

Jeremiah 9:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Yet hear the word of the LORD, O ye women, and let your ear receive the word of his mouth, and teach your daughters wailing, and every one her neighbour lamentation.

Analysis

Yet hear the word of the LORD, O ye women, and let your ear receive the word of his mouth, and teach your daughters wailing, and every one her neighbour lamentation. This verse forms part of Jeremiah's prophecy of imminent judgment upon Judah. The Hebrew imperative shema (שִׁמְעוּ, "hear") demands urgent attention to divine revelation. God directly addresses women, likely because in ancient Near Eastern culture, women led public mourning rituals and passed cultural traditions to the next generation.

The command to "teach your daughters wailing" (nehi, נְהִי—a formal lamentation) and "neighbour lamentation" (qinah, קִינָה—a funeral dirge) indicates the magnitude of coming devastation. This wasn't to be ordinary grief but organized, intergenerational mourning. The Hebrew construction suggests professional mourning women would be insufficient—every woman must become skilled in lamentation because death would be so widespread.

Theologically, this verse underscores God's sovereignty in judgment and the seriousness of covenant unfaithfulness. Yet even in announcing judgment, God shows mercy by warning the people, giving them opportunity to repent. The New Testament application reminds believers that persistent rejection of God's word leads to inevitable judgment, but also that God faithfully warns before He judges (2 Peter 3:9). The verse challenges us to receive God's word seriously, even when it confronts our sin.

Historical Context

This prophecy dates to approximately 605-586 BC, during the final decades before Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah ministered during the reigns of Judah's last kings (Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah), a period of political instability, religious apostasy, and impending Babylonian invasion. Despite King Josiah's earlier reforms (622 BC), Judah had relapsed into idolatry, social injustice, and false confidence in the temple's presence.

Ancient Near Eastern mourning customs involved professional mourning women who led public lamentations with stylized crying, tearing garments, wearing sackcloth, and casting dust on heads. These rituals expressed communal grief and sought to move the gods to compassion. Archaeological findings from Mesopotamia and Egypt confirm such practices were widespread. However, Jeremiah's prophecy indicates this coming judgment would exceed normal mourning capacity—every woman would need to learn these skills because professional mourners couldn't handle the scale of death.

The Babylonian sieges of 597 and 586 BC fulfilled this prophecy terribly. Thousands died from famine, disease, and violence. Lamentations (likely written by Jeremiah) records the unbearable suffering, including cannibalism during the siege. The intergenerational teaching mentioned here proved tragically necessary.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. Why does God specifically address women in this passage, and what does this reveal about their role in transmitting faith and culture?
2. How does this prophecy demonstrate both God's justice in judgment and His mercy in providing warning?

3. What parallels can we draw between Judah's rejection of God's word and contemporary society's response to biblical truth?
4. How should believers today respond to God's warnings about judgment, both personally and in calling others to repentance?
5. In what ways does this passage challenge us to take God's word seriously even when it contains difficult or uncomfortable messages?

Interlinear Text

פִּי	שָׁמַעְנָה	וְאִשָּׁה	דְּבַר	יְהוָה	וְתִקַּח	אָזְנוֹךָ
H3588	Yet hear	O ye women	the word	of the LORD	receive	and let your ear
	H8085	H802	H1697	H3068	H3947	H241
דְּבַר	פִּי	וְלִמֵּד דָּנָה	בְּנוֹתֵיכֶם	נָהִי	וְאִשָּׁה	
the word	of his mouth	and teach	your daughters	wailing	O ye women	
H1697	H6310	H3925	H1323	H5092	H802	
רֵעוּתָהּ	קִינָה:					
her neighbour	lamentation					
H7468	H7015					

Additional Cross-References

Job 22:22 (Word): Receive, I pray thee, the law from his mouth, and lay up his words in thine heart.

Isaiah 3:16 (References Lord): Moreover the LORD saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: