

# NOTES ON THE PROPHECY AND LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

“The Weeping Prophet”

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## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

### “THOU, O LORD, REMAINEST FOREVER!”

(Lamentations 5)

The detailed story of Judah’s sufferings is spread out before the Lord in this last chapter, but the soul is stayed upon the fact that One remains, when all else is swept away. There is rest and confidence despite the wretched circumstances brought about by sin and waywardness. Everything has been gone over before God, and in Him the hearts of Jeremiah and of the few who are left of his people can find repose. He has not failed in all that He foretold as to the woes entailed by their wicked ways. He will not fail in carrying out His promises as to future deliverance and restoring mercy. The last few verses connect closely with the theme of chap. 3:22-26.

The entire portion takes the form of a prayer, rather than a lamentation. “**Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach**” (ver. 1). It is a great relief for the troubled heart to feel that there is One in heaven who observes every trial to which His children are subject, and that He has ordered all according to His infinite wisdom and love. There is rest in knowing that His eye is looking on, and that He is no unconcerned spectator.

Confidently, as knowing His deep interest in them still, though they have failed so grievously, they enumerate the causes of their anguish and reproach. “**Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens**” (ver. 2). The goodly land, unappreciated, had passed under the dominion of the Gentiles. It was not that God delighted to have it so; but that His own might realize the folly of departing from Him.

“**We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows**” (ver. 3). This gave them special title to the care of Him who is the Father of the fatherless, and the Judge of the widow. In so speaking of themselves they express their own utter helplessness, and their confidence in Him who had been the Guide of their youth. So earnest a plea would not be despised. None ever called upon Him in vain when in felt need, and truly repentant.

“**We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us**” (ver. 4). All that this world has for the soul away from the Lord comes high. It may seem as though much is to be gained by taking one’s own way and casting the fear of God behind the back.

Satan will suggest, too, that it costs too much to live for God, and will allure with tempting baits the already unhappy heart that has begun to lust after other things; but it will only be to prove in the end that disobedience to God is a costly indulgence, an unholy luxury, if we may use the term, that none can really afford.

They who here complain that they have drunken their water for money, had foolishly forsaken Him who is **“the Fountain of living waters”** (of which all might drink freely), **and had hewed out for themselves cisterns that could hold no water”** (Jeremiah 2:13). When they sought it from the enemies of the Lord, a price was put upon it that it burdened them to pay. And then, of all that they purchased so dearly, it could be said, **“Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again;”** while the Lord’s living water satisfies the weary soul. Departure from God is the most foolish and worst investment any child of grace ever made.

**“Our necks are under persecution: we labour, and have no rest”** (ver. 5). How could it be otherwise? Was rest to be found in taking their own way? It could not be. “Thou hast made us for Thyself,” said Augustine of Hippo, “and our souls can never be at rest until they rest in Thee.” It is the most egregious folly to seek for it anywhere else.

That worldlings should make such a mistake is no cause for surprise: they have never known anything better than the alluring enticements of Satan’s realm: but for one who has shared in the deep, true peace which the Spirit gives to those that obey Him, to turn his back upon the only source of rest and seek it in the world from which, he was once delivered, is an anomaly beyond explanation, save on the ground of hidden backsliding of heart long before.

Such we know was the case of Judah. Their heart went out after unholy things first; then the feet soon followed. But they found, like the dove sent forth out of the ark, no rest for the sole of their feet. A raven, type of the evil nature in every man, could rest upon a floating carcass, while feeding on the carrion; but the clean, pure dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit and of the new nature which all God’s children have received, could find neither rest nor food in such a scene, but must needs return to the ark, a type of Christ for both.

**“We have given the hand to the Egyptians, and to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread”** (ver. 6). But Egypt soon failed them, and Assyria only oppressed them. All human props broken, the remnant were cast upon God alone, on whom they should have counted from the first.

Continuing in their confession, they own, **“Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities”** (ver. 7). They were the children of wayward fathers, and had gone astray in the same unholy paths. Bitterly they complain that servants had borne rule over them, and there was no deliverer. At the peril of their lives they brought in their bread, **“because of the sword of the wilderness”** (vers. 8, 9). Famine-stricken, their skin became **“black like an oven.”** They women of Zion and the maids of the cities of Judah were devoted to shame by the ravishers of the idolatrous armies. Princes were ignominiously hanged up by the hand; the elders were dishonored; while the young men and children were taken to be household servants (vers. 10-13).

The place of judgment and the place of merriment were alike vacant. The elders were no longer seen in the gate, and the song of the youths had ceased. The joy of their heart had ceased, and their dance was turned into funereal gloom. The voice of the mourner had usurped the place of the voice of the singer (vers. 14, 15).

Realizing keenly the immediate connection between their wrongdoing and their woes, they cry in contrition and penitence, **“The crown is fallen from our head: woe unto us, that we have sinned!”** (ver. 16). Thanks to a merciful God, blessing is not far away when the soul thus bends to the rod and confesses the justness of the punishment. **“The Lord will not always chide, neither will He keep His anger forever.”** The surest way to find deliverance from God’s governmental rod is humbly to bow in His presence, and frankly acknowledge how fully deserved the chastisement has been.

Judah had been brought very low; but He who cast them down can lift them up, when the needed lesson has been laid to heart and borne its fruit. Fainting in heart, with tear-dimmed eyes, **“because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate,”** and a habitation for foxes, they look up to Him from whom all their past blessings had come, and who found it necessary to pass them through all their sorrows: know He is their only resource, they exclaim, **“Thou, O Lord, remainest forever; Thy throne is from generation to generation”** (vers. 17-19). Everything else may have been swept away, but He remains forever.

What unspeakable consolation, dear fellow-saint, is in this precious fact for every tried and suffering child of God! Circumstances may be very hard; blow upon blow may strike; disaster follow disaster; until the stricken heart has not one earthly thing left to cling to. In such an hour Satan would fain lead the soul to believe that God too is gone: that it is no longer the object of His care, that He has left it to die alone. But no! It cannot be. Faith looks up and shouts, **“Thou, O Lord, remainest!”** for He abides the same **“yesterday, and to-day, and forever.”**

There is an authentic incident related of a widowed Christian women who lived in Scotland years ago. Left with several dependent “bairns,” she was at length reduced to great straits, and in order to feed and clothe her little household was obliged to practise the strictest economy. Yet withal, her heart was fixed upon the Lord, and both by precept and practice she taught the lesson of trust and confidence to her children.

But there came a day when the purse was flat and the cupboard bare. In the meal-barrel there was only left a handful of flour; and, like the widow of Zarephath, she went to get it to make a morsel of food to satisfy the craving of the hungry little ones, knowing not where the next would come from. As she bent over the barrel, scraping up the last of the flour, her heart for a moment gave way, and in a paroxysm of doubt the hot tears began to fall, and she felt as one utterly forsaken. Hearing her sobs, her little boy Robbie drew near to comfort. Plucking at her dress till he attracted her attention, he looked up into her face with wonder, and asked, in his quaint Scotch dialect, “Mither, what are ye greetin’ (weeping) about? Dinna God hear ye scrapin’ o’ the bottom o’ the barrel, mither?” In a moment her failing faith reasserted itself. Ah, yes, God did hear. All else might be gone, but He remained, and His Word declared her every need should be supplied. And so it was; for help was provided from a most unexpected source, when the last of what she had was gone.

It is the time of trial that tests faith; and never more so than when one is aware that the trial has been brought on by one's self.

The spared of Judah feeling this, go on to ask, **“Wherefore dost Thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?”** (ver. 20). But in confidence they add, **“Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old”** (ver. 21). If He shall turn them, all will be well. They are unable to trust themselves. They had ever been treacherous and false; but He can make them willing in the day of His power. Then they shall be as He would have them.

**“But Thou hast utterly rejected us; Thou art very wroth against us.”** This was indeed true, but already His fierce anger was passing away. He was soon to arise, to be their Deliverer once more. This came to pass in part when, by permission of Cyrus, all who had heart enough for it returned to the cities from which their fathers and some of themselves had been carried captive.

But the day of Judah's lamentations will never be truly over until the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings, to dry their every tear, and to restore them to the land promised to Abraham for an inheritance forever. Then shall Zion put off her sackcloth; and, adorned with her beautiful garments, shall become the queen city of the world, when her King shall reign and prosper.

**“In that day,”** in place of lamentation and wailing, **“shall this song be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee. Trust ye in the LORD forever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength”** (Isaiah 26:1-4).

Then Jerusalem's mourning will be accomplished; her warfare will be ended!

~ end of chapter 31 ~

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