

Lamentations 3:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail.

Analysis

Siege imagery: "He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail" (banah alai vayakaf rosh utla'ah). The verb banah (בָּנָה, "built") suggests constructing siege works—towers, ramps, and walls used in ancient warfare to surround and starve cities. "Compassed" (yakaf, יָקַף) means encircled, surrounded with no escape. "Gall" (rosh, שָׂרָף) is poison or bitterness. "Travail" (tla'ah, תְּלָאָה) means weariness, hardship. The speaker feels besieged by God Himself—surrounded, cut off, poisoned, and exhausted. This metaphor accurately describes Jerusalem's 18-month siege but also portrays the psychological and spiritual experience of divine discipline. Hebrews 12:11 acknowledges: 'Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.' The siege metaphor prepares for recognizing that God's purposes, though painful, are ultimately redemptive.

Historical Context

Ancient siege warfare involved surrounding a city, cutting off supplies, and building siege works. 2 Kings 25:1 records: 'Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and built forts against it round about.' These 'forts' (dayeq) were siege ramps, towers, and walls. Jeremiah 6:6 describes: 'Hew ye down trees, and cast a mount against Jerusalem.' Ezekiel 4:1-3 symbolically enacts this siege. The psychological effect was crushing—no escape, supplies dwindling, disease spreading, enemy visible on all sides.

Josephus describes similar conditions in AD 70. The metaphor extends beyond physical siege to spiritual/emotional experience—feeling trapped with no relief. Yet even siege ends; cities fall or are rescued. The question is whether the besieged submit or resist until destruction. Jeremiah counseled submission to Babylon to minimize suffering (Jeremiah 21:8-10, 38:2-3)—practical wisdom often rejected.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the siege metaphor help us understand experiences when we feel trapped, surrounded, and unable to escape our circumstances?
2. What's the spiritual application of Jeremiah's counsel to submit to Babylon—are there times when submitting to God's discipline is wiser than resisting?
3. How does knowing that sieges eventually end (one way or another) provide perspective during seasons of feeling spiritually besieged?

Interlinear Text

בָּנָה ה	עָלַי	וְקָרַב	רַאשׁ	וּתְלָאָה:
He hath builded	H5921	against me and compassed	me with gall	and travail
H1129		H5362	H7219	H8513

Additional Cross-References

Lamentations 3:19 (Parallel theme): Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall.

Jeremiah 23:15 (Parallel theme): Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets; Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them

drink the water of gall: for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land.

Job 19:8 (Parallel theme): He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and he hath set darkness in my paths.

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