

You are treasuring up for yourself wrath

Romans chapter 2 demonstrates:

- That a person is not acceptable to God on the grounds of race. A Jew needs salvation as much as a Gentile (1–16).
- That it is not enough to possess the law of God. His laws must be obeyed (17–24).
- That the Jewish rite of circumcision does not entitle a man to acceptance by God if he is a lawbreaker (25–29).

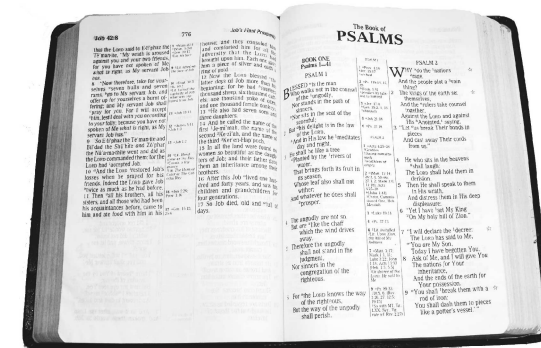
Some religious people are often complacent in their sins. They are often quick to condemn others because they themselves do not sink to the depths described in chapter 1, verses 22–32. They are still sinners, however good they imagine themselves to be. We should examine our own hearts before passing judgment on others (Matthew 7:1–5). Men often judge by outward appearances (1 Samuel 16:7; Matthew 23:28; John 7:24), God's judgment *is according to truth* (2). He knows our hearts and we cannot hide our sin from him. We will all be judged by God (3–5, 16).

Many who profess a belief in God believe that he is good, and that is true. They make a great mistake, however, in thinking that a good God would never punish us for our sins. He exercises great patience and restraint and his goodness should lead us to repentance. We can refuse to think about judgment but we must not imagine that we will escape it if we do not repent of our sin. We may not fall into the excesses of sin described in chapter 1, but we may still despise the riches of God's *goodness, forbearance and longsuffering*. If we are hard and impenitent in our hearts, we treasure up for ourselves wrath (4–5).

If you have not repented of your sin, you are despising the goodness of God. If you spurn the opportunities that he gives you to turn to him, if you let those opportunities pass by, you will become hard in heart. *You are treasuring up for yourself wrath* (4–5). Let these solemn and awesome words be impressed on your mind!

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



October 2015

Bible readings from Mark chapters 14 to 16
Lamentations, Romans chapters 1 to 2

The Scriptures must be fulfilled

Judas had left the Last Supper to go to the Jewish authorities to set his treacherous plot in motion (John 13:30). He must have known that Jesus was going to Gethsemane (John 18:2). As the Lord Jesus roused his disciples who were *sleeping from sorrow* (Luke 22:45–47), Judas arrived with a great multitude who were armed with swords and with clubs. He was able to distinguish Jesus from his disciples in the darkness. The religious authorities would know that the one whom he greeted with a kiss was the Lord Jesus.

Peter, in an act of bravado, cut off the right ear of Malchus, a servant of the high priest. Jesus told Peter that he had to drink the cup given to him by the Father (47; John 18:10–11). The Lord, full of grace, healed Malchus (Luke 22:51). The terrified disciples forsook Jesus and fled for their lives. Many Bible scholars believe that the young man mentioned in verses 51 and 52 was John Mark, the writer of this Gospel.

The cowardly chief priests and elders had sent the armed crowd out to Jesus as if they were to arrest a robber. They did not touch him while he taught in the temple (2), but took him under cover of darkness. Judas and the enemies of Christ had their plans, but all that happened to Jesus in Gethsemane, and at Calvary was according to God's plan (Acts 2:23). Jesus told them, '*The Scriptures must be fulfilled*' (49). The death of the Lord Jesus was planned by God the Father in eternity past. The Old Testament has many prophecies concerning the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus (eg. Psalm 22; 41:9; Isaiah 52:13–53:12; cp. Luke 24:27). They were all fulfilled.

The Bible, this holy book that you are reading, is God's precious Word. Do you take it seriously? **God's Word is true, and it will be fulfilled in every detail. The Bible also reveals that Jesus is coming again to judge the world and to take his people to be with himself. *The Scriptures must be fulfilled.***

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God gave them up

Paul wrote this letter while at Corinth, a city which was infamous for its vile, depraved and debauched way of life. The sins described in verses 21–32 were very much in evidence in Corinth. The Bible is quite clear about our sin. We have no excuse for it (20)! We are shown how the ungodly suppress the truth about God's existence (18):

- God has made us so that we know deep within ourselves that he exists (19). Sinners do not like to retain God in their knowledge, however (28).
- Though God is invisible, his majesty and eternal power are clearly seen in his creation (20). *The heavens declare the glory of God* (Psalm 19:1–6).
- God has put within our conscience the fact that he will judge the world in righteousness (32).

The Bible does not say that everyone is guilty of every sin described in verses 26 to 32, but these sins are found everywhere in human society. Scoffers may think that they are wise but they are fools with darkened hearts (21–22). How stupid and wicked to make images like mortal man or beast and then to worship them (23)! How foolish to serve sensual passions rather than the holy God (24–26)! The Bible is quite clear about homosexuality. It is vile and wicked (26–27; cp. Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Judges 19:22–23; 1 Corinthians 6:9).

Our reading gives a solemn and terrifying warning. If we persist in sin, God will give us up to sin! The words, '*God gave them up*' are found in verses 24, 26 and 28 ('*God gave them over*' is the same in the Greek as '*God gave them up*'). We must never think of the wrath of God solely in terms of the final judgment when he will send the ungodly to hell. The wrath of God is also revealed when he gives sinners up to a debased mind and to debauched practices. The good news of the gospel is that the Lord Jesus is well able to save the vilest sinner (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). Thanks be to God!

The wrath of God

The gospel is good news but it is no gospel unless we also tell men and women about God's wrath. Paul's message was that *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men* (18). What does the Bible mean by the wrath of God? M.R. Vincent writes, 'Wrath is God's holy hatred of sin, his essential, necessary antagonism to everything evil' ('WORD STUDIES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT'),

Many people like only to think of God as a God of love and reject the Bible teaching that he is angry with sinners. Such reasoning is weak and flawed. If God is not angry with the wicked it would mean that he is indifferent to rebellion against him and to men's sin. He cares passionately about the wickedness in this world! Paul later anticipates the question that people often ask. '*Is God unjust who inflicts wrath?*' He answers, '*Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world?*' (3:5–6).

There is a mistaken notion that the divine wrath is an Old Testament concept. Those who hold such a view deny the inerrancy of Scripture, for the Old Testament is the word of God just as much as the New. They also betray a woeful ignorance of the New Testament. The letter to the Romans has ten references to the wrath of God and John chapter 3 ends with this warning, *He who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him* (John 3:36). When Christ returns, the unsaved will quake with terror at the wrath of the Lamb (Revelation 6:15–17).

If you are not a Christian, you are in a perilous state! I urge you to repent of your sin and to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ who died for sinners to save them *from the wrath to come* (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Submit to him as your Lord and Saviour and he will freely forgive you and accept you. You will then rejoice with all Christians in the amazing love of God and you will be eternally grateful to him.

But he kept silent and answered nothing

Jesus was taken to the palace of the high priest where his enemies made feverish attempts to find a charge against him that would carry the death penalty. The false witnesses contradicted each other. Some of them accused him of threatening to destroy the temple and to rebuild it within three days (58). Jesus had never said such a thing. He had said that if they destroyed '*this temple*' (his body), he would raise it up in three days (John 2:19–21).

The Lord Jesus *kept silent and answered nothing* (61). He could have easily outwitted them in any argument but he remained silent (Isaiah 53:7). Many of us are so quick to react when we are unfairly treated. We must control our tongues and remember that there are times when we should be silent. Let us take seriously the admonition from Peter's first letter, which points to Jesus as an example to follow when we are slandered (1 Peter 2:21–23).

The question of the high priest was a way of asking whether Jesus was God (61). The Lord's answer, quoting from Daniel 7:13, indicated that he is indeed God. When he returns, he will come as King and Judge (62; Matthew 25:31–46). The high priest in feigned distress, tore his clothes and accused Jesus of blasphemy. He had the answer he wanted and stated that they had no further need of witnesses. We must not think that Jesus was trapped into giving such an answer. He knew that he had to go the way of humiliation and the cross in order to save us (Philippians 2:5–8). The Sanhedrin condemned Jesus to death and he was spat upon, mocked and beaten (63–65). Jesus could have easily destroyed his tormentors but he allowed them to vent their wicked spite upon him because he loved sinners and was determined to bring us salvation through his suffering and death.

The Lord Jesus is worthy of our heartfelt praise and devotion. Let us thank him for all that he endured to save us. Let us always strive to please him, who for our sakes did not please himself.

When he thought about it, he wept

The suffering of the Lord Jesus was not confined to the day of his crucifixion. He was betrayed by Judas and he was humiliated and beaten when facing the high priest and the Sanhedrin. Peter who had protested that he would never deny his Lord, did just that.

Peter followed Jesus *at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest* where he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire (54). He loved his Lord and no doubt wanted to see what would become of him. As he warmed himself, he was accused on three occasions of being a follower of Jesus. Peter's courage deserted him and he first pretended not to understand what the girl was talking about. He then denied his Lord by swearing on oath that he did not know Jesus and calling down a curse upon himself if he were lying (71). He may have thought that this would convince them that he could not be one of the disciples. Are you fearful and lacking in boldness in your Christian witness? Remember, *God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind* (2 Timothy 1:7).

The Lord Jesus warned Peter that he would deny him three times before the cock crowed twice. When Peter heard the crowing, he thought about the words of Jesus, and *he wept* (72). He wept over his sin; he repented and he was restored. He went on to accomplish great things for God. **Peter's denial is a warning for us to beware of self-confidence. We may think that we could never deny our precious Saviour but we must never forget that we are capable of any sin. We need to depend on the Lord at all times.**

Jesus prayed for Peter (Luke 22:31–32), and it is encouraging to know that he also prays for us (Hebrews 7:25). If you are beset by guilt because of some sin in your life, come to the Lord Jesus and ask him to forgive you. He will accept you and freely forgive you when you repent of your sin and trust in him.

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ

Paul wanted the Roman Christians to know that although he had been hindered from coming to Rome, he desired to come as soon as possible to preach the gospel to them (13–15). The word '*gospel*' is found four times in this chapter (1,9,15,16). Paul was ready and eager to preach the gospel because he gloried in its good news and in its power to save sinners. He declared, *'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes'* (16).

Why is the gospel of Christ so wonderful? *In it the righteousness of God is revealed* (17). The gospel is God's answer to human sin. It is the good news of his great love in giving his Son to die for sinners (5:8); it is good news of forgiveness and reconciliation to God (4:7; 5:10–11); it is good news of peace with God (5:1); it is good news that sinful men can live a holy life when saved by Christ (6:2–6,13–14,22); it is good news of salvation from the wrath of God (5:9; 8:1); it is the good news of eternal life (6:22–23).

Why is the gospel of Christ so glorious? *It is the power of God to salvation* (16). The Greek word translated 'power' is 'dunamis' from which our English word 'dynamite' is derived. The gospel of Christ is dynamite! Many a dark and tragic life had been transformed by its power in Rome and wherever Paul had preached. We should expect to see God work in the lives of sinners when the gospel is preached. When we share the good news in personal witness to the unsaved, we are not just sharing a set of beliefs, but the power of God to salvation. The righteousness of God is by faith from start to finish – *from faith to faith* (17). We are not saved by our own works but by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8).

Sinners should be ashamed of their sin but Christians should never be ashamed of the gospel! Can we be ashamed that we are *beloved of God, called to be saints* (7)? Can we be ashamed of a gospel that saves sinners? *I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes.*

I am ready to preach the gospel

Paul had already described himself as ‘*a servant (slave) of Jesus Christ*’ (1), but he was not reluctant or grudging in his toil. He served God with his spirit (9) – ‘with sincere devotion’ (Calvin). He longed to visit Rome, but he always remembered in his prayers that God’s will must have priority (10; cp. James 4:15). Paul wanted to visit Rome:

- To impart to them *some spiritual gift* (11) in order to establish (strengthen) them. Most commentators do not see this as the impartation of supernatural spiritual gifts such as those listed in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. Paul did not say ‘some spiritual gifts,’ but used the singular ‘gift.’ Dr Lloyd-Jones comments, ‘The spiritual gift he wants to impart to the Romans is to open out the doctrines, to teach them, to instruct them, to establish them, to ground them.’ (ROMANS VOLUME 1, page 227, published by Banner of Truth). His visit would be a gift to the church to establish them so that they would be encouraged together with him (12).
- To *have some fruit* among them (13). He may have been referring to his desire to see the fruit of the Holy Spirit in greater evidence in their lives as they were strengthened (cp. Galatians 5:22–23). I believe rather, that Paul is referring to a desire to see a harvest of souls won to Christ. He goes on to write that he was a debtor to these Gentiles (13,15) and that he felt a strong obligation to take the gospel to them (cp. 1 Corinthians 9:16). He said, ‘*I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also*’ (15; the Greek verb translated ‘ready’ means ‘to be eager’).

Do you seek to make Christ known through your witness and testimony? Are you ready and eager to share the good news of the gospel with those around you?

Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas

The chief priests and the Sanhedrin needed the approval of the Roman governor for the execution of Jesus who was led away to Pilate early in the morning. Mark does not detail the charges that they pressed against Jesus which are recorded in Luke’s Gospel. They falsely accused Jesus of inciting the people to refuse to pay their taxes to Caesar. They also said that he claimed to be a king (Luke 23:2) and Jesus agreed that he was the king of the Jews but that his kingdom was not an earthly kingdom (2; cp. John 18:33–37). Jesus continued to be silent in the face of his accusers (3–5).

Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent and wanted to release him (10; Luke 23:4,14–16,22). He sent Jesus to Herod, who he hoped would make the decision for him but this was inconclusive (Luke 23:6–7). There was a custom at Passover for the governor to set a prisoner free at the request of the people. Pilate saw this as an opportunity to release the innocent Jesus and gave them a stark choice. He would release a murderer, Barabbas, or Jesus (6–10). Pilate expected the crowd to ask for the release of Jesus but his plan failed. The chief priests stirred up the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas and to demand that Jesus be crucified. *Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas* but delivered Jesus to be whipped and crucified (15).

Many a person has violated their conscience and refused to do what they have known to be right because of the fear of men which brings a snare (cp. Proverbs 29:25). Are you a coward who seeks to gratify your ungodly acquaintances, or do you seek to please the Lord? Pilate could not pretend innocence by washing his hands (Matthew 27:24). When we are faced with the challenge of Christ we must not wash our hands of him. We must not pretend that we have no sin or that we do not need to be saved. **If we refuse to own him as our Saviour and Lord, we reject him; if we reject him, we will be eternally lost.**

A certain man, Simon a Cyrenian

Let us ponder the suffering of the Lord Jesus to save sinners. The scourge was a whip with several thongs into which were knotted small pieces of metal or bone. When a victim was lashed, his flesh was torn away. Jesus was scourged before being handed over to the soldiers who proceeded to mock him. They put an imitation royal robe of purple over the bleeding, lacerated back of the Saviour. The crown of thorns ripped into his brow and scalp, and they put a reed (a piece of wood) into his right hand as an imitation royal sceptre. They spat on him as they knelt in mock worship and beat him over the head with the reed. When they finished their wicked game, the soldiers removed the purple robe and put his own clothes upon him. They then led him away to be crucified (16–20).

Jesus was led out of Jerusalem, carrying his cross, but he was unable to carry it far, owing to his injuries and sheer exhaustion. *Now they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian ... to bear his cross* (21). Simon was probably a Jewish pilgrim to the Passover feast. Cyrene was on the north coast of Africa, in what is now Libya. There was a sizeable Jewish community in Cyrene (Acts 2:10; 6:9; 11:20). We see in his experience the wonderful and mysterious ways of God. Simon may have been annoyed when the Roman soldiers singled him out but it was to be the turning point in his life.

Mark points out that Simon is the father of Alexander and Rufus (21). These men were obviously known to Mark's first readers. It would appear that they were well known Christians in the early church. Rufus may be the same person mentioned in Romans 16:13. *Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.* Early Christian tradition has it that this Rufus was the son of Simon, though we cannot be sure. Paul comments that the mother of Rufus (Simon's wife?) had been like a mother to him. **God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform!**

Beloved of God, called to be saints

Paul goes on to say something about the Christians at Rome which is true of every child of God. They were not called to be apostles, but they were *beloved of God, called to be saints* (7).

Christians are *beloved of God*. In his letter to the Ephesian church, the apostle describes the desperate plight of those who are not Christians. They are dead in their sins, enslaved by Satan, and disobedient to God. We were once like that and the wrath of God was upon us, *but God who is rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, saved us* (Ephesians 2:1–8). Hallelujah!

The world may despise us and persecute us, but remember that we are *beloved of God*. In all our trials, in uncertain and perplexing times *we are beloved of God*. Even in our failures we are *beloved of God*. He daily cares for us and nothing whatever is able to separate us from his great love (8:35–39). We also know his grace and his peace in our lives (7). Paul had a glorious gospel to declare and we too have the very same gospel.

Like the Christians in Rome, we are *called to be saints*. A saint is a holy one, someone who is set apart to God. The Roman Catholic Church practice of canonising those they consider to be outstanding Christians to make them 'saints' is a departure from the teaching of the Bible. **Every Christian is called to be a saint, to lead a holy life.** *'But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct'* (1 Peter 1:15).

Paul rejoiced and thanked God for the testimony of the church at Rome (8). Notice that he describes God as *'my God.'* He belonged to God and enjoyed a personal relationship with him! Can you honestly describe God as your God? Do you really know God?

A servant ... an apostle, separated to the gospel of God

Paul begins his letter to the Romans by describing himself as:

- ‘*A servant of Jesus Christ.*’ The Greek word for *servant* (‘*doulos*’) means a bond-slave. Paul realised that he was not his own, but that he had been bought at a price (1 Corinthians 6:19–20) to be set free (‘redeemed’) from the slavery of sin. To be ‘a servant of Christ’ is a great privilege because Jesus is a wonderful and kind Master. It should give us great joy to serve him.
- ‘*Called to be an apostle.*’ An apostle is someone who has been sent. Dr Lloyd-Jones describes an apostle as ‘one chosen and sent with a special mission as the fully authorized representative of the sender’ (page 38, ‘EXPOSITION OF ROMANS CHAPTER 1’, published by Banner of Truth). The apostles were unique in that they were witnesses of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:22; 1 Corinthians 9:1). They were also given the ability to work miracles (2 Corinthians 12:12).
- ‘*Separated to the gospel of God*’ (1). Paul had a mission from the Lord Jesus Christ to preach the gospel to which he had been separated. His whole life was given to serve his King and to make him known. He had been a Pharisee before his conversion. The word, ‘Pharisee’ is derived from a Hebrew word meaning ‘separated’ and members of this sect set themselves apart to keep their own interpretation of God’s law.

The gospel which Paul preached had been promised in the Old Testament Scriptures. This gospel was about Jesus Christ who was born into the world as a man, through his mother, a descendant of David. By his resurrection from the dead, he was *declared to be the Son of God with power* (2–4). It is important to notice that Christ became man, but he always was the Son of God. His victory over death at his resurrection declared him to be God’s holy Son. Through him, Paul had received grace (undeserved favour) and apostleship. **The message of the gospel is wonderful! It exalts God in his power, grace, love and mercy; it transforms the lives of sinners.**

He saved others; himself he cannot save

The soldiers brought the Lord Jesus to a place called Golgotha where they crucified him. They offered him wine mingled with myrrh to help deaden his pain but he refused it (23). They crucified Jesus at the third hour (nine o’clock in the morning) between two criminals and gambled for his clothes, fulfilling Old Testament prophecy (24–27; cp. Psalm 22:18; Isaiah 53:12).

The Lord Jesus was blasphemed by those who gazed at the gruesome spectacle. They shook their heads with contempt for Jesus. They seized upon the accusation of the two false witnesses who accused Jesus of threatening to destroy the temple and to rebuild it within three days (14:58). They taunted him, ‘*You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross*’ (29–30). They were saying, ‘If you have such great power, prove it by coming down from the cross.’

