

H.A. Ironside

**THE LAMENTATIONS OF
JEREMIAH**

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Chapter 1 – THE DESOLATIONS OF JERUSALEM	5
Chapter 2 – THE DAY OF THE LORD'S ANGER	13
Chapter 3 – LET US SEARCH AND TRY OUR WAYS	17
Chapter 4 – THE FINE GOLD BECOME DIM	25
Chapter 5 – “THOU, O LORD, REMAINEST FOR EVER!”	34

INTRODUCTION

It should be a matter of deep interest for the child of God, in any dispensation, to know that there is One above who notes with compassion all of his sorrows, and is afflicted in all his afflictions. Nothing could demonstrate this more clearly than the incorporation, as a part of the Holy Scriptures, of the expressions of the heart-sorrows of Jeremiah as he beheld the overwhelming woes of his people, and the desolations of the Holy City . These feelings were right and proper – nay, produced by the Spirit of God in the heart of His servant Jeremiah. He, the God of Israel, was no cold, indifferent spectator of the anguish, humiliation and pains of the people of His choice. His holiness demanded that He chasten them for their iniquities; and He had used the king of Babylon to that end, but His heart was grieved for them still, as a loving father is sorely pained in his own correction of a wayward son. He greatly valued, therefore, the soul-exercises of His grief-stricken prophet, and has seen fit to place his lamentations on record for our instruction and comfort. In a certain sense Jeremiah speaks for the godly ones left in the land – their mouthpiece, as it were.

The peculiar structure of this elegiac poem is worthy of note. In their original form, the first four chapters are acrostic, after the pattern of a number of the psalms. Chapters 1, 2 and 4 consist of twenty-two verses each; every verse commencing with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in regular order. Chapter 3, in which the fullest confession of their sin and grief is found, consists of sixty-six verses; and here *three* verses are given to each letter. That is, each of the first three verses begins with *Aleph* , the first letter of the alphabet; and the next three verses, each begins with *Beth* , the second letter; and so on to the end of the alphabet.

In Psalm 119 we have twenty-two divisions of *eight* verses each, similarly arranged, as even the ordinary English

Bible shows. There, every letter of the alphabet (which represents the whole compass of man's speech) is used in the praise of the perfect law of the Lord. In Lamentations every letter is required to express the sorrows following upon the neglect and breaking of that law.

Chapter 5 is an exception to the acrostic style, though containing the same number of verses as the first, second, and fourth.

CHAPTER 1 – THE DESOLATIONS OF JERUSALEM

In this first chapter the remnant of Judah confess the righteousness of the Lord in permitting their afflictions, though they are filled with sorrow as they behold the sad results. They acknowledge their own sinfulness and extol the holiness of God, while calling for judgment upon the instrument of His wrath.

In the opening verses the ruined city, where once Jehovah had set His name, is contemplated with broken heart and tearful eye. "How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people!" exclaims the prophet; "How is she become as a widow! She that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!" (v. 1). To a faithful Israelite it was indeed a sorrowful spectacle. What joy and gladness had once filled that now deserted city, in the happy, festive days when the law of the land was honoured and His name exalted! How dreadful the change – the awful result of departure from God, manifested in pride, self-will, and idolatry! How could Jerusalem remain the acknowledged wife of Jehovah, when so faithless and wanton? Alas, she is left to sit in solitude in her widow's weeds until the day when God shall grant repentance.

"She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies" (v. 2). The false gods in whom she trusted when she proved recreant to the covenant of Jehovah are unable to mitigate in anyway her present sorrows. The powers upon which she sought to lean when she forsook the Word of her God, are all indifferent to her present plight. He, the "eternal

Lover” whom she has despised, is the only One who loves her still.

Yet He had given her into the hand of her enemies, and had apparently hidden His face from her. “Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude: she dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest: all her persecutors overtook her between the straits” (v. 3). In this Judah becomes a warning beacon for saints of all time. Failing to maintain the place of separation to which God had called her, mingling promiscuously among her heathen neighbours, she soon proved, as all do who follow her steps, that “evil communications corrupt good manners.” Walking with idolaters, she learned their ways; and as a result God gave her up to wander among the nations until she sickened of their practices. Has not this been the repeated history of every company which God separated from the world and owned as His people? How soon the apostolic Church corrupted itself. The dense darkness of the Middle Ages was the governmental recompense. In even shorter time did the movement begun in the glorious Reformation of the sixteenth century become vitiated by conformity to the world; so that one has well asked, “Where is the Church?” and replied, “In the world!” Again, “Where is the world?” and answered, “In the Church.”

From this mixed multitude, at various times, God has been pleased to separate little remnant companies to Himself; only to become, in their turn, enamoured of the world they once professed to forsake. Has it been otherwise with those, enlightened above many, who in these last days were called out from human systems to be a testimony to the unity and heavenly calling of the Church? Alas, my brethren, “how are the mighty fallen!” How unspeakably sad has been the chequered history of that movement which began so auspiciously, and once promised so much! Worldliness, like a canker, is eating out the very life. Pride, haughtiness and self-sufficiency are everywhere apparent. In judgment God has sent division following division until we are like to be utterly destroyed; and

yet how much pretension; how little brokenness before Him; how many indifferent hearts and calloused consciences!

Shall it be said of us as of Judah in the past, "The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate: her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness. Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper; for the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her children are gone into captivity before the enemy. And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed: her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer" (vv. 4-6). Nor is it possible to avoid so sad a result by "daubing with untempered mortar," seeking to heal divisions by glossing over the evils that led to them, and thus failing to hear the voice of God in them. One course, and one alone, would have saved Judah. That was genuine self-judgment and brokenness of spirit before the Lord, causing the people to "tremble at His Word." This is what is needed everywhere today. It is not so much looking for and learning new truth that will bless and deliver the saints of God, as testing our ways by the truth already committed to us, and seeking to walk in the reality of it. Because of failure so to do, Judah went into captivity, a Christian Church lost her candlestick of testimony, and the world was allowed to prevail against the people of the Lord.

Sad indeed it is to have to look back to blessings, once delighted in, when all is but a memory. "Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old, when her people fell into the hand of the enemy, and none did help her: the adversaries saw her, and did mock at her sabbaths (or, her desolations, R.V., v. 7)." A quiet like the rest of the Sabbath lay over all the city, but it was the quiet of desolation and death, There was no longer anything to hinder her rest. The work of the Lord had often been a burden. She was delivered from it all now; but at how frightful a cost! Set aside as "a vessel wherein is no pleasure," Jerusalem was left in undisturbed repose.

Touchingly the prophet acknowledges the justice of all this in the four verses that follow (vv. 8-11). Jerusalem had grievously sinned. It is because of this that she “is removed,” or “has become as an unclean thing,” unfit to be used of God any more. Because of this, those who once honoured, now despise her. Her nakedness had been openly manifested. Her filthiness is apparent to all. She forgot her latter end – forgot God’s purpose in delivering her from Egyptian bondage. “Therefore is she come down wonderfully,” until she has no comforter. Yet, in her season of dire shame and distress, there are some faithful hearts left to cry, “O Lord, behold my affliction, for the enemy hath magnified himself.” Her adversary had triumphed over her, even defiling her sanctuary; the charge of which had been committed to Judah when they were commanded that no uncircumcised should enter into the congregation of the Lord. Having failed to guard her precious things, they were given up to the unclean of the nations. It is ever thus. If God’s people do not value what He entrusts them with, He will teach them its worth by taking it from them, even to making it the sport of their enemies.

Left without bread, sighing for food to refresh the soul, the remnant cry, “See, O Lord, and consider; for I am become vile.” These are precious and needful exercises. Would that they had characterized them in days of grace now gone by! Ah, brethren, may the spirit of humiliation and confession before God be found in us also. The Holy Spirit will associate Himself with this, and still comfort and bless such.

The Spirit of Christ speaks loudly through Jeremiah and the remnant of Judah in the next few verses. Primarily, the words refer unquestionably to what we have had under consideration, the chastisement meted out to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the land. The query, “Is it nothing to you?” is addressed to the nations who had no sympathy for, but rather gloried over them in their deep anguish. But as all Scripture points to Christ, one must be blind indeed not to see here the

suffering Saviour entering to the full into the griefs of the spared company, left like grape-gleanings in the vineyard.

What a pathetic interest attaches itself to every word as we thus look at them. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow, which is done unto Me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger" (v. 12). The sins of Judah drew down that fierce anger upon their heads. It was the just recompense for their departure from the Lord. But when He, the holy Sufferer of Calvary, bowed His head beneath the overwhelming flood of God's wrath, it was for sins not His own; but He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. He was incomparably "the Man of Sorrows," having full acquaintance with grief, that our joy might be full, as we enter into fellowship with the God we had so terribly offended.

Can it be that any one reading these lines would reply to the heart rending question of the dying Lamb, and honestly confess, "It is nothing, all nothing to me?" Nothing to you that He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities! Nothing to you that God manifest in flesh so gave Himself to save guilty rebels against His outraged majesty! Nothing to you that the dreaded cup of wrath was pressed to His parched lips in order that the cup of salvation might be offered to you! *Can* it really be that it is *nothing* to you?

Alas! there was a day when it was so with us all: when, even though our emotions might bestirred as we heard or read the story of the Cross, yet, so far as apprehending that it was to meet the need of our sinful souls, it was all nothing to us. How well has the saintly McCheyne expressed what many more could say:

*"I oft read with pleasure, to soothe or engage,
Isaiah's wild measure, or John's simple page:
But e'en when they pictured the blood-sprinkled tree,*

*Jehovah Tsidkenu was nothing to me.
 "Like tears from the daughters of Zion that roll,
 I wept when the waters went over His soul;
 Yet thought not that my sins had nailed to the tree
 Jehovah Tsidkenu: 't was nothing to me."*

And this might be our condition still – if not yet in the pit of the lost, forever beyond the reach of mercy – had it not been for the sovereign grace of God that led Him by His Spirit to show us our needy, lost estate, and to cause us to flee to Him (so long and coldly neglected) for mercy and pardon.

Thus we can join with the same poet-preacher and sing:

*"When free grace awoke me by light from on high,
 Then legal fears shook me – I trembled to die.
 No refuge, no safety in self could I see;
 Jehovah Tsidkenu my Saviour must be.
 "My terrors all vanished before that sweet name;
 My guilty fears banished, with boldness I came,
 To drink at the fountain, life-giving and free;
 Jehovah Tsidkenu is all things to me."*

In the joy of assured redemption we can look up into His face, once marred more than any man's, and cry from full hearts, "Yea, Lord, it is something, it is everything to me, that Thou didst so suffer and die!" And our souls are filled with holy awe as we turn aside to see this great sight, and hear Him cry, "From above hath He sent fire into My bones, and it prevaieth against them. He hath spread a net for My feet, He hath turned Me back: He hath made Me desolate and faint all the day" (v. 13).

But we rejoice to know that nevermore shall He suffer thus. His sorrows and pains are now forever past; and with gladness unutterable "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa. 53:11). How expressive is the use of that word "travail" in this connection! Two women were once overheard speaking of their sons. The one had adopted a boy from an orphan-house; the other was the mother of a child by birth. "I am sure," said the first, "my love for my child is as deep as though he had actually been born into the family. I do not believe I could love him more than I do." "Ah," replied the other, "you do not really know love yet. You never suffered for your son as I did for mine!"

