

# Lamentations

We will not outline this book. It is a series of “funeral poems” marking the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. It is written in acrostic form: each of the twenty-two verses in chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 starts with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet; in chapter 3, there are three verses given to each letter. No book in the Bible reveals the suffering heart of God over sin as does this one. See Jer. 13:17 and Matt. 23:36–38.

## Lamentations 1–5

This is a collection of five “lamentations” or “funeral dirges” commemorating the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Jeremiah was witness to this tragic event. His heart was broken as he saw Jerusalem and the temple destroyed, the people slain, and the prisoners taken off to captivity in Babylon. We can see the prophet's tears all through the book. From this book we can learn five important lessons about God and His will.

### I. The Awfulness of God's Judgments (1:1–6)

These verses compare Jerusalem to a rich princess or queen suddenly left alone and robbed of all her wealth and beauty. Once she had been full; now she is empty. Once she was honored; now she is disgraced. Her joy has been replaced by tears; her great victories are now lost in defeat. Why? Because instead of loving Jehovah, she courted many “lovers” (v. 2) and the false gods of the heathen nations. Now those heathen nations have become her enemies.

Sin always brings sorrow and tragedy. In chapter 2, Jeremiah explains that God was no longer their friend, but their enemy. Once He had fought their battles, but now it was too late. Read the sad description of the hungry eating their own children (2:20; 4:10; and see Jer. 19:9). Jerusalem not only lost her joy, wealth, and beauty, but she also lost her testimony. All the heathen laughed at her (2:15–16). Certainly this applies to the believer today: when God chastens the backslider, the experience is not an easy one. Sin always makes the sinner lose.

### II. The Righteousness of God's Wrath (1:18–22)

“We are reaping just what we have sown,” the prophet is crying. The awful judgments that came were only what the city and the nation deserved. “We have rebelled against His Word.” Rebellion always leads to discipline; see Heb. 12:1–14. Why did God allow His people to go into captivity? To teach them to trust Him and obey His Word. In v. 19 Jeremiah names these troublemakers: the “lovers,” that is, the false gods and the pagan

nations that Judah trusted when she got into trouble; and the false prophets and priests, who taught lies and gave the people a false confidence. When a nation will not listen to the truth of God's Word, there is no hope for that nation.

What can the people do? Nothing but yield to God's chastening hand and trust His mercy (1:22). Confession of sin is better than continuous rebellion against God. It was too late for God to call off the invasion, but certainly He would see the repentance of His people and begin to work on their behalf even while they were in captivity.

### **III. The Truthfulness of God's Word (2:17)**

"He has fulfilled His Word." For forty years, Jeremiah had warned the people that their sins would bring judgment; yet the nation would not listen. People do not want to hear the truth; they prefer the "popular messages" of the false prophets (2:14). Jerusalem laughed at Jeremiah, persecuted him, and even tried to kill him, but in the end, God honored His servant and his words came true. Read Jer. 4:5–10 for Jeremiah's message of warning. Read Jer. 5:30–31 for his description of the nation believing lies. It sounds very contemporary. In Jer. 6:13–14 he compares the false prophets to doctors who hide the symptoms but do not cure the disease. See 8:11, 21–22. In 23:9ff, Jeremiah explains what happens to a people when they reject the truth of the Word of God and believe the lies of men. Yet the truth of God's Word shall stand, just as it did in Jeremiah's day. The time has already come when people will not endure "healthy doctrine," but want instead preachers who will tickle their ears and entertain them with a message of false assurance (2 Tim. 4:1–5). God will certainly judge this world, in spite of what the false prophets say.

### **IV. The Tenderness of God's Heart (1:12–16)**

Jeremiah certainly reveals to us the heart of Jehovah, broken for the sins of His people. Judgment is God's "strange work" (Isa. 28:21); He does not afflict willingly. And even when He does chasten His people, He is with them in their suffering (Isa. 63:9). "Whom the Lord *loves* He chastens." Jeremiah's tears remind us that God does love His own, even if they are rebellious, and that His love for them cannot change. As the people walked by the ruins, Jeremiah asked, "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?" We can hear the voice of Jesus Christ here as He hung on the cross for the sins of the world. Remember how He wept over Jerusalem because He saw her day of judgment coming?

God, in love, had warned the people of their sins and His impending judgment. In fact, as far back as Moses, the Lord had warned Israel not to follow false gods (see Lev. 26 and Deut. 28). In love He had sent the prophets to warn them (2 Chron. 36:15–17), but they would not listen. Now, in love, He had to chasten them to teach them the lessons they would not learn.

### **V. The Faithfulness of God's Mercy (3:18–36)**

Here at the heart of this book we find one of the greatest confessions of faith found anywhere in the Bible. Jeremiah had been dwelling on his sorrows and the sorrows of

his people, but then he lifted his eyes to the Lord—and this was the turning point. In the midst of sorrow and ruin he remembered the mercy of the Lord. “His compassions fail not.” We have failed Him, but He cannot fail us. “Great is Your faithfulness.”

The faithfulness of God is a tremendous encouragement in days when people's hearts are failing them for fear. If you build your life on people or on the things of this world, you will have no hope or security; but if you build on Christ, the Faithful One, you will be safe forever. He is *faithful to chasten* (Ps. 119:75); Lamentations itself teaches this lesson. He wants to bring us to the place of repentance and confession (Lam. 3:39–41). He is *faithful to forgive* when we do confess our sins (1 John 1:9). He is *faithful to sympathize* when we have burdens and problems (Heb. 2:17–18; 4:14–16). We never need fear that He is too busy to listen or too tired to help. He is *faithful to deliver* when we cry out for help in temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). He is *faithful to keep us* in this life and unto life eternal (1 Tim. 1:15; 1 Thes. 5:23–24). We can commit our lives and souls into the hands of the faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:19) and know that He will do all things well.

God in His mercy spared a remnant of Judah, protected and blessed them during their years of captivity, and then permitted them to return to their land once again. He enabled them to rebuild their city and temple; He protected them from heathen nations that hated the Jews. How merciful God was to His people. How merciful He is to us today.

In times of trouble we need to imitate Jeremiah who looked away from himself to the Lord, and who waited on the Lord in patience and faith (3:24–26). Too often we look at ourselves and our problems and become so discouraged that we quit. Instead, we must “look away unto Jesus” (Heb. 12:1–2) and let Him see us through. It is difficult to wait on the Lord. Our fallen nature craves activity, and usually what we do only makes matters worse. Jeremiah waited on the Lord, trusted in His mercy, and depended on His faithfulness. He knew the truth of Isa. 40:31 (nkjv), “Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”