

Bible Survey - Lamentations

by Peter Hammond

Peter Hammond's sermon on Lamentations explores the themes of mourning, judgment, and the hope of restoration through repentance and God's mercy.

Scripture: Isaiah 2:6, Isaiah 5:20, Jeremiah 23:10, Lamentations 1:5, Lamentations 3:22, Lamentations 3:39

Topics: "Repentance", "Restoration"

Description

Peter Hammond preaches on the Book of Lamentations, emphasizing the consequences of immorality, idolatry, and injustice faced by Jerusalem due to their disobedience to God. The prophet Jeremiah mourns the devastation of Jerusalem but also expresses faith in God's compassion and restoration for the repentant. The sermon challenges listeners to examine their ways, repent, and seek the Lord amidst national calamities and betrayals, highlighting the importance of returning to God and renewing devotion in times of distress.

Transcript

"Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?" Lamentations 1:12

Lamentations for Jerusalem

Lamentations is structured as an acrostic poem for the first four chapters, each verse beginning with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Jeremiah describes what he witnessed of the judgement of God upon immoral and idolatrous Jerusalem. Deserted, destroyed, in distress, desolate, devastated, dishonoured, despised, and destitute. Because she broke God's Law and refused to obey Him as Lord, she had lost her land. No Law. No Lord. No Land.

When any friend, or family member, suffers a tragedy, or dies, it is right and necessary to grieve. The Book of Lamentations was written by the Prophet Jeremiah after the fall of Jerusalem in 586BC to the Babylonians. It records the stunned, dazed, heart-breaking sorrow and shock that he felt at the defeat of his nation.

Immorality, Idolatry, Injustice and Interfaith

"Her adversaries have become the master, her enemies prosper; for the Lord has afflicted her because of the multitude of her transgressions. Her children have gone into captivity before the enemy... all her splendour has departed..." Lamentations 1:5-6. Pagans and parasites plunder her prosperity (1:10).

Jeremiah had given his life to warning the people of Judah of the disastrous consequences of their idolatry and immorality, sin and rebellion. He had done his very best to save Jerusalem. The book of Lamentations speaks to all those who have suffered the trauma of seeing their nation occupied by enemy forces.

Yet, Lamentations is far more than a funeral dirge. It is a statement of faith that God controls the destinies of nations, that He judges the persistent sin and rebellion of His people and that He is gracious and merciful - restoring the repentant. Jeremiah's grief was comforted by the assurance that Jerusalem would rise again from its ruins. Which it did in the days of Nehemiah and Ezra, 70 years later.

Lamentations means to "cry aloud" or mourn. It was originally appended to Jeremiah to comprise one book. The book of Jeremiah warned of the coming fall of Jerusalem if her people failed to repent. In Lamentations Jeremiah wept in mourning after the fall of God's judgement upon the unrepentant city in 586BC.

"Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which has been brought on me, which the Lord has inflicted in the day of His fierce anger" (1:12).

Lamentations 1 mourns over the desolation of Jerusalem - devastated, disgraced, distressed, dishonoured and despised. "All her friends have betrayed her; they have become her enemies" (1:2). Many of her citizens have "gone into exile" (1:3). "Her foes have become her masters; her enemies are at ease..." (1:5). "The enemy laid hands on all her treasures; she saw pagan nations enter her sanctuary..." (1:10).

Yet Jeremiah recognises that the people brought this catastrophe upon themselves "because of her many sins" (1:5); "Jerusalem has sinned greatly and so has become unclean" (1:8); "My sins have been bound into a yoke" (1:14); "The Lord is righteous, for I rebelled against His commandments" (1:18).

Lamentations 2 weeps over the severe punishment with which God had judged Judah. "The Lord has rejected His altar and abandoned His sanctuary. He has handed over to the enemy the walls of her palaces..." (2:7). "All your enemies open their mouths against you; they scoff and gnash their teeth and say `we have swallowed her up. This is the day we have waited for..." (2:16). "The Lord has done what He planned; He has fulfilled His Word...He has let the enemy gloat over you..." (2:17).

Lamentations 3 records Jeremiah's faith and hope amidst the devastation of defeat. He first describes the agony and affliction he experienced: "besieged...with bitterness and hardship...he had walled me in...weighed me down with chains...pierced my heart...they mock me...I have been deprived of peace." (3:5-17). Jeremiah then sings this song of hope and faith: "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed. For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness...The Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him" (3:22-25). "Though He brings grief, He will show compassion, so great is His unfailing love. For He does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men" (3:32-33).

Therefore Jeremiah challenges his readers: "Why should any living man complain when punished for his sins? Let us examine our ways and test them and let us return to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven and say: 'We have sinned and rebelled..." (3:39-42).

And he prays for God to similarly judge the wicked who had inflicted such suffering on the people of God. "Pay back what they deserve, O Lord, for what their hands have done" (3:64).

Lamentations 4 recalls the just wrath of God poured upon Jerusalem: "The Lord has given full vent to His wrath; He has poured out His fierce anger...The kings of the earth did not believe, nor did any of the world's people, that enemies and foes could enter the gates of Jerusalem. But it happened because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests who shed within her the blood of the righteous" (4:11-13). Yet Jeremiah could add this note of hope to his dejected people: "Your punishment will end; He will not prolong your exile." (4:22).

Lamentations 5 is Jeremiah's prayer for the Lord to restore his nation: "Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens, our homes to foreigners" (5:2). "The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned" (5:16) "You, O Lord, reign forever; Your Throne endures from generation to generation...Restore us to Yourself O Lord, that we may return; renew our days as of old..." (5:19,21).

The Repentance

The cheerful face and carnival atmosphere presented to the world on the occasion of South Africa's transition in 1994 was less than honest. Ignoring the widespread chaos and fraud involved in the elections could not make those proceedings "free and fair". Pretending that the handing over of power to a revolutionary organisation was "a victory for democracy" was the height of hypocrisy. The fact is that the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as president was less of a birthday and more of a funeral for South Africa.

Yes, one had to be grateful for the, at least temporary, cessation of violence during the voting. But for the grace of God the massacres raging in Rwanda and the civil war in Angola could just as easily have erupted in South Africa. And the apparent note of reconciliation and goodwill at the inauguration was refreshing after the months of electioneering and years of vicious acrimony.

Yet the presence of Marxist dictators like Fidel Castro and terrorist leaders like Yasser Arafat as VIP's and the prominent prayers to false gods by a witchdoctor, Hindu priest and Muslim Imam at the inauguration were ominous.

"You have abandoned Your people, the house of Jacob. They are full of superstitions from the East; they practise divination like the Philistines and clasp hands with pagans." Isaiah 2:6

The fact is that the ANC's accession to power had very little to do with democracy. It was overwhelmingly a victory for sanctions, terrorism, intimidation, subversion, propaganda and fraud. Millions lost their jobs, and tens of thousands lost their lives in order to bring the ANC to power. Despite their carefully cultivated international public relations image, the fact remained that the ANC was, and is, massively infiltrated by the South African Communist Party.

"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." Isaiah 5:20

Comparing the reported jubilation over the ANC's election victory to the joyous celebrations when the Berlin Wall came down (as some have done) was as false an analogy as one could possibly make. The fall of the Berlin Wall was a victory over communism. The rise of the ANC was a victory for communism.

More people have died as a result of communism (over 160 million in the 20th century), than of any other ideology in the history of the world. How could any informed person rejoice over the handing over of power to a movement which, as a matter of policy, promoted sanctions and strikes which deprived millions of people of their jobs; planted bombs in shopping centres, public streets and restaurants; tortured and

murdered their own men in their concentration camps; assassinated politicians who opposed them and massacred peaceful marchers in the streets (such as the Shell House Massacre)?

"The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting Covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt." Isaiah 24:5-6

When terrorist leaders, murderers, child abusers, pro-abortionists and false prophets are exalted in our nation's capital then it is time to grieve and mourn and repent. Over 25,000 people have been murdered every year since 1994 - that is over half a million dead. In addition, over 1.2 million babies have been aborted under the ANC - officially and legally, often with tax payers money.

"The kings of the earth did not believe...that enemies and foes could enter the gates...But it happened because of the sins of her prophets..." Lamentations 4:12-13.

As a South African who served honourably in the defence of our land I was ashamed to see our Defence Force honouring the sworn enemies of our God and country. Many tens of thousands of Christians perished under the Cuban persecution and occupation in Angola - yet Fidel Castro was received as an honoured guest.

"You boast, 'We have entered into a covenant with death, with the grave we have made an agreement. When an overwhelming scourge sweeps by, it cannot touch us for we have made a lie our refuge and falsehood our hiding-place.'" Isaiah 28:15

The one consolation was that it was not our uniforms that the new National Defence Force wore and it was not under our old South African flag that these degrading and disgraceful displays took place.

Those who so successfully fought against and defeated the Marxist terrorists of SWAPO and the ANC and against the Cuban colonializing forces - we can still say that we did our duty and we were never defeated. The graveyards of hundreds of Soviet tanks and armoured cars, on the banks of the Lomba River, in Angola, testify to that.

"Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens, our homes to foreigners...slaves rule over us..." Lamentations 5:2,8

Yet while we were never defeated - we were betrayed. Now we see the riches of our land handed over to foreign squatters and revolutionary parasites. Those who are slaves to sin and slaves of foreign ideologies, like humanism and Marxism, are now appointed to rule.

"Wake up, you drunkards and weep! ...A nation has invaded my land...It has laid waste my vines and ruined my fig trees. It has stripped off their bark...The fields are ruined, the ground is dried up, the grain is destroyed..." Joel 1:5-10

Despite vast amounts of foreign aid, the disgraceful fact remains that as the ruling ANC party applied their socialist policies the economic results have been disastrous. As communist nations throughout the world prove - no amount of foreign aid can repair the devastation caused by the unworkable wastage of socialism. Besides of which South Africa always managed just fine without foreign aid. Our economic woes began with the ANC promoted sanctions, strikes, and violence of the 1980's.

"Woe to the obstinate...to those who carry out plans that are not Mine, forming an alliance, but not by My Spirit, heaping sin upon sin." Isaiah 30:1

Unwelcome as the truth may be - we need to face the facts. South Africa obstinately continued to abandon Biblical principles and embrace anti-Christian ideologies. It started in many theological seminaries decades ago when theologians became infatuated with liberalism, higher criticism and existentialism.

As the authority of the Word of God was questioned and eroded, sin was increasingly tolerated. The desecration of the Lord's Day, Sunday trading, the proliferation of the pornography plague, the advent of gambling, selfish materialism and the blight of blasphemy led to widespread moral breakdown.

"The land is full of adulterers; ...Both prophet and priest are godless;...Therefore their path will become slippery;...they will fall. I will bring disaster on them...They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his wickedness..." Jeremiah 23:10-14

When the NGK's "Church and Society" document abandoned objective Biblical standards for society it was an effective surrender to humanism. Soon "Christian" TV programmes like "Kruis en Kroniek" were promoting abortion, pornography and even blasphemous films like "The Last Temptation of Christ!"

The resultant break-up of families, rapid rise of occultism and the explosion of crime and violence became inevitable. Once the Biblical foundations were rejected (Psalm 11:3) the floodgates of evil were opened up on the land.

"I am bringing disaster on this people, the fruit of their schemes, because they have not listened to My Words and have rejected My Law." Jeremiah 6:19

When Evangelical ministers joined with the apostate World Council of Churches, at the Rustenburg National Conference of Churches, it indicated just how weak and ineffective the churches had become. When Christian ministers subsequently joined with Muslim Imams, Hindu priests and witchdoctors and participated in polytheistic inter-faith prayers at the National Peace Accord, the CODESA multi-party talks, at the Inter-faith Prayer Service for Peace and Unity and at the presidential inauguration of Nelson Mandela - it confirmed how compromise and syncretism have become epidemic.

"They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves... My people have exchanged My glory for worthless idols... My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water." Jeremiah 2:5,11,13

Now we have a government which holds to legalised abortion, pornography, homosexual "marriages" and the "right" of homosexuals and lesbians to adopt children, replacing Bible education with multi-faith religious education in the schools, increased taxes, corruption, restricting the rights of citizens to obtain firearms for self-defence, Affirmative Action, Black Economic Empowerment and racial quotas and disastrous "land reform".

"The visions of your prophets were false and worthless; they did not expose your sin to ward off your captivity. The oracles they gave you were false and misleading." Lamentations 2:14

The Hope

How then are we as Christians to respond to this catastrophic turn of events? First of all in repentance:

"Why should any living man complain when punished for his sins? Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven and say: we have sinned..." Lamentations 3:39-42

We should also be grateful that even in His wrath the Lord has remembered mercy (Habakkuk 3:2). We deserved worse. Our situation is far better than it could have been. At least the Western Cape has remained out of the control of the ANC. Because many are armed, we have so far been spared the widespread massacres that have all too often accompanied changes of government in Africa. "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness...The Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him..." Lamentations 3:22-25

We need to use this difficult time to renew our devotional life, to rediscover what it means to fear God alone. We need to make the most of every opportunity to proclaim the Word of God, make disciples of all nations, work for Reformation and pray for Revival.

"You, O Lord reign forever; Your Throne endures from generation to generation... Restore us to Yourself, O Lord, that we may return; renew our days as of old." Lamentations 5:19-21

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