

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 (שָׁמְרוּ, guard yourselves) and al-tivtachu (אֲלֹתְבָתָחוּ, do not trust) indicate pervasive social breakdown. 'For every brother will utterly supplant' uses the Hebrew aqov ya'aqov (עֲקֹב יָעֹקֹב), 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, רְכִיל, 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

אֲשֶׁר	אֲשֶׁר	רְשָׁם	רְשָׁם	כִּל	כִּל	אֲחָ	אֲחָ	אֵל	אֵל
every one	and every neighbour	Take ye heed	H8104	H5921	H3605	for every brother	H251	H408	
H376	H7453								

תָּrust	תָּrust	כִּי	כִּי	בְּ	בְּ	יְעַלְקָ	יְעַלְקָ	כִּל	כִּל
and trust	H3588	H3605	for every brother	H251		supplant	supplant	H3605	
H982						H6117	H6117		

בְּ	בְּ	לִבְלָה:	לִבְלָה:	בְּ	בְּ
and every neighbour	with slanders	will walk	H1980		
H7453	H7400				

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.

Psalm 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.