

# LAMENTATIONS

## A funeral poem

Thoughts come from a wide variety of sources. Some from messages I have heard from individuals, some from assembly Bible studies, some from home life, and some from books I have read. The Holy Spirit is the Teacher who makes them real to me.

- "The Life Application Bible." Tyndale House and Zondervan
- "The Wycliffe Bible Commentary." Moody Press

It is a common practice for people to look at some things like a boat, vehicle, house, city or country with a sense of personhood. So, the pronouns, "she" or "he," can refer to a thing occasionally. That seems to be the way the writer of Lamentations views the destroyed city of Jerusalem after everything that was familiar and important to him was destroyed and nothing was left but ruins. In this group of five poems/prayers; grief over the horrible outcome of the fall of Jerusalem, expressed his personal sense of loss. The temple was destroyed; the major buildings were nothing but ruins and even the walls, were just piles of stones. It would have been very personal to him as he watched all that was familiar broken to pieces and burned.

Many people he knew and had lived among, were killed. Others were taken away in chains as slaves, and the few survivors were poor and in despair. The emotions of one's heart are sometimes best expressed in poetic form, rather than in the dispassionate way of an essay. In groups of twenty-two verses, each one a letter of the Hebrew alphabet beginning with the first and going to the last, these poems took a special form. This indicates that a lot of thought went into expressing his grief. That, in turn, means that his grief had a purpose behind it, rather than being the loud wailings of purposelessness.

Often when grief is an uncontrollable outpouring of emotion, it is self-centered and without control of one's mind, words, and actions. Deep, thoughtful grief considers the cause, the persons involved, the memories, and the possible purpose behind the loss. That sensible approach to a terrible loss does not minimize in any way the grief, but it can make the whole experience to be of some value. The grieving person and those who share the grief of those who look on with sympathy and empathy, may all learn some very important lessons at the place of mourning. When grief is not without purpose, there will be an opportunity to pass on truth and lessons to generations to come, when the history behind the event is explained.

To disobey God, to turn to ancient or modern idols as a way to find meaning and satisfaction in life, is to invite disaster to fall on any person or nation. It is an insult against God to ignore Him and reject Him and His sovereign right to direct our lives. To deny His existence when evidence of divine intelligence, power, and authority are all around us, is the mind of a foolish person who is making himself or herself out to be their own supreme authority. God is grieved when His people are grieved, but His holy character and righteousness cannot be compromised. If God ignored sin and did not carry out just judgments against sin, He would not even be God. To overlook evil and compromise truth is a characteristic of failing mankind. That compromising attitude of man toward sin, justice, and righteousness has led to lawlessness and chaos in the world. Consequently, the whole world is in a state of suffering and grief.

The deliberate expressions of grief in this book, give form to the serious consequences of sin, and in that way teach us that there can be hope in spite of tragedy. In mercy, the Lord did not totally annihilate every person in the nation of Judah in spite of their national rejection of Him. Poor, overlooked people were some of the survivors because they had nowhere else to look for help, but to God. In the depths of despair and affliction, God is near us. We can put our hope in Him even when everything around us is gone. His compassions fail not. His faithfulness is great. He does not change. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

Laments are not uncommon in literature or even in the scriptures. In historical writings, especially in the ancient times in the Middle East, much of secular writing was a lament over what was lost to wars, poverty, and supposed injustice. Even God knows what it is to grieve over the failings and troubles of those He loves and cares for. God was grieved that He had made man when he saw that the intent of the heart of mankind was to do evil continually. The fact of the flood happening wasn't to make God happy. In His grief, He showed grace to Noah, and through him and his family, allowed mankind to survive just judgment. For one hundred and twenty years, God lived with His grief until the ark was ready for Noah and his family to have a place of safety. That whole worldwide event gives us a little insight into how the sin of mankind grieves the Lord.

Uncontrollable grief is of no real value. However, in the process of repentance and learning; we learn from the Book of Lamentations, that repeated disobedience and rejection of God and His word, lead to suffering and agony. To defy God, and to ignore His faithfulness and love, is to bring the consequences of our own sin down upon us. To disrespect, dishonor and act in defiance toward the Lord, should make us stop and consider our ways, attitudes, and actions. Lamentations is not a quick unthought, outpouring of grief and loss. It is a carefully scripted expression of what grief is, its cause, and its effect. It is a lesson to us as to what we can and should do when times of grief come.

Times of loss and horrible disaster, deserve serious and thoughtful times of contemplation and consideration. "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart." In times of lamentation, we learn what is really important, and hopefully will take to heart, and keep; what is learned. We know that judgment is coming on this world, and this nation, and it will come on individuals because of sin. In reading through the book of Lamentations, we affirm our need for God and reaffirm our commitment to Him and His word. There are glimpses of light in the darkness of this book, to remind us that in the same way, prophecies of judgment were true, the words relating to restoration and the new covenant also are true. Those are written assurances that can give us hope for the future, as we endure these dark times.

