

Lamentations 5:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned;
renew our days as of old.

Analysis

Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned (בְּשִׁיבָנוּ יְהִי אֶלְךָ, hashivenu YHWH elekha venashuvah)—The plea for God to 'turn us' before we can 'be turned' acknowledges human inability to repent apart from divine initiative. This is proto-Augustinian theology: conversion requires God's prevenient grace. The wordplay on 'shuv' (turn/return) emphasizes that repentance is both divine gift and human responsibility—a mystery. **Renew our days as of old** (חִדְשֵׁנוּ יְמִינֵנוּ כְּלֹאֵם, chadesh yameinu keqedem)—'as of old' recalls wilderness wanderings after Exodus, or perhaps David/Solomon's golden age. The prayer is for restoration to former covenant relationship, not merely former prosperity.

Historical Context

This became a liturgical prayer in Judaism, recited when returning the Torah scroll to the ark after synagogue reading. It expresses perpetual Jewish longing for restoration to God. The theology of God initiating return while humans respond anticipates New Covenant teaching (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. Do you approach repentance as your own accomplishment or as a gift you must ask God to grant? What difference does this distinction make?
2. What would 'days as of old' look like in your spiritual life—what past experiences of closeness with God do you long to see renewed?

Interlinear Text

וְשַׁבְּנָה	וְהִתְהַלֵּל	אֱלֹהִים	שְׁבִעָה וְבָשָׁר	אֶל יְהָוָה	וְשַׁבְּנָה	פְּתַת שְׁבִעָה	וְשַׁבְּנָה
Turn	thou us unto thee O LORD		H413	Turn	renew	our days	

H7725

H3068

H413

H7725

H2318

H3117

וְשַׁבְּנָה

as of old

H6924

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 80:3 (Parallel theme): Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

Psalms 80:7 (Parallel theme): Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

Psalms 85:4 (Parallel theme): Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease.

Psalms 80:19 (References Lord): Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

Jeremiah 31:18 (References Lord): I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God.

Ezekiel 36:37 (References Lord): Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock.

Habakkuk 3:2 (References Lord): O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.

Jeremiah 31:4 (Parallel theme): Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry.

Jeremiah 33:13 (References Lord): In the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the vale, and in the cities of the south, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks pass again under the hands of him that telleth them, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah 33:10 (References Lord): Thus saith the LORD; Again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say shall be desolate without man and without beast, even in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast,