

NOTES ON THE PROPHECY AND LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

“The Weeping Prophet”

H. A. Ironside

Copyright © 1906

CHAPTER EIGHT

SIN WHERE THE BLOOD SHOULD BE!

(Chaps. 16, 17)

In the portion of the “**Word of the Lord**” which now claims our attention, we no longer hear the tender supplication of the seer on behalf of Judah. He pleaded unweariedly while there seemed to be hope of averting the threatened disaster. But there was no repentance on the part of the people, and the holiness of God’s character demanded that sin, in those so closely linked with His Name, be not passed over lightly.

The present section is a solemn indictment on His part showing why His hand must be against them, however much His heart may still be for them.

The prophet is bidden to refrain from marriage, for connubial bliss was not to be thought of under the present sad conditions. Children born in such circumstances were only being introduced into a scene of sorrow and grief, with the prospect of an unlamented death before them (vers. 1-4). Parents and offspring alike would be involved in the general ruin. He is neither to go to the house of mourning nor to the house of feasting.

In neither are God’s judgments owned, nor His Word bowed to. Why should he go to join the general lamentation when the mind of the Lord had been clearly revealed? “**For I have taken away My peace from this people, saith the Lord, even lovingkindness and mercies**” (ver. 5). To seek to comfort them in their hardness of heart would be but to turn aside the keenness of the chastisement. He must leave them severely alone. They were in the hand of God.

The same thing comes out in the New Testament in connection with discipline in the assembly. Wicked persons are to be withdrawn from and put away from the company of the saints. The moment there is brokenness of spirit manifested, the compassions of those who are spiritually-minded will at once flow forth; but in any way to condone or encourage persons persisting in ungodliness, and under the Lord’s discipline, is only to hinder restoration and blessing. It is evident from verse 6 that many heathen customs were being regularly practiced by the people of Judah. The announcement that none should “**cut themselves, nor make themselves bald**” for the dead, would not have been made had it not been practiced; that was a plain defiance of Deuteronomy 14:1, 2:

“Ye are children of the Lord your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead. For thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto Himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth.”

Alas, that the Lord’s **“peculiar people”** should have so far corrupted themselves as to have fallen into the most degrading practices of the pagan nations about them! So true is it that **“evil communications corrupt good manners.”** The cutting themselves and making baldness were in honor of heathen deities, notably Baal, the sun-god, who was worshiped under various names.

“Neither shall men tear themselves for them in mourning, to comfort them for the dead; neither shall men give them the cup of consolation to drink for their father or for their mother” (7) This is the first mention in sacred Scripture drinking a cup of consolation in remembrance of the departed. The Lord Jesus instituted such a feast on that **“same night in which He was betrayed.”** He gave new significance to the breaking of bread by declaring that it set forth the bruising of His precious body for our sin upon the cross of shame; while the cup became to us **“the cup of blessing,”** even **“the communion of the blood of Christ,”** **“shed for many for the remission of sins.”**

It is clear that to have had no one break bread nor drink the cup of consolation in memory of one who had died would have betokened utter forgetfulness. So our Lord has said, **“This do, for the keeping of Me in mind”** (literal rendering). Well may our hearts respond -

**“With joy and sorrow mingling,
We will remember Thee.”**

Jeremiah is to join in no memorial feasts, nor yet in seasons of mirth. In the grief and the joy of the people he can have no part. He is forbidden to go into **“the house of feasting, to sit with them to eat and to drink. For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will cause to cease out of this place in your eyes, and in your days, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride”** (vers. 8, 9). So stupefied and insensate had they become that, like their children in the days of Messiah, though mourned unto, they lamented not; though piped unto, they danced not. Neither their joy nor their sorrow led to a recognition of the One who was dealing with them in these various ways; hence their grief should only become deeper, and their laughter be turned into anguish of heart.

It was quite to be expected that, when **“all these words”** were proclaimed, so seared would be their consciences, that they would ask, **“Wherefore hath the Lord pronounced all this great evil against us? or what is our iniquity? or what is our sin that we have committed against the Lord our God?”** (ver. 10) The hardening effect of sin is one of its appalling results. Even **“when the Son of Man shall come in His glory,”** and **“shall sit upon the throne of His glory,”** and all nations be gathered before Him, there will be those who, with amazing effrontery, shall ask, **“When saw we Thee ahungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee?”** while conscious of the fact that they had neglected His servants and His Word all their days.

Jeremiah's reply to the gainsayers is that their fathers had ever been characterized by disobedience to God, and they had outdone them by far; therefore they were to be cast out of their land. They had walked after other gods in Canaan: now they should be carried away to the countries where these false deities were especially recognized, and there they should **"serve other gods day and night"** (vers. 11-13).

Their casting off, however, shall not be forever. **"He that scattered Israel shall gather him."** Just as He of old brought them up from the land of Egypt, so shall it be said in the near future, **"The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, and from all the lands whither He had driven them."** and He adds, **"I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers"** (vers. 14, 15).

For centuries "the tribe of the wandering foot" have proved the truth of His Word in regard to their dispersion; and the prophecies relating to their return and restoration shall be as literally carried out. The going up from Babylon, in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, in no complete sense fulfilled this promise. A few thousand, a mere handful, were brought back at that time, only to be scattered again with their rejection of Christ.

When the **"times of restitution of all things, spoken of by the prophets"** shall have come, Israel shall then be saved; as it is written, **"There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins"** (Romans 11:26, 27). Meantime it is the **"times of the Gentiles;"** the **"holy city"** is trodden by the Gentiles; blindness is fallen upon Israel **"until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in."**

This is the universal testimony of the prophets, strangely overlooked by multitudes who, it is to be feared, read their Bibles to find confirmation for theories of their own, in place of reading in the fear of God, to get His mind. It is interesting to notice how complete the ingathering is to be in the latter day - yet only after the people have passed through the last and great tribulation by which the godly and faithful ones are manifested, and the unrepentant apostate part of the nation cut off.

Verse 16-18 tell of this: **"Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the Lord, and they shall fish them; and after I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks. For Mine eyes are upon all their ways: they are not hid from My face, neither is their iniquity hid from Mine eyes. And first I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double; because they have defiled My land, they have filled Mine inheritance with the carcasses of their detestable and abominable things."**

From every corner of the earth God will seek out His **"lost sheep of the house of Israel"** and bring them back to their land. Many return in unbelief, and judgment will be visited accordingly; but the result will be the reestablishment of the repentant remnant in the home of their fathers, and the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David. During all their wanderings His **"eyes are upon all their ways."**

This is most strikingly brought out in the little book of Esther, where He is found watching over and caring for them even though unrecognized and unsought. *

*** For an exposition of this interesting and instructive portion of Scripture the reader is referred to “Notes on the Book of Esther,” by the same writer.**

Do these lines meet the eye of a tried and distressed saint who has been tempted by Satan to believe that God has forgotten and cares not for him? Surely the words are as true of every Christian as of every Israelite, “**Mine eyes are Upon all their ways.**”

Oh, look up, dear doubting one, and faint not beneath the chastening of the Lord! for His eyes never lose sight of you for one moment, and His heart is ever concerned about you. He is taking careful note of all your circumstances, and “**He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.**” Sweet it is to trust where all is dark, and to sing with childlike faith, “**My times are in Thy hand!**”

Israel’s enlargement shall result in blessing for the nations too: “**For if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?**” and “**if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?**” (Romans 11:12,15).

So we are told in verses 19 to 21 that the Gentiles shall come to restored Israel and to Israel’s God saying, “**Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein is no profit.**”

Turning to the only true God in confession and repentance, He will make them to know Himself.

The prophet gets but a glimpse of that day of glory, as if the Lord would cheer the weak heart of His servant by rolling back the dark clouds for a moment and giving him a sight of Messiah’s reign when He shall, as the Sun of Righteousness, arise with healing in His wings. Jeremiah must now return to the sterner business of showing the people their iniquity.

“**The sin of Judah,**” they are told, “**is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars**” (chap. 17:1).

This tells the awful tale in a very pronounced way. Their sin was written down where the blood of atonement should have been. This was why there must be unsparing judgment. God had ordained that for the sin of a priest, or of the whole congregation, the sacrificial blood should be put upon the horns of the golden altar, the altar of sweet incense, to make atonement for it, that their fellowship with Himself might be maintained. (See Leviticus 4:7, 18).

If a ruler, or one of the common people, sinned, the blood was to be put upon the horns of the brazen altar, the altar of burnt offering, that all might know the sin had not caused the Lord to give up the sinner, but to provide a righteous ground to forgive him. (See Leviticus 4:25, 30).

Alas! in the times of Jeremiah, while the offerings of the Lord were neglected, the offerings of the false gods of the nations were smoking under almost every green tree. Therefore His holy eye sees - not the blood that was ordained to speak of the sacrifice of His beloved Son, but sees the sin of guilty Israel graven upon their hearts and upon the horns of their altars! Therefore the Lord's "**Mountain in the field**" – Jerusalem - where He had set His Name, the place where His honor dwelt, should be given, with all its treasures, for a spoil and a prey to their enemies, while their high places should be given up to sin in all their borders (ver. 3).

It was not that He delighted in judgment, but that they had themselves given up all title to their inheritance. By turning aside from the commandments of the Lord and ignoring the appointed offerings and the sprinkling of blood, they had forfeited all claim to their land. They must be carried away to a country wherein they should be strangers; for He could say, "**Ye have kindled a fire in Mine anger, which shall burn forever**" (ver. 4).

Such is ever man's history when placed in a position of responsibility.

From Adam in Eden, to a world blessed under Messiah in the Millennium, one word gives his story - failure.

He cannot be depended upon. "**Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited**" (vers. 5, 6).

Israel's history, as well as that of all the race, should surely teach one the important lesson of "**no confidence in the flesh.**" But alas with most, one at least is considered trustworthy, even one's self.

"Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit" (vers. 7, 8).

