

Psalms 118:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns: for in the name of the LORD I will destroy them.

Analysis

They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns: for in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. The third repetition adds vivid imagery. S'vavuni chid'vorim (they surrounded me like bees) pictures swarming attack—multiple enemies, aggressive assault, painful stings, overwhelming numbers. Bees attack in coordinated swarms, making defense difficult. Yet the counterimage follows: **they are quenched as the fire of thorns** (do'achu k'esh kotzim). Do'achu (are quenched/extinguished) pictures fire going out. Esh kotzim (fire of thorns) burns hot and fast but briefly—thorns provide quick kindling that blazes intensely then dies quickly, leaving only ash.

The double simile contrasts apparent threat with actual outcome. Enemies swarm like bees—numerous, painful, frightening—yet extinguish like thorn-fire—quickly, completely, leaving no lasting damage. What seems overwhelming proves ephemeral when confronted by divine power. The refrain returns: **for in the name of the LORD I will destroy them.** The threefold repetition (vv. 10-12) hammers home this truth: no matter how numerous, aggressive, or painful the enemy assault, invocation of God's name brings decisive victory.

Historical Context

Ancient warfare regularly faced literal swarms—not just metaphorical. Exodus 23:28 and Deuteronomy 7:20 describe God sending hornets before Israel to drive out Canaanites. Deborah's victory over Sisera involved divine intervention through

nature (Judges 4-5). The image of enemies as bees appears in Deuteronomy 1:44 describing Amorite pursuit of Israel. Fire imagery pervades judgment passages: Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19), Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10), Elijah's altar (1 Kings 18), the final judgment (Revelation 20:9-10). Isaiah 27:4 pictures God burning thorns and briars representing enemies. The New Testament speaks of testing by fire (1 Corinthians 3:13) and enemies of the cross facing destruction (Philippians 3:18-19).

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What 'swarming' problems currently feel overwhelming in number and intensity, and how does God's name extinguish them?
2. How does the thorn-fire image warn against fearing threats that appear intense but lack lasting power?
3. In what ways should believers respond to aggressive, multiple, painful opposition while trusting divine vindication?

Interlinear Text

מִתְבַּאֲכָה	מִתְבַּאֲכָה	מִתְבַּאֲכָה	מִתְבַּאֲכָה	מִתְבַּאֲכָה	מִתְבַּאֲכָה
They compassed me about	like bees	they are quenched	as the fire	of thorns	
H5437	H1682	H1846	H784	H6975	

בְּשָׁם	בְּשָׁם	אָמַלְמָה	אָמַלְמָה	
for in the name	of the LORD	H3588	I will destroy	

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 1:44 (Parallel theme): And the Amorites, which dwelt in that mountain, came out against you, and chased you, as bees do, and destroyed you in Seir, even unto Hormah.

1 Samuel 17:45 (References Lord): Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.

Psalms 20:5 (References Lord): We will rejoice in thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners: the LORD fulfil all thy petitions.

Psalms 20:1 (References Lord): The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee;

Ecclesiastes 7:6 (Parallel theme): For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity.

Psalms 8:9 (References Lord): O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

Psalms 58:9 (Parallel theme): Before your pots can feel the thorns, he shall take them away as with a whirlwind, both living, and in his wrath.

2 Samuel 23:6 (Parallel theme): But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands:

Isaiah 27:4 (Parallel theme): Fury is not in me: who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together.

Nahum 1:10 (Parallel theme): For while they be folden together as thorns, and while they are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry.