

Lamentations 4:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem.

Analysis

Universal shock at Jerusalem's fall: **"The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem."** The Hebrew *lo he'eminu malkei-erets vekhol yoshevei tevel ki yavo tsar veoyev beshaarei Yerushalayim* emphasizes the unexpected nature of Jerusalem's fall. *Lo he'eminu* (לֹא הֶעֱמִינוּ, "they did not believe") indicates this seemed impossible.

"Kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world" (*malkei-erets vekhol yoshevei tevel*) uses parallel terms for universal scope. This wasn't merely local surprise but international shock. Jerusalem was considered impregnable—God's city, protected by His presence. For enemies to "enter into the gates" (*beshaarei*, בְּשַׁעְרֵי) meant complete conquest. Gates were the strongest defensive points; their breach meant total defeat.

Theologically, this verse explains why Jerusalem's fall shocked the world. Ancient Near Eastern theology assumed gods protected their cities. Jerusalem seemed especially secure—the temple of the Almighty, city of David's dynasty, site of God's covenant promises. That it fell demonstrated either God's weakness or His willingness to judge His own people. The correct understanding is the latter—divine holiness doesn't play favorites. Even the elect nation faces judgment for persistent sin (Amos 3:2).

Historical Context

Jerusalem's reputation for impregnability had strong historical basis. King David captured it from Jebusites who boasted even the blind and lame could defend it (2 Samuel 5:6-9). Under Solomon, its fortifications were massively strengthened (1 Kings 9:15). Psalm 48:2-3 celebrated: "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion...the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge."

When Assyrian Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem in 701 BC, God supernaturally destroyed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night (2 Kings 19:35, Isaiah 37:36). This miraculous deliverance reinforced Jerusalem's reputation as inviolable. False prophets built on this, claiming the temple's presence guaranteed protection (Jeremiah 7:4): "The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these."

When Babylon actually breached the walls (586 BC), international shock was genuine. Psalm 48:4-6 describes kings seeing and being amazed and troubled, fear taking hold. Surrounding nations who assumed Jerusalem's special protection experienced cognitive dissonance—their worldviews couldn't accommodate this event. Only recognizing that Yahweh Himself judged His people resolves the paradox. God's presence doesn't automatically protect; it requires covenant faithfulness.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. Why did Jerusalem's fall shock the world, and what did it reveal about ancient assumptions regarding gods protecting their cities?

2. How does God's willingness to judge His own people demonstrate His impartial holiness rather than favoritism?
3. What false securities do Christians today sometimes trust (church attendance, heritage, rituals) similar to Jerusalem's trust in the temple's presence?
4. In what ways does 1 Peter 4:17 ('judgment must begin at the house of God') echo the principle demonstrated in Jerusalem's fall?

Interlinear Text

ל א	הָאֵמָּן יִנּוּ	מַלְכֵי	אֶרֶץ	כָּל ל
H3808	would not have believed	The kings	of the earth	H3605
	H539	H4428	H776	
יֹשְׁבֵי י	תֵּב ל	כִּי	יָבֹא	צָר
and all the inhabitants	of the world	H3588	should have entered	that the adversary
H3427	H8398		H935	H6862
וְאֹיֵב	בְּשַׁעַר י	יְרוּשָׁלַם:		
and the enemy	into the gates	of Jerusalem		
H341	H8179	H3389		

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