

Hosea 9:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Give them, O LORD: what wilt thou give? give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.

Analysis

Prayer for barrenness: 'Give them, O LORD: what wilt thou give? give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.' Hosea's anguished prayer: תִּן־לָהֶם יְהוָה מַה־תִּתֶּן (ten-lahem YHWH mah-titten, Give them, O LORD: what will You give?). Answer: רֶחֶם מִשְׁכִּיל וְשָׁדַיִם צְמָקִים (rechem mashkil veshadayim tsomeqim, miscarrying womb and dry breasts). This shocking prayer requests covenant curse (Deuteronomy 28:18) as mercy—better not born than born for slaughter. It demonstrates that sometimes temporal loss prevents greater suffering. Only Christ transforms curse into blessing, death into life (John 10:10).

Historical Context

Understanding Hosea's prayer requires recognizing historical context: Assyrian conquest meant children faced brutal death or slavery. Archaeological evidence and Assyrian annals describe horrific treatment of conquered peoples: impalement, mutilation, enslavement. Given this certain future, barrenness becomes relative mercy—preventing children suffering such fate. The prayer echoes Job 3:11-19, Jeremiah 20:14-18—preferring non-existence to suffering. Jesus similarly warns: 'Woe unto them that give suck in those days!' (Matthew 24:19, Luke 23:29). This demonstrates that divine judgment sometimes makes life's normal blessings (fertility, children) become curses—better to lack them than see them destroyed.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does Hosea's prayer for barrenness demonstrate that sometimes temporal loss is mercy compared to greater suffering?
2. What does this prayer reveal about the prophet's compassionate identification with people's suffering despite pronouncing judgment?

Interlinear Text

תֵּן	לָהֶם	יְהוָה	מָה	תֵּן	תֵּן	לָהֶם	רֶחֶם
Give	H0	them O LORD	H4100	Give	Give	H0	womb
H5414		H3068		H5414	H5414		H7358
מִשְׁכָּן יֵל	וְשֵׁי יָדַי	צִמְקֵי:					
them a miscarrying	breasts	and dry					
H7921	H7699	H6784					

Additional Cross-References

Luke 23:29 (Parallel theme): For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck.