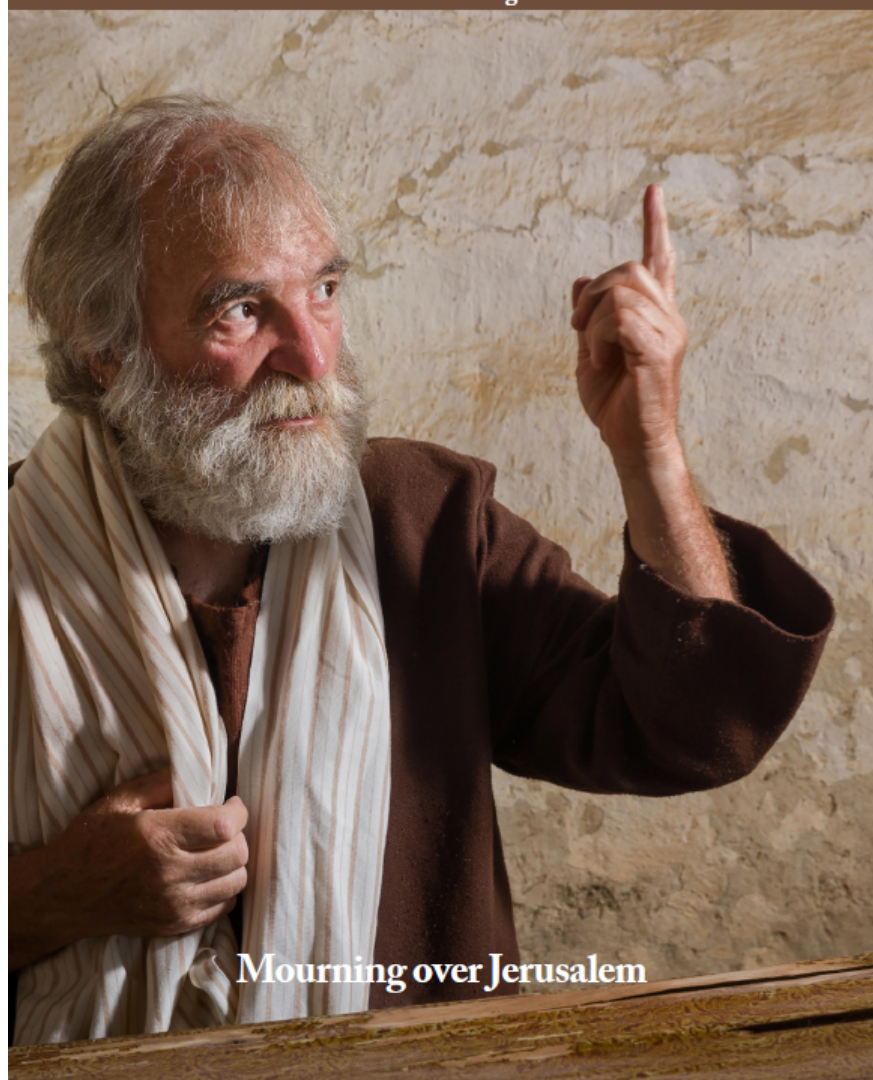


Lamentations Explained & Applied 25

Ger de Koning



Mourning over Jerusalem

The Book of Lamentations

The Book of Lamentations

Mourning over Jerusalem

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Dutch version:

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Contents

Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible	9
Old Testament	9
New Testament	10
Explanation of general format	11
The book of Lamentations	12
Introduction	12
Lamentations 1	19
Introduction	19
Lam 1:1-3 City and Land in Deep Sorrow	19
Lam 1:4-6 The City, Formerly Full of Feast and Joy	21
Lam 1:7-8 Reflection	24
Lam 1:9-11 The Present Condition as a Lament to God	25
Lam 1:12-14 The LORD Has Done It, For the Sake of Sin	26
Lam 1:15-17 The People of Jerusalem	29
Lam 1:18-19 Reflection	30
Lam 1:20-22 Prayer	31
Lamentations 2	34
Introduction	34
Lam 2:1-9 Jerusalem Destroyed – the Lord Has Done It	34
Lam 2:10-12 Response of Some Survivors	40
Lam 2:13-17 Jeremiah Laments Jerusalem	41
Lam 2:18-19 Crying Out to the LORD	45
Lam 2:20-22 The LORD Is Called Upon	46
Lamentations 3	49
Lam 3:1-18 The Man Who Has Seen Affliction	49
Lam 3:19-21 Prayer	54
Lam 3:22-33 Insights and Perspectives	55
Lam 3:34-39 The Lord Sees Evil	59
Lam 3:40-45 Prayer of the People	61

Lam 3:46-54 Renewed Complaints	62
Lam 3:55-66 Prayer for Deliverance	63
Lamentations 4	66
Introduction	66
Lam 4:1-10 Past and Present	66
Lam 4:11-16 Confession of the Cause of Affliction	69
Lam 4:17-20 Lamentation About Dashed Hope	71
Lam 4:21-22 Edom and Zion	72
Lamentations 5	74
Introduction	74
Lam 5:1 Call to the LORD to Remember	74
Lam 5:2-18 Description of the Affliction	74
Lam 5:19-22 Supplication for Restoration	77
Other Publications	80

Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen – Genesis

Exo – Exodus

Lev – Leviticus

Num – Numbers

Deu – Deuteronomy

Jos – Joshua

Jdg – Judges

Rth – Ruth

1Sam – First Samuel

2Sam – Second Samuel

1Kgs – First Kings

2Kgs – Second Kings

1Chr – First Chronicles

2Chr – Second Chronicles

Ezra – Ezra

Neh – Nehemiah

Est – Esther

Job – Job

Psa – Psalms

Pro – Proverbs

Ecc – Ecclesiastes

Song – Song of Songs

Isa – Isaiah

Jer – Jeremiah

Lam – Lamentations

Eze – Ezekiel

Dan – Daniel

Hos – Hosea

Joel – Joel

Amos – Amos

Oba – Obadiah

Jona – Jonah

Mic – Micah
Nah – Nahum
Hab – Habakkuk
Zep – Zephaniah
Hag – Haggai
Zec – Zechariah
Mal – Malachi

New Testament

Mt – Gospel of Matthew
Mk – Gospel of Mark
Lk – Gospel of Luke
Jn – Gospel of John
Acts – Acts of the Apostles
Rom – Letter to the Romans
1Cor – First Letter to the Corinthians
2Cor – Second Letter to the Corinthians
Gal – Letter to the Galatians
Eph – Letter to the Ephesians
Phil – Letter to the Philippians
Col – Letter to the Colossians
1Thes – First Letter to the Thessalonians
2Thes – Second Letter to the Thessalonians
1Tim – First Letter to Timothy
2Tim – Second Letter to Timothy
Tit – Letter to Titus
Phlm – Letter to Philemon
Heb – Letter to the Hebrews
Jam – Letter of James
1Pet – First Letter of Peter
2Pet – Second Letter of Peter
1Jn – First Letter of John
2Jn – Second Letter of John
3Jn – Third Letter of John
Jude – Letter of Jude
Rev – Revelation

Explanation of general format

PERSONAL PRONOUNS are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

BRACKETS [] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

SHARP BRACKETS < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS** * are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

ALL CAPS in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

The book of Lamentations

Introduction

Name

In Hebrew, the book is called *Ekah*, which means “How”, and this is so because the book begins with this word (Lam 1:1; 2:1; 4:1). The book is the third of the five “scrolls” or *Megilloth* – the others being, in the order in which they are listed therein, Song of Songs, Ruth, Ecclesiastes and Esther – which are read in the synagogue on special days. The book of Lamentations is read on the ninth day of the fifth month, the month Ab, the day of mourning over the two destructions of the Temple and the failed Bar Kochba revolt (135 AD).

Author

Both Jewish and Christian tradition have assumed Jeremiah to be the author of the book. Lamentations is apparently written by an eyewitness to the destruction of the city. It is someone who strongly identifies himself with the fate of the city and people. Who else could this be but Jeremiah? It is plausible that he penned these Lamentations in one piece in or near the destroyed Jerusalem, under the immediate impression of the tragedy.

Form

The five chapters the book contains are actually five separate poems. Lamentations 1, 2, 4, and 5 each have twenty-two verses. The contents of Lamentations 1, 2, and 4 are arranged alphabetically according to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Lamentations 3 has sixty-six verses, which is three times twenty-two. That chapter is also arranged alphabetically. The first three verses each begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the next three begin with the second letter, and so on. Lamentations 5 also has twenty-two verses, but has no alphabetical order. The first three poems, Lamentations 1-3, contain, except for Lam 1:7 and Lam 2:19, three lines of poetry per verse. Lamentations 4 contains two lines of poetry per verse. Lamentations 5 has one line of poetry per verse.

The Holy Spirit does not just use the alphabetical order. Therein lies a deep thought. Various interpreters have said: Just as these poems encompass all the letters of the alphabet and thus the whole of human language, so the book expresses all human suffering in its fullness, from A to Z. No aspect of it is left out. Every detail of human tragedy is accurately described and expressed.

A common reaction to suffering that someone undergoes is to cheer him up and quickly start talking about something else. The book of Lamentations is written in a structure that does not allow for such levity.

In a general sense, the use of all those letters shows the importance of each letter and word. The Lord Jesus is the Word of God. He calls Himself “the Alpha and the Omega”, the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet (Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13). He is the perfect revelation of God. His sufferings are also seen in this book.

Theme

The subject of the book is Jeremiah’s lament about the disasters brought by the LORD upon sinful Judah and the lamentable destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple by the Babylonians, in 587 BC. The city that should have been an example and guide for all nations has instead become a mockery and an object of ridicule. The book of Jeremiah contains warnings of the judgments that would come on the city if she persisted in disobedience. The book of Lamentations contains deep expressions of mourning over the judgment that had come on Jerusalem.

Embedded in the prophet’s lament is an urgent appeal to the severely chastened people. That call implies that they acknowledge that God’s judgments on them are just. This call also means that, with repentance and confession, they entrust themselves again to the mercy of God, Who will not ultimately forsake His people. At the same time, the prophet sees how bad the mind and the behavior have been of those who destroyed the city and the temple. That is why he asks that the judgment come down on them.

Jeremiah’s lament is so intense that the book of Lamentations is one of the two most tragic books of the Bible. The other book is the book of Job. That book also has suffering as its main theme. The difference is that the book of

Lamentations deals with the suffering of an entire people, while the book of Job deals with the suffering of one person.

Both books deal with the problem of God's justice on the one hand and His love on the other, God's sovereignty on the one hand and man's responsibility on the other. God is sovereign, that is, He is above everyone and everything and governs everything. Everything is subject to Him and dependent on Him. He Himself is dependent on no one (Rom 11:33-36). At the same time, man himself is responsible for the choices he makes, the deeds he does and the words he speaks. This is a contrast or also a merging of two things, both of which are perfectly true, but which cannot be reconciled by us.

By the way, this book is more about the LORD than it is about man. In this book we see primarily His pain and His sorrow that because of the unfaithfulness of His people He had to act in this way. Jeremiah sees the destruction of Jerusalem and the judgment on the Judeans more as a Divine judgment and not so much as the result of the invasion of the Babylonians.

This we hear in the words

"Is it nothing to all you who pass this way?

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" (Lam 1:12).

This connects to what the LORD Himself says: "I Myself will war against you with an outstretched hand and a mighty arm, even in anger and wrath and great indignation" (Jer 21:5).

Purpose

The Jews read the book of Lamentations during the annual fast in remembrance of the destruction of Jerusalem (Zec 7:3,5; 8:19). Its purpose seems to be to recall that God is faithful to His covenant when He brings judgments on His people when His people are unfaithful to that same covenant (Deu 28:45-68). The book teaches later generations the importance of faithfulness to the covenant and also that God is faithful to it. The book holds the serious teaching that sin, despite all its enticements, brings with it a tremendous burden of sorrow, misery, desolation, barrenness, and pain.

For us Christians, there is also a message in this book. The book also holds up to us the consequences of sin: that sin destroys our lives and causes only misery, sorrow and pain. In times of personal, national and international crises, the book is a call to repentance and confession of sins in order to rededicate ourselves to God, Who is love. Although that love is always there and goes out to people, a holy and righteous God must always judge unrepentant sinners, for God is also light.

Practical significance

The book of Lamentations has a practical meaning for us.

1. The book gives place within the inspired Word of God, together with the book of Job, to the most intense human sorrow. This is of immediate practical value to every believer today who reads these books of the Bible in his sorrow. He then discovers that he is not the first to go through thick darkness, before light breaks through again. Thus the believer experiences that God takes note of the pain and sorrow of His own, yes, that He records their tears in His book (Psa 56:8). The detailed description of misery in this book is a remarkable proof that God sees and notices the misery of His own.

As mentioned above under the heading **Form**, four of the five poems are given in alphabetical order, using all the letters of the alphabet. This is to indicate that all human language is needed to express the misery in which the believer may be. In other cases, too, all the letters are sometimes used, as in some psalms. There it is mostly a matter of giving expression to worship.

