

Lamentations (Part Seven; 1989)

Lamentations 3:55 - 4:22

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Let us go back to the book of Lamentations. Well, we are kind of plodding our way through chapter 3, which is one of the longer chapters in the entirety of the Bible. There are not very many chapters in the Bible that have 66 verses. This is not the longest chapter, but nonetheless, it is one of the longer ones.

We had worked our way to verse 55. Again I want to go back just a little bit and pick up some of the flow that we had covered up until verse 55. And I want to reiterate some of the things that I said in verses 25, 26, and 27 because I think that it is so significant that we understand these verses and their application to you and me. It really struck me as something that is a good principle to hang on to because we are so frequently beset by problems that seem to go on and on, and we grow impatient with them because there seems to be no resolution of it. And sometimes we lose our spiritual bearings and our balance, and because of that tend to get into a frustrated and bitter attitude.

But as I mentioned to you the last time, verse 25 I feel, has the key, along with verse 26, to understanding these long, drawn out, and difficult trials that some of us have to go through from time to time. And that is in the understanding of the word "good."

Lamentations 3:25-26 The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

Now, the problem that brings on the bitterness and frustration is very frequently a misunderstanding of what good is. Because we tend to look at good in different parameters than God does.

Good generally means to you and me a general sense of well-being. It means good health, that we are comfortable; that we have plenty to eat, we have a nice place to live in, we have a job that is challenging and rewarding; our family is good and strong, and everything is coming up roses. And that is good.

Well, those things *are* good. But we do not tend to look upon difficulties, trials, troubles as being good. Now in our finer moments we look upon them as being good and we are willing to admit intellectually that they are good. But when push comes to shove in reality, we wish that God's idea of good was the same as our idea of good. And if a problem goes on long enough, then it is very easy for us to become frustrated and bitter at God.

Now we may not actually say to God, you know, "I hate You. I don't like what You're doing to me." But yet in the heart of our hearts we do not feel very kindly toward God because if God really knew how good we are, God would not do this thing that He is doing to us. And maybe it is the very reason we have that kind of a thought is the reason that things are not going well with us.

Well, good to God included the horrible trials that these people were going through in the book of Lamentations.

I think that you will have to agree that the descriptions of the problems that we see here in the book of Lamentations are vivid, graphic, horrifying, terrible to think on. They make a person cringe and nobody in their right mind would want to go through them. And yet to God it was *good* that these people go through it. They needed that.

Now would you say what Laodicean is going to have to go through in the Tribulation is good? Yes, it is. But it is not very pleasant to think about. Going through the Tribulation, though, is the difference between being in God's Kingdom and not being in God's Kingdom. Therefore it is good. They have to pass through the fire of the Tribulation.

I am looking at it objectively from this position of comfort that you and I are in. Here we are, it is about 75 degrees outside, nice air conditioned comfort.

We are reading God's Word in peace. There is not a riot of people chasing us. They are not after us with, you know, rods and rubber hoses and chains to put us into prison. And we can reflect on the Laodiceans and say, "Yeah, I can read there in Revelation 3 and it's good for the Laodiceans to go through that."

But to actually experience it is going to be another thing altogether. That is why Jesus said what He did there in Luke 21:36.

Luke 21:36 "Watch and pray always that you may be accounted worthy."

Intellectually we can say yes, it was good that Paul's thorn in the flesh was never removed. Maybe we can say in our moments of reflective thought, yeah, it is good what the McCutchens are going through with their son Dave. But they have to go through it. It is a painful and heart-wrenching experience. And no one wants to face those things.

Now, can you honestly accept God's will for your life? That is what you covenanted with Him when you were baptized. You gave yourself to Him unreservedly, saying, "Yes, God, Your will is good for me." Now the next time you get into a difficulty you remember that and then maybe you can learn to live a more contented life.

Like the apostle Paul, he said he had to learn. He said,

Philippians 4:11-12 For I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound.

It is very difficult at times to accept what God considers to be good for us.

Lamentations 3:26-27 It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord [meaning submissively, uncomplainingly, contentedly]. It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth.

That is, the yoke of God's discipline, whatever He chooses to put us through. You know, it is in youth that our passions are the strongest and we also need the most discipline. But it good that we bear God's yoke then, because then we have a much longer time to take advantage of the discipline, a much longer period of time to reap the benefits of that discipline, see, that God thought was good for us.

So He says,

Lamentations 3:38-29 Let him sit alone [that is, the person who has this yoke on him, the person who is undergoing the pain and discomfort that God considers to be good] and keep silent [an indication of resignation], because God has laid it on him. Let him put his mouth in the dust—

It is a symbol of absolute submission. You see, when your mouth is in the dust, you cannot even cry out in pain. I mean that is all you can get out.

Lamentations 3:29 There may yet be hope.

Well, to me that was one of the more significant sections in that part that we covered last week. I know it was significant to me anyway. And I hope that I will be more willing to accept what God allows to come on me in the future than I have been in the past.

Sort of like a kid—I just happened to think of this. Did you ever see a kid who knew that he was going to get a spanking? And his mother or dad was holding him by the upper arm, and the kid was running in circles around his father or mother. And dad or mom was kind of chasing the kid's rear end with a paddle. And very likely, the longer the kid struggled at the end of his parent's arms and the more that he made the parent go around in circles, kind of chasing after him with a paddle, the more frustrated the parent became and the more harsh the punishment was going to be. It would have been so much better if the kid had just stopped squirming and bent over and took his licks before he got his father or mother more irritated.

Well, that is why the prophet is saying, "Let him sit alone." "Put his mouth in the dust." Take your licks, we might say, like a man and learn. It would be so much better that way.

Let us jump all the way down to verse 55. Now verses 55 through 66 are a prayer. And it is actually a prayer for retribution. Sort of like, God get even with our enemies for us. Come back on those people.

Lamentations 3:55 I called on Your name, O Lord, from the lowest pit.

That can either mean the lowest depths of misery or it could even mean that he was in a cistern of some kind, at the very bottom of the cistern. The word pit is a word that is normally translated cistern. And since Jeremiah was put in a cistern during the book of Jeremiah, it is thought that this again is evidence that he was the author of chapter 3.

Lamentations 3:56 You have heard my voice: You did not hide Your ear from my sighing.

That is an indication to this person that he understood that regardless of the situation that he was in God's Spirit is everywhere. He is omnipresent. In addition to that, why, in the midst of all of this discipline that was coming on him and on the people of Judah, God was still really not that far away. That He was monitoring what was going on and that God could be cried out to and God would respond in the way that was going to be good for these people.

Lamentations 3:56-57 You have heard my voice: You did not hide Your ear from my cry for help. You drew near on the day I called on You and said, "Do not fear!"

That is very interesting. Notice the hope that is beginning to creep in to this very dismal, if I can put it that way, writing. So his prayer that he made from the lowest pit was answered.

This is what he is reflecting on. If God answered that prayer, why will not He answer this? I mean, there is hope there that God is going to do that.

So he is beginning to be confident of God's intervention. And this is a lesson for every one of us. And that is, when we get in a situation that is difficult like this, we need to reflect on the former times, the times that God *did* hear our prayers, the times that God *did* respond, the times that God *did* bless us, and use that as a starting point to build confidence. So he is beginning to be confident of God's intervention on the side of Judah and that God would also punish the enemies of Judah as well.

Lamentations 3:58-60 O Lord, You have pleaded the case for my soul [that is, You have taken my part]; You have redeemed my life. O Lord, You have seen how I am wronged; judge my case. [Now it is very possible that the prophet here is uttering a prayer as though the whole city or the whole nation was speaking.] You have seen all their vengeance, all their schemes against me. You have heard their reproach, O Lord, . . .

I am really impressed at how frequent that phrase, or what that phrase represents, appears in this book. It seems to me as though the thing that was of primary concern or very high concern all along here was the indignity of suffering humiliation, of being reproached through curses like, "Nyeah, nyeah, nyeah, nyeah, nyeah, nyeah, you got yours now! You've been riding high all these years. Now you've gotten it, God finally caught up with you!" kind of thing. "Now suffer! Go in pain. You rode on the high places of the earth, Judah, now you're going to live like the rest of us."

So they were suffering those kind of taunting indignities. They were the scorn of their enemies and the enemies were taking advantage. But that really seemed to affect the author's thinking here having to suffer the reproach and scorn of this humiliation.

Lamentations 3:61-65 You have heard their reproach, O Lord, all of their schemes against me, the lips of my enemies and their whispering against me all the day. Look at their sitting down and their rising up; I am their taunting song. [The subject of all of their taunts.] Repay them, O Lord, according to the work of their hands.

Give them a veiled heart [dullness of heart]; Your curse be upon them!

And undoubtedly he was asking that in the sense that they would be so affected by the kind of things that God would then put them through that they would be beyond feeling. In other words, what he was asking God to do was to put them through the sequence of events that would be so agonizing, so emotional, that eventually they would come to the place where they could not feel anything any longer. They would be beyond pain, beyond feeling.

Lamentations 3:66 In Your anger, pursue and destroy them from under the heavens of the Lord.

Now, we might ask the question here, how can a godly man make a seemingly vindictive prayer like this? Let me show you another one back in the book of Habakkuk. In Habakkuk the first chapter it begins with the statement, the burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw. And it is a prayer of a person in extreme sorrow once again. He says,

Habakkuk 1:2 O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" and You will not save.

Now what he is reflecting on here is what he sees in the streets. No longer safe to walk on the streets because there is so much violence. He is asking God, why do You not intervene?

Habakkuk 1:3-4 Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me. There is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is powerless [Can you imagine society breaking down to that point? Yes, you ought to be able to because it is happening. There is so much crime that the justice system cannot process it.], and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; and therefore perverse judgment proceeds.

Even what the court does get to decide on is not very sound-minded in the decisions.

Then he begins to reflect on something else a little bit later that begins in verse 12. In between verses 5 through 11, God replied to that. Now the prophet is reflecting on what God said.

Habakkuk 1:12-13 Are You not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O Lord, You have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction. You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours one more righteous than he?

This was really a bone of contention with Habakkuk. Because now he began to understand what God said in the intervening verses there in verses 5 through 11. That God was going to correct the situation in Israel by allowing the Chaldeans to come on Israel and God was going to correct the injustices that were going on on Judah's streets, you see, by having the Chaldeans come in and punish.

Now, Habakkuk begins to realize that the Chaldeans who are coming in to punish Israel are worse than what he sees going on in his own streets. So he makes that statement. "How in the world can You punish Your people Israel, as bad as they are, with a nation that is worse than we are?" Somehow or another that did not seem fair.

Well, we have to understand that the prophets were searching out an understanding of the mind of God, and God was slowly but surely revealing these things to them. And Habakkuk, of course, came to understand that God was dealing not only with the Israelites, Judah, but He was also dealing with the Chaldeans as well. Their time was yet to come.

Now you and I have the whole story. We have it from beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation. And we have to understand that God's Book was written by men and God has been faithful in recording the human aspect as well.

And so He allowed these men's emotions, their feelings, to come into His Book so that we could better relate to it. Now the Bible is not sterile in its

approach to life. It is full of emotion. It is full of patriotism. These people had the welfare of Israel at heart. And if there was anybody that was patriotic, it was them. They knew that as bad as Judah and Israel were, they were not as bad as the nations that were around them. It was only bad relatively.

That is, that because they had the truth, they should have done better than they did. There was more required of them. To whom much is given, much is required. But they had to learn the lesson that God was going to allow Israel and Judah to be punished by nations that were actually worse than they were.

And so the vindictiveness came out. It is human to think that way when you begin to realize that you are being punished by somebody who is worse than you are.

Now we might reflect on Psalm 73, which is accredited to Asaph. I am not going to go through the whole thing, but he was envious of the wicked when he saw their prosperity, and he thought that God was unfair. It is really a wonderful meditation on this very thing that we are talking about here. And he came later to understand. He says that when he went into the sanctuary, then he understood, he understood their end. What is their end? Well, their end is destruction.

But God is not dealing with these people in the same way now as He was with the Israelites, and He is not dealing with us in the same way as He is with the Israelites that are around us or with the other nations besides the Israelites. We can find David reflecting on this in Psalm 35. He spends a lot of time talking about, you know, God dealing harshly with his enemies and surely that was the way he wanted it.

So what we are seeing here is a very human cry for vindication. One thing never really escapes them when you begin to get all of the information together, and that is that God indeed will vindicate the righteous, *but He will do it in His time*. And He will correct the ones who are doing the punishment, but His correction will be in measure to them as well.

