

Lamentations 1:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Behold, O LORD; for I am in distress: my bowels are troubled;
mine heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled:
abroad the sword bereaveth, at home there is as death.

Analysis

Honest appeal: "Behold, O LORD; for I am in distress: my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me" (re'eh YHWH ki-tsar-li me'ai chomaru lib' nehpakh be-kirbi). The physical descriptions—"bowels troubled" (me'ai chomaru) and "heart turned within me" (libi nehpakh be-kirbi)—convey visceral anguish. Hebrew anthropology located emotions in physical organs: bowels (me'ah) for compassion and distress, heart (lev) for thought and will. The phrase "for I have grievously rebelled" (ki marokh mariti) uses emphatic construction: "rebellng, I have rebelled"—acknowledging willful, serious disobedience. "Abroad the sword bereaveth" (ba-chus shikhelah-charev) describes death outside from warfare. "At home there is as death" (ba-bayit ka-mavet) describes conditions inside (plague, famine) as deadly as warfare. Trapped between external and internal threats, with no escape. Yet the verse begins "Behold, O LORD"—even in despair, the speaker addresses God, maintaining relationship. This models bringing our worst moments to God rather than away from Him.

Historical Context

The siege created the described conditions: warfare outside Jerusalem's walls, death inside from starvation and disease. Jeremiah 14:18 presents similar picture: 'If I go forth into the field, then behold the slain with the sword! and if I enter into the city, then behold them that are sick with famine!' Ezekiel 7:15 warns: 'The sword is without, and the pestilence and the famine within.' Archaeological

evidence from besieged cities shows mass graves, burn layers, destruction, and evidence of malnutrition. The confession of grievous rebellion is significant. Throughout Jeremiah's 40-year ministry, leaders and people refused to acknowledge sin. False prophets promised peace (Jeremiah 6:14, 8:11, 23:17). Only when judgment fell did confession come—sadly, too late to avert consequences, though never too late for mercy. The verse demonstrates that even in extremity, honest confession before God is appropriate. Psalm 51:17 promises: 'a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.'

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does bringing our anguish honestly to God (rather than suppressing it or avoiding Him) demonstrate faith even in crisis?
2. What does it mean to be trapped between 'sword without' and 'death within,' and how does this describe the comprehensive nature of judgment?
3. How does confession of rebellion, even when consequences are unavoidable, still matter to God and affect our restoration?

Interlinear Text

נֶהַפּ נְ	חֲמָרָם רֹ	יַעַי	לִי	צָר	כִּי	יְהוָה ה	רָא ה
is turned	are troubled	my bowels				O LORD	Behold
H2015	H2560	H4578	H0	H6862	H3588	H3068	H7200
מָר יִתִּי	מָר יִתִּי	כִּי	בְקִרְבִּי	לִבִּי			
me for I have grievously	me for I have grievously		within	mine heart			
H4784	H4784		H7130	H3820			
כְּמֹתַי:	בֵּית יֵת	חֶרֶב	שְׂכָלָה	מֶח וַי			
there is as death	at home	the sword	bereaveth	abroad			
H4194	H1004	H2719	H7921	H2351			

Additional Cross-References

Lamentations 2:11 (Parallel theme): Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people; because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city.

Isaiah 16:11 (Parallel theme): Wherefore my bowels shall sound like an harp for Moab, and mine inward parts for Kir-haresh.

Deuteronomy 32:25 (Word): The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of gray hairs.

Ezekiel 7:15 (Word): The sword is without, and the pestilence and the famine within: he that is in the field shall die with the sword; and he that is in the city, famine and pestilence shall devour him.

Job 30:27 (Parallel theme): My bowels boiled, and rested not: the days of affliction prevented me.

Jeremiah 4:19 (Parallel theme): My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.