

# The Lamentations of Jeremiah

## Chapter 4

The prophet here again (Lam. 4: 1) returns to a consideration of Israel's departure from the ways of the Lord; and in so doing draws attention to a feature of the Temple structure. His mind travels to the glorious adorning of Solomon's Temple, wherein everything was overlaid with pure gold—how the gates and walls thus covered were engraved with the likeness of cherubims.

These are features which are revealed to us as we travel through our daily readings year by year. When we realize the significance of the various appointments of the Temple, akin to the Mosaic Tabernacle in many respects, we understand the wisdom of God in recording these details for our learning.

We will thus be more inclined to pause and reflect upon them, rather than hurrying through what—at first glance—may appear unnecessary and unintelligible detail. We will remember that *no word of God is unnecessary*, and none will return unto Him void of its Divine purpose.

Gold is a symbol of faith in God on the part of the saints.

"When He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).

Peter (1:1:7) tells us that the trial of our faith is "much more precious than gold that perisheth." The final injunction to the Laodicean ecclesia was that they should "buy gold tried in the fire" (Rev. 3:18). They had the mental outlook of confidence in their own possessions and accomplishments. They felt that they did not need the Creator's help.

Those who comprise the living Holy City of God, referred to in Rev. 21, will be the righteous who through faith in God shall have overcome the world. This city is spoken of as being "pure gold" (Rev. 21:18).

In the days of king David the aspect of faith in God was clearly manifest. *The kingdom and throne were constituted on the basis of faith and confidence in the heavenly King.* In all David's ways, both in affliction and in exaltation, he committed his actions to the will of God. He trusted in the Father at all times. It was in this glorious age that the gold of the true Temple was gleaming in the Divine favor.

"Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6).

David rejoiced in God's help and constantly declared His praise:

"The Lord is my shield and the horn of my salvation" (2 Sam. 23:2).

And as if to typify the age of faith in God, we find Solomon making *300 shields of beaten gold*, speaking of faith tried and refined through persecution and trial. Remember Gideon's 300 chosen warriors of faith.

Carrying the picture into New Testament exhortation, Paul said to the Ephesians and to all those of faith,

of "Above all, taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts the wicked" (Eph. 6:16).

But the gold of Solomon's age soon became dim, even before the passage of forty years. The riches, which God had given to Solomon, became in themselves the object of trust rather than the Giver. As in most things, man has failed to grasp the import of Divine appointments, rather having placed confidence in the external things themselves. *The gold was used to purchase defensive leagues with other nations and to glorify the flesh.*

How striking then is the early reference in the days of Solomon's son, Rehoboam, to the coming of Shishak and his taking of the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the 300 shields of gold, which Solomon had made. It was a sad typification of the departure of trust in God from the hearts of Israel's kings. Rehoboam's act of replacing the shields with those of brass only served to accentuate the breach; for shields of brass can only symbolize confidence in the flesh.

Thereafter we only get brief flashes of golden character as we follow David's descendants to the days of Zedekiah. The golden faith in God had become dim; had been changed into faith in men and nations. How often do we read of the treasures of gold being stripped from the Temple to purchase foreign assistance! Need we wonder at the prophet's lament at the lack of faith evidenced in Judah in his days?

"The sanctuary stones are poured out in the top of every street."

The scriptural use of stone speaks to us of *a foundation, a pillar, a witness, and as an object of support or soundness*. We find that stone pillars were used as a remembrance of covenants or agreements. We call to mind the incident of the strife between Jacob and Laban, and the pillar of witness that they set up, giving it the name of *Mizpah*, meaning "The heap of witness."

Peter the apostle, was called *Cephas*, meaning a rock or stone. His record of faithful service gives force to his typical name. In the dark days toward the end of Christ's ministry when asked if he would leave his Master, he said,

"To whom shall we go? — thou hast the words of eternal life."

With these things in mind, Peter was later inspired to write,

"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5).

And he continues, quoting from the Old Testament Scriptures,

"Behold I lay in Sion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious . . . Unto you therefore he is precious" (1 Pet. 2:6-7).

In the wilderness wanderings at Rephidim, Moses was commanded to smite the Rock to make provision for Israel's thirst for life-giving water. The spiritual thought of this incident is shown by the words of Paul and Peter.

"Our fathers did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:1-4).

"This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner" (Acts 4:11).

The prophet Jeremiah would witness the desolations which had been brought upon the glorious Temple of Solomon by generation after generation of wickedness, plunder and neglect; finally culminated by the destruction under Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah records the details of the devastation both of Temple and city in the final chapter of his prophecy—chapter 52.

But to such a man of faith the literal Temple was but a temporary stepping stone to the spiritual Rock which was to come afterwards. *His mind was on the stones of faith*, those prophets and faithful men who had suffered and died to maintain alight the embers of the Spirit's teaching.

There are many illustrations which could be shown of the pouring out of the lively stones from God's Temple at the hands of wicked men, both in imprisonments and death. It was a long and bitter record Israel had inscribed against God's faithful ones:

"Wherefore behold, I send unto you prophets and wise men, and some of them ye shall kill and crucify . . . that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias" (Matt. 23:34-35).

It was shortly after this that Christ's disciples pointed out the Temple of Herod with its beautiful stones, to whom he replied,

"The days will come in which there shall not be left one stone upon another" (Matt. 24:2).

All the literal stones would be thrown down. Another day of darkness was fast approaching for Israel. It was brought about by the Roman legions under Titus in A.D. 70. The ruined state was to continue until the end of Gentile times. The Abomination that maketh desolate still stands on the glorious holy mountain.

Is it possible that Christ had a deeper meaning in his words when referring to these stones? Isn't it possible that the *real* stones are again the faithful servants who have been poured out in the top of every street, through the long night of Gentile times? Pagan and nominal "Christian" alike have lent their hands to the destructive work.

The destruction and scattering of the living stones is but for a period. The glorious return of the Chief Cornerstone and the resurrection to endless life of the faithful stones draw very near.

Amos, Ezekiel and Paul in the Spirit's words illustrate the "raising up of the tabernacle of David" which had fallen because of wickedness. They speak of a wonderful day for Israel when all nations shall flow to the glorious Temple in Jerusalem, realizing that their fathers have inherited lies, but that in the pure religion of that Age there is truth and salvation.

So also the lively stones, which have been ground and polished through much tribulation, shall be revealed as the beautiful spiritual Temple of the Creator, wherein He will dwell with men in the fullest sense.

"Behold the Tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3).

*"The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold—how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!"—Lam. 4: 2*

The age of faith in God had passed. That spiritual frame of mind illustrated by David, who was precious in God's sight, who was termed a man after God's own heart, had given place to flesh glorification.

Man, as naturally constituted, is considered but an earthen pitcher, or container. His acceptability to God as a container is only measured by *what he puts in*. If he has but earthly sensual thoughts, he simply remains an earthen vessel. He has added no other characteristics to distinguish him from his original elements.

"Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19).

But if he fill himself with the Divine attributes of mercy, kindness and longsuffering, gentleness and meekness, having responded with wholehearted obedience to God's requirements, he takes on a reflection of his Creator, Who is the potter.

"God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ . . .

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Cor. 4:6-7).

If we permit the Divine impressions to be molded into our characters we become vessels meet for the Master's use. We become *precious sons of Zion*, comparable unto fine gold. But if there is no response to the hand of the Potter, if we are brittle and not pliable, if we become marred in the forming, we remain vessels of wrath, fit only for destruction.

The prophet Jeremiah now was witnessing the fulfilment of his earlier words to Judah in chapters 18 and 19. In ch. 18 the prophet is instructed to go to the potter's house and observe the potter at his work. The lesson was that God was the Potter and would direct the circumstances of men and nations according to their attitude toward Him. If they repented of evil ways, God would turn from His wrath and bless them. So also if a people had been promised blessings at the Creator's hands, and they turned away to wickedness, God would withdraw His blessings.

The enacted parable was lost on Judah for they replied to the prophet's words of exhortation to repentance,

"We will walk after our own devices, and we will everyone do the imagination of his evil heart" (Jer. 18:12).

Ch. 19 carries the parable to its climax as Jeremiah takes an earthen bottle to the refuse dump of the city of Jerusalem, even to the valley of Hinnom, in the presence of the elders of his people. There he expostulates with them of all their wickedness in worshipping strange gods, and sacrificing their sons to Baal, and causing them to pass through fire in offerings to these heathen abominations. Then he broke the earthen bottle, saying,

"Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel" (Jer. 19:11).

Thus the prophet contemplating the ruins in later years would call to mind the parable.

"How are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!" (Lam. 4:2).

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"The daughter of my people is become cruel" (Lam 4: 3).

The prophet now draws our attention to a characteristic which was evident amongst the greater part of the population of Jerusalem in his time. It is only necessary to make a comparison or two to observe the reasons for this degeneracy in God's people. First let us consider God's attributes as proclaimed by Himself—

"The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and in truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exo. 34:6-7).

These loving characteristics were manifested throughout God's dealings with His people. They were exhibited, not only for Israel to honor and reverence their Heavenly Father, but also for the people to *develop in themselves* and to manifest in their actions one with another and to all people.

The spiritual aspects of their Law were designed to promote these very things. They were commanded to instruct their children in the fear of the Lord, and to feed them with spiritual food, that they also should know the *real meaning* behind God's commandments. Did not Christ say (Matt. 22:37) that the whole Law was enwrapped in the first two commands?—

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, all thy soul, and all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.

"And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two hang all the Law and the Prophets."

The constant repetition of seedtime and harvest with their loaded blessings were to impress upon their minds God's ever-present goodness and love, teaching that He is a Rewarder of them that seek Him *with their whole heart and mind*. God epitomized these blessings through Moses in Deut. 28:1-14, making them contingent upon their observance of His commandments.

All of God's actions are done in love and kindness and mercy. It is on this basis that He has framed the present principle of salvation from death (John 3:16)—

"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

But what of Baal and Molech and the base and sensual worship connected with those idolatries? They completely destroyed the finer characteristics which God's law sought to develop. Parental affection was submerged in the hard principle of passing their children through fire to those pagan demons.

Such a cult produced cold individuals, indifferent to the instincts of love and affection, and careless to the life of their offspring, both from the natural aspect as well as the spiritual. Paul told Timothy that such a class would again appear in the last days. He used language which would well apply to degenerate Israel:

"Men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:2-4).

It is not surprising then that with such idolatry competing with the worship of God, Jeremiah should say that the *natural brute beasts put Israel to shame*:

"Even the sea-monsters give suck to their young" (Lam. 4:3).

—while the children of this faithless generation wandered for the precious fruits of the earth, and their cry unheeded.

Elijah had illustrated that the God of heaven was the Provider of rain in due season, to cause the fruitful earth to yield its increase. But Israel's sister Judah espoused the worship of Baal through association and fellowship and became baser in her idolatrous affections.

God is not mocked. He gave them over to the results of their pagan adorations. In the siege and straitness their idols could not save them, nor provide for their hunger. Yet it was in the power of God to provide overnight if they had trusted in Him. Do we not recall the miraculous supply of food when Samaria was besieged by the Syrians (2 Kgs. 7)? The taunting of Sennacherib before the city walls in Hezekiah's day now was driven home:

"Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their countries out of mine hand?" (2 Kings 18:35).

Now that Judah trusted in Baal and Molech they had no more protection than all the other countries.

The pride of the upper classes—primarily responsible for the calamities upon God's people—is brought even to the dust. The haughty ones are brought low and the princes themselves realize the pangs of hunger, while the siege brings out the worst in them as they seek to assuage their appetites (v. 10). It was a merciful sword that destroyed them. Hunger was worse than death (v. 9).

The very circumstances of their city only served to aggravate their plight. The city was an impregnable fortress; looked upon by all nations as a natural fortification, impossible of capture. Therefore the length of the siege and the lack of supply caused the famine and pestilence—the irresistible swords of God—to stalk from palace to humble cottage.

"*Serve the king of Babylon and live,*" cried Jeremiah. But they put him in prison as a traitor, and chose to die by famine. Approximately 18 months the city was besieged. God had kindled the fire which would eat to its very foundations (v. 11).

"Though the kings of the earth would not have believed that the adversary should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem."

—yet God opened a way and accomplished His fury in wrath upon them. In the days of Hezekiah faith in God saved the city. Now there was no redeeming virtue; just a righteous handful whose lives were spared by escape and deliverance. It speaks of another day when Lot and his two daughters were all that finally escaped the judgments upon Sodom.

In the case of Sodom and Gomorrah the destruction of those cities was swift and summary. The final pangs of Jerusalem were intense and long drawn out. Their responsibility was far greater by reason of knowledge and instruction. Therefore,

"The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands stayed on her."

We are impressed with the lesson of *responsibility*. God had told Israel through Amos the prophet (3:2)—

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

This same principle pervades all the teaching of the Scriptures. The lesson of Israel's failure is set forth as an example for us to consider. Let us understand the magnitude of the love and mercy extended to us by God, in calling us to the knowledge of His eternal purpose. Let us not despise it, for in such case the judgments of God are reserved for us. For—

"If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

It seems remarkable that the prophets and priests should be associated with the blood of the righteous (v. 13). Yet if we observe the record of these supposed leaders of God's heritage we see that it is a record of blood crying from the ground against them.

Their action is well illustrated by the rulers in the time of Christ. It was the priests who were envious of the Master. It was this class who excited the people to cry, "Crucify him!" Christ had rightly assessed them as "*blind leaders of the blind*."

"They have wandered as blind men in the streets." (Lam. 4:14).

There was no positive leadership in their teachings and actions, no certain destination to their idolatries; they were but ready to fall into the ditch.

As the original custodians of the Law the priests were to instruct the people of the defilement associated with the blood of a dead man. The very proximity to death was defiling, and required ceremonial cleansing in a specific way. But now they added blood to blood themselves, making no effort to cleanse their ways (v. 14). Their wicked deeds brought them low, even in the eyes of their captors, so that they also despised them (v. 15).

Zephaniah the prophet speaks in like manner of the degraded condition of Judah,

"Woe to her that is filthy and polluted. Her **prophets** are light and treacherous persons: her **priests** have polluted the Sanctuary, they have done violence to the Law. (Zeph. 3:4).

Jeremiah had previously warned of the coming day of cleansing,

"Because they have forsaken Me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents . . .

"Therefore this place shall no more be called Tophet, nor The valley of Hinnom, but, The valley of slaughter" (Jer. 19:4-6).

Moses had indicated that the land was holy, because it was the habitation of God, and when wickedness was found in it, it could only be cleansed by the blood that had sinned (Num. 35:33)—

"So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it."

There is a spiritual aspect to this point which has a decided bearing upon the principle of salvation. As we have observed, "*We are the Temple of God*." This thought, combined with the fact that "there is no man that doeth good and sinneth not," impresses the lesson of the necessity for a cleansing sacrifice. This we know has been illustrated from the Garden of Eden, by means of typical sacrifices, and was clearly manifested in the sacrifice of the Savior, whose blood was poured out as a representative of the race that had sinned.

*It is God's purpose to dwell with us and in us in the fullest sense.* This is set forth by the repeated references and types under the Law, both in the cleansing of the Tabernacle and priesthood, and the general cleanliness exacted from the whole congregation. It is carried into the spiritual by the allusions to cleanliness of character, thought and speech required of those who have been called to become constituents of the heavenly Jerusalem.

