



KRESS
BIBLICAL
RESOURCES

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Introduction

As we open the neglected book of Lamentations, we may imagine the prophet Jeremiah¹ sitting on a hillside outside Jerusalem, overwhelmed by grief—*weeping*—as he remembers the glory of a city now in ruins. Undoubtedly, his mind’s eye still sees the city wall, its towers, its palace, and the incomparable beauty of Solomon’s temple. Perhaps Jeremiah is also reflecting on the forty years he preached throughout Judah, warning the people of the judgment God had promised if they continued in their defiance against the authority of His Word as proclaimed by His prophets. Despite beatings, opposition, and imprisonment, this spokesman for God had fulfilled his calling by preaching against the idolatrous people, disobedient priests, corrupt civil leaders, and false prophets—choosing to trust the Lord rather than men (Jeremiah 17:5–8).

This calling from God came to Jeremiah while he was still very young. In fact, he was ordained by God as a prophet while yet in his mother’s womb (Jeremiah 1:5, 10). During his long ministry, Jeremiah spoke for God by warning the people of the impending threat of judgment if they refused to repent. Consider one example:

“I will give over Zedekiah king of Judah and his servants and the people, even those who survive in this city from the pestilence, the sword and the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of their foes and into the hand of those who seek their lives; and he will strike them down with the edge of the sword.” (Jeremiah 21:7)

The capture of the city, its king, and its people is described in detail in Jeremiah 39:1–11. After eighteen exhausting months of warfare, the city fell to the king of Babylon.

¹ According to 2 Chronicles 35:25, Jeremiah was known as the author of a noncanonical book of lamentations, written after Josiah’s death some 20 years earlier. There are also many similarities of expression between the book of Lamentations and the book of Jeremiah (cf. Lamentations 1:2 with Jeremiah 30:14; Lamentations 1:16; 2:11, 18; 3:48 with Jeremiah 9:1, 18; 13:17; 14:17–22; Lamentations 2:20; 4:10 with Jeremiah 19:9; and Lamentations 4:21 with Jeremiah 49:12; see also the comparison between Lamentations 2:22 with Jeremiah 6:25; 20:3, 10; 46:5; 49:5, 29; Lamentations 3:14 with Jeremiah 20:7—taken from *Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* and Walter C. Kaiser. *Grief and Pain in the Plan of God* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2004), 27).

Zedekiah, king of Judah, attempted to flee but was easily caught by Nebuchadnezzar, who then executed Zedekiah's sons before their father's eyes, which were then plucked out before binding him in bronze shackles and hauling him off to Babylon while the Chaldeans burned the city. So devastating was the destruction of the cherished city, and so shameful was Judah's defeat, that the Jews have made it a practice to read the book of Lamentations once every year, in mid-July, so that they will never forget the day their great city fell.

Jerusalem's destruction had been predicted eight hundred years earlier: "When you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you will perish quickly from off the good land which He has given you" (Joshua 23:16). Jeremiah had also predicted its destruction for forty years, for which he was scorned and mistreated. The people did not want to hear God's truth, as is often the case even now. It is difficult for people to listen to warnings of impending judgment.

Unlike the false prophets, who preached only cheery messages of false hope, and who contradicted God's promise of captivity, Jeremiah endured to an unpopular end. The faithful prophet's message was simple: "'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the LORD; 'I will not look upon you in anger'" (Jeremiah 3:12). "Repent, people of God. Return to the Lord," was his message. But they closed their ears, refusing to listen to God's servant. Consequently, they "made their faces harder than rock" and continued to commit spiritual adultery with false gods (5:3-7; 6:10). It's no wonder Jeremiah has earned the nickname "The Weeping Prophet." Little did he know, a ministry characterized by such loneliness was preparing him for a worse day—a day that held deeper grief than he had ever imagined.

Now, about forty years after his initial call, Jeremiah reflects on all that has happened and writes five funeral dirges in memory of his beloved city. These mournful poems, comprising the book of Lamentations, were written after the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC and before the prophet was forced to move to Egypt (Jeremiah 43:1-7), where, according to Jewish tradition, he died.

The original audience who received Jeremiah's dirge was the generation of Jewish peoples who survived the destruction of Jerusalem. For the inspired historical accounts of

what they experienced, we may look to 2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 36:11–21; and Jeremiah 39–40 (see also Ezekiel 24; Zechariah 7:3, 5; 8:19—cf. Leviticus 26:14–33; Deuteronomy 28:15–57; 32:15–43). The generation that experienced this ruin had been self-deceived, trusting in their religion instead of in Yahweh (Jeremiah 7:3–15).

The book of Lamentations was written as a testimony to the sovereign faithfulness of God in judgment and the enduring mercies of God in the face of overwhelming pain, grief, sorrow, despair, and devastation. It would help the survivors cope with the horrendous consequences they no doubt had to deal with. It would be used for generations to come to memorialize the destruction of the Temple (and, in God’s providence, the destruction that came at the hands of the Romans in AD 70 was on the same calendar day as the Babylonian destruction). It would give subsequent generations a model of how to deal with the consequences of sin on both a national and personal level. And it would remind all those who read or heard it of the horrifying consequences of sin and covenant unfaithfulness.

Millennia later, Jeremiah’s lament continues to lead God’s people on the painful but sure path to the faithful mercies of Israel’s God. We, like Jeremiah, have to live with the temporal consequences of sin in a fallen world. How do we deal with sin’s devastation all around us? We must begin to see the difficult circumstances as God’s discipline or training rather than the dealings of blind fate (Hebrews 12:5–11). We must yield to the discipleship of Jeremiah—who spoke with compassion, yet clarity and realism, about the consequences of sin and who counseled a relentless pursuit of the Lord.

After almost twenty years of pastoral ministry, I (Paul) have learned that too many people don’t like to be counseled in the manner Jeremiah prescribed. However, my role as a preacher requires me to warn people of the judgment that will come if they refuse to repent. As a counselor, I must sometimes tell others that “a little bit of emergency counseling” will not solve their problems. Instead, I must warn them that things may get worse—sometimes much worse—before they get better. That is not a popular message, but it is often true. When we finally get serious about turning away from our sin and following after God, our way may be difficult for a long time as the Holy Spirit exposes the cancerous sin in our hearts—sin we must honestly face if we want to avoid death.

In truth, all suffering is ultimately caused by sin—individual, corporate, or simply the residual effects of Adam and Eve’s sin. At times in our life, we will be faced with the task of comforting the sufferer. At other times, we will be the sufferer. In fact, the believer’s greatest pain comes in dealing with the consequences of unfaithfulness and sin—whether one’s own or someone else’s.

When we find ourselves here—and we will—Lamentations is our handbook. In this biblical record, we are exhorted to place our hope fully in the faithful mercy and loyal love of a gracious God, to praise and take refuge in God, no matter the suffering. He alone is sovereign and rules forever. His mercies are new every morning, and His faithfulness is unfathomably great. No other book of the Bible, except Job, so unabashedly addresses the issue of suffering. And in a unique sense, Lamentations tackles the painful issues of suffering that are caused as the direct consequence of sin.

We might humbly summarize God’s great design in including this magnificent book in His Scriptures with the following four statements of purpose:

1. To reveal the horror, tragedy, pain, sorrow, and devastation that results from sin (see entire book, but especially 1:5, 14, 18–19, 22; 2:14; 3:42; 4:13–16, 22a; 5:16–18).

Sin does not deliver on its promises. Rather, it brings only pain and misery with its rebellion. Sin’s pleasure is only for a moment. Moses knew this and therefore did not consider “the passing pleasures of sin” or the “treasures of Egypt” to be ultimately worthwhile (Hebrews 11:25–26). Sin delivers hardship, misery, and pain. James 1:14–15 records the gestation cycle of sin and its horrifying consequences: “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.” The book of Lamentations graphically pictures the deadly consequences of sin. As Charles Swindoll writes:

It [Lamentations] is a mute reminder that sin, in spite of all its allurements and excitement, carries with it heavy weights of sorrow, grief, misery, barrenness, and pain. It is the other side of the “eat, drink, and be merry coin.”²

As heinous as some of the scenes poetically captured in Lamentations are, the *eternal* consequences of sin are indescribably worse. The wages of sin is eternal destruction, “away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:9). It will be a place where the worm never dies and the fire is never quenched—indeed, a place of eternal destruction (Mark 9:48; Revelation 20:10, 15). Lamentations is but an earthly picture of the consequences of sin; the reality of the eternal consequences is much worse. But the graphic and grotesque consequences of sin disclosed in the book of Lamentations only serve to highlight the wondrous truth revealed in Matthew 1:21, as the angel announced the arrival of Messiah to Joseph: “She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (see also 1 John 3:5). This is the hope of the gospel—the hope Jesus was sent to bring to sinners like us.

2. To reveal the hope that is found in God—His faithfulness, His love, and His mercy in the midst of such consequences (3:19–38, 54–66; and by implication 1:9b, 11b, 20; 2:20; 3:39–66; 4:22; 5:1, 19–22).

Jeremiah chose a highly stylized method of recording this book of sorrows. He composed five individual songs of sorrow, which correspond to our five chapters. The poetry of each of the first four chapters follows an alphabetic acrostic form with some slight variations (Psalm 119 is an example of poetry done in acrostic form).

Chapter 1 is comprised of twenty-two verses with sixty-six lines, each verse beginning with the corresponding letter of the Hebrew alphabet (e.g., v. 1—“Ah, lonely sits...”; v. 2—“Bewailing she wails...”; v. 3—“Captive is Judah...”). The general meter is in a 3 + 2 pattern, resulting in a halting rhythm that would accentuate the words and identify it as a funeral lament. As Dyer writes, “This forms a 3 + 2 ‘limping meter’ which

² Charles R. Swindoll. *The Lamentations of Jeremiah*, “Introduction,” quoted in *Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible*. (Garland: Galaxie Software)

conveys a hollow, incomplete feeling to the reader. Both of these elements lend an air of sadness to the dirges and heighten their emotional intensity.”³

Like the first poem, chapter 2 is comprised of twenty-two verses with sixty-six lines, following the same acrostic pattern—except that the Hebrew letters corresponding to *O* and *P* in our English alphabet are transposed.⁴ As Dyer explains:

In each of chapters 2–4, two of the Hebrew letters are reversed. The normal order of the Hebrew alphabet for the 16th and 17th letters is *ayin-pe* (cf. Ps. 119). This is the order given in Lamentations 1. However, in Lamentations 2–4 this order is reversed, giving a *pe-ayin* sequence. This reversal perplexed scholars for many years, but recent archeological discoveries have helped clear up the difficulty. Several Hebrew abecedaries (alphabets scratched on pieces of broken pottery by Hebrew children learning to write) have been found by archeologists. Some of these alphabetical lists are in the normal order for the Hebrew letters but others are in the reverse *pe-ayin* order. Evidently both arrangements of the alphabet were acceptable. Thus the writer of Lamentations was merely employing two forms of the Hebrew alphabet, both of which were used in his time.⁵

Chapter 3 is comprised of sixty-six verses, but still with sixty-six lines. The alphabetic acrostic in chapter 3 corresponds with the Hebrew alphabet, except in triplets (a, a, a, b, b, b, c, c, c, etc.; i.e., v. 1—“Affliction by the rod”; v. 2—“And in darkness, not in light”; v. 3—“All the day”; v. 4—“Bones of mine”; v. 5—“Bitterness and distress”; v. 6—“Buried in dark places”⁶).

Chapter 4 returns to the twenty-two-verse format, but this time with only forty-four lines. The acrostic pattern is used here as well.

Chapter 5 has twenty-two verses and again forty-four lines but has no acrostic pattern.

The overall structure of the book of Lamentations then points to chapter 3 as the centerpiece, as the first two chapters build up to it. The final two chapters lessen in intensity from the crescendo of chapter 3 and seem to communicate a continued

³ Charles H. Dyer in Roy B. Zuck and John F. Walvoord, eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1985), 1210.

⁴ Kaiser, 13.

⁵ Dyer, 1210–11.

⁶ See Irving L. Jensen. *Jeremiah and Lamentations* (Everyman’s Bible Commentary) (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 123.

processing of the pain so intensely described in the first two chapters. Chapter 5 ends with a prayer of humble affirmation and petition for restoration (vv. 19–20).

There is only one real help in suffering. There is only one genuine hope for those who know their utter hopelessness—*God Himself*. Looking in faith to God is the only lasting comfort in sorrow. Even if worship is washed in tears of grief, worship is the only proper response to pain. The book of Lamentations leads us to that conclusion.

3. To reveal the sovereign faithfulness of God in both judgment and mercy—His hatred of sin, His holy wrath, and His loyal love (1:12b–15, 18; 2:1–8, 17; 3:21–26, 37–38, 54–66; 4:11, 16, 22; 5:19; cf. Leviticus 26:14–33; Deuteronomy 28:15–57; 32:15–43).

It is interesting to note that Babylon and the Babylonians are never mentioned in Lamentations. Only Edom is cited as an adversary (4:21–22). The perspective of this book clearly leads to the conclusion that God was ultimately sovereign over the horrendous events that happened. Certainly the Bible teaches that God is not the source of evil, but Lamentations stresses that He is sovereign over it—and will use the evil of men to accomplish His purposes. It is precisely because God is sovereign that His disciplined and grieving people can have hope in the midst of pain and tragic circumstances.

4. To foster prayer and worship in the face of tragedy, pain, sorrow, and devastation—and increase our anticipation of the glory to come (cf. point 2 above; see also all of chapter 5).

The final song, found in chapter 5, is a prayer. Lamentations should help us understand how we can pray and worship in the face of devastation—even the devastation of sin and its consequences. And worship is man’s deepest need, highest joy, and everlasting privilege. Such worship will thus help the sufferer process the grief, horror, and pain of sin’s consequences—until the God of all comfort wipes away every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21:1 ff).

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is designed to be helpful for a wide range of readers seeking to access the wisdom of God contained in Lamentations. For *the Bible student*, this book complements a study of Lamentations at any depth. For *the expositor*, you have at your fingertips an exegetical commentary loaded with application as well as research. For *the biblical counselor*, the final section of each chapter includes a set of principles designed for the soul work you are doing—applying the Word of God to the lives of those to whom you minister. A complete set of ready-made homework assignments for your counselees is also included. For *the small group leader*, a comprehensive study guide, suitable for discussion and/or individual study, is provided at the end of the book.

NOTE TO BIBLICAL COUNSELORS

It's essential to begin teaching your counselees this truth: Now that they are believers in Christ, they need to discipline themselves to reorient every part of their lives under 2 Corinthians 5:14–15: “For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.” Help them to understand that the saving gospel of Christ provides not only security for eternity (as substantial as that is), but also empowers them to exchange their self-centeredness for the joy of living for the One who died and rose again. With this truth in mind, 2 Corinthians 5:9 is an essential memory verse: “Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.”

Teach your counselees (those you are discipling for the Lord) the practice of preaching the gospel to themselves every day as they learn to put off the old life and put on the new (Ephesians 4:17–32). An excellent resource is *A Gospel Primer for Christians* by Milton Vincent.⁷ Make regular reading of portions of this small and extremely helpful book part of your homework assignments.

⁷ Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer for Christians* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2008). Available from www.focuspublishing.com.

Chapter 1

“See, O LORD!”

A Song of Sorrow and Despair

Lamentations 1:1–22

As he looks upon the smoking rubble of Jerusalem, Jeremiah wonders, *Does anyone care? Does anybody care what we've been through? Does anyone really know the depth of my grief and pain?* Six times in this chapter, the loneliness of the empty city is expressed: “She has no one to comfort her” (v. 2); “She has no comforter” (v. 9); “Is it [our pain and suffering] nothing to all you who pass this way?” (v. 12); “...far from me is a comforter” (v. 16); “There is no one to comfort her” (v. 17); and finally, the city, personified as a woman, says, “There is no one to comfort me” (v. 21).

It can be that way for us too. When we find ourselves experiencing correction from the hand of our loving God, we often feel alone and are tempted to ask, “Does anyone really care?”

Where can we go when drowning in the pain, grief, loneliness, and shame of sin's consequences? The book of Lamentations addresses this issue plainly yet poetically. It reveals that we can be unflinchingly honest in our prayers and in our assessment of our circumstances. We can speak emotionally. Yet in the midst of the emotion, we must seek God to somehow cope with the pain. He alone is the key to finding mercy in the midst of misery.

God is faithful not only to chastise His people in order to save us from the eternal condemnation of sin, but also to walk through our suffering with us. God loves His own too much not to discipline us, and He also loves us too much to abandon us in the midst

of His discipline. Instead, He is faithful to suffer with His people, cleansing us, healing us, and grieving with us for the purpose of molding us into useful vessels for His glory.

In Lamentations 1:1–22, we will see four movements in this first song of sorrow that will help us process the pain and loneliness that comes as a result of sin.

TEACHING OUTLINES

Option A

- I. A song of sorrow and despair (vv. 1–22)
 - A. Chronicling the pain of loneliness and loss (vv. 1–7)
 1. No position (v. 1)
 2. No lovers (v. 2)
 3. No rest (v. 3)
 4. No joy (v. 4)
 5. No freedom (v. 5)
 6. No strength (v. 6)
 7. No testimony—nothing but memories (v. 7)
 - B. Clarifying its causes from a human standpoint—sin and uncleanness (vv. 8–11)
 1. Sin led to dishonor and shame (v. 8)
 2. Sin led to despair and shocking failure (v. 9)
 3. Sin led to defilement and sacrilege (v. 10)
 4. Sin led to desperation and starvation (v. 11)
 - C. Clarifying its causes from the divine standpoint—divine judgment (vv. 12–17)
 1. The LORD’s fierce anger (v. 12)
 2. The LORD’s merciful discipline (v. 13)
 3. The LORD’s sovereign judgment (v. 14)
 4. The LORD’s sovereign humbling (vv. 15–17)
 - a. The appointed time of judgment (v. 15)
 - b. The agony and tears (v. 16)

- c. The adversaries decreed by Yahweh (v. 17)
- D. Confessing sin and calling for covenant mercy/faithfulness (vv. 18–22)
 - 1. The LORD is righteous for I have rebelled against His command (v. 18)
 - 2. The lovers I trusted in deceived me (v. 19)
 - 3. The look of the LORD is my only hope in the midst of sin's consequences (v. 20)
 - 4. The longing I have is for God's covenant faithfulness to be expressed (vv. 21–22)
 - a. The folly of Israel's enemies (v. 21a)
 - b. The faithfulness of God (v. 21b–22)

Option B

- I. A Portrait of Misery (vv. 1–11)
 - A. Characteristics of the misery (vv. 1–7)
 - 1. Financial reversal (v. 1)
 - 2. Desertion by friends (v. 2)
 - 3. Servitude without rest (v. 3)
 - 4. Heavy sadness (v. 4)
 - 5. Bondage to adversaries (v. 5)
 - 6. Fear and hopelessness (v. 6)
 - 7. Bitter regret (v. 7)
 - B. Cause of the misery (vv. 8–11)
- II. A Plea for Mercy (vv. 12–22)
 - A. Right thinking about sin (vv. 12–17)
 - 1. My sin has provoked God's anger (v. 12)
 - 2. My sin has sapped me of strength (vv. 13–15)
 - 3. My sin has brought much shame (vv. 16–17)
 - B. Right thinking about God (vv. 18–22)

1. God is right to discipline me (v. 18)
2. God is the only true satisfier (v. 19)
3. God sees me in my distress (v. 20)
4. God will judge all sin righteously (vv. 21–22)

EXPOSITION: VERSE 1

How lonely sits the city that was full of people!

Verse 1 emphasizes the contrast between what had been and the current painful reality. As Jeremiah looks at the city, once a bustling marketplace filled with people going to and from the Temple for worship, he now sees nothing but emptiness. The word here translated “how” is an exclamation that also begins chapters 2 and 4 (2:1; 4:1). It is used rhetorically to reference incredible, even tragic circumstances (see Isaiah 1:21; Jeremiah 48:17). The NET Bible translates it “Alas!”—a cry of lament. “It is an exclamation of shock, an incredulous gasp behind which lurks a question: how ever did this change come about?”⁸

The word *lonely* can be translated “alone” or “solitary.” Jeremiah recounts that Jerusalem was once a very populated “city...full of people.” But now it sits nearly deserted, a solitary place, isolated like a leper from the rest of humanity (Leviticus 13:46). “In normal times Jerusalem, Judah’s capital, was a bustling commercial center as well as the focal point of national cultic worship. Now she is a deserted ruin, stripped of all her former grandeur and emptied of her inhabitants.”⁹

She has become like a widow who was once great among the nations!

Widow in Jeremiah’s culture was synonymous with difficulty, loneliness, poverty, and hardship (see Deuteronomy 24:17ff; Isaiah 1:23). Jerusalem “was once great among the nations”; now, however, “she has become like a widow”—“destitute and defenseless”¹⁰ (cf. Psalm 94:6; Isaiah 10:2; Malachi 3:5). She does not know how to deal with her

⁸ John L. Mackay. *Lamentations: A Mentor Commentary* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2008), 40..

⁹ R. K. Harrison *Jeremiah & Lamentations* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973), 207

¹⁰ Charles H. Dyer in Roy B. Zuck and John F. Walvoord, eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1212.

loneliness; she is overtaken by it. Greatness has turned to vulnerability, grief, reproach, difficulty, poverty, and hardship.

She who was a princess among the provinces has become a forced laborer!

Jerusalem has lost all prestige and position. She was a “princess among the provinces,” but is now a slave, “a forced laborer,” one who must pay tribute to a master. From royalty to rags, her fortune has been reversed. This newly widowed one is alone, empty, and poor. In Solomon’s day, Jerusalem was the greatest city on earth; now, in Jeremiah’s time, it is a slave paying tribute to Gentiles.

Jeremiah sings a song of pain and lament over Jerusalem’s loss of position, place, and prestige in the world.

VERSE 2

She weeps bitterly in the night / and her tears are on her cheeks

This could be translated, “Weeping she weeps in the night; and the tears are on her cheeks.” The isolation, grief, and pain are depicted as sleeplessness, continual sobbing, and tears. Instead of the normal progression of weeping giving way to sleep, here there is no mention of sleep.

She has none to comfort her / among all her lovers / all her friends have dealt treacherously with her

The utter lack of any consolation or comforter is a resounding theme in this chapter as seen by the use of the same term in 1:9, 16, 17, and 21. *All* is used sixteen times in this chapter (1:2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 18, 21, 22) to emphasize the total devastation. “She cannot discern any ray of light in the gloom of her depression.”¹¹

The idea of Israel’s illicit “lovers” is also seen in Jeremiah 2:20–3:2 (see also Jeremiah 4:30; 22:20–22; 30:14; Ezekiel 16:35–41; 23:22–49; Hosea 2:7.) These lovers were the idols and nations Israel trusted in rather than Yahweh, the true and living God.

¹¹ Mackay, 44.

Those she believed to be friends were in fact unfaithful to her. They betrayed her. Weeping, she finds no comfort in her false gods.

Her idols fail to satisfy and ultimately forsake her. Israel has now learned this lesson the hard way—through degradation, sleeplessness, sobbing, and tears. There is “none to comfort her.” All her military alliances are useless. They too have abandoned her and have even “dealt treacherously with her.” She has been deserted by those she trusted most.

VERSE 3

Judah has gone into exile under affliction / and under harsh servitude

From Jerusalem, Jeremiah moves on to speak of Judah, a nation that had “gone into exile under affliction / and under harsh servitude.” The term *affliction* was used of Israel’s suffering in Egypt before the Exodus (Exodus 3:17), as with the term *servitude* (1:14). She is back under bondage, without rest or peace.

She dwells among the nations, but she has found no rest

The nation was scattered “among the [Gentile] nations.” In the days of Moses and Joshua, *rest* was equated with Israel living in the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 12:10; 25:19; Joshua 1:13; 21:44; 23:1; 1 Kings 8:56; Psalm 95). But after the fall of Jerusalem, Israel “found no rest” (see the promises of Leviticus 26:33–38; Deuteronomy 28:64–67; Joshua 23:11–16).

All her pursuers have overtaken her / in the midst of distress

The word *distress* means literally “narrow places.” The language pictures a fleeing Judah seeking to escape but being overtaken in a narrow place. The troublesome nightmare has become a reality. The carefree princess is now a slave whose life is filled with anxiety.

There is no rest—only capture, exile, affliction, and great servitude.

VERSE 4

The roads of Zion are in mourning / because no one comes to the appointed feasts

Zion had become synonymous with Jerusalem, but properly speaking, it referred to the hill of the LORD, where the Temple sat—the house of God (Psalm 2:6; 68:16). That seems to be the distinction here. Jerusalem is a widow, Judah a captive, and the Temple mount embittered because of loneliness and desolation. Poetically the “roads of Zion” are personified as mourning because of the want of people coming to partake of “the appointed” worship prescribed by the Law of Moses. The roads of Jerusalem, once occupied by those coming to celebrate the feasts of the Lord, are now empty because the temple is gone, reduced to a pile of smoking bricks.

All her gates are desolate; her priests are groaning, her virgins are afflicted, and she herself is bitter

The “gates” of the Temple were “desolate,” empty and ruined (cf. 1:13, 16; 3:11; 4:5; 5:18). The Temple “priests” are sighing, groaning (cf. 1:8, 1, 21 for “groan”), the loss and emptiness seemingly unbearable. The Temple “virgins” (or “young women”) may have had some role in worship, as Jeremiah 31:13–14 and Joel 1:8–9 indicate. Psalm 68:25 says, “The singers went on, the musicians after them, in the midst of the *maidens* beating tambourines.” The “virgins” were “suffering/afflicted,” which speaks of “grief” (1:5; 3:32–33) and even “torment” (Job 19:2; Isaiah 51:23).

Finally, Judah “herself is bitter” or, better translated, “suffers bitterly” in the depths of grief. She carries a heavy burden on her shoulders: the loss of joy and worship. There is no more position, power, or prestige; no more friends or worldly lovers; no more rest; and no more joy.

VERSE 5

Her adversaries have become her masters, her enemies prosper

Not only have her friends become her enemies, but those enemies have also enslaved her. She is in deep bondage. This could be translated, “Her distressors have become for [her]

the head; the ones hostile to her are at ease” (see specifically Deuteronomy 28:13, 43–44). Babylon and its rulers became the head and appeared to be “at ease.”

For the LORD has caused her grief / because of the multitude of her transgressions

This is the first acknowledgment in this song of sorrow concerning the cause of Israel’s pain. Jeremiah records the name “Yahweh” here for the first time as well. Israel’s faithful, covenant-keeping, loyal God—the ever-living One—had “caused her grief.” The reason? “Because of the multitude of her transgressions.” The NET Bible renders this phrase, “For her many acts of rebellion.”

While not all suffering is a direct result of personal sin, it is related to mankind’s rebellion against God. Jeremiah will deal with this in greater detail in verses 8–11 and even more extensively in chapter 2. But here he briefly records it while detailing the loneliness and loss in Jerusalem, Judah, and Zion.

Her little ones have gone away / as captives before the adversary

Captivity had been foretold in Deuteronomy 28:36, 62–68. Not even their “little ones,” their children, have the prospect of freedom. They “have gone away as captives before the adversary.” It is one thing to be a slave yourself, but quite another to see your children taken as slaves to a foreign land, never to be seen again. Families and lives were shattered beyond comprehension.

Jeremiah lamented the loss of freedom as a result of sin. And it reached to even the “little ones.”

VERSE 6

All her majesty / has departed from the daughter of Zion

The word *majesty* can speak of “splendor” but also of “honor” and “dignity.” “The daughter of Zion” would seem to again refer to Jerusalem and, by extension, all of Judah and Israel. She is no doubt afraid about the future and suffers from despair. There is hopelessness—all has been lost; all has been destroyed. The next phrase reveals that Jeremiah was thinking of the splendor, honor, and dignity of Judah’s monarchy. It too is now gone.

***Her princes have become like deer / that have found no pasture; and they have fled
without strength / before the pursuer***

See Jeremiah 52:6–11 (cf. 2 Kings 25:3–7). See also Lamentations 5:12. The NLT translates this as, “Her princes are like starving deer searching for pasture. They are too weak to run from the pursuing enemy.”

VERSE 7

***In the days of her affliction and homelessness / Jerusalem remembers all her precious
things / that were from the days of old***

Here, finally, Jeremiah uses the common name of “Jerusalem.” The root term here translated *homelessness* is rendered “wandering” in 3:19. The “precious things” refer to the articles of the Temple in 1:10 and 2 Chronicles 36:19, which were taken to Babylon. That which was used to honor the LORD is now gone. These worship treasures are now merely a memory as all Jerusalem suffers from bitter regret.

***When her people fell into the hand of the adversary / and no one helped her / the
adversaries saw her, they mocked at her ruin***

No one came to Jerusalem’s aid. All her allies abandoned her; they “mocked” her in the midst of her desperate condition. “Ha! She deserves it!” was their cry. The word *ruin* is related to the word “Sabbath.” It speaks of “cessation.” The thought seems to be that though Jerusalem remembers the “precious things” of Temple worship, she also remembers the “mocking” that occurred when the worship ceased. The city of Yahweh, the Temple of Yahweh, the worship of Yahweh became a laughing matter to Israel’s enemies. This graphic description of misery leads to the conclusion that, from the princes to the people, all has been destroyed. All is lost. Nothing is left except the empty loneliness and enslavement that characterizes a bitter life. But what was the cause of such misery?

VERSE 8

Jerusalem sinned greatly / therefore she has become an unclean thing

This could be translated, “Sinning Jerusalem sinned, thus she became an object of mockery.” While the cause of Judah’s desperate suffering has already been revealed in verse 5—“For the LORD has caused her grief because of the multitude of her transgressions”—here Jeremiah clearly and emphatically clarifies the human cause of the pain that he has chronicled—“sin,” failure to live by faith and honor God. It was the southern kingdom’s defiance against God’s Word that brought such miserable conditions upon her. Sin led to dishonor and shame.

The root for “unclean thing” may be related to menstrual impurity.¹² The NLT renders this phrase: “Jerusalem has sinned greatly, so she has been tossed away like a filthy rag.” The context seems to support such an understanding.

All who honored her despise her / because they have seen her nakedness

The nations once “honored” or “glorified” Israel (1 Kings 10:4–29). Even Babylon had come to admire her in Hezekiah’s day (Isaiah 39:2). Now they “despise her”—treat her lightly and consider her worthless. The picture Jeremiah’s words depict is of a prostitute. Jerusalem had been stripped naked for the entire world to behold her filthiness. We see this representation in Ezekiel 16 as well. Jerusalem sinned greatly, and as a result, she who was once smug in her rebellion is now filled with self-loathing. She is ashamed of herself and weeps.

Even she herself groans and turns away

The sight of Jerusalem’s sin was so disgusting that when it was exposed, it was unbearable to look at. As Laetsch remarks: “Stripped naked of all her splendor, only filth is seen (cf. Ezekiel 16:1–43), filth so horrible, and nakedness so abhorrent, that not only her former admirers despise her (v. 8), but she herself moans and turns her back in shame, aghast at her own ugliness.”¹³

¹² *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, (I believe this is Rick’s note. My version of TWOT is 2 volumes, Moody, 1980, edited by R. Laird Harris. Mine was taken from BibleWorks 7.0.

¹³ Theo Laetsch. *Jeremiah* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1952), 379–80.

VERSE 9

Her uncleanness was in her skirts

Jeremiah speaks of sin as the stain of menstruation, or an unclean discharge in the skirts of a prostitute. The horrible scene is one of an illicit woman being stripped in the sight of all with the pollution in her skirt evident to all. The language is poetic but brutally blunt.

She did not consider her future / therefore she has fallen astonishingly

She once enjoyed her sin without any thought of future consequences. She sinned without limit, giving no thought to the painful consequences it was sure to deliver. Jeremiah here seems to be referencing a line from the song of Moses, which was to be a warning and testimony to Israel concerning apostasy and its consequences: “Would that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would discern their future!” (Deuteronomy 32:29, though the warning may have first referenced Israel’s enemies in the context of Moses’ song). Again, the NLT is provocative: “She defiled herself with immorality and gave no thought to her future. Now she lies in the gutter with no one to lift her out.”

She has no comforter

This exact phrase is also used in verses 17 and 21. Lying in the gutter, exposed for what she is, the fallen woman “has no comforter.” Only God and His promises can serve as an adequate comforter (cf. Jeremiah 31:13). Thus, comfortless, the remnant of faith cries out to God in the next phrase.

“See, O LORD, my affliction, for the enemy has magnified himself!”

Moving abruptly from third person to a startling direct address, Jeremiah pens a prayer of fledgling faith on behalf of the fallen city: “See, O LORD, my suffering.” Judah is crying out, “See what I have done to my life. See what the enemy has accomplished as he has ‘magnified himself,’ through the deceitfulness of my sin!” Even in her low estate, Judah knows that the merciful “look” of Yahweh is her only hope. The final phrase, “for the enemy has magnified himself,” assumes a level of faith in the Abrahamic promises of Genesis 12:3: “I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you will I curse.”

VERSE 10

The adversary has stretched out his hand / over all her precious things, for she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary

The mention of “precious things” and “sanctuary” most likely alludes to the Temple. See Jeremiah 52:17–20 (cf. Psalm 74; 79; Isaiah 64:10–12; Jeremiah 15:13–14; 20:5; Ezekiel 7:22). Judah must stand by and watch as the enemies enter the Temple and plunder everything sacred.

The ones whom You commanded / that they should not enter into Your congregation

According to Deuteronomy 23:3, Ammonites and Moabites were forbidden from entering the Temple. There may have been troops from these nations within the Babylonian coalition army. In fact, 2 Kings 24:2 confirms that they were present in earlier forays against Judah. Deuteronomy 23:7–8 indicates that first- or second-generation Edomites were forbidden as well, and they likely helped to loot and destroy the Temple. Jeremiah 51:51 reads: “We are ashamed because we have heard reproach; disgrace has covered our faces, for aliens have entered the holy places of the LORD’s house” (cf. Nehemiah 13:3; Ezekiel 44:7, 9).

Sin led to a complete and total corruption of worship, as her enemies have entered her “sanctuary,” the Temple, and have carried the treasures away to idolatrous Babylon (cf. Daniel 1:1–2). Israel had already defiled Jerusalem and the sanctuary (Ezekiel 5:10–11; 8:10–18; 23:29), and God, in judgment, brought it to completion (Ezekiel 9:6–10).

VERSE 11

All her people groan seeking bread; they have given their precious things for food / to restore their lives themselves

She who was once rich is now begging for bread. She has sold all that she has (the term “precious things” is used again, this time evidently referring to prized personal possessions) simply to buy food. Perhaps there is an ironic twist to the people selling their charms and prized idols for “food to restore their lives themselves.” Second Kings 25:3 says, “On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that

there was no food for the people of the land.” Some suggest that the term “precious things” here is a reference to their own children¹⁴ (cf. Hosea 9:16 for a parallel). Evidently, “life was an unremitting search for bread...the city gates might be open, but the surrounding land had been devastated by the invading armies, and the farm labourers had been slain or enslaved. And agricultural economy would take years to recover from such an invasion.”¹⁵

“See, O LORD, and look, for I am despised”

A second time, Jeremiah abruptly shifts from third to first person to utter a prayer on behalf of Jerusalem’s remnant, invoking a plea for Yahweh, the faithful, covenant-keeping God of love and justice, to “see” and “look” with regard and pity. The phrase “for I am despised” speaks of a worthless condition. This picture of misery rightly leads the prophet to beg for God’s mercy.

VERSE 12

“Is it nothing to all you who pass this way?”

Verses 12–22, with the exception of verse 17, switch to the first person—as if Jerusalem herself is giving account of the Lord’s fierce anger against her. This difficult poetic line seems to picture Jerusalem personified as calling out to whoever passes by. It is possible to translate this phrase, “May it never happen to you!”¹⁶ But the sentiments of verses 21–22 militate against that rendering. Here Jerusalem is focused on her own suffering and the absence of anyone to comfort her. The idea is, “Doesn’t anyone care?” Perhaps the Geneva Bible captures this: “Have ye no regard, all ye that pass by this way?”

“Look and see if there is any pain like my pain / which was severely dealt out to me”

Whereas verse 11 petitioned for Yahweh to “look” and “see,” now it is addressed to “all you who pass this way.” There may be an intended warning in these words.

¹⁴ *The Complete Biblical Library*, “Jeremiah and Lamentations,” (Springfield: World Library Press, 2000), 577.

¹⁵ Mackay, 57.

¹⁶ Harrison, 210.

We call for Yahweh to mercifully regard our distress, and we look to others to see and regard the severity of our pain and sorrow as well. “This is not too much different from what we also do in our grief. We believe what we are going through is extraordinary and totally removed from what any normal human being can bear.”¹⁷ But the description in the rest of the book merits some consideration for Jerusalem’s more grievous sorrow. In fact, Daniel’s prayer in Daniel 9:12 confirms the uniqueness of the divine judgment that fell upon Jerusalem in Jeremiah’s day: “He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity. For under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem.”

Jerusalem personified identifies the ultimate Agent behind her pain in the next phrase.

“Which the LORD inflicted on the day of His fierce anger”

Clearly stated, it was “Yahweh” who “inflicted,” or caused affliction, “on the day of His burning anger.” Psalm 5:4–6 says, “For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil dwells with You. The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity. You destroy those who speak falsehood; the LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.”

Jeremiah makes no mistake about the fact that Yahweh is a God who possesses righteous, holy “burning anger” against all sin and those who rebel against Him. Proof of this divine attribute is the harsh judgment Jerusalem received on “the day” God demonstrated His wrath through the instrument of the Babylonian king. Yet for His chosen, such judgment is actually merciful discipline, as verse 13 reveals.

VERSE 13

“From on high He sent fire into my bones, and it prevailed over them”

Jeremiah uses a similar expression concerning his own dealings with God in Jeremiah 20:9. Here, Jerusalem experienced the judgment of God that went to the innermost man (Psalm 11:6; see also Deuteronomy 32:22). David echoes this connection in Psalm 32:3–

¹⁷ Walter C. Kaiser. *Grief and Pain in the Plan of God* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2004), 52.

4: “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.” David acknowledges the cause of his physical degeneration—the sin he cherished by refusing to deal honestly with it. Warren Wiersbe makes an interesting connection concerning the divine fire that consumed Jerusalem: “According to the law of Moses, if a priest’s daughter was guilty of immorality, she was burned to death (Leviticus 21:9). Israel was a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6), but she had betrayed the Lord and consorted with idols.”¹⁸

“He has spread a net for my feet; He has turned me back”

The expression “He has spread a net for my feet” speaks of an inescapable trap. Some interpret the words “He has turned me back” as speaking of defeat—which was no doubt true. But the grammar and the word itself, *turned*, can just as readily be understood as a turning in repentance.¹⁹

“He has made me desolate, faint all day long”

Jeremiah continues to describe sin’s physical effects—a crushing of the body, mind, and spirit. The verb *made* is literally “given” (cf. v. 14). This desolation, faintness “all day long,” is actually a gift from God (see Psalm 118:18 for the same form of the word). Could it be that Jeremiah wanted his audience to see such desolation and faintness as merciful?

VERSE 14

“The yoke of my transgressions is bound; by His hand they are knit together / they have come upon my neck”

The picture is of God taking all of Jerusalem’s “transgressions” and making them into a “yoke,” which is placed “upon [her] neck.” God will not simply wink at her sin or sweep it under the rug, but rather He will employ its consequences to chasten her (see

¹⁸ Weirsbe, 154. [[full FOP needed]]

¹⁹ See Kaiser, 53.

Deuteronomy 28:48). The yoke of slavery came ultimately from the hand of a sovereign God, due to sin. See also Jeremiah 28 and the ironic use of *yoke*.

The yoke will stay on the nation until that future day when Yahweh of hosts “will break his yoke from off their neck and will tear off their bonds; and strangers will no longer make them their slaves. But they shall serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom [God] will raise up for them” (Jeremiah 30:8–9).

“He has made my strength fail / the Lord has given me into the hands / of those against whom I am not able to stand”

Yes, divine judgment “made [Jerusalem’s] strength fail.” And *Adonai*, the Sovereign Master, gave her “into the hands of those against whom [she was] not able to stand.” But in another light, such is a merciful judgment. As Kaiser writes:

Unchecked sin can so bind its practitioners that all power to overcome it or the grip of those into whose hand such sinners eventually fall is spent and gone. Only by reducing sinners to such desperate straits will some eventually listen and turn. Thus grief may often work a very wonderful work that none of the [so-called] goodness or blessings of God will ever effect.²⁰

VERSE 15

“The Lord has rejected all my strong men / in my midst”

Again, the strength of Jerusalem had been rejected. Her “strong men” were rejected by the Sovereign Master. The word *rejected* speaks of something tossed aside or something made light of. Both judgment and mercy can be detected in these words.

“He has called an appointed time against me / to crush my young men”

The “appointed time” was not for a festival in Israel, but rather for Israel’s enemies to “crush [her] young men.” Again, all hope of self-defense was taken away in the sovereign discipline of the Lord.

²⁰ Kaiser, 53.

“The Lord has trodden a wine press / the virgin daughter of Judah”

See Isaiah 63:1–4 and Joel 3:13 for the imagery of the wine press of God’s wrath. Here, however, the punishment is poured out on “the virgin daughter of Judah.”

The song continues in identifying the pain as coming from the sovereign hand of the Lord. It was the appointed time for judgment.

VERSE 16

“For these things I weep; my eyes run down with water”

Jeremiah 9:1 says, “Oh that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!” (See also Isaiah 22:4; Jeremiah 8:18; 9:18; 13:17; 14:17; Lamentations 2:18.)

“Because far from me is a comforter, One who restores my soul”

The agony and tears remain because “far from [her] is a comforter, One who restores [her] soul” (cf. v. 2, 9, 17, 21). God’s presence seems distant. But the promise of Isaiah 66:2 remains: “But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.” And likewise Psalm 34:18: “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

“My children are desolate / because the enemy has prevailed”

The NIV renders this: “My children are destitute because the enemy has prevailed.” The NLT: “My children have no future, for the enemy has conquered us.” On a human level, comfort is often found in one’s children. But “because the enemy [had] prevailed,” there was no earthly consolation. This can only point to a heavenly comfort and Comforter (Isaiah 40:1ff).

VERSE 17

Zion stretches out her hands; there is no one to comfort her

Jeremiah briefly turns back to third person in this verse. Again, “there is no one to comfort her.” This time the term *Zion* is used—either the Holy Hill or the city. Once

again, human comfort is sought but none is found, as the next phrase indicates. The stretching out of hands can speak of a signal for help, as in Jeremiah 4:31.

The LORD has commanded concerning Jacob / that the ones round about him should be His adversaries

It was from the faithful, loyal, and loving decree of “Yahweh...concerning Jacob, that the ones round about him should be his adversaries.” Second Kings 24:2 says, “The LORD sent against him bands of Chaldeans, bands of Arameans, bands of Moabites, and bands of Ammonites. So He sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD which He had spoken through his servant the prophets.” Though this was some years before the final siege and destruction, it illustrates Yahweh’s sovereignty over the enemy troops sent against Jerusalem. Perhaps “Jacob” was used poetically here to refer to Israel, to hint at her forefather’s preconversion nature, which she exhibited in her unbelief.

Jerusalem has become an unclean thing among them

Again the language depicts a woman in her menstrual impurity. Her cherished sin results in uncleanness, not only before God, but also among others who witness her rebellion. For the sake of worship, it rendered her and those who came in contact with her unclean (see Leviticus 15:19–30).

VERSE 18

“The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against His command”

Immediately after directly attributing the pain to God’s judgment and discipline, personified Jerusalem—once again in first person—declares, “Yahweh is righteous.” Yahweh was in the right to judge so severely “because [Jerusalem had] rebelled against His command,” literally “because His mouth I have disobeyed.” In his larger book, Jeremiah mentions Babylon as the earthly cause of Judah’s misery; however, he never names the enemy in Lamentations. Here his focus is on God as the One who is ultimately dealing with Judah’s rebellion. Nebuchadnezzar and the armies of Babylon are simply God’s servants—His tools of discipline.

This is the climax of this first song in Lamentations. The poet has told it like it is. He has cried and wept—detailed the pain, the sorrow, the degradation—but in the end he justifies Yahweh’s righteousness in judgment and confesses Jerusalem’s rebellion. Jeremiah’s conclusion smacks of Job’s confession in Job 42:1–6.

