

Luke 23:29

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say,
Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and
the paps which never gave suck.

Analysis

For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. This verse pronounces a shocking reversal of cultural values. In Jewish culture, barrenness was considered a curse and childbearing a blessing (Genesis 1:28, Psalm 127:3-5). The phrase "the days are coming" (erchontai hēmerai, ἔρχονται ἡμέραι) prophetically announces future judgment, echoing prophetic formulas throughout Scripture (Jeremiah 7:32, 9:25, Amos 4:2).

The triple description—"barren" (hai steirai, αἱ στεῖραι, sterile), "wombs that never bare" (koiliai hai ouk egennēsan, κοιλίαι αἱ οὐκ ἐγέννησαν), and "paps which never gave suck" (mastoī hoi ouk ethrepsan, μαστοὶ οἱ οὐκ ἔθρεψαν)—emphasizes completeness. Women who never conceived, carried, or nursed children would be called makariai (μακάριαι, "blessed")—the same word used in the Beatitudes (Luke 6:20-22). This indicates suffering so severe that childlessness would be preferable to watching children suffer.

This prophecy finds fulfillment in the AD 70 siege of Jerusalem. Josephus records mothers eating their own children during the famine, making barrenness appear blessed by comparison. Jesus' words echo Hosea 9:14—"Give them, O LORD: what wilt thou give? give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts." When judgment falls on a society that rejected God's Messiah, even natural blessings become sources of unbearable grief.

Historical Context

First-century Jewish culture viewed motherhood as sacred duty and divine blessing. The worst curse imaginable was to see one's children suffer or die. During the siege of Jerusalem (AD 70), Josephus describes horrific scenes where starving mothers devoured their own infants (Jewish War 6.3.4). The Roman historian Tacitus corroborates these accounts, recording that 600,000 bodies were carried out of the city gates during the siege.

Archaeological excavations in Jerusalem have uncovered evidence of the catastrophe—destruction layers from AD 70, including arrowheads, burned buildings, and skeletal remains showing signs of trauma and malnutrition. The temple was burned, its treasures looted (depicted on the Arch of Titus in Rome), and Jewish survivors were sold into slavery throughout the empire. Jesus' prophecy proved devastatingly accurate—in that judgment, childlessness was indeed preferable to motherhood.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. What does this radical value reversal teach about the severity of divine judgment upon those who reject Christ?
2. How should the historical fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy shape our urgency in proclaiming the gospel before judgment comes?
3. In what ways does this passage challenge cultural assumptions about what constitutes blessing apart from relationship with God?

Interlinear Text

ὅτι ἴδού, ἔρχονται ἡμέραι ἐν οἵ ἔροῦσιν Μακάριαι
For behold are coming the days in that they shall say Blessed
G3754 G2400 G2064 G2250 G1722 G3739 G2046 G3107

αἱ στεῖραι καὶ κοιλίαι οἵ οὐκ ἐγένυνησαν καὶ
G3588 are the barren and the wombs that never bare and
G4723 G2532 G2836 G3739 G3756 G1080 G2532

μαστοὶ οἵ οὐκ ἔθηλασαν
the paps that never gave suck
G3149 G3739 G3756 G2337

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 24:19 (Parallel theme): And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!

Hosea 13:16 (Parallel theme): Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword: their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up.