

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The prophet shows the dire effects of the Divine anger in the miseries brought on his country; the unparalleled calamities of which he charges, on a great measure, on the false prophets, Lamentations 2:1-14. In thus desperate condition, the astonishment and by-word of all who see her, Jerusalem is directed to sue earnestly for mercy and pardon, Lamentations 2:15-22.

Verse 1

How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud - The women in the eastern countries wear veils, and often very costly ones. Here, Zion is represented as being veiled by the hand of God's judgment. And what is the veil? A dark cloud, by which she is entirely obscured.

Instead of יְהוָה (Adonai), lord, twenty-four of Dr. Kennicott's MSS., and some of the most ancient of my own, read יְהוָה (Yehovah), Lord, as in Lamentations 2:2.

The beauty of Israel - His Temple.

His footstool - The ark of the covenant, often so called. The rendering of my old MS. Bible is curious: - And record not of his lital steging-stole of his feet, in the dai of his woodnesse.

To be wood signifies, in our ancient language, to be mad.

Verse 2

The Lord hath swallowed up - It is a strange figure when thus applied: but Jehovah is here represented as having swallowed down Jerusalem and all the cities and fortifications in the land: that is, he has permitted them to be destroyed. See Lamentations 2:6.

Verse 3

The horn of Israel - His power and strength. It is a metaphor taken from cattle, whose principal strength lies in their horns.

Hath drawn back his right hand - He did not support us when our enemies came against us.

Verse 4

He hath bent his bow - he stood with his right hand - This is the attitude of the archer. He first bends his bow; then sets his arrow upon the string; and, lastly, placing his right hand on the lower end of the arrow, in connection with the string, takes his aim, and prepares to let fly.

Verse 6

As if it were of a garden - As it were the garden of his own hedging. - Blayney.

The Lord hath caused the solemn feasts - By delivering us up into the hands of the enemy our religious worship is not only suspended, but all Divine ordinances are destroyed.

Verse 7

They have made a noise in the house of the Lord - Instead of the silver trumpets of the sanctuary, nothing but the sounds of warlike instruments are to be heard.

Verse 8

He hath stretched out a line - The line of devastation; marking what was to be pulled down and demolished.

Verse 9

Her gates are sunk into the ground - The consequence of their being long thrown down and neglected. From this it appears that the captivity had already lasted a considerable time.

Her king and her princes are among the Gentiles - Zedekiah and many of the princes were then prisoners in Babylon, another proof that the captivity had endured some time, unless all this be spoken prophetically, of what should be done.

Verse 10

Sit upon the ground - See the note on Lamentations 1:1.

Keep silence - No words can express their sorrows: small griefs are eloquent, great ones dumb.

Verse 11

Swoon in the streets of the city - Through the excess of the famine.

Verse 12

When their soul was poured out into their mothers' bosom - When, in endeavoring to draw nourishment from the breasts of their exhausted mothers, they breathed their last in their bosoms! How dreadfully afflicting was this!

Verse 13

What thing shall I take - Or, rather, as Dr. Blayney, "What shall I urge to thee?" How shall I comfort thee?

Thy breach is great like the sea - Thou hast a flood of afflictions, a sea of troubles, an ocean of miseries.

Verse 14

They have not discovered thine iniquity - They did not reprove for sin, they flattered them in their transgressions; and instead of turning away thy captivity, by turning thee from thy sins, they have pretended visions of good in thy favor, and false burdens for thy enemies.

Verse 15

The perfection of beauty - This probably only applied to the temple. Jerusalem never was a fine or splendid city; but the temple was most assuredly the most splendid building in the world.

Verse 16

This is the day that we looked for - Jerusalem was the envy of the surrounding nations: they longed for its destruction, and rejoiced when it took place.

Verse 17

The Lord hate done that - This and the sixteenth verse should be interchanged, to follow the order of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet; as the sixteenth has פ (phe) for its acrostic letter, and the seventeenth has א (ain), which should precede the other in the order of the alphabet.

Verse 18

O wall of the daughter of Zion - חֹמַת בַּת צִיּוֹן (chomath bath tsiyon), wall of the daughter of Zion. These words are probably those of the passengers, who appear to be affected by the desolations of the land; and they address the people, and urge them to plead with God day and night for their restoration. But what is the meaning of wall of the daughter of Zion? I answer I do not know. It is certainly harsh to say "O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night." Zion's ways may lament, and her streets mourn; but how the walls can be said to weep is not so easy to be understood, because there is no parallel for it. One of my most ancient MSS. omits the three words; and in it the text stands thus: "Their heart cried unto the Lord, Let tears run down like a river day and night; give thyself no rest," etc.

Let not the apple of thine eye cease - בַּת עַיִן (bath ayin) means either the pupil of the eye, or the tears. Tears are the produce of the eye, and are here elegantly termed the daughter of the eye. Let not thy tears cease. But with what propriety can we say to the apple or pupil of the eye, Do not cease! Tears are most certainly meant.

Verse 19

Arise, cry out in the night - This seems to refer to Jerusalem besieged. Ye who keep the night watches, pour out your hearts before the Lord, instead of calling the time of night, etc.; or, when you call it, send up a fervent prayer to God for the safety and relief of the place.

Verse 20

Consider to whom thou hast done this - Perhaps the best sense of this difficult verse is this: "Thou art our Father, we are thy children; wilt thou destroy thy own offspring? Was it ever heard that a mother devoured her own child, a helpless infant of a span long?" That it was foretold that there should be such distress in the siege, - that mothers should be obliged to eat their own children, is evident enough from Leviticus 26:29; Deuteronomy 28:53, Deuteronomy 28:56, Deuteronomy 28:57; but the former view of the subject seems the

most natural and is best supported by the context. The priest and the prophet are slain; the young and old lie on the ground in the streets; the virgins and young men are fallen by the sword. "Thou hast slain them in the day of thine anger; Thou hast killed, and not pitied." See Deuteronomy 4:10.

Verse 22

Thou hast called as in a solemn day - It is by thy influence alone that so many enemies are called together at one time; and they have so hemmed us in that none could escape, and none remained unslain or uncaptured, Perhaps the figure is the collecting of the people in Jerusalem on one of the solemn annual festivals. God has called terrors together to feast on Jerusalem, similar to the convocation of the people from all parts of the land to one of those annual festivals. The indiscriminate slaughter of young and old, priest and prophet, all ranks and conditions, may be illustrated by the following verses from Lucan, which appear as if a translation of the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first verses of this chapter: -

Nobilitas cum plebe perit; lateque vagatur

Ensis, et a nullo revocatum est pectore ferrum.

Stat cruor in Templis; multaque rubentia caede

Lubrica saxa madent. Nulli sua profuit aetas.

Non senes extremum piguit vergentibus annis

Praecipitasse diem; nec primo in limine vitae,

Infanti miseri nascentia rumpere fata.

Pharsal. lib. ii., 101.

"With what a slide devouring slaughter passed,

And swept promiscuous orders in her haste;

Whether noble and plebeian ranged the sword,

Nor pity nor remorse one pause afford!

The sliding streets with blood were clotted whether,

And sacred temples stood in pools of gore.

The ruthless steel, impatient of delay,

Forbade the sire to linger out his day:

It struck the bending father to the earth,

And cropped the wailing infant at its birth."

Rowe.