This is the blessed man of the first Psalm - the man whose food is the Word of God, whose confidence is in the Lord alone - the perfect example of which is our Lord Himself. How little do we, who know Him as our Saviour, practically follow Him in this! When all goes well it is easy to deceive ourselves and think that we are trusting in the Lord, when in reality we are resting on an arm of flesh. The time of trial proves where our confidence really is. "**If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.**"

But "**the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;**" and God Himself asks, "**Who can know it?**" He answers it by saying, "**I the Lord search the heart. I try the reins**" (vers. 9, 10). The deceitful heart is what all men have by nature - the depravity resultant upon the fall. In Isaiah 44:20 we read that "**a deceived heart hath turned him aside;**" and in Deuteronomy 11:16 Moses warns against the heart being deceived. In these passages, however, it is not the condition of man by nature, but the result rather of listening to the suggestions of the devil - the arch-deceiver.

All have a deceitful heart: those only have deceived hearts who are not subject to the Word of God. He who tries the reins and searches the heart is going to give to every man according to the fruit of his doings. **“Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”** It is vain to fight against the government of God, for **“as the partridge sitteth on eggs and hatcheth them not, so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool”** (ver. 11).

The Lord’s throne is high and glorious; yea, He is the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity. All men are but as the small dust of the balance before Him. **“They that depart from Me,”** He says, **“shall be written in the earth”** (ver. 13). What a vivid light this casts upon the striking scene in the eighth of John! There, when the scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus the poor woman taken in adultery, He stooped down and wrote upon the ground. In their lofty pride they pressed Him for judgment. He, looking into man’s heart, bade the one without sin among them cast the first stone, and once more stooped down to write them in the earth - the sentence of death is upon them all! Feeling the exposure of His Word, they went forth from the convicting light of His presence one by one, leaving the sinner alone with the Saviour.

In Psalm 22 the Lord says, **“Thou hast brought Me into the dust of death.”** **“Death,”** says the apostle, **“passed upon all men because all have sinned”** (Romans 5). The Lord in grace stooped to the dust of death to save all who turn to God in repentance. Those who refuse His grace must be **“written in the earth;”** that is, they are appointed to death from which they might have been saved had they but accepted the Lord Jesus as their Deliverer from the wrath to come. He is **“the fountain of living waters,”** where all who will may drink and have life forevermore.

The 14th verse is the prophet’s cry, voicing their need of God’s salvation - **“Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for Thou art My praise.”**

Alas, they only scoff and cry, **“Where is the word of the Lord? let it come now”** (ver. 15). It is the taunt of skepticism. As for Jeremiah, he has no unholy anxiety to see his prophecies of doom fulfilled. He had not desired the woeful day. His own inclinations had not led him assume the role of a prophet, but God was witness that what he had given utterance to had been in sincerity as it was revealed to him.

The Lord was his hope in the day of evil, when his adversaries would be confounded and dismayed.

It may seem, at first sight, like a break chain of thought as we pass from what has just been claiming our attention to the paragraph relative to the Sabbath with which this portion of the prophecy is concluded. It should be remembered, however, that the Sabbath was the weekly memorial of Israel’s covenant relation with the Lord. It was to be kept sacred as a perpetual reminder of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage (Deuteronomy 5:15); and it pointed forward to the final rest, when, all man’s labor ended, the redeemed should enter into the undisturbed bliss of the new creation (Leviticus 23:3). Therefore the state of the people was ever manifested by the estimation in which they held the Lord’s holy day.

If they “**called the Sabbath a delight,**” and rejoiced in its privileges, there was good evidence that their hearts were true to Himself. If on that day they did their own pleasure and neglected the ordinances of the law relative thereto, no further proof need be sought as to their wretched state.

In order to bring this out beyond controversy, Jeremiah is bidden to go and stand in the gate (the place of judgment) and cry in the hearing of the king and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as they passed in or out of the city, “**Hear ye the Word of the Lord . . . Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the Sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers**” (vers. 19-22).

This summons as to the Sabbath would be a reminder of God’s past deliverance and future promise. But man prefers his useless labor. “**They obeyed not, neither inclined their ear,**” but deliberately turned away from hearing the message and refused the instruction.

Even at this late day they were promised a continuance of the divine favor if they thus returned to God, and manifested their subjection to Him by hallowing the seventh day. From all the cities of Judah and Benjamin the people should throng to Jerusalem as in the days of old, and once more sacrifices and offerings should be accepted by the Lord at their hands. But if they persisted in their refusal to hearken unto Him, then the city, with all its palaces, should be utterly consumed. Surely never were a people more tenderly entreated or more faithfully warned; but the “**evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God,**” was in them. Entreaties and commands alike had but fallen on ears willfully closed-bent, as it were, on their own destruction!

It is easy enough to censure them; but oh, reader, let us examine our own ways, and ask ourselves whether we too may not be refusing Him who now speaks to us both by their example and by His Word. Departure from God and coldness of heart are the order of the day. The last great apostasy is fast hastening on. The Scriptures of truth are being readily surrendered at the behests of a host of venerated infidels who, parading as Christian ministers, are decrying every fundamental truth of the Bible.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
