

Introduction

The name Lamentations comes from its content. It is a book of five poems that are laments about the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in Jerusalem at the hand of the Babylonians in 586BC. It is believed that the prophet Jeremiah penned Lamentations which is why it is placed directly next to the Prophecy of Jeremiah in the Bible.

In the centuries before the coming of Christ, Lamentations would be read each year on the ninth day of the month of Ab, which was an annual day of fasting and mourning to commemorate the fall of Jerusalem.

The book is instructive in a number of ways, especially to us who live in the modern world. Our lives are filled with convenient distractions that enable us to avoid looking at the painful and lamentable aspects of our lives. Lamentations pushes against this as the reader is forced to meditate on the pain and suffering of Jerusalem.

One scholar points out that in Lamentations, God's mercy is expressed through the lament of the people. It can often be in lament itself that God is graciously and mercifully at work in the lives of His people.

And our passage breaks into two parts:

1. [Lamentations 1:1-11](#) present the reality of what has happened to Jerusalem
2. [Lamentations 1:12-22](#) present the response of Jerusalem to that reality.

The Reality (vv. 1-11)

The Description

The first 7 verses describe what has happened to Jerusalem.

Throughout Lamentations, Jerusalem is personified. In [Lamentations 1-2](#) Jerusalem is personified as a woman who is lamenting what has happened to her.

Verses 1-2 set the scene. She is woman who is lonely and abandoned like a widow. She is in this state because her lovers have abandoned her.

Jerusalem has been an unfaithful bride. She is like a widow, not because her husband died, but because she abandoned her husband for other lovers. But now, those lovers have abandoned her. Jerusalem abandoned the Lord her husband for idols. But these idols have now dealt treacherously with her and become her enemy.

Throughout the Bible we learn that idolatry and sin is treacherous. Satan is a liar and sin is deceitful. The world is promised, but death is delivered, for the wages of sin is death.

In C.S. Lewis' book *That Hideous Strength* there is a great line near the end where Dr. Ransom says the following:

When fighting [those] who serve devils we always have this on our side. Their masters hate them as much as they hate us.

Jerusalem abandoned YHWH for idols, and the idols turned on Jerusalem, as they always do.

We see the result of this in verse 3. Judah has gone into exile and she has no rest. Just as the Hebrews had no rest in Egypt, they have once again come under the yoke of a hard master who gives them no rest.

Verses 4-6 continue to set the scene for just how bad the devastation of Jerusalem is. There is now mourning instead of festival. The children of Jerusalem have been taken captive before the foes of Jerusalem. All the majesty of daughter Zion has departed.

The description concludes in verse 7 as Jerusalem remembers, in her affliction, all the precious things that were once hers. As one scholar puts it, "Memory is a bitter herb".

The Explanation

Verse 8 offers an explanation for this devastation, “Jerusalem sinned grievously; therefore she became filthy;”

Back in Deuteronomy, as Israel is about to enter the Promised Land, Israel was presented with the ways of life and death. If they would be faithful to God’s covenant, they would be blessed with all the blessings of the covenant. However, if they broke God’s covenant, they would bring upon themselves the curses of the covenant. The greatest of the covenantal curses was being taken into exile by foreign nations.

But there is something to note in verses 8-9 that also hearkens back to the time when the Law was given. The ESV says that Jerusalem became “filthy”, but the word is the word for “uncleanness”. In the Law there were commands for Israel to maintain ritual purity before the LORD who was in their midst. This was so they might stand out from the nations around them. This ritual cleanliness enabled them to come into God’s presence and trained them to be obedient to God.

Israel was “clean” and the nations around them were “unclean”. But here, everything has been reversed. As Jerusalem sought after the gods and idols of the nations around her, she became like them, she became unclean.

[Lamentations 1:9](#) states, “Her uncleanness was in her skirts; she took no thought of her future; therefore her fall is terrible; she has no comforter.”

Not only is sin and idolatry deceitful, it is also **short-sighted**. If you read the story of Israel, there is always an underlying theme that the greatest representatives of God’s people were extremely long-sighted.

Sin holds out short-term “pleasure” and gain but does so at the cost of one’s life and future. Esau exchanging his birthright for a bowl of soup is the quintessential example of the short-sighted nature of sin.

Israel and Judah proved themselves to be children of Esau by following after the short-sighted pleasures of sinful idolatry rather than seeking after the eternal blessings that God offered in his covenant.

Christians must learn from Jerusalem’s fall. Take thought for your future. Do not sell your birthright for a bowl of soup. All things are yours in Christ. Do not turn

away from Christ to idols who only want to destroy you and take everything from you.

The Response (vv. 12-22)

[Lamentations 1](#) shifts in verse 12 to show the response of the lady Jerusalem to the description of verses 1-11. This response is instructive to how we think through our own response to God (both individually and corporately in our liturgy).

God has created man and the world in such a way that humanity is to offer an “amen” to all the works of God. This is how our liturgy is structured and it is how our the entirety of our lives should be structured. In the liturgy, God declares your sins forgiven and you respond by saying “amen.” God invites you to his table and you come in faith. God sends you out with His blessing in the power of the Holy and you go to love and serve Him and your neighbor.

In verses 13-16 Lady Jerusalem laments the judgement of God on her.

In verse 13-14 she says that God sent fire into her bones, spread a net for her feet, bound her transgressions as a yoke on her neck. All this language is the language that God normally uses for what will be done to the enemies of God’s people, but now it is done to Jerusalem.

In verse 15, instead of the mighty men of Jerusalem gathering for festival, her mighty men are rejected by the Lord and the Lord has summons an assembly against Jerusalem to crush her young men.

It is in verse 16 Lady Jerusalem states that her eyes flow with tears for these things because she has no comforter. Her children are desolate and the enemy has prevailed.

Lady Jerusalem has acknowledged the judgement of the Lord against her and she weeps.

We have much to learn from Lamentations here. We live in a modern and technological society. We have all been trained to believe that the implementation of the right technique can fix any problem. This is how we approach finance, medicine, health, business, and technology in our culture.

In pre-modern times things were much different. **Human flourishing was sought through the conformity of our souls and our lives to the created order and to God's providential dealings with us.** Such an approach is seen in the patience of the lamenting city in Lamentations. There is not an immediate turn to a technological solution in Lamentations. Rather, **there is an acceptance of God's judgement and a willingness to be formed through God's judgements.**

The Bible teaches that God is in the business of *conforming* his people into the image of Jesus Christ. But formation takes time and it can often be a painful process. Moreover, God often plays rough with his characters. Read the stories of Abraham and the patriarchs, of Moses, Joshua, and the judges, of David, Elijah, and the prophets. All of these great men were shaped and formed by God but this formation happens through trials.

You must be willing to submit to God's means of forming you through all the seasons of your life. This does not mean you seek after suffering, but that you learn to read the story rightly and prayerfully depend on God's merciful hand to sustain us through suffering when it comes.

This acceptance continues in verse 18 where Lady Jerusalem says, "The LORD is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word". Again in verse 20 she says, "my heart is wrung within me, because I have been very rebellious".

It is only in the final verses that there is any sense of hope, and even here it is dim. Verse 21 speaks of how the enemies of Jerusalem have heard of her trouble and they are glad. Lady Jerusalem confesses that God has merely brought about the day that he had long announced through his prophets.

But then she says of the nations who mock her, "let them be as I am. Let all their evil doing come before you, and deal with them as you have dealt with me because of all my transgressions".

At this point in her lament, Lady Jerusalem's only hope is that God will also bring his day of judgement upon the enemies of God's people as he has brought his judgement on Jerusalem.

Conclusion

I want to conclude by taking a moment to consider how we might hear Lamentations as Christian scripture. The same Holy Spirit that authored [Romans 8](#) and [Psalm 23](#) also authored Lamentations.

To do this I want to draw your attention to verse 12 “Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.”

In the ancient world, Jerusalem stood at the crossroad of commerce from the west to the east. As the merchants and emissaries of the great kingdoms would pass by Jerusalem they would marvel at the Temple and the people who lived there. But now, Lady Jerusalem laments that those who travel by Jerusalem only see her sorrow.

The church has seen in [Lamentations 1:12](#) an allusion to Christ’s suffering on the cross. When Jerusalem asks, “is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which the LORD inflicted.” we can hear Jesus speaking. As Jesus suffers the wrath of God on the cross, he asks “is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.”

During this season of Lent we consider the suffering of Christ on our behalf and how our sin led him to the cross.

Let Lamentations teach us that in our own suffering, Christ likewise suffered, yet without sin.

In the name of the Father, the Son , and the Holy Spirit.