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Zephaniah 2:8-15
I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the curses of the sons of Ammon, with which they have cursed My people and have magnified themselves on their border. (9) Therefore, as I live, says Jehovah of Hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be like Sodom, and the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah; a possession of nettles, and salt pits, and a ruin forever. The remnant of My people shall plunder them, and the remnant of My people shall possess them. (10) They shall have this for their pride, because they have cursed and magnified themselves against the people of Jehovah of Hosts. (11) Jehovah will be frightening to them; for He will make all the gods of the earth lean; each man from his place and all the coastlands of the nations shall bow to Him. (12) You Ethiopians also shall be slain by My sword. (13) And He will stretch out His hand against the north and destroy Assyria, and will make Nineveh a desert and dry like a desert. (14) And flocks shall lie down in her midst, all the beasts of a nation; both the pelican and the bittern shall roost in the capitals of its pillars; a voice shall sing at the window, ruin shall be at the doorsill, for he will bare the cedar-work. (15) This is the rejoicing city, dwelling confidently, who says in her heart, I am, and no other still is. How she has become a ruin, a resting-place for animals! Everyone who passes by her shall hiss; he shall wag his hand.

Those that hate God's people will be overthrown – the resentful, the atheists, the idolaters, hostile religions of other lands and the grand empire builders who want the Church and her ethics swept aside – these will end up as desolate the empires of old.

Verses 8 to 11 deal with the Moabites and Ammonites who actually cursed and reproached Israel and harassed Israel at every opportunity. These have several modern equivalents from hostile terrorist groups blowing up churches, to the ACLU harassing Christians in court to witches and pagans literally cursing pastors and their ministries. They will not be victorious for: "The remnant of My people shall plunder them, and the remnant of My people shall possess them."

We can claim this – so if you feel you are under some sort of hostile persecution you can ask God for the power to "plunder" your enemies –just as Moses "plundered the Egyptians" who persecuted them and oppressed them. We see this in history Rome persecuted Christians – and was later possessed by Christians. The Communist Party in Russia persecuted the Church and later was brought down by prayer meetings! If you are facing hostility at work because of your faith you can ask God to give you victory so that you "plunder and possess" (not in a literal violent sense of course!). If God is for us – who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)

Not only does God plunder the hostile nations He also punishes the religious systems: “Jehovah will be frightening to them; for He will make all the gods of the earth lean; each man from his place and all the coastlands of the nations shall bow to Him.” They will be starved of spiritual power and supporters. The old religious systems of Ammon and Moab are now no more and their temples are in ruins. Thus anti-Christian cults and religions like Wicca, Communism and fundamentalist Islam will lose their power and supporters over time, they cannot triumph, they are doomed. God will diminish them. They will end up like the temples of Moab.

Powerful empires often think they can overthrow the Church and act insolently towards the Creator. Yahweh rebukes the Assyrian empire based in Nineveh for such proud ideas: And He will stretch out His hand against the north and destroy Assyria, and will make Nineveh a desert and dry like a desert. (14) And flocks shall lie down in her midst, all the beasts of a nation; both the pelican and the bittern shall roost in the capitals of its pillars; a voice shall sing at the window, ruin shall be at the doorsill, for he will bare the cedar-work. (15) This is the rejoicing city, dwelling confidently, who says in her heart, I am, and no other still is. How she has become a ruin, a resting-place for animals! Everyone who passes by her shall hiss; he shall wag his hand.

Nineveh felt untouchable and on top. “This is the rejoicing city, dwelling confidently, who says in her heart, I am, and no other still is.” This pride, this self-exaltation, brings desolation and ruin. “How she has become a ruin, a resting-place for animals! Everyone who passes by her shall hiss; he shall wag his hand.” This is the Enron syndrome of untouchability. I saw it first hand when I worked as a 17 year old office boy in a major finance firm in Australia that went bankrupt in the early-70’s. As the office boy sorting through the piles of accounts for the auditors I was looking at the dreadful figures with astonishment yet all around me were people saying “we are the biggest, we cannot go bankrupt”. Pride leads to silly actions and great blindness that results in desolation.

Not only does it lead to physical desolation it results in spiritual desolation as in ”being haunted” for that is the import of: “And flocks shall lie down in her midst, all the beasts of a nation; both the pelican and the bittern shall roost in the capitals of its pillars; a voice shall sing at the window, ruin shall be at the doorsill, for he will bare the cedar-work. “ This is also the fate of the final Babylon: “Revelation 18:2 And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great has fallen, has fallen! And it has become the dwelling-place of demons, and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a cage of every unclean bird which has been hated,”

This is well captured by Shelley in his famous poem Ozymandias about a famous statue of the Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses II :

Ozymandias

I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read,
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,

The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed,
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
Look upon my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

-Percy Bysshe Shelley
1792-1822

This desolate haunting can sometimes be palpably felt in the offices and buildings of organizations that have defied God – old Communist party headquarters, desolate cult temples, and the like. The Kingdom of God seems fragile - but is in fact indestructible and Jesus Christ is the Stone on which others break themselves and fall. Do not fear for the Church, it will survive while Empires crumble into dust.

Revelation 11:15 And the seventh angel sounded. And there were great voices in Heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ. And He will reign forever and ever.

Blessings,

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