## **Lamentations 1**

### **FORSAKEN AND DISTRESSED**

A song of grief and sorrow penetrated into the heart of the writer as he saw the results of defeat, in the suffering and humiliation of a rejected people who had rejected their God in their pursuit of idolatry and rebellion. This passage is read aloud in synagogues even today as a reminder to the Jewish people of what they have lost. In his mind, he remembered a bustling city filled with people going about their business. She was like a princess among the nations but now has become a widow and a despised slave. She used to be like a popular person who had a lot of friends but now had become an outcast enemy to those same people.

She had become a captive because of her willful unrighteousness. She wouldn't pay attention to those who tried to warn her of the folly of her actions. She didn't release her indentured servants in the year of jubilee, and so now she will have to pay the cost of her failure over all those past years by being a slave herself in captivity to a foreign nation far from her own land.

The activity of worship used to see the temple filled with people coming and going; but now, not only were the people gone, but the temple was a silent pile of ruins, and the road to it that used to be so filled with people, was empty and even beginning to grow over. The enemy was now above Jerusalem, and she had been brought low because of her willful sin. The people who used to live there were being driven like sheep into distant captivity. Where there was once beauty, now the city was like a starved wild animal. They once had all the desirable things they wanted, right at their disposal. Now all they had was memories of what they had and lost.

People who play with fire get burned. To refuse to believe that immoral living and idolatry will bring suffering and bad consequences is the mind of fools. We can ignore warnings, but to ignore them doesn't mean they won't come. Just judgment for sin, is inevitable, even though it may not happen immediately. To think that because justice is delayed, it won't be carried out by God is merely wishful thinking. Judgment will come on those who defy God. Those who disobey and turn a deaf ear will experience that which they refused to believe.

Jerusalem was once like an impudent, aggressive woman, but was now looked down on and despised and pitied. She had not been ashamed to expose herself, but now that it had happened, she had been brought low. The prophet calls out to God to look at that pitiful place and the awful condition it was in. Enemy hands had taken all that was of value. All that was good in the temple, had been stripped by wicked hands and carried away as spoil to Babylon. Now they saw what they had taken for granted, for what it was really worth – but it all was lost.

The people had nothing at all after the siege. The prophet again identifies himself with the few people that are left. The liberty to do what we want has no bounds when we become captive to our own desires. Freedom to sin leads to the bondage and unbreakable yoke of sin. Real freedom comes when we obey God and follow where He leads. We who are believers in Christ cannot go along with the sins of others. Some of the judgments that fall on people we may grieve over, but we must distance ourselves from the sins and those who commit them. The only way to find relief from sin and its consequences is to repent of our sins and acknowledge the righteousness of God's judgments.

Jerusalem was like a woman sitting in misery by the side of the road and calling out to passersby for help. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me." She is looking for some compassion to be shown to her who was the object of fierce anger. She was experiencing herself, what she had done to others who were poor and despised by those who were high and mighty. Her affliction was like fire in the bones, and because of this evil, the afflictions she caused have totally captured her. The people of Jerusalem admitted that it was their sin that brought the just punishment on them, and it made them fall so they could not even get up again.

People that are strangers to God, can't give any dependable assistance, because all they can see are the temporary effects that are quickly used and gone. Spiritual needs are hidden from the minds of those who are dead in trespasses and in sins. When counsel is needed, go to those who know God, and who get their wisdom and understanding from Him.

When God's call to them was given they refused to answer. Instead of responding to the call to worship God, they rejected Him, so God called upon the Chaldeans to crush them. This wasn't vengeance, but it was justice. The prophet wept because of the hopelessness that had come upon the city, and there was nothing left that could help any of them. There was no comfort in their counterfeit religion. There was no comfort in their heritage. They had become loathsome to everyone around. So, the prophet urged the people to call on the Lord, acknowledge their sins, and show real sorrow for their sins like a woman who is sorrowing for her lost family.

All of the alliances the people of Judah and Jerusalem had made with other nations, had failed. Rich and poor; small and great were all suffering in the same way from hunger and loss. The call for mercy came from the depths of misery. The awareness of what they had done; the sin, the guilt it brought, was like a war on the outside and death inside. The nations around with whom they had made the alliances and that had pretended friendship, were actually glad for what had happened to the Jews. In the bitterness of her soul, she wanted them to go through what she was going through.

God is both the Judge and the Comforter. What He does is without partiality. The principles and practices of sowing and reaping what you sow, are the same for everyone. Justice will prevail. Punishment for sin is inevitable. The consequences of rejecting Christ today, are the same as rejecting the calls of the Lord to Jerusalem. For those who turn from their sin to God, and put their trust in Him; He is there to save them, to console them in the difficulties of life, and to give the comfort of hope that is needed to sustain us in adversity. Suffering and anguish are not always because of sin. We live in a fallen world; and events, people, and our own sinful nature bring suffering. Whenever we feel hopeless; for God's people there is hope and comfort when we turn our hearts toward Him.

