

Lamentations 4:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They cried unto them, Depart ye; it is unclean; depart, depart, touch not: when they fled away and wandered, they said among the heathen, They shall no more sojourn there.

Analysis

Social ostracism described: **"They cried unto them, Depart ye; it is unclean; depart, depart, touch not: when they fled away and wandered, they said among the heathen, They shall no more sojourn there."** The Hebrew *sur tame karu lamo sur sur al-tigga'u ki natsu gam-nau ameru bagoyim lo yosifu lagur* depicts rejection. *Sur* (סור, "depart, turn aside") is repeated three times, emphasizing forceful removal. *Tame* (טמא, "unclean") is the Levitical term for ritual impurity.

The response "depart, depart, touch not" (*sur sur al-tigga'u, אֶל-תִּגַּעוּ, סור סור*) mimics what lepers had to cry: "Unclean, unclean" (Leviticus 13:45). Leaders who should have been holy became untouchable outcasts. When they "fled away and wandered" (*natsu gam-nau, נָצוּ וְגָם-נָעוּ*), even among the nations (*bagoyim, בְּגוֹיִם*) they found no welcome: "They shall no more sojourn there" (*lo yosifu lagur, לֹא יִסְיְפוּ לָגוּר*).

Theologically, this demonstrates the principle that those who corrupt themselves become outcasts even among pagans. The very leaders who should have been lights to nations became objects of revulsion everywhere. This fulfills Deuteronomy 28:25, 37: "The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies...thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations." Sin doesn't merely separate from God but makes one repulsive even to the unregenerate world.

Historical Context

The cry "Depart; it is unclean" treats corrupt leaders as lepers. Leviticus 13:45-46 commanded lepers to dwell alone outside the camp and cry "Unclean, unclean" so others would avoid them. That Jerusalem's prophets and priests received such treatment from ordinary people shows complete social breakdown. The authorities were rejected by those they should have led.

When these leaders fled during Jerusalem's fall, even foreign nations rejected them. Jeremiah 48:28 and 49:11 mention refugees seeking safety in other lands, but Lamentations 4:15 indicates some received no welcome. Their reputation for corruption and blood-guilt preceded them. Ezekiel 5:14-15 prophesied: "Moreover I will make thee waste, and a reproach among the nations...So it shall be a reproach and a taunt, an instruction and an astonishment unto the nations."

This exile differed from normal ancient practice. Typically, conquered elites would be absorbed into imperial administration. Babylon employed Daniel and his friends in government service. But some Judean leaders were so corrupt that even pagans rejected them. This demonstrates how thoroughly sin degrades—until even those lacking moral standards find the sinner repulsive. The principle appears in Proverbs 30:10: "The way of transgressors is hard."

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What does treating corrupt leaders as 'lepers' who must be avoided teach about sin's social consequences?

2. How does even pagans rejecting these leaders demonstrate the universal revulsion against hypocrisy and blood-guilt?
3. In what ways can Christian leaders today become so corrupt that even unbelievers reject them, bringing reproach on Christ?
4. How does this verse illustrate that sin doesn't ultimately pay—even earthly consequences make the transgressor's way hard?

Interlinear Text

ס וִרּוּ	טָמֵא אֵל	קָרְאוּ	לְ מוֹ	ס וִרּוּ	ס וִרּוּ	אֵל	תִּגַּע עוֹ
depart	ye it is unclean	They cried	H0	depart	depart	H408	touch
H5493	H2931	H7121		H5493	H5493		H5060
כִּי	נָצַח וְ	גַּם	וַ עוֹ	אָמְרוּ	בְּגוֹיִם		
H3588	not when they fled away	H1571	and wandered	they said	among the heathen		
	H5132		H5128	H559	H1471		
ל אֵל	יוֹסֵף יִפּוֹ	לְגוֹר:					
H3808	They shall no more	sojourn					
	H3254	H1481					

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