

LAMENTATIONS

The Point of
No Return

GERALD FLURRY

LAMENTATIONS:
**THE POINT OF
NO RETURN**

BY GERALD FLURRY

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Lamentations was a warning to ancient Judah that it had reached the point of no return. The nation could no longer repent to avoid being taken captive by Babylon.

What happened to Judah is only a *type* of what is prophesied to happen in this end time. It is a prophecy where the Laodicean Church and three nations of Israel (America, Britain and the Jewish nation) have reached the point of no return. They are going to become enslaved by a modern-day Babylon from Europe.

Only individuals can still repent *before* the Great Tribulation. And even they have only a tiny span of time to do so.

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Chapter 1

The God That Rules

THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS WAS A WARNING TO ANCIENT JUDAH that it had reached the point of no return. The nation could no longer repent and avoid being destroyed.

This book is only a *type* of what is prophesied to happen in this end time. So how is it a prophecy where the Laodiceans and the nations of Israel reach the point of no return?

God has revealed this book to me in two stages. Lamentations was the subject of one of the first booklets I had printed. But recently God has revealed more to me. Now I fully understand Lamentations.

Why would God reveal it in two stages? Because the first time, God's Laodicean Church, America, Britain and Judah (called "Israel" today) *had not reached the point of no return*. GOD THEN GAVE THE FULL REVELATION WHEN THEY HAD REACHED THAT POINT!

Since Lamentations is prophecy for this end time, it must have a *point-of-no-return* lesson for us today.

Also, I believe the *fruits* show that these peoples have reached the point of no return. Look around at what is happening to the Laodiceans and the nations of Israel.

However, we have not reached a point of no return for *individuals*. If *you*—yes, *you*—heed this warning message and repent, God will save you from the terrifying prophecies of this book.

‘UNLESS YOU REPENT’

“Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land” (Amos 7:10-11). At this point, it has gotten so bad that the land can’t bear our message. Why? Because everything is falling apart! Jeroboam, a *type* of the leader of what is called the world’s number-one superpower, is told he is going to die. It doesn’t say he will die *unless he repents*. And Israel is going to be taken captive. There is no room for them to repent and save the nations.

In the past, I have thought the evil priest just told the king and the people of Israel about God’s message and left out, *unless you repent*. I no longer believe that.

God has been delivering a powerful message to the nations of Israel for over 70 years, especially to America, which has been a protective powerhouse to the British peoples and the Jewish nation in the Middle East. That equation is about to change dramatically.

America, Britain and Judah are about to fall together (Hosea 5:5). Now we know absolutely that this prophecy is going to be fulfilled.

How does reaching the point of no return affect our message to the Laodicean Church and the nations of Israel? We must stop writing and speaking about their terrible destruction “unless they repent.”

We will now *only* make the “if you repent” appeal to individuals.

In the past, we had at least a faint hope that they would repent. But not any more. The massive suffering of the Great Tribulation is coming as prophesied. WE MUST NOW TELL THEM THEY HAVE REACHED THE POINT OF NO RETURN! That makes it even harder for the land “to bear all his words.”

THE FUNERAL DIRGE

The Hebrew text doesn’t actually have a title for the book of Lamentations. For many books, the Hebrew just uses the first

word as the title. The first word in Lamentations is *how*, but according to the *Companion Bible* it can also mean *alas*, or an exclamation of pain and grief. Terrible things are happening in this book.

The Talmud calls Lamentations *kinot*, which means *dirges* or *elegies*. A dirge is a song or hymn of grief or lamentation intended to accompany funeral or memorial rites. An elegy is a song or a poem expressing extreme sorrow or lamentation, especially for one or more who are dead. In a sense, the book of Lamentations is like a funeral dirge. It's about dying and death.

Still, in that dying and death, we see the most inspiring hope ever!

The nations of Israel are going to die (Ezekiel 33:11). But this funeral dirge in Lamentations is far worse than that. The nations of Israel will be resurrected to life again (Ezekiel 37 and 38). That is not the case with spiritual Israel, or God's Laodicean Church. Fifty percent of the Laodiceans are going to die and be resurrected into the lake of fire—eternal death! They will be forever dead!

THAT WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE THE SINGLE WORST FUNERAL DIRGE EVER! THERE HAS PROBABLY NEVER BEEN SUCH A TOWERING SPIRITUAL FUNERAL IN GOD'S CHURCH. Never a spiritual disaster of such magnitude before.

The other 50 percent of the Laodiceans will repent in the Tribulation and be resurrected at Christ's Second Coming. They will then rule with Christ forever. The hope of God will fill the Earth forever!

This book of Lamentations is primarily for God's own Church and secondarily for the nations of Israel.

The book of Lamentations has five chapters, and you could say it is five elegies, each one a complete poem. It's a book with unusually bad news. But it also contains a lot of *good news* you *won't* see unless you have a childlike mind that enables God to reveal this book to you (Matthew 11:25).

If you look closely at Lamentations, you will discover that it is actually a detailed explanation of the prophecies of Matthew 24:21, Daniel 12:1 and Jeremiah 30:7. It describes the worst time of suffering in human history!

Ezra had this book read to Israel on the 10th day of the fifth month, Ab, because it marked the anniversary of the

destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. (The Jews today still read this book on the anniversary of the temple destruction.) “Now in the fifth month, *in the tenth day of the month*, which was the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzar-adan, captain of the guard, which served the king of Babylon, into Jerusalem, And *burned the house of the LORD*, and the king’s house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, and all the houses of the great men, burned he with fire: And all the army of the Chaldeans, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down all the walls of Jerusalem round about” (Jeremiah 52:12-14). This fact should be of interest to all of us, because in A.D. 70 the temple was also destroyed on the 10th day of the fifth month. That was not just coincidence.

But that destruction was only a *type* of what is about to happen in this end time.

Lamentations is *primarily* about the destruction of *another* temple: the *spiritual* temple of God.

Spiritually, God says those people who turned away from Him were “The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth” (Lamentations 2:15). God had the greatest of praise for them! Never has there been such a powerful message delivered to this world by God through His Church! Yet look what happened. They turned away from being “the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth,” and turned toward sin and selfishness! The great God’s own Work was destroyed.

God emphasizes “the joy of the whole earth” during the worst suffering ever on Earth!

That description is also a prophecy of what will happen in the World Tomorrow: God’s people will once again be “the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth.” What a beautiful prophecy.

If you go through the book of Lamentations line by line, word by word, you’ll see that God’s spiritual temple, those people of God, are completely *shattered*. No people have ever been punished more than those who are discussed in this book. Their falling away was a spiritual disaster of astonishing proportions.

Still, the central theme of this book is an expression of hope—a people waiting for God’s “perfection of beauty.” The

light in all of that black, black darkness is that God is getting His people ready for a marriage! Sometimes, it's very difficult to do that, as illustrated in the book of Lamentations, but God knows what His people need. He will do *everything He can* to bring them into His Family.

THE BIBLE'S MOST ELEGANT POETRY

All the way through the book of Lamentations, *Lange's Commentary* refers to the author as "the poet." The Bible doesn't say *for sure* who wrote it, but most scholars believe Jeremiah did. I believe the Bible clearly shows us that Jeremiah was the author, though he could have directed his scribe, Baruch, to do much of the writing. Perhaps Baruch was a great poet.

LAMENTATIONS IS THE MOST ELEGANT POETRY IN ALL THE BIBLE. *Lange's* describes it as "The most perfect product in regard to the external artistic structure of the Old Testament scriptures."

Adam Clarke's Commentary says, "The composition of this poem is what may be called very technical. Every chapter, except the last, is an acrostic. ... The third chapter contains [66] verses, each, as before, formed of three hemistichs, but with this difference, that each hemistich begins with the same letter, so that the whole alphabet is thrice repeated in this chapter. ... I HAVE CALLED THIS AN INIMITABLE POEM [*inimitable* means it can't be imitated!]; better judges are of the same opinion. 'NEVER,' says Bishop Lowth, 'was there a more *rich and elegant variety of beautiful images and adjuncts arranged together within so small a compass, nor more happily chosen and applied*'" (Introduction to the Lamentations of Jeremiah, emphasis mine throughout).

This is worth thinking deeply about. WHY would God invest so much into this book, making it the most poetic book in the Bible? *The answer to that question is deeply moving.* We must see it from God's point of view.

Most scholars, past and present, think the book of Lamentations was *finished* shortly *after* the fall of Jerusalem, around 585 B.C. And they may be right. But the Bible tells us that that is not the time when this message was first written. "The Lord hath swallowed up ALL the habitations of Jacob, and

hath not pitied: he hath thrown down in his wrath the strong holds of the daughter of Judah; he hath brought them down to the ground: he hath polluted the kingdom and the princes thereof. *He hath cut off in his fierce anger all the horn of Israel: he hath drawn back his right hand from before the enemy, and he burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, which devoureth round about*" (Lamentations 2:2-3). This is addressed to "the habitations of Jacob" (or the nations of Israel) and to "all the horn of Israel." Israel had already been in captivity over 100 years. *So it couldn't have been written for ancient Israel!* Why can't more Bible students see this?

Most Bible prophecy is dual. Request our free booklet about Jeremiah. You will see that the book of Jeremiah is primarily for this end time. The same is true of Lamentations.

Lamentations was written after Josiah was killed (2 Chronicles 35:25). This is fully explained in the next chapter of this booklet. However, it is quite possible that the book was expanded before it was canonized. We often add to our books and booklets over a span of time.

Jeremiah was clearly an *eyewitness* to much of the tragedy in Jerusalem! *Smith's Bible Dictionary* states: "The poems belong unmistakably to the last days of the kingdom, or the commencement of the exile They are written by one who speaks, with *the vividness and intensity of an eyewitness*, of the misery which he bewails." The Jews were under siege by Nebuchadnezzar for 19 years before Jerusalem fell. Jeremiah was imprisoned by the last Jewish king, Zedekiah, during the siege. When Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, Jeremiah was released. (For more information, request our free book *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*.) Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, undoubtedly experienced some or all of that 19-year siege with Jeremiah. Clearly, *someone* could have been an eyewitness to much of that suffering. God's in-depth revelation is certainly adequate to write the book of Lamentations, but an eyewitness account could have added to the drama. What description there is, particularly if you really understand poetry! You won't find anything quite like it in the Bible.

Clarke's says, "Misery has no expression that the author of the Lamentations has not employed." It also quotes a man

named Dr. South as saying of this book, "One would think that EVERY LETTER WAS WRITTEN WITH A TEAR; EVERY WORD, THE SOUND OF A BREAKING HEART: that the author was compacted of sorrows; disciplined to grief from his infancy; one who NEVER BREATHED BUT IN SIGHS, nor spoke but IN A GROAN."

Lamentations is the expression of PROFOUND GODLY EMOTION! That is because, most of all, it is about God *reaching out to His own Spirit-begotten children*, whom He loves with a Father's love, and who have turned away from Him! GOD LOVES HIS PEOPLE, and He'll use *everything He possibly can to reach out to His family members!* God will do *all He can* to touch them with a powerful message!

The Laodicean rebellion is probably the worst spiritual disaster ever in God's Church. God has prophesied that *half* of the Laodiceans won't make it. But the other part of the picture is, half of the Laodiceans *will* make it! And that doesn't include those who repent *before* the Tribulation. Clearly, God *still* wants the Laodiceans to repent SO HE CAN PREPARE THEM TO MARRY HIS SON!

Jeremiah went to the nation of Judah just before it fell in 585 B.C. He warned the people of Judah and wrote the warnings in a book, which he addressed *to all Israel*. Since the book of Jeremiah is clearly an end-time message for all Israel, it is logical that Lamentations is as well. But there is a difference.

The book of Jeremiah gives the overview of Israel's fall. LAMENTATIONS GIVES THE HORRENDOUS DETAILS OF WHAT THE FALL AND ENSLAVEMENT ARE LIKE.

'AS A WIDOW'

The book of Lamentations uses *Jerusalem* and *Zion* interchangeably. *Zion* in prophecy refers to God's Church. Here, *Jerusalem* also refers to God's Church; Galatians 4:26 describes "Jerusalem which is above" as "the mother of us all," which is the Church. It is mainly about the Church.

Notice this in the first verse: "How doth *the city* [that is, *Jerusalem*] sit solitary that was full of people! how is she *become as a widow!* she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!" (Lamentations 1:1).

You will see as we proceed that this is a book of *end-time* prophecy. Where do you see a widow in this end time?

This is talking about a woman who once had God's protection, was once led by God, was protected and watched over by God—who was, in fact, the very *wife* of God! Only those few who receive God's Spirit during this present age are considered Jesus Christ's Bride (e.g. Romans 7:4; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:31-32; Revelation 19:7-8). That unparalleled honor will NEVER be extended to anyone else.

But something happened with this Bride: She became as a widow! Jerusalem—that is, God's Church—was “full of people,” or Spirit-begotten Church members, and then became *as a widow*. THIS IS ABOUT THE FALLING AWAY OF MOST OF GOD'S CHURCH MEMBERS—THE BRIDE OF CHRIST!

There is good news there, however. Notice it says she is become “*as a widow*.” It is worded that way because she still has the potential to get back and be the wife of Christ! Half of the Laodiceans *will* repent and make it back.

There is even better news. There was a small remnant Bride who remained loyal to her Husband. She is delivering this painful message of Lamentations for Jesus Christ. That is the best news of this book, which is often overlooked.

Nobody would even understand the book of Lamentations if God did not have an obedient very elect. This elite group will be rewarded with positions at headquarters, serving with Christ forever. The Laodiceans who repent in the Tribulation will lose that inspiring reward.

Remember, Lamentations applies *first of all* to the Spirit-begotten people of God; it also depicts the suffering to occur in the nations of Israel, of which Jerusalem, the ancient capital of Israel, is *a type*. This first verse also warns us that soon the great cities of our nations will become desolate through a nuclear holocaust. The cities that once were full of people and successful with much commerce will be destroyed and the people slain. Those who survive will become an enslaved people.

WEEPING IN BITTERNESS

Notice immediately the mourning and woe in the book of Lamentations. “She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears

are on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies” (Lamentations 1:2). During the night, when she ought to be getting rest, this widow weeps sore. No Husband is there to comfort her. The picture here gets worse and worse.

Verse 3 speaks of *Judah*. Elsewhere in Scripture, God describes His people as being of the tribe of Judah *spiritually*—or *spiritual Jews* (e.g. Romans 2:28-29; Revelation 3:9). The reference to *Judah* in verse 3 is *primarily* about God’s own people who turned away from Him: “Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude: *she dwelleth among the heathen*, she findeth no rest: all her persecutors overtook her between the straits.” The Laodiceans are in captivity before and during the Great Tribulation. God’s people find no rest when they *should* be finding rest.

Lamentations 1:4 specifically mentions *Zion*—again, God’s own Church. “The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts” “Solemn feasts” is talking about God’s annual holy days, which His faithful people observe year after year to this day. But here it says no one is coming to these festivals. The Laodiceans have *lost* God’s solemn feasts! Most of them don’t even *observe* God’s holy days anymore, and those who do certainly don’t keep them the way God commands, or with the understanding that God gave His Church through Herbert W. Armstrong.

God is addressing the outer court, *not* the inner court of His temple, or Church (Revelation 11:1-2). The Laodiceans have rejected or watered down these holy days and refuse to enter the inner court where God dwells. Christ leads the inner court to keep His *solemn feasts* His way. None of the Laodiceans come to where God is! This is how God shows them that they are rebelling against His *solemn feasts*. So IN ALL THIS BAD NEWS, WE SEE THE SHINING HOPE OF GOD’S VERY ELECT.

Lamentations 1:4 also says that “all her gates are desolate.” The Laodicean churches have opened their doors to allow *anybody* to come in. They are trying to love the world by allowing the world into God’s holy temple. (Verse 10 in this chapter describes the same problem.) These people heard for *years* that God simply does not operate that way in this world, and they

ought to *know* that! But they feel they have a better way than what God's apostle taught them—and as a result, their gates are desolate.

Look at the result of such policies: "... her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness" (verse 4). These people should be full of *festive joy*—the joy of God's feasts! The very elect of God's people who continue to build their lives around God's holy days are filled with joy! But this woman who has become as a widow instead sits afflicted and in bitterness. Here God portrays His own people being caught in the terror of the Great Tribulation and in the worst mourning ever! The ministry is sighing, the Church's young people have been physically harmed, and the entire Church is in bitterness. Why? Because they think God has forsaken them. In reality, they have forsaken God. God must use the Tribulation to teach them this lesson.

HER BEAUTY IS DEPARTED

"Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper; for the LORD hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her children are gone into captivity before the enemy" (verse 5). God is about to afflict the Laodiceans for the multitude of their *sins*—rebelliously breaking His law. This verse shows that even the young children of the Laodiceans will be taken into captivity and experience the horrors of the holocaust because of the transgressions within "Zion." It is all extremely tragic. Church members will have to watch their own little children suffer. They all should be protected by God.

In verse 6, we see that "FROM THE DAUGHTER OF ZION ALL HER BEAUTY IS DEPARTED." WHAT A TOWERING CALAMITY!

Do you realize how *beautiful* God's faithful people are to God? The obedient remnant *retains* "*all her beauty*." What makes God's Church beautiful? Its way of life and character. Yes, we have our trials and tests, but HOW BEAUTIFUL THE VERY ELECT ARE TO GOD! It is only when Christ's Bride *turns away* that this precious beauty departs.

That is just what happened to most of God's people. As God looks at it, they are no longer beautiful as they once were. They had spiritual beauty, but it "is departed." They have

forsaken God's truth! Watering down doctrine does not produce the beautiful character that God desires. The Church has become spiritually ugly.

Verse 6 concludes, "her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer." In the Tribulation, the Church's princes, or ministers—those who led the way in weakening the people—will become as deer who have been weakened by starvation. Then the "harts" are easily caught by the hunter—they cannot save themselves from destruction!

"Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that she had *in the days of old ...*" (verse 7). Yes, "in the days of old" these people of God had pleasant things—all the wonderful truths God gave His people through Mr. Armstrong. But they let those things slip long ago. They have a terrible punishment awaiting them as a result. Their misery is excruciating because while they suffer, they can remember the "good times" when God did help them.

The good news is, this punishment will cause a large number of them to return to God. But will you heed God's warning *now* so you don't have to *experience* such suffering?

THE WIDOW SPEAKS

As you read this chapter you can begin to feel the mental anguish of the people. They struggle with the question *why? Why is all this happening to us?* God begins to show them in verse 9.

"Her filthiness is in her skirts," He says. Their sin is so great, it is like filth that has been ground into clothing so thoroughly that it has become part of the cloth.

This verse continues, "she remembereth not *her last end*; therefore she came down wonderfully: she had no comforter." God also shows them that they didn't consider the end of all their ways. Where there is no vision, the people perish. A lack of repentance brought them to this point, and remains the real issue with the Laodicean Church (Revelation 3:17). Since the Laodiceans would not hear Christ knocking (Revelation 3:20), they must experience extreme suffering at the hands of the enemy.

At that point comes this statement: "... O LORD, behold my affliction ..." (Lamentations 1:9). This is the voice of the "widow." The second half of this chapter is mostly her words—God's Church prophetically speaking for herself in the midst of her future tribulation.

Verse 11 shows that things become so bad that the people die of starvation. The people are willing to give up their "pleasant things"—meaning their silver and gold—for bread in order to stay alive. The expression "to relieve the soul" means to bring back to life. The people become diseased and sick because they lack food. They realize they have become vile.

A GRIEVOUS REALIZATION

"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger" (verse 12). As God afflicts the Laodiceans, they're going to be asking, *Is there any sorrow like my sorrow? Is there any pain like mine?*

The entire world was shocked by the photographs that came out of the Nazi concentration camps. YET THE SCENES FROM LAMENTATIONS ARE FAR WORSE! As Matthew 24:21 states, there was not a time, nor will there be again, like this. Can any human mind imagine anything worse than the Nazi concentration camps? Yet, God says here that things will get far worse! Verse 12 of Lamentations 1 states there is no "sorrow like unto my sorrow"!

This is the last time ever that God's own Church or the nations of Israel will be punished like this. Christ is going to rule and stop the rebellion. This is a hope that is endless and soon to be reality.

Why do the Laodiceans suffer pain as no other group? Because they knew God's truth and prophecies. Theirs is a sorrow unparalleled—and not just because of the grievous nature of the punishment, but because they will recognize exactly what is happening! They should have escaped the Great Tribulation, but they rebelled against God. They *know* the prophecies about the Tribulation that Mr. Armstrong taught them—and they realize they could have avoided

this punishment completely if only they hadn't rejected that instruction.

And realize: God is doing the afflicting! God will use Germany and a united Europe as a club in His hand. It is the day of HIS FIERCE ANGER (Isaiah 10:5-6).

BUT THERE IS HOPE! THIS PASSAGE SHOWS THAT THE PEOPLE FINALLY BEGIN TO REALIZE THAT GOD IS DOING THE AFFLICTING.

Most of the time it takes so long before sinners understand that God is warning and cursing them!

ELOHIM AND ADONAI

Note that the Hebrew word for "Lord" in Lamentations is *Adonai*, which means THE GOD THAT RULES. The word *Adonai* is used 14 times in Lamentations. God is teaching those caught in this sore trial that HE IS GOING TO RULE HIS CHURCH AND NATION! He will do *anything* to bring His people under His rule so that He can bring us into His Family! THE LAODICEANS HAVE REJECTED ADONAI—THE GOD THAT RULES!

Here is a quote from the *Anchor Bible Commentary*: "The Lord *Adonay* [*Adonai*] occurs 14 times in Lamentations Rather STRIKINGLY, *Elohim*, 'God,' does not occur at all."

There is a horrendous warning in that omission.

Elohim is a plural noun like church or family, with more than one member. *Elohim* is the word we associate most of all with God's Family and honoring the Father. The Laodiceans are condemned for not honoring their Father (Malachi 1:6). They rejected the Head of the Family.

I think it is also rather *striking* that Lamentations uses the word *Adonai* exactly 14 times. Seven is the number of completion in the Bible. Here we have double completion. It's as if God says, *Teach the Laodiceans a strong message about how Adonai rules. Then double that message and hammer it home! Only heeding this message can save them.*

Perhaps the strongest warning in this book is what is *not* stated. Normally, *Elohim* would be used numerous times in this book. It is used hundreds of times in the Old Testament. But here it is not mentioned one time. Why? The *Elohim* name for God shows us that God is a Family. This understanding is the heart of the gospel: the good news of the coming Kingdom,

or Family, of God, which administers the government of God.

The Laodiceans have lost the gospel. They have lost the thirst of what the whole Bible is about and why they were created.

Elohim being omitted from the book of Lamentations is universe-shaking! The Laodiceans are headed for the lake of fire. Only the Great Tribulation will save 50 percent of them.

What warning could be stronger than the omission of *Elohim*?

This understanding helps us to see how God rewards in-depth Bible study and how deep the Bible truly is! We need to know what the Bible says—and often what it does *not* say!

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33). Paul clearly taught about God’s astonishing depth and how shallow mankind is apart from God.

No strongly corrective book of the Bible is more precisely structured than Lamentations. We must comprehend this message, or we will suffer as nobody has ever suffered.

I BELIEVE THERE IS AN ALARMING MESSAGE IN THE NUMBER OF TIMES GOD INSPIRED THE WORD *ADONAI*. His own Laodicean Church has refused to be ruled. God will not receive anybody into His Family that He can’t rule!

How about you? And me? Do we love Adonai? Do we love God’s government that enforces His law?

There is a strong warning for all of us in the word *Adonai*. God is going to rule His creation and His *Family*.

Lucifer rejected Adonai. He refused to administer God’s rule on this Earth and was rejected forever. Now you and I have the opportunity and honor to be ruled by Adonai. Now we have the potential to replace Satan’s rule over this Earth—if we will allow Adonai to rule us. Then we can rule the Earth with Christ.

What a breathtaking opportunity we have! Do we comprehend how awesome this is? And how much suffering we can avoid by submitting to Adonai now?

NO COMFORTER

The Laodiceans’ crying out continues in Lamentations 1:16: “For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down

with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me ...” What are they talking about? Jesus Christ referred to God’s Holy Spirit as “the Comforter” (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The Laodiceans know, in the midst of the Tribulation, that the Holy Spirit is not there to comfort them as it should be! They’re not being comforted because God’s Holy Spirit is far from them. Lamentations 1:9 says, in fact, that they have “no comforter.” God only gives His Spirit to them that obey Him (Acts 5:32). By failing to obey, the Laodiceans quenched the Spirit that God had supplied to them (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

God’s *faithful* people ought to truly *rejoice* because we do have that Comforter! When we pray for God’s help in facing our trials and problems, we have this Comforter. We *know* God works miracles in our lives. What a blessing to have the Comforter working in your life!

Lamentations 1:16 continues, “... my children are desolate, because the enemy prevailed.” This is God warning of a truly tragic aspect of their punishment: having to see their little children experience lamentations, mourning and woe! And all because of *their own* disobedience! *They* are the cause of that misery! They are guilty.

There is hope contained within these lamentations. In verse 17, the Laodiceans realize that God has commanded this punishment, and begin to repent. The widow says, “The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment I have grievously rebelled ...” (verses 18, 20). This punishment from God brings many of God’s people to *repentance*. They recognize where the correction is coming from, and they submit to it. They tell God that they have rebelled against His commandments. They recognize that they rejected God’s end-time type of Elijah, Mr. Armstrong. They begin to realize that *Malachi’s Message* was a warning sent from God (Malachi 2:4). They recognize that they have “grievously rebelled” and that their just punishment is death.

Now notice verses 21-22 of Lamentations 1. The Church also begins to warn its enemies to take caution because the punishment that came onto the Church will soon come upon them. The Gentile nations have also sinned, and God will punish them too.

This is also a very hope-filled development. It demonstrates the repentant Laodiceans' renewed faith in God's prophecies, and their willingness to once again step out and speak on God's behalf. It took correction of unparalleled severity. But God was finally able to bring these errant sons back into line with His loving family law.

Thus ends the first of the five elegies of the book of Lamentations.

Chapter 2

Josiah's Role in the End Time

LET ME REMIND OUR READERS OF THIS VITAL POINT: JEREMIAH wrote the book of Lamentations when Judah had reached the point of no return. The nation could no longer escape God's wrath because of its many transgressions.

God has now given me more revelation of what this book is all about. It is primarily about GOD'S LAODICEAN CHURCH AND THE NATIONS OF ISRAEL HAVING REACHED THE POINT OF NO RETURN! Of course, there are some *individual* exceptions. But God can no longer reach with words the collective Laodicean Church and the three nations of biblical Israel: America, Britain and the Jewish nation. So God describes their physical destruction like no book in the Bible.

GOD WANTS THEM TO SEE THEMSELVES IN THEIR OWN BLOODY, HORRIFYING PROPHECY! "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). No book in the Bible illustrates that point more than Lamentations!

There is a direct connection between the book of Lamentations and King Josiah of ancient Judah. The book was written as a response to Josiah's death. "And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah: and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel: and, behold, THEY ARE

WRITTEN IN THE LAMENTATIONS” (2 Chronicles 35:25). Almost all the commentaries will tell you this does not apply to the book of Lamentations. I’m certain it *does*, because otherwise that would be very confusing. This is clearly talking about lamentations that are written down *somewhere* that people can see. Jewish tradition says Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations upon the death of Josiah. Josephus wrote, “... Jeremiah the prophet composed an elegy to lament him [Josiah], which is extant till this time ...” (*Antiquities*, Book 10, Chapter 5). How could Josephus be referring to anything but the book of Lamentations?

There is a serious reason Jeremiah and the people of Judah were so intense in their mourning. God had given them some terrifying prophecies about what would happen to the nation after Josiah died. The people had not only lost a righteous king, but they also knew they were about to enter a chamber of nightmares. Lamentations was originally written as a conclusion to Judah’s history. But that was only a *type* of the conclusion to physical Israel’s history today. Lamentations is a prophecy that the Tribulation is about to descend upon the nations of Israel.

This book also contains another dimension. Only secondarily is it addressed to national Israel. First of all, it is addressed to God’s own Church, which turned away from Him in this end time. It is primarily aimed at *spiritual Israel*, the Laodicean Church of God.

ONE OF THE BIBLE’S MOST REMARKABLE PROPHECIES

Josiah’s reign was prophesied in 1 Kings 13:1-3—not only some of his actions but even his name. So his was a very significant reign in ancient Judah.

The prophecy was delivered by an unnamed prophet. “And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel: and *Jeroboam* stood by the altar to burn incense. And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O ALTAR, ALTAR ...” (1 Kings 13:1-2). This prophet *cried against the altar*. “[T]hus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, *Josiah by name*;

and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee" (verse 2).

This is a *dire prophecy*. This prophet told Jeroboam, *This whole system of yours is going to be destroyed by a righteous king!* And miraculously, 360 years later, Josiah came on the scene.

This is surely one of the most remarkable prophecies in all the Bible! What a religion we are part of!

Adam Clarke's *Commentary* calls this prophecy "a fact which was attested by the two nations"—that is, both Israel and Judah. "The Jews in whose behalf this prophecy was delivered would guard it most sacredly; and it was the interest of the Israelites [led by Jeroboam], against whom it was leveled, to impugn its authenticity and expose its falsehood, *had this been possible.*" Of course, Jeroboam was not leading the 10 tribes of Israel to be righteous. Clarke says, "This prediction not only showed the knowledge of God, but His power." It certainly did show God's power—to prophesy and then *360 years later* raise up a man by the name of Josiah to *rip apart* the pagan idolatry of the nation!

Adam Clarke continued with this rather poetic perspective: "He [God] gave, as it were, this warning to idolatry, that it might be on its guard, and defend itself against this Josiah whenever a person of that name should be found sitting on the throne of David; and no doubt it was on the alert, and took all prudent measures for its own defense; but **ALL IN VAIN**, for Josiah, in the 18th year of his reign, literally accomplished this prophecy ..." (emphasis mine). How powerful is God! He had put the forces of evil on notice: When a king named Josiah came on the scene, they had better look out!

If you read 2 Kings 23:15-20, you can see that this unnamed prophet ended up buried in a sepulcher in Bethel, and it served as a reminder to Israel and Judah of this prophecy about Josiah for *generations*. When Josiah fulfilled the prophecy 360 years later, the people *still knew exactly what he had prophesied*. This was **ABSOLUTE PROOF NOBODY COULD DENY** that Josiah was doing the work of the Almighty God!

This is **STILL PROOF TODAY!** This is absolutely **ASTONISHING PROOF** of the omnipotence of the great God! There was another similar prophecy about King Cyrus issued 177 years before he

was born; this one was 360 years before. What a *miraculous book* this Bible is! But most people don't think too much of the Bible.

JEROBOAM'S REBELLION

The prophecy from that unnamed prophet had included this: "And he gave a sign *the same day*, saying, This is the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out" (1 Kings 13:3). This was a sign God gave *that very day* in order to prove it was a true prophecy.

Jeroboam was there in the temple, bullying people around, acting like the high priest, which he was not. He heard this unnamed prophet issue this prophecy against the altar, and he was so *incensed* that he stretched his hand out and ordered his men to lay hold of the prophet. At that instant, his hand *dried up and would not move!* (verse 4). Then THE ALTAR SPLIT IN TWO, JUST AS THIS PROPHET HAD SAID IT WOULD (verse 5).

At that moment, Jeroboam began to realize God was behind this man. "And the king answered and said unto the man of God, Intreat now the face of the LORD thy God"—he said *YOUR God* to the prophet—"and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again. And the man of God besought the LORD, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before" (verse 6). What an amazing event!

You would think this would have been a life-altering experience for Jeroboam. But as with so many people, it didn't change anything—he still refused to obey. Miracles from God just don't have much effect on most people. They happen all the time, yet people remain adamant in their rebellion.

This prophecy about Josiah (and Lamentations, indirectly) is one of the most stupendous prophecies in the Old Testament.

It is also a frightening prophecy for this end time.

JOSIAH'S HISTORY

Josiah began to reign when he was 8 years old after his father had been assassinated (2 Chronicles 33:25; 34:1). He behaved

righteously, zealously following God's ways as he knew how (2 Chronicles 34:2).

In the 12th year of his reign, when he was 20 years old, he began to fulfill that prophecy from 360 years before. He set about ripping the idolatry right out of the nation. He broke down the pagan altars and idols and ground them to powder, which he sprinkled on the graves of the idolaters. Then he *burned the bones of the priests on the altars*, just as the unnamed prophet had said he would (2 Kings 23:3-5).

"Moreover the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he brake down, and burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove. And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount, and sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned them upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words. Then he said, What title is that that I see? And the men of the city told him, It is the sepulchre of the man of God [that unnamed prophet], which came from Judah, and proclaimed these things that thou hast done against the altar of Bethel" (verses 15-17). Even Josiah knew he had fulfilled that prophecy.

Josiah killed all the pagan priests and burned their bones on the altars! (verses 19-20). He was truly zealous for God!

During Josiah's reign, Solomon's temple still stood, but the people had allowed it to deteriorate; it was dilapidated and looked awful. Josiah, in the 18th year of his reign, when he was 26, began to repair the temple—a type of God's Church today. "Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land, and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, TO REPAIR THE HOUSE OF THE LORD HIS GOD" (2 Chronicles 34:8).

Mr. Armstrong also found God's temple, the Church, in terrible disrepair. The Sardis era of God's Church was dead when he came on the scene (Revelation 3:1).

"And when they came to Hilkiah the high priest, they delivered the money that was brought into the house of God, which

the Levites that kept the doors had gathered of the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim, and of all the remnant of Israel, and of all Judah and Benjamin; and they returned to Jerusalem. And they put it in the hand of the workmen that had the oversight of the house of the LORD, and they gave it to the workmen that wrought in the house of the LORD, TO REPAIR AND AMEND THE HOUSE: Even to the artificers and builders gave they it, to buy hewn stone, and timber for couplings, and to floor the houses which the kings of Judah had destroyed" (2 Chronicles 34:9-11). What a magnificent project Josiah oversaw.

Anciently the book of God's law was discovered in the temple. When it was read before Josiah, the king saw that Israel was failing horribly to keep it. He rent his clothes, humbled himself and began to turn himself and some people in Israel to God (verses 14-21). He realized that they were under curses they didn't even understand, and he warned all Israel. Though not everyone repented, the nation made a remarkable turnaround under his leadership.

The previous leaders had *not* been discussing the condition of God's temple. Nor had they been promoting God's law. They had *not* been discussing David's attitude toward the temple and God's law. We must learn enough about God and His Work to know what must be said and accomplished. Then we will usually know what is *not* being said and done that should be.

Why is Josiah's history so important? God taught the nation of Israel to look to the *temple* for spiritual guidance. The people were commanded to look to the temple. This is where God's *law* was supposed to be taught and kept as an example for all Israel. Whenever the temple worship was polluted or omitted, the nation became cursed by God and was usually sent into captivity.

The temple today is God's true Church.

Most of Josiah's history is in the books of Chronicles and Kings. There is a big difference in these books. The book of Kings emphasizes the kings. But in the book of Chronicles the emphasis is on Jerusalem, where the temple was—not Mount Gerazim, as some people said. Chronicles emphasizes the Davidic dynasty and the priesthood, also in Jerusalem. This is where the whole nation was to focus.

2 Chronicles is the last book of the Old Testament. You can see that order in Jewish Bibles. The Christian world has the order of the Old Testament books all messed up. That one error is enough to keep them confused about the Old and New Testaments.

So the last book of the Old Testament leaves us a strong warning: Keep your spiritual focus on Jerusalem and the temple, or you will be led astray.

That temple today is where God's true Church is. Learn to look to where God's headquarters is today, or your church or nation will have a catastrophic end. That is an absolute!

JOSIAH'S DEATH

Jeremiah had also come on the scene near the end of Josiah's reign with some *terrifying prophecies from God*. Josiah provided great leadership. Still, the Prophetess Huldah told Josiah and Judah that these frightening prophecies would still be inflicted upon Judah because most of the people failed to repent. Huldah spoke on behalf of God: "Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched" (2 Chronicles 34:25). This was a very sobering prophecy.

But notice: Because Josiah had humbled himself and had shown such zeal, God decided to delay the fulfillment of the prophecies *until after* Josiah died (verses 27-28).

This prophecy caused Judah to feel somewhat secure; Josiah was still a young man at the time. It proved to be a false security.

When Egypt decided to march to Assyria to make war with the Assyrians, Pharaohnechoh wanted to go through Judah to save time. He didn't want to fight Josiah. He told Josiah he just wanted to pass through, and he didn't want any trouble.

But Josiah was upset. He led his army out to fight the pharaoh. This proved to be a foolish mistake. "In his days Pharaoh-nechoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and king Josiah went against him; and he slew him [Josiah] at Megiddo, when he had seen him. And his servants carried him in a chariot dead from

Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own sepulchre. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and anointed him, and made him king in his father's stead" (2 Kings 23:29-30). Josiah was killed.

This news struck terror in the people of Judah, because they knew of the prophecy that PEACE WOULD CONTINUE ONLY AS LONG AS JOSIAH LIVED! After Josiah's death, they *knew* that Judah was going down. Again let me remind you they had reached the point of no return for the nation.

NOW GOD HAS REVEALED TO ME THE FULL MEANING OF THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS. IT IS A BOOK ABOUT THE POINT OF NO RETURN. THIS IS GOD'S WAY OF SAYING THAT THE LAODICEANS AND THE NATIONS OF ISRAEL HAVE ALSO REACHED THE POINT OF NO RETURN TODAY! (But, let me repeat, there will be individual exceptions.)

That adds a much greater urgency to our work.

Josiah's death marked a very sad day for the people of Judah. They were entering into the time of Lamentations. The destruction of their nation was near. This filled the people with fear and anger.

But then something interesting happened—something with strong parallels to our time today.

THE YEARS AFTER JOSIAH'S DEATH

Josiah's life spanned from 640 to 609 B.C. Some say 608 B.C. The destruction of Jerusalem began in 585 B.C. If Josiah died in 609, that means there was a *24-year gap* between his death and Judah's fall. Although 24 years passed after Josiah's death before Nebuchadnezzar invaded, I don't think they were 24 years of peace and prosperity. God was cursing Judah horribly even then.

The king who succeeded Josiah was his son Jehoahaz (also called Shallum; see 2 Kings 23:30-31; 1 Chronicles 3:15; 2 Chronicles 36:1-2). His reign was a curse: "And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done" (2 Kings 23:32). Jeremiah prophesied exactly what would happen to him: He would be taken captive and die in captivity (Jeremiah 22:10-12). Within just a few months, that is exactly what happened. The pharaoh whose army had killed Josiah saw Judah as a vassal nation of Egypt. He invaded and took Jehoahaz captive back to Egypt,

where Jehoahaz died (2 Kings 23:33-34).

In Jehoahaz's place, the pharaoh demanded that Josiah's older son Eliakim, who regarded pharaoh as his master, be made king, and he changed his name to Jehoiakim (verse 34). Just the fact that the *king of Egypt* made him king tells you something. Under pharaoh's command, Jehoiakim taxed the people grievously and sent the money to Egypt (verse 35), while keeping a generous cut for himself at the people's expense (see Jeremiah 22:13-17). He too was a very wicked king who led the people of Judah back into idolatry and other evils (2 Kings 23:36-37; 2 Chronicles 36:5). He rebelliously ignored the warnings of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36), and ended up dying according to one of Jeremiah's prophecies (Jeremiah 22:18-19)—at the hands of the Babylonians.

Jehoiakim was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin, who was also an evil king (2 Kings 24:6-9; 2 Chronicles 36:8-9). By this time, the Babylonians had taken over as the masters of Judah. Jehoiachin was only on the throne for a short time when Nebuchadnezzar removed him and placed his uncle, whom he renamed Zedekiah, on the throne (2 Chronicles 36:10).

Under these terrible leaders, the more time that passed after Josiah died, the worse conditions in Judah grew! *The curses had begun!* Even though the captivity didn't come for some time, the people still suffered horrible curses!

ZEDEKIAH

Lamentations 4 describes the decay within the Church leadership after Mr. Armstrong died. "How the gold has grown dim, how the pure gold is changed! The holy stones lie scattered at the head of every street. The precious sons of Zion, worth their weight in fine gold, how they are reckoned as earthen pots, the work of a potter's hands!" (Lamentations 4:1-2, Revised Standard Version). This is talking about the ministers, who have turned into cheap pottery.

Examples like Josiah and Mr. Armstrong are pure gold. How powerful and wonderful to have men of that stature to look to and learn how to become pure gold spiritually! Look at the revelation God gave through Mr. Armstrong! All that wonderful truth is pure gold.

But Satan turned the people of God away from that! They rebelled against that golden example.

“Our persecutors are swifter than the eagles of the heaven: they pursued us upon the mountains, they laid wait for us in the wilderness. The breath of our nostrils, THE ANOINTED OF THE LORD, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen” (verses 19-20).

What does that mean? Who is “the anointed of the Eternal”? That is an extremely positive description of *some king*. Most commentators will say it refers to Zedekiah, but that couldn't be true.

In fact, *Soncino Commentary* says about this verse, “This apparently favorable judgment, contrasted with the unfavorable judgments on Zedekiah in Jeremiah and Kings, has given much trouble to commentators.” I would think so!

Zedekiah was a terribly evil king. Nebuchadnezzar actually had him installed as Judah's king after taking King Jehoiachin captive, because it was thought he would be subservient to Babylon. Jeremiah warned him to continue paying tribute to the Babylonians, but Zedekiah ignored that godly counsel. “And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and *humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the LORD*. And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel. Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem” (2 Chronicles 36:12-14). Those mistakes set the nation of Judah up for being besieged by Babylon!

This man certainly wasn't “the breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Eternal” in Lamentations 4:20.

This verse is actually referring to King Josiah.

Before we prove that, notice in 2 Chronicles 36 this inspiring verse: “And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; *because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place*” (verse 15). God sends His message *because He has compassion!* That's why He sends this message today! He has

compassion on the people of Israel and the people in His Church.

Sadly, the response we get today is all too often the same as the response the ancient prophets received: “But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy” (verse 16).

THE ANOINTED OF THE LORD

There is a great deal of meaning packed into Lamentations 4:20.

It describes “the breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Eternal,” mentioning *the breath* of that anointed one. Josiah, when he lived, really was God’s anointed and did the Work of God. When his breathing stopped, trouble intensified.

That anointed of God was teaching the message of God! No message is more important than that! If we receive a message from the anointed of God, we have everything!

The word *anointed* appears 40 times in the Old Testament. The *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* calls it “one of the most important words in the Hebrew Bible.” It usually refers to the anointing of kings and priests. That is what God is doing today: anointing His people as kings and priests to rule with Christ!

Do you deeply realize that the people of God have been ANOINTED BY THE GOD WHO CREATED EVERYTHING? God anointed the Laodiceans before they became Laodicean. The Laodicean ministers were *anointed of God!* They were called by the Father to become members of the Family of God!

We are anointed to do a job—to proclaim this message to the world and build character in the process. If we don’t do God’s Work today, we’re not being true to that anointing.

This verse says that the Lord’s anointed “was taken in their pits.” What does that mean? *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon* says the word *pits* means *destruction*. Destruction! As with Josiah, somebody came along after Mr. Armstrong died and *destroyed* what the anointed of the Eternal taught. The Bible calls him the *son of perdition*, or *destruction*.

Soncino Commentary says, “The biblical book of Lamentations contains no explicit reference to Josiah, but

Jewish tradition applies Lamentations 4, verses 1 and 20 to the fallen king.” I believe that is absolutely right. It doesn’t apply to Zedekiah—it applies to a *righteous* king whose work was *destroyed*. *Soncino* continued, “Targum and Rashi interpret this as a reference to King Josiah. . . . ‘And Jeremiah lamented over Josiah’”—that is quoting 2 Chronicles 35:25. “Perhaps he [Rashi] bases this on the end of the verse, where Jeremiah’s lamentations over Josiah are mentioned as being written in the book of Lamentations.” That is right. Most every other commentary has this wrong!

Notice that Lamentations 4:20 says, “Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen.” What does that mean? Well, when the events came to pass that Jeremiah had warned would happen after Josiah’s death, *they lived under the shadow of Josiah*. They realized those prophecies were true, and what a shadow that was!

WHEN THE LAODICEANS GO INTO THE TRIBULATION, THERE WILL BE A HEAVY SHADOW HOVERING OVER THEM! You can be sure they will say, *Oh, if only we had listened to God’s Elijah!* Throughout the Tribulation, that shadow will hang over their heads. What an example Mr. Armstrong was! DON’T YOU THINK THAT WHEN GOD’S PEOPLE ARE IN THAT HOLOCAUST AND 60-MEGATON H-BOMBS ARE EXPLODING, THE SHADOW OF MR. ARMSTRONG WILL LOOM OVER THEM?

That is the only hope they have of making it into the Kingdom of God. Half of them will finally wake up, and his words will come alive to them once again.

SPIRITUAL ISRAEL FIRST

God begins His destruction of Israel with spiritual Israel, His own rebellious Church. “And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and BEGIN AT MY SANCTUARY. Then they began at the ancient men [elders, or ministers] which were before the house” (Ezekiel 9:5-6).

There is a reason that God, as He begins to correct all Israel, corrects His own people first. Like Judah anciently,

God's end-time Laodicean Church is guilty of a great sin. Judah was the only tribe of Israel left to direct the world to the true God. God's true Church has that responsibility today. The Laodiceans have failed God. That is why God raised up the Philadelphia Church: We are doing what all of the Laodiceans should be doing.

The Prophet Jeremiah wrote, "The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot" (Jeremiah 3:6). You can read in Jeremiah chapters 2-6 how the people of Judah continued to sin even as Josiah tried to turn them to God. Then, when Josiah died, there was an "almost immediate reversion to idolatry" (*New Bible Dictionary*).

"And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed: her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer" (Lamentations 1:6). Zion is God's Church today. "From above hath he sent fire into my bones, and it prevaieth against them: he hath spread a net for my feet, he hath turned me back: he hath made me desolate and faint all the day" (verse 13). THIS IS THE DAY OF GOD'S FIERCE ANGER AGAINST PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL ISRAEL. And it is directed to all Israel—but first it falls on God's own Laodicean Church.

When Lamentations was proclaimed in Judah, the nation had reached the point of no return. God has now given us a full understanding of Lamentations today. Now we must deliver this final, major warning to God's own Laodicean Church and to the nations of Israel. Both spiritual Israel, God's Church, and the nations of Israel have reached the point of no return. Collectively, it is too late to repent. The ONLY HOPE for the people of Israel is our message.

Chapter 3

Why God Must Punish the Laodiceans

REVELATION 3:17-18 SHOW THAT THE MOST TRAGIC FAULT OF THE Laodicean Church is its spiritual complacency. The Laodiceans are blind to their wretched spiritual condition. In setting their own spiritual standards, the Laodiceans have grown so far removed from God's standards that they cannot imagine how God could possibly be angry with them. In their deceived minds, they feel they are growing and on-target spiritually. In reality, the Laodiceans are in serious rebellion against God, and He is very angry with them.

The second chapter of the book of Lamentations describes the lamentable future awaiting the people of God who have rebelled against Him in this end time.

It is important to remember that the tragedies it describes represent God's efforts to CORRECT these people and bring them into obedience to Him. Throughout these graphic and disturbing prophecies are statements that serve as shining signals of God's unparalleled love for the people He is trying to reach.

BLACK CLOUD OVER ZION

Lamentations 2 begins, “How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger!” (verse 1).

God has cast down the beauty of Israel from heaven. Now God is cursing the Laodicean Church. At one time that Church was the beauty of this Earth! God’s Spirit flowed from heaven with God’s new revelation. The Work under Herbert W. Armstrong glorified God. Now that beauty has been cast down by the great God!

The glory of God’s Church comes from heaven. We must never forget that. Anciently, the temple was called THE HOUSE OF OUR GLORY. The temple today is God’s Church, and its beauty comes only from the northern heaven where God dwells. It is the spiritual house of our glory.

This chapter mentions the word *Zion* seven times (more on this later). Herbert W. Armstrong taught God’s people that *Zion* always refers to the Church today. This can easily be proven from your Bible. This verse refers to “the *daughter of Zion*,” which is specifically the *end-time* Church of God.

It is clear God is intensely angry at this church’s deeds. By the time of the Tribulation, God is so angry with His Church that He has covered it with a CLOUD and cast it down to Earth! Rather than covering His people with a cloud of protection as He did in ancient Israel, God is covering them with a black, ominous cloud symbolizing His anger! To *cover with a cloud* means that God is placing thick darkness between Himself and His Church. God is no longer leading this group of people. He has cut off His guiding light. It is the same type of description as removing a “lampstand,” as found in Revelation 2:5. It is also similar to God sending “strong delusion” to His Church as revealed by the Apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:11.

Also, in His anger, God casts His Church, “the beauty of Israel,” down to Earth. This is similar to what Michael and the angels did to Satan in Revelation 12:7-9. But here in Lamentations, *God* does the casting out. Are we surprised by this? Remember, Jesus Christ *spews* the Laodicean Church out of His mouth (Revelation 3:16). What does this mean for God’s

Church? In the Tribulation, God will not lead them, until they repent. Though His people make many prayers, God will not deliver them from severe punishment.

This all seems unthinkable to many of God's people today. Many ministers have ridiculed the Philadelphia Church of God for making such strong statements. THESE ARE BIBLICAL STATEMENTS! Some full-time ministers have stated that God would never send "strong delusion" to His Church. Others have said that God would never punish older "innocent" people and children. Could God allow His people to "believe a lie" by sending them "strong delusion"? Will God severely punish the elderly and children? THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS CLEARLY SAYS HE WILL! Why? Because there is something very wrong in Zion, and it must be corrected!

Notice, however, as in Lamentations 1:6, how God speaks of the *beauty* of His people—"the beauty of Israel." They once had—and *should still have*—dazzling beauty! God gives them that label here because He is trying so earnestly to *restore* that beauty to them!

The "footstool" mentioned here can refer to the ark of the covenant (e.g. 1 Chronicles 28:2). For God to "remember not his footstool" means that He will no longer abide by His covenant. There is only *one* reason why God would not keep His covenant: HIS PEOPLE HAVE BROKEN IT! What is wrong in Zion? God's people are breaking God's covenant! Malachi 2:8, 14-16 show that God's own ministry is causing an entire Church era to "stumble at the law" and to break His covenant! God's own ministry is committing treachery against God's true religion.

When we were baptized, we made a covenant with God. That covenant was based upon obedience to God's truth. It was God's truth that brought us to repentance and baptism. God will not give salvation to any individual who doesn't deeply love His truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10). He gets very angry when His Church does not love TRUTH above all else.

"He hath cut off in his fierce anger all the horn of Israel: he hath drawn back his right hand from before the enemy, and he burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, which devoureth round about" (Lamentations 2:3). God has cut off Israel in His *fierce* anger. This refers to His rebellious Laodicean Church—spiritual Israel.

God also “BURNED AGAINST JACOB LIKE A FLAMING FIRE.” This is anger that consumes and devours! Jacob was Israel’s name before he was converted. So God is addressing the nations of Israel. The young and the old lie in the streets—young ladies and young men have been slain (verse 21). God has shown them no pity!

Do you have any concept of the raging, flowing fury God is about to inflict on the Laodiceans and nations of Israel? Nuclear fire is about to be unleashed.

GOD—THE CHURCH’S ENEMY

Three times in Lamentations 2:4-5, God says what He will do if His rebellious Laodicean sons do not respond to His correction: “He hath bent his bow LIKE AN ENEMY: he stood with his right hand AS AN ADVERSARY The Lord was AS AN ENEMY” God becomes the Church’s enemy! Woe be unto ANYONE who becomes GOD’S ENEMY!

Like an angry warrior with a taut bow, God begins to deal with the Laodicean Church—the “tabernacle of the daughter of Zion.” This says He “slew all that were pleasant to the eye in the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion: he poured out his fury like fire. ... [He] hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation” (verses 4-5). Oh, how God will take vengeance!

We shouldn’t kid ourselves as to what causes God to act this way. God has poured out His revelation on the Philadelphian and Laodicean eras as never before. God holds us responsible for every word. He must severely punish all who take His truth lightly.

All that was “pleasant” to the Laodicean Church He begins to destroy. God does not hold back His anger. He pours it forth like a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29) because the Laodiceans rejected His truth.

But He will do that because the Laodiceans’ only hope is to heed God’s warning and respond to His punishment!

“And he hath violently taken away his tabernacle, as if it were of a garden: he hath destroyed his places of the assembly: the LORD hath caused the solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion, and hath despised in the indignation of his

anger the king and the priest” (Lamentations 2:6). This is a monstrous crisis. Could anyone believe that God would destroy His own tabernacle?—His own “places of the assembly”? This is what God inspired the prophet to write for us. Where is God’s tabernacle today? God revealed to us through Mr. Armstrong that it is the Church (Ephesians 2:21-22). This is where God dwells, unless His people drive Him out!

Notice—it says the feasts and Sabbaths are FORGOTTEN in this sinful Zion. Jeroboam, when he became king, changed the Sabbath and the holy days for the nation of Israel. The Worldwide Church of God leaders did the same thing inside God’s own Church, and Satan took them all captive! Soon, you will see a great false church establish a false sabbath in many nations, and enforce it—what Scripture calls the “mark of the beast”—on threat of death! (Request our free reprint article on this subject.) The Laodiceans who recognize what they have done, and determine to obey God and refuse to accept that mark, will be martyred. That act will require a *deep, deep repentance*.

Realize, God is bringing this punishment about! Yes, the great God of LOVE is doing it—because the people of God must never let God’s truth be compromised again.

‘THE LORD HAS CAST OFF HIS ALTAR’

The message in Lamentations is directed at the lay members of the Church. Most of the ministers and members have already rejected *Malachi’s Message*. COLLECTIVELY, THEY HAVE BOTH REACHED THE POINT OF NO RETURN. Revelation 11:1 shows that when God wants His temple measured, “the altar,” or the ministry, is measured before “them that worship therein,” or the Church members. Lamentations shows God is in that *final* stage of measuring.

Lamentations 2:7 begins with this frightening statement: “THE LORD HATH CAST OFF HIS ALTAR . . .” Who is the author talking about here? Who does the work of the altar? It is the priests. This is a type of God’s ministers today.

Here God is reaching out to the members of His Church with the message of Lamentations, and then He makes this statement. What does God mean by saying He has CAST OFF

HIS ALTAR? *Cast off* forever? It appears this means that many of the ministers might have already lost *their eternal lives*. If that is true, they have reached the ultimate point of no return!

God blames the ministers most of all for what happened in His Church. Very few of the Laodicean ministers have come into God's faithful Philadelphia remnant. It was to them that we sent the little book in the first place; *Malachi's Message* is aimed *directly* at the ministry. And there God says they are in danger of losing their eternal inheritance completely! That is what is at stake! Because they led the Laodicean rebellion against God, they will be cast off. Because they were ashamed of God and His truth, they will be put to shame. God will cause them to fall into the hands of their enemies.

Verse 7 continues, "[God] hath abhorred his sanctuary, he hath given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; they have made a noise in the house of the LORD, as in the day of a solemn feast." "His sanctuary" refers not to the ministry, but to the people—what Revelation 11:1 terms "them that worship therein." (This shows a strong relationship between the book of Lamentations and *Malachi's Message*—a connection I will stress later. Please request a free copy of *Malachi's Message* if you don't have one.) This says God absolutely *abhors* what His sanctuary is doing!

Verse 7 states that it is "given up into the hand [power or authority] of the enemy the walls of her palaces."

Here is what *Lange's Commentary* says about this verse: "He hath given up—*He gave up*—into the hand of her enemy the walls of her palaces. The connection requires us to understand *by the walls of her palaces* the walls of the sanctuary. (The altar is treated with contempt, the holy places are defiled, the edifice itself is given into the power of the enemy, and where we once heard the voices of a worshipping people, is heard now the wild clamor of heathen idolators.)"

The word *palaces* literally means high buildings. But the context of these verses is God's temple. They refer to a *physical edifice that has walls* and other buildings that are used for the temple or Church Work.

The most important building is the one where God dwells in spirit. All of the worship revolves around that building.

This can only refer to God's physical house in Pasadena, California. At one time the voices of God's loyal people were heard singing and rejoicing on God's holy days. But now we hear only the "wild clamor of heathen idolators"! What a prodigious catastrophe!

All you need do is ask someone who has visited the Pasadena auditorium recently to learn of the "wild clamor of heathen idolators"! It's no wonder God spews the Laodiceans out of His mouth!

Verse 6 relates how God has "laid in ruins *the place* of his *appointed feasts*" (Revised Standard Version). So the subject here is a spiritual and physical house of God where His people rejoiced on the holy days—in "the place."

Prophetically, we must look at the book of Lamentations spiritually in this end time. But verses 6 and 7 in this chapter are dual in this sense: They apply to a spiritual and a physical house. All of the spiritual worship revolved around that physical house.

The people Jeremiah addressed anciently did not have God's Holy Spirit. Today, God's people who built that physical house were given the Holy Spirit. But after Mr. Armstrong died, they rebelled.

The expression *appointed feasts* means something *fixed*, in the sense of a *fixed* or *set time* for meeting together for worship. This is obviously referring to God's holy days—His annual festivals!

This was the place of His—God's—appointed feasts! This clearly refers to God's own people being conquered by the enemy spiritually! The mighty feasts of God are no longer kept in what was once God's house.

The Laodiceans know what God's "*appointed feasts*" are! Mr. Armstrong made certain of that.

This is also a coded message telling us where God's very elect are today. They are *raising up the ruins* and building another house for God where God's feasts will be kept. It is obvious why we must do so. (For more information, request our new booklet on Haggai.)

Who keeps the great feasts of God today? Only God's very elect. And we will again keep them in God's physical house.

How do we know that God has cast off His altar? *Malachi's Message* proves that to be true. Also, many other booklets we have published have proven to people why God abhors the

lukewarm sanctuary. God has revealed these truths to us.

Verses 6 and 7 are an end-time prophecy. What else could it apply to except what was once God's house in Pasadena? It's a perfect description of what that auditorium has become!

Does God have His eyes on His people and His Work? Is He deeply concerned about us and what we do?

WHAT A SHOCKING CONTRAST BETWEEN THE FORMER, JOYFUL FEASTS OF GOD AND NOW THE NOISES OF PAGAN IDOLATERS!

The owners of that house today say they are doing an Elijah work, which we have abundantly proved applied to God's Work done through Mr. Armstrong. That same Work is continued today in the PCG. Was that group led there by happenstance? Or did Satan conquer God's people and replace them with his own sick, perverted Elijah work? How Satan hates and taunts the living God! And God's flowing wrath is about to consume the Laodiceans for what they have done!

Even worldly commentaries understand a lot of the truth here.

MEASURING WITH PRECISE DESTRUCTION

Lamentations 2:8 shows a *measuring* just like in Revelation 11: "The LORD hath purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion: *he hath stretched out a line*, he hath not withdrawn his hand from destroying: therefore he made the rampart and the wall to lament; they languished together." God has stretched out a line to measure, and He is measuring His people.

But notice: It is measuring taking place in the midst of *destruction*. God has precisely "stretched out a line" to destroy the Church! Just as a builder must lay a straight line to erect a sturdy building, God lays a straight line to bring the Church down. God will not stop until the Church repents! God is measuring the only way these people understand: in a time of lamentations, mourning and woe. Do you want to be in the inner court or the outer court? Fifty percent of those in the outer court will be measured out in this terrible violence! It will be violence as never experienced before on this Earth!

As terrible as this destruction will be, however, it will not be indiscriminate. God builds with precision. When He used Zerubbabel to build His temple, He used a plummet—a

measuring instrument to ensure the utmost exactness (Zechariah 4:10). What is interesting is that God also *destroys* with precision! This verse in Lamentations shows God **PRECISELY MEASURING THE DESTRUCTION OF “THE DAUGHTER OF ZION.”**

God knows the Laodiceans’ eternal lives are at stake! God doesn’t destroy in a fit of anger! It is calculated to be of exactly the right intensity and duration and power! (You can see similar uses of a plummet in 2 Kings 21:13 and Isaiah 28:17.) They will either make it into the Kingdom now, or they won’t make it at all—they have no other opportunity.

THE LAW

The next verse reveals a great difference between Mr. Armstrong and the false churches that turned away from him—as well as the difference between those churches and God’s faithful remnant today. Anyone should be able to discern this: It is like a towering monument showing where God is working today.

“Her gates are sunk into the ground; he hath destroyed and broken her bars: her king and her princes are among the Gentiles: **THE LAW IS NO MORE; HER PROPHETS ALSO FIND NO VISION FROM THE LORD**” (Lamentations 2:9). **THIS IS A MARVELOUS AND MOST REVEALING VERSE!** It tells us who is in darkness and who is in the light!

This curse is mentioned several times in the Bible, as well as in the little book. Because of their rebellion, the Laodiceans lose their focus on prophecy and are caught off guard. The prevailing attitude is, “My lord delayeth his coming” (Matthew 24:48). Then the Tribulation crashes in around them when they could have escaped.

GOD HAS STOPPED GIVING REVELATION TO HIS REBELLIOUS PEOPLE. When people stop receiving new revelation, or vision from God, it’s because “the law is no more”—they are not keeping God’s law!

Here in Lamentations 2:9, God is saying to the Laodiceans, *I will not speak to you until you repent of breaking my law!*

If we reject the law, which the Father gave us, then we don’t have revelation or the God Family vision. That comes from the same source that the law came from: the Father. Only God’s

true Church even keeps God's law.

Under Mr. Armstrong, the Church received *all kinds of revelation!* That is because Mr. Armstrong *established the law* when he restored all things (see Malachi 2:6-7). The Laodiceans stumbled at the law. The LAW is the FOUNDATION OF "all things"! (Matthew 17:11).

God's faithful remnant, which keeps that law, also has *all kinds of revelation!* Anyone should be able to recognize that as clearly as a shining beacon in a dark night.

The beauty of this truth is that it tells you where God is. *The flow of His revelation shows where God is working!* It identifies His very elect. New revelation *keeps flowing abundantly* into the Philadelphia Church of God! That should make us deeply grateful to be a part of this Work. We are the *wife of Jesus Christ*, and THERE IS NOWHERE ELSE ON EARTH THAT PEOPLE ARE RECEIVING NEW REVELATION.

THIS IS A MONUMENTAL POINT. God either speaks to His Church through new revelation or He does not! God always speaks to His Family—His sons—if they are obedient to His law. The source of the law and new revelation is the *same*.

"The elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground, and keep silence: they have cast up dust upon their heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth: the virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground" (Lamentations 2:10). While in the Tribulation, some of the ministry will begin to repent. This verse says "the elders," or ministry, just sit in silence. This is an enormous change for the Laodicean ministers. Prior to the Tribulation, they were very talkative. They "wearied" God with all their words. They were quick to give their opinions and even spoke against God (Malachi 2:17; 3:13; Revelation 3:17). The ministers who gave their own human reasoning for changing God's truths now just sit in the dirt—SPEECHLESS. And the "virgins of Jerusalem," or God's true people (Revelation 14:4), just hang their heads. They know that no one but God can save them now!

SICK AT THE SIGHT

Again, the author of Lamentations, undoubtedly Jeremiah, was *eyewitness* to the destruction of Judah. It deeply pained him

to see that! This book describes better than anywhere in the Bible what is going to happen to Israel and to the people of God during the Tribulation.

Notice this intense reaction: “Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people ...” (Lamentations 2:11).

Can you vividly imagine the horrible pictures this author witnessed? We do not like to focus on dreadful events—but we need to face the reality of what is coming. *What this man envisioned and perhaps witnessed made him physically sick! His eyes became blinded by his many tears.* His grief and crying were so bad, HIS EYES BECAME SWELLED SHUT! His bowels wrenched in pain and HE HAD TO VOMIT BECAUSE OF THE HORROR! The Church, “the beauty of Israel,” will be destroyed. It will not be a pretty sight.

It is important for all people to think deeply about these prophecies. The warning they contain should motivate all people to seek God in repentance.

“[T]HE CHILDREN AND THE SUCKLINGS SWOON IN THE STREETS OF THE CITY. THEY SAY TO THEIR MOTHERS, WHERE IS CORN AND WINE? when they swooned as the wounded in the streets of the city, when their soul was poured out into their mothers’ bosom” (verses 11-12). WHAT A SICKENING SCENE! The young children and infants of the Church will die of starvation. What has happened to many African nations will happen to God’s own people. CAN YOU SEE GOD’S ONCE VIBRANT PEOPLE CRAZED WITH STARVATION? Church members’ children about to die ask their mothers, “Where is the corn and wine?” Imagine emaciated little children asking their mothers for food, and there is none to give them! The infants look at their mothers, longing for food, as they die upon their breasts.

This tragedy will be awfully difficult to endure. Who wouldn’t become sick at such images? The author of Lamentations had to ask himself why the parents allowed this to happen to their children. Church parents will have to realize that they brought this on their children. Many if not all those children will probably miss the Millennium and will have to come back to life in the second resurrection. No wonder this prophet became so stressed by these events. It should not have ended that way.

GOD WANTS TO COMFORT THEM

Is God trying to hurt these people? “What thing shall I take to witness for thee? what thing shall I liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? what shall I equal to thee [unparalleled rebellion], *that I may comfort thee*, O virgin daughter of Zion? ...” (verse 13). Here, through the prophet, God is saying, *What can I do to you people to comfort you?* He wants to comfort them, but they need correction because they have pushed Him away. What will it take to reach these people? Prophecy shows that God won’t be able to reach half of the Laodiceans *even with the Tribulation!*

This verse describes a “witness” against them. The Gesenius’ *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon* says for that word *witness*, “to turn back or to say again and again, to witness, to exhort, to testify, to bear witness, to admonish solemnly what they’re doing.” That’s the kind of witness God’s talking about. “To chastise, even,” Gesenius says. God’s going to do most of that Himself. “Solemnly to enjoin on any one a precept ...” (ibid.).

Strong’s Concordance says it means to “admonish” or “give warning.” Who’s giving the warning? Does anybody outside the PCG get a message like that out of Lamentations? Who is giving that warning to God’s Laodicean people who turned away from God’s house and have allowed Satan himself to get control of God’s house?

The word *witness* means “to say again and again”! (verse 13). God has warned repeatedly. If they heeded that warning, it would bring them comfort, but the Laodiceans and nations of Israel refuse. God can’t comfort them because He can find “no equal” to their stubbornness and rebellion! And they won’t repent. They are being cursed by God and refuse to believe what we are telling them!

Lange’s Commentary paraphrases the verse: “I have no message of comfort for thee, and thy misery is so great that I can find no likeness or parallel to it, wherewith to assuage thy sorrow. For your breach is great like the sea—for great as the sea is thy ruin, or injury; who can heal you?”

You won’t read in any book of the Bible about suffering like *this book*. Where is there another one like it?

Verse 13 concludes, “for thy breach is great like the sea: who can heal thee?” The *breach* is the afflictions and problems

the people are suffering. It's not like a creek or a river—it's a vast sea of tribulation!

FALSE PROPHETS

What caused all this trouble for the Church? Jeremiah lays the blame where it belongs! “Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee: and they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment” (Lamentations 2:14). The Laodicean leaders are the main cause of all this trouble inflicting the people. These false prophets will not tell people the true cause of their problems. Instead of God's warning, they preach only deceit and smooth things—only what the people want to hear.

Because they refused to prophesy what God taught, these ministers convinced the people that the horrible end-time events were far into the future. By not prophesying the truth, Church leaders actually gave false visions. What they did *not* say led people to be grossly deceived. The false ministers did not do their job in warning members of the coming punishment for sins. They ridiculed God's truth about a place of safety. They failed to teach the people about a future captivity and holocaust. The *Anchor Bible* calls their message “so much whitewash. Hebrew [phrase], literally, [means] ‘emptiness and whitewash,’ as applied to visions by false prophets” It compares this image to the one in Ezekiel 13, where people are trying to fix a rickety wall by just painting over it.

The false prophets have seen “vain and foolish things.” There is no English word to express both of these ideas. The expression means *delusive folly* or *foolish delusions* that bring extreme damage to God's Church. The ministers are delusional, and the people love *the smooth things*.

NOW THE CHURCH HAS GONE TOO FAR TO EVEN BRING THE COLLECTIVE BODY BACK. BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS AND FALSE TEACHERS!

Here is what *Lange's Commentary* says about verses 13 and 14: “In these two closely connected verses, the Poet expresses the thought that the true prophets cannot repair the injury the bad prophets have caused. He greatly desires to comfort

Zion, by way of prophetic testimony in her behalf, and by way of comparison to her advantage with other sufferers. But it is impossible: for immeasurable and irretrievable injury has been done by the false testimony of her prophets.”

The PCG warning is the good news and hope here. Our message of hope has been rejected too long. The heinous damage done by the false leaders is too great now to turn them around. (That includes the nations of Israel.) They have reached the point of no return, but our message will help them immensely to repent in the Tribulation.

Let's not overlook the hope. It is there for all to see, but they have rejected it!

God's love has been there for them to accept or reject. They made an evil choice.

Smooth things don't help anybody. What we need is the *truth from God!* That is how we really receive comfort. After all, God IS BUILDING HIS FAMILY! He made us in His own likeness, and is developing us in His image—the very character and mind of God! That is *reality!* We really are going to be in God's Family and sit on the throne with Jesus Christ!

THE JOY OF THE WHOLE EARTH

“All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?” (Lamentations 2:15). Clearly this is describing a time of woe, when God's people and the nations of Israel are being trampled. But again: Notice God's heartfelt description of His precious people! At one time, they were “The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth”!

When God's Church obeyed God under Mr. Armstrong and fulfilled its commission, God was enamored by its beauty! THAT IS GOD'S ASSESSMENT OF HIS LOYAL REMNANT EVEN TODAY, AS WE FULFILL THE JOB HE HAS GIVEN US. THAT IS ALSO A PROPHECY OF HOW, IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD, THE GLORIFIED SAINTS OF GOD WILL BRING JOY TO THE WHOLE EARTH!

Sadly, that “perfection of beauty” is departed from the church Mr. Armstrong founded. The college campuses that exuded such excellent standards, the golden character of



King Leopold III (left) visits the Ambassador College campus with Herbert W. Armstrong.

the students and instructors—the beauty that impressed even noted world leaders—are gone. Most of those young people have since *turned away* from what they learned! WHAT WOULD KING LEOPOLD, WHO SAID THAT THE DAY HE SPENT ON THE AMBASSADOR CAMPUS WAS THE HAPPIEST OF HIS LIFE, SAY IF HE SAW THOSE PEOPLE TODAY?

Verse 16 reveals that the Church’s enemies rejoice because what they have desired for God’s Church has finally happened. But what the world does not see is that God’s Philadelphia Church is alive and in a place of safety.

GOD’S ANGER COMPLETE

The entire second chapter of Lamentations discusses the destruction of “Zion,” or the Church. I mentioned earlier in this booklet that the word *Zion* is mentioned seven times in Lamentations 2. This signifies that God *completes* His wrath against His Church.

“The LORD hath done that which he had devised; he hath fulfilled his word that he had commanded in the days of old: he hath thrown down, and hath not pitied: and he hath caused

thine enemy to rejoice over thee, he hath set up the horn of thine adversaries” (Lamentations 2:17). This is all *God’s* doing. God is fulfilling His word that He commanded in the “days of old.” Why would God mention the “days of old” at this point? God is telling the Laodiceans that what Mr. Armstrong taught in the old days, or the Philadelphia traditions, are right! God wants the Laodicean Church to admit that what He revealed through Mr. Armstrong should not have been changed. It was the absolute truth of God.

In the Tribulation, God will get the Church back on track to WHAT IT USED TO BE! God will condemn His entire Church for getting away from the old ways!

“Cry aloud to the Lord! O daughter of Zion! Let tears stream down like a torrent day and night! Give yourself no rest, your eyes no respite! Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches! Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord! Lift your hands to him for the lives of YOUR CHILDREN, WHO FAINT FOR HUNGER AT THE HEAD OF EVERY STREET. Look, O LORD, and see! With whom hast thou dealt thus? SHOULD WOMEN EAT THEIR OFFSPRING, the children of their tender care? Should priest and prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?” (verses 18-20, RSV).

Satan has broken down the wall of Zion, or God’s Church. And what a price the members must pay. Tears are going to run down like a river!

The Apostle Paul warned us that “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31). God loves His Church so much that He will pull out all stops to help His people repent. Verse 20 shows that He will even allow some members to come to the point where they may be tempted to eat their own children because of their severe starvation.

Do God’s people really have to experience something so gruesome? Is that the only way God can reach them and finally comfort the half of them who repent? Is that how *hard* and *self-willed* they are?

WE CANNOT AFFORD TO BE HARD! If we use the Spirit of God, that makes us childlike and teachable. We will *want* God to correct us! That is our only hope!

The closing verses of Lamentations 2 show dead bodies everywhere. It is a tragic scene, worse than any human mind

can imagine. How horrible! But it is necessary to wake people up!

Nobody is exempt—not even the nursing children. Mothers in the nations will eat their own nursing children. They will have been driven mad!

These are not pleasant prophecies, are they? But this is what the Laodiceans are going to experience. Should we not talk about it? If you have this delusional Laodicean attitude, you'd better brace yourself. If you're into this state of delusion God is going to remove it *or else*.

Here is the real shocker: “Behold, O LORD, and consider to whom thou hast done this” (Lamentations 2:20). God is responsible for all of this suffering. It's the only way He can save 50 percent of the Laodiceans!

“The young and the old lie on the ground in the streets: my virgins and my young men are fallen by the sword; thou hast slain them in the day of thine anger; thou hast killed, and not pitied” (verse 21). The prophet—moved by God's Spirit—called the people in the midst of this tribulation “my virgins and my young men.” He was intensely, personally moved by the utter destruction God brings against them.

“Thou hast called as in a solemn day my terrors round about, so that in the day of the LORD's anger none escaped nor remained: those that I have swaddled and brought up hath mine enemy consumed” (verse 22). THIS VERSE SPEAKS OF “TERRORS ROUND ABOUT”—THEY ARE *EVERYWHERE*. AND *NONE*—NOT A SINGLE ONE OF THESE LAODICEAN REBELS—WILL ESCAPE! God “swaddled and brought [them] up” through Mr. Armstrong. He handled them like a mother handles a little baby, when they would allow it. Still, this is the terrible end they came to.

There is still hope for God's people in the Tribulation. Some will begin to see their desperate need for repentance. God's anger will have brought them to a point where they can be saved spiritually. In the Tribulation, Church members will realize that they cannot be saved physically. Some will repent and be granted salvation—though they still must die for God's truth! Those who don't repent will die in the Tribulation or the Day of the Lord. Their fate is eternal death.

What a bitter price this church must pay for its rebellion. No one will escape alive. Yes, God will severely punish both

the young and old, the infants and children. God is going to force people to the point of death to get them to listen.

Wouldn't it be MUCH BETTER TO LISTEN NOW—while there is still time—THAN TO HAVE TO GO THROUGH THIS TRAGEDY? It's too late for the Laodicean churches and nations of Israel to repent. But it's not too late for individuals like *you*.

Will you repent while there is still time?

Chapter 4 *Building a Foundation of Hope*

GOD REVEALED THROUGH HERBERT W. ARMSTRONG THAT THE United States and the British peoples are prophetically known as the nations of Israel in the Bible. Others understood that truth, but only in a shallow way compared to Mr. Armstrong. God also revealed to Mr. Armstrong that the modern-day Israelis are prophetically known as Judah in the Bible.

These are God's own nations, called to set an example for the world. Our nations have failed miserably to live up to God's standards. Our crime rates are some of the highest in the world—and our *morals* are the **LOWEST** in the world!

And now even God's own Church, God's *spiritual* nation, has fallen away from God's truth. Chapters 3 and 4 of Lamentations describe in vivid detail how God is going to punish His nations and Church for their many sins. They contain very bad news for our nations and the Laodicean Church.

The author of Lamentations felt this pain **PERSONALLY!** He speaks for God's nations and Church.

ISRAEL—MAULED BY A WILD ANIMAL

Lamentations 3 begins, "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He hath led me, and brought me into

darkness, but not into light. Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day. My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones” (verses 1-4).

It appears from these scriptures that this prophet EXPERIENCED SOME OF THE HORRORS described in these verses. Perhaps God’s Philadelphians will also. In verse 1, the verb “seen” in the Hebrew is *raah*, which implies personal experience. We know the author saw some of these events firsthand. He may have added some of what he saw and experienced to the book of Lamentations later. He felt the agony that God’s nations and Church will feel when God completely turns against His Laodicean people.

Verse 2 shows God is going to totally abandon His people. The word “led” is the Hebrew word *nahag* and means *driven*. This doesn’t describe God leading His Church by His Spirit—it shows that God is DRIVING His Church and nations completely away from His blessings and protection into the worst curses ever.

Verses 3 and 4 reveal that God’s people will be put through exceptional suffering. They will experience intense mental agony, knowing that God is doing this to them. THEY HAVE BECOME VICTIMS OF THE VERY PROPHECIES THEY ONCE BELIEVED! God will wear them out, making them look like old people even though they may be very young. Their pain will be so great, it will be as if every bone in their bodies had been broken. That is acute pain!

Verses 5 through 9 show that none will escape. God has caused His people to be taken captive. They are *locked*, like a captive in chains, into the Great Tribulation—“that I cannot get out” (verse 7). Though God’s people make many prayers, God will not deliver them. There is nowhere for them to turn.

“He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old” (verse 6). Some of the Laodiceans are already in dark places. The “dead of old” in the Hebrew means DEAD FOREVER! Those who don’t repent in the Great Tribulation shall be dead forever. Fifty percent of them are going to experience that very fate! What a seriously dangerous calling we have been given by God. All Church members who find themselves in the Tribulation will know that they must either repent then or die forever!

THIS SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE IS ABOUT ETERNAL LIFE AND ETERNAL DEATH. How real is this to *you*?

Verse 9 states that THE LAODICEANS ARE “INCLOSED ... WITH HEWN STONE.” IT’S AS IF THEY ARE IN A STONE TOMB. THEY MUST EITHER REPENT OR BE IN THE BLACKNESS OF DARKNESS FOREVER. Repentance is the ONLY escape.

Never has suffering been expressed in such stirring poetry. IT’S LIKE A SYMPHONY OF HORROR.

The author recognized that even if God’s people *could* find a path out of the maze, God is still waiting to destroy them. “He was unto me AS A BEAR LYING IN WAIT, AND AS A LION IN SECRET PLACES. He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces: he hath made me desolate” (verses 10-11). God is going to punish His nations and Church so severely that THEY WILL APPEAR AS IF A BEAR OR LION MAULED THEM! What a horrible sight! Can you imagine the horror? A severed hand here, a severed leg there! This is God’s doing. Clearly, it is better to face God’s warning message today.

“He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow. He hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins” (verses 12-13). Like a skilled archer, God is waiting to destroy His people with many arrows. For what reason?

Jeremiah spent many years of his life warning the people of their coming doom if they did not repent. But they rejected his messages. “I was a derision to all my people; and their song all the day” (verse 14).

Anciently, the people rejected the warning—and their punishment descended on them quickly. They were starved, taken captive and brutalized! Why is God going to punish His Laodicean Church? Because it has rejected Mr. Armstrong and the messages God gave the Church through him. It has also rejected the prophecies of Jeremiah and the revealed prophecies of the PCG.

God has been an ugly derision to the Laodiceans. They deride Him by how they scorn His message delivered by the PCG.

God is going to punish His nations, the Church and eventually the entire world until they admit that what Mr. Armstrong taught was truth revealed from God. It should not have been changed—BUT BELIEVED!

GOD'S PEOPLE REPENT IN TRIBULATION

“He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood. He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, he hath covered me with ashes. And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgot prosperity. And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD” (Lamentations 3:15-18). The Laodiceans had strength and hope in God, but lost it. There is always hope in God. The greatest tragedy is losing that hope. However, 50 percent of God’s own people will repent and be able to re-establish that hope—this time forever!

Can we see why God had to punish them in the worst suffering ever on this Earth? It was the *only* way to save them so they could be born into His Family.

The Laodiceans still remembered God’s truth. “My soul hath [them] still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope” (verses 20-21). As they remembered and repented, the hope in God returned.

GOD HAD TO PLUNGE THEM INTO THE GREAT TRIBULATION TO RESURRECT THEIR HOPE! There was finally a breakthrough. They were saved from being FOREVER DEAD! If there is any way God can get us into His eternal Family, He will do it.

WHAT A MARVELOUS HOPE THERE IS IN OUR FIERY TRIALS.

“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. *The LORD is my portion*, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him” (verses 22-24). The God of hope is our portion. We are never without hope if we walk with God.

The very elect kept their hope in God—set the example and continued declaring the hope that finally brought the Laodiceans back to God.

God gives us eternal hope. When we are born into His Family, our eternal lives will be filled with hope.

God is a God of hope forever!

“The LORD is my portion” is a powerful statement. All we need is God. Stay close to Him and our lives are filled with blessings. Nothing matters but God! This calling is the greatest thing that can or ever will happen to you! Everything

else is trivia by comparison. Hang on to God!

“The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him” (verse 25). Can we *wait* for God in hope—without grumbling and giving up? If we wait for God, even in death, we still have a magnificent hope.

Sometimes God has to put us into the fiery furnace to remove the dross from the spiritual gold. **THERE IS GLORIOUS HOPE IN THE FIERY FURNACE!**

“It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD” (verse 26). We must “*hope and quietly wait*” for salvation—without moaning or groaning! That is a real battle.

“He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope. He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach” (verses 29-30). Sometimes we must find hope by putting our mouth in the dust—in the worst suffering ever. Whenever God smites it is for our own good—always!

Jeremiah suffered through all of the 19-year siege before Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah. Much of that time he was imprisoned and even in a dungeon. We must follow his example of suffering.

“For the Lord will not cast off for ever: But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men” (verses 31-33). God does not afflict willingly—He always corrects His sons in “the multitude of his mercies.”

That is often the way He restores or builds hope.

The leaders in God’s Church who were very quick to speak—to publicly preach wrong doctrine—will be silent in the Tribulation. Finally, they will have learned the lesson that it is better just to put their mouths “in the dust.” But it will take great punishment to bring them to this point. God’s Laodicean people will be willing to give their lives over to their captors—give their “cheek to him that smiteth”—because they realize the depth of their sin. They recognize that even though they must die, they will make it to the first resurrection and will be born into the Family of God. In all the tragedy, God’s people still find great hope.

“To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most

High, To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not” (verses 35-36). The Laodiceans have worked to “turn aside the right of a man.” That expression refers to *legal rights* according to *Lange’s Commentary*. This is about our six-year court case against the Laodiceans. They fought “before the face of the most High,” and God gave us even more than we asked for in the court case.

These are scriptures about God’s very elect who stood up for God. They stood up before the face of God and represented God and were given victory because they did, and the fruits are there for all to see.

The expression “in his cause” can refer to *a lawsuit*. The *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* calls it “litigation, a judicial cause. The expression, used 60 times in the Old Testament, covers the entire process of adjudication.” *Adjudication* means to hear and decide a case or to serve as a judge. Then the *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* discusses “various parts of a lawsuit” and gives a list of scriptures.

God is giving the antichrists (1 John 2:18), who fought in court against Christ as the Head of the very elect, specific reasons why they must experience the Tribulation. GOD IS GOING TO SHOW THEM WHAT REAL JUSTICE IS!

He is saying, *Read in the book of Lamentations what is about to happen to you! I am not going to let you get away with that! You’re going to experience lamentations, mourning and woe from me!*

How dare they fight before the face of the Most High? How could anybody possibly win that battle? God says He’s going to take vengeance, and the book of Lamentations makes that vengeance painful to THINK about! What about when we go *into* that Babylonian captivity if we don’t obey God? What will *that* be like—that Lamentations experience? How mad with starvation do you have to be for a mom to eat her own nursing child?! How mad is your brain, your psyche, when you have to go through something like that?

There are terrifying penalties for fighting against God and for failing to fight for Him in court! God is about to take vengeance. They have reached the point of no return. At the same time, those members who fought *for* God are going to escape Satan’s worst wrath. They are the ones who kept God’s law

and continually received new revelation from God, as in this booklet you are reading. This truth is from the Most High God! (Lamentations 2:9). WHEN GOD GIVES NEW REVELATION, THE VERY ELECT DELIVER THE MESSAGE SO YOU CAN RECEIVE and understand God's revealed warning. It is painfully clear where the very elect are.

TURN AGAIN TO GOD

“Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?” (Lamentations 3:39). There is no need to complain about the punishment of sin. It is a time to repent—not complain. That is where the Laodiceans get into trouble. They grumbled and groaned because of their punishment. They should have been repenting of their sins!

Even in the midst of all the tragedy of the Tribulation, many of God's people will repent and turn back to Him. “Let us search and try our ways, and *turn again* to the LORD. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens. We have transgressed and have rebelled: thou hast not pardoned” (verses 40-42). God's people begin to “search and try” their ways. They will have to return to the truth as taught by God's end-time Elijah (Malachi 3:18). In the Tribulation, God's repentant Laodiceans will proclaim that what Mr. Armstrong taught, and what the Philadelphia Church of God held fast to, WAS THE TRUTH!

They begin to search their ways and “*turn again*” to the Eternal. These are God's own people who turned to Him and then shamefully turned away.

Jeremiah says to all of us, “let us search and try *our* ways.” This is how we keep from turning away from God in the first place. This is something we must do all the time to avoid spiritual disaster.

Are you and I doing this now? Every day?

The Laodiceans will finally admit they have transgressed God's law and rebelled. They learn deeply that God is not going to pardon unless they repent.

“Thou hast made us as the offscouring and refuse in the midst of the people. All our enemies have opened their mouths against us. Fear and a snare is come upon us, desolation and

destruction. Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people. Mine eye tricketh down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission, Till the LORD look down, and behold from heaven” (verses 45-50). Israel has gone from possessing fabulous wealth to embracing the dunghill. Its desolation is not hidden. The whole world sees it, and many of them help to punish Israel.

Tears are going to flow from many eyes like rivers of water. And those tears won't stop until God intervenes for Israel and all of mankind.

“Mine eye affecteth mine heart because of all the daughters of my city. Mine enemies chased me sore, like a bird, without cause. They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me” (verses 51-53). Here we see indescribable suffering, and the daughters don't escape.

Enemies of the Laodiceans and nations of Israel *busy* themselves all day long to sing about their destruction! (verse 63). They love seeing Israel in this unparalleled Tribulation. They love it so much that they sing about it throughout the day! This is the evil world in which we live.

GOLD BECOMES TARNISHED

Chapter 4 of Lamentations supplements the lessons of chapter 2 by bringing into sharper focus the main cause for the Church being led into the Tribulation. The author shows that the main problem lies with the ministry.

“How the gold has grown dim, how the pure gold is changed! The holy stones lie scattered at the head of every street” (Lamentations 4:1, Revised Standard Version). These verses prophesied long ago that the majority of God's end-time ministry would become Laodicean. God compares the end-time Laodicean ministry to GOLD THAT HAS BECOME TARNISHED AND TO “STONES OF THE SANCTUARY” (KJV). These ministers had God's precious truth and then corrupted themselves.

The *gold* that “has grown dim” undoubtedly refers to the 50 percent of the lukewarm Laodiceans who will repent in the Great Tribulation. The gold has become tarnished, but it is still gold. The *stones* that have been thrown into the streets

surely refers to the 50 percent of the Laodiceans who refuse to repent and are cast into the lake of fire. They are no longer spiritual gold and have no value to God.

But verse 2 shows that God's very elect are doing a work at the same time. "The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!" The very elect have remained humble, so God could shape and mold them.

Look at how God talks about those precious sons of Zion! You can see in the Revised Standard Version this is the most powerful kind of poetry: "The precious sons of Zion, worth their weight in fine gold, how they are reckoned as earthen pots, the work of a potter's hands!"

How does God look upon His people? *Precious! Fine gold!* God wants to make us understand how He loves us! The saints of God are like pure gold! Do we see how precious that character is that we're building? The ministers spoken of *here* are referred to as "fine gold," a term similar to that of the "JEWELS" found in Malachi 3:17. *God esteems His Family very highly, for they are rare*—the Eternal's most precious possession. These ministers have remained close to God and are upholding His truths.

Verses 1 and 2 of Lamentations 4 are more proof that a Church split was prophesied to occur. Verse 1 refers to a group of ministers as GOLD THAT BECAME DIM—or Laodicean. They were ministers of God who became tarnished! Verse 2 refers to the PRECIOUS SONS OF ZION, who are compared to FINE GOLD! They have surrendered to God and have been refined spiritually by Him.

That is how God viewed *all* of His people—but as you can see in verse 1, many of them have grown dim, and that pure gold has changed. What happened to those precious sons of Zion? They were deeply *precious* to God—noble, golden, pure gold—and then that gold degenerated.

IT IS TOTALLY CONTRARY TO THE NATURE OF GOLD TO CHANGE LIKE THAT! It should also be contrary to us. Woe be unto us if we allow golden character to tarnish or become like common stones.

Is our nature golden like God's? Oh, how God loves the golden character that is preparing us to marry His Son!

LAODICEAN MINISTRY CRUEL

The next verse gives another example of how the ministers have degenerated. “Even the jackals give the breast and suckle their young, but the daughter of my people has become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness” (Lamentations 4:3, RSV). The Laodicean ministers are cruel like ostriches. Compare this scripture with Job 39:13-18. Ostriches are very careless about their eggs, and if there’s any danger they’ll just run off and leave their young. An ostrich becomes “hardened” against her own young, treating them as if they were not hers. Even the ugly old *jackal* will suckle its young and fight for its young.

THIS IS A VERY TRUE PICTURE OF WHAT HAPPENED WITHIN THE LAODICEAN CHURCHES! The Laodiceans let their love wax cold (Matthew 24:12). The Laodicean ministers did not take care of their members as they should have. They passively allowed God’s people to be fed false doctrine. The Church is to be the “mother” of us all—a place where people can grow up in God’s precious truth. Who can grow under the tutelage of confusion? Many of the PCG members, before they left the WCG, were dealt with very harshly for questioning the many changes.

The Laodiceans have lost their love of God—and their love *for* God and for man. They won’t reach out to mankind with God’s wonderful message. They are doing a great disservice to our nations. They no longer thunder out a warning message about the coming punishment for sin. Prophecy has been intentionally pushed aside! Our nations should be warned that great trouble is on the horizon because of our corruption.

Lamentations 4:4-5 show that our nations’ children will starve to death. Even though the United States, the British peoples, and modern-day Israel (biblical Judah) have enjoyed the greatest wealth, our people will soon embrace “dung-hills”—they will pick through garbage to survive.

Our people will be punished more than Sodom (verse 6) because our sins are worse. Sodom was not destroyed by *men*; it was destroyed by fire from heaven (Genesis 19:24). In this end time, calamities linger—famine, pestilence, starvation, pestilence, race wars, lamentations, mourning and woe! It’s all about to spring upon us. We must be ready. Sodom was

destroyed in a moment. But those who survive the nuclear attack must suffer for *years* in the Tribulation or until they die.

Most people don't even like to *read* of such horror. But it is better to *read* about it and repent than to EXPERIENCE it!

Verses 7 and 8 of Lamentations 4 show that the Levites, or ministry, must shoulder the blame for this trouble. The Nazarites are a type of God's ministers today. Our ministers, like the Nazarites, are set apart by God to sacrifice for and serve God. They were "purer than snow." They were *spiritually* very beautiful, like red rubies and highly polished sapphires. But they became good for nothing. THEY STOPPED DOING THEIR JOB OF WARNING THE WORLD—NOW THEY TOO MUST SHARE IN ITS BLOODCURDLING PUNISHMENT! Verse 8 reveals that the ministers' skin becomes black with famine. They are no longer seen out in the streets with God's people. They become so thin, they look like sticks.

"Happier were the victims of the sword than the victims of hunger, who pined away, stricken by want of the fruits of the field" (verse 9, RSV). YES—THERE IS COMING A TIME WHEN TO BE KILLED RIGHT AWAY WILL BE A FAR PREFERABLE FATE.

"The hands of compassionate women have BOILED THEIR OWN CHILDREN; they BECAME THEIR FOOD in the destruction of the daughter of my people" (verse 10, RSV). This will happen in the Tribulation—and these are not the cruel women, these are the *compassionate* women! This is how even the *compassionate* ones act!

This is terrible news—but we cannot turn away from it. We must face it, because God wants His people to reach out and help the Laodiceans and try to *shake them* one last time!

ZION—FOUNDATIONS ARE BURNED

"The LORD gave full vent to his wrath, he poured out his hot anger; and he kindled a fire in Zion, which consumed its foundations" (Lamentations 4:11, RSV). Here is another depiction of Zion's total destruction. When a building is burned, usually the foundation is left standing. But with Zion, GOD INTENDS TO BURN EVEN THE FOUNDATION! You cannot build on sin, you cannot build on evil, and you cannot repent 90 percent of the way. God says it will all be the pure character of God, or He's

going to destroy it—including the foundation. That is the only way to create the perfection of beauty.

God's Church has never been punished more severely! Verse 12 shows that EVEN THE KINGS OF THE EARTH ARE AMAZED AT THE DESTRUCTION! The world can't even imagine the kind of destruction coming on the Laodiceans and the nations of Israel.

Why did the Church have to endure such punishment? "This was for the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed in the midst of her the blood of the righteous" (verse 13, RSV). It is primarily because of the sins of the *ministers!* The ministers loved to speak smooth things, and the people loved to hear it, and look what happened.

Rather than warning people of the coming punishment for sin, the ministry *led the people into sin!*

God is going to put the blood of His people on the heads of the Laodicean ministry (Ezekiel 33:8). God likens the Laodicean ministers to murderers. As God views it, they "shed the blood" of the Church members and the nations of Israel (Lamentations 4:13).

"They wandered, blind, through the streets, so defiled with blood that none could touch their garments. 'Away! Unclean!' men cried at them; 'Away! Away! Touch not!' So they became fugitives and wanderers; men said among the nations, 'They shall stay with us no longer'" (verses 14-15, RSV). God's Laodicean people will become like despised lepers.

And the next verse shows who is behind all this tragedy. It is God. "The anger of the LORD hath divided them; he will no more regard them: they respected not the persons of the priests, they favoured not the elders" (verse 16). Jesus Christ has officially divided the ministry and the Church. The final separation of the Philadelphian and Laodicean ministry and members was begun on December 7, 1989, when the Philadelphia Church of God began as a separate entity from the Worldwide Church of God.

Verse 22 shows that the punishment for falling into Laodiceanism will come. It will be fulfilled to the precise letter. Why allow yourself to go through such torture—and far worse, lose your reward in God's headquarters throughout eternity?

“The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen” (verse 20). God’s Church, the ones called out of this world now, are God’s *anointed*. This is “one of the most important words in the Bible” (*Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*). The kings and high priests were anointed ones. Already, God has anointed us kings *and* priests (Revelation 1:6) to help Him rule this world. We are the very Bride of Christ in embryo. We are in God’s true Church for the most special purpose you can imagine. We are God’s anointed ones!

Verse 22 of Lamentations 4 also ends with splendid hope: The people will never be exiled again.

LEARN THE LESSON OF HISTORY

Lamentations 5 is a poem of 22 verses. It has the same number of verses as letters in the Hebrew alphabet. It is a precisely structured book recounting the history and prophecy of God’s people being destroyed.

Mr. Armstrong taught that one third of the Bible is prophecy and that 90 percent of those prophecies were written for our day. Anciently, God’s people were severely punished for rejecting God and His revealed truth. The punishment of the Laodicean Church and our nations is in the immediate future.

We all need to learn the lesson of history. We need to take warning that history is also prophetic—it’s about to repeat itself.

“Remember, O LORD, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach. Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens. We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows. We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us. Our necks are under persecution: we labour, and have no rest” (verses 1-5). Conditions are about to become terribly bad—our wealth will be enjoyed by others; our families will be destroyed by famine and war. People will have to buy water, and their own wood will be sold back to them. Once the Tribulation starts, these conditions will not end until God’s fury is spent. There will be no rest.

Verse 6 shows that our people will be enslaved by the Assyrians and the Egyptians. We know the Assyrians prophetically are modern Germany. Our nations will soon be subject to them. Anciently, the Assyrians were well known for their cruel, torturous practices. Verse 11 shows **THEY WILL EVEN BE PERMITTED TO RAPE THE WOMEN OF THE LAODICEAN CHURCH!** Could it be any worse? The leaders of our nations and the Laodicean Church—the “princes” of verse 12—will be tortured. All the people, young and old, will be subjected to hard labor.

Not many will survive! Please read the entire chapter.

Verse 18 describes Zion being inhabited by wild animals. This is a picture of what the Laodicean churches look like to God today: a desolate city filled with nothing but wild jackals running around and scavenging for food or shelter.

Although this is a terribly tragic scene, there is still hope. God’s people will have been brought to repentance. God’s people and nations will have finally learned that sin brings destruction (verse 16). They will turn back to God and realize that He will again give them a future place of prominence in the World Tomorrow and in His Kingdom. He will restore the former glory of our nations. God’s people will realize that God will not forsake them forever (verse 20).

“But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us” (verse 22). God is *very* wroth or wrathful against us. **IT IS TIME EACH ONE OF US UNDERSTANDS THE GOD OF LOVE—AND WRATH!**

Why would God want us to understand more deeply the book of Lamentations today? Because the Laodiceans, America, Britain and Israel have reached the point of no return. And we must tell them so! Look at world conditions! Does anything good await us in the future, under the rule of mankind? There is only blackness and ugliness before us, as long as men are in power!

Let us be sure that we do our part to prevent this tragic fate from happening to ourselves, our families and our loved ones. Those of us who have come into the PCG will continue to warn the Laodiceans and the world of the coming Tribulation.

We must tell the world what is about to occur! It is time for all of us to stand up for God’s precious truth!

Chapter 5

Lamentations, Mourning and Woe

THE FLAGSHIP OF THE PHILADELPHIA CHURCH OF GOD'S ORIGINAL literature is *Malachi's Message to God's Church Today*. Written in 1989 just a few years after Herbert W. Armstrong died, *Malachi's Message* was God's revelation concerning His Church entering its final era, the Laodicean era, before Jesus Christ's Second Coming.

It was clear from the beginning that God wanted that book distributed to the Worldwide Church of God. The Old Testament book of Malachi, on which *Malachi's Message* is based, is a message directed specifically to the rebellious ministry in God's Church. We sent *Malachi's Message* to everyone in the WCG we could, because it is also a strong warning to the members who followed the rebellious ministry.

God has now given the PCG a message directed to all of the *members* of the Laodicean churches of God—probably the last major and direct warning God intends to give before the events of the biblically prophesied Great Tribulation begin. That Tribulation is going to be the most horrifying experience ever inflicted on God's people and the world. Never has anybody experienced such massive horror. If we love God's people and the world, we must warn them.

This warning is contained within the book of Lamentations.

SPIRITUAL CAPTIVES

Let's look at some background from the book of Ezekiel. There we will see how *Malachi's Message* connects directly to the book of Lamentations.

In Ezekiel 2, the prophet discusses a scroll and a book. "And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll [or scroll] of a book was therein; And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein LAMENTATIONS, AND MOURNING, AND WOE" (verses 9-10).

This book about "lamentations, and mourning, and woe" is the same book as the "little book" of Revelation 10. It has a direct tie to the book of Lamentations. In a November 1976 co-worker letter, Herbert W. Armstrong noted the similarity between Ezekiel 2 and Revelation 10. He didn't realize it, but the reason for the similarity is that both passages are talking about the little book, *Malachi's Message*. You can read my booklet *Ezekiel: The End-Time Prophet* for a thorough explanation of that truth. (Proof that *Malachi's Message* is the little book of Revelation 10 can be found in our booklet *The Little Book*.)

In Ezekiel 2:9, the little book is called a "roll [or scroll] of a book." The word translated *roll* means scroll. Zechariah 5 also refers to the little book as a roll, or a scroll. But Ezekiel also uses the term *book*. Perhaps God did that to help us identify it in this end time, since we talk so much about the little *book* of Revelation.

In Revelation 10:9-10, when John ate the little book, it was sweet in his mouth but bitter in his belly. The emphasis in Ezekiel is on the bitterness. It is a message of *lamentations, mourning and woe*. That is what those who fail to heed this message are going to suffer.

God revealed *Malachi's Message* to strongly rebuke God's own ministers for what they were doing to the Church. But the members are also going to suffer as never before for following them. That is made painfully clear in the book of Lamentations. So God's strongest warning and even condemnation of the ministers and then members is spelled out in these two books. Ezekiel helps to tie these two books together. The bigger picture emerges when the two are linked.

This prophecy causes *our* belly to be bitter. It's a bitter message about lamentations, mourning and woe striking God's own people! The most bitter part of that disaster is that 50 percent of God's own Family is going to die forever! It is *bitter* to know about that, and it is a difficult message to deliver. But it's better to *SPEAK* about lamentations, mourning and woe than to *EXPERIENCE* them!

GOD'S CHURCH IS DYING! (2 Thessalonians 2:10). We must lament and mourn that woeful event. No book describes it as the book of Lamentations does. "Lamentations, mourning and woe" could be the title of that book. No book in the Bible explains what is going to happen to God's Laodicean people like the book of Lamentations! All three of those words in Ezekiel—*lamentations*, *mourning* and *woe*—appear in the book of Lamentations. Ezekiel helps to tie *Malachi's Message* to this new booklet on Lamentations.

The book of Malachi is focused on the sinning Laodicean ministers. The Laodicean members who follow those rebellious ministers are obviously being cursed. Those curses are *not* explicitly stated in the book of Malachi, but they are in the book of Lamentations. That is especially true of the 50 percent of the Laodiceans who repent during the Great Tribulation.

Ezekiel 2:10 says that the scroll of the little book was written "within and without"; the Revised Standard Version says "on the front and on the back." Normally you would only write on one side of a scroll, but there's *so much detail here*, so much God has to say about the problems among His people, that it's written on the front and the back! These are problems worse, perhaps, than any God has ever faced with His Church.

A MESSAGE FOR THE CAPTIVES

There should be no chapter break going into Ezekiel 3, which immediately talks about eating the scroll and preaching a message. "Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this [scroll], and go speak unto the house of Israel" (verse 1). What God reveals, He commands us to speak! Ezekiel said we must take this message to spiritual Israel first. But before we speak, we must eat and digest God's spiritual

food. Then we will have the faith to deliver the message. It is not an easy job.

“So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that [scroll]. And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness” (verses 2-3). Though it is a message of lamentations, it is sweet in the mouth to God’s faithful people. God has revealed to His very elect what is happening to the Church of God and how the problem will be solved.

THE FACT THAT THIS MESSAGE IS SWEET IN THE MOUTH SHOWS THAT THERE IS AN AWESOME HOPE HERE. Still, it is a message of lamentations, mourning and woe! The way John expresses it in Revelation 10 is that it is *bitter in the belly*. Here it says the *victims* will have lamentations, mourning and woe. The emphasis is on the victims, not the very elect, who find it *bitter in the belly*.

God instructed Ezekiel to speak to the Jewish captives who were right there with him (Ezekiel 3:11). He was personally able to go only to the people in captivity—the Jews. He had to speak to all of those Jews who were in captivity—not just the ministers. He had a message for the ministers and a message for all of the captives.

Ezekiel *never* delivered his message to the nations of Israel.

In Ezekiel 33, God sets a watchman who is to warn the people of Israel *before* they go into captivity. But in Ezekiel 3, he is to speak to some who are *already in captivity*. *This is not a watchman message; it is something altogether different.*

This is about *spiritual* Israel in a spiritual captivity—people who were spiritual Jews in this end time. They are people today who say they are spiritual Jews and are not (Revelation 3:9). They were at one time, but aren’t anymore. However, they have the potential to become spiritual Jews again.

In verse 11 of Ezekiel 3, God calls these captives “the children of thy people.” The *Companion Bible* says it should read *sons*. This is God’s Family! These spiritual captives are *sons of God!* They are people who have been TAKEN CAPTIVE BY SATAN THE DEVIL: THE LAODICEANS. Spiritual Israel has gone into captivity. And a message of lamentation, mourning and woe needs to be delivered to them. Why? Now they are Satan’s captives.

and soon they are going to experience his worst wrath ever! (Revelation 12:12). It will be the worst lamentations, mourning and woe ever on planet Earth! The outer edges of this perfect storm are already pounding us!

This is not talking about the world—it's talking about *God's sons!* And they're in *captivity to the devil*, of all things! How ugly can it get? This is one of the most shameful and pathetic pictures in the Bible. God's own Family, which has been called out of this world, is in bondage to the devil! Could there be any greater bitterness for the very elect than to watch this happen? This is our own God Family! Those Laodiceans ought to be delivering God's message to all the world, giving it hope and showing the solution to its problems—and 95 percent of them are in *CAPTIVITY TO THE DEVIL*—the greatest evil you can imagine! Jesus Christ *said* in Revelation 3:21 that we must overcome as He overcame, and He overcame the devil. But most of God's people *didn't*—instead they're in *CAPTIVITY* to the being they should be overcoming! This is probably the worst crisis *ever* in God's Church!

And it's about to get a lot worse!

A BOOK OF WOE

The little book is discussed in Revelation chapters 10 and 11. You could say it's broken into three parts: lamentations, mourning and woe.

First, the Laodicean Church stopped prophesying—and the piercing pain of lamentations resulted. The very elect had to prophesy again (Revelation 10:11). Second, 95 percent of God's people were cast into the outer court—outside the inner court where God dwells—causing heavy mourning (Revelation 11:1-2). Third, they were all plunged into the greatest time of suffering and *woe* ever: the Great Tribulation followed by the Day of the Lord.

We might get a better picture of the woe if we examine the context of the little book. Its message is located in the midst of the three woes. Revelation 10 and the first part of chapter 11 discuss the little book. Revelation chapters 8 and 9 discuss the first two woes. Germany attacking the Russian-Chinese alliance is the first woe. The latter counterattacking is the second woe.

Chapter 10, talking about the little book, is an inset chapter,

showing us what happens inside God's Church, leading up to the third woe. Satan is cast down at about the same time Herbert W. Armstrong dies. He is full of wrath because he knows his time is short. The little book explains that Satan attacks the Church of God first. It is the BEGINNING of his "WOE to the inhabitants of the earth" (Revelation 12:12). This all leads to the third woe, or the seventh trumpet, which consists of the seven last plagues. All of this woe is concluded by the return of Jesus Christ (Revelation 11:15).

God's Church has never experienced more woe than what those chapters describe. Much of it is explicitly described in the book of Lamentations.

On his last Pentecost before he died, Mr. Armstrong warned God's people, "Most of you don't get it." Events after his death proved him right. They didn't get it, so God had to begin trying to reach them in more intense ways, like the Great Tribulation and events leading up to that worst punishment ever! The book of Lamentations is undoubtedly the strongest message they will ever receive.

A NEW COMMISSION

For the first *seven years* of our work, we went to the Laodiceans with God's message to them. That was our primary message during that period. Ezekiel fulfilled a type of that commission by preaching to *all* of the captives. "Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them *seven days*" (Ezekiel 3:15). Exiled among these captives, Ezekiel was *astonished*—by their rebellion and punishment. These "seven days" mean seven years in fulfilled prophecy. (That is fully explained in our Ezekiel booklet. All of our literature is free.)

Today, 95 percent of God's people are dying spiritually in the wilderness. THAT IS A MESSAGE OF LAMENTATIONS, MOURNING AND WOE! THAT IS BITTER! It is a message of seven thunders and a lion's roar (Revelation 10:3). We have to deliver that message to our Laodicean family. It is a message that is going to cause them a lot of lamentations, and they're going to mourn—and it's going to be woe, woe, woe for them!

Lamentations and *woe* are coming upon all of God's Laodicean people. They are going to be *punished* mightily by God as a *last resort*. God in His love is trying to reach them and save them from eternal death.

God is saying there are lamentations for the Laodiceans, they're going to mourn and mourn—and then there's going to be *oh*, so much woe! That's the way it will be for the Laodiceans or anybody who rebels against God.

Verses 16-17 of Ezekiel 3 show what happened at the end of those seven days—or, in type, the first seven years of the PCG's work. The primary warning shifted from those spiritual captives to "the house of Israel." At that point, we stepped out and printed *Mystery of the Ages* in an effort to reach out to this world. We didn't understand this prophecy at that time, but we knew our commission had changed after seven years. We simply stepped out in faith, and later God revealed to us where it was all prophesied.

It was *then* that the *watchman* work began. "... I have made thee a WATCHMAN unto the house of Israel," verse 17 says. The work that happened before that time wouldn't qualify as a watchman work, because it was directed to people *already in captivity*. The watchman's warning is an attempt to keep people *out of captivity*. THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS ALSO EXPLAINS IN DETAIL THE UNPARALLELED TERROR ABOUT TO AFFLICT THE NATIONS OF ISRAEL.

At the seven-year mark of the PCG, this is what I wrote in the *Trumpet*: "The first seven years of our work were concentrated primarily on warning God's own Laodicean churches. There was a *massive* falling away, and Christ directed us to knock on their door with a strong warning message (2 Thessalonians 2:1-11; Revelation 3:20). *Malachi's Message* was the centerpiece of our work. That meant the *emphasis* was on reaching God's own people.

"Now that emphasis has shifted to the whole world, and only secondarily to God's Laodiceans. We have entered a new phase in God's Work. We are now printing, and giving away free, Herbert W. Armstrong's book *Mystery of the Ages*. It is difficult for any new convert to come out of the world and be led by God through *Malachi's Message ONLY*" (February 1997).

Now—did that new commission mean God had stopped

reaching out to the Laodiceans? Not at all. He continues to warn them—including through the bitter message of Lamentations. At the same time, even this book shows the Laodiceans and the nations of Israel an inspiring hope.

Now we are entering into a new phase of this Work. We are no longer warning the Laodiceans and nations of Israel that God will not inflict them with the Great Tribulation if they repent. Now we warn them that they have reached the point of no return.

THE POINT OF NO RETURN

God is giving me more depth in understanding Lamentations. NO BOOK IN THE BIBLE HAS STRONGER CORRECTION FOR GOD'S CHURCH IN SUCH DETAIL. The consequences of the Laodiceans' rebellion are going to be horrendous because they knew so much. This book shows what is going to be inflicted upon God's people, and it is as bad as anything I've ever read in the Bible. Still, there is *good news* in the midst of all that.

Lamentations is specifically for the Laodicean members. It describes a coming massive funeral dirge, spelling it out in such detail that it's shocking if you really understand it. Lamentations is about the 95 percent who *heard* what Mr. Armstrong taught but wouldn't do it! God's end-time Elijah tried so hard to make the truth plain to them, yet they were too hardheaded to be corrected by it! Even to this day, when you tell them what the problem is, they refuse to get it! That is a terrible hardness. The little book was a strong warning from God, but it was rejected by all but a few people.

So now God is giving this warning from the book of Lamentations, which is tied directly to the little book in Ezekiel. God is saying that the Laodiceans will have to face lamentations, mourning and woe.

They have REACHED THE POINT OF NO RETURN. As a collective body, the Laodiceans are destined to experience the Great Tribulation. The nations of Israel have reached that point of no return also.

The problems are intensifying for the Laodiceans because of their sins. God is telling them what's coming. This is an ominous message for them. They are in captivity to the devil,

and the only way God can reach most of them is through what they're going to experience in the Tribulation. Revelation 11:2 says those in the outer court will be trodden underfoot by the Gentiles right along with Jerusalem, which is a symbol of all Israel. The horror of that future time is spelled out very *poetically* in Lamentations.

The combination of the Lamentations warning and being subjected to that Great Tribulation will finally lead 50 percent of the Laodiceans to repent. The Lamentations warning will make it clear to the Laodiceans that they brought all this suffering upon themselves. They will then see their *only* hope is in bitter repentance.

The other 50 percent will lose their eternal lives. As Mr. Armstrong said, this is dangerous knowledge!

If you remember, in May 2001, I talked about how God had revealed to me that we were in the last hour. Just a few months after that came September 11—the worst terrorist attack in U.S. history! God is fulfilling these prophecies. This isn't a fantasy—it is real.

THE FINAL WARNING

“And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter” (Revelation 10:10). This message came right out of the angel's hand! John digested it, and then what did he do? He delivered it!

“And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings” (verse 11). This is how we qualify and make it into the Family of God: by doing God's Work. After God gives us new revelation, He says, *I want you to go and DELIVER this message! That's how you build my character; that's how you become like I am: You learn to think as I do about the messages I give to my people, the Laodicean Church, and the world.*

Then notice the next verse: “And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure *the temple of God* . . .” (Revelation 11:1). The “temple of God” is the people of God (e.g. Ephesians 2:21-22). This is specifically talking about the 5 percent of God's people who remained

faithful and allowed themselves to be measured.

Then God says to measure “*the altar*.” This refers to the ministry. *Malachi’s Message* is directed to that group.

Finally, God instructs to measure “them that worship therein.” This is what the book of Lamentations is all about. All sons who enter God’s Family must be measured. If we won’t be measured now, then our last chance is in a nuclear tribulation. The 50 percent of the Laodiceans who repent then will do so in the worst holocaust of suffering ever known to mankind.

The book of Lamentations is about those members “that worship therein” who refused to be measured *before* the Great Tribulation. They rejected *Malachi’s Message*, or the little book.

God is going to measure *all of us* one way or the other. He measures us with His warning message, and those who don’t hear it will move to the next stage. “But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months” (verse 2). There is an inner court and an outer court, and that outer court is going to have to suffer in the Great Tribulation.

Now we see that the Laodiceans and the nations of Israel have reached the point of no return with the new revelation about Lamentations. Only a comparatively few *individuals* will repent before the Tribulation.

God measures—but once He puts His people in the outer court, is He finished with them? No—He hasn’t even really *measured* them yet! Those who refused to be measured by *Malachi’s Message* are going to have to suffer—as it is painfully detailed in the book of Lamentations like no other book in the Bible. It contains lamentations, and mourning and woe like you’ve never even heard about before! It’s coming, and it’s coming fast.

That suffering will bring half of God’s rebellious people to the point of repentance. If there is any hope, God wants them in His Family. That is the love of God!

I believe the message in Lamentations will be the final blast we have to give to the Laodiceans. God’s very elect must thunder God’s message to them if we are going to work with Christ at headquarters for all eternity. We must warn them of

the coming horror, which they are now destined to experience. They're not going to like the message, but they must face the bad news as well as the good news.

When we do this job, then in the end, Jesus Christ will be waiting there, and that fabulous, wonderful, inspiring marriage ceremony is going to take place!

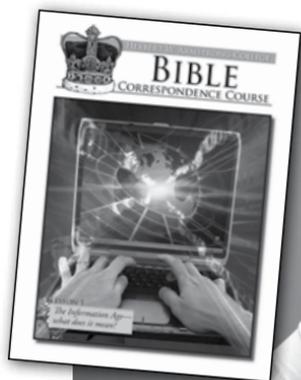
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