

## THE WAY IT USED TO BE *continued*

that those who died from the sword are better off than those who died from famine; **4:9**: death by starvation is much more painful and protracted than death by the sword.

(b) THE ACCOUNTABLE NATURE OF THIS COMPARISON. The weighty truth of accountability ‘sits tall’ here (cf. summary found in **Luke 12:48**). Matthew Henry notes, “*Sodom never had the means of grace that Jerusalem had, the oracles of God and His prophets.*” Cf. Leonard Ravenhill’s book, ‘Sodom Had No Bible.’ Because Jerusalem had tasted so much of the Lord her sin was more horrendous in His sight.

## [3] THE REASONS BEHIND THEIR CURRENT

**PREDICAMENT; 4:11.** Their sin had brought God’s wrath;

(a) THE POURING OUT OF GOD’S ANGER; **4:11**.

(b) THE PENETRATION OF GOD’S ANGER: Normally a fire will take hold of the roof and the contents of buildings; this one has gone below the surface and penetrated to the very foundations of life. Lessons lie in the realms of: (i) PRESUMPTION – we cannot afford to rest on any laurels, or take the view that since God has blessed us in the past He will bless us in the future. (cf.

**Philippians 1:27; 2:12**); (ii) PERMANENCE: **Lamentations**

**4:1-11** drills home the message of the perishable and passing nature of the ‘splendours’ of this world – and the extreme danger of in any of earth’s externals (cf. **Matthew 6:19-21**); (iii) PENDULUM: God withdraws because His people have been disobedient; however, when God revives His church, the results of this are felt far beyond the boundaries of the church and the whole nation is affected. Repentance is always a necessity.

## MEETINGS TODAY



- Morning Worship – 11.30am:

*10th Message in Lamentations Series:*

“The Way It Used To Be.”

- Children’s Carol Service – 3.00pm.

- Evening Service – 7.00pm:

“What A Wedding Reception May Teach Us.”



## SPECIAL CHRISTMAS NIGHT FOR ‘LITTLE ONES’

The annual ‘Little Ones’ Christmas Night was held on Thursday past. Twenty-two parents and helpers met in the Jubilee Hall for a Chinese buffet and desserts. This was followed by a themed game, then Margaret Beattie brought a challenging message about ‘The Greatest Gift’ that mothers can give to their children.

‘Little Ones,’ now in its 9th year, is a most valuable opportunity for outreach into the community that lives on our doorstep. When it began in February 2010 the attendance was 4 for the first number of weeks; now the Thursday morning attendance averages 25 parents and 35-40 children. This is certainly a cause for rejoicing as it represents a significant answer to prayer and is a reflection of the dedication and diligence that is shown by those who spearhead this work in the Martyrs.

Many thanks to Heather and Sharon and their merry band of helpers who keep this, what is obviously to them a real labour of love, going throughout the year. They comprise a tremendous team, with each one doing a necessary and wonderful job! Please continue to be much in prayer for them – and those who, through them, come under Gospel influence.



## THE WAY IT USED TO BE **Lamentations 4:1-11.**

Nightfall on 10 December 2018 will mark the end of the celebration of the Jewish Hanukkah. This year a stone altar that has been prepared for use in the Third Temple will be consecrated – a replica of the one on which daily sacrifices were made in the old Temple times. This is some of the first evidence that the Temple project is underway.

At the very least, this is evidence that there are elements within the Jewish nation who wish that former days would return – who long for, “*The Way It Used To Be*.”

In **Lamentations 4** the fact that Jeremiah could look back to days of previous glory made his – and his nation’s – suffering so much worse. Reflection was a heart-crushing exercise.

**[1] THE REACH OF THEIR CURRENT PREDICAMENT; 4:1-8.** This section reminds us of some features we considered in **2:9-11**, especially in the list of various groups of people involved: infants, young children, mothers, dignitaries. Notice how dramatically the condition of the people has deteriorated: (a) FROM EXPENSIVE TO EARTHEN; **4:1-2**: fine gold had become crumbly clay! The connection with Jeremiah’s ministry is unmistakable: many years before, the prophet had gone to the potter’s house, purchased a clay jar, and smashed it into a thousand pieces (**Jeremiah 19**). This was meant to be a sign of impending judgment – the judgment that had now appeared. (b) FROM COMPASSION TO CRUELTY; **4:3-4**: seen in two illustrations from the animal kingdom. (i) In our AV “sea monsters” is translated in various ways (the margin of the Bible gives “jackals” as an alternative), while it is rendered as “dragon” (or dinosaur) on 21 occasions. Either reading locks us into the same thing – judgment: jackals populate those desolate cities that have fallen under punishment (cf. **Jeremiah 9:10**), and sea monsters (dragons) are also spoken of in connection with judgment (cf. **Isaiah 13:22; 34:13**). Therefore, the daughters of Jerusalem share the ruins of the city with the jackals / dragons –

but with this major difference: only the jackals have enough energy and nourishment to offer the breast to their young. (ii) The “ostrich” had a reputation for cruelty and carelessness with respect to the needs of its young (cf. **Job 39:14-16**). The Arabs often called the ostrich the “*impious*” or “*ungodly*” bird. The end result was **4:4**: One Hebrew scholar noted that this picture of the tongue cleaving to the roof of its mouth points to individuals who were unable to make a sound; these infants are, “*so weak from starvation that they no longer cry when hungry.*” Even worse: **4:3-4** notes how they were unable to feed their children; **4:10** depicts them as now feeding on their children! (c) FROM ROYALTY TO RUIN; **4:5**: nobles who once ate rare and royal foods are now lying desolate on the dunghills. (d) FROM DIGNITY TO DARKNESS; **4:7-8**: John Calvin suggests that the religious class is meant by this reference to “*the Nazarites*” and claims that the demise of such a special group of people underlines the scale of the city’s fall.

The fall depicted in **4:1-8** is ‘colour-coded’: from gold and scarlet (**4:1,2,5**); white, red, sapphire, to black (**4:7-8**): “*Bright colours represent the earlier conditions; as the famine progresses, the colours are erased from the picture and all that remains is dullness and blackness.*”

## **[2] THE REFLECTION OF THEIR CURRENT PREDICAMENT; 4:6, 9.**

“... *the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom*” points to:

(a) **THE ASTOUNDING NATURE OF THIS COMPARISON.** It is hard to imagine a more telling comparison than the people of the Lord being compared to the most sinful city of Sodom. And – Jerusalem’s punishment was not equal to, but exceeded – that of Sodom. Sodom was “*overthrown as in a moment, and no hands stayed on her*” – but Jerusalem, “*for her far more serious crime of rejecting covenant mercies ... must seemingly endure a proportionately greater chastisement.*”

The phrase at the end of **4:6**, “*and no hands stayed on her,*” means, “*with no hands trembling in it*” – giving the sense that the people of Sodom were taken completely by surprise, whereas God had warned His people over and over again. Emphasising this contrast between Jerusalem and Sodom, the poet suggests