Now what God wants you and me to do, because we have the revelation of God in a way that these people did not have, you can see that in I Peter. They

wrote things that they did not understand. And so for you and me, the requirement is a great deal higher. Turn with me back to I Peter in verse 8 of the first chapter.

I Peter 1:8-12 whom having not seen You love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, through the prophecy of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.

Now Daniel said very plainly that he did not understand what he wrote. And there were others who did not fully comprehend the things that they wrote. But God inspired them nonetheless, and He allowed this humanity to come out of them.

In I Peter 2 we are told in verse 13,

I Peter 2:13 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, . . .

I Peter 2:18 [we are told to] be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.

I Peter 2:21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow His steps, who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth.

I Peter 2:23 When He was reviled, [He] did not revile in return [See, here we have the epitome.]; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.

That is the instruction to you and me. The righteous are going to live by faith. We could go back to Habakkuk, and we would find in chapter 2 that he was beginning to figure it out. And he did figure it out.

So Habakkuk, as he said there, that the faithful, those who live by faith will commit themselves to Him who judges righteously. And let the vindication come from Him and leave the vindictiveness out of it. There is certainly nothing wrong with praying to God that He will take vengeance in His way, according to His will He will correct the situation, and that He will deal with these people to bring them to the conversion that He desires.

Let us go back to Lamentations again to chapter 4. You might remember that I said that it appears that chapter 2 was written before chapter 1. Now chapter 4 appears to be written immediately after chapter 2. Sometime just very shortly after it but sometime, maybe just a little while after the initial shock of the fall of Jerusalem had taken place and the person had a little bit of time for reflection.

Now again, the chapter begins with the word HOW. And it is written in such a way so that there are very sharp contrasts between one statement and another, and it is done in sort of a before-and-after method. And so the contrast is in the difference between the two.

Lamentations 4:1-2 How the gold has become dim! How changed the fine gold! The stones of the sanctuary are scattered at the head of every street. The precious sons of Zion, valuable as fine gold, how they are regarded as clay pots, the work of the hands of the potter.

The contrast here is between the way the Temple formerly was and the way it now appeared to the person as he was reflecting. In verse 2, the contrast is between the way the precious sons of Zion had appeared before the trashing of the city and as they now appeared after the city had been taken.

Now, gold does not tarnish. I mean, eventually it will. But it takes a very, very long time for gold to get to the place where it is actually dim.

What is thought here is that there were still sections, pieces, overlays of gold that maybe were on some of the things that we would call paneling, things that had been inlaid with gold in the Temple. That some of these things had collapsed, you know, they were down on the ground just laying there but they were covered over with soot, debris, layers of dust, all kinds of things like that. And what he is contrasting is the beauty of the finery as it was before and now as it is in its destroyed state.

He is also, of course, reflecting, you know, the Temple, it was kind of like the banner, the flag, the shield, almost meant life itself to the people there in Jerusalem. We are going to get to that just a little bit later in the context here.

And so he is reflecting on the contrast between the way he looked at the Temple before and the way he looked at it now. The Temple was instructive in regard to the way he himself had been brought down. So in verse 2, the much blessed Israelites were now being treated as though they were worthless slaves and nothing more than old clay pots.

You know, whenever archaeologists go digging about in those archaeological digs, much of the time they are digging around in the garbage dumps. I mean, literally what we would call the garbage dump. And what is it they are mostly finding there? It is pieces of pottery that have been broken. And then when they are broken, they are useless and so the people throw them into the junkyard. Well, that is his word picture here, is that the people of the city were being treated like broken shards of clay.

There is also evidence that whenever pots were broken, eventually they would make their way to the junkyards. But there the city fathers would have every once in a while a roundup, a collection. They would send laborers into

the junkyard—this is no kidding—they would send laborers into the refuse area and they would pick out all the broken pots, all the shards that they could find, brought them into the city, and guess what they did with it? They threw them on the street and then they broke them into smaller pieces. And that became pavement for the city streets. So instead of the people having to walk on dust, at least there was a clay that had been fired and become hard and then that was spread out on the city street and it made it less dusty.

Now he is taking that into consideration as well. Because what do you do on a city street? You just roll your wagons over top of it, the animals tramp on top of it, and the people tramp on top of it. That is what he is reflecting upon is that it is as though these people who were finely dressed, they had the finest of clothing, they had nice incomes, they had beautiful homes to live in; they were in the city that they considered to be the jewel of the planet, and now here they were just like clay pots that had been dragged out of the junkyard, ground into small pieces, and the enemy was just walking on top of them. Really a vivid picture of the way he felt. That is what he is trying to get across. The mindset of the people was like that.

Lamentations 4:3-5 Even the jackals present their breasts to nurse their young; but the daughter of my people has become cruel, like ostriches in the wilderness. The tongue of the infant clings to the roof of its mouth for thirst; the young children ask for bread, but no one breaks it for them. Those who ate delicacies are desolate in the streets; those who are brought up in scarlet embrace ash heaps.

Now the mention of jackals is intended to indicate that even those animals that one would not expect would have any care or concern for their young, do have some. Now if there is a worse, more loathsome beast than a jackal, I do not know what it is. They feed on carrion garbage. They are mammalian garbage men, mammalian vultures.

But even a jackal takes care of its young. But the daughter of my people has become cruel like ostriches in the wilderness. An ostrich was notorious for its stupidity toward its eggs. It will lay an egg in wherever it happened to be and then wander off and leave the thing there and forget where it was.

Again, he is trying to give a picture of the mindset of the people. That even dumb animals, you see, that one would expect to have terrible attitudes toward their young, even they take care of their young. But these people had become so desperate for life, so desperate for survival, that they had gotten to the place where they were allowing their children to starve to death or whatever, be without any care, just like an ostrich is toward its egg.

So "the tongue of the infant clings to the roof of its mouth" and nobody gives it anything to eat. "Those who ate delicacies are desolate in the streets" and "those who are brought up in scarlet," meaning rich clothing, embrace ashes.

Now what does that tell you, those three verses? It tells you that what little food was available was not being shared with the young. He is giving you an idea of what happens in this kind of a situation. The people who were formerly considered to be smart, sophisticated, chic, intelligent, the movers and shakers, the fine people in society, when it came to their own survival, they even forgot their own children. I mean, deliberately neglecting them.

You see, even in a situation like that, it became a me-or-them mentality and the *them* was their own children that they gave birth to. You can see how desperate that situation was.

Lamentations 4:6 The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, with no hand to help her!

Now Jerusalem's punishment is greater because it was prolonged. Sodom's punishment was over in a minute and it was gone. There were no agonizing death throes that lasted for months on end because there was nothing to eat. Everybody, every inhabitant was killed in a moment.

God did not do that to Jerusalem. What did He say in the book of Isaiah? He says, give Jerusalem double in the way of punishment. And again it came because they should have known better, to whom much is given, much is required.

Lamentations 4:7-9 Her Nazarites were brighter than snow and whiter than milk; they were more ruddy in body than rubies, like sapphires in their appearance. Now their appearance is blacker than soot; they go unrecognized in the streets; their skin clings to their bones, it has become dry as wood. Those slain by the sword are better off than those who die of hunger; for these pine away, stricken for lack of the fruits of the fields.

Now, a Nazarite, everybody knows what a Nazarite was from back there in Numbers the 6th chapter. Here he is not talking about that kind of a Nazarite. He is using it in a more common sense.

A Nazarite, when used in this kind of a context, simply means a separated person. Now here, because he was not talking about those who are particularly religious, it means somebody who was set apart by rank or quality. So when he says Nazarite, some Bibles even translate that princes who would be separated from the rank and file by their station in life. So a Nazarite in this context are those who were wealthier. Those who were leading citizens in terms of maybe the courts, others who were leading citizens in terms of education, religion, or whatever, but it just means somebody separated by rank or qualities.

Now, he is showing that these people were brighter than snow and whiter than milk. What he means is that these were people who formerly had the time and the money to be able to pay a great deal of attention to their personal appearance. They were always bathed, they always had the finest in clothing that was available to them, to those people.

These were people who were able to spend a great deal of time taking care of their physical appearance and would even include things like athletes, wrestlers, runners, those kind of things. And so as a result of that, they always projected or radiated a kind of glow about them. That is what he is talking about.

You see, they are ignominious and undernourished and dehydrated in their appearance. Their skin has all shriveled up till it looks like tree bark. See,

"their appearance is blacker than soot." Again, you see the contrast before and after. And so he says by way of conclusion, it would be better to die quickly than to suffer slowly wasting away.

Back in II Kings I want to show you an example of what hunger drives people to do.

II Kings 6:25 There was a great famine in Samaria; and indeed they besieged it until a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver [How much meat is there in a donkey's head? Besides that, it is unclean. And look at this], and one-fourth of a kab [I do not know how much that is. The Bible here in the margin says approximately one pint. Can you imagine this?], of dove droppings were five shekels of silver.

Can you imagine yourself eating dove droppings? I *think* they ate it. Maybe they used it to burn so that they could cook the little that they had. I do not know, we will give them the benefit of the doubt.

II Kings 6:26-29 Then, as the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried out to him, saying, "Help, my Lord, O king!" And he said, "If the Lord does not help you, where can I find help for you? From the threshing floor or from the winepress?" Then the king said to her, "What is troubling you?" And she answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.' [Can you imagine two ladies making a deal like this?] So we boiled my son, and ate him. [And I presume that they had to kill him first.] And I said to her on the next day, 'Give your son, that we may eat him'; but she has hidden her son."

Yeah, that is hard to imagine. Back to Lamentations.

Lamentations 4:10 The hands of the compassionate women have cooked their own children [Compassionate here is referring to hitherto, or formerly compassionate. Anybody who is cooking their own children can no longer be considered to be compassionate.];

they became food for them in the destruction of the daughter of my people. The Lord has fulfilled His fury, He has poured out His fierce anger. He kindled a fire in Zion, and it has devoured its foundations. The kings of the earth, and all of the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem—

Now we are beginning to find out what part of their problem was. They were so proud, they were so cocksure of themselves, they thought they were impregnable. Nobody could beat them.

Do you know how long it had been since Jerusalem had been taken by anybody at all? The last person, the last army to mount a successful attack against Jerusalem was David, somewhere around roughly, let us say, about 1000 BC. And nobody in all that time; we are talking here 500 years Jerusalem had stood and nobody had ever got to Jerusalem's threshold. And the reason was, it was built in a place that for that time period was easily defensible, almost impregnable. In addition to that, it was very stoutly defended by the Jews, by the Israelitish people. And in addition to that, the walls were extremely heavily fortified.

The location, the fortifications, and a very stout defense, they thought, left them in an impregnable position. They felt that they could withstand a siege for years on end and not be the worse for wear. But you see, no fortress can stand when God decrees that it is time for it to fall. And decree He did.

Lamentations 4:13 Because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed in her midst the blood of the just.

Now we are seeing a revelation here of why God caused it to come down. Look where He puts the blame: on the prophets, false, and on the priests, false. It is entirely possible that the prophets and the priests did not literally shed any blood in the city. I mean, they were not going around carrying a sword and whacking people over the head with their sword and causing people to die.

But what we are talking about here is the principle that is given there in Ezekiel 33 about the watchman. It is the responsibility of the watchmen to

warn the people. And if the watchman does not do his job, then the blood of the people shed in warfare is on his hands. These people should have been warned by the prophets and the priests, but they were not. I mean, warned about their lifestyle, warned about their sins, warned about the injustices, warned about the tremendous accumulations of wealth that were getting into the very few hands, warned about a multitude of things regarding religion.

We will see more about that in the next chapter. And so God lays the blame right on the ministry.

Lamentations 4:14 They wandered blind in the streets [What a vivid metaphor that is.]; They have defiled themselves with blood so that no one would touch their garments.

The picture is turning here a little bit. Because now the city has fallen and a contrast is being shown. Now, here is what is happening to the few prophets and priests that are left in the city.

Lamentations 4:15 They [meaning the people] cried out to them, "Go away, unclean! Go away, go away, do not touch us!"

Now formerly these people, the prophets and the priests, were fawned over. People were devoted to them, loved to hear them preach those beautiful sermons that tickled their ears. Heard those beautiful tones coming out of their mouths, and now they are treating them like they are lepers.

Lamentations 4:15 When they fled [that is, when the guilty prophets and priests fled] and wandered, those among the nations said to them, "They shall no longer dwell here."

Nobody else would have them either.

Lamentations 4:16-17 The face of the Lord scattered them; He no longer regards them. The people do not respect the priests nor show favor to the elders. Still our eyes failed us, watching vainly for our help; in our watching, we watched for a nation that could not save us.

We find out from the book of Jeremiah that that nation was Egypt. When we get to chapter 5, we will see something very interesting there about Syria and Egypt.

Now what he is saying here is that they looked so intently for help from Egypt that their eyes failed. Of course that is not literal, but nonetheless, you get the impression of somebody staring into a blazing sun across the desert looking for an army to appear out of the mirage that is out there on the horizon. Nothing ever came. So he is saying there is no help in man.

Lamentations 4:18-19 They tracked our steps so that we could not walk in our streets. [Somebody was always dogging their heels and that trying to escape was also vain.] Our end was near; our days were over, for our end had come. Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the heavens.

He is talking here now about those who did somehow or another make it outside the walls of the city and hoped to escape into the mountains and valleys, in the wilderness that lay beyond Jerusalem.

Lamentations 4:19-20 Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the heavens. They pursued us on the mountains and lay in wait for us in the wilderness. The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was caught in their pits.

Now, they are talking here about Zedekiah. See, the anointed of the Lord. Zedekiah represented the other pillar of the Jews' confidence. See, the one pillar was Jerusalem itself in its past history. Five hundred years nobody had even dared to try to attack Jerusalem because they knew it would be useless. Surely that was something that God put into their minds.

The closest any nation came to attacking Jerusalem was when the Assyrians attacked Samaria. They did come down. This is when you read that thing about Hezekiah and how God destroyed Sennacherib's army. That was as close as they got, which was, I think, to Lachish, and God turned them back.

But that was one pillar. All of past history showed that Jerusalem was just impregnable. The other one was Zedekiah. He does not seem like any pillar to me. But he was, and you know why? Anybody have any reason? Forget about the man Zedekiah himself. It was something that he was though. He was king but what does that have to do with it? He was a descendant of David, you see, and the Davidic covenant in Psalm 89 said that David would never lack for a man to sit on the throne.

And so these people thought they had it made. We might think we have it made because we are part of the true church. Kind of just unconsciously going along without making the efforts and in our self-confidence, be overconfident.

There was actually a third pillar and it also had something to do with Jerusalem. And that is, of course, that the Temple was there. And so the combination of Jerusalem's history, the location of the Temple being in Jerusalem, because after all, God lived there, did He not? And if God was with us, we live in an impregnable city. Why, God is not going to let anything happen. And then there was the Davidic covenant and the fact that God would always have a descendant of David's ready to sit on the throne.

Well, we have to remember what John the Baptist is recorded as saying there in Matthew the 3rd chapter when he spoke to the scribes and the Pharisees and called them a bunch of snakes and hypocrites. And he told them they better flee from God's wrath.

And he told them,

Matthew 3:9 "For I say to you that God is able to raise up sons to Abraham from the stones [of the ground]."

You see, they too felt a security. They had forgotten the lessons of history, and they felt a security. Somehow or another their relationship with God was inviolable.

Lamentations 4:21 Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the land of Uz!

Why in the world would he mention Edom? Edom did not have a thing to do, as far as we can see, with the fall of Jerusalem. There are some who feel that maybe Edom played some kind of a role and that they doublecrossed some Jews who may have been trying to escape or supplied a means of access to the Babylonian armies that they might otherwise not have had.

But they are brought into the context here right at the end. Why would he talk about Edom and you who dwell in the land of Uz? Well, Edom was kind of a symbol to the Jews, the way Rome, Babylon, is to us. They were a symbol of everything evil. They were a symbol of the world. So they had played a part in Jerusalem's destruction, though it was not direct, and they represented the world.

Now look,

Lamentations 4:21 The cup shall also pass over to you [It is a warning from the prophet to Edom. You are laughing now. But do not laugh too hard because you are going to get it too.] and you shall become drunk and make yourself naked.

Naked is a symbol for slavery. See, a slave owned nothing, had nothing, and so it was a symbol for slavery. If a person was naked, it meant that he owned nothing and he had nothing. And so he was a slave.

Lamentations 4:22 The punishment of your iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; He will no longer send you into captivity. He will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom; He will uncover your sins!

So what he is saying here is that in Edom's punishment, Israel is going to see a sign of restoration to God's favor. So Israel's restoration will begin. For you and me, it would not be Edom, it would be Rome, it would be Babylon. And so when Babylon is destroyed (Revelation 18), that is going to be the signal for the restoration of Israel. So that prophecy is going to repeat itself.

We will stop right there and in the next Bible study we will finish off the book of Lamentations.

