

## DEALING WITH OUR DEPARTURE *continued*

neck. The STRENGTH of her sins is indicated, both by “bound” and “wreathed”; The SITUATION for them is noted – upon the neck; The STUMBLING under them is also expressed: Jerusalem has found herself unable to continue because of the penalty for her sin. Matthew Henry gives further help with this picture: “*The yoke of Christ’s commands is an easy yoke (Matthew 11:30), but that yoke of our own transgressions is a heavy one ... and nothing but the hand of His pardoning mercy will unbind it.*” (iv) **1:15** – the winepress, often used as a symbol of God’s judgment (**Isaiah 63:3, Revelation 14:19**).

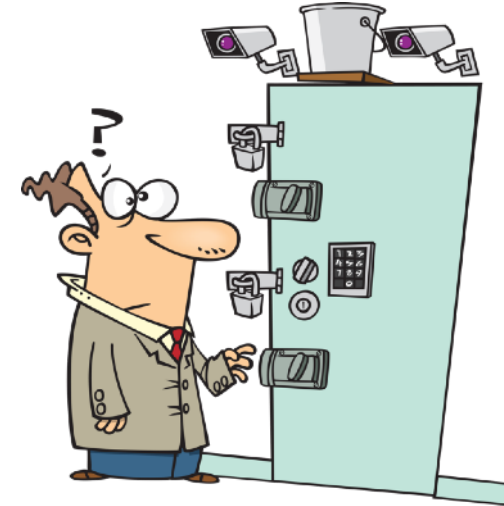
**(b) CONFESSION: 1:18, 20, 22.** (i) CONFESSION OF HER COMPLAINT; **1:20**: reference to her inward agony and agitation is a standard Hebrew expression for the emotions and represents her consternation. The result was total catastrophe for the nation – DEATH (“... *abroad the sword bereaveth, at home there is as death*”) – and DISHONOUR, **1:21**: What caused grief to her conjured up gladness in her adversaries. (ii) CONFESSION OF THE CAUSE OF HER COMPLAINT (cf. **1:18, 22**): she had defied the Lord and repudiated His counsels, commands, and warnings. (iii) CONFESSION OF THE CURE FOR THE CAUSE OF HER COMPLAINT: for the third time For the third time in this lament, Zion entreats the Lord to “*behold*” (cf. **1:9, 11, 18**).

**(c) CRY.** (i) BE MIGHTY AGAINST THEM, **1:21-22**: Jerusalem’s enemies will not be exempt from the punishment under which Zion has suffered so terribly. (ii) BE MERCIFUL TO US. God has provided a way to escape His wrath, hinted at in **1:12**: Christ, our burden-bearing High Priest, is the only answer (cf. **Hebrews 4:14-15**). A cry to comrades will not yield results; but a cry to Christ will, therefore, “*Get to the Cross!*”



### MEETINGS TODAY

- Morning Worship – 11.30am:  
*3rd Message in the Lamentations*  
Series: “*Dealing with our Departure from God’s Standard.*”
- Evening Service – 7.00pm:  
“*Mighty To Save!*”



### AUTUMN WEEK OF PRAYER & OUTREACH

Our Week of Prayer that coincides with the restarting of the various works in the church was encouraging on several fronts. Solid issues lay before us: a Gospel Mission with Rev. Ron Johnstone in October, outreach work in South and East Belfast designed to promote interest in our Children and Youth meetings, and no shortage of people on our ‘sick lists.’ Each of these provided ample targets for prayer.

During the week, parents contacted us via the Martyrs Memorial FPC Facebook page, giving permission for their children to attend our meetings and asking if they could be collected by the bus. These contacts were particularly gratifying as they are such clear answers to prayer. May the Lord be pleased in His great mercy not merely to bring the children, but their parents too, under the sound of the Word of God as it is proclaimed in this House so that His honour may be demonstrated and homes revolutionised in Belfast. Please continue in prayer with these goals in mind ... .



## DEALING WITH OUR DEPARTURE

### Lamentations 1:12-22.

Words spoken by Leonard Cohen come very close to the mark for this prophet in Judah: *“Poetry is just the evidence of life. If your life is burning well, poetry is just the ash.”*

There was plenty of ash in Jerusalem – both of the poetic and the literal varieties! As his capital city burned, Jeremiah took up his pen and committed many scorching, searing expressions to verse. The five poems that comprise this Book display to the full the artistic skill of the poet – from the alphabetic acrostic pattern followed by 4 out of 5 of its chapters, to the fact that the 2nd half of **Lamentations 1** is virtually a mirror image of the 1st half (**1:1** corresponds to **1:22**, **1:2** to **1:21**, etc.). From the centre of this chapter erupt two cries, one that goes upwards (**1:11**), the other outwards (**1:12**). God’s Righteousness – and the people’s departure from it – is the dominant thought from **1:12-22**.

#### [1] THE STANDARD OF GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS.

**Lamentations 1:18** opens with an altogether magnificent statement: *“The Lord is righteous ... .”*

#### (a) THE RECOGNITION OF GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS.

When measuring ourselves spiritually, we must look at a true and accurate standard – not that of the Pharisees (cf. **Luke 18:11**; **Matthew 5:20**). The child of God who is living in disobedience tends to add to his own sin by trying to find some justification for it: it is so refreshing to note that there is none of this with Jerusalem; she acknowledges that her suffering is the just result of her sin: *“The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against His commandment ... .”* Matthew Henry: *“She owns the equity of God’s actions, by owning the iniquity of her own.”*

#### (b) THE REQUIREMENT FROM GOD’S

**RIGHTEOUSNESS.** God’s constant charge to us is to reflect His righteousness in our lives (cf. **1 Peter 1:15-16**; **1 John 5:21**; **James 1:27**; **Galatians 5:24-25**; **1 Thessalonians 4:7**).

#### (c) THE REBELLION AGAINST GOD’S

**RIGHTEOUSNESS.** She is unclean even in the estimate of those neighbouring nations; **1:17**. John Calvin: *“... if we rightly consider in how many ways and how obstinately we have provoked His wrath, we shall not wonder if we also be counted at this day an abomination and a curse.”*

#### [2] THE SEVERITY IN GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS.

The Book of Lamentations is one long illustration of the eternal principle that, ‘you reap what you sow’ (**Galatians 6:7**). It is instructive for us to note what the sins of the people led to:

(a) **SUFFERING**; **1:12**: undisputed, unparalleled pain and agony.

(b) **SORROW**; **1:16** (cf. **1:12**, **18**, **20**): *“Mine eye, mine eye”* is a poetic repetition to underline the dire condition in which she finds herself: it is not one tear, but an unending stream.

(c) **SEPARATION**; **1:17-18**: ... (i) *From COMFORT*: five times in **Lamentations 1** allusions to the absence of a comforter occur (**1:2**, **9**, **16**, **17**, **21**) – a possible reference to the Holy Spirit’s absence; (ii) *From COMMUNITY / CONTINUITY*: **1:18**: captivity of the virgins and young men casts a dark shadow over Zion’s survival; (iii) *From CONTROL*; **1:19**: with the priests (in charge of worship and education) and elders (traditional leaders due to age and experience), gone: Judah’s spiritual leadership is non-existent.

#### [3] THE SETTLEMENT WITH GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS.

How will Jerusalem – and Jeremiah – ever get back on track; properly measure up to God’s standard?

(a) **CORRECTION**: Jeremiah uses four illustrations to describe this correction: (i) **1:13** – he paints a graphic picture of fire in the bones. This is Intensive (fire, cf. *“fierce anger”*), Illustrative (may well reflect what God did to the cities of the plain – a symbol in history that displays how God’s judgment falls on unforgivable sin (**Lamentations 4:6**; **Genesis 19:24**; **Isaiah 1:9-10**), and Invasive (That this fire had penetrated the bones is an expression for “throughout my body”). (ii) **1:13** – a net for his feet. Zion never seriously considered for herself, for she had always expected that the Lord would intervene and free her from the nets of others (**Psalms 25:15**; **31:5**). (iii) **1:14** – a yoke for her