

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

GOD'S PEOPLE MELTED AND TRIED.

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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“Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, I will melt them, and try them; for how shall I do for the daughter of my people?”—Jeremiah ix. 7.

OBSERVE, here, that God represents himself as greatly concerned to know what to do with his people. Of course, he speaks after the manner of men; for, as the infinitely wise God, knowing all things from the beginning, Jehovah knew what he would do. But yet, in order that we may understand something of the workings of the divine mind, he represents himself as brought to a non-plus, and saying, in the words of our text, “How shall I do for the daughter of my people?” There are some men and women in the world who seem to greatly perplex those who love them, and who desire their welfare. They are a great perplexity to those with whom they live, and who labour for their good, and it seems as if God himself regarded it as a matter of perplexity when he said, “How shall I do for the daughter of my people?”

But notice, next, the Lord is so resolved to save his people, that he will use the sternest possible means rather than lose any of those whom he loves. He says here, “I will melt them, and try them; I will cast them into the furnace, and put them into the melting-pot. I will make the fire so hot that their iron hearts shall melt; and, though they be like hell-hardened steel, devoid of feeling, I will make it so hot for them that they shall be melted. As men assay metal, pouring out the molten mass in a red-hot or white state, I will melt them, and try them.” Sinners, that God may save you, he will do the roughest things with you. He will not spare you any kind of sorrow here, or any sort of loss, or any measure of despair of spirit, so that he may bring you to himself. He asks the question, as though he were very anxious to avoid using his rough ways, “How shall I do for the daughter of my people?” But he answers the question with all the severity of almighty love, “Behold, I will melt them, and try them.

There is nothing else to be done with them, so I will do that by which alone they can be saved."

Observe, once more, in our preface, that God's concern about his people, and his resolve to use strange ways with them, springs out of his relationship to them; for he says, "How shall I do for the daughter of *my* people?" "*My* people." They were his, though they were so far away from him through their evil ways. Though they had gone from evil to evil, though their lives provoked him to the highest degree, yet he did not disown them. He remembered the covenant that he made for them with Abraham, and with Isaac, and with Jacob; and because of that covenant, he thought upon them for good, and resolved to save them somehow. When God has chosen a man from before the foundation of the world, and when he has given that man over to Christ to be a part of the reward of his soul's travail, he will adopt strange means to accomplish his sacred purpose, and he will carry out that purpose, let it cost him what it may.

We are going to apply these principles in three ways: first, to *the matter of conversion*; secondly, to *the matter of Christian life*; and thirdly, to *the Church of God in its corporate capacity*.

I. First, these principles may be applied to THE MATTER OF CONVERSION. There is a very simple way of being saved; it should be, I hope it is, the common way. It is *the simple way of following the call of grace*. This should be your way; I hope it is. The gospel is preached, you believe it; Christ is set before you, you accept him, you trust him, you are saved. Without any violence, your heart is opened, as with the picklock of grace. God puts the latch-key into the door, and steps into your heart without a word. "Whose heart the Lord opened," we read of Lydia. Even if you have known nothing of the terror of the Lord, if you have had no strange convulsion of feeling, no earthquake, and tempest, and thunder, God is in the still small voice; and you are saved by his grace as much as those who have had a deeper experience.

This is the way of salvation, but *there are some who will not come this way*. There is the Wicket Gate. They have but to knock, and it will be opened; but they prefer to go round about through the Slough of Despond, or to get under the care of Mr. Worldly Wiseman, who leads them round by the house of Mr. Legality, who dwells in the village of Morality, and there they go with their burdens on their backs, which they need not carry even for a single hour, for they would roll off directly if they would but look to Jesus, and believe in him. But they will not do this. There are some of whom God has to say, "How shall I do for the daughter of my people?" Why is this?

