

Lamentations 4:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed! the stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street.

Analysis

Chapter 4 opens with shocking imagery: "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!" (eikah yugam zahav yishneh ha-ketem ha-tov, אֵיכָה יוּגַם זָהָב יִישְׁנֶה הַכֶּתֶם הַטוֹב וְשִׁשְׁתָּהּ הַכֶּתֶם הַטוֹב). Gold symbolized the temple's glory and purity. Ketem (כֶּתֶם) refers to pure, refined gold. The tarnishing of gold—inherently resistant to corrosion—represents a cosmic disorder, an unnatural degradation. The verse continues: "the stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street" (tishtapokhnah avnei-kodesh be-rosh kol-khutsot). "Stones of the sanctuary" likely refers to the foundation stones and sacred materials of the temple, now scattered in streets as common rubble. What was holy and set apart (kodesh, קֹדֶשׁ) is now trampled underfoot, profaned. Some interpreters see "gold" and "stones" as metaphors for people—the precious children of Zion (verse 2) now treated as worthless. This double meaning enriches the text: both the physical temple and the human temple (God's image-bearers) have been violated and degraded. The transformation from "most fine gold" to tarnished metal parallels humanity's fall from created glory to sinful corruption. Only divine restoration can reverse such comprehensive ruin.

Historical Context

Solomon's temple contained massive quantities of gold. 1 Kings 6-7 describes gold overlay on the entire inner sanctuary, gold cherubim, gold altar, gold lampstands, gold furnishings, and gold decorations. The description suggests tons of precious metal. This represented not mere wealth but the surpassing value of God's

presence dwelling among His people. When Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, his forces systematically stripped the temple. 2 Kings 25:13-17 and Jeremiah 52:17-23 detail the plunder: bronze pillars cut up and carried to Babylon, the bronze sea broken and taken, gold and silver articles removed. What couldn't be transported was destroyed. The phrase "stones...poured out" describes the violent demolition—sacred architecture reduced to street rubble. This desecration fulfilled Isaiah 64:11's lament: "Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste." The temple that took seven years to build (1 Kings 6:38) and represented God's covenant presence was destroyed in days. The loss was not merely material but theological—God's glory had departed (Ezekiel 10:18-19, 11:22-23). Yet Haggai 2:9 promises that the glory of the latter house (the second temple after exile) would exceed the former. Ultimately, this found fulfillment in Christ—the true temple (John 2:19-21) containing the fullness of deity bodily (Colossians 2:9). Human temples become obsolete when the living God dwells among His people through His Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19, Ephesians 2:21-22).

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What 'gold' in our lives—things we consider most precious and valuable—might God allow to be tarnished to reveal they're not ultimate?
2. How does the desecration of the temple's sacred stones illustrate the comprehensive nature of sin's corruption and the futility of trusting external religious forms?
3. In what ways does Christ fulfill the role of the true temple, and how does His body broken and scattered (the cross) lead to the building of the spiritual temple (the church)?
4. What does it mean that believers are now 'living stones' (1 Peter 2:5) being built into a spiritual house, and how should this shape our understanding of corporate worship?

Interlinear Text

הֵט וְבֵ	הַכֶּתֶם	יִשְׁנָה אֶ	זֶה בֹ	יֹעַם	אֵיכָה
how is the most	fine gold	changed	How is the gold	become dim	
H2896	H3800	H8132	H2091	H6004	H349
חוֹצוֹת:	כָּל	בֵּרֶךְ אֶשׁ	קֵן דָּשׁ	אֲבִי	תִשְׁתַּף כָּנָה
of every street	in the top		of the sanctuary	the stones	are poured out
H2351	H7218		H6944	H68	H8210

Additional Cross-References

Lamentations 2:19 (Parallel theme): Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up thy hands toward him for the life of thy young children, that faint for hunger in the top of every street.

Isaiah 1:21 (Parallel theme): How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers.