

Isaiah 51:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she hath brought forth; neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons that she hath brought up.

Analysis

There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she hath brought forth; neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons that she hath brought up. This poignant verse depicts Jerusalem's helpless isolation. The doubled imagery—"brought forth" (birthed) and "brought up" (raised)—emphasizes Jerusalem's maternal investment in her children, making their absence more tragic. The terms "guide" (nahal, נָהַל, lead) and "taketh her by the hand" (machaziq, מַחְזִיק, support) describe reciprocal care children owe aging parents.

The verse exposes role reversal: the mother who birthed and nurtured sons now needs guidance and support, but all have abandoned her. This reflects the exile's demographic devastation—educated leaders, skilled workers, and protective sons deported or killed. Jerusalem staggers drunk (v. 17) with no one to steady her, amplifying her vulnerability and shame.

From a Reformed perspective, this illustrates humanity's utter helplessness apart from divine intervention. Like Jerusalem, sinners cannot guide themselves out of judgment's stupor or grasp salvation's hand through their own offspring or works. Verses 17-20 describe the problem; verses 21-23 provide God's solution. This teaches that salvation must come from outside ourselves—Christ becomes both guide (John 14:6) and hand-holder (Isaiah 41:13) for those incapable of self-rescue. The doctrine of total depravity finds illustration here: even one's own children cannot save from divine judgment's effects.

Historical Context

This verse reflects ancient Near Eastern values of filial piety where adult children cared for aging parents. Exodus 20:12's command to "honour thy father and thy mother" included material and physical support. Ruth's devotion to Naomi exemplifies this ideal (Ruth 1:16-17). Jerusalem's tragedy is that despite fulfilling maternal duties, she receives no reciprocal care.

The Babylonian deportations specifically targeted leadership—the king, princes, warriors, craftsmen (2 Kings 24:14-16). This brain drain left Jerusalem defenseless and leaderless. Archaeologically, post-exilic population estimates suggest dramatic decline. The promise implicit in this lament is that God Himself will guide and uphold Jerusalem since human help fails. Psalm 146:3-5 teaches this lesson: don't trust princes but the God who "upholdeth the fatherless and widow." God becomes Jerusalem's true Son who guides and supports.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What situations in your life expose your complete dependence on God rather than human help?
2. How does this picture of helplessness deepen appreciation for Christ as guide and helper?
3. Where might God be calling you to 'take by the hand' someone spiritually staggering?

Interlinear Text

אֵין	לֹא	מִנְהָה	לְהַמְכִיל	בָּנִים	בָּנִים	בָּנִים
H369			H0	H3605		her among all the sons
		H5095			H1121	
whom she hath brought forth				neither is there any that taketh		her by the hand
	H3205		H369		H2388	H3027
מִכֶּל	בָּנִים		מִכְזִיק			
H3605	her among all the sons					
	H1121					
			גִּדְלָה:			

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 49:21 (Parallel theme): Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?

Psalms 88:18 (Parallel theme): Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.

Isaiah 41:13 (Parallel theme): For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.

Isaiah 45:1 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut;

Psalms 142:4 (Parallel theme): I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.

Mark 8:23 (Parallel theme): And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought.

Matthew 9:36 (Parallel theme): But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

Matthew 15:14 (Parallel theme): Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

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