

Lamentations (Part Two)

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 09-Sep-17; Sermon #1396

Before we get into Lamentations, I want to give you a little bit of background information that I could not fit in last week.

What would be your reaction if God told you personally, say in a vision or in a dream, that because of America's sins which have vexed Him for more than 200 years, He would send the Russians and their allies with all their weapons of war and all their built-up hatred of America, against the United States? They would, God would say to you, devastate the land. They would destroy the cities, kill or capture most of the people, and reduce the nation to a poor and backward vassal state. What would you think? How would you react?

On top of that, He would tell you there was nothing you or anyone else could do about it because the time for repentance had passed, it would surely come.

That is essentially what God told the prophet to Habakkuk. Habakkuk wrote his book near the end of the seventh century ^{BC}, just before the Babylonians invaded the kingdom of Judah. Except God did not tell him the Russians were coming. He told him that the Chaldeans were coming and the Babylonians. So if you will please turn with me to Habakkuk 1 and we are going to read verses 6-11 and see what God told to Habakkuk. It put more than a shiver up the spine of Habakkuk and we will see why here.

Habakkuk 1:6-11 "For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful; their judgment and their dignity proceeds from themselves. Their horses also are swifter than leopards, and more fierce than evening wolves. Their chargers charge ahead; their cavalry comes from afar. They fly as the eagle that hastens to eat. They all come for violence; their faces are set like the east wind. They gather their captives like sand. They scoff at kings, and

princes are scorned by them. They deride every stronghold, for they heap up earthen mounds and seize it. Then his mind changes, and he transgresses; he commits offense, ascribing this power to his god."

Here God promises to send the bitter and hasty Chaldean, essentially the same people as the Babylonians. And He is going to send them against Judah as they had attacked other nations around them and He is going to use them as the rod of His anger against Judah's sinful and unfaithful people.

Now in Hebrew, underneath what we see here in English in the Old Testament, the Chaldeans are called the Kasdim. And if you know a little bit about biblical Hebrew, you know that the "im" at the end is a marker for plural. So they, like the Egyptians were the Mizrahim, they were probably from a person named Mizrah. That was the Egyptians original ancestor. And that suggests that the Chaldeans' original ancestor was someone called Kasid. In any case, you know how Hebrew words are made up of three consonants with vows in between, their original ancestor would have been somebody with a name that had K, S, and D in it. Kasdim (k, s, d) So, who would that be?

If you want to go back to Genesis 22:22, this would make a great memory scripture because it is 22:22, but it is just a bunch of names. But this verse has a genealogy of Abraham's brother Nahor. I will just read from verse 20.

Genesis 22:20-22 Now it came to pass after these things that it was told Abraham, saying, "Indeed Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: Huz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram [meaning the Arameans], Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel."

And so we know that Abraham's servant later worked with Bethuel quite a bit because he begot Rebecca. But we see there this one in verse 22, Chesed. And in Hebrew that that ch sound is pronounced very much like a K. This person here, Chesed the son of Nahor, is thought to have been the father of what became the Chaldeans.

They are related to Israel fairly closely. The Chaldeans were a Semitic people, just like the Israelites. But the Chaldeans were closer to the Arameans who lived in the area of Syria. They were cousins, the Chaldeans and the Arameans. There was a bit of a kinship there with the Israelites so it was a double curse in that they were going to be punished by part of the family, as it were.

Now the people of Chesed, or the Kasdim, the Chaldeans, eventually moved to the region of southern Mesopotamia near the northwest end of the Persian Gulf. If you know anything about that area of the world, the Persian Gulf runs up there on the other side of the Arabian Peninsula. They lived on the northwest side of the very end of the Persian Gulf. That area, where they moved to, nobody else wanted it because it was very swampy and very hard to invade though, so it made a good place to hunker down and they had a hard time being overcome by any other nation. This taught them, over time, to be a very hardy and independent people, and they were quite the good fighters.

They are also very ingenious people. They took this swampy land that they had wrested from whoever was there before, and they made canals and they channeled the water through these canals and, over time, over a few hundred years, they made this area of Mesopotamia, called Chaldea, the bread basket of the Fertile Crescent. So they were very ingenious people, people who were willing to take something that was not quite so good and make it into something that was very helpful and useful.

They came into their own as a people during the last few decades of the Assyrian Empire. They had been finally subjugated by Assyria, but being an independent people, they began to fight back almost immediately. And so by the time we get to the end of the seventh century, about 625, they began to rise up against the Assyrians, and with the Medes as their allies, they captured Asher and Nineveh in two years; in 614 they captured Asher and then two years later in 612, they captured Nineveh. And Nineveh, if you want to look at it from a Hebrew prophetic point of view, is the story that is told in the book of Nahum.

They had some very good leaders right there at that time. Nebuchadnezzar and his father were quite good at their job of conquering other people, and by 605 they had defeated Egypt at the battle of Carchemish and essentially, at that point, established their supremacy over the whole Near East. In that same year, 605, Judah became a vassal kingdom to Babylon under King Joachim. And then it was at that time that Daniel was taken to Babylon. (I told you last time I spoke that it was later on in 597. But I was wrong. It was in this time about 604, 605 BC.) The Jews revolted in 597 against Nebuchadnezzar. This time it was under the king whom we called Jehoiachin and Jerusalem was then captured. This is when Ezekiel and King Joachim were taken to Babylon by the River Chebar. Remember that story?

We are coming down in time to the time when Judah would finally revolt again under Zedekiah, which was a few years later. Nebuchadnezzar sent his armies back for a third invasion and this time they did destroy Jerusalem. They destroyed the Temple in 586 and that is when many citizens were killed and most of the remainder were taken into captivity. We know that a few were left in the land. That is a bit of their historical background.

But what were the Chaldeans like? What made them so feared? Why did just the thought of the Chaldeans coming strike terror into the hearts of men like Habakkuk and Jeremiah and others who lived at that time? Well, Habakkuk 1:6 says that they are a bitter and hasty nation. Now modern scholars usually translate this a little bit differently. Not bitter and hasty, but ruthless and impetuous. They had no mercy whatsoever and they just did what they felt like doing. They get the idea in their head to go conquer somebody, they up and did it. And they were the kind of people who could make that work.

As we see here in this passage in Habakkuk 1, they were known for their cruelty, take-no-prisoners type of approach—and speed. It took them from 625 to 605, twenty years to go from a subjugated people under Assyria to being the masters of the Middle East. They just ran roughshod over everyone. So, they were known for both their cruelty and speed in conquering most of Western Asia. They had an incredible thirst for power, for plunder. You can kind of see that in Nebuchadnezzar as the way he is

portrayed in the book of Daniel. That he was very proud and of course God had to take him down for that. But what did He do? He took away his power. He took away his ability to think like a man and had to humble him greatly.

But Habakkuk list their traits here in chapter 1, verse 6. There is the merciless idea. They are hot-headed and greedy. They are, it says, a bitter and hasty nation. They march through the breadth of the earth to possess dwelling places that are not theirs. They had a greed and a desire, a thirst, for more. In verse 7 it tells you how that they are terrible and dreadful, very cruel. They are also arrogant and lawless. Their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves. They did not have concern for what anybody else thought, any other kind of power. It was all about them and their power.

Verse 8 says that they are speedy and fierce, likening them to leopards and wolves, an eagle. All of those are predators that go after their prey with single vision. Verse 9 shows that they are violent. They are resolute, saying, "Their faces are set like the east wind." Verse 10 tells you that they are slavers. They scoff at kings, haughty: their princes are scorned by them, they are better than, they have more majesty than even princes. And fearless. "They deride every stronghold." There is nothing that can stop them.

In verse 11, the underlying idea here, especially this part at the very end where it says, "ascribing this power to his god," is the underlying idea is that they worship power. That is really their god, that they want all this power for themselves. And so it just comes around to their own gods and their power is what makes them do what they do. They want to appease their god, which is their thirst for power. So, they seem unstoppable from what God tells Habakkuk here.

Now, I just wanted to pick up one image here in verse 8. It compares them to wolves. The Hebrew literally expresses wolves of the evening. The wolves there in Palestine, and I am sure in other places too, they hunt at night. This is the idea that God wanted Habakkuk to understand: they were like hunting wolves at night. And the kind of fear that puts in you. If you are out in the wilderness and you hear that wolf howl and you know he is hungry and you know he has caught your scent, will he and the rest of his pack stop and turn around, or will they try to sate their hunger by coming after you?

That was the idea that God wanted Habakkuk to have. That they were an indomitable enemy, hungry for victory and spoils and they wanted to subjugate everybody under them. Because of their predatory nature and their other characteristics here, it would be impossible either to stand before them or negotiate for peace. They would just do what it is that they would do and their will was to conquer.

Go back to Jeremiah, if you will. I am going to read several sections here because Jeremiah describes them very similarly. Here God is laying out to Jeremiah the essence of his prophecy to the people before the onset of the Babylonian invasion.

Jeremiah 4:5-8 Declare in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem, and say: "Blow the trumpet in the land [this was a sign of war, telling everybody]; Cry, 'Gather together,' and say, 'Assemble yourselves, let us go into the fortified cities.' [because an invasion force was on the horizon] Set up the standard toward Zion. Take refuge! Do not delay! For I will bring disaster from the north, and great destruction." The lion has come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of nations is on his way. He has gone forth from his place to make your land desolate. Your cities will be laid waste, without inhabitant. For this, clothe yourself with sackcloth, lament and wail. For the fierce anger of the Lord has not turned back from us.

You get the idea here that God has sent this lion up from his thicket and made him the destroyer of nations and it was going to come down hard on the people of Judah.

Jeremiah 4:13 "Behold, he shall come up like clouds, and his chariots like a whirlwind. [sounds like a tornado coming or a great storm like a hurricane.] His horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us, for we are plundered!"

Jeremiah 5:5-6 But these have altogether broken the yoke and burst the bonds. [speaking of the Israelites, the people of Judah] Therefore a lion from the forest shall slay them, a wolf of the desert shall destroy them; a leopard will watch over their cities. Everyone

who goes out from there shall be torn in pieces, because their transgressions are many, their backslidings have increased.

Jeremiah 5:15-17 "Behold, I will bring a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel," says the Lord. "It is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say. Their quiver is like an open tomb; they are all mighty men. And they shall eat up your harvest and your bread, which your sons and daughters should eat. They shall eat up your flocks and your herds; they shall eat up your vines and your fig trees; they shall destroy your fortified cities, in which you trust, with the sword."

So they are not going to hold back. It is going to be total war.

Jeremiah 6:22-25 Thus says the Lord, "Behold, a people comes from the north country, and a great nation will be raised from the farthest parts of the earth. They will lay hold on bow and spear; they are cruel and have no mercy; their voice roars like the sea; and they ride on horses, as men of war set in array against you, O daughter of Zion." We have heard the report of it; our hands grow feeble. Anguish has taken hold of us, pain as of a woman in labor. Do not go out into the field, or walk by the way. Because of the sword of the enemy, fear is on every side.

So Jeremiah tells us a very similar story to Habakkuk. He emphasizes their predatory nature. They are like lions and wolves that are ready to strike. They have a great deal of speed. They come from afar, but they are coming fast and there is no way to get out of their way. They have an insatiable greed for plunder. They want whatever beautiful things, valuable things that you may have—all your food, all your flocks, all your vines, everything that you value. They are cruel. He talks about them tearing the people of Judah in pieces, of using total war against them, and provoking terror.

All in all, the Chaldeans seem to have been a pretty nasty piece of work when they were on the warpath. They were vicious, they were ruthless, they were unrelenting. They were ravenous like wolves. To use a poker expression, they were all in and they played for keeps. They were the worst

enemies that anybody could imagine. Imagine some of these prophets saying, "No! Send the Syrians, send somebody else. I don't care who it is. But not the Babylonians, not the Chaldeans!" But God had had enough. And He said, "Okay, I'm going to send against you the very worst of those people."

Now go to Ezekiel the 28th chapter. Normally we come to Ezekiel 28 because we are talking about Satan and his fall because he is called here the king of Tyre. But earlier in the chapter it is talking to physical Tyre. Talking to the prince of Tyre, who was the human ruler of the city. I just want verses 6-8. We are still in that section where he is talking to the prince of Tyre.

I should mention here before we go into it that this is a prophecy to Tyre because they were going to be facing the Babylonians themselves. They were coming down upon Tyre first because they are coming from the north. Tyre is north and west of Jerusalem. So they would they would hit Tyre before they would hit Judah and they were looking to the north, they were seeing the same onslaught coming against them that Judah would later face. So here we have Tyre awaiting the Babylonians. So the Lord God says to him:

Ezekiel 28:6-8 "Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Because you have set your heart as the heart of a god [for their pride], behold, therefore, I will bring strangers against you, the most terrible of the nations; and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom, and defile your splendor. They shall throw you down into the Pit, and you shall die the death of the slain in the midst of the seas."

So they would be destroyed by the most terrible of the nations. They were the worst of the heathen and they lived up to their reputation. They were *proud* of their reputation of being such a cruel people who were able to put down other nations.

This, I hope, helps to get us to understand the terror that was experienced by the people of Judah and Jerusalem before the invasion came. And of course

this helps us to understand the subsequent grief and horror once the Babylonians had destroyed the city and killed most of the people, and then packed the most of the rest of them into slavery.

Now we will pick up the story of the sorrow of the people of Judah in the book of Lamentations in chapter 1, as we continue this series. I am, in the first eleven verses, going to go verse by verse here through this chapter, because this sets the stage, gives you an idea of what the people of Judah were thinking, how they were reacting to the destruction that the Chaldeans had just done upon them. And I think you are going to see a normal human reaction to disaster, but they had a disaster put on them that we in our time have not seen. We have not seen this type of total destruction in our lifetimes or here in America. So we have to kind of see it through their eyes here and consider what is coming upon this earth, what will come upon this nation because there is the same type of sins. So let us just start in verse 1. We will read each verse as they come and give you a fuller view of what is going on here and connect it to some of these other verses.

Lamentations 1:1 How lonely sits the city that was full of people!
How like a widow is she, who was great among the nations! The
princess among the provinces has become a slave!

This first verse is a classic example of a literary type called "before and after." First, it tells us how she was before and then it tells us how she was after. Or sometimes, like here, "How lonely sits the city that *was* full of people!" reverses the order here, tells us how she is now and then how she was before. So, what we get here is an idea that Jerusalem was a bustling city of thousands of people, maybe hundreds of thousands of people. It was the nation's center of government, the nation's center of social things, society, and the center of the nation's commerce. It was the hub of everything that was Judah. Trade was brisk, the social scene was hopping, parties and whatnot going on. People trying to climb the ladder.

The king and his court were full of bravado and patriotism. They were telling the people that everything would be okay and they would keep the Babylonians away even though all the examples that they had from the other nations were that they were going to get trounced, just like everybody else had. But the king and all his court, his courtiers, they were thinking that

everything was going to be just fine. And had not the prophets, that were not of God but were false prophets, been saying there would be peace? This thing would not come upon Judah. God would not allow His Temple to be destroyed, would He?

But now, what were they saying? Crickets, they were dead, most of them. There was not a soul to be seen. "How lonely sits the city." There is nobody around. Jerusalem was desolate. It had been destroyed. The wall is broken down. The Temple burned, all the treasures taken from it, and the people carted it off. It was just a ruined hulk, sitting there on the top of those mountains. The city had once been the envy of the nations, especially with the Temple that Solomon built there as one of the most beautiful buildings on the face of the earth.

But now that city had been laid low, it was desolate, it was destroyed. All the beauty and charm of the city was gone and the few people that were left were in despair. She had been a haughty princess, a beautiful noblewoman, but she has hit the bottom now, a slave, a wretch, a forced laborer. What a comeuppance or a come-down-ance, and she has come down from all that splendor and glory as being in God's people, thinking she was the queen of the nation, and now there was this ruin. Things could not be worse. This is an example of a riches-to-rags story. Not the other way around.

Lamentations 1:2 She weeps bitterly in the night, her tears are on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has none to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies.

So her bitter weeping not only describes her bottomless grief for what has happened to her, but it also is a indicator of her embarrassment and her disappointment in her lovers, that is, her allies whom she trusted to come protect her when the Babylonians struck. And she was very foolish and now she was ashamed of what had happened. She was beginning to realize what had happened to her and why it had happened to her. Not fully. But we see that her bitter tears are making her think a little bit.

Let us go back to Jeremiah. We were in chapter 4 there. We did not get as far as verse 30 in the chapter, but here we will get an indication of what was going on.

Jeremiah 4:30 "And when you are a plundered, what will you do? Though you clothe yourself with crimson, though you adorn yourself with ornaments of gold, though you enlarge your eyes with paint, in vain you will make yourself fair; your lovers will despise you; they will seek your life."

So, however many years before this God prophesies that this is what was going to happen, that they would be ashamed and that the ones that she had allied herself with would eventually come to despise her even though she looked nice. She looked pretty. But it was the prettiness or the nice-lookingness, or however you want to put it, of a harlot, and they would come to realize this.

Jeremiah 30:14-15 [it is written here] All your lovers have forgotten you; they do not seek you; for I have wounded you with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of your iniquities, because your sins have increased. Why do you cry about your affliction? Your sorrow is incurable. Because of the multitude of your iniquities, because your sins have increased, I have done these things to you.

You deserved it, is essentially what He is saying here. Why are you crying? This was inevitable. Why are you feeling so sorry for yourself? This is the consequence of what you have done.

Go to Ezekiel 16 and He says something similar. This is in the section about the sisters and the harlotry and all that.

Ezekiel 16:23-30 "Then it was so, after all your wickedness—'Woe, woe to you!' says the Lord God—that you have also built yourself a shrine, and made a high place for yourself in every street. You built your high places at the head of every road,

and made your beauty to be abhorred. You offered yourself to everyone who passed by, and multiplied your acts of harlotry. You also committed harlotry with the Egyptians, your very fleshly neighbors, and increased your acts of harlotry to provoke Me to anger. Behold, therefore, I stretched out My hand against you, diminished your allotment, and gave you up to the will of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd behavior. You also played the harlot with the Assyrians, because you were insatiable; indeed you played the harlot with them and still were not satisfied. Moreover you multiplied your acts of harlotry as far as the land of the trader, Chaldea; and still you were not satisfied. How degenerate is your heart!" says the Lord God, "seeing you do all these things, the deeds of a brazen harlot."

As we all know, God considered her alliances with these other nations—we see them here: Egypt, Syria, Chaldea, among others—to be adultery. He was their husband, He was the husband of Israel. She should have remained faithful to Him. We see it played out in the book of Hosea, with Hosea and Gomer. Hosea being the type of God as their Husband and how He loved them and did whatever He could for them. But she always went back to her harlotry.

Had they remained faithful to Him (and I am going back to Judah now), He would never have allowed these things to happen. He would never have let them go to this extreme. He would have protected them from all these problems. But that is not the way they wanted it to go. They wanted to be like the other nations and have all these alliances with these foreign nations. And this is what happened, what we see there in Lamentations. I am sure she had thought, meaning Jerusalem and its leaders and its people too, "Surely my allies will help me. They will give us what we need. They promised. They made treaties with us. We gave them so much of our food and our flocks and our wine and our olive oil to make sure that they stayed close to us." But when push came to shove, they did not lift a finger. At least Egypt made a feint of helping Judah. They looked like they were going to help Judah.

Let us go to there in Jeremiah 37. You have got to give those fleshly Egyptians a little bit of credit, but it did not help much. Notice what God says about them.

Jeremiah 37:5-10 Then Pharaoh's army came up from Egypt; and when the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard news of them, they departed from Jerusalem. [So here they are lifting the siege of Jerusalem to go attack the allies, the Egyptians.] Then the word of the Lord came to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Thus you shall say to the king of Judah, who sent you to Me to inquire of Me: "Behold, Pharaoh's army which has come up to help you will return to Egypt, to their own land. And the Chaldeans shall come back and fight against this city, and take it and burn it with fire.'" Thus says the Lord: 'Do not deceive yourselves saying, "The Chaldeans will surely depart from us," for they will not depart. For though you had defeated the whole army of the Chaldeans who fight against you, and there remained only wounded men among them, they would rise up, every man in his tent, and burn the city with fire.'"

So the Egyptians come and they make this feint against the Chaldeans, "Hey, we're down here in the south. You need to get off your siege and come fight us." And so the Chaldeans swoop down south, but the Egyptians see the Chaldeans coming and they scurry back across the Nile, their tail between their legs. And what happened? Nebuchadnezzar laughs—Ha, ha, ha—and he comes back and he continues to siege in Jerusalem. That is what God had sent him to do—to destroy Judah. And not even that little help from the Egyptians, fruitless, futile help, would take him away from his objective.

What about Edom, brother to Jacob? He was the worst of these lovers that Judah had or was he a friend? What was he? Let us go to Obadiah.

Obadiah 10-14 "For your violence against your brother, Jacob, shame shall cover you [talking to Edom right here], and you shall be cut off forever. In the day that you stood on the other side [that is, that you stood on the other side of the two sides that were going on, you were on the other side, not on Judah's side, but on the other

side]—in the day that strangers carried captive his forces, when foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem—even you were as one of them. But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother in the day of his captivity; nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; nor should you have spoken proudly in the day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of My people in the day of their calamity. Indeed, you should not have gazed on their affliction in the day of their calamity, nor laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity. You should not have stood at the crossroads to cut off those among them who escaped; nor should you have delivered up those among them who remained in the day of distress."

What terrible friends! They would say, "Oh, look which way the wind is blowing here. Looks like the Chaldeans are going to win this thing. So we're going to switch sides and we're going to give them our all. We're going to go up and plunder. We're going to fight against Judah. We're going to cut off anybody who's escaping and either kill them or return them to the Chaldeans." And God said, "For that, you're going to get it." And it was not too long thereafter that they were destroyed, just like Judah, for their perfidious ways. Jeremiah 37:10 said (which we read just a few minutes ago), nothing was going to stop the Babylonians from punishing Jerusalem. If all the Chaldeans had left were wounded men, that would be enough. Judah would fall. Not even sincere repentance would help because that ship has sailed. We will get to that in a few minutes.

But her lovers and her friends were useless against God's wrath. God had determined that this was going to be the way it was. They needed to be punished and He was going to let the Chaldeans have their heads.

Lamentations 1:3 Judah has gone into captivity, under affliction and hard servitude; she dwells among the nations, she finds no rest; all her persecutors overtake her in dire straits.

The result of all of this that had happened was captivity, suffering, slavery, and exile. For any of those that remain, they found themselves away from the land of Israel. They were out of the land. They had been taken or had

escaped from the land of Israel, from the land of their fathers. But even though they may have escaped, or maybe they were in exile, they felt like they were constantly looking over their shoulder for the next thing to happen. You know that expression, they were waiting for the other shoe to drop. They were expecting another blow, whatever it was, to fall at any moment.

So it says very simply, "she finds no rest." How can you rest when you are expecting something horrible to happen at any second? No peace of mind, always under stress, down to your last nerve, because you just do not know what is going to happen next. And maybe, worst of all, those that were pursuing her, all her enemies, would end up catching her in the worst possible places. Kind of like, remember, the Egyptians chasing after the Israelites as they were leaving Egypt. They caught Israel in the worst place there against the Red Sea. They were hemmed in with mountains on two sides and the sea on the third side, and their only route of escape, to a physical way of looking at things, was right back through the Egyptian army in their chariots.

That is kind of the picture of what is going on here with Judah—that they would escape and they think they would find a place to escape to that was safe, and it ended up being a death trap. The picture is of an army pursuing their enemies across country and the little army that is fleeing ahead of them slips into a canyon thinking that they can get away and hide themselves. But it ends up being a death trap there, a box canyon, and the enemy soldiers can just pick them off one by one.

That is that it means there, "All her persecutors overtake her in dire straits." The word has to do with narrow places and they can just box up both ends and kill them as they will. So they were always running into chokepoints, like God was forcing them into these places where they would be killed or captured and not escape. Notice what Amos says in Amos 5. This is about the Day of the Lord, but it is a similar type of experience here.

Amos 5:18-20 Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? [And this, what was happening to Judah, was a day of the Lord to them. He says] It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion [Did not Jeremiah and Habakkuk also compare Babylon to a

lion?], and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall [thinking okay, I'm safe now.], and serpent bit him! Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?

The people of Judah were experiencing this under God's wrath against them for their sins.

Lamentations 1:4 The roads to Zion mourn because no one comes to the set feasts. All her gates are desolate; her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness.

This verse laments free, happy activities that are now distant memories and will not be seen there in Jerusalem for at least three more generations, and perhaps more. The first one that they will not see for all this time are pilgrims coming up the road to Jerusalem and to the Temple for the feast. That is why they are mourning. The ones who would come up these roads are not there anymore, they are dead, most of them. And it would be the descendants of the exiles that would come back and begin this again many years later, after 70 years. But Jerusalem is not seeing all those great crowds of people coming up the road to keep the feast in Jerusalem.

The second thing that is being mourned here are the crowds gathering at the city gates for commerce. That is where most of the markets were, right there in the city gates. Also they had the courts of justice in the city gate. So good things were happening there. There was a lot of trade and a lot of fellowship and then there was justice being meted out to keep the city safe and to keep things humming right along there, and that would not be seen in Jerusalem for another three generations.

And the third one, maybe the most poignant, is the young ladies that would not be seen in Jerusalem dancing at the festival or looking for a husband, hoping for children and to keep house. Most of them were dead and it would be their descendants, or the three generations, later that would maybe be able to do this again. But there is no joy in Mudville, if you know what I am referring to. Casey at the bat. There is no joy here at all. The city is just desolate. A way of life had perished in mere months and they would never see it again. That is why she is so bitter.

Lamentations 1:5 Her adversaries have become the master, her enemies prosper; for the Lord has afflicted her because of the multitude of her transgressions. Her children have gone into captivity before the enemy.

Yes, there is a lot of grief, a lot of sorrow, a lot of lamentation that is being done here because of all the desolation, deaths, and ruin that had happened there in Jerusalem. It is enough to make us pity her and think, "Oh, how terrible! All those people! What a waste!" But despite her bitter tears, she is not innocent. That is what this verse is telling us. That even though these horrible things happened, we should not think that she was an innocent that just happened to have this happen to her. She deserved every stripe, every death, every ruined building, every bad thing that had happened was deserved.

It was not just one sin that caused this to happen or even just a few sins. But God calls it multitudes of transgressions, thousands upon thousands of sins and not just the sins of that generation, but of the generations before and all of those sins against God's covenant and against God Himself. He is the one that had been offended. He is the one that has been sinned against, and the curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 came to pass just as He had said. It is not like the people of Israel had not been warned. It was right there in Scripture. All they had to do was read what would happen if they turned away from God. And God did pretty much all of those things to them that He said He would do because He is a God of His word.

The same could be said for this nation who probably have an even greater biblical literacy than they did because of the amount of Bibles that are in this nation sitting dusty on bookshelves. Those warnings are there for them. And as God's physical people, they are going to pay for the transgressions of those laws.

The Hebrew word here that is translated transgression is a word pronounced *pesha'*. It is often thought to mean rebellion and that is fine. That is kind of a catch-all word for what this word means. But it really implies a breach of relationship. A breaking with another over something, a breaking with God in particular here. Another thing that it means that I think is really interesting

and I am really going to need to give it a lot more thought, but *pesha'* means a misappropriation of what God has given as a result of His part in the covenant. A misappropriation of what God has given, all His gifts, all His blessings. Everything that He provided for them had been misappropriated, either for their own pleasure or given to the enemy, given to those lovers that we talked about a little earlier. This word *pesha'* ultimately means unfaithfulness, disloyalty, infidelity, and treachery. He says they did this all the time. There were multitudes of infidelity, multitudes of treachery against Him and His covenant.

Go to the book of Ezekiel, chapter 16 and see how this word *pesha'* is described here in this example. I do not know if the word even appears in Ezekiel 16, but it is describing how they were and particularly this idea of misappropriating what God had given.

Ezekiel 16:3 Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem" "Your birth and your nativity are from the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite and your mother was a Hittite."

Ezekiel 16:8-21 "When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine," said the Lord God. "Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. [So He cleaned her up and He set her apart here as His nation.] I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. [He is talking about the blessings that He gave her.] I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. [I mean, He dressed her up nice, gave her all kinds of bling, and put her on a pedestal.] Your

fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you," says the Lord God.

[This is where things turn.] But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it. You took some of your garments and adorned multicolored high places for yourself, and played the harlot on them. Such things should not happen, nor be. You have also taken your beautiful jewelry from My gold and My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images and played the harlot with them. You took your embroidered garments and covered them, and set My oil and My incense before them. Also My food, which I gave you—the pastry of fine flour, oil, and honey which I fed you—you set it before them as sweet incense; and so it was," says the Lord God. "Moreover, you took your sons and your daughters, whom you bore to Me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your acts of harlotry a small matter, that you have slain My children and offered them up to them by causing them to pass through the fire?"

We do not need to read anymore. But God encapsulates Israel's and Judah's sins in this word, *pasha'*. They broke the covenant, they abandoned God, their Husband, they misused His blessings, and trusted in men and nations instead. They betrayed everything good and right and joined the enemy. And the result, as we see back here in Lamentations 1 at the very end of verse 5, is that she sees her children being whipped by the enemy as they trudge as captives towards Babylon. That was the payment she got for all of her misappropriation of what God had provided for. She ends up seeing her children in a line of slaves being whipped as they go to Babylon.

Lamentations 1:6 And from the daughter of Zion, all her splendor has departed. Her princes have become like deer that find no pasture, that flee without strength before the pursuer.

Not only has Zion, or Jerusalem, lost her splendor, or majesty, that is, her dignity and her authority, but she has also lost her leaders. That is better than

princes here. They are referring to the nation's leadership here, which no longer had a constituency. That is, they had no pasture there. There was nothing for them to graze upon anymore, as it were. But they had fled the city, it says "her princes have become like deer that flee without strength before the pursuer." And that is what happened. I will not go there, but in Jeremiah 52:7-11 and also in II Kings 25:4-7, shows the princes and Zedekiah, fleeing the city with their tails between their legs to save their own skins, and they came to no good end. Many of them were killed. Zedekiah's sons were slain before his eyes. And Zedekiah himself was blinded and taken off captive to Babylon.

Lamentations 1:7 In the days of her affliction and roaming, Jerusalem remembers all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old. When her people fell into the hands of the enemy, with no one to help her, the adversaries saw her and mocked at her downfall.

So, she looks back on her glory, on her power and possessions that she has now lost, but it does nothing to dull the pain of seeing her enemy sneering and laughing derisively at her fallen state. She has gone from the height of pride to the low nadir of humility, humiliation.

Lamentations 1:8 Jerusalem has sinned gravely, therefore, she has become vile. All who honored her despise her because they have seen her nakedness; yes, she sighs and turns away.

This naturally flows from verse 7. Her sins had brought her low. They had made her vile, it says. It is probably better as filthy or unclean or even impure. It is probably a reference to Leviticus 18:19, which talks about female impurity during menstruation and after childbirth, that sort of thing. Her nakedness, as we have seen, refers to her dalliances with foreign nations and these nations now despise her for what she was, a debased harlot. They see that now and they see that she deserves what she got.

It is also probably a reference to her idol worship. Not just the fact that she had foreign alliances, but the fact that when she made these foreign alliances, she also took the gods of these foreign peoples and took them into her worship. So when they were allied with the Egyptians, they worshipped Ra

and Horus and Isis and all those, and then when they were allied with the Assyrians, they worshipped the Assyrian gods, and when they were allied with the Chaldeans, they worshipped their gods. So it was all one big ball of very bad acts and God had to punish them very severely for this.

Lamentations 1:9 Her uncleanness is in her skirts; she did not consider her destiny; therefore her collapse was awesome; she had no comforter. "O Lord [she says], behold my affliction, for the enemy is exalted!"

This verse intensifies the accusation of her sinfulness. Her major problem is right there in the second phrase, "she did not consider her destiny." A big problem with Israelites of any stripe, but it was particularly a problem here with Judah, that they did not consider the consequences of their actions, of their choices. Remember in Haggai 1:5 and 7, God tells them to consider their ways. They may be trying to build the Temple, but they were more focused on themselves. And God says, "Hey, you have got to put Me first." So He tells them to consider their ways.

Proverbs 22:3 A prudent man foresees evil and hide themselves, but the simple pass on and are punished.

And that is how Judah had acted. She just did not think about what would come over the horizon. All she was considering at any time, no matter what she did, was what was convenient, what was expedient. She did not think about any future costs or future penalties. She just did what came natural, what she thought was best without thinking about what God would think, about what God would want her to do. And now she was having to pay severely in blood and treasure for her stupidity and for her indifference to what is right, and to her carelessness with God and His law. Only her complete collapse and degradation had brought her to her senses at all, if only in part.

So, here we have at the end of verse 9, she cries to God to punish those who had afflicted her. But she has no grounds for calling on God's mercy, no grounds for begging God to avenge her. And begging is really the only thing she can do. She has nothing to offer. And is that not typical? Is it not typical that it takes the worst dangers and problems to get people to finally turn to

God? How many soldiers turn to God only in the foxhole with the enemy marching toward them? Or how many people find themselves fleeing from low-lying areas with the wind and the rain coming and finally they say, "Oh God, help us!" They have not darkened the door of a church or opened their Bible in years and suddenly they remember God.

Lamentations 1:10 The adversary has spread his hand over all her pleasant things; for she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary, those whom You commanded not to enter Your assembly.

The focus here is on the Temple. That was Judah's most precious thing and it was defiled. On top of all her other treasures that had been taken away, also were taken the Temple furnishings, all the utensils, all the tithes of the people, even all of the gold that was on the Temple itself. Everything was taken away. And worse, these greedy conquerors, these Chaldeans had deigned to enter the Holy Place. They wantonly polluted God's house. And this was both an abomination and a humiliation, that they had sunk so low that they could not even protect God's house. I want you to see something in Ezekiel the 44th chapter. This is a prophecy about this kind of a situation.

Ezekiel 44:6-9 Now say to the rebellious, to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord God: "O house of Israel, let Us have no more of all your abominations. When you brought in foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary to defile it—My house—and when you offered My food, the fat and the blood, then they broke My covenant because of all your abominations. And you have not kept charge of My holy things, but you have set others to keep charge of My sanctuary for you." Thus says the Lord God: "No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart or uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter My sanctuary, including any foreigner who is among the children of Israel."

Notice that in this charge against Israel that He blamed them, the Israelites, for allowing foreigners into the sanctuary. And if you think of it in terms of the Chaldeans coming in war and taking the sanctuary, destroying the Temple, God is saying, "It was your sins that made this possible." If they had not sinned, if they had kept the covenant, God would have made sure that no foreign nation could ever come close to the defiling the Temple, as the

Chaldeans did and as later the Romans did. They would have been kept far away if they had just kept the covenant with God because He would have put a hedge about them and protected them. But no, it is their sins that opened the door and that was why the Temple was defiled.

Lamentations 1:11 [this is the final verse we are going to get to today] All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their valuables for food to restore life. [and then she says] "See, O Lord, and consider, for I am scorned."

Now, there is a good bit of understatement in this verse. They do not just sigh. The word should be groan, in their starved state. It is talking about a people that are famished, there is a famine because of the siege. So they groan in starvation. They want food. They do not just *seek* bread. They do not just go out and try to get bread from the grocer. They hunt it like a famished predator chases prey.

This is the worst one. They do not just give their valuables for food. That is an understatement, a *terrible* understatement. They sell their children or even eat them to restore their lives. It has been suggested that this third phrase should be translated, "They gave their darlings for food to keep alive." Cannibalism is mentioned, not just here, but twice more in Lamentations. In Lamentations 2:20 it says, "See, O Lord, and consider! To whom have You done this? Should the women eat their offspring, the children they have cuddled? Should the priest and prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?"

Then in chapter 4, verse 10: "The hands of the compassionate women have cooked their own children; they became food for them in the destruction of the daughter of my people." And if you want to look at this in Deuteronomy among the curses, it is Deuteronomy 28:53-57. God prophesied that they would be doing this.

So once again, at the end of verse 11, Jerusalem breaks in and makes an appeal to God. The sense of her words here, she says, "See, O Lord, and consider, for I am scorned." But the sense of it is something more like, "You see God, why they despise me. I've sunk to this level where I'm eating my own children. Don't you understand God? I've had enough. This is why the other nations think that I have just lost everything, lost it all. That I am the

worst of all people." It is an appeal to God to realize how far His punishment had gone and beseeching Him, urging Him, begging Him to relent, to revive them, rather than to continue punishing them. "God, we've hit the bottom. Let us up." is what she is saying.

Let us conclude in Jeremiah 15 because there is an important thing that we need to understand here. God seems so cruel in allowing this, but He is not. He is just.

Jeremiah 15:1-7 Then the Lord said to me, "Even if Moses and Samuel [two of the most righteous men that ever were] stood before Me, yet My mind could not be favorable towards this people. Cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth. And it shall be, if they say to you, 'Where should we go?' then you shall tell them, 'Thus says the Lord: "Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as there are for the famine, to the famine; such as are for the captivity, to the captivity.'" "And I will appoint over them four forms of destruction," says the Lord: "the sword to slay, the dogs to drag, the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy. I will hand them over to trouble, to all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for what he did in Jerusalem. [And I should say, what the people followed very readily.] For who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem? Or who will bemoan you? Who will turn aside to ask how you are doing? You have forsaken Me," says the Lord, "You have gone backward. Therefore I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you; I am weary of relenting! And I will winnow them with a winnowing fan in the gates of the land; I will bereave them of children; I will destroy My people, since they do not return from their ways."

This was the case in which God would not relent until the bitter fruit of their sins had been fully unloaded upon them. We see in Jeremiah 7:16; Jeremiah 11:14; and Jeremiah 14:11, that God commanded the prophet not to pray for the people of Judah, because He had determined that enough was enough and

they had to pay in full for their breaking of the covenant and all their individual and national sins. So He said, "Do not pray for these people. It will not do any good, save your breath."

God is a merciful God. He is gracious, longsuffering, and full of goodness and truth. That is how He describes himself in Exodus 34:6. But He also has His limits. While He prefers to extend mercy, His justice must be satisfied sooner or later, and His wrath will, at some point, pour forth like dark waters demolishing a dam that has held it back and everything below it is destroyed.

So, while we may pity Judah and her people for what they suffered, they received everything they deserved.