

Psalms 137:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.

Analysis

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning (אֶשְׁכַּח יְרוּשָׁלַם תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי אֶשְׁכַּח)—A self-maledictory oath. Shakach (forget) appears twice: if the psalmist forgets Jerusalem, may his right hand forget its skill. Yemin (right hand) represents strength, ability, craftsmanship—for a musician or scribe, professional capacity. **Her cunning** translates one Hebrew word implying skill/craft.

This vow prioritizes covenant memory over personal success. Better to lose functional ability than lose Jerusalem-centered identity. Jesus commands similar allegiance: if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off (Matthew 5:30). Kingdom priorities demand radical subordination of everything else.

Historical Context

The oath's form follows ancient Near Eastern treaty language—invoking self-curse if covenant terms are broken. The psalmist treats Jerusalem-remembrance as covenant obligation. Second-generation exiles risked assimilation; this oath resists forgetting through liturgical repetition.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What competing loyalties threaten to displace your covenant identity—and what oath prevents drift?
2. Would you sacrifice professional success or personal comfort to maintain theological integrity?
3. What does it mean to 'remember' Jerusalem as a Christian—and does Hebrews 12:22 change this?

Interlinear Text

אָם	תִּשְׁכַּח	יְרוּשָׁלַיִם	תִּשְׁכַּח	יְמִינִי
H518	If I forget	thee O Jerusalem	If I forget	let my right hand
	H7911	H3389	H7911	H3225

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 51:50 (References Jerusalem): Ye that have escaped the sword, go away, stand not still: remember the LORD afar off, and let Jerusalem come into your mind.

Zechariah 11:17 (Parallel theme): Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.