

Lamentations 1:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper; for the LORD hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her children are gone into captivity before the enemy.

Analysis

The reversal of covenant blessing appears starkly: "Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper." The Hebrew hayu tsareha le-rosh (הָיוּ צָרֶיהָ לְרֹאשׁ) literally means "her adversaries have become the head"—the exact opposite of Deuteronomy 28:13, where obedience would make Israel "the head, and not the tail." The prosperity of enemies (oyveha shalvu) contrasts with Jerusalem's distress. The theological explanation follows immediately: "for the LORD hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions." The Hebrew rov pasha'eha (רַב פְּשָׁעֶיהָ) emphasizes not just sin but "multitude of transgressions"—willful, repeated covenant violations. The verb hogah (הוֹגָה, "afflicted") presents Yahweh as the active agent in judgment. This isn't random tragedy but divine discipline. The verse concludes with the heartbreaking image: "her children are gone into captivity before the enemy." Children (olaleha, עוֹלָלֶיהָ) refers to young ones, emphasizing innocence suffering for parental sin. Yet this judgment serves redemptive purposes—breaking pride, exposing the futility of idolatry, and preparing hearts for restoration. The Reformed doctrine of divine sovereignty shines through: even judgment serves God's ultimate purposes of redemption.

Historical Context

Deuteronomy 28 established the covenant framework: obedience brings blessing, disobedience brings curse. Verses 13-14 promised that faithful Israel would be "the head and not the tail," superior to surrounding nations. But verses 43-44 warned that disobedience would reverse this: "the stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low." Jerusalem's fall in 586 BC enacted this curse precisely. Babylon, a pagan empire, ruled over God's covenant people. Nebuchadnezzar plundered the temple, took sacred vessels to Babylon's idol temples (Daniel 1:2), and deported Judah's nobility, craftsmen, and children. This represented not just political defeat but theological crisis: how could pagan nations triumph over Yahweh's people? The answer lies in covenant theology. God remained faithful to His word—both promises and warnings. The exile demonstrated God's holiness and justice. He cannot overlook sin, even in His chosen people. This establishes the pattern that only perfect obedience satisfies God's justice, pointing forward to Christ's perfect righteousness imputed to believers.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does the reversal from 'head' to 'tail' demonstrate the seriousness of covenant breaking and the certainty of God's warnings?
2. What does it reveal about God's character that He disciplines His own people more severely than the surrounding nations?
3. How should the suffering of children for parental sin inform our understanding of corporate solidarity and generational consequences of sin?

4. In what ways does Christ reverse the curse of Lamentations 1:5, restoring believers to their position as covenant heirs and not slaves?

Interlinear Text

הִיא	צָרָהּ	לְרֹאשׁ	אֹיְבֵיהָ	שָׁלֹו	כִּי	יְהוָה
H1961	Her adversaries	are the chief	her enemies	prosper	H3588	for the LORD
	H6862	H7218	H341	H7951		H3068
הוּגָהּ	עַל	רַב	פְּשָׁעֶיהָ	עוֹלָלֶיהָ		
hath afflicted	H5921	her for the multitude	of her transgressions	her children		
H3013		H7230	H6588	H5768		
הֵלָכָהּ	שָׁבָהּ	לִפְנֵי	צָרָהּ			
are gone	into captivity	before	Her adversaries			
H1980	H7628	H6440	H6862			

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 39:9 (Parallel theme): Then Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carried away captive into Babylon the remnant of the people that remained in the city, and those that fell away, that fell to him, with the rest of the people that remained.

Ezekiel 9:9 (Sin): Then said he unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness: for they say, The LORD hath forsaken the earth, and the LORD seeth not.