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Preface

An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of The Lamentations of Jeremiah

Since what Solomon says, though contrary to the common opinion of the world, is certainly true, that *sorrow is better than laughter*, and *it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting*, we should come to the reading and consideration of the melancholy chapters of this book, not only willingly, but with an expectation to edify ourselves by them; and, that we may do this, we must compose ourselves to a holy sadness and resolve to weep with the weeping prophet. Let us consider, I. The title of this book; in the Hebrew it has one, but is called (as the books of Moses are) from the first word *Ecah—How*; but the Jewish commentators call it, as the Greeks do, and we from them, *Kinoth—Lamentations*. As we have sacred odes or songs of joy, so have we sacred elegies or songs of lamentation; such variety of methods has Infinite Wisdom taken to work upon us and move our affections, and so soften our hearts and make them susceptible of the impressions of divine truths, as the wax of the seal. We have not only *piped unto you*, but have *mourned* likewise, Mt. 11:17. II. The penman of this book; it was Jeremiah the prophet, who is here Jeremiah the poet, and *vates* signifies both; therefore this book is fitly adjoined to the book of his prophecy, and is as an appendix to it. We had there at large the predictions of the desolations of Judah and Jerusalem, and then the history of them, to show how punctually the predictions were accomplished, for the confirming of our faith: now here we have the expressions of his sorrow upon occasion of them, to show that he was very sincere in the protestations he had often made that he did not desire the woeful day, but that, on the contrary, the prospect of it filled him with bitterness. When he saw these calamities at a distance, he wished that his *head were waters and his eyes fountains of tears*; and, when they came, he made it to appear that he did not dissemble in that wish, and that he was far from being disaffected to his country, which was the crime his enemies charged him with. Though his country had been very unkind to him, and though the ruin of it was both a proof that he was a true prophet and a punishment of them for prosecuting him as a false prophet, which might have tempted him to rejoice in it, yet he sadly lamented it, and herein showed a better temper than that which Jonah was of with respect to Nineveh. III. The occasion of these Lamentations was the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldean army and the dissolution of the Jewish state both civil and ecclesiastical thereby. Some of the rabbies will have these to be the Lamentations which Jeremiah penned upon occasion of the death of Josiah, which are mentioned 2 Chr. 35:25. But, though it is true that that opened the door to all the following calamities, yet these Lamentations seem to be penned in the sight, not in the foresight, of those calamities—when they had already come, not when they were at a distance; and these is nothing of Josiah in them, and his praise, as was no question, in the lamentations for him. No, it is Jerusalem's funeral that this is an elegy upon. Others of them will have these Lamentations to be contained in the roll which Baruch wrote from Jeremiah's mouth, and which Jehoiakim burnt, and they suggest that at first there were in it only the 1st, 2nd, and 4th chapters, but that the 3rd and 5th were the *many like words* that were afterwards added; but this is a groundless fancy; that roll is expressly said to be a repetition and summary of the prophet's sermons, Jer. 36:2. IV. The composition of it;

it is not only poetical, but alphabetical, all except the 5th chapter, as some of David's psalms are; each verse begins with a several letter in the order of the Hebrew alphabet, the first *aleph*, the second *beth*, etc., but the 3rd chapter is a triple alphabet, the first three beginning with *aleph*, the next three with *beth*, etc., which was a help to memory (it being designed that these mournful ditties should be got by heart) and was an elegance in writing then valued and therefore not now to be despised. They observe that in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th chapters, the letter *pe* is put before *ain*, which in all the Hebrew alphabets follows it, for a reason of which Dr. Lightfoot offers this conjecture, That the letter *ajin*, which is the numeral letter for Septuagint, was thus, by being displaced, made remarkable, to put them in mind of the seventy years at the end of which God would turn again their captivity. V. The use of it: of great use, no doubt, it was to the pious Jews in their sufferings, furnishing them with spiritual language to express their natural grief by, helping to preserve the lively remembrance of Zion among them, and their children that never saw it, when they were in Babylon, directing their tears into the right channel (for they are here taught to mourn for sin and mourn to God), and withal encouraging their hopes that God would yet return and have mercy upon them; and it is of use to us, to affect us with godly sorrow for the calamities of the church of God, as becomes those that are living members of it and are resolved to take our lot with it.

Chapter 1

We have here the first alphabet of this lamentation, twenty-two stanzas, in which the miseries of Jerusalem are bitterly bewailed and her present deplorable condition is aggravated by comparing it with her former prosperous state; all along, sin is acknowledged and complained of as the procuring cause of all these miseries; and God is appealed to for justice against their enemies and applied to for compassion towards them. The chapter is all of a piece, and the several remonstrances are interwoven; but here is, I. A complaint made to God of their calamities, and his compassionate consideration desired (v. 1–11). II. The same complaint made to their friends, and their compassionate consideration desired (v. 12–17). III. An appeal to God and his righteousness concerning it (v. 18–22), in which he is justified in their affliction and is humbly solicited to justify himself in their deliverance.

Verses 1-11

Those that have any disposition to *weep with those that weep*, one would think, should scarcely be able to refrain from tears at the reading of these verses, so very pathetic are the lamentations here.

I. The miseries of Jerusalem are here complained of as very pressing and by many circumstances very much aggravated. Let us take a view of these miseries.

1. As to their civil state. (1.) A city that was populous is now depopulated, v. 1. It is spoken of by way of wonder—Who would have thought that ever it should come to this! Or by way of enquiry—What is it that has brought it to this? Or by way of lamentation—Alas! alas! (as Rev. 18:10, 16, 19) *how doth the city sit solitary that was full of people!* She was full of her own people that replenished her, and full of the people of other nations that resorted to her, with whom she had both profitable commerce and pleasant converse; but now her own people are carried into captivity, and strangers make no court to her: she *sits solitary*. The *chief places of the city* are not now, as they used to be, *place of concourse*, where *wisdom cried* (Prov. 1:20, 21); and justly are they left unfrequented, because wisdom's cry there was not heard. Note, Those that are ever so much increased God can soon diminish. *How has she become as a widow!* Her king that was, or should have been, as a husband to her, is cut off, and gone; her God has departed from her, and has given her a bill of divorce; she is emptied of her children, is solitary and sorrowful as a widow. Let no family, no state, not Jerusalem, no, nor Babylon herself, be secure, and say, *I sit as a queen*, and shall never *sit as a widow*, Isa. 47:8; Rev. 18:7. (2.) A city that had dominion is now in subjection. She had been *great among the nations*, greatly loved by some and greatly feared by others, and greatly observed and obeyed by both; some made her presents, and others paid her taxes; so that she was really *princess among the provinces*, and every sheaf bowed to hers; even the princes of the people entreated her favour. But now the tables are turned; she has not only lost her friends and *sits solitary*, but has lost her freedom too and *sits tributary*; she paid tribute to Egypt first and then to Babylon. Note, Sin brings a people not only into solitude, but into slavery. (3.) A city that used to be full of mirth has now become melancholy and upon all accounts full of grief. Jerusalem had been a joyous city, whither the tribes went up on purpose to rejoice before the Lord; she was *the joy of the whole earth*, but now *she weeps sorely*, her laughter is turned into mourning, her solemn feasts are

all gone; she weeps *in the night*, as true mourners do who weep in secret, in silence and solitude; *in the night*, when others compose themselves to rest, her thoughts are most intent upon her troubles, and grief then plays the tyrant. What the prophet's head was for her, when she regarded it not, now her head is—as *waters*, and her eyes *fountains of tears*, so that she *weeps day and night* (Jer. 9:1); *her tears are continually on her cheeks*. Though nothing dries away sooner than a tear, yet fresh griefs extort fresh tears, so that her cheeks are never free from them. Note, There is nothing more commonly seen *under the sun* than *the tears of the oppressed*, with whom *the clouds return after the rain*, Eccl. 4:1. (4.) Those that were separated from the heathen now *dwell among the heathen*; those that were a peculiar people are now a mingled people (v. 3): *Judah has gone into captivity*, out of her own land into the land of her enemies, and there she abides, and is likely to abide, among those that are aliens to God and the covenants of promise, with whom *she finds no rest*, no satisfaction of mind, nor any settlement of abode, but is continually hurried from place to place at the will of the victorious imperious tyrants. And again (v. 5): "*Her children have gone into captivity before the enemy*"; those that were to have been the seed of the next generation are carried off; so that the land that is now desolate is likely to be still desolate and lost for want of heirs." Those that dwell among their own people, and that a free people, and in their own land, would be more thankful for the mercies they thereby enjoy if they would but consider the miseries of those that are forced into strange countries. (5.) Those that used in their wars to conquer are now conquered and triumphed over: *All her persecutors overlook her between the straits* (v. 3); they gained all possible advantages against her, so that her people unavoidably *fell into the hand of the enemy*, for there was no way to escape (v. 7); they were hemmed in on every side, and, which way soever they attempted to flee, they found themselves embarrassed. When they made the best of their way they could make nothing of it, but were overtaken and overcome; so that every where *her adversaries are the chief and her enemies prosper* (v. 5); which way soever their sword turns they get the better. Such straits do men bring themselves into by sin. If we allow that which is our greatest adversary and enemy to have dominion over us, and to be chief in us, justly will our other enemies be suffered to have dominion over us. (6.) Those that had been not only distinguished by a dignified people, on whom God had put honour, and to whom all their neighbours had paid respect, are now brought into contempt (v. 8): *All that honoured her before despise her*; those that courted an alliance with her now value it not; those that caressed her when she was in pomp and prosperity slight her now that she is in distress, *because they have seen her nakedness*. By the prevalency of the enemies against her they perceive her weakness, and that she is not so strong a people as they thought she had been; and by the prevalency of God's judgments against her they perceive her wickedness, which now comes to light and is every where talked of. Now it appears how they have vilified themselves by their sins: *The enemies magnify themselves against them* (v. 9); they trample upon them, and insult over them, and in their eyes they have *become vile*, the tail of the nations, though once they were the head. Note, *Sin is the reproach of any people*. (7.) Those that lived in a fruitful land were ready to perish, and many of them did perish, for want of necessary food (v. 11): *All her people sigh* in despondency and despair; they are ready to faint away; their spirits fail, and therefore they sigh, *for they seek bread* and seek it in vain. They were brought at last to that extremity that there was *no bread for the people of the land* (Jer. 52:6), and in their captivity they had much ado to get break, ch. 5:6. *They have given their pleasant things*, their jewels and pictures, and all the furniture of

their closets and cabinets, which they used to please themselves with looking upon, they have sold these to buy bread for themselves and their families, have parted with them *for meat to relieve the soul*, or (as the margin is) *to make the soul come again*, when they were ready to faint away. They desired no other cordial than meat. *All that a man has will he give for life*, and for break, which is the staff of life. Let those that abound in pleasant things not be proud of them, nor fond of them; for the time may come when they may be glad to let them go for necessary things. And let those that have competent food to relieve their soul be content with it, and thankful for it, though they have not pleasant things.

2. We have here an account of their miseries in their ecclesiastical state, the ruin of their sacred interest, which was much more to be lamented than that of their secular concerns. (1.) Their religious feasts were no more observed, no more frequented (v. 4): *The ways of Zion do mourn*; they look melancholy, overgrown with grass and weeds. It used to be a pleasant diversion to see people continually passing and repassing in the highway that led to the temple, but now you may stand there long enough, and see nobody stir; for *none come to the solemn feasts*; a full end is put to them by the destruction of that which was the *city of our solemnities*, Isa. 33:20. *The solemn feasts* had been neglected and profaned (Isa. 1:11, 12), and therefore justly is an end now put to them. But, when thus *the ways of Zion* are made to *mourn*, all the sons of Zion cannot but mourn with them. It is very grievous to good men to see religious assemblies broken up and scattered, and those restrained from them that would gladly attend them. And, as *the ways of Zion mourned*, so *the gates of Zion*, in which the faithful worshippers used to meet, *are desolate*; for there is none to meet in them. Time was when *the Lord loved the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob*, but now he has forsaken them, and is provoked to withdraw from them, and therefore it cannot but fare with them as it did with the temple when Christ quitted it. *Behold, your house is left unto you desolate*, Mt. 23:38. (2.) Their religious persons were quite disabled from performing their wonted services, were quite dispirited: *Her priests sigh* for the desolations of the temple; their songs are turned into sighs; they sigh, for they have nothing to do, and therefore there is nothing to be had; they sigh, as the people (v. 11), *for want of bread*, because the offerings of the Lord, which were their livelihood, failed. It is time to sigh when the priests, the Lord's ministers, sigh. *Her virgins* also, that used, with their music and dancing, to grace the solemnities of their feasts, *are afflicted* and *in heaviness*. Notice is taken of their service in the day of Zion's prosperity (Ps. 68:25, *Among them were the damsels playing with timbrels*), and therefore notice is taken of the failing of it now. *Her virgins are afflicted*, and therefore *she is in bitterness*; that is, all the inhabitants of Zion are so, whose character it is that they are *sorrowful for the solemn assembly*, and that to them *the reproach of it is a burden*, Zep. 3:18. (3.) Their religious places were profaned (v. 10): *The heathen entered into her sanctuary*, into the temple itself, into which no Israelite was permitted to enter, though ever so reverently and devoutly, but the priests only. *The stranger that comes nigh*, even to worship there, *shall be put to death*. Thither the heathen now crowds rudely in, not to worship, but to plunder. God had commanded that *the heathen should not so much as enter into the congregation*, nor be incorporated with the people of the Jews (Deu. 23:3); yet now they *enter into the sanctuary* without control. Note, Nothing is more grievous to those who have a true concern for the glory of God, nor is more lamented, than the violation of God's laws, and the contempt they see put upon sacred things. What *the enemy did wickedly in the sanctuary* was complained of, Ps. 74:3, 4. (4.) Their religious utensils, and all the rich things with which the

temple was adorned and beautified, and which were made use of in the worship of God, were made a prey to the enemy (v. 10): *The adversary has spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things*, has grasped them all, seized them all, for himself. What these pleasant things are we may learn from Isa. 64:11, where, to the complaint of the burning of the temple, it is added, *All our pleasant things are laid waste*; the ark and the altar, and all the other tokens of God's presence with them, these were their pleasant things above any other things, and these were now broken to pieces and carried away. Thus from *the daughter of Zion all her beauty has departed*, v. 6. *The beauty of holiness* was the *beauty of the daughter of Zion*; when the temple, that holy and beautiful house, was destroyed, her beauty was gone; that was the breaking of *the staff of beauty*, the taking away of the pledges and seals of the covenant, Zec. 11:10. (5.) Their religious days were made a jest of (v. 7): *The adversaries saw her, and did mock at her sabbaths*. They laughed at them for observing one day in seven as a day of rest from worldly business. Juvenal, a heathen poet, ridicules the Jews in his time for losing a seventh part of their time:—

—cui septima quaeque fuit lux

Ignava et vitae partem non attigit ullam—

They keep their sabbaths to their cost,

For thus one day in sev'n is lost;

whereas sabbaths, if they be sanctified as they ought to be, will turn to a better account than all the days of the week besides.

And whereas the Jews professed that they did it in obedience to their God, and to his honour, their adversaries asked them,

"What do you get by it now? What profit have you in keeping the ordinances of your God, who now deserts you in your distress?" Note, it is a very great trouble to all that love God to hear his ordinances mocked at, and particularly his sabbaths.

Zion calls them *her sabbaths*, for the sabbath was made for men; they are his institutions, but they are her privileges; and the contempt put upon sabbaths all the sons of Zion take to themselves and lay to heart accordingly; nor will they look upon

sabbaths, or any other divine ordinances, as less honourable, nor value them less, for their being mocked at. (6.) That which

greatly aggravated all these grievances was that her state at present was just the revers of what it had been formerly, v. 7. Now,

in the days of affliction and misery, when every thing was black and dismal, *she remembers all her pleasant things that she*

had in the days of old, and now knows how to value them better than formerly, when she had the full enjoyment of them. God

often makes us know the worth of mercies by the want of them; and adversity is borne with the greatest difficulty by those that have fallen into it from the height of prosperity. This cut David to the heart, when he was banished from God's ordinances, that he could remember when he *went with the multitude to the house of God*, Ps. 42:4.

II. The sins of Jerusalem are here complained of as the procuring provoking cause of all these calamities. Whoever are the instruments, God is the author of all these troubles; it is *the Lord that has afflicted her* (v. 5) and he has done it as a righteous Judge, for *she has sinned*. 1. Her sins are for number numberless. Are her troubles many? Her sins are many more. it is *for the multitude of her transgressions that the Lord has afflicted her*. See Jer. 30:14. When the transgressions of a people are multiplied we cannot say, as Job does in his own case, that *wounds are multiplied without cause*, Job 9:17. 2. They are for nature exceedingly heinous (v. 8): *Jerusalem has grievously sinned*, has *sinned sin* (so the word is), sinned wilfully,

deliberately, has sinned that sin which of all others is the abominable things that the Lord hates, the sin of idolatry. The sins of Jerusalem, that makes such a profession and enjoys such privileges, are of all others the most grievous sins. She has *sinned grievously* (v. 8), and therefore (v. 9) she *came down wonderfully*. note, Grievous sins bring wondrous ruin; there are some workers of iniquity to whom there is a strange punishment, Job 31:3. They are such sins as may plainly be read in the punishment. (1.) They have been very oppressive and therefore are justly oppressed (v. 3): *Judah has gone into captivity*, and it is *because of affliction and great servitude*, because the rich among them afflicted the poor and made them serve with rigour, and particularly (as the Chaldee paraphrases it) because they had oppressed their Hebrew servants, which is charged upon them, Jer. 34:11. Oppression was one of their crying sins (Jer. 6:6, 7) and it is a sin that cries aloud. (2.) They have made themselves vile, and therefore are justly vilified. They all *despise her* (v. 8), for *her filthiness is in her skirts*; it appears upon her garments that she has rolled them in the mire of sin. None could stain our glory if we did not stain it ourselves. (3.) They have been very secure and therefore are justly surprised with this ruin (v. 9): *She remembers not her last end*; she did not take the warning that was given her to *consider her latter end*, to consider what would be the end of such wicked courses as she took, and therefore she *came down wonderfully*, in an astonishing manner, that she might be made to feel what she would not fear; therefore God shall *make their plagues wonderful*.

III. Jerusalem's friends are here complained of as false and faint-hearted, and very unkind: They *have all dealt treacherously with her* (v. 2), so that, in effect, *they have become here enemies*. Her deceivers have created her as much vexation as her destroyers. The staff that breaks under us may do us as great a mischief as the *staff that beats us*, Eze. 29:6, 7. *Her princes*, that should have protected her, have not courage enough to make head against the enemy for their own preservation; they *are like harts*, that, upon the first alarm, betake themselves to flight and make no resistance; nay, they *are like harts* that are famished for want of *pasture*, and therefore *are gone without strength before the pursuer*, and, having no strength for flight, are soon run down and made a prey of. her neighbours are unneighbourly, for, 1. There is none *to help her* (v. 7); either they could not or they would not; nay, 2. *She has not comforter*, none to sympathize with her, or suggest any thing to alleviate her griefs, v. 7, 9. Like Job's friends, they saw it was to no purpose, her *grief was so great*; and *miserable comforters were they all* in such a case.

IV. Jerusalem's God is here complained to concerning all these things, and all is referred to his compassionate consideration (v. 9): "*O Lord! behold my affliction, and take cognizance of it;*" and (v. 11), "*See, O Lord! and consider, take order about it.*"

Note, The only way to make ourselves easy under our burdens is to cast them upon God first, and leave it to him to do with us as seemeth him good.

Verses 12-22

The complaints here are, for substance, the same with those in the foregoing part of the chapter; but in these verses the prophet, in the name of the lamenting church, does more particularly acknowledge the hand of god in these calamities, and the righteousness of his hand.

I. The church in distress here magnifies her affliction, and yet no more than there was cause for; her groaning was not heavier than her strokes. She appeals to all spectators: *See if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow*, v. 12. This might perhaps be

truly said of Jerusalem's griefs; but we are apt to apply it too sensibly to ourselves when we are in trouble and more than there is cause for. Because we feel most from our own burden, and cannot be persuaded to reconcile ourselves to it, we are ready to cry out, Surely never was *sorrow like unto our sorrow*; whereas, if our troubles were to be thrown into a common stock with those of others, and then an equal dividend made, share and share alike, rather than stand to that we should each of us say, "Pray, give me my own again."

II. She here looks beyond the instruments to the author of her troubles, and owns them all to be directed, determined, and disposed of by him: "It is *the Lord* that *has afflicted me*, and he has *afflicted me* because he is angry with me; the greatness of his displeasure may be measured by the greatness of my distress; it is *in the day of his fierce anger*," v. 12. Afflictions cannot but be very much our griefs when we see them arising from God's wrath; so the church does here. 1. She is as one in a fever, and the fever is of God's sending: "*He has sent fire into my bones* (v. 13), a preternatural heat, which *prevails against them*, so that they are *burnt like a hearth* (Ps. 102:3), pained and wasted, and dried away." 2. She is as one in a net, which the more he struggles to get out of the more he is entangled in, and this net is of God's spreading. "The enemies could not have succeeded in their stratagems had not God *spread a net for my feet*." 3. She is as one in a wilderness, whose way is embarrassed, solitary, and tiresome: "*He has turned me back*, that I cannot go on, *has made me desolate*, that I have nothing to support me with, but am *faint all the day*." 4. She is as one in a yoke, not yoked for service, but for penance, tied neck and heels together (v. 14): *The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand*. Observe, We never are entangled in any yoke but what is framed out of our own transgressions. The sinner is *holden with the cords of his own sins*, Prov. 5:22. The yoke of Christ's commands is an *easy yoke* (Mt. 11:30), but that of our own transgressions is a heavy one. God is said to bind this yoke when he charges guilt upon us, and brings us into those inward and outward troubles which our sins have deserved; when conscience, as his deputy, binds us over to his judgment, then *the yoke is bound and wreathed by the hand* of his justice, and nothing but the hand of his pardoning mercy will unbind it. 5. She is as one in the dirt, and he it is that has *trodden under foot all her mighty men*, that has disabled them to stand, and overthrown them by one judgment after another, and so left them to be trampled upon by their proud conquerors, v. 15. Nay, she is as one in a wine-press, not only trodden down, but trodden to pieces, crushed as grapes in the wine-press of God's wrath, and her blood pressed out as wine, and it is God that has thus *trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah*. 6. She is in the hand of her enemies, and it is the Lord that has delivered her *into their hands* (v. 14): *He has made my strength to fall*, so that *I am not able to make head against them*; nay, not only not able to rise up against them, but *not able to rise up from them*, and then *he has delivered me into their hands*; nay (v. 15), *he has called an assembly against me, to crush my young men*, and such an assembly as it is in vain to think of opposing; and again (v. 17), *The Lord has commanded concerning Jacob that his adversaries should be round about him*. He that has many a time *commanded deliverances for Jacob* (Ps. 44:4) now commands an invasion against Jacob, because Jacob has disobeyed the commands of his law.

III. She justly demands a share in the pity and compassion of those that were the spectators of her misery (v. 12): "*Is it nothing to you, all you that pass by?* Can you look upon me without concern? What! are your hearts as adamants and your eyes as marbles, that you cannot bestow upon me one compassionate thought, or look, or tear? Are not you also in the body? Is it

nothing to you that your neighbor's house is on fire?" There are those to whom Zion's sorrows and ruins are nothing; they are not *grieved for the affliction of Joseph*. How pathetically does she beg their compassion! (v. 18): "*Hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: hear my complaints, and see what cause I have for them.*" This is a request like that of Job (ch. 19:21), *Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O you my friends!* It helps to make a burden sit lighter if our friends sympathize with us, and mingle their tears with ours, for this is an evidence that, though we are in affliction, we are not in contempt, which is commonly as much dreaded in an affliction as any thing.

IV. She justifies her own grief, though it was very extreme, for these calamities (v. 16): "*For these things I weep, I weep in the night* (v. 2), when none sees; *my eye, my eye, runs down with water.*" Note, This world is a vale of tears to the people of God. Zion's sons are often Zion's mourners. *Zion spreads forth her hands* (v. 17), which is here an expression rather of despair than of desire; she flings out her hands as giving up all for gone. Let us see how she accounts for this passionate grief. 1. Her God has withdrawn from her; and Micah, that had but gods of gold, when they were stolen from him cried out, *What have I more? And what is it that you say unto me? What aileth thee?* The church here grieves excessively; for, says she, *the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me*. God is the comforter; he used to be so to her; he only can administer effectual comforts; it is his word that speaks them; it is his Spirit that speaks them to us. His are strong consolations, able to *relieve the soul, to bring it back* when it is gone, and we cannot of ourselves *fetch it again*; but now he has departed in displeasure, he is *far from me*, and beholds me *afar off*. Note, It is no marvel that the souls of the saints faint away, when God, who is the only Comforter that can relieve them, keeps at a distance. 2. Her children are removed from her, and are in no capacity to help her: it is for them that she weeps, as Rachel for hers, *because they were not*, and therefore she *refuses to be comforted*. *Her children were desolate, because the enemy prevailed* against them; there is *none of all her sons to take her by the hand* (Isa. 51:18); they cannot help themselves, and how should they help her? Both the damsels and the youths, that were her joy and hope, *have gone into captivity*, v. 18. It is said of the Chaldeans that they had *no compassion upon young men nor maidens*, not on the fair sex, not on the blooming age, 2 Chr. 36:17. 3. Her friends failed her; some would not and others could not give her any relief. She *spread forth her hands*, as begging relief, but *there is none to comfort her* (v. 17), none that can do it, none that cares to do it; she *called for her lovers*, and, to engage them to help her, *called them her lovers*, but they *deceived her* (v. 19), they proved like the brooks in summer to the thirsty traveller, Job 6:15. Note, Those creatures that we set our hearts upon and raise our expectations from we are commonly deceived and disappointed in. Her idols were her lovers. Egypt and Assyria were her confidants. But they deceived her. Those that made court to her in her prosperity were shy of her, and strange to her, in her adversity. Happy are those that have made God their friend and keep themselves in his love, for he will not deceive them! 4. Those whose office it was to guide her were disabled from doing her any service. The *priests* and the *elders*, that should have appeared at the head of affairs, died for hunger (v. 19); they *gave up the ghost*, or were ready to expire, *while they sought their meat*; they went a begging for bread to keep them alive. *The famine is sore indeed in the land* when there is no bread to the wise, when priests and elders are starved. The priests and elders should have been her comforters; but how should they comfort others when they themselves were comfortless? "*They have heard that I sigh*, which should have summoned them to my

assistance; but *there is none to comfort me. Lover and friend hast thou put far from me.*" 5. Her enemies were too hard for her, and they insulted over her; they have *prevailed*, v. 16. *Abroad the sword bereaves* and slays all that comes in its way, and *at home* all provisions are cut off by the besiegers, so that *there is as death*, that is, famine, which is as bad as the pestilence, or worse—*the sword without and terror within*, Deu. 32:25. And as the enemies, that were the instruments of the calamity, were very barbarous, so were those that were the standers by, the Edomites and Ammonites, that bore ill will to Israel: They have *heard of my trouble, and are glad that thou hast done it* (v. 21); they rejoice in the trouble itself; they rejoice that it is God's doing; it pleases them to find that God and his Israel have fallen out, and they act accordingly with a great deal of strangeness towards them. *Jerusalem is as a menstruous woman among them*, that they are afraid of touching and are shy of, v. 17. Upon all these accounts it cannot be wondered at, nor can she be blamed, that *her sighs are many*, in grieving for what is, and that *her heart is faint* (v. 22) in fear of what is yet further likely to be.

V. She justifies God in all that is brought upon her, acknowledging that her sins had deserved these severe chastenings. The yoke that lies so heavily, and binds so hard, is *the yoke of her transgressions*, v. 14. The fetters we are held in are of our own making, and it is with our own rod that we are beaten. When the church had spoken here as if she thought the Lord severe she does well to correct herself, at least to explain herself, but acknowledging (v. 18), *The Lord is righteous*. He does us no wrong in dealing thus with us, nor can we charge him with any injustice in it; how unrighteous soever men are, we are sure that the *Lord is righteous*, and manifests his justice, though they contradict all the laws of theirs. Note, Whatever our troubles are, which God is pleased to inflict upon us, we must own that therein he *is righteous*; we understand neither him nor ourselves if we do not own it, 2 Chr. 12:6. she owns the equity of God's actions, but owning the iniquity of her own: *I have rebelled against his commandments* (v. 18); and again (v. 20), *I have grievously rebelled*. We cannot speak ill enough of sin, and we must always speak worst of our own sin, must call it *rebellion, grievous rebellion*; and very grievous sins is to all true penitents. It is this that lies more heavily upon her than the afflictions she was under: *"My bowels are troubled; they work within me as the troubled sea; my heart is turned within me, is restless, is turned upside down; for I have grievously rebelled."* Note, Sorrow for our sin must be great sorrow and must affect the soul.

VI. She appeals both to the mercy and to the justice of God in her present case. 1. She appeals to the mercy of God concerning her own sorrows, which had made her the proper object of his compassion (v. 20): *"Behold, O Lord! for I am in distress; take cognizance of my case, and take such order for my relief as thou pleasest."* Note, It is matter of comfort to us that the troubles which oppress our spirits are open before God's eye. 2. She appeals to the justice of God concerning the injuries that her enemies did her (v. 21, 22): *"Thou wilt bring the day that thou hast called, the day that is fixed in the counsels of God and published in the prophecies, when my enemies, that now prosecute me, shall be made like unto me, when the cup of trembling, now put into my hands, shall be put into theirs."* It may be read as a prayer, "Let the day appointed come," and so it goes on, *"Let their wickedness come before thee, let it come to be remembered, let it come to be reckoned for; take vengeance on them for all the wrongs they have done to me (Ps. 109:14, 15); hasten the time when thou wilt do to them for their transgressions as thou hast done to me for mine."* This prayer amounts to a protestation against all thoughts of a coalition with them, and to a

prediction of their ruin, subscribing to that which God had in his word spoken of it. Note, Our prayers may and must agree with God's word; and what day God has here called we are to call for, and no other. And though we are bound in charity to forgive our enemies, and to pray for them, yet we may in faith pray for the accomplishment of that which God has spoken against his and his church's enemies, that will not repent to give him glory.