O beloved, how He has suffered for us! What pangs He endured! What tears He shed! What drops of blood He sweat! How dreadful the travail He had to experience in order that we might be eternally saved! "Fire from above" descended upon Him that we might find a refuge where the fire has been, and thus be forever safe from the eternal fire to come for all who spurn His matchless grace. Precious and holy theme for devout meditation

Not in the same sense could the next two verses be applied to the Lord Jesus. It involves the consciousness of guilt, and He was the guiltless *One* ; but the words were most fitting in the mouth of the people of Judah. They confess that the yoke of their transgressions is bound by His hand. Like a wreath they are twined about the neck. Because of this, their strength failed, and they were unable to deliver themselves out of their enemies' hands. The Lord Himself it was who had destroyed their mighty men and summoned the Chaldeans for their ruin. As grapes are trodden in a wine-press, so had He cast the daughter of Judah into the press of His wrath because of her manifold transgressions (vv. 14-15).

On account of these things the prophet weeps, as he had wept, before they came to pass, in foretelling them. There is no comforter; for Judah 's children are desolate. Zion spreadeth forth her hands, but there is no helper, nor any to sympathize.

She is as a separated, unclean woman, because of the Lord's anger (vv. 16-17).

In verse 18 there is the unreserved acknowledgment, "The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against His commandments." This is an evidence of true godly exercise. They received but the due reward of their deeds; and they own it in contrition of heart and abasement of soul. They had been deceived by other lovers (v. 19), and were left in great distress; but they humbly confess, "I have grievously rebelled." This what makes it all so bitter: they realize they deserve all that they have been called upon to endure.

Their enemies had heard of their sighs. They rejoiced in their affliction, glad that the Lord had so dealt with them. Their time of woe was coming. God should bring the appointed day when they too should know His indignation because of their sins (v. 21). So the prayer goes up that the time may be hastened when all their wretchedness shall come before Him and He will do as He has said (v. 22). It is a cry for vengeance not consistent with Christian light and privilege and the grace of this dispensation, but thoroughly in keeping with the character of Jewish blessing. Their deliverance being an earthly one, it therefore requires the judgment of their oppressors.

In a certain sense these last two verses might also be looked upon as setting forth the doom of those who refuse to own the Lordship of Jesus. He too could say of such, "Thou wilt bring the day that Thou hast called, and they shall be like unto Me." Despising His sufferings, men who reject His grace must know for themselves the awful power of divine wrath.

CHAPTER 2 – THE DAY OF THE LORD'S ANGER

It is the city of Jerusalem in a very particular sense that is under contemplation in this chapter. That city, once famed as the dwelling-place of the great King, was now a waste of blackened ruins. Throughout, it is recognized that not an enemy from the outside acting of his own volition, but the Lord Himself, who had so long dwelt in the midst of the city, had devoted it to destruction.

This the very verse brings out. "How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not His footstool in the day of His anger!" It was sorrowful to contemplate that the city once called "the holy" should have become so vile and apostate that Jehovah could no longer endure it. It is noticeable, however, that the beauty of Israel is "cast down from heaven to earth;" not "to hell" (Sheol, or hades, the place of the dead), as in the case of privileged Capernaum (Matt. 11:23). There, the Lord Jesus had done many mighty works, and given a testimony beyond anything enjoyed by Jerusalem of old. But He and His words had been utterly rejected. Therefore Capernaum, "exalted to heaven," should be "brought down to hell." Its day was over forever. Not so was it with Jerusalem. "Cast down to earth," treated like a city of the nations; yea, trodden down of the Gentiles; still it is destined yet to occupy a place of glory such as it never knew in the past. It must be disciplined by adversity, but was not forsaken in perpetuity. In His indignation against idolatry, the Lord had "swallowed up all the habitation of Jacob," not pitying, because of the hardness of their hearts. He had "thrown down in His wrath the strongholds of the daughter of Judah," bringing them down to the ground and polluting the kingdom and princes. It was all because of sin. He loved them truly, but could

not permit them to go in peace while in so dreadful a moral state. Therefore had He, "in His fierce anger," cut off the horn of Israel, and caused their right arms to fail before the enemy (vv. 2, 3).

Three times in verses 4 and 5 He is said to have acted as though He were their enemy. First, we read, "He hath bent His bow *like* an enemy." Second, "He stood with His right hand as an adversary;" and, third, "The Lord was as an enemy." But it is well to notice the qualifying expressions "like" and "as." An enemy He never was; though their conduct compelled Him to act as if He were. How many a Christian has had to know Him in a similar way! How often has He seemed to become an enemy! But faith looks beyond all that the eye can see, and knows that He is unchanged in His love and tenderness. It is sin in His children that has broken in on the fellowship He delights to have them enjoy. He is "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;" and while He will never give up one of His redeemed, He will not countenance looseness of walk and an unbridled tongue in any, simply because He has saved them. In fact, it is just the contrary, for "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." This was the lesson the remnant of Judah had to learn; bitter as it must have been.

In verse 6, "tabernacle" should be as in the margin, "hedge." By turning to Psalm 80, we find the same metaphor employed. Israel is likened to vine brought out of Egypt and planted in a land from which the heathen had been cast out. Hedged in and tended by the divine Husbandman, it should have borne fruit for Himself, but we know His verdict (Isa. 6:1-7): "It brought forth wild grapes." Because of this He allows it to be overrun by the heathen, as we read in Ps. 80:12-16, "Why hast Thou broken down our hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her? The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it. Return, we beseech Thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; and the vineyard which Thy right hand hath planted, and the branch which Thou madest strong

for Thyself. It is burned with fire, it is cut down; they perish at the rebuke of Thy countenance.” It is the same thought that we have expressed here: the enclosure which in the past had separated the garden of the Lord from the Gentiles around was broken down by the Lord Himself, and “the places of the assembly” destroyed, so that the solemn feasts and Sabbaths had been caused to cease in Zion .

