

Lamentations 2:1-22 The Source of Suffering Falls Ch. AM 10/22/2023

The second chapter of Lamentations has the same structure that chapter 1 had - each successive line begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Two reasons for this: 1) it emphasizes the words in the center, verse 11, as if it were underlined and highlighted. 2) to show the comprehensive nature of the coverage of the topic. We get everything we need to know about suffering and grief, everything from A to Z. This is an artful and thoughtful reflection about suffering: its causes, its meaning, its limits, its reversal, its perspective.

While the Book of Job speaks to personal disasters, the book of Lamentations speaks to community or national disasters, such as extreme food shortages, wars, or mass murder. How are we to think of God while we travel together through a mass catastrophe? One clue is that while Job's suffering was undeserved, the suffering of Jerusalem was deserved.

**That brings us to the main point: When we suffer, we are to return to its Source, asking Him for comfort and aid.**

Laments points us back to God for hope during the deepest agonies of our grieving. Even when we know that God has sent us the suffering, still God is our source of mercy and comfort.

### **1. The LORD became like an enemy! (v.1-10)**

Back in chapter 1, Jerusalem was compared to a widow. Here in chapter 2, the city of Jerusalem is now compared to a star, because the city was the splendor of the nation of Israel. But what happened to the star? In verse 1, we read that God "*...has cast down from heaven to earth the splendor of Israel...*" Jerusalem was a falling star. It was a city and nation that used to enjoy a privileged position with God through its covenant relationship, but the people did not retain the understanding of the moral obligations that such a relationship required.

Verse 2, the language of God's judgment intensified. What was the Lord doing? The Lord was swallowing up without mercy, breaking down the strongholds in His wrath, and bringing down to the ground in dishonor the kingdom and its rulers. This activity of God has us alarmed.

Verse 3, we continue to see a ratcheting up of the surprising activity of the covenant God, instead of coming to the defense of the people, God cut down the strength of Israel, and He completely withdrew His help. Significantly, we read in verse 3 that God "*has withdrawn from them His right hand in the face of the enemy...*" It was God who "*burned like a flaming fire...consuming all around.*" Across the Old Testament, fire is frequently a symbol for God's judgment, and it is the same here – God's fire is against Jacob, a burning, flaming, consuming fire all around. We are in shock at what our God is doing. It is almost as if God is behaving the opposite of what He as covenant God has said He would do! It is as if

God was hitting the wrong target. If we did not know better, we might start thinking that God is behaving like the enemy of His people!

Verse 4, sure enough, that is how the poet now expresses the unfolding situation that God “...*has bent His bow like an enemy...His right hand set like a foe....He has poured out His fury like fire.*” The hand that had symbolized the Lord’s help in the past, was now the same hand that was turned against Judah.

We have to stop being frozen in shock, snap out of it and face the fact that God truly is acting like an enemy. Verse 5 puts that statement out there, “*The Lord has become like an enemy...*” The rest of verse 5 has God swallowing up Israel, laying in ruins its stronghold, and multiplying their mourning and lamentation.

Verse 6 continues this picture of God as their enemy, where God has laid waste...laid in ruins, and in fierce anger has spurned both king and priest. In verse 7, God has scorned His own altar, disowned His own sanctuary, has delivered His house and the palaces of the kings and nobles, over into the hand of an enemy army. To show how out of character this is, the only other time there was this much activity was during a holy festival, but this activity was a hostile takeover.

Verse 8, it was not Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon who alone determined to destroy the city of Jerusalem, but rather it was God. Listen for who ordered the hit in verse 8, “*The LORD determined to lay in ruins the wall of the daughter of Zion; he stretched out the measuring line; he did not restrain His hand from destroying; He caused rampart and wall to lament...*” The true source is vitally important for a proper understanding the archtypal event, the fall of Jerusalem.

Verse 9, God removed protections of gates and bars, and God also removed His previous messages, and no new messages were released from heaven. Verse 9 ends with this “...*law is no more, and her prophets find no vision from The LORD.*”

Verse 10 describes how the people of the city reacted to these actions from God. They grieved. The signs of grief in that culture were: a) sitting on the ground in silence, b) sprinkling dust on their own heads, and c) wearing sackcloth (itchy clothes). They did all of them. How could they do otherwise?

## **2. The LORD intended our suffering. (v.11-17)**

Verse 11, the center of the poem, and so the emphasized verse, shows us that the poet described his personal anguish at the unparalleled suffering of his city. Especially, the focus here is the poet’s reaction to the suffering and dying of small children. We can resonate, because we all grieve that innocent children are often the victims of the sins of adults. Our poet is so overcome with grief that he cannot stop weeping, his stomach is upset, and he has lost personal continence.

Verse 12, the poet heard the children crying to their mothers, asking for food, and all that each mother had was a dry bosom. Each child was momentarily comforted just to lay there upon their mothers, and to fall asleep, which became a

euphemism. The children's lives were being lost right in the one feeding position that is supposed to represent safety and provision, but instead took on a horrific inverse picture, now representing emptiness and even death. A nightmare!

Verse 13, the poet desired to reach out with a word of comfort or an embrace of healing, but could not provide that healing, and had no comfort to offer! The poet has expressed what our Savior expressed in Matthew 23:37, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!*" The final statement in Lamentations 2:13 is "*your ruin is vast as the sea; who can heal you?*" There are times when nothing can be done by us to alleviate the pain of another - as much as we would desire - because that person will not turn back to God for comfort and healing.

