

NOTES ON THE PROPHECY AND LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

“The Weeping Prophet”

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE BURNED BRANCHES AND THE SWELLING OF JORDAN

(Chaps. 11, 12)

I have but little to say on these two chapters, solemn and searching as they assuredly are. It is the continued expostulation of the Lord with the people who were ever upon His heart, however much they had loved to wander.

He goes back to the beginning, the time of their sorrow and slavery when He found them in Egypt and brought them out of the iron furnace. In the joy of deliverance they had sworn obedience to His commandments, but their whole subsequent history had only manifested their faithlessness; in result of which the curse - the only thing the law could give to them or any other - rested upon them (chap. 11:1-8).

Again and again warned and entreated, both Israel and Judah had broken the covenant and joined themselves to idols (vers. 9, 10). Judgment, at last, must fall upon them, and they would cry in vain for deliverance to their self-chosen gods, powerless to save. Altars to their shameful idols were seen everywhere; but no prayer nor cry of need went up to Him who alone could deliver: now He declares, “**I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto Me for their trouble**” (vers. 13, 14). She whom He still called “**My beloved**” had no longer any place in His house, for on the ground of her responsibility all had been forfeited.

Ver. 16 is doubtless the text of the apostle’s dissertation in the 11th of Romans. The branches in the olive tree of blessing, “**fair, and of goodly fruit,**” are to be destroyed with the fire of judgment. The apostle indeed tells us what the prophet does not - that wild olive branches were to be grafted in their place; though, if they continue not in God’s goodness, they too shall be cut off, and Israel grafted in again; for “**God is able.**”

Jeremiah himself speaks in verse 18-20, taking, as another has said, “the place of the faithful remnant who have the testimony of God.” Persecuted, he appeals to the One on whose errands he ran, and He to whom vengeance belongs assures him of righteous recompense upon “**the men of Anathoth;**” for it was true of him as of our Lord that a prophet in his own country and city is without honor.

It is quite in keeping with the Old Testament and God's government to find Jeremiah here praying for the destruction of these enemies of the Lord. It is certainly not the grace of the gospel, but according to the righteousness of God's moral government. We see the same thing in the fifth chapter of Revelation, which of itself should show that the souls under the altar are clearly Jewish martyrs in the tribulation period, after the present dispensation of grace is closed, and not Christian martyrs, whose prayer would rather be, "**Father, forgive them,**" or, "**Lay not this sin to their charge.**"

In chap. 12 the prophet pleads with God in regard to the vengeance soon to fall. There is something intensely beautiful and touching in the holy familiarity with which he addresses the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity. One is reminded of Abraham overlooking the cities of the plains.

"Righteous art Thou, O Lord, when I plead with Thee: yet let me talk with Thee of Thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? . . . Thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins."

How gracious of God to be thus talked with! Submissively, Jeremiah pours out his heart; not in complaint, but as seeking to know the mind of the Lord, and yet pleading that all may not be engulfed in the common ruin, but that the wicked may be separated from the mass, for the slaughter, and thus blessing come upon the mourning land (vers. 1-5).

In the answer of God, it is made known to him that the mass are far from His thoughts of righteousness; and the prophet must have a deepened and more solemnizing sense of their iniquity.

He has been but running with footmen; and as they have hastened on in sin, he has been grieved at heart; but, like horses prepared for battle, like a charge of cavalry, is he to see the abounding evil: how can he contend with such? Thus far he has been in the land of peace, and hoping that widespread indignation might not be poured out; yet he has been wearied by their sin and rebellion. He is to see the judgment of God poured out in all its fury, as the swelling waters of Jordan in harvest-time (Joshua 3:15), sweeping all before them. In that day, both the righteous and the wicked will suffer in the desolating woes that are to be poured upon Judah. How, then, will he do? Even his nearest kinsmen will reject the word he brings, and deal treacherously with him (vers. 5, 6).

It is too late to plead for them. The Lord has forsaken His house and left His heritage. His "**dearly beloved**" is to be given into the hand of her enemies. Like a lion roaring in the forest, they have proudly defied Him; now, like a speckled bird persecuted of the birds of the wood, the assembled nations shall devote her to destruction.

Their pastors had spoiled them as a ruined vineyard and trodden His portion beneath their feet, and no man laid to heart the desolation ensuing; so from one end of the land to the other the sword of the Lord should devour and no flesh have peace. The awful reaping time had come, the day of the fierce anger of the Lord (vers. 7-13).

In the last section of the chapter a word is addressed to the surrounding nations.

“His evil neighbors” He calls them, thus intimating His concern for Israel still; for they were not only Israel’s neighbors, but His. Then blessing is foretold both for the chosen people about to be scattered and to any among the nations who turn to their God - which looks on to the Millennium.

The nation of Israel shall yet be the center of God’s dealing with the earth, and shall be the means of blessing to the surrounding peoples. **“But if they will not obey, I will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation”** saith the Lord” (ver. 17).

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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