All this happens under the guidance of God's Spirit. That God expressed Himself in this way shows that He, Who is unlimited, expresses Himself in limited human language. Language has its limits. The Hebrew language is limited to twenty-two letters.

2. This book – unlike the book of Job – shows how the good suffer with the wicked. The judgment on Judah and Jerusalem is a national judgment, it affects the whole nation. The righteous must also bear the consequences of this judgment, even though they have no part in the appalling sins of Judah. As stated above, the book of Job deals with the suffering of one

righteous person; the book of Lamentations deals with the suffering of a whole people.

Prophetic Meaning

The book of Lamentations also has a prophetic meaning.

1. Prophetically, both the book of Job and the book of Lamentations refer to the suffering of the remnant of Israel in the end time. At the first siege of Jerusalem in the future, the king of the north will take the city and largely destroy it (Zec 14:2). This destruction will again be the result of the sins of Judah. At the same time, there is a righteous remnant in the city who will suffer along with the wicked (Zep 3:12; Zec 12:8). Prophetically, this remnant will be able to unite itself with the laments expressed in this book, on the one hand by confessing the guilt of the entire people as their guilt (cf. Dan 9:4-19), and on the other hand, by pleading with God for their own innocence.

2. The grievous question of Job in his book and of the righteous in the book of Lamentations as to why they should suffer innocently is not in fact answered by God. Limited man cannot fathom the ways of God. God's love and justice are evident enough from His words and actions. However, there are times in our lives when God's actions seem to contradict His love and justice.

In this book, as so often in the book of Psalms, the Spirit of Christ makes Himself one with the faithful remnant of Israel. Wherever the righteous express their lament, we always hear, as it were, the lament of the Righteous One resounding.

We see Christ in type most clearly in this book where the prophet speaks of his own feelings and experiences as a righteous man in the midst of an unjust people. What is worked in Jeremiah is done by the Spirit of God, although we also notice shortcomings in the expression of his feelings and experiences. This is not the case with Christ. In Lamentations 3 we see Jeremiah as a type of Christ in the expression of his feelings. See for example when he speaks of what the people have done to him (Lam 3:14) and when he speaks of what the LORD has done to him (Lam 3:1-13,15-18).

Jeremiah must suffer with the wicked. The wrath of the LORD (cf. Lam 3:1) also comes down on him, the innocent. See, for example, when he laments about those who are hostile to him “without cause” (Lam 3:52; cf. Psa 69:4; Jn 15:25). This clearly points to Christ, the Righteous One, Who innocently suffers on the part of His people. With Him it goes much further. He not only suffers *with* the people, especially with the remnant in the future, but He suffers thereupon alone and vicariously *for* the people.

We see this latter form of Christ’s suffering only in the three hours of darkness on the cross. Then and only there He is forsaken by God and made sin by Him. Then He undergoes the judgment for the sins of and dies the atoning death for all who believe.

The book is an expression of lamentation, repentance and supplication. Lamentation occurs over misery; awareness of the cause of misery brings about repentance before God for sins; this is followed by supplicating for restoration for oneself and for judgment on one’s enemies.

Division of the book

As already noted, the book consists of five poems.

1. First poem (Lamentations 1): Jerusalem is devastated and desolate. The prophet vividly describes her wretched condition. Jerusalem weeps bitterly like a bereft widow. He recalls her former glories and laments her ruin. In Lamentations 1:11b-22 (except Lam 1:17) the I-figure is the city herself. She calls on all to pity her (Lam 1:12) and begs God for vengeance on her enemies (Lam 1:22).

2. Second poem (Lamentations 2): This poem describes the reasons for God’s anger on the city and the ruin that results (Lam 2:1-12). The prophet argues that repentance and conversion are her only hope (Lam 2:13-19). The city responds (Lam 2:20-22).

3. Third poem (Lamentations 3): Here we hear the lament of the people as a whole through the mouth of the righteous one in that people – Jeremiah himself – about

- a. the tragedy that has struck him (Lam 3:1-20);
- b. his trust in God when he remembers His past mercies (Lam 3:21-39);

c. a call to the people to examine and probe their ways and return to the LORD (Lam 3:40-54).

d. After acknowledging that God has heard their cry, the nation begs Him to exercise vengeance on its enemies (Lam 3:55-66).

4. Fourth poem (Lamentations 4): Here Zion's former glory is compared to her present misery.

1. The horrors of the siege are described (Lam 4:1-11),

2. but also the sins of the people, especially those of their priests and prophets (Lam 4:12-16).

3. All their hopes has become vain (Lam 4:17-20).

4. But it is also announced that the sin of Zion is hereby blotted out, and that the woe of Edom shall descend upon its own head (Lam 4:21-22).

5. Fifth poem (Lamentations 5): The repentant people beg the LORD to remember their misery (Lam 5:1-18) and entrust themselves to His mercy to be restored (Lam 5:19-22). The entire chapter is a prayer and therefore has no alphabetical order. In a supplication, a heart pours itself out before the LORD without regard to any particular word choice or order.

Lamentations 1

Introduction

This chapter has two parts: verses 1-11 and verses 12-22. In verses 1-11 we have a general description of the misery after the destruction of Jerusalem. It describes life in the land after the destruction. It is the condition of the few who remained in the land. The verses are written in the third person singular, recorded from the mouth of an observer and at the same time one directly affected.

In verses 12-22 we hear Zion's lament about what the LORD has done. These verses are written in the first person singular, recorded from the mouth of the prophet who is expressing the feelings of the suffering city. It is someone who is overwhelmed with sadness, grief and pain. But there is no rebellion, for one's own guilt is confessed as the cause of this misery.

A division into smaller units or pericopes is difficult. The poet, guided by the Spirit, by using the alphabet has made a division that actually makes each verse a separate pericope. We can, however, cautiously try to discover whether there is a certain connection between certain verses after all, creating pericopes larger than those indicated by the alphabet. The following classification is therefore no more than a suggestion that hopefully will help to better understand the coherence of this book.

Lam 1:1-3 | City and Land in Deep Sorrow

*1 How lonely sits the city
That was full of people!
She has become like a widow
Who was [once] great among the nations!
She who was a princess among the provinces
Has become a forced laborer!*
*2 She weeps bitterly in the night
And her tears are on her cheeks;
She has none to comfort her*

*Among all her lovers.
All her friends have dealt treacherously with her;
They have become her enemies.
3 Judah has gone into exile under affliction
And under harsh servitude;
She dwells among the nations,
[But] she has found no rest;
All her pursuers have overtaken her
In the midst of distress.*

In verse 1 we see a characteristic of the book of Lamentations, namely the contrast between the brilliant past and the desolate present. The city is described in the change that took place. It has changed in terms of population (verse 1a) and in economic (verse 1b) and social (verse 1c) terms.

1. Verse 1a. The once populous city, in which there were also many pilgrims during the great feasts, is now “lonely”. It has been robbed of most of its inhabitants through battle and deportation.

2. Verse 1b. Once the city was great among the nations. She was so because of the God Who she had and by kings whom He gave. This was especially so in the days of David and Solomon (cf. Psa 48:2). Now she is without protection and help, she no longer has a husband, but is a vulnerable widow. She experiences it this way, that God has been taken away from her.

3. Verse 1c. She used to be a princess, great in esteem in her surroundings. She, who has ruled over others, is now a slave of the king of Babylon.

In the night, sorrow is most strongly felt and expressed (verse 2). There is no moment of rest in the night, which serves to sleep and rest. It is also night in her entire existence. Incessantly, grief is felt and tears flow. Her cheeks are permanently covered with them. It is not that she cries herself to sleep. A strong burst of crying can be a relief. That is not the case here.

Tears that usually dry quickly do not get the chance to do so, because they continue to flow, making them stick to the cheeks as it were. There is no one to dry them either. She weeps not only because of her suffering, but more so because she has been betrayed by her “lovers” and “friends” (cf. Jer 4:30c).

The grief is aggravated because there is no comforter (cf. Ecc 4:1). That she is without a comforter, that is, without God as her Comforter (verse 16), runs like a thread – perhaps better: sounds with the regularity of the striking of a death bell – through this chapter (verses 9,16,17,21).

The issue is not so much that some treasonous act was committed by Judah's allies, but more that the people are ashamed in their reliance on those allies. They should have trusted in the LORD for their safety. However, they did not, for they sought their help from the nations around them (Hos 8:9-10a; 1Kgs 15:16-20).

The prophets have always warned that such covenants lead to apostasy (Hos 5:13; 8:8,11; 14:3). But both the leaders of the northern ten tribes realm and those of the southern two tribes realm would not listen. Jerusalem had to learn that such friends are a broken reed (Eze 29:6-7). This is a lesson that all of us also need to learn more often in our lives.

The most difficult thing for lamenting people is to find comfort in someone who really understands something of the grief and helps to bear it. In any case, the former lovers of Jerusalem, with whom she dealt adulterously and with whom she made alliances, cannot give that comfort. But her former friends do not give comfort either; on the contrary, they treat her as an enemy. She sought love and friendship from others than from the LORD. Such love and friendship always disappoint.

From Jerusalem, Jeremiah now turns to Judah (verse 3). The people of Judah are no longer in the land. She has been led into exile, where she is in misery and harsh servitude. She lives outside the land, among the nations. She is a displaced person, away from the place of rest and therefore restless. The true rest, that of the realm of peace, is far away. Enemies control the place of rest. Zedekiah and some soldiers did try to escape the exile by fleeing, but they were overtaken by the enemy (Jer 39:4-5).

Lam 1:4-6 | The City, Formerly Full of Feast and Joy

*4 The roads of Zion are in mourning
Because no one comes to the appointed feasts.
All her gates are desolate;
Her priests are groaning,*

*Her virgins are afflicted,
And she herself is bitter.
5 Her adversaries have become her masters,
Her enemies prosper;
For the LORD has caused her grief
Because of the multitude of her transgressions;
Her little ones have gone away
As captives before the adversary.
6 All her majesty
Has departed from the daughter of Zion;
Her princes have become like deer
That have found no pasture;
And they have fled without strength
Before the pursuer.*

In these verses the prophet looks back to earlier, better days. Against that backdrop, the present misery comes out all the more poignant. The roads of Zion, that is, the roads that lead to Zion, used to be full of those who come “to the appointed feasts” (verse 4). Now they lie desolate, for no one goes up to Zion anymore, nor can they, for the people are in exile.

To emphasize the desolation, the roads are represented as persons who “are in mourning” because of the desolation. Three times a year the feasting people covered the roads with song as they went up to Jerusalem for the feasts of the LORD. Now these roads mourn because no one goes up to Jerusalem for the feast anymore. There are no more people.

The gates of the city are in ruins, and when the gates are in ruins, the city is also in ruins. It is an open city; anyone who wants to can walk right in. The gates are the places where justice was spoken (Rth 4:1). But there is no more justice. The gates were also places where social intercourse took place and markets were held. It was the meeting place between the pilgrim and the city (Psa 122:2). All that is over.

The priests who were leading the people in idolatry see the result of their false pursuits and sigh. The few faithful priests can no longer enter the temple, for it has been destroyed. The few young women who are still there, who sang at the great feasts (Psa 68:25; Jer 31:13), who also imagined

life so totally different, are saddened. For herself, that is the city, the society in it, everything is bitter.

Zion has been surrendered into the hand of her adversaries who are now her masters (verse 5; cf. Deu 28:13,44b-45). These now finally prosper (cf. Job 12:6). The thorn in their side, Jerusalem, has been destroyed. It is painful to be humiliated. It is extra painful to find that the enemy finds satisfaction in it.

Who really did it is the LORD. He has had to bring this sorrow upon her and to do so “because of the multitude of her transgressions”. Here, for the first time, the occasion of the misery is mentioned. It is the first statement – from the poet and not yet from Jerusalem itself – about the city’s transgressions and that the LORD therefore had to execute judgment. More of such statements follow (verses 8,14,18,20,22). The people must come to this confession and seek the cause of judgment in themselves.

Immediately after this expression of faith, the poet again sees the prevailing distress and is again seized by it. He describes until the end of verse 6 what Jerusalem has lost. First he mentions the little children, the toddlers, the children of the covenant. It shows in a very penetrating way that the LORD has abandoned His people.

Several times in this book the children are mentioned (Lam 2:20; 4:4; cf. Jer 9:21). For them especially, the consequences are disastrous. They are the greatest victims of the unfaithfulness of a people or parents. They are chased into captivity before the adversary, torn away from their parents and from brothers and sisters. Little children must be eliminated so that they cannot grow up and in their adulthood become a danger to the occupying forces.

Of the splendor that the city, the “daughter Zion”, once possessed because of the glorious sanctuary in which the LORD dwelt (Psa 96:6), nothing remains, it has disappeared (verse 6). The princes, the people who ruled the city, have become hunted deer with nowhere to rest and pasture. The siege of the city has left them starving and powerless. They can’t even flee anymore, but are driven out like slaughter cattle before the persecutors.

Lam 1:7-8 | Reflection

*7 In the days of her affliction and homelessness
Jerusalem remembers all her precious things
That were from the days of old,
When her people fell into the hand of the adversary
And no one helped her.
The adversaries saw her,
They mocked at her ruin.
8 Jerusalem sinned greatly,
Therefore she has become an unclean thing.
All who honored her despise her
Because they have seen her nakedness;
Even she herself groans and turns away.*

Jerusalem – here the name of the city is mentioned for the first time – is in affliction and homelessness (verse 7). As for the past, there are only memories of what she possessed then in many precious things. This only makes the situation sadder. When she was in possession of all those precious things, the enemy came and she fell into the hand of the adversary. Again and again she must think of that terrible moment.

There was no helper, which makes it even more dramatic. It is dramatic to be without a helper in the power of a ruthless enemy. It is in this condition that a people or a human being ends up when God is rejected as Helper (Hos 13:9). Then it also becomes apparent that such a situation, instead of arousing pity, gives gloating to the adversary, who rejoices at her downfall. This laughter is a hateful, evil, devilish laughter.

This change of situation is the result of her grievous sins, the guilt of which became greater and greater because those sins were repeated incessantly (verse 8). As a result, Jerusalem has become disgraced and stripped of all value and honor, while she now lies ‘naked’, that is without any means of protection, open to her enemies. Her nakedness is the punishment for her unfaithfulness to the LORD. We see here again the contrast between past and present. All those who used to revere her, with whom she had made covenants, and who now see her, despise her.

The city is always seen as a woman. In verse 1 she is a widow and here she is an unclean woman because of her monthly uncleanness, but she is also a naked woman. All she does is sigh and turn away, turn backwards. She has developed an aversion to herself. She does not want to see herself or know what others see of her.

Lam 1:9-11 | The Present Condition as a Lament to God

*9 Her uncleanness was in her skirts;
She did not consider her future.
Therefore she has fallen astonishingly;
She has no comforter.
"See, O LORD, my affliction,
For the enemy has magnified himself!"
10 The adversary has stretched out his hand
Over all her precious things,
For she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary,
The ones whom You commanded
That they should not enter into Your congregation.
11 All her people groan seeking bread;
They have given their precious things for food
To restore their lives themselves.
"See, O LORD, and look,
For I am despised."*

The poet compares the city to a woman in whom menstruation has stained her skirts, which is seen by everyone and evokes horror in everyone (verse 9). This refers to her idolatry by which she has become unclean, an uncleanness that clings to her whole walk. She has not thought at all about the consequences of her idolatry, what the end of it is, where it would end up and what it has ended up in now (cf. Deu 32:29; Isa 47:7). She did not consider that the LORD would intervene, although He had often warned her of this through His prophets.

The depth of misery into which the city sank because of her unfaithfulness was "astonishingly" (cf. Deu 28:43). She had never imagined this. "Astonishingly" means that God has acted in an astonishing way with her, causing her to sink into an unimaginable depth of misery. The depth into

which the city sank has a supernatural origin in the eyes of the prophet. Following on from this, we read for the second time that she has no comforter, an observation that shows her misery even more emphatically.

In the last part of verse 9 we hear for the first time the city herself speak of her, “my”, affliction. Jeremiah here identifies himself with the city. He puts the words in the mouth of the city. The exclamation “see, O LORD” occurs two more times in this chapter (verses 11,20). The purpose of the exclamation is to point out to the LORD her affliction, so that when He sees it, surely this will arouse in Him compassion for her. She points out to Him that by humbling her the enemy magnifies himself. Surely He, Who alone is truly to be “magnified”, cannot let that go unpunished.

The adversary not only disgraced Jerusalem, but he also reached out his hand to the valuables of the temple (verse 10; 2Chr 36:10; Jer 52:17-23). That nations have entered the sanctuary is a shocking thing and intolerable to a Jew (Psa 79:1; cf. Deu 23:3-4).

Foreigners were forbidden to enter the temple (Eze 44:7). People who were not even allowed to join the congregation of Israel had entered the sanctuary. That it could happen is because Jerusalem did not keep the sanctuary of her heart free from the destruction of the enemy of the soul. She has allowed the enemy to rob her spiritual treasures because she has become involved with the enemy and started serving his gods.

After the destruction of the city – and not during the siege – “all her people”, that is, the remaining population, sigh and are desperate for food (verse 11). The desperation is general. They have given all their valuables just to get some food. This revived them for a while and extended their lives (cf. Jdg 15:19; 1Sam 30:12). Now there is nothing left to give. Starvation is their future.

For the second time we read “see, O LORD” (verse 11; verse 9). It comes from the depths of her soul. It is not about calling His attention to the scorn as such, but to the depth and extent of it. She hopes this will move the LORD to compassion.

Lam 1:12-14 | The LORD Has Done It, For the Sake of Sin

| 12 *“Is it nothing to all you who pass this way?”*

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.
 13 "From on high He sent fire into my bones,
 And it prevailed [over them].
 He has spread a net for my feet;
 He has turned me back;
 He has made me desolate,
 Faint all day long.
 14 "The yoke of my transgressions is bound;
 By His hand they are knit together.
 They have come upon my neck;
 He has made my strength fail.
 The Lord has given me into the hands
 Of [those against whom] I am not able to stand.

After the lament *about* Jerusalem in verses 1-11, in the second part of this chapter we hear the lament of Jerusalem (verses 12-22). That lament is not directed to the LORD, as in verse 11, but to those "who pass this way", the nations around her who are represented as travelers passing along the roads of ruined Judah (verse 12).

Jeremiah, identifying himself with the city and speaking on her behalf, appeals to the passers-by to see if it does not affect them when they see the misery in which he, the city, finds himself. He urges them to look carefully and consider whether there is any suffering anywhere in the world comparable to the suffering that has been inflicted on her. He adds that he is aware that this suffering is from the LORD and not from the enemies. The LORD has grieved her, but it is because His fierce anger had to come upon the guilty city.

The "day of His fierce anger" is the day of the LORD, the day announced as a day of judgment by Him through His prophets. This day will dawn in its fullness in the end time, when the LORD intervenes acting and judging in world events for the benefit of the remnant of His people who are suffering terribly, with the end result being the realm of peace. The day of the fall of Jerusalem is connected to the suffering in the end time.

Behind this speaking of Jeremiah about the misery in which he and the city find themselves, we also hear the Lord Jesus speaking. He has uniquely been in God's fierce anger. This was not because of His sins – He did not do or know sin – but because of the sins He took upon Himself of those who believe in Him. He is the true Man of sorrows, Who as no other has felt the unfaithfulness of His people. What makes Him infinitely greater than Jeremiah is that He has removed the deepest cause of this and will bring about a new situation that is completely in accordance with God's will.

In verse 13 we have three pictures by which judgment is described. The pictures are quite different and show no connection between them. This reinforces the impression of desperation.

The first picture is that of a "fire" that penetrates the bones, that is, it goes to the deepest interior and is total. It is the expression of intense, unbearable suffering (Psa 102:3; Job 30:30). Jeremiah feels so identified with the destroyed city that he feels in his bones the fire of the judgment that the LORD has sent and that He rules over it. He experiences the LORD as an adversary Who kindled in anger against His people and His city.

The second is "a net". This refers to the suddenness of the judgment. Judgment overwhelmed Jerusalem, just as a wild animal unexpectedly finds itself in a net that a hunter has spread, into which it becomes entangled and from which it cannot free itself (cf. Psa 10:9; Hos 7:12; Eze 12:13; 19:8). Jeremiah sees before his feet a net by which he is caught. That net has been put there by the LORD (cf. Job 19:6). Jeremiah feels himself in the power of the hunter who forces him to turn backward.

The third picture is that of being "faint" as a result of judgment. He feels the desolation to which he has been given by the LORD. It makes him faint "all day long", not knowing a moment's relief from the pains and despair that plague him.

Here we hear a man deeply concerned with the suffering that has befallen the city. He has announced that suffering for many years and in many ways (Jer 11:16; 15:14; 17:4,27; 21:10,12,14; 22:7; 34:2,22; 37:8,10; 38:23), with the purpose that Jerusalem would repent and she would be spared this suffering. Then, when it has come, he does not say reproachfully that he

has said it all along anyway and that now she will get her due. No, he grieves deeply over the fulfillment of God's judgment.

The yoke of transgressions weighs heavily on the city, on Jeremiah (verse 14). On the one hand, the city has woven this yoke itself through her sins. But it is also the LORD Who has done it and is putting it on her neck as a disciplinary measure. Sin pressing down on a man robs him of strength and causes him to stumble.

For Jeremiah, the discipline by the enemies comes from "the Lord", *Adonai*, his sovereign Lord and Master. He is delivered by Him into the hands of the enemies. The acceptance of this ensures that the discipline has a complete effect. He cannot get up to go his own way. No form of resistance is possible. All freedom of movement is gone.

Lam 1:15-17 | The People of Jerusalem

15 *"The Lord has rejected all my strong men*

In my midst;

He has called an appointed time against me

To crush my young men;

The Lord has trodden [as in] a wine press

The virgin daughter of Judah.

16 *"For these things I weep;*

My eyes run down with water;

Because far from me is a comforter,

One who restores my soul.

My children are desolate

Because the enemy has prevailed."

17 *Zion stretches out her hands;*

There is no one to comfort her;

The LORD has commanded concerning Jacob

That the ones round about him should be his adversaries;

Jerusalem has become an unclean thing among them.

The strong men of the city are gone. They have been rejected by the Lord (verse 15). Jeremiah, or rather Jeremiah who identifies with Jerusalem, calls them "my strong men". They have been rejected from the midst of

the city. This is based on a decision of God. He has called an appointed time for that. It is a terrible appointed time. It is not an appointed time for the LORD, but for the enemies. The enemies have crushed the strength of the young men. In a picture of a virgin that immediately follows, the daughter of Judah is seen in a wine press being stepped on by the Lord. He judges her.

Wine belongs to a feast. The joy of wine is obtained by the treading of the grapes in the winepress, which is a picture of judgment (Isa 63:3; Joel 3:13; Rev 14:19). There is irony in the used pictures of feast and wine press. They arouse the thought of joy, jubilation, when it is a question of the judgment that has come in all its horror upon Jerusalem, “the virgin daughter of Judah”.

All this misery causes the prophet intense grief and a flood of tears (verse 16). He feels without comfort. The LORD, Who is his only Comforter, is so far away. And if He doesn't comfort, who will? His sons, who are the children of His people, are appalled at the power of the enemy who can exercise it undisturbed over the city.

In verse 17, Jeremiah is again a spectator. He no longer speaks of 'I', but of 'her', which is Zion. He sees Zion stretching out her hands to heaven, but having no comforter. Heaven is silent. Throughout this book we hear no answer from God. Jeremiah expresses the certainty that whatever befalls the people is commanded by the LORD. All suffering comes from Him. He has caused the bystanders to become opponents and Jerusalem to find support in no one. She has been given up by the LORD, abandoned, because she has become “an unclean thing”. She owes this to her own unfaithfulness to Him.

Lam 1:18-19 | Reflection

*18 “The LORD is righteous;
For I have rebelled against His command;
Hear now, all peoples,
And behold my pain;
My virgins and my young men
Have gone into captivity.*

*19 "I called to my lovers, [but] they deceived me;
My priests and my elders perished in the city
While they sought food to restore their strength themselves.*

In these verses Jeremiah or the city speaks again, that is, the faithful remnant (verse 18). They are innocent, but bow their heads under judgment. It is precisely they who complain and bow down. The unbelieving multitude does not complain, but curses and rebels. The remnant makes itself one with the condition of the multitude.

He declares the LORD to be righteous in His dealings with the city (Jer 12:1) and with him, for he also knows himself to be guilty. Here, knowing God and knowing himself go hand in hand. He is no better than the masses. Yet because of his confession he can call the nations to look at his suffering (verse 12). That suffering is that the flower of the nation, "my virgins and my young men", the hope of the future, has gone into captivity.

The city had put her hope in those who had an intimate relationship with her because of the profit they derived from her, with whom she had made an alliance (verse 19). But she has been deceived by it. In need, they all turned out to fail.

It was sinful to have lovers, for the LORD Himself was her Lover. Moreover, it was sinful to cry out to those lovers in distress instead of to the LORD. The prophet's need to make himself one with the city is so great here that he takes both the first – the surrounding peoples as lovers – and the second – crying out to those lovers in their distress – for his account.

Even in the city, there is no help from people she first relied on, the priests and the elders. They also thought only of themselves and their own needs. There was no life left in them. They tried to get food in order to thereby "restore their strength", that is, to revive themselves (verse 11). In doing so, these leaders did not remain alive. They expired and perished.

Lam 1:20-22 | Prayer

*20 "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.*

*In the street the sword slays;
In the house it is like death.
21 "They have heard that I groan;
There is no one to comfort me;
All my enemies have heard of my calamity;
They are glad that You have done [it].
Oh, that You would bring the day which You have proclaimed,
That they may become like me.
22 "Let all their wickedness come before You;
And deal with them as You have dealt with me
For all my transgressions;
For my groans are many and my heart is faint."*

For the third time the cry "see, O LORD" is heard (verse 20; verses 9,11). Now this is no longer to focus attention on the misery or the enemies, but on himself. His spirit is afraid and he is full of turmoil inside. His heart is overturned within him. He is consumed with guilt over his disobedience which he fully acknowledges. Jeremiah is here again the voice of the city. He sees death everywhere. The children, by whom are meant here the inhabitants of the city, have been killed by the sword outside the house. As a result, the house is like dead now.

The enemy is always out to kill our children. He does this especially when they are outside the safe sphere of the home, when they need to be outside, in the world. He has also succeeded in penetrating the safe atmosphere of the homes of believers and sows death and destruction there as well.

The city is aware that the enemy hears her sighs of misery (verse 21). Her groaning is primarily that there is no comforter. The enemies perceive the city's calamity and rejoice in it. They see that the hand of the LORD has smitten His people. The judgment that was to strike the people from the hand of enemies came from the hand of the LORD. That is what the enemies are saying here.

The people acknowledge that the LORD is indeed the Executor of judgment. He has caused the day to come that He has announced (Jer 4:9; 7:32-34; 17:16-18). The people also say that this judgment will also come on the enemies because of their wickedness. The enemies have carried out God's

judgment, but they have done it in a wicked, selfish way and therefore the LORD will judge them as well.

Jeremiah reminds the LORD of all the evil that the enemies have done to him, that is the city of Jerusalem (verse 22). For this he asks the LORD that He will justly repay them in the same way that the LORD has done to him because of all his transgressions (cf. Jer 51:35). He is able to ask this because numerous sighs are uttered by him, indicating that he is bowing deeply under the discipline that has come upon him. His heart is thereby exhausted and deeply depressed. He no longer boasts of anything.

Lamentations 2

Introduction

Here the second lament begins, which also starts with the word “how” (cf. Lam 1:1). Again, what we have seen in the first lament applies: twenty-two verses of three lines each, with the first verse beginning with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and each subsequent verse with the next letter of it. Again we hear the great sorrow of Jeremiah who needs every letter to express his sorrow.

The first lament (Lamentations 1) is more about desolation, loneliness and disgrace as a result of the destruction of Jerusalem. In the lament in this chapter, we see more of the state of destruction with the destruction of the temple being the main issue. We also see emphatically here that the destruction is the result of the anger of God.

1. Verses 1-9 describe the destruction of Jerusalem, where it is attributed to the Lord (*Adonai*).
2. In verse 10 we see the condition of some of the survivors and
3. in verses 11-12 we hear the personal distress of Jeremiah.
4. In verses 13-17 Jerusalem is lamented; Jeremiah looks for something to comfort with, but does not find it.
5. Verses 18-19 contain a call to call on the Lord (*Adonai*) and
6. in verses 20-22 we hear how the LORD (*Yahweh*) is called.

Lam 2:1-9 | Jerusalem Destroyed – the Lord Has Done It

*1 How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion
With a cloud in His anger!
He has cast from heaven to earth
The glory of Israel,
And has not remembered His footstool
In the day of His anger.
2 The Lord has swallowed up; He has not spared*

*All the habitations of Jacob.
In His wrath He has thrown down
The strongholds of the daughter of Judah;
He has brought [them] down to the ground;
He has profaned the kingdom and its princes.
3 In fierce anger He has cut off
All the strength of Israel;
He has drawn back His right hand
From before the enemy.
And He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire
Consuming round about.
4 He has bent His bow like an enemy;
He has set His right hand like an adversary
And slain all that were pleasant to the eye;
In the tent of the daughter of Zion
He has poured out His wrath like fire.
5 The Lord has become like an enemy.
He has swallowed up Israel;
He has swallowed up all its palaces,
He has destroyed its strongholds
And multiplied in the daughter of Judah
Mourning and moaning.
6 And He has violently treated His tabernacle like a garden [booth];
He has destroyed His appointed meeting place.
The LORD has caused to be forgotten
The appointed feast and sabbath in Zion,
And He has despised king and priest
In the indignation of His anger.
7 The Lord has rejected His altar,
He has abandoned His sanctuary;
He has delivered into the hand of the enemy
The walls of her palaces.
They have made a noise in the house of the LORD
As in the day of an appointed feast.
8 The LORD determined to destroy
The wall of the daughter of Zion.*

*He has stretched out a line,
He has not restrained His hand from destroying,
And He has caused rampart and wall to lament;
They have languished together.
9 Her gates have sunk into the ground,
He has destroyed and broken her bars.
Her king and her princes are among the nations;
The law is no more.
Also, her prophets find
No vision from the LORD.*

Right at the beginning Jeremiah says that it is not the enemy, but that it is the Lord (*Adonai*) Who in His anger has covered Jerusalem with the darkness of mourning and grief (verse 1). A cloud, the mourning and grief, covers Jerusalem; the city is immersed in them. In this darkness, no ray of light of God's presence can be seen. There is no prayer that can reach the Lord.

"The glory of Israel", which is the LORD's own dwelling place, the temple, He has, by the hand of the enemies, "cast from heaven to earth" and razed to the ground. Zion went from the highest glory to the deepest disgrace (cf. Mt 11:23). Although the enemies were used by Him in the execution of His anger, Jeremiah still attributes everything to the Lord. He has done it.

"His footstool", the place of His rest, is the ark of His covenant (1Chr 28:2). He has not been willing and able to keep it because the people have deprived Him of His rest because of their sins. He has not remembered to protect and keep it for His people. He had to leave the temple and therefore the temple and the objects in it no longer have any meaning. In the day when He had to exercise His anger, He gave everything into the hand of the enemies to destroy it or carry it away.

The Lord did not spare His own dwelling. Nor has He (*Adonai*) spared the dwellings of His people, but has thrown them all down (verse 2). He swallowed them as if He were a great monster. It points to the completeness of the destruction.

His anger because of their sins is great. Therefore He wiped out from the face of the earth all the strongholds, all the fortified cities of Judah, on

which they had relied as a protection against the enemy. The description is clear. The Lord dealt with the cities.

He has “brought [them] down to the ground”, that is, levelled them to the ground. By doing so, He desecrated the kingdom and its leadership, that is, deprived them of the special place they had before Him. Judah lost its independence. Zedekiah was taken to Babylon and his sons and princes were killed.

“All the strength of Israel”, literally “every horn of Israel”, He has cut off in His fierce anger (verse 3). The horn is a picture of strength (1Sam 2:1; Jer 48:25). Israel has been strong through the LORD. However, nothing is left of their strength because they have forsaken their strong God. They stand powerless in the midst of misery and ruin.

When the LORD acted, it was against His people. But even when He did not act, it was against His people. “His right hand”, which protected them and which fought for them and redeemed them (Exo 15:12; Psa 18:35; 20:6; 108:6), He has drawn back from them (Psa 74:11). Israel had to cope without His help. The enemy saw that and seized his opportunity.

The enemy has been given free rein because the LORD has burned in anger against Jacob. His anger is “like a flaming fire, consuming round about”. Nothing is spared. Every corner of the land is visited and falls prey to His judging fire.

He has become the adversary of His people (verse 4). He has acted as an enemy of His people. In verse 3, He has withdrawn His right hand from His people. Here His right hand reappears, but now “He has bent His bow” ready to approach and punish His people like “an enemy”. He has cocked the bow and slain all those who were pleasant to the eye, that is the fighting young men.

Now in the hiddenness of the tent, a place of security and fellowship (Psa 27:5b), by which Jerusalem and especially the temple are meant, the fire of His anger rages.

The Lord (*Adonai*) has “become like an enemy” to His people, for He has given them into the hand of the king of Babylon, making this enemy His representative (verse 5). If His people would obediently serve Him, He

would be the enemy of the enemies of His people (Exo 23:22). But now He, the Lord Himself, is the enemy of His people (cf. Isa 63:10). He has done it, His hand has brought this calamity upon them. We must also be well aware of this in what comes upon us or is said to us. No matter how hostile or carnal something may be that comes upon us, we must accept it from His hand.

Again the word “swallowed” is used (cf. verse 2). Israel and all her palaces were swallowed by Him. All her strongholds have been “destroyed”. It causes an increasing lamentation among His people, the daughter Judah.

He has pulled down His temple as a temporary booth, “His tabernacle”, as if it were a temporary shelter that farmers build in the fields and tear down when they are finished in the fields (verse 6). Nothing remains of the temple, for He has “violently treated” it, which also expresses His anger. He has done it thoroughly. The “garden” is His land. His people have sacrificed to idols in it. So why should He still maintain His temple? Therefore, He has taken away from them the privilege of worshipping Him.

“His appointed meeting place”, the place where the people gathered by and with Him, the temple, is gone. He Himself brought that place to ruin. He was forced to do so because of the behavior of His people. We see the same thing today, where places of gathering are disappearing because pride has made “His place” a place where people call the shots. If He is no longer given all authority in His place of meeting, He can no longer be in the midst there (cf. Mt 18:20).

Everything that the people connected to the LORD (*Yahweh*) in a festive meeting is over. The people have forgotten because there is nothing left reminding of it. The cause of this lies with the LORD. He has also taken away “the appointed feast and sabbath” with the temple. He has made it impossible to meet Him on the occasion of the feasts in the temple. This is true in a double sense: He left the temple and He destroyed it.

With the temple, “king and priest” have also been rejected. The house of David is in captivity as is the priesthood. There is a close connection between the Davidic kingship and the Levitical priesthood. David and his son Solomon were intimately involved with the temple, the priest’s field of activity. When the temple is gone and there is no place for the priest, there

is no place for kingship either. The whole public religious life no longer has a reason to exist. This situation will exist until the true King-Priest, the Lord Jesus, will sit on His throne as Priest and reign (Zec 6:13).

In His majesty, the Lord (*Adonai*) “rejected His altar” and “abandoned His sanctuary” (verse 7). He could no longer maintain it because they continued to sin. By doing so, they indicated that they did not value the altar as a symbol of atonement and His sanctuary as a symbol of His presence.

He has also given the walls of the palaces of princes into the hand of the enemy. What should humanly provide protection becomes an easy obstacle for the enemies to overcome because the Lord helps them.

The enemies themselves have no regard for that. They are in the temple instead of His people. They are not there to thank the LORD, but to sound their roaring voices in haughty joy of victory in that house. It is their day of an appointed feast. It is not a joy to the LORD and not a day of an appointed feast dedicated to Him.

The LORD did not act on a whim. He made a deliberate decision, after careful consideration. Because of their irredeemably sinful behavior, He had to decide to destroy Jerusalem (verse 8). The wall is down. The enemy can walk right in.

That His decision is deliberate is also evident from “a line” that He “stretched out”. Such a thing is also done carefully. His hand worked this “destroying” and determined its precision as with a measuring line (cf. 2Kgs 21:13; Isa 34:11). Usually a measuring line is used to do edifying work (Job 38:5; Zec 1:16), but here it is used to do a destructive work.

The devastation here concerns mainly the fortifications, walls and ramparts, which here are again presented as living persons lamenting what has happened to them. All the protection that was supposed to provide peace and security has collapsed with the result that they languish together.

The gates and bars are destroyed (verse 9). When Nehemiah hears of the downed walls and the destroyed gates and bars, it brings him to humility, prayer and action (Nehemiah 1-3). Those who were supposed to protect and govern the city, “her king and her princes” – possibly Jehoiachin and

his staff are meant here – have been carried away and are among the nations.

No one talks about the law anymore. The law was done away with and the false prophets have nothing to say anymore. The will of God was not asked. The priests were not asked to explain the law; nor were the prophets approached to hear what the LORD had shown them. None of it made sense either because God was silent. Everything that gave guidance to the people on God's behalf disappeared. He had to take it away from them because of their unfaithfulness (cf. 1Sam 28:6). There was no message of comfort and support for them.

Lam 2:10-12 | Response of Some Survivors

*10 The elders of the daughter of Zion
Sit on the ground, they are silent.
They have thrown dust on their heads;
They have girded themselves with sackcloth.
The virgins of Jerusalem
Have bowed their heads to the ground.
11 My eyes fail because of tears,
My spirit is greatly troubled;
My heart is poured out on the earth
Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people,
When little ones and infants faint
In the streets of the city.
12 They say to their mothers,
"Where is grain and wine?"
As they faint like a wounded man
In the streets of the city,
As their life is poured out
On their mothers' bosom.*

These verses no longer tell of the events, but of the condition that resulted. We see that condition especially in the reactions of survivors, from the elders to the youngest of the people. The elders have nothing more to say, they have no wise counsel (verse 10). Powerless and distraught, they sit down in silence. They have lost their respectability. The natural shelter,

the walls, have been pulled down. The spiritual shelter, the elders, has also been pulled down, as it were.

As the wall and the rampart mourn (verse 8), so do the elders. They show signs of mourning, as if someone had died. In their appearance they show how much they mourn over the city's situation (cf. Job 2:12-13; Jer 4:8).

The young women, those who could provide progeny, have lost all hope for the future. The offspring they have brought into the world, they have eaten up in their boundless selfishness to survive at all costs. Now they can do nothing but stare at the ground.

