

IT COULD NEVER HAPPEN TO US! *continued*

(b) EACH EXIT FOR ESCAPE WAS CLOSED; **4:18-19**: No space in which to manoeuvre; no room to breathe; they were under the most stringent control and restrictions. Even if they managed to escape the streets, things did not improve.

(c) EACH DREAM OF DELIVERANCE WAS CRUSHED; **4:18**: There was an air of inevitability about the eventual outcome; the doubling up of the use of the word “end” leaves us in no doubt as to what was expected: “*We’re waiting for the final bell!*”

(d) EACH PRINCE OF POWER WAS CAPTURED; **4:20**: King Zedekiah is the monarch in question at this point, the last king of the house of David (597-586 B.C.); his fate is described in **Jeremiah 52:7-11** – captured and blinded.

[3] TO THE PRAYER FOR EQUITY: THE ENEMIES UNDER THE LASH; **4:21-22**.

Matthew Henry hits the heart of the matter in **Lamentations 4:21-22** like this:

- **4:21**: An end shall be put to Edom’s triumph;
 - **4:22**: An end shall be put to Zion’s troubles.
- (a) A CRY FOR VENGEANCE; **4:21**: (i) THE IDENTITY of one of Israel’s enemies is revealed – Edom; (ii) THE IRONY comes in the fact that God told her to “*rejoice and be glad*” even though He was marching against her in judgment; (iii) THE INFLICTION; the Edomites would be forced to drink the wine from the cup of God’s wrath (cf. **Jeremiah 25:15-29; 49:7-22**).
- (b) A CALL OF VICTORY: Mixed in with this cry for vengeance is a promise that Judah’s exile will end. A little ray of hope had begun to flicker for Judah in **4:21**; this ray becomes a little brighter in **4:22**: God will send deliverance!.



MEETINGS TODAY

- Morning Worship – 11.30am:
11th Message in Lamentations Series:
“It Could Never Happen To Us!”
- Evening Service – 7.00pm:
“Considerations for Christmas”
Soloist: Stephen Anderson



RECORD NUMBER AT CHILDREN’S CAROL SERVICE

“The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.” (Psalm 126:3).

We praise the LORD for the Youth Carol Service going so well last Sunday afternoon. With no fewer than eight buses employed to do calls in East and South Belfast, this represented a huge operation (logistically speaking!), but we are happy that everyone was both collected and returned without incident.

The service took place in the Jubilee Hall, with the children taking part in song, reading and recital. Jeannie Graham brought the closing message.

We are thankful for over 110 children and 25 parents being present.

With representation from Monday & Tuesday night children’s meetings, AM & PM Sunday schools and Little Ones, the Carol Service showed that there has been an improvement in the linkages between the different activities in the church.

Thanks to those who contributed in any way to making the service the success it was. (by Jeff Hammond).



IT COULD NEVER HAPPEN TO US! Lamentations 4:12-22.

Sometimes situations develop with us that shock us. We were well aware that the same things had happened to others, but we never expected them to arrive at our door – “*It could never happen to us!*” But it has!

The second half of **Lamentations 4** begins with amazement that the judgment of Jehovah

– their covenant God and Protector – could ever

have targeted Judah and Jerusalem. Not only God’s people, but their enemies, are astounded; **4:12**. This is (i) a sobering reminder that there is on earth no city so secure and no kingdom so powerful that it may not be ruined by sin and unrighteousness; (ii) a solemn warning that God’s judgment may fall on His people so that their enemies are shocked.

Lamentations 3 contains such promises of hope that we may have expected **chapter 4** to build on this: however, it does not. It reflects **chapters 1 and 2** in both format and content: all three chapters (**1, 2 and 4**):

- begin with a cry of woe – “*How!*” – and proceed to sketch the sufferings of Jerusalem;
- follow the same acrostic pattern (1st verse begins with 1st letter of Hebrew alphabet, etc).

The difference between the chapters is that the first 3 **chapters** consist of 66 lines; **Chapter 4** consists of 44 lines; and **Chapter 5** consists of 22 lines: however, though the *metre* of the book is reducing, fading, dying away, the *message* is not! Again, the prophet Jeremiah traces the problems with the nation ...

[1] TO THE POSITIONS OF EMINENCE: THE EMISSARIES OF THE LORD; 4:12-16.

(a) THE RINGLEADERS AMONG THEM. The failure of all three branches of the leadership of Israel is striking. The prophets, the priests and the king – those who, more than anyone else, should have known better – turned out to be the worst of all.

(b) THE RESPONSIBILITY BEFORE THEM. It was the primary duty of the prophets and priests to enunciate, explain and

enforce the Word of God, but they were the prime movers in the attempts to silence that word from heaven (cf. **Jeremiah 6:13-15** ... no different in time of Jesus, **Matthew 15:12-14**). “*He must indeed be a heartless preacher who has not himself in his own heart the Christ and the grace he declares*” (R. Baxter). (c) THE RASCALITY FROM THEM; **4:13**. The supreme problem was the sins of the priests and the prophets who shed the blood of the righteous. Cf. duty of the watchman – **Ezekiel 33:7-9** with actions of these men who, “*They not only shed the blood of their innocent children, ... but the blood of the righteous men that were among them, whom they sacrificed to that more cruel idol of enmity to the truth and true religion.*” (Matthew Henry). (cf. **Jeremiah 26:1-11; 26:20-23**).

(d) THE RETRIBUTION UPON THEM; **4:14-16**.

(i) OUTCASTS: The same warnings were given to people to have nothing to do with them as would have been given if a leper – one of the untouchables of society - were to be seen approaching. This restriction applied both inside and outside the city.

(ii) OFFSCOURING: Even when they went off to find a place of refuge outside of their native land, they were shunned; These blood-covered, blinded persons can find no place of refuge.

(iii) OPPOSITION; Just as he had done in **2:17**, Jeremiah again emphasises that the Lord has judged these men; **4:16**. Wherever they run to, God’s face detects them – and just as His eye sees them, so His punishment reaches them. There is no punishment too severe for unfaithful ministers of God’s Word.

These three offices in Old Testament Israel – prophet, priest and king – were provided by God to lead the nation both spiritually and politically. When one leader failed, another leader was able to get the nation back on course (cf. **2 Samuel 12; 2 Kings 12**). Ultimately, what Jeremiah was looking for was the kind of leadership that can only be found in Jesus Christ. He is the true prophet, the holy priest and the servant king (cf. WSC, Q23-26).

[2] TO THE PATH TOWARDS EXIT: THE ESCAPE FROM THE LAND; 4:17-20.

In this section we discover what the people were saying about themselves.

(a) EACH HAND OF HOPE WAS CLENCHED; **4:17**: “*In our watching we have watched*” is the intense action of a man on a watchtower – but no one could come to save them.