

Lamentations

Chapter 4

The Holy Stones Lie Scattered

How the gold has grown dim, how the pure gold is changed! The holy stones lie scattered at the head of every street. 2 The precious sons of Zion, worth their weight in fine gold, how they are regarded as earthen pots, the work of a potter's hands! 3 Even jackals offer the breast; they nurse their young; but the daughter of my people has become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness. 4 The tongue of the nursing infant sticks to the roof of its mouth for thirst; the children beg for food, but no one gives to them. 5 Those who once feasted on delicacies perish in the streets; those who were brought up in purple embrace ash heaps. 6 For the chastisement of the daughter of my people has been greater than the punishment of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, and no hands were wrung for her. 7 Her princes were purer than snow, whiter than milk; their bodies were more ruddy than coral, the beauty of their form was like sapphire. 8 Now their face is blacker than soot; they are not recognized in the streets; their skin has shriveled on their bones; it has become as dry as wood. 9 Happier were the victims of the sword than the victims of hunger, who wasted away, pierced by lack of the fruits of the field. 10 The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they became their food during the destruction of the daughter of my people. 11 The LORD gave full vent to his wrath; he poured out his hot anger, and he kindled a fire in Zion that consumed its foundations. 12 The kings of the earth did not believe, nor any of the inhabitants of the world, that foe or enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem. 13 This was for the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed in the midst of her the blood of the righteous. 14 They wandered, blind, through the streets; they were so defiled with blood that no one was able to touch their garments. 15 "Away! Unclean!" people cried at them. "Away! Away! Do not touch!" So they became fugitives and wanderers; people said among the nations, "They shall stay with us no longer." 16 The LORD himself has scattered them; he will regard them no more; no honor was shown to the priests, no favor to the elders. 17 Our eyes failed, ever watching vainly for help; in our watching we watched for a nation which could not save. 18 They dogged our steps so that we could not walk in our streets; our end drew near; our days were numbered, for our end had come. 19 Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles in the heavens; they chased us on the mountains; they lay in wait for us in the wilderness. 20 The breath of our nostrils, the LORD's anointed, was captured in their pits, of whom we said, "Under his shadow we shall live among the nations." 21 Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the land of Uz; but to you also the cup shall pass; you shall become drunk and strip yourself bare. 22 The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter of Zion, is accomplished; he will keep you in exile no longer; but your iniquity, O daughter of Edom, he will punish; he will uncover your sins.

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 *gold*. Unlike other metals, gold does not tarnish. Yet Judah's "gold" has tarnished, revealing its true character. (TLSB)

grow dim. Lit. "changed"; contrast Mal 3:6. (CSB)

at the head of every street. See Isa 51:20. (CSB)

holy stones. The ashlar (dressed) stones that made up the temple and temple courts. (TLSB)

"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 fine gold. See Job 28:15–19. (CSB)

earthen pots... potter's hands. They were regarded as less valuable and therefore smashed. (TLSB)

4:3 *ostriches.* Known for abandoning their young (cf Jb 39:13–16). (TLSB)

4:4 *tongue of the nursing...sticks to the 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); 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)

perish in the streets. They were without homes and without food as well. (Kretzmann)

4:6 *Sodom.* The punishment of Sodom was less severe because it did not suffer the horrors of a long siege and the cruelties perpetuated by human agents. God dealt harshly with Israel because of her apostasy. Cf Jer 23:14; Ezk 16:48–51. (TLSB)

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 *her princes* – Israel's princes or rulers, separated from the rest of the people by virtue of the dignity of their office. (Kretzmann)

purier than snow...ruddy. The Hebrew underlying these two words is translated “radiant ... ruddy” in SS 5:10. (CSB)

than coral. See Job 28:18. (CSB)

Another word is or "corals." (Kretzmann)

sapphire. 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 *who wasted 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 *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)

4:11 *kindled a fire ... consumed*. 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 *kings*. Or “rulers” (parallel to “kings”); the Hebrew form underlying this word is translated “king” in Am 1:5, 8. (CSB)

Defended by the Lord, Jerusalem was impregnable against even such mighty conquerors as Sennacherib (Is 36–37). God’s promise of divine protection gave rise to Israel’s false sense of security (Jer 7; 26). (TLSB)

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 *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 *they wandered blind*. “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)

The lying prophets who came among God's people were eventually shunned like lepers. (TLSB)

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

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

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

They were run down everywhere, even in the most 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)

breath of our nostrils. A title used also of Pharaoh Rameses II in an inscription found at Abydos in Egypt. (CSB)

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

4:21 *Edom.* 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. This was on the border of the great Arabian Plain. (Kretzmann)

cup. This is God's punishment. (Kretzmann)

strip yourself bare. 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)

Ch 4 Jeremiah contrasts the wealth of Jerusalem's past with the poverty of its residents after the Babylonian conquest. The sins of the religious leaders come into focus as the cause for the destruction of the city. A note of hope appears at the end with a veiled reference to the eventual return of the exiles from Babylon (v 22). Spiritual leaders carry a great responsibility for the welfare of God's people (cf Jas 3:1). God sustained His people, and through their descendants raised up a Savior for all, Christ the Lord. • Father, send Your Spirit to strengthen Your shepherds, that they may teach Your Word in purity and truth. We pray through Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)