

Lamentations 1:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Zion spreadeth forth her hands, and there is none to comfort her: the LORD hath commanded concerning Jacob, that his adversaries should be round about him: Jerusalem is as a menstruous woman among them.

Analysis

Isolation compounds suffering: "Zion spreadeth forth her hands, and there is none to comfort her" (perserah Tsiyon be-yadeha ein menachem lah). The spread hands gesture signals distress and petition (Psalm 143:6, Isaiah 1:15). "No comforter" echoes verses 2, 9, 16—a repeated refrain emphasizing abandonment. "The LORD hath commanded concerning Jacob, that his adversaries should be round about him" (tsivah YHWH le-Ya'akov sevivav tsarav). God commands (tsivah, צַוָּה) enemies to surround Jacob—actively orchestrating judgment. Psalm 76:10 affirms even human wrath serves God's purposes. "Jerusalem is as a menstruous woman among them" (hayetah Yerushalayim le-nidah beneihem). Nidah (נִדָּה) refers to menstrual uncleanness (Leviticus 15:19-24), rendering one ceremonially defiled and socially isolated. The metaphor is deliberately offensive—what was holy is now unclean, what was honored is now avoided. This represents total reversal of covenant status.

Historical Context

The command for adversaries to surround Jacob was fulfilled literally. Archaeological and biblical evidence shows Babylon's systematic conquest: first campaign (605 BC) subdued region, second (597 BC) captured Jerusalem and exiled nobility, third (586 BC) destroyed city after 18-month siege. Surrounding

nations—Edom, Moab, Ammon, Philistia—aided or celebrated Judah's fall (Psalm 137:7, Obadiah 1:10-14, Ezekiel 25:3, 6, 8, 12, 15, 26:2). The menstrual uncleanness metaphor would powerfully communicate ceremonial defilement. Levitical law required separation during menstruation; the woman couldn't participate in worship or normal social interaction. Similarly, exiled Judah was cut off from temple worship, covenant land, and normal national existence. The comparison to menstruation appears also in Isaiah 64:6: 'all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags' (literally: menstrual garments).

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does the repeated 'no comforter' refrain emphasize the depth of isolation that covenant breaking produces?
2. What does it mean that God 'commanded' adversaries to surround His people, and how does this show His sovereignty even in judgment?
3. How does Christ remove the ceremonial uncleanness of sin, making us holy and acceptable in God's presence (Ephesians 5:25-27, Hebrews 10:19-22)?

Interlinear Text

פָּרֹשׂ הַ	צִיּוֹן	בְּיָדֶיָּהּ	אֵין	מִנְחָם	לָהּ
spreadeth forth	Zion	her hands	H369	and there is none to comfort	H0
H6566	H6726	H3027		H5162	
צִוָּה	יְהוָה	לִיעָקֹב	בְּ	סָבִיב יוֹ	
hath commanded	her the LORD	concerning Jacob		should be round about	
H6680	H3068	H3290		H5439	
צָר יוֹ	הִיא	יְרוּשָׁלַיִם	לְנָדָה	בְּיָנֶיהֶם:	
that his adversaries	H1961	him Jerusalem	is as a menstruous woman	H996	
H6862		H3389	H5079		

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 1:15 (Parallel theme): And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

Jeremiah 4:31 (Parallel theme): For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, and the anguish as of her that bringeth forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion, that bewaileth herself, that spreadeth her hands, saying, Woe is me now! for my soul is wearied because of murderers.

Lamentations 1:9 (References Lord): Her filthiness is in her skirts; she remembereth not her last end; therefore she came down wonderfully: she had no comforter. O LORD, behold my affliction: for the enemy hath magnified himself.

Lamentations 1:16 (Parallel theme): For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me: my children are desolate, because the enemy prevailed.

2 Kings 25:1 (References Jerusalem): And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about.

