

The Lamentations of Jeremiah

The Argument

This book in Greek, Latin, and English hath its name from the subject matter of it, which is lamentation; so also amongst the Hebrew writers; but in the Hebrew it hath its name from the first word of the book, as also the five books of Moses have.

That it was wrote by Jeremiah none can reasonably question, because in the Hebrew it is styled, The Book of Jeremiah.

There is little controversy about the time or occasion of the writing of it. That the occasion was the miseries of the people, by reason of the famine, sword, and captivity, is evident to those that read any part of it; but whether they were those miseries which began with the death of Josiah, and held on till the city was taken, which was two and twenty or three and twenty years after, or those only which began with the siege and followed on many years, hath been doubted by some. That Jeremiah lamented for Josiah, and all the singing men and singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations, is plain from [2Ch 35:25](#). But that these were the forms they used, or that they were composed upon that sad account, appeareth not; and the miseries which the prophet mentioneth befell not the people in the time of Josiah, but during the siege, more than twenty years after Josiah's death. Nor is there any thing which looks like a lamentation for Josiah through the whole book, unless [Jer 4:20](#), which (as we shall show) may also be fairly interpreted of Zedekiah. Some think that Jeremiah began to write them upon the death of Josiah, and continued his style to the time of the captivity, setting down all the miseries the people suffered all along that time.

The scope of the writing as to those whom it immediately concerned is plain and obvious, viz. to affect the people with those judgments which came upon them for their sins: as to us, (upon whom the ends of the world are come,) to mind us to take heed of their sins, lest we be sharers in their plagues.

The book is made up of complaints of their lamentable condition, petitions unto God for mercy, and prophecies both of their better estate and the ruin of their enemies.

In the four first chapters are several alphabets of letters beginning the several verses, each verse beginning with a new letter, only [La 3:1-66](#), every three verses begin with a new letter; the mystery of which we do not understand, nor possibly was there any mystery intended in it, only the chapters were so composed for the advantage of our memories.

The whole book lets us see from what a height of dignity to what a depth of misery sin may bring nations, how much soever interested in God; and likewise directs us to our duty in such states of affliction and misery if we would obtain mercy.

Chapter 1

Jeremiah lamenteth the former excellency and present misery of Jerusalem for her sin, [La 1:1-11](#). She complaineth of her grief, [La 1:12-17](#); confesseth God's judgments to be righteous; and prayeth unto him, [La 1:18-22](#).

[La 1:1](#)

The interrogative particle *how*, once expressed and twice more understood in this verse, doth not so much inquire the cause or reason of the effect, as express admiration or lamentation. The prophet admires the miserable state of the city, which was full of people beyond the proportion of other cities, and now was solitary, so thin of people that scarce any could be seen in her streets. She that had a king, or rather a god, that was a husband to her, now was forsaken of God, her king taken from her, and she like a poor widow. She that was like a princess amongst the nations, that sometimes (as in David's time) had the Moabites, Ammonites, &c. tributaries to her, was now a tributary herself.

[La 1:2](#)

All her hours are hours of sadness, she doth not only mourn in the day time, but in the night also, when she should rest; her cheeks are like the grass in the morning, hanging full of drops, as if her head were a fountain of water, and her eyes rivers of tears. In her prosperity she had a great many friends that sought and courted her favour, with whom she made leagues and confederated (such were the Egyptians, Assyrians, &c.); but they were now so far from helping the Jews, that they helped their enemies, and dealt treacherously with them, becoming themselves enemies instead of assistants to them.

[La 1:3](#)

This is expounded as the cause why the Jews were carried into captivity, because of the servitude and oppression exercised amongst them, oppression by their rulers, and servitude more generally, keeping their servants beyond the year of jubilee, when they ought to have set them at liberty; and that this was one cause appeareth from [Jer 34:17](#): or if *because of affliction*, &c. be joined to the next words, the sense is plain, *she dwelleth amongst the heathen*, by reason of her low condition, and the state of servitude she is in; where she, that is, the Jews, have neither any satisfaction nor quiet in their own minds, nor are they by their enemies suffered to be at quiet any where. Those that pursued them with all violence to destroy them overtook them in places where they could not escape them, as huntsmen and others take their game by driving them into strait and narrow places.

[La 1:4](#)

The ways that lead to the temple have as unlovely a complexion as mourners, being overgrown, by reason that none goeth up as usually to the feasts of the passover, of tabernacles, &c. Either all the gates of Jerusalem, or the temple, or all her cities, are very thin of people, the places that use to be so full. Her priests that were wont to be so fully employed at festivals receiving the people's oblations, and offering sacrifices, they mourn, having now nothing to do. The virgins who in those feasts were wont to play with timbrels, [Ps 68:25](#), they now mourn, and persons of all ages and ranks are in bitterness.

[La 1:5](#)

God hath fulfilled his threatening, [De 28:43](#); the enemy is got *above us*, and *we are brought very low*, for the multitude of our sins, directly contrary to his promise in case of obedience, [La 1:13](#). Not only our young and old men, but the little children, have been driven like sheep before the enemy into a miserable captivity.

[La 1:6](#)

All the inhabitants of Zion have lost their former beauty; whatsoever splendour the city had, whether from the multitude or gallantry of her inhabitants, it is all gone; her nobles are become thin and ill-favoured, like beasts almost starved, their enemies pursue them to destroy them, and they have no strength to oppose or resist them.

[La 1:7](#)

The inhabitants of Jerusalem, now that they are in affliction and misery, have time to remember their former mercies, and with how many desirable things God had once blessed them, and compare her former state before she fell into the enemies' hands, with her present state now she is in their power. Now it is an affliction to them to hear her enemies mock at her sabbaths, which while they enjoyed they abused.

[La 1:8](#)

She is carried out of her own land into an enemy's country, and made a hissing and scorn to those who before revered her, (in all this God is righteous, for all orders of men have grievously sinned,) because they have seen the Lord stripping her of all her blessings, and exposing her to the scorn and reproach of all men, as strumpets are exposed.

[La 1:9](#)

He persisteth in his comparison of the Jewish people, either to a sluttish, nasty woman, or to an impudent woman that is not ashamed to expose her nastiness or wickedness to the view of all.

She remembereth not her last end, therefore she came down wonderfully; that is, the Jews never considered, or would not believe, what those degrees of sin would at last bring them to, and that hath been the cause of that prodigious calamity into which God had brought them.

O Lord, behold my affliction: for the enemy hath magnified himself: the prophet turns himself to God, whom he desires to behold the affliction of this people, that is, with a pitiful, compassionate eye. It is a very usual thing in Holy Scripture to signify the acts of the heart by the acts of the inward and outward senses, those especially of the memory, eye, and ear, because objects must be first brought in by the senses before they can affect the soul. Hence (the Scripture speaking of God after the manner of men) the servants of God desiring God to have compassion on them, show them favour, &c., desire him to *behold* and look upon their affliction.

[La 1:10](#)

Hath spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things; that is, hath got them into possession. By pleasant things are here to be understood the ornaments of the temple, upon which the enemy had laid violent hands; so this phrase of *spreading out the hand* is taken [Isa 25:11](#). The things of the sanctuary were always pleasant things to those that feared God; possibly those that little valued them before, now looked upon them in their true notion. We seldom know our mercies till we come to be deprived of them.

The heathen entered into her sanctuary; he means the Ammonites and Moabites, whom the law concerned, [De 23:3](#); some of whom probably assisted the Babylonians in the conquest of Judea.

[La 1:11](#)

He speaketh probably with reference to the siege, after which the people had scarcely any pleasant things to exchange for bread. The whole body of the people was in a sad condition; and in a land that ordinarily flowed with milk and honey, they were at loss for bread to eat, and gave any thing for something to satisfy their hunger.

See, O Lord, and consider; for I am become vile: the prophet sends up a sudden ejaculation to God, much like that [La 1:9](#). The argument he useth is drawn from the misery the people were in, expressed under the notion of being become vile, that is, miserable or contemptible.

[La 1:12](#)

The prophet speaks in the name of the Jewish church, as a woman in misery sitting by the way-side, and calling to passengers that came by to have compassion on her, suggesting to them that her affliction was no ordinary affliction, nor the effect of a common and ordinary providence, but the effect of the Lord's fierce anger, a most severe punishment.

[La 1:13](#)

By *fire* he means a judgment as consuming and as afflictive as fire in the bones, which had consumed the strength of the Jews.

He hath spread a net for my feet; that is, God had brought them into a condition wherein they were entangled, and could not get out. The holy man owneth God as the first cause of all the evil they suffered, and entitles God to their various kinds of afflictions, both in captivity and during the siege, looking beyond the Babylonians, who were the proximate instrumental cause.

[La 1:14](#)

Still the prophet eyeth God in all, and acknowledgeth his justice while he calls their afflictions the yoke of their transgressions, that is, which was put upon their neck, upon the same account that yokes are put about the necks of beasts that use to break hedges, &c. and bound to keep them fast. My punishments are twisted as cords, to make them more strong; I have a complication of judgments upon me, sword, famine, pestilence, captivity; they are not only prepared for my neck, but they are already put upon it. All my valiant men, the strength of my nation is broken; and I am so fallen, that I am not able to rise again.

[La 1:15](#)

In the midst of me, may be interpreted either as *pleonastical*, or as denoting the place in which they lost their valiant men, viz. in the midst of the city during the siege, not in the field.

He hath called an assembly against me to crush my young men; instead of those solemn assemblies that were wont to be called together within Jerusalem by sound of trumpet for the solemn worship of God, God had called an assembly of Chaldeans as adversaries against the city, to crush the inhabitants of it.

The Lord hath trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah, as in a wine-press; God had trodden upon the Jews as men use to stamp grapes in a wine-press, where they use to crush them to pieces to get out the juice, and then they throw the husks, that are good for nothing, upon the dunghills. These are but various expressions to set out the misery into which God had brought this people for their sins.

[La 1:16](#)

For these sore afflictions, and for my sins that have caused them, and for these impressions of Divine wrath which I discern in them, Lord! I that am thy prophet, and we that are Israelites indeed, weep, and that plentifully; having neither thee present with us as formerly to be our hope or comfort, nor any friend that will deal by us as friends sometimes do by others in swooning fits to fetch back their souls.

My children are desolate, because the enemy prevailed; either the other cities of Judah, (Jerusalem was the mother city,) or my people, my inhabitants, are wasted, destroyed, and made desolate, because the enemy hath prevailed.

[La 1:17](#)

The same in this verse is meant by *Zion, Jacob, and Jerusalem*, unless Zion more specially signifieth the Jews considered as a church, because of the temple built upon it. She spreadeth out her hands as in a posture of mourning, and bewailing herself; but she had none that could afford her any comfort. God had commanded concerning the Jews who were descended from Jacob, (their twelve tribes from his twelve sons,) that their enemies should encompass them. They were become loathsome and filthy even in the eyes of their enemies, like women which were separated from the congregation during their legal uncleanness.

[La 1:18](#)

The prophet either directeth those that feared God what they should say, or expresseth what many of them did say in the name of the rest, acknowledging both the Lord's justice and faithfulness, because they had been disobedient to the commandments of God.

Hear, I pray you, &c.; In these words the prophet only personates a passionate woman begging pity of all because her children were taken from her.

[La 1:19](#)

I desired help of my allies and confederates who courted my friendship and alliance in any prosperity, but they failed mine expectation, none of them either would or could succour me. My misery was such through the famine, that not only my common people, but those of the best rank in the city, magistrates and priests, fainted as they went along the street seeking bread to satisfy their hunger.

[La 1:20](#)

The petition is of the same nature as before, a petition for mercy, as the product of that pity and compassion which extreme misery begets in good souls, (and is ascribed unto God, though found in him in a much more perfect degree, [Ps 78:38](#); [86:15](#); [111:4](#)) through the eyes affecting the heart. The argument the prophet useth is drawn from the misery this people was now in, which he expresseth metaphorically, telling us their bowels were troubled, their heart turned, signifying the more inward disturbance of their mind; or more plainly, and that both generally, saying they were in distress, and more particularly by the great judgments of the sword and famine, the sword in the field, the famine in the city; unless the sword alone be meant both without and within the gates of the city. In all this the church justifieth God, confessing this was but the righteous product of her sin, by which, she having formerly subjected herself to God, had grievously rebelled; for as all men are born subjects to God, so by their sins they are become rebels; so it is a great aggravation of men's rebellion against the Lord, when they have formerly taken an oath of fealty to the Lord, and, as Moses said, avouched the Lord as their God.

[La 1:21](#)

The nations contiguous to me, Egypt, &c., those that before courted me, as pretended friends, have been no strangers to my bitter afflictions, that have brought forth sighs from me; but there is none of them can or will comfort me, but give me over as in a desperate case. The Edomites, [Ob 1:1-21](#), &c., and Moabites, and other heathen nations, with whom I have had hostility, they are glad at the great misery that hath befallen me. But thou hast declared thy pleasure for their destruction also, and hast by me proclaimed it, [Jer 49:1](#), and thou shalt in that day bring them into as sad a condition as the church of the Jews are now in. As they seldom in themselves feel those miseries which they have felt and compassionated in others; so men hardly escape their own share at last in those evils which they have rejoiced to see brought upon God's people.

[La 1:22](#)

This verse is another prophetic curse or imprecation, several of which we meet with in holy writ, [Ps 109:6-9](#); [137:8](#); [Jer 11:20](#); [18:23](#), and in many other texts; which would incline us to think that our Saviour's precept, [Mt 5:44](#), to pray for those that persecute us, backed by his own example, [Lu 23:34](#), and Stephen's; [Ac 7:60](#), is either to be interpreted of praying for the forgiveness of their sins, (we ought to desire the eternal condemnation of none,) or to be restrained to such as are our personal enemies, not the common enemies of the church of God. Our Saviour's precept most certainly is not to be so interpreted, but that we may lawfully pray for such evils to the implacable enemies of the church and people of God, as may restrain and weaken their hands, and put them out of a capacity of wasting the Lord's heritage: we are only obliged by it to wish well to their souls, and to desire no evil against them out of private revenge or malice, but only out of love to God, and zeal for his glory; but for their outward prosperity in their courses of enmity we ought no more to pray than against their eternal salvation; for this were to beg of God to encourage his enemies in their enmity against him. And though Jeremiah were a greater prophet than any of us can pretend to be, and had revelations of particular future contingencies which we have not; yet every one may prophesy a ruin to the enemies of God's church and people, and such as rejoice in their ruin; God never using a rod against his people which he doth not at last burn, nor ever

countenancing inhumanity in any, but much less when it is rooted in a malice against himself, and his interest in the world.

Chapter 2

Jeremiah lamenteth the misery of Jerusalem, and its causes, and their enemies' derision, [La 2:1-17](#). In exhortation to true sorrow and repentance; a fervent prayer, [La 2:18-22](#).

[La 2:1](#)

How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger? It hath been formerly observed that great states and kingdoms are often in Scripture expressed under the notion of daughters, [Ps 137:8](#); [Isa 10:30](#); [47:1](#), [5](#); [Jer 46:11](#); [La 4:21-22](#): the meaning is, How hath God obscured all the beauty and glory of the church and state of the Jews!

And cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel; that is, thrown them down from the highest pitch of glory and honour, to the meanest degree of baseness and servitude.

And remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger: the earth is called the Lord's footstool, [Isa 66:1](#); [Mt 5:35](#); [Ac 7:49](#), but here plainly the *temple* is understood, called God's footstool, [1Ch 28:2](#); and the whole temple seems rather to be understood than the ark, for we read of no indignity offered to the ark by the Chaldeans, more than to any other part of the temple; God had suffered the Chaldeans to burn the whole temple, and it may justly be doubted whether those other texts that mention a worshipping at God's footstool, [Ps 99:5](#); [132:7](#), be not to be understood of worshipping in the temple, for it was not the privilege of all the Jews to come so near the ark as to worship before that. The reason of the complaint is God's permission of the Chaldeans to burn the temple. See [Jer 52:13](#).

[La 2:2](#)

The Lord hath swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob, and hath not pitied; as he hath had no respect to his own house, so he hath had much less respect to the common habitations of the Jews.

He hath thrown down in his wrath the strong holds of the daughter of Judah; their military fortifications have been of no use to them, he hath made them to touch the ground, i.e. suffered the enemies to batter them to the earth.

He hath polluted the kingdom and the princes thereof; that is, either delivered them into the hands of pagans, whom to touch they judged a legal pollution, or else dealt with them as with a polluted thing, east them off, or brake them in pieces. All this is made the effect of God's wrath, and his work; for as a man is said to do that which he encourageth others to do, and assists them in doing; so God is said to have done this, because he did not only suffer the Chaldeans to do it, but used them as a rod in his hand, inclining them to do it, and assisting them in the execution of his wrath.

[La 2:3](#)

He hath cut off in his fierce anger all the horn of Israel; that is, the beauty and strength of Israel, so horn signifieth by a usual metaphor in Scripture, [Ps 74:4](#); [Jer 48:25](#), &c., the horn

being much the beauty of the beast, as also that member by which the beast puts forth its strength in assaulting its adversary.

He hath drawn back his right hand from before the enemy; either God hath drawn back his assistance which he was wont to give the Jews against their enemies; or Israel, through God's leaving of them, hath drawn back his right hand; but it seems rather to be understood of God's weakening the Israelites' right hands, so as they were not able to hold them up (as before) against their enemies.

He burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, which devoureth round about; God had consumed them, not in this or that part, but round about, as a fire seizing a house or heap of combustible matter at once, on all sides.

[La 2:4](#)

That is, God (whom by their sins they had provoked and made their enemy) behaved himself as an enemy, bending his bow, and stretching out his right hand, and slew their young men and maidens, who were pleasant to look upon; and had brought judgments upon them like fire, which devours without any discrimination.

[La 2:5](#)

See [La 2:2](#). Several pathetic expressions signifying the same things, properly imitating the dialect of mourners, whose passion suffers them not to speak according to art, but frequently they say the same things over and over.

[La 2:6](#)

The word translated *tabernacle* (say some) signifies a *hedge or fence*, and they would have it here so translated, and so the phrase should denote God's withdrawing his protection from the Jews; but it is no where so translated. It is another word used [Ps 80:12](#); [89:40](#). The most judicious interpreters think that the word here signifieth the *temple*, and the rather because of what followeth. By the *places of the assembly* may be understood the synagogues. By *the king and the priest* are meant persons of greatest rank and eminency, though it is thought here is a special reference to Zedekiah the king of Judah, and Seraiah who was the high priest, the former of which was miserably handled, the latter slain.

[La 2:7](#)

By *altar* and *sanctuary* seemeth not to be meant strictly here the places or buildings so called, which are said to be the Lord's, because he directed the making of them, and they were dedicated to his service, and used for no other use; but the stated worship and communion of the church of the Jews; as altar is taken, [1Co 10:18](#). God, by his suffering the place to be destroyed where alone they might sacrifice, seemed to have abhorred his own institutions, as it is said, *The prayers of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord*. He saith the Lord also had destroyed the most stately of their civil edifices; and the enemies, with their triumphs and blasphemies, had made as great noise, to the reproach and dishonour of God, as before those that sang holy songs, or played on instruments, were wont to make in the temple to the honour and glory of God.

[La 2:8](#)

The term *wall* in this verse seemeth to be taken in a metaphorical sense, for the strength and security of the Jews (the strength and security of a place lying much in its walls).

He hath stretched out a line: artificers use with lines not only to mark out places for building, but also for destruction, to direct them what to cut off; such a line is here meant.

He hath not withdrawn his hand from destroying; God had gone on in destroying them: and had made their walls and ramparts feeble, and to shake like a man under some languishing distemper, that had no strength left.

[La 2:9](#)

Her gates are sunk into the ground; that is, the gates of Jerusalem are destroyed and covered over with rubbish.

He hath destroyed and broken her bars; the bolts of the gates are broken.

Her king and her princes are among the Gentiles; Zedekiah and the nobles of Judah that were not slain were in miserable captivity.

The law is no more; the law was no more read and opened, nor was there any more sacrifices offered according to the prescript of it, nor any solemn feasts kept according to the direction of it.

Her prophets also find no vision from the Lord; they had but very few prophets amongst them from this time to the time of the gospel, and very few of those at this time alive had any revelations from God; we read only of this prophet, Ezekiel, Daniel, and three after the captivity, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

[La 2:10](#)

Sitting upon the ground, keeping silence, throwing dust on their heads, girding themselves with sackcloth, hanging down the head, were all of them postures, and actions, and gestures of mourners. The meaning of this whole verse is, that the whole city of Jerusalem was in a very sad state and condition, and all persons in it in a mournful posture; not the common people only, but the gravest of their magistracy and ministry, those who were wont to sit in the chairs of magistracy and of teachers. Their young women also, which used to be most brisk and frolic, those whose condition was furthest off from sorrow, and who were least disposed to it, were now all of them drowned in floods of it.

[La 2:11](#)

This whole verse is but expressive of the prophet's great affliction for the miseries come upon the Jews: he wept himself almost blind, his passion had disturbed his bodily humours, that his bowels were troubled; his gall lying under his liver, upon this disturbance was vomited up: they are all no more than expressions of very great affliction and sorrow.

For the destination of the daughter of my people; for the miseries befallen the Jews: he had mourned for their sins before, and for their plagues too which he had in prospect, [Jer 9:1](#); he now mourns for them as being come upon them: which mourning considered only as for their miseries, spake no more than the prophet's good nature and love to his country; but considered as the indication of God's wrath and displeasure, was also a godly sorrow.

Because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city; the children and sucklings fainted and swooned, either for want of water, or bread, or milk in their mothers' or nurses' breasts during the famine, occasioned by the long siege of the city. This appears in the next verse.

[La 2:12](#)

The little children, ignorant of the cause of the failure of their usual food, called to their mothers for it as formerly, being ready to faint and die, as men mortally wounded, for want of spirits and blood, use to faint, and died in their mothers' arms; for so I had rather interpret the phrase *poured out their souls*, than (as some) understand by *souls* the desires of their souls, for he is speaking of *sucklings* as well as more grown children: the phrase is capable of both senses.

[La 2:13](#)

The sum of this verse is, that the miserable condition of the people was both *incomparable* and *incurable*. There was no people whose miserable condition was in any degree parallel to the misery of the Jews. It is some comfort to persons in misery to consider that others are and have been, as miserable as they, but the prophet had not this topic from whence to fetch an argument of comfort to the Jews; there were none to whom he could liken them, nor was there any present cure for them; their breach was like a *sea-breach*, where the waters come in with such a torrent, that while the tide abates there is no making any bank of defence against them.

[La 2:14](#)

Not the Lord's prophets in thee, but those prophets to whom you chose rather to hearken, and whom you believed rather than me and others sent by God to reveal his will unto you, came and told you idle and vain stories, that those who were carried into captivity should after two years return, &c. And by telling you such smooth and pleasant things, tickled your humours instead of discovering your sins, which were bringing these judgments upon you; whereas they ought to have dealt freely and faithfully with you, and have made you sensible of your sins, and this might have prevented your miserable captivity. But they rather spent their breath in telling you false stories to encourage you in your sinful courses, and so proved to you the causes of your banishment; or else they told you false stories, which they pretended to be the causes of the captivity of your brethren, in the mean time concealing the true causes, and suffering you to run on in the same errors, till you came to be more miserable than those that went into captivity before you.

[La 2:15](#)

This was according to God's threatenings, [1Ki 9:8](#); [Jer 18:16](#); [19:8](#). God had poured out all his blessings upon this people, whatsoever might adorn them, or make them happy, so as all

people blessed the Jewish nation; but now the case was so altered, that all people scoffed at them, and hissed, and admired at the change which God had made.

[La 2:16](#)

As strangers that had no quarrels with nor prejudices against the Jews, passing by their country, and their great city Jerusalem, despised and scorned it; so their enemies with whom they had former quarrels, and who had taken up prejudices against them, they reproached and abused them, and triumphed in their ruin, and in the success of their arms against them, and blessed themselves, as having now seen the day they had looked and wished for.

[La 2:17](#)

God hath not surprised us by these providences, he gave us notice what he would do, and hath done no more than what he threatened long since, [Lev 26:16](#), &c.; [De 28:15](#), &c. It is true he hath severely punished us, so as in his dispensation there appear no prints of pity, he hath set up our enemies, and hath made them to triumph over his people, but in all this he hath but justified his truth, and fulfilled his word.

[La 2:18](#)

They cried unto God seriously, though not sincerely; from their heart, though not with their whole heart; either by the wall, or upon the wall, or (which is judged most probable) by occasion of the breaches made in the wall. Upon this he turns his discourse to the wall itself, and calls to it, or to those that were upon it, or near it, incessantly to mourn.

Let not the apple of thine eye cease; in the Hebrew it is, let not the daughter of thine eye cease. We call it the apple; the Latins, the pupil, or babe, of the eye.

[La 2:19](#)

The prophet calls upon the Jews not to be slothful in this their very evil day, but to rise up from their beds, and either at the beginning of the four watches, or at the beginning of each watch, at all times in the night, to betake themselves to God by prayer, and that not in a cold, lazy manner, but so as to pour out their hearts with their words; and he moveth them to it, as for their own sake, so for the sake of their young children, who every where were starved to death.

[La 2:20](#)

Consider to whom thou hast done this; that is, not to heathen, who never owned thee, nor were called by thy name, but to thine own people, called thy portion and thine heritage; let thy former relation to us, and our former acknowledgments of thee, prevail with thee. Wilt thou suffer, or should such a thing be, as for women to satisfy their hunger with the fruit of their own bodies, and that when they are very young? And shall thy ministers be slain, and that in thy sanctuary? Any human blood polluted it; shall not the blood of those that were the ministers of God be judged a pollution and profanation of it?

[La 2:21](#)

None of what sex or age soever are spared: though the hands of the Chaldeans have done this, yet they have been set on and assisted by thee, and have been but the executioners of thy wrath and displeasure.

[La 2:22](#)

As my people were wont to be called together from all parts in a solemn day, when they were to meet at Jerusalem from all parts of Judea; so now by thy providence my terrible enemies, or terrible things, are by thee called together against that holy city, whither thy people were wont to be called to thy solemn worship. Thou hast made me as a great mother to bring Up many inhabitants that were my children, and now the enemy hath consumed the far greater number of them.

Chapter 3

The faithful bewail their misery and contempt, [La 3:1-21](#). They nourish their hope by consideration of the justice, providence, and mercies of God, [La 3:22-38](#). They stir up themselves to repentance, patience, prayers, and confidence of deliverance for themselves, and Divine vengeance on their enemies, [La 3:39-66](#).

[La 3:1](#)

Some understand this of the prophet, some of the people, who were before set out under the notion of a woman, a daughter, here of a man.

Affliction must here be taken emphatically for eminent degrees of affliction, caused not merely from the power and malice of the enemy, but from the wrath of God, though brought upon them by the Chaldeans, who were to the two tribes the rod of God's wrath, as the Assyrians are called with reference to the ten tribes, [Isa 10:5](#).

[La 3:2](#)

Darkness in Scripture (metaphorically taken) signifies *ignorance, sin, and misery*; and *light* signifies *knowledge, a state of grace, or a state of mirth and jollity*; they are both here taken in the latter sense, as light is taken, [Es 8:16](#); [Mic 7:8](#); [Job 18:5](#); [Ps 97:11](#); and also darkness is used, [Jer 13:16](#); [2Sa 22:29](#); [Pr 20:20](#); [Joe 2:2](#); [Eze 32:8](#). The sense is, God hath not brought me into a joyful and prosperous, but into a sad and calamitous, estate and condition.

[La 3:3](#)

The course of God's providence toward me is quite altered, his hand, that is, his power, which was wont to be with me, and for me, against my enemies, is now turned against me; nor is it for a moment, or for one stroke or two, but his hand is continually against me.

[La 3:4](#)

I was a virgin, young and fair, but I am quite altered, and am now as an old woman whose flesh is decayed, and my skin wrinkled; all my beauty is gone, and all my strength is gone; my bones, those in whom my strength consisted, are slain and broken.

[La 3:5](#)

He hath not builded with me, increasing my prosperity, and protecting my houses, but he hath builded forts, and batteries, and castles, (military buildings,) to batter down my walls and houses, [Isa 29:2-3](#). And compassed me with gall and travel; or with poison, venom, and misery, as some translate it; and it seems more proper than gall and travel, which have no cognation one with another. We are not well acquainted with the ancient dialect of other countries: the sense is obvious, God had surrounded them with misery and calamities.

[La 3:6](#)

The prophet compareth their state in Babylon to the state of bodies in the graves, or in some charnel-house, which are places of darkness, full of rottenness and dead men's bones. Such was the state of the Jews in Jerusalem during the time of the siege before the city was taken, when Jerusalem was a most miserable place by reason of the multitudes slain by the enemy, or by the famine: such was their state in Babylon, where the company of heathens made their state as the state of the living amongst the dead.

[La 3:7](#)

The use of a hedge about an enclosed field is twofold: 1. To keep out other beasts which belong not to the owner of the ground; in this sense God set a hedge sometimes about Canaan, [Isa 5:5](#). 2. To keep in those beasts that are within; thus God had now hedged them in, into a barren place where they had no pasture, but were continually pushed at by other beasts with whom they were mixed, and who were stronger than they, and they could not get out. God had dealt with them as with grievous malefactors, who are loaded with heavy chains. He had made their affliction heavy and insupportable.

[La 3:8](#)

In the condition I am in, I cannot help myself, no creatures can help me, I have no hope but in God. I take the ordinary course in that case, which is prayer, I pray fervently and aloud, as those that are serious and importunate for what they desire (for shouting here signifies no more than making a loud noise, not a loud noise of joy and rejoicing, as it mostly signifies); but he deals with me as great persons that have no mind to listen to suitors, and shut their gates against them, he shutteth out my supplications: which made their case wholly desperate and remediless.

[La 3:9](#)

Ways in Scripture ordinarily signifies men's courses, and methods of counsels, and actions; if the term be taken in that sense here, it signifieth God's defeating all their methods and counsels taken for their own security, in the pursuit of which they met not with ordinary, but

with insuperable difficulties, like walls of hewn stone. Nay, God had not only defeated their counsels, but had made them prove more fatal and pernicious to themselves, which seemeth to be intended, by making their ways crooked, which should have led right on to the end intended.

[La 3:10-11](#)

The same thing is repeated in other phrases which was before said, viz. that God had pleased by his providence to frustrate all the designs and counsels of the Jews, and miserably to destroy them, as a lion or a bear (the wild beasts mentioned before) tear in pieces the beasts they prey upon.

[La 3:12](#)

He hath prepared himself for acts of vindicative justice, and he hath made me the object of it.

[La 3:13](#)

That is, he hath made his judgments to pierce the most inward parts of the nation; or, he hath mortally wounded me. In the Hebrew it is, *the daughters of his quiver*, a way of speaking very usual in Hebrew, to express any thing that comes from another as the effect either of a natural or moral cause; so sparks are called the sons of the quick coal, [Job 5:7](#), and corn *the son of the floor*, &c.

[La 3:14](#)

Though some think the prophet speaks this of himself, yet, considering he hath all along spoken in the name of the people, it is not probable, which makes a difficulty, how the people could be a derision to themselves? It seemeth therefore ill translated, and that it should have been, *I was a derision to all people*, leaving out *my*, that is, to all foreigners, to whom the Jews were made a derision and a hissing; there only wants the last letter in עמי and it is well observed by the learned author of the English Annotations, that the like defect is to be found, as to the same word, [2Sa 22:41](#), compared with [Ps 18:43](#), so that ך is not a pronoun affix, (upon which supposal our translators go,) but one of the letters that form the plural number, the other being left out, and עמי put for עמים.

[La 3:15](#)

That is, he hath filled me with severe and bitter dispensations.

Wormwood is a bitter herb, but it is also a wholesome herb, and therefore some think that the Hebrew word should rather be translated *henbane*, and that it signifies some herb whose juice is intoxicating and poisonous.

[La 3:16](#)

These are but more metaphorical expressions, signifying the unpleasant difficult condition into which God had brought this people. They were like men that lived upon gritty bread, more fit to break their teeth than to nourish them; they were in the state of mourners, and no

ordinary mourners, who were wont to throw ashes on their heads, they were all over covered with ashes.

[La 3:17](#)

Peace here signifieth *prosperity*, rather than a *freedom from war*. Though during the siege they were far from peace in a strict sense, yet in their captivity they had that peace; but both their minds were far off from quiet, and their persons from prosperity: the prophet owneth God as the cause of this. They had in Canaan lived prosperously, but now they thought of it no more, nor understood what such a thing meant.

[La 3:18-19](#)

If, according to our translation, we read *Remembering*, or *While I remember*, these two verses contain but one sentence; in the former part the prophet in the name of this people expresseth their despairing condition; in the latter he gives the reason of it, viz. the people's poring upon their great and heavy afflictions, which he compares to wormwood and gall, two things excessively bitter, and often made use of to signify great affliction, [Ps 69:21](#); [Jer 8:14](#); [9:15](#); [23:15](#); [Re 8:11](#). But it may as well be read imperatively, *Remember* mine affliction; so the first of these two verses expresseth the dejection of the people's minds in their captivity, caused through their proneness to despair of any better condition that their angry God would bring them into. The 19th verse is a prayer directed to God, which showed that though they were mightily perplexed, yet they were not in utter despair; and to this sense the following verses seem to incline.

[La 3:20](#)

That is, I cannot forget them, and the thoughts of them sink my spirits.

[La 3:21](#)

This, not what was already said, that made them despair, and their souls to bow down; but this, that which followeth, concerning the nature of God, and other good providences. I see nothing in the circumstances of my condition to comfort me, but I see something in God's nature, and in some other dispensations of his providence, which gives me ground to hope for better things than an utter ruin and destruction.

[La 3:22](#)

Mercy is nothing else but love flowing freely from any to persons in misery, and differs from compassion only in the freeness of the emanation. It is not because God had not power enough utterly to have consumed us, nor because we had not guilt enough to have provoked his justice to have put an end to our lives, as well as to the lives of many thousands of our countrymen, but it is merely from the Lord's free love and pity to us in our miseries. If God had not a blessing in store for us, how is it that we are captives, and not slain as many others were during the siege?

[La 3:23](#)

These compassions of God are renewed day by day, to declare the great faithfulness of God in fulfilling his many promises made for mercy to his people.

[La 3:24](#)

God is the portion of his people, and they have chosen him as their portion; he hath declared himself to them as such, and they have accepted him as such. This gives them ground both for patience under his providences, and also of expectation of good from him in their lowest and meanest state.

[La 3:25](#)

Good is a term of a very comprehensive notion. The nature of it lieth in a suitableness to the thing or person to whom it relateth; so it signifieth *profit* and *pleasantness*. There is in God an essential goodness, which is his absolute perfection; but this text speaketh of a communicative goodness, which floweth from him to his creatures, and is seen in his suiting their various necessities and desires with satisfactory dispensations of providence. Though God be in one degree or oilier good to all, yet he is more especially good to the true worshippers of him; yet possibly not in their seasons or times when they expect or would have God show himself so to them, in this or that way, but always to those who wait for him, patiently enduring trials and afflictions until God please to send them deliverance.

[La 3:26](#)

Good here either signifies *honestum*, what becomes men, and is their duty; or *utile*, what is profitable, and will turn to good account to them. *Hoping* and *waiting* differ but as the mother and daughter, hope being the mother of patience and waiting; or as the *habit* and *act*, hoping and waiting being ranch the same, flowing from a gracious power and habit given the soul to wait. *Quietness* is necessary to waiting, for all turbulency and impatience of spirit under sad providences is opposed to waiting. *The salvation of the Lord* refers to the outward man, in preserving or delivering us from dangers; or to the soul and inward man, in preserving us from, and delivering our souls out of, dangers they fear, or evils they are pressed with. Now for a man in the midst of all evils to hope in God, and, without turbulence or disorder in himself, to wait for a preservation from, or a delivery out of, any evils, is what becometh a man, (a child of God especially,) and will turn to a good account to them.

[La 3:27](#)

Good here must be expounded in the same sense as in the foregoing verse. It is not pleasant, but it is profitable, it is honourable, what becomes us, and is our duty, quietly and patiently to bear what afflictions God will please to lay upon us, to restrain our wild and wanton spirits when they are most prone to be too brisk and lascivious. Some by yoke understand the law of God, called a *yoke*, (because indeed it is so to flesh and blood,) [Mt 11:29](#). It is not so easy to bend a neck stiffened with age, or change a heart made hard by custom. Solomon bids us to train up one in their youth in the way we would have them to walk; and whether God will tame us when young by his word or by his rod, it is of advantage to a man. It is also laudable, and what becomes a man, early to bear the yoke of God's law, or to bear afflictive providences, to have his heart betimes humbled to the will and feet of God.

[La 3:28](#)

Our English Annotations supplying *that*, makes the connexion clear, It is good for a man that he *sit alone*, [Jer 15:17](#); not doing what he doth to be seen of men, but sitting alone, and when he is alone suppressing the mutinies of his spirit, and keeping his soul in subjection to God; because God hath humbled him by his rod, humbling himself to his will.

[La 3:29](#)

If *that* may be supplied, or *when*, (as Pagnine translatheth כִּי [La 3:28](#), the connexion of these words with the former is very fair and easy, for then those words, [La 3:27](#), *It is good that* must be repeated in the beginning of [La 3:28](#) and [La 3:29](#); however, both this and the former verses let us know the duty of persons under afflictions in order to their obtaining mercy at the hand of God, and admirably give us the character of persons under afflictions preparing for mercy. They *hope and quietly wait for God's salvation*, [La 3:26](#); *they bear God's yoke*, [La 3:27](#), because he hath laid it upon them; they *sit alone and keep silence*, [La 3:28](#); and here, they *put their mouths in the dust*, that is, humble themselves to the feet of God, and to the will of God; not being too confident of deliverances in this life, but if peradventure *there may be hope*.

[La 3:30](#)

According to our Saviour's precept, [Mt 5:39](#), he doth not take any private revenge; he is reproached and reviled, but when he is so he *revileth not again*, [1Pe 2:23](#); he is filled with reproach from others, but his mouth is not filled with the reproachings of others.

[La 3:31](#)

This is that which beareth up his spirits, that though the Lord may for a time estrange himself from his people, yet he will not always forsake them.

[La 3:32](#)

But though, as a prudent parent, he may see reason to cause grief in and to afflict his own people, yet as a tender good father, that pitieth his children in misery, he will have compassion upon them, having not only mercies, but a multitude or abundance of mercies.

[La 3:33](#)

In the Hebrew it is, he doth not afflict from his heart, that is, with pleasure and delight; or (which seemeth the best sense to me) not from his own mere motion without a cause given him from the persons afflicted. Hence judgment is called God's *strange work*. Showing mercy is his proper natural work, which floweth from himself without any cause in the creature. Judgment is his *strange work*, to which he never proceedeth but when provoked, and as it were forced from the creature, whence it followeth that he cannot delight in it.

[La 3:34-36](#)

Here are three things mentioned, of all which it is said that God *approveth* them *not* neither all, nor any of them. The first is, *to crush the prisoners of the earth*: he hath power to crush all men in the world, they are his prisoners, and cannot flee from him, but he delighteth not in it. Some think it spoken with special reference to the Jews, who now were all captives. A second thing which it is said God *approveth not* is, *turning away the right of a man before the face of the Most High*. Some by *the Most High* understand God, and make the sense to be, *in the sight of God*. Others think that a superior magistrate is understood, who, [Ec 5:8](#), is called the *highest*; and that seemeth the most probable sense. The turning away the right of a man before them, signifieth the use of any arts to deprive them of their just right by misrepresenting their cause, aspersing their persons, &c. The third thing mentioned is, the *subverting* a man in his cause, either by art and rhetoric, making it to appear bad when it is not so, or by mere will and power, overruling it contrary to right and justice.

[La 3:37](#)

The sense of these words is doubted by none, that nothing cometh to pass in the world but by the disposal of Divine Providence, either effecting it by an immediate influence, or permitting it; but to what end these words are brought in in this place is not so generally agreed. Some think they are brought in to check the blasphemy of some that spake of what had befallen the Jews as a thing which God had no hand in. Others think they are brought in as expounding that term that went before, *The Lord seeth not*. Though God doth not approve of sinful actions, nor incline any man's heart or will to them, yet God hath a hand in the permission of the most cruel and unjust actions, which he could easily hinder. I should rather incline to interpret them as an argument brought by the prophet in the name of the people of God, arguing themselves into a quiet submission to the afflictive providences under which they laboured from the consideration of the superior hand of God in them; as Christ told Pilate, Thou couldst not have had any power against me, if it had not been given thee from above. *Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?* [Am 3:6](#).

[La 3:38](#)

In the Hebrew the form of these words is interrogatory, as much as if he should say, Doth not evil come out of God's mouth from his direction and command, and from his providence, as well as good? He speaks of evils of punishment, judicial afflictive dispensations; so it agreeth with [Job 2:10](#); [Am 3:6](#). It is no reproach unto God to make him the author of his own punishments, though we call them evil.

[La 3:39](#)

This verse admits of various senses, caused from the various interpretation of the Hebrew word, which we translate *complain*, which also signifies to mourn or grieve; so some render it, Why doth a living man grieve or vex himself? But the word is noted most generally to signify complaining or murmuring. The word also which we translate *sin* sometimes signifieth that oblique act which we call sin; and those who interpret the former grieve or vex, thus understand the word translated sin, supplying some such words as these, *Let him mourn for his sin*. Why doth he mourn for his afflictions and plagues? let him rather spend his tears upon his sins. But the word also signifies the *guilt of sin*, or obligation to death, which it layeth men under: *Sin lieth at the door*, [Ge 4:7](#); so also [Ge 20:9](#); and also any punishment

brought upon men for sin, [Ge 4:13](#), where we translate it punishment. This sense our translators follow. The prophet then, in the person of the Jews, checks himself in his complaints for their punishments from the consideration, that nothing had befallen them but what was the just reward of their sins.

[La 3:40](#)

Seeing God doth not grieve us willingly, nor delight to crush us, though we be his prisoners, and seeing the hand of God is in these things upon us, and that justly, to recompense our iniquities into our bosoms, instead of mourning and fretting against God, which is not reasonable, nor will be of any profit to us, let us examine our thoughts, words, and actions, and consider what they have been, and reform, and turn again to the Lord, by apostatizing from whom we have brought these evils upon us.

[La 3:41](#)

Let us apply ourselves unto God by prayer, often expressed under this notion in Scripture from that gesture ordinarily used in prayer; and let us not do it in hypocrisy, but joining our hearts with our hands, praying seriously and fervently.

[La 3:42](#)

The prophet doth not dictate words, but sense to them, teaching them the matter of their prayer; first, by way of confession. Sin is called a *transgression*, because it is going aside from the way of God's precepts; it is called *rebellion*, because it is an act contrary to that allegiance and duty which we owe unto God, and the covenant we have made with him. By *pardonning* here is meant the discharge of the guilty persons from the temporal punishment due for sin (as it is often taken in Scripture); so it signifies, thou hast plagued us according to the just desert of our sins.

[La 3:43](#)

Thou hast covered with anger; either thou hast covered thyself with anger, or covered thy own face with anger, so as not to look upon us to move thy pity; or (which is more probably the sense) thou hast covered, that is, *overwhelmed*, us with thy wrath. Thou hast slain, thou hast not pitied; thou hast pursued us to a fatal ruin, without showing us any pity.

[La 3:44](#)

God had covered them with wrath, overwhelming them with afflictions. so as they had no way to escape; and whereas in this distress they had nothing else to do but only to apply themselves to God, he had hid his face from them, so as they could get no comfortable sight of him; he was as one covered with a cloud, that could not be discerned through that opacous body. What is meant by this cloud, whether his fixed resolution to punish them, or his fresh remembrance of their sins, or his just will to be revenged on them, seems too curiously inquired. The phrase is a metaphor, and signifies no more than that God would not hear their prayers in their distress.

[La 3:45](#)

That is, thou hast made us to all nations extremely contemptible, so as they value us no more than the sweepings of their houses, or the most vile, refuse, and contemptible things imaginable.

[La 3:46-47](#)

All manner of misery was come upon them. They were seized first with fears and terrors; going to escape these they fell into a snare, or (as it is in the Hebrew) into a pit, out of which they could not get; they were wasted, made desolate, and destroyed.

[La 3:48-49](#)

The prophet was deeply affected upon the prospect of this evil before it came, [Jer 9:1](#), and was now much more affected when he saw the judgment was come; he wept plentifully and constantly, as for their sins which had brought these judgments upon them, so for the judgments themselves, as indications of God's displeasure and wrath against them for their transgressions.

[La 3:50](#)

That is, until the Lord show me some favour. See the notes on [La 1:9](#).

[La 3:51](#)

The eye and the ear are those organs of the body, by which the soul exerciseth its senses to bring in all objects, whether pleasant or sad, to the understanding to judge of them, according to the judgment of which upon them it is affected with joy or sorrow, desire or aversion, &c.; and the eye is the chiefest of these, because its evidence is more certain, and less subject to deceit. The prophet and most of the Jews were eye-witnesses to the evils which had befallen the Jews, and which at present were upon them; so as their hearts were the more affected. The word translated *affect* is by some noted to signify to *waste* and *consume*, which are the effects of a deep affecting the heart with sad and miserable objects. *Because of all the daughters of my city*: our margin tells us that it may be also read *more than all the daughters of my city*; according to which the sense is, that he was more affected with the state of Jerusalem than the tenderest woman that had lived in it: but it is as well, if not better, in this place rendered causally, showing the reason of his deep affliction, viz. all those miseries he had seen fall upon all the Jewish nation, or upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

[La 3:52](#)

As boys beat a bird from bush to bush, suffering it to rest no where, so mine enemies, to whom I gave no cause, pursued me.

[La 3:53](#)

Dungeon seemeth not to be here taken literally, for the lowest and nastiest place in prisons, which probably was the portion but of a few of the Jews; but metaphorically, for the lowest

and saddest condition of misery. Their enemies had brought them into the deepest miseries, to the cutting off of their lives; and as men use to roll great stones upon the mouths of dens and pits, where they have shut up persons, to make them sure from escaping out, so their enemies had dealt with them, doing what lay in them to make their condition remediless and desperate.

[La 3:54](#)

Afflictions often in Scripture are called *waters*, [Isa 28:17](#); [59:19](#).

I am cut off; that is, I am utterly undone, there is no hope for me.

[La 3:55](#)

That is, out of my deepest affliction, as Jonah out of the *belly of hell*, [Jon 2:2](#). I cried unto God, and called upon him for mercy.

[La 3:56](#)

I in former great afflictions applied myself unto thee, and thou didst hear me; show me now the same favour. Our former experiences of God's goodness to us in hearing our prayers ought to hold up our hands in prayer, mid beget a confidence in us that we, persisting in our duty, shall find God the same God, yesterday, this day, and for ever.

[La 3:57](#)

There was a time when I was in distress, and called upon thee, and thou didst draw near unto me. God is never far off from any of us, as to his essential presence; nor is it possible that he should, for he filleth all places. But he is said to be near us or far off from us, as he manifests, or doth not manifest, his goodness to us by acts of gracious providence: of that drawing near the text speaketh. God being infinite in goodness and mercy, is spoken of as absent from those persons and places where he is not showing mercy, and present only there where he showeth forth his goodness, and to be drawing nigh to them to whom he beginneth to show mercy.

Thou saidst, Fear not; thou didst encourage me formerly upon my prayer.

[La 3:58](#)

Thou hast been wont to take my part against my enemies, not like a lawyer by word of mouth, but actually and really pleading my cause. Thou hast redeemed my life; thou hast saved me from many a danger which looked fatally upon me.

[La 3:59](#)

Thou hast a perfect knowledge of men's perverse and unrighteous dealings with me at this time; do thou judge betwixt me and mine enemies, and deal with them according to what shall appear just to thee.

[La 3:60](#)

Thou hast been a witness to all their fury and rage, and all their malicious and bloody contrivances against me.

[La 3:61](#)

Whatever knowledge men get of things done from their eye or ear, thou hast from thy omniscency; thou knowest not only their malicious actions, but words and thoughts.

[La 3:62](#)

That is, thou hast observed and noted the motions or products of my enemies' lips, and their secret devices before they came out of their lips.

[La 3:63](#)

That is, at all times, when they sit down and rise up, I am their song. Though probably the words have a special reference to their sitting down at feasts, and at their merry meetings. I am all the subject of their discourse, they spend their time in mocking and scoffing at us, and at Jerusalem; we are they that make them sport.

[La 3:64](#)

These three last verses are all but the same general petition, though expressed in various phrases; the prophet had prayed, [La 3:59](#), that God would judge his people's cause, here he prayeth that he would also judge his enemies, he only desireth justice against them, a recompence of the work of their hands.

[La 3:65](#)

The word translated *sorrow of heart* is found no where else in holy writ, which makes a certain particular explication of it to be difficult, and hath given interpreters a strange liberty in translating it *shield, sorrow, and grief, obstinacy or hardness of heart, perplexity, abjection or breaking of heart*; the best guides we have to direct us in the sense of it are, 1. *The other things joined with it; persecution, destruction*, a recompence according to their works, so that some afflictive evil of a heavy nature is certainly signified by it. 2. *The analogy of faith*, which restraineth us from wishing or praying for spiritual or eternal evils against our worst enemies; it therefore probably signifies such perplexity and breakings of mind as commonly attend a state of great affliction.

[La 3:66](#)

Bring them to a temporal ruin and destruction. How far such petitions are lawful we have before showed, in our notes on [Ps 69:22-24](#), &c.; [Ps 119:6-10](#), &c.; [Jer 11:20](#); [15:15](#): see also [La 1:22](#). It is hard to interpret all passages of this nature which we meet with as prophecies, though some of them are so, and others may be both prophecies and prayers.

Chapter 4

Zion bewaileth her misery, confesseth her sins, [La 4:1-6](#). Miseries of the chief ones; women who killed and dressed their own children, [La 4:7-12](#). The sin of the false prophets and priests; their vain hope, [La 4:13-19](#). Their king taken prisoner, [La 4:20](#). Edom is threatened, and Zion comforted, [La 4:21-22](#).

[La 4:1](#)

Though some take *gold* here metaphorically, as signifying the most precious things, yet the most and best interpreters take it in its native sense, for the gold which adorned the temple either in its ceiling or in its vessels; the house of the Lord being burnt by Nebuzar-adan, [Jer 52:13](#), the gold in and about the temple must needs be discoloured.

How! is here a note of admiration.

Are poured out in the top of every street; that is, are tumbled down and scattered in the head of every street about the city.

[La 4:2](#)

Either the nobles and great men, or the priests, or the good men amongst the Jews, that for their intrinsic worth and value may be compared to gold, are looked upon no better than earthen vessels, the workmanship of an ordinary potter. God carrying Jeremiah down to the potter's house, [Jer 18:2](#); [19:1](#), had taught them that they were no more in his hand; he now proveth it by his providence, they were indeed made so, and as miserably and irreparably broken in pieces.

[La 4:3](#)

The learned author of our English Annotations well observeth, that whatever creature is here intended by the word translated sea-monsters, yet our translation is not proper, the text speaking of creatures of God's making, monsters properly signifying such as have something beyond their natural bulk and proportion. What creatures are signified by the Hebrew term, whether sea-calves, or dragons, or serpents, or whales, is very hard to say, the Hebrew word signifying some creatures, occurring so rarely as it is not easy to determine the species, from the word used to express it. He certainly speaks of some brute beasts, and those that are most savage. He saith there are none such but by a natural instinct feed and nourish their young ones; but the Jewish women were become cruel to their children, either forced to appear so, having through the famine no milk to give them, nor any thing to relieve them, or were indeed so, killing them to make food for themselves, as [La 2:20](#).

Like the ostriches in the wilderness; like *ostriches*, that lay their eggs and leave them in the sand, and are hardened against their young ones, as [Job 39:14-16](#). Some think a kind of *owls* are intended, which for want of meat eat up their young ones, as the Jewish women now did. See [La 4:10](#).

[La 4:4](#)

As the fatness of the mother's milk makes it instead of bread and flesh to the sucking child, so the moisture of it makes it to be as drink to allay its heat; the children wanting this moisture, their mouths were hot and dry. It was a time of famine; the little children, understanding not-

the case of the city, were importunate for something to eat, but none had enough for himself, much less for others. See [La 2:12-13](#).

[La 4:5](#)

This judgment reached not only to the common people, but to persons of the highest rank and order, whose misery was now so much the greater, because so contrary to their former splendid state and way of living. They were wont to fare deliciously; now they wanted bread to eat, and were desolate in the streets. They were wont to eat upon scarlet carpets, or to lodge upon scarlet beds and conches; now they searched for their meat upon, or were glad to lie upon, dunghills.

[La 4:6](#)

The word translated *punishment* signifies also *iniquity*, as was said in the notes on [La 3:39](#). The sins of the Jews are compared to the sins of Sodom, [Isa 3:9](#); [Eze 16:46, 48-49](#); hence their rulers are called *rulers of Sodom*, [Isa 1:10](#); either their sins were specifically the same (as they were) as to many sins, [Eze 16:49](#), or they were of an equal magnitude and provocative nature. The prophet here complains that they were punished like Sodom, [Am 4:11](#); yea, and their punishment was greater, because more lingering and gradual, whereas Sodom was overthrown in a moment, and that by no human hands that abode upon her, causing her a continued torment, as there did upon the Jews. David said, It is better to fall into the immediate hand of God than into the hands of men.

[La 4:7](#)

By *Nazarites* in this place the most and best interpreters do not understand persons who were of the religious order of Nazarites, the laws of which order are to be read [Nu 6:1-27](#), and of whom we read [Am 2:11-12](#), for here is a beauty described (under several metaphors) which could never agree to them; but persons that were nobly and ingenuously bred; the word *Nezer* signifying a crown, or ensign of honour, [2Sa 1:10](#); [2Ki 11:12](#). The name Nazarite was given to persons splendid for their breeding and education, or honour and dignity; it is given to Joseph, [Ge 49:26](#), we translate it *separate from his brethren*, [De 33:16](#); so [Na 3:17](#). *Her Nazarites* in this place signifieth her separated ones, who either in respect of birth, education, estate, places of magistracy, or the like, were distinguished from the rest of the people. He expresseth their former splendid estate by the metaphors of snow, milk, rubies, and sapphires.

[La 4:8](#)

They that in the prosperity of the city were fair, plump, and ruddy, look now black for want of fit nourishment, and through sorrow and grief; insomuch that those who before knew them by their countenances, garbs, and habits, did not now know them. And by reason of the famine (for he speaketh with relation to the famine during the siege) they are almost starved, their skin is withered and hard, and even sticketh to their bones.

[La 4:9](#)

During the siege many were killed by the enemies' sword, many more perished by famine; the prophet saith the condition of those who perished by the sword was much better than the condition of those who perished by famine, because they had a quicker death, and were

sooner despatched and put out of their pain; whereas they who perished by hunger died a miserable, lingering death, gradually pining away, because they wanted corn and herbs, the fruits of the field, to uphold their souls in life.

[La 4:10](#)

This was according to what God had threatened in case of disobedience, [De 28:57](#), and a thing which hath often happened in sieges, [2Ki 6:29](#). Such things did happen in the last destruction of Jerusalem, as we read in Josephus; and though we read of no such thing happening in the siege of it by Nebuchadnezzar, yet that there were some such sad instances appears from this text.

[La 4:11](#)

An unusual fire, which burns up not only the roof and superstructure, but the foundations, leaving no bottom for hopes of being restored. See [De 32:22](#).

[La 4:12](#)

Jerusalem was so naturally and artificially fortified, and so favoured by God, and taken notice of as a place which the Lord cared for, and watched over, that it could not have entered into the thoughts of any of those that were enemies to it, that they should ever have been able to make themselves masters of it.

[La 4:13](#)

Not for their sins alone who were the *false prophets* and *Baal's priests*, but for their sins in an eminent degree; they were the ringleaders, either encouraging the people to the wickednesses they committed, or not restraining them, and denouncing the wrath of God against them. So though they were the corrupt magistrates that had shed the innocent blood, yet the priests and prophets became guilty of it, either encouraging the magistrates to it, or soothing them up in their bloody courses, or by burning the children that were burnt in the valley of Hinnom. The ecclesiastical men were a great cause of the first and last destruction of Jerusalem, and so they are of most other places that come to ruin, through their neglect of their duty, or encouraging others in their wicked courses; which both showeth us how great a blessing to a people a godly, conscientious ministry is, and how great a plague and curse a ministry is which is otherwise. See [Jer 5:31](#); [23:21](#).

[La 4:14](#)

A variety of interpreters hath made this text much more difficult than it is. Certainly nothing can appear more reasonable than to interpret the pronoun in the front of the verse relatively, and to fetch the antecedent from the former verse. They, that is, the prophets and the priests, wandered up and down the streets like blind men, being spiritually blind, polluting themselves with blood, either the blood of the children which they slew, or the just men mentioned [La 4:13](#), the slaughter of whom they either encouraged, or at least did not discourage; so as one could not touch a prophet or a priest but he must be legally polluted, and there were so many of them, that men could not walk in the streets but that he must touch some of them. Some thinking the discourse of the priests done with interpret they of the blind men in the city who could not walk up and down the streets without touching the bodies of

some that were slain. Others interpret the words of the common people, who, during the siege, could no more avoid touching bodies slain, and so polluting themselves with blood, than blind men could; so as they abhorred to touch their own garments. The first sense to me seemeth most natural and easy.

