

# CHAPTER 4

This chapter is another single alphabet of Lamentations for the destruction of Jerusalem, like those in the first two chapters.

**I.** The prophet here laments the injuries and indignities done to those to whom respect used to be shown (v. 1, 2).

**II.** He laments the direful effects of the famine to which they were reduced by the siege (v. 3-10).

**III.** He laments the taking and sacking of Jerusalem and its amazing desolations (v. 11, 12).

**IV.** He acknowledges that the sins of their leaders were the cause of all these calamities (v. 13-16).

**V.** He gives up all as doomed to utter ruin, for their enemies were every way too hard for them (v. 17-20).

**VI.** He foretels the destruction of the Edomites who triumphed in Jerusalem's fall (v. 21).

**VII.** He foretels the return of the captivity of Zion at last (v. 22).

## ~~2311~~ LAMENTATIONS 4:1-12

### EFFECTS OF FAMINE IN JERUSALEM

The elegy in this chapter begins with a lamentation of the very sad and doleful change which the judgments of God had made in Jerusalem. The city that was formerly *as gold*, as *the most fine gold*, so rich and splendid, *the perfection of beauty and the joy of the whole earth*, has become dim, and is changed, has lost its lustre, lost its value, is not what it was; it has become dross. Alas! what an alteration is here!

**I.** The temple was laid waste, which was the glory of Jerusalem and its protection. it is given up into the hands of the enemy. And some understand the gold spoken of (v. 1) to be the *gold of the temple*, the fine gold with which it was overlaid (~~4102~~1 Kings 6:22); when the temple was burned the gold of it was smoked and sullied, as if it had been of little

value. it was thrown among the rubbish; it *was changed*, converted to common uses and made nothing of. *The stones of the sanctuary*, which were curiously wrought, were thrown down by the Chaldeans, when they demolished it, or were brought down by the force of the fire, and were *poured out*, and thrown about *in the top of every street*; they lay mingled without distinction among the common ruins. When the God of the sanctuary was by sin provoked to withdraw no wonder that the stones of the sanctuary were thus profaned.

**II.** The princes and priests, who were in a special manner the *sons of Zion*, were trampled upon and abused, v. 2. Both the house of God and the house of David were in Zion. The sons of both those houses were upon this account precious, that they were heirs to the privileges of those two covenants of priesthood and royalty. They were *comparable to fine gold*. Israel was more rich in them than in treasures of gold and silver. But now they are *esteemed as earthen pitchers*; they are broken as *earthen pitchers*, thrown by as vessels in which there is no pleasure. They have grown poor, and are brought into captivity, and thereby are rendered mean and despicable, and every one treads upon them and insults over them. Note, The contempt put upon God's people ought to be matter of lamentation to us.

**III.** Little children were starved for want of bread and water, v. 3, 4. The nursing-mothers, having no meat for themselves, had no milk for the babes at their breast, so that, though in disposition they were really compassionate, yet in fact they seemed to be cruel, *like the ostriches in the wilderness, that leave their eggs in the dust* (~~1834~~ Job 39:14, 15); having no food for their children, they were forced to neglect them and do what they could to forget them, because it was a pain to them to think of them when they had nothing for them; in this they were worse than the seals, or *sea-monsters*, or *whales* (as some render it), for they *drew out the breast, and gave suck to their young*, which *the daughter of my people* will not do. Children cannot shift for themselves as grown people can; and therefore it was the more painful to see *the tongue of the sucking-child cleave to the roof of his mouth for thirst*, because there was not a drop of water to moisten it; and to hear the young children, that could but just speak, *ask bread* of their parents, who had none to give them, no, nor any friend that could supply them. As doleful as our thoughts are of this case, so thankful should our thoughts be of the great plenty we enjoy, and the food

convenient we have for ourselves and for our children, and for *those of our own house*.

**IV.** Persons of good rank were reduced to extreme poverty, v. 5. Those who were well-born and well bred, and had been accustomed to the best, both for food and clothing, who had *fed delicately*, had every thing that was curious and nice (they call it *eating well*, whereas those only eat well who eat to the glory of God), and *fared sumptuously every day*; they had not only been *advanced to the scarlet*, but from their beginning were *brought up in scarlet*, and were never acquainted with any thing mean or ordinary. They were *brought up upon scarlet* (so the word is); their foot-cloths, and the carpets they walked on, were scarlet, yet these, being stripped of all by the war, are *desolate in the streets*, have not a house to put their head in, nor a bed to lie on, nor clothes to cover them, nor fire to warm them. They *embrace dunghills*; on them they were glad to lie to get a little rest, and perhaps raked in the dunghills for something to eat, as the prodigal son who *would fain have filled his belly with the husks*. Note, Those who live in the greatest pomp and plenty know not what straits they may be reduced to before they die; as sometimes the *needy* are *raised out of the dunghill*. *Those who were full have hired out themselves for bread*, <sup><0015></sup>1 Samuel 2:5. It is therefore the wisdom of those who have abundance not to use themselves too nicely, for then hardships, when they come, will be doubly hard, <sup><0256></sup>Deuteronomy 28:56.

**V.** Persons who were eminent for dignity, nay, perhaps for sanctity, shared with others in the common calamity, v. 7, 8. *Her Nazarites* are extremely charged. Some understand it only of her honourable ones, the young gentlemen, who were very clean, and neat, and well-dressed, washed and perfumed; but I see not why we may not understand it of those devout people among them who *separated themselves to the Lord* by the *Nazarites' vow*, Numbers 6.

**2.** That there were such among them in the most degenerate times appears from <sup><3011></sup>Amos 2:11, *I raised up of your young men for Nazarites*. These *Nazarites*, though they were not to cut their hair, yet by reason of their temperate diet, their frequent washings, and especially the pleasure they had in devoting themselves to God and conversing with him, which made their faces to shine as *Moses's*, were *purser than snow* and *whiter than milk*; drinking no wine nor strong drink, they had a more healthful complexion and cheerful countenance than those who regaled themselves

daily with the blood of the grape, as *Daniel* and his fellows with *pulse and water*. Or it may denote the great respect and veneration which all good people had for them; though perhaps to the eye they had *no form nor comeliness*, yet, being separated to the Lord, they were valued as if they had been *more ruddy than rubies and their polishing had been of sapphire*. But now *their visage is marred* (as is said of Christ, <sup><2504></sup>Isaiah 52:14); it is *blacker than a coal*; they look miserably, partly through hunger and partly through grief and perplexity. *They are not known in the streets*; those who respected them now take no notice of them, and those who had been intimately acquainted with them now scarcely knew them, their countenance was so altered by the miseries that attended the long siege. *Their skin cleaves to their bones*, their flesh being quite consumed and wasted away; it is *withered*; it has *become like a stick*, as dry and hard as a piece of wood. Note, It is a thing to be much lamented that even those who are separated to God are yet, when desolating judgments are abroad, often involved with others in the common calamity.

**VI.** Jerusalem came down slowly, and died a lingering death; for the famine contributed more to her destruction than any other judgment whatsoever. Upon this account the destruction of *Jerusalem was greater than that of Sodom* (v. 6), for that was *overthrown in a moment*; one shower of fire and brimstone dispatched it; *no hand staid on her*; she did not endure any long siege, as Jerusalem has done; she fell immediately into the *hands of the Lord*, who strikes home at a blow, and did not *fall into the hands of man*, who, being weak, is long in doing execution, <sup><4782></sup>Judges 8:21. Jerusalem is kept many months upon the rack, in pain and misery, and dies by inches, dies so as to feel herself die. And, when the iniquity of Jerusalem is more aggravated than that of Sodom, no wonder that the punishment of it is so. Sodom never had the means of grace the Jerusalem had, the oracles of God and his prophets, and therefore the condemnation of Jerusalem will be *more intolerable* than that of Sodom, <sup><4123></sup>Matthew 11:23, 24. The extremity of the famine is here set forth by two frightful instances of it: —

**1.** The tedious deaths that it was the cause of (v. 9); many were slain with hunger, were famished to death, their stores being spent, and the public stores so nearly spent that they could not have any relief out of them. They were *stricken through, for want of the fruits of the field*; those who were starved were as sure to die as if they had been stabbed and stricken through; only their case was much more miserable. *Those who are slain*

with the sword are soon put out of their pain; in a moment they go down to the grave, <sup><8213></sup>Job 21:13. They have not the terror of seeing death make its advances towards them, and scarcely feel it when the blow is given; it is but one sharp struggle, and the work is done. And, if we be ready for another world, we need not be afraid of a short passage to it; the quicker the better. But those who die by famine pine away; hunger preys upon their spirits and wastes them gradually; nay, and it frets their spirits, and fills them with vexation, and is as great a torture to the mind as to the body. There are *bands in their death*, <sup><934></sup>Psalms 73:4.

2. The barbarous murders that it was the occasion of (v. 10): *The hands of the pitiful women have first slain and then sodden their own children*. This was lamented before (<sup><2121></sup>Jeremiah 2:20); and it was a thing to be greatly lamented that any should be so wicked as to do it and that they should be brought to such extremities as to be tempted to it. But this horrid effect of long sieges had been threatened in general (<sup><829></sup>Leviticus 26:29, <sup><633></sup>Deuteronomy 28:53), and particularly against Jerusalem in the siege of the Chaldeans, <sup><2149></sup>Jeremiah 19:9; <sup><2150></sup>Ezekiel 5:10. The case was sad enough that they had not wherewithal to feed their children and make meat for them (v. 4), but much worse that they could find in their hearts to feed upon their children and make meat of them. I know not whether to make it an instance of the power of necessity or of the power of iniquity; but, as the Gentile idolaters were justly *given up to vile affections* (<sup><416></sup>Romans 1:26), so these Jewish idolaters, and the women particularly, who had *made cakes to the queen of heaven* and taught their children to do so too, were *stripped of natural affection* and that to their own children. Being thus left to *dishonour their own nature* was a righteous judgment upon them for the dishonour they had done to God.

## VII. Jerusalem comes down utterly and wonderfully.

1. The destruction of Jerusalem is a complete destruction (v. 11): *The Lord has accomplished his fury*; he has made thorough work of it, has executed all that he purposed in wrath against Jerusalem, and has remitted no part of the sentence. He has poured out the full vials of his fierce anger, poured them out to the bottom, even the dregs of them. He has *kindled a fire in Zion*, which has not only consumed the houses, and levelled them with the ground, but, beyond what other fires do, has *devoured the foundations thereof*, as if they were to be no more built upon.

2. It is an amazing destruction, v. 12. It was a surprise to the kings of the earth, who are acquainted with, and inquisitive about, the state of their neighbours; nay, it was so to *all the inhabitants of the world* who knew Jerusalem, or had ever heard or read of it; they *could not have believed that the adversary and enemy would ever enter into the gates of Jerusalem*; for,

(1.) They knew that Jerusalem was strongly fortified, not only by walls and bulwarks, but by the numbers and strength of its inhabitants; the strong hold of Zion was thought to be impregnable.

(2.) They knew that it was the *city of the great King*, where the Lord of the whole earth had in a more peculiar manner his residence; it was the holy city, and therefore they thought that it was so much under the divine protection that it would be in vain for any of its enemies to make an attack upon it.

(3.) They knew that many an attempt made upon it had been baffled, witness that of Sennacherib. They were therefore amazed when they heard of the Chaldeans making themselves masters of it, and concluded that it was certainly by an immediate hand of God that Jerusalem was given up to them; it was by a commission from him that the enemy broke through and entered the gates of Jerusalem.

## ~~2043~~ LAMENTATIONS 4:13-20

### CAUSE OF JERUSALEM'S SORROWS

We have here,

**I.** The sins they were charged with, for which God brought this destruction upon them, and which served to justify God in it (v. 13, 14): It is *for the sins of her prophets*, and the *iniquities of her priests*. Not that the people were innocent; no, they *loved to have it so* (~~245~~ Jeremiah 5:31), and it was to please them that the prophets and priests did as they did; but the fault is chiefly laid upon them, who should have taught them better, should have reprov'd and admonish'd them, and told them what would be in the end hereof; of the hands of those watchmen who did not give them warning will their blood be required. Note, Nothing ripens a people more

for ruin, nor fills the measure faster, than the sins of their priests and prophets. The particular sin charged upon them is persecution; the false prophets and corrupt priests joined their power and interest to *shed the blood of the just in the midst of her*, the blood of God's prophets and of those that adhered to them. They not only shed the blood of their innocent children, whom they sacrificed to Moloch, but the blood of the righteous men that were among them, whom they sacrificed to that more cruel idol of enmity to the truth and true religion. This was that sin which the Lord would not pardon (<sup><1204></sup>2 Kings 24:4) and which brought the last destruction upon Jerusalem (<sup><506></sup>James 5:6): *You have condemned and killed the just*. And the priests and prophets were the ringleaders in persecution, as in Christ's time the chief priests and scribes were the men that incensed the people against him, who otherwise would have persisted in their hosannas. Now these are those that *wandered as blind men in the streets*, v. 14. They strayed from the paths of justice, were blind to every thing that is good, but to do evil they were quick-sighted. God says of corrupt judges, *They know not, neither do they understand; they walk in darkness* (<sup><1805></sup>Psalm 82:5); and Christ says of the corrupt teachers, *They are blind leaders of the blind*, <sup><154></sup>Matthew 15:14. They have so *polluted themselves with innocent blood*, the blood of the saints, that *men could not touch their garments*; they made themselves odious to all about them, so that good men were as shy of touching them as of touching a dead body, which contracted a ceremonial pollution, or of touching the bloody clothes of one slain, which tender spirits care not to do. There is nothing that will make prophets and priests to be abhorred so much as a spirit of persecution.

**II.** The testimony of their neighbours produced in evidence against them, both to convict them of sin and to show the equity of God's proceedings against them. Some that have grown very impudent in sin boast that they *care not what people say of them*; but God, by the prophet, would have the Jews to take notice of what people said of them and what was the opinion of the standers by concerning them (v. 15, 16), what they said, nay, what *they cried unto them*, especially to the corrupt priests and prophets, *among the heathen*.

**1.** They upbraided them with their pretended purity, while they lived in all manner of real iniquity. They cried to them, "*Depart you; it is unclean*. You were so precise that you would not touch a Gentile, by cried, *Depart, depart; stand by thyself; I am holier than thou*," <sup><115></sup>Isaiah 65:5. Thus the prosecutors of Christ would not go *into the judgment-hall, lest they should*

*be defiled.* “But can you now keep the Gentiles from touching you, when God has delivered you into their hands? When you flee away and wander you will bid them stand off and not touch you, because they are unclean. But in vain; these serpents will not be charmed or enchanted thus; no, they will no *respect the persons of the priests, nor favour the elders*; the most venerable persons will to them be despicable.”

**2.** They upbraided them with their sins, and the anger of God against them for their sins, and the direful effects of that anger. *They cried to them, Depart you; it is unclean.* They all cried out shame on them, and could easily foresee that God would not long suffer so provoking a people to continue in so good a land. They knew their *statutes and judgments were righteous*, and expected they should be *a wise and understanding people*, <sup>(1016)</sup>Deuteronomy 4:6. But, when they saw them quite otherwise, they cried, *Depart, depart*; they soon read their doom, that the land would spue them out, as it had done their predecessors, and, when they saw the dispersed of *Jacob fleeing and wandering*, they told them of it. They said, *Now the anger of the Lord has divided them*, has dispersed them into all countries, because *they respected not the persons of the priests*, the pious priests that were among them, such as Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, Jeremiah, and others; neither did they *favour the elders*, but despised them and their authority when they went about to check them for their vicious courses. The very heathen foresaw that this would ruin them.

**3.** They triumphed in their ruin as irrecoverable. They said, when they saw them expelled out of their own land, “*Now they shall no more sojourn there*; they have bidden it a final farewell, never more to return to it, for *God will no more regard them*, and how then can they help themselves?” Herein they were mistaken. God had not cast them off, for all this. yet thus much is intimated, that all about them observed them to be so very provoking to their God that there was not reason to expect any other than that they should be quite abandoned.

**III.** The despair which they themselves were almost brought to under their calamities. Having heard what they said concerning them *among the heathen*, let us now hear what they say concerning themselves (v. 17): “*As for us*, we look upon our case to be in a manner helpless. *Our end is near* (v. 18), the end both of our church and of our state; we are just at the brink of the ruin of both; nay, *our end has come*; we are utterly undone; a fatal final period is put to all our comforts; the days of our prosperity are



fulfilled; they are numbered and finished.” Thus their fears concurred with the hopes of their enemies that the *Lord would no more regard them*. For,

**1.** The refuges they fled to disappointed them. They looked for help from this and the other powerful ally, but to no purpose; it proved vain help. The succours they expected did not come in, or at least they had not the success they expected, and their eyes failed with looking for that which never came (v. 17); they *watched in watching*; they watched long, and with a great deal of earnestness and impatience, *for a nation* that promised them assistance, but failed the, and frustrated their expectation. They *could not save them*; they were too weak to contend with the Chaldean army and therefore retired. Help from creatures is vain help (<sup>3901</sup>Psalm 60:11), and we may look for it till our eyes fail, till our hearts fail, and come short of it at last.

**2.** The persecutors they fled from overtook them and overcame them (v. 18): *They hunt our steps, that we cannot go in our streets*. When the Chaldeans besieged the city they raised their batteries so high above the walls that they could command the town, and shoot at people as they went along the streets. They *hunted them* with their arrows from place to place. When the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled, their *persecutors were swifter than the eagles of heaven* when they fly upon their prey, v. 19. There was no escaping them; they *pursued them upon the mountains*, and, when they thought they had got clear of them, they fell into the hands of those that *laid wait for them in the wilderness*, to cut off their retreat, and to pick up stragglers. nay, the king himself, though he may be supposed to have had all the advantages the exigence of the case would admit to favour his flight, yet could not escape, for divine vengeance pursued him with them, and then (v. 20), *The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits*. Some apply it to Josiah, who was killed in battle by the king of Egypt; but it is rather to be understood of Zedekiah, who was the last king of the house of David, and who was pursued by the Chaldeans and seized in the plains of Jericho, <sup>2905</sup>Jeremiah 39:5. He was *the anointed of the Lord*, heir of that family which God had appointed to the government. he was very much confided in by the Jewish state: *They said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen*. They promised themselves that the remnant which were left after Jeconiah's captivity should, under the protection of his government, yet again *take root downward and bear fruit upward*. They thought, though they were so reduced that they could not think of reigning over the

heathen, as they had done, yet they might make a shift to live among them and not be insulted and pulled to pieces by them. Thus apt are sinking interests not only to catch at every twig, but to think it will recover them. Jerusalem died of a consumption, a flattering distemper. Even when she was ready to expire she formed some hopeful symptoms to herself, and on them grounded a hope that she should recover; but what came of it? The shadow under which they thought they should live proved like that of Jonah's gourd, which *withered in a night*. He that was *the anointed of the Lord was taken in their pits*, as if he had been but a beast of prey; so little account did they make of a person deemed sacred and not to be violated. Note, When we make any creature *the breath of our nostrils*, and promise ourselves that we shall live by it, it is just with God to stop that breath, and deprive us of the life we expected by it; for God will have the honour of being himself along *our life and the length of our days*.

## ~~2002~~ LAMENTATIONS 4:21-22

### COMFORT FOR ZION

David's psalms of lamentation commonly conclude with some word of comfort, which is as life from the dead and light shining out of darkness; so does this lamentation here in this chapter. The people of God are now in great distress, their aspects all doleful, their prospects all frightful, and their ill-natured neighbours the Edomites insult over them and do all they can to exasperate their destroyers against them. Such was their violence against their brother Jacob (~~300~~ Obadiah 1:10), such their spleen at Jerusalem, of which they cried, *Rase it, rase it*, ~~1000~~ Psalm 137:7. Now it is here foretold, for the encouragement of God's people,

**I.** That an end shall be put to Zion's troubles (v. 22): *The punishment of thy iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion!* not the fulness of that punishment which it deserves, but of that which God has designed and determined to inflict, and which was necessary to answer the end, the glorifying of God's justice and the taking away of their sin. The captivity, which is *the punishment of thy iniquity, is accomplished* (~~2002~~ Isaiah 40:2), and *he will no longer keep thee in captivity*; so it may be read, as well as, *he will no more carry thee into captivity*; he will turn again thy captivity and work a glorious release for thee. Note, The troubles of God's people

shall be continued no longer than till they have done their work for which they were sent.

**II.** That an end shall be put to Edom's triumphs. It is spoken ironically (v. 21): "*Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom! go on to insult over Zion in distress, till thou hast filled up the measure of thy iniquity. Do so; rejoice in thy own present exemption from the common fate of thy neighbours.*" This is like Solomon's upbraiding the young man with his ungoverned mirth (<sup>2119</sup>Ecclesiastes 11:9): "*Rejoice, O young man! in thy youth; rejoice, if thou canst, when God comes to reckon with thee, and that he will do ere long. The cup of trembling, which it is now Jerusalem's turn to drink deeply of, shall pass through unto thee; it shall go round till it comes to be thy lot to pledge it.*" Note, This is a good reason why we should not insult over any who are in misery, because we ourselves also are in the body, and we know not how soon their case may be ours. But those who please themselves in the calamities of God's church must expect to have their doom, as aiders and abettors, with those that are instrumental in those calamities. The destruction of the Edomites was foretold by this prophet (<sup>2407</sup>Jeremiah 49:7. etc.), and the people of God must encourage themselves against their present rudeness and insolence with the prospect of it.

**1.** It will be a shameful destruction: "*The cup that shall pass unto thee shall intoxicate thee*" (and that is shame enough to any man); "*thou shalt be drunken, quite infatuated, and at thy wits' end, shalt stagger in all thy counsels and stumble in all thy enterprises, and then, as Noah when he was drunk, thou shalt make thyself naked and expose thyself to contempt.*" Note, Those who ridicule God's people will justly be left to themselves to do that, some time or other, by which they will be made ridiculous.

**2.** It will be a righteous destruction. God will herein *visit thy iniquity and discover thy sins*; he will punish them, and, to justify himself therein, he will discover them, and make it to appear that he has just cause thus to proceed against them. Nay, the punishment of the sin shall so exactly answer the sin that it shall itself plainly discover it. Sometimes God does so visit the iniquity that he that runs may read the sin in the punishment. But, sooner or later, sin will be visited and discovered, and all the hidden works of darkness brought to light.