

Jeremiah 47:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

O thou sword of the LORD, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still.

Analysis

O thou sword of the LORD, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still. The prophet personifies the sword of divine judgment, crying out for it to cease its devastating work. "Sword of the LORD" (cherev laYHVH, חֶרֶב לְיְהוָה) identifies Babylon's military conquest as God's instrument—not merely human warfare but divine judgment. The possessive "of the LORD" indicates ownership and control: this sword acts under God's authority and direction.

"How long will it be ere thou be quiet?" (ad anah lo tishhaqt, עד־אתה לא תשחט) expresses exhaustion with prolonged judgment. The verb שָׁקַט (shaqat) means to be quiet, at rest, or inactive. This plaintive cry recognizes the sword's relentless activity—campaign after campaign, city after city, year after year of destruction. The threefold imperative that follows intensifies the plea: "put up thyself into thy scabbard" (heasfi, הִאֵסֵף, gather yourself in), "rest" (hiragai, הִרְגַּעַת, be at ease), and "be still" (domi, דָמֵי, be silent/cease).

This verse captures ambivalence toward divine judgment: recognizing its justice while longing for its end. The speaker (whether Jeremiah or representing the Philistines) acknowledges the sword as the LORD's but pleads for mercy. This tension between justice and mercy, judgment and compassion, pervades prophetic literature. The cry anticipates the greater question: when will God's wrath be satisfied? The answer comes only through Christ, who absorbed divine wrath on the cross, satisfying justice and enabling mercy.

Historical Context

The imagery of God's sword executing judgment appears throughout Scripture (Deuteronomy 32:41-42, Isaiah 34:5-6, Ezekiel 21:3-5). Ancient Near Eastern warfare was brutal, with campaigns often involving siege, slaughter, and destruction of entire cities. Babylonian military tactics, documented in both biblical and extra-biblical sources, included systematic devastation designed to prevent rebellion and ensure submission.

Nebuchadnezzar's campaigns against the western territories (including Philistia, Judah, Phoenicia, and others) extended over decades. The Babylonian Chronicle records multiple military expeditions between 605-585 BCE as Nebuchadnezzar consolidated control over territories formerly dominated by Assyria and Egypt. The sustained nature of these campaigns—"how long?"—reflects historical reality: Babylon's sword was not quickly sheathed but remained active for years.

The plea for the sword to return to its scabbard echoes ancient Near Eastern concepts of divine weapons that execute judgment and then rest. Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Canaanite texts describe war deities whose weapons personify destructive power. Jeremiah adopts this imagery while radically redefining it: the LORD alone controls the sword, using even pagan Babylon as His instrument, and will determine when judgment ceases.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How should believers understand the tension between longing for God's judgment on evil and hoping for His mercy?
2. In what ways does Christ's cross answer the cry "how long?" by satisfying divine justice and enabling the sword to be sheathed?
3. What does God's use of pagan nations as His "sword" teach about His sovereignty over all historical events and powers?

Interlinear Text

תִשְׁאַק תִּי
לֹא
אָנָה עַד לִיהְיוֹת הַנִּכְבֵּד הַזֶּה
O thou sword of the LORD H5704 H575 how long will it be ere thou be quiet
H1945 H2719 H3068 H3808 H8252

אַל הַאֲסִפֵּי
תַּשְׁעַר גַּת
thyself into thy scabbard
put up H413 H8593 rest and be still
H622 H7280 H1826

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 12:12 (Word): The spoilers are come upon all high places through the wilderness: for the sword of the LORD shall devour from the one end of the land even to the other end of the land: no flesh shall have peace.

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