

The Lament Over Jerusalem

Luke 13:31-35

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ **Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!** See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Jesus' lament over Jerusalem is set in the context of the description of the Pharisees warning Jesus about Herod wanting to kill him and of Jesus' words about Herod and his own mission. It's important to notice, in light of the frequent motif in the gospels about various Jewish groups Jesus was fighting with, that the Pharisees here are Jesus' buddies, not his enemies. They have come to warn him that Herod Antipas is out to kill him just as he killed John the Baptist, who was Jesus' mentor and the one who baptized him. This is also the Herod to whom Pilate will send Jesus during the trial that ends with Jesus being sentenced to capital punishment by crucifixion (Luke 23.6-12). Thus, in this story Jesus is first of all talking to us as if we were friendly Pharisees.

Then he addresses Jerusalem. His prayerful address grows out of the implicit prophecy that he will be killed in Jerusalem. The prayer of Jesus is a prayer for Jerusalem's health. It is an expression of grief that Jerusalem rejected his offer of comfort, consolation and protection and his recommendation about the policies that Jerusalem should follow. Jesus is speaking here as one of the prophets who will be killed in Jerusalem.

The historical probability is that Luke was writing sometime in the period 80-85 A.D. In Luke's context, some of the consequences of Jerusalem's decision not to follow Jesus have already happened. The greatest disaster in the entire history of Jerusalem took place within 40 years after Jesus' death. The result of the Jewish War in 66-70 A.D. was that the temple was destroyed and the city was laid waste. The entire temple area was burned. Luke's story is written some 10 to 20 years after that great disaster, so Luke's listeners are hearing Jesus' prophecy in the context of something that they already know has happened. There is, therefore, great poignancy and power in Jesus' words for Luke's listeners.

The pronouncement of woe over Jerusalem is reminiscent of Jeremiah's lamentations. Jesus here speaks in the same spirit as Jeremiah weeping and

lamenting over the destruction of Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judea at the time of the Babylonian invasion some 600 years earlier. Jesus' describes Jerusalem in relation to the people's response to their great prophets like Jeremiah, "You, Jerusalem, who killed the prophets and stoned those who were sent to you."

The hen metaphor is a very interesting metaphor that Jesus uses to describe his own internal desire. He longed to take the people under his wings and protect them. The rejection of Jesus' care, of his consolation, and of his politics did have consequences. This story anticipates the story of the Pilate trial, in which the people of Jerusalem reject Jesus. They implicitly choose Barabbas and the way of war, rather than the way of peace and reconciliation. So the choice of war is in the background of the story about Jesus' lament over Jerusalem.

This story connects with the contemporary experience of the woes of the American people over the losses that have been suffered in their decisions to go to war in Vietnam and Iraq, the tragedy of the Civil War, and the on-going consequences of chattel slavery—these hang over American history. The history of warfare in the world, the stories of the great wars of the 20th century, are tragedies of ongoing grief that are evoked by Jesus' words here: "Oh Jerusalem, (Oh Europe, Oh Japan, Oh United States) how much I would like to take you under my wings and protect you, but you choose another way."

This story also connects with the contemporary experience of Jerusalem, perhaps the most divided city in the world. The dream of Jerusalem as a place of peace and reconciliation between the peoples and religions of the world remains an unrealized dream.

Suggestions for discipleship formation this week—you might do a different exercise each day.

You might:

- ❖ Read Luke 13:31-35 through out loud once, and then read Luke 13:34 three times. Each time read it with a different volume, speed or tone of voice. Then see if you can say any of it by heart. Notice which parts you remember and which you forget. Here's the verse:

*“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets
and stones those who are sent to it,
how often have I desired to gather your children together
as a hen gathers her brood under her wings,
and you were not willing!”*

- ❖ Get a picture in your mind's eye of a city you have visited. Then read out loud Luke 13:34 (printed above), substituting the name of the city you visited for Jerusalem. Pray for the well being of that city and its people.

Your city: _____	Draw a skyline to represent it:
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Repeat this exercise another day for Dayton, and a third day for Jerusalem.

- ❖ Reading some or all of Lamentations (located right after the book of Jeremiah in the Old Testament) This would be a good way to get some feeling for the context of Jesus' lament.
- ❖ Who specifically does the statement about prophets being killed in Jerusalem refer to? There are a number of possibilities. Read about them:
 - Uriah, the prophet who was killed by king Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 26:20-23)
 - Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 38:4-6 about the attempt on his life)
 - Zechariah (see 2 Chronicles 24:20-22 about his death)
 - Isaiah, whose martyrdom is related in the Pseudepigrapha (see [The Martyrdom of Isaiah](#) for the story of how Isaiah was sawn in two with a wood saw)
http://wesley.nnu.edu/biblical_studies/noncanon/ot/pseudo/amartis.htm

Meditate on the courage and commitment to God's way demonstrated by the prophets, including Jesus.