

Chapter Eighteen

God Chastens: Jeremiah, Lamentations

What would be the reaction of the congregation if some present-day American stood in his pulpit and persistently declared God was on the side of the Communist bloc nations and against America? Suppose he claimed divine inspiration in declaring that God was raising up the Russians to be His servants for the destruction of the United States. And further, that God cared nothing for the Declaration of Independence or the American Constitution or the heritage of religious worship which our nation has experienced. In fact, emphasis on these things were an offense to God.

And what if this preacher even advocated that Christians renounce their loyalty to their country and join the Communist bloc of nations? What if that preacher were to be subjected to house arrest, flung into prison, even slapped in the face in public and his writings burned, and he himself half-drowned in a pit of slime--yet he would not take back one word of what he had said, but stubbornly repeated it again? If this should occur it would have a very similar impact to that recorded in the prophecy of Jeremiah! This was the experience of Jeremiah the prophet. Imagine yourself as that preacher. Imagine how you would feel when you preached your heart out but no one would listen, and persecution hounded you every way you turned. You are unable to seek comfort in marriage because the days are too difficult and God has specifically told you to- remain unmarried. You feel abandoned and alone. All your friends turn from you. But if you try to quit, and refuse to preach, you find that you cannot quit--that the word of God burns in your bones and you have to speak it whether or not you want to. Despite the message of judgment you are called upon to deliver, your love for your country is genuine and deep. As you see it surrounded by its enemies, ravished, conquered and despoiled, you are overcome by a deep sorrow that breaks out in the lamentations of grief.

If you can imagine such a situation, you will understand why Jeremiah, of all the prophets, was unquestionably the most heroic. Isaiah spoke in more exalted language and saw more in detail the coming of the Messiah and the fullness of His work. Others of the prophets speak more specifically concerning future events to be fulfilled. But Jeremiah is outstanding among the prophets as a man of heroic and dauntless courage. For almost 50 years he endured the kind of persecution we have described, and yet he never gave up!

Jeremiah lived in the last days of the southern kingdom of Judah. Isaiah had finished his ministry about 60 years before Jeremiah came on the scene. Jeremiah ministered at the close of the reign of the last good king of Judah, the boy king Josiah who led the last revival the nation experienced before it went into captivity. His ministry carried on through the reign of King Jehoahaz and through King Jehoiakim--one of the most evil kings Judah had. Jehoiakim was followed by the three-month reign of Jehoiachin (also called Coniah), who was taken by Nebuchadnezzar and brought into captivity in Babylon. Jeremiah's ministry continued through the reign of Judah's last king, Zedekiah, who reigned until Nebuchadnezzar returned and utterly destroyed Jerusalem, taking the entire nation into Babylonian captivity.

Unfortunately, the messages of the prophet which appear in this book are not arranged in chronological sequence, especially in the latter part of the book. The Greek version (the Septuagint) shows considerable difference from the Hebrew text of Jeremiah. We learn from the book itself that Jeremiah dictated his prophecy to his secretary Baruch (see 36:4-8), and the disorderly arrangement of the messages may possibly be accounted for by the confusion attendant upon Jeremiah's flight to Egypt.

Two important emphases are woven into the fabric of this entire book. One concerns *the fate of the nation*. The other concerns *the feelings of the prophet*. Both are exceedingly instructive to us. The first chapter of the prophecy recounts the call and commissioning of Jeremiah to his prophetic office. He was only a young man,

probably in his late teens or perhaps 20 years of age when he was set aside for his prophetic task. Like Moses at the burning bush, Jeremiah protested his commission and pleaded that he was too young for the immense task set before him, but God gave him clear answer: "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (1:9, 10).

In the first of many parabolic figures which appear in the book as helpful visual aids, the young prophet is shown the vision of an almond tree which is the first of the fruitbearing trees to bloom in the early spring. Because the Hebrew word for *almond* is very close to the word for *watcher*, the prophet is told that the almond branch is a symbol of God's watchfulness over His word to perform all that He said in precise detail. Jeremiah is then shown a vision of a boiling pot, facing away from the north, and this is interpreted to be a picture of the tumultuous trouble that will come upon the land of Judah from a northern kingdom. These introduce the themes of the entire prophecy. The prophet himself is encouraged to speak regardless of what the reaction of his hearers may be, for God says: "And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you" (1:18,19).

Condemnation of Judah's Apostasy

As with many of the prophets, Jeremiah's early messages, recorded in the first 13 chapters, consist largely of condemnation of Judah's apostasy and earnest pleas for repentance while there is yet time before judgment falls. The major figure employed is that of a bride with her husband whom she forsakes and turns to many strange lovers. For this reason God calls Judah a prostitute, for the Baal worship which she was indulging in involved many foul sexual practices.

In a similar manner Israel, the northern kingdom, had fallen into idolatry and had been sent into exile which the prophets likened to being "divorced" by the Lord. But in spite of this vivid example, Judah persists in her idolatrous behavior, and though she attempts to win God's favor by an outward show of religion, it is but a sham repentance and neither God nor His prophet Jeremiah is deceived by it. The lion from Babylon is stalking its prey and soon Jerusalem will be laid under siege. It is not a cruel and heartless God who brings that about, but Jeremiah plainly declares to the people of Judah: "Your ways and your doings have brought this upon you. This is your doom, and it is bitter; it has reached your very heart" (4:18).

Nor does the prophet deliver these messages with unfeeling indifference. When his prophetic vision sees the coming judgment he cries out: "My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent; for I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war" (4:19). In beautiful poetic discourse the prophet describes in detail the sight of the invading armies of the north and the terror they create as they enter the land, though it will be several decades before this fierce judgment ultimately falls, for God is a very patient God and waits until the last possible moment for genuine repentance from His people. Nevertheless, the prophet knows that judgment is inevitable, for he sees the events of his day from the divine viewpoint.

He is told by the Lord concerning his own ministry: "I have made you an assayer and tester among my people, that you may know and assay their ways" (6:27). But such clear vision only means deeper anguish on the prophet's part, for he sees how blind the people are to their own peril and how they turn a deaf ear to all words of warning.

An example of this is found in chapters 7-10. The prophet is sent by the Lord to stand in a gate of the Temple and proclaim a great message of warning to the people who trust in their ritual--and in the fact that the Temple was God's earthly home--to protect them from any judgment. To them the prophet said: "Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!'--only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, says the Lord" (7:8-11).

In vivid and forthright words the prophet describes their foul idolatrous practices and warns them that exile is certain unless they change. The prophet identifies himself deeply with the people's fate, crying: "O that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (9:1).

In the midst of this great Temple message there are many wise words of counsel, such as: "Thus says the Lord: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord'" (9:23,24). Also, with keen awareness of the nature of fallen humanity, the prophet says: "I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps." (10:23)

Chapters 11-13 highlight the fact that God's judgment of His faithless people rests upon the broken covenant which Israel as a nation had accepted at Sinai. There Moses had faithfully warned them of the consequences of turning from their relationship with God; and now in Judah those terrible results were hovering on the horizon of national life. They were so far advanced in their stubborn rebellion that the prophet is told not to pray for them any longer, for judgment was now inevitable.

Prayer has the effect of delaying judgment, but delay is not helpful unless it can lead to repentance. In this case long delay had not awakened a true repentance in the people and God knows that only a severe hand of punishment can awaken them to their true condition. It is evident that nations, like individuals, can sin "the sin which is unto death" (see 1 John 5:16). Physical judgment cannot be averted even by prayer, because it is the only way to at last reach the stubborn and willfully rebellious heart.

The prophet employs in this section two vividly enacted parables to impress upon the people the impact of his message. He is sent by the Lord to buy a pair of linen undershorts and to go to the Euphrates River and hide them in the dirt. Then after several weeks he was to recover the rotted cloth and display it before the people, with the words: "Thus says the Lord: Even so will I spoil the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own heart and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be like this waistcloth, which is good for nothing. For as the waistcloth clings to the loins of a man, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, says the Lord, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory, but they would not listen." (13:9-11)

Pull wine jars are also employed as a parable of the stupefaction and bewilderment which possessed the people who, like drunken men, fall helpless to the ground, unable to rise.

God Prohibits Jeremiah's Intercession

Further symbols are used as vivid visual aids by the prophet in the section from chapters 14 through 19. Once again the prophet is told not to intercede for the people, for the Lord will not hear their cry even though they offer burnt offerings and sacrifices, for He knows their hearts. In fact God says that even though Moses and Samuel stood before Him, yet their intercession would not effect deliverance for this stubborn people.

This seemingly heartless stance finds immediate effect upon the prophet, who cries out in protest: "Thy words were found, and I ate them, and thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by thy name, O Lord, God of hosts" (15:16).

But despite his joy in the word of the Lord, he cannot reconcile this with the refusal of God to allow intercession for the people, and so he cries again: "Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Wilt thou be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail." (15:18)

But Jehovah is merciful with His overwrought prophet, and says: "If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them. And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze,

they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you for I am with you to save you and deliver you, says the Lord. I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless" (15:19-21).

Because of the troubles which were coming upon the land and the resentment which Jeremiah's message would arouse, the Lord commanded him to remain unmarried though it would mean loneliness and pain to the prophet. He is given great insight into the troubled character of fallen humanity and is encouraged to deal resolutely and realistically with life as it truly is, for he is told:

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it? I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings" (17:9, 10).

But to encourage him, in chapter 18 the prophet is sent to visit the house of the potter and there to observe the potter at work. He watches him take a lump of clay and shape from it a vessel. As the prophet watches, the vessel in the potter's hand is marred and broken. Then the potter takes the broken vessel and forms it again into a lump of clay to reshape it into a vessel, true and perfect according to the potter's design.

So the prophet was taught by this object lesson what God does with a broken life, whether it be a nation or an individual. He can take it and make it over, not according to the foolish dreams of an individual, but according to His own heart, for the potter has power over the clay to shape it as he wishes. So Jeremiah spoke a prophecy of ruin, desolation, destruction and judgment; nevertheless beyond the judgment would lie the hope of the glory of God when God would reshape the vessel and make it according to His desire.

Jeremiah's faithful preaching in the public courts of the Temple was not taken lightly. Chapter 20 records how Pashhur the priest, chief officer of the Temple, seized the prophet and beat him and put him in stocks, but when he is released the next morning Jeremiah proceeds again to prophesy. The courage of this prophet is amazing, for when he is in the public eye he is fearless as a lion. He speaks to kings and captains and even hired murderers who hurl enraged threats against him, and he is utterly fearless! He looks them right in the eye and delivers the message of God, even when it predicts their own destruction. But when he is alone with God, he is filled with discouragement and depression and bitterness, and it all comes flooding out.

After his encounter with Pashhur, the prophet pours out his troubled heart to the Lord. He determines not to preach any more, but says: "If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (20:9). Like Job, he curses the day he was born, and wishes that the Lord would take pity upon him and end his days on earth. The problem is, of course, that he has forgotten what God has promised to be to him; but when he remembers his God, his despair passes and he realizes that his adversaries cannot ultimately prevail against him.

Prophecies of Exile and Restoration

In the section, chapters 21-39, there is a collection of messages from the prophet uttered during the reign of King Jehoiakim and the last king of Judah, Zedekiah. They are not found in chronological order, but contain many items of interest within them.

Before King Zedekiah, as recorded in chapter 21, the prophet foretells the victory of the Babylonian forces who are besieging the city, and announces that the king himself will be taken captive. He urges the people to go out of the city and surrender to the Chaldeans. This message was of course regarded as treason by the leaders of the nation, and plots were laid to trap Jeremiah and put him to death.

The short three-months reign of Jehoichin, the son of Jehoiakim, is covered. This king is also called Coniah, and in chapter 22 an important thing is said about him by the prophet: "Thus says the Lord: 'Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days; for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David, and ruling again in Judah'" (22:30). The fulfillment of this prediction meant an end to the dynasty of the descendants of King Solomon. His uncle, Zedekiah, was the last king of that line to sit upon

the throne, and since that time no king of the Solomonic line has occupied the throne in Israel.

In the New Testament, Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus, comes from the line of kings which trace back through Jehoiachin, but that line has lost its right to reign. It is for this reason that the genealogy of Mary is traced by Luke and indicates descent from David through another of his sons, not Solomon. It is through David's son Nathan that the royal line is continued, and Mary thus passes on to her son Jesus the right to the throne, thus evading the curse placed upon Jehoiachin.

In chapter 23, Jeremiah sees across the centuries and describes the outworking of God's ultimate plan for His people: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness'" (23:5,6).

Chapter 24 employs another vivid visual aid in the figure of two baskets of figs which have been brought to the Temple as first-fruits. One basket is filled with good figs and the other with rotten. The good figs represent the exiled from Judah which are taken to Babylon but who are godly in heart and continue to worship the Lord there. Promises are given of encouragement to them. The bad figs represent Zedekiah and the leaders of the nation who remain in the land and become a curse to the nation, bringing warfare, famine and pestilence upon the land.

In chapter 25 the great prophecy of the 70 years of captivity is found. Most scholars compute this as beginning in 605 B.C. when the first deportation to Babylon took place. This would bring the end of the 70 years in 538 B.C. with the decree of Cyrus the Persian for the return of the remnant to the land, recorded in the book of Ezra. It was this very prophecy of Jeremiah which young Daniel, one of the royal captives in the land of Babylon, studied and understood from it when the 70 years would end. As the time drew near, he based his prayer for restoration upon the promise of God to end their captivity within 70 years.

Chapter 26 is a flashback to the days of King Jehoiakim at the beginning of the ministry of Jeremiah, and records his contest with certain false prophets in the royal court.

Chapters 27 and 28 leap ahead to Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, and describe the prophet's conflict with the false prophets in Zedekiah's reign, especially Hananiah, who had prophesied to the king that Babylon would soon be defeated and the Temple vessels returned to Jerusalem. He claimed divine inspiration for his prophecy, and in answering, Jeremiah predicts the death of Hananiah as a sign of his false ministry. Within the year the prophet died, but the people seemed to be unimpressed by this dramatic sign. By this time a considerable number of exiles had already been carried to Babylon, and the prophet sought to encourage them by writing them a letter, recorded in chapter 29. Certain false prophets among the Jews in Babylon were predicting a speedy return to Jerusalem, but Jeremiah warned them that their captivity must last out the entire 70-year period predicted. During this time they were to marry and raise families, build houses and work for the welfare of the land in which they found themselves captive.

Chapters 30-33 are the heart of the prophecy, and in this section Jeremiah seems to see with clear vision the days of restoration after the judgment of Israel. In the peculiar way of prophets, he extends his view from immediate events to those far distant, even beyond the ultimate dispersion of the people of Israel to the final regathering of the nation into the land. In this section is found the promise of the new covenant, to be applied to the united nations of Israel and Judah. This new covenant is what is called in Hebrews 13:20 "the eternal covenant," and is what the Lord Jesus referred to when, at the Last Supper, He took the cup and said, "This is my blood of the [new] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28) The new covenant is the promise of an indwelling power and a full forgiveness which enables individuals to fulfill the law and walk in unbroken fellowship with a holy God. Hebrews 8 makes clear that it is the privilege of believers today to live in the power of the new covenant by faith, but one day that blessed promise will be worked out for the entire nation of Israel, as the apostle Paul confirms in Romans 11.

This new covenant is so sure in its fulfillment as applied to the nation that Jeremiah is told that while the sun gives light by day and the moon and the stars by night he may rest assured that God will fulfill His word and

carry out His promises to His people.

This beautiful vision of restoration was given to Jeremiah during a time of great personal pressure. The Babylonian army was besieging Jerusalem and Jeremiah had been shut up in the court of the palace of King Zedekiah because he had predicted that the city would fall to the Babylonians, but while Jeremiah was a prisoner God sent his cousin to him to arrange for Jeremiah to purchase a field in his hometown of Anathoth and to record the deed very carefully in the legal records of the kingdom. This was a seemingly foolish action in light of the present circumstances, for what good are legal deeds when an army is pounding at the doors ready to carry the people off into captivity? But Jeremiah rightly saw it as a promise of God that the nation would be restored and that when the days of captivity were ended the deeds would again be valid.

Once again the prophet is given a vision of the coming Messiah and the days of fulfillment which await the nation: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness'" (33:14-16).

Chapters 34-39 again are not in consecutive order but concern certain relationships which the prophet had with two of the kings of Judah, Zedekiah and Jehoiakim. Chapter 34 especially gives a keen perspective on what God expects of kings in relationship with their subjects and emphasizes the divine view of human slavery. King Zedekiah took back the slaves which he had freed in accordance with the word of the Lord in Deuteronomy and he is accused by the prophet of having thus "profaned the name of the Lord" (see v. 16). Thus mistreatment of other human beings is clearly regarded as an insult to the divine name and will. For this the king was to suffer greatly in Babylon.

Chapters 35 and 36 concern an earlier incident during the reign of Jehoiakim. One concerns the family of the Rechabites, who seem to be the forerunners of modern gypsies. Another important incident describes how King Jehoiakim deliberately destroyed the scroll of prophetic revelation which came to him from Jeremiah by the hand of Baruch, Jeremiah's servant. Insolently the king took his pen knife and cut the scroll in pieces, throwing them into the fire, thus indicating his contempt for the word of God. We are told: "Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote on it at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the scroll which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire, and many similar words were added to them" (36:32). Here we see something of the method of the prophet in recording the revelations which God gave.

Turning again to the reign of Zedekiah and the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, we learn in chapters 37-39 of the personal persecution which fell upon Jeremiah the prophet during the closing days of Judah's national existence. During the siege, Jeremiah left Jerusalem to go to his native Benjamin, but was arrested as a deserter, was beaten and imprisoned in the house of the secretary to the king. When Zedekiah secretly questioned him about a word from the Lord, Jeremiah stoutly refused to change his message but insisted that the city would fall into the hands of the king of Babylon. Though the king meant only to confine him to the court of the guards, the prophet's enemies within the royal court conspired against him and he was taken and cast into a dark cistern partly filled with muck and water. But an Ethiopian eunuch in the king's court took pity on the prophet and arranged for his release from the terrible dungeon. Again with remarkable boldness the prophet said to King Zedekiah: "Thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel, if you will surrender to the princes of the king of Babylon, then your life shall be spared, and this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live. But if you do not surrender to the princes of the king of Babylon, then this city shall be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and you shall not escape from their hand" (38:17,18).

The king attempted to evade these words and escape from the city by night, but in accordance with the prophetic word he was captured by the armies of Babylon and taken before Nebuchadnezzar; there his eyes were put out and he was bound in fetters and carried to Babylon. The walls of the city of Jerusalem were breached and, as Jeremiah had long been warning, the Babylonians came into the Temple and the city and carried away all the treasures of Judah to Babylon, leaving only a remnant of the people in the land.

Prophecies to the Remnant

After the fall of the city, Jeremiah continued to minister to the remnant of Judah under the governorship of Gedaliah who had been left in charge of the country by Nebuchadnezzar. When Gedaliah was murdered by certain of his enemies in Jerusalem, the remnant of the nation thought to flee to Egypt to escape the terrible conditions then prevailing in Judah. But Jeremiah waited upon the Lord for 10 days and, at the conclusion of this, summoned the leaders of the remnant and told them they were to remain in the land and God would sustain and keep them if they would do so. They were further warned: "If you set your faces to enter Egypt and go to live there, then the sword which you fear shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt; and the famine of which you are afraid shall follow hard after you to Egypt; and there you shall die" (42:15, 16).

But the remnant refused the divine warning and fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah captive with them. There Jeremiah continued his prophetic ministry, predicting the conquest of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar, and warning the Jewish fugitives that they must learn from the lessons of history not to persist in idolatry, for God would afflict them in Egypt as He afflicted their fathers in Jerusalem. This too was rejected, and soon Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled; for in 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt and carried out the divine word.

The short chapter 45 is a personal word of both warning and encouragement to Baruch the servant of Jeremiah not to seek for himself great things in the midst of God's judgments on the world at that moment in history. It was a wise warning to take note of the movements of God and adjust his personal life accordingly.

Judgment of Surrounding Nations

Chapters 46-51 record Jeremiah's prophetic messages to the nations surrounding Jerusalem. His call was to be a prophet to the nations, and this closing section of his prophecy fulfills that calling. Words of warning and coming judgment are given, first to Egypt (46:2-28) then against Philistia (47:1-7) and Moab (48:1-47) and Ammon, the sister nation of Moab (49: 1-6), Edom (49:7-22), Damascus (49:23-27), Kedar, one of the Arabian tribes (49:28,29), and Hazor, a city in the north of Israel which was a confederate of the Arabian tribes (49:30-33).

Then the prophetic vision enlarges and includes Elam (present-day Iraq) where the Tigris River flows. Finally the vision of the nations ends with the description of the fall of Babylon and God's judgment upon them for their cruelty and evil.

Though these prophetic judgments have long since been fulfilled in history, they constitute a present-day word of help to believers when viewed from their typological significance. Each of these ancient nations is consistently used throughout the Old Testament as picturing aspects of what the New Testament calls "the flesh." Here in these nations is pictured characteristics of the fallen nature which we all inherited from Adam. Pride, lust, envy, jealousy, ambition, anger, bitterness, violence, debauchery--all these are faithfully pictured in these enemy nations of Israel, and God's judgments upon them as well.