In verse 11, the prophet speaks of his intense sorrow and thus participates in the lament. He cannot help but weep incessantly. As a result, he can no longer use his eyes. He can no longer see anything. Inside, in his spirit, he is full of turmoil. His heart comes out, as if he must vomit, so overwhelmed is he by what has happened to the city. He is wreck about it.

He sees before him the heartbreaking scenes of hunger in the city. He observes how "little ones and infants" sink down in helplessness in the streets of the city, while there is no one to help them. In any war or conflict, the saddest spectacle is the suffering of children.

There is no more poignant picture than that of mothers watching their children die of want, when there is nothing they can give. Jeremiah hears the children lamenting and crying out for food to their mothers (verse 12). Grain refers to necessary provisions and wine to more luxurious, not immediately necessary foods. It is a terrible picture where we hear children say this to their mothers. The children are slowly starving.

Mothers who still have some care for their children have taken them on their laps and feel desperate because they cannot give their children what they need. Babies die in their mothers' arms. The womb, the place of life and security, is no longer a safe place and no longer offers protection from suffering.

Lam 2:13-17 | Jeremiah Laments Jerusalem

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?
For your ruin is as vast as the sea;
Who can heal you?
14 Your prophets have seen for you
False and foolish [visions];
And they have not exposed your iniquity
So as to restore you from captivity,
But they have seen for you false and misleading oracles.
15 All who pass along the way
Clap their hands [in derision] at you;
They hiss and shake their heads
At the daughter of Jerusalem,
"Is this the city of which they said,
'The perfection of beauty,
A joy to all the earth'?"
16 All your enemies
Have opened their mouths wide against you;
They hiss and gnash [their] teeth.
They say, "We have swallowed [her] up!
Surely this is the day for which we waited;
We have reached [it], we have seen [it]."
17 The LORD has done what He purposed;
He has accomplished His word
Which He commanded from days of old.
He has thrown down without sparing,
And He has caused the enemy to rejoice over you;
He has exalted the might of your adversaries.

In verse 13, the prophet speaks to the city. He does want to speak words of comfort and wonders what he should say as a message from the LORD. But he has difficulty finding words of comfort.

Nor can he refer to similar suffering. In suffering, sometimes the awareness that others are in similar suffering can help (cf. 1Pet 5:8-9). But the suffering that afflicts Jerusalem is unprecedented. It knows no example. In

this sense, too, there is no comfort to be found. The fragile defenselessness is reinforced by the double designation “daughter of Jerusalem” and “virgin daughter of Zion”.

The calamity is enormous, yes, as immeasurable as the sea. Is there anyone who can help here? Jeremiah is careful not to speak superficial words of comfort that might imply a vain hope of improvement. All the false prophets have always denied this suffering and healed the breach with the LORD because of their sins at the lightest by speaking of peace when there is no peace (Jer 6:14; 8:11). Where are they now? Jeremiah announced this very suffering (Jer 30:12) and is now suffering with them now that his words have come true.

The false prophets here are tellingly called “*your* prophets”. They are prophets as the people liked them, prophets who appeased them, who told them what they wanted to hear. They fooled the people with their false visions and proclaimed folly (verse 14; Jer 23:18-22; Eze 13:10-16). The word for foolish is literally “lime”, “varnish”. They covered sins under a nice looking coat of varnish (Eze 22:28). They did not want to make people feel guilty. They are soft healers who have caused stinking wounds. Not only do they not call the people back from their wrong ways, but they actually tempt and encourage the people to go wrong ways.

About the iniquity of the people they did not say a word. A true prophet does speak of the iniquity. False prophets speak what the people like to hear and thus drag the people along to destruction. That is how it went with the false prophets who spoke to Jerusalem.

They have not spoken the truth, but words that come from the darkness. The visions they have seen have not come from the LORD, but from the demons. It has been falsehood and deception. This is evident now, as Jerusalem has fallen. These false prophets led the people down a path that ended in this. The shock of the Babylonian captivity is needed to break the power and influence of the popular prophets and expose them as false prophets.

To the disasters of suffering is added the gloating of “all who pass along the way” who witness the suffering of Jerusalem (verse 15). The various gestures – clap their hands, hissing, shaking their heads – indicate dismay,

while the aspect of contempt is also present in them. Surrounding nations, seeing the misery in which Jerusalem is, rejoice and clap their hands for joy. They are also surprised that this is how things have gone with that magnificent city (Psa 48:2).

The enemies also rejoiced over the fall of Jerusalem (verse 16). They put on a big mouth about what has happened to Jerusalem. Their gaping mouths are like those of tearing monsters. This is how they dealt with Jerusalem. With that, a long-held hatred has been satisfied. They hiss to express their disgust for the city. The gnashing of their teeth is an expression of great hatred and anger (Psa 37:12; Acts 7:54).

They wanted to destroy Jerusalem for so long and now have finally succeeded. These words echo their effort that they have made and how satisfied they are now, because the city has finally fallen. This hubris and self-confidence of the enemy makes it difficult for Jerusalem to come to terms with her fate.

In verses 15-16 we also see another picture that we can apply to the Lord Jesus. In it we see what people did when they saw Him in His misery on the cross (Psa 22:7,13; 35:21).

While the enemies in the previous verse boast of what they have done, here the poet speaks of Who actually did it (verse 17). The “we” of the previous verse becomes “He” here. Yet the conclusion must not be drawn from the events that the LORD cannot help it all either, that He would have been powerless to prevent it. No, the horrors are God’s deliberate work. He has done what He had planned. He is fulfilling His word that He spoke through Jeremiah and other prophets based on what He said in the law (Lev 26:14-46; Deu 28:15-44). The LORD had often warned them in earlier days, but they would not listen.

Behind the merriment of the enemy lies the anger of the LORD Who has acted without sparing. He has exalted the might, literally horn, of the enemies, which means that He has given them the strength (cf. 1Sam 2:1) to battle against His city and overcome it.

We also should not be blinded by what people do to us, but realize that the Lord is in control of everything. He is behind everything and controls everything. Therefore, with Him alone we can find help in adversity, if it

strikes us, and He alone can give relief. With Him are deliverances from all distress, even escapes from death (Psa 68:20).

In verse 16 and verse 17 the letters have been switched in order. In the Hebrew alphabet, *ain* comes first and then *pe*. It seems that this happens because in verse 16 the enemy is speaking first, then in verse 17 we are pointed to the LORD. He is the real cause of the misery, not the enemy.

Lam 2:18-19 | Crying Out to the LORD

*18 Their heart cried out to the Lord,
 "O wall of the daughter of Zion,
 Let [your] tears run down like a river day and night;
 Give yourself no relief,
 Let your eyes have no rest.
 19 "Arise, cry aloud in the night
 At the beginning of the night watches;
 Pour out your heart like water
 Before the presence of the Lord;
 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."*

Jeremiah's response about the situation he has seen and described comes in verse 18. Although the destruction has come from the Lord (*Adonai*) and that destruction has taken place according to His purpose, there is no hope of relief other than from that same Lord. Therefore, the heart of the remnant cries out to the Lord (*Adonai*). Jeremiah expresses this crying out and addresses the "wall of the daughter of Zion", by which is meant all the inhabitants within the wall. She must let her tears run down incessantly, day and night. She must allow herself no relief. From her eyes, tears must continually run down.

It is an exhortation to pray in the misery that has befallen them. Prayer is the only thing left in such a situation. It moves the LORD to remember them anyway and to rescue them from their misery. They must do this unceasingly, so that they prove that they expect salvation from Him alone

(cf. Lk 18:1-8). They must also do it in full awareness of their sins, while constantly showing repentance for them, day and night.

When night comes into life, there can be begging to the Lord (*Adonai*) (verse 19). There must be, as soon as the awareness of an invading darkness is there, begging for the children, for the young people. They must pour out their hearts like water before Him (Psa 62:8), which means completely, without reserve. The hands must be lifted up in fervent prayer. Heart and hands go together and in this order: first the heart, then the hands. The stakes of prayer are the little children, the toddlers.

A whole generation is about to perish. We need to lift our hands more to God for the lives of our children, for our youth. Then the Lord can make a new beginning before He comes.

Lam 2:20-22 | The LORD Is Called Upon

*20 See, O LORD, and look!
With whom have You dealt thus?
Should women eat their offspring,
The little ones who were born healthy?
Should priest and prophet be slain
In the sanctuary of the Lord?
21 On the ground in the streets
Lie young and old;
My virgins and my young men
Have fallen by the sword.
You have slain [them] in the day of Your anger,
You have slaughtered, not sparing.
22 You called as in the day of an appointed feast
My terrors on every side;
And there was no one who escaped or survived
In the day of the LORD's anger.
Those whom I bore and reared,
My enemy annihilated them.*

Verses 18-19 are a call to prayer. In verses 20-22 we have the prayer. The people here again say “see, O LORD” (verse 20; Lam 1:9,11,20). Jeremiah

reminds the LORD that He brought this misery upon the people of His election. Is it not so anymore, is the people no longer the people of His election? Will there be no outcome?

The misery has already reached the point where women, in desperation, have eaten their own children (Deu 28:53; cf. 2Kgs 6:24-31). Also the sanctuary of Him Who after all has all authority, the Lord (*Adonai*), has been desecrated in a terrible way. There lie the corpses of priest and prophet slain there by strangers. Should this not come to an end?

There is much lamenting in our day about so much that is wrong. To the extent that it is justified, we should not do that to one another, but speak about it to the Lord. What we cannot say to Him, we should not say to one another.

We may point out to the Lord the suffering that His own are undergoing, under which they are weighed down. We may remind Him of the value of His people to Him. Can He allow the children to fall prey to the despair of the parents? Can He allow the service of priest and prophet to disappear completely? We may beg Him to prevent that or to change it.

Jeremiah points out to the LORD the streets of the city (verse 21). Those who walk through the city shudder at the sight of what the enemy has done. The enemy has killed young and old. They are lying in the streets. Those who are the strength and future of the people have fallen by the sword. Age and gender did not matter to the enemy. Without paying attention to anything, they have sown death and destruction with their sword in great ferocity.

Yet even here Jeremiah sees that they are not the prey of the enemy powers around them, but of the anger of the LORD. He has slaughtered them and could no longer spare them because they have persisted so much in their sins.

He utters it to the LORD that He has called the enemies together, as it were, to feast at the expense of the city (verse 22). We see here again that interchange of feast and terror, or worse, that connection between feast and terror. What is a day of an appointed feast for the enemy, is for the pious a day of terrors by which he is completely surrounded. There is no escape from the terrors for anyone.

The “I” speaking here is Jeremiah. He is here interpreting the voice and feelings of the city, the remnant. Those he has carried on his hands and raised up are the children of Zion, the inhabitants of the city. They are those children who have been killed by the enemy.

The important lesson of this chapter is that the city expresses all its woes before the LORD. If we have reasons to lament, about ourselves, our family, the church, we may go to Him with our laments. We may give Him the opportunity to do with it what is pleasing to Him, to the glorification of His Name.

Lamentations 3

Lam 3:1-18 | The Man Who Has Seen Affliction

*1 I am the man who has seen affliction
Because of the rod of His wrath.
2 He has driven me and made me walk
In darkness and not in light.
3 Surely against me He has turned His hand
Repeatedly all the day.
4 He has caused my flesh and my skin to waste away,
He has broken my bones.
5 He has besieged and encompassed me with bitterness and hardship.
6 In dark places He has made me dwell,
Like those who have long been dead.
7 He has walled me in so that I cannot go out;
He has made my chain heavy.
8 Even when I cry out and call for help,
He shuts out my prayer.
9 He has blocked my ways with hewn stone;
He has made my paths crooked.
10 He is to me like a bear lying in wait,
[Like] a lion in secret places.
11 He has turned aside my ways and torn me to pieces;
He has made me desolate.
12 He bent His bow
And set me as a target for the arrow.
13 He made the arrows of His quiver
To enter into my inward parts.
14 I have become a laughingstock to all my people,
Their [mocking] song all the day.
15 He has filled me with bitterness,
He has made me drunk with wormwood.
16 He has broken my teeth with gravel;*

He has made me cower in the dust.

*17 My soul has been rejected from peace;
I have forgotten happiness.*

*18 So I say, "My strength has perished,
And [so has] my hope from the LORD."*

In verse 1, there is a new 'I' person. In Lamentations 1, the 'I' person is the city speaking out about the suffering that has come upon her. In Lamentations 2, it is Jeremiah who speaks of and to the city, to voice her lament to the LORD. That chapter concludes with that as well. Now we come to a third "I". The city has spoken in the female form. But now a man speaks. It is someone from among the people who has experienced suffering himself and now describes it as his own personal suffering. Who else could this be but Jeremiah?

"Seen" here implies not only observation, but also participation in it. Here it means an actual experiencing. Furthermore, it also appears that this man is innocent. He does make himself one with the guilty people and speaks of 'we', but personally he can say in verse 52 that he has enemies who pursue him without cause. The people in Lamentations 1 cannot say that. They are partly to blame. But here someone is speaking very personally, someone from the guilty people, but who himself is innocent.