“Hear now, all peoples, and behold my pain; my virgins and my young men / have gone into captivity”

The call is for others to see, “behold,” Jerusalem’s “pain.” Perhaps this is a warning to all who would disobey the mouth of the LORD. See especially Deuteronomy 28:32, 41: “Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on and yearn for them continually; but there will be nothing you can do... You shall have sons and daughters but they will not be yours, for they will go into captivity.”

Jeremiah 22:8–10 says:

Many nations will pass by this city, and they will say to one another, “Why has the LORD done thus to this great city?” Then they will answer, “Because they forsook the covenant of the LORD their God and bowed down to other gods and served them.” Do not weep for the dead or mourn for him, but weep continually for the one who goes away; for he will never return or see his native land.

Suffering, sorrow, pain, and grief can only be processed rightly when we confess and embrace that the Lord is righteous and we are sinners. A second confession/declaration is found in verse 19.

VERSE 19

“I called to my lovers, but they deceived me”

Here is an admission that *before* turning to Yahweh in confession and faith, Jerusalem had “called” to her “lovers,” but “they deceived” her (see Jeremiah 30:14; 37:7–9; Hosea 2:5, 7). The nations and gods she had given herself over to were faithless and deceptive.

“My priests and my elders perished in the city / while they sought food to restore their strength themselves”

Even the religious leadership—“my priests and my elders”—proved to be self-serving and under the same condemnation (see Jeremiah 10:21; 14:15–16; Lamentations 2:20; 4:7–9; 5:12). When Nebuchadnezzar cut off the food supplies to Jerusalem, attacking the city for eighteen months, there was a great famine. So great was this famine that mothers boiled their infants and ate them (2:20; 4:10).

VERSE 20

“See, O LORD, for I am in distress”

For a third time, personified Jerusalem calls for the merciful gaze of Yahweh. The word *distress* speaks of “narrow straights.” Again, *the only hope to be found in the wake of sin and its distressing consequences is in Yahweh’s mercy and grace*. Thus she cries, “See, O LORD.” He sees her suffering and has compassion upon her. Hagar found great comfort in this truth after she fled from the bitter words of Sarai, who despised her. In her pain, Hagar cried out to God, “You are a God who sees” (Genesis 16:13). What did she mean? She rightly concluded: “You are a God who sees me in my affliction. You see me in my need.”

“My spirit is greatly troubled; my heart is overturned within me”

This literally reads: “My bowels churn; my heart is overturned inward.” The NET Bible reads: “My stomach is in knots! My heart is pounding inside me.” The ESV: “My stomach churns; my heart is wrung within me.” The reason for the sickness is seen in the next phrase.

“For I have been very rebellious”

This could be translated, “For disobeying I disobeyed.” This is a clear and emphatic confession of sin: “For I have been utterly defiant.”²¹ The suffering God brought on Judah accomplished its purpose—that she realize her sinful ways and repent so that when

²¹ Mackay, 72.

the people returned from seventy years of captivity in Babylon, they would never return to idolatry.

“In the street the sword slays; in the house it is like death”

Inside or out, there was no escape from the consequences of her sin (see Deuteronomy 32:25). She knew it. She confessed it. She was seeking to embrace it.

Next, personified Jerusalem expresses a measure of faith in God’s faithfulness—even if it might be mixed with the bitterness of her pain.

VERSE 21

“They have heard that I groan; there is no one to comfort me; all my enemies have heard of my calamity”

The subject of “no comfort” again surfaces within the prayer-song. The “enemies have heard”—the implication being that they took pleasure in her pain and “calamity.” Thus she took the folly of her enemies to the LORD.

“They are glad that You have done it”

The Hebrew is difficult here. It may be best to understand the phrase “they are glad” as belonging to the preceding thought: “All my enemies have heard of my calamity. They are glad.”²² The final phrase is more literally translated, “When You Yourself have done this.” Those hostile to Judah exulted in the distress of Jerusalem’s destruction, but they did not understand that Yahweh Himself was behind it. Unbelievers often rejoice in the downfall of God’s people, mistakenly assuming that God has failed them or that He is not real—but the remnant of Jerusalem knew that Yahweh Himself had done it. This calamity was not because Yahweh was weak or had failed to help His people. Rather it was from His hand.

The enemy might accuse Israel’s God of faithlessness and impotence, but the remnant now knew differently—and thus, in the rest of verses 21 and 22, Jerusalem prayed for the faithfulness of God.

²² Mackay, 73.

“Oh, that You would bring the day which You have proclaimed, that they may become like me”

This is a plea for God to judge the enemies of Jerusalem as He has judged her. Jeremiah is correct to conclude that God judged Judah and was righteous to do so, but God will also judge Babylon for the sins that she as a nation has committed. God did not choose Babylon as His tool of discipline because she was more righteous than Judah. Judgment was sure to come upon Babylon as well, and when it did, it would be just. In pondering God’s righteousness and the words of His mouth that she had disobeyed—in the midst of confession and repentance—Jerusalem remembers the promises of God’s Word (see for example Psalm 137:7–9; Isaiah 51:22–23; Jeremiah 48:27ff; 50:11ff; 51:24; Ezekiel 25:2–26:2; Obadiah 12–13; Micah 7:9–10).

VERSE 22

“Let all their wickedness come before You”

See Jeremiah 10:25 (cf. Nehemiah 4:4–5). This is not solely an Old Testament concept (see Revelation 6:10).

“And deal with them as You have dealt with me / for all my transgressions”

The Lord has dealt with her in righteousness, justice, discipline, and mercy (cf. 1:12–18). See 2 Thessalonians 1:6–10 for a New Testament parallel.

But what about this prayer that the Lord would do to Jerusalem’s enemies as they had done to her? Must the Christian blush and set aside this teaching in favour of Christ’s word in Matthew 5:44, “Love your enemies?”

Such a strong contrast between the testaments is unfair. For one thing, the injunction of our Lord in Matthew 5:44 came from the Old Testament (Exodus 23:4–5; Leviticus 19:18; Proverbs 25:21–22; cf. Rom. 12:20). Love for one’s enemy was not an optional luxury in either testament.²³

But there was another matter:

There are two kinds of enemies. Some who bear ill-will towards us personally for private reasons (which) concern ourselves alone. When the matter extends no further

²³ Kaiser, 57.

than to our own person, then we should privately commend it to God, and pray for those who are ill-disposed towards us...to do them good, and not return evil for evil, but rather overcome evil with good (Romans 12:17, 21). But if our enemies are of that sort, that they bear ill-will toward us, not for any private cause, but on account of matters of faith; and are also opposed not only to us, but especially to God in Heaven...; then indeed we should pray that God would convert those who may be converted, but as for those who continue ever to rage, stubbornly and maliciously, against God and His Church, that God would execute upon them according to His own sentence, judgment and righteousness (Psalm 139:19).²⁴

“For my groans are many and my heart is faint”

The first song ends with a confession that though Yahweh is righteous, just, and faithful, the pain is still very real. This could be translated, “For my sighs/gasps are many and my heart is sick.” Jerusalem thus confesses her weak and weary state.

INSIGHTS FOR COUNSELING

As it was in Jeremiah’s day, so it is in ours. When we respond properly to the sorrow our sin has caused, it produces a deep repentance that leads to a firm commitment to please God from that day forward. Unfortunately, many people suffer greatly under great sorrow but never get to this point. Instead, they remain sad and bitter about all they’ve lost, filled with grief over the destruction in their life, their marriage, or their family, but they fail to reach the point of admitting, “This is *my* doing. This is *my* fault. God is chastening *me*. It is *I* who have brought this misery into my life.” As a result, God’s mercy seems to elude them. As miserable as the realization of our sin is, it is a necessary step to our being restored to God. Without a full acknowledgment of the depth of our sin against Him, any remedy God offers us will seem cheap. True hope is born out of deep repentance.

This type of confession and repentance—faith, hope, and prayer—is not a recipe to make the temporal consequences of sin go away, but it is the path to recovery, faith, and a restored joy and testimony. Immeasurable comfort can be found in the glorious gospel

²⁴ Cramer, as cited by C.W. Eduard Nagelsbach, *The Lamentations of Jeremiah*, trans., enlarged, and ed. William H. Hornblower in *Lange’s Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, 25 vols. (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1870), 3:67—quoted by Kaiser, 58.

truth that the sinless Messiah suffered the infinite and eternal consequences of sin as our substitute (Isaiah 53; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24–25)!

Many sufferers have been encouraged by the Word of God recorded in the first chapter of Lamentations. We learn that we must not run from God in shame because of sin's misery, but rather run to Him with our misery if we desire His mercy. In light of this, we must take time to consider numerous biblical principles.

1. Before mercy can be experienced, one's misery must be understood from a divine perspective.

There must be humble repentance that confesses one simple reality: "God is righteous to destroy me because of my sin. Therefore, I do not deserve His mercy." Only then can there truly be a new beginning. It is crucial to note that the cause of the prophet's misery on behalf of Judah is not chiefly the devastation he witnesses, though that certainly has made him miserable. The root cause of the pain is his full realization that Judah herself is to blame. *Her* deep-seated rebellion against God's Word and *her* pride and stubbornness caused her ruin. All blame shifting is finally gone; this is true brokenness (Lamentations 1:12, 14; Proverbs 16:18; Psalm 51:17).

2. When faced with the grievous consequences of sin, it is appropriate to chronicle our pain, loneliness, and despair and recount from where we have fallen.

Though we must not sinfully *dwell* on the past or the consequences of sin alone, it is appropriate to honestly face the devastating losses experienced because of sin, as well as our current state of humiliation (Lamentations 1:1–11a; Philippians 3:13–14; Psalm 51:3).

3. Friendship with the world is hostility toward God—and in the end, the world will be an unfaithful lover who betrays us.

Our idols will fail to satisfy and will ultimately forsake us. Like Judah, we too often turn to worldly solutions—only to be left bereft of any lasting hope, satisfaction, or true joy (Lamentations 1:2, 19; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15–16).

4. We can recite our losses and acknowledge quite bluntly our pain, but in the midst of this we must remember 1) the sovereignty of the true God of the Bible and 2) the “ultimate cause” of all suffering—sin and rebellion against God.

The personal value of any suffering is lost when we don't humbly submit to God's sovereign will. This is true of suffering we bring upon ourselves, as in the case of Judah, as well as suffering we experience in the wake of the sins of others, as in the case of Jeremiah. When we identify sin as the “ultimate cause” of all suffering, we are not saying that all personal suffering is the result of one's own personal sin. However, we do need to recognize that there was no suffering prior to man's fall into sin in Genesis 3, and therefore, the “ultimate cause” of all suffering is sin and rebellion. Since we have each inherited our sin nature from Adam, we must each acknowledge that there exists no good thing in our flesh and consequently bow our will to the will of the sovereign Lord who appoints our pain. Only when we submit to our suffering will we recognize its true value (Lamentations 1:18; Psalm 103:19; Romans 7:18).

5. The greatest pain and aloneness experienced by a penitent believer is that of the loss of testimony.

A *testimony* is a believer's Christian reputation before a watching world. Our witness, or testimony, concerning God's righteousness is often mocked and ridiculed as hypocritical and worthless when the world around us sees sin's consequences in our lives (Lamentations 1:7–9a; Philippians 2:14–16; Titus 2:5).

6. We must remember that sin leads to dishonor and shame.

Sin delivers only part of what it promises. It promises fleshly pleasure, as well as freedom from the confines of God's laws. However, the pleasure it supplies is only temporary, while the so-called freedom from God's authority often results in long-lasting enslavement to sin and to the devil (Lamentations 1:16–17; Romans 6:16; James 1:13–15).

7. It is always appropriate to cry out to God for mercy.

Therein lies the hope of every believer, faint as it may be at times. Don't be stubborn. Don't be proud. Don't be like Judah and stiffen your neck against God. What use is that? What good will that bring you? Isaiah writes, “Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near” (55:6; cf. Lamentations 1:20).

8. Many times we feel that no one understands what we are going through.

We must wage war against these self-centered thoughts by recalling the unimaginable depth of humility borne by the Lord Jesus in His incarnation, especially the depth of grief and pain He endured for us at Calvary. There is no pain like the pain He suffered for our sins. Even so, we cannot engage in comparisons of our levels of suffering. This is a vanity and distraction from what God intends to teach us in our trial (Lamentations 1:1–2; Isaiah 53:4; Mark 15:34; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 4:15).

9. When we lose sight of the fact that there are consequences to sin (consequences we do not see now but will see in the days ahead), our natural tendency is to sin without limit.

We must keep in mind the holiness of God and the future day in which He will judge sin. Like Moses, we must also train ourselves to look to the joy of eternal reward that always surpasses the temporal pleasure of sin. Unlike Judah, we must deliberately consider our future (Lamentations 1:8, 12–15; Hebrews 11:24–26).

10. The grief caused by our sin becomes a gift when it brings us to the realization of how deeply we have transgressed against God and, therefore, makes us ready to receive His mercy and grace.

By God’s grace, we are able to conclude that for too long we have been tolerant of our sin and complacent in our pursuit of holiness. Things must change in our lives, or all hope will be lost forever. That is the verdict Jeremiah comes to in Lamentations. In like manner, we must personally recognize our guilt before God and be willing to face it honestly (Lamentations 1:15–18; Luke 13:1–5; Hebrews 3:15; 4:7; Revelation 2:5).

11. Not only is God ultimately sovereign over our suffering, but He also intervenes as the comforter in our sorrows.

He is “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4). Many say or imply that it is awfully cruel for a sovereign God to create misery and then fly to the rescue as our comforter. But that is not the right picture. The misery is *our* responsibility; it is because of *our* sin. We *should* be miserable. However, in our misery we must quickly run to God for mercy lest we become trapped in a dark cave of despair so filled with self-worship that we become totally blinded to the grace of God (Lamentations 1:20; James 4:8–10).

12. At the end of your discipline, you can only say, “It is good for me,” if you have learned what God sought to teach you.

The psalmist confesses, “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes” (Psalm 119:71). The author of Hebrews explains, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness *to those who have been trained by it*” (Hebrews 12:11). Only after Job was humbled by his affliction (which was not caused by personal sin but was still overwhelmingly painful) that he was able to testify: “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees Thee” (42:5). When you have “seen” God in a new way (have understood His character and learned to trust His ways) as a result of your suffering, He becomes more precious to you than ever before, and your heart is filled with thanksgiving, realizing, “It is His kindness that leads us to repentance” (Romans 2:4). When Jeremiah admitted, on behalf of his nation, “For I have been very rebellious,” though outward circumstances did not change for the better, spiritual profit began to be received internally (Lamentations 1:18, 20).

13. God fashions the consequences of our sin for maximum effectiveness.

Jeremiah describes the effects of Judah’s sin: “The yoke of my transgressions is bound; by His hand they are knit together” (Lamentations 1:14). Because God loves us and wants us to walk with Him in true faith and holiness, He brings us to the point where we are broken. Many who refuse to let go of their sin and come to Christ for cleansing have not been brought low enough, even though from the perspective of an outsider it might appear they could not go any lower. To think rightly about our sin means we must admit our guilt to the Lord and humbly accept the consequences that our sin has brought into our lives. Only then are we prepared to receive the grace of forgiveness (Lamentations 1:9b–10; Luke 8:43–48; Psalm 51:17).

14. In the wake of the suffering that sin causes, we cannot carelessly “move on with life,” knowing that we have tromped on the holiness of God by rebelliously going our own way.

We must see how serious sin is before God. He will not let us continually say to Him, “I have no use for You. You have no part in my life. I’ll come to You on occasion—when I am super desperate—but otherwise leave me alone!” God will not tolerate that attitude. For the mercy of God to be fully realized, we must stop to take notice of our rebellion

and honestly repent before Him, trusting in the shed blood of Christ alone as the basis for our reconciliation with God (Lamentations 1:18, 20; Isaiah 53:6; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:18).

HOMEWORK FOR COUNSELING

(You are encouraged to photocopy homework pages for use in personal counseling.)

PART 1: THINKING RIGHTLY ABOUT SIN

Before we can be assured of God's mercy, we need to begin to think rightly about our sin. As described in the first chapter of Lamentations, Jeremiah and the people could not receive the mercy of God until they had come to three realizations concerning sin.

1. Our sin provokes God's anger, and He brings about painful consequences.

“Look and see if there is any pain like my pain, which was severely dealt out to me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of His fierce anger” (Lamentations 1:12).

[[editor: please note for typesetter formatting for these sections (spacing, etc.)]]

Read Lamentations 1:1–11a, and consider some of the consequences of Judah's sin.

List the many forms of humiliation and suffering that are part of your current situation. (Note: your list will not be limited to, or necessarily include, the same painful suffering Judah experienced)

Place an *X* next to the ones in your list that you think are consequences of your own sinful choices.

When and where (at what place in your life) did you turn onto the path of sin? What did that path look like? Did anyone seek to persuade you to change your ways?

Read Psalm 51:1–4. Before David could be fully cleansed of the guilt of his adulterous encounter with Bathsheba, he had to come to an important realization. What did David realize in verse 4? Have you come to the same realization about your sin?

2. *Our sin often affects us physically, sapping us of strength and stamina.*

“From on high He sent fire into my bones, and it prevailed over them.... [I am] faint all day long.... He has made my strength fail” (Lamentations 1:13–15).

Do you believe you are facing any physical effects from your sin, such as a lack of energy and vitality? What are you experiencing?

Read Psalm 38. What were some of the physical effects of David’s sin? What was his only hope for relief?

3. *Our sin often causes us to experience shame in ourselves and before others, and therefore, we must assume personal responsibility for it.*

“For these things I weep.... My children are desolate because the enemy has prevailed. Zion stretches out her hands; there is no one to comfort her...Jerusalem has become an unclean thing among them” (Lamentations 1:16–17).

Do you feel it is ever appropriate to be ashamed? For what reason?

Read Genesis 3:1–10. What was it that caused Adam and Eve to feel shame?

Read Hebrews 12:1–3. How did Jesus take our shame?

PART 2: THINKING RIGHTLY ABOUT GOD

Before we can be assured of God’s mercy, we must also begin to think rightly about our God. If our plea for mercy is to be heard by Him, we must think correctly about the One to whom we cry out. In Lamentations 1, Jeremiah came to four important conclusions about God.

1. *God is right to discipline His children.*

“The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against His command” (Lamentations 1:18).

Do you believe that God is too loving, too gracious, or too merciful to inflict pain on you as a consequence for your sin? Why or why not?

Proverbs 3:11 says, “My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD or loathe His reproof.” In other words, we must not openly reject God’s discipline or quietly chafe under it. Why do you think this is?

Read Proverbs 3:12. Why does the Bible say we must not complain about His discipline? Can you think of any reason to complain about it?

Read Hebrews 12:5–11. Why does God discipline His children? What is the proper response to divine discipline? Are you responding biblically to your present discipline from God? Do you believe that God has custom-designed your suffering as a form of discipline to train you in righteousness?

Consider the following quote: “No truth is more affecting than that God still loves and suffers with those whom He is obliged in righteousness to smite.”²⁵ Does this truth “affect” you? That is, does it help you understand that God is right to discipline you?

Why must we rightly conclude that divine discipline is a mark of God’s love for us?

Perhaps you need to say to God, “Thank You for loving me enough to spank me. Forgive me for being bitter and angry at You. What right do I have to ever be angry at You? Forgive me, Lord. Teach me to submit to Your discipline so that I will be trained to follow in Your righteousness.”

Write out a prayer of thanks to God for loving you enough to spank you. If necessary, ask God’s forgiveness for being angry with Him and for whatever sinful attitudes you have had regarding your discipline.

2. God is the only One who can truly satisfy us.

“I have called to my lovers, but they have deceived me” (Lamentations 1:19).

When the people of Judah found themselves in dire straits, they declared in effect, “I called to my idols, my false gods, all the things I have placed my hope in and chosen to worship. But in my time of greatest need, they were not there for me.”

Are you in a time a great need in your life? What are some of the things that you have been absorbed by in place of God? List as many as you can. How have they let you down?

Suffering often has a way of stripping us of the useless, time-wasting distractions we fill our lives with and the golden calves we craft for our own pleasure. Suffering

²⁵ J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960), 286.

scrapes away these idols, leaving us wanting only God. Read Psalm 73:25–26. Is God the strength of your heart? Is He your portion forever? Are you ultimately satisfied with Him? If you think you are, then why do you keep pursuing so many other false gods, other means of satisfaction?

Read Colossians 3:1–4. Write out your thoughts on what your life might look like if you were preoccupied with Christ and His cross.

3. God sees us in our distress.

“See, O LORD, for I am in distress; my spirit is greatly troubled; my heart is overturned within me, for I have been very rebellious” (Lamentations 1:20).

Do you believe that God truly sees your affliction and desires to come to your aid?

Sometimes, when we are treading the deep waters of suffering, Satan tempts us to think that God is nowhere to be found. But the truth is that God sees even the minutest detail of our situation and is there to help and give comfort. In light of Lamentations 1:11b, 18–20, write out your own prayer to the Lord, confessing any sin and idolatry and seeking His mercy and forgiveness.

4. God will judge all sin righteously.

“Let all their wickedness come before You; and deal with them as You have dealt with me for all my transgressions” (Lamentations 1:22).

Are you confident that God will take care of punishing sin? Are you ever frustrated when others appear to “get away with their sin”? What are some examples in your experience?

In light of Genesis 12:3, how might Judah’s prayer in Lamentations 1:22 differ from an individual’s request? Yet it is appropriate to pray that God’s justice will bring about repentance in others who have sinned. Why?

Read Romans 12:17–21. Sometimes our suffering comes at the hands of others. Is God still in control? What is our responsibility according to this Scripture?

How does your thinking need to change about sin and about God? Pray Psalm 51 back to God, confessing specific sins as needed and asking God to turn your heart toward His Word.

PART 3: HOPING IN JESUS

So where does all of this thinking about our sin and about God’s righteousness bring us? It directs us to the only true source of hope—Jesus. There is no hope anywhere else. No hope in our solving our own problems, cleaning up our own lives, or making up for the sins we have committed. Hope is found only in humbling ourselves before the One who says, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30).

This may mean you need to come to the end of yourself for the very first time, to let the painful consequences of sin do the work God has sent them to accomplish. For the first time in your life, you must reach out with empty hands of faith to Jesus, who said, “Come to Me. Come to Me, and I will forgive you. Come to Me, and I will cleanse you. Come to Me, and I will give you rest in the midst of your pain and affliction.”

Come to Jesus and He will accept you. Not because you are acceptable, but because *He* has already been accepted by God and gives that same acceptance to those who repent and believe in Him. He lives now to save you from your sin and bring you back to God.

Read Hebrews 7:23–27. What is the basis of any sinner’s acceptance with God? What does the Bible mean when it refers to Jesus as the Great High Priest for sinners? What does it mean that Jesus lives to intercede for sinners?

If you have been a believer in Christ for quite some time, this is another opportunity to come to Him. It is a time to thank Him for absorbing the wrath of God against your sins so that you don’t have to endure it for all of eternity.

Read Romans 5:6–10. What kind of people did Jesus die for? What is the greatest demonstration of the love of God?

Write out your own prayer of thanks to God for Jesus and for His cross of reconciliation.

Chapter 2

“Pour Out Your Heart Like Water”

A Song of Sovereignty and Divine Discipline

Lamentations 2:1–22

As the prophet writes this second song lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem, he wants us to understand clearly from the beginning that God is the One who has done this. As the people of God look at the city—once beautiful and well populated, now destroyed and empty—the prophet wants them to know: “God has done this to you.”

In the first ten verses, forty references point to God’s judgment and anger.²⁶ Forty times in ten verses! Jeremiah does not want us to miss the point. We must make no mistake about it. We must put away from our minds any fragment of a perverted theology that refuses to give God credit for suffering since God in His Word identifies Himself as its sovereign cause. Of course, He does not take credit for the sin that serves as the instrumental cause. God is holy. We are responsible for our sin. But in His providential work in human history, God takes credit for the suffering and affliction we find ourselves in.

Isaiah 45:7 says, “The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.” If God is not ultimately in control of both what we consider to be “good” and “calamity,” then any real hope for humans is destroyed. If evil, or Satan himself, is free to steal, kill, and destroy without God’s permission, then there is nowhere for man to turn for help.

²⁶ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Grief and Pain in the Plan of God* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2004), 59.

Though all pain and suffering is the result of the curse of sin upon earth and some personal suffering is the result of personal sin, the Bible consistently identifies *God* as the One who ultimately orders our afflictions. Whether our suffering is a direct consequence of our own sin, or the sins of others, the truth remains that the pain is meant to purify us and bring us back to God in a humble spirit of repentance.

If we are going to let suffering accomplish its deep work of sanctification in our hearts, then we must deal with the pain birthed by sin, which God uses to get our attention. Just as physical pain signals something wrong in the body, the pain of suffering alerts us to the presence of poison in our spiritual bloodstream. Pain, especially pain that comes from the chastening hand of God, is therefore beneficial to us. “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful,” says the writer of Hebrews, “yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Hebrews 12:11).

God’s holiness and justice forbid Him from looking the other way when His people sin. He loves us too much to let us remain content with our sinful ways. He is long-suffering and kind, but at the same time He is a God who judges sin and, therefore, will spank His own when they go astray in order to prevent their condemnation. However, we must submit to His discipline in order to fully profit from it. How do we do this? Lamentations 2 answers that question.

In Lamentations 2 we will see three movements that will help us process and deal with the severe discipline of the Lord in our lives, and perhaps others’ as well.

TEACHING OUTLINES

Option A

- I. A song of sorrow and despair (1:1–22)
- II. A song of sovereignty and divine discipline (2:1–22)
 - A. The discipline of the sovereign Lord recounted (2:1–10)
 1. The Lord’s destruction of Israel’s worldly pride (2:1–5)
 - a. He has cast from heaven to earth, the glory of Israel (v. 1)

- b. He has thrown down, the strongholds of the daughter of Judah (v. 2)
 - c. He has cut off all the strength of Israel (v. 3)
 - d. He has poured out His wrath like fire (v. 4)
 - e. He has destroyed its strongholds (v. 5)
 - 2. The Lord's destruction of Israel's religious pride (2:6–10)
 - a. He has violently treated His tabernacle (v. 6)
 - b. He has rejected His altar (v. 7)
 - c. He has destroyed Israel's confidence (vv. 8–10)
 - i. The wall (v. 8)
 - ii. The gates (v. 9a)
 - iii. The political leadership (v. 9b)
 - iv. The religious leadership (v. 9c)
 - v. The mourning of society (v. 10)
- B. The discipleship of the songwriter recorded (2:11–19)
 - 1. Compassion concerning the pain (2:11–12)
 - a. The compassionate sorrow expressed (v. 11)
 - b. The cruel suffering illustrated (v. 12)
 - 2. Clarity and realism concerning sin and its consequences (2:13–17)
 - a. You have been damaged beyond measure (v. 13)
 - b. You have been deceived by false prophets (v. 14)
 - c. You have been degraded by all and the truth is mocked (v. 15)
 - d. You have been despised by your enemies (v. 16)
 - e. You have been delivered up by Yahweh in faithfulness to His Word [thus there is an implicit hope concerning Yahweh's promises of restoration] (v. 17)
 - 3. Counsel concerning devastation and faith (2:18–19)
 - a. Pursue the Lord incessantly in your grief (v. 18)

- b. Pour out your heart to the Lord in prayer and petition (v. 19)
- C. The devastation and flickering faith of the suffering city recited before the LORD (2:20–22)
 - 1. The petition of faith, seeking mercy (v. 20a)
 - 2. The prayer of devastation, seeking mercy (vv. 20b–22)
 - a. Questions that reveal the horror, yet imply faith in the righteousness of God (v. 20b)
 - b. Confirmation of the Lord’s righteous judgment, which implies that the only hope is His mercy (vv. 21–22)
 - i. In the day of Your anger (v. 21)
 - ii. In the day of the LORD’s anger (v. 22)

Option B

- I. Jeremiah recognized God’s anger as being righteous (vv. 1–10)
 - A. God removed Judah’s glory (v. 1)
 - B. God humbled them (v. 2)
 - C. God withheld His protection (v. 3)
 - D. God treated Judah as an enemy (vv. 4–5)
 - E. God discarded His temple and punished the priests (vv. 6–7)
 - F. God destroyed the city wall and its gates (vv. 8–9)
 - G. God caused much grief (v. 10)
- II. Jeremiah realized the grief and suffering that sin brings on others (vv. 11–12)
- III. Jeremiah regretted sin and its painful consequences (vv. 13–17)
 - A. Sin devastates (v. 13)
 - B. Sin deceives (v. 14)
 - C. Sin degrades (vv. 15–16)
 - D. Sin delivers (v. 17)
- IV. Jeremiah requested mercy from God (vv. 18–22)
 - A. Their grief drove them to the compassion of God (vv. 18–19)

- B. Their hope rested in the faithfulness of God (v. 20)
- C. Their faith looked to the mercy of God (vv. 21–22)

EXPOSITION

VERSE 1

How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion / with a cloud in His anger!

Again this chapter begins with an exclamatory cry: “How” (“Alas,” “Ah” [cf. 1:1; 4:1]). “Ah, *Adonai* [the sovereign Master] has overshadowed with anger, the daughter of Zion” (author’s translation). At one time, Jerusalem had been the resting place of God’s glory cloud as it filled the temple (see 1 Kings 8:10–11). Now, however, Jeremiah sings a lament about God’s anger cloud enveloping “the daughter of Zion.”

