

Jeremiah's Lamentations

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Introduction:

- I. As teachers of the gospel we encounter many hurting people; and we ourselves will also have times of pain and suffering. How can we help those who suffer? How can we arm ourselves to meet the personal challenges of our own suffering? What about those whose suffering is the result of their own bad judgment and sin? What if that happens to us?
- II. The book of Lamentations can offer helpful insight into these issues: yet it is commonly acknowledged that Lamentations is one of the most unfamiliar books of the OT to many people.
- III. I hope I can share some information that will draw us to this part of the Lord's word and make us appreciate its relevance to both our personal experience and our life's work.

Body:

I. Introductory Issues

A. Title:

1. In the Hebrew OT, Lamentations is called *'ekah* (translated "how") after its first word (as is common in the identification of other books, like those of the Pentateuch). *'Ekah* also is the first word in Lamentations 2 and 4 as well.
2. The ancient Jews referred to it as קִינּוֹת (*qinot*), the Hebrew plural term for "lamentations."
3. In the Septuagint Version it was given the name *Threnoi* (wailings). The title is derived from the Greek meaning "to cry aloud." (Jackson, *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, 152)
4. This name was continued in the Vulgate to which the subtitle was appended, "It comprises the Lamentations of Jeremiah the prophet." (Harrison, *Jeremiah & Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary*, 195)
5. Consequently modern English versions likewise title it "Lamentations."

B. Authorship:

1. The Hebrew text does not identify the author(s) of this work by name.
2. The ancient Jews ascribed the writing to the prophet Jeremiah. This view was the consistent belief of ancient Jews and early church writers up to the 19th century.
 - a. However it is noteworthy that Lamentations was not included in the section of Hebrew Scripture called *Nebi'im* (Prophets) and after the book of Jeremiah as one might have expected based on its placement in the Septuagint, Latin, and English Versions. Instead it was included in the third division of the Hebrew Bible known as the *Ketubim* or "writings."
 - b. Among the writings, it is usually placed in the *Hamesh Megillot* (*five scrolls*), the scrolls commonly read at various Jewish festivals. Lamentations was read on תִּשְׁעָה בְּאָב (Tisha b'av, i.e. the 9th of the month Av in July-August). "It is a fast day that marks the anniversary of the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. and the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E. Tisha b'Av eventually became a symbol for all the catastrophes that have befallen the Jewish people throughout its history." (Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*, 304)

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- c. The order within the *Megillot* appears to be based on the chronological order of the festivals during which the various books of the collection were read.
 3. The translators of the Septuagint attributed the Lamentations to Jeremiah appending this introduction: “*And it came to pass, after Israel was led into captivity and Jerusalem was laid waste, that Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem and said...*” Thus in the Septuagint it was placed after Jeremiah and before Ezekiel.
 4. Arguments for Jeremiah’s authorship of Lamentations (Kaiser, *Grief and pain in the plan of God: Christian assurance and the message of Lamentations*, 26)
 - a. Jeremiah was an acknowledged composer of laments.
 - 1) The point is not that the lamentations for the death of Josiah (2 Chron. 35:25) are the lamentations of the book by that name, as some may have mistakenly concluded.
 - 2) It suggests rather that the writing of lamentations was something Jeremiah was known to have done.
 - b. Jeremiah was also the prophet who mourned.
 - 1) Jeremiah in his prophecies spoke of his many tears in behalf of his people (cf. Jer. 9:1).
 - 2) There is a strong presumption in favor of the Lamentations coming from him in view of texts like Lam. 3:48ff.
 - c. The experiences of “the man” in Jeremiah chapter three strongly resemble the experiences of Jeremiah.
 - 1) Perhaps no one suffered more during this period than Jeremiah, not only from the mistreatment by his fellow-Jews, but also the pain of seeing the suffering of his people and identifying with it.
 - 2) Some of the references in Lamentations 3 bear a striking similarity to Jeremiah’s actual experiences as a prophet. Even if he intended to speak figuratively about his sufferings, his past sufferings might serve as a basis for the figures he uses.
 - d. Jeremiah and Lamentations have many similarities in subject matter, vocabulary, and modes of expressions.
 - 1) In reading the commentaries one can discover numerous linguistic links and concepts between Lamentations and the prophecies of Jeremiah.
 - 2) Even those who hold a more agnostic view about Jeremiah’s authorship of Lamentations acknowledge that the writer is at least Jeremiah-like in his sufferings.
 - e. Smith offers interesting evidence for Jeremiah’s authorship from Josephus (Smith, *An Exegetical Commentary on Lamentations*, 2).
 - 1) Josephus in *Against Apion* 1.8 along with other writers mentions that there were twenty-two books in the OT canon.
 - 2) Smith suggests that to arrive at that number it would be necessary to combine some books now separate. He suggests the combination of Judges with Ruth and Jeremiah with Lamentations. Thus it is conjectured that

Lamentations was once a part of the Jeremiah scroll, but was later separated and placed in the writings.

5. Arguments against Jeremiah's authorship of Lamentations (*A compilation of arguments from Kaiser, Grief and pain in the plan of God: Christian assurance and the message of Lamentations, 24-26 and McComiskey, The Book of Lamentations, 1301*)
 - a. Jeremiah's name is not mentioned.
 - 1) Such would not prove that Jeremiah is not the author. Several biblical works are anonymous.
 - 2) In this case we must rely upon circumstantial evidence.
 - b. The artificiality of the acrostic form is atypical of Jeremiah.
 - 1) It is argued that the styles of the two works are too incompatible to have been written by the same author.
 - 2) This seems quite arbitrary. It is like saying, because most of my published works are sermons, I could not publish a hymn.
 - 3) Jeremiah did in fact compose lamentations in the aftermath of Josiah's death (2 Chron. 35:25).
 - c. Jeremiah and Lamentations have contradictory concepts.
 - 1) It is argued that there is an outright contradiction between Lamentations 5:7 and Jeremiah 31:29-30
 - a) There is no contradiction here. The Jeremiah 31 text seeks to refute the irreverent charge that the present generation had to suffer for the sins of the fathers.
 - b) The fact is the suffering of Jerusalem was not only because of the father's sins, but also because of the children's sins of the current generation.
 - 2) It is argued that the two books present contradictory views of the role of the nations.
 - a) It is argued that in Jeremiah, Babylon is an instrument of God's wrath, while in Lamentations the nations are portrayed as "onlookers."
 - b) It is hard to take this argument seriously. God used Babylon as the primary agent of destruction as Jeremiah had prophesied, while Judah's allies simply looked on without providing aid.
 - d. Lamentations 2:14 proves the writer made use of Ezekiel.
 - 1) It is true that Lamentations uses terms also used by Ezekiel. One is the reference to Jerusalem as "the perfection of beauty" (Lam. 2:15). The other is the combination of terms translated "false and foolish visions" (Lam. 2:14)
 - 2) In response, Kaiser points out that the phrase used to describe Jerusalem is also found in Psalm 50:2 and may be the basis for references in the works of both Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Moreover he shows that the writer's use of the Hebrew term *taphel* is different from Ezekiel's usage (i.e. the idea of white-washing).

- e. The lack of emphasis on the sins of the people.
 - 1) The argument is that Lamentations does not emphasize the sins of the people.
 - 2) It is hard to take this argument seriously in view of texts like Lamentations 1:5, 8, 14, 18, 22; 2:14; 3:39, 42; 4:6, 13, and 5:7.
 - f. Many of the words and modes of expression do not occur in Jeremiah's prophecies.
 - 1) This argument always seems to me to be of dubious value, *i.e.* when scholars develop personal expectations of a biblical writer and then make a point about the fact that he does not meet those expectations.
 - 2) Clearly there is a large shared vocabulary between Jeremiah and Lamentations.
 - 3) Probably most of the unique terms of Lamentations grow out of the more elaborate description of the circumstances of Jerusalem's fall.
 - g. Jeremiah is placed among the writings.
 - 1) This would not prove that Jeremiah was not the author. It is possible that Lamentations were later placed there for liturgical purposes or because of their poetic nature.
 - 2) See the argument by Smith on the numbering of OT books under "authorship."
6. Most older commentaries, which were also scholarly, attributed the book to Jeremiah. The tendency among modern scholars is to take a more agnostic position based on the lack of any textual claim that the Lamentations were written by Jeremiah. Garrett points out a rather large list of modern introductions that acknowledge that the author of Lamentations is unknown. (Garrett, *Song of Songs/Lamentations*, 285)
7. Though we cannot say for certain, it is hard to imagine that anyone would have been more qualified or motivated to write Lamentations than Jeremiah. The evidence of the ancient tradition and the similarities in tone and language would strongly suggest Jeremiah as the author, even if one cannot conclusively prove it. However we must acknowledge that not knowing with certainty the author would not diminish the value or usefulness of the book.

C. Background:

1. The lamentations depend upon the background of Jerusalem's destruction recorded in 2 Kings 25, Jeremiah 39, Jeremiah 52, and 2 Chronicles 36:11-21. Its importance can be seen in the repetition of the account in these various texts. One can identify numerous parallels between 2 Kings 25, the Book of Jeremiah, and Lamentations.
2. However each has a distinct role in describing the event. Jeremiah's work gives a prophetic warning of the destruction. Second Kings records the prophetic fulfillment of the destruction. Lamentations gives prophetic expression to the pain of the destruction and a path to healing and restoration.

D. Date of composition:

1. Lamentations appears to have been composed out of the anguish and suffering of one who experienced the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC. It shows the

marks of one intimately familiar with the devastation of the city and its emotional impact upon those who survived.

2. "Lamentations was written in reaction to the physical devastation of the city and expresses the psychological and spiritual anguish over God's abandonment of his people and his hostility toward them (Longman, *An Introduction to the OT*, 345).
3. Some have contended that the work was authored in connection with the rebuilding of the temple in 520 BC. But it is hard to see how a work of such intense emotion should be produced so much later, and at a time when the people of God were encouraged at least by the prospects of their return and rebuilding effort.
4. Thus a date not long after 587 BC seems most appropriate for the book.

E. Purpose:

1. Kiel offers this summary of the purposes for the Lamentations: "In these Lamentations he seeks not merely to give expression to the sorrow of the people that he may weep with them, but by his outpour of complaint to rouse his fellow-countrymen to an acknowledgement of God's justice in this visitation, to keep them from despair under the burden of unutterable woe, and by teaching them how to give due submission to the judgment that has befallen them, to lead once more to God those who would not let themselves be brought to Him through his previous testimony regarding that judgment while it was yet impending. (Kiel, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 475).
2. "Perhaps the most important purpose of the book was to explain the theological reason for the catastrophe. The book places the reason for Jerusalem's fall in clear focus and demonstrates what can be learned about God from this. The reason given for Jerusalem's demise is the sin of the people (1:8, 9, 14; 4:14). The fall of the city is a vivid illustration of God's justice in not overlooking sin even in those who are his own (1:18). It demonstrates the fact that God may seem like an enemy to his people when they are disobedient (2:5, 7). It shows that the catastrophe was not outside the purposes of God (2:17) and vividly describes the results that can come from willful disobedience. But God is envisioned as a God of mercy and faithfulness as well. Even though Jeremiah saw his beloved homeland crumbling about him, there remained one great element of stability: God's loyalty to his promises. Jeremiah knew that this was not the end, for he trusted in the steadfast love of the Lord and learned to wait quietly for God to act in his time (3:22–27)." (McComiskey, "The Book of Lamentations," 1302).

F. Literary features:

1. Genre:
 - a. The genre of Lamentations has been described as having elements of the personal lament, communal lament, and funeral dirge. It might be compared to various laments in the Psalms (44, 60, 74, 79, 80). It is noteworthy that there are numerous connections between the wording of Lamentations and the Psalms. This might also be another evidence for Jeremiah's authorship since the Psalms were frequently used by the priests in the worship of the temple.
 - b. Some find in the poetry an imbalanced meter (3:2) called *qinah* that might be heard as a "limping" meter, adding to it a mournful tone.
2. Poetic features:

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- a. Lamentations does not in general use the typical parallelism found in Hebrew poetry. However this feature of Hebrew poetry is found in the prayer of Lamentations 5 where the acrostic structure is no longer used.
 - b. The use of vivid metaphor and personification adds a strong emotional human element in the description of the city's destruction and in the expression of the pain of experiencing God's judgment.
3. The use of the acrostic structure:
- a. The first four chapters are alphabetical acrostics.
 - 1) In the first lament there are three lines per verse (except verse seven). The opening line in each verse begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
 - 2) In the second lament there are also three lines per verse (except verse 19). The opening line of each verse begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. (The alphabetical ordering is slightly different in chapter 2-4. The Hebrew letters *pe* and *'ayin* are reversed.)
 - 3) In the third lamentation there is one line per verse; but there are three lines for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet (thus 66 verses).
 - 4) In the fourth lamentation there are two lines per verse. The opening of each verse begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
 - 5) The final lamentation does not use the acrostic structure; but it does consist of 22 verses.
 - b. Reasons for the acrostic structure:
 - 1) An acrostic poem's purpose is to create an intentionally thorough description or argument, not simply to create a poem with a built-in memory device. (Garrett, *Song of Songs/Lamentations*, 372).
 - 2) The purpose of the acrostic structure was to make sure that the grounds of the grief and suffering were worked through completely. In that way, suffering is taken seriously by being given its fullest expression and treatment; yet there is closure to the suffering lest it remains debilitating and prevents wholeness. Therefore the acrostic will help to itemize, organize, and finalize grief. (Kaiser, *Grief and pain in the plan of God: Christian assurance and the message of Lamentations*, 14-15)
 - 3) This concept of totality may be reflected in Jesus' reference to the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet in Revelation 1:8: "I am the Alpha and the Omega."

G. Literary structure:

1. Each of the lamentations appears to have its own individual stress; yet contributes to the overall effect of the whole composition. One senses movement or progress in the book as one works his way through Lamentations. Kaiser suggests that there is chiasmic structure with the emotional peak in the third chapter.
2. Wayne Jackson offers this analysis:
 - a. The Suffering of Jerusalem (Lam. 1)
 - b. The Suffering of the Sanctuary (Lam. 2)

- c. The Suffering of Jeremiah (Lam. 3)
 - d. The Suffering of the Siege (Lam. 4)
 - e. Judah's Penitent Plea (Lam. 5)
3. J. Sidlow Baxter offers this analysis:
- a. Jerusalem's plight (Lam. 1)
 - b. Jehovah's anger (Lam. 2)
 - c. Jeremiah's grief (Lam. 3)
 - d. Jehovah's anger (Lam. 4)
 - e. Jeremiah's prayer (Lam. 5)
4. Kaiser suggests the following analysis in which he finds the climax of the book in the third lamentation:
- a. The Outside View: The city (Lam. 1)
 - b. The Inside View: The Wrath of God (Lam. 2)
 - c. The Upward View: The Compassions of God (Lam. 3)
 - d. The Overall View: The Sins of all Classes (Lam. 4)
 - e. The Future View: The Prayer (Lam. 5)

II. The Content of Lamentations

A. Lamentations 1 (Jerusalem's Devastation Described):

1. Text and Commentary:
- a. This lamentation begins with the narrator's description of Jerusalem's devastation (v. 1-11).
 - b. *¹HOW lonely sits the city That was full of people! She has become like a widow Who was once great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces Has become a forced laborer!*
 - 1) The opening Hebrew word *'ekah* can ask a question such as "how" or "where;" but here it functions to sorrowfully describe the magnitude of the loneliness of the daughter of Zion. It is a characteristic term of the lament genre.
 - 2) Her devastated state is described by contrast in the reversal of fortunes. She who was "full" of inhabitants sits "alone." She who was "great among the nations" is now "like a widow." The "princess" has become a "forced laborer" or "vassal" of Babylon.
 - 3) In a sense, God's people find themselves back where they were before their deliverance from Egypt!
 - c. *²She weeps bitterly in the night, And her tears are on her cheeks; She has none to comfort her Among all her lovers. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; They have become her enemies.*
 - 1) In prophetic literature, Judah's reliance upon the nations around her and their gods is regarded as spiritual adultery against the Lord.

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- 2) Now her “lovers” and “friends” have dealt treacherously with her, *i.e.* they have dealt falsely with her and abandoned her in her time of need.
 - 3) Note the repetition in this chapter of the theme “no one to comfort.”
 - d. ³ *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.*
 - 1) The Lord had visited upon Judah the covenantal curses of Deuteronomy 28:36, 63-68.
 - 2) She has been judged by exile and by servitude. The blessing of rest that she had once enjoyed through the Lord’s past provision no longer exists (*cf.* Deut. 12:9-10); and there is no way of escape from the pursuer.
 - e. ⁴ *The roads of Zion are in mourning Because no one comes to the appointed feasts. All her gates are desolate; Her priests are groaning, Her virgins are afflicted, And she herself is bitter.*
 - 1) Zion’s road and gates participate in the sorrow. No one travels to Jerusalem for the pilgrim festivals. Consequently the priests have no one to lead in worship nor do they receive the tithes brought for their livelihood. Thus they groan in their loss.
 - 2) The virgins who joyously celebrated in festival times now suffer affliction.
 - f. ⁵ *Her adversaries have become her masters, Her enemies prosper; For the LORD has caused her grief Because of the multitude of her transgressions; Her little ones have gone away As captives before the adversary.*
 - 1) The condition of servitude is the Lord’s doing. It is the Lord’s punishment for Judah’s many sins (*cf.* Deut. 28:49ff).
 - 2) The people taken captive are regarded as Zion’s “children” or “little ones” who are led out before their enemies.
 - g. ⁶ *And all her majesty Has departed from the daughter of Zion; Her princes have become like bucks That have found no pasture; And they have fled without strength Before the pursuer.*
 - 1) Jerusalem’s queenly majesty has been removed.
 - 2) Judah’s princes are now like starving bucks weakened by their lack of food—easy prey for the hunter.
 - h. ⁷ *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.*
 - 1) The city’s glorious past--its rulers, its victories, its wealth-- is now only a memory.
 - 2) It has all been taken away; and her adversaries mock her.
 - i. ⁸ *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.*
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- 1) Because of her sin, Jerusalem has become defiled like a woman who has committed adultery.
 - 2) Even she is disgusted with her defilement.
 - j. ⁹ *Her uncleanness was in her skirts; She did not consider her future; Therefore she has fallen astonishingly; She has no comforter. "See, O LORD, my affliction, For the enemy has magnified himself!"*
 - 1) Again Jerusalem's reliance upon her political alliances and false gods is likened to fornication that defiles.
 - 2) She did not consider the consequences of her immoral behavior. Now she can only cry out to the Lord to see her affliction. The narrator continues:
 - k. ¹⁰ *The adversary has stretched out his hand Over all her precious things, For she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary, The ones whom Thou didst command That they should not enter into Thy congregation.*
 - 1) Those who had been forbidden to enter the congregation because of their idolatry (*i.e.* Gentiles; cf. Deut. 23:1-3) have now entered the temple.
 - 2) The enemy now possesses the treasures of the Lord's temple.
 - l. ¹¹ *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."*
 - 1) The siege has created famine; those who remain in the city are forced to surrender their valuables for food to survive.
 - 2) Again, she can only cry out for the Lord to see and pity her despised condition.
 - m. The pain becomes more personal as the daughter of Zion speaks for herself (v. 12-22).
 - n. ¹² *"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.*
 - 1) In the first half of the lamentation, the narrator describes the suffering and the city intermittently cries out in the first person. Now the situation is reversed; the city personified cries out and the narrator breaks in with intermittent comments.
 - 2) The widow cries out to those who pass by, "Is it nothing to you?" Jerusalem's pain is unprecedented because it has been inflicted out of the Lord's wrath.
 - 3) The intensity of Jerusalem's suffering is exacerbated by the realization that it comes from the hand of her own Lord; it is a day of judgment from Him for her sins.
 - o. ¹³ *"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.*
 - 1) God's judgment is like a fire that consumes or a net that ensnares its victim.
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- 2) There is no escape from the judgment. The city has been made desolate and weak.
- p. ¹⁴ *"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.*
- 1) Like a master who ties the yoke upon his oxen, so Jerusalem's sins have become a yoke of slavery tied by the Lord's own hand upon her.
- 2) She is powerless to stand against her enemies.
- q. ¹⁵ *"The Lord has rejected all my strong men In my midst; He has called an appointed time against me To crush my young men; The Lord has trodden as in a wine press The virgin daughter of Judah.*
- 1) The Lord is portrayed as the active agent of the destruction. Those who have the greatest strength yield to His destructive power. Instead of an appointed time (Hebrew *mo'ed*) for worship and festivity (*cf.* Lev. 23:2), it is an appointed time for destruction and sorrow.
- 2) Jerusalem is trodden down like grapes in the winepress of the Lord's wrath.
- r. ¹⁶ *"For these things I weep; My eyes run down with water; Because far from me is a comforter, One who restores my soul; My children are desolate Because the enemy has prevailed."*
- 1) Again the daughter of Zion testifies to her great sorrow and the lack of any one to comfort her.
- 2) Her children are likewise desolate because the enemy has been victorious.
- s. ¹⁷ *Zion stretches out her hands; There is no one to comfort her; The LORD has commanded concerning Jacob That the ones round about him should be his adversaries; Jerusalem has become an unclean thing among them.*
- 1) The narrator now bridges the gap between the two sections where the city speaks in her own behalf. He comments that Zion has reached out for a comforter, but finds none.
- 2) Jerusalem's neighbors have become her enemies; they see her as unclean.
- t. ¹⁸ *"The LORD is righteous; For I have rebelled against His command; Hear now, all peoples, And behold my pain; My virgins and my young men Have gone into captivity.*
- 1) The suffering widowed city must confess that her punishment is completely deserved because she has lived in rebellion against the Lord. He has been righteous or just in His dealings with His people.
- 2) The city now calls out to "all peoples" to see the pain brought about by the captivity of her virgins and young men.
- u. ¹⁹ *"I called to my lovers, but they deceived me; My priests and my elders perished in the city, While they sought food to restore their strength themselves.*
- 1) Jerusalem was to learn that the nations upon whom they relied had made empty promises which deceived her.

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- 2) Those who might have provided leadership in the city, the priests and elders, perished in their pursuit of their own needs.
- v. ²⁰ *“See, O LORD, for I am in distress; My spirit is greatly troubled; My heart is overturned within me, For I have been very rebellious. In the street the sword slays; In the house it is like death.*
- 1) For the third time the widow calls upon the Lord to see her affliction; but must acknowledge that it is the result of her rebellion against the Lord.
- 2) Death is everywhere.
- w. ²¹ *“They have heard that I groan; There is no one to comfort me; All my enemies have heard of my calamity; They are glad that Thou hast done it. Oh, that Thou wouldst bring the day which Thou hast proclaimed, That they may become like me.*
- 1) The enemies of Jerusalem have heard of its destruction; and they rejoice in her judgment rather than pity or comfort her.
- 2) Zion's only consolation is the realization that her enemies will likewise suffer in due time the same day of judgment that she has experienced.
- x. ²² *“Let all their wickedness come before Thee; And deal with them as Thou hast dealt with me For all my transgressions; For my groans are many, and my heart is faint.”*
- 1) Consequently the city's final appeal can only be for the Lord to manifest His justice toward the enemy as He has toward His sinful people.
- 2) In the meantime she can only suffer.
2. Message summary:
- a. This first lament is dominated by the themes of Jerusalem's painful devastation with no source of comfort. Judah's great unfaithfulness is the ground of that devastation, and the Lord is the ultimate active cause of that suffering through His chosen agents of destruction, the Babylonians.
- b. Three key themes:
- 1) *Painful devastation*: This lamentation is a portrait of suffering, each verse supplying the brush strokes to fill out a picture of intense but completely-deserved anguish and devastation. The frequent appearance of the word “all” shows the totality or comprehensiveness of that destruction. And a point of special emphasis throughout the lament is the lack of any source of comfort for the painful conditions. The narration of the devastation is accented by the appeal of the suffering daughter to the Lord to “see” her suffering (v. 9, 11).
- 2) *Great transgression*: The lamenter's portrait is grounded in Israel's unique calling as the bride of the Lord and her unfaithfulness to that divinely-chosen role (*cf.* Jer. 31:32). Instead of relying upon her “husband” for protection by faithfully loving him and serving him with her whole heart, Judah (as the surviving manifestation of the nation of Israel) resorted to political alliances with the surrounding nations (and their gods) for her protection and turned away from her true husband. These were acts of
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spiritual infidelity or adultery in violation of the covenant she had made with the Lord and by which she made herself defiled or unclean.

- 3) *The Lord's judgment*: Because of Jerusalem's sins, she was given into the hands of her enemies. She realized too late that her trust had been misplaced, since her "lovers" did nothing to help. Now devastated and alone, the daughter of Zion can only express the deepest grief at her devastating condition. Even so she must confess that all her pain is deserved due to her many transgressions, and that the Lord is righteous in all that He has done. She can only give expression to the greatness of her grief and appeal to the Lord to look mercifully upon her affliction. Her only consolation is the realization that the painful judgment with which she has been judged will at last fall upon the nations the Lord has used for her punishment.

B. Lamentations 2 (The wrath of the Lord):

1. Text and Commentary:

- a. ¹*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.*
 - 1) The first nine verses are unified by the actions of the Lord in punishing Jerusalem and Judah. The image of "covering with a cloud" describes how she has been totally engulfed in the wrath of the Lord. The verses that follow give detail to that statement.
 - 2) In the past the Lord exalted Jerusalem in royal glory as His dwelling place. Jackson thinks the "footstool" is a reference to the ark of the covenant. (cf. 1 Chron. 28:2; Ps. 99:5) (Jackson, *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, 155)
 - 3) "He has not remembered" stands in stark contrast to the language of God's remembrance in their time of need. It conveys the idea that, this time, there is no help or deliverance. Instead this is His day of wrath.
- b. ²*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.*
 - 1) These actions are typically associated with an enemy; but now they are said to be performed by the Lord.
 - 2) The verbs show the comprehensive nature of the judgment touching the people as well as their fortifications and rulers.
- c. ³*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.*
 - 1) The strength by which Israel might have defeated their enemies is withdrawn. God's right hand by which He would have protected His people and defeated their enemies is now drawn back.
 - 2) Instead the Lord's wrath is like a fire that consumes and spreads throughout the land.

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- d. ⁴ *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.*
- 1) Now instead of using his right hand to protect His people, the Lord uses it as the divine warrior to destroy them.
 - 2) His wrath slays “all that were pleasant to the eye,” an apparent reference to the families within Jerusalem’s tent.
- e. ⁵ *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.*
- 1) This verse recapitulates the preceding verses and adds the effect of all this destruction.
 - 2) Judah experiences multiplied sorrow and moaning from her pain.
- f. ⁶ *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.*
- 1) Even the institutions of the Lord’s worship are not exempt from the Lord’s wrath. He acts with violence against His temple and its altar so that the commanded festivals and Sabbaths are no longer observed.
 - 2) Those appointed to lead the people, kings and priests, are despised or spurned rather than honored because of their opposition to the Lord.
- g. ⁷ *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.*
- 1) Clearly the reference is to the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians.
 - 2) But instead of the joyful praises that commonly took place in the house of the Lord during its festivals, the enemies now loudly celebrate in the same place their victory over God’s people.
- h. ⁸ *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.*
- 1) The Lord has measured the extent of the destruction and follows through with the purposed destruction—no holding back.
 - 2) Thus the city’s fortifications are said to lament and languish together.
- i. ⁹ *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.*
- 1) The fortifications of the city have been broken through and destroyed.
 - 2) But more importantly the spiritual protections are also removed. Both law and prophecy no longer exist in the city. Those upon whom the Lord would rely to execute his law and reveal His word are in exile.
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- j. ¹⁰ *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.*
- 1) Those who might give judgments at the gate have nothing to say; they can only show remorse for Jerusalem's fate by the customary symbols of mourning.
 - 2) Likewise the virgins whose typical activity was joyful singing are now likewise bowed down in sorrow.
- k. A new speaker appears—either Jeremiah or someone like him who identifies with Jerusalem's suffering.
- l. ¹¹ *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.*
- 1) The prophet pours his heart out with tears over Jerusalem's punishment.
 - 2) He especially laments the impact that the destruction has had on its most innocent ones, the infants and small children.
- m. ¹² *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.*
- 1) The little ones ask their mothers where their food is.
 - 2) And in the absence of nourishment, their lives slip away on their mothers' bosom.
- n. ¹³ *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?*
- 1) The prophet seems to say that the unprecedented level of Zion's suffering leaves him without a similar circumstance from which to derive some word of comfort or hope.
 - 2) Her condition is like a disease for which there is no cure or remedy.
- o. ¹⁴ *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.*
- 1) Zion's condition is the result of false prophets who refused to rebuke their sin and call for their repentance.
 - 2) They gave false and misleading oracles or false and foolish visions that misled the people and legitimized their sinful lives.
- p. ¹⁵ *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'?"*
- 1) Zion can expect no help from those who pass by. Instead they will manifest the gestures of mockery and scorn.
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- 2) They will ask in incredulity if this devastated city could actually be the city once gloriously described as “the perfection of beauty, a joy to all the earth.” (cf. Ps 48:1-2)
- q. ¹⁶ *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.”*
- 1) The enemies of Jerusalem gloat over her fall.
 - 2) They celebrate the event as something they have always longed for and now at last have witnessed.
- r. ¹⁷ *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.*
- 1) Jerusalem’s destruction is the fulfillment of the covenantal curses the Lord had spoken long before as well as the fulfillment of the warnings of His prophets.
 - 2) Though the enemies have taken credit for her devastation (v. 16), it is the Lord who has empowered the enemy to carry out His work of judgment. It has come at His command.
- s. ¹⁸ *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.*
- 1) It is difficult to determine who is referred to here. Is it the children mentioned earlier who have suffered so much?
 - 2) They call upon the Lord, as Jerusalem’s true protector, to weep at the suffering He sees.
- t. The prophet urges his people to pray to the Lord (v. 19).
- u. ¹⁹ *“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.”*
- 1) Apparently the prophet now urges the suffering people to respond spiritually to the devastation.
 - 2) He urges them to cry aloud to the Lord, to pour their hearts out to Him, to lift up their hands to Him for the deliverance of their children who are perishing.
- v. The daughter of Zion once more pleads with the Lord to look on with mercy.
- w. ²⁰ *See, O LORD, and look! With whom hast Thou dealt thus? Should women eat their offspring, The little ones who were born healthy? Should priest and prophet be slain In the sanctuary of the Lord?*
- 1) The daughter of Zion appeals to the Lord to see and consider the horrific conditions. She asks what precedent there is for the way the Lord has treated Jerusalem.
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- 2) Has not her suffering involved things that should not be—mothers cannibalizing their children, priests and prophets slain in the place where they should teach God's law and reveal God's word?
 - 3) The implication seems to be that these things should arouse the Lord's pity at the extent to which Zion has suffered in comparison with others. The prayer is offered in hope that He will respond with mercy.
- x. ²¹ *On the ground in the streets Lie young and old, My virgins and my young men Have fallen by the sword. Thou hast slain them in the day of Thine anger, Thou hast slaughtered, not sparing.*
- 1) Again the daughter of Zion speaks of the lives of her young people which have fallen by the sword.
 - 2) She acknowledges that this is the Lord's doing, prompted by His anger toward his sinful people.
- y. ²² *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.*
- 1) The Lord has called for terrors to fall upon Jerusalem.
 - 2) The children of the daughter of Zion have been slain by her enemies.
2. Message summary:
- a. In the second lamentation, focus shifts somewhat from the devastation and pain of the city to its cause, namely, the wrath of the Lord. This wrath is the fulfillment of the covenantal curses of ancient times and the more recent prophecies that announced this day of the Lord. The city can only plead for the Lord to consider the severity of the judgment as it has fallen upon not only the guilty but also upon the innocent.
 - b. Three key themes:
 - 1) *The Lord's severe wrath*: The second lamentation builds upon the first with its focus on the Lord, who as a divine warrior has become the enemy of His people. The narrator describes the Lord as the active agent who destroys all in Jerusalem. Even those institutions that were intended to glorify the Lord, the temple, its furnishings, and its worship, are also objects of His wrath.
 - 2) *An honest and sympathetic prophet*: Jeremiah shares in the pain of the city's suffering, especially the innocent ones who suffer as a result of their parents' and ancestors' rebellion. He sees that this suffering is unprecedented in its severity; yet it is clearly the fulfillment of ancient curses now brought upon the city. The people listened to false prophets and priests who led them astray; and now they suffer the consequences of their sinful rebellion. He urges the city to call out to the Lord on behalf of the innocent sufferers.
 - 3) *Zion's painful pleading*: Once more Zion pleads for the Lord to see the horrors and respond to them. Her hope is that the severity of their suffering, especially upon the little ones, will evoke the mercy and compassion of the Lord.

C. **Lamentations 3** (Hope in the Character of the Lord):

1. Text and commentary:
 - a. The speaker shares his own experience of suffering (v. 1-21). If the speaker is Jeremiah then his suffering is representative of that of all his people. He has suffered not only by means of the persecutions of his people in opposition to his prophecies of judgment, but also in sharing in the deepest sorrow in seeing those judgments come to pass.
 - b. ¹*I AM the man who has seen affliction Because of the rod of His wrath.*
 - 1) Commentators differ greatly on who the speaker of this section is. Most likely the speaker is the prophet Jeremiah or someone like him who has also suffered greatly, enabling him to identify with the pain of Zion.
 - 2) The prophet too has experienced the discipline of the Lord's wrath, presumably if Jeremiah, not because of personal sin, but for the perfection of his character.
 - c. ²*He has driven me and made me walk In darkness and not in light.*
 - 1) The Day of the Lord is commonly portrayed as a day of darkness.
 - 2) Darkness is a metaphor for the sorrow and despair of suffering and the withdrawal of the Lord's presence.
 - d. ³*Surely against me He has turned His hand Repeatedly all the day.*
 - 1) The image is one of repeated striking.
 - 2) The sufferer does not get even temporary relief from the blows.
 - e. ⁴*He has caused my flesh and my skin to waste away, He has broken my bones.*
 - 1) The verbs used here are the same used to describe Zion's suffering (cf. 2:2, 1:15).
 - 2) The verbal linkage of this section with the earlier description of Zion's suffering enables the speaker to convey his identification with it.
 - f. ⁵*He has besieged and encompassed me with bitterness and hardship.*
 - 1) The verbs use the language of siege warfare.
 - 2) Like the city, the speaker also has had to meet in battle bitterness and hardship.
 - g. ⁶*In dark places He has made me dwell, Like those who have long been dead.*
 - 1) Again the figure of darkness describes his gloom.
 - 2) The sufferer feels as if he is already in the grave.
 - h. ⁷*He has walled me in so that I cannot go out; He has made my chain heavy.*
 - 1) He feels trapped, imprisoned in his suffering.
 - 2) He is unable to escape from his pain; he is chained to it.
 - i. ⁸*Even when I cry out and call for help, He shuts out my prayer.*
 - 1) The speaker turns to the only one who can help, namely, the Lord.
 - 2) Yet he feels that the Lord is not hearing his prayer.

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- j. ⁹ *He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked.*
- 1) It is as if the Lord is building a prison from which there is no escape.
 - 2) He can find no straight path out of his misery.
- k. ¹⁰ *He is to me like a bear lying in wait, Like a lion in secret places.*
- 1) In his suffering, the speaker feels the Lord is seeking his death.
 - 2) He feels like the prey of the bear or lion who seeks to devour.
- l. ¹¹ *He has turned aside my ways and torn me to pieces; He has made me desolate.*
- 1) In a sense, he has already been attacked.
 - 2) And like the city, he too has been made desolate (*cf.* 1:13).
- m. ¹² *He bent His bow And set me as a target for the arrow.*
- 1) The speaker is the object of the divine warrior's arrows.
 - 2) He is targeted for suffering.
- n. ¹³ *He made the arrows of His quiver To enter into my inward parts.*
- 1) The Lord's arrows strike a successful blow.
 - 2) To penetrate the inward parts is to experience great pain in the deepest recesses of his being.
- o. ¹⁴ *I have become a laughingstock to all my people, Their mocking song all the day.*
- 1) The speaker's suffering from the Lord is exacerbated by the actions of those around him.
 - 2) They laugh and mock at his suffering.
- p. ¹⁵ *He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drunk with wormwood.*
- 1) In another metaphor of suffering, the prophet must eat "bitter herbs."
 - 2) His drink is "wormwood," a plant with a very bitter taste.
- q. ¹⁶ *And He has broken my teeth with gravel; He has made me cower in the dust.*
- 1) These are images of the deepest humiliation.
 - 2) The Lord has brought the prophet to the lowest point in life.
- r. ¹⁷ *And my soul has been rejected from peace; I have forgotten happiness.*
- 1) The prophet reveals the effects of all that has been done to him.
 - 2) The word "peace" in Hebrew conveys not only the absence of conflict, but a state of well-being.
- s. ¹⁸ *So I say, "My strength has perished, And so has my hope from the LORD."*
- 1) The prophet is weak; he no longer possesses the strength to go on.
 - 2) His condition seems hopeless.
- t. ¹⁹ *Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness.*
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- 1) He can only cry to the Lord and those around him to remember the bitterness of his experience.
 - 2) He has no clear direction.
 - u. ²⁰ *Surely my soul remembers And is bowed down within me.*
 - 1) Though others may not remember, he will certainly not forget.
 - 2) That memory makes him bow in sorrow within.
 - v. The one who has suffered so much overcomes his despair and give reasons for the hope he has (v. 21-24).
 - w. ²¹ *This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope.*
 - 1) We begin to see a beautiful transition from despair to hope.
 - 2) It is to be found in thinking on the whole of one's experience with the Lord.
 - x. ²² *The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail.*
 - 1) The prophet's hope is grounded in the "lovingkindnesses" of the Lord. The Hebrew *hesed* refers to the Lord's covenantal mercy and commitment to His people. Or as Kaiser suggests, "In essence, *hesed* is just an Old Testament way of saying God is gracious and God is love. (Kaiser, *Grief and pain in the plan of God: Christian assurance and the message of Lamentations*, 81)
 - 2) "Compassions" translates a Hebrew word that in a literal singular sense refers to the "womb." Just as the mother feels the deepest feeling of compassion for the infant in her womb, so the Lord feels great compassion for His people.
 - 3) This is how the Lord had described Himself in his self-revelation to Israel (Ex. 34:6-7; Deut. 30:3).
 - y. ²³ *They are new every morning; Great is Thy faithfulness.*
 - 1) The Lord offers daily manifestations of His compassion.
 - 2) The Lord is faithful to keep His promises. He is worthy of the trust of His people.
 - z. ²⁴ *"The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I have hope in Him."*
 - 1) The speaker has come full circle from hopeless despair to hope again (cf. 3:18).
 - 2) His hope resides in the possession of the Lord as his god; he needs nothing else (cf. Ps. 73:25-26). It frees him from the bitterness of the losses he has experienced.
 - a. Having found hope in the Lord, the prophet now proclaims what he has learned from his experience in suffering (v. 25-39).
 - b. ²⁵ *The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the person who seeks Him.*
 - 1) For three verses in a row, the Hebrew text will begin with the word "good." The speaker first affirms the goodness of the Lord.
 - 2) That goodness is experienced by those who seek and wait for Him.
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- c. ²⁶ *It is good that he waits silently For the salvation of the LORD.*
- 1) Second it is good for one to wait on the Lord in faith.
 - 2) The faithful must wait in quiet trust rather than angry complaining.
- d. ²⁷ *It is good for a man that he should bear The yoke in his youth.*
- 1) Third it is good that young people in particular should experience life's suffering in youth.
 - 2) The experience of suffering early in life can teach valuable lessons for the whole of life.
- e. ²⁸ *Let him sit alone and be silent Since He has laid it on him.*
- 1) The sufferer must acknowledge the role of the Lord in suffering.
 - 2) To wait silently here means to confess God's power in the situation, to trust in the Lord's faithfulness and covenant mercy, and to embrace humility in the face of what has happened. (Garrett, *Song of Songs/Lamentations*, 417)
- f. ²⁹ *Let him put his mouth in the dust, Perhaps there is hope.*
- 1) The figure is one of humility.
 - 2) Those who suffer should yield to life's suffering without arrogance and with trust in the Lord that He will deliver.
- g. ³⁰ *Let him give his cheek to the smiter; Let him be filled with reproach.*
- 1) Rather than resist the indignities of the enemy, the sufferer is urged to accept it.
 - 2) It is a part of the discipline determined by the Lord.
- h. ³¹ *For the Lord will not reject forever,*
- 1) The sufferer has the hope that his affliction will not be permanent.
 - 2) He has the hope that the Lord will relent.
- i. ³² *For if He causes grief, Then He will have compassion According to His abundant lovingkindness.*
- 1) The same Lord who may punish or discipline is also the one who can show compassion and lovingkindness (*cf.* 3:22).
 - 2) The prophet's hope is grounded in his faith in God's covenantal commitment to His people to fulfill His promises.
- j. ³³ *For He does not afflict willingly, Or grieve the sons of men.*
- 1) Just as a parent does not desire to cause his children pain, but only when he must do so because of their disobedience, so likewise the Lord does not seek to cause His children pain or grief.
 - 2) The angry side of his nature, turned so unflinchingly against Jerusalem, is not the determinative factor in the divine purposes. Begrudgingly, regretfully, if there is no other way toward his higher purposes, he may unleash the forces of evil, but 'his heart' is not in it." (Garrett, *Song of Songs/Lamentations*, 418)
- k. ³⁴ *To crush under His feet All the prisoners of the land,*
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- 1) The author proposes in the general character of the Lord three things that he does not countenance or approve. They mollify the severity of Jerusalem's or Jeremiah's immediate circumstances and suggest that they are the exception rather than the rule in God's dealings with mankind.
 - 2) First, He does not seek to crush men under His feet.
 - l. ³⁵ *To deprive a man of justice In the presence of the Most High,*
 - 1) Second, He does not seek to deprive men of justice.
 - 2) One must continue to believe in the righteousness of the Lord.
 - m. ³⁶ *To defraud a man in his lawsuit— Of these things the Lord does not approve.*
 - 1) Third, He does not seek to defraud one who has a righteous claim.
 - 2) In sum, these acts of judgment are not the primary manifestations of God's nature; they are secondary but necessary in view of human disobedience.
 - n. ³⁷ *Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the Lord has commanded it?*
 - 1) The prophet finds comfort in the sovereignty of the Lord.
 - 2) The sufferings of life are under His control.
 - o. ³⁸ *Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth?*
 - 1) Likewise all events, both good and evil, fall under His sovereign providence.
 - 2) To realize that the Lord can afflict with suffering is also to realize that He can also remove it (*cf.* Job 1:21).
 - p. ³⁹ *Why should any living mortal, or any man, Offer complaint in view of his sins?*
 - 1) Can a person who is punished for sin rightly complain or make accusation against the Lord? Is he morally superior to the Lord?
 - 2) In Jerusalem's case, her suffering was the result of centuries of rebellion against the Lord.
 - q. ⁴⁰ *Let us examine and probe our ways, And let us return to the LORD.*
 - 1) All of these considerations should cause the sufferer to see that his suffering has been the result of his own transgressions and not the Lord's caprice.
 - 2) Through self-examination the sufferer is motivated to return to the Lord and serve Him faithfully.
 - r. In the following section, the prophet appears to lead his hearers in a communal prayer of confession and repentance (v. 41-45).
 - s. ⁴¹ *We lift up our heart and hands Toward God in heaven;*
 - 1) The prophet and the people lift up their hands to the one who dwells in heaven.
 - 2) However this must be more than a physical act; the heart must also be lifted up.
 - t. ⁴² *We have transgressed and rebelled, Thou hast not pardoned.*
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- 1) The sins of the nation are confessed in general terms; they have transgressed the Lord's law and rebelled against him.
 - 2) Consequently their sins have remained unforgiven; instead they have been punished through the Babylonian conquest.
- u. ⁴³ *Thou hast covered Thyself with anger And pursued us; Thou hast slain and hast not spared.*
- 1) The actions of the Babylonian invaders are God's actions in response to their sins.
 - 2) The Babylonians are His agents to slay the guilty.
- v. ⁴⁴ *Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud So that no prayer can pass through.*
- 1) Because of His people's hard-heartedness, He has refused to hear their prayers.
 - 2) This is the complement to the prohibitions of the Lord to Jeremiah not to pray for the people of Jerusalem because of their impenitence (*cf.* Jer. 7:16).
- w. ⁴⁵ *Mere offscouring and refuse Thou hast made us In the midst of the peoples.*
- 1) Once more the prophet returns to the suffering that has come for Judah's sins.
 - 2) They have been lowered to the status of offscouring and refuse among the people of the world.
- x. ⁴⁶ *All our enemies have opened their mouths against us.*
- 1) Jerusalem's enemies are like wild animals.
 - 2) They have opened their mouths wide to devour their prey.
- y. ⁴⁷ *Panic and pitfall have befallen us, Devastation and destruction;*
- 1) The pairings are alliterations also in Hebrew.
 - 2) They combine to describe the fearful and devastating conditions of Jerusalem.
- z. ⁴⁸ *My eyes run down with streams of water Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.*
- 1) Once more the prophet identifies with and is moved by the suffering of his people.
 - 2) His tears are like streams of water falling from his eyes.
- a. ⁴⁹ *My eyes pour down unceasingly, Without stopping,*
- 1) He weeps continually.
 - 2) There is no end to his weeping.
- b. ⁵⁰ *Until the LORD looks down And sees from heaven.*
- 1) He will weep until he has a response from the Lord.
 - 2) There is hope of restoration in the prophet's words.
- c. ⁵¹ *My eyes bring pain to my soul Because of all the daughters of my city.*
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- 1) The prophet feels pain deep within.
 - 2) He is reminded of the cruelties of war that the women of the city would have experienced.
- d. The prophet returns to his own experiences of suffering:
- e. ⁵² *My enemies without cause Hunted me down like a bird;*
- 1) The speaker rehearses his own suffering at the hand of the enemy. Is he speaking of mistreatment by the heathen, thus identifying with Jerusalem's suffering? Or is he speaking of the personal sufferings he endured as a prophet by his fellow-countrymen?
 - 2) Whatever the source, the speaker affirms his innocence in the mistreatment. He had done nothing to deserve the mistreatment.
- f. ⁵³ *They have silenced me in the pit And have placed a stone on me.*
- 1) Jeremiah may be alluding to the episode in Jeremiah 38.
 - 2) Or he may only be speaking figuratively of efforts to silence him.
- g. ⁵⁴ *Waters flowed over my head; I said, "I am cut off!"*
- 1) This verse would suggest that those attacking were seeking his death.
 - 2) The prophet thought the end was near.
- h. ⁵⁵ *I called on Thy name, O LORD, Out of the lowest pit.*
- 1) The sufferer's only hope was to call upon the name of the Lord.
 - 2) The lowest pit may be a metaphor for death as it often is in the Psalms.
- i. ⁵⁶ *Thou hast heard my voice, "Do not hide Thine ear from my prayer for relief, From my cry for help."*
- 1) Like other faithful men of God, he pled for the Lord to hear his cry for help.
 - 2) The Lord heard the prayer.
- j. ⁵⁷ *Thou didst draw near when I called on Thee; Thou didst say, "Do not fear!"*
- 1) The Lord drew near to deliver.
 - 2) He sought to help him overcome his fears.
- k. ⁵⁸ *O Lord, Thou didst plead my soul's cause; Thou hast redeemed my life.*
- 1) It is as if the Lord has become a lawyer or advocate in defense of His suffering client's cause.
 - 2) The prophet acknowledges the Lord's role in answering the prayer, redeeming his life from certain death.
- l. The prophet's past experience now appears to be the basis for his present prayer not only for himself, but for those who he leads in prayer. His personal appeal represents the prayer of each one who might join him in faith:
- m. ⁵⁹ *O LORD, Thou hast seen my oppression; Judge my case.*
- 1) The prophet now represents all the suffering people in his petitions to the Lord.

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- 2) He calls upon the Lord to judge his case.
 - n. ⁶⁰ *Thou hast seen all their vengeance, All their schemes against me.*
 - 1) He rehearses all that they have done.
 - 2) The Lord has seen their acts of revenge and schemes of malevolence.
 - o. ⁶¹ *Thou hast heard their reproach, O LORD, All their schemes against me.*
 - 1) He is confident the Lord has heard their reproach of His people.
 - 2) He has heard their evil plans against God's people.
 - p. ⁶² *The lips of my assailants and their whispering Are against me all day long.*
 - 1) The prophet brings before the Lord the schemes and machinations of the enemy.
 - 2) They are constantly planning and scheming against him.
 - q. ⁶³ *Look on their sitting and their rising; I am their mocking song.*
 - 1) He pleads with the Lord to be aware of their every movement.
 - 2) He acknowledges that he is the object of their mocking.
 - r. ⁶⁴ *Thou wilt recompense them, O LORD, According to the work of their hands.*
 - 1) The lamenter is confident that the Lord will repay His enemies.
 - 2) They will be recompensed for their evil deeds.
 - s. ⁶⁵ *Thou wilt give them hardness of heart, Thy curse will be on them.*
 - 1) The prophet is confident of the Lord's actions in response to his prayer.
 - 2) Instead of showing them mercy, He will harden them so that they will be visited with the curse of God.
 - t. ⁶⁶ *Thou wilt pursue them in anger and destroy them From under the heavens of the LORD!*
 - 1) The day of wrath will come for the enemies of Zion.
 - 2) Just as the Lord in his wrath had punished Jerusalem, so in the future he will totally destroy the enemies of Israel.
2. Message summary:
- a. In this lament, the prophet appears to share his own experience of suffering. His was a journey from suffering to despair to hope and deliverance. What he had learned through his suffering, he now shares with his suffering people. He encourages them also to affirm the true character of the Lord and to cast their souls upon him in prayer.
 - b. Three key themes:
 - 1) *Lonely and hopeless despair*: The prophet describes a circumstance of intense suffering, a time of loneliness and darkness. His suffering was a prison from which there was no apparent escape. He searched in vain for relief with no hope of recovery.
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- 2) *A path to hope in the Lord's character:* Yet in spite of these painful feelings, Jeremiah is able to look past his pain and have hope again. His consolation was not found in merely venting feelings, but in spiritual remembrance of the nature of the Lord, namely, His lovingkindness, His compassion, His faithfulness, His provision, His discipline, and His turning again to His people.
- 3) *Turning back to the Lord in prayer:* It was important for the fallen people of the Lord to look to the only one who could save them. They must acknowledge His sovereignty and ultimate goodness and accept their suffering with humility and contrition. Jeremiah leads them in the confession of sin and in a prayer of hope that the Lord would respond in compassion to them. Their suffering would be resolved with the overthrow of the enemies that had so oppressed them.

B. Lamentations 4 (The consequences of the Lord's wrath):

1. Text and commentary:

- a. In the first speech a voice from the community details the horrors Jerusalem has faced and continues to face (v. 1-10).
- b. ¹*HOW dark the gold has become, How the pure gold has changed! The sacred stones are poured out At the corner of every street.*
 - 1) Some think this is a reference to the destruction of the temple with its gold and sacred stones.
 - 2) Others see this as a metaphor for the fall of the people in the streets.
- c. ²*The precious sons of Zion, Weighed against fine gold, How they are regarded as earthen jars, The work of a potter's hands!*
 - 1) The worth of God's people had been great.
 - 2) But now the lives of Jerusalem's inhabitants were now regarded as clay potsherds.
- d. ³*Even jackals offer the breast, They nurse their young; But the daughter of my people has become cruel Like ostriches in the wilderness.*
 - 1) The desperate conditions of the siege led mothers to neglect their young, a thing contrary to the natural instincts of the mothers in the animal world.
 - 2) The ostrich was considered an exception to the mother's natural love of its offspring (*cf.* Job 39:13-17)
- e. ⁴*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.*
 - 1) The little children suffer greatly in the horror of warfare.
 - 2) There is no one to feed them.
- f. ⁵*Those who ate delicacies Are desolate in the streets; Those reared in purple Embrace ash pits.*
 - 1) The judgment has no respect for social class.
 - 2) The affluent who had eaten fine food now find themselves scouring in the refuse to prevent starvation.

- g. ⁶ *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.*
- 1) The cause of this devastation is clear, namely, the sin of the people of Judah.
 - 2) They are said to be more wicked than the city of Sodom, a city that might have been saved were there no less than ten righteous souls (*cf.* Gen. 18:32) Jerusalem's special position magnifies her iniquity in comparison with Sodom.
- h. ⁷ *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.*
- 1) The group referred to by the Hebrew *naziri* (translated "consecrated ones") is unclear; but the contrast suggests a dramatic change in appearance.
 - 2) These had all the features of natural beauty and healthful radiance.
- i. ⁸ *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.*
- 1) The state of those in the previous verse is now dramatically altered.
 - 2) Now they are blackened by emaciation and withered like dried wood.
- j. ⁹ *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.*
- 1) Those who are slain by the sword experience a hasty death.
 - 2) That death would be preferable to prolonged death by starvation.
- k. ¹⁰ *The hands of compassionate women Boiled their own children; They became food for them Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.*
- 1) In their desperation, Jerusalem's mothers resort to cannibalism to survive.
 - 2) The Lord in the covenant curses had spoken of this possibility (Deut. 28:53-55).
- l. In the second speech (vv. 1-16) the narrator adds his depiction of the terrors Jerusalem has experienced because of her sin.
- m. ¹¹ *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.*
- 1) Jerusalem's suffering is no mere misfortune of being at the wrong place at the wrong time, the victim of circumstances.
 - 2) Their destruction is the direct result of the Lord's anger with them because of their sin.
- n. ¹² *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.*
- 1) Everyone was living in denial.
 - 2) No one believed that the Lord would allow His city to be made desolate by the adversary.
- o. ¹³ *Because of the sins of her prophets And the iniquities of her priests, Who have shed in her midst The blood of the righteous,*

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- 1) Those who should have provided moral leadership were themselves morally bankrupt.
 - 2) Those who were supposed to lead the people with a moral example shed the blood of the righteous.
- p. ¹⁴ *They wandered, blind, in the streets; They were defiled with blood So that no one could touch their garments.*
- 1) "Wandered" and "blind" describe the darkness of their understanding of the truth.
 - 2) Hence these false prophets and wicked priests became instead sources of defilement because of the innocent blood they had shed.
- q. ¹⁵ *"Depart! Unclean!" they cried of themselves. "Depart, depart, do not touch!" So they fled and wandered; Men among the nations said, "They shall not continue to dwell with us."*
- 1) Like unclean lepers, they called for others not to come near.
 - 2) But even among the Gentiles they could find no reception. Who wants the likes of these false prophets and wicked priests?
- r. ¹⁶ *The presence of the LORD has scattered them; He will not continue to regard them. They did not honor the priests, They did not favor the elders.*
- 1) Those responsible for misleading Judah participated in their punishment. The Lord had no regard for them due to their false conduct.
 - 2) Neither did the nations from which they sought refuge treat them with respect.
- s. In the third speech (vv. 17-20) a speaker from the community describes the fall of the city, which included the capture of the king.
- t. ¹⁷ *Yet our eyes failed; Looking for help was useless. In our watching we have watched For a nation that could not save.*
- 1) Judah watched intently, anticipating in hope the help of the nations upon whom they had relied.
 - 2) They watched in vain; the allies never came to their rescue.
- u. ¹⁸ *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.*
- 1) The inhabitants of the city were forced to hide to evade capture and death.
 - 2) They did so knowing that the end had come.
- v. ¹⁹ *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.*
- 1) Those who tried to run away suffered a similar fate. They could not run fast enough to evade their attackers.
 - 2) No matter where they tried to escape, there they met the enemy.
- w. ²⁰ *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."*
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- 1) Even the king in whom they had hope for deliverance was captured.
 - 2) The people had trusted in the Davidic promises of rest through their ruler. However Judah's kings had not walked in David's ways; thus their subjects could not enjoy the protection the Lord had promised.
- x. In the fourth and final speech (vv. 21-22) a prophetic voice pronounces woe on Edom and relief for Jerusalem. The most comforting aspect of this sequence is the final speech. Jerusalem has been waiting since the first verse in Lamentations for the news that God has finished punishing. (*Garrett, Song of Songs/Lamentations, 436*).
- y. ²¹ *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.*
- 1) The Edomites, though Israel's kin, had sided against the people of Israel; they rejoiced in their destruction (*cf.* also the similar conduct of the Edomites mentioned by Obadiah).
 - 2) The prophet predicts that the Edomites will also experience Judah's fate, experiencing the shame of destruction.
- z. ²² *The punishment of your iniquity has been completed, O daughter of Zion; He will exile you no longer. But He will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom; He will expose your sins!*
- 1) In contrast to Edom, the prophet announces that Zion's punishment has come to an end.
 - 2) At last, there is the beginning of a hope that the Lord's wrath has been completed and that restoration is possible.

2. Message summary:

- a. The fourth lamentation continues the book's emphasis on detailing the people's excruciating pain, while at the same time highlighting their sin. The chapter moves from descriptions of woe to an assertion of release from judgment. Deliverance awaits Israel; but destruction awaits Edom, Israel's enemy.
- b. Three key themes:
 - 1) *Severe punishment deserved*: The fourth lamentation emphasizes the fact that the judgment was well deserved. The author describes the various classes of the population (4:1-16) and indicates how each has been affected by Jerusalem's downfall. Verses 12-20 affirm that the judgment of God is a direct consequence of their sin.
 - 2) *Corrupt leadership*: The narrator attributes the destruction in part to the corrupt false prophets and priests who led the nation astray. They too participated in the pain of its devastation.
 - 3) *Punishment of the Lord's enemies*: This lamentation also becomes a joyous statement of hope (4:21, 22) as the writer affirms that God will punish Israel's enemies. Israel's sin will be forgiven, and the guilt of "the daughter of Edom" will be punished. (The "daughter of Edom" undoubtedly stands for all the enemy nations. Edom is used in Isaiah 63:1 in the same fashion.)

C. **Lamentations 5** (A prayer for restoration):

1. Text and Commentary:
 - a. This twenty-two line prayer departs from the acrostic form of the first four chapters. The opening verse appeals to the Lord to remember, have regard for, and see Jerusalem's disgrace.
 - b. ¹*REMEMBER, O LORD, what has befallen us; Look, and see our reproach!*
 - 1) It is a strong plea for the Lord to act in behalf of His people based on the promises of Deuteronomy 30.
 - 2) In the next section, v. 2-18, the speaker rehearses for a final time the sufferings of the city, giving definition to the reproach or disgrace mentioned in v. 1.
 - c. ²*Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, Our houses to aliens.*
 - 1) The Lord had given Israel their inheritance in the land.
 - 2) Now that land had been turned over to hostile enemies.
 - d. ³*We have become orphans without a father, Our mothers are like widows.*
 - 1) The people of Jerusalem were "orphans" in multiple senses (biologically, politically, and spiritually). (Garrett, Song of Songs/Lamentations, 460).
 - 2) The mothers were like widows who had no support or advocate.
 - e. ⁴*We have to pay for our drinking water, Our wood comes to us at a price.*
 - 1) What might have been provided by a father without cost must now be purchased.
 - 2) Water and wood, essentials of daily life, must be purchased, possibly at exorbitant prices.
 - f. ⁵*Our pursuers are at our necks; We are worn out, there is no rest for us.*
 - 1) This verse depicts the harsh oppression of those who are now enslaved by their captors.
 - 2) They are pushed beyond their physical limits without needed rest.
 - g. ⁶*We have submitted to Egypt and Assyria to get enough bread.*
 - 1) This statement may suggest the past reliance upon other nations for survival.
 - 2) Implicit in the statement is an acknowledgement of the lack of wisdom in relying upon foreigners instead of the Lord, a theme common in the prophetic literature.
 - h. ⁷*Our fathers sinned, and are no more; It is we who have borne their iniquities.*
 - 1) It is acknowledged that Jerusalem's judgment is the result of sin compounded over the generations.
 - 2) The present generation was experiencing the results of this long-term pattern of disobedience. (*cf.* Ex. 20:5)
 - i. ⁸*Slaves rule over us; There is no one to deliver us from their hand.*
 - 1) This reversal of fortune statement may suggest that those over whom Judah once had hegemony now have power over them.

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- 2) Though once powerless, these slave lords have dominion, since there is no one to deliver their subjects.
- j. ⁹ *We get our bread at the risk of our lives Because of the sword in the wilderness.*
- 1) It is a fight to survive.
 - 2) Attempts to leave the city to find food elsewhere is met by enemies who cut down the remaining Israelites, even in areas where one would not expect to find those enemies (*i.e.* in the wilderness).
- k. ¹⁰ *Our skin has become as hot as an oven, Because of the burning heat of famine.*
- 1) Those who have survived the destruction suffer malnutrition and near starvation because of the lack of food.
 - 2) Their skin is wrinkled and shriveled as if roasted in an oven.
- l. ¹¹ *They ravished the women in Zion, The virgins in the cities of Judah.*
- 1) Not only during the destruction but perhaps also in the aftermath, women were particularly vulnerable.
 - 2) They were abused by the lustful and lawless soldiers who attacked the city.
- m. ¹² *Princes were hung by their hands; Elders were not respected.*
- 1) The reference may be to execution by impalement.
 - 2) The elderly were not given any consideration or the respect due because of their age.
- n. ¹³ *Young men worked at the grinding mill; And youths stumbled under loads of wood.*
- 1) The youths who survived the destruction are assigned to harsh labor, doing the tasks of slaves and even animals.
 - 2) They are put to the point of collapse.
- o. ¹⁴ *Elders are gone from the gate, Young men from their music.*
- 1) The things associated with normal community life have ceased.
 - 2) The elders no longer sit in the gate for judgment; the young no longer enjoy the music that might have been played there.
- p. ¹⁵ *The joy of our hearts has ceased; Our dancing has been turned into mourning.*
- 1) The whole mood of the city has changed.
 - 2) There is no longer joyous celebration; instead there is only mourning.
- q. ¹⁶ *The crown has fallen from our head; Woe to us, for we have sinned!*
- 1) The fallen crown may refer to the loss of the king; or, if the metaphor is extended to the city of Jerusalem, the queen has lost the rule she once enjoyed.
 - 2) The people must acknowledge however that all this is the result of their sin.
- r. ¹⁷ *Because of this our heart is faint; Because of these things our eyes are dim;*
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- 1) The metaphor may suggest that the city is so weak as to be near death or extinction.
 - 2) The eyes may be dimmed the faintness or by the multitude of tears that impair their vision.
- s. ¹⁸ *Because of Mount Zion which lies desolate, Foxes prowl in it.*
- 1) Mount Zion, the dwelling of the Lord, now lies desolate.
 - 2) The desolation of the city brings animals that typically haunt uninhabited ruins, namely, the jackals or foxes.
- t. The prayer closes with an acknowledgement of the sovereignty of the Lord and a plea for restoration to the days of old (v. 19-22).
- u. ¹⁹ *Thou, O LORD, dost rule forever; Thy throne is from generation to generation.*
- 1) The people must still confess that the Lord is in control.
 - 2) Their judgment is not the result of the supreme power of false gods or powerful nations; the commands for its destruction have come from the everlasting throne of the Lord.
- v. ²⁰ *Why dost Thou forget us forever; Why dost Thou forsake us so long?*
- 1) These questions express the deep frustration with the conditions.
 - 2) How long must the city lie in ruins? When will the Lord return to His people?
- w. ²¹ *Restore us to Thee, O LORD, that we may be restored; Renew our days as of old,*
- 1) Just as it was Judah's departure from the Lord that precipitated her fall, so now she must be restored to the Lord to experience the restoration of her kingdom.
 - 2) The prayer expresses a longing to be restored.
- x. ²² *Unless Thou hast utterly rejected us, And art exceedingly angry with us.*
- 1) At last those who pray wonder if this has been the ultimate end of Israel.
 - 2) Israel's restoration is uncertain; but the prophet hopes that the Lord's anger is not so great that He will not relent from it and restore them to their former glory.
2. Message summary:
- a. The final chapter is a prayer offered to the Lord in hope of restoration. For a final time the writer describes the desperate conditions of the destruction for the Lord to "see." He acknowledges that sin is the cause and that only restoration to the Lord will resolve the pain and suffering.
 - b. Three key themes:
 - 1) *Judah's sufferings described:* The glorious conditions of Jerusalem's past are ended; the city is devastated and full of sorrow. The enemy has committed acts of violence and oppression without mercy or regard for the person. The people are fighting for their very survival.

- 2) *God's sovereignty affirmed*: The prayer acknowledges that God is in control. The kingdom of Judah has been destroyed; but the throne of the Lord is untouched. His sovereign rule continues; and that it is His decision as to whether He will hear and restore His fallen people.
- 3) *A plea for restoration*: The prayer acknowledges that Israel needs to be restored to the Lord before her conditions can change. Implicit is the need for humble contrition, confession of sin, and true repentance as the conditions of that restoration. God's people can hope that the Lord has not forsaken them utterly and that they can once more have a relationship with Him.

II. The Value And Importance Of Lamentations To The Modern Reader

A. Insight into the character of the Lord

1. His elective grace and sovereignty
2. His wrath
3. His righteousness and justice
4. His faithfulness
5. His lovingkindness

B. Insight into man's relationship with the Lord

1. The consequences of sin
 - a. Rebellion against God has real consequences. Every person in covenant with the Lord should take seriously the consequences of rejecting the Lord's grace and covenant. We too can experience the Savior turned enemy.
 - b. "High calling, flaunted by low living, inevitably issues in deep suffering." (J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 286)
2. Huey suggests these lessons for the modern reader:
 - a. The wickedness of any people will eventually result in the disintegration of that society.
 - b. We should never take God's past blessings as assurance that they will continue when we continue in sin.
 - c. Our nation and our churches are subject to God's judgment when they are no longer faithful.
 - d. Though many solutions for human suffering have been proposed, ultimately the only satisfactory way to deal with it is through deep and abiding faith in God in spite of the circumstances. (Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 446-447)
3. The pain and suffering of the punishment expressed in Lamentations could be seen as a preview of hell itself.
 - a. How will it feel for one to know that he has rejected all divine appeals to repentance, that he has persisted in unbelief and impenitence in spite of the Lord's sacrificial love and patient pleas, and that he alone is the cause of his eternal torment?

- b. Indeed hell will be the ultimate place of lamentations, a place which Jesus described as a place where there is only weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt. 8:11-12)

C. Insight into the problem of suffering

1. Kaiser takes a unique homiletical approach to Lamentations. He writes of Lamentations, "Instead of explaining pain, it helps us to face grief. In short, it is a pastoral tract that avoids the 'cheery bromides' and offers 'articulation' for one's suffering, 'companionship' for support during the suffering, and the seeds of hope (e.g. 3:20-36; 4:21-22; 5:19-21) for rebuilding one's life when the time has come for putting an end to the grief and pain left from the disaster. (Kaiser, *Grief and pain in the plan of God: Christian assurance and the message of Lamentations*, 31)
2. Lamentations supplies: 1) orientation, 2) a voice for working completely through grief (from *a* to *z*), (3) instruction on how and what to pray, and (4) a focal point in God's faithfulness and in the fact that He is our portion. Is that not what we need in the midst of trouble and calamity? Surely comfort, community, compassion, companionship, and conclusion to suffering are all found in this marvelous little book inserted in the biblical corpus for people and times like ours (Kaiser, *Grief and pain in the plan of God: Christian assurance and the message of Lamentations*, 38-39)

D. An example of devoted compassion

1. Jeremiah's conduct toward his sinful brethren is amazing. Who could have suffered more at the hands of his fellow-Jews than he? Yet we see him, in spite of his terrible mistreatment by them, languishing in grief at their punishment – no gloating or glee over their misfortune, but rather rivers of tears shed in the deepest sorrow.
2. Jeremiah's heart of compassion anticipates the tears of the weeping Christ who shed tears over the same city centuries later (Lk. 19:41) and who revealed the deepest compassion for the masses in their suffering (Mt. 9:36). Perhaps it is this shared compassion that prompted the view that Jesus was the return of Jeremiah from the dead (Mt. 16:14).

Conclusion:

- I. May our study of Lamentations give us insight into our moments of pain. May we not lose faith in the lovingkindness, faithfulness, goodness, and compassion of the Lord of Lamentations. He is our Lord too! Let us face our sins with humility and contrition, openly confessing them to the Lord in real repentance and seeking restoration to Him. Let us show others the path from suffering to healing.
- II. Calvin's prayer is appropriate: "Grant, Almighty God, that though thou chastisest us as we deserve, we may yet never have the light of truth extinguished amongst us, but may ever see, even in darkness, at least some sparks, which may enable us to behold thy paternal goodness and mercy, so that we may be especially humbled under Thy mighty hand, and that being really prostrate through a deep feeling of repentance, we may raise our hopes to Heaven, and never doubt that Thou wilt at length be reconciled to us when we seek Thee in Thine only-begotten Son. Amen." (Kaiser, *Grief and pain in the plan of God: Christian assurance and the message of Lamentations*, 71-72)

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