We also hear the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking in the remnant from the time then. That is how it will be in the future. The faithful remnant will have to experience everything. They will suffer doubly: both at the hands of the enemies from outside and at the hands of the apostate people from inside.

This has been the part of the Lord Jesus, Who identifies Himself one with this remnant. We often hear this in the book of Psalms. His voice makes itself one with that of the remnant. We hear the Innocent speak: "I am the man." The rod of God's wrath comes down on Him.

The depth of Jeremiah's suffering is reflected in the three complaints in verses 1-3. He has "seen", experienced, and witnessed misery

1. through the rod of the LORD's wrath (verse 1),
2. because the LORD drives him into darkness (verse 2), and

3. because the LORD turns His hand against him again and again (verse 3).

In contrast to the expectation of being led by God as his Shepherd into light and joy, he has been driven in darkness, which is affliction (verse 2). The word for “driven” does not have the meaning of God’s gracious guidance, but of driving animals. He was driven harshly by the rod of God’s wrath.

The suffering he experiences as a result is without ceasing (verse 3). It goes on and on, without a moment to be able to take a breath. We can think of the great tribulation for the remnant, but also of the Lord Jesus and His suffering on the cross.

In verses 4-18 follow the evidence of His suffering. In them we hear how this suffering was experienced. The first evidence is the wasting away of His flesh and skin and the breaking of His bones (verse 4). Flesh, skin and bones make up the whole body. The breaking down of the individual parts may be the result of a serious illness (cf. *Psa 38:3*) or an aging process, where everything breaks down and wastes away. The breaking of the bones refers to the removal of all strength and an end to the ability to live (*Isa 38:13*).

In doing so, he indicates the severity of this illness. The removal of the strength to bear it shows the depth of his suffering. All his strength is failing him. We hear here the language of *Psalm 22* and *Psalm 69*. We also hear someone like *Job* speaking in these verses (*Job 7:5; 19:20; 30:30*).

In verse 5 we are confronted with suffering from the outside. *Jeremiah* uses the picture of a besieged city, against which the enemy is erecting a siege wall to attack the inhabitants of the city. His suffering feels, as if the LORD has thrown up a rampart of bitterness and hardship against him. He is surrounded by it, hemmed in. From all sides, destruction grins at him like a high, impregnable wall. *Nebuchadnezzar* has built against *Jerusalem* and surrounded the city (*Jer 52:4*), but *Jeremiah* knows that the LORD is doing it.

He feels so hopeless and despairing that he already counts himself among those who have died (verse 6; *Psa 143:3*). His comparison with “those who have long been dead” also means that he is not only abandoned and alone, but also that he is forgotten, gone from memory. No one thinks of him anymore. That is how hopeless he feels. Inside wasting away, around him

a wall, while he is in deadly darkness (Psa 88:10-12). Is there a more tragic condition imaginable in which a human being can find himself?

Verses 7-9 are a climax and evaluation of the previous three verses, reflecting his feelings of total loss of freedom of movement. Jeremiah feels like someone who is completely walled in (verse 7). He is encased in concrete that surrounds him like an armor. He feels surrounded by a wall of affliction inflicted upon him by the LORD. In his stone shell he is also bound with chains of bronze. The chains of bronze with which Zedekiah was brought to Babylon (Jer 39:7; 52:11), he feels as if he was bound with them himself. This is hard on the prophet to whom the LORD promised that He would make him walls of bronze against the people (Jer 1:18).

Jeremiah feels so hemmed in that he believes that even his prayer does not reach God's ears (verse 8; verse 44). It is dramatic to experience that God does not hear, that He closes His ears to prayer (cf. Psa 22:1b-2; 77:9). Also the way out upward seems closed.

Not only does he feel himself enclosed in a narrow, walled-off space, but he also sees that all his roads, if he could go them, are blocked with hewn stones (verse 9; cf. Job 19:8). And if he could find a way, it turns out to be crooked. We cannot enter a road that is blocked (cf. Hos 2:6b). If we go a crooked way, we won't end up where we want to be. Here, to Jeremiah's feelings, the LORD makes his path crooked. He is not coming out to Him. That is something to be distraught about. Balaam's way is also blocked by the LORD (Num 22:26), but that is because this bad man is on his way to do a bad work.

In verse 10 the picture changes again (cf. Hos 13:7-8; Amos 5:19). Jeremiah experiences God "like a bear lying in wait" and "a lion in secret places". A bear and a lion are tearing animals that know no compassion. They are out to attack and devour their prey unexpectedly. They lurk and hide and wait patiently until their unsuspecting prey is near them. Then they strike ruthlessly.

It is to him as if the LORD has so deflected his ways that he did have to fall into the claws of the bear and the lion (verse 11). The LORD has allowed him to fall into a trap. In this way the LORD has torn his life apart and made him desolate. There is no life left in him and it cannot emerge from it.

The next picture of the LORD looms before Jeremiah: that of an archer (verse 12). He feels himself the prey of God's arrow on the bow that He has bent against him and aimed at him. He experiences that God is after him.

The arrows from the LORD's quiver hit him in his inward parts, literally his kidneys (verse 13; cf. Deu 32:23; Job 16:13). The kidneys are the seat of wisdom (Psa 16:7; mind is literally kidneys). He has lost all his wisdom. He cannot understand or reconcile this with what he knows of God.

Besides feeling like the target of God's arrows, he is also the target of jeers (verse 14). It is not here as in Lamentations 1 where the people lament about their enemies, but here Jeremiah speaks as the innocent about what his own people do to him (Jer 20:7b).

What Jeremiah says in verse 15 is the experience of Job (Job 9:18; cf. Rth 1:20). The LORD has said that He will do this to Judah and the false prophets (Jer 9:15; 23:15), but now that fate befalls the faithful prophet. Instead of good food, he is given nothing but bitter food to eat. It is not even possible to refuse it, for it is administered to him. He has to eat it. He is satisfied with it and drenched in it.

Taking in that bitter food is like biting on gravel (verse 16). Biting one's teeth on gravel is the punishment for telling lies (Pro 20:17). When you have that experience, even though you have always spoken the truth, you feel being pressed down in dust or ashes (cf. Jer 6:26). Then there is no more peace, nor is there any memory of the good (verse 17).

Verse 18 is a kind of conclusion to the previous verses, in which Jeremiah expressed his feelings (cf. verse 54b). Such a spiritual state of utter despair robs a person of all his strength. What is left when nothing remains of what was expected of the LORD? The lament ends in despair. Yet despair does not have the last word. Despair brings to prayer and prayer brings to hope. We see this in the following verses.

The question may well be asked what we do with our laments when we become despondent and think that the expectation of the Lord is gone. When that expectation is gone, what good is prayer? As a result, some have fallen away from the faith, showing that they had no living relationship with the Lord. But for the believer, precisely when there is despair, the way out is to pray again.

Lam 3:19-21 | Prayer

*19 Remember my affliction and my wandering,
the wormwood and bitterness.*

*20 Surely my soul remembers
And is bowed down within me.*

*21 This I recall to my mind,
Therefore I have hope.*

Even though Jeremiah thinks the LORD does not hear (verse 8), he continues to pray (verse 19). He cannot help but think of the LORD. It simply cannot be that the LORD does not hear. Would it leave Him unmoved when He sees his misery and homeless situation? Would it not move Him when He notices the wormwood and the bitterness that the wretched must take to himself as a bitter, disgusting food?

For all the despair, he himself cannot help but think of the LORD (verse 20). Then new hope comes (verse 21). The hope was gone, there was despair, but after prayer there is hope again. There is the reminder of what a God he is dealing with, that He is and remains kind and gracious. He takes this to heart. He takes here a purpose of heart. He ‘pulls himself together’. That is why hope suddenly flares up here.

Isn't it the same with us? We can also sometimes fail to see the aforementioned attributes of God for a time. We can become despondent about it, all the more so when we only see suffering and distress and ruin. But when we remember that He is greater than all distress, we will with resolute heart stay with Him (cf. Acts 11:23) because He is the unchanging One. Then hope also returns.

It is important, however, to keep in mind the difference between an Old Testament believer and a New Testament believer. The Old Testament believer does not know full salvation through the work of Christ. He lives one moment in the assurance that he has been accepted by God, while the next moment he may have lost that assurance again.

The believer who lives after the work of Christ on the cross may live in the full assurance of salvation. That he may occasionally go through a period when this is not experienced by him is something else than doubting salvation.

However, it may be that even believers in this day and age do not live in the full assurance of salvation. The cause of this is usually wrong teaching from God's Word. This is especially the case with those who use the law as the standard for their lives.

Lam 3:22-33 | Insights and Perspectives

22 *The LORD's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease,
For His compassions never fail.*

23 *[They] are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.*

24 *"The LORD is my portion," says my soul,
"Therefore I have hope in Him."*

25 *The LORD is good to those who wait for Him,
To the person who seeks Him.*

26 *[It is] good that he waits silently
For the salvation of the LORD.*

27 *[It is] good for a man that he should bear
The yoke in his youth.*

28 *Let him sit alone and be silent
Since He has laid [it] on him.*

29 *Let him put his mouth in the dust,
Perhaps there is hope.*

30 *Let him give his cheek to the smiter,
Let him be filled with reproach.*

31 *For the Lord will not reject forever,*

32 *For if He causes grief,*

Then He will have compassion

According to His abundant lovingkindness.

33 *For He does not afflict willingly*

Or grieve the sons of men.

Now instead of lamenting he begins to speak of the LORD's lovingkindnesses (verse 22). For the first time in this chapter he involves the whole people. He does not say "that I am not consumed", but "that we are not consumed" [as "indeed never cease" can also be translated]. In verses 40-47 he also speaks in the plural. He knows that his feelings about the loving-

kindness, compassion and faithfulness of the LORD are shared by all who cling to the LORD in their distress.

The eyes must be open for it to be able to say that. We learn this in dealing with God. If we have an eye for His lovingkindness and that His compassion never fails, there is the comfort of His presence every day (verse 23). Every day we may begin with that and count on it to remain with us, for His faithfulness is great. Every new day is a renewal of God's goodness.

To say that the LORD is kind and compassionate means that they feel supported by Him in the need in which they are. To say that His faithfulness is great means that they count on Him to keep His promises. One is for the present and the other for the future. For one, the believer looks upward; for the other, the believer looks forward. Both aspects are an encouragement to hold fast to Him.

What Jeremiah says in verse 24 is also what the priest and Levite say, who have no portion in the land, but whose portion is the LORD (Num 18:20; cf. Psa 16:5a; 73:26; 119:57a). He is their ground of life; He will provide for them and sustain them. By "my soul" is meant the whole person.

No support is left for him but the LORD alone. It is now not just a hope in what the LORD gives, as in verses 21-23, but a hope in the LORD Himself. It is not a general hope, but a hope with an Object. This is how Jeremiah overcomes his despair. He communicates this so that all who are in great suffering will also have that hope. To have God as our portion is the only basis for hope.

Verses 25-27 all three begin not only with the same letter, but also with the same word, the word "good" (tow). This word expresses the will and purpose of God. These verses show three aspects of goodness. The first aspect is the goodness of the LORD Himself, of His nature, His Being (verse 25). When the prophet has sight of this again, he testifies to it. Even though the LORD must bring pain and suffering, it is necessary to hold on to the fact that He is good. He expresses it that the LORD is good to everyone who waits for Him. This He is not only for him, but for all who seek Him.

The second aspect of goodness has the believer's happiness in mind. It is good if we do not consume our strength with lamenting and grumbling, but wait for God's time and expect our help from Him (verse 26). He gives

relief in His time. Therefore it is good to hope for His salvation, His outcome, and to wait for it silently.

Even though we are in great distress and even though we have to denounce ourselves because of our sins and even though we have to see God's wrath in what is happening, if we flee to Him, He gives relief. Again, it is important to keep in mind the distinction already mentioned between an Old Testament believer and the New Testament believer (verse 21).

The third aspect of goodness is bearing the yoke that the LORD puts on someone in his youth (verse 27). It involves bowing under what He brings upon someone. One is taught not to rebel against it, but to accept it in the knowledge that God's goodness governs it. The purpose is that someone in the growth and blossoming of his life already learns to deal with situations of brokenness and failing strength.

Such a yoke is good because it paves the way to the good of the previous two verses. The yoke teaches one to submit to the will of the LORD. Many have problems with the yoke later because they did not learn to bear it in their youth. It is about learning to bear the yoke of obedience and trust. Those who are exercised in it will have an easier time later. If we only spoil our children and always give them what they ask for, they will not know how to deal with setbacks later.

Also, verses 28-30 begin not only with the same letter, but also with the same encouraging word, the word "let". In connection with the previous verses, this means that those who acknowledge that the LORD is good can show it in their attitude when suffering. There is an ascending level of difficulty in these verses. Verse 29 is more difficult than verse 28, while verse 30 is even more difficult than verse 29.