The chief priests, scribes and elders did not speak to him directly. They spoke to each other about him. They mocked him for claiming to be the promised Messiah, the King of Israel and said, ‘*He saved others; himself he cannot save*’ (31–32). Those words had a far deeper significance than his enemies realised. He could have saved himself and come down from the cross, but he would not. It was not the nails that bound him to the cross, but his great love for sinners like you and me. *He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death* (Philippians 2:8) to fulfil the Father’s plan to save sinners (Acts 2:23). *By one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous* (Romans 5:19). **Are you having problems with obedience to God? Meditate upon Christ’s great love and obedience to save us. If you love him, surely you will want to obey him (John 14:15)!**

*Was it the nails, O Saviour,
That bound thee to the tree?
Nay, ’twas thine everlasting love,
Thy love for me, for me.* (Katherine A.N. Kelly)

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

A supernatural darkness came over the land at the sixth hour (12 noon) and lasted for three hours. Jesus then cried out, ‘*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*’ before taking his last breath. Some thought that he was calling upon Elijah for help but they had not correctly heard the words, ‘*Eloi, Eloi*’ (33–37).

We rightly proclaim the deity of Jesus but we must never forget his humanity. His suffering was not easier to bear because he is God. The fact that he is sinless and that he had enjoyed constant fellowship with the Father from all eternity greatly increased his suffering as he was made ... *to be sin for us* (2 Corinthians 5:21). When Jesus died, the great curtain which separated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple *was torn in two from top to bottom* (38). This was a sign that the way to God was now open to all who put their trust in Christ (Ephesians 2:13,17–18).

We were reminded of the physical suffering of Jesus in yesterday’s reading, but he also suffered spiritually. He had enjoyed the closest and most intimate fellowship with the Father from all eternity. *He was in the beginning with God* (John 1:2; cp. Proverbs 8:30). We are here faced with a scene of judgment. The Holy God turned his face away from his beloved Son at Calvary, as he bore our sins. Sin separates us from God and the three hours of darkness symbolised the utter horror brought by such a separation (33; cp. Isaiah 59:2). The cry, ‘*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*’ expresses something of the horror in the appalling suffering of our Saviour. **He died to save us from hell, that lonely, dreadful place of final and eternal separation from God. What wonderful love! Let us worship him and adore him!**

*O, make me understand it,
Help me to take it in,
What it meant to thee, the Holy One,
To bear away my sin.*

(Katherine A. N. Kelly).

4. Righteousness Rejected by the Jews (9:1 to 11:36).
 - The absolute sovereignty of God in election – 9:1–29.
 - Israel’s rejection of the righteousness of God – 9:30–10:21
 - Has God rejected the Jew? – 11:1–36
5. Righteousness in Practice (12:1 to 15:13)
 - Consecration and service – 12:1–21
 - The Christian and the state – 13:1–7
 - The Christian in society – 13:8–14
 - The Christian and liberty of conscience – 14:1–23
 - Christian fellowship – 15:1–13
6. Closing Greetings (15:14 to 16:27)
 - Paul’s ministry and his plans – 15:14–33
 - Greetings to friends at Rome – 16:1–16
 - Final exhortation and encouragement – 16:17–20
 - Greetings, benediction and doxology – 16:21–27

‘This epistle is the chief book of the New Testament, the purest gospel. It deserves not only to be known word for word by every Christian, but to be the subject of his meditation day by day, the daily bread of his soul. The more time one spends in it, the more precious it becomes and the better it appears.’ (Martin Luther — Preface to his Commentary on Romans).

Robert Haldane lived in Geneva in the nineteenth century. One day he overheard some theological students talking. It was obvious that they did not have a clue about the gospel. He spoke to them and invited them to his home for a Bible study, taking them through Romans and carefully explaining its teaching. The expositions continued week by week and he witnessed a great revival which spread through Switzerland and into France. Merle d’Aubigné who wrote a great history of the Reformation was one of those converted through Haldane’s ministry. Others included Adolphe Monod and César Malan who were to become outstanding church leaders. Those expositions of Haldane form his one and only Bible commentary – on Romans! I also commend William Hendriksen’s Commentary on Romans and sermons of Dr D.M. Lloyd-Jones on Romans (published by Banner of Truth) and Stuart Olyott’s ‘The Gospel as it Really is’ published by Evangelical Press.

ROMANS

8 OCTOBER

Mark 15:37–47

Paul wrote his letter to the church at Rome towards the end of his third missionary journey, approximately 57 AD (15:25–27; cp. Acts 20:2–3; 1 Corinthians 16:1–4). He was in Corinth and planned to return to Jerusalem and afterwards visit Rome before going to preach the gospel in Spain (15:24–28). God had other plans for him, however; Paul did not go to Spain, but he did go to Rome as a prisoner (Acts 28).

Themes in Romans

- The righteousness of God is the main theme of the book (the words *'righteous'* and *'righteousness'* are found 66 times in Romans).
- The goodness of God (2:4; 5:8; 8:35–39; 11:22).
- The sovereignty of God (9:11–29; 11:1–36).
- The grace of God (3:24; 5:2, 15–21; 6:1,14–15; 11:5–6; 12:3,6).
- The law of God (7:1 to 8:7).

Outline of Romans

1. Greetings & Introduction to Main Theme of Letter (1:1–17)
(Righteousness)
2. Righteousness Lacking in Men (1:18 to 3:20).
 - Lacking in Gentiles – 1:18–32
 - Lacking in Jews – 2:1 to 3:20
3. Righteousness Provided by God (3:21 to 8:39).
 - God's righteousness – 3:21–31
 - Abraham justified by faith – 4:1–25
 - The believer's righteousness – 5:1–21
 - Free grace not a licence to sin – 6:1–23
 - The Christian and the law – 7:1–25
 - The Holy Spirit in the life of the believer – 8:1–17
 - Suffering and glory – 8:18–30
 - 'More than conquerors' – 8:31–39

Truly this man was the Son of God

When Jesus died, the curtain which surrounded the 'holy of holies' in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (38; cp. Exodus 26:31–33). This was a sign that the way into the presence of God was open to all believers because of the sacrifice of Jesus at Calvary (Ephesians 2:18; Hebrews 10:19–20). The Roman centurion was profoundly affected as he saw Jesus die. He had heard all the words of Jesus from the cross and the triumphant cry, *'It is finished'* (John 19:30). The enemies of Christ had said, *'If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross'* (Matthew 27:40), but the centurion exclaimed, *'Truly this man was the Son of God'* (39). John was the only disciple at the cross but the women were faithful to the end (40–41; cp. John 19:26). It is a fact that women often put men to shame in devoted and sacrificial service for God.

Joseph of Arimathea was a devout Jew and a prominent member of the ruling council (known as 'the Sanhedrin' – 43). He had been a secret believer (John 19:38), but he now went in boldly to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus. Some people claim that Jesus did not die on the cross but that he was taken down while still alive and survived to continue his teaching mission. Such theories are without any foundation. They are concocted by those who deny the resurrection of Christ but have to find an explanation for the phenomenal spread of Christianity during the first century AD. Pilate recognised that Jesus had died and so did his enemies (44; cp. Matthew 27:62–66).

