

Psalm 83:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

As the fire burneth a wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire;

Analysis

As the fire burneth a wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire.

The imagery shifts to consuming fire—irresistible, comprehensive destruction. Kesh tiv'ar-ya'ar (כְּאֵשׁ תְּבַעַר־יָאָר, "as fire burns a forest") depicts wildfire's unstoppable advance through woodland. The verb ba'ar (בָּאָר) means to burn, consume, kindle—fire that devours everything in its path. Ancient forests, dry during summer, became infernos when ignited, consuming trees, undergrowth, wildlife—total devastation.

V-khi-lehavah t'lahet harim (וְכִלְפָבָה תְּלַהֵת הָרִים) "and as flame sets mountains ablaze") escalates the imagery. The verb lahat (לְהַת) means to blaze, flame intensely. Mountain fires, driven by wind and fed by dry vegetation, become infernos visible for miles, their smoke darkening the sky. Nothing escapes; nowhere offers refuge. The imagery conveys totality of judgment—as fire leaves no tree unburned, God's judgment will leave no enemy unpunished.

Fire imagery for divine judgment appears throughout Scripture: Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24), Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16:35), Elijah's contest (1 Kings 18:38), and eschatological judgment (2 Peter 3:10, Revelation 20:9). Fire symbolizes God's holiness consuming sin, His wrath destroying wickedness. The image is terrible but necessary—evil cannot coexist with absolute holiness any more than dry wood can survive in fire. God's purity demands sin's eradication.

Historical Context

Mediterranean climate featured hot, dry summers when vegetation became tinder. Lightning strikes, human carelessness, or military tactics (Judges 15:4-5) could ignite devastating fires. Ancient peoples feared wildfires as uncontrollable forces of destruction. The psalmist uses universally understood imagery to depict divine judgment's comprehensive nature. Prophets employed similar fire imagery: Isaiah 10:17 warns that "the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame"; Amos 7:4 depicts judgment as fire devouring "the great deep" and consuming "a part of the land." These metaphors communicate judgment's inevitability and thoroughness.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What does fire imagery for divine judgment teach about God's holiness and its incompatibility with sin?
2. How should the reality of coming judgment motivate evangelism and personal holiness?
3. What comfort does this imagery provide for believers facing enemies who seem to prosper despite their wickedness?

Interlinear Text

פָּרִים:	תָּلָה	ט	וְכַלְבָּב	ה	בַּעַר	תְּבֻעָר	כִּי	שׁ
As the fire	burneth	a wood	and as the flame		on fire		the mountains	

H784

H1197

H3293

H3852

H3857

H2022

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 32:22 (Parallel theme): For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains.

Isaiah 9:18 (Parallel theme): For wickedness burneth as the fire: it shall devour the briars and thorns, and shall kindle in the thickets of the forest, and they shall mount up like the lifting up of smoke.

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