The yoke in youth (verse 27) is the yoke of suffering that the LORD imposes (verse 28). This yoke will separate a person from ordinary life and turn him into one who is cast out. To sit alone and be silent involves both acceptance of God's will and the refusal to lament to people.

Young people especially have had a tough time during the siege and fall of Jerusalem. Their whole future is in ruins with the city. They find it difficult to bear their fate. However, if they have the same firm confidence in God's

promises in these terrible circumstances as Jeremiah has expressed here, it will bring them enormous spiritual gain.

Then there should be no rebellion, but a silent acceptance of it (verse 29). It is suffering for His sake. Then we bear His yoke. The word “perhaps” does not take away the assurance of hearing. The word expresses that there is no right to be answered nor that it can be claimed.

Bearing the yoke leads to the willingness to be treated as a slave (verse 30). Giving the cheek to the smiter here means that people are bowing under the judgment that God is exercising. It is He Who strikes. When the Lord Jesus speaks of turning the other cheek (Mt 5:39), it has to do with other people hurting us for His sake. It is going the way of reproach after Him and on that way experiencing what His portion has been.

If the Lord is our portion, then it is our portion too. He gave His back to those who stroke Him, and His cheeks to those who plucked out the beard (Isa 50:6). Many bear in patience the afflictions that come from God, but when people do something to them, they react in anger. The God-fearing endures the latter as well as the former as sent from God.

Also, verses 31-33 begin not only with the same letter but also with the same word, the word “for”. They give reasons that make bearing the yoke easier for they offer hope and prospects. We may feel that He has rejected us forever, but He does not (verse 31). For Jeremiah, He is “the Lord” (Adonai), Who controls everything; nothing gets out of His hands. He determines both the severity and duration of the suffering. The time of suffering is over when He has accomplished His purpose with it.

Again, we have here the enormous contrast with the experience of the New Testament believer. We may say: “We know.” This is not pride or a false sense of security, but the language of one who sees the sacrifice of Christ as God sees it. The uncertainty of the Old Testament believer has been removed by the Offering for New Testament believers and replaced by the certainty that God is for us.

Another reason to bear the yoke and not cast it off is the knowledge that after He has caused grief, He also will have compassion (verse 32). And He will show this in an overwhelming way. He not only takes away all sorrow, but He does so in a way that that sorrow is forgotten in light of “His

abundant lovingkindness". That great lovingkindness is so compassionate that nothing of the sadness remains (cf. 2Cor 4:16-17).

The third reason to accept the yoke is the knowledge of God's heart (verse 33). He is not a God Who takes pleasure in afflicting and grieving people. He does so with pain in His heart. Yet He knows that this is necessary because He wants man to return to Him. Therefore, He acts out of love.

Lam 3:34-39 | The Lord Sees Evil

*34 To crush under His feet
All the prisoners of the land,
35 To deprive a man of justice
In the presence of the Most High,
36 To defraud a man in his lawsuit—
Of these things the Lord does not approve.
37 Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass,
Unless the Lord has commanded [it]?
38 [Is it] not from the mouth of the Most High
That both good and ill go forth?
39 Why should [any] living mortal, or [any] man,
Offer complaint in view of his sins?*

Jeremiah now deals in one long sentence (verses 34-36) with the objections of people to what he has just said. Also these three verses begin not only with the same letter, but also with the same word, the word "to" or "that". This word is the introduction to the observation of some facts which the believer perceives and which he cannot reconcile with God's goodness. Nor can he see causing grief as an evidence of His love.

Someone may object: 'It may be true that the LORD does not bring grief willingly, but what about the evils and troubles that people bring upon us?' Surely, God's people suffered greatly from the inhumane treatment of the Babylonians (verse 34). The enemy crushed them under his [not: His] feet.

Added to this is the fact that they are burdened with utter lawlessness and are defrauded in lawsuit (verses 35-36). Justice is being bent, not caring that they are committing this injustice "in the presence of the Most High".

Why should they? The Most High does not seem to care. He does not intervene to punish this injustice.

The doers of evil do not remember that He is omnipresent and that nothing is hidden from Him. This leads them not only to pervert the law, but to act in total contradiction to it. Those who stand in their right are proven wrong. The believers wonder if God even knows, if He sees, and if He still cares about them.

Jeremiah responds to this with the question which is at the same time the answer, that the Lord certainly does see all evil. Nothing escapes Him, nor does He forget all the evil that has been and is being done. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (Gen 18:25b). Here, asking the question is like answering it. Of course He does justice. There is no evil that happens on earth over which He would have lost control. Man has no power and evil does not have free rein to do what pleases them without the permission or direct will of God. He is "the Most High", that is, He is above every conceivable power. He is "the Lord", *Adonai*, which is the sovereign Ruler.

Verses 37-38 underscore the omnipotent power of "the Lord", which necessitates the acceptance of His will. When He speaks, something always happens, whether in view of creation (Psa 33:9; Gen 1:3), or as here (verse 37) in view of the relationships among the people. Everything, both good and ill, comes from the hand of God (verse 38; Isa 45:7; Amos 3:6b). No one can act in his own right. Each is dependent on Him. How, then, would God have no knowledge of what befalls them? Do they think this is beyond God's control?

"The Most High" is above all people and nations. Everything is under His authority. Kings may think that they govern everything, but they only do what He determines. The Most High has everything under His control. He determines whether trouble or peace should be sent, He decrees whether evil or good events or times are needed. What befell Israel came from God's hand as punishment for their sins. What happens to us comes from Him and not from a stranger. That thought helps to find peace in the circumstances.

Jeremiah rejects the objections with a question that is an answer (verse 39). No man who is alive has a reason to complain to God. The fact that he is

alive is already a proof of God's mercy. His power does not fall short. The only thing they (and we) may complain about is about their (our) sins, not about circumstances. To complain about our circumstances is to complain against and about God. These words are preparation for the next section.

Lam 3:40-45 | Prayer of the People

*40 Let us examine and probe our ways,
And let us return to the LORD.
41 We lift up our heart and hands
Toward God in heaven;
42 We have transgressed and rebelled,
You have not pardoned.
43 You have covered [Yourself] with anger
And pursued us;
You have slain [and] have not spared.
44 You have covered Yourself with a cloud
So that no prayer can pass through.
45 [You have made us mere] offscouring and refuse
In the midst of the peoples.*

These verses connect directly to verse 39 and contain the call to lament about themselves before the LORD. The prophet here is going to speak in the “we” form. He is speaking on behalf of the people here, leading them down the road of confessing their sins. The first thing to do is to examine their ways, that is of their deeds, to discover where things have gone wrong (verse 40). Then they will see that the fault lies in leaving the LORD. Therefore, they must return to Him.

Let them turn to Him in prayer, toward God in heaven (verse 41) and no longer to the queen of heaven and other pagan idols. It must be a genuine return to the LORD, that is with the heart, and not a meaningless outward waving of the hands. The lifting up of the hands is the usual attitude of prayer (Exo 9:33; 1Kgs 8:22; Ezra 9:5; cf. Psa 25:1; 143:8). But the point is that the heart, the whole inner man, is involved in prayer.

The not pardoning has been shown by the disciplining (verse 42) that has come because of their unrepentant attitude and persistence in sin. Here

they acknowledge the righteousness that God has not pardoned, for their confession has not been a matter of their heart (verse 44).

In verses 43-45, the prophet goes on to acknowledge God's righteous anger. The people admit that because of their sins the LORD must cover Himself with anger as if it were a garment (verse 43). The people see from Him only His anger. He must pursue them because they want to flee the righteous discipline. But He knows how to find them and kills them, not sparing them.

Besides covering Himself with anger and killing them without sparing them, He also covers Himself with a cloud (verse 44). In this way He makes Himself inaccessible to them. They experience this when they cry out to Him. Their prayer does not come to Him, because it is not a prayer of repentance for their sins, but only because of the misery in which they are.

That which has escaped His anger has been made by Him to be offscouring and refuse (verse 45). There is nothing left of their former fame and the former prestige they had among the peoples. For Paul, this is an experience because of his faithfulness to the commission he received from his Lord (1Cor 4:13b).

Lam 3:46-54 | Renewed Complaints

*46 All our enemies have opened their mouths against us.
47 Panic and pitfall have befallen us,
Devastation and destruction;
48 My eyes run down with streams of water
Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.
49 My eyes pour down unceasingly,
Without stopping,
50 Until the LORD looks down
And sees from heaven.
51 My eyes bring pain to my soul
Because of all the daughters of my city.
52 My enemies without cause
Hunted me down like a bird;
53 They have silenced me in the pit*

And have placed a stone on me.

54 Waters flowed over my head;

I said, "I am cut off!"

Jeremiah goes on to describe the vile treatment they are subjected to on the part of the enemy. He sees all their enemies open their mouths to devour them (verse 46). This fills them with fear. He sees the pitfall, devastation and destruction before him, with no one to save (verse 47). That whole sight fills him with intense sorrow, so that tears run down from his eye like streams of water (verse 48). The downfall of the daughter of his people affects him deeply.

He will continue to cry, he cannot do otherwise, for he has no rest (verse 49). There will only be rest, when "the LORD looks down and sees from heaven" (verse 50; cf. Exo 3:7-10). That is, He will then look upon His people and come down to redeem them. What Jeremiah now sees is a torment to his soul (verse 51). All the daughters of his city are in deep misery.

In verses 52-54 Jeremiah compares himself

1. to a bird that is the target of a hunter (verse 52),
2. to a wild beast caught in a pit (verse 53), and
3. to one who is near drowning (verse 54).

It shows the hopelessness of his situation and that of Judah. There is no hope of survival.

In these verses Jeremiah is again speaking of himself. What he says in verse 52, the Lord Jesus also said. Without cause, He too was persecuted, hated, scorned and killed. Jeremiah also literally experienced being thrown into a pit (verse 53; Jer 37:11-21; 38:1-6).

In verse 54 we again hear the cry from a depth of affliction (cf. Psa 69:1b-2; Jona 2:3). He imagines himself and them lost as he feels cut off from God's compassions. But it is precisely because of the thought of this that he turns to the LORD out of the pit in the next verse.

Lam 3:55-66 | Prayer for Deliverance

55 I called on Your name, O LORD,

Out of the lowest pit.

56 You have heard my voice,
"Do not hide Your ear from my [prayer for] relief,
From my cry for help."
57 You drew near when I called on You;
You said, "Do not fear!"
58 O Lord, You have pleaded my soul's cause;
You have redeemed my life.
59 O LORD, You have seen my oppression;
Judge my case.
60 You have seen all their vengeance,
All their schemes against me.
61 You have heard their reproach, O LORD,
All their schemes against me.
62 The lips of my assailants and their whispering
[Are] against me all day long.
63 Look on their sitting and their rising;
I am their mocking song.
64 You will recompense them, O LORD,
According to the work of their hands.
65 You will give them hardness of heart,
Your curse will be on them.
66 You will pursue them in anger and destroy them
From under the heavens of the LORD!

From the darkest night of affliction, Jeremiah called on the name of the LORD (verse 55). This is what Jonah also does when he is in the darkness of the stomach of the fish (Jona 2:1-10). In that great distress and as he cries out to the LORD with an appeal to His Name, he receives the inner assurance that the LORD has heard his voice (verse 56). But then, let Him not hide His ear from him. Let Him not consider Himself deaf to his sighs and cries for help. During prayer he remembers an earlier occasion when he cried out to the LORD. Then He has been near to him. Then he heard His voice and what He answered: "Do not fear!" (verse 57).

Jeremiah also remembers that the Lord, *Adonai*, has always helped and vindicated him against the accusers (verse 58). His accusers are gone and

his life is no longer in danger. He owes the redemption of his life to the Lord. The highest Power has vindicated him and redeemed his life.

This gives him courage to knock on God's door to bring him justice now that he has been wronged again. He emphatically addresses Him in verse 58 as "O Lord", *Adonai*, and in verse 59 as "O LORD", *Yahweh*. He makes a penetrating appeal to Him as the sovereign Ruler (*Adonai*) and the faithful God of the covenant (*Yahweh*).

The LORD knows that His servant feels wronged, that he has been wronged unjustly. Therefore, he asks Him to judge his case against his enemies (verse 59). After all, his enemies are out for vengeance and all their schemes are against him (verse 60).

The LORD not only heard his pleading, but also the reproach of the enemies and their schemes against him (verse 61). He has heard their talking and even their whispering that they have uttered against him all day long (verse 62). They have no other occupation. Their lives are filled with hatred against him. Let the LORD observe all their movements, for he is their mocking song (verse 63).

This chapter ends with a new assurance. It is more of an assurance than a question to the LORD to recompense the enemies what they deserve (verse 64). Jeremiah asks this not out of vindictiveness, but from the certainty of the justice of God, Who will not always let His people be prey to the boundless arbitrariness of their enemies. Jeremiah does not take the law into his own hands, but leaves the retribution to the LORD.

He does ask, entirely consistent with God's dealings with such men, that the LORD will close their hearts to His call and seal their judgment so that the curse will come upon them (verse 65). He adds that the LORD will pursue them in His anger to such an extent that they will be destroyed from under the heavens (verse 66).

