

The Casting Down of Zion

Lamentations 2:1-22

The Casting Down of Zion...

Does the thought of Zion being cast down to the earth grip your soul?

The concept of Zion is very important to a correct understanding and application of Lamentations 2.

As I read through this second Lament, I want you to pay particular attention to the 7 times that Zion is mentioned.

Chapter 1 mentioned Zion 3 times.

Chapter 3 does not mention Zion at all.

Chapters 4 and 5 both mention Zion twice.

Read Lamentations 2:1-22.

In chapter 1 Jerusalem, the holy city, suffers terribly. Jeremiah uses personification to help us to enter into the lonely pain she experiences.

Chapter 2 focuses less on the personal expression of pain.

Instead, we feel Jeremiah's pain as he reflects on Jerusalem's suffering.

Jeremiah wants us to interpret the Fall of Jerusalem as the "Casting Down of Zion to the earth" by God in his anger.

How the Lord in his anger has set the daughter of Zion under a cloud!

He has cast down from heaven to earth the splendor of Israel;

The casting down from heaven to earth is poetic. The physical city of Jerusalem was not literally in the place of heaven.

It is the splendor of Jerusalem that has been cast down. Her reputation, her dignity, her glory has been taken from her. Her exalted position as the bride of the Lord has been ripped from her and she now has become the lowly slave of the Babylonians.

"The daughter of Zion" is best taken as a reference to the current generation of those belonging to Zion.

Zion is a concept that is transgenerational. There are not many Zions. There is one Zion that continues throughout history. The daughter of Zion is the current generation.

Three points:

1. The Bible wants us to have an exalted view of Zion
2. The Bible wants us to weep when Zion is cast down to the earth
3. The Bible wants us to continue hoping in the exaltation of Zion

1. The Bible wants us to have an exalted view of Zion.

The city of Jerusalem was built upon several “mountains” one of which was Mt. Zion. Although, truth be told, these mountains were little more than “hills”.

God had instructed David that it was on these hills that the throne of God would exist on earth. David, in obedience to the LORD, conquers the Jebusites, who had a stronghold on Mt. Zion.

2 Samuel 5:7 ⁷ Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David.

So, in the beginning, Zion was simply one of the hills on which Jerusalem and the Temple would be established. Very quickly Mt. Zion is identified with the rule of God through his human representative – the king.

Psalm 2:6 ⁶ "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill."

And the reign of the human king was really the rule of the LORD himself.

Psalm 9:11 ¹¹ Sing praises to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds!

You can begin to understand why Zion’s position was truly exalted. The God of heaven ruled on earth from Zion.

As David, and then Solomon, built up the city and made her strong and beautiful, Zion became the term most closely associated with that beauty. Psalm 48 expresses it well.

Psalm 48:1-2 Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His holy mountain, ² beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King.

Psalm 48:11-14 ¹¹ Let Mount Zion be glad! Let the daughters of Judah rejoice because of your judgments! ¹² Walk about Zion, go around her, number her towers, ¹³ consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels, that you may tell the next generation ¹⁴ that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever.¹

Of course, no physical city can contain the God of the Universe. But, the language of Psalm 48 connects looking at the physical beauty of Zion with seeing the beauty of God. Verse 14 says, “... this (Zion) is God.”

In the same way that you can see the glory of God in creation, so you can see the beauty of God in Zion.

We might say, “Mt. Zion is the emblem of God’s own beauty.”

But the concept of Zion was more than a physical city. Zion is the place in which God establishes the spiritual people of God. If you are a true follower of Yahweh, then it is true that you have been born “in Zion.” Psalm 87 makes this clear.

Psalm 87:1-7 On the holy mount stands the city he founded; ² the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. ³ Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God. Selah ⁴ Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon; behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush¹ - "This one was born there," they say. ⁵ And of Zion it shall be said, "This one and that one were born in her"; for the Most High

himself will establish her. ⁶ The LORD records as he registers the peoples, "This one was born there." Selah ⁷ Singers and dancers alike say, "All my springs are in you."

Psalm 74:2 ² Remember your congregation, which you have purchased of old, which you have redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage! Remember Mount Zion, where you have dwelt.

Mt. Zion was an immovable mountain. And, if any individual placed their faith in Yahweh, they too would be made immovable. They would possess a salvation that could never be destroyed, just like Mount Zion could not be moved.

This connection is made clear in Psalm 125.

Psalm 125:1 Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.

But what happens if Mount Zion is moved?

What happens if Mount Zion is cast down from heaven to earth?

What if Mount Zion does not actually abide forever?

Well, the initial conclusion that you have to at least consider is that your own salvation could also be in question.

How is my faith in Yahweh going to save me if he has spoken such wonderful things about Zion, and she is now cast down from heaven to the earth?

This is more than an individual being cut out of Zion, or cut off from Zion. It is the downfall of Zion itself – at least in the present generation.

Zion holds an exalted position in Scripture. If you don't see the multifaceted glory of Zion and its connection to salvation, you will never understand Jeremiah's reaction.

Jeremiah has labored many years calling the people to turn from their sins. But few repented.

Jeremiah's worst fears have been realized. The daughter of Zion has been cast to the ground.

The first 10 verses of chapter 2 are Jeremiah's coming to terms with the truth that Zion has been cast down by God in his anger.

How the Lord in his anger has set the daughter of Zion under a cloud!

He has cast down from heaven to earth the splendor of Israel;

he has not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger.

Jerusalem was the place where God rested his feet as he ruled the world.

Zion, and specifically the Temple, was also where God's people came to give him worship.

ESV **Psalm 132:7** "Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool!"

But now, God has not remembered his footstool.

To "not remember" is not amnesia. It is a purposeful decision to forget the promises of blessing laid out in the covenant.

2 The Lord has swallowed up without mercy all the habitations of Jacob;

The concept of being “swallowed up” has deep meaning.

During the wilderness wanderings Korah leads a revolt against Moses. Needless to say, God was not pleased and so he puts down the rebellion. Listen to the language.

Numbers 16:32-33 ² And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods. ³³ So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly.

That is strong language. God has not done this with a portion of his people. He has done this to “all the habitations of Jacob.” That’s the whole thing.

The casting down of Zion is so unfathomable, so unbelievable, that Jeremiah has to keep repeating himself in only slightly different ways. Verses 1 and 2 would have been sufficient. But instead we are given more than 25 statements of God’s anger.

3 in his wrath he has broken down the strongholds of the daughter of Judah;
he has brought down to the ground in dishonor the kingdom and its rulers.
He has cut down in fierce anger all the might of Israel;

4 he has withdrawn from them his right hand in the face of the enemy;
he has burned like a flaming fire in Jacob, consuming all around.
He has bent his bow like an enemy, with his right hand set like a foe;
and

he has killed all who were delightful in our eyes in the tent of the daughter of
Zion;
he has poured out his fury like fire.

5 The Lord has become like an enemy;

he has swallowed up Israel;
he has swallowed up all its palaces;
he has laid in ruins its strongholds,
and

6 he has multiplied in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation.
He has laid waste his booth like a garden, laid in ruins his meeting place;

God has laid waste “his booth.”

Since the second half of the line has, “laid in ruins his meeting place” it seems clear that he is referring to the Temple.

The Holman Standard Bible makes this explicit:

He has done violence to His temple¹ as if *it were* a garden *booth*, destroying His place of meeting.^{CSB}

The temple was made to last. A booth in the field was not. A booth would be put up to give some temporary shade as one worked in the field.

As Jeremiah looks at the temple in ruins, he is reminded of one of these booths. There is a certain amount of disbelief. The glorious temple looks like shack that has been torn apart by a storm.

the LORD has made Zion forget festival and Sabbath,
Without the temple or the priesthood, it is impossible to celebrate the worship of the festivals or the Sabbaths. If you quit practicing your faith, you will soon forget it altogether.

and
in his fierce indignation has spurned king and priest.
7 The Lord has scorned his altar,
disowned his sanctuary;

King, priest, altar, and sanctuary... God has spurned and scorned and disowned them all.

he has delivered into the hand of the enemy the **walls** of her palaces;
they raised a clamor in the house of the LORD as on the day of festival.
8 The LORD determined to lay in ruins the **wall** of the daughter of Zion;
he stretched out the measuring line;
he did not restrain his hand from destroying;
he caused rampart and **wall** to lament;
they languished together.
9 Her **gates** have sunk into the ground;
he has ruined and broken her bars;

These verses focus more on the physical walls of Jerusalem.

Apparently, even though they are broken down, and the gates are in shambles, you can still see them.

The walls of Jerusalem are like an empty shell. They were there to protect what occurred within. But God has torn them down and rendered them useless as a means of protection.

her king and princes are among the nations;
the law is no more,
and
her prophets find no vision from the LORD.
10 The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground in silence;
they have thrown dust on their heads and put on sackcloth;
the young women of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground.

King, princes, law, prophets, elders, young women. Every class of society has been cast down.

The king and the princes have been carried off into exile.

The Law of God is no more.

Maybe, God's Law is no longer the law of the land.

Maybe, copies of God's law are being destroyed.

Prophets, who once received visions from the LORD, do so no longer.

Elders are in mourning.

Young women as well.

Jeremiah looks at all of this. He takes it in. What is his response?

Does Jeremiah think to himself, "They are getting what they deserve. I warned them"?

Does he theologize by separating his own trust in God's promises from the destruction of the city?

"God will still save me and the rest of his remnant. Who really cares about Jerusalem anyway?

It was only a foreshadow of the real thing."

11 My eyes are spent with weeping;
my stomach churns;
my bile is poured out to the ground
because of the destruction of the daughter of my people,

Youngs Literal Translation

Consumed by tears have been my eyes, Troubled have been my bowels, Poured out to the earth hath been my liver, For the breach of the daughter of my people

2. The Bible wants us to weep when Zion is cast down to the earth

Jeremiah's reaction is the only appropriate reaction.

When the enemies of God are destroyed, we should rejoice.

But when Zion is cast down, we should weep.

Why does Jeremiah weep?

He weeps because he associates himself with Zion. He refers to her as "the daughter of MY people."

Jeremiah loves the visible people of God. There is no cold calculation of those who are truly God's people and those who are merely outwardly God's people. He loves the current generation of God's people who are being devastated.

Remember in chapter 1 how Zion had a glimmer of hope that God would see her affliction and be moved to pity.

Jeremiah's response is similar.

As important as it is to accept, and fear, that God can and will judge his own people, it is equally important to believe that God truly hurts to bring down such terrible punishments on those he loves.

Some parents tell their kids when they spank them, "This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you."

Kids never believe their parents.

But, after studying Lamentations, I am convinced that it is totally true with God.

I believe Jeremiah's response reflects the response of God himself.

Jesus, in his own day, wept over Jerusalem.

Notice how personal it is for him:

12 because infants and babies faint in the streets of the city.
 They cry to their mothers,
 "Where is bread and wine?"
 as they faint like a wounded man in the streets of the city,
 as their life is poured out on their mothers' bosom.

These babies are in the place of safety and comfort and provision, being held by their mothers. But it does them no good, for their mothers have nothing to give them. Their own mothers cannot feed them.

Whether thinking to himself or actually speaking, Jeremiah is also utterly unable to help.

13 What can I say for you,
 to what compare you,
 O daughter of Jerusalem?
 What can I liken to you,
 that I may comfort you,
 O virgin daughter of Zion?
 For your ruin is vast as the sea;
 who can heal you?

Jeremiah cannot see any hope for Jerusalem.

He would give them comfort, if he saw any way to give it to them.

Notice the term of endearment: "O virgin daughter of Zion."

There is nothing "pure" about Zion. She is being punished for her great rebellion.

And yet, Jeremiah still thinks of her in her innocence.

But his weeping cannot help her. And he is not about to try to fill her mind with false hopes, like the false prophets were doing.

14 Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions;
they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes,
but
have seen for you oracles that are false and misleading.

Before the Fall of Jerusalem, had the prophets "exposed the sins" of the Israelites, they might have repented. But instead they gave visions of false hope that did not explain the need for repentance.

But now that the Fall has already occurred, even the call to repentance seems empty.

Once Zion has been cast to the earth what hope is there for her to ever be raised up to heaven again?

What makes matters worse is that the enemies of God are gloating.

15 All who pass along the way clap their hands at you;
they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem;
"Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth?"
16 All your enemies rail against you;
they hiss, they gnash their teeth,
they cry:
"We have swallowed her!
Ah, this is the day we longed for;
now we have it;
we see it!"

Jeremiah is able to hear the mocking of the conquerors over Jerusalem.

Where do they get the language "perfection of beauty, joy of all the earth"?

It comes directly from the psalms that the Jews had sung?

Before the Fall of Jerusalem, the Babylonians must have heard God's people singing Psalm 50 and Psalm 48, which use these very phrases to speak of their hope in Zion.

They likely had used it as motivation in their attacks against Jerusalem.

Now, they are using the same language in their jeering of the daughter of Zion.

As I read these two verses I am immediately drawn to the mocking that Jesus received on the cross. The enemies of Christ longed for his destruction. And now they were witnessing his downfall. Psalm 22 is a prophetic psalm of the sufferings of Christ on the cross.

Psalm 22:1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

Psalm 22:7 ⁷ All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;

What Jeremiah is witnessing in his day is what Jesus experienced while he hung on the cross. Only Jesus endured it for our sins, not his own.

In a strange way, the death of Zion foreshadows the death of Christ. And in the death of Christ is found Zion's true freedom from her rebellion.

But for Jeremiah, Jesus has not yet come. He is simply tormented in his soul because the enemies of Zion are mocking her.

Into Jeremiah's lament comes a ray of truth.

17 The LORD has done what he purposed;
he has carried out his word,
which he commanded long ago;
he has thrown down without pity;
he has made the enemy rejoice over you
and
exalted the might of your foes.

Jeremiah knows his Bible. He knows that what he is witnessing was declared in the curses of Lev. 26 and Deut. 28. Before Jerusalem was conquered by David, all the way back to the time of Moses, God had said this would happen.

Deuteronomy 28:47 ⁴⁷ Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart,

Jeremiah realizes, that as bad as it is, God is only carrying out what he said in his Word that he would do if Israel persisted in her rebellion. As bad as it is to accept that God has cast Zion to the ground, it is better than if God's enemies had somehow overpowered Him and so defeated Zion.

Why?

Because God is still good. And God continues to cherish Zion.

3. The Bible wants us to continue hoping in the exaltation of Zion.

18 Their heart cried to the Lord.

This verse is somewhat mysterious.

I think the pronoun “they” refers to those who have been thrown down without pity. They cry to the Lord, but the content of their cry is not found in what follows.

Instead, Jeremiah speaks to the walls of Jerusalem.

Is he talking to actual walls?

I think he is again using personification. The walls reflect the people who are cast down to the earth.

O wall of the daughter of Zion,
let tears stream down like a torrent day and night!
Give yourself no rest,
your eyes no respite!
19 "Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the night watches!
Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord!
Lift your hands to him for the lives of your children,
who faint for hunger at the head of every street."

Jeremiah is calling on God’s people to suffer with the people of God.

Let tears stream down like a torrent day and night!

Give yourself no rest.

Get up in the middle of the night and cry out for the rebuilding of Zion.

Lift up your hands in prayer, for the lives of your children.

Think of future generations.

Do not walk away from Zion, and have no burden for her rising from the ashes!

The Lament ends with a cry for the LORD to “look and see!”

The cry is from Jeremiah or maybe from Jerusalem herself, personified – maybe even from the walls.

20 Look, O LORD, and see!
With whom have you dealt thus?

LORD, we deserve every bit of what we are getting. But remember “who it is” that is suffering.

I am amazed at how, even languishing under God’s wrath, there is continued hope in the covenant pity of God towards his own children.

Jeremiah gives two horrendous images of suffering!

v. 20

Should (Zion's) women eat the fruit of their womb,
the children of their tender care?
Should (Zion's) priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord?

The horror is that during the siege, food was so scarce that children died in their mother's arms. And then, the mother's were so hungry that they were driven to eat the flesh of their children.

We all should cringe at the thought of this.

And the second image is presented as equally horrendous. The temple was the holiest place on earth. The normal Jew could not even enter into the sanctuary. But now priest and prophet are slaughtered there.

I would wish these terrors on no one. But that is not the cry. It is that these have come upon the apple of God's eye – Zion.

Without a doubt, Zion mattered to Jeremiah.

He did not, could not, be content in his own personal redemption while she was languishing. He feels, while still living in Jerusalem, about Zion as the remnant taken into Exile in Babylon also felt.

Psalms 137:1-6 By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. ² On the willows¹ there we hung up our lyres. ³ For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" ⁴ How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land? ⁵ If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! ⁶ Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!

Why does God want his people to continue holding out hope for Zion?
Because He has not forgotten Zion.

Isaiah 49:14-16

¹⁴ But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me."

¹⁵ "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. ¹⁶ Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.

In fact, when Jesus was born incarnate, he took on flesh in order to redeem Zion!

Zechariah 9:9 ⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

And as believers in Jesus Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, you have come to Mount Zion. Your redemption is equated with coming to and dwelling in Mount Zion.

Hebrews 12:22-24 ²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³ and to the assembly¹ of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

The blessings that we so cherish as Christians are blessings that belong to those who dwell in Zion.

The Church is not the fullness of Zion. That must await Jesus' return. But the blessings of Zion and the blessings of the Church are one. Our hopes for a New Heavens and a New Earth where Jesus reigns eternally with his people are hopes of Zion.

The Church does not have visible walls like Jerusalem.

But she does have spiritual walls of protection against spiritual foes.

And just like the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, the walls of protection around the Church can also be broken down.

We do not have a physical temple in which God dwells. But God does dwell in our hearts. And he does also dwell in our midst as we gather to worship. And just God abandoned his physical temple before the Fall of Jerusalem, so Jesus is able to remove the lampstand of the Holy Spirit from churches that no longer hold to the truth of God's Word.

Jerusalem was the capital of one nation. The Church is scattered throughout the world. Still, churches individually, and even whole regions of the world can rise and fall like Jerusalem. And when they rise, blessings flow upon the people. And when they fall, people suffer.

The parallels are not perfect. But they are certainly there.

Where is the Church in America?

Are we rising? Or are we falling?

Like a doctor, we must try to read the symptoms.

1. Piety
2. Doctrine
3. Influence

By piety, I mean both the moral character and the religious zeal of God's people.

Is the moral fiber of Christians stronger now than 20, 40, 60 years ago? During the Welsh revival the mules of the miners had to be retrained. Why? Because the miners were no longer cussing at them. They were so used to commands including foul language that they no longer

understood their masters. Is the Church more or less sexually immoral? Can Christians be trusted to keep their word?

Piety also includes religious zeal.

Is the commitment to prayer, and the study of God's Word, stronger or weaker than a generation ago?

Do the Christians of today consider corporate worship the most important activity of their entire week?

How full are churches that preach the truth?

How many churches have closed their doors?

Doctrine

Do the members of churches in America know more or less of the doctrines of the faith?

Having a scholastic knowledge of God is not the goal. True piety is the goal. But without a firm grasp of sound doctrine, true piety is impossible. Godliness is founded upon truth. Zeal without knowledge does not save. Learning sound doctrine requires time and effort. Not every believer must be a scholar. But when we see the diminishing of sound doctrine in a congregation, or in a whole region, we can only conclude that the Church is waning.

Influence

The Church is called to be salt and light. Salt both preserves the food and also adds flavor. Light reveals. The Church is to have influence for good in the world around. We are to shine like stars in the universe.

In our day, which do you think is more the case? Is the Church more influencing the world? Or is the world more influencing the Church?

Has the Church in America lost its saltiness?

I am not the final judge of these things. But meditating on Jeremiah's reaction to Zion being cast down to the earth has been truly helpful.

One of the subtle, yet truly detrimental, trends among American Christians is their disdain of the visible Church. American Christians quickly criticize the Church. They are quick to distance themselves from the Church. They do not view the Church as worth making sacrifices for.

What does Jeremiah have to teach us?

Jeremiah labored long and hard to improve the Church. He taught the truth. And he called God's people to repentance. He prayed for the Church. He loved the Church.

But then, when God abandoned the Church, and even poured out his righteous anger on the Church, Jeremiah does not abandon ship.

He continues to identify with the Church. And weeps for her. He grieves for her. He yearns for God to again pour out mercy upon her.

That is the challenge to us.

First, we must believe that the Church is worth our labors to make her better. She will never be perfect in this life. But she is worth fighting for.

And secondly, when you see the Church waning... when you see a member fall away from the Church... or when you see whole congregations abandoning the truth... or when you see sin creep into the Church... do not abandon ship. Weep for the Church. Pray for her. Ask God for mercy.

Because it is the Church, like Zion, that God loves. And it is the Church, like Zion, who is the perfection of beauty and the joy of the whole earth.

Let your heart break for the Church, even when she is being cast down to the earth. Amen!