

Psalms 80:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her?

Analysis

Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her? This pivotal question introduces the lament's crisis: inexplicable reversal of blessing into curse. "Why?" (lamah, לָמָּה) challenges God for explanation. The question isn't rhetorical but genuine theological wrestling: if You carefully planted, cultivated, and blessed this vine to maximum fruitfulness, why destroy Your own work? The question assumes God is responsible for devastation, not merely permitting it—"thou hast broken down" (paratsta, פָּרַצְתָּ) uses active verb indicating God personally dismantled protections.

"Her hedges" (gedareyha, גִּדְרֶיהָ) refers to stone walls or thorn hedges protecting vineyards from wild animals and thieves (Numbers 22:24; Isaiah 5:5; Micah 7:4). Ancient vineyards required protective enclosures; without them, crops would be destroyed. The hedge represents God's covenant protection—military defense, prophetic guidance, law's boundaries. By breaking down hedges, God has removed protections, exposing Israel to predators and passers-by. Isaiah 5:5 uses identical imagery describing God's judgment: "I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up."

"So that all they which pass by the way do pluck her" (ve'aruha kol-ovrey darek, וְאָרוּהָ כָּל-עֹבְרֵי דֶרֶךְ) describes opportunistic pillaging. Arah (אָרָה) means to pluck, gather—anyone passing can casually steal fruit without consequences. This depicts Israel's vulnerability to any enemy—great empires and minor raiders alike exploit defenseless condition. The contrast with verses 8-11's description of

comprehensive protection and flourishing makes current exposure all the more tragic.

Historical Context

The broken hedges describe Israel's historical experience of invasion and conquest. For northern kingdom, this began with Aramean raids under Hazael (2 Kings 10:32-33, 13:3-7), intensified under Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC), and culminated in Assyrian destruction (722 BC). For Judah, Babylonian invasion (605-586 BC) removed final protections, exposing people to surrounding nations' predation. The question "why?" drove prophetic theology: God removed hedges because covenant violations made protection impossible (Deuteronomy 28:15-68), yet this explanation intensified the crisis—how can relationship be restored after such comprehensive judgment?

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How should believers process seasons when God seems to have 'broken down hedges'—removing protections and exposing them to attacks?
2. What is the relationship between divine discipline (God breaking hedges) and human accountability (enemies opportunistically attacking)?
3. How can Christians maintain trust in God's goodness when He appears to be the agent of devastation rather than the provider of protection?

Interlinear Text

לָמָה	כָּרַעְתָּ	גִּדְךָ יָהּ	אֶרְוֶה	כָּל
H4100	Why hast thou then broken down	her hedges	do pluck	H3605
	H6555	H1447	H717	
עַל כִּי	דֶּרֶךְ:			
so that all they which pass	by the way			
H5674	H1870			

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 5:5 (Parallel theme): And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down:

Nahum 2:2 (Parallel theme): For the LORD hath turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel: for the emptiers have emptied them out, and marred their vine branches.

Luke 20:16 (Parallel theme): He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said, God forbid.