

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

מָה	תֹּאמֶרְתָּ	בַּיּ	יִפְלֹךְ	עַל	יְהוָה	וְאַתָּה
H4100	What wilt thou say	H3588	when he shall punish	H5921		H859
		H559		H6485		
לְמַה	דָּתָת	אַתָּה	עַל	יְמִינְךָ	לְרַאשְׁךָ	
thee for thou hast taught		H853	H5921	them to be captains	and as chief	
				H441		H7218
כָּל	וְאַתָּה	סְבִּילִים	כִּמְהַזֵּבֶן	אַשְׁתָּוֹת	לְדֹהָה:	
H3808	over thee shall not sorrows	H2256	H3644	thee as a woman	in travail	
			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.