

Lamentations 1:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude: she dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest: all her persecutors overtook her between the straits.

Analysis

This verse succinctly describes Judah's exile: "Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude." The Hebrew galtah Yehudah (גָּלְתָּה יְהוּדָה) emphasizes the totality of exile—not just individuals but the nation itself has been removed from covenant land. The dual cause—"affliction" (oni, עָנוֹת) and "great servitude" (rov avodah, רֹב עֲבוֹדָה)—points to both external oppression and internal burdens that preceded exile. The phrase "she dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest" fulfills Deuteronomy's covenant curse: "among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest" (Deuteronomy 28:65). The Hebrew manoach (מְנוֹחָה, "rest") is the same term used for the Promised Land as God's rest (Deuteronomy 12:9). In exile, Judah loses not just geography but the covenant rest that land represented. The final clause, "all her persecutors overtook her between the straits," uses vivid imagery of hunters trapping prey in narrow passages where escape is impossible. This describes both the military campaigns that led to capture and the theological reality that covenant breakers cannot escape divine judgment. Yet Lamentations as a whole moves toward hope, anticipating the greater rest found in Christ (Hebrews 4:1-11).

Historical Context

The Babylonian exile (586-538 BC) represented the greatest crisis in Old Testament Israel's history. Approximately 4,600 Judeans were deported in three waves (Jeremiah 52:28-30), though the total number including women and children may have exceeded 10,000. They settled in Babylonian communities like Tel-abib by the Chebar River (Ezekiel 3:15). The "affliction and great servitude" refers both to the siege conditions (famine, warfare, disease) and the heavy tribute Babylon imposed before the final conquest. Jeremiah records that King Jehoiakim became Nebuchadnezzar's vassal, paying oppressive taxes (2 Kings 24:1, Jeremiah 22:13-17). This servitude intensified under Zedekiah, draining resources and morale. Life in exile meant dwelling "among the heathen" in a land of idolatry, without temple worship, far from covenant land. Daniel, Ezekiel, and others maintained faith, but the community faced intense pressure to assimilate. The "no rest" experience fulfilled Moses' warnings and previewed the spiritual homelessness of all who live outside God's covenant rest.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does the exile experience of ancient Judah illuminate the spiritual exile that all humanity experiences outside of Christ?
2. What does it mean to find 'no rest' in worldly pursuits, and how does Jesus offer the rest that Judah lost in exile (Matthew 11:28-30)?
3. In what ways might Christians today experience a similar tension of living 'among the nations' while seeking God's kingdom rest?
4. How should the fulfillment of Deuteronomy's covenant curses strengthen our confidence in God's promises and warnings throughout Scripture?

Interlinear Text

גָּلַת הַ	יְהוּדָה	מִעַנִּי	וּמְרַב	עֲבָדָה הַ
is gone into captivity	Judah	because of affliction	and because of great	servitude
H1540	H3063	H6040	H7230	H5656
בְּיַאֲשָׁב הַ	בְּגֹוי מִ	לֹא	מִצְאָה הַ	כֹּל
H1931	H3427	H1471	H3808	H4672
she dwelleth	among the heathen		she findeth	no rest
				H4494
רָדָף יָבֵךְ	הַשִּׁגְוָה	בֵּין	בֵּין	בֵּין
all her persecutors	overtook	H996	her between the straits	
H7291	H5381		H4712	

Additional Cross-References

Lamentations 2:9 (Parallel theme): Her gates are sunk into the ground; he hath destroyed and broken her bars: her king and her princes are among the Gentiles: the law is no more; her prophets also find no vision from the LORD.

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