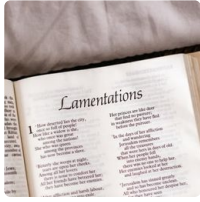


OpenTheo

Lamentations (Part 2)



Lamentations - Steve Gregg

Explore the profound contrasts and symbolic imagery found in Steve Gregg's thought-provoking analysis of Lamentations (Part 2). With careful nuance, Gregg highlights the figurative nature of certain passages, emphasizing the need to avoid misinterpretation. Drawing from historical and biblical references, he reflects on the downfall of Capernaum and the absence of divine guidance. Through his meticulous examination, Gregg sheds light on the complex interplay between Old and New Testament perspectives, ultimately urging listeners to consider a response that transcends worldly acceptance.

Transcript

It's rather obviously not literal because Israel never was up into heaven. And to cast down from heaven to earth is something that is a figurative expression of casting down from a pinnacle of privilege and splendor down to, you know, shame and contempt and disaster. Now, by the way, the same thing is said of Capernaum by Jesus when he weeps.

Well, he doesn't exactly weep, I guess, but he does speak imprecations or something like that against Capernaum and Chorazin. But in Matthew 11, 23, Jesus says, And you, Capernaum, who are exalted into heaven, will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in song, it would have remained to this day.

Notice he says Capernaum, not literally, of course, figuratively. But will be brought down to Hades, just a figurative speech, of course. But we have a similar thing said about Edom in the book of Obadiah, a very short book, only one chapter, right after the book of Amos.

And Obadiah, verses 3 and 4, You who dwell in the cluster of the clouds, you who say in your heart, Though you exalt yourself as high as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, From there I will bring you down, says the Lord. Now the reason I point these things out is because we need to be familiar, we don't misinterpret certain passages. And one passage that has been very much misinterpreted, to my mind, By the failure to recognize this kind of imagery, is Isaiah 14, in the passage about Lucifer.

Because, as you know, Lucifer has traditionally been identified in traditional theology. But the only place that Isaiah 14, 12, and then only in the King James and the New King, A human being, although the evidence from the converse is because of what it says in verses 13 and following. Isaiah 14, 13, says, For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God.

I also will sit on the mouths of the congregation, on the forehead of the prophets, I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the most high. Then verse 15 says, yet you should be brought down to Sheol, or hell, to the lowest depths of the pit.

Some say, well no human being could make such claims, this must be an angel or someone like that. But they fail to recognize, exalt my throne above the stars, Set of Edom, though you set your throne above the stars of God, yet you'll be brought down. Or Capernaum, though you be exalted into heaven, you'll be brought down to hell.

And even in Lamentations too, it speaks of the condition of Israel before she had been in heaven. It says, and God has cast you, but we recognize it as a figure of speech in all other places. The important thing, forcibly preclude the possibility of Lucifer, what is said of Edom.

Okay, let's go on. Lamentations 2. The Lord has swallowed up and has not pitied all the inhabitants of Jacob. He has thrown down in his wrath, he has brought them down to the ground.

He has cut off in fierce anger, which the horn in Hebrew poetry usually refers to every horn in Israel. He has drawn back his right hand from before the enemy. He has blazed against Jacob like a flaming fire.

Standing like an enemy, he has bent his bow. With his right hand like an adversary, he has slain all who were pleasing to God. He's not really saying that the people who were truly pleasing to God were slain.

He's speaking of the people of Judah in general as those that God has given to him with deference. That nation previously, and now he's speaking figuratively of the nation, was once a nation pleasing to him. And now he's taken his vengeance on them.

The Lord was like an enemy in the daughter of Judah. He has done violence to his tabernacle as if it were a garden. He has destroyed his... The Lord has caused the appointed feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion.

In his burning indignation, he has spurned the king and the priest. He has abandoned his sanctuary, again referring to the temple there. He has given up the walls of... They have made a noise in the house of the Lord as on a day of set feast.

On the set feasts, the Jews would usually make a lot of noise of singing and celebration

and partying and so forth, and feasting. Now, in the same region where the feasting usually was taking place, but of a very different sort. A cry of victory on the part of the... The Lord has purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion.

He has stretched out a line. He has not withdrawn... They languish together. Her gates have sunk into the ground.

He has destroyed and broken her bars. Her kings and her princes are among the nations. The law is no more, and her prophets find no vision from the Lord.

One of the ways that God exhibited his displeasure in judgment was that he would no longer speak to the prophets. Now, he spoke to Jeremiah at this time, and apparently... But they were no longer... Basically, her and Daniel. But there were... When Jeremiah put the... The law required... Practice and... Anymore through prophets.

At least through... The elders of the daughters... Sitting on the ground as opposed to on their thrones. Humiliation for life. They throw dust on their heads... Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.

Because the children of... Because the children and the infants faint in the streets of the city. Probably meaning for lack of food. They thank to their mothers... As their life is poured out.

Even in their mothers bosom. The life of an infant being poured out. Or having away... Even while they're being held at their mothers breast.

It's fairly familiar to us in our time... The problems in Ethiopia. To what shall I liken you... For your ruin is spread wide as the sea. Who can heal you? Again, the healing motif.

The sickness motif. The condition of being under God's judgment. They have not uncovered... False prophets... Generally... Said what you want to hear.

True prophets were saying... Sin. And therefore they... They did not expose your iniquity to bring back your captives. But have envisaged... Or envisioned... For you false prophets... Was that your hand, Jeff? They hit and shake their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem.

Is this the city that is... The joy of the whole earth and the perfection... 48. In verse 2. You may know verse 1. Of our God. Is Mount Zion.

2.15. In most of the... All your enemies have... Surely this is the day we have waited for. We have found it. We have seen it.

The Lord has done what he purposed. He has fulfilled his word which he commanded in days of old. He has caused your enemy to rejoice over you.

He has exalted... Their heart cried out to the Lord. Oh Lord, give yourself no rest. Arise, cry out in the night.

At the beginnings of the watch is... Lift your hands toward him. For the life of your young... See, oh Lord, and consider. To whom have you done this? Should the... Should the priests and the prophets... Young and old lie on the ground.

You have slain them in the day of your anger. You have invited us to a feast day. In the day of the Lord's... He compares the... To feast on Jerusalem.

Jesus told wedding feasts. And he said a king wanted to make a wedding for his son. And he sent out... And they made excuses and didn't come.

And it says he was wroth with them. And he sent his armies and destroyed their city. A reference to the... And compelled them to two feasts.

As it were. Here is the feast. Where the people of... The Gentiles come and feast on Jerusalem.

But there's also the feast of salvation. That people are invited to. And the Jews who rejected the feast of salvation.

That they had to participate in two feasts. And the same contrast is made. One, the feast... The wedding feast of the lamb.

The wedding supper of the lamb. The other is a feast of carnivorous birds coming to eat the wicked who have been slain. We see for example in Revelation 19.9. Then he said to me... And he said to me, these are the true saints.

But then... In verse 17 of the same chapter. Then I saw an angel standing in the sun. And he cried with... That you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of... Re-enslave both small... So we have two feasts beginning in contrast.

Or be feasted upon by the vultures. As it were. And if... Again if Revelation is talking about the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

As some believe. And could be well argued. Then it would be saying a similar thing.

If they don't come to the wedding feast. Then they will be part of the feast of the king sending his armies to destroy their city. And the vultures will eat them.

And so also... The prophet likened it to... Chapter 3 then. There is the I and me seen throughout this section. That almost suggests the prophet would be speaking about himself.

And it can sound like he is. But in all likelihood he is personifying the nation. And

speaking as a representative of the nation.

So it's like the nation is speaking in a first person singular. Though later on. At about verse 52.

There is some reason to believe that maybe the prophet is speaking of others. But at least some of it is so much as about the nation itself. I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.

Of God's wrath. He has led me and made me walk in darkness and not in light. Surely he has turned his hand against me time and time again.

He has aged my flesh and my skin and my bones. He has besieged me. Which sounds more like a city speaking than an individual.

