

Isaiah 26:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Like as a woman with child, that draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain, and crieth out in her pangs; so have we been in thy sight, O LORD.

Analysis

Like as a woman with child, that draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain, and crieth out in her pangs (כִּמוֹ הָרָה תִּקְרִיב לֵלֶדֶת תַּחֲלִיל תִּזְעַק בְּחִבְלֶיהָ / kemo harah taqriv laledet tachil tiz'aq bachavaleiha)—The childbirth metaphor appears frequently in prophetic literature for suffering that precedes new life (Jeremiah 4:31, Micah 4:9-10, John 16:21). The verb חוּל (chul, "to writhe, be in pain") and חֶבֶל (chevel, "labor pains") emphasize intense suffering. Yet labor pains are purposeful—they deliver new life.

So have we been in thy sight, O LORD (כִּן־הָיִינוּ מִפְּנֵיךָ יְהוָה / ken-hayinu mipanekha YHWH)—But verse 18 reveals the tragedy: Israel's labor produced only wind, not deliverance. Their suffering proved unfruitful because it lacked faith. Contrast this with 26:19's resurrection hope—God Himself will bring forth life. Human striving cannot produce salvation; only God's intervention can.

Historical Context

The childbirth metaphor would resonate deeply with Isaiah's audience, for whom childbirth was both hoped-for blessing and dangerous ordeal. High maternal and infant mortality made labor a life-threatening crisis. Isaiah uses this image to describe Israel's national suffering under Assyrian and Babylonian threats. The people endured tremendous pain but failed to produce deliverance. Only Messiah's birth pangs (His suffering) would accomplish salvation. Jesus uses similar imagery

in Matthew 24:8, describing tribulations as 'beginning of sorrows' (literally 'birth pains').

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the childbirth metaphor help us understand that suffering can be purposeful and productive, leading to new life?
2. What's the difference between suffering that produces spiritual fruit and suffering that remains fruitless (as in verse 18)?
3. How does Christ's suffering as 'labor pains' for the new creation encourage endurance during trials?

Interlinear Text

כִּמּוֹ	הִכָּה	תִּקְרַב יב	לְזֶדֶת	תִּהְיֶה יל
Like	as a woman with child	that draweth near	the time of her delivery	is in pain
H3644	H2030	H7126	H3205	H2342
וְתִזְעַק	בְּחִבְלֵי יָהּ	הֵי יָנוּ כִּי	נִמְכָּנָה יְיָ	יְהוָה:
and crieth out	in her pangs	H3651 H1961	so have we been in thy sight	O LORD
H2199	H2256		H6440	H3068

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 13:8 (Parallel theme): And they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be as flames.

John 16:21 (Parallel theme): A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.

Isaiah 21:3 (Parallel theme): Therefore are my loins filled with pain: pangs have taken hold upon me, as the pangs of a woman that travaileth: I was bowed down at the hearing of it; I was dismayed at the seeing of it.

1 Thessalonians 5:3 (Parallel theme): For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.