

Lamentations 1:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul: see, O LORD, and consider; for I am become vile.

Analysis

The personified city cries: "All her people sigh, they seek bread" (kol-amah ne'enachim mevakshim lechem). The verb anach (אָנַח, "sigh, groan") indicates deep distress. "Seeking bread" describes the siege's famine. Verse 19 reveals even priests and elders "gave up the ghost" while seeking food. The phrase "they have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul" (natnu machmudihem be-okhel lehashiv nafesh) shows people bartering family treasures and heirlooms for food—the ultimate desperation. Material possessions prove worthless when survival is at stake. This challenges materialism: what we accumulate means nothing in crisis compared to daily bread. The verse concludes with a plea: "See, O LORD, and consider; for I am become vile" (zole hayiti, זֹלֶלָה הָיִיתִי). The term zolel means despised, worthless—Jerusalem acknowledges her degradation, appealing to God's compassion.

Historical Context

Archaeological evidence confirms severe famine during ancient sieges. At Lachish, excavators found evidence of hasty mass burials during the Babylonian conquest. Skeletal remains show signs of malnutrition. The bartering of treasures for food was common in desperate sieges. Later, during the AD 70 siege described by Josephus, similar conditions prevailed—people trading gold and jewelry for tiny amounts of food. The 'pleasant things' (machmudim) likely included family jewelry, precious metals, and other valuables normally passed as inheritance. Proverbs

31:10 says a virtuous woman is worth more than rubies; these same rubies were now exchanged for a loaf of bread.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does bartering treasures for bread illustrate Jesus's teaching that we cannot serve both God and mammon (Matthew 6:24)?
2. What 'pleasant things' in our lives might we value too highly until crisis reveals their relative worthlessness?
3. How does acknowledging 'I am become vile' model the humility necessary for receiving God's mercy and restoration?

Interlinear Text

כָּל	עַמָּהּ	נָאֲנָחִים	מִבֶּקֶשׁ יֵם	לֶחֶם	נָתַן וּ	
H3605	All her people	sigh	they seek	bread	they have given	
	H5971	H584	H1245	H3899	H5414	
מִמְּוִדֵּיהֶם	בָּא כָל	לְהַשִּׁיב	נַפְשׁ	רְאֵה	יְהוָה	וְהִבֵּי יָטָה
H4262	for meat	to relieve	the soul	see	O LORD	and consider
	H400	H7725	H5315	H7200	H3068	H5027
כִּי	הִי יָתִי	זוֹלִלָה:				
H3588	H1961	for I am become vile				
		H2151				

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 52:6 (Parallel theme): And in the fourth month, in the ninth day of the month, the famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land.

Jeremiah 38:9 (References Lord): My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city.

Lamentations 2:12 (Parallel theme): They say to their mothers, Where is corn and wine? when they swooned as the wounded in the streets of the city, when their soul was poured out into their mothers' bosom.

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