

October 1

Scriptures: Read Lamentations 1 & 2

Key Verse: “See, O Lord, that I am in distress; my soul is troubled... for I have been very rebellious...” (Lamentations 1:20)

Overview

In each of the five poems found in the Book of Lamentations, Jeremiah bewailed the destruction of Jerusalem, but chapter one is the most poignant in expressing his grief. Jeremiah personifies Jerusalem as a mourning and abandoned widow, bereft of her husband (the Lord) and her children (the inhabitants), many of whom were slaughtered or carried away captive. He deeply felt her pain and humiliation. He identified himself with her and with the people of Judah. He admitted her guilt and made confession before God, even though he was innocent of the sins which led to the Lord’s wrath and judgment upon Jerusalem (1:12ff). He made it clear that she deserved that punishment and was suffering because of her many transgressions in rebellion against God (1:5, 8, 18, 20). Jerusalem had become like an unfaithful wife, since she had defiled herself by playing the harlot in worshipping foreign gods. At the appointed time of her collapse, however, none of her many lovers, those worthless idols, could give her any help or comfort (1:2, 9, 19; cf. Jer. 2:25-28; 3:1), for the only true God had purposed to throw her down and pour upon her the cup of His fury, which is graphically described in chapter two (2:4b, 8,17).

Jerusalem’s friends (allies), those idolatrous nations upon whom she had trusted, such as the Egyptian coalition, would likewise not come to her aid nor give her any comfort; rather, they would mock and scorn her after her fall (1:2b, 21; 2:15). The only One who could give real comfort was the Lord God, but He was now far from her, for sin brings separation from God (1:16; cf. Isa. 59:1-2). Sin never leads to happiness, but only to judgment, shame, mourning, and suffering; and this is especially tormenting to the backslider who, like Jerusalem, can remember the blessed days with the Lord, thus making their suffering more poignant (1:7a). Yet, in the midst of Jerusalem’s distress, God’s servant, Jeremiah, was present to intercede on her behalf. His deeply moving lamentations give evidence to the love and compassion of God for sinful mankind. The Lord does not take pleasure in bringing severe judgments, but such is demanded by His justice, holiness, and righteousness (1:18). God takes pleasure in extending His grace and in receiving unto Himself the repentant sinner. We, the people of God today, must not be indifferent to the sorrows and sufferings of those who are lost in sin (1:12; 2:20). In their sinful state, they are under the judgment of God, but through our witness and intercession, they can come to see and understand the love God has for them, leading many to repentance.

In describing Jerusalem’s divinely appointed disaster and God’s wrath upon her, Jeremiah stressed that nothing was spared, not even the Temple (“His footstool”, 2:1) and the holy furnishings. God had removed His protective hedge, cut off all Israel’s strength (“every horn”, 2:3), and given everyone and everything over to the invading nations led by Babylon. The adversaries not only brought further defilement to the Temple (1:10) but completely destroyed it, carrying away all the costly articles, along with most of the people. Jeremiah accused the false prophets of playing a large part in this downfall; for unlike true prophets, they did not reveal the sin of the people but rather deceived them (2:14; 4:13), giving them false hope which caused the

leaders to refuse to surrender, and therefore Jerusalem greatly suffered from famine during the long siege. Jeremiah painfully recollected the innocent ones who died of starvation and the cannibalism of the once-loving mothers (2:19-20; 4:10; cf. Lev 26:29). He interceded and pled for the Lord's mercy to be shown.

Jeremiah's lamentation attests to the accuracy of his former prophecies concerning Jerusalem and the future of the unrepentant people. They did indeed have to wear the yoke and be subservient to Nebuchadnezzar, just as he had dramatized (1:14; cf. Jer. 27:2; 28:10), but now that his words had been fulfilled, he did not scorn them and say, "I told you so!"; rather, the love of God remained in his heart. As he spoke the words of the personified Jerusalem, his own eyes must have wept profusely as he viewed the situation of Jerusalem and the plight of the people (1:16; 2:11). Likewise, centuries later, Jesus wept over this same city because of her spiritual blindness and the inevitable coming destruction (Luke 19:41-44; Matt. 23:37-39). Followers of Christ are to have this same tender heart toward our lost and dying world. This is the heart which prompts us to be witnesses for Jesus.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help us to live in a close relationship with You and to turn away from evil, that we may lead others to a knowledge of Your forgiveness which is available to all who call upon Your name.