

Jeremiah 9:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders.

Analysis

This verse warns against trusting neighbors: 'Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother.' The Hebrew *shameru* (שִׁמְרוּ, guard yourselves) and *al-tivtachu* (אַל-תִּבְטְחוּ, do not trust) indicate pervasive social breakdown. 'For every brother will utterly supplant' uses the Hebrew *aqov ya'aqov* (עָקַב יַעֲקֹב), a wordplay on Jacob's name—who 'supplanted' his brother Esau (Genesis 25:26, 27:36). The society has become a nation of Jacobs, everyone deceiving everyone. 'And every neighbour will walk with slanders' (*rakhil*, רָכִיל, slander, tale-bearing) indicates gossip and false witness as normal behavior. Trust, the foundation of community, has collapsed entirely.

Historical Context

The reference to Jacob's supplanting recalls patriarchal history, suggesting the nation has degenerated to primordial treachery. Social breakdown during Jeremiah's era reflected political instability and moral chaos. Court intrigues, false accusations, and betrayal characterized Judah's final decades. Jeremiah himself experienced betrayal by family (11:21, 12:6) and fellow citizens (38:4-6). Micah 7:5-6 describes similar social dissolution.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What does the Jacob wordplay suggest about how covenant people can degenerate to their ancestors' worst traits?
2. How does the breakdown of social trust relate to the breakdown of covenant faithfulness to God?

Interlinear Text

אֵשׁ every one H376	וְכָל and every neighbour H7453	הִשָּׁמְרוּ Take ye heed H8104	וְעַל H5921	כָּל H3605	אָח for every brother H251	אֵל H408
וְתִבְטְחוּ and trust H982	כִּי H3588	כָּל H3605	אָח for every brother H251	יַעֲקֹב supplant H6117	בְּ supplant H6117	וְכָל H3605
וְכָל and every neighbour H7453	כִּי יֵלֶךְ with slanders H7400	יִהְיֶה will walk H1980				

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 6:28 (Parallel theme): They are all grievous revolters, walking with slanders: they are brass and iron; they are all corrupters.

Matthew 10:21 (Parallel theme): And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.

Leviticus 19:16 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD.

Psalms 15:3 (Parallel theme): He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.

Proverbs 25:18 (Parallel theme): A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow.

Proverbs 10:18 (Parallel theme): He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool.

Jeremiah 12:6 (Faith): For even thy brethren, and the house of thy father, even they have dealt treacherously with thee; yea, they have called a multitude after thee: believe them not, though they speak fair words unto thee.

Genesis 32:28 (Parallel theme): And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.