Well, some of them have a crooked sort of mind, they never can believe anything straight; they must go round about. I know a friend, whose conversation is always of this kind; if he were in King William Street, and I were in the Borough, he could not come across London Bridge to me, he would find it necessary to go at least as far as Hammersmith before he crossed the river, and then he would come round to me; that is how he always talks. I sometimes get a little tired of that style; and I wish he would come to the point at once. There are some minds of that sort. You say to some people, "Believe

and live." Then they begin scratching their heads a bit, and saying, "What is it to believe, and what is it to live? And how can a man live by believing, and does he believe first, or does he live first? And if he lives before he believes, then how does believing make him live?" I could puzzle away like that all night if I liked; any fool can put stools in the way for people to tumble over. There are some minds that seem to be made with what I may call a *circumbendibus*, that cannot take the truth as God puts it, believing him as a child believes his father; they must somehow twist it about, wrest it, distort it, contort it. Oh, that the Lord would give them another mind! "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." O you wise people, you deep and subtle people, you very thoughtful folk who cannot think that God means what he says, and that a sinner has only to look to Christ and live; but imagine that there must be some particular kind of spectacles to be worn through which you are to look, or that you are to get to some point of the compass from which to look, or that you are to do something else beside look, oh, that you would lay aside all this, for you are making the work of your salvation needlessly difficult! It is of such as you that God saith, "How shall I do for the daughter of my people?"

But some others are obstinate in sin. They are not happy in it; but they will not give it up. They have had some very serious talks with their conscience, and they know that they are wrong, yet they persist in continuing to be wrong. They mean to be right some day, but not yet. They wish somehow that they had overcome the difficulty, but they cannot face it; they cannot give up their evil habits. They still cling to them; and, though often persuaded, and threatened, and moved, they still stand where they always stood, obstinately continuing in sin, while God repeats the enquiry, "How shall I do for the daughter of my people?"

Some others are unwilling to confess sin at all. They think themselves wrong; but they try to make excuses. They are wrong, but not so very wrong. They are such poor, frail creatures, and so greatly tempted; it cannot be very wrong for them to sin. The mind is so easily led astray; surely that is the fault of heredity, or the fault of environment, or the fault of—well, they really make it out that it is the fault of God; so they say in their thoughts, if they do not dare to put it into words. But as for confessing that they are sinners, they will not come to that. Before they will cry, "Father, I have sinned," they will have to be melted, I expect. Before they will ever come to confess their iniquity, they will have to pass through the melting-pot.

Then there are some people who are not saved, but who are outwardly very religious. They have never omitted going to church, or, perhaps, to the meeting-house, whichever they think the better of the two; and they have been brought up carefully, and they have said their prayers regularly, and they have had family prayer, too. They have a Bible; they do not read it much, but still they have one. They are very nice people, everybody thinks that they are Christians; yet all this religion of theirs is not worth a single farthing, for there is no heart-work in it, no repentance of sin, no love to God, no faith

in Christ. The robe of their self-righteousness clings to them, and prevents their coming to rest in Jesus. Sinful self is bad enough to get rid of, but righteous self is even worse. Self-righteousness is a kind of mud that will not be brushed off. The man who is bespattered with it does not let it get dry; he renews it every day. The self-righteous man thinks he is too good to go to heaven by the way a sinner goes, and so he never goes at all.

Some, who have no forms of religion, are, nevertheless, wonderfully self-righteous. They are not Christians; but in their own opinion they are quite as good as Christians; in fact, they think they are a great deal better. Yet their conscience must tell them that this is a lie. Still, they flatter themselves in their own conceit, and hide away in a refuge of lies, till God himself says, "How shall I do for the daughter of my people?" And we cannot answer the question except it be in the words of the text, where the Lord says, "Therefore I will melt them, and try them." They will have to go into the fire, and be melted down before they will be meet for the Master's use.

There are some others who will not come to Christ because they are so full of levity and fickleness. They are all froth, all fun. They live like butterflies; they suck in the juices from the flowers, and only flit from one to the other. They are easily impressed one way and another; but there is no heart in them. "Ephraim is a silly dove without heart." They have no stability, they are fickle; they are like the morning cloud, that is soon blown away: as the early dew, that melts in the beams of the rising sun, so is their goodness soon departed from them. How are they to be saved? Some of you have been aroused fifty times already; and if you had been at some places of worship, you would say that you had been converted a dozen times; but we shall never flatter you into that delusion, I hope. I have heard some people say that they have been converted ever so many times. How can a person be born again more than once? I have heard of being born again, and I know that it is possible; but to be born again, and again, and again, must be impossible; that cannot be. Yet people of this sort are good, bad, or indifferent, just as the fit takes them, for they are fickle, changeable; one does not know where to find them.

