

Matthew 24:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days (οὐαὶ δὲ ταῖς ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχούσαις καὶ ταῖς θηλαζούσαις ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις)—The interjection οὐαί (ouai, "woe") expresses grief and lament, not condemnation. Jesus sympathizes with the unique vulnerability of pregnant women (ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχούσαις, literally "having in the womb") and nursing mothers (θηλαζούσαις, "giving suck"). Their physical condition makes rapid flight over mountainous terrain nearly impossible.

This isn't theoretical—Josephus records horrific accounts from Jerusalem's siege, including a woman who ate her own child during the famine. The prophesied tribulation would be so severe that normal life circumstances become unbearable liabilities. Jesus's compassion here reveals his pastoral heart even while warning of judgment. The phrase ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις ("in those days") points to the specific historical catastrophe of AD 70, though it may have typological application to future tribulation.

Historical Context

Ancient warfare was especially brutal for women and children. Josephus describes mothers hiding their children's food rations, the desperate eating grass, and infanticide during Jerusalem's siege. Pregnant women and nursing mothers, unable to flee quickly or endure harsh conditions, suffered disproportionately. Approximately 1.1 million died and 97,000 were enslaved—many women and

children among them. Early Christian women who heeded Jesus's warning and fled to Pella avoided this horror.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus's compassion in this verse reveal his character even in contexts of divine judgment?
2. What does this teach about God's concern for the vulnerable and physically disadvantaged?
3. How should churches today care for those whose circumstances make spiritual disciplines or service more difficult?

Interlinear Text

οὐαὶ	δὲ	ταῖς	ἐν	γαστρὶ	ἐχούσαις	καὶ	ταῖς
woe	And	G3588	in	child	unto 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 21:23 (Parallel theme): But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people.

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.

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.

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