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LAMENTING A NATION'S DOWNFALL (Lamentations 1:1 - 3:25)

With the election three weeks away, there are many Americans who are simply ready for all the rancor and disunity to end. That's understandable with the polarization we often feel when hearing candidates disparage and attack each other when there are so many important problems that need addressed.

*I've recently spent some time studying a book of the Old Testament which isn't heard from very much. In fact, with the exception of just a few verses, many who are familiar with the Bible might struggle to remember what it has to say. That book is **Lamentations**.*

Lamentations was written by a man named Jeremiah, who earned the well-deserved nickname "The Weeping Prophet". He lived at a time when the southern kingdom of a divided nation, Judah, was being warned by God to repent of its sin and rebellion or face his judgement. After the northern kingdom of Israel had already fallen (to the Assyrians in 722 B.C.) Judah was given another 100 years or so to turn back to God. Jeremiah's prophecies were among the warnings given, but Judah eventually fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

The book of Lamentations is the observations and feelings of a prophet who deeply loved his nation and mourned the consequences it paid for not following God. While God hasn't made a covenant with America like he had with Israel, there are warnings to us (and any nation) that will not repent, individually or collectively, and revere God and his ways.

JEREMIAH GRIEVED FOR HIS NATION

*Lamentations 1:1 – **How** lonely sits the city that was full of people! **How** like a widow has she become, she who was great among the nations!*

As a term of dismay, Jeremiah repeats this word "How" throughout the book. We find it at the beginning of other chapters as well.

*Lamentations 2:1 – **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;*

*Lamentations 4:1 - **How** the gold has grown dim, **how** the pure gold is changed! The holy stones lie scattered at the head of every street.*

When we look around us and see our nation rejecting God and removing him from every corner of our society, we grieve. We do what we can to stop it or slow it, but you have agree that the trajectory is not good. The trend is downward. And we can use that word "how" just like Jeremiah.

How our leaders have made ungodly laws and much of our population approves. How we have forgotten what the Founders of our nation intended in their documents and their reverence for a Creator God. How we have elevated our personal good above thinking of the good of others. How our educators have hijacked God's truth for an agenda of godless ideology. How America celebrates erotic liberty over religious liberty.

The cause for the laments of Jeremiah is clear.

*Lamentations 1:8, 9 - Jerusalem **sinned** grievously. . . she **took no thought of her future**; therefore her fall is terrible; she has no comforter.*

Unfortunately, the rejection of God and his Word in modern America shows we aren't giving thought to where we're headed, either. Sin is the cause and repentance is the remedy. But to do that, individuals and nations must consider the future rather than decide what is pleasurable and expedient in the present.

JEREMIAH SUFFERED WITH HIS NATION

Lamentations 3:17, 18, 20 . . . my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say, "My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD." My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me.

When Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians first came to Jerusalem, the strategy was to surround Jerusalem and starve them out. The siege of Jerusalem lasted 2 ½ years. No food or supplies coming in.

Jeremiah writes in this book that he saw the dead bodies of adults and children in the streets. If hunger didn't kill you, the sword of a Babylonian soldier would. God's judgment on sin was severe, but he always punishes unrepentant sin. Always.

Jeremiah was a mess. Every part of his life was touched by the pain of Judah. He even felt that his prayers weren't being heard by God - *though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer (3:8)*, but he was heard.

Our prayers for America may seem ineffective also. But let me encourage you not to stop praying because you and I are being heard by the God who wants to forgive.

JEREMIAH HOPED IN THE CHARACTER OF GOD

There is something very strange that happens in verse 21 of chapter three. In the middle of a horrific book, out of nowhere, Jeremiah feels hope and writes one of the most beautiful passages in all of Scripture

*Lamentations 3:21-25 - But this I call to mind, and therefore **I have hope**: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; **great is your faithfulness**. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." **The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.***

When we see these words describing God's character, we have to ask some obvious questions. Was God good to Jeremiah? Was he good to Israel? Is he good to us when he does something different than we want? Or inconvenient? Or painful? Is he

being good if some of the people you vote for next month don't win?

The key to answering all of these questions is to define "good" the way God defines "good". God is good because he brings himself glory. The plan he uses to bring himself glory may involve suffering and pain for people, but we must have a category in our minds for the goodness of God and the control of God even when he judges sin.

We have no clue what is the best path for America in God's providence. We have no idea what will cause the gospel to grow more in America. The gospel is growing the most in Iran right now. There are now more Christians in China than there are members of the Chinese Communist party. Freedom didn't cause that. No election caused that. God did that.

We need to be involved in the process, be good citizens, be informed, vote as we're led, but America's future path is not decided by the consent of the governed. It's decided by the consent of the King of Kings.

Lamentations 3:37 - Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it?

When Babylon showed up to carry out God's wrath on Judah, Jeremiah had a different journey than people like Daniel and his friends, who were exiled to Babylon. No, Jeremiah stayed through the siege and ended up in Egypt where he was killed. The countrymen he wept for executed him. And, according to these verses, God was still good.

Only God knows if it's too late for America, if she will be willing to repent. Are we willing to repent? God is ready to gather you in. In his mercy, faithfulness, love and goodness. Forever God is faithful. His mercies are new every morning.