

Lamentations (Part Four; 1989)

Lamentations 2:1-16

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Let us get back to the book of Lamentations.

As I have mentioned to you each time that we have gone into this book, studying into this book is not going to do a great deal of good to us unless we use it as a basis for providing us with a certain measure of urgency.

What we are reading here, of course, is a memorial to the fall of Jerusalem that took place in 586 BC. It also prefigured the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD when [unclear] and then Titus destroyed the city and the Temple. And it also prefigures the fall of the great Israelite nations here at the end time.

It is written from several different points of view. The very first chapter was from the point of view of the city. The city was personified; the city is talking. And it is a very interesting approach because the city is not lamenting so much what it suffered as what it had become.

From its perspective, what it had become was a widow, meaning one who was now alone, in mourning. There was no one to comfort, no one to cheer her up. All of her friends had departed.

Another thing that the city had become was a focal point of derision, that all of the enemy that had triumphed over her were gloating about what they had done to this glorious city of God—destroying its beauty, bringing it down, and making it something to be laughed at and derided. So the city complains about being held in derision and about being held to the public's scorn.

It is very interesting that the city admits its sin.

Lamentations 1:8 Jerusalem has sinned gravely, . . .

What she laments, you see, is that the facade of her beauty had been stripped away, and all of the vile nakedness of her sin was now there for public view and public scorn.

When we get into chapter 2, the scene changes somewhat. We begin to look at it from a different perspective.

As I mentioned to you before, the scholars say that it is not likely that this book was written at one place at one time; that is, that a poet did not sit down and just start from the beginning and go to the end. But rather it appears to have been written over a number of years. And according to them, they feel that the first chapter was probably the last chapter that was written, but it is best in the structure of the poem to be put at the beginning.

Now chapter 2 appears to be one of the earliest portions of it that was written, and apparently it was written while the suffering was going on, apparently immediately after the city was taken and burned, the Temple was destroyed.

And it seems as though the emphasis here is a great deal different. The emphasis in chapter 2 is not on what the city has become, but rather what had happened. The focus is on desolation, desertion, shame, those kinds of things. And it is felt that it was probably composed within about a month after the city had actually fallen.

Now at the beginning, that is, immediately after it occurred, the sheer impact of the disaster was so overwhelming, so stunning because it was so unexpected (we will get to that in just a little bit), that hardly anybody could have had enough feeling to be able to write anything, and it took a little while for people's recognition, thoughtful recognition of what had occurred to sink in and to begin to be able to record things. And whenever they began to record, why, a real tale of terrible, terrible woe begins.

Chapter 2 begins with the same word that chapter 1 begins. It is an exclamation. HOW! that is the word, and that is the title of the book. In Hebrew, the name of the book is HOW, which is taken from the first word of the book.

And so chapter 2, verse 1 begins with exclamations of shock, surprise that such a thing should even occur. I think that we are being set up here in the United States for such a thing. It is awfully hard to think of this nation in destruction. It is hard to think of the Washington Monument in Washington, DC toppled over, nothing more than a pile of debris. Maybe the Lincoln Memorial and the Jefferson Memorial also equally destroyed, the Capitol building destroyed, Congress destroyed, everything in total chaos, bodies lying everywhere, rotting in the street. The dogs going around eating what offal there is, human offal.

It is hard to think of a city that was once teeming with life, tens of thousands of automobiles streaming in on all the streets, 8 o'clock in the morning, 5 o'clock they are going in the opposite direction. And now all you hear is silence, except for the wail of people who are starving to death or in agony from some sort of an injury.

Such a thing would be so stunning; it is almost unthinkable because we have never gone through anything like that—and neither had these people.

They had preachers preaching to them, but the times were good (we will see more of that a little bit later too) and everything was all right. They were God's country. God was on their side. Their defenses were impregnable. They had a great army; all this power. Who is going to be able to break the pride of their power? So it was unthinkable.

Is there another nation on earth that has power like the United States has power? Even Russia shrinks from challenging us. They will push us as far as they can, but when push comes to shove they draw back. They do not want the challenge.

Now who is going to challenge us? Germany? France? China? Nobody could stand before the United States!

That is the way these people felt. But the unthinkable, you see, had occurred. Is that not what people call now, nuclear war, the unthinkable? See, it cannot occur.

God is giving mankind its best shot at peace, so we think.

Lamentations 2:1 How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion [that is, Jerusalem] with a cloud in His anger! He has cast down from heaven to the earth the beauty of Israel, . . .