And withal, there is another class of persons that are insincere. There is no depth of earth about them. They do not really feel what they think they feel; and when they say that they believe, they do not really believe in their heart. They promise, too, when they are ill, what saints they will be if the Lord will but raise them up; but when they get well again, they are not saints. How many have promised and vowed that if they but escaped in such an accident, or their lives were spared in such a disease, they would seek the Lord; yet they have done nothing of the kind! So again, to-night, the question has to be asked about them by God, "How shall I do for the daughter of my people?"

Now, having brought before you these characters, or held up the looking-glass of God's Word so that they might see themselves in it, I want you to notice how God does deal with such people very often. According to my text, *they will have to feel the furnace.*

I have noticed, during a considerable period of time, some of the self-righteous and the outwardly-religious put into the fire and melted, by being permitted to fall into some gross and open sin. I knew a young man, an excellent and worthy young fellow he was to all appearance; but he was wrapped up in his own righteousness entirely, and there was no getting at him. Under the stress of a sudden temptation in the workshop, he distinctly told a falsehood. It was a very sorrowful business. Nobody but himself knew that he had done so; it was never found out; but he knew that he had told a falsehood distinctly and wilfully; and he felt so ashamed of himself that all his pretty buildings of self-righteousness vanished away in a moment, and instead of being great and grand, as he had been aforetime, he had to come to Christ with the publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner." He had such a sense of right and wrong, that he condemned himself outright. He came to me in an awful state of mind. There were thousands of men who would have done what he had done, and never thought the worse of themselves for it; but he had a conscience, and a truthful spirit, and he felt mean as dirt for having told his master a falsehood. God blessed that experience to him. He was melted right down; and, in the bitterness of his spirit, he cried, for weeks, for mercy, and glad enough he was to find it at the Saviour's feet. I pray God that none of you self-righteous people may be left to go into an open sin; but it may be that the Lord may leave you to yourselves, to let you see what you really are, for you probably have no idea what you are. I, as the servant of God, might flood my face with tears, and weep over you if I could prophesy what you will yet do if restraint be taken from you, for in your heart there are the eggs of all manner of sins, and it only needs favourable circumstances for these to be hatched out into a very cage of unclean birds. That is one way in which I have seen men melted.

Some, again, have been melted down by temporal calamities. I have seen a very great man, with his diamond ring flashing on his finger—I was almost going to say, "and with bells on his toes," for he would almost have liked to wear them there if he could, to call attention to his superior position and his eminent rank. He was a gentleman, he felt that he was; and as to preaching to him as a poor sinner, he was offended at the idea. He had good health and strength, too, and he was not going to die. He counted it one of the wisest things to "drive dull care away." He was merry-hearted, full of spirits, and the gospel had no power over him. "Take it to the dying," said he; "take it to the poor people down in the slums; it is the right thing for them; but I—I do not require it." Yes, but when his fortune melted, he began to melt a little; and when his health went, and he found himself on a sick-bed, and those who once did him reverence forgot him, and he was almost without a friend, he wanted to come round to God by the back door somehow, and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Oh, yes, there are some who cannot be saved as long as they have a silver spoon in their mouths; but when they are brought to poverty, it is the nearest way round to the Father's house, round by the far country where they would fain fill their bellies with the husks that the swine eat. Some years ago,

a young gentleman, whose father was a godly man, told me that he was keeping race-horses, and betting. I said to him, "That is right, bet all your money away, and when you have nothing left, you will come to your father's God. Maybe that is the way home for you, an empty pocket, a ragged coat, and a sick body. Then, perhaps, you will turn to God." The Lord has often done so with men. Am I speaking to any who are passing through such a trial as that? God grant that your poverty shall lead you to the best riches, and your sickness conduct you to eternal health!

