

Isaiah 51:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

These two things are come unto thee; who shall be sorry for thee? desolation, and destruction, and the famine, and the sword: by whom shall I comfort thee?

Analysis

These two things are come unto thee; who shall be sorry for thee? desolation, and destruction, and the famine, and the sword: by whom shall I comfort thee? The opening "two things" actually lists four calamities, suggesting Hebrew parallelism pairs them: desolation (shod, שׁוֹד) with destruction (shever, שֶׁבַר), and famine (ra'av, רָעָב) with sword (cherev, חֶרֶב). These represent comprehensive judgment—external military attack (sword) and internal social collapse (famine), physical devastation and human destruction.

The rhetorical questions—"who shall be sorry for thee?" and "by whom shall I comfort thee?"—emphasize Jerusalem's isolation. The Hebrew yenud (יָנַד, "be sorry") suggests shaking the head in sympathetic grief, while anachamekh (אָנַחְמֶךָ, "comfort thee") involves consoling presence. The implied answer: no human comforter exists. This creates desperation that forces looking beyond human sources to divine provision.

From a Reformed perspective, this verse sets up the gospel paradox. Humanity under judgment deserves no sympathy, no comfort—we've merited wrath. Yet verse 21 begins "Therefore hear now this," introducing God's merciful intervention despite deserved judgment. Christ becomes the comforter (Paraclete, John 14:16) when no human comfort suffices. The doctrine of grace shines brightest against the backdrop of deserved desolation. God's comfort comes not because we merit it but despite our forfeiting all right to it.

Historical Context

These four judgments correspond to covenant curses in Deuteronomy 28:15-68 and Leviticus 26:14-39. The pairing of famine and sword appears frequently (Jeremiah 14:12, 18; 21:7; Ezekiel 5:12)—siege warfare created starvation, culminating in violent conquest. Archaeological evidence from 586 BCE destruction layers shows burned grain stores and weapons, confirming both judgments.

Lamentations provides extended meditation on Jerusalem's isolation: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" (Lamentations 1:12). Neighboring nations either gloated over Judah's fall (Obadiah 1:12-13) or feared similar fate, offering no comfort. Yet God's comfort comes (2 Corinthians 1:3-4—"God of all comfort"), ultimately through Christ who endured desolation, destruction, abandonment, and death to bring consolation to the afflicted.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What losses in your life seem beyond human comfort, requiring divine consolation?
2. How does recognizing that you deserve no comfort deepen gratitude for God's mercy?
3. Where is God calling you to comfort others who experience isolation and loss?

Interlinear Text

שְׁתֵּי יָמִים	הֵנָּה	קֹרְאֶתְךָ	מִי	יָבֹוד	לָךְ
These two	H2007	things are come	H4310	unto thee who shall be sorry	H0
H8147		H7122		H5110	
הַשֹּׁד	וְהַפְּסָד	וְהָרָעָב	וְהַחֶבֶד	מִי	
for thee desolation	and destruction	and the famine	and the sword	H4310	
H7701	H7667	H7458	H2719		
אֲנִי־מְנַחֵם:					
by whom shall I comfort					
H5162					

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 47:9 (Parallel theme): But these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood: they shall come upon thee in their perfection for the multitude of thy sorceries, and for the great abundance of thine enchantments.

Amos 7:2 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, that when they had made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord GOD, forgive, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small.