

# **NOTES ON THE PROPHECY AND LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH**

“The Weeping Prophet”

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## **PART TWO THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH**

### **CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN**

#### **THE DESOLATIONS OF JERUSALEM (Lamentations 1)**

It should be a matter of deep interest for the child of God, in any dispensation, to know that there is One above who notes with compassion all of his sorrows, and is afflicted in all his afflictions. Nothing could demonstrate this more clearly than the incorporation, as a part of the Holy Scriptures, of the expressions of the heart-sorrows of Jeremiah as he beheld the overwhelming woes of his people, and the desolations of the Holy City.

These feelings were right and proper - nay, produced by the Spirit of God in the heart of His servant Jeremiah. He, the God of Israel, was no cold, indifferent spectator of the anguish, humiliation and pains of the people of His choice. His holiness demanded that He chasten them for their iniquities; and He had used the king of Babylon to that end, but His heart was grieved for them still, as a loving father is sorely pained in his own correction of a wayward son. He greatly valued, therefore, the soul-exercises of His grief-stricken prophet, and has seen fit to place his lamentations on record for our instruction and comfort. In a certain sense Jeremiah speaks for the godly ones left in the land - their mouthpiece, as it were.

The peculiar structure of this elegiac poem is worthy of note. In their Hebraic form, the first four chapters are acrostic, after the pattern of a number of the Psalms. Chapters 1, 2 and 4 consist of twenty-two verses each; every verse commencing with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in regular order. Chapter 3, in which the fullest confession of their sin and grief is found, consists of sixty-six verses; and here three verses are given to each letter. That is, each of the first three verses begins with Aleph, the first letter of the alphabet; and the next three verses, each begins with Beth, the second letter; and so on to the end of the alphabet. In Psalm 119 we have twenty-two divisions of eight verses each, similarly arranged, as even the ordinary English Bible shows. There, every letter of the alphabet (which represents the whole compass of man's speech) is used in the praise of the perfect law of the Lord. In Lamentations every letter is required to express the sorrows following upon the neglect and breaking of that law.

Chapter 5 is an exception to the acrostic style, though containing the same number of verses as the first, second, and fourth. In this first chapter the remnant of Judah confess the righteousness of the Lord in permitting their afflictions, though they are filled with sorrow as they behold the sad results. They acknowledge their own sinfulness and extol the holiness of God, while calling for judgment upon the instrument of His wrath.

In the opening verses the ruined city, where once the Lord had set His name, is contemplated with broken heart and tearful eye. **“How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people!”** exclaims the prophet; **“How is she become as a widow! She that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!”** (ver. 1).

To a faithful Israelite it was indeed a sorrowful spectacle. What joy and gladness had once filled that now deserted city, in the happy, festive days when the law of the land was honored and His name exalted! How dreadful the change - the awful result of departure from God, manifested in pride, self-will, and idolatry! How could Jerusalem remain the acknowledged wife of the Lord, when so faithless and wanton? Alas, she is left to sit in solitude in her widow’s weeds until the day when God shall grant repentance.

**“She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies”** (ver. 2).

The false gods in whom she trusted when she proved recreant to the covenant of the Lord. are unable to mitigate in any way her present sorrows. The powers upon which she sought to lean when she forsook the Word of her God, are all indifferent to her present plight. He, the **“eternal Lover”** whom she has despised, is the only One who loves her still. Yet He had given her into the hand of her enemies, and had apparently hidden His face from her.

**“Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude: she dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest: all her persecutors overtook her between the straits”** (ver. 3).

*In this Judah becomes a warning beacon for saints of all time.*

Failing to maintain the place of separation to which God had called her, mingling promiscuously among her heathen neighbors, she soon proved, as all do who follow her steps, that **“evil communications corrupt good manners.”**

Walking with idolaters, she learned their ways; and as a result God gave her up to wander among the nations until she sickened of their practices. Has not this been the repeated history of every company which God separated from the world and owned as His people? How soon the apostolic Church corrupted itself. The dense darkness of the Middle Ages was the governmental recompense. In even shorter time did the movement begun in the glorious Reformation of the sixteenth century become vitiated by conformity to the world; so that one has well asked, **“Where is the Church?”** and replied, **“In the world!”** Again, **“Where is the world?”** and answered, **“In the Church.”**

From this mixed multitude, at various times, God has been pleased to separate little remnant companies to Himself; only to become, in their turn, enamored of the world they once professed to forsake. Has it been otherwise with those, enlightened above many, who in these last days were called out from human systems to be a testimony to the unity and heavenly calling of the Church? Alas, my brethren, **“how are the mighty fallen!”**

How unspeakably sad has been the checkered history of that movement which began so auspiciously, and once promised so much! Worldliness, like a canker, is eating out the very life. Pride, haughtiness and self-sufficiency are everywhere apparent. In judgment God has sent division following division until we are like to be utterly destroyed; and yet how much pretension; how little brokenness before Him; how many indifferent hearts and calloused consciences!

Shall it be said of us as of Judah in the past, **“The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate: her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness. Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper; for the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her children are gone into captivity before the enemy. And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed: her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer”** (vers. 4-6).

Nor is it possible to avoid so sad a result by **“daubing with untempered mortar,”** seeking to heal divisions by glossing over the evils that led to them, and thus failing to hear the voice of God in them. One course, and one alone, would have saved Judah. That was genuine self-judgment and brokenness of spirit before the Lord, causing the people to **“tremble at His Word.”** This is what is needed everywhere to-day. It is not so much looking for and learning new truth that will bless and deliver the saints of God, as testing our ways by the truth already committed to us, and seeking to walk in the reality of it. Because of failure so to do, Judah went into captivity, a Christian Church lost her candlestick of testimony, and the world was allowed to prevail against the people of the Lord.

Sad indeed it is to have to look back to blessings, once delighted in, when all is but a memory. **“Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old, when her people fell into the hand of the enemy, and none did help her: the adversaries saw her, and did mock at her sabbaths”** (ver. 7).

A quiet like the rest of the sabbath lay over all the city, but it was the quiet of desolation and death. There was no longer anything to hinder her rest. The work of the Lord had often been a burden. She was delivered from it all now; but at how frightful a cost! Set aside as **“a vessel wherein is no pleasure,”** Jerusalem was left in undisturbed repose.

Touchingly the prophet acknowledges the justice of all this in the four verses that follow (vers. 8-11). Jerusalem had grievously sinned. It is because of this that she **“is removed,”** or **“has become as an unclean thing,”** unfit to be used of God any more. Because of this, those who once honored, now despise her.

Her nakedness had been openly manifested. Her filthiness is apparent to all. She forgot her latter end - forgot God's purpose in delivering her from Egyptian bondage.

**“Therefore is she come down wonderfully,”** until she has no comforter. Yet, in her season of dire shame and distress, there are some faithful hearts left to cry, **“O Lord, behold my affliction, for the enemy hath magnified himself.”**

Her adversary had triumphed over her, even defiling her sanctuary; the charge of which had been committed to Judah when they were commanded that no uncircumcised should enter into the congregation of the Lord. Having failed to guard her precious things, they were given up to the unclean of the nations. It is ever thus. If God's people do not value what He entrusts them with, He will teach them it's worth by taking it from them, even to making it the sport of their enemies.

Left without bread, sighing for food to refresh the soul, the remnant cry, **“See, O Lord, and consider; for I am become vile.”** These are precious and needful exercises. Would that they had characterized them in days of grace now gone by! Ah, brethren, may the spirit of humiliation and confession before God be found in us also. The Holy Spirit will associate Himself with this, and still comfort and bless such.

*The Spirit of Christ speaks loudly through Jeremiah and the remnant of Judah in the next few verses.*

Primarily, the words refer unquestionably to what we have had under consideration, the chastisement meted out to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the land.

The query, **“Is it nothing to you?”** is addressed to the nations who had no sympathy for, but rather gloried over them in their deep anguish. But as all Scripture points to Christ, one must be blind indeed not to see here the suffering Saviour entering to the full into the griefs of the spared company, left like grape-gleanings in the vineyard.

What a pathetic interest attaches itself to every word as we thus look at them.

**“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow, which is done unto Me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger”** (ver. 12).

The sins of Judah drew down that fierce anger upon their heads. It was the just recompense for their departure from the Lord. But when He, the holy Sufferer of Calvary, bowed His head beneath the overwhelming flood of God's wrath, it was for sins not His own; but He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. He was incomparably **“the Man of Sorrows,”** having full acquaintance with grief, that our joy might be full, as we enter into fellowship with the God we had so terribly offended. Can it be that anyone reading these lines would reply to the heart rending question of the dying Lamb, and honestly confess, “It is nothing, all nothing to me?”

- Nothing to you that He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities!
- Nothing to you that God manifest in flesh so gave Himself to save guilty rebels against His outraged majesty!
- Nothing to you that the dreaded cup of wrath was pressed to His parched lips in order that the cup of salvation might be offered to you!

Can it really be that it is nothing to you?

Alas! there was a day when it was so with us all: when, even though our emotions might be stirred as we heard or read the story of the Cross, yet, so far as apprehending that it was to meet the need of our sinful souls, it was all nothing to us.

How well has the saintly McCheyne expressed what many more could say:

“I oft read with pleasure, to soothe or engage,  
Isaiah’s wild measure, or John’s simple page:  
But e’en when they pictured the blood-sprinkled tree,  
Jehovah Tsidkenu was nothing to me.

“Like tears from the daughters of Zion that roll,  
I wept when the waters went over His soul;  
Yet thought not that my sins had nailed to the tree  
Jehovah Tsidkenu: ‘twas nothing to me.”

And this might be our condition still - if not yet in the pit of the lost, forever beyond the reach of mercy - had it not been for the sovereign grace of God that led Him by His Spirit to show us our needy, lost estate, and to cause us to flee to Him (so long and coldly neglected) for mercy and pardon.

Thus we can join with the same poet-preacher and sing:

“When free grace awoke me by light from on high,  
Then legal fears shook me-I trembled to die.  
No refuge, no safety in self could I see;  
Jehovah Tsidkenu my Saviour must be.

“My terrors all vanished before that sweet name;  
My guilty fears banished, with boldness I came,  
To drink at the fountain, life-giving and free;  
Jehovah Tsidkenu is all things to me.”

In the joy of assured redemption we can look up into His face, once marred more than any man’s, and cry from full hearts, “Yea, Lord, it is something, it is everything to me, that Thou didst so suffer and die!” And our souls are filled with holy awe as we turn aside to see this great sight, and hear Him cry,

**“From above hath He sent fire into My bones, and it prevaileth against them. He hath spread a net for My feet, He hath turned Me back: He hath made Me desolate and faint all the day”** (ver. 13).

But we rejoice to know that nevermore shall He suffer thus. His sorrows and pains are now forever past; and with gladness unutterable **“He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied”** (Isaiah 53:11).

How expressive is the use of that word **“travail”** in this connection!

Two women were once overheard speaking of their sons. The one had adopted a boy from an orphan-house; the other was the mother of a child by birth.

“I am sure,” said the first, “my love for my child is as deep as though he had actually been born into the family. I do not believe I could love him more than I do.”

“Ah,” replied the other, “you do not really know mother-love yet. You never suffered for your son as I did for mine!”

O beloved, how He has suffered for us! What pangs He endured! What tears He shed! What drops of blood He sweat! How dreadful the travail He had to experience in order that we might be eternally saved! **“Fire from above”** descended upon Him that we might find a refuge where the fire has been, and thus be forever safe from the eternal fire to come for all who spurn His matchless grace. Precious and holy theme for devout meditation!

Not in the same sense could the next two verses be applied to the Lord Jesus. It involves the consciousness of guilt, and He was the guiltless One; but the words were most fitting in the mouth of the people of Judah. They confess that the yoke of their transgressions is bound by high hand. Like a wreath they are twined about the neck. Because of this, their strength failed, and they were unable to deliver themselves out of their enemies’ hands. The Lord Himself it was who had destroyed their mighty men and summoned the Chaldeans for their ruin. As grapes are trodden in a wine-press, so had He cast the daughter of Judah into the press of His wrath because of her manifold transgressions (vers. 14, 15).

On account of these things the prophet weeps, as he had wept, before they came to pass, in foretelling them. There is no comforter; for Judah’s children are desolate. Zion spreadeth forth her hands, but there is no helper, nor any to sympathize. She is as a separated, unclean woman, because of the Lord’s anger (vers. 16, 17).

In verse 18 there is the unreserved acknowledgment, **“The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against His commandments.”**

This is an evidence of true godly exercise. They received but the due reward of their deeds; and they own it in contrition of heart and abasement of soul. They had been deceived by other lovers (ver. 19), and were left in great distress; but they humbly confess, **“I have grievously rebelled.”**

This is what makes it all so bitter: they realize they deserve all that they have been called upon to endure.

Their enemies had heard of their sighs. They rejoiced in their affliction, glad that the Lord had so dealt with them. Their time of woe was coming. God should bring the appointed day when they too should know His indignation because of their sins (ver. 21). So the prayer goes up that the time may be hastened when all their wretchedness shall come before Him and He will do as He has said (ver. 22). It is a cry for vengeance not consistent with Christian light and privilege and the grace of this dispensation, but thoroughly in keeping with the character of Jewish blessing. Their deliverance being an earthly one, it therefore requires the judgment of their oppressors.

In a certain sense these last two verses might also be looked upon as setting forth the doom of those who refuse to own the Lordship of Jesus. He too could say of such, **“Thou wilt bring the day that Thou hast called, and they shall be like unto Me.”**

Despising His sufferings, men who reject His grace must know for themselves the awful power of divine wrath.

~ end of chapter 27 ~

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