At other times, without any overt sin, without any temporal trouble, God has ways of taking men apart from their fellows, and whipping them behind the door. It has been my lot to meet with, not merely hundreds, but I think I may say, thousands of souls in this condition; and wherever I go, I feel an intense happiness in meeting with miserable, broken-hearted souls, because I believe they are on the way to the possession of a new heart and a right spirit. God is dealing with them in a way of love, though his way seems to them to be very rough. I have tried to cheer them. I have prayed with and for them. They have told me that their sin haunts them day and night; they cannot hope for mercy; they cannot think that God will ever blot out their transgressions. Their Bible seems to thunder at them, as they read it. Their heart is heavy, their friends think them melancholy, and talk about putting them in an asylum, and I do not know what besides. They are ground down, and brought low. This is all meant to work for their good; they would not come to God any other way. It is by such an experience that God is fulfilling his word, "I will melt them, and try them."

In all this God has one great object. It is just this, first, to hide pride from men. God will not save us, and have us proud. He will not let any one of us throw up his cap, and glorify himself for his own salvation. Grace must have the glory of it from first to last.

Beside that, God means to take us out of our sin, and to do that he makes it to be a bitter and an evil thing to us. All that he is doing is to make our sin too heavy for us to carry, and to make us sick of sin, and fond of Christ, and earnest after holiness. Blessed is the blow that almost crushes you if it breaks off the connection between you and sin.

The drift of all this experience is to bring us to Christ, to the great sacrifice; and none ever will come to Christ but those who have nowhere else to go. No man ever puts into this port except under stress of foul weather. Souls try to go anywhere except to Christ; but when they cannot go anywhere else, and they are done for, and ruined, and lost, then it is that they fly to him, and take him to be their all in all. Why, it takes a long time to get even a child of God fully to understand the way of salvation by sacrifice. I went to see my venerable friend, George Rogers, yesterday. He is close upon ninety-two, and cannot leave his bed. He has to lie there, and can do nothing for himself; but his mental faculties are as bright as ever. I was not long with him before he said to me, "They do not seem to savour now the sacrifice of Christ; and," he added, "you know that Peter believed in the deity of our Lord, and he made such a delightful

confession of the deity of Christ that the Master said, 'Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.' But," said Mr. Rogers, "although Peter knew the deity of Christ, and knew it well, he did not know Christ's sacrifice, for no sooner did his Master begin to tell him that he was to be crucified, and so on, than 'Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.' He could not believe it; he could not see the sacrifice; and his Lord had to call him 'adversary', and to say to him, 'Get thee behind me: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.'" My dear old friend said, "Until we can see the sacrifice of Christ, we have not seen things as they really are in God's sight; and any gospel, even if it appears to glorify Christ, and has his deity in it, savours of the things of men, and not of the things of God, if it leaves out Christ's sacrifice." Mr. Rogers was right; there must be the sacrifice of Christ; it is that savour which we are to make known in every place. That is a sweet savour unto God which we are never to cease to give forth as long as we can speak. But, oh, it takes such a time with some to bring them to smell that blessed savour of the sacrifice of the Son of God! When they do perceive it, they get peace, and light, and love, and liberty; but, until then, God himself seems to say concerning them, "How shall I do for the daughter of my people?"

I have dwelt so long upon the matter of conversion that my time is largely gone. I beg you who can pray to join me in asking God to bless the word I have spoken.

II. But, in the second place, I want to say something to Christians; for, IN THE MATTER OF CHRISTIAN LIFE, God seems to say, "What shall I do for the daughter of my people? I will melt them, and try them."

Some Christians go from joy to joy. Their path, like that of the light, shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Why should not you and I be like that? Why should not we simply believe, and keep on believing, and go on rejoicing, serving God with all our heart, and resting in the precious blood of Jesus?

