

GLIMMER OF HOPE AMIDST SEA OF JUDGMENT AND DESPAIR -- COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

by Paul G. Apple, January 2008, Revised April 2020

THE HEAVY HAND OF THE LORD'S DISCIPLINE FOR SIN BRINGS CATASTROPHIC DEVASTATION AND INTENSE GRIEF BUT STILL A WINDOW FOR HOPE AND RESTORATION

*“The Lord’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease,
For His compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
Great is your faithfulness.
‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul,
Therefore I have hope in Him.”*

- Lamentations 3:22-24

For each section in the Book of Lamentations:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

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BACKGROUND OF BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

Malick: The title to the book in Hebrew is *hkyā* ('Ekah). This is the Hebrew term for "How," "Alas," or "Oh" that appears as the first word in the Hebrew text in 1:1; 2:1; 4:1. This word was commonly used in Israelite funeral dirges (cf. 2 Sam 1:19; Isa 42:12)¹

B. Greek: The title to the book in Greek is QRHNOI (Threnos) meaning "lament."

C. Latin: The title to the book in the Latin Vulgate was a transliteration for the title "lament" (Threni) and was subtitled *Id est Lamentationes Jeremiae Prophatae* which became the basis for our English title "Lamentations."

MacArthur: Jeremiah wrote Lamentations as an eyewitness (cf. 1:13-15; 2:6,9; 4:1-12), possibly with Baruch's secretarial help (cf. Jer. 36:4; 45:1), during or soon after Jerusalem's fall in 586 B.C. It was mid-July when the city fell and mid-August when the temple was burned. Likely, Jeremiah saw the destruction of walls, towers, homes, palace, and temple; he wrote while the event remained painfully fresh in his memory, but before his forced departure to Egypt ca. 583 B.C. (cf. Jer 43:1-7).

Chuck Smith:

There is on the site of Golgotha a cave that is called Jeremiah's Grotto. This cave known as Jeremiah's Grotto comprises a part of the face of the skull; hence the name Golgotha. Because as you look at the cliff, with these caves that are there in the cliff, they take the appearance of a skull. One of these caves is called Jeremiah's Grotto. It is interesting that from those caves there on the site of Golgotha, you have a tremendous view of the city of Jerusalem, for Golgotha is actually the top of what was once Mount Moriah. And it looks down over the city of Jerusalem.

Tradition declares that Jeremiah sat in this grotto when he wrote the book of Lamentations, and there he wept and cried over the desolation of the city of Jerusalem as he saw its ruins, as he saw the walls destroyed, as he saw the buildings leveled. And from this vantage, he wrote this book.

In the Septuagint, which is a translation of the scriptures into Greek that was done by seventy Hebrew scholars about 200 B.C., they prefaced the book of Lamentations with these words, "And it came to pass, that after Israel had been carried away captive, and Jerusalem made desolate, Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented this lament over Jerusalem and said, 'How doth the city sit solitary.'" So, they have that as a prologue to the book of Lamentations, and it was picked up and put in the Vulgate.

C. S. Lewis: In his classic treatment of suffering, *The Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis wrote:

God whispers to us in our pleasures,
speaks in our conscience,
but shouts in our pain:
it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

Lewis argues, not only that it is possible to find God when life is hard, but also that it is in some sense easier than when life is good.

Stedman: The book of Lamentations is sandwiched between the books of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. This unusual book properly follows the book of Jeremiah the prophet and priest because it was written by him . It is the "Lamentations of Jeremiah" as he wept over the city of Jerusalem following its desolation and captivity by Nebuchadnezzar. In the Septuagint version of this -- the Greek translation of the Hebrew -- there is a brief notation to the effect that as Jeremiah went up on the hillside and sat overlooking the desolate city, he uttered these lamentations.

As you read through this book, you will find many foreshadowings of our Lord weeping over the city of Jerusalem. In the Lord's last week, when he went up to the Mount of Olives and sat looking out over the city, he wept over it saying,

"O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" {Matt 23:37 RSV}

The tears ran down his face as he looked out over the city that had rejected him; this people that did not know the hour of their visitation, and had turned their backs upon the one who was their Messiah and their deliverer. . .

The book of Lamentations is also unusual in the way it is put together. There are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet, which begins with "aleph," the equivalent of our "a," and ends with "tau" which is the equivalent of our "t." (The letter "z," by the way, comes around the middle of their alphabet.) In this book of Jeremiah's Lamentations, chapters one, two and four form an acrostic, each chapter consisting of twenty-two verses, and each verse beginning with one of each of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, beginning with aleph and ending with tau. Chapter three is interesting in that it consists of sixty-six verses in triads, or triplets, in which every verse making up each triad begins with the same letter of the alphabet, so that there are twenty-two groups of three altogether, one for each letter of the alphabet. These chapters have been written very, very carefully, according to the rules of Hebrew poetry. Chapter five does not follow this acrostic plan, although it does have twenty-two verses.

This is certainly an intriguing structure, but the real interest of this book is in its content. It is a study in sorrow, a hymn of heartbreak. This is the kind of book you might read when sorrow strikes your own heart, and sorrow comes to all of us at times. As Jeremiah was looking out over Jerusalem, he saw its desolation and he remembered the terrible, bloody battle in which Nebuchadnezzar had taken the city and sacked it, destroying the temple and killing the inhabitants.

Donald Curtis: The author of Lamentations uses subtle literary devices to underpin his message. There are three that are clearly important and all, but one, are easily discerned in an English translation. First, the author uses acrostics to demark sections of the work. The acrostics are not all perfect, however, and we must understand that the author is speaking within the variation. Second, each section has different arrangements of its

verses within the acrostic pattern. Third, there are changes in the pronouns and points of view. I will first cover the first two of these devices in the next section and cover the third device when I take a chapter-by-chapter look at the book's contents.

http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=1807

Constable: Since the Jews read Lamentations on the annual fast that celebrated Jerusalem's destruction as far back as tradition reaches (cf. Zech. 7:3, 5; 8:19), it may be that the writer wrote this book to be read then. Its purpose then would have been to memorialize God's faithfulness in bringing covenant punishment on His people for their unfaithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant. The book would then have taught later generations the importance of covenant faithfulness and God's faithfulness. . .

The book consists of five laments (funeral or mourning songs, elegies). All but the third of these describe the Babylonians' destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and its aftermath. Each chapter exhibits its own special qualities of form and content, and each of the five laments looks at the destruction of Jerusalem from a different point of view.¹⁰ Yet the basic structure of the book is chiasmic.

- A The misery of Jerusalem's citizens ch. 1
- B God's punishment of Jerusalem ch. 2
- C Jeremiah's personal reactions ch. 3
- B' God's severity toward Jerusalem ch. 4
- A' The response of the godly ch. 5

There are two books in the Old Testament that deal primarily with the problem of suffering. Job treats the problem of *personal* suffering, and Lamentations deals with the problem of *national* suffering. Both books present the problem of God's justice and His love, or divine sovereignty and human responsibility, though both of them fall short of solving it. Indeed, this antinomy is insoluble this side of heaven (cf. Mark 15:34). Both books also present God rather than man as the central figure in human history.

The writer viewed the devastation of Jerusalem and the punishment of the Judahites as divine judgment, not primarily the result of the Babylonian invader from the north. This added a depth to the tragedy that it would not have had if viewed as simply a loss in war.

. . .

The lack of hope in these laments is due in part to the writer's viewing the tragedy as divine discipline. The destruction had been so great that the people could not see, or had perhaps forgotten, God's promises of a future beyond the conquest. Similarly, Jesus' disciples did not remember the promises of His resurrection because the tragedy of His death so overwhelmed them initially.

<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/lamentations.pdf>

Irving Jensen:

- I. LAMENT (1:1 – 4:22)
 - A. Jerusalem Weeps (1:1-22)
 - 1. Fallen Jerusalem Described (1:1-11)
 - 2. Fallen Jerusalem Laments (1:12-19)

3. Plea for Vindication (1:20-22)
- B. Jehovah Punishes (2:1-22)
 1. Punishments Described (2:1-9)
 2. The Consequences (2:10-12)
 3. The Prophet's Reflections, and Exhortations to Zion (2:13-19)
 4. Zion's Lament to God (2:20-22)
- C. Hope in the Midst of Affliction (3:1-66)
 1. The Suffering Servant (3:1-18)
 2. Hope in the Lord (3:19-42)
 3. The Suffering Nation (3:43-54)
 4. Prayer of Gratitude (3:55-66)
- D. Sin, the Cause of Punishment (4:1-22)
 1. Horrors of the Siege (4:1-12)
 2. Sin as the Cause (4:13-20)
 3. A Ray of Hope (4:21-22)

II. PRAYER (5:1-22)

- A. "Look upon us" (5:1-10)
- B. "Woe unto us" (5:11-18)
- C. "Turn thou us" (5:19-22)
 1. Ascription (v. 19)
 2. Question (v. 20)
 3. Petition (v. 21)
 4. Question (v. 22)

Baxter: This pathetic little five-fold poem, the Lamentations, has been called "an elegy written in a graveyard." It is a memorial dirge written on the destruction and humiliation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. It is a cloudburst of grief, a river of tears, a sea of sobs.

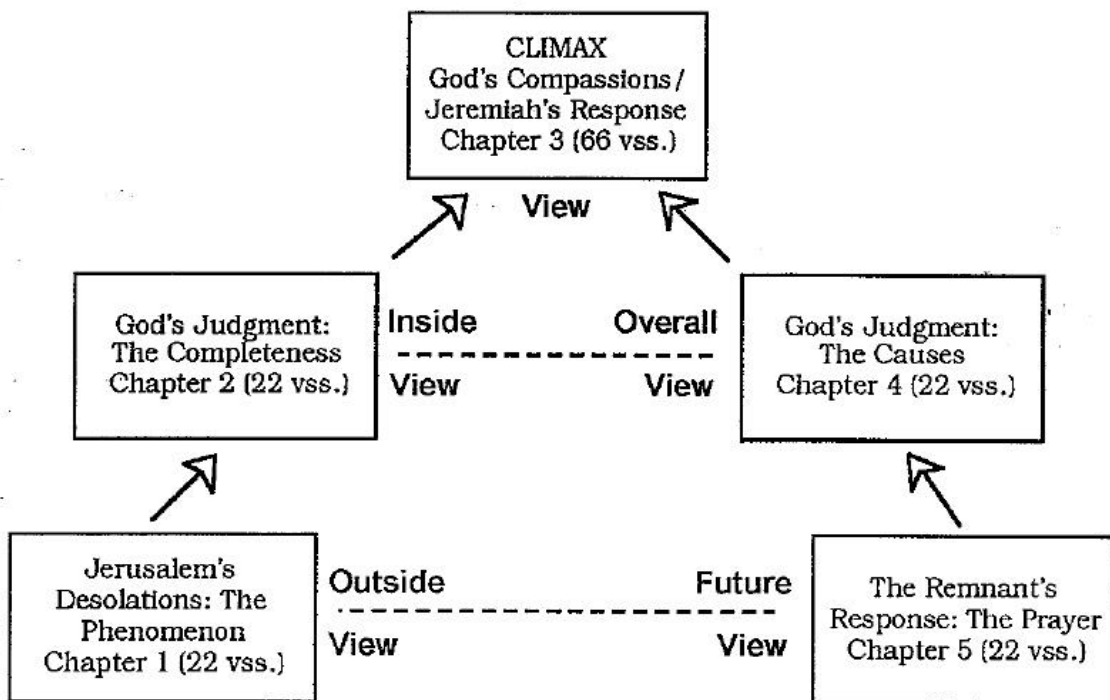
- I. Lament 1 – Jerusalem's Flight
- II. Lament 2 – Jehovah's Anger
- III. Lament 3 – Jeremiah's Grief
- IV. Lament 4 – Jehovah's Anger
- V. Lament 5 – Jerusalem's Prayer

God suffers with those whom He chastises. . . Affliction does its humbling work . . . It is of Jehovah's mercies that we are not consumed . . . The sins of Christian believers bring grievous chastisings and chastenings upon them . . .

Walter Kaiser Jr., *A Biblical Approach to Personal Suffering*, quoted by **McIntosh:** No book of the Bible is more of an orphan book than Lamentations; rarely, if ever, have interpreters chosen to use this book for a Bible study, an expository series of messages, or as a Bible conference textual exposition. Our generation's neglect of this volume has meant that our pastoral work, our caring ministry for believers, and our own ability to find direction in the midst of calamity, pain, and suffering have been seriously truncated and rendered partially or totally ineffective.

McIntosh: The reasons for the neglect of Lamentations are not too hard to discover. To begin with, it is a book of great sadness, and we don't often like to be around sadness, either other people's or our own. Then again, it is sorrow that seems unrelieved throughout the book. When you read Job, you see great sorrow, but in the end Job comes out, if not unscarred, at least largely restored and vindicated. Lamentations does not have a happy ending. Then again, where Job's message is focused around an individual, and for that reason easy to identify with, Lamentations is a national book. It treats the suffering of a whole country and the reasons for it.

The alphabetic arrangement also gives us a clue to the book, which comes to its apex in chapter three. Jeremiah wrote in a stairstep pattern, something like this:



Bryson Smith: Perspective Resources

The anguish is crippling. The pain is all encompassing, dark and suffocating. Life has collapsed. Priests and prophets blindly wander the streets. Famine ravished mothers devour their own children. Everyone is alone. There is no comforter. And worst of all, there is no escape because God himself has become the enemy. Welcome to the world of Lamentations. What on earth could we possibly learn from a place of such terror? Lamentations is a book of ordered grief. . .

Within this highly organised structure, emphasis falls on the third poem by way of its central location and its extended form. . . Surrounded as it is by poems of despair, the dominant contribution of Poem 3 is its stress on hope. *“Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope. Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassion never fail”* (Lam 3:21-22).

Here is the keynote message of Lamentations. It is a book that confronts Israel with the terrible reality of the wrath of God so as to force her to recognise that when God is against you only God can save you. When divine justice condemns only divine mercy can rescue. In this respect Lamentations is an excellent book for pointing the reader to Christ. Lamentations is a dark place against which Christ shines all the more brilliantly. . .

You can get an insight into the horror of the exile by virtue of the pictures of grief that are piled on top of each other in the first chapter of Lamentations. Images of a war torn city (1:1,4,6), a distraught widow (1:1-2), a mother torn from her children (1:5), a homeless old woman, dressed in rags (1:1-7). And all these images are made all the worse because we are repeatedly told that there is no one to comfort (1:2, 7, 16, 17, 21).

Bryson Smith is the Senior Minister of the Dubbo Presbyterian Church, New South Wales.

<http://perspective.org.au/sermonseries/169/lamentations---crosswords>

John Stevenson: LESSONS FROM LAMENTATIONS:

1) God is Sovereign over the Events of Men.

*37 Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass,
Unless the Lord has commanded it?*

*38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High
That both good and ill go forth? (Lamentations 3:37-38).*

The writer realizes that, even as bad things have taken place and they face great tragedy, God is still in control.

2) Sin brings forth Tragic Consequences.

*15 The joy of our hearts has ceased;
Our dancing has been turned into mourning.*

*16 The crown has fallen from our head;
Woe to us, for we have sinned! (Lamentations 5:15-16).*

The writer recognizes that the reason for the sorrow and the heartache and the lament is because of sin. The lie of the devil echoes from Eden: "You shall surely not die. Sin will not bear fruit. It has no lasting consequences. It doesn't matter as long as it is between two consenting adults."

3) There is Hope in the Darkness.

19 Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness.

*20 Surely my soul remembers
And is bowed down within me.*

*21 This I recall to my mind,
Therefore I have hope.*

*22 The LORD's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease,
For His compassions never fail.*

*23 They are new every morning;
Great is Thy faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:19-23).*

The writer of this book sees the most bitter afflictions, yet he is able to remember the compassion and the lovingkindness of God. This gives him HOPE.

What is hope? It is faith in the future. It is faith that the God of the past will continue to be faithful in the future.

<http://www.angelfire.com/nt/theology/Proph06.html>

Dr. Mark Dever – Justice Up Close – Overview of Lamentations

Cf. the Fall of Rome – What is safe if Rome perishes? Great turning point in history. Suffering and loss are often great turning points in history at large as well as in our own personal lives. No one likes suffering; we like prospering. Smaller griefs ... vs. larger griefs ... how have you coped.

10 Stages of Grief have been detailed: (Westburg)

- 1) state of shock
- 2) express emotion
- 3) feel depressed and lonely
- 4) May experience some physical symptoms
- 5) May become panicky
- 6) Feel a sense of guilt about the loss
- 7) Filled with anger and resentment
- 8) We resist returning
- 9) Gradually hope comes through
- 10) We struggle to affirm reality

Structure of Lamentations – series of 5 laments; acrostic form; Fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians was cataclysmic; Israelites had lost their capital city; their most defensible point; more devastating loss than we can begin to imagine; to lose the land was to lose the promise was to lose their special relationship with God. Grotesque suffering of people; perplexing questions of people in despair; written not just as an expression of grief, but to help people cope with suffering and loss. Understand God in the midst of your suffering

Suffering acts as a check on our hopes – refining them and even changing them. It either hardens us or makes us more pliable in God's hands. How do you fare in times of suffering?

5 Things we can learn when these calamities come:

1) God would lead the Israelites **To confess their sins (Chap. 1)**

Desolation well captured at beginning of vs. 9 – Jerusalem had been shocked at her fall.

Grim circumstances ... what were they to do? Confess their sins.

Their sins are the reason for their sufferings. What about us ... how should we react?

We must be patient and humble. Don't become hardened and bitter. See your sin. Be humbled by God's Word rather than by God's Wrath. Don't confess the sins of others, but your own sins.

2) God would lead these Israelites **To recognize who their Judge was (Chap. 2)**

People sought messages of false hope that would soothe their suffering; all of this destructive work was God's work; the Lord has fulfilled His Word; it would have been easy to blame others;

3) **To consider their leaders (Chap. 4)**

leaders are condemned for having led the people in a bad way; cared for themselves more than their flocks

4) **To Pray for their future (Chap. 5)** – this is a prayer to God that the prophet would lead the people in; a prayer for restoration; at least ask God for His help; for some understanding; for some light; while there is life and breath it is there for a reason; there is still hope; what reason was there for God to listen to them if they were being judged

5) **To Hope in God (Chap. 3)** – most important chapter at the center of the book
Don't look at your circumstances or yourself; look to God; He may dash some of your hopes, but will give you better ones; you will experience trials that are greater than your ability to figure out or come up with explanation for; know from God's character that He can be trusted

Conclusion: What do you value more than God Himself

<http://www.chbcaudio.org/1998/10/>

OVERVIEW OF BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

Introduction:

Last week we studied Jeremiah's prophetic words regarding the harsh reality of the Fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Captivity. God's justice was displayed in His terrible judgments against His own people who had degenerated into apostasy and idolatry. Today in the Book of Lamentations we see the heart of the prophet exposed and broken as he weeps over the rubble of the destroyed city and the desecrated temple. No wonder that Jeremiah earned the reputation of "*the weeping prophet*" -- Not just because he cried, but because his entire prophetic ministry was marked by **compassionate sorrow**, **personal suffering**, and **emotional vulnerability** in the face of a collapsing nation. His tears were for both the people and the God whose love they rejected.

"Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people." — **Jeremiah 9:1**

J. Sidlow Baxter: This pathetic little five-fold poem, the Lamentations, has been called "an elegy written in a graveyard." It is a **memorial dirge** written on the destruction and humiliation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. It is a cloudburst of grief, a river of tears, a sea of sobs.

Like the Song of Solomon, this is another book that has largely been neglected in evangelical preaching circles – but for vastly different reasons. We have a natural aversion to dwell on the topic of **suffering**. At least in the book of Job you have a happy resolution with Job being abundantly blessed and restored to health, family life and prosperity. But here Jeremiah is left in his cave overlooking the ruined city with only a glimmer of future hope based on the unchanging character of God.

Walter Kaiser Jr.: Our generation's neglect of this volume has meant that our pastoral work, our caring ministry for believers, and our own ability to find direction in the midst of calamity, pain, and suffering have been seriously truncated and rendered partially or totally ineffective.

We need the message of this book to help those struggling with pain and suffering; those mourning some great loss and overwhelmed with grief. The **nugget of hope** that the prophet highlights comes at the center of these five chapters as the point of emphasis:

"This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. ²² The LORD's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; Great is Thy faithfulness."

Big Idea: THE HEAVY HAND OF THE LORD'S DISCIPLINE FOR SIN BRINGS CATASTROPHIC DEVASTATION AND INTENSE GRIEF BUT STILL A WINDOW FOR HOPE AND RESTORATION

Reasons to study this book:

- To find comfort when experiencing extreme times of sorrow and grief and suffering as we reflect on the character of God

- To understand the workings of the Lord's heavy hand of discipline upon His own people because of their sin
- To motivate us to confession of sin and repentance
- To appreciate the abundant fountain of the Lord's lovingkindnesses, compassions and faithfulness – no matter how bleak our circumstances might look
- To be confronted with how seriously God takes sin and the awful consequences of His anger
- To be reminded of God's Sovereignty over all of the nations and His future promises yet remaining for the nation Israel

Structure of the Book:

The 5 chapters represent **5 songs of lament**.

Chaps. 1, 2, 4 are funeral dirges written as acrostics;

Chap. 3 at the center of the book has 3 times as many verses = triple acrostic: aaa / bbb / etc.;

Chap. 5 is not an acrostic.

Chaps. 1&2 have 3 lines per verse;

Chap. 4 has 2 lines;

Chaps. 3&5 have 1 line per verse.

This elaborate structure stands in contrast to the passionate outpouring of grief and emotion.

Lamentations was in regular use in the synagogues by the time the NT came to be written; It is still read publicly by orthodox Jews on the day the temple was destroyed by the Romans under the emperor Titus in 70 AD (a later destruction of the temple).

Jeremiah probably wrote this eyewitness account not long after the destruction of the city and right before he was taken captive to Egypt.

(1:1) PRELUDE: GRIEF VS JOY

I. (CHAP 1) FIRST DIRGE: SORROWS WITHOUT COMFORT

II. (CHAP 2) SECOND DIRGE: GOD'S ALL-CONSUMING ANGER

III. (CHAP 3) THIRD DIRGE: REKINDLING OF HOPE

IV. (CHAP 4) FOURTH DIRGE: ANGRY JUDGMENT

V. (CHAP 5) FIFTH DIRGE: APPEAL FOR RESTORATION

(1:1) PRELUDE: GRIEF VS JOY

3 STARK CONTRASTS BETWEEN SPIRITUAL GRIEF AND SPIRITUAL JOY

A. CONTRAST #1: LONELINESS VS COMMUNITY

*“How lonely sits the city
That was full of people!”*

Steven Smith: Jerusalem was once lovely and vivacious, the center of the nation that was central to God’s plan. Was there a more envied place in the whole world? She was God’s bride! This is the place where David ruled with imperial, military gravitas. This is the place where Solomon built palaces so grand that the queen of Sheba came to visit. Jerusalem was spectacular, magnificent, marvelous! The beauty is important to remember because it makes **Lamentations 1:1** more provocative. She went from epicenter to wasteland.

B. CONTRAST #2: HELPLESSNESS VS GREATNESS

*“She has become like a widow
Who was once great among the nations!”*

Psalm 146:9 *“The Lord protects the strangers; He supports the fatherless and the widow, but He thwarts the way of the wicked.”*

C. CONTRAST #3: SLAVE VS ROYALTY

*“She who was a princess among the provinces
Has become a forced laborer!”*

John 8:36 *“If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”*

(1:2-22) FIRST DIRGE: SORROWS WITHOUT COMFORT

JERUSALEM LIES DEVASTATED WITH NO ONE TO COMFORT

5 CRIES OF DESPAIR: (organized around the repetition of the same refrain)

A. (:2-6) THE DESPAIR OF EXILE AND CAPTIVITY

Refrain: (:2) *“She has none to comfort her”*

B. (:7-11) THE DESPAIR OF HUMILIATION AND DEFILEMENT

Refrain: (:9) *“She has no comforter”*

C. (:12-16) THE DESPAIR OF PAIN AND REJECTION

Refrain: (:16) *“Because far from me is a comforter”*

D. (:17-19) THE DESPAIR OF ISOLATION AND POWERLESSNESS

Refrain: (:17) *“There is no one to comfort her”*

E. (:20-22) THE DESPAIR OF PROLONGED AND INTENSE SUFFERING

Refrain: (:21) *“There is no one to comfort me”*

Ray Stedman: Each chapter stresses and develops a particular aspect of sorrow. Chapter one gives us a description of the utter depths of sorrow, the desolation of spirit that sorrow makes upon the human heart, the sense of abandonment, of complete loneliness. Here

you can see how vividly the prophet has captured this feeling as he pours out the feelings of his own heart. The people have been vanquished and taken into captivity; the city has been set on fire and totally destroyed.

Walter Kaiser Jr.: Jerusalem is personified as a woman who has been forsaken by her friends, massacred by her enemies, left bereft of her former glory, and now stands comfortless and without any “*resting place*.” Zion in her stateless, friendless, hopeless, godless, and Messiahless condition was without a “*resting place*;” her condition was the reverse situation of the Moabitess, Ruth, who found a **place of rest** in Jehovah and Judah (**Ruth 1:9; 3:1**).

II. (CHAP 2) SECOND DIRGE: GOD’S ALL-CONSUMING ANGER -- POURED OUT UPON JERUSALEM – MOURNING AND MOANING THE DAY OF THE LORD’S ANGER CONSUMES JERUSALEM WITH TOTAL DESTRUCTION

This chapter should be a wake-up call to those who minimize or overlook the extent and severity of God’s wrath. Sin must be taken seriously. If God would so fiercely discipline His chosen nation Israel with such all-consuming anger, what will be the end of those who reject His authority and rebel against His commands? This **day of the Lord’s anger** is but a foretaste of that great and awful Day of the Lord that awaits. Read this chapter through twice: the first time noting every reference to God’s anger and the second time underlining every description of the totality of destruction unleashed by God’s wrath.

A. (:1-10) THE PERSPECTIVE OF WHAT THE LORD HAS DONE TO HIS PEOPLE – GOD HAS POURED OUT HIS WRATH IN TOTAL DESTRUCTION

1. (:1) The Removal of Israel’s Glory

*“How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger!
He has cast from heaven to earth the glory of Israel,
And has not remembered His footstool in the day of His anger.”*

2. (:2-3) The Destruction of Israel’s Strength and Defenses

*“The Lord has swallowed up; He has not spared all the habitations of Jacob.
In His wrath He has thrown down the strongholds of the daughter of Judah;
He has brought them down to the ground;
He has profaned the kingdom and its princes.
In fierce anger He has cut off all the strength of Israel;
He has drawn back His right hand from before the enemy.
And He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire consuming round about.”*

3. (:4-5) The Role Reversal so that the Defender of Israel Now Destroys Like Her Enemy

*“He has bent His bow like an enemy;
He has set His right hand like an adversary
and slain all that were pleasant to the eye;
In the tent of the daughter of Zion He has poured out His wrath like fire.
The Lord has become like an enemy.*

*He has swallowed up Israel; He has swallowed up all its palaces.
He has destroyed its strongholds and multiplied in the daughter of Judah
mourning and moaning.”*

4. (:6-7) The Rejection of All Ritualistic Worship and Religious Celebration

*“And He has violently treated His tabernacle like a garden booth;
He has destroyed His appointed meeting place.
The Lord has caused to be forgotten the appointed feast and sabbath in Zion.
And He has despised king and priest in the indignation of His anger.
The Lord has rejected His altar, He has abandoned His sanctuary;
He has delivered 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 an appointed
feast.”*

5. (:8-9) The Obliteration of Israel’s Unique Identity as the People of God

*“The Lord determined to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion.
He has stretched out a line, He has not restrained His hand from destroying,
And He has caused rampart and wall to lament; They have languished together.
Her gates have sunk into the ground, He has destroyed and broken her bars.”
Her king and her princes are among the nations;
The law is no more.
Also her prophets find no vision from the Lord.”*

**B. (:11-19) THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE IMPACT OF THAT SCENE OF
DESTRUCTION ON THE PROPHET – GOD’S PEOPLE LIE DEVASTATED –
CRYING OUT TO THE LORD WHILE THEIR ENEMIES EXULT**

1. (:11-12) Unmitigated Sorrow with the Echoes of Pitiful Cries

*“My eyes fail because of tears, my spirit is greatly troubled;
My heart is poured out on the earth,
because of the destruction of the daughter of my people,
When little ones and infants faint in the streets of the city.
They say to their mothers, ‘Where is grain and wine?’
As they faint like a wounded man in the streets of the city,
As their life is poured out on their mothers’ bosom.”*

2. (:13) Unprecedented Ruin with no Savior in Sight

*“How shall I admonish you?
To what shall I compare you, O daughter of Jerusalem?
To what shall I liken you as I comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion?
For your ruin is as vast as the sea; Who can heal you?”*

3. (:14) Unchecked False Prophets with their Failure to Reprove Sin

*“Your prophets have seen for you false and foolish visions;
And they have not exposed your iniquity so as to restore you from captivity,
But they have seen for you false and misleading oracles.”*

4. (:15-16) Unabashed Mocking with Derisive Exultation

*“All who pass along the way clap their hands in derision at you;
They hiss and shake their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem:
‘Is this the city of which they said,
The perfection of beauty, a joy to all the earth?’”
All your enemies have opened their mouths wide against you;
They hiss and gnash their teeth.
They say, ‘We have swallowed her up!
Surely this is the day for which we waited; We have reached it, we have seen it.’”*

5. (:17) Unrelenting Discipline with the Sovereign and Faithful Lord Exalting Israel’s Enemies

*“The Lord has done what He purposed;
He has accomplished His word which He commanded from days of old.
He has thrown down without sparing,
and He has caused the enemy to rejoice over you;
He has exalted the might of your adversaries.”*

Steven Smith: Anyone with any sympathy whatsoever is disturbed by this image of a city destroyed at the hands of God. What are we to make of this? How do we explain God’s action? First, remember the **uniqueness** of this situation. This nation is the (singular, definite article) chosen people of God. They are unique. They were to have a love relationship with God like a bride to her groom. As such, God would use them to be a blessing to the nations and to fulfill all his covenant promises. Their rejection of their groom/God was serious because their responsibility to their God was great.

6. (:18-19) Unceasing Crying with Pleas for Mercy and Compassion

*“Their heart cried out to the Lord,
‘O wall of the daughter of Zion,
let your tears run down like a river day and night;
Give yourself no relief, let your eyes have no rest.
Arise, cry aloud in the night at the beginning of the night watches;
Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord;
Lift up your hands to Him for the life of your little ones
Who are faint because of hunger at the head of every street.’”*

C. (:20-22) THE APPEAL TO THE LORD FOR COMPASSION

Change of perspective indicator: “See, O Lord and look”

1. (:20A) Desperate Appeal

*“See, O Lord, and look!
With whom hast Thou dealt thus?”*

2. (:20B-21A) Four Devastated Groups

a. Mothers / Infants

*“Should women eat their offspring,
The little ones who were born healthy?”*

b. Priests / Prophets

“Should priest and prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?”

c. Young / Old

“On the ground in the streets lie young and old”

d. Virgins / Young Men

“My virgins and my young men have fallen by the sword.”

3. (:21B-22) Summary of Destruction:

The Lord Has Consumed Jerusalem in Anger with Total Destruction

“Thou hast slain them in the day of Thine anger,

Thou has slaughtered, not sparing.

Thou didst call as in the day of an appointed feast my terrors on every side;

And there was no one who escaped or survived in the day of the Lord’s anger,

Those whom I bore and reared, my enemy annihilated them.”

III. (CHAP 3) THIRD DIRGE: REKINDLING OF HOPE THE JOURNEY FROM DESPAIR TO HOPE HINGES ON THE CHARACTER OF GOD – HIS LOVINGKINDNESS, COMPASSION AND FAITHFULNESS

Everyone faces situations of suffering, grief, and trial. It is important to remember that this context in Lamentations arises from the sin of God’s people and His corresponding judgment – different than the unprovoked trials faced by Job at the hand of Satan. The tone of hopelessness and despair that weighs heavily throughout these dirges is broken here by the ray of sunshine of the character of God. His lovingkindness and compassion can never be exhausted. We wake up every morning to find new resources to encourage us. Because God is faithful we can cling to His promises and hope in His deliverance and restoration. Note the structure of this chapter. It is still an acrostic – but now you have 3 consecutive verses starting with the same Hebrew letter – so the total number of verses = 22 X 3 = 66.

A. (:1-18) THE STARTING POINT -- NO STRENGTH . . . NO HOPE FOR THE PROPHET – VIEWED AS THE SUFFERING SERVANT

1. (:1-6) No Light for the Afflicted Prophet Because the Life-Giver is Against Him
2. (:7-12) No Help Because the Helper Has Become the Hunter
3. (:13-18) No Peace or Happiness or Strength or Hope – Instead Pain and Derision and Bitterness and Fear and Rejection are His Lot

B. (:19-42) THE TURNING POINT -- THE CHARACTER OF GOD REKINDLES HOPE FOR THE NATION ISRAEL – GOD’ LOVINGKINDNESS, COMPASSION AND FAITHFULNESS

1. (:19-21) A Broken Spirit is the Foundation for Hope
2. (:22-24) The Character of God is the Basis for Hope = Key to the entire book

a. Unceasing Lovingkindnesses

“The Lord’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease.”

b. Unexhausting Compassions

“For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning.”

c. Unchanging Faithfulness

“Great is Your faithfulness.”

These words were the inspiration for a hymn first introduced during the 1954 Billy Graham Crusade in Great Britain. The words were written by **Thomas Chisholm**, a man born in a Kentucky log cabin, a man who never even received a high school education.

*"Great is Thy faithfulness, Great is Thy faithfulness;
morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided,
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me."*

William Wye: God's Unfailing Faithfulness

God's unfailing faithfulness means that everything He says and does is certain, and that we can be certain that He will always be one hundred percent God, one hundred percent of the time, or He will not be God at all.

- Jeremiah discovered in **verse 22a** that His faithfulness is never partial, but He has an unfailing fullness of faithfulness. . .
- Finally, His faithfulness is not stale, He has an unfailing freshness of faithfulness.

<http://sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=77252>

d. Unlimited Inheritance

“The Lord is my portion, ' says my soul.”

e. Rekindling of Hope

“Therefore I have hope in Him.”

Ray Stedman: In many ways, this is one of the most beautiful passages in all the Bible. It reveals the compassion of the heart of God. Judgment, as Isaiah says, is his **strange work**. He does not like to do it. He does not willingly afflict or grieve the sons of men. His mercies are fresh every morning. In his own pain Jeremiah remembers this: that behind all the desolation is the work of love. God destroyed Jerusalem because it was heading the wrong way. He destroyed it so that he could restore it later, and build it up again in joy and peace and blessing. The Lord does not cast off forever; though he causes grief, he will have compassion.

3. (:25-27) Patient Endurance is the Blessed Pathway to Hope

a. (:25) Patiently Seek the Lord

*“The Lord is good to those who wait for Him,
To the person who seeks Him.”*

b. (:26) Silently Wait for the Lord's Deliverance

“It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the Lord.”

- c. (:27) Meekly Accept the Lord's Nurturing Discipline and Providential Direction
"It is good for a man that he should bear the yoke in his youth."

4. (:28-30) The Loneliness of Rejection and Reproach is the Training Ground for Hope (the Fertile Soil for Hope)

- a. (:28) Sit Alone in Silence – Submitting to God's Discipline
"Let him sit alone and be silent since He has laid it on him."
- b. (:29) Shut Your Mouth – No Rebuttals – but Glimmers of Hope
"Let him put his mouth in the dust, perhaps there is hope."
- c. (:30) Surrender Your Cheek – Accept Attacks and Reproach
"Let him give his cheek to the smiter; let him be filled with reproach."

5. (:31-33) The Restorative Goal of Discipline is the Perspective of Hope

- a. (:31) Ultimate Rejection is not the Goal of Discipline
"For the Lord will not reject forever,"
- b. (:32) Restoration (according to the Lord's abundant compassion and lovingkindness) is the Goal of Discipline
*"For if He causes grief, then He will have compassion
According to His abundant lovingkindness."*
- c. (:33) Blessing Rather Than Cursing Delights the Lord
"For He does not afflict willingly or grieve the sons of men."

6. (:34-36) The Justice of the Lord is the Encouragement of Hope --
3 Injustices Condemned by the Lord – "Of these things the Lord does not approve":

- a. (:34) Oppression (or Cruel mistreatment)
"To crush under His feet all the prisoners of the land."
- b. (:35) Inequity
"To deprive a man of justice, in the presence of the Most High."
- c. (:36) Cheating (defrauding a man of his legal rights)
"To defraud a man in his lawsuit"

7. (:37-39) The Vindication of God's Judgment is the Grounds for Repentance (Leading to Hope)

- a. (:37) God is Sovereign Over All
*"Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass,
Unless the Lord has commanded it?"*
- b. (:38) God Dispenses Both Blessing and Cursing
*"Is it not from the mouth of the Most High
That both good and ill go forth?"*

- c. (:39) Man Can Offer No Complaint in Light of His Sinfulness
“*Why should any living mortal, or any man,
offer complaint in view of his sins?*”

8. (:40-42) The Response of Repentance is the Prerequisite for Hope

- a. (:40) Call for Examination and Repentance
“*Let us examine and probe our ways, And let us return to the Lord.*”
- b. (:41) Posture of Repentance and Appeal
“*We lift up our heart and hands toward God in heaven*”
- c. (:42) Confession of Sin and Rebellion
“*We have transgressed and rebelled; Thou hast not pardoned.*”

**C. (:43-66) THE DESTINATION POINT -- THE EXPECTATION OF
DELIVERANCE FOR ISRAEL AND VENGEANCE ON HER ENEMIES --**

IV. (CHAP 4) FOURTH DIRGE: ANGRY JUDGMENT

**THE ANGER OF THE LORD HAS PUNISHED HIS PEOPLE BECAUSE OF THEIR SIN –
TRANSFORMING THEIR FORMER GLORY INTO DEVASTATION – AND THIS WRATH
WILL FALL UPON THEIR GLOATING ENEMIES AS WELL**

God is always justified and righteous in His judgments. Here we have another account of the horrors of the siege and devastation of Jerusalem. The contrast between the former glory of God’s people and their present distress is striking. But the emphasis is on the culpability of the nation – especially due to the corruption of its leadership. The cup of God’s wrath needed to be drunk in full. And the nations round about like Edom who were presently gloating would soon be forced to drink the cup they deserve as well. Sin cannot go unpunished. This intense passage highlights the mercy of our Lord Jesus who willingly drank the cup of God’s wrath for us and made a complete end of our guilt and sin so that we never have to fear God’s wrath. We still may experience His loving and nurturing discipline in our lives, but Christ has been made the propitiation for our sins.

**A. (:1-10) DEVASTATION OF THE SIEGE DETAILED IN EYEWITNESS
ACCOUNT – CONTRAST BETWEEN FORMER GLORY AND CURRENT
HUMILIATION**

Howard Tillman Kuist: The most striking feature of this poem is the contrast drawn between the former glory of the Holy City and its present desolation. The city itself is like tarnished gold, and its precious stones, once devoted to a holy purpose, are scattered. As for the sons of Zion, once esteemed to be of great worth, they are now debased like earthen sherds. Mothers, deranged by suffering, have become inhuman. Their nursings are parched, their children are unfed. Those who were accustomed to delicacies are faint with hunger, while those who were clad royally now

grovel in ashes. The sufferings of the heinous sinners of Sodom were momentary as compared to the prolonged chastisement now justly inflicted upon the Covenant people. The nobles of Zion, once renowned for their healthy appearance, are now blacker than soot and shriveled like a stick. Under these conditions it would be better far to be slain by the sword than to be consumed by hunger. The hands of the women, accustomed to practice kindly deeds, now, under torments of famine, have boiled their own children for food. Prophets and priests who condemned just persons to death now are defiled with blood. Once they were honored people. Now as unclean men they are compelled to flee away as though leprous.

B. (:11) Key Verse – DEVASTATION ACCOMPLISHED BY THE ANGER OF THE LORD

*“The Lord has accomplished His wrath,
He has poured out His fierce anger;
And He has kindled a fire in Zion which has consumed its foundations.”*

C. (:12-20) DEVASTATION SHOCKS THE WATCHING WORLD AND ISRAEL’S CORRUPT LEADERS

D. (:21-22) DEVASTATION AWAITS THE GLOATING ENEMIES OF ISRAEL

**V. (CHAP 5) FIFTH DIRGE – APPEAL FOR RESTORATION
THE LORD’S UNCHANGING DOMINION AND PROMISE OF ULTIMATE RESTORATION
SHOULD GIVE HOPE EVEN IN THE MIDST OF DESOLATION AS WE CONTINUE TO
APPEAL TO HIS MERCY**

Deliverance and restoration have not yet arrived. The prophet continues to be burdened with the reality of the pain and suffering he witnesses. The hand of the Lord’s discipline has been heavy. It seems like the Lord needs to be awakened to action. The litany of indignities seems unbearable. Ultimately it is the Lord’s name that is at stake. He needs to respond to the pleas of His repentant people. Each verse in this chapter must be looked at as a separate unit with parallelism in thought between the two different members.

A. (:1) THE WAKEUP CALL – REMEMBER . . . LOOK . . . SEE

*“Remember, O Lord, what has befallen us;
Look, and see our reproach!”*

B. (:2-16) THE LITANY OF 14 INDIGNITIES (major section of this chapter)

[In studying this list, take the opposite positive blessing and meditate on all of the riches we enjoy in union with and fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ.]

1. **(:2) Bankrupt** – Possessions Appropriated by Foreigners

*“Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers,
Our houses to aliens.”*

2. (:3) Destitute Like Orphans and Widows
*"We have become orphans without a father,
Our mothers are like widows."*
3. (:4) Held Hostage for Basic Necessities
*"We have to pay for our drinking water,
Our wood comes to us at a price."*
4. (:5) Worn Out
*"Our pursuers are at our necks;
We are worn out, there is no rest for us."*
5. (:6) Enslaved
"We have submitted to Egypt and Assyria to get enough bread."

(:7) Refrain of Confession – Emphasis on the Sins of the Fathers

*"Our fathers sinned, and are no more;
It is we who have borne their iniquities."*

6. (:8) Oppressed
*"Slaves rule over us;
There is no one to deliver us from their hand."*
7. (:9) At Risk
*"We get our bread at the risk of our lives
Because of the sword in the wilderness."*
8. (:10) Starved
*"Our skin has become as hot as an oven,
Because of the burning heat of famine."*
9. (:11) Ravished
*"They ravished the women in Zion,
The virgins in the cities of Judah."*
10. (:12) Disrespected / Humiliated
*"Princes were hung by their hands;
Elders were not respected."*
11. (:13) Overworked
*"Young men worked at the grinding mill,
And youths stumbled under loads of wood."*
12. (:14) Leaderless
*"Elders are gone from the gate,
Young men from their music."*

13. (:15) Reduced to Mourning
*“The joy of our hearts has ceased;
Our dancing has been turned into mourning.”*

14. (:16A) Fallen from Glory to Derision
“The crown has fallen from our head.”

C. (:17-18) THE OVERALL IMPACT:

- HOPE ALMOST EXTINGUISHED

- JERUSALEM LIES DESOLATE

1. (:17) Hope Almost Extinguished

*“Because of this our heart is faint,
Because of these things our eyes are dim;”*

2. (:18) Jerusalem Lies Desolate

*“Because of Mount Zion which lies desolate,
Foxes prowl in it.”*

D. (:19-22) THE FINAL APPEAL

1. (:19) Dominating Principle: God is Always in Charge

*“You, O Lord, rule forever;
Your throne is from generation to generation.”*

2. (:20) Perception of Being Forgotten

*“Why do You forget us forever?
Why do you forsake us so long?”*

3. (:21) Plea for Restoration

*“Restore us to You, O Lord, that we may be restored;
Renew our days as of old.”*

4. (:22) Possibility of Ultimate Rejection

*“Unless You have utterly rejected us
And are exceedingly angry with us.”*

OUTLINE OF LAMENTATIONS

GLIMMER OF HOPE AMIDST SEA OF JUDGMENT AND DESPAIR

THE HEAVY HAND OF THE LORD'S DISCIPLINE FOR SIN BRINGS CATASTROPHIC DEVASTATION AND INTENSE GRIEF BUT STILL A WINDOW FOR HOPE AND RESTORATION

*“The Lord’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease,
For His compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
Great is your faithfulness.
‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul,
Therefore I have hope in Him.”
- Lamentations 3:22-24*

(1:1) PRELUDE: GRIEF VS JOY

3 STARK CONTRASTS BETWEEN SPIRITUAL GRIEF AND SPIRITUAL JOY

A. CONTRAST #1: LONELINESS VS COMMUNITY

1. Disadvantages of Loneliness
2. Advantages of Community

B. CONTRAST #2: HELPLESSNESS VS GREATNESS

1. Disadvantages of Widows
2. Advantages of Greatness

C. CONTRAST #3: SLAVE VS ROYALTY

1. Advantages of Royalty
2. Disadvantages of a Slave

I. (CHAP 1) FIRST DIRGE: SORROWS WITHOUT COMFORT

JERUSALEM LIES DEVASTATED WITH NO ONE TO COMFORT --

5 CRIES OF DESPAIR: (organized around the repetition of the same refrain)

A. (:2-6) THE DESPAIR OF EXILE AND CAPTIVITY

Refrain: (:2) “She has none to comfort her”

1. (:2A) The Emotion of Despair – Bitter Weeping
2. (:2B) The Treachery of Despair – Friends have become Foes
3. (:3) The Harsh Bondage of Despair – Affliction without Rest
4. (:4) The Bitter Frustration of Despair – No fulfillment for God’s People
5. (:5) The Divine Discipline of Despair – God has Turned the Tables
6. (:6) The Nakedness of Despair

B. (:7-11) THE DESPAIR OF HUMILIATION AND DEFILEMENT

Refrain: (:9) “*She has no comforter*”

1. (:7) Mocked by those who witnessed her Great Fall
2. (:8-9A) Despised because her uncleanness was exposed
3. (9B:10) Defiled by those who exploited her vulnerability
4. (:11) Despised because she is destitute of even the bare necessities

C. (:12-16) THE DESPAIR OF PAIN AND REJECTION

Refrain: (:16) “*Because far from me is a comforter*”

1. (:12) Pain that is Unique in its Severity
2. (:13-14) Pain that is Inescapable in its Suffering
3. (:15) Rejection that is Pervasive in its Scope
4. (:16) Rejection that is Hopeless in its Salvation

D. (:17-19) THE DESPAIR OF ISOLATION AND POWERLESSNESS

Refrain: (:17) “*There is no one to comfort her*” -- There is no one to help

1. (:17) Surrounded by Enemies
2. (:18A) Submitted to Divine Discipline
3. (:18B-19) Separated from all Helpers

E. (:20-22) THE DESPAIR OF PROLONGED AND INTENSE SUFFERING

Refrain: (:21) “*There is no one to comfort me*” – How long, O Lord?

1. (:20) No Escape from Despair
2. (:21A) No Relief from Mocking
3. (:21B-22A) Cry for Retribution
4. (:22B) Cry of Suffering and Despair

II. (CHAP 2) SECOND DIRGE: GOD’S ALL-CONSUMING ANGER POURED OUT UPON JERUSALEM – MOURNING AND MOANING

THE DAY OF THE LORD’S ANGER CONSUMES JERUSALEM WITH TOTAL DESTRUCTION

A. (:1-10) THE PERSPECTIVE OF WHAT THE LORD HAS DONE TO HIS PEOPLE – GOD HAS POURED OUT HIS WRATH IN TOTAL DESTRUCTION

Key phrase: “*He has*” – this is destruction the Lord has accomplished

(Think of the opposite of these as privileges that must be maintained and treasured by the people of God.)

1. (:1) The Removal of Israel’s Glory
2. (:2-3) The Destruction of Israel’s Strength and Defenses

3. (:4-5) The Role Reversal so that the Defender of Israel Now Destroys Like Her Enemy
4. (:6-7) The Rejection of All Ritualistic Worship and Religious Celebration
5. (:8-9) The Obliteration of Israel's Unique Identity as the People of God
6. (:10) The Grieving Posture of a Devastated People

B. (:11-19) THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE IMPACT OF THAT SCENE OF DESTRUCTION ON THE PROPHET – GOD'S PEOPLE LIE DEVASTATED – CRYING OUT TO THE LORD WHILE THEIR ENEMIES EXULT

Change of perspective indicator: *"My eyes"*

1. (:11-12) Unmitigated Sorrow with the Echoes of Pitiful Cries
2. (:13) Unprecedented Ruin with no Savior in Sight
3. (:14) Unchecked False Prophets with their Failure to Reprove Sin
4. (:15-16) Unabashed Mocking with Derisive Exultation
5. (:17) Unrelenting Discipline with the Sovereign and Faithful Lord Exalting Israel's Enemies
6. (:18-19) Unceasing Crying with Pleas for Mercy and Compassion

C. (:20-22) THE APPEAL TO THE LORD FOR COMPASSION

Change of perspective indicator: *"See, O Lord and look"*

1. (:20A) Desperate Appeal
2. (:20B-21A) Four Devastated Groups
3. (:21B-22) Summary of Destruction

III. (CHAP 3) THIRD DIRGE: REKINDLING OF HOPE

THE JOURNEY FROM DESPAIR TO HOPE HINGES ON THE CHARACTER OF GOD – HIS LOVINGKINDNESS, COMPASSION AND FAITHFULNESS

A. (:1-18) THE STARTING POINT -- NO STRENGTH . . . NO HOPE FOR THE PROPHET – VIEWED AS THE SUFFERING SERVANT

1. (:1-6) No Light for the Afflicted Prophet Because the Life-Giver is Against Him
2. (:7-12) No Help Because the Helper Has Become the Hunter
3. (:13-18) No Peace or Happiness or Strength or Hope – Instead Pain and Derision and

B. (:19-42) THE TURNING POINT -- THE CHARACTER OF GOD REKINDLES HOPE FOR THE NATION ISRAEL – GOD' LOVINGKINDNESS, COMPASSION AND FAITHFULNESS

1. (:19-21) A Broken Spirit is the Foundation for Hope
2. (:22-24) The Character of God is the Basis for Hope = Key to the entire book
3. (:25-27) Patient Endurance is the Blessed Pathway to Hope
4. (:28-30) The Loneliness of Rejection and Reproach is the Training Ground for Hope (the Fertile Soil for Hope)
5. (:31-33) The Restorative Goal of Discipline is the Perspective of Hope
6. (:34-36) The Justice of the Lord is the Encouragement of Hope --

7. (:37-39) The Vindication of God's Judgment is the Grounds for Repentance
(Leading to Hope)
8. (:40-42) The Response of Repentance is the Prerequisite for Hope

C. (:43-66) THE DESTINATION POINT -- THE EXPECTATION OF DELIVERANCE FOR ISRAEL AND VENGEANCE ON HER ENEMIES --

1. (:43-54) No Resolution Yet – Just Pain and Destruction and Apparent Hopelessness
2. (:55-66) Expectation of Deliverance and Vengeance

IV. (CHAP 4) FOURTH DIRGE: ANGRY JUDGMENT

THE ANGER OF THE LORD HAS PUNISHED HIS PEOPLE BECAUSE OF THEIR SIN – TRANSFORMING THEIR FORMER GLORY INTO DEVASTATION – AND THIS WRATH WILL FALL UPON THEIR GLOATING ENEMIES AS WELL

A. (:1-10) DEVASTATION OF THE SIEGE DETAILED IN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT – CONTRAST BETWEEN FORMER GLORY AND CURRENT HUMILIATION

1. (:1-5) First Series of Contrasts
2. (:6) Problem = Unimaginable Sin (worse than Sodom)
3. (:7-10) Second Series of Contrasts

B. (:11) DEVASTATION ACCOMPLISHED BY THE ANGER OF THE LORD – key verse

*“The Lord has accomplished His wrath,
He has poured out His fierce anger;
And He has kindled a fire in Zion which has consumed its foundations.”*

C. (:12-20) DEVASTATION SHOCKS THE WATCHING WORLD AND ISRAEL'S CORRUPT LEADERS

1. (:12-16) Response to the Devastation
2. (:17-20) Additional Causes for the Devastation

D. (:21-22) DEVASTATION AWAITS THE GLOATING ENEMIES OF ISRAEL

1. (:21) Your Turn is Coming, Edom
2. (:22A) Your Turn is Completed, Israel
3. (:22B) Your Turn is Coming, Edom

V. (CHAP 5) FIFTH DIRGE – APPEAL FOR RESTORATION

THE LORD'S UNCHANGING DOMINION AND PROMISE OF ULTIMATE RESTORATION SHOULD GIVE HOPE EVEN IN THE MIDST OF DESOLATION AS WE CONTINUE TO APPEAL TO HIS MERCY

A. (:1) THE WAKEUP CALL – REMEMBER . . . LOOK . . . SEE

B. (:2-18) THE LITANY OF 14 INDIGNITIES (major section of this chapter)

1. (:2) Bankrupt – Possessions Appropriated by Foreigners
2. (:3) Destitute Like Orphans and Widows
3. (:4) Held Hostage for Basic Necessities
4. (:5) Worn Out
5. (:6) Enslaved

(:7) Refrain of Confession – Emphasis on the Sins of the Fathers

*“Our fathers sinned, and are no more;
It is we who have borne their iniquities.”*

6. (:8) Oppressed
7. (:9) At Risk
8. (:10) Starved
9. (:11) Ravished
10. (:12) Disrespected / Humiliated
11. (:13) Overworked
12. (:14) Leaderless
13. (:15) Reduced to Mourning
14. (:16A) Fallen from Glory to Derision

(:16B) Refrain of Confession – Emphasis on the Sins of All

“Woe to us, for we have sinned!”

C. (:17-18) THE OVERALL IMPACT:

- HOPE ALMOST EXTINGUISHED

- JERUSALEM LIES DESOLATE

1. (:17) Hope Almost Extinguished
2. (:18) Jerusalem Lies Desolate

D. (:19-22) THE FINAL APPEAL

1. (:19) Dominating Principle: God is Always in Charge
2. (:20) Perception of Being Forgotten
3. (:21) Plea for Restoration
4. (:22) Possibility of Ultimate Rejection

TEXT: Lamentations 1:1

TITLE: *PRELUDE: GRIEF VS JOY*

BIG IDEA:

3 STARK CONTRASTS BETWEEN SPIRITUAL GRIEF AND SPIRITUAL JOY

INTRODUCTION:

This passage should remind us of the riches we enjoy in union with our Lord Jesus Christ. The heart of the OT prophet was broken as he surveyed the landscape of the devastated former capital of the City of God. Certainly our fellowship within our local church should provide the stimulus to keep us on a path of spiritual joy rather than despairing in spiritual grief.

I. CONTRAST #1: LONELINESS VS COMMUNITY

*“How lonely sits the city
That was full of people!”*

A. Disadvantages of Loneliness

- Unnatural for a city to be empty and deserted and by itself – forsaken by all
- Painful Memories of former times of companionship now forfeited
- Subject to further decay and deterioration

(see other sermon outlines below on subject of loneliness)

B. Advantages of Community

- Life and activity should characterize a city rather than death and silence
- Possibility for growth and stimulus
- Full of hope and promise for the future

Yet God is able to gather the lonely under His wing and provide all of their emotional needs as the one who knows them the best.

If you are lonely, come to the Lord Jesus Christ today.

John 14:3 *“If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”*

II. CONTRAST #2: HELPLESSNESS VS GREATNESS

*“She has become like a widow
Who was once great among the nations!”*

A. Disadvantages of Widows:

- Dependent on others for financial support
- Bereft of companionship
- No possibility of offspring

TEXT: Lamentations 1:1

TITLE: *PRELUDE: GRIEF VS JOY*

BIG IDEA:

3 STARK CONTRASTS BETWEEN SPIRITUAL GRIEF AND SPIRITUAL JOY

INTRODUCTION:

This passage should remind us of the riches we enjoy in union with our Lord Jesus Christ. The heart of the OT prophet was broken as he surveyed the landscape of the devastated former capital of the City of God. Certainly our fellowship within our local church should provide the stimulus to keep us on a path of spiritual joy rather than despairing in spiritual grief.

Steven Smith: Jerusalem was once lovely and vivacious, the center of the nation that was central to God's plan. Was there a more envied place in the whole world? She was God's bride! This is the place where David ruled with imperial, military gravitas. This is the place where Solomon built palaces so grand that the queen of Sheba came to visit. Jerusalem was spectacular, magnificent, marvelous! The beauty is important to remember because it makes Lamentations 1:1 more provocative. She went from epicenter to wasteland.

I. CONTRAST #1: LONELINESS VS COMMUNITY

*"How lonely sits the city
That was full of people!"*

A. Disadvantages of Loneliness

- Unnatural for a city to be empty and deserted and by itself – forsaken by all
- Painful Memories of former times of companionship now forfeited
- Subject to further decay and deterioration

(see other sermon outlines below on subject of loneliness)

B. Advantages of Community

- Life and activity should characterize a city rather than death and silence
- Possibility for growth and stimulus
- Full of hope and promise for the future

Yet God is able to gather the lonely under His wing and provide all of their emotional needs as the one who knows them the best.

If you are lonely, come to the Lord Jesus Christ today.

John 14:3 *"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also."*

II. CONTRAST #2: HELPLESSNESS VS GREATNESS

“She has become like a widow

Who was once great among the nations!”

A. Disadvantages of Widows:

- Dependent on others for financial support
- Bereft of companionship
- No possibility of offspring

Yet God is able to be the companion and the sustainer of widow and even provide joy in the midst of their grief.

B. Advantages of Greatness:

- Self-sufficient
- Honored among the nations
- Powerful and prestigious
- Source of blessing for surrounding Gentile nations; a light and a witness

If you are helpless, come to the Lord Jesus Christ today.

Psalm 146:9 *“The Lord protects the strangers; He supports the fatherless and the widow, but He thwarts the way of the wicked.”*

III. CONTRAST #3: SLAVE VS ROYALTY

“She who was a princess among the provinces

Has become a forced laborer!”

A. Advantages of Royalty

- Wealthy
- In Control
- Lives in Comfort
- Freedom

B. Disadvantages of a Slave

- Impoverished
- Dominated by others – the nation of Israel sent off into captivity
- Consigned to hard labor in Babylon – remember the former days in Egypt
- Bondage

Yet God is able to turn slavery into an opportunity to serve Him and look to Him for our ultimate reward and inheritance.

If you are in bondage, come to the Lord Jesus Christ today.

John 8:36 *“If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”*

Matt. 11: 28 “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”

So whatever our circumstances, we should look to the Lord for the fullness of joy. He is our portion and all that we need.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Which would you choose – grief or joy? The choice is simple.
- 2) Is our church characterized by life and activity that is encouraging and edifying?
- 3) Do we have a sense of our greatness in connection with Christ?
- 4) Are we looking forward to reigning with Christ in glory?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

MacArthur: Jeremiah wrote Lamentations as an eye-witness possibly with Baruch’s secretarial help, during or soon after Jerusalem’s fall in 586 B.C. It was mid-July when the city fell and mid-August when the temple was burned. Likely Jeremiah saw the destruction of walls, towers, homes, palace, and temple; he wrote while the event remained painfully fresh in his memory, but before his forced departure to Egypt ca. 583 B.C. . .

The chief focus of Lamentations is on God’s judgment in response to Judah’s sin. . . A second theme which surfaces is the hope found in God’s compassion. . . Though the book deals with disgrace, it turns to God’s great faithfulness (3:22-25) and closes with grace as Jeremiah moves from lamentation to consolation (5:19-22),

Apple: Previous sermon on **Life of Joseph**
THE HEARTACHE AND POTENTIAL REWARDS OF LONELINESS --
JOSEPH -- A MAN ALONE WITH GOD FOR MUCH OF HIS LIFE

1. Joseph's Privileged Position

the favorite of his father (37:3); had a coat of many colors
living in the promised land
surrounded by friends and loved ones
blessed with spiritual insight in the interpretation of dreams
promising future -- Joseph will rule over his elder brothers
obedient to his father's wishes (37:13)

2. Sold into Captivity by his Envious Brothers

thru no fault of his own (in fact he was carrying out desires of his father stripped of his privileged position (symbolized by tunic) 37:23 reported to be dead

3. Faithful Service in Obscurity in Egypt (alone in the world)

Key = "*the Lord was with Joseph*"

Result: "*so he became a successful man*" (Gen. 39:2)

The Lord caused all he did to prosper

Given great responsibility by his Egyptian master

4. Unjustly Accused and Imprisoned

Faced with great temptation

Suffered persecution for his righteous conduct

Still the Lord was with Joseph and blessed him

5. Restoration to Privileged Position

Realization of promised future

Relationships with family renewed

Apple: Former sermon outline on topic of Loneliness

THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS SUFFICIENT TO NEGATE EVEN THE MOST EXTREME CASE OF LONELINESS

I. THE PAIN OF LONELINESS -- OF DESERTION AND ISOLATION EXTREME EXAMPLES

A. The Example of Christ -- John 16:31-32

not just deserted by a bunch of casual acquaintances; these were his hand-picked disciples in whom He had invested an entire ministry of training (cf. The Training of the Twelve)
not just disciples, but friends John 15:13-15

B. Example of Apostle Paul -- 2 Tim. 4:16-18

In his first trial, no one had taken Paul's side.
especially imp. in light of the necessity for corroborating testimony;
what type of sacrifice and risk had Paul taken for others?
This was during his first Roman imprisonment or a prelim hearing;
Cf. the difference to now:
Demas had deserted him (4:10) and "all those in Asia"
had turned away from him (2 Tim. 1:15). But Onesiphorus had come from Asia and Luke remained faithful
Importance of forgiving those who let you down: "may it not be counted against them" -- Paul felt abandoned, but not vengeful
Insufficiency of human aid

C. Example of Job -- Chap. 16-17

recognizes the sovereignty of God behind the desertion he has

experienced (both comforting and painful)

- D. Example of Hagar -- Genesis 16
Sarah despised her and treated her harshly
- E. Example of Elijah -- 1 Kings 19
The Fear associated with Loneliness
- F. Example of Joseph in prison -- Genesis 39:21 no complaint

II. THE REALITY OF GOD'S PRESENCE – WHAT SHOULD IT MEAN TO ME?

- A. What did it mean to Christ? "*Yet I am not alone*"
relationship He enjoyed as a Son to a perfect Father
there are times children need their father present
a time to draw even closer to God
- B. What did it mean to Paul? the Lord stood with me and strengthened me
Phil. 4:13
purpose for this strengthening was not just to enjoy the good life,
but to be empowered for continued ministry -- don't let loneliness
divert us from the ministry God has called us to
- C. What did it mean to Job? 42:5-6
importance of the fear of God
need for repentance of any bitterness and complaint
- D. What did it mean to Hagar? "*Thou art a God who sees*"
- E. What did it mean to Elijah? experienced the presence of God
- F. What did it mean to Joseph? no deviation from faithfulness

CONCLUSION:

The example of Christ on the Cross: the extreme pain and suffering when His Father turned His back on Him. We will never have to experience that type of loneliness and pain

SONGS:

Lonely Voices Crying in the City
Blest be the Tie that binds

TEXT: Lamentations 1:2-22

TITLE: *FIRST DIRGE: SORROWS WITHOUT COMFORT*

BIG IDEA:

JERUSALEM LIES DEVASTATED WITH NO ONE TO COMFORT

This is one of the darkest chapters in all of Scripture. You can find a few glimmers of hope – but for the most part this is a picture of sorrows without comfort. The repeated refrain says it all: *“There is no one to comfort me.”* This poetic chapter was written as an acrostic in the Hebrew. Most commentators divide this chapter into 2 sections based on the viewpoint of the one speaking:

A. (:1-11) Jeremiah’s Sorrow

B. (:12-22) Jerusalem’s Sorrow

I have taken a more thematic approach centered around the repeated refrain.

Steven Smith: Jeremiah writes that Judah is suffering because of her sin (v. 5), and that is why she is despised by all (v. 8). She fell because she failed to consider the consequences of her actions (v. 9). . . The idea is clear: sin brings ruin. Sin ruins individuals; sin ruins families; sin ruins churches; sin ruins cities. The weight of destruction is heavier still in light of the warnings: the prophets, the metaphors, the miracles. All the things God did in the past to prevent this from happening are now clear.

(:1) INTRODUCTION: SPIRITUAL GRIEF VS SPIRITUAL JOY

3 contrasts – see earlier message

A. Loneliness vs Community

“How lonely sits the city that was full of people!”

B. Helplessness vs Greatness

“She has become like a widow who was once great among the nations.!”

C. Slavery vs Royalty

“She who was a princess among the provinces has become a forced laborer!”

5 CRIES OF DESPAIR: (organized around the repetition of the same refrain)

I. (:2-6) THE DESPAIR OF EXILE AND CAPTIVITY

Refrain: (:2) *“She has none to comfort her”*

A. (:2A) The Emotion of Despair – Bitter Weeping

*“She weeps bitterly in the night;
And her tears are on her cheeks”*

B. (:2B) The Treachery of Despair – Friends have become Foes

“She has none to comfort her among all her lovers. = Refrain

*All her friends have dealt treacherously with her;
They have become her enemies.”*

MacArthur: *lovers . . . friends . . . have become her enemies . . .* This refers to the heathen nations allied to Judah, and their idols whom Judah “loved” (Jer 2:20-25). Some later joined as enemies against her (2Ki 24:2,7; Ps 137:7).

Ellison: Once the monarchy was firmly established, Israel was always faced with an inescapable choice. She could rely on God for her safety against external aggression, or she could turn to allies great and small. . . The prophets warned Israel that such alliances involved apostasy, but both the northern and the southern leaders would not listen. Judah had learned that such friends were a broken reed (**Ezek 29:6-7**).

C. (:3) The Harsh Bondage of Despair – Affliction without Rest

*“Judah has gone into exile under affliction and under harsh servitude;
She dwells among the nations, but she has found no rest;
All her pursuers have overtaken her in the midst of distress.”*

D. (:4) The Bitter Frustration of Despair – No fulfillment for God’s People

1. Frustration of Fellowship and Worship

*“The roads of Zion are in mourning because no one comes to the
appointed feasts.”*

2. Frustration of Government and Justice

“All her gates are desolate”

3. Frustration of Religious Rulers

“Her priests are groaning”

4. Frustration of all that is Pure and Precious

“Her virgins are afflicted”

Albert Barnes: The “virgins” took a prominent part in all religious festivals

5. Frustration Summary – Nothing but bitterness

“and she herself is bitter.”

E. (:5) The Divine Discipline of Despair – God has Turned the Tables

1. Role Reversal

*“Her adversaries have become her masters,
Her enemies prosper”*

2. Righteous Execution of Divine Discipline

“For the Lord has caused her grief

Because of the multitude of her transgressions”

3. Collateral Damage

“Her little ones have gone away as captives before the adversary.”

F. (:6) The Nakedness of Despair

1. Stripping away of Majesty

“All her majesty has departed from the daughter of Zion”

2. Stripping away of Material Prosperity and Provision

“Her princes have become like deer that have found no pasture”

3. Stripping away of Might and Power

“And they have fled without strength before the pursuer.”

Constable: Once majestic, Jerusalem now sat humiliated. Her leaders, including Zedekiah and his advisers, had fled like frightened stags that could find no pasture even though they had been strong in the past (cf. 2 Kings 24:1, 12; 25:4; Jer. 39:4-5).

II. (:7-11) THE DESPAIR OF HUMILIATION AND DEFILEMENT

Refrain: (:9) “She has no comforter”

A. (:7) Mocked by those who witnessed her Great Fall

*“In the days of her affliction and homelessness
Jerusalem remembers all her precious things that were from the days of old,
When her people fell into the hand of the adversary and no one helped her.
The adversaries saw her, they mocked at her ruin.”*

B. (:8-9A) Despised because her uncleanness was exposed

*“Jerusalem sinned greatly,
Therefore she has become an unclean thing.
All who honored her despise her because they have seen her nakedness;
Even she herself groans and turns away.
Her uncleanness was in her skirts;
She did not consider her future.
Therefore she has fallen astonishingly;*

She has no comforter.” = Refrain

C. (9B:10) Defiled by those who exploited her vulnerability

*“See, O Lord, my affliction,
For the enemy has magnified himself!
The adversary has stretched out his hand over all her precious things,
For she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary,*

The ones whom You commanded that they should not enter into Your congregation.”

MacArthur: *enter her sanctuary* – This was true of the Ammonites and Moabites (Dt 23:3; Ne 13:1,2). If the heathen were not allowed to enter for worship, much less were they tolerated to loot and destroy. On a future day, the nations will come to worship (Zec 14:16).

- D. (:11) Despised because she is destitute of even the bare necessities
*“All her people groan seeking bread;
They have given their precious things for food to restore their lives themselves.
See, O Lord, and look, For I am despised.”*

III. (:12-16) THE DESPAIR OF PAIN AND REJECTION

Refrain: (:16) “Because far from me is a comforter”

- A. (:12) Pain that is Unique in its Severity
*“Is it nothing to all you who pass this way?
Look and see if there is any pain like my pain
Which was severely dealt out to me,
Which the Lord inflicted on the day of His fierce anger.”*
- B. (:13-14) Pain that is Inescapable in its Suffering
*“From on high He sent fire into my bones, and it prevailed over them.
He has spread a net for my feet; He has turned me back;
He has made me desolate, faint all day long.
The yoke of my transgressions is bound; by His hand they are knit together.
They have come upon my neck; He has made my strength fail.
The Lord has given me into the hands of those against whom I am not able to stand.”*

Constable: The Lord had sent fire into the city's bones when he allowed the Babylonians to burn it. He had captured Jerusalem as a bird in His net. He had thoroughly desolated and demoralized her by removing all sustenance from her. . . Four metaphors describe God's judgment of Jerusalem in the last four verses: fire (v. 12), a net (v. 13), a yoke (v. 14), and a winepress (v. 15).

Albert Barnes: The yoke of punishment thus imposed and securely fastened, bows down her strength by its weight, and makes her totter beneath it.

- C. (:15) Rejection that is Pervasive in its Scope
1. Extends to the Strong Men
“The Lord has rejected all my strong men in my midst;”
 2. Extends to the Young Men

“He has called an appointed time against me to crush my young men;”

3. Extends to the Virgin Daughter of Zion

“The Lord has trodden as in a wine press the virgin daughter of Judah.”

D. (:16) Rejection that is Hopeless in its Salvation

1. Emotion of Despair

“For these things I weep; my eyes run down with water;”

2. Repetition of Refrain – No hope of Deliverance

“Because far from me is a comforter, one who restores my soul.”

3. Admission of Defeat

“My children are desolate because the enemy has prevailed.”

IV. (:17-19) THE DESPAIR OF ISOLATION AND POWERLESSNESS

Refrain: (:17) “There is no one to comfort her” -- There is no one to help

A. (:17) Surrounded by Enemies

“Zion stretches out her hands;

There is no one to comfort her; = Refrain

*The Lord has commanded concerning Jacob
That the ones round about him should be his adversaries;
Jerusalem has become an unclean thing among them.”*

MacArthur: *unclean* – This refers to a menstruous woman, shamed, separated from her husband and the temple (cf. vv. 8,9 and Lv 15:19ff.).

B. (:18A) Submitted to Divine Discipline

*“The Lord is righteous;
For I have rebelled against His command;
Hear now, all peoples, and behold my pain”*

C. (:18B-19) Separated from all Helpers

1. Separated from Youthful Strength

“My virgins and my young men have gone into captivity”

2. Separated from Misguided Alliances

“I called to my lovers, but they deceived me”

3. Separated from Religious Ministers

*“My priests and my elders perished in the city
While they sought food to restore their strength themselves.”*

Constable: The city had called to its political allies (e.g., Egypt) and its leaders for help, but even the priests and elders had been selfishly taking care of themselves rather than guarding the citizens.

V. (:20-22) THE DESPAIR OF PROLONGED AND INTENSE SUFFERING

Refrain: (:21) “There is no one to comfort me” – How long, O Lord?

A. (:20) No Escape from Despair

1. Appeal to the Lord

“See, O Lord, for I am in distress;”

2. Anxiety and Affliction

*“My spirit is greatly troubled;
My heart is overturned within me,”*

3. Admission of Guilt

“For I have been very rebellious.”

4. Anywhere . . . No Escape

*“In the street the sword slays;
In the house it is like death.”*

B. (:21A) No Relief from Mocking

“They have heard that I groan;

There is no one to comfort me; = Refrain

*All my enemies have heard of my calamity;
They are glad that You have done it.”*

C. (:21B-22A) Cry for Retribution

*“Oh, that You would bring the day which You have proclaimed,
That they may become like me.
Let all their wickedness come before You;
And deal with them as You have dealt with me for all my transgressions;”*

D. (:22B) Cry of Suffering and Despair

“For my groans are many and my heart is faint.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) This chapter offers many insights into the subject of loneliness and isolation. What steps do you take or tactics do you use to combat loneliness?
- 2) Study the various admissions of sin and guilt in this passage. Was the prophet in any way blaming God or trying to make excuses for the people here? Do we accept God's discipline as righteous and just?
- 3) Why does God choose to use as instruments of discipline those nations who are even more wicked than His people?
- 4) What type of similar emotions did the Lord Jesus experience as He cried out "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Malick:

I. A--First Dirge--A Vivid, Dramatic Description of the isolation of Jerusalem and Its Misery Because of Her Sin: through the voices of the prophet and a personified city Jerusalem's desolation is described as being both physical and covenantal because of the sin of the people, but throughout the descriptions are repeated calls for Yahweh to deliver them 1:1-22

A. The Prophet's Description of the Desolate City:

Jeremiah laments the fall of Jerusalem from a position of a prominence to one of servitude and covenant cursing, and yet pleads for Yahweh's deliverance

1:1-11

1. The Fall of a Prominent City: 1:1-9

a. Description of the Fall: 1:1-9a

b. Refrain--A Call for Yahweh to Look at Their Distress: 1:9b

2. The Loss of Covenant Blessings: 1:10-11

a. Description of the Loss: 1:10-11a

b. Refrain--A Call for Yahweh to Look at Their Distress: 1:11b

B. The People's (Zion's) Description of the Desolate City:

A personified city (Zion) describes her judgment as just from Yahweh, laments that there are no comforters, confesses their guilt in misplaced trust, and cries to Yahweh for deliverance 1:12-22

1. A Just Judgment from Yahweh: 1:12-15

2. There Are No Comforters: 1:16-17

3. A Confession of Misplaced Trust in People and Foreign Alliances 1:18-19

4. A Petition for Yahweh to See Their Distress and Judge Their Enemies

1:20-22

Stedman: Each chapter stresses and develops a particular aspect of sorrow. Chapter one gives us a description of the utter depths of sorrow, the desolation of spirit that sorrow makes upon the human heart, the sense of abandonment, of complete loneliness. Here

you can see how vividly the prophet has captured this feeling as he pours out the feelings of his own heart. The people have been vanquished and taken into captivity; the city has been set on fire and totally destroyed. Verse 16:

*"For these things I weep;
my eyes flow with tears;
for a comforter is far from me,
one to revive my courage;
my children are desolate,
for the enemy has prevailed." {{Lam 1:16 RSV}}*

Donald Curtis: Besides the acrostics, each verse in chapter 1 contains three related thoughts. For example, the first verse contains these three thoughts:

1. How lonely sits the city that was full of people.
2. She has become like a widow who was once great among the nations.
3. She who was a princess among the provinces has become a forced laborer. . .

Lamentations flows from grief at arms length to up front and personal. The first chapter talks about the recent events in Jerusalem in a detached manner. In my own mind, I even imagine the chapter as a breaking news event from the WJER newsroom. Verses 1 through 11 can be made to sound like an on-scene reporter describing the recent events. Verses 12-16, in typical news fashion, presents the microphone to devastated Jerusalem herself to speak firsthand of her suffering. In verse 17, the camera moves back to show the outstretched arms of Jerusalem in grief, while in verses 18 through 22, she continues to speak of her sorrows. While this musing is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, it connects with some realities about the chapter; the tone of Lamentations 1 is factual. The author, or observer, may or may not have been part of the events. And although it invokes sympathy in the reader, personal grief is kept away. Notice how this meshes with the perfect acrostic structure in chapter 1. The author is trying to keep himself together by pushing the events away. He is in denial.

Constable: The destruction and misery of Jerusalem (the first lament) ch. 1

A. An observer's sorrow over Jerusalem's condition 1:1-11

1. The extent of the devastation 1:1-7
2. The cause of the desolation 1:8-11

B. Jerusalem's sorrow over her own condition 1:12-22

1. Jerusalem's call to onlookers 1:12-19
2. Jerusalem's call to the Lord 1:20-22

Calvin: The Prophet could not sufficiently express the greatness of the calamity, except by expressing his astonishment. He then assumes the person of one who on seeing something new and unexpected is filled with amazement. It was indeed a thing incredible; for as it was a place chosen for God to dwell in, and as the city Jerusalem was not only the royal throne of God, but also as it were his earthly sanctuary, the city might have been thought exempted from all danger. Since it had been said, *"Here is my rest for ever, here will I dwell,"*

(Psalm 132:14,)

God seemed to have raised that city above the clouds, and to have rendered it free from all earthly changes. We indeed know that there is nothing fixed and certain in the world, and that the greatest empires have been reduced to nothing; but, the state of Jerusalem did not depend on human protection, nor on the extent of its dominion, nor on the abundance of men, nor on any other defenses whatever, but it was founded by a celestial decree, by the promise of God, which is not subject to any mutations. When, therefore, the city fell, uprooted from its foundations, so that nothing remained, when the Temple was disgracefully plundered and then burnt by enemies, and further, when the king was driven into exile, his children slain in his presence, and also the princes, and when the people were scattered here and there, exposed to every contumely and reproach, was it not, a horrible and monstrous thing?

It was not, then, without reason that the Prophet exclaimed, How! for no one could have ever thought that such a thing would have happened; and then, after the event, no one with a calm mind could have looked on such a spectacle, for innumerable temptations must have come to their minds; and this thought especially must have upset the faith of all — “What does God mean? How is it that, he has promised that this city would be perpetual? and now there is no appearance of a city, and no hope of restoration in future.” As, then, this so sad a spectacle might not only disturb pious minds, but also upset them and sink them in the depths of despair, the Prophet exclaims, How! and then says, How sits the city solitary, which had much people! Here, by a comparison, he amplifies the indignity of the fact; for, on the one hand, he refers to the flourishing state of Jerusalem before the calamity, and, on the other hand, he shows how the place had in a manner been turned into darkness. For this change, as I have said, was as though the sun had fallen from heaven; for the sun has no firmer standing in heaven than Jerusalem had on earth, since its preservation was connected with the eternal truth of God. He then says that this city had many people, but that now it was sitting solitary. The verb to sit, is taken in Hebrew in a good and in a bad sense. Kings are said to sit on their thrones; but to sit means sometimes to lie prostrate, as we have before seen in many places. Then he says that Jerusalem was lying solitary, because it was desolate and forsaken, though it had before a vast number of people.

Walter Kaiser: Jerusalem is personified as a woman who has been forsaken by her friends, massacred by her enemies, left bereft of her former glory, and now stands comfortless and without any “*resting place*.” Zion in her stateless, friendless, hopeless, godless, and Messiahless condition was without a “*resting place*;” her condition was the reverse situation of the Moabitess, Ruth, who found a place of rest in Jehovah and Judah (Ruth 1:9; 3:1).

Swindoll: Jerusalem’s cries express a timeless truth: Only those who have personally experienced the depths of loneliness can understand the anguish of a lonely heart. And no individual, group, or people has ever suffered the pangs of alienation more intensely than has the Son of God, Jesus Christ. For over thirty years, the spotless Lamb walked among sinners and met their needs – only to be betrayed, beaten, mocked, and crucified

by those He sought to help. He died alone . . . forsaken by God and despised by man.

Dr. Doug McIntosh, Cornerstone Bible Church – **Godly Grief and the Serious Disciple – The Elements of Godly Grief**

- Its Loneliness (:1-7)
 - the loss of abundance (:1)
 - the loss of allies (:2)
 - the loss of a resting place (:3)
 - the loss of worship (:4)
 - the loss of prestige (:5)
 - the loss of courage (:6)
 - the loss of prosperity (:7)
- Its Causes (:8-11)
 - the shame sin brings (:8)
 - the defilement sin brings (:9)
 - the desecrations sin brings (:10)
 - the famine sin brings (:11)
- Its Purposes (:12-17)
 - to turn us back to the Lord (:12-13)
 - to tie us up in our sin (:14)
 - to crush us before our enemies (:15)
- Its Confession (:18-22)
 - the Lord has been in the right (:18a)
 - we have rebelled against His Word (:18b-19)
 - we plead for Him to witness our sufferings (:20)
 - we plead for His requital of our enemies (:21-22)

<http://www.cornerstonebibch.org/Pages/Sermons/Lamentations/Lam01.pdf>

TEXT: Lamentations 2:1-22

TITLE: SECOND DIRGE: GOD'S ALL-CONSUMING ANGER Poured out upon
JERUSALEM – MOURNING AND MOANING

BIG IDEA:
**THE DAY OF THE LORD'S ANGER CONSUMES JERUSALEM WITH TOTAL
DESTRUCTION**

INTRODUCTION:

This chapter should be a wake-up call to those who minimize or overlook the extent and severity of God's wrath. Sin must be taken seriously. If God would so fiercely discipline His chosen nation Israel with such all-consuming anger, what will be the end of those who reject His authority and rebel against His commands? This day of the Lord's anger is but a foretaste of that great and awful Day of the Lord that awaits. Let's learn lessons from this account of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Read this chapter through twice: the first time noting every reference to God's anger and the second time underlining every description of the totality of destruction unleashed by God's wrath.

Steven Smith: Walter Brueggemann observed that the Psalms move from orientation to disorientation to reorientation (Spirituality of the Psalms). Life is oriented in a certain direction, and then tragedy brings disorientation. We want to go back to the original orientation. This is not how God works. Rather, ultimately he reorients us to a new reality.

**I. (:1-10) THE PERSPECTIVE OF WHAT THE LORD HAS DONE TO HIS PEOPLE –
GOD HAS Poured OUT HIS WRATH IN TOTAL DESTRUCTION**

Key phrase: "*He has*" – this is destruction the Lord has accomplished
(Think of the opposite of these as privileges that must be maintained and treasured by the people of God.)

Steven Smith: 26 action verbs attributed to God in the first nine verses . . . God has done this.

A. (:1) The Removal of Israel's Glory

*"How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger!
He has cast from heaven to earth the glory of Israel,
And has not remembered His footstool in the day of His anger."*

Israel's privileged position among all the nations has been negated for this time of the Lord's discipline. His anger rather than His favor is being poured out on the nation.

B. (:2-3) The Destruction of Israel's Strength and Defenses

*"The Lord has swallowed up; He has not spared all the habitations of Jacob.
In His wrath He has thrown down the strongholds of the daughter of Judah;
He has brought them down to the ground;
He has profaned the kingdom and its princes."*

*In fierce anger He has cut off all the strength of Israel;
He has drawn back His right hand from before the enemy.
And He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire consuming round about.”*

John Calvin: Now it was in itself a grievous thing that the people had been so rejected by God, that no help could be expected from him; but it was still a harder thing, that he went forth armed to destroy his people. And the metaphor of fire ought to be noticed; for had he said that God’s right hand was against his people, the expression would not have been so forcible; but when he compared God’s right hand to fire which burned, and whose flame consumed all Israel, it was a much more dreadful thing.

C. (:4-5) The Role Reversal so that the Defender of Israel Now Destroys Like Her Enemy

*“He has bent His bow like an enemy;
He has set His right hand like an adversary and slain all that were pleasant to the eye;
In the tent of the daughter of Zion He has poured out His wrath like fire.
The Lord has become like an enemy.
He has swallowed up Israel; He has swallowed up all its palaces.
He has destroyed its strongholds and multiplied in the daughter of Judah mourning and moaning.”*

D. (:6-7) The Rejection of All Ritualistic Worship and Religious Celebration

*“And He has violently treated His tabernacle like a garden booth;
He has destroyed His appointed meeting place.
The Lord has caused to be forgotten the appointed feast and sabbath in Zion.
And He has despised king and priest in the indignation of His anger.
The Lord has rejected His altar, He has abandoned His sanctuary;
He has delivered 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 an appointed feast.”*

E. (:8-9) The Obliteration of Israel’s Unique Identity as the People of God

1. Her defining walls and gates

*“The Lord determined to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion.
He has stretched out a line, He has not restrained His hand from destroying,
And He has caused rampart and wall to lament; They have languished together.
Her gates have sunk into the ground, He has destroyed and broken her bars.”*

2. Her divinely appointed leadership

“Her king and her princes are among the nations;”

3. Her divine code for personal and civil conduct – “Thou shalt . . . Thou shalt not . . .”

“The law is no more.”

4. Her prophetic vision – “Thus saith the Lord”

“Also her prophets find no vision from the Lord.”

Constable: The city gates with their bars were no longer effective in keeping

Jerusalem safe, and the king (Jehoiachin) and his advisers had gone into exile. The Mosaic Law now failed to govern the Israelites since they could no longer observe its cultic ordinances. Yahweh had also stopped giving His prophets revelations of His will.

Ellison: From the temple the lament passes briefly to the city and then to the king (surely Jehoiachin is meant) and his ministers in exile.

F. (:10) The Grieving Posture of a Devastated People

*“The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground, they are silent.
They have thrown dust on their heads; They have girded themselves with sackcloth.
The virgins of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground.”*

II. (:11-19) THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE IMPACT OF THAT SCENE OF DESTRUCTION ON THE PROPHET – GOD’S PEOPLE LIE DEVASTATED – CRYING OUT TO THE LORD WHILE THEIR ENEMIES EXULT

Change of perspective indicator: “My eyes”

A. (:11-12) Unmitigated Sorrow with the Echoes of Pitiful Cries

*“My eyes fail because of tears, my spirit is greatly troubled;
My heart is poured out on the earth, because of the destruction of the daughter of my people,
When little ones and infants faint in the streets of the city.
They say to their mothers, ‘Where is grain and wine?’
As they faint like a wounded man in the streets of the city,
As their life is poured out on their mothers’ bosom.”*

B. (:13) Unprecedented Ruin with no Savior in Sight

*“How shall I admonish you? To what shall I compare you, O daughter of Jerusalem?
To what shall I liken you as I comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion?
For your ruin is as vast as the sea; Who can heal you?”*

C. (:14) Unchecked False Prophets with their Failure to Reprove Sin

*“Your prophets have seen for you false and foolish visions;
And they have not exposed your iniquity so as to restore you from captivity,
But they have seen for you false and misleading oracles.”*

MacArthur: As Jer 23:16,17 indicates, these lies spoke of peace and comfort, not judgment. Cf. Jer 23:30-40 to see how such lying led to destruction.

Ellison: The best commentaries on this verse are **Jeremiah 23:18-22** and **Ezekiel 13:10-16**. Just as the majority of preachers are so obsessed with the holiness of the church that they have not been able to take the church’s shortcomings seriously, so it was in Israel. It took the shock of the Babylonian exile to break the power and influence of the popular prophets and to discredit them finally.

D. (:15-16) Unabashed Mocking with Derisive Exultation

*“All who pass along the way clap their hands in derision at you;
They hiss and shake their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem:
‘Is this the city of which they said, The perfection of beauty, a joy to all the earth’?”
All your enemies have opened their mouths wide against you;
They hiss and gnash their teeth.
They say, ‘We have swallowed her up!.
Surely this is the day for which we waited; We have reached it, we have seen it.’”*

E. (:17) Unrelenting Discipline with the Sovereign and Faithful Lord Exalting Israel’s Enemies

*“The Lord has done what He purposed;
He has accomplished His word which He commanded from days of old.
He has thrown down without sparing, and He has caused the enemy to rejoice over you;
He has exalted the might of your adversaries.”*

This surprising work of judgment against God’s People came from the hand of the Lord Himself. He used Israel’s enemies as His instruments of discipline. The Lord is faithful to carry out His Word and accomplish all of His purposes.

Steven Smith: Anyone with any sympathy whatsoever is disturbed by this image of a city destroyed at the hands of God. What are we to make of this? How do we explain God’s action? First, remember the uniqueness of this situation. This nation is the (singular, definite article) chosen people of God. They are unique. They were to have a love relationship with God like a bride to her groom. As such, God would use them to be a blessing to the nations and to fulfill all his covenant promises. Their rejection of their groom/God was serious because their responsibility to their God was great. Knowing this instructs us not to attach divine motives on national or natural disasters when they occur in other times or to other nations. Israel is unique, and so is her relationship with God. This uniqueness is clear in the summary verse quoted above (v. 17).

F. (:18-19) Unceasing Crying with Pleas for Mercy and Compassion

*“Their heart cried out to the Lord,
‘O wall of the daughter of Zion, let your tears run down like a river day and night;
Give yourself no relief, let your eyes have no rest.
Arise, cry aloud in the night at the beginning of the night watches;
Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord;
Lift up your hands to Him for the life of your little ones
Who are faint because of hunger at the head of every street.’”*

Ryken: Then Jeremiah turned his suffering into intercession, which is the general movement of the book of Lamentations. One commentator calls the prayer at the end of the second lament “a desperate recounting of utmost woe.” It is the prayer of someone suffering a crisis of faith because he has witnessed unspeakable horrors, of someone who has no answers, only questions.

III. (:20-22) THE APPEAL TO THE LORD FOR COMPASSION

Change of perspective indicator: “*See, O Lord and look*”

A. (:20A) Desperate Appeal

*“See, O Lord, and look!
With whom hast Thou dealt thus?”*

B. (:20B-21A) Four Devastated Groups

1. Mothers / Infants

*“Should women eat their offspring,
The little ones who were born healthy?”*

2. Priests / Prophets

“Should priest and prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?”

3. Young / Old

“On the ground in the streets lie young and old”

4. Virgins / Young Men

“My virgins and my young men have fallen by the sword.”

C. (:21B-22) Summary of Destruction:

The Lord Has Consumed Jerusalem in Anger with Total Destruction

*“Thou hast slain them in the day of Thine anger,
Thou has slaughtered, not sparing.
Thou didst call as in the day of an appointed feast my terrors on every side;
And there was no one who escaped or survived in the day of the Lord’s anger,
Those whom I bore and reared, my enemy annihilated them.”*

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When God disciplines his people in this NT church age for their sin, is He angry with them?
- 2) How is God glorified through terrible displays of judgment such as here and as in the great and final Day of the Lord?
- 3) Is there more despair over the present state of destruction described in such detail here ... or in the apparent lack of any deliverer or resource to turn to for help?
- 4) Why is this judgment so thorough and so all-consuming?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Howard Tillman Kuist: The first part (2:1-10) is a vivid eyewitness portrayal of the fall of Jerusalem in which the speaker depicts how palace and stronghold, altar and sanctuary, ramparts and walls, gates and bars, are broken down under the might of a relentless hand. The splendor of Zion is beclouded. The habitations of Jacob are broken down. The might of Israel is cut off. The kingdom and its rulers are dishonored. The king and princes are captured. Prophet and priest are silenced. The elders and maidens of Jerusalem are bowed to the ground. What is most singular about all this is that the Lord is pictured as the enemy! He himself has initiated and executed the action. His anger has been poured out on the daughter of Zion. *“He has bent his bow like an enemy.”* He has determined to lay Zion in ruins. He has not restrained his hand from destroying.

The second part (2:11-22) becomes even more pointed as the sufferings of the people during the siege are described. Some starving children swoon with hunger in the streets, others find no nourishment at their mothers’ breasts. Zion’s ruin, beyond human aid, is seen to be as vast as the ocean in its scope. This overwhelming judgment is viewed as a direct consequence of the deceptive visions of the false prophets and their misleading oracles. Well may travelers hiss and wag their heads and cry out in amazement over the ruin of the city (2:15). This day of terror, marked by the enemy’s destruction of the Holy City, is declared to be but what the Lord himself had purposed. Well may the daughter of Zion give herself no respite, but pour out her heart at every watch hour of the night for the lives of her children.

But is God really as relentless and obdurate as these acts would imply? What makes this outpouring of grief amid Zion’s ruin so moving is the fact that the daughter of Zion does not blame God for her woes. Rather she recognizes the futility of seeking relief from any source except him.

Swindoll: In Lamentations 2, Jeremiah recounts the measures God took in His discipline of Judah. As he does, he suggests five results of a sinful lifestyle that apply to any individual or community that disobeys God’s counsel.

- A. Diminishing of one’s dignity and unique impact
- B. Removal of one’s stability and vitality
- C. Multiplication of inner anguish
- D. Feelings of abandonment and emptiness
- E. Heartbreaking absence of vision and purpose

Malick:

II. B--Second Dirge--A Description of the City's Desolation from the Vantage Points of Yahweh and the Prophet (Jeremiah): The Lord describes the desolation of Jerusalem as that which He has actively done against His own, and the prophet confirms that her desolation is due to her sin, but he urges the people to seek the Lord in prayer, and the Lord to look upon the tragic state of His people 2:1-22

A. The City's Desolation from Yahweh's Vantage Point: Like a Master against His possessions and the Covenant God against His covenantal institutions, the Lord has caused the destruction of

Jerusalem so that no one knows what to do 2:1-10

1. The Lord against His Possessions: God (Adonai, yn*da , "Lord") has turned against his own possessions as an owner/enemy 2:1-5
2. The Lord against His Institutions: God (YHWH, hwhy) has turned against His covenantal Institutions and no one knows what to do 2:6-10
 - a. The Temple and Theocratic Administrators: 2:6
 - b. The Altar and Feasts: 2:7
 - c. The Covenant City: 2:8-9a
 - d. No one knows what to do: 2:10

B. The City's Desolation from the Prophet's Vantage Point:

The prophet laments over the devastation of the city which was brought upon her by her sin, exhorts the people to cry to the Lord for help, and calls upon the Lord to look upon them in their inhumane state of death 2:11-22

1. The Prophet Laments over the City: The prophet cries over the city whose suffering is typified in the suffering of little children, who were led astray by false prophets, whose enemies are now in control, and who are experiencing the fulfillment of Yahweh's word in judgment 2:11-17
 - a. The Suffering of Little Children: 2:11-12
 - b. The Deceit of False Prophets Who Led the Nation Astray: 2:13-14
 - c. Enemies Are Now In Control: 2:15-16
 - d. God's Word Has Been Fulfilled in Judgment (cf. Deuteronomy 28): 2:17
2. A Call for the People to Cry Out to God: The Prophet urges the people to cry out in prayer to God because all of their lives are dependent upon this 2:18-19
 - a. Exhortation to Constantly Pray: 2:18
 - b. All of Their Lives Depend on Their Praying: 2:19
3. A Call upon God to See the State of the Nation:
The prophet urges the Lord to see the tragic state of affairs in the city as dead children are eaten, and priests, prophets, and the people of God are slaughtered 2:20-22
 - a. An Exhortation for the Lord to See the Nation's Inhumane State of Affairs: 2:20a
 - b. An Exhortation for the Lord to See the Slaughter of Those Who Administer the Covenant (Priests and Prophets): 2:20b
 - c. An Exhortation for the Lord to See the Slaughter of the Covenantal People: 2:21-22

Chris Tiller: In the Book of Lamentations, a heartfelt cry is lifted up to God. There is no attempt to minimize the tragedy of what has happened. There is no attempt to disguise the sorrow and the pain the author feels at seeing the city devastated, the people dying, mothers desperate to feed their babies and despair everywhere. There is no attempt to put on a happy face. There is no attempt to defend God.

Stephens-Hodge: Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian armies are completely ignored! The capture of Jerusalem, so far from being a defeat for Jehovah, was a victory for His righteousness. . . The plight of innocent children (11, 12) is a theme which recurs in verses 19-21 and in iv. 4, 10. The writer evidently could not get the harrowing scenes out of his mind. The elders or heads of families who shared in the administration were powerless to do anything. . . In verse 22,

instead of summoning worshippers to a festival, God has called together His terrors round about (cf. Je. Xx. 3, AV and RV mg.) and so encircled His people that none escaped nor remained.

Charles Dyer: But lest anyone forget the ultimate Judge, Jeremiah again (cf. v. 17) reminded the people that God was the One wielding the sword of punishment. The Babylonians prevailed only because He let them prevail. God had warned Israel what He would do if she disobeyed Him (Lev. 26:14-39); Deut. 28:15-68) and He faithfully carried out His threat. Those whom He had loved were now destroyed.

Steven Brinegar: A Biblical View of History

The twin problem of history:

- 1) complete ignorance – those who don't know the mistakes of history are doomed to repeat them; cf realm of heresy – nothing new under the sun; just a recycling of previous heresy
- 2) the problem of living in the past – instead of looking at what we need to do today, we rest on what we did previously

Structure of book: Hebrew poetry; acrostic for chaps 1-4; idea of completeness – I have used every single letter of the alphabet to describe and show what is happening; author begins very general and then gets more specific

Zion covered with a cloud of God's anger (v.1). Dealing with the source of the suffering described in chapter 1. It was because God had purposed this destruction. The image of the destruction was so complete and total it looked like God had completely forgotten His people.

The Lord removed 4 things from the people:

- 1) (:3) **their national strength** (represented by horns)
Hand of God and power of God is the only thing that offers strength and protection; stubborn in their idolatry; Israel thought they were the biggest fish and could not be swallowed up by any other nation; but Lord is far bigger
- 2) (:6) **their religious strength**; destroyed His tabernacle; His place of assembly; just because we have the trappings of religion and worship doesn't mean we have the true essence of worship; they had forgotten to keep the sabbath; God desires worship from the heart; unfeigned worship
- 3) (:8) **removed their city defenses**; the Lord has purposed to destroy the walls of Jerusalem; the wall was the final defense of a city; cf. how mighty wall of Jericho fell before hand of Lord; people took false security in their defensive system
- 4) (:9) **removed the Word of God**; "*the law is no more*"; they had no more desire for the law;

<http://www.biblepc.org/downloads/091607Sermon.mp3>

Dr. Doug McIntosh, Cornerstone Bible Church – Should You Take Suffering Personally?

Four reasons why I believe that suffering (regardless of whether it is deserved or undeserved) is always to be taken personally. To begin with, we take deserved suffering personally...

- Because God regards sin and indifference to Him as personal offenses (:1-10)
 - the anger of God: the problem
 - the anger of God: the solution

God's anger is never explosive, unreasonable or unexplainable. It is His firm displeasure with our wickedness and sin. It is never a ruling passion; rather, it is always an instrument of His will. As a result His anger does not shut off His compassions from us (Ps. 77:9). But it does express a personal offense.

- Because even the most godly can profit from personalized suffering, given the right conditions (:11-13) / So how do you benefit from God acting in anger? Three conditions have to be met. You must possess, first...

- A thoroughgoing confidence in the sovereignty of God
- A teachable heart
- A conviction that God suits the discipline to the offense

- Because the alternative to taking it personally is hopelessness (:14-19)

If God is not involved, then what is going on in the universe is beyond His control. And if what is going on in the universe is beyond His control, then there is no point whatever in prayer. And if there is no point whatever in prayer, then there is no hope in human experience.

- Because personal pain alerts us to a need for a personal God (:20-22)

On what do you lean when you have seen such horrible things? You have to lean on a personal God. He must be...

- One whose character is irreproachable
- One whose actions are tied to His Word

<http://www.cornerstonebibch.org/Pages/Sermons/Lamentations/Lam02.pdf>

TEXT: Lamentations 3:1-66

TITLE: *THIRD DIRGE: REKINDLING OF HOPE*

BIG IDEA:

THE JOURNEY FROM DESPAIR TO HOPE HINGES ON THE CHARACTER OF GOD – HIS LOVINGKINDNESS, COMPASSION AND FAITHFULNESS

INTRODUCTION:

Everyone faces situations of suffering, grief, and trial. It is important to remember that this context in Lamentations arises from the sin of God's people and His corresponding judgment – different than the unprovoked trials faced by Job at the hand of Satan. The tone of hopelessness and despair that weighs heavily throughout these dirges is broken here by the ray of sunshine of the character of God. His lovingkindness and compassion can never be exhausted. We wake up every morning to find new resources to encourage us. Because God is faithful we can cling to His promises and hope in His deliverance and restoration. Note the structure of this chapter. It is still an acrostic – but now you have 3 consecutive verses starting with the same Hebrew letter – so the total number of verses = 22 X 3 = 66.

I. (:1-18) THE STARTING POINT -- NO STRENGTH . . . NO HOPE FOR THE PROPHET – VIEWED AS THE SUFFERING SERVANT

A. (:1-6) No Light for the Afflicted Prophet Because the Life-Giver is Against Him

(:2) *“He has driven me and made me walk in darkness and not in light.”*

(:6) *“In dark places He has made me dwell, like those who have long been dead.”*

B. (:7-12) No Help Because the Helper Has Become the Hunter

(:8) *“Even when I cry out and call for help, He shuts out my prayer.”*

(:12) *“He bent His bow and set me as a target for the arrow.”*

C. (:13-18) No Peace or Happiness or Strength or Hope – Instead Pain and Derision and Bitterness and Fear and Rejection are His Lot

1. (:13) Pain

“He made the arrows of His quiver to enter into my inward parts.”

2. (:14) Derision

*“I have become a laughingstock to all my people,
their mocking song all the day.”*

3. (:15) Bitterness

“He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drunk with wormwood.”

4. (:16) Fear
“And He has broken my teeth with gravel; He has made me cower in the dust.”

Like giving the prophet stones to eat instead of bread

4. (:17) Rejection
“And my soul has been rejected from peace; I have forgotten happiness.”

5. (:18) Summary
“So I say, ‘My strength has perished, and so has my hope from the Lord.’”

II. (:19-42) THE TURNING POINT -- THE CHARACTER OF GOD REKINDLES HOPE FOR THE NATION ISRAEL – GOD’ LOVINGKINDNESS, COMPASSION AND FAITHFULNESS

[Illustration: cf. fire that looks like it has gone out; but when you put that fresh piece of wood on the embers and stir it up ... it bursts back into flames.]

A. (:19-21) A Broken Spirit is the Foundation for Hope

1. (:19) Plea for God to See My Affliction and Have Compassion
“Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness.”

2. (:20) Prostration of Humbling Self = Reflecting on God’s Perspective on My Afflictions

“Surely my soul remembers and is bowed down within me.”

Matt 5:3 *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

Psalm 34:18 *“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”*

Psalm 51:17 *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”*

Is. 57:15 *“For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, ‘I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.’”*

Is. 66:2 *“‘For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,’ declares the Lord. ‘But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.’”*

Lev. 26:40-42; Deut. 8:2-10; 2 Chron. 7:14; 33:12-13; Prov. 16:19; 29:23;
Is. 61:1; Micah 6:8

3. (:21) Rekindling of Hope
"This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope."

B. (:22-24) The Character of God is the Basis for Hope = Key to the entire book

1. Unceasing Lovingkindnesses
"The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease."
2. Unexhausting Compassions
"For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning."

Dyer: God offered a fresh supply of loyal love every day to His covenant people. Much like the manna in the wilderness, the supply could not be exhausted.

3. Unchanging Faithfulness
"Great is Your faithfulness."

God will always do what He has promised to do.

Dr. Neil Chadwick: In fact, these words were the inspiration for a hymn first introduced during the 1954 Billy Graham Crusade in Great Britain. The words were written by Thomas Chisholm, a man born in a Kentucky log cabin, a man who never even received a high school education. "Great is Thy faithfulness, Great is Thy faithfulness; morning by morning new mercies I see. All I have needed Thy hand hath provided, Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me."

The message is obvious and clear. When we reflect on the past, we recall the blessings and the abundance of God's provision. We also remember the pain, the sorrow and the many heartbreaks that have been endured. At that point we are tempted to identify with Jeremiah who said, "Joy is gone from our hearts; our dancing has turned to mourning." (5:15) But then we remember that even in the times of deep sorrow, the Lord has proven Himself to be faithful, and for that reason we can face the future with great hope. With the Prophet we can testify, "You came near when I called you, and you said, 'Do not fear.'" (3:57) War, destruction, and disease may rage all around us, but because the faithfulness of God has been proven over and over, ". . . there may yet be hope. . . Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love." (3:29,32)

4. Unlimited Inheritance
"'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul."

Cause for great contentment; answer to humanistic despair; looking away from one's circumstances to the character of the Lord and all we possess in union with Him

Streane: For the expression, which is a frequent one, we may compare Ps. xvi. 5. Its origin is probably to be looked for in the Lord's words to Aaron (Num. xviii. 20).

5. Rekindling of Hope

“Therefore I have hope in Him.”

C. (:25-27) Patient Endurance is the Blessed Pathway to Hope

1. (:25) Patiently Seek the Lord

*“The Lord is good to those who wait for Him,
To the person who seeks Him.”*

2. (:26) Silently Wait for the Lord’s Deliverance

“It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the Lord.”

3. (:27) Meekly Accept the Lord’s Nurturing Discipline and Providential Direction

“It is good for a man that he should bear the yoke in his youth.”

Streane: in the time when his passions are strongest and therefore most need the discipline, which, if established in its seat then, will hold sway throughout his life. The words by no means imply that the writer was young at the time he used them. Rather he is looking back through a long life of trouble and the experience which he has gained in the course of it.

Steven Smith: The argument is that since the Lord will not cast off forever, since our suffering is not eternal, why not bear up under the yoke now and learn all that God wants to teach us?

D. (:28-30) The Loneliness of Rejection and Reproach is the Training Ground for Hope (the Fertile Soil for Hope)

1. (:28) Sit Alone in Silence – Submitting to God’s Discipline

“Let him sit alone and be silent since He has laid it on him.”

2. (:29) Shut Your Mouth – No Rebuttals – but Glimmers of Hope

“Let him put his mouth in the dust, perhaps there is hope.”

3. (:30) Surrender Your Cheek – Accept Attacks and Reproach

“Let him give his cheek to the smiter; let him be filled with reproach.”

E. (:31-33) The Restorative Goal of Discipline is the Perspective of Hope

1. (:31) Ultimate Rejection is not the Goal of Discipline

“For the Lord will not reject forever,”

2. (:32) Restoration (according to the Lord’s abundant compassion and lovingkindness) is the Goal of Discipline

*“For if He causes grief, then He will have compassion
According to His abundant lovingkindness.”*

3. (:33) Blessing Rather Than Cursing Delights the Lord

“For He does not afflict willingly or grieve the sons of men.”

F. (:34-36) The Justice of the Lord is the Encouragement of Hope --

3 Injustices Condemned by the Lord – *“Of these things the Lord does not approve”*:

1. (:34) Oppression (or Cruel mistreatment)
“To crush under His feet all the prisoners of the land.”
2. (:35) Inequity
“To deprive a man of justice, in the presence of the Most High.”
3. (:36) Cheating (defrauding a man of his legal rights)
“To defraud a man in his lawsuit”

G. (:37-39) The Vindication of God’s Judgment is the Grounds for Repentance (Leading to Hope)

1. (:37) God is Sovereign Over All
“Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the Lord has commanded it?”
2. (:38) God Dispenses Both Blessing and Cursing
“Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth?”
3. (:39) Man Can Offer No Complaint in Light of His Sinfulness
“Why should any living mortal, or any man, offer complaint in view of his sins?”

Jimmy Chapman: THE SIN OF COMPLAINING - THE OPPOSITE OF THANKSGIVING

- Complaining denies God’s Sovereignty
- Complaining disrupts Christian Unity
- Complaining discredits Christian Testimony

<http://sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=114238>

H. (:40-42) The Response of Repentance is the Prerequisite for Hope

1. (:40) Call for Examination and Repentance
“Let us examine and probe our ways, And let us return to the Lord.”
2. (:41) Posture of Repentance and Appeal
“We lift up our heart and hands toward God in heaven”
3. (:42) Confession of Sin and Rebellion
“We have transgressed and rebelled; Thou hast not pardoned.”

III. (:43-66) THE DESTINATION POINT -- THE EXPECTATION OF DELIVERANCE FOR ISRAEL AND VENGEANCE ON HER ENEMIES --

A. (:43-54) No Resolution Yet – Just Pain and Destruction and Apparent Hopelessness

1. (:43-45) Lobbying for the Reversal of Divine Discipline
 - a. (:43) Divine Favor Still Hidden by Divine Anger – Pursuing and Slaying

*“Thou hast covered Thyself with anger and pursued us;
Thou has slain and hast not spared.”*

- b. (:44) Divine Access Still Hidden by Divine Blockade – Ignoring Prayers
*“Thou has covered Thyself with a cloud
so that no prayer can pass through.”*
 - c. (:45) Glory and Respect Still Replaced by Shame and Derision
*“Mere offscouring and refuse Thou hast made us
in the midst of the peoples.”*
2. (:46-48) Looking at Complete Devastation
- a. (:46) Devoured by her Enemies
“All our enemies have opened their mouth against us.”
 - b. (:47) Devastated on Every Side
“Panic and pitfall have befallen us, devastation and destruction;”
 - c. (:48) Utterly Destroyed
*“My eyes run down with streams of water
Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.”*
3. (:49-51) Longing for the Lord’s Compassion and Mercy
- a. (:49) Weeping Continually
“My eyes pour down unceasingly, without stopping,”
 - b. (:50) Waiting for the Lord to See and Act
“Until the Lord looks down and sees from heaven.”
 - c. (:51) Watching in Horror
*“My eyes bring pain to my soul
because of all the daughters of my city.”*
4. (:52-54) Lamenting the Apparent Hopelessness
- a. (:52) Pursued
*“My enemies without cause
Hunted me down like a bird!”*
 - b. (:53) Buried
*“They have silenced me in the pit
And have placed a stone on me.”*
 - c. (:54) Cut Off
*“Waters flowed over my head;
I said, ‘I am cut off!’”*

- B. (:55-66) Expectation of Deliverance and Vengeance
1. (:55-57) Desperate Cry for Help
 - a. (:55) Calling on the Name of the Lord
*“I called on Thy name, O Lord,
Out of the lowest pit.”*
 - b. (:56) Gaining a Hearing
*“Thou hast heard my voice,
Do not hide Thine ear from my prayer for relief,
From my cry for help.”*
 - c. (:57) Encouraged by the Response
*“Thou didst draw near when I called on Thee;
Thou didst say, ‘Do not fear!’”*
 2. (:58-60) Righteous Appeal for Justice
 - a. (:58) The Lord is My Redeemer, My Deliverer
*“O Lord, Thou didst plead my soul’s cause
Thou hast redeemed my life.”*
 - b. (:59) The Lord is My Righteous Judge
*“O Lord, Thou hast seen my oppression;
Judge my case.”*
 - c. (:60) The Lord Sees All Wrongs and Wicked Plots
*“Thou hast seen all their vengeance,
All their schemes against me.”*
 3. (:61-63) Vivid Reminder of Mocking
 - a. (:61) It Was Malicious
*“Thou hast heard their reproach, O Lord,
All their schemes against me.”*
 - b. (:62) It Was Constant
*“The lips of my assailants and their whispering
Are against me all day long.”*
 - c. (:63) It Was Derisive
*“Look on their sitting and their rising;
I am their mocking song.”*
 4. (:64-66) Confident Anticipation of Vengeance
 - a. (:64) Equitable Judgment
*“Thou wilt recompense them, O Lord,
According to the work of their hands.”*

- b. (:65) Unrelenting Curse
*“Thou wilt give them hardness of heart,
 Thy curse will be on them.”*

- c. (:66) Wrathful Destruction
*“Thou wilt pursue them in anger and destroy them
 From under the heavens of the Lord!”*

MacArthur: This imprecatory prayer for divine vengeance would be answered in Babylon’s fall (cf. Is 46, 47); Jer 50, 51; Da 5). It would also have its ultimate answer at the Great White Throne (Rev 20:11-15).

Jensen: (:55-66) The opening lines are the prominent ones, even though the prayer ends on a severe note of imprecation. The tone is one of deep gratitude to the Lord for hearing the prophet when he called upon Him out of the dungeon of despair and affliction. No greater testimony can a sinner offer to God than to say, in thanksgiving, *“Thou hast redeemed my life”* (3:58).

Steven Smith: This reads like a man trying to sleep at night and he can’t. He is trying to find peace, trying to find rest, trying to find hope, trying to find a way to live. His survival skills don’t lead him to quote some proto-Talmud. He does not quote the Torah. He is looking for new mercy, so he carefully selects psalms he has mentally archived for these types of situations – music as portable theology. He is desperate, and there are songs for that. He is desperate, hopeless, lost, and weak, but not alone. He had been needing help but finding none. This is when he reaches for his ancient songbook to meet his new problems. What he needs is the grace of new mercy. Grace comes with a melody.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Have you ever cried out for the Lord’s help when it seemed like He was not listening or responding? Did you learn the lesson of patient endurance and waiting upon the Lord?

- 2) Have you ever felt that your spiritual condition or physical circumstances were just hopeless and that the Lord had cut you off from all assistance? List all of the images or analogies of despair that you can find in this chapter. Did the Lord give you a renewed appreciation for His compassion and lovingkindness and faithfulness?

- 3) What specific examples of the Lord’s mercy and faithfulness can you point to?

- 4) Is it appropriate today for us to pray for vengeance upon those who actively oppose us as our enemies? Why are we instructed to love our enemies?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Malick:

III. Third Dirge--The Response of the Prophet (Jeremiah) to the Destruction of Jerusalem: As a representative of the community the prophet laments God's judgment upon him, yet expresses his hope in God and urges the nation to repent and confess their sins also praying for vengeance upon their enemies in view of their present suffering 3:1-66

A. Personal Suffering: The Prophet, as a representative of the people, laments God's judgment upon him 3:1-19

1. Suffering at God's Hand: 3:1-3
2. The Life of Suffering and Hardship: 3:4-7
3. Ineffective Prayers: 3:8
4. No Escape: 3:9-13
5. Total Humiliation: 3:14-15
6. Total Depression: 3:16-18
7. A Call for the Lord to Remember His Afflictions: 3:19

B. Consolation and Hope of Grace in God: The prophet expresses his hope in God in the face of dark suffering 3:20-39

1. He has been humbled: 3:20
2. Hope Because of the Lord's Loyal Love : 3:21-23
3. A Remembrance of the Promise of Restoration through Yahweh: 3:24-38
 - a. Yahweh Inspires Hope: 3:24
 - b. Yahweh Is Good to a Seeker: 3:25
 - c. Suffering Can Be Good: 3:26-27
 - d. The Endurance of Suffering Is Necessary: 3:28-30
 - e. Suffering Is Not Forever: 3:31-38
4. A Need to Suffer in Silent Faith: 3:39

C. Exhortation of the Nation to Penitence: The prophet confirms that confession and repentance are proper for the nation to do 3:40-42

1. An Exhortation for the Nation to Examine Itself: 3:40
2. A Reminder that the Nation is Rebellious 3:41-42

D. An Imprecatory Prayer for Vengeance in View of Desolation: The prophet returns to the desolate state of the people and prays for vengeance on the enemy 3:43-66

1. An Affirmation of the Nation's Just Judgment for Her Sin: 3:43-51
2. An Affirmation of Personal Deliverance by the Lord: 3:52-58
3. A Plea for the Lord to Bring about Judgment upon His/Their Enemies: 3:59-66

Stedman: In many ways, this is one of the most beautiful passages in all the Bible. It reveals the compassion of the heart of God. Judgment, as Isaiah says, is his strange work. He does not like to do it. He does not willingly afflict or grieve the sons of men. His mercies are fresh every morning. In his own pain Jeremiah remembers this: that behind all the desolation is the work of love. God destroyed Jerusalem because it was heading the wrong way. He destroyed it so that he could restore it later, and build it up again in joy and peace and blessing. The

Lord does not cast off forever; though he causes grief, he will have compassion.

Kuist: When viewed in terms of a speaker, there are three parts:

- (1) In verses 1-39 an individual “I” (“me,” “my”) speaks concerning “him” (“he,” “his”).
- (2) In verses 40-47 the singular “I” changes to the plural “We” (“us,” “our”) and the voice of the individual is blended with that of his suffering, confessing people.
- (3) In verses 48-66, once again the individual “I” (“my,” “me”) speaks, while addressing himself to the Lord.

When viewed in terms of topic the poem has four main parts:

(1) A Cry of Despair (3:1-18)

A sorely afflicted person, who refers to himself in the words “*I am the man,*” voices his despair over the extremity and persistence of his sufferings under the hand of his adversary (3:1-3) and under his own people, who have made him a laughingstock (3:14).

(2) A Psalm of Hope (3:19-39)

Here the speaker contemplates the mercies of God. He addresses the Lord twice as “*the Most High*” (3:25, 38), and refers to himself as a mere “*man*” (3:27, 35, 39). He then concludes that good and evil come “*from the mouth of the Most High*” (3:38-39).

(3) A Prayer of Penitence (3:40-47)

Here the stricken people to whom the individual belongs describe themselves as “*offscouring and refuse,*” and urge one another to examine their ways and return to the Lord.

(4) A Prayer for Deliverance and Requit (3:48-66)

Once again the individual is heard: “*Judge thou my case*” (3:59). The conviction that God has seen the wrong done to him, backed by an earnest plea for justice, leads the speaker to believe that divine retribution will fall upon his enemies (3:59-66).

Dyer: The identity of the subject in chapter 3 has been disputed. . . The best solution is to see the individual in chapter 3 as Jeremiah representing all Israelites. He used his own experiences because the things he suffered represented things that many Israelites had suffered.

[Re vv. 25-40] Jeremiah wrote seven principles about the nature of Israel’s affliction:

- (1) Affliction should be endured with hope in God’s salvation, that is, ultimate restoration (Lam. 3:25-30).
- (2) Affliction is only temporary and is tempered by God’s compassion and love (vv. 31-32).
- (3) God does not delight in affliction (v. 33).
- (4) If affliction comes because of injustice, God sees it and does not approve of it (vv. 34-36).
- (5) Affliction is always in relationship to God’s sovereignty (vv. 37-38; cf. Job 2:10).
- (6) Affliction ultimately came because of Judah’s sins (Lam. 3:39).
- (7) Affliction should accomplish the greater good of turning God’s people back to Him (v. 40).

Tim Wegener: (3:21-26)

Jeremiah saw no widespread turning to God; rather they persecuted him; threw him into prison and a muddy pit; accused him of being a traitor. He hoped for restoration. He took no joy in the destruction of Jerusalem. Composed a series of acrostic poems, laments, dirges, songs to give vent to his great emotions of grief. His pain screams out to us. But at the very center of this book is a light that is so intense it is shocking.

Jeremiah knew: **There is hope in God's Mercy:**

1) Because of God's Attributes:

Lovingkindnesses

Compassions

Faithfulness

2) Because God was his Portion

3) Because of God's Sovereignty

<http://documents.shepherdchurch.com/SermonAudio/There%20is%20Hope%20in%20God's%20Mercy.mp3>

Todd Riley: Precious Counsel for Those who are in one of Life's Valleys

1. Don't feel that you need to bottle all your pains in
2. Realize that the pain and sufferings we experience ultimately come from the Lord- either by his permissive will or his direct agency.
3. Understand that the pain and sufferings we experience by the hand of God do not delight him.
4. Contemplate this: If it were not for the depths of God's love and mercy, things would be much worse for all of us.
5. Above all, put your hope and trust in God
6. Wait patiently for his deliverance v.24, 28-30
7. Examine yourself that you may determine if you are right with the Lord v. 40-42
8. Recognize that in every trial and pain that God has a lesson to teach.

<http://sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=97837>

William Wyne: God's Unfailing Faithfulness

The Marine Corps has an interesting motto, Semper Fidelis, the short is Semper Fi. Perhaps you have seen that on windows or bumpers of cars. Semper Fidelis are two Latin words that mean, "Always Faithful". It is really the code of conduct and character of the gallant soldiers of the Corps. It is a description of their loyalty, and a definition of their lives as Marines. It is supposed to be their driven purpose as honorable and dedicated soldiers to this branch of service – Always Faithful. I believe that the language of scriptures says the same thing about God. . .

God's unfailing faithfulness means that everything He says and does is certain, and that we can be certain that He will always be one hundred percent God, one hundred percent of the time, or He will not be God at all. Jeremiah discovered in verse 22a that His faithfulness is never partial, but He has an unfailing fullness of faithfulness. . . Finally, His faithfulness is not stale, He has an unfailing freshness of faithfulness.

<http://sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=77252>

Donald E. Curtis: Grief Becomes Personal

What the author comes to know in chapter 3 is that the Lord prefers to show mercy. It is the Lord's terrors that are only for a moment. Therefore, the immediate events that he is facing are the anomaly, not the days of grace and mercy. He realizes the Lord had shown great mercy in the past and that He will show great mercy in the future. This, by the way, is exactly what Jesus demonstrated during His earthly ministry. Although He never compromised His message and never glossed over sin, he always welcomed a sinner in need of mercy and forgiveness. And so Lamentations 3 gives us a core truth.

Let me help you connect with this further. Read through and follow these steps:

1. Close your eyes.
2. Picture yourself standing in the smoking rubble of the ruin of the World Trade Towers right after the dust settled.
3. Say to yourself, *“The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.”*

Is this exercise crazy? How much more did the author of Lamentations overcome to find hope in this truth? He is at Ground Zero in Jerusalem, his home city is gone, his people are gone, he has seen inexpressible horrors, and he knows that the Lord did it! If this truth rescued him from despair, how much more can it rescue us from the situations that we face?

I am struck by the suddenness of the reversal from despair to hope and the recognition of the preeminence of God's mercy. I am inclined to believe that the author experienced the presence of the Lord in response to his prayer. He was in a situation that was beyond all logic. To come to him as an “instructor” and say, “Cheer up, God is merciful,” would hardly bring a change of attitude. Such truths as these require the manifested presence of the Lord to carry them. In other words, it was not logic that brought these amazing thoughts into his head and caused such a turn for hope. It was his apprehending the presence and character of the Lord that made it sink in.

http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=1807

Dr. Doug McIntosh, Cornerstone Bible Church – Hope When Life is Darkest

3 Reasons for Hope When Life Is Its Darkest --

- God's love and mercy to His people are unending (:1-24)
We find this in the first 24 verses of this chapter, which begins with a long list of sorrowful reflections on just how desperate the situation really is. But the prophet knew God well enough to know that the ruins of Jerusalem were not the end of the story. There were two encouraging facts that he could lay hold of:
 - As long as I have life, I can do something about the future (:21-22)
 - My circumstances may change, but God does not (:23-24)
- God's goodness and control of our lives is reassuring (:25-39)
If we can cling to two fundamentals in the middle of our pain, we will be a long way toward dealing with our difficulties:
 - God is good even when necessary suffering comes our way
 - God is in control even when necessary suffering comes our way
- God's forgiveness and answers to prayer are encouraging (:40-66)

- Hope comes from right relations with God
- Right relations with God cannot be had apart from convictions

<http://www.cornerstonebibch.org/Pages/Sermons/Lamentations/Lam03.pdf>

Steven Smith: Main Idea: **Great is his faithfulness.**

I. Sometimes God Seems to Be the Enemy (3:1-18)

- A. God is the enemy (3:1-6).
- B. God is a warden (3:7-9).
- C. God is a wild animal (3:10-11).
- D. God is a warrior (3:12).
- E. God is a hunter (3:13-14).

II. When God Seems against You, Remember: Great Is His Faithfulness (3:19-33)

III. Sometimes We Are Drowning in Desperation (3:34-54).

- A. What God has done (3:34-45).
- B. The response of the enemy (3:46-47).
- C. Jeremiah's response (4:48-54).

IV. When We Are Drowning in Desperation, Remember: Great Is His Faithfulness (3:55-66).

TEXT: Lamentations 4:1-22

TITLE: *FOURTH DIRGE: ANGRY JUDGMENT*

BIG IDEA:

THE ANGER OF THE LORD HAS PUNISHED HIS PEOPLE BECAUSE OF THEIR SIN – TRANSFORMING THEIR FORMER GLORY INTO DEVASTATION – AND THIS WRATH WILL FALL UPON THEIR GLOATING ENEMIES AS WELL

INTRODUCTION:

God is always justified and righteous in His judgments. Here we have another account of the horrors of the siege and devastation of Jerusalem. The contrast between the former glory of God's people and their present distress is striking. But the emphasis is on the culpability of the nation – especially due to the corruption of its leadership. The cup of God's wrath needed to be drunk in full. And the nations round about like Edom who were presently gloating would soon be forced to drink the cup they deserve as well. Sin cannot go unpunished. This intense passage highlights the mercy of our Lord Jesus who willingly drank the cup of God's wrath for us and made a complete end of our guilt and sin so that we never have to fear God's wrath. We still may experience His loving and nurturing discipline in our lives, but Christ has been made the propitiation for our sins.

Steven Smith: Throughout the history of the nation of Israel, three offices provided leadership. The office of prophet tethered people to the vision of God for a pure, distinct nation. The office of priest provided a mediating function. The priest served to facilitate access to the presence of God. The people had access to God's presence because the priest would act as a go-between, leading God's people into God's presence by following God's temple rites. The office of king facilitation military and civil leadership.

When these offices were in full force, it was a beautiful thing . . . When one office was out of kilter, another was on point . . . Lamentations 4 documents the downward slide of leadership in all three offices. Everything rises and falls on leadership.

- The princes who were strong are now emaciated (vv. 7-8).
- The prophets and priests shed innocent blood (v. 13).
- The priests and the elders are being chastised by God (v. 16).
- The king is captured (v. 20).
-

I. (:1-10) DEVASTATION OF THE SIEGE DETAILED IN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT – CONTRAST BETWEEN FORMER GLORY AND CURRENT HUMILIATION

A. (:1-5) First Series of Contrasts

1. (:1-2) Present Distress Contrasted with Former Glory –
Imagery of Gold and Precious Stones vs Dust and Earthen Pottery

*“How dark the gold has become,
How the pure gold has changed!
The sacred stones are poured out at the corner of every street.
The precious sons of Zion, weighed against fine gold,
How they are regarded as earthen jars, the work of a potter’s hands!”*

Barnes: *the hallowed stones*, literally stones of holiness, a metaphor for the people themselves.

MacArthur: The gold adornment of the temple, looted by the conquerors, lost its luster with a coating of dust where they scattered the remains.

Dyer: Clay was common in Palestine; nearly all vessels were made from it. Clay pots were abundant and their value was little. If one broke, it was thrown out and a new one replaced it. Similarly the people of Jerusalem, God’s precious people, had become worthless.

2. (:3-5) Cruelty of Starvation –

Imagery of Uncaring Mothers and dearth of food and clothing

*“Even jackals offer the breast, they nurse their young;
But the daughter of my people has become cruel like ostriches in the wilderness.
The tongue of the infant cleaves to the roof of its mouth because of thirst;
The little ones ask for bread, but no one breaks it for them.
Those who ate delicacies are desolate in the streets;
Those reared in purple embrace ash pits.”*

MacArthur: Even worthless jackals by nature nurse their young, but under the severities of conquest, Israelite women were unable to nurse their babies. *Ostriches* = birds which were notable for ignoring their young (cf. Job 39:14-16).

Dyer: Mother ostriches seem unconcerned about their young, for they lay their eggs in the sand where they may be trampled.

B. (:6) Problem = Unimaginable Sin (worse than Sodom)

*“For the iniquity of the daughter of my people
Is greater than the sin of Sodom,
Which was overthrown as in a moment,
And no hands were turned toward her.”*

MacArthur: Their sin was homosexuality. The fact that the suffering of Jerusalem was prolonged, while that of even Sodom was swift, marks it as the greater punishment (cf. 1 Pe. 4:17).

C. (:7-10) Second Series of Contrasts

1. (:7-8) Present Distress Contrasted with Former Glory – Imagery of Strength and Health vs Weakness and Withering

*“Her consecrated ones were purer than snow,
They were whiter than milk;
They were more ruddy in body than corals,
Their polishing was like lapis lazuli.
Their appearance is blacker than soot,
They are not recognized in the streets;
Their skin is shriveled on their bones,
It is withered, it has become like wood.”*

Barnes: “polishing” -- Or, their shape was “a sapphire.” The allusion is no longer to color, but to form. Their shape was exact and faultless as the cutting of a precious stone.

Ross Price: a picture of unburied bodies in the desert sun

2. (:9-10) Cruelty of Starvation – Resorting to Cannibalism

*“Better are those slain with the sword than those slain with hunger;
For they pine away, being stricken for lack of the fruits of the field.
The hands of compassionate women boiled their own children;
They became food for them because of the destruction of the daughter of
my people.”*

II. (:11) Key Verse – DEVASTATION ACCOMPLISHED BY THE ANGER OF THE LORD

*“The Lord has accomplished His wrath,
He has poured out His fierce anger;
And He has kindled a fire in Zion which has consumed its foundations.”*

III. (:12-20) DEVASTATION SHOCKS THE WATCHING WORLD AND ISRAEL’S CORRUPT LEADERS

A. (:12-16) Response to the Devastation

1. (:12) Response By the Watching World – Had Viewed Jerusalem as Impregnable

*“The kings of the earth did not believe,
Nor did any of the inhabitants of the world,
That the adversary and the enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem.”*

Constable: The overthrow of Jerusalem had surprised the leaders and people of other nations. Invaders had forced their way into it in the past (cf. 1 Kings 14:25-28; 2 Kings 14:13-14; 2 Chron. 21:16-17), but the citizens had rebuilt and strengthened its defenses (2 Chron 32:2-5; 33:14). In Jeremiah's day it appeared impregnable, especially to the people of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam. 5:6-8).

2. (:13) Culpability of Corrupt Leaders – Had Viewed Themselves as Untouchables as the Lord’s Anointed

“Because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, Who have shed in her midst the blood of the righteous.”
3. (:14-15) Response By Israel’s Corrupt Leaders = Now Despised
 - a. Wandering, Scattered, Blind

“They wandered, blind, in the streets”
 - b. Defiled, Unclean as Lepers

*“They were defiled with blood so that no one could touch their garments.
'Depart! Unclean!' they cried of themselves.
'Depart, depart, do not touch!'”*
 - c. Unwanted and Rejected

*“So they fled and wandered;
Men among the nations said,
'They shall not continue to dwell with us.'”*
4. (:16) Response by the Lord
 - a. Driven from the Lord’s Presence

“The presence of the Lord has scattered them,”
 - b. Denied the Divine Favor

“He will not continue to regard them;”
 - c. Disciplined for Insubordination

*“They did not honor the priests,
They did not favor the elders.”*

B. (:17-20) Additional Causes for the Devastation

1. (:17-18) Futility of Foreign Alliances

*“Yet our eyes failed, looking for help was useless;
In our watching we have watched for a nation that could not save.”*

Dyer: Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel had warned against the futility of trusting in Egypt for protection (Jer. 37:6-10; Ezek. 29:6-7). That false hope brought only bitter grief when Babylon’s armies *swifter than eagles* (cf. Hab. 1:8), finally captured Jerusalem, pursuing those who tried to escape, and the end came.

2. (:18-19) Futility of Fleeing

*“They hunted our steps so that we could not walk in our streets;
Our end drew near, our days were finished for our end had come.
Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the sky;*

*They chased us on the mountains,
They waited in ambush for us in the wilderness.”*

3. (:20) False Security in Human Leadership

*“The breath of our nostrils, the Lord’s anointed,
Was captured in their pits,
Of whom we had said, ‘Under his shadow we shall live among the
nations.’”*

IV. (:21-22) DEVASTATION AWAITS THE GLOATING ENEMIES OF ISRAEL

A. (:21) Your Turn is Coming, Edom

*“Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, who dwells in the land of Uz;
But the cup will come around to you as well,
You will become drunk and make yourself naked.”*

Constable: The Edomites, kinsmen of the Judahites, were rejoicing over Judah's destruction (cf. Ps. 137:7; Jer. 49:7-22; Ezek. 25:12-14; 35), but the same fate was sure to overtake them (Deut. 30:7). They would have to drink the cup of Yahweh's judgment and would lose their self-control and self respect.

B. (:22A) Your Turn is Completed, Israel

*“The punishment of your iniquity has been completed, O daughter of Zion;
He will exile you no longer.”*

C. (:22B) Your Turn is Coming, Edom

*“But He will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom;
He will expose your sins!”*

Stephens-Hodge: “Discover” is the opposite of “cover”, the usual word for “forgive.”

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How precious does the Lord view His chosen people when they are in right relationship to Him?
- 2) What do we learn from these intense images of devastation – extending even to the unthinkable practice of cannibalism?
- 3) Do we fall into the same trap of placing too much confidence in our spiritual leaders rather than directing our trust to the Lord?
- 4) What do we learn from the premature gloating on the part of Israel’s enemies?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kuist: The poem falls into four parts.

- (1) In verses 1-10 an eyewitness depicts the horrors of the siege which engulfed all classes of the people.
- (2) Verses 11-16 attribute the cause of this overwhelming calamity to the iniquities of the prophets and priests.
- (3) Verses 17-20 (compare Jer. 37:6-10) describe the vain hopes of the besieged citizenry for deliverance, and the futile attempt of the faithless king to escape.
- (4) Verses 21 and 22 rebuke the neighboring Edomites for gloating over the fall of the Holy City.

The most striking feature of this poem is the contrast drawn between the former glory of the Holy City and its present desolation. The city itself is like tarnished gold, and its precious stones, once devoted to a holy purpose, are scattered. As for the sons of Zion, once esteemed to be of great worth, they are now debased like earthen sherds. Mothers, deranged by suffering, have become inhuman. Their nursings are parched, their children are unfed. Those who were accustomed to delicacies are faint with hunger, while those who were clad royally now grovel in ashes. The sufferings of the heinous sinners of Sodom were momentary as compared to the prolonged chastisement now justly inflicted upon the Covenant people. The nobles of Zion, once renowned for their healthy appearance, are now blacker than soot and shriveled like a stick. Under these conditions it would be better far to be slain by the sword than to be consumed by hunger. The hands of the women, accustomed to practice kindly deeds, now, under torments of famine, have boiled their own children for food. Prophets and priests who condemned just persons to death now are defiled with blood. Once they were honored people. Now as unclean men they are compelled to flee away as though leprous. Even the king (Zedekiah), known as "*the breath of our nostrils, the Lord's anointed,*" was pursued and trapped like an animal in a hunter's pit (compare Jer. 39:4-7).

Malick: Fourth Dirge--The Lord's Anger in View of Zion's Former Glory and Present Misery: Unstoppable Judgment from Yahweh made the blessed people of Judah into a suffering people because of the sins of the religious leaders, but the nation of Edom who mocked them in their captivity will also be destroyed 4:1-22

A. A People of Contrast: Judgment from Yahweh has made the people of Judah a people of contrast in that they were blessed, but are now suffering severely 4:1-11

1. Once Honored, Now Humbled: 4:1-2
2. Unnaturally Cruel and Uncaring Mothers: 4:3-4
3. Once Rich, Now Destitute: 4:5
4. Once Strong and Healthy, Now Weak and Sickly: 4:6-8
5. Longing for Death Due to Hunger: 4:9
6. Once Compassionate, Now Cannibalistic: 4:10
7. The Judgment Is from the Lord: 4:11

B. The Sin of Leaders: Although all used to consider Jerusalem impregnable, it was the sin of the religious leaders which caused God to bring judgment, and the leaders are despised 4:12-16

1. Impregnable Jerusalem: 4:12
2. The Sins of the Religious Leaders Brought Destruction: 4:13
3. The Religious Leaders Are Now Despised: 4:14-15
4. The Judgment Is from the Lord: 4:16

C. The Completion of Judgment: Although no one could have helped Judah because of Babylon's readiness, and this became evident with the capture of their king, the nation of Edom who mocked Judah will itself experience judgment 4:17-22

1. No Ally Could Have Helped the Nation: 4:17
2. Babylon's Stalking: Destruction was certain as the Babylonians patiently waited until the fall 4:18-19
3. The King Captured: When the king was captured it was proof that the nation was being judged for breaking the covenant 4:20
4. Mockery of the Edom: Although the nation of Edom laughed at Judah's complete destruction, they too will be destroyed 4:21-22

Donald E. Curtis: National Confession

Chapter 4 does not have the energy of the previous chapters. Unlike chapters 1 and 2 with their 22 triplet verses and chapter 3's 66 single verses, chapter 4 contains 22 doublets. The first 16 verses again recap the last days in Jerusalem, and the last verses contain words of national confession and national hope. But the emotional energy that drove chapter 3 is dissipating, and the tears are beginning to dry out. Unlike the first chapter that is on the outside looking in, or the second and third chapters that is the man alone in his grieving, this fourth chapter contains the confession of the nation.

Dyer: Chapter 4 parallels the judgment discussed in chapter 2. After describing the response of an individual in the midst of judgment (chap. 3), Jeremiah again returned to survey the scene of calamity in Jerusalem. He contrasted the conditions in Jerusalem before and after the siege (4:1-11), explained the causes for the siege, (vv. 12-20), and gave a call for vindication from Zion (vv. 21-22).

Stephens-Hodge: Those normally conspicuous because of their rank or calling are no longer *known in the streets*; they are indistinguishable from all the rest (8). Verse 12 is at one and the same time an illustration of arrogant self-confidence and of subsequent disillusionment. . . The *anointed of the Lord* (20) is Zedekiah, Judah's last tragic king, whose fate is described in 2 Ki. xxv. 4-7. Thus ecclesiastical leaders, politicians, the king himself, have all been powerless to avert God's judgments from the guilty nation whose *end is come* (18).

Ross Price: In this chapter we have something of an eyewitness account of both Zion's guilt and her punishment. The inspired poet-prophet first describes her fate as a people, then gives the moral explanation for such a fate.

- A. Horrors of the Siege, and the Sad fate of Zion's Nobility (4:1-11)
- B. Causes and Climax of Zion's Catastrophe (4:12-20)
- C. An Apostrophe to Haughty and Gloating Edom (4:21-22)

Spurgeon: Daughter of Zion vs. Daughter of Edom (vv.21-22)

Sin deserved God's wrath; that wrath has spent itself on Christ. The black and gathering clouds had all been summoned to the tempest, and manhood stood beneath the dark canopy waiting till the clouds of vengeance should empty out their floods. "Stand thou aside!" said Jesus—"Stand thou aside, my spouse, my Church, and I will suffer in thy stead." Down dashed the drops of fire; the burning sleet swept terribly over his head, and beat upon his poor defenseless person, until the clouds had emptied out their awful burden, and not a drop was left. Beloved, it was not that the cloud swept by the wind into another region where it tarries until it be again called forth, but it was annihilated, it spent itself entirely upon Christ. There is no more punishment for the believer since Christ hath died for him. In his dying, our Lord has satisfied the divine vengeance even to the full. Then this, too, must satisfy our conscience. The enlightened conscience of a man is almost as inexorable as the justice of God, for an awakened conscience, if you give it a false hope, will not rest upon it, but crieth out for something more. Like the horse-leech it saith—"Give, give, give." Until you can offer to God a full satisfaction, you cannot give the conscience a quietus. But now, O daughter of Zion, let thy conscience be at rest. Justice is satisfied; the law is not despised: it is honored; it is established. God can now be just, severely so, and yet, seeing that thy punishment is accomplished, thou mayest come with boldness unto him, for no guilt doth lie on thee. Thou art accepted in the Beloved; thy guilt was laid on him of old, and thou art now safe." . . .

But who is this daughter of Edom? As we searched for the daughter of Zion just now, so we must also search for the daughter of Edom. The verse preceding our text seems to give us some inkling of who she is. Of course it refers to the race of Esau, who inhabited such cities as Bozrah and Petra, which are now become a desolate wilderness. It seems, then, according to the twenty-first verse, that the daughter of Edom was a mirthful one. In irony and sarcasm the prophet says—"Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, that dwellest in the land of Uz; the cup shall pass through unto thee: thou shalt be drunken, and shalt make thyself naked." There is a holy joy which belongs unto the people of God; there is an unholy mirth which is a sure sign of a graceless state. You say from day to day, "How shall we amuse ourselves? What next gaiety; and what new levity? With what new liquor shall we fill the bowl of merriment? What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Wherewithal shall we be clothed? Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." Pleasure is your life, your only thought. Ah! daughter of Edom, there is sackcloth for thy fine linen; there are ashes for all thine ornaments; thine earrings shall give place to everlasting tears-drops, and all thy beauty shall turn to rottenness and decay! Weep, all ye that thus make mirth in the presence of the avenging Judge, for the day cometh when he shall turn your laughter into mourning, and all your joys shall be ended! "Thus saith the Lord: say, a sword, a sword is sharpened, and also furbished: it is sharpened to make a sore slaughter; it is furbished that it may glitter: should he then

make mirth?" . . .

The reason why I had to publish a message of mercy to the daughter of Zion just now was sovereign grace. The daughter of Zion had no right to pardon; she had done nothing to deserve it, but God had chosen her, and had entered into covenant with Abraham concerning her, that he would not leave nor forsake her. Everlasting love preserved deliverance for the beloved city. Our God had kindled in her heart thoughts of repentance, and in his sovereignty, because he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, he sent her the gracious message of full remission by an accomplished punishment.

But why was the second message sent to the daughter of Edom? Here it is not the line of sovereignty, but the line of justice; he sent it because the daughter of Edom deserved it. Sinner, when God says he will punish sin, thou mayest kick against it if thou wilt, but thy conscience tells thee thou deservest to be punished. God will not smite thee more than thou deservest, but let him only give thee as much, and wrath will come upon thee to the uttermost. Edom hath waxed proud; she hath been careless; she hath despised God; she is unbelieving; she repenteth not; therefore shall her iniquity be published, and God shall visit it upon her head.

Moody Bible Institute -- Today in the Word:

Verse 12 reflects Jerusalem's arrogance that her supposed impregnability was evident to all.

We have seen all along that sin brought on the city's ruin, but the sins of its religious leaders (v. 13) were especially blameworthy. Chapter 2 (see Feb. 10) revealed the prophet's passivity regarding the people's sin; today's passage shows that both the prophets and priests actively led the people into sin.

More than any other part of ancient Jewish society, these two groups were supposed to foster and preserve spiritual well-being. Prophets revealed insights into God's word and interpreted His law. Priests offered sacrifices for sin. The high priest alone was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies on the annual Day of Atonement.

Yet deplorably the blood shed in the Temple was not for atonement but from murder--the murder of the righteous (v. 13)! This refers either to the actual murder of individuals who resisted the false prophets or to the spiritual death of idolatry. Either way, the blame for Jerusalem's ruin fell squarely on the religious leadership. . .

God's justice is never mocked. Eventually--and not according to human timetables--God's judgment falls upon those who commit flagrant evil (v. 21). When Jeremiah considered neighboring Edom perversely delighting in Judah's destruction, he chided it not to "rejoice and be glad," knowing that no sin escapes punishment.

Edom, land of the descendants from Esau, was located in Uz, southeast of Jerusalem. Because of its relationship to Judah, Edom should have been an ally; but Psalm 137:7

records the bitter antagonism between the two countries: “Remember, O Lord, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. 'Tear it down,' they cried, 'tear it down to its foundations.' ” Ancient documents also reveal that Nebuchadnezzar gave allotments of rural Judah to Edomites as a reward for neutrality.

Edom’s gloating would be short-lived--it too would drink the cup of God’s wrath and suffer humiliation (vv. 21–22). This cup anticipates the One who ultimately drank the cup of divine wrath--Jesus. He revealed that His willingness to do this inaugurated the promised new covenant (Luke 22:20). Yet drinking this cup was more terrifying than any judgment ever experienced in all of history, for this alone fulfilled God’s righteous judgment on sin. Only Jesus’ sacrificial submission to the Father (Luke 22:42) enabled Him to consume this awful cup when He poured out His blood on the cross.

<http://www.todayintheword.com/GenMoody/default.asp?SectionID=ABECA3F4F745454090BB3C5F613C9CE7&date=2/21/2001>

Matthew Henry: Re vs. 11-12 -- **Jerusalem comes down utterly and wonderfully.**

1. The destruction of Jerusalem is a complete destruction (Lamentations 4:11): The Lord has accomplished his fury; he has made thorough work of it, has executed all that he purposed in wrath against Jerusalem, and has remitted no part of the sentence. He has poured out the full vials of his fierce anger, poured them out to the bottom, even the dregs of them. He has kindled a fire in Zion, which has not only consumed the houses, and leveled them with the ground, but, beyond what other fires do, has devoured the foundations thereof, as if they were to be no more built upon.

2. It is an amazing destruction, Lamentations 4:12. It was a surprise to the kings of the earth, who are acquainted with, and inquisitive about, the state of their neighbours; nay, it was so to all the inhabitants of the world who knew Jerusalem, or had ever heard or read of it; they could not have believed that the adversary and enemy would ever enter into the gates of Jerusalem; for, (1.) They knew that Jerusalem was strongly fortified, not only by walls and bulwarks, but by the numbers and strength of its inhabitants; the strong hold of Zion was thought to be impregnable. (2.) They knew that it was the city of the great King, where the Lord of the whole earth had in a more peculiar manner his residence; it was the holy city, and therefore they thought that it was so much under the divine protection that it would be in vain for any of its enemies to make an attack upon it. (3.) They knew that many an attempt made upon it had been baffled, witness that of Sennacherib. They were therefore amazed when they heard of the Chaldeans making themselves masters of it, and concluded that it was certainly by an immediate hand of God that Jerusalem was given up to them; it was by a commission from him that the enemy broke through and entered the gates of Jerusalem.

Dr. Doug McIntosh, Cornerstone Bible Church – **Putting a Name on the Pain** – Hoping in the Lord means resting all my aspirations for relief or fulfillment on the living God, and that in turn means committing my anxieties to Him. In order to do that, however, I need to be able to identify them—to put a name on them, so to speak. Jeremiah shows how you can keep your head in severe testing if you do. There are **three areas** in which we do well to put a name on the pain:

- In its Costs (:1-12)

- in theological terms (:1-2)
- in physical terms (:3-4)
- a comparison (:6)
- in illustrative terms (:7-12)

- In its Causes (:13-20)

- Bad Advice (:13-16)
- Foolish Hopes (:17-20)

- In its Conclusion (:21-22)

The big problem in suffering is to lift your eyes away from the pain of the moment to the One who knows the end of all things.

<http://www.cornerstonebibch.org/Pages/Sermons/Lamentations/Lam04.pdf>

Steven Smith: When leadership fails, the people are aimless.

Setting: The Siege of Jerusalem Was Horrific (4:1-12).

Setting: the Enemy Was Powerful (4:17-20).

I. Leaders Can Fail Us Miserably (4:11-16)

II. There Is Hope When Leaders Fail (4:21-22)

So, in the end, what do we do if leaders fail us? There are so many natural responses that are wrong:

- Justify their sin because we are friends.
- Ignore their sin because we are affiliated with them in some way.
- Not deal with a public sin publicly.
- Use their sin as an excuse for our own sin.
- Fail to learn the lesson that all of us are vulnerable.
- Fail to see ourselves as a candidate for the same sin.
- Fail to use the moment of failure to warn us about our own sin.
- Fail to hold leaders accountable for their actions.
- Fail to restore the fallen leaders with grace.

TEXT: Lamentations 5:1-22

TITLE: *FIFTH DIRGE – APPEAL FOR RESTORATION*

BIG IDEA:

THE LORD’S UNCHANGING DOMINION AND PROMISE OF ULTIMATE RESTORATION SHOULD GIVE HOPE EVEN IN THE MIDST OF DESOLATION AS WE CONTINUE TO APPEAL TO HIS MERCY

INTRODUCTION:

Deliverance and restoration have not yet arrived. The prophet continues to be burdened with the reality of the pain and suffering he witnesses. The hand of the Lord’s discipline has been heavy. It seems like the Lord needs to be awakened to action. The litany of indignities seems unbearable. Ultimately it is the Lord’s name that is at stake. He needs to respond to the pleas of His repentant people. Each verse in this chapter must be looked at as a separate unit with parallelism in thought between the two different members.

Barnes: This final chapter (Lamentations 5) consists of the same number of verses as there are letters in the Hebrew alphabet, but they no longer begin with the letters in regular order. Strict care is shown in the form and arrangement of the poem, each verse being compressed into a very brief compass, consisting of two members which answer to one another both in idea and expression.

Constable: This poem, like the one in chapter 3, contains verses of only two lines each. It is the only non-acrostic chapter in the book, though like chapters 1, 2, and 4, it consists of 22 verses. The doleful qinah meter is also absent in this chapter giving it a somewhat more positive tone. However, 45 words end in u (in all verses except 19), which gives the chapter a rather mournful tone when read aloud in Hebrew.

I. (:1) THE WAKEUP CALL – REMEMBER . . . LOOK . . . SEE

*“Remember, O Lord, what has befallen us;
Look, and see our reproach!”*

Constable: Jeremiah called on Yahweh to remember the calamity that had befallen His people and to consider the reproach in which they now lived (cf. 3:34-36). The humbled condition of the Judahites reflected poorly on the Lord because the pagans would have concluded that He was unable to keep His people strong and free. Jeremiah implied that if Yahweh remembered His people He would act to deliver them (cf. Exod. 2:24-25; 3:7-8).

II. (:2-18) THE LITANY OF 14 INDIGNITIES (major section of this chapter)

[In studying this list, take the opposite positive blessing and meditate on all of the riches we enjoy in union with and fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ.]

A. (:2) Bankrupt – Possessions Appropriated by Foreigners

*“Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers,
Our houses to aliens.”*

Concept of the land and the inheritance very crucial to Israelites.

[**Eph. 1:11** – we have obtained an inheritance in Christ; riches in Christ]

Steven Smith: Verse 2 is the song in summary. The thrust of the lament is that other people have God’s chosen people’s inheritance. The theme of inheritance is a huge theme in Scripture. These people were God’s inheritance. This is God’s lot, meaning what God really wanted out of this relationship was them. He wanted their hearts turned back to him. Because God did not have his inheritance, the land, the inheritance of the people, was turned over to pagan people and their so-called gods.

B. (:3) Destitute Like Orphans and Widows

*“We have become orphans without a father,
Our mothers are like widows.”*

[**1 John 3:1** – privilege of being children of God]

C. (:4) Held Hostage for Basic Necessities

*“We have to pay for our drinking water,
Our wood comes to us at a price.”*

Barnes: The bitterness of the complaint lies in this, that it was their own property which they had to buy.

[**Matt. 6:25-34** -- your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things]

D. (:5) Worn Out

*“Our pursuers are at our necks;
We are worn out, there is no rest for us.”*

[**Matt. 11:28-30** – Jesus will give us rest]

E. (:6) Enslaved

“We have submitted to Egypt and Assyria to get enough bread.”

[**Gal. 5:1** – We have been set free by Christ]

(:7) Refrain of Confession – Emphasis on the Sins of the Fathers

*“Our fathers sinned, and are no more;
It is we who have borne their iniquities.”*

F. (:8) Oppressed

*“Slaves rule over us;
There is no one to deliver us from their hand.”*

[**2 Tim. 2:12** – we will reign with Christ]

G. (:9) At Risk

*“We get our bread at the risk of our lives
Because of the sword in the wilderness.”*

Dyer: The severe conditions and scarcity of food prompted the people to take desperate means for survival. Probably the *sword* they had to brave was carried by the bands of roving *desert* nomads through whose area the people of Judah had to travel in order to buy bread.

[**John 6:35** – Jesus is the bread of life]

H. (:10) Starved

*“Our skin has become as hot as an oven,
Because of the burning heat of famine.”*

[**Psalm 23** – He leads me beside the still waters and refreshes my soul]

I. (:11) Ravished

*“They ravished the women in Zion,
The virgins in the cities of Judah.”*

[**John 10:28-29** – no one can snatch us out of God’s protective hands; we have eternal security]

J. (:12) Disrespected / Humiliated

*“Princes were hung by their hands;
Elders were not respected.”*

Barnes: After the princes had been put to death their bodies were hung up by the hand to expose them to public contumely. Old age, again, no more availed to shield men from shameful treatment than the high rank of the princes. Such treatment of conquered enemies was not uncommon in ancient warfare.

[**Psalm 3:3** – the glory and the lifter of my head]

K. (:13) Overworked

*“Young men worked at the grinding mill,
And youths stumbled under loads of wood.”*

[**Psalm 55:22** – Cast our burden upon the Lord and He will sustain us]

L. (:14) Leaderless

*“Elders are gone from the gate,
Young men from their music.”*

Constable: Young men had to grind grain like animals (cf. Judg. 16:21), and small children buckled under the loads of firewood that the enemy forced them to carry. Elders no longer sat at the town gates dispensing wisdom and justice, and young men no longer played music bringing joy and happiness into the people's lives. These were marks of the disappearance of peaceful and prosperous community living conditions.

[**John 10:11** – Jesus is our Good Shepherd -- provides pasture and protects His flock;]

M. (:15) Reduced to Mourning

*“The joy of our hearts has ceased;
Our dancing has been turned into mourning.”*

[**John 17:13** – given joy]

N. (:16A) Fallen from Glory to Derision

“The crown has fallen from our head”

Barnes: Literally, *“The crown of our head is fallen,”* i.e. what was our chief ornament and dignity is lost; the independence of the nation, and all that gave them rank and honor.

[**John 17:22** – given glory]

(:16B) Refrain of Confession – Emphasis on the Sins of All

“Woe to us, for we have sinned!”

III. (:17-18) THE OVERALL IMPACT:

- HOPE ALMOST EXTINGUISHED

- JERUSALEM LIES DESOLATE

A. (:17) Hope Almost Extinguished

*“Because of this our heart is faint,
Because of these things our eyes are dim;”*

B. (:18) Jerusalem Lies Desolate

*“Because of Mount Zion which lies desolate,
Foxes prowl in it.”*

Barnes: As these animals live among ruins, and shun the presence of man, it shows that Zion is laid waste and deserted.

IV. (:19-22) THE FINAL APPEAL

A. (:19) Dominating Principle: God is Always in Charge

*“You, O Lord, rule forever;
Your throne is from generation to generation.”*

John Calvin: When we fix our eyes on present things, we Inevitably vacillate, as there is nothing permanent in this world and when adversities bring a cloud over our eyes, then faith in a manner vanishes; at least we are troubled and stand amazed. Now the remedy is, to raise our eyes to God, for however confounded things may be in the world, yet He remains always the same. His truth may indeed be hidden from us, yet it remains in Him. In short, were the world to change and perish a hundred times, nothing could ever affect the unchangeableness of God.

B. (:20) Perception of Being Forgotten

*“Why do You forget us forever?
Why do you forsake us so long?”*

Dyer: The knowledge of God’s ability to restore the nation prompted the people to ask two questions. Because of the nature of Hebrew parallelism these two questions should be viewed synonymously.

C. (:21) Plea for Restoration

*“Restore us to You, O Lord, that we may be restored;
Renew our days as of old.”*

D. (:22) Possibility of Ultimate Rejection

*“Unless You have utterly rejected us
And are exceedingly angry with us.”*

Prophet does not believe that the Lord would act in this fashion; he has faith in ultimate restoration; but things certainly look bleak at present

Steven Smith: Think about the power of this prayer. First, it assumes that God hears, that Jeremiah is not praying to the air, but that God perceives the situation. Second, this prayer assumes that God cares. There must be compassion in him. Finally, this prayer assumes that God can act. We often hole up in self-pity and self-loathing with worries and concerns that God could easily take care of. Prayer deflects the ultimate responsibility for the resolution of problems and places it on God. There is more to say about prayer here, but at this point it is enough to create distance between complaining and lament:

- Complaining is rooted in self-pity and is self-centered
- Lament prayers are rooted in brokenness and are God focused.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you feel sometimes like you need to get the Lord's attention? How do you approach Him to appeal to Him? What type of memory does the Lord have? What is the value of Him seeing everything?
- 2) Are we living like those who have been blessed with all riches in Christ or are we despondent like Jeremiah looking over the desolation of Jerusalem?
- 3) The unchanging dominion of the Lord means that He is in control of everything that impacts our life. How does that change how we view trials and suffering – whether deserved or undeserved?
- 4) How long is the time of the Lord's discipline compared with the eternity of the Lord's blessing? The truth that ultimately we are accepted in the beloved should bring us great security.

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Malick: Fifth Dirge--The Repentant Remnant Pleads with Yahweh for a Merciful Remembrance of Them: Once again reminding the Lord of the condition of His people, the prophet confesses trust in Yahweh's sovereignty and asks that He might restore them 5:1-22

A. A Final Description of Desolation & Prayer for Remembrance: The prophet urges the Lord to remember and see His people who are extremely downcast because of their condition which occurred as a result of their sin 5:1-18

1. Introductory Petition: The prophet urges the Lord to Remember and See what has occurred to His people in the land 5:1

2. First Lament:

- a. No Property: 5:2
- b. Helpless People: 5:3
- c. Only Necessities of Life in the Land: 5:4
- d. Oppressed People: 5:5
- e. A Dependent People to Survive: 5:6
- f. Confession of Sin as the Cause: 5:7

3. Second Lament: 5:8-16

- a. No Hope of Deliverance: 5:8
- b. Constant Famine and Hunger: 5:9
- c. Women Are Raped: 5:11
- d. Leaders Are Humiliated: 5:12
- e. Endless Work for the Strong: 5:13
- f. No Joy in the City: 5:14-15

- g. Confession of Sin as the Cause: 5:16
- 4. The Result of the Lament: The people are depressed because Zion is destroyed 5:17-18

B. A Tribute and Plea to Yahweh: Confessing that Yahweh is sovereign, the prophet also requests that He will not abandon the nation, but restore them 5:19-22

- 1. Confession of Trust: 5:19-20
 - a. Yahweh Is Sovereign: 5:19
 - b. Why is Yahweh forsaking His Covenant People so Long? 5:20
- 2. Petition of Yahweh:
 - a. Asks for Restoration: 5:21
 - b. Trust that Yahweh Has Not Totally Rejected the Nation: 5:22

Donald E. Curtis: Lamentations' last chapter is a national appeal. Like the fourth chapter, it is exclusively communal. It is a chapter of humility. The nation asks the Lord to turn His face to them and see their condition, and then they ask for restoration. To this day, the last verses represent the plea of the children of Israel in exile. You can see both hope and impatience, and a certain lack of certainty about the future.

http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=1807

Homer Heater: In 5:19-20 the writer carefully chose his words to summarize the teaching of the entire book by using the split alphabet to convey it. Verse 19 embraces the first half of the alphabet by using the aleph word (. . . 'you') to start the first half of the verse, and the kaph word (. . . 'throne') to start the second half. This verse reiterates the theology of God's sovereignty expressed throughout the book. He had the right to do as He chooses, humans have no right to carp at what He does. Wisdom teaching grappled with this concept and God's speech at the end of the Book of Job, which does not really answer Job's many sometimes querulous questions, simply avers that the God of the whirlwind cannot be gainsaid (Job 38—41). Job must accept who God is without criticism. Then Job bowed to this very concept (42:1-6). Now the writer of Lamentations also bowed before the throne of God accepting the implications of such sovereignty. . . .

One reason there is no full acrostic in chapter 5 may be that the writer wanted the emphasis to fall on these two verses near the conclusion of the book. In so doing, he has adroitly drawn attention to the only hope for people in despair.

"Structure and Meaning in Lamentations." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:595
(July-September 1992):304-15. quoted by **Constable**

Dyer: Thus the Book of Lamentations ends on a note of hope. In spite of severe suffering because of her sin, Judah had not been abandoned as a nation. God was still sovereign, and His covenant with Israel was still operative despite her disobedience. The hope for the nation was that if she would call on God and confess her sin He would protect her during her captivity (Lam. 3:21-30) and would ultimately restore her as a nation to covenant blessing (5:21).

Matthew Henry: The one word in which all their grievances are summed up is *reproach*: Consider, and behold our reproach. The troubles they were in compared with their former dignity and plenty, were a greater reproach to them than they would have been to any other people, especially considering their relation to God and dependence upon him, and his former appearances for them; and therefore this they complain of very sensibly, because, as it was a reproach, it reflected upon the name and honour of that God who had owned them for his people. *And what wilt thou do unto thy great name?*

Dr. Doug McIntosh, Cornerstone Bible Church – Help Us Remember

For the past five weeks we have been looking at the song of a godly person who was in mourning—in mourning for a nation whose stubborn rebellion had finally met its logical end, for the embarrassment of being part of such a people, and for the personal pain of having so many people he loved endure such hardship. Lamentations was the prophet Jeremiah’s sad song of how his nation’s sins and disloyalty had led it to complete and utter ruin.

Of course, from the outside, it looked like a simple matter of politics. It looked as though a Babylonian king, upset because an Israelite king refused to pay tribute, made a simple military expedition to solve the problem and things got out of hand. The world frequently looks that way. It looks as though it is run by the impulses of kings, presidents, and prime ministers, and, to use Napoleon’s phrase, is always in the control of whoever has the biggest battalions. The interesting thing about it is that Scripture acknowledges that the world does frequently look as though it is on its own and God is not involved. According to the book of Ecclesiastes, the world looks as though it engages in endless cycles of birth and death and has no point to it whatever. . .

Lamentations is a book written by a man who knew God well. He spent his whole life making God known to people who really didn’t want to know Him at all. Lamentations is the song of a mourner, but it closes with a prayer. In the end, when everything has been said and done, when pain has increased and you are confused, the one thing you can do is pray. That is what the fifth chapter of Lamentations is—a prayer, asking God to remember exactly where we are, and to above all, help us remember Him.

But there are some barriers to lifting our eyes to God. Frankly, we forget to do so very often. Four of the things that keep us from focusing on this anchor truth are talked about in this chapter. Let’s look at the obstacles we sometimes face to focusing on this truth of God’s unchangeableness. First, we have the obstacle of...

- 1) Our Condition (5:1-10)
 - Disinherited
 - Destitute
 - Despised
- 2) Our Individual Suffering (5:11-13)
- 3) Our Emotions (5:14-18)
- 4) Our Questions (5:19-22)

<http://www.cornerstonebibch.org/Pages/Sermons/Lamentations/Lam05.pdf>

Steven Smith: Prayer is greater than regret.

I. We Pray Just to Survive (5:1-10).

II. We Pray When We Are Suffering (5:11-14).

III. We Pray When We Are Sorrowful (5:15-18).

IV. We Pray When We are Searching for God (5:19-22).

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