

Lament for Jerusalem

After all of the warnings that had been given by prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the city of Jerusalem would finally fall in ca. 586 B.C. “The city has been taken” (Ezek. 33:21). The captain of Nebuchadnezzar’s army, Nebuzaradan, “burned the house of the Lord, the king’s house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; even every great house he burned with fire. So all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem. Then the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon and the rest of the people, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away into exile” (2 Kings 25:9-11). Some of the poorest of the land were left to be “vinedressers and plowmen” (vs. 12). Zedekiah was taken, and Gedaliah was made governor of the area, though he would be assassinated.

Imagine how Jeremiah felt after all of this. For years he had poured himself out in God’s service trying to get the people to listen and repent. He was persecuted, threatened, and lived a life of sorrows. Even though he knew people wouldn’t listen, he continued boldly proclaiming the truth about the people and the city. Even so, the destruction still came just as prophesied. Jeremiah had every right to be angry and sorrowful at the same time. His sorry is most prominent, and we hear the great sorrow manifested in the we know as the book of



Lamentations. The opening words tell the story of desolation:

How lonely sits the city
That was full of people!
She has become like a widow
Who was once great
among the nations!
She who was a princess

among the provinces
Has become a forced laborer!
She weeps bitterly in the night
And her tears are on her cheeks;
She has none to comfort her
Among all her lovers.
All her friends have dealt treacherously with her;
They have become her enemies.
Judah has gone into exile under affliction
And under harsh servitude;
She dwells among the nations,
But she has found no rest;
All her pursuers have overtaken her
In the midst of distress. (Lam. 1:1-3, NASB)

Why did this happen? By this time the story should be well known: sin and the failure to repent. Israel in the north was destroyed because of their unfaithfulness to the covenant. Judah saw it happen, yet still followed in the very same path despite the warnings (Jer. 3:6-10). Jerusalem fell because she “sinned greatly” and became an “unclean thing” (1:8). Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel had gone into great detail about the nature of the sins of those in Jerusalem. The idolatry, injustices, and ritualism had finally caught up with them. None of what happened next should have been a surprise. God spelled it

out, and He kept His word.

Jeremiah's distress and sorrow was in full view.

They have heard that I groan;
There is no one to comfort me;
All my enemies have heard of my calamity;
They are glad that You have done it (1:21).

The message of the prophets did contain hard words of judgment. God meant business when He warned them, and they should have known better. Yet the prophetic messages also contained words of hope, restoration, and renewal, all of which would culminate in the coming of the Messiah. Hope, as with judgment, was based upon the faithfulness of God. If God said it would happen, it would happen.

This I recall to my mind,
Therefore I have hope.
The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease,
For His compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.
"The Lord is my portion," says my soul,
"Therefore I have hope in Him."
The Lord is good to those who wait for Him,
To the person who seeks Him.
It is good that he waits silently
For the salvation of the Lord. (3:21-26)

Ezekiel, likewise, pointed to better days: "As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in

all the inhabited places of the land." (34:12-13).

God would indeed restore His people, but it would be several years yet before He made that happen. Jeremiah ended his lamentations with a recognition of God's rule and a plea for that restoration to come:

You, O Lord, rule forever;
Your throne is from generation to generation.
Why do You forget us forever?
Why do You forsake us so long?
Restore us to You, O Lord, that we may be restored;
Renew our days as of old,
Unless You have utterly rejected us
And are exceedingly angry with us. (5:19-22)

While sin keeps us from God, He does reach out to restore through Christ. Thank God for His lovingkindness!

Doy Moyer