

Lamentations 2:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The Lord was as an enemy: he hath swallowed up Israel, he hath swallowed up all her palaces: he hath destroyed his strong holds, and hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation.

Analysis

One of Scripture's most disturbing statements appears here: "The Lord was as an enemy" (hayah Adonai ke-oyev, הָיָה אֲדֹנָי כְּאֹיֵב). The covenant LORD (Adonai) who promised to fight for Israel (Exodus 14:14, Deuteronomy 1:30) now fights against her. The preposition ke ("as, like") suggests comparison, yet the actions described are unmistakably hostile: He "swallowed up" Israel and her palaces, destroying strongholds. The verb bala (בָּלַע, "swallowed up") conveys complete consumption—like a monster devouring prey whole. It appears three times in this chapter (verses 2, 5, 16), emphasizing totality. Nothing remains when God acts in judgment. The parallel structure "swallowed up Israel...swallowed up all her palaces...destroyed his strong holds" shows comprehensive devastation affecting the entire nation, not just military targets. The consequence is "multiplied in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation" (vayerev be-bat Yehudah ta'aniyah va'aniyah). The Hebrew pairs two related words for grief—ta'aniyah (mourning) and aniyah (lamentation)—creating alliteration that echoes wailing sounds. When God becomes enemy, His people experience unparalleled sorrow. Yet even this severe language serves redemptive purposes—forcing recognition that apart from God's favor, no strength or wisdom avails (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

Historical Context

The concept of God as enemy contradicts pagan religious thinking but reflects biblical covenant theology. Ancient Near Eastern gods were thought to protect their cities automatically. People believed that as long as temples stood and sacrifices continued, divine favor was assured. But Yahweh demanded heart obedience, not mere ritual (1 Samuel 15:22, Psalm 51:16-17, Isaiah 1:11-17). When Israel persisted in covenant breaking despite repeated warnings, God Himself became their enemy—not abandoning them to fate but actively judging them. Isaiah 63:10 summarizes: "they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them." The same divine power that defeated Egypt, Canaan, and Philistia now acted against Judah. The phrase "swallowed up all her palaces" was literally fulfilled. Nebuchadnezzar's forces destroyed Jerusalem systematically (2 Kings 25:9). The palace complex David and Solomon built was reduced to rubble. Excavations reveal the intensity of the conflagration—stones cracked from heat, ash layers several feet deep, evidence of deliberate, thorough destruction. God's enemies could accomplish only what He permitted for His purposes.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What does it reveal about God's character that He opposes His own people when they persist in covenant rebellion?
2. How should the reality that God 'was as an enemy' to Israel inform our understanding of divine discipline in the Christian life (Hebrews 12:5-11)?
3. In what ways does this verse challenge the modern tendency to view God primarily as a friend or helper while minimizing His holiness and justice?
4. How does Christ bear the full weight of God's enmity against sin (Isaiah 53:4-5, Romans 5:10) so that believers never experience God as enemy?

Interlinear Text

הָיָה	אֶדְנִי יְיָ	כְּאֹיֵב	בָּלַע	יִשְׂרָאֵל
H1961	The Lord	was as an enemy	he hath swallowed up	Israel
	H136	H341	H1104	H3478
בָּלַע	כָּל	אֲרָמְנוֹתַיָּהּ	שָׁהָתָהּ	מִבְצָרָיו
he hath swallowed up	H3605	all her palaces	he hath destroyed	his strong holds
H1104		H759	H7843	H4013
וַיִּרְבּוּ	בִּתּוֹ	יְהוּדָה	תִּאֲנִיָּהּ	וְאֲנָהּ:
and hath increased	in the daughter	of Judah	mourning	and lamentation
H7235	H1323	H3063	H8386	H592

Additional Cross-References

Lamentations 2:2 (References Lord): The Lord hath swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob, and hath not pitied: he hath thrown down in his wrath the strong holds of the daughter of Judah; he hath brought them down to the ground: he hath polluted the kingdom and the princes thereof.

Jeremiah 30:14 (Parallel theme): All thy lovers have forgotten thee; they seek thee not; for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of thine iniquity; because thy sins were increased.

Jeremiah 52:13 (References Lord): And burned the house of the LORD, and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, and all the houses of the great men, burned he with fire:

Lamentations 2:4 (Parallel theme): He hath bent his bow like an enemy: he stood with his right hand as an adversary, and slew all that were pleasant to the eye in the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion: he poured out his fury like fire.

2 Kings 25:9 (References Lord): And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire.