There are *other Christians who appear to make much progress in divine things, but it is not true progress.* Some appear to have a great deal of knowledge. They talk as if they knew everything; but when you come to examine them closely, you find that they do not know hardly anything that they ought to know. Some, too, get a very wonderful experience. You see them swagger about, you hear them brag of it, until you are disgusted with them. That experience which a man boasts of is an experience he ought to be ashamed of. Some, too, seem to have great ability. To hear them talk of what they can do, you would imagine that they could drive the church before them, and drag the world behind them, and I do not know what besides. Paul said, "When I am weak, then am I strong;" but these people are so strong that they never know what weakness means. As for the progress that some professors make in sanctification, why, just look at some of them, and listen to their tall talk! They have not sinned for years! The very principle of sin seems to have died out of them! Poor deluded souls! This is what they say, mark you;

not what I believe. As for their graces, they have all things and abound. They are as patient as martyrs. They believe as strongly as John Knox or Martin Luther. You ordinary Christians cannot attain to their stature. If they were to stand bolt upright, they would strike the stars from their places; they are so great and tall. And yet—and yet, there is nothing in their boasting after all. I do not say that they know that much of their wonderful religion is false. No; but they have wrong ideas, confused notions, addled brains, and so they do not know their own real state. Whereas they say that they are rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, they are all the while naked, and blind, and poor, and miserable.

The worst thing about their condition is that some of them do not want to know their real state. They half suspect that it is not what they say it is; but they do not like to be told so; in fact, they get very cross when anyone even hints at the truth. No one is so imperfect in temper as the perfect man; he soon shows his imperfection. He is just the brother who must not be touched. You must stand a long way off, and look at him with reverence, or else he is soon sorely grieved at you. Some do not want to know their real condition. They have an idea that, perhaps, they are not what they seem to be; but they would not have their dream roughly broken. Instruction is not desired by them. Why are they to be instructed? They know a great deal more than anybody else can teach them, and they like the man who will speak flatteringly to them, and who will make them believe that what they say is all gospel. Now, there are such people in all our congregations, of whom God might well say, "How shall I do for the daughter of my people?"

This is what he will do with a great many who are now inflated with a false kind of grace: "I will melt them, and try them," says the Lord of hosts. *He will put them to a test.* Here is a man who has a quantity of plate, and he does not know the value of it, so he takes it to a goldsmith, and asks him what it is worth. "Well," says he, "I cannot exactly tell you; but if you give me a little time, I will melt it all down, and then I will let you know its value." Thus does the Lord deal with many of his people. They have become very good, and very great, as they fancy, and he says, "I will melt them."

This is a natural test for silver and gold, the very best kind of test for precious metal. But in the process of melting, if it is with you, my brethren, as it is with me, the bulk is very much reduced. When God begins to melt us by letting fierce corruptions burn within us, or by allowing our spirits to be depressed and our minds to be darkened, oh, what a shrinkage there seems to be almost immediately in that melting-pot! What fear takes hold upon us then, lest we should shrink to nothing, and disappear altogether!

Then, also, the fashion of the precious metal is marred; its beauty soon departs. That silver vase was beautifully fashioned; but when it is melted, nothing of the chaste design remains. All that is of human fashioning is lost in the melting-pot. Were you ever in the melting-pot, dear friends? I have been there, and my sermons with me, and my frames and feelings, and all my good works. They seemed to quite fill the pot till the fire burned up, and then I looked to see what

there was unconsumed; and if it had not been that I had a simple faith in my Lord Jesus Christ, I am afraid I should not have found anything left. This is what God will do with all his people unless they walk very humbly with him. "He that is down needs fear no fall." He that is pure gold will lose nothing in the melting; but he that is somebody in his own opinion, will have to come down a peg or two before long. It is well that it is so; for if it were not, we should soon grow proud, and worldly, and careless, and even licentious; for it is strange, but it is true, that the next thing to a boast of perfect holiness has almost always, throughout history, been intense licentiousness. How it comes to be so, perhaps they who study metaphysics can tell; but so it has constantly been in the history of mankind. When you fancy that you are out of gunshot, there is an enemy close at hand. When you dream that the road is safe, there is a pitfall just before you. When you say, "I am perfectly holy," the very pride that makes you say so is an indication of a deadly cancer of self-righteousness that is eating into your very soul.

Now, beloved, *the result of melting is truth and humility.* The result of melting is that we arrive at a true valuation of things. The result of melting is that we are poured out into a new and better fashion. And, oh, we may almost wish for the melting-pot if we may but get rid of the dross, if we may but be pure, if we may but be fashioned more completely like unto our Lord!

If any of you who have been converted are undergoing a melting just now, do not be staggered at it. It is no strange thing that has happened unto you, and it is no evil thing. You have, no doubt, needed it. You were growing too gross, too careless, and it was necessary for you that you should be melted. Now God has given you the highest proof of his love in this melting, this scourging, this suffering, this down-breaking, this annihilating of carnal confidence, this hanging up of Mr. Presumption by the neck that he may die, that self may fall, and that Jesus may be all in all. God grant that it may be so!

III. I was going to speak about this principle in THE MATTER OF THE CHURCH OF GOD IN ITS CORPORATE CAPACITY; but I will speak of that at another time, if the Lord permit. This you may take for granted, that, if God has chosen us, but we are not willing to go in his way, and humbly trust in Jesus, and have him to be our all in all, the Lord will not give us up, but he will melt us, and try us, till we are fit to run in any mould that he likes to use.

God bless you, and save you, and comfort you, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

JEREMIAH IX.

Verse 1. *Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!*

Jeremiah foresaw that the Chaldeans would come up, and so many would be slain that the nation would be almost destroyed.

2. *Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! for they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men.*

He mourned because of the doom that awaited them; but he equally mourned because of the sin that would bring that doom upon them. He wished that he could get away into one of those refuges which were provided in lonely places, where travellers might lodge for a night.

3. *And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies:*

They made use of the tongue, as if it were a bow, to shoot out falsehood. It is a very graphic description of the men of Jeremiah's day. He dips his pen in his heart's blood as he writes about them.

3. *But they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth;*

Oh, no! No one stood up for the truth in those days; no man was willing to suffer for it, to argue for it, or even to own it.

3. *For they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the LORD.*

They grew worse and worse. It is the way of wicked men to ripen into greater sin. They proceeded from evil to evil; and Jeremiah had Jehovah's testimony for it that, though they knew a great many things, they did not know the LORD: "They know not me, saith the LORD."

4. *Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders.*

It was an evil time indeed when, even in the domestic circle, there could be no brotherly confidence. "Every brother will utterly supplant." Jacob's name, you remember, was supplanter; and all these men were Jacobs, each one ready to supplant his brother, to throw him on one side that he might occupy his place. As to neighbourly conduct, there was none; the neighbours were all gossips and slanderers of one another.

5. *And they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity.*

What a sad state they were in! Their tongues spoke lies without any teaching; but they schooled them till they were masters of the art of lying. They were D.D.s, doctors of dissembling; they understood the art thoroughly. They had taught their tongue to speak lies, and they had committed so much evil that they even tired themselves in the doing of it.

6. *Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know me, saith the LORD.*

Putting forth all their critical ingenuity to get rid of God, his Word, inspiration, and the divine sacrifice, doing all they could that they might not know God.

7, 8. *Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, I will melt them, and try them; for how shall I do for the daughter of my people? Their tongue is as an arrow shot out; it speaketh deceit: one speaketh peaceably to his neighbour with his mouth, but in heart he layeth his wait.*

Do you wonder that Jeremiah wept? With so true a spirit, so tender and sympathetic, he could not bear it when man had become man's worst enemy, and no man could be relied upon, for all practised and spoke deceit.

9. *Shall I not visit them for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?*

Divine justice sets the fire of indignation burning. Nothing excites God's wrath more than continued falsehood and deceit, unkindness, unbrotherly conduct, and unholiness of life. Put all these evils together, and you have more than enough God-provoking sins calling for an avenging visitation.

10. *For the mountains will I take up a weeping and wailing, and for the habitations of the wilderness a lamentation, because they are burned up, so that none can pass through them; neither can men hear the voice of the cattle; both the fowl of the heavens and the beast are fled; they are gone.*

The prophet pictures what the Chaldeans would do. They would not only destroy the cities, but they would even rob the hills of their cattle, and sweep the fields till there would be nothing left that men could gather.

11. *And I will make Jerusalem heaps, and a den of dragons; and I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant.*

Jeremiah had to live to see all this. The thought of it pulled up the sluices of his tears, and made him wish that all the clouds and seas and rains would come, and dwell in his eyes, for his grief had need of all the watery things that nature could produce. George Herbert sings, and I quote his lines to illustrate the depth of Jeremiah's griefs:—

"Let every vein
Suck up a river to supply mine eyes,
My weary, weeping eyes, too dry for me,
Unless they get new conduits, new supplies,
To bear them out, and with my state agree."

12. *Who is the wise man, that may understand this? and who is he to whom the mouth of the LORD hath spoken, that he may declare it, for what the land perisheth and is burned up like a wilderness, that none passeth through?*

The land would never have been desolate if it had not been for the wickedness of the people. Sin—sin it is that does the mischief. There are some who cavil at the punishment that God puts upon sin; they would do better if they found fault with the sin which brings its own punishment with it. There is nothing arbitrary in God's justice; he allows sin itself to ripen, and when it is finished, it bringeth forth death eternal.

13, 14. *And the LORD saith, Because they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, neither walked therein; but have walked after the imagination of their own heart, and after Baalim,*

After many Baals, is the meaning; many are the gods that men make for themselves when they turn away from Jehovah.

14, 15. *Which their fathers taught them: therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with worm-wood, and give them water of gall to drink.*

You cannot sin without suffering. If you will not drink of the waters of obedience, but will drink of the waters of rebellion, they shall be bitter.

16. *I will scatter them also among the heathen, whom neither they nor their fathers have known: and I will send a sword after them, till I have consumed them.*

A patriot for man, a prophet for God, do you marvel that he wept?

17. *Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Consider ye, and call for the mourning women, that they may come; and send for cunning women, that they may come:*

These were the hired mourners, the women who were paid to go to funerals, and simulate grief. "Send for your weepers now;" said the LORD of hosts, "for if you ever needed mourners, you need them now."

18, 19. *And let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters. For a voice of wailing is heard out of Zion,*

These were no mock mourners ; but real weepers, who had cause to mourn.

19. *How are we spoiled ! we are greatly confounded,*

Why did they not say, "How have we sinned" ? No ; men will think of the punishment they suffer ; but they will overlook the sin they commit.

19. *Because we have forsaken the land, because our dwellings have cast us out.*

Why did not they say, "Because we have forsaken the LORD, because we have cast off the worship of Jehovah" ? You cannot bring men to that point. They quarrel with the rod rather than with the hand that holds it. They mourn over the result of sin ; but to the sin itself they still cling.

20, 21. *Yet hear the word of the LORD, O ye women, and let your ear receive the word of his mouth, and teach your daughters wailing, and every one her neighbour lamentation. For death is come up into our windows,*

It did not wait to come in by the door. In time of war or pestilence, death comes how it will through every casement, closed or open.

21. *And is entered into our palaces, to cut off the children from without, and the young men from the streets.*

Generally, in war, they spare the children ; and they carry the young men away as captives. The Chaldeans were cruel ; they killed the little ones, and they slew the young men.

22. *Speak, Thus saith the LORD, Even the carcasses of men shall fall as dung upon the open field, and as the handful after the harvestman, and none shall gather them.*

So dreadful was the devastation that was wrought by these Chaldeans on account of the people's sin, that dead bodies lay like heaps of dung that the husbandman strews upon the field.

23, 24. *Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches : but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth : for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.*

This was the God who turned again to his rebellious people, and who would have been glad if they had but known him. He would have made them richer than the rich, and wiser than the wise, and mightier than the mighty ; but they would not have the things in which Jehovah delighted.

25. *Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will punish all them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised ;*

If they sin like others, they shall die like others, circumcised or uncircumcised, baptized or unbaptized.

26. *Egypt, and Judah, and Edom,*

You see that Judah is sandwiched in between Egypt and Edom. Those who were the people of God are put in the same category with the accursed nation, because they had forsaken him, and mixed up with them.

26. *And the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness : for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.*

If the heart be not right with God, vain are all external rites.