

Lamentations (Part Two; 1989)

Lamentations 1

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Let us go to the book of Lamentations.

I mentioned to you last time as we were just beginning to get into the background, that it was apparently not at all uncommon in those days for dirges to be composed whenever a loved one or some notable figure within the nation died. I think that I at least showed you a couple: in II Samuel 1:17, which was David's lamentation for Saul and Jonathan and again in II Samuel 3:33-34, where there is a lamentation there for Abner. And there is another one in Amos 5:1-2, which is a lamentation by Amos for the entire nation. Jeremiah and Ezekiel both have several other lamentations within the context of the books.

Now most people could not lament very well and so a professional class of mourners arose. These apparently were almost exclusively women and they were used in order to arouse a feeling of sympathy and empathy, pathos and grief within the family members so that there would be an outward display of the same.

Here we have in the book of Lamentations a lament that is made over what appears to be the death of a nation.

Now who wrote it? My Bible does not give any author. It does not say the book of Lamentations of Jeremiah. I do not know whether your Bible says anything like that at all, my Bible does not.

The book itself does not ascribe any person as being the author. It is only tradition that ascribes Jeremiah and that is rather ancient and persistent. However, there is apparently absolutely no proof that Jeremiah was actually the author of the book.

In II Chronicles the 35th chapter, is a verse that has misled some people. In a way, I can see why it misled some people because Jeremiah was undoubtedly alive at the time that the context of II Chronicles 35 was taking place. It says in verse 25 that Jeremiah also lamented for Josiah. Josiah died during Jeremiah's lifetime. Josiah was killed when he involved himself in a war that he had no business involving himself in.

II Chronicles 35:25 And to this day all the singing men and the singing women speak of Josiah in their lamentations. And they made it a custom in Israel; and indeed they are written in the Laments.

The book of Lamentations is not a lament for Josiah. The connection in II Chronicles 35 is a lamentation for Josiah and the book of Lamentations is not a lamentation for Josiah. That seems to be one of the few connections that people can make, as roundabout as it is and as vague as it is, with Jeremiah.

Now I am going to give you some arguments for and arguments against that the commentaries give for Jeremiah's being the author.

The first group that I am going to give you are the arguments *for* Jeremiah being the author of both of them.

1. Both Jeremiah and Lamentations show similar sensitive, touching sympathy for the nation.

Now you are going to see that these things are rather vague.

2. Both attribute national calamity to sin; to the same cause, that is, sin. And both Lamentations and Jeremiah hold the same people responsible: Religious leaders.

3. Both use similar figures. That is, things like the virgin daughter of Zion; eyes flowing with tears; fleeing, surrounded with terrors and fears; the confidence that those who celebrate Jerusalem's fall will also become desolate.

Things of that nature.

So both books show similarity of expression. But it is not as similar to Jeremiah's writing as some other fellow's writings I will mention in just a minute.

Now these are the arguments against and you can see that the arguments for are rather vague. The arguments (which you will find these are much more solid) against Jeremiah being the author is:

1. That both authors wrote both books from different points of view.

Now the different points of view are this: In the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah says that Babylon is carrying out God's purpose. In the book of Lamentations there is much to say about retribution against Babylon for doing this.

There are verses like in chapter 2, verse 9.

Lamentations 2:9 Her gates have sunk into the ground; He has destroyed and broken her bars. Her kings and her princes are among the nations; the law is no more, her prophets find no vision from the Lord.

According to the scholars who study into these things, it does not sound like Jeremiah or any other prophet for that matter. But rather they even get the feeling that perhaps this was written by somebody who was not a prophet. Now I do not believe that, I believe a prophet did write this. But that is what they say.

Also under the same heading is that Lamentations gives the implication that they were expecting help from Egypt, where Jeremiah makes it very clear, he never did. In fact, he counseled against it. "Don't go to Egypt for help."

2. A second major point is that there are many differences in phraseology. Lamentations uses many words that are not found in Jeremiah. For instance, Lamentations uses Adonai, which is one of the names for God, meaning Lord or master, 14 times, whereas Jeremiah only uses it one way. He always connects Adonai with Yahweh. And it is felt that if he were the author here,

that he would carry through with the same similarity and hook the two names together as he consistently did. In fact, he always did it, apparently, in the book of Jeremiah.

Now one of the strongest arguments is this third one.

3. That there is such a major difference in the writing style. Jeremiah apparently is written in a freewheeling unstructured varied style, whereas Lamentations is probably the most structured book in the whole Bible. It is rigidly structured.

Now there is a possibility that Jeremiah did do both. But it is an indication because most writers tend to follow the same general pattern. And so the book of Jeremiah is freewheeling, highly expressive in a freewheeling way. Whereas Lamentations is vividly expressive in a highly structured way.

Some come to the conclusion that perhaps Jeremiah did indeed have a hand in it, however, that it was written by someone else that was a disciple of his, perhaps Baruch. Nobody knows that.

There is no doubt though that whoever wrote it, they lived at the same time that Jeremiah did and were witnesses of many of the same things that Jeremiah was a witness of.

There is one other thing, and that is that it seems pretty apparent, you are going to see this as we go through Lamentations, that whoever the author was, he was right there on the spot, whereas the book of Jeremiah makes it very clear that Jeremiah was not. Jeremiah left. First, he went to Egypt. He undoubtedly might have gotten back to Judah. Remember he went off with the king's daughters.

Now when was it written? Nobody knows, except they seem to find fairly conclusive evidence that the whole book was not written at one time. That is, that somebody did not sit down and start in chapter 1 and go right through chapter 5. But rather they feel that there is fairly conclusive evidence that chapters 2 through 5 were written fairly close together and then chapter 1, which is the introduction to the whole book, was actually written a good deal later and then attached on to the front.

Now the dates that people give are anywhere from 586, which would put it right in the midst of the destruction, or right shortly after the destruction, all the way to 530 BC. So there you have a span of about 50 to 55 years.

What is the structure of the book? Any of you who have a modern Bible can see that it is a poem and it is a very interestingly constructed poem at that. Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 each have 22 verses. Chapter 3 has 66 verses, which is 3 times 22.

Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 are arranged in an acrostic manner. That is, the Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters and each verse begins with the succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. So if verse 1 began with the letter A, the first letter of the first word in the first verse would begin with A. Verse 2 then would begin with B, the first word or the first letter of the first word in verse 2 would be B. And the third verse, first word, first letter would begin with the word beginning with C. And then the fourth one D and the fifth one E, and so forth until the author got all the way through the 22 letters. So chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 are written in that way.

Now chapter 3 is a triple acrostic. That is, verses 1 through 22 begin with A, B, C, D, and then verses 23 through 44 begin with A, B, C, D, and then verses 45 through 66 begin with A, B, C, D all the way to the end.

Now the meter, that is, the rhythm of the poems are also very interesting as well. Chapters 1 through 4 have a five beat rhythm, five beat meter. Most of the time, the meter is three plus two, that is, three beats and then two beats. But every once in a while he changes it and it will be two beats and then three beats. And then every once in a while he changes it again and it will be two beats and then another two beats. And then he will even change it again to three beats, two beats, and then two beats.

So what I am saying here is that the rhythm is all mixed up. Now, why? Well, I have not, of course, ever heard anyone read this in the Hebrew, but apparently because the rhythm is so mixed up it gives the impression of somebody trying to speak while they are crying. They are sobbing. You ever

hear a little child trying to speak when he is crying, you know, tears are coming out of his eyes. He is trying to catch his breath and trying not to be ashamed and trying to talk, you know, that kind of thing.

You see, that is exactly apparently how it sounds. There is no rhythm to it. Like the words are coming out at one time in a torrent, and then another time like they are so overcome that they cannot get the words out and it comes out like one word at a time, you know, almost like they are stuttering. So that apparently was one reason. You can see how structured this thing is.

That was one reason.

Another one is that there is no other writing in the entirety of the Bible that can even begin to compare. There is a lot of poetry in the Bible, but none of it has that kind of a mixed up meter rhythm to it. And since they did not have books and many of these things, if a family or a person was going to kind of carry it with them, it had to be committed to memory.

And so it was thought that because this thing is so unusually structured, that one of the reasons why it was written that way was to set it so far apart that it would be something that would be more easily remembered because of its meter, because of its rhythm. A possibility.

So at any rate it was done, in an overall sense, to reinforce the feeling that undoubtedly the first thing that hits your attention is that it was written to memorialize Jerusalem's fall.

Now I do not think that that was even really the most important thing. But maybe the more important thing was that it fell exactly as God said it would through His prophet Jeremiah. Now that is the thing that you and I have to remember.

Jerusalem's fall is way in the past for you and me, 2,600 years ago. It is history, it is gone. But we never, ever better forget the lesson! If God says something, it is going to happen just like He says it is happening. So that is the lesson to you and me.

Now there are some sub-lessons here, and they are important.

The Bible deals with suffering on two different levels. First of all, there is the individual level and the book of Job covers that in a great deal of detail. But also there is a national suffering, and this is the book that deals with suffering on a national level.

Now Lamentations, then, combined with Job shows that they have to be kept separate. That when it comes to the national level, there has to be a measure of detachment, especially for us because God is not calling everyone now. We can lament for the things that are going on in this nation, where it is headed, I mean, all of the things that are going on and where it is headed, we can see the doom coming, but we cannot allow ourselves to get pulled down by it or swallowed up in it or distracted by it. But there has to be a measure of detachment.

So on the one hand here there is no effort to minimize Judah's sins. And yet on the other hand, the author is almost overwhelmed by the greatness of its doom. But not quite, because we are going to see that there is injected here every once in a while a prayer of hope that somehow or another they are going to pull out of it. So Lamentations then deals with God's rigorous treatment of His people so that we will learn the lessons of the past and retain our faith in the face of overwhelming disaster.

I am telling you, brethren, as we approach the end, this book is going to become more and more important to you in keeping your feet on the ground and your eyes toward the Kingdom of God.

So this book then deals with the preservation of faith in the face of overwhelming pressure to desert the ship.

Now this book is read and meditated on leading up to and during the fast on the 9th of Av (this year that follows on August 10th) when the destruction of both of the temples is commemorated. And this book is going to do you and me very little good unless we apply it to modern day Israel and Judah.

It is very important that you understand that the things that are in this book in one sense are our past, but there is as surely as I am here and you are here, a duality in the Bible, and the things that He is talking about here *are* going to

happen again. And the things that you read about Jerusalem, you need to think about in relationship to Washington, DC; to London, England; to Canberra in Australia; to Pretoria in Africa; to Paris in France; to Oslo in Norway; Stockholm in Sweden; Helsinki in Finland; Ottawa in Canada; Auckland in New Zealand. Where our capital cities are located, those places that surely symbolize the strength and greatness of these nations.

Maybe we will somehow escape having to see these things as whoever the author of this book is had to see them.

You know very well that there are people out there who are concerned about what is going on. But their concern is not like our concern. Our concern ought to be something that we know that it is going to happen. It is just as sure as the destruction of Jerusalem was when God told Jeremiah to proclaim that it was coming, and he had to proclaim it in the face of all those other prophets out there who said, "No, no, that's not going to happen. Peace, peace."

Now we need to think about this in relation to the book of Ezekiel that makes it very clear that Ezekiel's message never got to Israel, that Ezekiel's message is intended for modern day Israel, and Ezekiel's message is very similar to the things that Jeremiah said were going to happen to Judah.

And as we go through this, every once in a while I am going to go into the book of Ezekiel, and I am going to show you there that Ezekiel is prophesying virtually the same thing for modern day Israel that Jeremiah prophesied for ancient Judah. And so we need to think of this in terms of what is coming upon the United States of America, and on the one hand, retain that air of detachment that will enable us to keep ourselves clear of that destruction and our eyes focused on the Kingdom of God.

Let us begin here in chapter 1. I mentioned to you before that it appears as though chapter 1 was written sometime after chapters 2 through 5. The reason that that conclusion is reached is that Jerusalem in chapter 1 is personified as a widow looking upon what she had become. It is a reflection on what had occurred, but it is a reflection that appears to have been made sometime after the fact of the destruction. So she is more concerned in chapter 1 with what she has become than what she has suffered.

Now in chapter 2, we will begin to get into what she has suffered, and there it appears that it is a reflection that occurred immediately after the pain began or occurred.

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!

In verses 1 through 11 the author is a speaker. Beginning in verse 12, the city speaks.

Now even in verse 1, the city is being personified as a living being, a single living being, Jerusalem, only this single living being is being personified as a widow and a widow is the Bible image for loneliness and misery, pathetic emptiness, someone who is alone.

Remember that first word, *how*! It is an exclamation. It is like drawing back a curtain with a blaring of trumpets. *HOW* kind of thing.

And what do you see when the curtain is drawn back? You see a single woman sitting in black robes, with them over her head. There is nobody there, nothing else, dark despair.

Now you are supposed to make a contrast, you see, and so he draws that contrast with "great among the nations," "princess among the province." Full of people, now just a single, solitary, lonely woman in contrast to a city that was bustling with people and commercial enterprise, a religious and political center full of people and now a princess, forced into labor. Somebody who had never gotten the soles of her feet dirty or her hands ever scarred with any kind of hard labor. Someone who had lived a life of softness and ease. And now as they say, the page has been flipped; the worm has turned; and her whole world has turned upside down.

And so the picture that he is trying to get across at the beginning, if you can imagine, maybe a city, if you have ever seen a city late at night, maybe you

have had to run out of an errand and it is midnight, one o'clock, and it is empty, spooky, eerie, deserted, pathetic. All of its vitality, represented by people bustling here and there, are gone.

Lamentations 1:2 She weeps bitterly in the night, her tears 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.

You see, it is dark, it is night, and one expects some silence, but the silence is broken by racking sobs. She is weeping.

Who were her lovers? They were Egypt, Edom, and Moab.

There is no one around to care. And even if there were, he is giving the intimation that there is no one who would even care to do it. Her friends have betrayed her. You can look, if you want, in Ezekiel 23 and Hosea 8 and 9 where these other nations are called lovers. They were people with whom they had concourse with.

You know, Jeremiah had prophesied this. I do want to turn to this in Jeremiah 4. Jeremiah said,

Jeremiah 4:30 "And when you are 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."

And again in Jeremiah chapter 30, verse 14.

Jeremiah 30:14-15 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.

Back to the Lamentations.

Now it is not that we are to think that Egypt pulled any specific act of betrayal because there is no record that neither Egypt, nor Moab, nor Edom, or any of those nations actually did some kind of an act of betrayal, but rather they simply acted in a normal self-centered way, that is all. They looked out for their own interests and did not come to the aid of Judah when they needed help.

The problem for Israel then, or Judah, was this: Once they became a monarchy it always had a choice and that choice was either trust God for their protection or trust the surrounding nations, you see, their lovers. Great and small, they could either go to them or they could go to God.

Now back in I Kings 15 we have an example of this. You have to understand that Israel never really was a very large nation by comparison to Egypt or Babylon or Assyria. God stuck Israel in a place unique, where they had to depend on Him. He did not bless Israel at that time with wonderful rivers from which they could draw copious amounts of water. There was only one river in the whole place that ever amounted to anything and that was the Jordan River and the Jordan River was placed in a place where it really did not do Israel all that much good. And so, even for the production of food, Israel had to trust God to send the right kind of weather.

Not only that, God placed Israel in a place where they were bound to be at the crossroads of many nations—the shipping lanes, the caravan routes—so that they were going to be always in a position where other nations were going to be jealous of their strategic position, and feeling that they were stronger than Israel, would want to hold the gates that led into Egypt, or the gates that led into Babylon, or the gates that led into Asia Minor into Turkey and on to Greece and Rome.

So they were always going to be in a position of being threatened. Were they going to trust God? Or whenever Egypt threatened, were they going to run to Babylon? Or when Babylon threatened, were they going to run to Egypt?

Does this sound familiar with your life? That God leaves you and me in a state of vulnerability where we have to prove our loyalty to Him? Certainly. God has a *modus operandi*. He leaves us most of the time in a state of vulnerability, and He does that so that we will virtually be forced either trust Him or turn to the world.

I Kings 15:16-20 Now there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days. And Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and built Ramah, that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. Then Asa took all the silver and gold that was left in the treasuries of the house of the Lord and the treasuries of the king's house, and delivered them into the hand of his servants. And King Asa sent them to Ben-Hadad the son of Tabrimmon, the son of Hezion, king of Syria, who dwelt in Damascus, saying, "Let there be a treaty between you and me, as there was between my father and your father. See, I have sent you a present of silver and gold. Come and break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel, so that he will withdraw from me. So Ben-Hadad heeded King Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel. He attacked Ijon, Dan, Abel Beth Maachah, and all Chinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali.

You see what Asa did? He turned to a lover. That was the choice Israel was making it seemed with regularity. Sometimes they had enough of a close relationship with God to hang on to God and trust Him—like Jehoshaphat did, like Hezekiah did, like David did.

There were times when they did not do it.

You see what it was, was idolatry. Now most frequently in the Bible, it is related to harlotry. That is, to bring it down to a human level so that we can see it in a more personal way.

Here was Israel married to God and yet instead of turning to their husband, they turned to the neighbor for the help that God had promised that He would give. So to God that was harlotry.

They were warned over and over back in the book of Hosea in chapter 5, verses 13 through 15 and also in Hosea 14:3. The prophets warned that such a thing is apostasy and will not work.

Let us go to Ezekiel 29. We are going to have to learn this lesson too.

Ezekiel 29:6-7 "Then all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know that I am the Lord, because they have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel. [Israel turned to Egypt. Egypt was like a reed. You cannot lean on a reed, no strength in a reed. But Israel has to learn that lesson.] When they took hold of you with the hand, you broke and tore all their shoulders; when they leaned on you, you broke and made all their backs quiver."

Well, right now we have all kinds of agreements going with everybody it seems. Western Europe, right now we are leaning on them. They are going to be a reed just like Egypt and when we need help, they are not going to be any help.

Are the Japanese going to be a help? No, they will not be a help either. Nobody is going to be a help. When push comes to shove, we are not going to have any lovers. And it is not that anybody is going to pull any specific act of betrayal. It is just simply that they are going to follow their own selfish national interests and we will be abandoned. And probably the only one who will stand with us will be our cousins over there in England.

Back to Lamentations.

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.

This is one of those verses again that gives the indication that this was written later because now it is so long afterward that the people have gone into captivity.

Now the punishment is very heavy. And the verse indicates that the going into captivity was either voluntary or involuntary. Some were forced, some fled for their lives. Regardless of which it was, life was hard. There were dangers and privations and fears. It seemed as though these things just sought them out, dogged their heels wherever they went, no matter where they went, there was pain, there was anxiety, there was fear.

When I was writing these things down, I could not help but remember as we were going through the book of Amos.

Amos 5:18-20 [He says] Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light. [It is hard to move in the darkness. You always trip over things when you cannot see. You run into things. You get off on the wrong trail.] It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! [As though he somehow or another escaped the lion, and just when he thought he was safe, gasping for breath, his lungs bursting for trying to get air because of running away from the lion. Just when he thought he was safe, a huge grizzly was in his path! Then he runs from the grizzly bear. He sees a little house somewhere, dashes through the front door of the house] Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him! Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?

That is what he is talking about here in Lamentations 1:3. Judah has gone into captivity under affliction and hard servitude. Some fled when they saw the Chaldeans coming, breaking in through the walls of the city, others remained to fight the battle, but they were taken captive. And regardless of whether they were forced into exile or went voluntarily into exile, no matter how it was, there was no escaping the affliction and the pain and the anxiety and the privation, nothing, absolutely nothing went right.

Back in Deuteronomy 28 I will show you a place where God prophesied that this would occur. Way back here He says,

Deuteronomy 28:25-29 "The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them; and you shall become troublesome to all the kingdoms of the earth. Your carcasses shall be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and no one shall frighten them away. [What a picture of degradation!] The Lord will strike you with boils of Egypt, the tumors, with the scab, and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed. The Lord will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart. And you shall grope at noonday, as a blind man gropes in darkness; and you shall not prosper in your ways; you shall be only oppressed and plundered continually, and no one shall save you."

That is a desperate situation, is it not?

Back to Lamentations.

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.

We can connect this with Jeremiah 41:4 where God prophesied that there would be no Temple. Now apparently for a while, even after the destruction, the people continued to come to Jerusalem to make offerings. There was no Temple there, but what Jeremiah 41:4 and Ezra 3:2-6 show, it is not absolutely necessary to have a Temple in order for there to be offerings because the people made the offerings even though there was no Temple.

But as verse 4 is showing that by this time, the making of the offerings had stopped too. So again, another indication that chapter 1 was written a number of years after 586 BC.

He is even showing here where it says "her gates are desolate" and that no one is coming to her set feasts and the roads to Zion mourn, remember he is personifying Jerusalem here as a living being, a woman, a widow, so he is

showing that even the roads were stricken because there were no pilgrims going to the feasts over them to give them any kind of joy. There was no gathering at the gates in order for people to communicate to one another, to exchange news, and to gossip about what was going on.

The virgins were afflicted because there was no hope of marriage, because the young men were either killed off or they were taken into captivity so that they could be used as slaves by the Babylonians.

Well, you really get a heart-wrenching, gut-wrenching picture here. You have to think about this in terms of what is coming here—because it is coming and this is what it is going to be like, you see, in Washington, DC and New York City and Los Angeles.

Wait till we get into chapter 2 and you begin to see the devastation in even more graphic form.

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.

What he is depicting here is that as Jerusalem's fortunes fell, the adversary's fortunes rose. God had already prophesied this in Deuteronomy 28:44.

Now what verse 5 is doing is that Lamentations is interpreting the reason or the cause of the sorrow. The cause of the sorrow is sin which God has reacted to—God, not the Babylonians—God. That is important.

You are going to see this repeated over and over again that the author recognized that the cause of this problem was sin and that God had reacted to it and the Babylonians were really nothing more than an instrument.

Now the reason is given in the middle of verse 5, "because of the multitude of her transgressions." It indicates repeated rebellion.

What this is important to tie this to is this: That God had not lost His power; that some foreign deity had not overpowered God and thus afflicted all this

pain and anxiety and torture upon Jerusalem. But rather, God Himself had done it to His own people. It had been brought upon them through their tempting of God, His patience finally reached an end. They had lived on His mercy for quite a long period of time and finally, it was more than He could stand, and it was more than would be good for them to allow them to continue the way they were.

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.

All the majesty is gone. Again, if you can think of Washington, DC, there are some areas in Washington that are quite beautiful. And there are some very fine monuments to the heroes of the past, Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, Jefferson Memorial, with a beautiful Capitol building, all of those things in that represent the splendor and power and might and liberties of this nation, and they are gone, destroyed in rubble, heaps of marble. That would be a devastating thing for us to look on.

That is what this person is doing, only this person *is* the city. It was formerly a light to the world, a city of beauty, a place of honor and respectability, seemingly. Now all the splendor of its majesty is gone. The king, meaning Zedekiah and the princes, they have all fled. They have abandoned their responsibilities. They are like a deer before hunters, fleeing for their lives.

You can read back in II Kings 25, Zedekiah and a group of his underlings fled the city at night. They went out the wall and tried to get out and escape from the Chaldeans. They got away for a while, but the Chaldeans caught up to them. And so Zedekiah had to witness, it says, all of his sons being killed, and I take it there were probably also some of his literal sons there, but son is also used in the sense of an underling, those who answered to Zedekiah. So this would mean other governmental officials that they were put to death and then after they were all put to death, then Zedekiah had his eyes put out. They allowed him to live but they put his eyes out.

Lamentations 1:7 In the days of her affliction and roaming, Jerusalem remembers all her pleasant things [is that not interesting] that she had in the days of old.

What a poignant picture. Do you not think of a widow, from time to time looking back to the beauty of her youth and remembering the good times—the singing, the dancing, the beautiful clothes; her wedding day, the birth of children, seeing the children grow up, seeing them marry and grandchildren born. Reflecting back on that, homes that they have owned, places they have lived—and remembering the good times and the good things, the pleasant things that she had in the days of old. And it could not help but make someone feel a gasp of pain.

Lamentations 1:7 When her people fell into the hand of the enemy, with no one to help her, the adversaries saw her and and mocked at her downfall.

This particular widow is like mother Jerusalem herself. All of them who were killed were her children. And all of those who went into captivity were her children. The same ones who had brought her joy before. And there was no one to help her.

And so now we see, then, Jerusalem participating in the sufferings of her inhabitants.

Now, she remembers two things: The good times and things, and the mercies forgotten or ignored in the times of prosperity. And when they are remembered in her affliction they have a way of producing bitterness because they are gone.

Bitterness, why? Anguish, why? Because now she is recognizing that she did not appreciate them when she had them. "Oh, why didn't I do more or better? Why didn't I live my life differently? Oh! Is there some way that I can go back there and change things?"

So she is bitter, even though the things that she was thinking about should have been pleasant, but they were not.

Now the second thing that she is thinking about is the worst one of all. That is, the mocking laughter of the conquerors.

It is interesting; something led me to do just a little bit of research on laughter in the Bible. Laughter in the Bible does not occupy the same place that it does in our culture. We associate laughter with good times, but the Bible does not. I do not mean that it ignores it. But rather the Bible tends to link laughter with immaturity and silliness, with foolishness, sometimes with incredulity.

I am just going to go through this very quickly. Turn back to Ecclesiastes chapter 7, verse 6.

Ecclesiastes 7:6 For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of a fool.

God is not saying that laughter is not good. It is a good emotion. However, the Bible just simply does not link it with joy all that often.

Go back to Genesis 17, verse 17. Abraham laughed, see.

Genesis 17:17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"

Incredulity with a little note of joy. Now on the other hand, Sarah laughed too.

Genesis 18:12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"

Now there we have incredulity again, only with a note of scorn as well. That is why God was down on her and not down on Abraham's laugh.

In the book of Job there is laughter mentioned in Job the 8th chapter, verses 21 and 22. Now notice the way this is put here. Bildad is speaking to Job and he says:

Job 8:21-22 "He will yet fill your mouth [meaning Job's] with laughing, and your lips with rejoicing [sounds good so far until you read the next verse] Those who hate you will be clothed with shame, and the dwelling place of the wicked will come to nothing."

Well, why is Job going to be happy? Because somebody else has been put down, a reversal of fortune. And so really it is kind of more like a wicked sneer of contempt.

We will go to another one. This will be the last one. In Psalm 2, where God has shown laughing.

Psalm 2:4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh [Why?]; the Lord shall hold them in derision.

It is the laughter of scorn again.

Now if you want to study the whole thing, you are going to find that there are times that the laughter in the Bible is associated with joy, which is the association that we like to make and we do make it most frequently. However, most of the time in the Bible, you will find that laughter is associated with something that is negative, even as strong as sneering contempt, a put down, rather than being the good thing that we think it is.

So Jerusalem is mocked. There is derisive laughter at what she is going through and that fits right in with the way the Bible most frequently uses laughter in the Bible. These people are delighted at the reversal of fortunes. This nation, the city that was so high all these years, is now getting hers, what they knew she was due all this while but had never gotten and so they are laughing at her.

It is not a good laughter to hear.