He has cast from heaven to earth / the glory of Israel

The word translated *glory* here can also be rendered *beauty*. Israel’s beauty was once exalted to heaven as God’s glory cloud rested in the temple, but now a divine cloud of wrath has enveloped the city. As a result of God’s anger toward Judah’s sin, He has cast her from heaven to earth and has removed her glory. Perhaps, as Guest remarks: “The poet was haunted by the memory of a cloud of smoke enveloping Jerusalem, filling his lungs with the stench of burning walls and of burning flesh.”²⁷ The glorious city is now a pile of smoking ruins.

And has not remembered His footstool / in the day of His anger

The word *remember* speaks of more than just mental recollection, but rather of care and protection. His “footstool” is a reference to the Ark of the Covenant, particularly the mercy seat where God sat in judgment over sin. He has not remembered His mercy. The Sovereign Master has said, “I have had it with these rebellious people!” As Kaiser notes:

“The splendour of Israel” was her Temple (Isaiah 64:11; see also 60:7; 63:15) and her “ark of the covenant” (Psalm 78:60–61; cf. 1 Samuel 4:21–22). Likewise, God’s “footstool” was identified in 1 Chronicles 28:2 with the ark [Jeremiah 3:16 would

²⁷ John Guest. *Mastering the Old Testament: Jeremiah, Lamentations*. Vol. 17. (Nashville: Word, 1988).

occur later; cf. 2 Chronicles 35:3]. David said there: “I had in mine heart to build a house of rest for the ark of covenant of the Lord; that is for the footstool of our God.” The reason the ark was named His footstool is that the Lord was enthroned and seated between the cherubim (1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2; Psalm 80:1; 99:1, 5; 132:7), which were over the ark of the covenant; thus the Lord’s feet rested on the cover of the ark (mercy seat) and He spoke “from above the mercy seat” (Exodus 25:22; Numbers 7:89). So great then was the wrath and anger of God at the depth of Judah’s sin that He even abandoned His footstool in the day of His anger.²⁸

The “day of [God’s] anger” will be cited again in verse 22, to form brackets around this second poem. The reference to the Lord’s “anger” or “displeasure” is repeated in 2:3, 6, 21, 22. Divine anger is not some irrational emotion, but rather a “sign that the universe is not ultimately irrational, but moral, guided and accountable.”²⁹

VERSE 2

The Lord has swallowed up; He has not spared / all the habitations of Jacob

Again, *Adonai* is acknowledged as the One who has severely humbled Israel. The poet laments that God’s anger has essentially eaten Israel alive. Concerning the prophet’s description of the holy city, Charles Dyer writes, “The words Jeremiah used depict an image of God personally overseeing the dismantling of the city. [The Hebrew verb meaning] ‘to swallow up’ or ‘to engulf completely’ was used four times...perhaps to picture the fire of God’s judgment engulfing the city itself...God was the ‘one-man wrecking crew’ responsible for the rubble.”³⁰ “Habitations of Jacob” speak of the dwelling places or homes in Israel. The NET Bible reads: “The Lord destroyed mercilessly all the homes of Jacob’s descendants.”

In His wrath He has thrown down / the strongholds of the daughter of Judah

“In His fury/wrath He has broken down the fortifications of the daughter of Judah” (author’s translation). Observers might have protested that it was the Babylonians who

²⁸ Kaiser, 66.

²⁹ John L. Mackay, *Lamentations: A Mentor Commentary* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2008), 95.

³⁰ Charles H. Dyer in Roy B. Zuck and John F. Walvoord, eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1985), 1214.

had “thrown down the strongholds of the daughter of Judah,” but Jeremiah records that it was God’s sovereign work.

He has brought them down to the ground; He has profaned the kingdom and its princes

The NET Bible reads: “He knocked to the ground and humiliated the kingdom and its rulers.” The idea is of profaning something held sacred—the destruction of an idol. “The sovereign Master struck them to the ground; He has polluted the kingdom and its princes” (author’s translation). Israel’s society had become a filthy idol that God cut down and humiliated so that all could see that it had no intrinsic glory in itself. It is God who lowered them. Jeremiah had been informed of this judgment ahead of time, when he was first called by God: “See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:10).

VERSE 3

In fierce anger He has cut off / all the strength of Israel

The word *strength* here is literally *horn*. In 2 Chronicles 34:4, 7, the verb *cut off* is translated, “chopped down.” The “strength” of Israel was an idol that the Sovereign Lord chopped down in “burning anger.”

He has drawn back His right hand / from before the enemy

The “right hand” represented the hand of position and power. Again, the Sovereign One had withdrawn His power and protection and allowed “the enemy” to overpower Israel. Notably, Babylon is not explicitly mentioned as Israel’s enemy. Rather the focus is on the sovereign judgment and discipline of the Lord in withholding the protection He had once provided.

And He has burned Jacob like a flaming fire / consuming round about

The Lord's wrath is here pictured as a "flaming fire" that "devours all around." It was "Jacob/Israel" whom "He has burned." See Deuteronomy 4:24–28 for God's character as a consuming fire and jealous God in the context of a warning against idolatry.

VERSE 4

He has bent His bow like an enemy; He has set His right hand like an adversary

Here Jeremiah states explicitly what was implied in the previous verse. The Sovereign Lord treated His own chosen people like an enemy. It was "*His* bow" that was behind the Chaldeans' weapons. God's "right hand" not only allowed the enemy access to Israel and Jerusalem (v. 3), but His sovereign and all-powerful "hand" was set "like an adversary." In previous days, Yahweh's right hand had been a source of comfort, joy, and deliverance (Exodus 15:6, 12). Now it was like an adversary.

And slain all that were pleasant to the eye

The NLT renders this phrase: "His strength is used against them to kill their finest youth." The NET Bible: "Like a foe he killed everyone, even our strong young men." The NRSV: "He has killed all in whom we took pride." Lamentations 1:18 may shed more light on this expression. Again God is depicted as active in His punishment of the nation.

In the tent of the daughter of Zion / He has poured out His wrath like fire

The "tent of the daughter of Zion" refers to the place where they lived—Jerusalem. The city had become an object of divine "wrath" that God "poured out...like fire." This seems to emphasize what was stated in verse 3. The prophet Amos promised this in Amos 2:4–5: "Thus says the LORD, 'For three transgressions of Judah and for four I will not revoke its punishment; because they rejected the law of the LORD and have not kept His statutes; their lies also have led them astray, those after which their fathers walked. *So I will send fire upon Judah and it will consume the citadels of Jerusalem.*'"

VERSE 5

The Lord has become like an enemy

Note again the phrase “as an enemy” (v. 4; see also v. 3). The Sovereign Master had become hostile toward His covenant nation. Perhaps the preposition *like* implies fledgling faith that understands that God is not an *actual* enemy, but in His wisdom He has acted “like an enemy” for their ultimate good. God treated His people like He had treated the other nations. What a horrible thought! Yet God warned them of this. In both Leviticus and Deuteronomy, Moses warned the people of God’s judgment upon their disobedience, in effect saying, “If you disobey Me then I will chasten you. I will turn you out. I will judge you.”

He has swallowed up Israel; He has swallowed up all its palaces, He has destroyed its strongholds

“Swallowed up” or “devoured” was used in 2:2, twice here in verse 5, and in 2:8, 16 as well. It is used elsewhere to describe the actual ground opening up and devouring those under judgment. It speaks of God’s holy, consuming, and devouring punishment upon those who oppose Him (see Psalm 21:8–9).

“Strongholds” were also mentioned in verse 2. See also Psalm 89:38–46 for a parallel portion of a song dealing with God’s humiliation of Israel’s pride.

And multiplied in the daughter of Judah / mourning and moaning

The phrase “mourning and moaning” is an attempt in English to echo the poetic flair of the Hebrew here. “Sorrow and sadness” or “weeping and wailing” might also work.

The main point of verses 1–5 is that God—as Sovereign Master—has destroyed Israel’s worldly pride and thus the objects to their looking to insure their success. He cast from heaven to earth (v. 1); He profaned the kingdom and its princes (v. 2); He cut off all the strength of Israel (v. 3); He killed all those pleasant to the eye (v. 4); and He swallowed up all its palaces and destroyed its strongholds (v. 5). But God’s sovereign chastening did not stop there.

VERSE 6

And He has violently treated His tabernacle like a garden booth

Like a farmer who erects a temporary shelter in the field only to demolish and discard it after he is done with fieldwork, so Israel's Sovereign Master treated "His tabernacle," the temple (cf. Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible; see also Jeremiah 7:4, 8–15).

He has destroyed His appointed meeting place

Israel's religious and social life centered on Jerusalem, specifically the temple. But now Jeremiah sings of the destruction of that "appointed meeting place."

The LORD has caused to be forgotten / the appointed feast and Sabbath in Zion

As a result of the destruction of the temple, "the appointed feast and Sabbath in Zion" were "forgotten." Incredibly, Yahweh Himself "caused" it (see 1:15).

And He has despised king and priest / in the indignation of His anger

Yahweh had made a covenant with David concerning both "king" and the "house" of God in 2 Samuel 7:12–19, which would in turn house the "priest[s]." In the destruction of the temple, Jeremiah saw both "king and priest" rejected "in the indignation of His anger." Though certainly Jeremiah understood in some measure the enduring promises of the Davidic covenant and even the hope of the New Covenant, he still lamented the divine denunciation of king and priest in the destruction of the temple. Not even the leaders escaped God's judgment (again see Psalm 89:40).

VERSE 7

The Lord has rejected His altar, He has abandoned His sanctuary

The altar that was intended to bring a "soothing aroma" (Exodus 29:41), *Adonai* had "rejected." He had also "abandoned His sanctuary." See Ezekiel 10 and the vision of God's glory departing from the temple.

He has delivered into the hand of the enemy / the walls of her palaces

It was Israel's Sovereign Master who had shut the enemy's hand over "the walls of her palaces."

They have made a noise in the house of the LORD / as in the day of an appointed feast

Instead of Israel celebrating "in the house of Yahweh," it was her enemy making "noise in the house of Yahweh." The heathen enemies, who were not allowed anywhere near the temple, marched in, murdered the priests, destroyed everything in sight, and let loose shouts of triumph, which sounded like shouts of celebration from the people "as in the day of an appointed feast." This was a total reversal. Imagine the grief in God's heart as He destroyed His own temple in His righteous anger, including the altar, where millions of animals had been slaughtered to atone for the sins of His people. What a mockery it was to have pagans crying out in celebration and perhaps pagan worship in the house of the true and living God.

VERSE 8

The LORD determined to destroy / the wall of the daughter of Zion

It was Yahweh who had "determined to destroy the wall" in Jerusalem, not Nebuchadnezzar's army (see Jeremiah 52:13–14; 2 Kings 25:9–10).

He has stretched out a line, He has not restrained His hand from destroying

"He has stretched out a line" pictures the Lord as a Builder, but in this context as One who will deconstruct Jerusalem—"destroying" it (cf. 2 Kings 21:13; Isaiah 34:11; Amos 7:7 for similar terminology). Like a surveyor, God went into the city with His measuring line and decided to raze the entire property. Yahweh demolished Jerusalem.

And He has caused rampart and wall to lament; they have languished together

"Rampart and wall" are depicted as mourning. A *rampart* speaks of a fortified wall. Both the fortified walls and the rest of the walls have become weak, "languished." It was Yahweh who caused them to weep and become weak.

VERSE 9

Her gates have sunk into the ground, He has destroyed and broken her bars

Jerusalem's "gates" had become part of "the ground." God had "destroyed and broken" Jerusalem's protection.

Her king and her princes are among the nations

A blind and childless Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:7) and Johoiachin and his sons were "among the nations" (24:10–16).

The law is no more; also her prophets find / no vision from the LORD

With the temple gone and the priesthood decimated, "the law" was no more. Yes, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel all prophesied after the destruction of Jerusalem, but "her prophets"—those Jerusalem had formerly looked to—found "no vision from Yahweh." See Jeremiah 18:18 for the people's attitude prior to the destruction (cf. also Jeremiah 8). In addition to God destroying the city's defenses and judging her leaders, worst of all, He stopped speaking to them. As a mark of God's judgment, His revelation temporarily ceased.

VERSE 10

The elders of the daughter of Zion / sit on the ground, they are silent

"Elders" refers to those who were elders in age and may speak of those who were leaders in Israel. God brought much grief into their experience, as they too "are silent" and humiliated, sitting "on the ground." No one would honor them or listen anymore.

They have thrown dust on their heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth

These silenced elders are pictured as mourning, as evidenced by the "dust on their heads" and the "sackcloth." These are all images of great grief and suffering.

The virgins of Jerusalem / have bowed their heads to the ground

"Virgins" may reference those who accompanied the singers in temple worship (1:4). From elder to virgin, Jerusalem is in pain, grief, and mourning. Second Chronicles 36:17

describes this: “Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or infirm; He gave them all into his hand.” There was no preferential treatment, no partiality. God judged, and He judged them all. There was *much* grief.

VERSE 11

My eyes fail because of tears / my spirit is greatly troubled; my heart is poured out on the earth

Incredibly, instead of expressing feelings of vindication and self-righteous superiority after preaching for decades against Israel’s sin and idolatry and warning them of the coming judgment, God’s messenger, Jeremiah, was deeply affected by Judah’s sin. Here he communicates his great compassion and sorrow for his people. He tells the nation that his “eyes are worn out from weeping” (NET). His stomach was in knots (cf. NET), and his liver/bile was poured out on the ground (cf. ESV). “My eyes fail because of tears” means he cried all the time. “My spirit is greatly troubled” means he grieved not only outwardly in tears, but inside as well. These phrases describe emotional exhaustion. Jeremiah was emotionally wiped out, expressing his own sickness and sorrow because of the horrific consequences of sin (see also Jeremiah 8:18; 9:1; 13:17; 14:17; Lamentations 3:48–49).

As Kaiser aptly writes:

No one had laboured longer and harder to reverse the destruction-bound forces within the Judean society than God’s messenger, Jeremiah. But now that the worst had happened he did not abandon his calloused audience with a weary wave of the hand and a flippant rebuff: “Well, I told you it would happen.” God’s love and personal regard for this people can be seen in His sending Jeremiah to express his grief at the hurt that came upon his fellow-citizens, nation, and Temple.

“Weep with those who weep”; and weep he did. He mourned until he was worn out and exhausted from weeping. The pain he genuinely felt had enraged his bowels

and liver (the organ which in that culture was felt to be the center of intense emotion; in this context, pain).³¹

Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, when little ones and infants faint / in the streets of the city

The reason for Jeremiah's broken heart is stated and an illustration given. The "destruction [brokenness] of the daughter of my people" is why his eyes failed with tears, his stomach churned, and his inner man was in utter turmoil.

The destruction was horrifically illustrated by the "little ones"—children and even "infants" (nursing infants)—who were "faint in the streets of the city." Since Nebuchadnezzar had cut off the supply lines, there was no food except what was already in the city and mothers were forced to produce nourishment for their infants without having ample nourishment for themselves. Evidently even nursing babies found no comfort or nourishment at their mothers' breasts.³² The helpless of society had to bear the temporal consequences of their parents' sin. Jerusalem was in a horrible, horrible state. Thus Jeremiah expressed his compassionate sorrow and wept profoundly with the weeping city.

VERSE 12

They say to their mothers, "Where is grain and wine?" As they faint like a wounded man / in the streets of the city

To further portray the scene, Jeremiah goes on to record a poetic conversation between children and their mothers. "Grain and wine" would be the staples of that society (Deuteronomy 11:14). These children were starving to death, losing consciousness "like a wounded man in the streets of the city."

As their life is poured out / on their mothers' bosom

As their helpless mothers held their precious babies, "their life [was] poured out on their mothers' bosom." The NET Bible reads: "They die slowly in their mothers' arms." Think

³¹ Kaiser, 70.

³² Kaiser, 70.

of the grief in these mothers' hearts—they had no means to fulfill the nurturing instinct God had placed within them. What suffering! This is a painful example of the extent of the cruelty of suffering sin brings. As Harrison writes: “This pathetic and tragic scene stands in stark contrast to the ideal of happy, carefree children playing in the streets of Jerusalem, a situation which is promised when the nation is restored (Zechariah 8:5).”³³ As Guest writes: “To see a child suffer was more than he could take. Now he understood, perhaps even thanked God for forbidding him to marry and to procreate.”³⁴

Rather than smugly offering an “I told you so,” Jeremiah first offered *compassion concerning the pain*.

VERSE 13

***How shall I admonish you? To what shall I compare you, O daughter of Jerusalem?
To what shall I liken you as I comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion?***

Jeremiah here acknowledges the inadequacy of words to fully address Israel's pain and suffering, implying that testimony and comfort can only ultimately come from One greater than him. Comparisons of grief and words of comfort on a human level fall short. The prophet himself is so overcome with grief that he has nothing left to offer to them.

For your ruin is as vast as the sea; who can heal you?

The implied answer has to be, “No one save God Himself.” No man can heal a heart and soul that has experienced such loss. But God is able to heal a heart that has experienced this kind of grief. Psalm 147:3 says of God, “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”

In speaking these words, Jeremiah reveals compassion, clarity, and realism concerning sin's consequences. From a human perspective, Israel has been damaged beyond measure. The prophet proceeds in verses 14–17 to realistically catalog some of the causes and the consequences and damage.

³³ R. K. Harrison, *Jeremiah & Lamentations* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973), 218.

³⁴ Guest, John, *Mastering the Old Testament: Jeremiah, Lamentations*, vol. 17 (Nashville, TN: Word, 1988), 366–67.

VERSE 14

Your prophets have seen for you / false and foolish visions

The terms *false* and *foolish* are literally “emptiness” and “whitewash.”³⁵ After clearly and genuinely showing compassion and acknowledging that words cannot fully describe Israel’s suffering, the prophet goes on to clarify some of the issues that led to her devastation. Judah’s “prophets” taught “emptiness and whitewash.” They spoke vain messages that made things look better than they really were; they spoke an “uplifting” message void of sin and judgment (see Jeremiah 5:31; 6:13–14; 14:13–17; 23:11, 16–17, 30–40; 27:14–15).

And they have not exposed your iniquity / so as to restore you from captivity

Jeremiah points out here that Israel’s prophets—those who called themselves the spokesmen of God—had not “exposed” their “guilt so as to turn them from captivity” (author’s translation). Their message was one of peace and blessing. It was a positive message that did not expose sin or guilt. Consequently, it did not really help those who listened because it was not faithful to God.

In contrast, Jeremiah was faithful to pronounce God’s message and paid the price for it. He was beaten and thrown into prison, where he endured the indescribable pain of loneliness that often characterizes the life of a true prophet. He warned the people of God’s judgment, but the other prophets did not. Instead, the false prophets contradicted God’s promise to give Judah into the hands of the king of Babylon by wrongly promising peace. “For from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for gain, and from the prophet even to the priest everyone deals falsely. They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ but there is no peace” (Jeremiah 6:13–14). But Jeremiah did not preach peace. He cried, “War! War! God is coming to judge you.” As a result, God lamented, “They healed the brokenness of My people superficially” (8:11).

³⁵ Kaiser, 71.

But they have seen for you false and misleading oracles

See Jeremiah 28 (cf. 29:8–9; 37:19; Ezekiel 13:1–16; Micah 2:11; 3:5–7). It is false hope to avoid the issue of sin and preach only peace and blessing.

Jeremiah reminds his suffering people that they were deceived by false prophets who did not expose sin, guilt, or error. Rather, these men actually coddled and tacitly promoted the sin that led to Israel’s judgment.

VERSE 15

All who pass along the way / clap their hands in derision at you

“All who pass along the way” refer to those non-Israelites who see the city in its now wretched condition. They give it a mocking ovation. If Judah’s own grief weren’t enough, we now see that her enemies added to the pain by heaping insult upon injury. Ezekiel 25:6–7 says this about Ammon: “Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet and rejoiced with all the scorn of your soul against the land of Israel, therefore, behold, I have stretched out My hand against you...” (see also 2 Chronicles 7:21–22).

They hiss and shake their heads / at the daughter of Jerusalem

Hiss can be translated “whistle” as well. Sin had not led to fulfillment but rather degradation, mockery, and disgust (see 1 Kings 9:6–8; Psalm 22:7; 44:14–15; and Jeremiah 19:8).

“Is this the city of which they said, ‘The perfection of beauty, a joy to all the earth?’”

Psalm 48:2 says, “Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion in the far north, the city of the great King.” And Psalm 50:2 says, “Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shone forth.” Jeremiah reminds suffering Jerusalem that because she listened to false prophets and bland prophecies that did not expose sin, the rest of the world now mocks the truth of God. It is too often true that hardened sinners eagerly wait for the demise of the righteous (Psalm 22:7–8).

VERSE 16

All your enemies / have opened their mouths wide against you

The ESV renders this phrase: “All your enemies rail against you” (see Psalm 22:13; 35:21; Lamentations 3:46).

They hiss and gnash their teeth

The enemies also deride and mock with hissing (whistling). Psalm 36:16 says, “Like godless jesters at a feast, they gnashed at me with their teeth.” Psalm 37:12 says, “The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes at him with his teeth.” There is both mockery and anger in their whistling, laughing, and vicious words.

They say, “We have swallowed her up! Surely this is the day for which we waited; we have reached it, we have seen it”

Babylon and the enemy coalition believe they have “swallowed” Judah and Jerusalem. But they fail to recognize that they were only tools in the hand of a sovereign and holy God (cf. 2:2, 5, 8—“swallowed”; see also Jeremiah 51:34).

VERSE 17

The LORD has done what He purposed; He has accomplished His word / which He commanded from days of old

This verse is the culmination of the chapter up to this point. Forty times in the first ten verses, God is referenced in relation to Israel’s humiliation.³⁶ This verse then succinctly attributes what has happened to the sovereign faithfulness of the LORD. Jeremiah reminds Jerusalem that Yahweh, the covenant-keeping One, was simply being faithful to His Word (the covenant curses promised in Leviticus 26:14–46 and Deuteronomy 38:15–68 as well as the commands found in Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Jeremiah, where specific warnings were also given as to what would happen if they committed spiritual adultery with false gods). The point is that it is God who takes responsibility for Israel’s

³⁶ Kaiser, 63.

calamity. The people of God were indeed responsible for their own sin, but it is God's purpose that is accomplished in the end.

Zechariah 1:6 may be a reference to what follows in 2:18–19 after this truth was fully recognized and embraced.

He has thrown down without sparing, and He has caused the enemy to rejoice over you

The verb “thrown down” or “tear down” was used in verse 2 (cf. also Jeremiah 45:4). See Psalm 89:42 for the enemy rejoicing.

He has exalted the might of your adversaries

The LORD exalted “the horn” of Israel's adversaries while cutting off Israel's (cf. v. 3).

The believing remnant, listening to Jeremiah's song of sorrow, would remember the covenant faithfulness of Yahweh, the implication being that if Yahweh was faithful in judgment, there is hope of His faithful restoration of all those who call upon Him in faith (cf. Leviticus 26:44–45; Deuteronomy 4:23–31; 30:1–14).

So in verses 18–19, Jeremiah counsels Israel concerning their devastation and the need for faith. In essence, he calls God's people to seek God!

VERSE 18

Their heart cried out to the Lord, “O wall of the daughter of Zion”

Some have taken verses 18–19 as Judah's enemies' mocking taunt. It would seem better, considering the larger flow of thought, to see this as Jeremiah's counsel concerning how Israel should respond to God's sovereign discipline.

The phrase “Their heart cried out to *Adonai*” may mean that his audience had finally received the prophet's message and turned in faith to the Sovereign Master. Modern English translations render this first sentence, with some poetic license, as an imperative—“Cry out from your heart to the Lord, O wall of Daughter Zion!” (NET). The Bible in Basic English renders it: “Let your cry go up to the Lord: O wall of the daughter of Zion.” The “wall of the daughter of Zion” may be a poetic way of describing all those who had been devastated by the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. Or it could be in

apposition to *Adonai*—a poetic way of telling the daughter of Zion that the Lord is her true wall/protection.

It seems best to understand Jeremiah as calling on Israel to cry out to the Sovereign One in their grief.

“Let your tears run down like a river day and night; give yourself no relief, let your eyes have no rest”

The poet counsels a humiliated and chastened nation to grieve mightily—“day and night,” without “relief.” The last phrase is literally, “Let not the daughter of thine eye stand still” (YLT). “Don’t stop grieving over sin and its consequences before the Lord,” seems to be the idea. Jeremiah wasn’t advocating endless grief; rather he was warning against letting the grief turn to numbness before fully and completely turning to the Lord, as the next verse indicates. He alone is sovereign; He alone can help.

VERSE 19

“Arise, cry aloud in the night / at the beginning of the night watches”

The “beginning of the night watches” would be sunset–10 p.m.; 10 p.m.–2 a.m.; 2 a.m.–6 a.m.³⁷ In essence, Jeremiah was calling the people to pray throughout the night. They were to incessantly cry out to God for compassion, for He is “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness” (Psalm 103:8). This is the only truly helpful response to grief, pain, suffering, and sorrow.

“Pour out your heart like water / before the presence of the Lord”

In Psalm 62:7–8, the psalmist wrote: “On God my salvation and my glory rest; the rock of my strength, my refuge is in God. Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.” Jeremiah here exhorts both prayer and faith “before the face of *Adonai*,” the Sovereign Master (see the example of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:15; see also Psalm 142:1–2).

³⁷ Theo Laetsch. *Jeremiah* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1952), 386.

In essence, Jeremiah's counsel is: "Go to the Lord; Go to the Lord; Go to the Lord." The thought is akin to Jacob's persistent prayer in Genesis 32:46: "I will not let You go..."

"Lift up your hands to Him / for the life of your little ones / who are faint because of hunger / at the head of every street"

The lifting up of "hands to Him" speaks of prayer, praise, and supplication in the Psalms (28:2; 63:4; 134:2; 141:2). Here the idea of supplication seems to be the strongest. See Isaiah 51:17–20 for the phrase "at the head of every street" in the context of judgment and famine.

The discipleship of the songwriter Jeremiah was one of compassion; clarity and realism concerning sin and its consequences; and counsel to pursue the Lord fully in the midst of grief.

The first movement of chapter 2 recounts the discipline of the Lord. Then the discipleship of the poet is recorded in verses 11–19. In verses 20–22, the third movement in the poem, Jerusalem responds in prayer to the counsel of Jeremiah.

VERSE 20

See, O LORD, and look!

The plea "See, O Yahweh" once again surfaces, as in 1:9, 11, 20. This exact phrase, "See, O LORD, and look," was also used in 1:11. It is a call for the merciful gaze of Yahweh to be fixed once more upon His covenant people. First Chronicles 21:15 records the merciful "look" of Yahweh and His relenting care for His own who are experiencing calamity.

At its heart, this is a petition of faith, seeking the mercy of the only One who can truly rescue the destitute, bereft of hope, apart from the mercy of God.

With whom have You dealt thus?

Dealt speaks of dealing with one in severity. As Kaiser notes: "The cry is not one of reproach but a reminder that the incomprehensible aspect of this whole affair is that the

Lord had not done this to a pagan nation but to the people and nation of promise.”³⁸

Perhaps the implicit cry is made explicit by the words of Isaiah 64:8–12:

But now, O LORD, You are our Father, we are the clay, and You our potter; and all of us are the work of Your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, O LORD, nor remember iniquity forever; behold, look now, all of us are Your people. Your holy cities have become a wilderness, Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers praised You, has been burned by fire; and all our precious things have become a ruin. Will You restrain Yourself at these things, O LORD? Will You keep silent and afflict us beyond measure?

Judah is saying, “Look at us. Look at *who* You have done this to. You have done this to *Your* people.” What were they doing? They were bringing to their minds the fact that God is a covenant keeper. What sliver of faith that remained reached toward the faithfulness of God. They were admitting, “We don’t have anything else to cling to. All is destroyed. Our children have died. We have nothing except God.” The next question details the horror of the circumstances but implies faith in Yahweh’s compassion.

Should women eat their offspring, the little ones who were born healthy?

See the grotesque prophecies of Leviticus 26:29 and especially Deuteronomy 28:53–57 (cf. also Jeremiah 19:9). In light of these warnings, we must view the suffering the people of God were experiencing as a testimony of God’s faithfulness to His own Word. Also, there is an appeal to both the compassion and righteousness of God here, which again implies a measure of faith by the supplicant, as they in essence remind God of the covenant He made with Abraham.

Should priest and prophet be slain / in the sanctuary of the Lord?

Jerusalem was heeding Jeremiah’s counsel and pouring out their heart to the Lord—the tragedy, the pain, the horror. No, under normal circumstances “priest and prophet” should not be slain “in the sanctuary of the Lord.” But note the words of Ezekiel 9:4–11.

³⁸ Kaiser, 73.

Jerusalem personified asks her questions of the Lord, questions that reveal the horror of her plight yet demonstrate faith in the righteousness and compassion of God.

VERSE 21

On the ground in the streets / lie young and old; my virgins and my young men / have fallen by the sword

Second Chronicles 36:17 says, “Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or infirm; He gave them all into his hand.” The Babylonians waited eighteen months outside the walls of Jerusalem, until the city was starving and the walls could be breached. The waiting no doubt served to intensify their rage.

You have slain them in the day of Your anger, You have slaughtered, not sparing

But rather than blaming the Chaldeans, the remnant personified acknowledges that it was God’s “anger” that brought about this slaughter (see 3:43). God is the One who had done this in the day of His anger. This is a prayer of brutal honesty but not utter faithlessness. Again, if God is sovereign over the misery, then He alone can grant mercy.