Chapter 2

The second alphabetical elegy is set to the same mournful tune with the former, and the substance of it is much the same; it begins with Ecah, as that did, "How sad is our case! Alas for us!" I. Here is the anger of Zion's God taken notice of as the cause of her calamities (v. 1-9). II. Here is the sorrow of Zion's children taken notice of as the effect of her calamities (v. 10-19). III. The complaint is made to God, and the matter referred to his compassionate consideration (v. 20-22). The hand that wounded must make whole.

Verses 1-9

It is a very sad representation which is here made of the state of God's church, of Jacob and Israel, of Zion and Jerusalem; but the emphasis in these verses seems to be laid all along upon the hand of God in the calamities which they were groaning under. The grief is not so much that such and such things are done as that God has done them, that he appears angry with them; it is he that chastens them, and chastens them *in wrath* and *in his hot displeasure*; he has become their enemy, and fights against them; and this, this is the wormwood and the gall in the affliction and the misery.

I. Time was when God's delight was in his church, and he appeared to her, and appeared for her, as a friend. But now his displeasure is against her; he is angry with her, and appears and acts against her as an enemy. This is frequently repeated here, and sadly lamented. What he has done he has done *in his anger*; this makes the present day a melancholy day indeed with us, that it is *the day of his anger* (v. 1), and again (v. 2) it is *in his wrath*, and (v. 3) it is *in his fierce anger*, that he has *thrown down* and *cut off*, and (v. 6) *in the indignation of his anger*. Note, To those who know how to value God's favour nothing appears more dreadful than his anger; corrections in love are easily borne, but rebukes in love wound deeply. It is God's wrath that *burns against Jacob like a flaming fire* (v. 3), and it is a consuming fire; it *devours round about*, devours all her honours, all her comforts. This is the *fury that is poured out like fire* (v. 4), like the fire and brimstone which were rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah; but it was their sin that kindled this fire. God is such a tender Father to his children that we may be sure he is never angry with them but when they provoke him, and give him cause to be angry; nor is he ever angry more than there is cause for. God's covenant with them was that if they would *obey his voice* he would be *an enemy to their enemies* (Ex. 23:22), and he had been so as long as they kept close to him; but now he is an enemy to them; at least he is *as an enemy*, v. 5. He has *bent his bow like an enemy*, v. 4. He stood *with his right hand* stretched out against them, and a sword drawn in it *as an adversary*. God is not really an enemy to his people, no, not when he is angry with them and corrects them in anger. We may be sorely displeased against our dearest friends and relations, whom yet we are far from having an enmity to. But sometimes he is *as an enemy* to them, when all his providences concerning them seem in outward appearance to have a tendency to their ruin, when every thing made against them and nothing for them. But, blessed be God, Christ is *our peace*, our peacemaker, who has slain the enmity, and in him we may *agree with our adversary*, which it is our wisdom to do, since it is in vain to contend with him, and he offers us advantageous conditions of peace.

II. Time was when God's church appeared very bright, and illustrious, and considerable among the nations; but now *the Lord*

has covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud (v. 1), a dark cloud, which is very terrible to himself, and through which she cannot see his face; *a thick cloud* (so that word signifies), *a black cloud*, which eclipses all her glory and conceals her excellency; not such a cloud as that under which God conducted them through the wilderness, or that in which God took possession of the temple and filled it with his glory: no, that side of the cloud is now turned towards them which was turned towards the Egyptians in the Red Sea. *The beauty of Israel is now cast down from heaven to the earth*; their princes (2 Sa. 1:19), their religious worship, their beauty of holiness, all that which recommended them to the affection and esteem of their neighbours and rendered them amiable, which had *lifted them up to heaven*, was now withered and gone, because God had covered it with a cloud. He has *cut off all the horn of Israel* (v. 3), all her beauty and majesty (Ps. 132:17), all her plenty and fulness, and all her power and authority. They had, in their pride, lifted up their horn against God, and therefore justly will God *cut off their horn*. He disabled them to resist and oppose their enemies; he *turned back their right hand*, so that they were not able to follow the blow which they gave nor to ward off the blow which was given them. What can their right hand do against the enemy when God draws it back, and withers it, as he did Jeroboam's? Thus was the *beauty of Israel cast down*, when a people famed for courage were not able to stand their ground nor make good their post.

III. Time was when Jerusalem and the cities of Judah were strong and well fortified, were trusted to by the inhabitants and let alone by the enemy as impregnable. But now the lord has in anger *swallowed them up*; they are quite gone; the forts and barriers are taken away, and the invaders meet with no opposition: the stately structures, which were their strength and beauty, are pulled down and laid waste. 1. The Lord has in anger *swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob* (v. 2), both the cities and the country houses; they are burnt, or otherwise destroyed, so totally ruined that they seem to have been *swallowed up*, and no remains left of them. He has *swallowed up, and has not pitied*. One would have thought it a pity that such sumptuous houses, so well built, so well furnished, should be quite destroyed, and that some pity should have been had for the poor inhabitants that were thus dislodged and driven to wander; but God's wonted compassion seemed to fail: *He has swallowed up Israel*, as a lion swallows up his prey, v. 5. 2. He has *swallowed up* not only her common habitations, but her palaces, *all her palaces*, the habitations of their princes and great men (v. 5), though those were most stately, and strong, and rich, and well guarded. God's judgments, when they come with commission, level palaces with cottages, and as easily swallow them up. If palaces be polluted with sin, as theirs were, let them expect to be visited with a curse, which shall *consume them, with the timber thereof and the stones thereof*, Zec. 5:4. 3. He had destroyed not only their dwelling-places, but their *strong-holds*, their castles, citadels, and places of defence. These he has *thrown down in his wrath, and brought them to the ground*; for shall they stand in the way of his judgments, and give check to the progress of them? No; let them drop like leaves in autumn; let them be rased to the foundations, and made to touch the *ground*, v. 2. And again (v. 5), *He has destroyed his strong-holds*; for what strength could they have against God? And thus he *increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation*, for they could not but be in a dreadful consternation when they saw all their defence departed from them. This is again insisted on, v. 7-9. In order to the *swallowing up of her palaces*, he has *given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces*, which were their security, and, when they are *broken down*, the palaces themselves are soon broken into. The walls of palaces cannot

protect them, unless God himself be a wall of fire round about them. This God did *in his anger*, and yet he has done it deliberately. It is the result of a previous purpose, and is done by a wise and steady providence; for the Lord has *purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion*; he brought the Chaldean army in on purpose to do this execution. Note, Whatever desolations God makes in his church, they are all according to his counsels; he *performs the thing that is appointed for us*, even that which makes most against us. But, when it is done, he has *stretched out a line*, a measuring line, to do it exactly and by measure: hitherto the destruction shall go, and no further; no more shall be cut off than what is marked to be so. Or it is meant of *the line of confusion* (Isa. 34:11), a levelling line; for he will go on with his work; he *has not withdrawn his hand from destroying*, that right hand which he stretched out against his people as *an adversary*, v. 4. As far as the purpose went the performance shall go, and his hand shall accomplish his counsel to the utmost, and not be withdrawn. Therefore he made the *rampart and the wall*, which the people had rejoiced in and upon which perhaps they had *made merry*, to *lament*, and they *languished together*; the *walls and the ramparts*, or bulwarks, upon them, fell together, and were left to condole with one another on their fall. *Her gates* are gone in an instant, so that one would think they were sunk into the ground with their own weight, and *he has destroyed and broken her bars*, those bars of Jerusalem's gates which formerly *he had strengthened*, Ps. 147:13. Gates and bars will stand us in no stead when God has withdrawn his protection.

IV. Time was when their government flourished, their princes made a figure, their kingdom was great among the nations, and the balance of power was on their side; but now it is quite otherwise: *He has polluted the kingdom and the princes thereof*, v. 2. They had first polluted themselves with their idolatries, and then God dealt with them as with polluted things; he threw them to the dunghill, the fittest place for them. he has given up their glory, which was looked upon as sacred (that is a character we give to majesty), to be trampled upon and profaned; and no marvel that the king and the priest, whose characters were always deemed venerable and inviolable, are despised by every body, when God has, *in the indignation of his anger, despised the king and the priest*, v. 6. He has abandoned them; he looks upon them as no longer worthy of the honours conveyed to them by the covenants of royalty and priesthood, but as having forfeited both; and then Zedekiah the king was used despitefully, and Seraiah the chief priest put to death as a malefactor. The crown has fallen from their heads, for *her king and her princes are among the Gentiles*, prisoners among them, insulted over by them (v. 9), and treated not only as common persons, but as the basest, without any regard to their character. Note, It is just with God to debase those by his judgments who have by sin debased themselves.

V. Time was when the ordinances of God were administered among them in their power and purity, and they had those tokens of God's presence with them; but now those were taken from them, that part of the *beauty of Israel* was gone which was indeed their greatest beauty. 1. The ark was God's footstool, under the mercy-seat, between the cherubim; this was of all others the most sacred symbol of God's presence (it is called his *footstool*, 1 Chr. 28:2; Ps. 99:5; 132:7); there the Shechinah rested, and with an eye to this Israel was often protected and saved; but now he *remembered not his footstool*. The ark itself was suffered, as it should seem, to fall into the hands of the Chaldeans. God, being angry, threw that away; for it shall be no longer his footstool; the earth shall be so, as it had been before the ark was, Isa. 66:1. Of what little value are the tokens of his presence

when his presence is gone! Nor was this the first time that God gave his ark into captivity, Ps. 78:61. God and his kingdom can stand without that footstool. 2. Those that ministered in holy things had been *pleasant to the eye in the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion* (v. 4); they had been *purser than snow, whiter than milk* (ch. 4:7); none more pleasant in the eyes of all good people than those that did the service of the tabernacle. But now these are slain, and their *blood is mingled with their sacrifices*. Thus is the priest despised as well as the king. Note, When those that were pleasant to the eye in Zion's tabernacle are slain God must be acknowledged in it; he has done it, and the *burning which the Lord has kindled must be bewailed* but the whole house of Israel, as in the case of Nadab and Abihu, Lev. 10:6. 3. The temple was God's tabernacle (as the tabernacle, while that was in being, was called *his temple*, Ps. 27:4) and this *he has violently taken away* (v. 6); he has plucked up the stakes of it and cut the cords; it shall be no more a tabernacle, much less his; he has *taken it away*, as the keeper of a garden takes away his hovel or shade, when he has done with it and has no more occasion for it; he takes it down as easily, as speedily, and with a little regret and reluctance as if it were but a *cottage in a vineyard or a lodge in a garden of cucumbers* (Isa. 1:8), but a *booth which the keeper makes*, Job 27:18. When men profane God's tabernacle it is just with him to take it from them. God has justly refused to *smell their solemn assemblies* (Amos v. 21); they had provoked him to withdraw from them, and then no marvel that he has *destroyed his places of the assembly*; what should they do with the places when the services had become an abomination? He has now *abhorred his sanctuary* (v. 7); it has been defiled with sin, that only thing which he hates, and for the sake of that he abhors even his sanctuary, which he had delighted in and called *his rest for ever*, Ps. 132:14. Thus he had *done to Shiloh*. Now the enemies have made as great a *noise of revelling and blaspheming in the house of the Lord* as ever had been made with the temple-songs and music *in the day of a solemn feast*, Ps. 74:4. Some, by the *places of the assembly* (v. 6), understand not only the temple, but the synagogues, and the schools of the prophets, which the enemy had *burnt up*, Ps. 74:8. 4. The solemn feasts and the sabbaths had been carefully remembered, and the people constantly put in mind of them; but now the Lord has *caused those to be forgotten*, not only in the country, among those that lived at a distance, but even in Zion itself; for there were none left to remember them, nor were there the places left where they used to be observed. Now that Zion was in ruins no difference was made between sabbath time and other times; every day was a day of mourning, so that all the *solemn feasts were forgotten*. Note, It is just with God to deprive those of the benefit and comfort of sabbaths and solemn feasts who have not duly valued them, nor conscientiously observed them, but have profaned them, which was one of the sins that the Jews were often charged with. Those that have *seen the days of the Son of man*, and slighted them, may *desire to see one of those days* and not be permitted, Lu. 17:22. 5. The altar that had sanctified their gifts is now cast off, for God will no more accept their gifts, nor be honoured by their sacrifices, v. 7. The altar was *the table of the Lord*, but God will no longer keep house among them; he will neither feast them nor feast with them. 6. They had been blest with prophets and teachers of the law; but now *the law is no more* (v. 9); it is no more read by the people, no more expounded by the scribes; the tables of the law are gone with the ark; the book of the law is taken from them, and the people are forbidden to have it. What should those do with Bibles who had made no better improvement of them when they had them? *Her prophets also find no vision from the Lord*; God *answers them no more by prophets and dreams*, which was the melancholy case of Saul, 1 Sa. 28:15. They had

persecuted God's prophets, and despised the visions they had from the Lord, and therefore it is just with God to say that they shall have no more prophets, no more visions. Let them go to the prophets that had flattered and deceived them with visions of their own hearts, for they shall have none from God to comfort them, or tell them *how long*. Those that misuse God's prophets justly lose them.

Verses 10-22

Justly are these called *Lamentations*, and they are very pathetic ones, the expressions of grief in perfection, mourning and woe, and nothing else, like the contents of Ezekiel's roll, Eze. 2:10.

I. Copies of lamentations are here presented and they are painted to the life. 1. The judges and magistrates, who used to appear in robes of state, have laid them aside, or rather are stripped of them, and put on the habit of mourners (v. 10); the elders now sit no longer in the judgment-seats, the *thrones of the house of David*, but they *sit upon the ground*, having no seat to repose themselves in, or in token of great grief, as Job's friends *sat with him upon the ground*, Job 2:13. They open not their mouth in the gate, as usual, to give their opinion, but they *keep silence*, overwhelmed with grief, and not knowing what to say. They have *cast dust upon their heads, and girded themselves with sackcloth*, as deep mourners used to do; they had lost their power and wealth, and that made the grieve thus. *Ploratur lachrymis amissa pecunia veris—Genuine are the tears which we shed over lost property*. 2. The young ladies, who used to dress themselves so richly, and *walk with stretched-forth necks* (Isa. 3:16), now are humbled; *The virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground*; those are made to know sorrow who seemed to bid defiance to it and were always disposed to be merry. 3. The prophet himself is a pattern to the mourners, v. 11. His *eyes do fail with tears*; he has wept till he can weep no more, has almost wept his eyes out, wept himself blind. Nor are the inward impressions of grief short of the outward expressions. *His bowels are troubled*, as they were when he saw these calamities coming (Jer. 4:19, 20), which, one would think, might have excused him now; but even he, to whom they were no surprise, felt them an insupportable grief, to such a degree that his *liver is poured out on the earth*; he felt himself a perfect colliquation; all his entrails were melted and dissolved, as Ps. 22:14. Jeremiah himself had better treatment than his neighbours, better than he had had before from his own countrymen, nay, their destruction was his deliverance, their captivity his enlargement; the same that made them prisoners made him a favourite; and yet his private interests are swallowed up in a concern for the public, and he bewails the *destruction of the daughter of his people* as sensibly as if he himself had been the greatest sufferer in that common calamity. Note, The judgments of God upon the land and nation are to be lamented by us, though we, for our parts, may escape pretty well.

II. Calls to lamentation are here given: *The heart of the people cried unto the Lord*, v. 18. Some fear it was a cry, not of true repentance, but of bitter complaint; their heart was as full of grief as it could hold, and they gave vent to it in doleful shrieks and outcries, in which they made use of God's name; yet we will charitably suppose that many of them did in sincerity cry unto God for mercy in their distress; and the prophet bids them go on to do so: "*O wall of the daughter of Zion!* either you that stand upon the wall, you *watchmen on the walls* (Isa. 62:6), when you see the enemies encamped about the walls and making their approaches towards them, or *because of the wall* (that is the subject of the lamentation), because of the *breaking down of the*

wall (which was not done till about a month after the city was taken), because of this further calamity, let *the daughter of Zion lament still.*" This was a thing which Nehemiah lamented long after, Neh. 1:3, 4. "*Let tears run down like a river day and night, weep without intermission, give thyself no rest from weeping, let not the apple of thy eye cease.*" This intimates, 1. That the calamities would be continuing, and the causes of grief would frequently recur, and fresh occasion would be given them every day and every night to bemoan themselves. 2. That they would be apt, by degrees, to grow insensible and stupid under the hand of God, and would need to be still called upon to afflict their souls yet more and more, till their proud and hard hearts were thoroughly humbled and softened.

III. Causes for lamentation are here assigned, and the calamities that are to be bewailed are very particularly and pathetically described.

1. Multitudes perish by famine, a very sore judgment, and piteous is the case of those that fall under it. God had corrected them by scarcity of provisions through want of rain some time before (Jer. 14:1), and they were not brought to repentance by that lower degree of this judgment, and therefore now by the straitness of the siege God brought it upon them in extremity; for, (1.) The children died for hunger in their mothers' arms: *The children and sucklings*, whose innocent and helpless state entitles them to relief as soon as any, *swoon in the streets* (v. 11) *as the wounded* (v. 12), there being no food to be had for them; those that are starved die as surely as those that are stabbed. They lie a great while crying to their poor mothers for corn to feed them and wine to refresh them, for they are such as had been bred up to the use of wine and wanted it now; but there is none for them, so that at length *their soul is poured into their mothers' bosom*, and there they breathe their last. This is mentioned again (v. 19): *They faint for hunger in the top of every street.* Yet this is not the worst, (2.) There were some little children that were slain by their mothers' hands and eaten, v. 20. Such was the scarcity of provision that the *women ate the fruit* of their own bodies, even their children when they were but of *a span long*, according to the threatening, Deu. 28:53. The like was done in the siege of Samaria, 2 Ki. 6:29. Such extremities, nay, such barbarities, were they brought to by the famine. Let us, in our abundance, thank God that we have food convenient, not only for ourselves, but for our children.

2. Multitudes fall by the sword, which devours one as well as another, especially when it is in the hand of such cruel enemies as the Chaldeans were. (1.) They spared no character, no, not the most distinguished; even the *priest and the prophet*, who of all men, one would think, might expect protection from heaven and veneration on earth, *are slain*, not abroad in the field of battle, where they are out of their place, as Hophni and Phinehas, but in *the sanctuary of the Lord*, the place of their business and which they hoped would be a refuge to them. (2.) They spared no age, no, not those who, by reason of their tender or their decrepit age, were exempted from taking up the sword; for even they *perished by the sword.* "The young, who have not yet come to bear arms, and the old, who have had their *discharge, lie on the ground, slain in the streets*, till some kind hand is found that will bury them." (3.) They spared no sex: *My virgins and my young men have fallen by the sword.* In the most barbarous military executions that ever we read of the virgins were spared, and made part of the spoil (Num. 31:18, Judges 5:30), but here the virgins were put to the sword, as well as the young men. (4.) This was the *Lord's doing*; he suffered the sword of the Chaldeans to devour thus without distinction: *Thou has slain them in the day of thy anger*, for it is God that *kills*

and makes alive, and saves alive, as he pleases. But that which follows is very harsh: *Thou has killed, and not pitied*; for his soul is *grieved for the misery of Israel*. The enemies that used them thus cruelly were such as he had both mustered and summoned (v. 22): "*Thou hast called in, as in a solemn day, my terrors round about*, that is, the Chaldeans, who are such a terror to me;" enemies crowded into Jerusalem now as thickly as ever worshippers used to do on a solemn festival, so that they were quite overpowered with numbers, and none escaped nor remained; Jerusalem was made a perfect slaughter-house. Mothers are cut to the heart to see those whom they have taken such care of, and pains with, and whom they have been so tender of, thus inhumanly used, suddenly cut off, though not soon reared: *Those that I have swaddled, and brought up, has my enemy consumed*, as if they were brought forth for the murderer, like lambs for the butcher, Hosea 9:13. Zion, who was a mother to them all, lamented to see those who were brought up in her courts, and under the tuition of her oracles, thus made a prey.

3. Their false prophets cheated them, v. 14. This was a thing which Jeremiah had lamented long before, and had observed with a great concern (Jer. 14:13): *Ah! Lord God, the prophets say unto them, You shall not see the sword*; and here he inserts it among his lamentations: *Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee*; they pretended to discover for thee, and then to discover to thee, the mind and will of God, to see *the visions of the Almighty* and then to speak his words; but they were all vain and foolish things; their visions were all their own fancies, and, if they thought they had any, it was only the product of a crazed head or a heated imagination, as appeared by what they delivered, which was all idle and impertinent: nay, it is most likely that they themselves knew that the visions they pretended were counterfeit, and all a sham, and made use of only to colour that which they designedly imposed upon the people with, that they might make an interest in them for themselves. They are thy prophets, not God's prophets; he never sent them, nor were they pastors after his heart, but the people set them up, told them what they should say, so that they were *prophets after their hearts*. (1.) Prophets should tell people of their faults, should show them their sins, that they may bring them to repentance, and so prevent their ruin; but these prophets knew that would lose them the people's affections and contributions, and knew they could not reprove their hearers without reproaching themselves at the same time, and therefore *they have not discovered thy iniquity*; they saw it not themselves, or, if they did, saw so little evil in it, or danger from it, that they would not tell them of it, though that might have been a means, by taking away their iniquity, to turn away their captivity. (2.) Prophets should warn people of the judgments of God coming upon them, but these *saw for them false burdens*; the messages they pretended to deliver to them from God they knew to be false, and falsely ascribed to God; so that, by soothing them up in carnal security, they caused that banishment which, by plain dealing, they might have prevented.

4. Their neighbours laughed at them (v. 15): *All that pass by thee clap their hands at thee*. Jerusalem had made a great figure, got a great name, and borne a great sway, among the nations; it was the envy and terror of all about; and, when the city was thus reduced; they all (as men are apt to do in such a case) triumphed in its fall; *they hissed, and wagged the head*, pleasing themselves to see how much it had fallen from its former pretensions. *Is this the city* (said they) *that men called the perfection of beauty?* Ps. 50:2. How is it now the perfection of deformity! Where is all its beauty now? *Is this the city which was called*

the joy of the whole earth (Ps. 48:2), which rejoiced in the gifts of God's bounty and grace more than any other place, and which all the earth rejoiced in? Where is all its joy now and all its glorying? It is a great sin thus to make a jest of others' miseries, and adds very much affliction to the afflicted.

5. Their enemies triumphed over them, v. 16. Those that wished ill to Jerusalem and her peace now vent their spite and malice, which before they concealed; they now *open their mouths*, nay, they widen them; they *hiss and gnash their teeth* in scorn and indignation; they triumph in their own success against her, and the rich prey they have got in making themselves masters of Jerusalem: "*We have swallowed her up*; it is our doing, and it is our gain; it is all our own now. Jerusalem shall never be either courted or feared as she has been. *Certainly this is the day that we have long looked for; we have found it; we have seen it; aha! so would we have it.*" Note, The enemies of the church are apt to take its shocks for its ruins, and to triumph in them accordingly; but they will find themselves deceived; *for the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church.*

6. Their God, in all this, appeared against them (v. 17): *The Lord has done that which he had devised.* The destroyers of Jerusalem could have *no power against her unless it were given them from above.* They are but the sword in God's hand; it is he that has *thrown down, and has not pitied.* "In this controversy of his with us we have not had the usual instances of his compassion towards us." *He has caused their enemy to rejoice over thee* (see Job 30:11); *he has set up the horn of thy adversaries*, has given them power and matter for pride. This is indeed the highest aggravation of the trouble, that God has become their enemy, and yet it is the strongest argument for patience under it; we are bound to submit to what God does, for, (1.) It is the performance of his purpose: *The Lord has done that which he had devised*; it is done with counsel and deliberation, not rashly, or upon a sudden resolve; it is the *evil that he has framed* (Jer. 18:11), and we may be sure it is framed so as exactly to answer the intention. What God devises against his people is designed for them, and so it will be found in the issue. (2.) It is the accomplishment of his predictions; it is the fulfilling of the scripture; he has now *put in execution his word that he had commanded in the days of old.* When he gave them his law by Moses he told them what judgments he would certainly inflict upon them if they transgressed that law; and now that they have been guilty of the transgression of this law he had executed the sentence of it, according to Lev. 26:16, etc., Deu. 28:15. Note, In all the providences of God concerning his church it is good to take notice of the fulfilling of his word; for there is an exact agreement between the judgments of God's hand and the judgments of his mouth, and when they are compared they will mutually explain and illustrate each other.

IV. Comforts for the cure of these lamentations are here sought for and prescribed.

1. They are sought for and enquired after, v. 13. The prophet seeks to find out some suitable acceptable words to say to her in this case: *Wherewith shall I comfort thee, O virgin! daughter of Zion?* Note, We should endeavour to comfort those whose calamities we lament, and, when our passions have made the worst of them, our wisdom should correct them and labour to make the best of them; we should study to make our sympathies with or afflicted friends turn to their consolation. Now the two most common topics of comfort, in case of affliction, are here tried, but are laid by because they would not hold. We commonly endeavour to comfort our friends by telling them, (1.) That their case is not singular, nor without precedent; there are many whose trouble is greater, and lies heavier upon them, than theirs does; but Jerusalem's case will not admit this

argument: *"What thing shall I liken to thee, or what shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee? What city, what country, is there, whose case is parallel to thine? What witness shall I produce to prove an example that will reach thy present calamitous state? Alas! there is none, no sorrow like thine, because there is none whose honour was like thine."* (2.) We tell them that their case is not desperate, but that it may easily be remedied; but neither will that be admitted here, upon a view of human probabilities; for *thy breach is great, like the sea*, like the breach which the sea sometimes makes upon the land, which cannot be repaired, but still grows wider and wider. Thou art wounded, and *who shall heal thee?* No wisdom nor power of man can repair the desolations of such a broken shattered state. It is to no purpose therefore to administer any of these common cordials; therefore,

2. The method of cure prescribed is to address themselves to God, and by a penitent prayer to commit their case to him, and to be instant and constant in such prayers (v. 19): *"Arise out of thy dust, out of thy despondency, cry out in the night, watch unto prayer; when others are asleep, be thou upon thy knees, importunate with God for mercy; in the beginning of the watches, of each of the four watches, of the night (let thy eyes prevent them, Ps. 119:148), then pour out thy heart like water before the Lord, be free and full in prayer, be sincere and serious in prayer, open thy mind, spread thy case before the Lord; lift up thy hands towards him in holy desire and expectation; beg for the life of thy young children. These poor lambs, what have they done? 2 Sa. 24:17. Take with you words, take with you these words (v. 20), Behold, O Lord! and consider to whom thou hast done this, with whom thou hast dealt thus. Are they not thy own, the seed of Abraham thy friend and of Jacob thy chosen? Lord, take their case into thy compassionate consideration!"* Note, Prayer is a salve for every sore, even the sorest, a remedy for every malady, even the most grievous. And our business in prayer is not to prescribe, but to subscribe to the wisdom and will of God; to refer our case to him, and then to leave it with him. *Lord, behold and consider, and thy will be done.*

Chapter 3

The scope of this chapter is the same with that of the two foregoing chapters, but the composition is somewhat different; that was in long verse, this is in short, another kind of metre; that was in single alphabets, this is in a treble one. Here is, I. A sad complaint of God's displeasure and the fruits of it (v. 1–20). II. Words of comfort to God's people when they are in trouble and distress (v. 21–36). III. Duty prescribed in this afflicted state (v. 37–41). IV. The complaint renewed (v. 42–54). V. Encouragement taken to hope in God, and continue waiting for his salvation, with an appeal to his justice against the persecutors of the church (v. 55–66). Some make all this to be spoken by the prophet himself when he was imprisoned and persecuted; but it seems rather to be spoken in the person of the church now in captivity and in a manner desolate, and in the desolations of which the prophet did in a particular manner interest himself. But the complaints here are somewhat more general than those in the foregoing chapter, being accommodated to the case as well of particular persons as of the public, and intended for the use of the closet rather than of the solemn assembly. Some think Jeremiah makes these complaints, not only as an intercessor for Israel, but as a type of Christ, who was thought by some to be Jeremiah the weeping prophet, because he was much in tears (Mt. 16:14) and to him many of the passages here may be applied.

Verses 1-20

The title of the 102nd Psalm might very fitly be prefixed to this chapter—*The prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and pours out his complaint before the Lord*; for it is very feelingly and fluently that the complaint is here poured out. Let us observe the particulars of it. The prophet complains, 1. That God is angry. This gives both birth and bitterness to the affliction (v. 1): *I am the man, the remarkable man, that has seen affliction, and has felt it sensibly, by the rod of his wrath*. Note, God is sometimes angry with his own people; yet it is to be complained of, not as a sword to cut off, by only as a rod to correct; it is to them *the rod of his wrath*, a chastening which, though grievous for the present, will in the issue be advantageous. By this rod we must expect to *see affliction*, and, if we be made to see more than ordinary affliction by that rod, we must not quarrel, for we are sure that the anger is just and affliction mild and mixed with mercy. 2. That he is at a loss and altogether in the dark. Darkness is put for great trouble and perplexity, the want both of comfort and of direction; this was the case of the complainant (v. 2): *"He has led me by his providence, and an unaccountable chain of events, into darkness and not into light, the darkness I feared and not into the light I hoped for."* And (v. 6), *He has set me in dark places, dark as the grave, like those that are dead of old, that are quite forgotten, nobody knows who or what they were*. Note, The Israel of God, though children of light, sometimes *walk in darkness*. 3. That God appears against him as an enemy, as a professed enemy. God had been for him, but no *"Surely against me is he turned"* (v. 3), as far as I can discern; for *his hand is turned against me all the day. I am chastened every morning,*" Ps. 73:14. And, when God's hand is continually turned against us, we are tempted to think that his heart is turned against us too. God had said once (Hos. 5:14), *I will be as a lion to the house of Judah*, and now he has made his word good (v. 10): *"He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, surprising me with his judgments, and as a lion in secret places; so that which way soever I went I was in continual fear of being set upon and could never think myself safe."* Do men shoot at those

thy are enemies to? *He has bent his bow*, the bow that was ordained against the church's prosecutors, that is bent against her sons, v. 12. *He has set me as a mark for his arrow*, which he aims at, and will be sure to hit, and then *the arrows of his quiver enter into my reins*, give me a mortal wound, an inward wound, v. 13. Note, God has many arrows in his quiver, and they fly swiftly and pierce deeply. 4. That he is as one sorely afflicted both in body and mind. The Jewish state may now be fitly compared to a man wrinkled with age, for which there is no remedy (v. 4): *"My flesh and my skin has he made old; they are wasted and withered, and I look like one that is ready to drop into the grave; nay, he has broken my bones*, and so disabled me to help myself, v. 15. *He has filled me with bitterness*, a bitter sense of his calamities." God has access to the spirit, and can so embitter that as thereby to embitter all the enjoyments; as, when the stomach is foul, whatever is eaten sours in it: *"He has made me drunk with wormwood*, so intoxicated me with the sense of my afflictions that I know not what to say or do. *He has mingled gravel with my bread*, so that *my teeth are broken* with it (v. 16) and what I eat is neither pleasant nor nourishing. *He has covered me with ashes*, as mourners used to be, or (as some read it) *he has fed me with ashes. I have eaten ashes like bread*," Ps. 102:9. 5. That he is not able to discern any way of escape or deliverance (v. 5): *"He has built against me*, as forts and batteries are built against a besieged city. Where there was a way open it is now quite made up: *He has compassed me on ever side with gall and travel; I vex, and fret, and tire myself, to find a way of escape, but can find none*, v. 7. *He has hedged me about, that I cannot get out.*" When Jerusalem was besieged it was said to be *compassed in on every side*, Lu. 19:43. "I am chained; and as some notorious malefactors are double-fettered, and loaded with irons, so he *has made my chain heavy. He has also (v. 9) enclosed my ways with hewn stone*, not only hedged up my way *with thorns* (Hos. 2:6), but stopped it up with a stone wall, which cannot be broken through, so that *my paths are made crooked; I traverse to and fro, to the right hand, to the left, to try to get forward, but am still turned back.*" It is just with God to make those who walk in the crooked paths of sin, crossing God's laws, walk in the crooked paths of affliction, crossing their designs and breaking their measures. So (v. 11), *"He has turned aside my ways; he has blasted all my counsels, ruined my projects, so that I am necessitated to yield to my own ruin. He has pulled me in pieces; he has torn and is gone away* (Hos. 5:14), and has *made me desolate*, has deprived me of all society and all comfort in my own soul." 6. That God turns a deaf ear to his prayers (v. 8): *"When I cry and shout*, as one in earnest, as one that would make him hear, yet he *shuts out my prayer* and will not suffer it to have access to him." God's ear is wont to be open to the prayers of his people, and his door of mercy to those that knock at it; but now both are shut, even to one that *cries and shouts*. Thus sometimes God seems to be angry even against *the prayers of his people* (Ps. 80:4), and their case is deplorable indeed when they are denied not only the benefit of an answer, but the comfort of acceptance. 7. That his neighbours make a laughing matter of his troubles (v. 14): *I was a derision to all my people*, to all the wicked among them, who made themselves an one another merry with the public judgments, and particularly the prophet Jeremiah's griefs. I am their song, their *neginath*, or hand-instrument of music, their *tabret* (Job 17:6), that they play upon, as Nero on his harp when Rome was on fire. 8. That he was ready to despair of relief and deliverance: "Thou hast not only taken peace from me, but hast *removed my soul far off from peace* (v. 17), so that it is not only not within reach, but no within view. *I forget prosperity; it is so long since I had it, and so unlikely that I should ever recover it, that I have lost the idea of it. I have been so inured to sorrow*

and servitude that I know not what joy and liberty mean. I have even given up all for gone, concluding, *My strength and my hope have perished from the Lord* (v. 18); I can no longer stay myself upon God as my support, for I do not find that he gives me encouragement to do so; nor can I look for his appearing in my behalf, so as to put an end to my troubles, for the case seems remediless, and even my God inexorable." Without doubt it was his infirmity to say this (Ps. 77:10), for with God there is *everlasting strength*, and he is his people's never-failing hope, whatever they may think. 9. That grief returned upon every remembrance of his troubles, and his reflections were as melancholy as his prospects, v. 19, 20. Did he endeavour as Job did (Job 9:27), to *forget his complaint*? Alas! it was to no purpose; he remembers, upon all occasions, *the affliction and the misery, the wormwood and the gall*. Thus emphatically does he speak of his affliction, for thus did he think of it, thus heavily did it lie when he reviewed it! It was an affliction that was misery itself. *My affliction and my transgression* (so some read it), my trouble and my sin that brought it upon me; this was *the wormwood and the gall in the affliction and the misery*. It is sin that makes the cup of affliction a bitter cup. *My soul has them still in remembrance*. The captives in Babylon had all the miseries of the siege in their mind continually and the flames and ruins of Jerusalem still before their eyes, and *wept when they remembered Zion*; nay, they could *never forget Jerusalem*, Ps. 137:1, 5. *My soul, having them in remembrance, is humbled in me*, not only oppressed with a sense of the trouble, but in bitterness for sin. Note, It becomes us to have humble hearts under humbling providences, and to renew our penitent humiliations for sin upon every remembrance of our afflictions and miseries. Thus we may get good by former corrections and prevent further.

Verses 21-36

Here the clouds begin to disperse and the sky to clear up; the complaint was very melancholy in the former part of the chapter, and yet here the tune is altered and the mourners in Zion begin to look a little pleasant. But for hope, the heart would break. To save the heart from being quite broken, here is something *called to mind*, which gives ground for *hope* (v. 21), which refers to what comes after, not to what goes before. *I make to return to my heart* (so the margin words it); what we have had in our hearts, and have laid to our hearts, is sometimes as if it were quite lost and forgotten, till God by his grace make it return to our hearts, that it may be ready to us when we have occasion to use it. "*I recall it to mind; therefore have I hope*, and am kept from downright despair." Let us see what these things are which he calls to mind.

I. That, bad as things are, it is owing to the mercy of God that they are not worse. We are *afflicted by the rod of his wrath*, but *it is of the lord's mercies that we are not consumed*, v. 22. When we are in distress we should, for the encouragement of our faith and hope, observe what makes for us as well as what makes against us. Things are bad but they might have been worse, and therefore there is hope that they may be better. Observe here, 1. The streams of mercy acknowledged: *We are not consumed*. Note, The church of God is like Moses's bush, burning, yet *not consumed*; whatever hardships it has met with, or may meet with, it shall have a being in the world to the end of time. It is *persecuted* of men, *but not forsaken* of God, and therefore, though it is *cast down*, it is *not destroyed* (2 Co. 4:9), corrected, yet *not consumed*, refined in the furnace as silver, but *not consumed* as dross. 2. These streams followed up to the fountain: *It is of the Lord's mercies*. here are mercies in the plural number, denoting the abundance and variety of those mercies. God is an inexhaustible *fountain of mercy, the Father of*

mercies. Note, We all owe it to the sparing mercy of God *that we are not consumed*. Others have been consumed round about us, and we ourselves have been in the consuming, and yet *we are not consumed*; we are out of the grave; we are out of hell. Had we been dealt with *according to our sins*, we should have been consumed long ago; but we have been dealt with *according to God's mercies*, and we are bound to acknowledge it to his praise.

II. That even in the depth of their affliction they still have experience of the tenderness of the divine pity and the truth of the divine promise. They had several times complained that God had not pitied (ch. 2:17, 21), but here they correct themselves, and own, 1. That *God's compassions fail not*; they do not really fail, no, not even when in anger he seems to have *shut up his tender mercies*. These rivers of mercy run fully and constantly, but never run dry. No; *they are new every morning*; every morning we have fresh instances of God's compassion towards us; he visits us with them *every morning* (Job 7:18); *every morning does he bring his judgment to light*, Zep. 3:5. When our comforts fail, yet God's compassions do not. 2. That *great is his faithfulness*. Though the covenant seemed to be broken, they owned that it still continued in full force; and, though Jerusalem be in ruins, *the truth of the Lord endures for ever*. Note, Whatever hard things we suffer, we must never entertain any hard thoughts of God, but must still be ready to own that he is both kind and faithful.

III. That God is, and ever will be, the all-sufficient happiness of his people, and they have chosen him and depend upon him to be such (v. 24): *The Lord is my portion, saith my soul*; that is, 1. "When I have lost all I have in the world, liberty, and livelihood, and almost life itself, yet I have not lost my interest in God." Portions on earth are perishing things, but God is *portion for ever*. 2. "While I have an interest in God, therein I have enough; I have that which is sufficient to counterbalance all my troubles and make up all my losses." Whatever we are robbed of our portion is safe. 3. "This is that which I depend upon and rest satisfied with: *Therefore will I hope in him*. I will stay myself upon him, and encourage myself in him, when all other supports and encouragements fail me." Note, It is our duty to make God the portion of our souls, and then to make use of him as our portion and to take the comfort of it in the midst of our lamentations.

IV. That those who deal with God will find it is not in vain to trust in him; for, 1. He is good to those who do so, v. 25. He is good to all; *his tender mercies are over all his works*; all his creatures taste of his goodness. But he is in a particular manner *good to those that wait for him, to the soul that seeks him*. Note, While trouble is prolonged, and deliverance is deferred, we must patiently wait for God and his gracious returns to us. While we *wait for him* by faith, we must *seek him* by prayer: our souls must *seek him*, else we do not seek so as to find. Our seeking will help to keep up our waiting. And to those who thus wait and seek God will be gracious; he will show them his *marvellous lovingkindness*. 2. Those that do so will find it good for them (v. 26): *It is good* (it is our duty, and will be our unspeakable comfort and satisfaction) *to hope and quietly to wait for the salvation of the Lord*, to hope that it will come, though the difficulties that lie in the way of it seem insupportable, to wait till it does come, though it be long delayed, and while we wait to be quiet and silent, not quarrelling with God nor making ourselves uneasy, but acquiescing in the divine disposals. *Father, thy will be done*. If we call this to mind, we may have hope that all will end well at last.

V. That afflictions are really good for us, and, if we bear them aright, will work very much for our good. it is not only good to

hope and wait for the salvation, but it is good to be under the trouble in the mean time (v. 27): *It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.* Many of the young men were carried into captivity. To make them easy in it, he tells them that it was good for them to *bear the yoke* of that captivity, and they would find it so if they would but accommodate themselves to their condition, and labour to answer God's ends in laying that heavy yoke upon them. It is very applicable to the yoke of God's commands. it is good for young people to take that yoke upon them in their youth; we cannot begin too soon to be religious. it will make our duty the more acceptable to God, and easy to ourselves, if we engage in it when we are young. But here it seems to be meant of the yoke of affliction. Many have found it good to bear this in youth; it has made those humble and serious, and has weaned them from the world, who otherwise would have been proud and unruly, and *as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.* But when do we *bear the yoke* so that it is really *good for us to bear it in our youth?* He answers in the following verses, 1. When we are sedate and quiet under our afflictions, when we *sit alone and keep silence,* do not run to and fro into all companies with our complaints, aggravating our calamities, and quarrelling with the disposals of Providence concerning us, but retire into privacy, that we may *in a day of adversity consider, sit alone,* that we may converse with God and *commune with our own hearts,* silencing all discontented distrustful thoughts, and laying our hand upon our mouth, as Aaron, who, under a very severe trial, held his peace. We must keep silence under the yoke as those that have borne it upon us, not wilfully pulled it upon our own necks, but patiently submitted to it when God laid it upon us. When those who are afflicted in their youth accommodate themselves to their afflictions, fit their necks to the yoke and study to answer God's end in afflicting them, then they will find it good for them to bear it, for it yields *the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are thus exercised thereby.* 2. When we are humble and patient under our affliction. *He gets good by the yoke who puts his mouth in the dust,* not only *lays his hand upon his mouth,* in token of submission to the will of God in the affliction, but *puts it in the dust,* in token of sorrow, and shame, and self-loathing, at the remembrance of sin, and as one perfectly reduced and reclaimed, and brought as those that are vanquished to *lick the dust,* Ps. 72:9. And we must thus humble ourselves, *if so be there may be hope,* or (as it is in the original) *peradventure there is hope.* If there be any way to acquire and secure a good hope under our afflictions, it is this way, and yet we must be very modest in our expectations of it, must look for it with an *it may be,* as those who own ourselves utterly unworthy of it. Note, Those who are truly humbled for sin will be glad to obtain a good hope, through grace, upon any terms, though they *put their mouth in the dust* for it; and those who would have hope must do so, and ascribe it to free grace if they have any encouragements, which may keep their hearts from sinking into the dust when they put their mouth there. 3. When we are meek and mild towards those who are the instruments of our trouble, and are of a forgiving spirit, v. 30. *He gets good by the yoke who gives his cheek to him that smites him,* and rather *turns the other cheek* (Mt. 5:39) than returns the second blow. Our Lord Jesus has left us an example of this, for he *gave his back to the smiter,* Isa. 50:6. he who can bear contempt and reproach, and not *render railing for railing,* and bitterness for bitterness, who, when he is *filled full with reproach,* keeps it to himself, and does not retort it and empty it again upon those who filled him with it, but *pours it out before the Lord* (as those did, Ps. 123:4, whose *souls were exceedingly filled with the contempt of the proud*), he shall find that *it is good to bear the yoke,* that it shall turn to his spiritual advantage. The sum is, *If tribulation work patience, that patience will*

work *experience*, and that *experience a hope that makes not ashamed*.

VI. That God will graciously return to his people with seasonable comforts *according to the time that he has afflicted them*, v. 31, 32. *Therefore* the sufferer is thus penitent, thus patient, because he believes that God is gracious and merciful, which is the great inducement both to evangelical repentance and to Christian patience. We may bear ourselves up with this, 1. That, when we are cast down, yet we are not cast off; the father's correcting his son is not a disinheriting of him. 2. That though we may seem to be cast off for a time, while sensible comforts are suspended and desired salvations deferred, yet we are not really cast off, because not *cast off for ever*; the controversy with us shall not be perpetual. 3. That, whatever sorrow we are in, it is what God has allotted us, and his hand is in it. It is he that causes grief, and therefore we may be assured it is ordered wisely and graciously; and it is but *for a season*, and when need is, that we *are in heaviness*, 1 Pt. 1:6. 4. That God has compassions and comforts in store even for those whom he has himself grieved. We must be far from thinking that, though God cause grief, the world will relieve and help us. No; the very same that caused the grief must bring in the favour, or we are undone. *Una eademque manus vulnus opemque tulit*—*The same hand inflicted the wound and healed it*. he has torn, and he will heal us, Hos. 6:1. 5. That, when God returns to deal graciously with us, it will not be according to our merits, but according to his mercies, *according to the multitude*, the abundance, *of his mercies*. So unworthy we are that nothing but an abundant mercy will relieve us; and from that what may we not expect? And God's causing our grief ought to be no discouragement at all to those expectations.

VII. That, when God does cause grief, it is for wise and holy ends, and he takes not delight in our calamities, v. 33. he does indeed *afflict, and grieve the children of men*; all their grievances and afflictions are from him. But he does not do it *willingly, not from the heart*; so the word is. 1. He never afflicts us but when we give him cause to do it. He does not dispense his frowns as he does his favours, *ex mero motu*—*from his mere good pleasure*. If he show us kindness, it is because *so it seems good* unto him; but, if he write bitter things against us, it is because we both deserve them and need them. 2. He does not afflict with pleasure. he delights not in the death of sinners, or the disquiet of saints, but punishes with a kind of reluctance. He comes out of his place to punish, for his place is the mercy-seat. He delights not in the misery of any of his creatures, but, as it respects his own people, he is so far from it that in all their afflictions he is afflicted and his soul is grieved for the misery of Israel. 3. He retains his kindness for his people even when he afflicts them. If he does not *willingly grieve the children of men*, much less his own children. However it be, yet *God is good* to them (Ps. 73:1), and they may by faith see love in his heart even when they see frowns in his face and a rod in his hand.

VIII. That though he makes use of men as his hand, or rather instruments in his hand, for the correcting of his people, yet he is far from being pleased with the injustice of their proceedings and the wrong they do them, v. 34–36. Though God serves his own purposes by the violence of wicked and unreasonable men, yet it does not therefore follow that he countenances that violence, as his oppressed people are sometimes tempted to think. Hab. 1:13, *Wherefore lookest thou upon those that deal treacherously?* Two ways the people of God are injured and oppressed by their enemies, and the prophet here assures us that God does not approve of either of them:—1. If men injure them by force of arms, God does not approve of that. he does not

himself *crush under his feet the prisoners of the earth*, but he regards the cry of the prisoners; nor does he approve of men's doing it; nay, he is much displeased with it. It is barbarous to trample on those that are down, and to crush those that are bound and cannot help themselves. 2. If men injure them under colour of law, and in the pretended administration of justice,—if they *turn aside the right of a man*, so that he cannot discover what his rights are or cannot come at them, they are out of his reach,—if they *subvert a man in his cause*, and bring in a wrong verdict, or give a false judgment, let them know, (1.) That God sees them. It is *before the face of the Most High* (v. 35); it is in his sight, under his eye, and is very displeasing to him. They cannot but know it is so, and therefore it is in defiance of him that they do it. he is *the Most High*, whose authority over them they contemn by abusing their authority over their subjects, not considering that *he that is higher than the highest regardeth*, Eccl. 5:8. (2.) That God does not approve of them. More is implied than is expressed. The perverting of justice, and the subverting of the just, are a great affront to God; and, though he may make use of them for the correction of his people, yet he will sooner or later severely reckon with those that do thus. Note, However God may for a time suffer evil-doers to prosper, and serve his own purposes by them, yet he does not therefore approve of their evil doings. *Far be it from God that he should do iniquity*, or countenance those that do it.

Verses 37-41

That we may be entitled to the comforts administered to the afflicted in the foregoing verses, and may taste the sweetness of them, we have here the duties of an afflicted state prescribed to us, in the performance of which we may expect those comforts. I. We must see and acknowledge the hand of God in all the calamities that befall us at any time, whether personal or public, v. 37, 38. This is here laid down as a great truth, which will help to quiet our spirits under our afflictions and to sanctify them to us. 1. That, whatever men's actions are, it is God that overrules them: *Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass* (that designs a thing and bring his designs to effect), *if the Lord commandeth it not?* Men can do nothing but according to the counsel of God, nor have any power or success but what is given them from above. *A man's heart devises his way*; he projects and purposes; he says that he will do so and so (Jam. 4:13); *but the Lord directs his steps* far otherwise than he designed them, and what he contrived and expected does not *come to pass*, unless it be what God's hand and his counsel had determined before to be done, Prov. 16:9; Jer. 10:23. The Chaldeans said that they would destroy Jerusalem, and it came to pass, not because they said it, but because God commanded it and commissioned them to do it. Note, Men are but tools which the great God makes use of, and manages as he pleases, in the government of this lower world; and they cannot accomplish any of their designs without him. 2. That, whatever men's lot is, it is God that orders it: *Out of the mouth of the Most High do not evil and good proceed?* Yes, certainly they do; and it is more emphatically expressed in the original: *Do not this evil, and this good, proceed out of the mouth of the Most High?* Is it not what he has ordained and appointed for us? Yes, certainly it is; and for the reconciling of us to our own afflictions, whatever they be, this general truth must thus be particularly applied. This comfort I receive *from the hand of God, and shall I not receive that evil also?* so Job argues, ch. 2:10. Are we healthful or sickly, rich or poor? Do we succeed in our designs, or are we crossed in them? It is all what God orders; *every man's judgment proceeds from him. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away*; he forms the light and creates the darkness, as he did at first. Note, All the events of

divine Providence are the products of a divine counsel; whatever is done God has the directing of it, and the works of his hands agree with the words of his mouth; *he speaks, and it is done*, so easily, so effectually are all his purposes fulfilled.

II. We must not quarrel with God for any affliction that he lays upon us at any time (v. 39): *Wherefore does a living man complain?* The prophet here seems to check himself for the complaint he had made in the former part of the chapter, wherein he seemed to reflect upon God as unkind and severe. "Do I well to be angry? Why do I fret thus?" Those who in their haste have chidden with God must, in the reflection, chide themselves for it. From the doctrine of God's sovereign and universal providence, which he had asserted in the verses before, he draws this inference, *Wherefore does a living man complain?* What God does we must not open our mouths against, Ps. 39:9. Those that blame their lot reproach him that allotted it to them. The sufferers in the captivity must submit to the will of God in all their sufferings. Note, Though we may pour out our complaints before God, we must never exhibit any complaints against God. What! Shall *a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?* The reasons here urged are very cogent. 1. We are men; let us herein show ourselves men. Shall *a man complain?* And again, *a man!* We are men, and not brutes, reasonable creatures, who should act with reason, who should look upward and look forward, and both ways may fetch considerations enough to silence our complaints. We are men, and not children that cry for every thing that hurts them. We are men, and not gods, subjects, not lords; we are not our own masters, not our own carvers; we are bound and must obey, must submit. We are men, and not angels, and therefore cannot expect to be free from troubles as they are; we are not inhabitants of that world where there is no sorrow, but this where there is nothing but sorrow. We are men, and not devils, are not in that deplorable, helpless, hopeless, state that they are in, but have something to comfort ourselves with which they have not. 2. We are living men. Through the good hand of our God upon us we are alive yet, though dying daily; and shall *a living man complain?* No; he has more reason to be thankful for life than to complain of any of the burdens and calamities of life. Our lives are frail and forfeited, and yet we are alive; now *the living, the living, they should praise*, and not complain (Isa. 38:19); while there is life there is hope, and therefore, instead of complaining that things are bad, we should encourage ourselves with the hope that they will be better. 3. We are sinful men, and that which we complain of is the just *punishment of our sins*; nay, it is far less than our iniquities have deserved. WE have little reason to complain of our trouble, for it is our own doing; we may thank ourselves. Our own wickedness corrects us, Prov. 19:3. We have no reason to quarrel with God, for he is righteous in it; he is the governor of the world, and it is necessary that he should maintain the honour of his government by chastising the disobedient. Are we suffering for our sins? Then let us not complain; for we have other work to do; instead of repining, we must be repenting; and, as an evidence that God is reconciled to us, we must be endeavouring to reconcile ourselves to his holy will. Are we *punished for our sins?* It is our wisdom then to submit, and to kiss the rod; for, if we still walk contrary to God, he will punish us yet seven times more; for *when he judges he will overcome*. But, if we accommodate ourselves to him, though we be *chastened of the Lord* we shall not be *condemned with the world*.

III. We must set ourselves to answer God's intention in afflicting us, which is to bring sin to our remembrance, and to bring us home to himself, v. 40. These are the two things which our afflictions should put us upon. 1. A serious consideration of ourselves and a reflection upon our past lives. *Let us search and try our ways*, search what they have been, and then try

whether they have been right and good or no; search as for a malefactor in disguise, that flees and hides himself, and then try whether guilty or not guilty. Let conscience be employed both to search and to try, and let it have leave to deal faithfully, to accomplish a diligent search and to make an impartial trial. *Let us try our ways*, that by them we may try ourselves, for we are to judge of our state not by our faint wishes, but by our steps, not by one particular step, but by our ways, the ends we aim at, the rules we go by, and the agreeableness of the temper of our minds and the tenour of our lives to those ends and those rules. When we are in affliction it is seasonable to *consider our ways* (Hag. 1:5), that what is amiss may be repented of and amended for the future, and so we may answer the intention of the affliction. We are apt, in times of public calamity, to reflect upon other people's ways, and lay blame upon them; whereas our business is to *search and try our own ways*. We have work enough to do at home; we must each of us say, "What have I done? What have I contributed to the public flames?" that we may each of us mend one, and then we should all be mended. 2. A sincere conversion to God: "Let us *turn again to the Lord*, to him who is turned against us and whom we have turned from; to him let us turn by repentance and reformation, as to our owner and ruler. We have been with him, and it has never been well with us since we forsook him; let us therefore now turn again to him." This must accompany the former and be the fruit of it; *therefore* we must *search and try our ways*, that we may turn from the evil of them to God. This was the method David took. Ps. 119:59, *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies*.

IV. We must offer up ourselves to God, and our best affections and services, in the flames of devotion, v. 41. When we are in affliction, 1. We must look up to God as a *God in the heavens*, infinitely above us, and who has an incontestable dominion over us; for *the heavens do rule*, and are therefore not to be quarrelled with, but submitted to. 2. We must pray to him, with a believing expectation to receive mercy from him; for that is implied in our *lifting up our hands* to him (a gesture commonly used in prayer and sometimes put for it, as Ps. 141:2, *Let the lifting up of my hands be as the evening sacrifice*); it signifies our requesting mercy from him and our readiness to receive that mercy. (3.) Our hearts must go along with our prayers. We must *lift up our hearts with our hands*, as we must pour out our souls with our words. it is the heart that God looks at in that and every other service; for what will a sacrifice without a heart avail? If inward impressions be not in some measure answerable to outward expressions, we do but mock God and deceive ourselves. Praying is lifting up the soul to God (Ps. 25:1) as to *our Father in heaven*; and the soul that hopes to be with God in heaven for ever will thus, by frequent acts of devotion, be still learning the way thither and pressing forward in that way.

Verses 42-54

It is easier to chide ourselves for complaining than to chide ourselves out of it. The prophet had owned that a living man should not complain, as if he checked himself for his complaints in the former part of the chapter; and yet here the clouds return after the rain and the wound bleeds afresh; for great pains must be taken with a troubled spirit to bring it into temper.

I. They confess the righteousness of God in afflicting them (v. 42): *We have transgressed and have rebelled*. Note, It becomes us, when we are in trouble, to justify God, by owning our sins, and laying the load upon ourselves for them. Call sin a transgression, call it a rebellion, and you do not miscall it. This is the result of their searching and trying their ways; the more they enquired into them the worse they found them. Yet,

II. They complain of the afflictions they are under, not without some reflections upon God, which we are not to imitate, but, under the sharpest trials, must always think and speak highly and kindly of him.

1. They complain of his frowns and the tokens of his displeasure against them. Their sins were repented of, and yet (v. 42), *Thou hast not pardoned*. They had not the assurance and comfort of the pardon; the judgments brought upon them for their sins were not removed, and therefore they thought they could not say the sin was pardoned, which was a mistake, but a common mistake with the people of God when their souls are cast down and disquieted within them. Their case was really pitiable, yet they complain, *Thou hast not pitied*, v. 43. Their enemies persecuted and slew them, but that was not the worst of it; they were but the instruments in God's hand: "*Thou hast persecuted us, and thou hast slain us*, though we expected thou wouldst protect and deliver us." They complain that there was a wall of partition between them and God, and, (1.) This hindered God's favours from coming down upon them. The reflected beams of God's kindness to them used to be the beauty of Israel; but now "*thou hast covered us with anger*, so that our glory is concealed and gone; now God is angry with us, and we do not appear that illustrious people that we have formerly been thought to be." Or, "*Thou hast covered us up as men that are buried are covered up and forgotten*." (2.) It hindered their prayers from coming up unto God (v. 44): "*Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud*," not like that bright cloud in which he took possession of the temple, which enabled the worshippers to draw near to him, but like that in which he came down upon Mount Sinai, which obliged the people to stand at a distance. "This cloud is so thick *that our prayers* seem as if they were lost in it; they cannot *pass through*; we cannot obtain an audience." Note, The prolonging of troubles is sometimes a temptation, even to praying people, to question whether God be what they have always believed him to be, a prayer-hearing God.

2. They complain of the contempt of their neighbours and the reproach and ignominy they were under (v. 45): "*Thou hast made us as the off-scouring*, or scrapings, of the first floor, which are thrown to the dunghill." This St. Paul refers to in his account of the sufferings of the apostles. 1 Co. 4:13, *We are made as the filth of the world and are the off-scouring of all things*. "We are the *refuse*, or dross, *in the midst of the people*, trodden upon by every body, and looked upon as the vilest of the nations, and good for nothing but to be cast out as *salt* which *has lost its savour*. *Our enemies have opened their mouths against us* (v. 46), have *gaped upon us as roaring lions*, to swallow us up, or made mouths at us, or have taken liberty to say what they please of us." These complaints we had before, ch. 2:15, 16. Note, It is common for base and ill-natured men to run upon, and run down, those that have fallen into the depths of distress from the height of honour. But this they brought upon themselves by sin. If they had not made themselves vile, their enemies could not have made them so: but *therefore men call them reprobate silver, because the Lord has rejected them* for rejecting him.

3. They complain of the lamentable destruction that their enemies made of them (v. 47): *Fear and a snare have come upon us*; the enemies have not only terrified us with those alarms, but prevailed against us by their stratagems, and surprised us with the ambushes they laid for us; and then follows nothing but *desolation and destruction, the destruction of the daughter of my people* (v. 48), *of all the daughters of my city*, v. 51. The enemies, having taken some of them *like a bird in a snare, chased others as a harmless bird is chased by a bird of prey* (v. 52): *My enemies chased me sorely like a bird* which is beaten from

bush to bush, as Saul hunted David *like a partridge*. Thus restless was the enmity of their persecutors, and yet causeless. They have done it *without cause*, without any provocation given them. Though God was righteous, they were unrighteous. David often complains of those that *hated him without cause*; and such are the enemies of Christ and his church, Jn. 15:25. Their enemies chased them till they had quite prevailed over them (v. 53): *They have cut off my life in the dungeon*. They have shut up their captives in close and dark prisons, where they are as it were cut off *from the land of the living* (as v. 6), or the state and kingdom are sunk and ruined, the life and being of them are gone, and they are as it were thrown into the dungeon or grave and a *stone cast upon them*, such as used to be *rolled to the door of the sepulchres*. They look upon the Jewish nation as dead and buried, and imagine that there is not possibility of its resurrection. Thus Ezekiel saw it, in vision, *a valley full of dead and dry bones*. Their destruction is compared not only to the burying of a dead man, but to the sinking of a living man into the water, who cannot long be a living man there, v. 54. *Waters of affliction flowed over my head*. The deluge prevailed and quite overwhelmed them. The Chaldean forces broke in upon them *as the breaking forth of waters*, which rose so high as to *flow over their heads*; they could not wade, they could not swim, and therefore must unavoidably sink. Note, The distresses of God's people sometimes prevail to such a degree that they cannot find any footing for their faith, nor keep their head above water, with any comfortable expectation.

4. They complain of their own excessive grief and fear upon this account. (1.) The afflicted church is drowned in tears, and the prophet for her (v. 48, 49): *My eye runs down with rivers of water*, so abundant was their weeping; *it trickles down and ceases not*, so constant was their weeping, *without any intermission*, there being no relaxation of their miseries. The distemper was in continual extremity, and they had no better day. It is added (v. 51), *"My eye affects my heart. My seeing eye affects my heart.* The more I look upon the desolation of the city and country the more I am grieved. Which way soever I cast my eye, I see that which renews my sorrow, even *because of all the daughters of my city*," all the neighbouring towns, which were as daughters to Jerusalem the mother-city. Or, *My weeping eye affects my heart*; the venting of the grief, instead of easing it, did but increase and exasperate it. Or, *My eye melts my soul*; I have quite wept away my spirits; not only *my eye is consumed with grief, but my soul and my life are spent with it*, Ps. 31:9, 10. Great and long grief exhausts the spirits, and brings not only many a *gray head*, but many a green head too, *to the grave*. I weep, says the prophet, *more than all the daughters of my city* (so the margin reads it); he outdid even those of the tender sex in the expressions of grief. And it is no diminution to any to be much in tears for the sins of sinners and the sufferings of saints; our Lord Jesus was so; for, *when he came near, he beheld this same city and wept over it*, which the daughters of Jerusalem did not. (2.) She is overwhelmed with fears, not only grieves for what is, but fears worse, and gives up all for gone (v. 54): *"Then I said, I am cut off, ruined, and see no hope of recovery; I am as one dead."* Note, Those that are cast down are commonly tempted to think themselves cast off, Ps. 31:22; Jon. 2:4.

5. In the midst of these sad complaints here is one word of comfort, by which it appears that their case was not altogether so bad as they made it, v. 50. We continue thus weeping *till the Lord look down and behold from heaven*. This intimates, (1.) That they were satisfied that God's gracious regard to them in their miseries would be an effectual redress of all their grievances. "If God, who now *covers himself with a cloud*, as if he took no notice of our troubles (Job 22:13), would but shine forth, all would

be well; if he look upon us, *we shall be saved*," Ps. 80:19; Dan. 9:17. Bad as the case is, one favourable look from heaven will set all to rights. (2.) That they had hopes that he would at length look graciously upon them and relieve them; nay, they take it for granted that he will: "Though he contend long, he will not contend for ever, thou we deserve that he should." (3.) That while they continued weeping they continued waiting, and neither did nor would expect relief and succour from any hand but his; nothing shall comfort them but his gracious returns, nor shall any thing wipe tears from their eyes *till he look down*. Their eyes, which now *run down with water*, shall still *wait upon the Lord their God until he have mercy upon them*, Ps. 123:2.

Verses 55-66

We may observe throughout this chapter a struggle in the prophet's breast between sense and faith, fear and hope; he complains and then comforts himself, yet drops his comforts and returns again to his complaints, as Ps. 42. But, as there, so here, faith gets the last word and comes off a conqueror; for in these verses he concludes with some comfort. And here are two things with which he comforts himself:—

I. His experience of God's goodness even in his affliction. This may refer to the prophet's personal experience, with which he encourages himself in reference to the public troubles. He that has seasonably succoured particular saints will not fail the church in general. Or it may include the remnant of good people that were among the Jews, who had found that it was not in vain to wait upon God. In three things the prophet and his pious friends had found God good to them:—1. He had *heard their prayers*; though they had been ready to fear that the cloud of wrath was such as their *prayers could not pass through* (v. 44), yet upon second thoughts, or at least upon further trial, they find it otherwise, and that God had not said unto them, *Seek you me in vain*. When they were *in the low dungeon*, as *free among the dead*, they *called upon God's name* (v. 55); their weeping did not hinder praying. Note, Though we are cast into ever so low a dungeon, we may thence find a way of access to God in the highest heavens. *Out of the depths have I cried unto thee* (Ps. 130:1), as Jonah out of the whale's belly. And could God hear them out of the low dungeon, and would he? Yes, he did: *Thou hast heard my voice*; and some read the following words as carrying on the same thankful acknowledgment: *Thou didst not hide thy ear at my breathing, at my cry*; and the original will bear that reading. We read it as a petition for further audience: *Hide not thy ear*. God's having heard our voice when we *cried to him*, even out of *the low dungeon*, is an encouragement for us to hope that he will not at any time *hide his ear*. Observe how he calls prayer *his breathing*; for in prayer we breathe towards God, we breathe after him. Though we be but weak in prayer, cannot cry aloud, but only *breathe in groanings that cannot be uttered*, yet we shall not be neglected if we be sincere. Prayer is the breath of the new man, sucking in the air of mercy in petitions and returning it in praises; it is both the evidence and the maintenance of the spiritual life. Some read it, *at my gasping*. "When I lay gasping for life, and ready to expire, and thought I was breathing my last, then thou tookest cognizance of my distressed case." 2. He had silenced their fears and quieted their spirits (v. 57): "*Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee*; thou didst graciously assure me of thy presence with me, and give me to see thee nigh unto me, whereas I had thought thee to be at a distance from me." Note, When we draw nigh to God in a way of duty we may by faith see him drawing nigh to us in a way of mercy. But this was not all: *Thou saidst, Fear not*. This was the language of God's prophets preaching to them not to fear (Isa. 41:10, 13, 14), of his providence preventing

those things which they were afraid of, and of his grace quieting their minds, and making them easy, by the witness of his Spirit with their spirits that they were his people still, though in distress, and therefore ought not to fear. 3. He had already begun to appear for them (v. 58): "*O Lord! thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul*" (that is, as it follows), "*thou hast redeemed my life*, hast rescued that out of the hands of those who would have taken it away, hast saved that when it was ready to be swallowed up, hast given me that for a prey." And this is an encouragement to them to hope that he would yet further appear for them: "*Thou hast delivered my soul from death*, and therefore wilt deliver *my feet from falling*; thou hast *pleaded the causes of my life*, and therefore wilt plead my other causes."

II. He comforts himself with an appeal to God's justice, and (in order to the sentence of that) to his omniscience.

1. He appeals to God's knowledge of the matter of fact, how very spiteful and malicious his enemies were (v. 59): "*O Lord! thou hast seen my wrong*, that I have done no wrong at all, but suffer a great deal." He that knows all things knew, (1.) The malice they had against him: "*Thou hast seen all their vengeance*, how they desire to do me a mischief, as if it were by way of reprisal for some great injury I had done them." Note, We should consider, to our terror and caution, that God knows all the revengeful thoughts we have in our minds against others, and therefore we should not allow of those thoughts nor harbour them, and that he knows all the revengeful thoughts others have causelessly in their minds against us, and therefore we should not be afraid of them, but leave it to him to protect us from them. (2.) The designs and projects they had laid to do him a mischief: *Thou hast seen all their imaginations against me* (v. 60), and again, "*Thou hast heard all their imaginations against me* (v. 61), both the desire and the device they have to ruin me; whether it show itself in word or deed, it is known to thee; nay, though the products of it are not to be seen nor heard, yet their device against me all the day is perceived and understood by him to whom all things are naked and open." Note, The most secret contrivances of the church's enemies are perfectly known to the church's God, from whom they can hide nothing. (3.) The contempt and calumny wherewith they loaded him, all that they spoke slightly of him, and all that they spoke reproachfully: "*Thou hast heard their reproach* (v. 61), all the bad characters they give me, laying to my charge things that I know not, all the methods they use to make me odious and contemptible, even the *lips of those that rose up against me* (v. 62), the contumelious language they use whenever they speak of me, and that at their sitting down and rising up, when they lie down at night and get up in the morning, when they sit down to their meat and with their company, and when they rise from both, still I am their music; they make themselves and one another merry with my miseries, as the Philistines made sport with Samson." Jerusalem was the tabret they played upon. Perhaps they had some tune or play, some opera or interlude, that was called *the destruction of Jerusalem*, which, though in the nature of a tragedy, was very entertaining to those who wished ill to the holy city. Note, God will one day call sinners to account for all the hard speeches which they have spoken against him and his people, Jude 15.

2. He appeals to God's judgment upon this fact: "*Lord, thou hast seen my wrong*; there is no need of any evidence to prove it, nor any prosecutor to enforce and aggravate it; thou seest it in its true colours; and now I leave it with thee. *Judge thou my cause*, v. 59. Let them be dealt with," (1.) "As they deserve (v. 64): *Render to them a recompence according to the work of their hands*. Let them be dealt with as they have dealt with us; let thy hand be against them as their hand has been against us.

They have created us a great deal of vexation; now, Lord, *give them sorrow of heart* (v. 65), *perplexity of heart*" (so some read it); "let them be surrounded with threatening mischiefs on all sides, and not be able to see their way out. Give them *despondence of heart*" (so others read it); "let them be driven to despair, and give themselves up for gone." God can entangle the head that thinks itself clearest, and sink the heart that thinks itself stoutest. (2.) "Let them be dealt with according to the threatenings: *Thy curse unto them*; that is, let thy curse come upon them, all the evils that are pronounced in thy word against the enemies of thy people, v. 65. They have loaded us with curses; as they loved cursing, so let it come unto them, thy curse which will make them truly miserable. Theirs is causeless, and therefore fruitless, it shall not come; but thine is just, and shall take effect. Those whom thou cursest are cursed indeed. Let the curse be executed, v. 66. *Persecute and destroy them in anger*, as they persecute and destroy us in their anger. *Destroy them from under the heavens of the Lord*; let them have no benefit of the light and influence of the heavens. Destroy them in such a manner that all who see it may say, It is a destruction from the Almighty, who *sits in the heavens and laughs at them* (Ps. 2:4), and may own *that the heavens do rule*," Dan. 4:26. What is said of the idols is here said of their worshippers (who in this also shall be like unto them), *They shall perish from under these heavens*, Jer. 10:11. They shall be not only excluded from the happiness of the invisible heavens, but cut off from the comfort even of these visible ones, which are the *heavens of the Lord* (Ps. 115:16) and which those therefore are unworthy to be taken under the protection of who rebel against him.

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).

Verses 1-12

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 (1 Ki. 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* (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*, 1 Sa. 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, Deu. 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*, Num. 6. 2. That there were such among them in the most degenerate times appears from 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, Isa. 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, Jdg. 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, Mt. 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*, 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*, Ps. 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 (ch. 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 (Lev. 26:29, Deu. 28:53), and particularly against Jerusalem in the siege of the Chaldeans, Jer. 19:9; Eze. 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* (Rom. 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.

Verses 13-20

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* (Jer. 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 reproved and admonished 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 (2 Ki. 24:4) and which brought the last destruction upon Jerusalem (Jam. 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* (Ps. 82:5); and Christ says of the corrupt teachers, *They are blind leaders of the blind*, Mt. 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*," Isa. 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*, Deu. 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 (Ps. 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, Jer. 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.*

Verses 21-22

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 (Obad. 10), such their spleen at Jerusalem, of which they cried, *Rase it, rase it*, Ps. 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* (Isa. 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 (Eccl. 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 (Jer. 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.

Chapter 5

This chapter, though it has the same number of verses with the 1st, 2nd, and 4th, is not alphabetical, as they were, but the scope of it is the same with that of all the foregoing elegies. We have in it, I. A representation of the present calamitous state of God's people in their captivity (v. 1–16). II. A protestation of their concern for God's sanctuary, as that which lay nearer their heart than any secular interest of their own (v. 17, 18). III. A humble supplication to God and expostulation with him, for the returns of mercy (v. 19–22); for those that lament and do not pray sin in their lamentations. Some ancient versions call this chapter, "The Prayer of Jeremiah."

Verses 1-16

Is any afflicted? let him pray; and let him in prayer pour out his complaint to God, and make known before him his trouble. The people of God do so here; being overwhelmed with grief, they give vent to their sorrows at the footstool of the throne of grace, and so give themselves ease. They complain not of evils feared, but of evils felt: "*Remember what has come upon us*, v. 1. What was of old threatened against us, and was long in the coming, has now at length *come upon us*, and we are ready to sink under it. *Remember what is past, consider and behold what is present, and let not all the trouble we are in seem little to thee*, and not worth taking notice of," Neh. 9:32. Note, As it is a great comfort to us, so it ought to be a sufficient one, in our troubles, that God sees, and considers, and remembers, all that *has come upon us*; and in our prayers we need only to recommend our case to his gracious and compassionate consideration. The one word in which all their grievances are summer up is *reproach: Consider, and behold our reproach*. The troubles they were in compared with their former dignity and plenty, were a greater reproach to them than they would have been to any other people, especially considering their relation to God and dependence upon him, and his former appearances for them; and therefore this they complain of very sensibly, because, as it was a reproach, it reflected upon the name and honour of that God who had owned them for his people. *And what wilt thou do unto thy great name?*

I. They acknowledge the reproach of sin which they bear, *the reproach of their youth* (which Ephraim bemoans himself for, Jer. 31:19), of the early days of their nation. This comes in in the midst of their complaints (v. 7), but may well be put in the front of them: *Our fathers have sinned and are not; they are dead and gone, but we have borne their iniquities*. This is not here a peevish complaint, nor an imputation of unrighteousness to God, like that which we have, Jer. 31:29, Eze. 18:2. *The fathers did eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge*, and therefore *the ways of the Lord are not equal*. But it is a penitent confession of the sins of their ancestors, which they themselves also had persisted in, for which they now justly suffered; the judgments God brought upon them were so very great that it appeared that God had in them an eye to the sins of their ancestors (because they had not been remarkably punished in this world) as well as to their own sins; and thus God was justified both in his connivance at their ancestors (he *laid up their iniquity for their children*) and in his severity with them, on whom he visited that iniquity, Mt. 23:35, 36. Thus they do here, 1. Submit themselves to the divine justice: "Lord, thou art just in all that is brought upon us, for we are a seed of evil doers, children of wrath, and heirs of the curse; we are sinful, and we

have it by kind." Note, The sins which God looks back upon in punishing we must look back upon in repenting, and must take notice of all that which will help to justify God in correcting us. 2. They refer themselves to the divine pity: "Lord, *our fathers have sinned*, and we justly smart for their sins; but *they are not*; they were taken away from the evil to come; they lived not to see and share in these miseries that have *come upon us*, and we are left to *bear their iniquities*. Now, though herein God is righteous, yet it must be owned that our case is pitiable, and worthy of compassion." Note, If we be penitent and patient under what we suffer for the sins of our fathers, we may expect that he who punishes will pity, and will soon return in mercy to us.

II. They represent the reproach of trouble which they bear, in divers particulars, which tend much to their disgrace.

1. They are disseised of that good land which God gave them, and their enemies have got possession of it, v. 2. Canaan was their inheritance; it was theirs by promise. God gave it to them and their seed, and they held it by grant from his crown, (Ps. 136:21, 22); but now, "It is turned to strangers; those possess it who have no right to it, who are *strangers to the commonwealth of Israel and aliens from the covenants of promise*; they dwell in the houses that we built, and this is our reproach." It is the happiness of all God's spiritual Israel that the heavenly Canaan is an inheritance that they cannot be disseised of, that shall never be turned to strangers.

2. Their state and nation are brought into a condition like that of widows and orphans (v. 3): "*We are fatherless* (that is, helpless); we have none to protect us, to provide for us, to take any care of us. Our king, who is the father of the country, is cut off; nay, God our Father seems to have forsaken us and cast us off; *our mothers*, our cities, that were as fruitful mothers in Israel, *are now as widows*, are as wives whose husbands are dead, destitute of comfort, and exposed to wrong and injury, and this is our reproach; for we who made a figure are now looked on with contempt."

3. They are put hard to it to provide necessaries for themselves and their families, whereas once they lived in abundance and had plenty of every thing. Water used to be free and easily come by, but now (v. 4), *We have drunk our water for money*, and the saying is no longer true, *Usus communis aquarum—Water is free to all*. So hardly did their oppressors use them that they could not have a draught of fair water but they must purchase it either with money or with work. Formerly they had fuel too for the fetching; but now, "*Our wood is sold to us*, and we pay dearly for every faggot." Now were they punished for employing their children to gather wood for fire with which to *bake cakes for the queen of heaven*, Jer. 7:18. They were perfectly proscribed by their oppressors, were forbidden the use both of fire and water, according to the ancient form, *Interdico tibi aqua et igni—I forbid thee the use of water and fire*. But what must they do for bread? Truly that was as hard to come at as any thing, for (1.) Some of them sold their liberty for it (v. 6): "*We have given the hand to the Egyptians and to the Assyrians*, have made the best bargain we could with them, to serve them, that we might *be satisfied with bread*. We were glad to submit to the meanest employment, upon the hardest terms, to get a sorry livelihood; we have yielded ourselves to be their vassals, have parted with all to them, as the Egyptians did to Pharaoh in the years of famine, that we might have something for ourselves and families to subsist on." The neighbouring nations used to trade with Judah for wheat (Eze. 27:17), for it was a fruitful land; but now it *eats up the inhabitants*, and they are glad to make court to the Egyptians and Assyrians. (2.) Others of them ventured their lives for it (v. 9): *We got our bread with the peril of our lives*; when, being straitened by the siege and all provisions cut

off, they either sallied or stole out of the city, to fetch in some supply, they were in danger of falling into the hands of the besiegers and being put to the sword, *the sword of the wilderness* it is called, or *of the plain* (for so the word signifies), the besiegers lying dispersed every where in the plains that were about the city. Let us take occasion hence to bless God for the plenty that we enjoy, that we get our bread so easily, scarcely with the sweat of our face, much less *with the peril of our lives*; and for the peace we enjoy, that we can go out, and enjoy not only the necessary productions, but the pleasures of the country, without any fear of *the sword of the wilderness*.

4. Those are brought into slavery who were a free people, and not only their own masters, but masters of all about them, and this is as much as any thing their reproach (v. 5): *Our necks are under* the grievous and intolerable yoke of *persecution* (the iron yoke which Jeremiah foretold should be laid upon them, Jer. 28:14); we are used like beasts in the yoke, that wholly serve their owners, and are at the command of their drivers. That which aggravated the servitude was, (1.) That their labours were incessant, like those of Israel in Egypt, who were daily tasked, nay, overtasked: *We labour and have no rest*, neither leave nor leisure to rest. The oxen in the yoke are unyoked at night and have rest; so they have, by a particular provision of the law, on the sabbath day; but the poor captives in Babylon, who were compelled to work for their living, *laboured and had no rest*, no night's rest, no sabbath-rest; they were quite tired out with continual toil. (2.) That their masters were insufferable (v. 8): *Servants have ruled over us*; and nothing is more vexatious than *a servant when he reigns*, Prov. 30:22. They were not only the great men of the Chaldeans that commanded them, but even the meanest of their servants abused them at pleasure, and insulted over them; and they must be at their beck too. The curse of Canaan had now become the doom of Judah: *A servant of servants shall he be*. They would not be ruled by their God, and by his servants the prophets, whose rule was gentle and gracious, and therefore justly are they ruled with rigour by their enemies and their servants. (3.) That they saw no probable way for the redress of their grievances: *"There is none that doth deliver us out of their hand*; not only none to rescue us out of our captivity, but none to check and restrain the insolence of the servants that abuse us and trample upon us," which one would think their masters should have done, because it was a usurpation of their authority; but, it should seem, they connived at it and encouraged it, and, as if they were not worthy of the correction of gentlemen, they are turned over to the footmen to be spurned by them. Well might they pray, *Lord, consider and behold our reproach*.

5. Those who used to be feasted are now famished (v. 10): *Our skin was black like an oven*, dried and parched too, *because of the terrible famine*, the *storms of famine* (so the word is); for, though famine comes gradually upon a people, yet it comes violently, and bears down all before it, and there is no resisting it; and this also is their disgrace; hence we read of *the reproach of famine*, which in captivity they received among the heathen, Eze. 36:30.

6. All sorts of people, even those whose persons and characters were most inviolable, were abused and dishonoured. (1.) The *women were ravished*, even *the women in Zion*, that holy mountain, v. 11. The committing of such abominable wickednesses there is very justly and sadly complained of. (2.) The great men were not only put to death, but put to ignominious deaths. *Princes were hanged*, as if they had been slaves, *by the hands* of the Chaldeans (v. 12), who took a pride in doing this barbarous execution with *their own hands*. Some think that the dead bodies of the princes, after they were slain with the sword,

were hung up, as the bodies of Saul's sons, in disgrace to them, and as it were to expiate the nation's guilt. (3.) No respect was shown to magistrates and those in authority: *The faces of elders*, elders in age, elders in office, *were not honoured*. This will be particularly remembered against the Chaldeans another day. Isa. 47:6, *Upon the ancient hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke*.

(4.) The tenderness of youth was no more considered than the gravity of old age (v. 13): *They took the young men to grind at the hand-mills, nay, perhaps at the horse-mills. The young men have carried the grist* (so some), *have carried the mill, or mill-stones*, so others. They loaded them as if they had been beasts of burden, and so broke their backs while they were young, and made the rest of their lives the more miserable. Nay, they made *the little children* carry their wood home for fuel, and laid such burdens upon them that they *fell down under* them, so very inhuman were these cruel taskmasters!

7. An end was put to all their gladness, and their joy was quite extinguished (v. 14): *The young men*, who used to be disposed to mirth, have ceased *from their music*, have hung their harps upon the willow-trees. It does indeed well become old men to cease from their music; it is time to lay it by with a gracious contempt when *all the daughters of music are brought low*; but it speaks some great calamity upon a people when their young men are made to cease from it. It was so with the body of the people (v. 15): *The joy of their heart ceased*; they never knew what joy was since the enemy came in upon them like a flood, for ever since *deep called unto deep*, and one wave flowed in upon the neck of another, so that they were quite overwhelmed: *Our dance is turned into mourning*, instead of leaping for joy, as formerly, we sink and lie down in sorrow. This may refer especially to the joy of their solemn feasts, and the dancing used in them (Jdg. 21:21), which was not only modest, but sacred, dancing; this was *turned into mourning*, which was doubled on their festival days, in remembrance of their former pleasant things.

8. An end was put to all their glory. (1.) The public administration of justice was their glory, but that was gone: *The elders have ceased from the gate* (v. 14); the course of justice, which used to run down like a river, is now stopped; the courts of justice, which used to be kept with so much solemnity, are put down; for the judges are slain, or carried captive. (2.) The royal dignity was their glory, but that also was gone: *The crown has fallen from our head*, not only the *king* himself fallen into disgrace, but *the crown*; he has no successor; the regalia are all lost. Note, Earthly crowns are fading falling things; but, blessed be God, there is *a crown of glory that fades not away*, that never falls, *a kingdom that cannot be moved*. Upon this complaint, but with reference to all the foregoing complaints, they make that penitent acknowledgment, "*Woe unto us that we have sinned!* Alas for us! Our case is very deplorable, and it is all owing to ourselves; we are undone, and, which aggravates the matter, we are undone by our own hands. God is righteous, for *we have sinned.*" Note, All our woes are owing to our own sin and folly. If *the crown of our head be fallen* (for so the words run), if we lose our excellency and become mean, we may thank ourselves, we have by our own iniquity profaned our crown and *laid our honour in the dust*.

Verses 17-22

Here, I. The people of God express the deep concern they had for the ruins of the temple, more than for any other of their calamities; the interests of God's house lay nearer their hearts than those of their own (v. 17, 18): *For this our heart is faint*, and sinks under the load of its own heaviness; *for these things our eyes are dim*, and our sight is gone, as is usual in a

deliquium, or fainting fit. "It is *because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate*, the holy mountain, and the temple built upon that mountain. For other desolations our hearts grieve and our eyes weep; but for this our hearts faint and our eyes are dim." Note, Nothing lies so heavily upon the spirits of good people as that which threatens the ruin of religion or weakens its interests; and it is a comfort if we can appeal to God that that afflicts us more than any temporal affliction to ourselves. "The people have polluted the *mountain of Zion* with their sins, and therefore God has justly made it *desolate*, to such a degree that *the foxes walk upon it* as freely and commonly as they do in the woods." It is sad indeed when the *mountain of Zion* has become *a portion for foxes* (Ps. 63:10); but sin had first made it so, Eze. 13:4.

II. They comfort themselves with the doctrine of God's eternity, and the perpetuity of his government (v. 19): But *thou, O Lord! remainest for ever*. This they are taught to do by that psalm which is entitled, *A prayer of the afflicted*, Ps. 102:27, 28. When all our creature-comforts are removed from us, and our hearts fail us, we may then encourage ourselves with the belief, 1. Of God's eternity: *Thou remainest for ever*. What shakes the world gives no disturbance to him who made it; whatever revolutions there are on earth there is no change in the Eternal Mind; God is still the same, and *remains for ever* infinitely wise and holy, just and good; with him there is *no variableness nor shadow of turning*. 2. Of the never-failing continuance of his dominion: *Thy throne is from generation to generation*; the throne of glory, the throne of grace, and the throne of government, are all unchangeable, immovable; and this is matter of comfort to us when *the crown has fallen from our head*. When the thrones of princes, that should be our protectors, are brought to the dust, and buried in it, God's throne continues still; he still rules the world, and rules it for the good of the church. The Lord reigns, reigns for ever, even *thy God, O Zion!*

III. They humbly expostulate with God concerning the low condition they were now in, and the frowns of heaven they were now under (v. 20): *Wherefore dost thou forsake us so long time*, as if we were quite deprived of the tokens of thy presence? Wherefore dost thou defer our deliverance, as if thou hadst utterly abandoned us? Thou art the same, and, though the throne of thy sanctuary is demolished, thy throne in heaven is unshaken. But wilt thou not be the same to us?" Not as if they thought God had forgotten and forsaken them, much less feared his forgetting and forsaking them for ever; but thus they express the value they had for his favour and presence, which they thought it long that they were deprived of the evidence and comfort of. The last verse may be read as such an expostulation, and so the margin reads it: *For wilt thou utterly reject us? Wilt thou be perpetually wroth with us*, not only not smile upon us and remember us in mercy, but frown upon us and lay us under the tokens of thy wrath, not only not draw nigh to us, but cast us out of thy presence and forbid us to draw nigh unto thee? How ill this be reconciled with thy goodness and faithfulness, and the stability of thy covenant?" We read it, *But thou hast rejected us; thou hast given us cause to fear that thou hast. Lord, how long shall we be in this temptation?*" Note, Thou we may not quarrel with God, yet we may plead with him; and, though we may not conclude that he has cast off, yet we may (with the prophet, Jer. 12:1) humbly reason with him concerning his judgments, especially the continuance of the desolations of his sanctuary. IV. They earnestly pray to God for mercy and grace: "Lord, do not reject *us for ever*, but *turn thou us unto thee; renew our days*," v. 21. Though these words are not put last, yet the Rabbin, because they would not have the book to conclude with those melancholy words (v. 22), repeat this prayer again, that the sun may not set under a cloud, and so make these the last words

both in writing and reading this chapter. They here pray, 1. For converting grace to prepare and qualify them for mercy: *Turn us to thee, O Lord!* They had complained that God had forsaken and forgotten them, and then their prayer is not, *Turn thou to us*, but, *Turn us to thee*, which implies an acknowledgment that the cause of the distance was in themselves. God never leaves any till they first leave him, nor stands afar off from any longer than while they stand afar off from him; if therefore he turn them to him in a way of duty, no doubt but he will quickly return to them in a way of mercy. This agrees with that repeated prayer (Ps. 80:3, 7, 19), *Turn us again, and then cause thy face to shine. Turn us* from our idols to thyself, by a sincere repentance and reformation, *and then we shall be turned*. This implies a further acknowledgment of their own weakness and inability to turn themselves. There is in our nature a proneness to backslide from God, but no disposition to return to him till his grace works in us both *to will and to do*. So necessary is that grace that we may truly say, *Turn us or we shall not be turned*, but shall wander endlessly; and so powerful and effectual is that grace that we may as truly say, *Turn us, and we shall be turned*; for it is a day of power, almighty power, in which God's people are made a *willing people*, Ps. 110:3. 2. For restoring mercy: *Turn us to thee*, and then *renew our days as of old*, put us into the same happy state that our ancestors were in long ago and that they continued long in; let it be with us as it was *at the first*, and *at the beginning*, Isa. 1:26. Note, If God by his grace renew our hearts, he will be his favour *renew our days*, so that we shall *renew our youth as the eagle*, Ps. 103:5. Those that *repent, and do their first works*, shall rejoice, and recover their first comforts. God's mercies to his people have been *ever of old* (Ps. 25:6); and therefore they may hope, even then when he seems to have forsaken and forgotten them, that the mercy which was *from everlasting* will be *to everlasting*.