

Lamentations 5:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning.

Analysis

The emotional toll: "The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning" (shavat mesos libeinu nehefakh le-evel mecholenu, שָׁבַת מֵשׁוֹשׁ לִבְנֵנוּ נְהַפֵּךְ לְאֶבֶל מְחוֹלָנוּ). The verb shavat (שָׁבַת, "ceased") is the same root as sabbath—rest from joy, silence of celebration. "Joy of our heart" (mesos libeinu) refers to inner gladness, not mere external merriment. Complete interior joy has vanished. "Dance is turned into mourning" (mechol...nehefakh le-evel) describes transformation: celebratory dancing at festivals and weddings becomes funeral lamentation. Ecclesiastes 3:4 acknowledges: "a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." The exile was emphatically a time to mourn. Psalm 137:1-4 captures this: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept...How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?" The loss of joy represents not just emotional state but broken fellowship with God—the source of true joy (Psalm 16:11, 43:4, Philippians 4:4). When relationship with God is fractured by sin and judgment, joy inevitably departs.

Historical Context

Ancient Israelite worship and festivals were characterized by exuberant joy. Psalms of Ascent sung by pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem radiate gladness (Psalms 120-134). Festival celebrations included music, dancing, feasting (Deuteronomy 16:13-15). Women danced with timbrels celebrating military victories (Exodus 15:20, 1 Samuel 18:6). Ecclesiastes 9:7-8 pictures festive joy: "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy...let thy garments be always white." But exile

silenced this. With no temple, no festivals, no national independence, celebration seemed inappropriate. The emotional and spiritual depression affected the entire community. Ezra 3:12-13 describes mixed emotions at the second temple's foundation: young people shouted for joy, but old people who remembered Solomon's temple wept. Nehemiah 8:9-12 shows the pattern reversing: after reading Torah, people wept, but Ezra commanded: "This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep...for the joy of the LORD is your strength" (8:9-10). Restoration allows joy to return, grounded not in circumstances but in God Himself.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What's the relationship between our joy and our spiritual state, and how does sin and broken fellowship with God inevitably diminish true joy?
2. How do we distinguish between appropriate seasons of mourning versus the perpetual joy that should characterize Christian life in Christ?
3. In what ways does Nehemiah 8:10's statement 'the joy of the LORD is your strength' show that true joy transcends circumstances?

Interlinear Text

is ceased	The joy	of our heart	is turned	into mourning	our dance
H7673	H4885	H3820	H2015	H60	H4234

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 25:10 (Parallel theme): Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle.

Amos 8:10 (Parallel theme): And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day.

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