanings? if thieves by night, they will destroy till they have enough.

Deuteronomy 24:21 (Parallel theme): When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

Isaiah 17:6 (Parallel theme): Yet gleanings shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the LORD God of Israel.