

MODERN APPLICATION OF LAMENTATIONS “THE DEVESTATION OF SIN”

INTRODUCTION: See also 2 Kings 22-25; 2 Chronicles 34-36

World Trade Center before and after: multiplied 1,000 times:

1. The Biblical book of Lamentations was written in about 587 B.C.
2. Most Bible scholars attribute the book to the “weeping prophet” Jeremiah, though his name does not actually appear in the book.
3. The Book is a series of five poems, lamenting the capture and destruction of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian Empire.

The following observations “a” through “p” are from Wayne Jackson:

- a) little-known portion of the Bible, frequently neglected by some students, contains some rich deposits of truth which will reward those who study it.
 - b) After the destruction of the ten tribes of Israel by Assyria (721 B.C.), the citizens of Judah (i.e., the tribes of Benjamin and Judah—collectively known as Judah) continued to degenerate spiritually.
 - c) Though there were occasional periods of reform (such as in the days of Josiah 2 Kings 22-23), they were both superficial and temporary. Finally, the time for punishment had come.
 - d) Jehovah, through his providence, brought Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonians against Judah.
 - e) Jehoiakin, king of Judah, “*became his servant*” (2 Kings 24:1).
 - f) This occurred in 606/5 B.C. Eight years later, the army of Nebuchadnezzar came again to Jerusalem and besieged the city.
 - g) The temple was ransacked. Its vessels of gold were confiscated and cut into pieces.
 - h) Also, many Hebrews were taken captive to Babylon (2 Kings 24:10-17).
 - i) Zedekiah was appointed as a puppet king over the “*poorest sort of the people*” who had not been transported to Babylon.
 - j) However, in the ninth year of his reign, Zedekiah rebelled, and Nebuchadnezzar came again with his army.
 - k) Jerusalem was besieged for almost eighteen months.
 - l) Conditions within the city were dreadful. “[*Famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land*” (2 Kings 25:3).
 - m) Finally, a breach was made in the city. The invading army “*had no compassion upon young man or virgin, old man or hoary-headed*” (2 Chronicles 36:17).
 - n) The remaining vessels of the temple were taken, and the Babylonians “*burned the house of God, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all the palaces thereof with fire.*” Truly, it was a horrible spectacle.
 - o) The author was witness to these events and the book of Lamentations is actually a funeral dirge that depicts the suffering and sorrow which attended Jerusalem’s death.
 - p) It was probably sung by the Jews in captivity as a reminder of their sorrow, and especially of their past sins which precipitated the destruction of the Holy City.
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4. As the writer walks about the streets of the once great city (either physically or by use of memory) he graphically describes the destruction, starvation, and general hopelessness that he sees.
 5. The great temple of Solomon, with its huge cedar trusses and magnificent architecture all overlaid with gold, lies in ruins!
 6. The once great people of the city are now slaves, or worse, they are forced to live on the streets and commit acts of cannibalism to stay alive!
 7. The word pictures are so vividly disturbing that one leaves the book in hopes that nothing so horrible will ever be

witnessed by our own eyes!

8. The modern application of this book has long been debated. While it was written to the Nation of Judah to point out the horrible result of their sin and rebellion, is there a contextually honest way to apply it today?
9. After a brief review of the book this morning we will explore possible useful modern applications.
10. God had warned the Israelites that if they did not remain faithful, they would be scattered.
11. They didn't and He kept His word (He always does 2 Peter 3:9).

I. SURVEYING THE DESOLATION:

A. He now looks at the desolation and bemoans her demolished state (1:1).

- 1) He thinks back to the time when she was a bustling city, full of activity.
- 2) He remembers roads worn by heavy traffic, now grass covered and deserted (1:4).

B. He remembers her wealthy inhabitants who once had an abundance of "things" now willing to trade that which was once of great value for a morsel of food (1:11).

- 1) He remembers children playing and enjoying prosperity, who are now starving and begging for food (2:11-12; 4:4).
- 2) He observes those who were once wealthy with the best food and clothing are now "*desolate in the streets*" and wearing rags (4:5).

C. Her once healthy, powerful, popular, nobles (the beautiful people) are now unrecognizable.

- 1) Their once pristine appearance is black and dry, and they have been reduced to skin and bones (4:2; 7-8).
- 2) He observes that a swift, sure death by the sword of the enemy would be better than the slow, painful death by starvation that they now face (4:9).
- 3) The despair had become so great that mothers who were once compassionate and loving had resorted to acts of cannibalism against their own children (2:20; 4:10)!

D. He remembers their desperate search for a nation who would come to their rescue, and he recalls their hopelessness when they found none (4:17-18).

- 1) He remembers how much more powerful the enemy was than they and how they were overrun in their attempts to escape (4:19).
- 2) He decries the sad fact that the foreign conquerors are now living on land that the Israelites inherited from their fathers and in houses that they built (5:2).

E. Necessities such as water and wood, once plentiful, are now scarce and controlled by nations that once feared and respected them (5:4-6).

F. This once fierce, wealthy, independent nation finds itself enslaved!

- 1) The women have been molested and ravished.
- 2) The princes were hanged and the elders are no longer respected.
- 3) The young healthy men are forced into slave labor.
- 4) The small boys stagger under the weight of "*loads of wood*" (5:13).
- 5) The old men no longer gather at the gate and discuss city business and dispense wisdom.
- 6) Happy music of celebration is no longer heard and the dance of joy is no longer seen. "*The joy of our hearts has ceased*" (5:14-15).

