

Triennial Torah Study – 3rd Year 27/10/2012 _ _ _ _ .

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Num 23-25	Amos 5	Lam 3	1 Corin 4-5
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Harlotry and Idolatry of the Israelites (Numbers 23:27-25:18)

Israel's journey is basically over. They stand at Acacia Grove in Moab (25:1), just across the Jordan River from the city of Jericho (26:63). But what happens? Chapter 25 describes one of the most horrible episodes in the book of Numbers. How Israel here plunged headlong into such idolatry and sinfulness is almost inexplicable without looking elsewhere in the Scriptures. But when we do look elsewhere, we find that Balaam advised Balak to set a trap of sin for the Israelites so that God would curse His people: "Balaam...taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality" (Revelation 2:14). And just how was this accomplished? In Numbers 31, we will see more of the advice that Balaam gave to Balak: "Look, these [Midianite] women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the Lord in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord" (31:15-16).

Balaam's plan worked. The women of Moab and its Midianite allies sexually enticed many of the Israelites to join with them in their sexually immoral idolatrous practices. This was likely presented as an offer of national friendship and perhaps even a new way to worship God. Yet it was, in fact, flagrant rebellion against the true God. No doubt, temple prostitutes seduced Israelite men into sexual rites linked with their religious sacrifices to Baal or Chemosh, also known as Molech. Such worship often included human sacrifice—the word "cannibal" actually being derived from Cahna-Bal, meaning "the priest of Baal" (Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, 1959, p. 232). Thus, when the Israelites ate of the Moabite sacrifices (25:2), they may have been participating in this ghastly practice. Psalm 106:28 says they ate "sacrifices offered to the dead," but the original King James is more literal in rendering this "sacrifices of the dead"—which, again, may imply human sacrifices. In any event, "this was not just another time of trouble, this was the most serious challenge yet. The people had been seduced into joining the worship of Baal. And it was Baal worship that they had been sent to Canaan to

eliminate!” (Nelson Study Bible, note on Numbers 25:4-5). God was infuriated, ordering Moses to execute every offender by hanging them in the sun till sunset (verse 4; Deuteronomy 21:23).

Zimri, an Israelite prince of Simeon, brazenly presented a princess of Midian, Cozbi, who was probably a temple prostitute, before Moses and the whole congregation. Although it is not entirely clear, it appears that they may have been performing their lewd rites in an open tent in full view of those at the door of the tabernacle of meeting! Aaron’s grandson Phinehas, in impassioned zeal for God and righteous indignation, took a spear and drove it through the two. Shamefully, the idolatrous worship must have been rather widespread as the plague was stopped only after 24,000 people died. In terms of the death toll, this was an even worse disaster than the rebellion of Korah, wherein 14,700 died. God was pleased with the zealousness of Phinehas in executing judgment (Numbers 25:11; Psalm 106:30) and gave the line of the priesthood to his descendants as an everlasting covenant of peace (verses 12-13).

Following this terrible incident, God gives Moses instructions to “harass” the Midianites, that is, to engage them in battle as His vengeance on them. And this battle, which will be Moses’ last, will be fought shortly—though it is not reported until chapter 31.

Amos 5

God says, “Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!” (verse 12). For some, this will be by death. But for the rest, it means God soon coming to earth—i.e., in the end-time return of Jesus Christ. “To be confronted—inescapably—by the God it had scorned and rejected would be a fate more terrible than Israel could imagine” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 12). In chapter 5, God lists a seventh calamity through Amos: captivity (5:3), a punishment mentioned in 4:2-3 and made clearer in 6:7. In 5:3, we are told that of those who go into captivity, only a tenth will survive (compare Isaiah 6:11-13, Living Bible).

God explains that He is the ultimate power to whom Israel should look—not their false gods. Interesting in His proclamations is a mention of the hydrological cycle of evaporation and rain, also referred to elsewhere in Scripture (compare Ecclesiastes 11:3; Job 36:27-29). One might wonder how this could have been so accurately understood by ancient authors—thus perhaps providing further evidence of God’s inspiration of Scripture.

In Amos 5:18-20, God issues a warning through Amos to those desiring the Day of the Lord, for that Day will bring judgment on the disobedient—and they themselves were thoroughly disobedient, just as modern Israel is today. “The lesson for us is clear. Look eagerly for Christ’s return—but not if you’re living a life of sin” (Bible Reader’s Companion, note on verses 18-20). It should be noted that while these prophecies are primarily for the end of this age, we can certainly see a secondary relevance for those to whom Amos preached—against whom an invasion by the Assyrian Empire was imminent. We can even envision the worshipers at Bethel cringing as Amos foretold its destruction, along with that of other centers of false worship in Gilgal and Beersheba (verses 5-6). In mentioning Beersheba, Judah is condemned along with Israel. These places of false worship serve as types of great houses of false worship in the end

time. The true God is not to be found in them, but in seeking “good and not evil” (verse 14). And this, of course, is to be found in the revealed Word of God.

Israel of Amos’ day had forsaken God and all His ways as found in His Word. For instance, since the days of Jeroboam I, Israel had her own feast days, which God utterly despised (compare verse 21). He had told them before that they should not look to the pagan nations and copy their modes of worship (Exodus 23:24, 33; Deuteronomy 12:29-32; Jeremiah 10:14), but that’s just what they did. Likewise, today, the nations of modern Israel have forsaken God’s biblically commanded Sabbaths and Holy Days for pagan celebrations such as Christmas and Easter (Astarte).

Furthermore, God did not and does not want any worship that is “hypocritical, dishonest, and meaningless” (Nelson, note on Amos 5:21-23)—whether offerings, music or anything else. “After dismissing Israel’s empty worship as noisy and tumultuous, God called for the honest tumult of the rolling waters of justice and the perennial stream of righteousness, the only foundation for true praise and worship of the Lord” (note on verse 24). If Israel would only listen to God and heed, then He would not send the calamities (verses 14-15). But history shows that the Israelites failed to listen—and Israel, as a political entity, ceased to exist. Just so, history will repeat itself in the end time.

The Heart of the Matter (Lamentations 3)

The third lament is 66 verses long, as each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet is used to begin three consecutive verses. This dirge details the personal complaint of the poet. The writer identifies himself in the opening verse as “the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath.” Again, the book is traditionally ascribed to Jeremiah, and that seems likely. Yet there is clear identification throughout with the entire nation (verses 40-47 even being written in first person plural). However, the words of this chapter could not have been written by just anyone.

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary does not agree with the assessment of some “that ‘every man’ is speaking. It would be an exceptional Israelite who could use this language, and some of his experiences could hardly be generalized. The commentary [here] is based on the assumption that Jeremiah is speaking... The reminiscences of many psalms [in what is written] is one of the arguments used against authorship by Jeremiah. Behind this lies—consciously or unconsciously—the supposition that many of these were written later than the prophet, an assumption that modern psalm-studies have almost completely dissipated. If the prophet adopted the difficult treble acrostic...as a curb on his anguish, the adoption of familiar phrases from the Psalms, especially from the psalms of lamentation, should create no psychological or literary difficulty in the ascription of this lament to him” (note on Lamentations 3).

Verses 1-18 appear to describe Jeremiah’s own suffering at the hands of his people—ultimately ascribed to God since He has ultimate oversight of all things. Verses 6-9 seem to

describe the time Jeremiah spent in the prison dungeon. The statement “He shuts out my prayer” in verse 8 may recall God forbidding Jeremiah to pray for Judah’s deliverance (see Jeremiah 11:14; 14:11). Of course, it may also refer to times Jeremiah called on God to rescue him and didn’t immediately hear from Him. Yet we can also see in these verses the entire nation describing its plight of being bound in the chains of Babylonian captivity. (There is some irony, and justice, in the comparison in that the people are crying out in their affliction just as Jeremiah cried out over what they did to him.)

Verses 10-12, about God being like a bear or ambushing lion who has torn in pieces, seem more a reference to what the nation experienced. Yet Jeremiah may have felt this way at times during his own suffering, thinking that God was responsible for it since He could have prevented it if He chose to. Verse 14’s statement “I have become the ridicule of all my people” fits Jeremiah and does not seem to fit the Jews as a whole. Nevertheless there is a parallel in that the Jewish nation became the ridicule of all the nations around them. We should also bear in mind that what happened in Jeremiah’s day—to himself and his people—was a forerunner of what all Israel will experience at the end of the age.

Regarding verse 16, “some suggest the feeding on gravel and dust (or ashes) [is] in mockery; some, the violent grinding of the face in the ground by others. The latter seems the more probable. Yet again it could be argued that it refers to the type of bread made from the sweepings of the granary floor that Jeremiah must have received toward the end of the siege” (Expositor’s, note on verse 16).

In verses 19-20 it appears that Jeremiah is praying, “Remember all the terrible things I’ve gone through. I remember them—and, alas, I feel worse than I did before.” Then, in verse 21, he seems to recover, saying essentially, “But!...I also remember how I came through it all.” That is, “I survived—You have not abandoned me.” “Jeremiah’s remembrance of God’s faithfulness brought about a change in the prophet’s emotions. As long as we contemplate our troubles, the more convinced we will become of our isolation, our hopelessness, our inability to extricate ourselves from the present trouble. But when we focus on the Lord, we are able finally to rise above, rather than to suffer under, our troubles” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 21).

Verse 22 is truly remarkable. Jeremiah expresses his conviction that in all the troubles, God is yet being merciful. For the entire nation to be totally exterminated would be justice—because the penalty for sin is death—but God continually shows mercy. “This verse seems to contradict all that had been written up to this point (see 2:1-5). Yet the very fact that there was a prophet left to write these words and a remnant left to read them show that not every person in Jerusalem had been consumed. The fact that there was a remnant at all was due to the mercies and compassions of God. Even in His wrath (2:1-4), God remembers to be merciful” (note on 3:22). Indeed, God’s compassions “are new every morning” (verse 23). “Every day presents us with a new opportunity to discover and experience more of God’s love. Even in the midst of terrible sorrow, Jeremiah looked for signs of mercy” (note on verse 23).

And then the pinnacle confession: “Great is your faithfulness” (verse 23). “Here is the heart of the Book of Lamentations. The comforting, compassionate character of God dominates the wreckage of every other institution and office. God remains ‘full of grace and truth’ in every situation (see Ex. 34:6, 7; John 1:14)” (note on Lamentations 3:23). Verses 22-24 are like a balm on a sore. Jeremiah is reminding himself of the true good and loving nature of God. That is one vital point that will strengthen a person throughout a trial.

This is not the mere painting of a happy face over a grievous situation. There is great blessing for those who wait on God (verse 25). “The idea here is the acceptance of God’s will and His timing (see Ps. 40:1; Is. 40:31)” (note on Lamentations 3:25). This idea carries through to verse 33 and helps us to understand the meaning of verse 27, which states that it is good to bear the yoke while young. The idea is that of a person of full vim and vigor willingly and humbly accepting the judgment God has placed on him. This is more clearly stated in verse 28. Putting one’s mouth in the dust in verse 29 means willing lying prostrate on the ground with, by implication, the conqueror’s foot on one’s back.

In verse 30, we see the idea of turning the other cheek in the face of oppression and maltreatment, just as Jesus would later direct the Jews of His day to do (Matthew 5:39). The point in Lamentations 3 is that we must not fight the judgment of God. We must bear it willingly and patiently, waiting on Him, with full hope and trust in the next verse: “For the LORD will not cast off forever” (verse 31). This is exactly why God’s message to the Jews of Jeremiah’s day was that they surrender to Babylon. Whatever the chastening, we must remember that it is only a temporary condition. God is full of mercy and compassion (verse 32). He does not afflict men willingly or easily (verse 33), but only when He, in His omniscience, deems it absolutely necessary. It hurts God to hurt His people—just as it does human parents to discipline their children. As many scriptures show, after Israel is humbled and repentant, God’s plan is to regather and restore His nation.

Jeremiah uses his own experiences that kept him humble to show the way that his people could once again regain the blessings of God. Verses 40-41 are a call to self-examination and change, which will renew the relationship with God. That is the path for all people ultimately. Repentance is required. This was the answer the apostle Peter gave to the Jews of his day in Acts 2:38: “Repent and be baptized.” Action is required to “be saved from this perverse generation” (verse 40). So, too, Israel was encouraged to act.

When the people lament their suffering at the hands of their enemies in verses 46-47 of Lamentations 3, Jeremiah in verses 48-51 again describes his own uncontrollable weeping and grief over what they must endure. He then looks back at his own sufferings at the hands of enemies (verse 52)—those enemies being some of the same people he is now weeping for. Jeremiah’s time in the cistern or dungeon is evidently referred to in verse 53 and 55, though the pit could also figuratively represent any dire situation. It appears that in verses 52-66 Jeremiah’s personal situation is again being used to represent the situation of the whole nation. His words in verses 55-58 are words of hope. God rescued Jeremiah in the past—and He

would do so again. Just the same, God had rescued the Israelites in the past—and He will do so again.

Though calmed through renewed hope, Jeremiah “cannot contain a last cry to God to judge those enemies whose brutality has brought him and his people such pain (vv. 58-66)” (Bible Reader’s Companion, chapters 1-3 summary). Again we can see the irony and justice here. Jeremiah was personally referring to what many of his own people had done to him—and that they deserved to be judged. And they are judged—by the enemy nation God has brought against them. Now they plea for justice using Jeremiah’s own words. (In the last days, we can perhaps imagine true Christians crying out over persecution they experience from fellow Israelites—and later those same Israelites crying out in the same terms over what they will suffer at the hands of end-time Babylon.)

Serving God included suffering for the prophets just as it did for the apostles of Christ centuries later. Christians today also suffer for their beliefs and their work, as well as in the normal course of life. Yet there is a purpose to all of these experiences as each human being is carefully prepared for a future that is much more wonderful and rewarding than anything we can comprehend. Even Jesus was made perfect for a position in the future through what He suffered (Hebrews 2:10, 5:8; 1 Peter 5:10). James 1:2 tells us to rejoice when we face a trial. It takes a strong belief in God’s overshadowing care for a follower to accept that the negatives that often come will ultimately work toward his good (see Romans 8:28).

Almost all of the prophets of God, and in all likelihood all His people who have suffered, have at times experienced moments of weakness and discouragement. Depression was the result for a time. God also experiences hurt and is afflicted by the suffering of His children. But there is purpose to it all. We learn genuine empathy for the sufferings of others by sharing their experiences. Paul wrote of how the experience of suffering, coupled with God’s comfort during the trial equips us to serve others (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Sometimes, we also have to learn the hard lesson that giving in to Satan’s temptations or to our human nature brings painful consequences. Jeremiah felt forsaken at times—and we see his depth of feeling over it portrayed in this powerful book. There are profound lessons for all of us in his experiences and in his emotions.

1 Corinthians 4

Chapter 4 continues to read of Paul’s admonishment to the Corinthian assembly. Topics of the letter are: being a servant and what that means, judging of one another, teachers and ministers, insight and blessings of knowledge or understanding, the true condition of being a servant, and the ugliness of pride or being “puffed up.” Paul does a comparison between a proper assembly and its members according to Messiah and the pure Good News and that of “other” types of worship. For the Good News preached is by a servant, one who has understanding of the deeper things of God yet is humble and shares them with others. In most other types of religions, men hold on to “secret knowledge” and keeps that for only the initiated. The Gospel of Messiah is not to be that way at all.

God alone is our judge and it is important for each of us not to be concerned or worried about the opinions of other men and women upon us. We are not to focus on the approval of groups for our truth. “do not judge any at all before the time, until the Master comes, who shall bring to light what is hidden in darkness and reveal the thoughts of the hearts. And then each one’s praise shall come from Elohim.” (verse 5). Paul cautions the new assembly not to go beyond what is written plainly in Scripture – to stay on the true path. The secret things will be revealed in time. Why? So that people will not become “puffed up” against one another with some thinking they now have some secret knowledge. There is a lot of that going on in the Hebrew Roots movement and causes many problems.

We are all equal. Even those who appear to have more knowledge are even equal. How do we know this? Because all of what is received is given to each one by the Same Elohim. None of any at all is obtained by our own doing. Why do people boast of some knowledge as if they did not receive it as a gift? Many of us can relate to this teaching of Paul here in this chapter 4. There are many “teachers” but few true fathers. It is one thing to have knowledge and teach the “secret matters” of Elohim and a completely different thing to be a true servant and emissary of Messiah. Paul delineates this very well. Emissaries are spectacles, they hunger, they thirst, lack for new clothing, sometimes beaten or homeless, persecuted, suffer, etc. These teachers in the assembly are revered, looked up to, adored, satisfied, enriched, and praised.

So what does Paul say to them “Ha! “Therefore I appeal to you to become imitators of me.” At this point... everyone begins to worry don’t they Questioning themselves about whether or not they are on the true path. It is something to consider and he wants them to consider it. There seem to be severe problems in this assembly to be sure.

1 Corinthians 5

Listen to some of these reports Paul writes about: there is whoring among the assembly persons... sure whorings that they are WORSE than what even the gentiles (non-believers) do! Incest among possible other things! And yet they have the audacity to be prideful in their knowledge? He admonishes them that they should rather mourn and remove this from them.

Paul tells this assembly quite plainly to put this, or these, members out of the assembly. They cannot stay as if nothing is the matter. To accept this behavior is the same as condoning it and approving of it. The one in the sin will never become uncomfortable enough to change. This is what is meant when he says, “deliver such an one to Satan for destruction of the flesh, in order that his spirit be saved in the day of the Master Yeshua!” True love is telling someone you love them and meaning it, but also telling them the destruction they are in for and that their sin will not be tolerated among you.

A little leaven (sin) leavens the whole lump. This type of acceptance of sinful behavior always infects everyone. When we are told not to keep company with wickedness, whoring, greediness, idolaters, etc... it is not the ones “outside” the camp or assembly being spoken of. These people are the lost ones, the spiritually sick ones, the ones who need our kindness and our light. These ones who we are warned not to keep company with who are involved in these

things and the people (brothers and sisters) who are in the assembly!! Being in the assembly means there has been a change, and renewed mind, a new walk... a desire for righteousness. There is no judgment on the people outside of the assembly, in the world, who are not hearing the Gospel preached and the way of righteousness, NO, the judgment is upon those who know better but continue to rebel willfully.

Do you not judge those who are inside??? Only God judges those who are outside, because He truly can see the heart. The Body of Messiah judges those inside and we are to be set apart, different, Holy as He is Holy. Keep the Body clean and when we bring someone inside to worship with the Body it should look different than the world, not the same – or worse! Put away the wicked one from among us!