[La 4:15](#)

The various application of the pronoun *they* by interpreters makes them as much divided in the sense of this as of the former verse. Either the Jews that made conscience of keeping to the law against *touching dead bodies* cried to the other Jews to leave the city as themselves did, the city being now so full of dead bodies that they could not stay in it without polluting themselves; or the priests called to them to that purpose; or their enemies spake in that language to them. For their enemies had resolved they should not stay in Jerusalem.

[La 4:16](#)

These words seem to be the language of their enemies triumphing over them, as discerning that their God was provoked against them, and would have no more regard or respect unto them; and that they had misused his prophets, which agreeth with [2Ch 36:16](#). But others rather think these latter words (if not the former also) are the prophet's words, expressive of the cause of their miseries, viz. the Lord's anger, who had divided them, &c., and the effect of it, their enemies having no regard to the most grave and venerable persons amongst them.

[La 4:17](#)

That is, in expectation of the Egyptians, whom they waited for to raise the siege; it was a long time before they came, and When they did come, they could do them no service at all, [Jer 37:5, 7-8](#).

[La 4:18](#)

The Chaldeans employed in the siege are so close upon us, that we cannot stir a foot about our businesses, nor look out at our doors, nor walk safely in the streets; we are ruined, there is an end of our civil state; our period is come, and the time of our prosperity is elapsed.

[La 4:19](#)

Our enemies who pursued us to destroy us were very swift in their pursuit of us, (*As swift as an eagle*, was a proverbial expression,) we could no where be safe: if we sought refuge in the mountains, they followed us thither; if we fled from them into the wilderness, they laid wait for us there.

[La 4:20](#)

That he calls some prince here *the breath of their nostrils*, that is, their life, [Ge 2:7](#), is out of doubt; and though some of the Jews would have it understood of Josiah, yet whoso considereth that he was not taken, but slain, and that not by the Chaldeans, but by the Egyptians twenty-three years before the city was taken, will see reason to conclude that he meaneth Zedekiah, who though a bad man, yet was a king, and of David's line, and afforded

some protection to the Jews. We promised ourselves that though the land of Judah was encompassed with pagan nations, yet through Zedekiah's valour and good conduct in government we should live comfortably, he being a covering and refreshing to us; but, saith the prophet, he also is fallen into the enemies' hands.

[La 4:21](#)

The Edomites were descended from Esau the elder brother of Jacob, and dwelled in a part of Arabia that obtained the name of Uz, probably from Uz the son of Dishan, who descended from Seir, [Ge 36:20, 28](#): they, out of their old hatred to the Jews, rejoiced at their ruin, as we learn from the prophecy of Obadiah, who upon this account was sent to prophesy against them: the prophet here ironically saith, *Rejoice*, in the same sense as, [Ec 11:9](#), Solomon bids the young man *rejoice*. But their joy should be but for a little time, for God was dealing out the cup of his fury to more than the Jewish nation, and amongst others to the Edomites; and they should be filled. and intoxicated with it, and make themselves naked, as drunken men sometimes do in their debauches.

[La 4:22](#)

O Judea, thy punishment is past, but the punishment of Edom is yet to come. The Jews were to abide many years in captivity, but they were now suffering their last punishment from the Chaldeans, they were only for some years to continue in that state of captives.

He will no more carry thee into captivity; after thy term of captivity shall be expired, thou shalt not for thy old sins suffer any more punishment. Not that their present captivity should be all their punishment in case they went on in sinful courses, as they did in rejecting Christ, and causing him to be crucified; for those new wickednesses after many years they were destroyed by the Romans; but the prophet hints that there should at present, or for their past sins, no more wrath be poured out upon them, nor would God ever detain them in this captivity. But for the Edomites, their punishment was yet wholly to come, God was yet beginning to punish them, and would do it, discovering their sins. As the pardon of sin is in Scripture set out under the notion of covering it, [Ps 32:1](#), so the punishment of sin may be expressed by *discovering* it, [Job 20:27](#); but the learned author of the English Annotations conceiveth the Hebrew may be better read, *he will discover thee for thy sins*, because of the particle **ל** set before thy sins (though our translation taketh no notice of it). *He will discover upon thy sins*; and so it answereth [Jer 49:10](#), (as he conceiveth,) *I have made Esau bare, I have uncovered his secret places, and he shall not be able to hide himself*.

Chapter 5

A humble prayer, presenting to the Lord their great misery, [La 5:1-15](#), confessing their sins, [La 5:16-18](#), imploring deliverance, [La 5:19-22](#).

[La 5:1](#)

It hath been before observed, that it is very frequent in Scripture to express those acts which are reasonably consequent to the exercise of our exterior or interior senses, by terms which signify the exercise of those senses. That which the prophet here prayeth for is God's freeing

the Jews from those calamities which oppressed them; this he prayeth for under the notion of God's remembering them, and beholding their reproach.

[La 5:2](#)

What our fathers inherited as given them by thee, and we as left to us by them, is come into the hands of the Chaldeans.

[La 5:3](#)

We are all of us without a king, (who is the common father of the country,) we are deprived of thy fatherly care and protection, many young children amongst us are left without an earthly parent.

Our mothers are as widows; either our great cities are like widows, wanting magistrates; or, our women that were married are left widows.

[La 5:4](#)

This seemeth to refer to the state of the Jews in Babylon, where it is probable their adversaries made them buy both water and wood, which in the land of Canaan they had plentifully, and without any further charge to them than fetching the one, and cutting down and bringing home the other.

[La 5:5](#)

As the generality of prisoners of war are made slaves, and put to hard and incessant labour, so in probability the most of the Jews were at first at least.

[La 5:6](#)

The ten tribes were all carried captives into Assyria, many of the kingdom of Judah, as we have heard, fled into Egypt after the taking of Jerusalem.

Giving the hand may either signify working with their hands, and labouring for them; or yielding up themselves to their power, or lifting up the hands as supplicants to them, or striking hands and making covenants with them, or lending them their hand, to help them, and all to get any thing to live upon.

[La 5:7](#)

We must not understand this in the same sense as [Eze 18:2](#), where God reflecteth upon them for using a proverb to this sense. It is the prophet who here speaketh, and in the name of the godly Jews, who would not excuse themselves as if they suffered merely for their forefathers' sins. But the prophet confesseth and bewaileth that God had punished their iniquities and the iniquities of their forefathers together; and it was better with their forefathers who had sinned, and were dead and gone, than with them, upon whom the punishment of their iniquity did abide, and was like so to do a long time.

[La 5:8](#)

Either those who sometimes were our servants, tributary to us, or the posterity of Ham, condemned of old to be servants to our forefather Shem, [Ge 9:26](#); or the servants of those masters whom we serve in Babylon: and none will help us and give us more liberty.

[La 5:9](#)

The enemies lay encamped in all the plains, so as they could stir out no way but the sword of the Chaldeans was upon them, and what victuals they got they adventured their lives for, during the time of the siege.

[La 5:10](#)

The want of bread caused leanness, and paleness, and ill colours in their faces.

[La 5:11](#)

Usual outrages of barbarous soldiers. The Hebrew is, They *humbled*, a modest term to express these actions by.

[La 5:12](#)

Most probably by the enemies' hands, though some would have it by their hands, intimating a more sharp and lingering death. Hanging was an ancient way in the Eastern countries of putting malefactors to death, [Ge 40:19](#).

[La 5:13](#)

Their base, servile condition is expressed by the labour they were put to, which was either grinding in the mill, (an ordinary employment of slaves in those countries,) or carrying millstones; and the younger children in carrying great burdens of wood, under which they fell, as being not able to stand under the burdens laid upon them.

[La 5:14](#)

Our grave men were wont to sit and execute judgment in the gates, but now there is no such thing. Our young men were wont to play on music, and to have their merry meetings, but they are also ceased.

[La 5:15](#)

Either our rejoicing at our solemn festivals, and dancings there, which were usual, as appeareth from many scriptures; or all our joy and dancings, as well at other times as in our solemn festivals.

temptations of diffidence, because it was impossible God should utterly cast off his people, [Ro 11:2](#). Others read it interrogatively, *Hast thou utterly rejected us?* which doth not suppose that the prophet believed he had, though his present providence showed him very angry with them.