G. The temple is destroyed (4:1).

- 1) The enemies who were once intimidated by her power and respected her as a threat rejoice in her fall.
- 2) They now walk freely along her streets, and enter at will, holy places where they were once forbidden (1:7c; 1:10; 2:16; 3:46;).

F. Unimaginable sadness abounds! They have cried rivers of tears (1:2a; 1:16a; 2:11; 2:18; 3:48-51)

G. The city is desolate!

II. THE REASON:

- A. The reason God allowed this once great city and its feared, respected and powerful people to be taken into captivity and to become a laughing stock for its enemies, is stated many times in the book.
- 1) *"Because of the multitude of her transgressions"* (1:5c).
 - 2) *"Jerusalem has sinned gravely, therefore she has become vile"* (1:8a).
 - 3) *"Her uncleanness was evident, she did not consider her destiny; therefore her collapse was awesome; she had no comforter"* (1:9).
 - 4) *"We have transgressed and rebelled"* (3:42).
 - 5) *"Because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of the priests"* (4:13).
- B. The Lord is righteous in allowing this because of their transgressions (1:18a)!

III. BUT THERE IS HOPE!

- A. Although they were overrun and taken captive by the enemy, there was still hope!
- B. There was a solution.
- C. The one thing to which they could cling was the fact that,
- 1) *"The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him"* (RSV 3:22).
 - 2) The writer plainly states both the problem and the solution. *"Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord; Let us lift our hearts and hand to God in Heaven. We have transgressed and rebelled"*(4:40-42).
 - 3) *"Turn us back to You, O LORD, and we will be restored; Renew our days as of old"* (5:21).

IV. APPLICATION:

- A. The modern application of this book has long been debated.
- B. While it was written to the Nation of Judah to point out the horrible result of their sin and rebellion, is there a contextually honest way to apply it today?
- C. It could be applied to individuals, in that *"all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23).
- 1) Sin definitely causes suffering and destruction.
 - 2) Therefore each of us could look at our lives individually as being a type of "Jerusalem" sacked and ravaged by the enemy, Satan, because of our own bad choices.
 - 3) Using this application, the book of Lamentations may be taken as a parallel expression of Psalm 51.
 - 4) This Psalm is the cry of the heart of David who had become painfully aware of his deserved punishment.
 - 5) He cast himself upon the mercy of God as his only hope in the hour of affliction.
 - 6) It is recognition that though grief has been brought by the righteous hand of God, it is the loving heart of God to which we appeal for restoration.
 - 7) The haunting images of Lamentations when applied to the individual sinner are cause for alarm, remorse, and repentance indeed!
- D. The more common modern application of the book is to compare it to modern-day America and the rapid decline of morals and values that we once held dear.
- 1) Is the United States on the brink of destruction?
 - 2) Is this once great nation so far advanced into sin and rebellion against God that He is about to give us over to the enemy?
 - 3) Frankly, no one knows where that line is or even if it still exists in modern times.

4) But, using Biblical history as an indicator, one would think that the patience of Jehovah with the United States would be wearing thin.

E. A third way of applying this is the generally horrible nature and devastation of sin!

- 1) Sin is laughed about, taken lightly and committed without a thought.
- 2) Yet, it always brings about adverse consequences.
- 3) Not always immediately, but always!
- 4) Whether it be nationally, as with the people of the Southern Kingdom, or individually, sin always brings destruction!

V. LESSONS LEARNED:

- A. No matter how great one has been in the past, that status can be altered by a change in conduct.
- B. Great reputations have been destroyed almost overnight by sinful choices.
- C. Heartache is frequently the companion of rebellion. Sin does have its price tag!
- D. Though the Old Testament was divinely designed to consist of “carnal ordinances” (cf. Hebrews 9:10), Jehovah was far more concerned with his people’s lives than the material trappings of the temple. That’s why, He had His temple destroyed as a part of Judah’s punishment.
- E. God can work through a wicked nation (e.g., the Babylonians [cf. Jeremiah 25:9f]) to accomplish a greater good.
- F. Judah’s destruction was a fulfillment of earlier prophecy. Deuteronomy 28 is very graphic in warning of Israel’s eventual punishment.
- G. While churches of Christ are autonomous, Every truly spiritual person will be concerned for the welfare of God’s people as a whole.
- H. The faithful Christian must never isolate himself and ignore the condition of the church as it exists everywhere. Note Paul’s empathy for the congregations of the Lord’s people wherever they were (2 Corinthians 11:28).
- I. When children suffered, some doubtless wondered, “Where is God?” But we must remember this, in a world that is plagued with evil, sometimes even the innocent suffer. (The death of a child in some cases may a deliverance).
- J. Apostasy sometimes begins among those who should be the safeguards against it—the religious leaders. There is great responsibility in leadership (cf. James 3:1).
- K. When men turn away from God, he will turn away from them (Isaiah 59:1-2).
 - 1) His holy nature cannot tolerate rebellion (Habakkuk 1:13).
 - 2) His justice demands punishment (Psalm 89:14).
 - 3) Happily, though, Jehovah is a God of tender compassion, and he is anxious to forgive those who yield to his divine will.
- L. God did remember the Hebrew people.
 - 1) A half century later, the restoration from Babylonian captivity was begun.
 - 2) The people came home again and the temple was rebuilt.
 - 3) But before that, many hard—though-valuable lessons had to be learned by the Jews.
- M. We too may profit by their experiences if we will but apply ourselves to the learning of these ancient events (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11; Romans 15:4).

CONCLUSION:

1. Just as our text tells us, there is hope.
2. Has sin ravaged your life?
3. Has it destroyed your home?
4. Have surveyed the devastation and decided to return to God?
5. We will help you in any way we can!