Review of Jerusalem's Fall

Chapter 52, the closing chapter of the book, is a historical review of the fall of Jerusalem. Its lesson is clear. Although God is a God of marvelous patience and waits until the last possible moment for human repentance, pleading in a hundred different ways for the return of His wandering people, yet inevitably if sin persists there will come a "fifth month, on the tenth day of the month" (see v. 12) when God's word will be carried out to the very letter and no human maneuvering can possibly evade it. When Nebuchadnezzar entered the city of Jerusalem, as predicted, "He burned the house of the Lord, and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. And all the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down all the walls round about Jerusalem" (52:13, 14).

The book closes with a brief word concerning God's grace to King Jehoiachin who had been imprisoned in Babylon for 37 years. At the end of that time he was taken from prison and allowed to dine regularly at the king's table. Thus the great prophecy of Jeremiah ends. The prophet himself has died a nameless death in

Egypt, in exile, but his words ring through the centuries since as a faithful recorder of the divine foreview of history and the certainty of God's purposes in human affairs.

LAMENTATIONS

This little book is an eloquent expression of the sorrow of Jeremiah as he saw his own prophecies fulfilled in the desolation and destruction of the city of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar. The Septuagint states that he sat weeping over the city and lamenting over Jerusalem in these moving words. The five poems which make up this book and correspond with its five chapters express not only the horror and desolations which came upon Jerusalem, but also the anguish of spirit which the prophet himself felt when these desolations occurred. There is no exultation over the fulfillment of his predictions, but a poignant expression of heart misery over the sins of the people of Judah and their consequent punishment. In this sense again Jeremiah becomes a type of Christ, the "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." (Isa. 53:3)

The first four chapters are in the form of acrostic poems, as each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The third chapter contains 66 verses, devoting three verses to each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 5, though a 22-verse poem, does not follow that acrostic form.

In the first poem there are two clearly defined movements. Using the figure of a widow sitting desolate in the midst of her degradation, the prophet describes Jerusalem as weeping bitterly in the midst of her lovers, finding no one to comfort her. The prophet acknowledges that the desolation has been brought about by the grievous sins of the city. He clearly acknowledges that "the Lord has made her suffer for the multitude of her transgressions; her children have gone away, captives before the foe" (1:5).

The latter part of the poem is an appeal to the passersby to understand something of the sense of desolation and sorrow which grips the city. Even though it is acknowledged that the siege is well-deserved, appeal is made to the Lord for mercy in a time of great distress.

In the second poem an explanation is given of the sources of the nation's evil. Judgment from the Lord has fallen upon the princes of Israel because of their perfidy. Both king and priest have contributed to the downfall of the nation. Likewise the place of worship has been destroyed and all of Israel's solemn assemblies are degraded. The prophets are judged because of their false visions and prophecies. All comfort is removed from the stricken city because it ignored the faithful warnings of the Lord. Earnest appeal is made, however, to cry to the Lord for deliverance and for His restoring mercy.

Chapter 3 centers upon the feelings of the prophet himself and his identification with the sins and sorrows of the nation. He has fully shared the grief of the people, and has felt in himself the horror of judgment, yet he clearly recognizes that the steadfast love of the Lord has never ceased, and even in the midst of His judgments His mercies are fresh and new.

Jeremiah reminds himself and he reminds the people that the Lord will not cast off forever, nor does He willingly afflict or grieve the sons of men, but will extend mercy and restoring grace when they call and return to Him. The poem ends with the realization that the enemy who brought such desolation upon the city will himself be judged for his evil, and the tender compassion of the Lord will be visible even in the midst of His judgments.

Chapter 4 is a dirge of desolation, describing again the disasters which befell Jerusalem because of its sin, which the prophet describes as greater than that of Sodom. The blame for all this is largely laid at the feet of the prophets and priests within the city who utterly failed to discharge their ministry. It ends with a satirical address to the nation of Edom to beware for it too shall come under Jehovah's judging hand.

The final poem is an appeal from a sorrowing heart to a merciful Lord to restore the nation. The prophet recognizes that the people cannot turn to Jehovah apart from

His help, and he cries in helplessness: "Restore us to thyself, O Lord, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old!" (5:21).

In its application to the individual, the book of Lamentations may be taken as a parallel expression of Psalm 51, which is the cry of a heart that has become aware of its deserved punishment, yet casts itself upon the mercy of God as its only hope in the hour of affliction. It is a recognition that though grief has been brought by the righteous hand of God, it is the loving heart of God which can be appealed to for restoration.

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