

Meditation on Lamentations

By Trisha Gerstel



As a noun the word lament means “a passionate expression of grief”; as a verb it means “mourn”. Both of these definitions fit perfectly the writings (most likely by priest and prophet Jeremiah) that we know as the book of Lamentations. Through strong imagery we find out just how hard the nation of Israel stumbled and fell during this particular period in history: “Her [Israel’s] filthiness clung to her skirts; she did not consider her future” (1:9a, NIV); “children and infants faint in the streets of

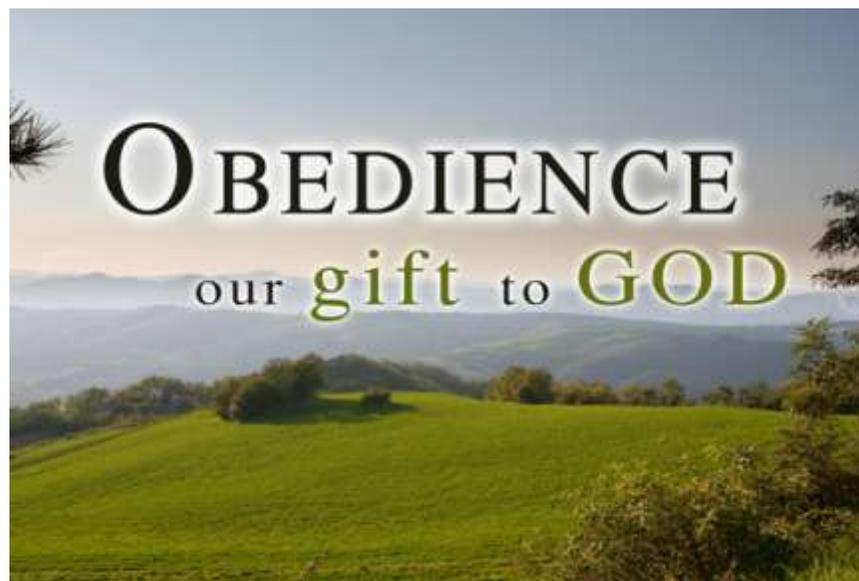
the city” (2:11b, NIV); “we have suffered terror and pitfalls, ruin and destruction” (3:47, NIV); “my people have become heartless like ostriches in the desert” (4:3b, NIV); “joy is gone from our hearts; our dancing has turned to mourning” (5:16a, NIV).

While I was reading through the book, a disturbing symmetry struck me: Lamentations is not just about the state of Jerusalem after its fall to Babylon – it’s about our world today! Throughout the globe we see destruction and suffering on multiple levels, and just as Jeremiah writes in verses 1:8a and 1:18a that Jerusalem’s downfall was caused by sin and rebellion against God, a reflection on today’s problems reveals that many – if not all – of our troubles are caused by a failure to keep God’s commandments.

Although we are no longer under the Law of Moses and certainly should not look at deliverance in a legalistic way, Christians still should strive toward obedience, and in doing so will see many more personal blessings. And on a larger scale, mankind’s failure to keep the “first and greatest commandment”, to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Mathew 22:37, NIV) as well as the second, to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39, NIV), has had severe consequences.

How many more would hear the saving message of the Gospel and have their lives transformed—how much more would our own lives be transformed—if we loved our God with all our hearts and souls and minds, and focused solely on Him instead of letting the desires, passions, and worries of the world take over? How many more people would be fed and healed of afflictions if we loved our neighbors as much as ourselves, choosing to share God’s monetary blessings instead of stealing it away for our own worldly pleasures?

While the applicability of Lamentations in our lives today may seem something of a disheartening, depressing realization, it’s important that we accept the admonishment against turning away from God and then move on to the book’s encouragement to do His work as well as its reminder of the hope we have in the Lord. After all, while Jeremiah writes in 4:-12a-13 that, “The kings of the earth did not believe. . . . But it happened because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests” (pointing to the consequences should Christians – the representatives of Christ here on earth – fail to do His work), he also reminds us that, “because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. . . . The Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him. . . . [and] He will show compassion, so great is His unfailing love” (3:22, 25, 32, NIV).



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