His altar He had cast off, and abhorred His sanctuary; permitting the unclean to pollute it, because of the unfaithfulness of His people. The walls of the city, with the gates and bars, were levelled to the ground; the king and princes were captive among the Gentiles; the very law (so long despised) was no more; and the prophets (to whom the deaf ear had been turned for years) had no vision from the Lord. Zion 's elders were girded in sackcloth, and sat upon the ground with dust upon their heads in speechless grief as they beheld the desolations on every hand (vv. 7-10). It was complete and overwhelming ruin, brought about by Jehovah because they had neglected His Word and followed in the ways of the heathen.

In deep-toned notes of woe Jeremiah cries “Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people; because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city. They say to their mothers, Where is corn and wine? when they swooned as the wounded in the streets of the city, when their soul was poured out into their mothers' bosom” (vv. 11-12). Only in fellowship with God do His people find peace and plenty. Away from Him unrest and famine must result. Is not this the reason why there are so many swooning babes and fainting children among the assemblies of God's saints today? Surely it is time to consider our ways and turn again to the Lord. Something is radically wrong when the gathering of believers is not a nursery where babes in Christ receive needed nourishment, and help for their upbuilding and establishment in

the things of God. When it is otherwise, it augurs a fallen state and testimony.

Zion had been overwhelmed as by the waves of the sea, so that there was no healing of her breach, humanly speaking (v. 13). Her prophets had seen vain and foolish things for her (as in the case of Hananiah, recorded in chapter 28) prophesying smooth things, but not discovering her iniquity. True peace there could not be with unjudged sin upon her (v. 14). Thus Jerusalem had become the sport of the passer-by, who scornfully asked, "Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?" (v. 15). Both these titles are found applied to it in the Psalms: the former in Psalm 50:2; the latter in Psalm 48:2.

Her enemies exulted in her ruin, and gloried in having "swallowed her up." This they had long desired, and now attributed it to their own prowess, not knowing of the Lord's controversy with her (v. 16). It was not the might of their arms that had caused them to triumph over her. Her offended Lord had but done that which He had devised, and fulfilled His Word given in the days of Moses (v. 17). To Him, therefore, the remnant turns, crying out in the bitterness of their souls and giving themselves no rest day nor night, but incessantly lifting up their hands toward Him for the life of their fainting children (vv. 18-19). This was as it should be, and argued a returning in heart to their God. The last three verses (vv. 20-22) form a prayer, and set forth their pitiable condition "in the day of the Lord's anger." He had said, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." To Him, therefore, they turn, bewailing their wretchedness, the result of their own evil ways, and beseeching His favour. They shall yet prove that His ear is not dull of hearing, neither is His eye blinded to their misery.

CHAPTER 3 – LET US SEARCH AND TRY OUR WAYS

In the sixty-six verses of this chapter, arranged in a triple alphabetic acrostic, as before mentioned, Jeremiah speaks for the remnant, describing his and their affliction, but manifesting unflinching faith in the goodness of God and calling upon all to search and try their ways and return to Him. Bearing upon his own heart the bitter woes of his people, as did the Lord Jesus, he recites his sorrows in a way that plainly indicates the utterance of the Spirit of Christ, who, as remarked in our introduction to Chapter 1, was afflicted in all their griefs, passing through all in spirit with them. Jeremiah here may almost be looked upon as a type of that Blessed One; for to him also, as to no other prophet, could the title be applied, "A man of sorrows."

"I am the man," he says, "that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath" (v. 1). And he goes on to tell how he has been brought into darkness, but not into light: how God is turned against him, His hand being upon him in judgment every day. Under the weight of the divine displeasure, vigour and elasticity departed, and his bones were as broken (vv. 2-4). It is the expression of one who, himself well-pleasing to God, entered to the full into the sorrows of his people.

Verses 5 to 17 continue his wail in view of the dire calamities which had fallen upon them. Compassed with gall and travail, set in dark places as in the tombs of the dead, hedged about and weighted with a heavy chain, he cried and shouted, only to feel that God shut out his prayer. Nothing could be more mournful than the gloomy estate thus pictured to the mind's eye. The Lord had apparently forgotten, or was even become as an enemy. He had enclosed the ways of His servant, made his paths crooked, and been unto him as a bear

or a lion waiting to take the prey. Made desolate and set as a mark for the arrow, Jehovah caused the darts of His quiver to enter into His servant's reins. Thus had he become a derision to all his people and their song all the day. In this how like Him who became the song of the drunkards! (Ps. 69:12). Filled with bitterness and drunken with wormwood, his teeth were as broken with gravel-stones, and he himself rolled in ashes. His soul was removed far off from peace, so that prosperity had been forgotten. It is a doleful recital of a man entering into the sense of God's displeasure because of sin.

But, though fallen, he was not completely cast down. True he said, "My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord" (v. 18). Yet, as he remembered the wormwood and the gall, his soul was humbled within him, and he could say, "This I recall to my mind; therefore have I hope" (vv. 19-21). Accordingly, an entirely different note is struck in verse 22, and an exalted strain of joyous confidence is sustained down to verse 36. In place of complaining that his woes were greater than he had deserved, he justifies God, and gratefully acknowledges that justice has been tempered with grace. "It is of the Lord's mercies," he owns, "that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness" (vv. 22-23). How precious the faith that, at such a time, could so speak! And what tried saint can truthfully say otherwise? Only when the soul is out of the presence of God does it seem as if His chastisements were too severe, and in part undeserved. No self-judged believer ever yet failed to own that he was far from *receiving* the full reward of his deeds. Rather, it seems as though God's grace leads Him to overlook even serious failure, and to correct but in part. "His compassions fail not." The rod is never directed by a cold, indifferent heart. He feels as no other can for the people of His choice, the children He loves. Every morning witnesses fresh evidences of His loving-kindness.

In contemplation of these precious truths the inspired seer can declare, "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him" (v. 24). All else might fail, but He will abide. It

is the confidence of Habakkuk (Hab. 3:17-18), and the abiding contentment of Paul (Phil. 4:11). Thus is one enabled to rejoice *in the Lord*, even when no other source of joy is left. He becomes the soul's portion, as in Psalm 16:5, where we read, "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance, and my cup." Little wonder that Psalm 23:5 asserts, "My cup runneth over." How could it be otherwise, when He it is who fills it?

"The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord" (vv. 25-26). The reason the truths here taught are so little entered into is simply because waiting upon God is largely a "lost art" among Christians nowadays. The rush and hurry of the age; "the lust of other things;" in a word, the worldliness so characteristic of the present momentous period in the Church's history, effectually shuts out all inclination to wait upon God, it is to be feared, for a large number of those who confess the name of Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Consequently, little or nothing is known, in a practical way, of His goodness in meeting felt need, and of His ability to satisfy the soul that seeks His face.

It is perhaps needless to say that when Jeremiah wrote, "It is good that a man both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord," he was not referring to soul-salvation, but to deliverance from the troubles and perplexities of the way. Nowhere in Scripture is the eternal salvation of the soul put before us as something to be waited for in patience and quietness. Again and again the contrary is distinctly stated. The prophet is not speaking of salvation in that sense. For light as to the salvation of the soul, we turn to the New Testament, especially the Gospel of John and the epistles of Paul, John, and Peter. These two aspects of salvation must be clearly distinguished. The Lord has nowhere promised immediate relief from sorrow and suffering. When in His righteous government He permits His people to be the subjects of affliction, it is well that they at once seek His face, and wait upon Him. It may not be His will to extract every thorn in the flesh; but if not, He will

give to the waiting soul grace to endure, and that with joyfulness.

There is a “ministry of suffering” which all believers have to learn in a greater or lesser degree. “It is good for a man,” we are told, “to bear the yoke in his youth” (v. 27). The result, if he is before God about it, will be to sober and humble him, and thus work out ultimate blessing. He may be called upon to sit alone and keep silence, to put his mouth in the dust, and, like his Saviour, to give his cheek to the smiters, but he can be assured of this: “The Lord will not cast off forever” (vv. 28-31).

As in Judah 's case, God may cause grief – deep and heart-rending; but He will still “have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He doth not afflict willingly (or, from His heart), nor grieve the children of men” (vv. 32, 33). Not for His own pleasure does He chasten, but that we may be partakers of His holiness. He is too loving to lay upon us one unnecessary burden: He is too holy to omit one needed stroke. Unrighteousness He cannot tolerate. “To crush under His feet all the princes of the earth, to turn aside the right of a man before the face of the Most High, to subvert a man in His cause, the Lord approveth not” (vv. 34-36). All His ways are equal. It is only man's defective vision that makes it appear otherwise. When at last He takes us by the hand, and goes over all the path with us, letting the light of His own glory shine upon every step, we shall understand, as we cannot now, how just and true were all His ways as He led us through this scene.

Nothing can by any means assail His people apart from His permission, for “Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord proveth not?” (v. 37). It is a simple and elementary principle, yet which many are long years in comprehending. Once let it be clear before the soul that God is immediately concerned in every detail of life, and one is delivered from being engrossed with the instrumentalities acting. This comes out strikingly in the case of David when cursed by Shimei. He will not permit the ardent Abishai to touch the offender, for he realizes that “the Lord hath said unto him,

Curse David,” and he can therefore leave all in His hands, trusting that He will change the curse into a blessing. Job too, in the early period of his testing, is a fine example of submission to the will of God: and, refusing to consider second causes, “Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord,” he asks, “and shall we not also receive evil?” It is blessedly true, and most comforting to the soul to know, that, “Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good” (v. 38); but, on the other hand, He allows evil for our chastening; even, as in the case just cited, using Satan as an instrument to accomplish His gracious purposes.

In view of His holy and righteous government, “Wherefore doth a living man complain – a man, for the punishment of his sins?” Surely it is far more becoming to say from the heart, “Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord” (vv. 39-40). This indicates that the discipline is having its desired effect. “No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness (not necessarily in the case of every saint, but) unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb. 12:11). It is this godly exercise that is so sadly lacking. Afflictions come, and souls faint under them; or else they are despised, and a stoical, self-confident air is assumed, that ill befits the state of one under God's hand. With most of us, it is to be feared, the first object is to get out of the place of discipline in any way that we can, apart from that breaking down before God which leads to the searching and trying of our ways. It was here that Judah so lamentably failed. When God sent the king of Babylon against them because of their sins, they turned to the king of Egypt for help, and that in plain defiance of the word of the Lord. But they had to learn in a practical way the bitterness of departure from God.

Thus, humbled in His presence, every false hope gone, the remnant search and try their ways, and the end of the Lord is reached. In brokenness of spirit they cry, “Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens. We have

transgressed and have rebelled: Thou hast not pardoned. Thou hast covered with anger, and persecuted us: Thou hast slain, Thou hast not pitied. Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through” (vv. 41-44). There is an important lesson here. It is useless to pray while persisting in sin. The man who does not seek to walk with God has no right to expect anything from Him. “Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thy heart.” “If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (Ps. 37:4; John 15:7). This is the key to answered prayer. Obedience gives confidence. It is impossible to ask in faith when clinging to something that is grieving the Holy Spirit and dishonouring the Lord Jesus Christ. If prayer is not answered, if the heavens seem as brass, it is a solemn indication of a wrong state of soul, and should lead to self-judgment and the forsaking of every evil way.

Because of the lack of this, Judah was brought very low. They were made “as the offscouring and refuse in the midst of the people, so that their enemies rejoiced over them. Fear and a snare had come upon them. Desolation and destruction were their portion” (vv. 45-47).

Hard indeed must have been the heart that could contemplate their sorrows without being deeply touched. Jeremiah says, “ Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people. Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission, till the Lord look down, and behold from heaven. Mine eye affecteth my heart, because of all the daughters of my city” (vv. 48-51). It was the manly grief of one who was not ashamed of tears when his people were under the chastening hand of the Lord. Censurable indeed would insensibility to it all have been.

Identifying himself with the erring ones, he continues to plead their cause, and invokes a recompense upon their persecutors. He was like a bird chased by the hunters without cause. He does not in this ignore the righteousness of God in visiting His people with judgment. On that side there was cause

enough. But Babylon 's oppression of Judah was quite unwarrantable from the standpoint of human equity. Her wars were dictated by the greed of dominion and the lust of power. It often occurs that God permits sorrows to come upon His own by way of discipline, which, so far as the actual troubles are concerned, were not really deserved. For instance, a saint may be falsely accused, and thereby caused extreme mental grief, while all the time he frets under the knowledge that he is guiltless of the cruel charge, and feels that he is wickedly treated. But this, when rightly viewed, would be seen to be but an opportunity to be a partaker of Christ's sufferings. For was not He hated "without a cause," and did not false witnesses rise up against Him? Such circumstances, therefore, painful as they are to flesh and blood, are often a necessary part of the education of the soul. And if, at the time, we are conscious of failed in personal dealings with God, it is used as chastisement, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

As one cast into a pit and left to die, the remnant call upon Jehovah "out of the low dungeon," and faith can say, "Thou hast heard my voice," and "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon Thee: Thou saidst, Fear not" (v. 57). How comforting this is! God is quick to respond to the first cry of a troubled soul when there is integrity of heart before Him. So the following verses celebrate His response in the hour of need. He has pleaded the cause of the soul of His afflicted one. He has redeemed his life. His eye has been upon all the wrong, and with confidence He is implored to judge the matter (vv. 58-59). Into His sympathetic ear the story of the enemy's heartlessness is told out, and to Him the whole case is committed. Recompense upon the oppressor is also invoked, which, as we have already seen, is not the spirit of the Christian dispensation, but of the law, where the principle of "an eye for an eye" prevailed (vv. 60-66). To us who live in this dispensation of grace, our Lord's instruction is to "pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us," even as He, the Lord

of all, could pray, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Grace is reigning; and having been taken up in grace we are responsible to manifest that same grace to others. But what we have here was quite in keeping with the dispensation of law, and will yet be suited language in the lips of another remnant, in "the time of Jacob's trouble," whose earthly deliverance can only be through judgment upon their enemies.

CHAPTER 4 – THE FINE GOLD BECOME DIM

Of a deeply spiritual character is the grief expressed in the lament of the fourth chapter. It is not now the temporal sorrows of the people of Judah and Jerusalem that occupy the prophet's mind, but their unhappy estate as away from God and no longer a testimony for Him in the earth. The past and the present stand out in vivid contrast. In days gone by, what grace has been manifested in them! Now, alas, how utterly fallen have they become!

“How is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed! The stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street. The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!” (vv. 1-2). Failure has characterized every dispensation since Eve reached forth her hand and took of that which God had forbidden. “Man being in honour, abideth not, but is as the beasts that perish.” Every fresh trial vouchsafed by God to man has but given occasion for the further manifestation of the incurable evil of his heart. Under conscience, from Adam to Noah, corruption and violence filled the earth. Under government, from Noah to Abraham, he forsook the true Governor of the universe; and not liking to retain God in his knowledge, worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator. Under promise and law, from Abraham to Christ, he violated every precept and broke every pledge; and at last, his awful course of wilfulness and rebellion culminated in the crucifixion of the Prince of Life. Under grace, the present dispensation of the Holy Spirit, he has turned that very grace into lasciviousness, and corrupted every truth committed to the Church.

If the long period from Abraham to Christ be subdivided into the numerous sections into which it readily falls, then each of them becomes a witness to the same sad failure. The days of the patriarchs witnessed the treachery of the sons of Jacob, and the resultant descent into Egypt. The wilderness was a forty years' record of God's faithfulness and man's unreliability. The days of the Judges but confirmed the same story; while the history of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel emphasized still more the deceitfulness of the human heart. From time to time God wrought in power and grace, giving revival and blessing; but soon the people wearied of His law, and gave themselves up to doing their own pleasure, "till there was no remedy," and Assyria and Babylon swallowed up the favoured people.

"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our admonition." Israel's history has often been duplicated by that of the professing Church; for "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." Only, in Christendom, the corruption has been even more detestable and the departure from God even more glaring. He, blessed be His name, has never left Himself without witness; and, as in the past dispensation, so in this, has ever and anon worked in power bringing about special awakenings, thus rousing those who were sleeping among the dead to renewed activity and true-hearted judgment of what they saw His Word condemned. But how soon the manifested energy of the Spirit declines, because of a settling back into the old ways, or worse ones, of the next generation. What is predicted of Israel in Joshua 24:13 has had its counterpart again and again down through the centuries since the ascension of the Lord Jesus and the descent of the Holy Spirit. "And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord that He had done for Israel." But the generations following soon relapse into formality and worldliness. The fine gold soon becomes dim, and the freshness of early days passes away. Yet it need not be so. If careful to maintain a good conscience before God; if

watchful as to the first beginnings of departure from the place of communion; above all, if prayerful and dependent, the dew of youth need never be lost: or, if so, it will be but to give place to the more mature grace of a Spirit-filled old age. This is equally true of movements as of individuals; only the difficulty there is greater, because movements are composed of individuals, and only by each unit going on with God can the mass do so.

In Judah's case it had, as has been made solemnly patent, become far otherwise. "The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold," were esteemed as earthen pottery. The glory had departed. There was no power to nourish the young. "The daughter of my people," complains Jeremiah, "is become cruel like the ostriches in the wilderness," who leave their offspring to shift for themselves. In vain the children cried for bread; no man gave to them; while the tongue of the babe cleaved to the roof of its mouth for thirst (vv. 3-4). Unspeakably sad is the state of God's people when their assemblies are not like nurseries where new-born babes and young saints can find nourishing food such as is suitable for them. It is to be feared the needs of the lambs are often forgotten; and, alas, oftener still there is nought to feed them with because all is parched and dry. If older saints are living for the world, it is small wonder that the babes languish and succumb at last to the withering influences about them, so far as their joy and testimony are concerned.

Because of their own famished condition, the mothers of Judah could not nourish their children. "They that did feed delicately are desolate in the streets; they that were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills" (v. 5); so that their punishment seemed to be even greater than that of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, while with Judah the agony was long continued.

"Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire; their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets: their skin cleaveth to their

bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick” (vv. 7-8). In order to understand what the prophet refers to in these verses, it is necessary that one be somewhat familiar with the law of the Nazarite as given in Numbers 6. To many of our readers this edifying portion of Scripture is familiar; but as it may not be so to some of them, it may be profitable to turn aside for a little to consider what is there set forth.

The Nazarite, as his name implies (from a root, meaning to separate), was one who was in a special sense separated to the Lord his God. All Israel were redeemed to be the people of God but all were not Nazarites. All Christians, however, as Nazarites, are called unreservedly to devote themselves to the Lord. It is to every saved one that the apostle addresses himself when he writes, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable (or, intelligent) service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:1-2). It will be seen that actually this is far from being true of all believers, nor perhaps of any of them at all times. The Lord Jesus was the true Nazarite, separated to God from His lowly birth to His death of shame upon the tree. We are called undoubtedly to “follow His steps;” but it is sad indeed to realize how few maintain the Nazarite character. There were three chief things in which the Nazarite of old was peculiar:

- (1) In Numbers 6:3-4, it was written, “He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink.” It is clearly specified that he was to partake of no product whatever of the vine tree, “from the kernels even to the husk.”
- (2) In verse 5 we read, “All the days of the vow of his separation there shall come no razor upon his head.” He was to let the locks of hair grow long like those of a woman.

- (3) Again, in verse 6 we are told, "All the days that he separateth himself unto the Lord, he shall come at no dead body." It is particularly stated that he was not in this respect to make himself unclean even for his father, his mother, or any of his kin.

Each command has a distinct lesson in it, Wine, in Scripture, symbolizes joy (Judg. 9:13; Ps. 104:15). The Nazarite must forego it. This world cannot minister to the joy of those who walk with God. Many Christians seem never to learn this. But such is the fact; and the sooner it is learned the better. The Nazarite is not without joy; but his are deeper, purer joys than this world's vines can offer. The wine of earth may stimulate and excite the fancy, thereby causing a thrill of pleasure for the moment; but it can never produce that deep-toned joy which characterizes the one who, like Enoch, walks with God. "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10), but it comes down from heaven. No plant of this sin-cursed scene produces it.

Secondly, the Nazarite allowed the hair of his head to grow. According to 1 Corinthians 11, long hair is the proper covering for the woman, telling of her place of subjection in the present order of things since the fall (Gen. 3:16; 1 Cor. 11:4-15). If the man has long hair, it is a shame unto him; but it is a glory to the woman, for "her hair is given her for a covering." The long hair speaks, then, of the place of dependence. In the Nazarite we see one who has voluntarily surrendered what man would call "his rights" and his independence in order to be wholly in subjection to God. The Lord Jesus is the great exemplar in this, as in all else, for He could say, "I came not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." This was the more remarkable in Him, as He was the only man who ever had title to do His own will: but He voluntarily surrendered that title; and humbling himself, became the dependent Man in the fullest sense. In the same way must the man of God lay aside his own thoughts and inclinations to make the will of the Lord supreme in his life.

Thirdly, the Nazarite was not to be defiled by the dead. So the believer who would devote himself to the Lord is called upon to walk apart from all the defiling influences of this scene. Hearing the word of Jesus, "Let the dead bury their dead, follow thou Me," it should be his to turn aside at once from everything that would grieve the Holy Spirit and dull his spiritual sensibilities, in order to be the Lord's alone. It is quite possible to be a Nazarite at times, and not at others. The balance of the chapter shows the solemn result of defilement. If brought into contact with death, all the days of his separation that went before would be lost, because his separation had become defiled (vv. 9-12). He could only be restored to that place of special blessing and privilege, as well as of responsibility, by bringing the prescribed offerings, which set forth the cross and the Holy One who hung there.

Not until the days of his separation were over, was he to shave his head and be free to eat or drink of the fruit of the vine. For the believer this will only be when the wilderness journey is over and the glory is entered. Then, with the Lord who loved us, we shall drink the new wine in the Father's kingdom, where pure joys, unsullied by sin, shall be the portion of our hearts forever.

Having before us the truth which the Spirit of God would impart concerning the Nazarite, we turn to the 7th and 8th verses of our chapter with a tender and sad interest. The past days of devotion to God are contrasted with the awful failure of their present condition. "Her Nazarites were purer than snow: ...their visage blacker than a coal." How terrible the declension! Judah's godliest and goodliest sons, once her proper pride, are now unknown in the streets, so changed are they by famine and pestilence. Their lot was even harder than that of those who had been slain with the sword, for "these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field" (v. 9). There is no hint of intentional defilement on the part of the Nazarites; but the dead were everywhere, and to escape becoming unclean thereby would have been impossible: they share in the

afflictions of the nation of which they form a part. In a still deeper sense is this true of those who, through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, are members of the Church, the Body of Christ. "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." The sin of Christendom is, in a way, our common sin; we are all in our measure accountable for its failure. It becomes us, therefore, not to spend our time pointing out for reprobation, or holding up to ridicule, the evils and follies into which our fellow-members may have fallen. Rather be it ours to confess our share in its sin and consequent ruin, and look to God for His mercy for revival and blessing.

In Jerusalem 's distress, the fearful predictions made by Moses (Deut. 28:56-57; Lev. 26:29) were again fulfilled, as they had been on several occasions in the past (2 Ki. 6:26-29). When "the hands of the pitiful women" could thus be stretched forth against their poor starved children, it is clear that the famine had done its worst (v. 10). Therefore the next verse declares that "the Lord hath accomplished His fury; He hath poured out His fierce anger, and hath kindled a fire in Zion , and it hath devoured the foundations thereof. The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy could have entered into the gates of Jerusalem ." But it was "because of the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, who have shed the blood of the righteous in the midst of her" (vv. 11-13). In His righteous anger God had brought Zion to the lowest depths, else, what could the nations have done against her?

It will be remembered that in Jeremiah 5:1 the Lord promised to pardon the city if even one person was found in it who executed judgment and sought the truth. One might wonder there were not to be found in Jerusalem a few righteous ones, as in a former day were found in Sodom; but, alas, they had all been slain or driven away by these ungodly priests and false prophets. A new translation, which we follow here, will make the following verses plainer: "It is for the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, who have shed the

blood of the righteous in the midst of her. They wandered about blind in the streets, they were polluted with blood, so that men could not touch their garments. They cried unto them, Depart, unclean! Depart, depart, touch not! When they fled away and wandered about, it was said among the nations, They shall no more sojourn there. The face of Jehovah hath divided them; He will no more regard them. They respected not the persons of the priests, they regarded not the aged" (vv. 13-16). The false prophets and false priests had put the just to death, or driven them into banishment. These faithful men "had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy: they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth" (Heb. 11:36-38). God's witnesses were despised and hated by the very people to whom they sought to minister. Isaiah, according to Jewish tradition, was sawn asunder. Elijah's life was sought by Jezebel and Ahab; Obadiah had to hide the prophets of the Lord in a cave; Amaziah endeavoured to intimidate Amos (Amos 7:12-13); Jeremiah was imprisoned on several occasions, and would have been left to die in the pit but for Ebed-melech; Baruch's life was declared forfeited. Thus, in a later day, Stephen could ask, "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:52). In rejecting those sent of God they rejected the Sender: therefore the woes that had come upon them.

Egypt is evidently referred to in verse 17, as a "nation that could not save us." To the last Zedekiah and his ministers counted upon help from Pharaoh, but in vain. God had said that Egypt was a bruised reed, and so it proved to be.

The keen eye of the ever-present Babylonians they could not escape. The steps of the men of Judah were noted. They

did not dare show themselves in the streets. Their persecutors were “swifter than the eagles of the heaven:” on the mountains and in the plains they pursued or laid wait for them (vv. 18-19). The king had been captured, despite his effort to escape with a few devoted retainers. “The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen (or, nations)” (v. 20). Not till the true “Anointed of the Lord” comes, will there be a ruler under whose shadow His people can dwell in perfect security.

Edom had rejoiced in the day of Judah 's calamity. The cup should soon pass to her. She must be made drunken and naked because of her exultation in the downfall of the city of God , and her manifold iniquities (v. 21). The punishment of the daughter of Zion was accomplished. Restoration in place of captivity should soon be her portion, but Edom 's judgment was just about to begin. “If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”

CHAPTER 5 – “THOU, O LORD, REMAINEST FOR EVER!”

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 chapter 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” (v. 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” (v. 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” (v. 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” (v. 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 (Jer. 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 Jehovah'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” (v. 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” (v. 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” (v. 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” (vv. 8-9). Famine-stricken, their skin became “black like an oven.” The 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 dishonoured; while the young men and children were taken to be household servants (v. 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 (vv. 14,16).

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!" (v. 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: knowing He is their only resource, they exclaim, "Thou, O Lord, remainest forever; Thy throne is from generation to generation" (vv. 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 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? Doesna God hear ye the 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 forever, and forsake us so long time?" (v. 20). But in confidence they add, "Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old" (v. 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.

It would seem that neither in the Authorized nor in the Revised Versions is the last verse adequately rendered. As it stands in both, it would imply that they were hopeless of any recovery, and considered their rejection to be final and their prayer unavailing. "But Thou hast utterly rejected us; Thou art very wroth against us" is the way both read. But the margin of

the R.V. is suggestive. It reads: "Unless Thou utterly rejected us and art very wroth." But we much prefer the interrogative of another translation. "For hast Thou utterly rejected us?" they ask; and the very question implies a confidence that it is otherwise, as Jeremiah well knew; though they justly add, "Thou hast been wroth against us exceedingly." 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" (Isa. 26:1-4). Then Jerusalem 's mourning will be accomplished; her warfare will be ended!