

The Lamentations of Jeremiah

Chapter 1

"It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart"—Eccl. 7:2.

In the final chapter of the prophecy by Jeremiah is given a resume of the destruction and captivity of the city of Jerusalem. We are shown the removal of the royal line of David to a strange land, to undergo imprisonment and humiliation. The city was destroyed and the Temple plundered.

In order to set before posterity the justice and righteousness of God in all His actions with His chosen people, Jeremiah is moved to ask (Lam. 1:1)—

"How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! How is she become a widow! She that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces—how is she become tributary!"

The message gives abundant testimony to exhort, to warn and to guide the servants of God concerning God's goodness and severity. Paul told the Romans that these things were written for our learning and instruction that we might have hope. He had previously stated (Rom. 11:22)—

"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them that fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness—if thou continue in His goodness. Otherwise thou also shalt be cut off."

The position of Jeremiah was typical of all the righteous through the long ages of Gentile ascendancy. Paul further instructs that though we are persecuted and "accounted as sheep for the slaughter" we shall be "conquerors through God's love" . . .

"For I am persuaded that neither death, life, things present, things to come, height, depth, nor anything . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus."

The lessons of Jeremiah's time apply to all. We ourselves are the only ones who can separate us from God's love. Therefore the preservation of this Lamentation is that we may be wise while it is our day of opportunity.

In the days of David and Solomon God had promised to bless Israel without measure if they were obedient unto His commandments. He agreed to care for them and watch over them through all their trials. All the other nations were to be controlled *according to God's purpose with Israel*. They were to be the head and not the tail.

But Israel left their first love, even the true love which God had expressed for them. They sought out others upon which they set their affections and trust. They patterned their lives after the surrounding nations, appropriated their idols and forms of worship; they despised God's prophets, and put His word behind their back.

Worldly ways may seem strong and tangible for the immediate moment as contrasted with spiritual things and the power of God. But the help of man is a vain thing in the day of adversity. When Israel's calamity came (and it was directed by God) she was destitute of assistance. Lam. 1:2—

"Among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her. Her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they are become her enemies."

Turning to other nations in affinity and by making political or expedient alliances was an *open distrust in the power of God to save in an evil day*.

It began with Solomon making affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and marrying his daughter; and then proceeding to surround his country in a similar manner with other supposedly friendly nations; permitting the observance of pagan sacrifices among the holy people of God. It was (as we read in 1 Kings 11) Solomon multiplying unto himself—

"... many strange women—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians and Hittites—of the nations concerning which the Lord had said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in unto them; surely they will turn away your heart after other gods."

This very thing came to pass when Solomon was old, for his heart was not perfect before the Lord his God.

God was Israel's husband. He was the One who had chosen them as His bride. But they turned from Him and chose other gods unto whom they offered their affections. Finally in the days of Zedekiah the bride was sent into captivity; she was unworthy of all the care and the everlasting love of a gracious and longsuffering husband. The Lamentations are a witness that it had become necessary for the Creator to dissociate His blessings and mercy from them. They had estranged themselves from His love. A continuation of the forbearance of God would have justified Israel's wickedness. God's final action was a vindication of His eternal principles of righteousness and justice and illustrate, for the sake of God's elect, the sureness of His Word. Lam 1:6-7—

"From the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed. Jerusalem remembered in the days of her afflictions 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 mocked her sabbaths."

We see the glory and splendor of Solomon's new-found throne, the wealth of his dominion, the magnificence of the temple and palace. God had advised him that if he walked faithfully before Him his throne and kingdom would be established forever.

But if perversity was found in him or his children, then Israel should be driven out of their land, and the wonderful temple (where God had agreed to place His name) would be cast out of His sight, and Israel would become a proverb and byword among all nations.

Israel's position in Divine favor was admired by all her surrounding neighbors, as the wealth of other lands was presented in gifts to Israel. The king of Tyre said, 1 Kings 5-7,

"Blessed be the Lord, which hath given unto David a wise son over this great people."

While the queen of Sheba praised in these words (1 Kings 10:9)—

"Blessed be the Lord thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel. Because the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made He thee king, to do judgment and justice."

But alas for Israel, their worship was for the glories which they saw and possessed. *They did not see the hand of God behind it.*

The first chapter of Lamentations is Israel's cry because the people unto whom she had looked, and who had admired her age of glory, failed her in the time of need. Jerusalem had not looked to God, their Rock and Fortress, therefore He abandoned them.

"Her adversaries are the chief" (Lam. 1:5).

Israel's position of pre-eminence during the days of David and Solomon was now turned about. Those nations such as Tyre and Sheba and others—who once came to view and marvel at the glory and splendor conferred upon Solomon—now turned their backs upon her. Israel was now the tail and not the head.

Solomon had marred the glorious type that his reign was intended to foreshadow of the Millennial reign of Christ. Therefore God marred the pride of Israel. And that by the very people who had admired her:

"The heathen entered into her sanctuary, whom God said should not enter into the congregation" Lam. 1:10).

"All that honored her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness" (v. 8).

When Israel was beautifully clothed with the garments of holiness God caused all nations to look unto her. But when her glorious garments were removed and she exposed herself unto the Gentiles, then they despised her; for of herself she was no better than they. It was only in God's favor that she was glorious and the object of admiration. Now she was only wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

Is it not so also in a spiritual sense? Peter tells us that if our speech and manners are honest among the Gentiles, they will glorify God by those things which they shall behold.

These things also speak to us of our own natural nakedness, that we need the sin-covering name of Jesus Christ and to clothe ourselves with the garment of righteousness, rather than the fleshly inventions of man.

Israel's punishment was sore, *because their responsibility was great.* They had the revealed purpose of God, and had it constantly drawn to their attention by prophet after prophet. As they were warned (Amos 3:2)—

"You only have I known of all the families of the earth: THEREFORE I will punish you for all your iniquities."

Let us not despise His merciful provision, nor ignore the constant warnings and long-suffering of our Heavenly Father, knowing that these blessings are designed to lead to *repentance*, rather than *presumption*.