Joseph prepared the body of Jesus for burial and laid him in a tomb which was in a garden at Calvary (John 19:41). He was prepared to be excommunicated from the council now that his secret was out (John 12:42). **Are you a secret disciple?** Why are you fearful? The Lord can make the most timid person bold. Take the plunge and confess Christ openly; you will be blessed and greatly strengthened!

Go and tell his disciples — and Peter

The Jewish Sabbath runs from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday and some of the women waited until early Sunday morning before returning to the tomb of Jesus. They wanted to anoint his body but they had no idea how they would move the stone from the entrance of the tomb (1–3). They were the first to discover the empty tomb with the stone rolled away, to see the angel, and to hear him announce the marvellous news that *‘he is risen’* (6).

The Lord Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene out of whom he had cast seven demons. There is no evidence whatever that she had been an immoral woman and it is a pity that some Evangelicals propagate such a myth. There is no valid reason for linking her with the sinful woman described in Luke 7:36–50. She had sufficient financial resources to be among those women who provided for Jesus from their substance (Luke 8:2). She had been delivered from a living nightmare and she had every reason to love the Lord Jesus. The grief-stricken disciples did not believe her message, however (9–11).

Christ’s resurrection declares him *to be the Son of God with power* (Romans 1:4). Death could not hold him (Acts 2:24)! He triumphed over the grave and his resurrection is a guarantee that all who belong to him will be raised at his coming to have new bodies which are immune from weakness, pain, ageing, and suffering (John 14:19; 1 Corinthians 15:20–28; Philippians 3:20–21; 1 John 3:1–3).

Our Lord is so patient and kind. Peter was in dark despair over his denial of Christ, but the angel had a message from God, *‘Go and tell his disciples — and Peter’* (7). Peter wasn’t written off, but gloriously restored. **How wonderful our gracious God who will never cast us off! If you have failed the Lord and feel ashamed, do not sink into despair feeling that God has finished with you.** Come to him, confessing your sin. Call upon him, asking him to help and strengthen you, and to restore to you the joy of your salvation. He still has work for you to do.

You, O LORD, remain for ever

Jerusalem is described as being *‘the joy of the whole earth’* (Psalm 48:2) but now Mount Zion is desolate (18). The prophet laments, *‘The joy of our heart has ceased, our dance has turned to mourning’* (15). The people of Judah were once in an honourable position (*‘crown’* upon head, 16) but now they were in disgrace. Why is this? We saw yesterday that it was because they had sinned. Sin pays terrible wages!

At the close of his prayer, the prophet turns his eyes from the ruins of Jerusalem to God on his eternal throne saying, *‘You, O LORD, remain for ever; your throne from generation to generation’* (19). Earthly kingdoms come and go, great empires last but for a time, but the Lord remains for ever. We belong to an everlasting kingdom if we belong to Christ. We see turmoil, wars, devastation, change and decay all around us, and life is very uncertain, but the Lord Jesus is always the same (cp. Hebrews 1:10–12; 13:8). When the church is weak, when evil seems to prevail, we must not sink in despair, but turn our eyes and hearts to God who reigns eternally. **The Lord is King and knowing this makes all the difference to our outlook on life. We are secure in him.**

*‘Thou remainest,’ blest Redeemer,
Lord of peace and Lord of strife;
Jesus, Saviour, Lord for ever,
‘Thou remainest,’ Christ my life.*

*‘Thou remainest,’ ... ‘Thou remainest,’
‘Thou remainest,’ Christ my all; . . .
Peace or conflict, joy or sorrow,
‘Thou remainest,’ Christ my all.*

(El Nathan)

The prophet calls on God, *‘Turn us back to you, O LORD, and we will be restored; renew our days as of old’* (21). We often take forgiveness for granted, thinking, ‘just a little prayer will make things right.’ Godly men and women in the Bible were not like that. They recognised the need for a deep inward work in the heart and were humble in their approach to the Lord (22).

Our fathers sinned ... but we bear their iniquities

The final chapter of Lamentations is a prayer in which the prophet pleads with the Lord to remove the disgrace that he had brought upon his people and to restore them to himself. He prayed, ‘Remember, O LORD, what has come upon us; look, and behold our reproach!’ (1). Matthew Henry writes, ‘Is any afflicted? Let him pray (James 5:13); and let him in prayer pour out his complaint to God, and make known before him his trouble; the people of God do so here; being overwhelmed with grief, they give vent to their sorrows at the footstool of the throne of grace and so give themselves ease.’

The prophet called on the Lord to remember their desperate situation. They had lost their inheritance and they were like helpless widows or orphans. Water and wood now had to be purchased whereas it had once been freely available. They were obliged to humble themselves by submitting to Assyria and Egypt in order to obtain bread, and when they did this, their lives were in peril from marauding Bedouin (2–6,9).

Why was Jerusalem destitute (10–18)? The prophet said to God, ‘Our fathers sinned and are no more, but we bear their iniquities’ (7). We must not fall into the trap of believing that God was punishing the innocent for the sins of the guilty. Previous generations had of course sinned, and this had its dreadful effects on those who followed them, but the prophet also confessed, ‘Woe to us, for we have sinned!’ (16).

Today, the older generation are often blamed for the crimes of the young. It is true that they failed to give a good lead and that they gave us ‘the permissive society’ which has brought so much misery and suffering with the breakdown of family life. However, those who are young are accountable for their own sin. **We must not blame-shift. The Lord holds us responsible for our own sin.** Whether young or old, we are all guilty sinners before God. We must not allow ourselves to be deceived by those who are always ready to blame society, blame the government, blame anyone but themselves for their wicked deeds. Let us always seek to have our attitude based on Scripture.

Go into all the world and preach the gospel

The Lord Jesus rebuked the eleven disciples for their unbelief and hardness of heart, but he still entrusted them with the gospel message (14–15). This message is one of wonderful hope for every one of us. *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day* (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Jesus commissioned the disciples to *go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature* (15). They were to preach the gospel to all people, not only the Jews. The spiritual need of sinful men and women is still the same and the unchanging gospel alone can meet that need. Notice that part of the gospel message is that those who believe should be baptized (16; cp. Matthew 28:19). Are you a Christian? **Have you been baptized? If not, why not, when Jesus commands it?**

The apostles were endowed with special gifts before Jesus ascended into heaven (17–20). We have no reason to believe that these gifts are available today; they are ‘*the signs of an apostle*’ (2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3–4). It is interesting to note that the Christians at Joppa sent for an apostle (Peter) when Dorcas died (Acts 9:38). They themselves did not have gifts of healing. Those who claim to be able to heal people through the power of God deceive themselves as well as many thousands of people who look in vain for healing miracles. God does heal today as he wills but we have no right to expect healing on demand. Those who teach that it is God’s will to heal every sick Christian are greatly mistaken (cp. 1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 4:20).

The Lord Jesus *was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God* (19). To be at God’s right hand is to be in the place of highest honour; it is the most exalted position (cp. Mark 10:35–37). The risen Lord Jesus is at God’s right hand where he ever lives to make intercession for all who come to God through him (Hebrews 7:25; cp. Romans 8:34). The truth of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus brings great comfort to the child of God. **We serve a risen Saviour! Our labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:57–58).**

LAMENTATIONS

22 OCTOBER

Lamentations 4:17–22

Lamentations is a poetical book which, according to Jewish and Christian tradition, was written by the prophet Jeremiah (though his name does not appear in the book). Each of the five chapters in the book is a lament over the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC and Jeremiah was a witness of this tragic event. The Hebrew title of the book is 'Ekah!' ('How!') taken from the first word in chapters 1,2 and 4. The title 'Lamentations' (loud cries) is taken from the Septuagint (Greek version of the Old Testament).

There are twenty-two verses in each chapter (except for chapter 3 which has sixty-six verses). In the Hebrew, the first four chapters are arranged as an acrostic, each of the twenty-two verses beginning with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet (which has twenty-two letters), moving from the first letter 'aleph' to the last letter 'tau'. Chapter 3 has three verses for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

The prophet acknowledges in his laments that Jerusalem was destroyed as an act of righteous judgment (1:18). God used the Babylonians in the punishment of his sinning people (eg. 1:5, 12–15; 2:1–8,17). There is a moving affirmation of the mercy and faithfulness of God in chapter 3, verses 19–39.

Watching vainly for our help

Jeremiah had warned Zedekiah the last king of Judah that he should not trust in other nations to help him in his defence against the Babylonians. Help from the Egyptians had been short-lived and when Jerusalem most needed help it was not forthcoming (cp. Jeremiah 37:7–10). When Jerusalem was captured, Edom behaved treacherously towards the Jews (cp. Ezekiel 25:12–14; Obadiah 10–16). The end of Zedekiah, 'the anointed of the LORD' (20) is recorded in 2 Kings 25:4–7. The prophet's words to Edom are not an encouragement for that nation to rejoice at the destruction of Jerusalem, but are uttered in irony (21–22). Let Edom rejoice and be glad, but God will surely judge her and uncover her sin!

The Lord had determined that Judah would go into captivity in Babylon because of her continual disobedience to his word. Many were expecting that Egypt, an enemy of Babylon, would come to the rescue of Judah, should the Babylonians invade (Jeremiah 2:36; 37:7–8). The people are described as *watching vainly for our help* because Egypt could not save them (17). When God visits in judgment, human help is of no avail. We will all be judged for our sin but the Lord Jesus died on the cross to save sinners. There is no other saviour. **Who are you trusting to save you?**

*Why should I make a man my trust?
Princes must die and turn to dust!
Vain is the help of flesh and blood:
Their breath departs, their pomp and power,
And thoughts all vanish in an hour,
Nor can they make their promise good.*

*Happy the man whose hopes rely
On Israel's God! He made the sky,
And earth, and seas, with all their train:
His truth for ever stands secure;
He saves the oppressed, he feeds the poor,
And none shall find his promise vain.*

(Isaac Watts)

Because of the sins of her prophets

The unbelievable had happened when Jerusalem was conquered (12)! Where did the greatest blame lie for this calamity? All this happened *because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests* (13). These people who should have known better, had not only been silent in the face of wickedness, but they had also lulled the people into a false sense of peace rather than warn them of judgment. Even worse, they were wicked and were involved in bloodshed (13; cp. Jeremiah 6:13–15; 26:20–23). They had made themselves unclean with the blood of those they had oppressed. Was it any wonder that when judgment came, the people they had oppressed treated them as they would treat those suffering with leprosy (14–16).

Many people despise the church not only because of their hostility to the gospel message but also because church leaders often fail to give a clear moral lead. We must realise that many men in clerical collars are far from God and are strangers to the truth of the gospel. They ignore the high and holy standards demanded of us by the Word of God, making excuses for all manner of wickedness in men, often blaming ‘social deprivation’ as the cause, denying personal responsibility. We are accused of lacking in compassion because we do not tolerate the sinful lifestyle of the sexually immoral and the homosexual. Many scorn the Scripture teaching concerning divine judgment for sin, quoting the words of Jesus to the adulterous woman, ‘*Neither do I condemn you*’ but conveniently forget that the Saviour also said in the same breath, ‘*go and sin no more*’ (John 8:11).

If we really desire the salvation of sinners, we will urge people to turn from their sinful ways and trust in the Lord Jesus to save them. **True compassion speaks the truth in love and warns people of the consequences of their sin if they do not repent.**

Outline of Lamentations

1. First Lament

Jerusalem – wretched and desolate	1:1–11
No one to comfort Jerusalem	1:12–22
2. Second Lament

The Lord’s judgment upon Jerusalem	2:1–17
A call to urgent prayer	2:18–22
3. Third Lament

The prophet’s grief	3:1–20.
The prophet’s hope	3:21–38
A call to repentance	3:39–42
The sorrows of sin	3:43–54
The prophet’s prayer against his enemies	3:55–66
4. Fourth Lament

The good times have gone	4:1–10
The wages of sin	4:11–20
A warning to Edom	4:21–22
5. Fifth Lament

A prayer for mercy	5:1–10
The shame and sorrow of sin	5:11–18
A final appeal to the eternal God.	5:19–22

She did not consider her destiny

Jerusalem is compared to a woman who was once powerful and popular but who is now a pathetic and lonely figure (1–2). Once a princess, she is now like a widow and a slave. She had been deserted by her *lovers* (neighbouring heathen nations who enticed her away from God to idolatry). Many of those she considered to be her friends had been treacherous towards her and had become her enemies (2). The people had gone into captivity and the great religious feasts were a thing of the past (3–6). She remembered *all her pleasant things* but the enemy had taken them away and there was no one to help her (7–11).

Why had Jerusalem come to such grief? It was because of her wickedness (5,8–9). The words of verse 9 are very telling – *She did not consider her destiny* (‘future’, ESV). Why do men, women and young people ignore the Word of God when they hear it preached? Why do they continue to sin and refuse to heed the voice of conscience? They are dead in their sin and give no thought to their eternal destiny. We may try to shut death and judgment from our thoughts but they will surely come. *Sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death* (James 1:15), and after death comes ‘*the judgment*’ (Hebrews 9:27).

If you are not a Christian, have you considered the consequences of refusing to repent of your sin or of rejecting God’s mercy? **Have you considered your destiny if you die without Christ? Be wise and come to the Lord Jesus, asking him to forgive you and to accept you before it is too late.**

*Pause, my soul! and ask the question,
Art thou ready to meet God?
Am I made a real Christian,
Washed in the Redeemer’s blood?
Have I union
With the church’s living head?*

(William Gadsby)

How the gold has become dim!

The verses in today’s reading contrast the former splendour of Zion (Jerusalem) with the misery and desolation of the city when it was taken by the Babylonians. Its citizens are likened to gold and precious stones (1–2,7), but something had gone wrong. *How the gold has become dim! ... The precious sons of Zion once valuable as fine gold were now regarded as clay pots* (1–2). The people had become cruel and the cries of starving children were ignored (3–4). Those who once enjoyed luxury were reduced to squalor and the Nazirites (better translated ‘nobles’ or ‘princes’) once so fine in their appearance were now hideous (5,7–8).

When a Christian backslides the gold of his godly life becomes dim. Gone is the habit of prayer, the humble dependence upon God, the delight of obedience to his will, the joy of meeting with the Lord’s people for worship, the bright testimony before the ungodly. The love of the world tarnishes a life which once honoured God. The enemy of our souls does his deadly work. How is it with you? Is the gold becoming dim in your life? Has the attractive lustre of a Christlike life gone? Oh, return to the Lord and confess your backsliding and coldness of heart! He will then restore to you the joy of your salvation.

The siege of Jerusalem brought such a dreadful famine that women who were once compassionate, ate their own children in order to survive. The prophet considered that instant death by the sword was to be preferred to slow death through starvation (9). He recognised that the calamity which had befallen them was a punishment for sin (6). When God’s righteous judgment is recognised, there is hope for sinners. We live in days when most people, including many in the professing church, refuse to accept that God punishes sinners. They dismiss any suggestion that God visits judgment on the wicked; others blame God when natural disasters occur and ask (often scornfully), ‘If God is a God of love, why ... ?’ *The gold has become dim. The situation calls for earnest prayer and intercession!*

You drew near on the day I called on you

The prophet continues to speak on behalf of the afflicted people of Jerusalem (43–47). The Lord had covered himself with anger as he pursued and punished the sinful inhabitants of the city. He had also covered himself *with a cloud that prayer should not pass through*. If we have sin in our hearts and have not repented of it, we will get nowhere in our prayers (Psalm 66:18). The once proud citizens of Jerusalem had become as *an off-scouring and refuse* among the nations (45). Their situation was one of fear, a snare, desolation and destruction. *The way of the unfaithful is hard* (Proverbs 13:15).

All this was too much for the prophet who wept profusely for the people (49–51; cp. Jeremiah 9:1). His faithful stand for God had brought him many enemies and he was cast into a pit (52–54; cp. Jeremiah 38:6–13). If we suffer for faithful witness our prayers will reach God, even *from the lowest pit* (55). The writer could testify, *‘You drew near on the day I called on you, and said, “Do not fear!”’* (57). The Lord had seen all that his enemies were doing against him and he could trust in the righteous God to deal with them (58–66).

Are you passing through a difficult time – not just a ‘valley’ experience, but a ‘pit’ experience? Call on the name of the Lord. He will hear you, even if you are in the lowest pit, and he will draw near to you (cp. Psalm 40:1–3).

*He took me from a fearful pit
And from the miry clay,
And on a rock he set my feet,
Establishing my way.*

*He put a new song in my mouth,
Our God to magnify;
Many shall see it and shall fear,
And on the Lord rely.*

(Psalm 40:2–3; from the Metrical Psalms)

The LORD is righteous

The verses that we have just read recognise that it is the Lord who had punished Jerusalem for her sinfulness. *The daughter of Zion* (6) is seen crying out for compassion from those who pass by (12) but there was no one to comfort her (17). An appeal to the neighbouring nations also fell on deaf ears. Those described as Jerusalem’s lovers had deceived her, breaking their promises (18–21). She then appealed to the Lord in her distress (20–22). She confessed that *the LORD is righteous* and that her troubles were the result of her rebellion against God’s commandments (18,20). When we repent of our sin, we make no excuses, but acknowledge from our heart that *the LORD is righteous* in all his ways and that we have rebelled against him.

The words of verse 12 are often linked to the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross: *‘Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which has been brought on me, which the LORD has inflicted on me in the day of his fierce anger.’* There was no sorrow or suffering like that of Christ at Calvary. What amazing love for us that God the Father should bring such sorrow on him as he suffered for sinners (cp. Isaiah 53:3–5). He was humiliated, mocked and taunted with no one showing pity. The depth of his suffering was shown in his cry to Heaven, *‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’* (Mark 15:34). **What amazing love for undeserving sinners like us! Have you responded to God’s mercy?**

*All ye that pass by, to Jesus draw nigh;
To you is it nothing that Jesus should die?
Your ransom and peace, your surety he is;
Come, see if there ever was sorrow like his.*

*For what you have done his blood must atone,
The Father has punished for you his dear Son,
The Lord in the day of his anger did lay
Your sins on the Lamb, and he bore them away.*

(Charles Wesley)

In the day of his anger

In the second lament the prophet describes the gruesome scenes which he had observed in Jerusalem. The *cloud* of divine judgment (1) had brought destruction to the palaces and strongholds of the land, to the temple ('*his tabernacle*'), the altar and the sanctuary (6). The great religious festivals were now a thing of the past (5–7). The walls, ramparts, gates and bars of the city had been removed and there was no word from the Lord for the prophets (9). This probably refers to the false prophets (see verse 14), because Jeremiah continued to prophesy (Jeremiah 40:1–10; 42:9–22; 43:8 to 44:30).

This chapter could be entitled '*In the day of his anger*' (1; cp. verse 22). God's anger is also described as '*his wrath*' (2), '*fierce anger*' (3), '*his fury*' (4) and '*his burning indignation*' (6). The people had rejected God and he had become *like an enemy* to them (4–5). These verses stress that the destruction of Jerusalem did not come because of Babylonian military might but because of God's righteous judgment (the expression '*The Lord has*' and '*he has*' are repeated many times in verses 1 to 9).

Many people refuse to believe that God is a God of wrath as well as being a God of love. The New Testament contains many references to God's wrath (eg. John 3:36; Romans 1:18; Revelation 6:16). **When we see that God does punish sinners in his wrath, we appreciate more the greatness of his love in not sparing his beloved Son, but punishing him for our salvation** (Isaiah 53:4–6,10; Romans 5:9; 8:32; 1 Peter 3:18). God's great love encourages us to love him, obey him, and to gladly serve him.

*Chosen, not for good in me,
Wakened up from wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Saviour's side,
By the Spirit sanctified,
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show
By my love how much I owe.*

(R.M. M'Cheyne)

He does not afflict willingly

We often hear people say, 'I cannot believe that a God of love can allow such-and-such to happen' Those who are not Christians have mistaken notions about God but Satan may also tempt us to have hard thoughts about the Lord (cp. Genesis 3:4). We must be ready to combat such malicious whispers from the enemy of our souls. We must remember that the Lord will show compassion *according to the multitude of his mercies for he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men* (32–33).

