

Jeremiah 18:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and pour out their blood by the force of the sword; and let their wives be bereaved of their children, and be widows; and let their men be put to death; let their young men be slain by the sword in battle.

Analysis

Jeremiah's imprecatory prayer: "Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and pour out their blood by the force of the sword." This harsh petition asks God to execute the judgment Jeremiah has prophesied. The comprehensive curse—"let their wives be bereaved of their children, and be widows; and let their men be put to death; let their young men be slain by the sword in battle"—encompasses all ages and both genders, matching the totality of threatened covenant curses (Deut 28:15-68).

Such imprecatory prayers trouble modern readers but reflect:

1. confidence that God will indeed judge the wicked
2. alignment with divinely revealed judgment
3. personal restraint from revenge while committing justice to God
4. prophetic authority to pronounce covenant curses.

Jeremiah doesn't take personal vengeance but asks God to fulfill His own word. These are covenant curses for covenant violation, not personal spite.

Under the new covenant, Christ taught loving enemies and praying for persecutors (Matt 5:44), yet also pronounced woes on hypocrites (Matt 23) and will execute

final judgment (Rev 19:11-16). The tension: God's people long for justice while extending mercy, knowing all deserve judgment but some receive grace. Imprecatory psalms can be prayed against spiritual enemies (Satan, demons, sin) while we show mercy to human opponents, recognizing that we too were once enemies whom God reconciled (Rom 5:10).

Historical Context

Covenant curses in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 included precisely these judgments—famine, sword, bereavement, widowhood. Jeremiah's imprecation aligns with revealed divine will for covenant-breakers. The Babylonian invasion fulfilled these curses literally (Lam 2:20-21, 4:10, 5:3, 11). Ancient Near Eastern treaty curses similarly invoked comprehensive disaster on covenant violators, demonstrating the cultural context of such language.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How do you balance desire for God's justice with Christ's command to love enemies?
2. What role do imprecatory prayers have in Christian spirituality when directed against spiritual enemies (sin, Satan)?
3. How does recognizing that you deserved the judgment Christ bore affect your prayers regarding others' judgment?

Interlinear Text

לְכָל	תֵּת	אֶת	בְּנֵי	לְרָעָב	וְהַגְּרָם	עַל
H3651	Therefore deliver up	H853	their children	H7458	to the famine	and pour out
	H5414		H1121		H7458	H5921
בְּדִין	בְּרִבּוֹת	וְתָהִרְתָּ	נְשִׁיחָה	שְׁפָלוֹת		
their blood by the force	by the sword	H1961	and let their wives	be bereaved		
H3027	H2719		H802	H7909		
וְאֶלְמָבָד	וְאֶלְמָבָד	בְּנֵי יִהְיֵה	בְּנֵי יִהְיֵה	מִתְּנִתָּה	מִתְּנִתָּה	
of their children and be widows	H376	H1961	be put	to death		
H490		H2026	H4194			
בְּבָנָיו	מִתְּבָנָה	בְּבָנָיו	בְּבָנָיו	בְּמִלְחָמָה		
let their young men	H5221	H2719	H4421	in battle		
H970						

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 9:21 (Parallel theme): For death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces, to cut off the children from without, and the young men from the streets.

Jeremiah 15:8 (Parallel theme): Their widows are increased to me above the sand of the seas: I have brought upon them against the mother of the young men a spoiler at noonday: I have caused him to fall upon it suddenly, and terrors upon the city.

Exodus 22:24 (Word): And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.

Deuteronomy 32:25 (Word): The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of gray hairs.

Amos 4:10 (Word): I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your

horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

Lamentations 5:3 (Parallel theme): We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows.

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