VERSE 22

You called as in the day of an appointed feast / my terrors on every side

This is an acknowledgement that God used human agents in His severe punishment. He “called as in the day of an appointed feast.” Jerusalem was the feast, and the Chaldeans became Judah’s “terrors on every side.” There was no escaping the terror. “There had been as much carnage in the city as there was on feast days when the priests slew large quantities of sacrificial animals.”³⁹

³⁹ Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible.

And there was no one who escaped or survived / in the day of the LORD's anger

The inescapability of God's judgment is graphically pictured in Amos 9:1–4. Certainly there were individual survivors in Jerusalem and elsewhere, but no social or age strata of society escaped judgment. As well, we can be assured in God's sovereignty that “no one” marked for death escaped “in the day of the LORD's anger” (again see Ezekiel 9:4).

Those whom I bore and reared, my enemy annihilated them

The prayer ends with a lament over the death of the children at the hands of the “enemy.” Perhaps this is an acknowledgement that because of her sins, Judah had become Yahweh's “enemy.” Or else it speaks directly of the Babylonians. Either way, Jerusalem tells the Lord of the loss of her children.

Thus *the song of sovereignty and divine discipline* concludes with tears rather than with a storybook ending of happiness. Yes, the people have recounted the discipline of the Sovereign Lord, heard the discipleship of the songwriter, and poured out their hearts in both faith and devastation, but the pain of loss is still present. Yet these are the steps to dealing with grief and despair.

INSIGHTS FOR COUNSELING

God is love. He would never intentionally bring pain and suffering into my life. Therefore the grief that I experience is from some impersonal force—like fate—something random and out of control. It certainly cannot be from God. He is too good to let me suffer.

So reason many professing Christians.

But the Bible clearly teaches that God is both infinitely good *and* in control of all creation—even *the evil in the world*. Though He is not the author of evil, He is Ruler over it, as the book of Job illustrates. And because God is in control of all things, we can have hope and turn to Him for mercy and grace in the face of overwhelming circumstances.

Jeremiah did not stop with simply recognizing that the Lord was the One who was behind Judah's horrifying circumstances. To simply say, “God did this,” and then stop would leave God's people to dangle over the precipice of bitterness and despair. It would inevitably lead to hardness of heart and hopelessness. Instead, as pastor-poet, Jeremiah

moved on to shepherd the severely disciplined nation and thus minister a measure of comfort and hope to them.

We, like Jeremiah, have to live with the temporal consequences of sin in a fallen world. But how do we deal with the devastation? We must learn to exercise biblical faith to see our painful circumstances as God's discipline or training rather than as cards dealt out by blind fate (Hebrews 12:5–11).

However, *while* we are in the valley of affliction, we don't always see it this way. When we feel God's heavy hand upon us and day by day face the grievous consequences of our sins, we feel His anger. Deep down we know that He is not pleased. If our chastening is the result of our sin, then we are right to think this way. And it would be wrong for us to dismiss suffering and affliction as an impersonal event that comes upon us without careful thought from God.

When we think about the anger of God, however, we must not equate it with our own expressions of this emotion. Our anger is almost always sinful and is usually sudden or volcanic in nature. But God's anger is different. It is never out of control. Walter Kaiser describes it this way:

God's anger is never explosive, unreasonable or unexplainable. It is rather His firm expression of real displeasure with our wickedness and sin. Even in God it is never a force or a ruling passion; rather, it is always an instrument of His will. And His anger has not, thereby, shut off his compassion to us (Psalm 77:9). God's anger marks the end of indifference. He cannot and will not remain neutral and impartial in the presence of continued sin.⁴⁰

God's anger "marks the end of indifference." It marks the end of His patience with sinners, and ironically, it also signals the opening of the door to experiencing His mercy. This is the discipleship of Jeremiah—who spoke with compassion yet clarity and realism and counseled his people toward a relentless pursuit of the Lord through their pain. Chapter 2 is rich with biblical principles that move believers to recite the devastation sin has wrought in their lives, even as they seek God and call upon Him with chastened words of faith.

⁴⁰ Kaiser, 62.

1. When faced with dreadful consequences in life, we tend to dwell on our circumstances and blame the people around us—failing to see our situation as ultimately coming from the hand of God (Lamentations 2:1–10).

If we focus on the human agent of our pain, or on our circumstances, there is no hope for mercy and relief. But if we see our situation in life as from God’s hand, we can run to Him with our pain and always have the hope of knowing that He turns His attentive ear to those who tremble at His Word (Isaiah 66:2). It is significant to note that Jeremiah does not even mention the human agents of Jerusalem’s destruction. Instead he focuses on the Lord’s sovereign chastening and displeasure (Romans 5:3–5; 8:28–29).

2. Recognizing God’s sovereignty in our circumstances ought to foster genuine humility (Lamentations 2:19).

He gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). Sadly, some who recognize God’s sovereign discipline harden their hearts to it and get angry with Him and turn away—either in outright rebellion (Jeremiah 44:15–17) or in hopelessness and quiet stubbornness of heart (18:11–12; Ezekiel 37:11). But note David’s trust in the sovereign hand of Yahweh, even when wielded in discipline in 1 Chronicles 21:9–13. It is fitting for this trust to produce honest crying out to God for help and hope.

3. Good counsel will compassionately but realistically point out the truth about sin, guilt, deception, truth, and error (Lamentations 2:13–17).

We must not surround ourselves with counselors or preachers who craft their words to build up our “self-esteem.” When we do this, we may feel better superficially, but the deepest needs of our hearts are not addressed (Jeremiah 6:13–14). In order for the heart to be healed, some pain must be inflicted through recognition of the hard truth concerning our sin. (For another example, see Nathan’s confrontation of David in 2 Samuel 12:1–7.) The Great Physician and lover of our soul—Jesus—uses His sometimes-painful Word to wound in order that He might heal.

4. We need to be realistic about sin and its consequences and then incessantly cry out to the Lord in our grief (Lamentations 2:18–22).

This is not our natural tendency, but His mercy is our only hope. His faithfulness is our only encouragement. Denying our guilt will get us nowhere except further from God. Like David, we must conclude and pray, “Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight” (Psalm 51:1–4). True hope is only found in God as we cry out to Him (Psalm 42:1–11).

5. When we are afflicted for our sins, we oftentimes feel that God is silent because He is silent (Lamentations 2:9).

And He is using that silence to bring us to a place of brokenness and repentance so that we will cry out to Him and be restored to fellowship. Affliction gets our attention so that we will hear again the voice of the Lord speaking to us through His Word (Isaiah 59:1–2).

6. If we are going to learn to respond properly to the discipline God brings into our lives, we must get to the point of realizing that God’s anger is righteous (Lamentations 2:17).

It is right for God to discipline us. It is right for Him to not let us get away with our sin. We must think correctly about God’s right to chasten us when we stray from His Word (Psalm 119:7, 75, 137; 145:17).

7. We must be careful that our grief does not become self-centered (Lamentations 2:11–12).

When we go through deep suffering, the temptation is to think primarily of ourselves. However, we need to realize that our sin brings suffering on other people as well. Our sin affects everyone around us. Perhaps the most vivid illustration of this principle beyond the book of Lamentations is the story of Achan, whose entire family was stoned for his disobedience (Joshua 7). One person’s sin can bring grief into the lives of many.

8. One of the chief purposes of divine discipline is to increase our awareness of the seriousness of sin (Lamentations 2:13–17).

The discipline of God is meant to produce painful regret over sin in order to deter us from repeating our foolish rebellion. Proverbs 13:15 honestly declares, “The way of the unfaithful is hard” (NKJV). Therefore, we must resist the temptation to wish that God would remove the pain *before* His sanctifying work within us is fully accomplished.

9. Sin does not deliver the promises that it claims (Lamentations 2:10).

Rather it brings only pain and misery with its rebellion. Its pleasure is but for a moment. Moses knew this; therefore he did not consider the passing pleasures of Egypt to be ultimately worthwhile (Hebrews 11:25). Sin delivers hardship, misery, pain, and ultimately death (James 1:13–16).

10. If God has brought grievous things into your life, then cry (Lamentations 1:2; 2:19).

There are people who still live in the pain of the past (perhaps over the death of someone dear) because they have never grieved. In the pride of their so-called strength, they have never allowed themselves to be humbled to the point of tears. Jeremiah essentially says, “If God has brought pain into your life, don’t be angry and bitter toward Him. Instead cry out to Him. Grieve. Cry rivers of tears before Him.” Unfortunately, too many people view tears as a sign of weakness, and that pride will not allow them to be brought to tears of brokenness. However, God wants us to respond to our grief in such a way that we are emptied of self and thereby made ready to be filled with His strength. Like Judah, we must allow our grief to drive us to the compassion of God (Psalm 147:3; 116:5).

11. God uses suffering and affliction to bring us to a place of Godward acceptance (2:17–19).

When we have nothing but God, we have everything we need. If we possess nothing of earthly value but know God through Jesus Christ, we possess everything. We must let our hope rest in the faithfulness and sufficiency of God (Psalm 73:25–26; Philippians 3:7–8). The mercy of God is what we must look to when He is chastening us for our unfaithfulness to Him. We must cry out to Him for mercy. We must tell Him that we

know we don't deserve to be treated any better. We must thank Him for the mercy that belongs to us when we belong to Christ (Ephesians 2:4–6).

HOMEWORK FOR COUNSELING

(You are encouraged to photocopy homework pages for use in personal counseling.)

PART 1: THINKING RIGHTLY ABOUT SIN AND ABOUT GOD

1. List the specific ways that God has humbled you in your current situation.
2. In what ways have you been tempted to blame others instead of seeing your present circumstances as being from the hand of a sovereign God?
3. Lamentations exhorts the sufferer to persistently cry out to God for mercy. What other avenues of comfort and relief do you find yourself turning to other than God (for example, Internet research, television, alcohol, food, medication, self-pity, etc.)?
4. Psalm 102 is a wonderful example of crying out to God in times of affliction. Read the psalm, and list (a) the circumstances the psalmist is facing, (b) the emotions he expresses, (c) his right and wrong thoughts concerning God, (d) specific requests made to God, and (e) lessons the psalmist learned or conclusions he reached as a result of his suffering.
5. Write out your own prayer acknowledging God's sovereignty over your current situation, confessing any known sin and asking Him to intervene with mercy—on His terms, as He decides, rather than according to your own expectations.

PART 2: HOPING IN JESUS

Where do the truths found in Lamentations 2 bring us? To the same place chapter 1 led—hope in Jesus. Why? Apart from Jesus there is no escape from the anger of God. We are sinners. We have gone our own way, against God's authority and in rebellion against His Word. We were once "children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). Before conversion we were objects of the wrath of God, but in Christ we have become His children by faith. Why?

“God displayed [Jesus] publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith” (Romans 3:24). This means that Jesus’ death fully satisfied the righteous anger of God. This is good news! Jesus Christ, the Son of God, went to the cross to absorb the anger of God so that you and I would not have to. If you are not hoping in Jesus, then there is no hope for you. There is no escape from God’s anger if you are not trusting in Jesus, the only One who can protect you from the righteous wrath of God. Jesus willingly became the object of God’s wrath so that we would no longer have to be. Paul says in Romans 5:9, “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.”

You and I are sinners and therefore deserve the wrath of God to be unleashed upon us in unlimited ways. However, in His mercy, He chose to pour out His righteous anger on His blameless Son instead of on us. As Jesus hung on the cross, our sins were laid upon Him and He was put to death in our place. Is this the Jesus you are hoping in? Is this the Jesus you are resting in? If it isn’t, then you’ve got the wrong Jesus. On the other hand, if you are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as the One who bore the penalty of your sin before a holy God, then you have already been released from the anger of God.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17–21.

1. What is continuously taking place in the person who is a new creature in Christ?
2. What does it mean that God has reconciled believers to Himself through Christ?
3. Explain the wondrous exchange mentioned in verse 21.
4. Write your own paraphrase of verse 21 in the first person (I, me, my).

As believers in Christ, it is significant to realize that although the eternal judgment for our sins has already been fully taken from us by the sacrifice of Jesus, the temporal consequences of our sin often remain. As His children, God lovingly disciplines us when we sin by allowing us to suffer the consequences of our sin. He does this in order to train us to live in righteousness for His glory (Hebrews 12:10–11; 2 Timothy 3:16–17).

STUDY GUIDE

CHAPTER 1

Lamentations 1:1–22

1. Read 2 Kings 25:1–21. Discuss the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.
2. Read Jeremiah 25:1–14. Why did God judge Judah with seventy years of captivity? What are some of the sin causes?
3. Read Jeremiah 2:29–30; 5:3–6; 5:20–25; 6:10. What was Judah's attitude toward God's Word and His correction? What words would you use to describe your attitude toward the preaching of God's Word? Do you faithfully sit under the consistent preaching of the Bible?
4. Read Hebrews 12:3–11. Why does God discipline His children? What is His intended purpose in the suffering He ordains? Compare with James 1:2–4. How submissive are you to God's discipline? Are you willingly trained by it, or do you bemoan it?
5. Read Psalm 34:18 and Isaiah 66:2. What can we be assured of in the midst of our affliction?
6. How does your thinking need to change about sin and about God?
7. Read the following Scriptures: 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24–25; 3:18; Hebrews 10:19–25; 1 John 1:8–2:2. How did the atoning work of Jesus on the cross open the way to God? Are you trusting in Him alone to make you right with God? Take time in prayer to confess this and thank God for the forgiveness that belongs to those who trust in Christ.
8. Who do you know that is going through a time of intense grief and suffering? What can you do this week to show that person that someone cares? How can you redirect his or her focus to God? If, to your knowledge, the grief and suffering is caused by sin, in what ways can you exhort him or her to repent and return to the Lord?

CHAPTER 2

Lamentations 2:1–22

1. Read 2 Chronicles 36:1–21. Discuss the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Compare this historical account with what James 1:14–15 teaches about the “process” of sin.
2. Look up the following Scriptures. Chart what they teach concerning the anger of God. What provokes God’s anger? What attributes of God are revealed?
Exodus 32:1–10
Numbers 16:1–50
Psalm 7:11
Jeremiah 25:15–29
John 3:36
Revelation 19:12–15
3. How does your thinking need to change about sin and about God? Pray Psalm 32 back to God, confessing specific sins as needed and thanking God for His forgiveness.
4. Meditate on Psalm 77. Especially note the feelings of grief and despair revealed in verses 7–10. In light of these, what is the significance of the psalmist’s decision in verse 11?
5. Look up the following Scriptures. What relationship does Jesus have to the anger of God the Father?
John 8:11
Matthew 26:36–46
Romans 3:25–26
Romans 5:6–10
1 Thessalonians 1:10
6. Who do you know that is going through a time of intense grief and suffering? What can you do this week to show that person that someone cares? How can you

redirect his or her focus to God? If, to your knowledge, the grief and suffering is caused by sin, in what ways can you exhort him or her to repent and return to the Lord?

7. Who do you know that is an unbeliever and therefore remains under the wrath of God? How can you reach out to them with the good news that Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath?