

Lamentations 4:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests,
that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her,

Analysis

The cause identified: **"For the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her."** The Hebrew mechatot neviyeha avonot kohaneyha hashofkhem bekerev dam tsaddiqim assigns specific blame. Mechatot (מַחַטֹּאת, "because of the sins") and avonot (עֲוֹנוֹת, "iniquities") indicate serious transgression. The religious leaders—prophets and priests—are held responsible.

"Shed the blood of the just" (hashofkhem...dam tsaddiqim, הַשְׁפֹּךְ דַּם צְדִיקִים) accuses these leaders of murdering the righteous. This may be literal (physical violence against faithful prophets like Urijah—Jeremiah 26:20-23, Zechariah son of Jehoiada—2 Chronicles 24:20-22) or judicial murder (condemning the innocent). Either way, those who should have protected justice instead perpetrated injustice.

Theologically, this verse teaches that leadership bears greater accountability (James 3:1). Prophets who spoke lies instead of truth, and priests who perverted justice instead of upholding it, bore special guilt. Jesus later condemned the scribes and Pharisees for similar sins: "that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias" (Matthew 23:35). Religious leaders who misuse authority face severer judgment.

Historical Context

Judah's prophets and priests had become corrupt. False prophets contradicted God's warnings, promising peace when destruction loomed (Jeremiah 6:13-14, 8:10-11, 14:13-15, 23:16-17, 28:1-17). They prophesied lies, divinations, and the deceit of their own hearts (Jeremiah 14:14, 23:25-26). They told people what they wanted to hear rather than God's truth.

Priests likewise failed. Jeremiah 2:8 accuses: "The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not." Ezekiel 22:26 condemns: "Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane." They participated in shedding innocent blood—both literally through corrupt justice and spiritually through leading people astray.

Specific examples include the prophet Hananiah who opposed Jeremiah and died under divine judgment (Jeremiah 28:15-17), and the priest Pashhur who beat Jeremiah and imprisoned him (Jeremiah 20:1-6). Jeremiah 26:7-11 records priests and prophets demanding Jeremiah's death. The religious establishment systematically opposed God's true messengers, fulfilling Jesus's later indictment: "ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets" (Matthew 23:29-31).

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. Why does God hold prophets and priests especially accountable for Jerusalem's fall?
2. What does 'shedding the blood of the just' teach about how religious leaders can murder truth and righteousness even without physical violence?
3. How does Jesus's condemnation of religious leaders (Matthew 23) parallel this verse's indictment?
4. What warnings does this verse provide for Christian leaders today about accountability for faithful teaching and just leadership?

Interlinear Text

מַחֲטֵּאת	נְבִיאֵי יְהוָה	עוֹנוֹת	כֹּהֲנֵי יְהוָה	הַשֹּׁפְכוֹת יָם
For the sins	of her prophets	and the iniquities	of her priests	that have shed
H2403	H5030	H5771	H3548	H8210
בְּקִרְבָּהּ	דָּם	צְדִיקִים:		
in the midst	the blood	of the just		
H7130	H1818	H6662		

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 5:31 (Prophecy): The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?

Jeremiah 6:13 (Prophecy): For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely.

Matthew 23:31 (Prophecy): Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

Lamentations 2:14 (Prophecy): Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee: and they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment.

