

Psalms 74:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness.

Analysis

Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces—In the midst of lamenting temple destruction, Asaph recalls God's primordial victory over chaos. Liwyātān (לִוִיָּתָן, leviathan) appears in Job 41 as the ultimate untamable creature, representing forces of chaos and evil. The Hebrew rāšaštā (רָשָׁתָה, crushed/shattered) is violent and decisive—God didn't merely defeat leviathan but pulverized its multiple heads, echoing Canaanite myths of seven-headed sea monsters while affirming Yahweh's absolute supremacy over all cosmic powers.

And gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness—The image shifts from cosmic battle to provision. God doesn't simply destroy chaos; He transforms it into sustenance for His people. ‘ām-ləšiyyîm (עָם-לְשִׁיָּם, "people of the wilderness") likely refers to desert creatures or possibly Israel in the wilderness wanderings. The theological point is profound: the very forces that threaten to destroy God's people become, through His power, the means of their nourishment.

This verse functions as encouragement amid present devastation. The same God who crushed leviathan at creation can defeat Babylon. Christians see deeper fulfillment: Christ crushed the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15; Romans 16:20), and even the cross—Satan's apparent victory—became the feast of redemption (John 6:51-58). What looks like chaos triumphant is actually God feeding His people through conquered evil.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern creation myths (Enuma Elish, Baal Cycle) featured gods battling chaos monsters. Israel's psalms deliberately echo and subvert these myths, showing Yahweh alone as Creator who effortlessly conquers chaos. This verse likely draws on Exodus imagery of crushing Egypt (the 'dragon,' Ezekiel 29:3) and providing manna in the wilderness.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What 'leviathans' in your life—seemingly unconquerable chaos—need you to remember God's creative power to crush?
2. How does God's pattern of transforming defeated evil into provision change your perspective on current trials?
3. In what ways does Christ's victory over death (the ultimate chaos) become spiritual food for believers?

Interlinear Text

מְאַכֵּל תַּתְּנַתֵּן לִי תְּבִשֵּׂת אֶת־הַלְּוִיָּתָן כִּי־אֲשֶׁר־אָתָּה־בָּא־לִי
H859 Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces and gavest him to be meat
H7533 H7218 H3882 H5414 H3978

לְעִמָּךְ לְאַיִם:
to the people inhabiting the wilderness
H5971 H6728

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 27:1 (Parallel theme): In that day the LORD with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.

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