You would almost have to live in a circumstance where clouds were comparatively rare to appreciate what he said. One did not see clouds all that often. That is why he used the metaphor of a cloud because one did not see clouds all that frequently in that area. And suddenly, there was Jerusalem having something that it only rarely had. It was sudden, as if disaster had occurred like a bolt out of the blue. And that is exactly what had occurred. The beauty of Israel, Jerusalem (it probably means Jerusalem).

Lamentations 2:1 . . . and did not remember His footstool [probably means His sanctuary in the Temple] in the day of His anger.

Who would have ever thought that such a thing would occur? Judah at this time had a history beginning from Moses. When did Moses lead Israel out of Egypt? 1441 or 1443, something like that, BC. Now here it is 586 BC, 900 years of history behind them. The United States is only 200 years old.

Judah lost an occasional battle but they had never really lost a war. *Nobody* had ever attacked Jerusalem that way. Who would ever think that such a thing would occur? That is why they felt so shocked. The United States only has 200 years of history. They had 900 years, never being defeated. They must have thought they were impregnable.

Lamentations 2:2 The Lord has swallowed up and has not pitied all the dwelling places of Jacob. He has thrown down in His wrath the strongholds of the daughter of Judah; He has brought them to the ground; He has profaned the kingdom and its princes.

By all the dwelling places He means the destruction, the devastation, was from one end of the country to the other, from Dan to Beersheba. Everything had been mowed down by Nebuchadnezzar's hordes so that there were very

few houses that were standing out in the country. The cities had been burned and pillaged to the ground. Total warfare. Everything had been knocked down.

"He has thrown down in His wrath the strongholds of the daughter of Judah; He has brought them to the ground." The strongholds, in contrast to the habitations which were where the people lived, were the fortifications that were around the city, and specifically in Jerusalem, they were mounted upon the wall.

Now Jerusalem was actually in a way, you might say, double walled because there was the ordinary wall that went around the city and then on the interior of the city up on Mount Zion was the Temple which offered an additional sanctuary should the initial wall be broken in. And so it was considered to be doubly impregnable. Not many cities had that kind of strength to protect it. It is one of the major reasons why Judah had never lost a war, even though there have been times when they had been invaded and they have lost some battles here and there.

Suddenly, like a bolt out of the blue, here comes somebody to not only defeat but who utterly devastates the country. Swallowed up. Boy, what a metaphor. That has to do with eating. It was as though Judah was just completely eaten up, consumed, devastated, city and country, housing, business buildings, military installations. Everything just mowed down.

He has profaned the kingdom and its princes, meaning the leadership has been taken away.

Lamentations 2:3 He has cut off in His fierce anger every horn of Israel; He has drawn back His right hand from before the enemy. He has blazed against Jacob like a flaming fire devouring all around.

"He has cut off in His fierce anger every horn in Israel." A horn is an animal's weapon, symbol of its strength. Here a horn, when applied to Israel, is the symbol of its military strength, fortification, the fortresses. So He has cut off in fierce anger every horn of Israel.

So it was not just Jerusalem; everywhere there was a fortification it was torn down, devastated.

"He has drawn back His right hand." Most people, another anthropomorphism here, are right-handed. It is the hand by which we fight. In this case, God has withdrawn His defending power away from Judah from before the enemy.

"He has blazed against Jacob like a flaming fire which devours all around." So He cut off all the strength. Flaming fire, it is as if, in the metaphor here, He has burned all of the field and cut off what they were growing for food. So that He has weakened their strength. If you do not have food, you do not have physical strength, and you are soon quite weak.

So God removed His help, and not only removed His help, but He also made sure that they were not going to be able to replenish their strength from within.

You have got to think about these things because it is going to happen here. We are going to be cut off internally, which will weaken us to such an extent that we are going to be easy pickings for the Common Market, the Beast, whenever they choose to attack.

The inside of the nation will have been devastated by famine, and then disease epidemic always follows on the heels of famine.

It is very interesting that we are once again selling wheat to Russia. It is just one of those things that I am sure has on the one hand humanitarian aspects to it, and on the other hand, it is a way to help balance payments by getting some business on our agriculture.

But on the other hand, we know what is coming and we are depleting our reserves. So believe me, brethren, we are going to be to the place when God finally sends the drought, that it is not going to take all that long of a drought. It will not take much because we will have no reserves. If I recall right, I saw recently that our wheat reserves are down to five or six months. You know when we came into the church back in the late 50s and early 60s, our wheat reserves were well over two to three years. We had so much wheat

that it was being thrown out on the streets in huge heaps because there were not enough silos to hold everything.

That is all fiddling away. Little by little, between the weather and between political programs, slowly but surely that is eroding away; now we are down to five months. I do not know what the corn reserves are, but I my guess is probably just a little bit greater than the wheat reserve.

Lamentations 2:4-5 Standing like an enemy, He has bent His bow; with His right hand, like an adversary, He has slain all who were pleasing to His eye; on the tent of the daughter of Zion, He has poured out His fury like fire. The Lord was like an enemy. He has swallowed up Israel, He has swallowed up all her palaces; He has destroyed her strongholds, He has increased mourning and lamentation [meaning moaning] in the daughter of Judah.

What he is you saying here is, in verse 4, He has bent His bow, meaning a bow was the rifle of its day and a bow was something by which you could pick off your enemy from quite a distance. So he is saying there that God has fought from a distance and with His right hand like an adversary.

Now in the right hand you hold a sword. Again, the poet is saying that from far and near God has fought against Israel. From far came Nebuchadnezzar. From near came droughts and famine and disease epidemics. So everywhere they turned, they faced God as an enemy.

And it is very interesting that the poet is recognizing that *God is the enemy*, and that really Nebuchadnezzar was just an instrument. So were the droughts and the famine.

In verse 4, "He has slain all who were pleasing to His eye," or some translations say He has slain all His treasured ones. The indication is that this was the leadership. There is a principle in the Bible that you smite the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.

Now what God did is that He not only devastated the country from outside and inside, but He took away the leadership. And so left without our leaders, the sheep are milling around in circles. They have no direction, nobody is standing up and saying this is the way that we ought to go.

This was not something that occurred all at one time. But you will find in the book of Isaiah, chapter 3 specifically, that God devastated the leadership over a period of time leading up to the place where even the leadership that they did have was almost totally corrupt, corrupted with selfishness, if nothing else.

Now he says there in Isaiah 3, where is the wise man? Where is the orator? Where is the military man? My people are being led by children and women. Remember reading that? That is what he means here by the pleasing ones.

You begin to get a picture. Not only is the city devastated, there is no order within it at all. People are wandering around in the city dumbstruck. They do not know what to do.

Lamentations 2:6 He has done violence to His tabernacle, . . .

Surely to those who were of a religious bent there is no doubt that the poet here was [?]. . . This was the most devastating blow of all. The Israelites considered Jerusalem to be the jewel of the nation and the "jewel of the jewel" was the Temple.

So *His* tabernacle, meaning His house, His dwelling place was devastated, was burned, it was pillaged.

What that meant to them was a severe blow to their self-esteem and confidence because they would have thought that if there was any place that would be protected, it would be the Temple. Because, after all, God lived there and He would protect His own home, would He not? And when they saw the Temple was destroyed, they knew then for sure that God had utterly forsaken them and they were on their own.

Lamentations 2:6 He has destroyed His place of assembly; the Lord has caused the appointed feasts and Sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion. [You can see that the realization that they were cut off from God was acute.] In His burning indignation He has spurned the king and the priest. The Lord has spurned His altar, He has abandoned His sanctuary; He has given up the walls of her palaces into the hand of the enemy. They have made a noise in the house of the Lord as on the day of a set feast.

Now walls indicate means of defense, a fortification. So the walls of her palaces would be fortified residences, defensive positions that they were broken down.

And the pride of the nation, the Temple, was trampled underfoot and it was accompanied, it says here, into the hand of the enemy: "They have made a noise in the house of the Lord as on the day of a set feast."

Now on the festivals there would be a lot of joy, the shouting then would be ones of joy. People would be talking about life. They would be talking about God; they would be talking about His work. And there would be peace and contentment, happy, you know, just the general hubbub of voices rising in the air.

But now what the poet hears are the voices of the victor, the captor, the enemy. And they are the ones that are inside the Temple. They are not there celebrating a feast; they are there celebrating their victory over the people of God.

Lamentations 2:7 The Lord has purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion.

The wall of the daughter of Zion here, the wall is Jerusalem.

Remember I mentioned to you before that the city surrounded the Temple, and the city itself was the wall for the Temple, was the first line of defense. If there is anything in the city that they wanted to protect, it was the Temple.

So militarily, the wall is the most important part of the city. And in this case, the most important part of the Temple, if I can put it that way, militarily, was the city of Jerusalem that was built around it. But God destroyed it.

Lamentations 2:7-8 He has stretched out a line; He has not withdrawn His hand from destroying. Therefore He has caused the rampart and the wall to lament; they languished together.

I want you to so hold your finger there just a second and let us go back to something that we covered in the book of Amos when we went through there.

Amos 7:7-9 Thus He showed me: Behold, the Lord stood on a wall made with a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand. And the Lord said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said: "Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore. [God had passed by many times, overlooking their sins.] The high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste. I will rise with the sword against the house of Jeroboam."

What is the plumb line used for? Well, it is an instrument that is used to test whether something is straight, or in the biblical parlance we would say something is upright.

Now back here, the author is using this same metaphor. "He has stretched out a line." What he is saying here is that God used the same precision in destroying Jerusalem that an engineer or architect would use building it. He held up the line and said, "Down with it," and just leveled everything.

In verse 9, he says,

Lamentations 2:9 Her gates have sunk into the ground [as if they have been swallowed up by the earth]; He has destroyed and broken her bars.

The bars were what they actually used to lock the gate. You have probably seen movies, medieval type movies, where they closed the door and then

they put a big bar down all the way across the door and that was actually the lock. Well, those bars were destroyed and broken.

Lamentations 2:9 Her king and her princes are among the nations.

We read the last time what happened to Zedekiah, who was the king, how that when he was absolutely certain that Jerusalem was going to fall, that he went down through a secret passage that went underneath the wall of the city. And once outside the wall of the city, he took off with a band of men who were going to escape.

Well, he was not alone in his attempt to escape. We know what happened to him. Nebuchadnezzar's army caught up with him, and the judgment was meted out on all of those people who tried to escape, including Zedekiah.

But many, many had gone into exile, I guess you might say escaping when the escaping was good. But again it is another way of picturing a people that are leaderless. And without leaders, you have no direction to go.

Now we understand from the book of Jeremiah what happened to him, that God directed him and a small group of people down into Egypt where they had safety. So God got His people off to the side. But others, those who had not gone with Jeremiah, had fled probably in every direction in which the compass turned. So the nation was leaderless.

Not only that, "the law is no more," meaning that there was no execution of the law. There was no administration of anything civil or religious. See, "the law is no more and her prophets find no vision." The word there actually is Torah, instruction from the Lord. It does not mean vision necessarily, the sense of seeing something; it just means revelation.

So now we see another picture. Not only is there no civil administration, there is no religious instruction, no meetings, no congregational meetings, no Sabbath services, no holy days. You can see here a picture of total devastation of the country physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally—they are broken. Everything is in disarray and disorder.

Lamentations 2:10 The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground and keep silence [Showing here a picture of total despair. There is nothing to govern. They are stunned!]; they throw dust on their heads and gird themselves with sackcloth. The virgins of Jerusalem bow their heads to the ground.

Virgins here of course meaning young, unmarried girls. They represent the future. There is no future. There is no hope. Who is going to marry them? Who is going to give them children?

Lamentations 2:11 My eyes fail with tears, my heart is troubled, . .

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Heart here is an English interpolation, it really says liver. That is because they considered the liver the seat of emotions, the inner man, his intellect, his emotions; everything. We use heart, they used liver. So to make it more recognizable and understandable to you and me, they have translated it heart rather than what it really is.

Lamentations 2:11 . . . my bile is poured on the ground because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, . . .

Can you see him looking at the devastation around him? There must have still been bodies lying around and what he saw just made him regurgitate until he had nothing left to come up but bile.

Lamentations 2:11 . . . because the children and the infants faint in the streets of the city.

Probably the most pitiful of all, children who somehow or another remained alive. Maybe the parents were dead. Who was there to take care of them? Where were they going to get any food?

Lamentations 2:12 They say to their mothers, "Where is the grain and wine?" [representing solid and liquid food] as they swoon like

the wounded in the streets of the city, as their life is poured out in their mother's bosom.

What a heart-wrenching thing. You are holding a baby, you have nothing to give it, and to just hold it and hold it and hold it, having to listen to the cries as its strength slowly ebbs away. What can you do? You cannot go down to the store and get something. There is no store. There must not have even been any water. Who knows, maybe the Babylonians threw all the bodies in the well and contaminated it. Really sobering.

Lamentations 2:13 How shall I console you? To what shall I liken you, . . .

Now the poet is talking to the city. The suffering is so great that the words fail. We just do not have the vocabulary to express it.

Lamentations 2:13 . . . O daughter of Jerusalem? What shall I compare with you, that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion?

He is saying here, you know, what shall I compare with you? He said, is there anywhere that I can point to in history where a city has suffered a calamity so great? He could not think of any.

Lamentations 2:13-14 For your ruin is spread wide as the sea. Who can heal you? Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions.

And now he is reflecting back. The prophets bear the largest share of the blame because they failed to tell people about their sins, what they needed to do. But they comforted them with smooth words, "Everything's going to be all right, everything will be fine. Pick yourself up by your bootstraps." Smooth, quasi-religion.

Lamentations 2:14 They have not uncovered your iniquity, to bring back your captives, but have envisioned for you false prophecies and delusions.

I want to go back to Jeremiah because he talked about this in Jeremiah 23, beginning in verse 16.

Jeremiah 23:16-17 Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord. They continually say to those who despise Me, "The Lord has said, "You shall have peace"; and to everyone who walks according to the imagination of his own heart, they say, 'No evil shall come upon you.'"

"Yeah, do your own thing!" That is what we have been hearing in the United States in the last 50 to 75 years. "If it feels good, do it!"

Jeremiah 16:18-20 For who has stood in the counsel of the Lord, and has perceived and heard His word? Who has marked His word and heard it? Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord has gone forth in fury—a violent whirlwind! It will fall violently on the head of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not turn back until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly.

Yeah, after they have gone through it. Jeremiah was saying things that people did not want to listen to. The fact that they did not turn is proof that they were not from God.

Back in the book of Ezekiel, chapter 13. I want to read this to you because you understand the book of Ezekiel was written after Jerusalem fell and yet it is written to Israel. Israel fell about 130 or 140 years after Jerusalem fell, and this book is primarily addressed to the people of Israel. So what we are reading in the book of Ezekiel is something that you are living through right now. So modern day Israel.

Ezekiel 13:10-11 Because, indeed, because they have seduced My people, saying, 'Peace!' when there is no peace—one builds a wall, and they plaster it with untempered mortar—say to those who plaster it with untempered mortar, that it will fall. There will be

flooding rain, and you, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall tear it down.

What is a wall? It is a means of defense. He is saying that the preachers today are not building a wall that is going to be able to withstand the onslaught of the things that God is going to bring against it. God is going to destroy this nation from within so that it will be easy pickings from without.

Ezekiel 13:12-16 Surely, when the wall has fallen, will it not be said to you, 'Where is the mortar with which you plastered it?' Therefore thus says the Lord God: "I will cause a stormy wind to break forth in My fury; and there shall be a flooding rain in My anger, and great hailstones in fury to consume it. So I will break down the wall you have plastered with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation will be uncovered; it will fall, and you shall be consumed in the midst of it. Then you shall know that I am the Lord. Thus will I accomplish My wrath on the wall and on those who have plastered it with untempered mortar; and I will say to you, 'The wall is no more, nor those who plastered it, that is, the prophets of Israel who prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and who see visions of peace for her when there is no peace,'" says the Lord God.

Back to Lamentations.

This nation's problems are moral and spiritual. And the problems that we are having, weather, our financial and economic problems, our trade problems, are a spin-off of our moral and spiritual problems.

We are already under siege financially. Now you hear economists talking about it but you do not hear very many preachers talking about it. And you do not hear any economists saying that the cause of our economic troubles are moral and spiritual. The solution is always to raise the interest, lower the interest, put the greater money supply out, build up walls of tariffs to protect us, break down the wall, free trade, see. Deregulation, you hear all kinds of schemes coming out of economic circles.

But the problems are moral and spiritual. And the ones who ought to be warning the nation are the preachers. But if we would turn to our God morally and spiritually, then these other problems would go away.

You see, just like the poet said, God has withdrawn His right hand so now we are on our own. We are going downhill fast.

Lamentations 2:15 All who pass by clap their hands at you; they hiss and shake their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem: "Is this the city that is called the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth'?"

The gestures of malicious joy and contempt, cruel pleasure, and reminding them of the high esteem that they were formerly held in—and now look at them.

Lamentations 2:16 All your enemies have opened their mouth against you; they hiss and gnash their teeth. [A triumphant rage as if they are a ravening lion.] They say, "We have swallowed her up! Surely this is the day we have waited for; we have found it, we have seen it!"

They were just out there waiting for their chance.

We have been riding so high on the crest of a wave without being grateful and thankful to our God and showing that by our submission to His law.

The handwriting is on the wall. It is only a matter of time unless somehow the warning can get out there and God in His mercy grants repentance. Otherwise, we are going to see some of these. Hopefully we do not see the worst of it. But it is coming.

And I hope somehow, someday, we can have enough urgency for you to want to escape it and to want to be some sort of a means to get the warning out to the United States of America and to Australia, Canada, England, France, South Africa, so that those nations will somehow turn and God will intervene.

