**Lamentations 4**

**I. Text Of Chapter 4 – “Our End Has Come” (3 min. to read)**

*A. “There’s A Shadow Hanging Over Me” (vv. 1-12)*

1. The magnificence of the Temple and of Jerusalem had been stripped bare through the vacillation of Judah’s last kings. Treaty after treaty was signed and broken; tribute after tribute had taken from the glory of Jerusalem. And now, the consequence of her wickedness has caused every source of boasting for Judah to be taken from her. The gold is tarnished; the youth of the land are as common pottery (cf. Jer. 19).

2. *“For those who esteemed themselves as high-quality gold, the kind of experience which reduced them to the level of base metal in the opinion of their enemies was of harrowing psychological and spiritual proportions.”* (Harrison, 232)

3. Families and especially mothers had lost all sense of familial affection (Rom. 1:31). The infants and children begged for food but the mothers turned away (v. 4). They not only do this, but they cook and cannibalize their children (v. 10). Compare 2:19. Even wild animals showed more compassion than the mothers at this time (cf. Job 39:13- 17). This was foreseen in the Law (Dt. 28:53ff; cf. Lam. 2:20; Jer. 19:9). *“The stark horror of this appalling deed had become indelibly etched on the consciousness of the author, and doubtless haunted him for the remainder of his life.”* (Harrison, 235)

4. All levels of Jewish society had been affected. Even the wealthy and the eaters of various delicacies, were made to be as homeless, sifting through rubbish heaps for scraps. They had no one to blame but themselves. Its destruction could have been avoided had they heeded the true prophets! *“Instead of leading other nations into the way of divine truth, the recalcitrant people of Judah had been hauled into an ignominious captivity by pagan nations who were acting as God’s instruments for their punishment.”* (Harrison, 233)

5. In v. 6, Jerusalem’s decimation is called worse than Sodom’s. The point is proportionality and duration. Sodom’s destruction came swiftly and suddenly (cf. Gen. 19:24f; Lk. 12:47f); Jerusalem’s dragged out in a siege lasting nearly two years (Jer. 52:4-7; 2Kgs. 25:1-3).

6. Regarding the level of accountability that Judah bears, Harrison (234) makes an astute point: *“It is precarious to postulate the concept of ‘degrees of sin’, since all wrongdoing is abhorrent to God, however insignificant man might happen to regard certain aspects of it. There are, nevertheless, degrees of culpability, as the penal legislation of the Law made clear (cf. Am. 3:2; Mt. 5:21ff.; Lk. 12:47f., etc.), but the nation had been slow to accept its responsibilities.”*

7. vv. 7f describe the Nazirites/consecrated ones/princes (hard to tell what the reference is). What we can be sure of is the point: those who were formerly renowned for their ruddy and handsome appearance have become as shadowed, beleaguered, and half-dead. They were totally gaunt, malnourished, haggard, parched, and dehydrated.

8. The close of this section discusses how preferable it would be for the immediate death of the sword to dying from the long-lasting famine. *“The pain and suffering of the Jews inside the city of Jerusalem would be exacerbated by their seeing (from the safety of inside the walls of the city) the Babylonian soldiers going into the fields and plundering the crops (cf. Deut. 28:33, 51; Jer. 5:17).”* (Humphries, 569)

9. Nobody could believe that the seemingly impregnable city of Jerusalem was taken (cf. 2Sam. 5:6-8; 2Kgs. 19:32-34; Ps. 76:1-3; Ps. 127:1).

*B. Sin Had Caused These Consequences (vv. 13-20)*

1. The kings of the earth are shocked and horrified at the destruction of Jerusalem. In other passages, they wag their heads and scoff and ridicule. Here they simply see it as unbelievable.

2. The people suffer primarily for two reasons: 1) The sins of the priests and prophets through negligence and active participation in immorality (Is. 28:7f; Jer. 2:30, 34; 6:13; 7:30; 8:10; 11:19; 14:14; 18:18; 19:4; 20:10; 23:11, 14-17; 26:7f, 15, 20-24; 27:16f; 37:19; Ezek. 3:17f; 13:8- 16; 22:25f; 33:6); and 2) The people had stubbornly rejected the Lord and sought refuge in the strength of man. *“Now, because of this shedding of innocent blood (2 Kings 24:3-4; Jer. 7:6; 19:4; 22:17; Ezek. 9:9), the nation is bleeding through the wounds inflicted upon them by the Babylonian sword (Jer. 9:16; 18:21; 24:10; 25:27; 29:17; Ezek. 7:15).”* (Humphries, 572)

3. The priests are depicted as lepers announcing their uncleanness and rejected as outcasts, even by the pagans (cf. Lev. 13:45f). Verse 16 depicts God with “an angry countenance” despising the work of the people (contrast Num. 6:22-27; Ezek. 7:22).

4. *“In the elegant literary hyperbole of verse 19 (cf. 2 Sa. 1:23), the relentless nature of the Babylonian pursuit of refugees was vividly described. To prevent any further political contacts between the remnant in the southern kingdom and the Egyptians, the Babylonians evidently set up ambushes in the desert areas south of Judah.”* (Harrison, 237) (compare this swiftness and response to Jer. 4:13; 2Kgs. 25:4f; Jer. 39:4f; 52:7f)

5. “The anointed of the Lord” references Zedekiah whose abjectly terrible character had added to the fire. He was weak, treacherous, corrupt, degenerate (cf. Ezek. 21:25; 2Kgs. 24:19).

*C. Zion Redeemed & Edom Condemned (vv. 21-22)*

1. Through the invocation of irony and sarcasm, Jeremiah/Jerusalem ridicules Edom whose fate is coming. *“Yeah, laugh it up…you’re next.”*

2. Edom would be visited by the Lord for their own sins and will also drink of the cup of the wrath of the Lord (Jer. 49:7-22; Ezek. 25:12-14; 35:15; Amos 9:12; Obad. 10-16).

**II. Thought Questions For Chapter 4**

A. What demographic groups are pointed out in this chapter? What might the inclusion of all of these groups imply?

B. In what sense was the decimation of Jerusalem worse than that of Sodom? If God’s people under the old covenant suffered a greater consequence, how much more will we, who have better things, suffer?

C. Look at verse 7 in different translations and/or commentaries. What main translational difference occurs between different translations?

D. How are the priests depicted in verse 15? Who else is depicted this way?

E. Who was *“anointed of the Lord”* in v. 20? What sort of a person was he? What leader in the NT acted in similar ways with a prophet? (Herod & JTB)

F. Record your feelings after reading through this chapter.

**III. Applications For Chapter 4**

A. *“To him who thinks he stands, take heed, lest he fall”* (1Cor. 10:12)

B. *“The brightest and the best of a society suffer serious consequences when the leaders and the people turn away from righteousness (Exod. 20:5; Isa. 14:21; Jer. 7:16- 20).”* (Humphries, 568)

C. *“Modern society needs to consider carefully and seriously what happened to the Jews here…We are spiritually and emotionally cannibalizing our precious children when we allow our family structure to be gored to death by the two-horned beast of immorality and materialism.”* (Humphries, 570)

D. If you do not come to God for life (Jn. 5:40), spiritual death will come to you.

E. All nations that forget God will suffer an eventual fate (Ps. 9:17-20; Isa. 34:1-7; Jer. 25:15-33; 49:7-22; Ezek. 25:12-14; 32:29; 35:1-15; Am. 1:11f; Obad. 15f).

F. All wickedness will ultimately be discovered & exposed & visited by God’s wrath (Num. 32:23; Gal. 6:7; Eccl. 12:14; 1Tim. 5:24).