

468 Christ-Blessed and Hope-Filled

The book of Lamentations is true to its name! - for throughout its chapters run many woes. But interwoven within such passages is a second, glorious, theme, that of divinely-inspired hope, which we shall come on to shortly.

The lamentations and woes are many and varied. Jerusalem is desolated, the people of Judah have gone into exile, “and from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed” (1.1-7 (6a); 4.1-2, KJV). Sin has brought its ugly consequences (1.8-11; 3.43-54; 4.13-20; 5.11-18). The Lord God has become an enemy, He has “cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger!” (2.1-9 (2.1b)); famine is rife (2.10-13; 4.3-5); false prophets utter their falsehoods and Judah’s enemies are gloating (2.14-17).

As we enter into this new year, “the year of our Lord 2022”, most of us, thankfully, are not in the dire realities of the woes of Lamentations, but we can certainly identify with those woes. For is there not a widespread weariness of spirit, caused in particular by the continuance of Covid-19, and a vague sense of foreboding as to what the future may hold? The many “news and comment”-type programmes as to the prospects for 2022 are not that encouraging either, with ongoing international tensions and serious social problems needing solutions.

It is no surprise to Bible-believing Christians that sin has consequences, at whatever level of a society where sin is found. Biblically, those sin-consequences took a grave turn when the twelve tribes that comprised Israel became split into two parts because of divided loyalties and rampant idolatry; King Solomon himself, who had started so well, ended up setting the scene for the further sinfulness that was to follow (I Kings 3.5-15; 11.1-9). In due time, and after many years of unheeded warnings from the Lord God sent through His prophets, first Israel fell to the Assyrians (720 BC, II Kings 18.9-12) and then Judah fell to the Babylonians (606 BCff, II Kings 24.10ff, during which subsequent exile Lamentations was inspired to be written).

Some parallels between biblical Israel and Judah on the one hand, and the supposedly-Protestant United Kingdom on the other, are not hard to spot. Almighty God warned Israel and He finally judged. So too, He is surely now warning the United Kingdom, with foretastes of His judgment within His warnings; and if those warnings remain unheeded, as is far

the most likely response humanly speaking, then we know that He will judge, and such judgment will be fully deserved and far from pleasant.

But now we can return to that second theme within Lamentations, of God-given hope which repeatedly breaks through the gloom! Our hope is based on our well-founded belief in the trustworthiness of Almighty God and of His Word. From this hope spring repentance and confession whenever these are needed, for the Lord in His mercy is never deaf to genuine repentance, which is the key to unlocking the door of His forgiveness (egs., Psalm 51.1-3, 10, 14-17 / Luke 18.9-14).

Hence, after a hope-filled passage in Lamentations 3.20-36 we read - "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord" (3.40). That's it! – there is nothing more to it than that. Those words are especially apt at the start of any new year, and apply to us as individuals, to the Church, and to the nations, including to our own nation, for - "[It is of] the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. [They are] new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3.22-23).

Those "compassions, new every morning" were true under the Old Covenant, and are now more vividly seen to be true under the New Covenant of grace and faith, wholly centred in Christ. About Him we read in that hope-overflowing passage in John Chapter 1 - "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... In him was life; and the life was the light of men ... He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, [even] to them that believe on his name ... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth ... And of his fulness have we all received, and grace for grace" (from John 1.1-16).

In our Christian lives, guilt, gloom and fear? No! Repentance and confession; awareness, concern, effort and involvement; steady prayers, thankful hearts and praising voices; faith, hope and love – Yes!

"Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is" (Jeremiah 17.7).

May the Lord indeed grant us all a Christ-blessed, hope-filled New Year.

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