***Lamentations***

**Chapter 4**

**How the gold has lost its luster, the fine gold become dull! The sacred gems are scattered at the head of every street. 2 How the precious sons of Zion, once worth their weight in gold, are now considered as pots of clay, the work of a potter’s hands! 3 Even jackals offer their breasts to nurse their young, but my people have become heartless like ostriches in the desert. 4 Because of thirst the infant’s tongue sticks to the roof of its mouth; the children beg for bread, but no one gives it to them. 5 Those who once ate delicacies are destitute in the streets. Those nurtured in purple now lie on ash heaps. 6 The punishment of my people is greater than that of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment without a hand turned to help her. 7 Their princes were brighter than snow and whiter than milk, their bodies more ruddy than rubies, their appearance like sapphires. 8 But now they are blacker than soot; they are not recognized in the streets. Their skin has shriveled on their bones; it has become as dry as a stick. 9 Those killed by the sword are better off than those who die of famine; racked with hunger, they waste away for lack of food from the field. 10 With their own hands compassionate women have cooked their own children, who became their food when my people were destroyed. 11 The LORD has given full vent to his wrath; he has poured out his fierce anger. He kindled a fire in Zion that consumed her foundations. 12 The kings of the earth did not believe, nor did any of the world’s people, that enemies and foes could enter the gates of Jerusalem. 13 But it happened because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed within her the blood of the righteous. 14 Now they grope through the streets like men who are blind. They are so defiled with blood that no one dares to touch their garments. 15 “Go away! You are unclean!” men cry to them. “Away! Away! Don’t touch us!” When they flee and wander about, people among the nations say, “They can stay here no longer.” 16 The LORD himself has scattered them; he no longer watches over them. The priests are shown no honor, the elders no favor. 17 Moreover, our eyes failed, looking in vain for help; from our towers we watched for a nation that could not save us. 18 Men stalked us at every step, so we could not walk in our streets. Our end was near, our days were numbered, for our end had come. 19 Our pursuers were swifter than eagles in the sky; they chased us over the mountains and lay in wait for us in the desert. 20 The LORD’s anointed, our very life breath, was caught in their traps. We thought that under his shadow we would live among the nations. 21 Rejoice and be glad, O Daughter of Edom, you who live in the land of Uz. But to you also the cup will be passed; you will be drunk and stripped naked. 22 O Daughter of Zion, your punishment will end; he will not prolong your exile. But, O Daughter of Edom, he will punish your sin and expose your wickedness.**

Another lament over the fall of Jerusalem. Sometimes, submission to God comes only after a prolonged battle against resentment and bitterness. The poet lets cries of anguish have free reign. The intensity of pain is to call to mind how grievously the nation has sinned against God. A penitent realization of having offended a loving God is not in vain, for restoration to favor will follow when the punishment is accomplished. (TLSB)

**4:1** *How … !* See note on 1:1. (CSB)

 *gold … gems.* Symbolic of God’s chosen people (see v. 2). For the imagery see SS 5:11–12, 14–15; Zec 9:16; see also “The Babylonian Theodicy”: “O … my precious brother,… jewel of gold” (lines 56–57). (CSB)

 *become dull.* Lit. “changed”; contrast Mal 3:6. (CSB)

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, זהב zahab, native gold from the mine, which, contrary to its nature, is become dim, is tarnished; and even the fine, the sterling gold, כתם 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. (ACC)

 *at the head of every street.* See 2:19; Isa 51:20. (CSB)

"The hallowed stones are cast forth at all street corners," with utter disregard of their costliness. The two expressions together are a picture of the holy people of the Lord, consecrated to be a kingdom of priests unto the Lord. (Kretzmann)

**4:2** PRECIOUS SONS – This would include all its inhabitants, noble by virtue of the Lord's selection. (Kretzmann)

 *worth their weight in gold.* See Job 28:15–19. (CSB)

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. (ACC)

 *pots of clay … potter’s hands.* See Isa 45:9; 60:21 and notes. (CSB)

They were regarded as less valuable and therefore smashed. (TLSB)

**4:3** *my people.* See vv. 6, 10; see also note on 2:11. (CSB)

 LIKE OSTRICHES – For her carelessness about her eggs, and her inattention to her young, the ostrich is proverbial. (ACC)

**4:4** INFANTS TONGUE…ROOF OF MOUTH – There was no nourishment for infants since no one was left to distribute food, even if the supply had not been exhausted. (Kretzmann)

**4:5** *delicacies … purple.* See Ge 49:20. Purple was the color of royalty (see, e.g., Jdg 8:26; see also note on SS 7:5); cf. the expressions “born to the purple” and “royal blue.” (CSB)

They were very choicy in the selection of the viands which loaded down their tables. (Kretzmann)

 *destitute.* See note on 1:13. (CSB)

They were without homes and without food as well. (Kretzmann)

**4:6** *my people.* See note on 2:11. (CSB)

 *Sodom.* See note on Jer 20:16. (CSB)

 *overthrown in a moment.* And therefore spared the suffering of a lengthy siege (like that of Jerusalem). (CSB)

The catastrophe came upon Sodom with great suddenness, and no hands stayed on her, it was not necessary for any human hands to be active in her destruction, since the Lord Himself brought the calamity upon her. The fate of Jerusalem was more terrible than that of Sodom because her guilt was greater. Thus Sodom, for instance, was spared the slow tortures of hunger and pestilence by the suddenness of the punishment which ended her existence. (Kretzmann)

**4:7** THEIR PRINCES – Israel’s princes or rulers, separated from the rest of the people by virtue of the dignity of their office. (Kretzmann)

 *whiter … ruddy.* The Hebrew underlying these two words is translated “radiant … ruddy” in SS 5:10. (CSB)

 *than rubies.* See Job 28:18. (CSB)

Another word is or "corals." (Kretzmann)

 *sapphires.* See SS 5:14 and note – (Hebrew *sappir* (from which the English word “sapphire” comes). (CSB)

This probably refers to the blue lapis lazuli which abounds in the Middle East and not to the modern sapphire stone. (PBC); Isa 54:11 and note – (Cf. the “pavement made of sapphire” (a blue stone) in Ex 24:10 (see also Eze 1:26; 10:1). (CSB)

The description of the city may remind us of the one John saw in a vision on the Isle of Patmos (Revelation 21:9-27). The turquoise, sapphires, rubies, sparkling jewels, and precious stone all communicate the incredible beauty and priceless value of the city that God has prepared for those who love Him. (PBC)

**4:8** *skin has shriveled on their bones.* See Job 19:20. (CSB)

This was on account of the excessive loss of flesh which they had suffered. (Kretzmann)

**4:9** THEY WASTE AWAY – Such was the fate of the men, of the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem; far more pitiful was that of the women. (Kretzmann)

**4:10** See note on Jer 19:9. (CSB)

 COMPASSIONATE WOMEN – This is spoken of those who were tenderhearted and merciful, from whom one might have expected a different behavior. (Kretzmann)

The extremity of the case influenced even delicate and kind-hearted women to commit such horrible crimes. (Kretzmann)

 *my people.* See note on 2:11. (CSB)

**4:11** *fierce anger.* See note on 1:12. (CSB)

 *kindled a fire … consumed.* See note on Jer 17:27. (CSB)

This is the reference to the total destruction of the city by the punishment of Jehovah. Thus the Lord proved Himself a holy and a jealous God, who was bound to visit the iniquity of the sinners upon them. (Kretzmann)

**4:12** *people.* Or “rulers” (parallel to “kings”); the Hebrew form underlying this word is translated “king” in Am 1:5, 8. (CSB)

NOR…FOES ENTER – It had indeed been taken in the earlier years, by Shishak of Egypt and by Joash of Israel, 1 Kings 14; 2 Kings 14, but it had since been fortified to such an extent that it was regarded as impregnable; moreover, there was an idea prevailing among the surrounding nations that it was under the special protection of Jehovah. But the unheard-of had come to pass. (Kretzmann)

**4:13** *because of the sins of her prophets and … priests.* See Jer 26:7–11, 16; see also Jer 6:13–15; 23:11–12; Eze 22:26, 28. (CSB)

God holds false religious leaders accountable for the suffering their misleading words cause. These false leaders were also involved in murderous plots against the righteous (Jer 26:20-23). (TLSB)

**4:14** *grope … like men who are blind.* See Dt 28:28–29; Isa 29:9 and note; 59:10 and note; Zep 1:17. (CSB)

"They," the priests and prophets, "reeled through the streets, defiled with the blood which they had shed." (Kretzmann)

 *defiled with blood.* See Isa 59:3. (CSB)

**4:15** *unclean!* The cry of the person with a skin disease (see Lev 13:45). (CSB)

 *people … no longer.* Threatened in Dt 28:65–66. (CSB)

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. (ACC)

**4:16** Threatened in Dt 28:49–50. (CSB)

The rank, station, and age of the priests no longer shielded them from humiliation and degradation. (Kretzmann)

**4:17** *our eyes failed.* See Dt 28:28; Ps 69:3. (CSB)

The people confess that they ignored Jeremiah’s warning against the folly of trying to ward off the threatened punishment by alliances with Egypt and other nations (Jer 2:18, 36-37). (TLSB)

 *nation that could not save us.* For example, Egypt (see Eze 29:16). (CSB)

This was shown also by the fact that the small band of people remaining after the murder of Gedaliah fled to Egypt. But all their hopes were in vain; they found that their trust had been misplaced. (Kretzmann)

**4:18** COULD NOT WALK IN 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. (ACC)

 END HAS COME – This was the very existence as a nation was at an end. The city was taken, the bulk of its population transported to Babylon or put to the sword, and the remaining fugitives scattered among the nations. (Kretzmann)

**4:19** *eagles.* See Jer 4:13; 48:40 and notes. (CSB)

Their pursuit having begun instantly and having been carried forward with the greatest energy. (Kretzmann)

 CHASED US – 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. (ACC)

 *desert.* The “plains of Jericho” (Jer 39:5; 52:8). (CSB)

They were run down everywhere, even in the moat inaccessible places. (Kretzmann)

**4:20** *The Lord’s anointed.* King Zedekiah. (CSB)

As long as a king, “the Lord’s anointed” theocratic representative, occupied the throne in Jerusalem, the people felt that their existence among the nations was assured. But their trust in kings, considered essential, was shattered when King Zedekiah was trapped like an animal by the Babylonians (Jer 52:8-11). Jeremiah predicted that Zedekiah’s irresponsible administration of his royal office would have tragic results (Jer 37:17). (TLSB)

 *our very life breath.* Lit. “the breath of our nostrils,” a title used also of Pharaoh Rameses II in an inscription found at Abydos in Egypt. (CSB)

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. (ACC)

 *was caught.* See Jer 39:4–7; 52:7–11. (CSB)

 *shadow.* Protection (see note on Jdg 9:15). (CSB)

**4:21** *Edom.* See note on Jer 49:8. (CSB)

The foe of Israel is chosen. Edom exemplifies the fate awaiting all who attempt to thwart the coming of God’s kingdom. (TLSB)

 *land of Uz.* See Jer 25:20; see also note on Job 1:1. (CSB)

This was on the border of the great Arabian Plain. (Kretzmann)

 *cup.* See note on Jer 25:15. (CSB)

This is God's punishment. (Kretzmann)

 *stripped naked.* See 1:8; see also Jer 49:10; Na 3:5. (CSB)

They were to be heaped with shame as a result of the Chaldean conquest. On the other hand, there is comfort for the children of the Lord. (Kretzmann)

**4:22** *Daughter of Zion.* A personification of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. (CSB)

 *Expose your wickedness.* Contrast ps. 32:1; 85:2. (CSB)

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. (ACC)