**Lamentations 1:12.** *"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger."*

### **BEHOLD, AND SEE.**

#### **PRIVILEGE**

*Up from slavery to be a kingdom of priests –  
Fed by God's hand until reaching a land flowing with milk and honey –  
A nation of winners until each had a place of their own –  
A place of peace after years of violence.  
What a privileged people!*

#### **THEN**

*Attracted by false promises – forgetting the promises of God.  
Complacency takes the place of praise and worship.  
Indifference supplants the pattern of living and worship God gave.  
Kings take the place of divine leadership.  
Privileged people are on a downhill course!*

#### **REJECTION**

*On they go past calls to repent from messengers of the Lord.  
Rejection of calls of entreaty from the One who loved them.  
Ignoring warnings of impending judgment –  
Denying responsibility for actions of disobedience.*

*Privileged people set aside!*

#### APPEAL

*Plaintive calls to passers-by who now ignore them.  
Sorrow beyond comparison that does not let up.  
Judgment from God that will continue until repentance is real.  
Continual pressure that does not stop, from nations around.  
Privileged people that are not listened to!*

#### LEARN

*The Lord takes sin seriously – its consequences are real and lasting.  
Sorrow for sin cannot be avoided – payday always comes.  
The Lord Jesus Christ suffered such sorrow on our behalf.  
He endured God's just wrath that He might bring us to God.  
Privileged people can be forgiven!*

*“O Righteous God: this is a graphic picture that seems to impress me with the seriousness of unrighteousness in Thy eyes. A lot of us don't take indifference and the downward slide of Thy people very seriously. I learn from this scene in the past, that ignoring the discipline of God is a very personal problem. “I need Thee every hour.” Amen.”*

## Lamentations 2

### THE CAUSE

God's patience has limits. Even though the word “daughter” is used around ten times in this chapter in reference to Jerusalem, there is also just wrath against their sin. God's love and compassion for sinners are real, but when it is spurned, scorned, and rejected, God does ultimately turn away from the sinner to whom He has shown great grace for so long. Unless there is repentance for sin and faith put in Him, there will be no justification or reconciliation. God does not compromise His integrity and holiness. He is open to hearing the calls of real repentance but does not reach out in grace to rescue those who despise and reject Him. Those who refuse Him and rebel against Him will be rejected by Him.

This chapter describes the misery of Jerusalem and the causes of it. Derision from the nations around them, shows them to have been enemies all along. Toward the end of this chapter, there are exhortations to demonstrate true sorrow and repentance and to turn to the Lord in fervent prayer like the prayer of Jeremiah. What God had done to that city was likened to a beautiful daughter in whom there was glory and honor, but because of willful sin was brought down to the ground to where even the temple was a footstool. The homes of the Jews and the military fortifications were decimated. The whole kingdom including the leaders of the nation were brought down to where they were no more than polluted merchandise.

Every form of strength, God had left to act on their own and they were defeated like fire would devour a house. Even the temple was devoured without any consideration for what was its original intent. It had been polluted by the sins of the people who had misused it and taken everything it stood for, as of little value. The people Jeremiah was looking on and mourning for, had lost all that was important and it was too late to get it back.

The temple had been the central place of worship in form, but the people really wanted their idolatry and lascivious religions rather than fellowship with God. They had the temple as a place of importance rather than the Lord who “dwelleth not in temples made with hands.” They likely thought because the temple was called “the house of God,” that God would never let anything happen to it. Where we worship, is not as important as who we worship and why we worship Him. Reality and sincerity in our worship of God are what have meaning to the Lord. The death of the “daughter of Zion” was deliberately planned and executed. Just judgment came on those, whose apparent worship, was merely a pretense and a form. Jerusalem had come far short of what God had intended. So, the temple, the law, and the forms people practiced had become a reproach and a dishonor. “Cursed be he that doeth the work of God deceitfully (negligently).”

Everything that seemed to have strength and value was gone. The leaders of government, and even those prophets who spoke to the people for the Lord, had no word from the Lord. Their protection, their leadership, their guidance, and their vision they had taken for granted. They had become so used to what they had but didn't claim, that they became comfortable in their sin. Their false sense of security had replaced God. Even when confronted and called to repent and return to the Lord, they wouldn't. The whole population was brought down to the ground in the dirt with their heads hanging down, and nothing in them but sorrow and humiliation. “The wages of sin” have to be paid.

A relationship with the Lord is not based on symbols, religious practices, and man-made designs of worship and service. The word of God is clear as to what pleases God. The reality of living for God and with God is not a religious experience, but a manner of life and walk based on shared values given to us by God Himself in His word.

The prophet Jeremiah was so grieved over all that had happened to his people, he was physically sick as well as being blinded by his tears. He had been grieved over their sins before, when they had ignored and then rejected his warnings. Now, he was mourning with godly sorrow over what was happening to them – men, women, and children. The consequences of their sin had overcome them, and the innocent children as well as adults were suffering. The condition of the people was incomparable and incurable. There was no defense for them, nor was there any way to help them recover what was lost.

The people of Judah and Jerusalem had chosen to listen and pay heed to their hired false prophets who told them what they wanted to hear. They chose to believe them rather than Jeremiah and the prophets the Lord had sent. They were encouraged by their paid hirelings to enjoy their sin, but now they were suffering the consequences of disobedience, idolatry, and their rejection of God. Their misery was greater than that of those who had surrendered to the Babylonians a few years earlier, and who had been taken captive before the terrible judging war and devastation swept over the nation.

God had blessed them and they had taken all His blessings for granted. Now that everything was gone and those who remained were desolate with nothing left, they became the object of derision by those nations around they had wanted to be like. Strangely, there are those who have grown up and lived in places of blessing, with parents and forebears who were people of dignity and honor; seem to want to get away from the “restrictions” of morality and righteousness so they can “experience what they have been deprived of.” After they have tried one thing, and “found it wanting,” they have to try another, and another, and another. Even though they were taught that there is “No satisfaction without salvation,” they reject that advice and the warnings that are given.

Strangers that passed by Jerusalem scorned the people who had nothing but once had everything. Their enemies rejoiced over the downfall of Jerusalem because the day they had hoped for, had actually come, and the proud were now humbled. Contempt, derision, and mockery were heaped upon the Jews. It is not uncommon today for people who had the opportunity to live for the Lord and to use their God-given gifts for the benefit of others, to leave the place God had been using them effectively, and go to where nothing at all is expected of them. They can do what they want and no one asks a thing of them. They can live independently of God and God's people. They can do what they want, but in the end, they find no lasting joy and no place for repentance.

The people of Jerusalem should not have been surprised by what happened to them. The Lord had told them many times before what He had planned to do if there was no repentance for their sin and no evidence of regret or recovery. They had brought this judgment down on themselves because of stubborn rebellion against the Lord. Their wickedness brought suffering to innocent children as well as the adult population. The guilty were punished and the residual effects of that were felt by those over whom they had control and leadership. The sins of the fathers fall on the children of the third and fourth generations. The fault lay with the wayward sinful people. God had warned them of the consequences of their sin, and how everyone around them would be affected, both old and young.

Pride, an independent attitude, and refusal to repent bring the consequences of sin down on a whole nation. When there is no admitting of guilt; no sorrow for sin; then there will be no forgiveness. The terrible results of human sin can be avoided when people will listen to warnings, pay heed to the advice given, and take action to repent and make right what has been wrong. Then when one turns in faith to the Lord, they can find mercy. Tragedy comes when sin has its way. Sorrow and devastation will not be avoided when willfulness to do evil prevails.

We know God is longsuffering and not willing that any should perish. He is also slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. But when rebellion and disrespectful rejection of God and His word continue; His justice demands an end to it. Divine wrath is far beyond man's ability to conceive of or defend against. There are limits to divine patience. He is open to hearing those who call upon Him with a pure heart and will respond in grace to the truly repentant person and nation. There is hope for reconciliation with God. This is how salvation from divine wrath comes. With that response of faith comes the gift of God which is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Lamentations 2:11.** *"Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people; because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city."*

#### **WEEPING.**

*His face is lined with grief; tears flow down his face.  
People he long has warned, now are being led to another place.  
They thought they could do what they wanted; it made no difference to them.*

*Until they found out God leaves to their own will those who will ignore Him.*

*Everywhere they turned, it seems like things were falling apart.  
Actually, things were worse than hundreds of years before at the start.  
Then God had left them alone to follow their own devices.  
It will be a long time yet before they will come to their senses.*

*A person can be in the midst of all this, and still be alone with the Lord.  
One watches all the goings on and one's mind is filled with dread,  
Because we know the end of the story and it will finish so bad.  
No wonder the tears flow down and we grieve because we are so sad.*

*I can easily understand the weakness Jeremiah felt inside.  
I watch the downward slide of our nation and know integrity died.  
There is a deliberate turning away from God and his infallible truth.  
People have made themselves their god, and strive for things of useless worth.*

*I may not walk around with tears flowing down but I know we have gone too far.  
Our nation's leadership and even the courts have dropped down the moral bar.  
Once we go so far there is no returning because we were gone too long.  
So now the nation is weak and rotting inside where once it was so strong.*

*I will keep on praying and preaching because I know God has great grace.  
But likely inward tears will often flow as the moral decline can trace.  
My hopes are not high for a turn-around, two new generations are so different,  
From where I came from, I am still not used to sinning so explicitly.*

*I am not giving up the call of the Lord, even those who listen are few.  
By God's grace in spite of weeping and tears, we will do what God called us to do.  
I am not a pessimist; I think I'm a realist, but I know God has a plan.  
So even though there may be weeping at times, I will seek to be a faithful man.*

***"Father God, as I watch and read of things that are changing in this nation, I believe we may not have our freedoms and privileges for too long. I do want to be ready for whatever task the Lord calls me to. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."***

### **Lamentations 3**

#### **THE HOPE**

This chapter is a carefully thought-out poem about all that happened to Jerusalem when the Babylonians leveled the city. God's servant, the prophet, had personally experienced the sorrows of pain and humiliation of defeat just like all the others in the city. He was like a soldier who was suffering, in despair and what he was going through was representative of the defeat of the whole of Zion. This same servant prayed with assurance. Even though deserved punishment had come, God still heard the prayers from his heart. At the end of the chapter, there is a prayer request for vindication, although he doesn't see any relief coming in the near future.

Of interest is the way the chapter is laid out in groups of three sentences in each group. Instead of each verse being a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in this chapter, every third verse begins with a successive letter of the alphabet. There must have been some reason for the triple acrostic that makes this chapter like three twenty-two-verse chapters in one. It may be that was done because of the three main subjects that we can reflect on when reading the text of the poem. It begins with suffering, despair, and a little glimmer of hope. Then there is advice given on how to deal with the tragedy that befell them. Toward the end of the chapter, there is a call to repent and call on God to deliver them.

The writer started out by identifying himself as "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath." Then he speaks to the fact that all he had hoped for, was gone; yet he still put his hope in God. He testifies to the fact that God is faithful; God is his inheritance, and only God Himself is his hope. With that view in mind, it is good to examine our ways, test our motives, and turn to the Lord. Right in the middle of this small book of Lamentations, he directs our attention to the consequences of defying God. Then he reminds them, and us, of the unchanging character of God and the continuing compassion of God.

Like a grief-stricken soldier, Jeremiah makes the wrath of God real and personal as he speaks for the devastated city. Just like Amos wrote about the punishment of Israel a hundred and fifty years before, Jeremiah sees the light of faith and testimony has gone out of God's people, and darkness had come over Jerusalem. They all knew what had happened to Samaria, but had not learned the lesson of what happens to people who go their own way, worship idols of their own choosing, and reject the Lord God of hosts.

Like premature aging, the pain and suffering caused by sin had come down hard on them like a body with a lot of broken bones. It was like they were prostrate on the ground in helplessness and hopelessness. The heavy chains of bondage were around the necks of the people who had failed to respond to the warnings Jeremiah had faithfully given for many years. Consequently, not only were they taken into exile, but because God's people had forgotten Him, rebelled against Him, and rejected Him; He did not respond to their prayers for deliverance. He had to turn His back on them to maintain His commitment to righteousness and justice. A holy God cannot ignore or overlook sin. He will answer prayer when people turn in sincerity away from sin, and turn to God in faith. To think of God as merely a servant to answer us when we want Him to do something for us is to totally misunderstand who God is.

God had offered His people a smooth road if they would follow Him, but they chose the rough road, and judgment is what they got. He offered forgiveness of sin if their repentance was genuine, but the people wanted their sin. The consequences of choices cannot be avoided. Desolation will overcome those who find no place of an excuse to hide from the chastening hand of God.

It was obvious to the people in the nations around Judah, that God had withdrawn His strong hand and arm of protection from those who previously had defeated them. The Jews had become objects of derision and scorn. Bitterness had taken the place of the pursuit of pleasure and the search for sinful satisfaction. "Wormwood" had eaten into the moral and spiritual vitals of the people until there was really nothing left except fear and trembling before God and their captors. The high and mighty; the proud and pretentious were trampled into the hard gravel to "eat the dust," and the ashes of their proud possessions had filled their souls with remorse. God did not allow them to remain comfortable in their sins any longer, so he took away both their inward and outward false peace. All they had hoped to get from the world had vanished. When people get comfortable with their sins, they lose the desire to confess and forsake them.

Then a remarkable statement of faith comes in this passage of scripture; right after the pitiful cries of despair and desolation. In the darkness of sin and sorrow around him, Jeremiah sees a reason for hope. The Lord's love has not diminished. In spite of all the pain and suffering brought on the people because of their sin and departure, God's covenant love remains, and they are not annihilated. His compassion toward them is still warm. His care for them is still actively directed toward His people. His compassionate care provided for their needs as each day of punishment brought them closer to the time when His promises for the future would be fulfilled. The faithfulness of the Lord can be counted on in spite of all the adverse problems and sorrows of the present.

The people of God no longer had the land they inherited from their forefathers. It was their own fault all they thought was theirs was gone. They no longer had earthly possessions, but they still had the Lord as their inheritance. They were still His people and He is not lost to them who are willing to turn to Him in repentance and faith. "To wait for Him," implies an expectant attitude of hope that is there for them in spite of what they were suffering. To bear the yoke of suffering with patience and silence means submission is real, and acknowledgment that what was happening to them was a just punishment.

Reflection on the will of God, and a willingness to act on His will without complaint, is part of bearing "the yoke." To be honest enough to repent in real humility is also involved in yoke bearing. To face adversity without bitterness and anger is part of the same learning process. To suffer patiently with full confidence that the Lord is in control of all that happens is a lesson to be learned. We may never even know the reason for the suffering, but we learn to accept what our benevolent Father allows to come upon us. Lessons like this are best learned when we are young before we get hardened into a pattern of self-will.

When a person is silent with his face in the dust, he is in a position to learn and listen to what the Lord has to say. God doesn't get delighted when He has to bring judgment on those He loves. When He has to "strike" us, it is for a righteous reason to bring about a change in behavior by accepting His discipline. Like caring parents who love their children enough to correct bad behavior, the Lord may have to cause us grief while He demonstrates compassion and mercy. If we learn from that instruction, we will want to please our Lord. He doesn't cast off those who repent. He doesn't willingly cause grief, affliction, and crush or deny those he loves, without a just cause. What right do we have to complain about the difficulties we have caused?

It is right to stop and consider what we have done. It is right to search our hearts and our motives and consider our ways. It is right to confess and repent of our sins. Jeremiah understood there was no reason for early relief from the punishment that was on his people. He made that plain in his prayer of confession. There is fear; there is terror and there are tears of personal grief when sin is being judged.

Jeremiah's enemies were still after him, but his doubts give way to his faith in the Lord. With confidence in the presence of the Lord with him, he prayed for his Redeemer and Advocate to judge his case. He was anxious for the Lord to understand the plight he was in and to recognize the antagonism of those who were against him.

**Lamentations 3:22-23.** *"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness."*

#### **EVERY MORNING.**

*The first conscious breath I draw every day,  
Is a vivid reminder to me –  
The mercies of the Lord are coming my way –  
That I, a living sacrifice will be.*

*His compassions keep coming, though none I deserve.  
I'm not consumed by the pressures around.  
Each morning He supplies far more than I've earned –  
And by His mercies, I've not been consumed.*

*He is my portion, He restoreth my soul –  
Every provision I need, He supplies.  
My hope is in Him; in Him I am whole –  
My body presented - a living sacrifice.*

*I wait here for Him, for He wholly is good –  
I seek Him here, and wait for His voice –  
To speak peace to me – the salvation of the Lord  
Still blesses me, as in grace my Savior comes close.*

*No longer a youth, but I still have my strength –  
That a yoke for my Lord I can bear.  
Each morning is fresh, as each day runs its length –  
I can sense that my Savior is near.*

*I listen and learn that it is foolish to think  
That any of this is my right.  
By trying my ways, and in turning, I search –  
With my heart in my hands lifted high.*

*"O God, there is great value to me in the morning watch. It seems things are clearer and more defined then. That Thou would renew all that I need each morning seems to guarantee a freshness that would be missing in any other time. Thanks very much for this daily provision. Amen."*

#### **Lamentations 4**

##### **THE SIEGE**

In this poem, the prophet is like an eyewitness who describes the people, their moral condition of soul, and their state as a defeated people. The prosperity the people of Jerusalem had enjoyed, was gone during the siege of over two years. That had been allowed by God to give them ample opportunity to repent of their sins and turn to the Lord, but they did not do that. The siege had been allowed by God because of the open and willful practice of idolatry, and their continued rejection of righteousness, holiness, and obedience to God. That attitude had permeated into every spectrum of society.

In chapter two, the lamentations were that of a grieving widow who was brought down from being a beautiful young woman to a hopeless person in the streets. In chapter three, the imagery is that of a defeated soldier who has been



humiliated, disgraced, disarmed, and abandoned. In chapter four the focus of the lamentation is on the children and how the siege of Jerusalem affected them. It is a horrible passage to read.

Even though they were of the nobility, they had been brought down from being like treasures of gold to nothing more than broken pottery lying on the street and being walked on. They had come from having everything to being like cruel animals feeding on dung. These were the last generation of people who had been brought into a society of people who had turned farther away from the Lord than even the generation before them. This is like the result of “evil men and seducers who wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” Not only are the parents a failure, but their children are, and suffer as much or more than those before them.

The punishment being meted out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem was more severe than that which came on the people of Sodom. People in Sodom sinned grievously and died quickly. People in Jerusalem and Judah were suffering something like a living death. They weren't living life as it was intended, and they were slowly perishing while they were alive, because they had chosen to be separated from their God who loved them. The leaders, priests, and false prophets who were once distinguished and good to look upon, were the ones upon whom the blame was laid. The fate of the beautiful children was made by them when they ignored the Lord and His truth.

Sadly, that is happening again to the young ones being brought up in this present time. Parents, when they were young, listened to, and accepted as true without question, all their teachers and professors taught. They accepted what they were taught by so-called educators, rather than those who taught them the word of God. Christian parents, Sunday School teachers, preachers, and Bible teachers have sought to bring the truth of God to the young, but soon the sinful appeal of the world system takes over their minds, and we are losing the next generation to the evil of the secular society in which we live. Outward beauty is the only beauty to be seen or considered of value to the young people around us. Inward, moral beauty and outward righteous living is considered old-fashioned and out of date as those things that are of real value.

In Jerusalem during the siege, all that was once good and beautiful; became black and ugly, both physically and morally. The parents even resorted to cannibalism and boiled their children to try to satisfy themselves. The death of the young now is quite commonplace in modern society, as self-indulgent adults and parents, live only to please themselves and fulfill their own selfish interests at the cost of the lives of the innocent. The hope of a nation is in their children. People who turn to sin for their own nefarious reasons are leaving the coming generation with no moral compass or righteous guidance for conduct in the days and years to come.

Self-satisfying sin leaves the next generation that may be able to survive the sins of their parents, in a worse condition than that of their parent's generation and the ones before them. Parents who defy God and disobey His word; some even to denying that God exists, bring a hopeless future down on the heads of their children. Often the sins of the parents will be copied and repeated by the next generation which will go even farther astray than their parents. The slippery downward slope of sin gets steeper with each succeeding generation. Deterioration of morality and righteous living accelerates until changes come so fast that there is no stopping the slide.

What started as a drifting away from God's righteous standards that are given in the Bible, gave way to adding and taking away from stated truth. Then began the substituting of opinions and “another way of looking at things,” for the plain statements of divine Persons. Following that comes the questioning of whether the ancient truths that have been tried and proven for centuries are relevant to life “in today's world.” Following that comes the ruling that those who represent the “will of the people,” have decided that much of the Bible is “hate literature,” and must be removed from the schools and rejected as standards of conduct in the life of modern society.

Glorying in material prosperity brings spiritual poverty. Spiritual poverty brings moral decay. Moral decay removes the foundation of righteous conduct upon which stable societies depend to prevent chaos. When anarchy and evil have their way, the nation is finished. The siege takes away everything that is needed for survival. We are in the middle of a siege in this nation presently. A rejection of biblical standards is where the siege against that which was once used by God begins. We have already passed that place.

New interpretations of old and reliable truths have become popular even in religious organizations. Those ideas of people allow sin and “religious practices” to coexist, and sometimes even join together. That is what idolatry is like. Once a new “outlook” on plainly stated words of scripture is accepted, the Bible is no longer the standard of belief, conduct, morality, and daily living. Rather, “what I think is truth,” is what is accepted and followed. “If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?”

The consequences of sin bring tragedy upon those who introduce sin; but unfortunately, it doesn't stop there. Those who follow their lead will suffer the same things, and in the case of children, even worse. In the besieged city of Jerusalem, the children were boiled and eaten. In our society, they are aborted and burned. People think what is right

depends on the opinion of each individual, not on God's righteous standards. But what individual has an opinion that didn't find its source in someone else's opinion? So, the adage, "What is right for me, may not be right for you," finds widespread acceptance. Hardly anyone asks, "What does God say about this matter?"

Parents who have rejected the clear message of the Gospel, accept a watered-down message that uses biblical terms in a non-biblical context. The watered-down message that brings no real change in attitude or in conduct of life, has no effect on children or their friends in the next generation. Consequently, Christianity is rejected completely as unimportant and irrelevant to life in the world today. In rejecting Christ, they turn to false prophets, self-centered opinions, and untried methods for guidance in their lives and find themselves without goals, guidance, or grace. By doing this they find themselves without any moral or spiritual standards except those they make up to suit themselves. A major problem with that mindset is that their standards will conflict with those of people who have ones that are different altogether. So, one person may feel it is all right to kill another person with a gun who trespasses on your property but doesn't feel it is right to abort a baby. Who is right?

To live without universally accepted standards brings a devastated society and ultimately a devastated world. That is why worldwide unrest and warfare have been going on for generations now. God's standards are based on universally understood standards that He placed in the soul of every human being. This eliminates the confusion of being guided by what a person thinks is okay for this moment.

The whole principle of restraint being imposed in order to maintain an orderly and satisfying life, has been rejected by whole groups of people in society. Even though social, moral, national, and personal restraint has been practiced for centuries, and there have been many failures; at least in this country, we have been able to live in a more or less safe society until recent years. People still have choices: wear a seat belt and you have a better chance to live; don't smoke and drink and you will have better health and live longer. Restraints have benefits and to reject them has adverse results. Sadly though, people are more and more rejecting restraints, and they die – and their children suffer and die!

**Lamentations 4:1-2.** *"How is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed! The stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street. The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold. How are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!"*

#### **BROUGHT TO RUIN.**

*It didn't have to be this way!  
This wasn't what God intended.  
He had chosen them to be a kingdom of priests,  
But they chose rather to into the world and become blended.  
So, what was once a thriving people and place,  
Now is a place of ruins.  
Where once everywhere was evidence of God's grace,  
Now judgment has brought this to them.*

*Where gold once covered much of the temple,  
Now it runs down the streets.  
Stones hewed out with skillful hands,  
Are walked on where people meet.  
The precious sons of Zion,  
Who were compared to fine gold;  
Now they are led in chains away;  
As slaves in a foreign country, they will be sold.*

*No wonder those who preach and warn,  
Have times when they are weeping.  
They knew all along this was bound to happen,  
They could sense that when they were speaking.  
I know from first-hand knowledge,  
The same attitude is here today.  
People want us to mind our own business,  
And from them they want us to stay away.*

*"I know Father God, that many people are uneasy when they see me coming. They are afraid I am going to ask a question or make some statement that will make them uncomfortable. Give to me the vision I pray, to not stray from the path of Thy leading, and the wisdom to say what is needed in the right way. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."*

## **Lamentations 5**

### **THE PRAYER**

The last chapter of the book of Lamentations is a penitential prayer of the nation. The people of Judah had finally come to the place where they knew, and openly admitted, their only hope was in God. This is an open appeal to God for help and hope in a time of despair and disgrace. The whole nation was in a time of suffering. This prayer is a call to God for mercy. "Remember, O Lord," is a conscious expression of faith at the opening of the prayer, and "Restore us to Thyself, O Lord," is an expression of cautious hope at the end.

"Remembering," as it is used here, is not to go over in memory things that have been in the past, but a plea for action in the present. The writer, likely Jeremiah, as a citizen, was speaking for them all. To them, it seemed like God had completely forgotten them, and they were hoping for the actions taken against them to be reversed. They admitted the promised land, "our inheritance," had satisfied them in the past, and they had taken it all for granted, but now they had lost everything. They finally realized how serious their sins were and how serious it is to sin against God. The degree to which the judgment of God came on them, made them wonder if God would ever look upon them again, let alone take them back into a place of favor.

It is hard for any of us who are sinners and have become so used to sin in us and around us, to conceive how bad sin is to our absolutely perfect and holy God. It is only when we read the scriptures and put ourselves into the situations that are recorded there; that we can begin to comprehend how abhorrent sin is to God, and how serious the results of sin are now and forever on human beings and the world which we have polluted by our sin. By reading and applying the word of God to ourselves and committing ourselves to acting on the truths revealed there, we can purify ourselves and conduct our lives in ways that can please God.

The people of Judah and Jerusalem had lost everything. Their homes were gone; many of their loved ones were taken captives; they were destitute and totally poverty stricken to where they had absolutely nothing. They had to sell everything to surrounding nations to get food to eat. They had to bear the sins of their forefathers as well as their own. Those who were their servants before the invasion of the conquering army of Babylon, were now their masters. They had no place of safety from those who raided them, and famine had come over the whole land. The wages of sin are really, really hard.

Individuals suffered personally, as well as the nation. The ravages of war on the women brought humiliation and suffering to them. Every age group: men, women, young people, children and leaders were all brought down to total and abject poverty and humiliation. In times of peace and prosperity, we are in danger of forgetting that everything we have and count on to make our life easy, can be lost in a very short time.

When we take for granted the goodness of God toward us, we are assuming that this is the way things will be from now on. We think "we have arrived," and then it may all be taken away. Everything we counted on can be lost overnight. Never let us think we are immune from suffering the loss of everything. Every good thing we have or ever will have, comes from the benevolent hand of God. A high calling and low living do not go together and cannot coexist. Low living and deep suffering can. "Be sure your sin will find you out," is not merely a Sunday School verse we teach children. It is a statement of fact.

Material goals in life will not last. They are not the reason for our existence, but merely temporary side-benefits that can be quickly taken away. Cheap grace is not an attribute of God. Because a crooked judge or deceptive government leader practices cheap grace, does not mean that God traffics in such compromise. His grace is readily available when guilty people repent of their sin, and truly forsake it. God does not down-play the sinfulness of sin. He deals with sin in the most severe way so that true justice is served. Restoration to God does not come when half-hearted repentance merely uses the right words. "I have sinned," can mean different things to different people. To people, they be only words. But God looks on the heart, and if those words are not the true confession of guilt, and the attitude is not that of true humiliation and remorse, it means nothing at all.

Christ had to die for our sins! That is how seriously God takes sin. Any truly repentant sinner, who repents of their sin and comes to Christ wanting salvation, will be welcomed by our Lord. "Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out." His grace has made full provision for our salvation so we can be saved by His grace through putting our faith in Him alone.

Even though Judah and Jerusalem were completely devastated and the people had nothing left; God was not done. His throne is forever. That was one thing the grieving people knew, and their prayer for mercy was based on that assurance. God's throne is eternal and unmovable. He will still remember His people. Everything those people had lived for was gone, but God remained unchanged. He is majestic in His holiness. His authority over this universe remains unchanged. His justice is, and will forever be, absolute. His mercy is still offered to the penitent sinner. His grace is limitless toward those who come to Him in faith. Hope for the future is found in Him alone. He does not forget His own.

When people turn in repentance from their sin to Him in sincerity and truth, He is ready to forgive, save and restore them to Himself. In times of grief, we must turn to Him for the lasting comfort He alone can give. We must not turn away from Him, even though there may be some nagging doubt in us; like in the writer of this lament, as to whether we will be accepted. God's love and justice are unchanging. "In wrath, remember mercy!"

**Lamentations 5:19.** *"Thou, O Lord, remainest forever; thy throne from generation to generation."*

### **REMORSE.**

*In that long-ago time God's children thought they could do what they wanted.  
But the time came to pass when they reaped what they had planted.  
That principle remains the same today as back then.  
God leavers us to our own devices when we forget about Him.*

*What we once had is now gone with no hope of return.  
What we invested in the world system is just waiting to be burned.  
Those ambitions and material things we thought were so dear,  
Now is just a memory of the past, and even that is not clear.*

*Things that were passed down to us from those gone on before,  
Someone else has taken, but to them it's like dust on the floor.  
The meaning it held for us, reminding us of them we loved -  
Was spurned in the race for things our souls craved.*

*When it comes to facing remorse, we could go on and on.  
What once brought us blessing is now forever gone.  
And we find that hopeless feeling will no longer go away.  
The sense of guilt and loss is obviously here to stay.*

*The one steadying force that remains with us forever,  
Is the unchangeable God who will allow nothing to sever;  
Our link with Him when once we come to know Him.  
The things that enchanted us once; now we despise them*

*Far better to live without one single thing -  
If our eternal life with God, we can then begin.  
To be in fellowship with God with nothing, is a far greater blessing;  
Then to live without the Lord, but with all the world's window-dressing.*

*"O Lord God, I am thinking and praying about a brother in Christ I have met but don't know very well. I think probably around this time he is filled with remorse. Help him to be willing to return to Thee and his family, even if he has nothing left but his life. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."*