

NOTES ON THE PROPHECY AND LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

“The Weeping Prophet”

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CHAPTER FOUR

“WHAT AGREEMENT HATH THE TEMPLE OF God WITH IDOLS?”

(Chaps. 7-10)

In this section it is more the temple that is before us, and the incongruity of professing great reverence for it while idolatrous practices and their accompanying evils are not only tolerated but diligently persisted in.

The prophet had been addressing the people rather as a civil community before. Now he sees them in connection with the newly-cleansed house of the Lord. His message is addressed to those **“that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord”** (ver. 2). This is shown to be all a mere pretence, for while they talked loudly of the temple - made it their rallying-cry, so to speak - their ways were anything but in accordance with the holiness that became God’s house.

“Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt; then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers for ever and ever” (vers. 4-7).

Nothing can be more obnoxious to God than to have His name vauntingly connected with unrighteousness. How terrible to hear some nowadays prate of “the authority of the Lord in His assembly,” and talk of “divine ground,” while deliberately refusing to execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, disclaiming all such responsibility! Nay, even worse, seek to foist it upon the Righteous One who dwells in the midst of His people!

Strange that the important word, **“Follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart”** (II Timothy 2:22), should be so overlooked! Such is Rome’s principle: sad it is, and solemn, to see those who should know better, following, in this at least, in her wake. We can rest assured no amount of professed regard for the assembly of God will atone for the neglect of righteousness. **“The righteous Lord loveth righteousness.”** It is with Him who is **“the holy and the true”** with whom we have to do - He in whom there is **“no darkness at all.”**

Nothing can be more abhorrent to Him than the dreadful state described in verse 8-10. It is the divorce of position from condition - the making much of ecclesiastical place, while the walk is utterly at variance with the truth connected with it. Position is important. Nothing, in fact, is more so; but let us be careful to maintain the corresponding practice. Those who, through grace, have been gathered out of unscriptural systems to the precious name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone, should see to it that their walk is consistent with their privileged place.

The next verse, it will be noted, is referred to by our Lord when He made a whip of small cords and drove the money-changers and venders from the courts of the temple (Matthew 21:13). On that occasion He connected two scriptures together. The first was from Isaiah 56:7 - "**My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.**" This shall yet be true when Christ's kingdom is set up in power; but when the King appeared in lowliness, His judgment was, "**Ye have made it a den of thieves,**" as Jeremiah had said before: "**Is this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold I, even I, have seen it, saith the Lord.**"

As a result, like Shiloh, it was to be left desolate, and the false worshipers were to be cast out from their land; nor would prayer avail for them now. Judgment must have its way (vers. 12-16).

"**The queen of heaven**" was an object of worship then as with Rome now; for it is well known that Mariolatry was but the continuation of the worship of the false goddess here referred to, universally acknowledged under various names.

"**The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women need their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger**" (ver. 18).

Terrible it is to see the evils of that dark day actually followed by a fast apostatizing Christendom at the present time! "**Do they provoke Me to anger? saith the Lord: do they not provoke themselves to the confusion of their own faces?**" (ver. 19). Fury and wrath unquenchable must they reap who have so grievously departed from the true God (ver. 20).

Though the ritual service of the temple, had been re-established, through king Josiah, yet, among the mass, the question of obedience had been entirely forgotten:

"**They hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward.**"

And this had characterized them from the day He had brought them out of Egypt, though He had sent prophets to them again and again, "**daily rising up early and sending them: yet they hearkened not unto Me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers**" (vers. 21-26).

The prophets' ministry, it is plain, had become hopeless. The word of God was still to be proclaimed; nothing was to be kept back, but all hope of national response was at an end. The verdict was already pronounced:

“This is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the Lord their God, nor receiveth correction: truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth” (ver. 28).

The Lord had rejected them; let them mourn and cut off the hair, as a woman put to shame, for they are denominated **“the generation of His wrath.”**

Terrible was to be the desolation resulting upon their casting off. Tophet, the high place of the valley of Hinnom, where the children were sacrificed upon the heated brazen arms of Moloch, was to become the valley of slaughter in which they should bury until there was no more place, while fowls and beasts devoured the unburied bodies of the residue.

“Then will I cause to cease from the cities of Judah, and from the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride: for the land shall be desolate” (vers. 30-34).

Even the very bones of the kings and princes of Judah, as well as of the priests, the prophets, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, would be brought from their tombs and strewed before the heavenly bodies which they had worshiped in life; while for the residue, death will be preferable to the terrors of that evil day. Doubtless this all had a fulfilment in the Chaldean conquest and the later Maccabean times; but as **“no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation,”** it likewise pictures the direful tribulation yet to come.

It is not because the Lord delights in judgment (**“His strange act”**) that His people must be so visited. It was the inevitable result of their own waywardness.

Theirs was a **“perpetual backsliding;”** and though oft pleaded with, they repented not, but **“every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into battle”** (chap. 8:5, 6).

Though they boasted of their wisdom, they had not the discernment of the migratory birds.

“Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle-dove and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but My people know not the judgment of the Lord” (ver. 7).

Of the same character was the Lord’s word to the scribes - **“Can ye not discern the signs of the times?”**

Yet they said, **“We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us;”** but the word of God was practically written in vain for them - not denied, as it is not always denied to be His Word to-day, by many who politely bow it out and profess veneration for it while walking in disobedience to it. **“Peace, peace,”** such may say, but true peace there is not. Priest and people alike deal falsely with the Sacred Oracles; as a result, the time of visitation cannot be long delayed. From ver. 14 of chap. 8 to the end of chap 10 we have a most touching lamentation over the fallen estate of the people who have been **“put to silence”** by God; that is, who are so clearly proven to be guilty before Him that they are speechless in His presence.

Jeremiah enters most deeply into all their feelings, even wailing with them, **“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved”** (chap. 8:20).

It is a temporal salvation that is referred to, of course. The day of God’s patience with them as a nation is ended, and all hope is now vain. How striking is the impassioned cry, **“Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of My people recovered?”** (See also chap. 46:11). Alas, too deep is the wound for Gilead’s balm to heal!

“Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!”

Well has Jeremiah been called the “Weeping Prophet.”

His was not the pharisaic spirit that could build its own reputation for holiness on the ruined testimony of others. Israel was his people. He would not be viewed as other than a part of the desolate nation - he identifies himself fully with it. True, he longs to flee from them to a wayfarer’s lodge in the wilderness, as did David in Psalm 55:6-8; but he is one with them still.

Their ways grieve him to the soul, as they must one in fellowship with God about them; but for themselves he has tenderest love and compassion. Sad that it should ever be otherwise with any of God’s people now. Yet, alas, a hard, judging spirit often accompanies outward separation from evil. How easy to forget that we are all part of a ruined Church, and all share in the responsibility of that ruin. With Jeremiah, we see that while he is obliged to make known to his people their deep, deep sin and departure from God, he does so with breaking heart, as one who longs after them all and is full of heaviness on their account.

How graphic is the language of ver. 21, descriptive of the decimating plague following the horrors of war:

“Death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces, to cut off the children from without and the young men from the streets.”

In such a world as this, how strange that a man should glory in the fleeting things of time and sense! Yet how needful to our souls ever to keep in mind the verses following:

“Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exerciseth lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord” (vers. 23, 24).

In the close of the chapter, Israel uncircumcised in heart is put on a level with the uncircumcised nations about them. They must be judged with the idolatrous nations whose ways they had followed.

Of the 10th chapter I need say little. It is much like the 44th of Isaiah. It gives us the Lord's condemnation of idolatry, and contrasts with the stocks and stones, to which His people had turned, Him who is **"the portion of Jacob," "the former of all things,"** who would fain have comforted the afflicted nation, but must **"sling out the inhabitants of the land"** as from a mighty catapult, causing them to cry, **"Woe is me for my hurt!"**

The 11th verse is in Chaldee, that the heathen might in their own tongue read the condemnation of their idolatry.

Solemn are the words with which this portion is brought to a close:

"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. O Lord, correct me, but with judgment, not in Thine anger, lest Thou bring me to nothing."

Judgment, unsparing, will fall on the heathen; chastisement, leading eventually to restoration, must be meted out to His own.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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