

Lamentations 2:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground, and keep silence: they have cast up dust upon their heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth: the virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground.

Analysis

Corporate mourning rituals: "The elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground, and keep silence" (yeshvu la-arets yidmu ziknei bat-Tsiyon, ישבו לארכץ יידמו זקנים בת-צִיּוֹן). Sitting on the ground signifies grief (Job 2:8, 13). The verb damam (דָמַם, "be silent") suggests grief so profound that words fail. "They have cast up dust upon their heads" (he'elu afar al-rosham)—a mourning gesture (Joshua 7:6, Job 2:12). "They have girded themselves with sackcloth" (chagru sakim)—coarse goat-hair garments worn in grief and repentance. "The virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground" (horidu la-arets roshen betulot Yerushalayim)—young women who should be joyful in courtship and marriage instead mourn in despair. The comprehensive grief spans all ages: elders (wisdom), virgins (future hope). When both aged and young mourn together, the entire community is in crisis. These external expressions of grief are appropriate when genuine repentance accompanies them (Joel 2:12-13).

Historical Context

Mourning rituals in ancient Israel were formalized and communal. Unlike modern Western individualized grief, ancient Near Eastern cultures processed loss corporately through visible, external actions. Sitting on the ground (rather than chairs or benches) demonstrated humbling oneself (Isaiah 47:1). Dust on the head

recalled human mortality: 'for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return' (Genesis 3:19). Sackcloth was uncomfortable, marking a departure from normal comfortable clothing. The elders' silence contrasts with their normal role—sitting in the gates, rendering judgments, teaching Torah (Deuteronomy 21:19, Ruth 4:1-2). Now they have nothing to say; judgment has come despite their warnings being ignored. The virgins of Jerusalem, who might have danced at festivals (Judges 21:21, Jeremiah 31:13), now bow in grief. Jeremiah 9:17-21 describes professional mourning women summoned to teach others lamentation, showing mourning was both spontaneous and formally structured.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What value is there in corporate, visible expressions of grief and repentance rather than private, internal sorrow only?
2. How do modern evangelical churches balance appropriate joy in Christ with necessary seasons of corporate lament and mourning over sin?
3. When might silence before God (like the elders' silence) be more appropriate than words, prayers, or songs?

Interlinear Text

יִשְׁבֶּן	לֹא	רָצֶן	יִדְמֹה	זְלִגָּה	בַּת	אֵל
sit	to the ground	and keep silence	The elders	of the daughter	of Zion	
H3427	H776	H1826	H2205	H1323	H6726	

קָרְבָּן	עַל	רָאשׁ	קָרְבָּן
they have cast up	dust	H5921	their heads

שְׁקָם	הָרַקְעָן	לֹא	רָאשׁ	בְּתוּלָת
themselves with sackcloth	hang down	to the ground	their heads	the virgins
H8242	H3381	H776	H7218	H1330

ירושלים

of Jerusalem

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 3:26 (Parallel theme): And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground.

Isaiah 15:3 (Parallel theme): In their streets they shall gird themselves with sackcloth: on the tops of their houses, and in their streets, every one shall howl, weeping abundantly.

Isaiah 47:1 (Parallel theme): Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon, sit on the ground: there is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate.

Amos 8:3 (Parallel theme): And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord GOD: there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence.

Ezekiel 7:18 (Parallel theme): They shall also gird themselves with sackcloth, and horror shall cover them; and shame shall be upon all faces, and baldness upon all their heads.

Joshua 7:6 (Parallel theme): And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads.

Lamentations 3:28 (Parallel theme): He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him.

Lamentations 1:4 (Parallel theme): The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate: her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness.

Lamentations 1:1 (Parallel theme): How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!