

The Lamentations of Jeremiah

Chapter 2

Whereas chap. 1 shows Israel's plight without natural assistance, when God's wrath had come to the full, chap. 2 impresses the fact that God had now withdrawn His sovereign care and protection.

"How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger!" (Lam. 2: 1).

Divine leadership with Israel was evidenced in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, which guided their steps through a barren wilderness, a constant reminder of His presence and protection. The language here seems borrowed from this type, as the object of Israel's protection is now turned to their destruction.

As Russia in the time of the end comes as a cloud to cover God's land (Eze. 38:16), so Babylon came against Jerusalem and covered the land to the utter dismay of Israel.

The cloud in the wilderness would be a welcome relief from a burning sun. But to apostate Israel it was as a consuming storm. Therefore the anger of the Lord is justified in removing the evidences of His name from their midst. That protection which He had constantly afforded through His angels was now gone.

An angel appeared to Joshua and instructed him that he would be a guide unto the nation (Josh. 5:13-14)—

"There stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand . . . He said, As captain of the host of the Lord am I now come."

But now—in the end of the kingdom—God turns to face Israel's armies, with drawn sword in hand. Though they, like Balaam, were unaware of the presence of the angel, the sword was poised over the city and fell with vengeance.

"He hath drawn back His right hand from before the enemy. He hath bent His bow like an enemy. He stood with His right hand as an adversary. He hath violently taken away His tabernacle" (Lam. 2:3, 4, 6).

When a man seeks to follow the ways of the Lord He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. But when he wilfully disobeys there is no hope of mercy. Israel now stood in the same position as Sodom and Gomorrah. Their iniquity had grown to such an extent that the city could not be saved. The kings, priests and prophets had taught rebellion against God and *the people loved to have it so*. From the least of them to the greatest of them there was no vestige of acceptability to God (Lam. 2:6)—

"He hath despised, in His anger, the king and the priest."

Those especially responsible members of His chosen race—those to whom was entrusted the duty of shepherds—were the chief upon whom the indignation fell. Prophet, priest and king alike bore their shame, for, v. 9,

"The Law is no more."

They had reduced it to a hollow shell; the seeds of pagan worship, sown by Solomon in the land, had borne their fruit of gall and wormwood. Throughout the message of Jeremiah we witness

how God singled out the false prophets, the priests and the kings because they wilfully rejected a clear warning.

But the responsibility did not end there. God caused the sword to fall upon all alike. The sword, the famine and the pestilence of the siege entered every home, except those faithful few whom God had assured should have their life for a prey. Those terrible pronouncements of Moses made 850 years previously to Israel, contained in Lev. 26 and Deut. 28, were now having their primary fulfilment (Lam. 2:11, 19-20)—

"The children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city. The young children faint for hunger in the top of every street. Shall the women eat their fruit, children a span long?"

The time for mercy for the city had come to an end. Prayers for the forbearance of God were now unavailing. *Jeremiah had been told not to pray for them.*

Jeremiah had said, "My heart is broken." He had spent his lifetime for what appeared to be a lost cause. But when analyzed with the eye of faith it was just another stage in the purpose of God in calling out and refining a people for His name. Though the vision was sad, though the oil of joy was turned to a spirit of heaviness, though the garments of praise had been exchanged for sackcloth and ashes—prayer still rises in all ages from the lips of the servants of God for the remembrance of the eternal promise (Lam. 2:19)—

"Arise, cry out in the night. In the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord."

Or as Isaiah had previously declared (62:6-7),

"I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night. Keep not silence: give Him no rest till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

Then the scorner will not ask, "Is *this* the city that men call the Perfection of Beauty, the Joy of the whole earth?" Then shall all men seek unto her and the wealth of the Gentiles shall be brought unto her, no more to be removed.

But that day has not yet arrived. It is still the time for the watchmen to stand upon the walls of Jerusalem, those sure foundations of the Abrahamic covenant, and to cry out in the night.

But hope fills the hearts which have been broken by man's failure to appreciate the love and mercy of God. The long night begins to give place to the rays of dawn. The resurrection of natural Israel is taking place before our eyes.

Though a time of Jacob's trouble yet remains, when the Russo-Assyrian power causes his thunderous clouds to cover the land, *he shall be saved out of it*, when Israel sees that their arm of flesh is broken, and they turn to God with their whole heart and mind.

Then shall they rejoice in their Law, executed by a divine priesthood. Then shall the sacrifice of praise from the altars of Israel be acceptable unto the Lord their God.

"Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth"—Heb. 12:6.

This is a divine principle pervading all God's dealings with His people. The operation of the Spirit of God is not capricious, but is exercised in wisdom and love and mercy; having the final result always as a basis. It is so, whether we look at the chosen people nationally, or spiritually, or in the case of the Lord Jesus.

The circumstances which God brought upon Judah caused anguish not only for those who experienced them, but for those who, though spared the trial, yet witnessed the calamities. But we are assured that the extreme nature of the trials was no greater than the sin of Judah required, and was designed to the end that the spirit should ultimately be saved.

Jeremiah takes up his lament, placing himself in the position of his erring countrymen, assuming their Iniquities and transgressions as his own. Many of the trials which he personally experienced are illustrated as the workings of the hand of God in the affairs of Israel nationally. The purpose is to clearly define the object that God had in the judgment He brought against His erring people. In 2 Peter 3:9 we read,

"The Lord is long suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

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