

Jeremiah 20:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And let that man be as the cities which the LORD overthrew,
and repented not: and let him hear the cry in the morning,
and the shouting at noontide;

Analysis

Jeremiah's lament continues with another hyperbolic curse: 'let that man be as the cities which the LORD overthrew, and repented not.' This clearly references Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24-25), paradigmatic examples of divine judgment. The phrase 'and repented not' (lo nicham, לֹא נִחַם) emphasizes the finality and irrevocability of that judgment—God did not relent or change His mind. The vivid imagery 'let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noontide' describes the sounds of destruction: cries of terror at dawn when attack begins, shouting of battle by midday. This continues the irrational cursing of the innocent messenger, expressing Jeremiah's wish that announcing his birth had brought disaster rather than joy. The allusion to Sodom's destruction carries theological weight—those cities represent complete judgment for complete wickedness. Yet Jeremiah applies this to the messenger of his birth, revealing how suffering can distort perspective. This teaches that godly people in crisis may make extreme statements that shouldn't be taken as theological pronouncements. God's grace allows such cries without condemnation, understanding that pain speaks through these words.

Historical Context

Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction became Israel's primary example of divine judgment (Isaiah 1:9, 13:19; Ezekiel 16:49-50; Amos 4:11). The phrase 'overthrew and repented not' would immediately call to mind that catastrophic judgment.

Ancient Near Eastern warfare began at dawn (the 'cry in the morning') and intensified through the day (the 'shouting at noontide'). Jerusalem itself would soon experience this pattern when Babylon attacked—morning assault, midday battle, eventual destruction (2 Kings 25:1-10). Jeremiah's prophetic imagination associates his birth with such destruction—he wishes his birth had brought disaster to the messenger rather than joy. This extreme language parallels Job's curses (Job 3:3-10) and demonstrates how God's faithful servants can experience profound despair. Church history records similar expressions: Jerome wished he'd never been born, Luther struggled with suicidal despair, Spurgeon battled depression. These examples comfort believers experiencing similar darkness, showing that such struggles don't disqualify us from faith or service.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does Jeremiah's reference to Sodom's irrevocable judgment express the depth of his wish that he'd never been born?
2. What does God's preservation of this extreme, irrational lament teach us about His patience with our struggles and emotional outbursts during suffering?
3. In what ways can understanding that godly people like Jeremiah experienced profound despair give us permission to be honest about our own struggles?

Interlinear Text

וְהָיָה H1961	וְהָיָה יֵשׁ H376	וְהָיָה וְאֵל H1931	וְהָיָה יֵשׁ H5892	וְהָיָה יֵשׁ H834	וְהָיָה יֵשׁ H2015
	And let that man	be as the cities	overthrew		
וְהָיָה H3068	וְהָיָה יֵשׁ H3808	וְהָיָה יֵשׁ H5162	וְהָיָה יֵשׁ H8085	וְהָיָה יֵשׁ H2201	
which the LORD	and repented	not and let him hear	the cry		
וְהָיָה יֵשׁ H1242	וְהָיָה יֵשׁ H8643	וְהָיָה יֵשׁ H6256	וְהָיָה יֵשׁ H6672		
in the morning	and the shouting	at noontide			

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 18:22 (Parallel theme): Let a cry be heard from their houses, when thou shalt bring a troop suddenly upon them: for they have digged a pit to take me, and hid snares for my feet.

Deuteronomy 29:23 (References Lord): And that the whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein, like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath: