
LAMENTATIONS 4: 1 How the gold has become dim! The most pure gold has changed! The stones of the sanctuary are poured out at the head of every street.

The present deplorable sate of the nation is now contrasted with its ancient prosperity, Lam 4:1-12; and the unhappy change ascribed, in a great degree, to the profligacy of the priests and prophets, Lam 4:13-16. The national calamities are tenderly lamented, Lam 4:17-20. The ruin of the Edomites also, who had insulted the Jews in their distress, is ironically predicted, Lam 4:21. See Psa 137:7, and Oba 1:10-12. The chapter closes with a gracious promise of deliverance from the Babylonish captivity, Lam 4:22.

Verse 1

How is the gold become dim - The prophet contrasts, in various affecting instances, the wretched circumstances of the Jewish nation, with the flourishing state of their affairs in former times. Here they are compared to gold, זָהָב zahab, native gold from the mine, which, contrary to its nature, is become dim, is tarnished; and even the fine, the sterling gold, כֶּתֶם kethem, that which was stamped to make it current, is changed or adulterated, so as to be no longer passable. This might be applied to the temple, but particularly to the fallen priests and apostate prophets.

The stones of the sanctuary - אֲבֵנֵי קֹדֶשׁ abney kodesh, the holy stones; the Jewish godly men, who were even then the living stones of which God built his Church.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 2 The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, How are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!

Verse 2

The precious sons of Zion - The Jewish priests and Jewish believers.

Comparable to fine gold - Who were of the pure standard of holiness; holy, because God who called them is holy; but now esteemed no better than earthen pitchers - vessels of dishonor in comparison of what they once were.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 3 Even the jackals draw out the breast, they nurse their young ones: The daughter of my people has become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness.

Verse 3

Even the sea monsters draw out the breast - The whales give suck to their young ones. The word תַּנִּין tannin, signifies all large and cruel creatures, whether aquatic or terrestrial; and need not here be restrained to the former sort. My Old MS. Bible translates curiously: Not and the cruel bestis that ben clepid Lamya, and thei nakeden ther tetis, geve ther whelpis souken.

Like the ostriches in the wilderness - For her carelessness about her eggs, and her inattention to her young, the ostrich is proverbial.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 4 The tongue of the nursing child clings to the roof of his mouth for thirst: The young children ask bread, and no man breaks it to them.

Verse 4

The tongue of the sucking child - See the note on Lam 2:12 (note).

LAMENTATIONS 4: 5 Those who fed delicately are desolate in the streets: Those who were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills.

Verse 5

Embrace dunghills - Lie on straw or rubbish, instead of the costly carpets and sofas on which they formerly stretched themselves.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 6 For the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the sin of Sodom, That was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands were laid on her.

Verse 6

For the punishment - He thinks the punishment of Jerusalem far greater than that of Sodom. That was destroyed in a moment while all her inhabitants were in health and strength; Jerusalem fell by the most lingering calamities; her men partly destroyed by the sword, and partly by the famine.

Instead of no hands stayed on her, Blayney translates, "Nor were hands weakened in her." Perhaps the meaning is, "Sodom was destroyed in a moment without any human labor." It was a judgment from God himself: so the sacred text: "The Lord rained down fire and brimstone from the Lord out of heaven." See Gen 19:24.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 7 Her nobles were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk; They were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was as of sapphire.

Verse 7

Her Nazarites were purer than snow - נָזִיר nazir does not always signify a person separated under a religious vow; it sometimes denotes what is chief or eminent. It is applied to Joseph, Gen 49:26.

Blayney therefore translates here, Her Nobles. "Her nobles were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk;

They were ruddier on the bone than rubies; their veining was the sapphires."

On which he remarks: - "In the first line the whiteness of their skin is described, and in the second, their flesh;" and as גזר gazar signifies to divide and intersect, as the blue veins do on the surface of the body, these are without doubt intended.

Milk will most certainly well apply to the whiteness of the skin; the beautiful ruby to the ruddiness of the flesh; and the sapphire, in its clear transcendent purple, to the veins in a fine complexion. The reverse of this state, as described in the following verse, needs no explanation. The face was a dismal dark brown, the flesh gone, the skin shrivelled, and apparently wrapped round the bones.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 8 Their appearance is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets: Their skin clings to their bones; it is withered, it has become like a stick.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 9 Those who are killed with the sword are better than those who are killed with hunger; For these pine away, stricken through, for want of the fruits of the field.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 10 The hands of the pitiful women have boiled their own children; They were their food in the destruction of the daughter of my people.

Verse 10

The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children - See on Lam 2:20 (note). But here there is a reference to mothers eating their own children; and this was done, not by mothers cruel and brutal, but by נשים רחמניות nashim rachmaniyoth, the compassionate, the tender-hearted mothers. From these horrible scenes it is well to pass with as hasty a step as possible.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 11 The LORD has accomplished his wrath, he has poured out his fierce anger; He has kindled a fire in Zion, which has devoured its foundations.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 12 The kings of the earth didn't believe, neither all the inhabitants of the world, That the adversary and the enemy would enter into the gates of Jerusalem.

Verse 12

The kings of the earth - Jerusalem was so well fortified, both by nature and art, that it appeared as a miracle that it should be taken at all.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 13 It is because of the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, That have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her.

Verse 13

For the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests - These most wretched beings, under the pretense of zeal for the true religion, persecuted the genuine prophets, priests, and people of

God, and caused their blood to be shed in the midst of the city, in the most open and public manner; exactly as the murderous priests, and blood-thirsty preachers, under the reign of bloody Queen Mary, did in England. However, the profligate priests and idolatrous prophets in Jerusalem, only shed the blood of the saints of God there: but the sanguinary papists, in the above reign, burnt the blood here, for they burnt the people alive; and at the same time, in their worse than Molochean cruelty, consigned, with all the fervor peculiar to their then ruthless Church, the souls of those whom they thus massacred, to the bitter pains of eternal death! O earth, cover not thou their blood!

LAMENTATIONS 4: 14 They wander as blind men in the streets, they are polluted with blood, So that men can't touch their garments.

Verse 14

They have wandered as blind men in the streets - Rather, "They ran frantic through the streets, they were stained with blood." This was in their pretended zeal for their cause. Bishop Bonner, who was at the head of those sanguinary executions in England, was accustomed to buffet the poor Protestants, when on their examinations they were too powerful for him in argument: - "He proved his doctrine orthodox,

By apostolic blows and knocks."

Just as his elder brethren, the false priests and prophets of Jerusalem.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 15 Depart! they cried to them, Unclean! depart, depart, don't touch! When they fled away and wandered, men said among the nations, They shall not live here any more.

Verse 15

When they fled away - These priests and prophets were so bad, that the very heathen did not like to permit them to sojourn among them. The prophet now resumes the history of the siege.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 16 the LORD's anger has scattered them; he will no more regard them: They didn't respect the persons of the priests, they didn't favour the elders.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 17 Our eyes still fail, looking in vain for our help: In our watching we have watched for a nation that could not save.

Verse 17

We have watched for a nation - Viz., the Egyptians, who were their pretended allies, but were neither able nor wilting to help them against the Chaldeans.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 18 They hunt our steps, so that we can't go in our streets:

Our end is near, our days are fulfilled; for our end has come.

Verse 18

We cannot go in our streets - Supposed to refer to the darts and other missiles cast from the mounds which they had raised on the outside of the walls, by which those who walked in the streets were grievously annoyed, and could not shield themselves.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 19 Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the sky: They chased us on the mountains, they laid wait for us in the wilderness.

Verse 19

They pursued us upon the mountains - They hunted down the poor Jews like wild beasts in every part of the country by their marauding parties, whilst the great army besieged Jerusalem. But this may apply to the pursuit of Zedekiah. See what follows.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 20 The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was taken in their pits; Of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the nations.

Verse 20

The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord - That is, Zedekiah the king, who was as the life or the city, was taken in his flight by the Chaldeans, and his eyes were put out; so that he was wholly unfit to perform any function of government; though they had fondly hoped that if they surrendered and should be led captives, yet they should be permitted to live under their own laws and king in the land of their bondage.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 21 Rejoice and be glad, daughter of Edom, that dwell in the land of Uz: The cup shall pass through to you also; you shall be drunken, and shall make yourself naked.

Verse 21

Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom - A strong irony.

The cup also shall pass through unto thee - Thou who hast triumphed in our disasters shalt shortly have enough of thy own. They had joined themselves to the Chaldeans, (see Psa 137:7), and therefore they should share in the desolations of Babylon.

LAMENTATIONS 4: 22 The punishment of your iniquity is accomplished, daughter of Zion; he will no more carry you away into captivity: He will visit your iniquity, daughter of Edom; he will uncover your sins.

Verse 22

The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion - On the contrary: Rejoice, O Jerusalem, for thy captivity will soon end; thy sufferings are nearly completed; thou shalt soon return to thy own land: but he will visit thy iniquity, O Edom; he will discover thy sins. When sin is pardoned it is said to be covered: here, God says he will not cover the sins of Edom - he will not pardon them; they shall drink the cup of wrath.

The promise in this last verse may refer to Jerusalem under the Gospel. When they receive Christ crucified, they shall be gathered from all nations, become one with the Church among the Gentiles, be one flock under one and the same Shepherd, and shall be carried no more into captivity.