Verse 14, part of the blame for the tragedy of the fall of Jerusalem is on the failure of the prophets. They became false prophets. Specifically, we read in verse 14 that the prophets did not help the people because the prophets "*...have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes...*" Instead of showing the people their own sins, the words of the prophets were "*false and deceptive.*" It is important to note that false prophets are an urgent and oft-repeated problem all across the New Testament. For example, the problem is described by God in 2 Peter 2:17-19, that the false prophets "*...are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For [false prophets] the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. For, speaking loud boasts of folly, [false prophets] entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. [False prophets] promise [the people] freedom, but [false prophets] themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.*" The job of the false prophets was to expose the sins of the people and warn them of the consequences. But the false prophets failed to do so.

Verse 15 shows the stark and ugly result of the absence of faithful prophets. Anyone who passed by the ruins of Jerusalem would mock and laugh at their suffering, misery, downfall, and destruction.

Verse 16, the enemies railed against the city. Their enemies took credit for the city's downfall, but it was really the LORD who intended it. That point is driven home once more when verse 17 reads, "*The LORD has done what He purposed; He has carried out His word, which He commanded long ago; He has thrown down without pity; He has made the enemy rejoice over you and [He has] exalted the might of your foes.*" The LORD intended suffering. It was deserved.

### **3. The LORD teaches us to cry out to Him! (v. 18-22)**

v.18, we reach the third section of this chapter. Now the poet called upon the city to 'yet even now' call on God to look at their suffering. The poet now personified the wall, and called upon the wall to cry streams of tears without

resting, to weep for the ruined city. Verse 19, cry out in the nighttime, in order to pray for the lives of the children, who are fainting and dying of hunger.

Going back to the start of the world, before God started the work of creating, we are told that there was chaos, as we read in Genesis 1:2, “*The earth was without form and void...*” So, here we find in the city of Jerusalem, the chaos caused by the absence of God’s glory in verses 20-21, “*...should women eat the fruit of their womb, and the children of their tender care? Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord? In the dust of the streets lie the young and the old; my young women and my young men have fallen by the sword; you have killed them in the day of your anger, slaughtering without pity.*” God’s judgment is to withdraw Himself. The result was prophets and priests fled to the temple based on the mistaken belief that God would protect them in that hallowed place. But God sent a sword that was indiscriminate, taking both old and young both men and women. Again, it is emphasized here that it was God who killed them, slaughtering them without mercy.

Verse 22, one last time, we are reminded that it was God who instigated this. In a similar manner to the manner of calling for a gathering for a religious festival, God called together people in order to render His judgment upon them. God would surround them with terrors on every side. Revelation 19:17-18, “*Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, ‘Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.’*”

Then in the final nine words of Lamentations chapter 2, Jerusalem suddenly reverts back again to the widow personified back in chapter 1, and so the city speaks about her own citizens the way a mother would speak about her own offspring, “*those whom I held and raised, my enemy destroyed.*” The end.

### **Conclusion:**

1. Take a good look at that from which Jesus saved us.

To understand this, we fast-forward from the Jerusalem destruction of Jeremiah’s day to the Jerusalem destruction of Jesus’ day. What happened in Jerusalem later that pictured the wrath of God? God the Father became the enemy of God the Son who bore our sins, and the result was the destruction of Jesus Himself.

When we consider Jesus, with the question about whether God the Father acted as the enemy of God the Son we ask how it looked from the cross, and we know the answer from Matthew 27:46, “*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*” Which is a direct quote of Psalm 22:1. Jesus was lamenting, but God the Father was not hearing. Why? Because Jesus was rejected, so that we will not need to be rejected. Jesus received the full anger of God, so that we receive the love of God.

## 2. Lament the correct thing.

### Lament Adam's sin, plus your own sin.

When Jesus was heading to the cross to be destroyed, it was a sad sight?

In Luke in chapter 23:26-31, *“And as they led [Jesus] away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. And there followed [Jesus] a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for [Jesus]. But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”*

What is Jesus saying to the women lamenting His own destruction? Jesus is saying, do not weep and lament for Jesus. Instead, lament and weep for yourselves. Why should they weep for themselves? Because Jesus is the green wood. Jesus was innocent, and yet bore the sin of others. He was perfect in His own behavior. But what are those women in the analogy of wood to burn? The woman and all of us as sinners are not green branches resistant to the flames. No. We are dry wood. What happens when fire is put to dry wood? It lights up fast and easily.

Rather than lament the destruction of Jesus, they should return to lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem.

What is our visceral reaction to Jesus with nails through his hands and feet? We are saddened and maybe grossed out, and surprised that the justice of God required this treatment of Jesus as our Sin-bearer.

Jesus is teaching us the same thing Jeremiah was teaching us - that the justice of God is not the place to lament.

Seeing God's justice and wrath fall on Jesus is not the place to lament.

Seeing God's justice and wrath fall on Jerusalem is not the place to lament.

Instead, we lament sin. We lament the community pain of the human community that is brought on the human race by Adam's sins, plus our own sins. We lament the lack of repentance in our fellow man in our community in pain.

## 3. Appreciate the sufficiency of Christ's salvation accomplished at Jerusalem.

Jesus stepped down from heaven in humiliation to become a man, the Second Adam, the last Adam. Jesus left being constantly praised by angels in heaven, and here He was from religious leaders of Jerusalem disrespectfully challenged, questioned, followed, suspected, accused, put on trial, indicted, sentenced, beaten, put to death and buried. And this at Jerusalem. But consider what this accomplished! Nothing else is needed. The cross and empty tomb are sufficient.

Jesus has come, and has provided his ONCE FOR ALL sacrifice. Hebrews 9:22-25, *“under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”*

Appreciate the sufficiency of Christ’s salvation accomplished at Jerusalem.