

Mark 13:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!

Analysis

Woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!

The Greek *ouai* (οὐαί, 'woe') expresses grief, not curse. Jesus mourns the hardship pregnant women and nursing mothers will face during Jerusalem's destruction. Fleeing urgently (vv. 15-16) proves especially difficult for those physically hindered—late pregnancy limits mobility; nursing infants require care. The practical difficulty intensifies suffering.

This reveals Jesus' compassion—He doesn't merely prophesy judgment but feels sorrow for those suffering it. He wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44). God takes no pleasure in wicked's death (Ezekiel 33:11) yet justice demands judgment. The 'woe' acknowledges human tragedy within divine judgment. It also warns hearers: flee immediately while physically able; don't delay until circumstances hinder escape. Spiritually, it teaches urgency—respond to gospel now, not later when conditions worsen. 'Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation' (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Historical Context

Josephus' account of Jerusalem's siege (AD 70) records horrific suffering, particularly for women and children. Starvation drove cannibalism—mothers ate children. Josephus describes Mary of Bethzuba, who killed and ate her infant. Pregnant women miscarried from stress, starvation. Nursing mothers had no milk. Attempting escape with infants proved nearly impossible—Roman blockade, Zealot

violence within city, terrain difficulty. Those who heeded Jesus' warning fled before siege tightened. Those who delayed faced unimaginable horror. Church history records similar patterns—Christians who delayed fleeing persecution (Roman, medieval, modern) suffered terribly. The lesson: immediate obedience spares suffering; delay invites tragedy. God's warnings are mercy—heed them promptly.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus' 'woe' (grief) over pregnant women and nursing mothers reveal His compassion even while prophesying judgment?
2. What does this warning teach about timing—why is immediate response to God's warnings crucial?
3. How might this apply spiritually to responding to gospel—why shouldn't people delay accepting Christ until circumstances seem better?

Interlinear Text

οὐαὶ	δὲ	ταῖς	ἐν	γαστρὶ	ἐχούσαις	καὶ	ταῖς
woe	But	G3588	in	child	to them that are	and	G3588
G3759	G1161		G1722	G1064	G2192	G2532	
θηλαζούσαις	ἐν	ἐκείναις	ταῖς	ἡμέραις			
to them that give suck	in	those	G3588	days			
G2337	G1722	G1565		G2250			

Additional Cross-References

Luke 23:29 (Parallel theme): 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.

Lamentations 4:10 (Parallel theme): The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people.

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