

Jeremiah 13:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

What wilt thou say when he shall punish thee? for thou hast taught them to be captains, and as chief over thee: shall not sorrows take thee, as a woman in travail?

Analysis

This verse announces unexpected reversal: 'What wilt thou say when he shall punish thee? for thou hast taught them to be captain, and as chief over thee.' When punishment comes, what excuse will remain? 'Thou hast taught them' (limmadt otham)—Jerusalem trained her own destroyers! Those she cultivated as 'captain' (alluf, chief, leader) and 'chief' (rosh, head) now rule over her as conquerors. The nations she courted as allies become oppressors. 'Shall not sorrows take thee, as a woman in travail?' Birth pangs (chavalim) picture sudden, inescapable, intensifying pain. Judgment arrives like labor—unavoidable once begun.

Historical Context

Judah's alliance politics—courting Egypt, then Babylon—created the relationships that destroyed her. Nebuchadnezzar, once Judah's suzerain whom they acknowledged, became the instrument of destruction when they rebelled. The nations they trained themselves to trust betrayed that trust. Political maneuvering produced the very enemies who destroyed them.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How did Judah 'teach' her oppressors to dominate her through alliance politics?
2. What does the birth pangs imagery suggest about judgment's inevitability once begun?

Interlinear Text

מֶה	תֹּאמְרֵי	כִּי	יִפְקֹד	עַל יוֹ	אֶת
H4100	What wilt thou say	H3588	when he shall punish	H5921	H859
	H559		H6485		
	לָמַדְתָּ	אֶתָּם	עַל יוֹ	אֶלְפֵי יָם	לְרֹאשׁ
	thee for thou hast taught	H853	H5921	them to be captains	and as chief
	H3925			H441	H7218
וְהָלַל	חֲבָלִים	יִאָּחֱזוּ וְ	כָמוֹ	אֶשֶׁת	לִדְהָ:
H3808	over thee shall not sorrows	take	H3644	thee as a woman	in travail
	H2256	H270		H802	H3205

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.

Jeremiah 4:31 (Parallel theme): For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, and the anguish as of her that bringeth forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion, that bewaileth herself, that spreadeth her hands, saying, Woe is me now! for my soul is wearied because of murderers.

Isaiah 10:3 (Parallel theme): And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? to whom will ye flee for help? and where will ye leave your glory?

Jeremiah 5:31 (Parallel theme): The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?

Jeremiah 38:22 (Parallel theme): And, behold, all the women that are left in the king of Judah's house shall be brought forth to the king of Babylon's princes, and those women shall say, Thy friends have set thee on, and have prevailed against thee: thy feet are sunk in the mire, and they are turned away back.

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