

Zephaniah 2:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand.

Analysis

This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly (zot ha'ir ha'alizah hayoshevet la'vetach)—'Rejoicing' (alizah) implies boastful revelry. 'Carelessly' (la'vetach) means false security, complacency. Nineveh assumed her power was unassailable.

That said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me (ani ve'afsi od)—This echoes the self-deification of Isaiah's Babylon (Isaiah 47:8, 10). Nineveh claimed divine uniqueness—'I AM'—the prerogative of God alone (Exodus 3:14). This is the essence of idolatry: creature claiming Creator's position.

How is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in—The contrast is stark: from self-exaltation to utter ruin. **Every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand** (kol ober aleha yishroq yaniad yado)—Hissing and hand-waving express scorn and mockery (Job 27:23, Lamentations 2:15). Former admirers now despise her.

Historical Context

Nineveh's hubris was legendary. Assyrian kings boasted of their conquests in monumental inscriptions. Ashurbanipal's library contained texts glorifying

Assyrian supremacy. Yet within a generation of Zephaniah's prophecy, the city fell, never to recover—a permanent warning against national pride.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What contemporary nations, institutions, or individuals claim 'I am, and there is none beside me'—implicitly denying God's uniqueness?
2. How does false security ('dwelling carelessly') set up individuals and nations for catastrophic judgment?
3. When have you witnessed the proud brought low, and what did it teach you about God's sovereignty?

Interlinear Text

הָעִיר זֹאת	הַעֲלִיזָה	הַיּוֹשֵׁב בָּתָּח	לֵב טָחַר	הָאֵמָרָה
H2063	city	This is the rejoicing	that dwelt	carelessly
H5892	H5947	H3427	H983	H559
בְּלִבָּהּ	אֲנִי	וְאֵפֶסֶת	אֵי יְהוָה	הִיטָה
in her heart	I am and there is none beside			
H3824	H589	H657	H5750	H349
				H1961
לִשְׁמִי	מִבְּרַח	לְחַיָּה	כָּל	
me how is she become a desolation	to lie down in	a place for beasts		
H8047	H4769	H2416	H3605	
עוֹבֵר	עַל יְהוָה	יִשְׁרָק	יָג יָע	יָדוֹ
every one that passeth by	her shall hiss	and wag	his hand	
H5674	H5921	H8319	H5128	H3027

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 28:2 (Parallel theme): Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God:

Isaiah 22:2 (Parallel theme): Thou that art full of stirs, a tumultuous city, a joyous city: thy slain men are not slain with the sword, nor dead in battle.

Nahum 3:19 (Parallel theme): There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous: all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?

Jeremiah 19:8 (Parallel theme): And I will make this city desolate, and an hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished and hiss because of all the plagues thereof.

Ezekiel 28:9 (Parallel theme): Wilt thou yet say before him that slayeth thee, I am God? but thou shalt be a man, and no God, in the hand of him that slayeth thee.

Lamentations 1:1 (Parallel theme): How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!

Lamentations 2:15 (Parallel theme): All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org