The Lord takes no pleasure in afflicting his wayward people. He feels our afflictions. *In all their affliction, he was afflicted* (Isaiah 63:9). He chastens us because he loves us; his discipline is for our good and *it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness* (Hebrews 12:6,10–11). The Lord Jesus Christ is our great High Priest who sympathises with our weaknesses; this encourages us to come boldly to the throne of grace for help (Hebrews 4:15). Do you seek the Lord in prayer when you are afflicted and tried?

God is righteous and is concerned for justice (34–36). **When he afflicts us, we should not complain at being punished for our sins but examine our ways and turn back to him in repentance (39–40).** God freely forgives us when we come to him to be saved through the Lord Jesus, but this does not mean that we do not have to seek his forgiveness when we sin as believers. We must seek him in lifting up not only our hands but also our hearts in prayer, as we acknowledge our sin. There can be no pardon without repentance (41–42).

*God shall alone the refuge be
And comfort of my mind;
Too wise to be mistaken, he,
Too good to be unkind.*

(Samuel Medley)

Great is your faithfulness

The prophet now moves from a position of no hope (18) to an attitude full of hope (21,24,26,29). He called to mind great truths about the character of God (21). He was able to declare, ‘*The LORD is my portion,*’ says my soul, ‘*Therefore I hope in him!*’ (24). Charles Bridges writes, ‘And surely the whole world cannot weigh against the comfort of this Christian confidence. For it is as impossible, that his own people should ever be impoverished, as that his own perfections should moulder away. But a portion implies, not a source of ordinary pleasure, but of rest and satisfaction, such as leaves nothing else to be desired.’ (referring to this verse in his commentary on Psalm 119:57, published by the Banner of Truth Trust). When God is our portion we have every reason to hope in him. We should also remember whenever Satan or the world seeks to dangle before us the passing pleasures of sin, whenever we are tempted to trust in material things, that nothing can compare with the priceless privilege of having God as our portion.

The Lord is merciful and *his compassions fail not. They are new every morning.* The prophet exclaimed, ‘*Great is your faithfulness*’ (22–23). The truth of God’s unfailing compassion and faithfulness gives hope to the backslider for he has promised to restore our souls. His great faithfulness is also a source of comfort to the perplexed child of God who is passing through very trying times. **Let us not sink into despair in perplexing circumstances and trials but trust in God who is faithful and who will not fail us.**

We do get impatient in difficult and testing times, sometimes wondering whether there will be an end of our particular trial. Let us take verses 25 and 26 to heart, *The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.* To wait upon God means to depend upon him, patiently submitting to his will. Never forget that God is faithful. *Great is your faithfulness.*

False and deceptive visions

When the Babylonians surrounded Jerusalem for eighteen months, famine was inevitable. Verses 11 and 12 present a vivid picture of starving children towards the end of this terrible siege (cp. Jeremiah 52:1–6). One of the great problems of Jerusalem before it was destroyed in 586 BC, was that the people were ready to believe false prophets who brought *false and deceptive visions*, but did not expose their sin (14). They rejected the message of Jeremiah the true prophet of God (eg. Jeremiah 5:31; 14:13–15; 23:9–40; 28:1–17). If sinners are not told of their sin and warned of its consequences they are lulled into a false sense of security just as Jerusalem was in Jeremiah’s day.

Times have not changed. *False and deceptive visions* are very common today. Most leaders of the established church have very little to say about sin and judgment. Many professing evangelical preachers speak much about the love of God, but little of our sin which alienates us from God. They major on man’s hurts and misery rather than on his desperate need of God’s forgiveness for his sin. **The note of judgment and repentance is missing. Beware of smooth talk and do not believe false and deceptive visions.**

*When nations are to perish in their sins,
‘Tis in the church the leprosy begins;
The priest whose office is with zeal sincere,
To watch the fountain, and preserve it clear,
Carelessly nods and sleeps upon the brink,
While others poison what the flock must drink;
Or, waking at the call of lust alone,
Infuses lies and errors of his own:
His unsuspecting sheep believe it pure,
And, tainted by the very means of cure,
Catch from each other a contagious spot,
The foul forerunner of a general rot.*

(From William Cowper’s ‘Expostulation.’ Find Cowper’s poems on the internet or borrow a copy from a library and read this poem. It has a very timely message).

The LORD has done what he purposed

Jerusalem with its worship of God and its magnificent temple had once been a wonderful place, described as ‘*the city of the great King*’ (Psalm 48:1–3; 50:2). It was now a ruin and the enemies of the Jews mocked and taunted them saying, ‘*Is this the city that is called the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?*’ They rejoiced to see the city in ruins (15–16). Why was the city in such a pitiful state? The answer is in verse 17: ‘*The LORD has done what he purposed; he has fulfilled his word.*’ God had warned that he would bring such a calamity upon Jerusalem if the people sinned against him (eg. 1 Kings 9:6–9). The Bible reminds us that there will be scoffers who refuse to believe that God will keep his promise concerning the return of Christ to judge the world (2 Peter 3:1–13).

The Lord will do all that he has purposed. He will fulfil all of his promises. **He does not make empty threats nor does he trade in vain promises. This should terrify you if you are not a Christian but be a great comfort to you if you belong to the Lord.** The Bible warns us that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God* (Hebrews 10:31). *How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?* (Hebrews 2:3).

Suffering Jerusalem is urged to cry out to the Lord (18–19). Famine was driving women to eat their own children and the streets were littered with the corpses of the slain as the Babylonians entered the city. Famine and the sword had come upon Jerusalem as if summoned to a feast day (20–22). There is a great famine in our nation – a famine *of hearing the words of the LORD* (Amos 8:11). Oh, for such a concern for our lost generation that we will give ourselves no relief but pour out our heart in prayer, like water before the face of the Lord (19)!

I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath

In this chapter the prophet identifies himself with the backsliding people of Jerusalem and Judah (40,48–51). He keenly felt the hand of God against them in judgment and cried out, ‘*I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath*’ (1). The Lord uses affliction to bring us back to himself when we backslide. We can say with the psalmist, ‘*Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep your word*’ (Psalm 119:67). How does God afflict us when we stray from him?

- He leads us in paths of darkness and bitterness (2–6,19).
- He hedges us in, trapping us like a prisoner (7).
- He shuts out our prayer so that he appears to ignore us (8, 44).
- He thwarts our plans (9).
- He chastens us (11).
- He takes away our peace (17).
- He destroys our hope (18).

We will wander away from the Lord if we neglect our times of personal prayer and thoughtful reading of God’s holy Word. **Are you backslidden in heart? If you have lost your Christian joy, turn back to the Lord, confessing your sin (40–42). He will hear you and answer your prayer for forgiveness and restoration (55–56).**

*O Jesus, full of truth and grace,
More full of grace than I of sin,
Yet once again I seek thy face;
Open thine arms and take me in,
And freely my backslidings heal
And love the faithless sinner still.*

*Thou knowest the way to bring me back,
My fallen spirit to restore;
O for thy truth and mercy’s sake
Forgive and bid me sin no more;
The ruins of my soul repair
And make my heart a house of prayer.* (Charles Wesley)