And surrounded me with bitterness and woe. He has set me into dark places like the dead of long ago. He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out.

He has made my chain heavy. Even when I cry and shout he shuts out my prayer. He has blocked my ways with hewn stone.

He has made my paths crooked. He has been to me like a bear lying in ambush. He is saying God has been like that.

Although in the book of Jeremiah, Babylon is called a lie. Crouching and coming against Jerusalem. See Jerusalem is likened in the scripture to God's flock of sheep.

The enemies of Jerusalem are usually compared to carnivorous beasts that are typical. Babylon is likened to a lion. Although here it's the Lord has been like a lion.

He has turned aside my ways and torn me in pieces. He has made me desolate. He has bent his bow and set me up.

He has caused the arrows of his quiver and their taunting song. He has filled me with bitterness. He has made me drink wormwood which also means bitterness.

He has also broken my teeth with gravel. It might even be a reference to the famine. That after pure food supplies were gone, they eat maybe food that is mixed with and not a reference to it.

You have moved my soul far. And I said my strength, my soul still remains. Now at verse 22 which is just about the middle of the book, just about the center, we have an unusually optimistic and positive passage.

Whereas the book is entirely made up of laments. We have here of the book which looks forward to God's restoration and mercies and so forth. Through the Lord's mercies we

are not consumed.

They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. Now you know where that song comes from.

In spite of the appearances to the contrary, God is still merciful. And those who look for him and who are in relationship with him can see that he is merciful. Evidence of his loving kindness is mercy.

Even in the midst of destruction and general devastation of the society around, individuals can certainly know his mercy. And even the destruction that was intended, that would be forever in them and destroying them if he hadn't done it. So even in wrath he remembers mercy.

Even in the judgments of God, those who have faith, he is faithful to his people. He didn't just leave them, he judged them so that they might change. The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.

So many people in Jerusalem, it is good that one should hope. It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. What it means, it suggests possibly that if a person has to be in slavery, humility and hard work and so forth, and if a condition is thinking for the rest of his life.

And he may be seeing that Jerusalem is like a man who is bearing the yoke now so that it will have a better perspective, more humility later in life. Let him sit alone and keep silent. Let him put his mouth shut, yet hope, there may yet be some hope.

Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him and be full of reproach. Now he is basically saying, just receive this from heaven God, turn the other cheek as it were. By the way, in a messianic passage in Isaiah 50 and verse 6, the messiah says, I gave my cheek to the smiters and did not turn away from him that plucked out the hair, meaning the beard was plucked out.

Same kind of language is here. Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him, just receive it. Hopefully it will pass.

Though he causes, or he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. That doesn't mean that something, but it means that that's not what he's, he doesn't desire to, he sometimes has to do it. But it's not something that, to crush under his feet all the, God doesn't willingly do that.

The Lord does not approve of those things. Although he has brought those things upon them, it is more or less a secondary measure that he had to bring on them, not what he really would prefer. Their own conduct has, who is he who speaks and it comes to pass when the Lord has not commanded it? Is it not from the mouth, well being proceed? Now

the prophet says, and well being proceed.

Job said that too. Job said to his wife, shall we receive only good from the Lord? So we need to have room in our theology. The devil may in fact be the agent, just as the Babylonians, who were wicked men, were agents that God used to bring.

So also when affliction comes to us, the devil himself may be the agent, as he was decreasing. God is the one who allows it. If God didn't speak it, the devil couldn't do it.

And so, Jeremiah and Job both have that, well and well being both proceed. Let a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins. Let us search out and examine, let us lift our hearts when God allows affliction in your life.

Don't complain. Receive it as something just, especially in this chastisement for sins, and use that as an example to examine your ways and say, well why is this happening? And return to the God of heaven. And so, that's what Jeremiah recommends to his people there.

We have transgressed and rebelled. You have not pardoned. You have covered yourself with shame and not pity.

You have covered yourself with the light of the sun, the moon, and the stars, but being a barrier, don't reach heaven. Not reaching their goals in heaven. You have made us in a hostile environment.

In the midst of the peoples. By the way, Paul uses this same reference to how the apostles are treated. To live in more humiliation than the average people, the off-scouring and the refugees of the world.

By the way, I should point out that in Judah becoming off-scouring and refugees, the apostles were made to be the off-scouring and the refugees. And therefore, what was seen in the Old Testament as, you know, in the New Testament it seems to some positions of response, a very different kind of thing. On the one hand, or when, verse 46, Now all of our enemies, my eyes flow and do not cease, my eyes bring suffering to myself and to the people of my city.

And that's what I see. Now here it says, without cause. Here's where I think, because Jerusalem, because they offended the Lord.

However, Jeremiah was personally oppressed without cause. And so we can see, if you'll look at the following verses, that very possibly the prophet is speaking autobiographically here of his own situation. The waters flowed over me.

You have heard my voice. On the day I called. O Lord, you have pleaded the case of my soul.

You have redeemed my life. O Lord, you have seen how I am wrong. Judge my case.

You have seen all their vengeance, all their schemes against me. You have heard their reproach, O Lord, all their schemes against me, the lips of my enemies, and their whispering against me all the day. Look at their sitting down and their rising up.

I am their taunting song. Repay them, O Lord, according, give them a veiled heart. Your curse be upon them.

In your anger pursue and destroy them from under the heavens of the Lord. Now, here in verses 64 through 66, we have a fairly typical imprecation. Now, this exact imprecation, as you will recall, no doubt immediately your mind is reminded of the unbelieving Jews.

And it continues to this day. When Moses is written in Romans 11, it talks about the Jews of the land of Num. Now, that wouldn't be true necessarily of every Jew today, especially those who live just on the nation.

Chapters form at the head of every street. There were lovely, soft-spoken individuals who were not so good to their children. But the daughter of my people is good to her children.

For she, that is the author, she treats her young children. Her labor is in vain without concern. And did not endow her with the children to feed its infants.

The bird-brain of Israel is contrasted unfavorably with the better and more competent. And they assure themselves of depriving their children. But it may well be that the mothers had some food and ate it themselves rather than giving it to their children.

Josephus indicates that that happened. Certainly, if sea monsters, we understand it to be whales. Whales do nurse their young.

But it would seem unlikely even that whales were mammals and that they nursed their young. You know, I don't know. Those who ate delicacies, it's more merciful, as he'll say a little later too, to die instantly, like verse 7. Her nasorites were brought to society.

They took a bath and they were more ruddy. They go unrecognized in the streets. Their skin clings to their bones.

It has become as dry as brittle skin from apparently dehydration, lack of water supply during the famine. Those slain by the sword are better off than those who die of hunger. For these, by the way, stricken for lack of the fruits of the field, the hands of the companions, they became food for them in the destruction.

And it has devoured, probably meaning the actual physical. They had to rebuild those. The kings of the earth and the enemy, that the adversary, even Titus, the Roman who destroyed Jerusalem, indicated that he must have had, he made this statement, that we

have certainly had God on our side in this endeavor, he said, because what armies? Jerusalem had powerful, no one would have thought.

The kings of the earth and the inhabitants of the world would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests who shed in her midst the blood of the just. Now let me just say something here. The walls of the city in those days were, and yet this security, no amount of, therefore the greatest security for a nation, and that is why when people sometimes accuse the Mennonites when they in fact take advantage of the benefits of this country, it is a false accusation.

The fact is, eventually that society is without salt and without redeeming value. And so here also it is celebrated that Jerusalem's walls had been the most powerful, God saw, and when God had no amount of the shedding of the blood of the just for most, they wandered blind in the streets, they had defiled themselves with blood, so that no one would touch their garments. They cried out to them, when they fled and wandered, those among the nation said, they shall no longer dwell here.

The face of the Lord scattered them. He no longer regards them. The people did not respect the priests nor show favor to the elders.

It is an interesting thing when the religious leaders begin to compromise and get into sin, they often do so so that they won't seem too aloof, they won't seem too holier than thou. They usually make their compromise in order to please the world and to obtain respect and acceptance in the world. That's the main reason that the clergy usually start to champion things like that.