

NOTES ON THE PROPHECY AND LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

“The Weeping Prophet”

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CHAPTER TWO

ENTREATY AND WARNING

(Chap. 2:1-3:5)

Jeremiah's first expostulation with his people - at least, the first recorded - is certainly a most remarkable address for one who said, **“I cannot speak, I am but a child.”** It would be difficult to find any portion of Scripture that would surpass it in genuine pathos and tenderness, not to speak of eloquence. The earnest pleading of the insulted and forgotten Lord, His grace and compassion towards the guilty nation, blended with solemn warnings of dreadful days to come if the heart is not turned back to Him - all together make up a discourse that might have moved the very stones; but alas, we read of no response on the part of hardened, willful Judah.

The opening words are remarkably beautiful.

“I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the firstfruits of His increase. All that devour him shall offend: evil shall come upon them, saith the Lord” (vers. 1-3).

How He delights to recall the first love of His people, when their hearts beat true to Himself and joy welled up in their souls at the thought of His dwelling among them (Exodus 16)!

Do we not well remember that it was so with us when first we knew Him to be really our Saviour-God and ourselves to be His forever, when the confidence of our hearts was established in His grace?

How much He was to us then!

What a poor thing this world seemed, with all its glittering baubles! How gladly we turned from everything we had once delighted in to go out after Himself revealed in Jesus! He was outside this scene, the rejected One; we, too, then, must be separated from it. That which had before been as the well-watered plains of Egypt to us now became as a desert, parched and dry, in which was nothing for our hearts. With deepest joy we exclaimed, **“All my springs are in Thee,”** and sang exultingly of the “treasure found in His love,” which had indeed “made us pilgrims below.”

Those were truly bright and happy days when first Christ dwelt in our hearts by faith: days when He joyed in us and we in Him. But, may we not ask ourselves, is it so now? Must He look back and say, “**I remember,**” or does He find us still occupied with Himself, still gladly and cheerfully counting all below as dross and dung for Him, still exclaiming, “**One thing I do**”? Alas, that it should be ever otherwise! But the first complaint He had to make against the newly-founded Church, when all else was going on well and orderly, was this: “**Thou hast left thy first love**” (Revelation 2).

“Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother. crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart” (Song of Solomon 3 :11).

If our joy was great, how deep was His when first our hearts were won for Himself! Beloved, do we give Him joy now as to our practical ways, and our heart’s affections from which our ways spring? Or is His Spirit grieved on account of our cold-hearted indifference - our heartlessness? for is it not worse than coldness? Let us turn, then, to His further gracious words in the portion before us.

“What iniquity have your fathers found in Me, that they are gone far from Me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?” (ver. 5).

Just think that He should ask that question - He to whom they owed everything! He had delivered them from bondage and brought them safely through a desert land, to their inheritance in the land of blessedness. He had planted them in a beautiful country to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof!

Alas, they had defiled the land.

- They had turned His grace into lasciviousness;
- They had made His heritage an abomination.
- They walked after things that could not profit (vers. 4-8).

Terrible indictment! Base ingratitude! But oh, beloved, let us ask ourselves, Are we any less guilty than they? Nay, have we not known a far greater deliverance, a more wonderful preservation, a more costly inheritance; and yet, have not our hearts, too, gone after the vain and unprofitable things of earth? Have we not forgotten that the cedar-wood, the hyssop and scarlet, were cast into the burning of the heifer (Numbers 19) - that, for faith, all the glory of this world came to an end on the cross? That tree on which He hung, that testified to His entire rejection by this world, has it really separated us from the scene where He has been set at nought?

Do we still want favor, power and place where He found only rejection, a cross, and a tomb?

How, then, is this? What iniquity have our hearts found in Him that they can thus turn from Him so ruthlessly? Ah, charge Him with this we cannot. Let us confess that it is in ourselves alone the iniquity is found. It is we who have changed our glory for that which doth not profit.

Well may He say: **“Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water”** (vers. 12, 13).

But has He changed towards those who have so changed towards Him?

Far be the thought: though He loves His own too much to permit them to prosper in the paths of disobedience. He chastened Israel with scourge after scourge, but His heart of love remained unchangeably the same. They might blame Him for what He could so easily have prevented, as we are in danger of doing; but He can say, **“Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, when He led thee by the way”** (ver. 17)?

He must make the backslidden in heart eat of the fruit of his own devices (Proverbs 14:14) in order to turn the heart back from its devices to Himself, the source of all blessing.

It is in vain to turn to Egypt, or Assyria - each speaking of different aspects of the world; for how can one who has known Him ever find refreshment and rest anywhere else?

- The waters of Sihor (supposed to be the mystic Nile, coming from no one knew where) could no longer satisfy those who once rejoiced in rain direct from heaven.
- Egypt is the world as we knew it when we groaned beneath the sense of its cruel bondage.
- Assyria is rather the world as the open enemy of the people of God.

How can His own look for comfort in either of these? Yet how true it is that the heart when turned from Himself soon sinks back to the dead level of the things from which it was once delivered, and sometimes also is found ranged against the very truths it once enjoyed!

In such a condition, when other remedies have failed, it is not seldom that the principle enunciated in ver. 19 has to be used to bring the wandering one to his senses. **“Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts.”**

This is, one might say, His last resource (if souls are not otherwise brought back to Himself) to **“deliver unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus”** (I Corinthians 5).

It has often been said that a child of God out of communion with the Father will stoop to evil reprobated even by the world - and this is doubtless true - until the very depths of the depravity is used of God to correct and reprove.

So it was in the case of David, who, confessing his sin, acknowledged that he had been left to fall so low **“that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest”** (Psalm 51).

So, too, with Peter. Self-confidence had characterized him for some time, and his self-confidence at last corrected him; his dreadful backsliding reproved him. And thus it was with the wretched man of I Corinthians 6. He must be left to himself-given over to Satan till, as a result, his brokenness and penitence can be pressed, in II Corinthians 2, as a reason for his being again received into the fellowship of the assembly.

Blessed it is to know, as already intimated in the preceding chapter, in the wisdom of God: that sin must serve. The waters below, though they speak of sinful self-will, shall yet be made to bring forth abundantly to the glory of God, as in the fifth day's work in Genesis 1. This is not, in any sense, to excuse sin, but the contrary. It's very hideousness is used of God to humble and bring very low the soul that has wandered from Him.

As we continue to look at the passage before us, it is well to remember that while the nation, as such, was in covenant-relationship with the Lord, it was not yet the New Covenant, but that entered into at Sinai. It still looked for something in man, who had said when his bonds were broken and he was delivered from the yoke, **"I will not transgress"** (ver. 20). But, far from continuing in that covenant, they had sinned and broken it from its very ratification.

He had planted them a noble vine. They had by their ways become a degenerate plant of a strange vine unto Him (ver. 21). Nor was their resource in themselves: **"For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me, saith the Lord God"** (ver. 22).

The covenant under which they had placed themselves had only manifested their guilt and helplessness. God alone would be their resource: and we know He was yet to send a Saviour whose precious blood does for every believing sinner what no **"soap and nitre"** (no human effort) ever could cleanse from every sin. But this it is not yet the province of Jeremiah to make known. His present object is to impress upon them their condition, their utter hopelessness, unless they return to the Lord; so he next likens them to the untamable wild ass of the desert, refusing all correction.

Exhorted to submission, they reply, **"There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go"** (ver. 25).

Still they were not entirely without a measure of shame and apparent penitence, for even at this time revival had begun among them; but, with the mass at least, there was no real conscience-work. **"As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed"** (ver. 26).

They were ashamed to have the light turned on their idolatry, but not ashamed of the sin itself. Not that they had utterly given up all faith in the Lord. Idols might do when things went well outwardly. In their trouble they turned to God. How much do we know of this to-day!

But if they seek not His face in times of quietness, He will not be found of them in the day of their sorrow, unless it is with true self-judgment and confession of their sin (vers. 27, 30).

How sad the reproach of verse 31, 32 - **“O generation, see ye the word of the Lord. Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? Wherefore say My people, We are lords; we will come no more unto Thee? Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet My people have forgotten Me days without number.”**

This opened the way for all else: it was quite unnecessary to dig deep (as the word **“secret search”** is said to mean, ver. 34) to find the evidence of the sin they refused to acknowledge. Ah, let God but be forgotten, let the soul be estranged from His presence, and most godless practices are indulged in unblushingly, and with a degree of self-confidence and effrontery that is amazing! But His word to such is, **“The Lord hath rejected thy confidences, and thou shalt not prosper in them”** (ver. 37).

This did not mean, however, that He had done with them. Far from it. He might chastise and punish them, but He loved them still, and assures them of it; for although to a wife put away, who had become another man's, her first husband would not return, despite the lewdness of Judah, He cries after her, **“Yet return again to Me!”** (chap. 3 :1).

What patient, matchless grace is this! Have we, too, wandered from Him? Have we forgotten the word that says, **“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God”** (James 4:4)?

Oh, then, in contrition of heart and self-judgment, may we turn again to Himself, confessing the evil of our unhallowed love for that which is so opposed to His holiness, and prove the sweetness of His restoring mercy. Our God has withholden the rain (ver. 3) that We might prove the barrenness of a life out of communion with Himself; but He longs for the moment when, realizing the depth of our backsliding, the heart turns back to Himself with this cry: **“My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth!”** (ver. 4).

Observe here, that though He would have Israel cry **“My Father,”** this is far different from crying **“Abba, Father”** by the Spirit of adoption, which we have, but they had not. Nationally Israel was God's son (Hosea 11:1; Exodus 4:22, 23).

It is only since the Cross that believers know Him in the individual relationship of Father - not merely national adoption - and, having life from Him, as the One revealed by the Son in resurrection as **“My Father and your Father.”**

Our privileges are far greater than theirs. How much holier should be our lives!

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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