*"The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits" (Lam. 4:20).*

This statement at first seems rather obscure. But upon analysis it appears to have a significance of great import not only to the immediate generation contemporary with Jeremiah, but also with *two widely-separated later generations*.

Judah's trust was primarily in the success of their king. It was in his resistance to foreign aggression that the nation had its continued existence, they reasoned. He was a descendant of the kingly line of David, and in this sense the "anointed of the Lord."

Certainly he was a *wicked manifestation* of one who was classed as the anointed of God, but we find a similar example in Israel's first king, Saul. Though Saul was wicked and persecuted the faithful David, David refused to raise his hand against his adversary, for Saul was he whom the Creator had placed on the throne. Patience vindicated the righteousness of him who endured.

Zedekiah fled from the city at night; the life of the nation being extinguished with his exit. *The breath of life of the nation ("the breath of our nostrils") departed with him.*

"Remove the diadem, take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him" (Eze. 21:26).

Ezekiel in the land of Babylon saw, in vision, the breath of life depart from the nation (Eze. 11:23)—

"The glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east of the city."

Zedekiah was apprehended by the Babylonians and taken away to captivity. Judah's confidence was gone. Their determination to oppose the will of God by not submitting to the Babylonians yoke was frustrated. They had boastfully stated—

"Under his shadow (their king) we shall live among (securely among) the heathen" (Lam. 4:20).

But nationally they died and were buried in the grave (or pit) of the nations.

Israel looked from then on for a deliverer. Had not all their faithful prophets constantly declared that the Anointed of the Lord would come to end their captivity, bringing joy and gladness?

But when their Messiah appeared they did not accept him.

"We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14).

Only the few were waiting patiently for the "Anointed of the Lord." Though they were not prepared for many things that happened, not being sufficiently acquainted with the Scriptures, they still trusted in God,

"We trusted it had been he who should have redeemed Israel."

Their minds were only on national deliverance from captivity. They failed to grasp the higher, the more necessary, *the far more important*, deliverance from sin. Thus Jesus opened their understanding with these words—

"O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:25-26).

There is therefore a double import to the Spirit's words—

"He sent His Word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction" (Psa. 107:20).

This word "destructions" is the same word in the Hebrew as translated "pits" in Lam. 4: 20, and is the only other place where this word appears in the original of the Old Testament.



The nations of the earth became the *grave or pits* for Israel and Judah over the centuries, as their dry bones lay in the valley of national death. But Christ, "The Word of God," "The Anointed of the Lord," will deliver them from these pits with a great deliverance. Combined with this national rebirth will be a healing of the nation spiritually.

As national dispersion came by uncleanness and wickedness, so their regathering will be associated with repentance and forgiveness. Then shall they be healed of their evil ways, serving their Creator with a true heart. Then also shall all other nations learn to dwell under their shadow in peace and confidence, for this man, Christ, "*shall be the peace*":

"Under his shadow (the anointed of the Lord) we shall live among the nations."  
For—

"The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; He will no more carry thee away into captivity."

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"Pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to Me: for I will not hear thee" (Jer. 7:16).

The faithful prophet, ever mindful of the glorious promise to the fathers—ever mindful of the merciful forgiveness of God in former ages to his wayward ancestors—would-be constantly burning, through all the long years of his message, to utter his fervency. *But his lips were as sealed against entreaty to the Creator.*

His utterances had to do with doom for an apostate people, his own people. His remarks were only occasionally broken with the brilliant ray of sunshine for the distant future. Like Moses, he stood afar off and viewed the land as these flashes of light broke through the mist of his tears for the holy city and people.

The inevitable day of misery drew near and the morn of darkness broke in upon Israel—unpleaded for, and undesirous of supplication for their sakes. And yet the prophet remained faithful unto the end. God had appointed him a work, a lone cry in a discordantly raucous tumult, a cry which went unheeded, as the curtain was lowered over Israel's sad history.