**Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: The Book of Lamentations: Some Chapter Notes**

**Monday July 31st: Lamentations Chapter 1**

**Some memorable/challenging Passages (Message Version):** Once Queen of the ball, she’s now a drudge in the kitchen (1). Jerusalem who out-sinned the whole world (8). O God, look at me: worthless, cheap, abject (11). No one listens, no one cares (21). Give them what you gave me for my sins (22).

**To think about/discuss:** 1) The writer assumes that God is in charge, so the suffering must be God’s will. Suffering often has an identifiable cause, but does it usually/always have a purpose/justification? Isn’t it truer to say that people can choose to use their suffering positively, or can just suffer – without any purpose or justification for the suffering? (The musician diagnosed with Parkinsonism at age 40 didn’t deserve this, couldn’t have behaved otherwise to avoid it; but chose to use the reality of suffering to get people together to make a musical composition raising money for the Parkinsonism Society. PS Elaine Cook had Parkinsonism taking her music from her.) 2) Why the focus on Jerusalem? Israel and the over the river bits of Jewish territory had already gone, and much of Judah had gone. In the last War, London had the Blitz, but people didn’t ignore the bombs that fell elsewhere. 3) Can you empathise with the “confusion” of Zion/Judah/Jerusalem/me: is there such a thing as collective suffering, or only individual/personal suffering? 4) The writer is angry that neighbouring countries looked on and laughed as Jerusalem suffered from invasion; but the neighbours had suffered from the original Jewish invasion, so can you blame them? 5) Why the female terminology for peoples, countries, cities? 6) Does God “care”? How do you answer the challenge that if there were a God who cared, that God would prevent suffering? 7) Is Exile so bad? – the first Jewish exiles were still nomadic, and opted for Egypt. Very few people in the UK die in the place they were born in. Settled status is relatively new for human beings.

**Monday August 7th: Lamentations Chapter 2**

**Some memorable/challenging passages**: In his anger, he treated his favourite as throw-away junk (1). He had Israel for supper (5). My eyes are blind with tears, my stomach is in a knot (11). Breathing their last in their mothers’ laps (12). God did carry out, item by item, exactly what he said he’d do (15). Beg for the lives of your children, who are starving to death in the streets (16). Should women eat their own babies? (20) The children I loved and reared gone, gone, gone (22).

**To think about/discuss:** 1) Is God ever angry, or is this just human speak? (I get angry, so God must get angry.) 2) We can sympathise with the emphasis on child suffering, but how does this tally with the harshness of the time towards children? (Spare the rod and spoil the child.) Children’s rights is a modern idea. 3) Why is cannibalism so offensive? 4) Why the emphasis on prophets, priests, kings as victims when it is argued that they led the ordinary folk (who suffered most) astray? 5) Prayer in suffering: should it be just about handling the suffering, or about the suffering being taken away? 6) Is God suffering too? 7) Should morality be based on fear: behave or suffer? (Or on love?)

**Monday August 14th: Lamentations Chapter 3**

**Memorable/challenging passages:** I’m the man who has seen trouble (1). He took me by the hand, and walked me into pitch-black darkness (1). He locked me up in deep darkness, like a corpse nailed inside a coffin (6). He locks up my prayers, and throws away the key (8). When he was finished, there was nothing left of me (11). I gave up on life altogether – life is a lost cause (16-18). The utter lostness (19). God’s loyal love couldn’t have run out (22), God is all I’ve got left (24). It’d a good thing to quietly hope (26). Enter the stillness (28). The “worst” is never the worst (30). He takes no pleasure in making life hard (35). You came close when I called out (57). Break their miserable hearts (60).

Note the huge mood changes: each mood overwhelmingly real at the time, and no doubt seeming the final mood.

**To think about/discuss: 1)** How do you feel about the desire for revenge that surfaces here and there, e.g. in relation to Babylon or to neighbouring countries enjoying Judah’s woes? You get this today with people wronged decades ago, but still wanting “to see justice done”. 2) What helps when you hit rock bottom? 3) How do we hang on to hope when we feel despair? Where is the borderline between “natural” depression and “clinical” depression; and is it more damaging to medicalise being down, or to fail to recognise the need for medical intervention? 4) Does having faith always help, or can it make matters worse because you believe in God but believe God no longer believes in you? 5) Does the Crucifixion offer an understanding of God that helps more with despair than any other God picture? 6) Are feelings all that important?!

**September 4th: Lamentations Chapter 4**

**Memorable/challenging passages:** How gold is treated like dirt (1). Babies have nothing to drink (4). Better to have been killed in battle than to have been killed by starvation (9) Because of the sins of her prophets and the evils of her priests (13). Our king, our life’s breath, the anointed of God (20). You won’t have to go through this exile again (22) Edom, he will punish your evil life (22).

**To think about. Discuss: 1)** The realities of siege warfare – Warsaw more recently. Could have been Kiev.  2) This wasn’t the last exile/ dispersion – AD 70!!! I know a Jewish lady in North London who came here from the dispersion of Jews to India. The Jews have handled dispersion (and persecution) incredibly well. Why so much persecution? Why such an incredible survival of a faith? 2) What was evil about Edom? (That country can hardly be blamed for breaking the Jewish Law!) 3) Do we see wickedness and punishment going together in today’s world? 4) If the prophets and priests led astray “good and trusting people”, how come the good and trusting people suffered? 5) Can you envisage even very hungry parents eating their own children?

**September 4th: Lamentations Chapter 5**

**Memorable/challenging passages:** Our precious land has been given to outsiders (1). We have to pay to drink our own water (8). Our parents sinned, and we are paying for the wrongs they did (6). Strapping young men given women’s work to do (8). The crown of glory has toppled from our head (16). Give us a fresh start (21).

**To think about/discuss:** 1) Both the land rights of the Jews and the whole concept of owning the land are open to question? Better to think of ourselves as (temporary) tenants? 2) The paying for water debate has a very contemporary feel to it, both in this country and planet-wise as water demand exceeds water supply. Jacob’s well: it never was Jacob’s! 3) Back to the sins of the parents: rights and realities? 4) Rape as a weapon of war then and now – perhaps the most despicable weapon. 5) Is there any longer such a thing as “Women’s work”? 6) You detect the writer daring to say to God: you are right to be angry, but this is disproportionate! Children dying of starvation because some of their parents broke the rules might be seen as rather over the top? 7) Is a fresh start always possible?