

Psalms 80:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure.

Analysis

Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure. This vivid metaphor inverts covenant blessing into covenant curse. Where God promised to feed Israel with finest wheat and honey (Deuteronomy 32:13-14; Psalm 81:16), He now feeds them tears. The parallel structure—"bread of tears" (lechem dim'ah, לֶחֶם דִּמְאָה) and "tears to drink" (dim'ot shalish, דִּמְאוֹת שְׁלִישׁ)—emphasizes tears constitute their entire diet, both solid food and liquid drink.

"Bread of tears" employs lechem (לֶחֶם), the staff of life, now replaced by sorrow. Tears become daily sustenance rather than occasional expression of grief. The phrase recalls Psalm 42:3: "My tears have been my meat day and night." This isn't momentary weeping but sustained, life-encompassing sorrow. The community subsists on grief rather than joy, suffering rather than blessing.

"In great measure" (shalish, שְׁלִישׁ) literally means "a third part" or may refer to a large measure. Either interpretation emphasizes abundance: God gives tears generously, in full measure—tragic inversion of promised overflowing blessing (Malachi 3:10). The theology is sobering: God Himself feeds His people bitterness as covenant discipline. Yet even judgment comes from God's hand, implying relationship hasn't terminated—only turned severe for corrective purposes.

Historical Context

This verse reflects the sustained suffering of exile or oppression, not momentary crisis. The image of tears as food recalls Lamentations' descriptions of Jerusalem's suffering, where starvation drove people to desperate measures (Lamentations 4:9-10). The abundance of tears contrasts sharply with the abundance of covenant blessings promised in Deuteronomy 28:1-14. The reversal demonstrates covenant curse fulfillment (Deuteronomy 28:15-68), particularly verses describing siege conditions where parents would eat their own children due to starvation.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How should believers understand seasons when God seems to 'feed' them suffering rather than blessing?
2. What is the relationship between covenant discipline (God causing suffering for correction) and natural consequences of sin?
3. How can Christians maintain trust in God's goodness during prolonged seasons when tears constitute daily 'bread'?

Interlinear Text

הָאֵכְלֵתֶם	לָהֶם	בְּדָמָע וְ	וְתִשְׁקוּ מִוְּ
Thou feedest	them with the bread	and givest them tears	to drink
H398	H3899	H1832	H8248
בְּדָמָע וְ	שְׁלִישׁ:		
and givest them tears	in great measure		
H1832	H7991		

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 30:20 (Parallel theme): And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers:

Psalms 42:3 (Parallel theme): My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?

Psalms 102:9 (Parallel theme): For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping,

Job 6:7 (Parallel theme): The things that my soul refused to touch are as my sorrowful meat.

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