

## CITY, CHURCH & CONGREGATION *continued*

### (a) THE REALITY OF THEIR INIQUITIES.

The point is repeatedly made: **1:5, 8, 14, 18, 20, 22**, summarised by Richard Brooks: *“The people are God-forsaken because they have become God-forsaking.”*

### (b) THE RESULTS FROM THEIR INIQUITIES.

Their sin resulted in (i) Scorn; **1:7**: the world always gloats over the calamities of God’s people; (ii) Shame; **1:8**: some have viewed the mention of “nakedness” as speaking of ill repute. When the glory of the Church (which is God’s own glory reflected by her) is polluted by sin, then the fall is terrible indeed; (iii) Spoiling; **1:9-10**: “filthiness in her skirts” underlines how this people has become so taken up with circumstances they have not noticed that their “skirts” have become visibly stained. God cannot tolerate moral impurity – and His people, as the temple of the living God, must separate themselves from defilement if they are to enjoy His welcome and serve Him acceptably (**2 Corin. 6:14-7:1; 1 John 3:3**); (iv) Starvation; **1:11**: anything was traded for food to preserve life during the days of famine; (v) Sighing; **1:4,8,11**: the believer should not be hardened but bow down before God, humble himself, acknowledge the justice of God’s punishment and sigh with the kind of godly sorrow that issues in real repentance (**Luke 18:13; 2 Corinthians 7:10**); (vi) Supplication; **1:9, 11**: Zion brings her lament and anguish directly to God as she realises that the God who has brought this shame and humiliation on her is also the only One who can fully grasp and completely heal. Until the church rediscovers how to lament not only will this book of Lamentations remain largely unread, the church’s ability to pray as the Bible instructs it to pray will remain impaired.



### MEETINGS TODAY

- Morning Worship – 11.30am:  
*2nd Message in the Lamentations Series: “Spotlight on The City, The Church & The Congregation.”*
- Evening Service – 7.00pm:  
*“Can God Save My Loved Ones?”*



### THE MISSION FIELD ON OUR DOORSTEP

I noticed a statistic a few days back that has burned its way into my heart: **42% of Belfast is under the age of 30.** This simply underlines the scale of the mission field that radiates around our own doorstep. I wonder how many out of that 42% regularly attend a place of worship? How many are perishing through lack of the knowledge of Christ? How many have we been able to connect with? A most pertinent question comes to us as the new season of work commences at Martyrs and a Gospel Mission begins to show itself on the horizon (21-28 October): what am I going to do in response to the challenge that this statistic poses?

Our Children’s Workers encountered a most encouraging response to outreach in Belfast on Friday. This means that an extra night of evangelistic effort is needed for this week; Monday and Tuesday are being devoted to it. Please pray earnestly – and, if you’re able to ‘put feet to your prayers’ and form part of the team that speaks to parents this week – your involvement will be very much appreciated.



## THE CITY, THE CHURCH & THE CONGREGATION

### Lamentations 1:1-11.

28 August 2018 was a dark day for historic buildings in Belfast; a fire on the fifth floor of the Bank Buildings eventually resulted in this Grade 2 listed property becoming nothing more than an empty, blackened facade. However, if the destruction of one building in our city centre has been able to provoke a huge impassioned reaction, what was it really like for Jeremiah to survey a completely devastated Jerusalem?

#### [1] AN ISOLATED CITY; 1:1-3.

##### (a) THE CITY IN HER SOLITARINESS, 1:1.

(i) Divested of her Sons – once bustling with people and bulging with life; Babylon's assault had reduced it to a weird and empty and deserted place. This word "solitary" is used in **Leviticus 13:46** of the leper = Jerusalem is ostracised; (ii) Divested of her Spouse: she resembles a "widow." Behind this picture lies the imagery of God as the Husband of His people (cf. **Isaiah 54:5**) – Judah no longer enjoys the presence of her 'Husband'; (iii) Divested of her Status, as she is now a city subject to the will and whim of her enemies: the former queen ("Sarah" in Hebrew) has become a slave.

##### (b) THE CITY IN HER SORROW, 1:2.

(i) The Type of her Sorrow – intensive and relentless, over the whole of her face; (ii) The Time of her Sorrow – daylight is not time enough for her tears; (iii) The Totality of her Sorrow – "all" occurs 16 times in this lament, twice in verse 2 where it shows how the intensity of Zion's anguish is increased by a total lack of sympathy from and the treachery of her former friends. What a contrast we have in Christ (**Proverbs 18:24; Hebrews 13:8**)!

##### (c) THE CITY IN HER SERVITUDE, 1:3.

(i) The Elements of it – in affliction, great servitude, without rest; everything Moses warned about in **Deuteronomy 28:64-66**.  
(ii) The Escape from it: "**straits**" = those narrow places from which escape is impossible. "Lovers" have become pursuers.

#### [2] AN 'ICHABOD' CHURCH; 1:4-6.

The picture becomes even darker. "**Zion**" is mentioned for the first time – a name that points to the religious significance of the city as the place where the Temple was located and the worship of God was focused (**Psalms 2:6; 87:2**).

(a) **THE PATHS TO THE SANCTUARY ARE DESERTED; 1:4**: the roads to Jerusalem used to be thronged with expectant worshippers singing the praises of God (cf. **Psalm 122:4**), but these same roads are now empty and silent.

(b) **THE PASTORS IN THE SANCTUARY ARE DEFUNCT**: priests sigh because of a dispirited ministry.

(c) **THE PRAISE IN THE SANCTUARY IS DISCORDANT**: "virgins" who sang and played music share in general bitterness.

(d) **THE PROSPERITY OF THE SANCTUARY IS DIVERTED** (cf. **1:10**): the temple had been looted.

(e) **THE PROGRESS AGAINST THE SANCTUARY IS DELINEATED; 1:5**: Sin is the reason why her enemies had become the head and Jerusalem the tail (cf. **Deut. 28:13, 44**).

##### (f) THE PRESENCE IN THE SANCTUARY IS

**DEPARTED; 1:6**. "Beauty" speaks of splendour; it was the presence of the Lord among His people that gave to Jerusalem all the splendour it had. This splendour had centred on the Temple, but it departed from the daughter of Zion when God forsook His people, permitted the temple to be destroyed and discontinued the ordinances of worship (cf. **Ezekiel 9:3; 10:19; 11:23**).

When men forsake the house of God, God forsakes it too – at that point, it is completely forsaken. "Ichabod" – "no glory / the glory is departed" is inscribed by invisible fingers over the door (**1 Samuel 4:21-22**). (cf. case of St. Enoch's, etc., in our city).

The solemn warning is that since the Lord could – and did – destroy Jerusalem without being unfaithful to His promises to her forefathers about the security of His dwelling place, He can – and does – remove the lamp stands from the churches (**Revelation 2:5**), denominations and congregations, without breaking His glorious promise given to the true church as a whole that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (**Matthew 16:18**).

#### [3] AN INQUITOUS CONGREGATION; 1:7-11.

This section reminds us of **Proverbs 14:34**: sin brings reproach.