

Jeremiah 21:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, wherewith ye fight against the king of Babylon, and against the Chaldeans, which besiege you without the walls, and I will assemble them into the midst of this city.

Analysis

Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands—God's answer begins with the covenant formula identifying Yahweh as 'the LORD God of Israel,' emphasizing His covenant relationship even as He pronounces judgment. The phrase hineni mesev, (הִנֵּה מֵסֵב) 'Behold, I will turn back') uses savav (שָׁבַב), meaning to turn around, reverse direction, or cause to return. God declares He will make Jerusalem's weapons turn against them—their own military equipment will become useless or counterproductive.

Wherewith ye fight against the king of Babylon, and against the Chaldeans, which besiege you without the walls—the description 'without the walls' (michutz lechomah, מִחוֹץ לְחוֹמָה) indicates Babylon's army surrounds Jerusalem completely. **And I will assemble them into the midst of this city**—asaphti otam (אָסַפְתִּי אֶתְּם, 'I will gather them') reveals God's active role: He will drive Jerusalem's defenders back from the walls, collapsing their defensive perimeter until the enemy occupies Jerusalem's heart. This reverses holy war theology where God fought for Israel. Now God fights against His own city, making defense impossible. This fulfills covenant curses of Leviticus 26:17, 25: 'I will set my face against you...

I will bring a sword upon you.' The tragedy is complete: Israel's covenant God becomes their enemy because they broke covenant.

Historical Context

This prophecy was fulfilled precisely during Jerusalem's fall in 586 BC. Despite having fortified walls, Jerusalem's defenders were gradually pushed back by relentless Babylonian siege tactics including siege towers, battering rams, and earthworks. Second Kings 25:4 records that when the city wall was breached, 'all the men of war fled by night'—showing complete military collapse. Archaeological excavations in Jerusalem's City of David reveal arrowheads, burnt layers, and destroyed buildings from this period, confirming the intensity of the fighting and Jerusalem's conquest. The prophecy's shocking element was God's declaration that He personally engineered Jerusalem's defeat. Ancient Near Eastern peoples expected their gods to defend their cities; Israel had experienced this in the past (2 Kings 19:35). Jeremiah's prophecy declared that Israel's God would instead fight for the enemy—a concept nearly unthinkable in ancient religious thought but consistent with covenant theology where God's blessing depended on obedience, not national loyalty.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does God's declaration that He would turn Israel's weapons against them illustrate the principle that covenant blessings become covenant curses through disobedience?

2. What does it mean for God to become His own people's enemy, and how should this warn us about presuming upon relationship with God while living in rebellion?

Interlinear Text

בָּהּ	אָמַר	הָנָכְנִי	יְהִי הָאֱלֹהִי	יְשִׁבָּא לְאַלְפָי	מִסְבֵּב
H3541	Thus saith	the LORD	God	of Israel	H2005
	H559	H3068	H430	H3478	Behold I will turn back
					H5437
אַתָּה	כָּל	אָשָׁר	בְּיָדְכֶם	אָשָׁר	
H853	the weapons	of war	H834	that are in your hands	H834
	H3627	H4421		H3027	
אַתָּה	בְּכָל	אַתָּה	מִלְּכֵם	אַתָּה	
H859	wherewith ye fight	H0	H853	against the king	H853
	H3898			H4428	H894
לְחוֹמָם	מִחְזָקָה	עֲלֵיכֶם	בְּפִשְׁדֵיכֶם	בְּכָל	
and against the Chaldeans	which besiege	H5921	you without	the walls	
H3778	H6696		H2351		H2346
בְּזָאתִי	בְּעֵיר	תְּוֹךְ	בְּזָאתִי	בְּזָאתִי	
and I will assemble	H853	H413	H8432	H2063	
	H622		H5892		

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 13:4 (Kingdom): The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as of a great people; a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together: the LORD of hosts mustereth the host of the battle.

Isaiah 5:5 (Parallel theme): And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down;

Jeremiah 32:5 (References Lord): And he shall lead Zedekiah to Babylon, and there shall he be until I visit him, saith the LORD: though ye fight with the Chaldeans, ye shall not prosper.

Jeremiah 33:5 (Parallel theme): They come to fight with the Chaldeans, but it is to fill them with the dead bodies of men, whom I have slain in mine anger and in my fury, and for all whose wickedness I have hid my face from this city.

Zechariah 14:2 (Parallel theme): For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

Jeremiah 39:3 (Kingdom): And all the princes of the king of Babylon came in, and sat in the middle gate, even Nergal-sharezer, Samgar-nebo, Sarsechim, Rab-saris, Nergal-sharezer, Rab-mag, with all the residue of the princes of the king of Babylon.

Lamentations 2:5 (References Lord): The Lord was as an enemy: he hath swallowed up Israel, he hath swallowed up all her palaces: he hath destroyed his strong holds, and hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation.

Lamentations 2:7 (References Lord): The Lord hath cast off his altar, he hath abhorred his sanctuary, he hath given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; they have made a noise in the house of the LORD, as in the day of a solemn feast.