He does not ask all this out of a desire for personal satisfaction. He asks that because of what they have done to God's people, God's city and God's temple, and thus ultimately to God Himself. He longs for the glorification of God's Name.

Lamentations 4

Introduction

This chapter is remarkably similar to Lamentations 2. Like Lamentations 1 and 2, it begins with the word “how” (Lam 1:1; 2:1). The difference is that each verse consists not of six, but of four lines. The chapter consists of laments before the LORD and it is about oneself and not about others. It deals with the glorious past and the disastrous present of Zion.

Lam 4:1-10 | Past and Present

*1 How dark the gold has become,
[How] the pure gold has changed!
The sacred stones are poured out
At the corner of every street.*

*2 The precious sons of Zion,
Weighed against fine gold,
How they are regarded as earthen jars,
The work of a potter's hands!*

*3 Even jackals offer the breast,
They nurse their young;
[But] the daughter of my people has become cruel
Like ostriches in the wilderness.*

*4 The tongue of the infant cleaves
To the roof of its mouth because of thirst;
The little ones ask for bread,
[But] no one breaks [it] for them.*

*5 Those who ate delicacies
Are desolate in the streets;
Those reared in purple
Embrace ash pits.*

*6 For the iniquity of the daughter of my people
Is greater than the sin of Sodom,
Which was overthrown as in a moment,*

*And no hands were turned toward her.
 7 Her consecrated ones were purer than snow,
 They were whiter than milk;
 They were more ruddy [in] body than corals,
 Their polishing [was like] lapis lazuli.
 8 Their appearance is blacker than soot,
 They are not recognized in the streets;
 Their skin is shriveled on their bones,
 It is withered, it has become like wood.
 9 Better are those slain with the sword
 Than those slain with hunger;
 For they pine away, being stricken
 For lack of the fruits of the field.
 10 The hands of compassionate women
 Boiled their own children;
 They became food for them
 Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.*

In verse 1 it is about the temple – the once magnificent golden building, the magnificent dwelling place of God – which has now been robbed of its golden luster. Gold and fine gold are indications of what is very precious and shiny. That luster is gone. The entire sanctuary has been demolished. The large stones are scattered throughout the city. We see here again the characteristic trait of the lament: the contrast between the glorious past and the ruinous present.

In verse 2, it is about the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They, like the gold of the temple, are precious. They were meant by the LORD to be His “own possession”, to be for Him “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exo 19:5-6). But nothing is left of their luster either. They have degenerated into fragile pottery that is carelessly thrown away because of its uselessness. Again, the prosperous past is contrasted with the disastrous present.

The theme of the children comes up again and again (verse 3). They are the most suffering, hit hardest. Jackals have even more feeling for their young than the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They are like ostriches. Ostriches do not care about their young (Job 39:13-18). This is the result of Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction which in turn is the result of the sins of the people. The

children are not looked after (verse 4). There are no natural feelings with the cruel enemy, but also no longer with the people. The infant is not given the breast and pleading older children are ignored.

Even the rich and princes, who have been used to luxury, have nothing left of their wealth (verse 5). They have no food. Once they prostrated themselves on precious cushions, now they sit in the ash pit, surrounded by it and embracing it (cf. Job 2:8).

In verse 6 we hear the cause of the misery from the mouth of Jeremiah. It has been said before. Yet it is not a repetition, for it goes deeper. It is not the description of a condition, but of its cause: the sin of the people which is greater than that of Sodom.

What the iniquities are is not mentioned. It is mentioned earlier that the sins of Jerusalem are *similar* to those of Sodom (Isa 1:10; Jer 23:14; Eze 16:46-48), but here they are presented as *greater* than those of Sodom. The cause is the greater responsibility that Jerusalem has. They have knowledge of the LORD and more privileges. They have not lived by these, but on the contrary have abused the privileges (cf. Amos 3:2; Lk 12:47-48a).

Sodom was judged by *sudden* destruction, and *no human hand* was involved in that either (Gen 19:25; cf. Dan 2:34,45). The judgment on Jerusalem is more severe. Jerusalem suffers *constantly* and that from the part of *men*. She suffered many months of siege and its inhabitants were finally ruthlessly killed by the enemies.

“Her consecrated ones” (verse 7) is literally “her Nazarites”, a word used for one who is set apart from his contemporaries by a distinctive feature (Gen 49:26; Deu 33:16). Here it is the made up ladies and gentlemen who passed gracefully through the city. They no longer have anything of the former elegance. The features white and red are features with which the bride describes the bridegroom in Song of Songs (Song 5:10a). They are the features that the Bridegroom placed on Jerusalem, but there is nothing left of them.

All beauty – of which the white skin is a sign – has disappeared. In its place has come repulsive blackness (verse 8; cf. Song 1:5-6a). They have become even more lackluster than something that is covered with soot (Job 30:30). Their faces are so distorted that they are no longer acknowledged. They

walk like skeletons. Their skin that glowed with oil is all withered like that of old people.

The sword provides a quick death, but death by hunger is preceded by a long suffering (verse 9). Just as others are pierced by the sword and die quickly, so they are mortally wounded by lack of food and die slowly.

The distress caused by famine can be so great that it drives people insane (verse 10). In their madness, women who were once merciful now unmercifully cook their own children (Lam 2:20; 2Kgs 6:25-29; cf. Isa 49:15; Jer 19:9). They eat their children as comfort bread, burial bread (Jer 16:17; Eze 24:17; Hos 9:4). "The daughter" is sometimes the city itself and sometimes the inhabitants.

Lam 4:11-16 | Confession of the Cause of Affliction

11 *The LORD has accomplished His wrath,
He has poured out His fierce anger;
And He has kindled a fire in Zion
Which has consumed its foundations.*

12 *The kings of the earth did not believe,
Nor [did] any of the inhabitants of the world,
That the adversary and the enemy
Could enter the gates of Jerusalem.*

13 *Because of the sins of her prophets
[And] the iniquities of her priests,
Who have shed in her midst
The blood of the righteous;*

14 *They wandered, blind, in the streets;
They were defiled with blood
So that no one could touch their garments.*

15 *"Depart! Unclean!" they cried of themselves.
"Depart, depart, do not touch!"
So they fled and wandered;
[Men] among the nations said,
"They shall not continue to dwell [with us]."*

16 *The presence of the LORD has scattered them,
He will not continue to regard them;*

They did not honor the priests,

They did not favor the elders.

In these verses we hear a detailed confession of the cause of the affliction. All this befalls Zion because the LORD has accomplished His wrath (verse 11). “Accomplished” means ‘completed’, ‘fully expressed’. Hence this dire fate. The LORD has destroyed Zion with the fire of His anger. Not Nebuchadnezzar, but He has kindled the fire that has consumed the foundations of the city, so that there is no foundation left to be called a city.

Everyone knows that Jerusalem was a strong, impregnable city (verse 12). It was unthinkable that it would be taken. Yet that is what happened now, because God’s holiness was not reckoned with. He cannot let sin go unpunished, even among His chosen city and people.

The cause of the city’s condition is the sins and iniquities of the spiritual leaders of the people, the false prophets and priests (verse 13). God has had to cancel His protection of the city. On her sticks the blood of the righteous who have perished with the unrighteous.

The prophets are the false prophets, who instead of showing God’s will to the people have prophesied what has arisen in their own hearts and is pleasing to men. The priests have had to explain God’s law, but have become the grossest lawbreakers and have gone ahead the people on a path of sin that has caused this judgment.

This select company of prophets and priests have blood on their hands. They have killed those who warned them of the coming judgment (cf. Mt 23:35). And not only that. They have silenced the warning voices so that judgment has become inevitable.

These deceivers wander in the streets like blind men (verse 14). They look terrible in their blood-stained garment. It is the outward sign of their conduct in which they have shed the blood of righteous people. They bear the mark of Cain and must be treated as lepers (verse 15).

The prestige they had among the people is completely gone. The people who are themselves unclean because of their sins are now driving out these false prophets and priests. The misguided people cry out in anger to them that they must go away. They shout what lepers are obliged to shout

of themselves (Lev 13:45). As if they were lepers, they are driven out by all. They are not granted a place to stay among the nations in exile.

In verse 16 the second confession of sin ends, which is at the same time a confession of faith. In fact, the false confessors are scattered not by the people, but by the LORD, so that they can no longer exercise their evil influence. It is because they have not been honoring the true priests and did not favor the elders.

Lam 4:17-20 | Lamentation About Dashed Hope

17 *Yet our eyes failed,
[Looking] for help was useless;
In our watching we have watched
For a nation that could not save.*

18 *They hunted our steps
So that we could not walk in our streets;
Our end drew near,
Our days were finished
For our end had come.*

19 *Our pursuers were swifter
Than the eagles of the sky;
They chased us on the mountains,
They waited in ambush for us in the wilderness.*

20 *The breath of our nostrils, the LORD's anointed,
Was captured in their pits,
Of whom we had said, "Under his shadow
We shall live among the nations."*

In verses 17-18 we read something about the siege, about the feelings during the siege. They looked forward to Egypt to deliver them (Jer 37:5,11), but in vain (verse 17). Jeremiah warned them not to trust in Egypt (Jer 2:36b). Again and again they made that mistake of relying on an arm of flesh. Jeremiah here again makes himself one with the people.

Their enemies were close in on them. They could no longer show themselves outside, for then they would be struck by the arrows of the enemy

(verse 18). They saw that their end drew near (cf. Eze 7:1-4). They no longer doubted that. But they did not take refuge in the LORD.

In verses 19-20 we read the second description about the end of the siege. Some tried to escape, but were seized (verse 19). That happened to Zedekiah. He and the little group that wanted to flee experienced how fast the enemy is (Deu 28:49; Jer 48:40; Hab 1:8).

“The LORD’s anointed” is Zedekiah. It does not refer to him as a person, but to his office, just as Saul was the LORD’s anointed (1Sam 10:1; 24:7,11; cf. 1Sam 16:3; 2Sam 23:1; 1Kgs 1:34; 2Kgs 11:12). He was the breath of life of the people (cf. Gen 2:7; 7:22). He was the natural hope of his people, under whose “shadow”, i.e., his protection (Jdg 9:15; Isa 30:2), they wanted to live. If they had trusted in the LORD, they would have been safe under His shadow (Psa 91:1).

Lam 4:21-22 | Edom and Zion

21 Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom,

Who dwells in the land of Uz;

[But] the cup will come around to you as well,

You will become drunk and make yourself naked.

22 [The punishment] of your iniquity has been completed, O daughter of Zion;

He will exile you no longer.

[But] He will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom;

He will expose your sins!

Edom is the greatest enemy of the people, with the greatest gloating. Edom will be judged and Zion saved, says the prophet Obadiah. Here Edom is called to gloat because it still is possible (verse 21; Psa 137:7; Eze 25:12). He represents all the enemies of God’s people (Isa 34:1-8).

At the same time, Edom is told that he too will come to his end. It is a comfort to Zion to know that the enemy who now laughs will also be judged by the LORD (Jer 49:12). The cup of God’s wrath will be given to him to drink. That will make him naked and disgraced (cf. Gen 9:21).

There will come a time when for God’s people iniquity will be over and they will be free from the exile and they will never be led into it again (verse 22). For God’s people, judgment will not have the last word. The op-

posite will be the fate of Edom. Jeremiah pronounces this with the greatest certainty. So it will be with all the enemies of Israel.

Lamentations 5

Introduction

This chapter also has twenty-two verses, but there is no alphabetical order. It is a kind of appendix and closes the circle. It is connected to Lamentations 1 and, like there, deals with the condition after the destruction. The chapter begins with a prayer in verse 1, then follows a prayer containing a long lament in verses 2-18, to conclude with a prayer in verses 19-22. Prayer is the best fruit of a lament someone has.

Lam 5:1 | Call to the LORD to Remember

*1 Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us;
Look, and see our reproach!*

Again, the prophet is the voice of Jerusalem, that is, the faithful remnant (verse 1). He begs the LORD to remember what has happened to them, His people, and to see them in their reproach. It includes the request to come to the aid of His people. It also contains the hope that He will do so when He truly looks and sees the suffering (cf. Exo 2:24-25; 3:7-8).

The following verses list the misery in which the city finds herself. Jeremiah gives this enumeration to prompt the LORD to act on behalf of His people.

Lam 5:2-18 | Description of the Affliction

*2 Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers,
Our houses to aliens.
3 We have become orphans without a father,
Our mothers are like widows.
4 We have to pay for our drinking water,
Our wood comes [to us] at a price.
5 Our pursuers are at our necks;
We are worn out, there is no rest for us.
6 We have submitted to Egypt [and] Assyria to get enough bread.*

7 Our fathers sinned, [and] are no more;
 It is we who have borne their iniquities.
 8 Slaves rule over us;
 There is no one to deliver us from their hand.
 9 We get our bread at the risk of our lives
 Because of the sword in the wilderness.
 10 Our skin has become as hot as an oven,
 Because of the burning heat of famine.
 11 They ravished the women in Zion,
 The virgins in the cities of Judah.
 12 Princes were hung by their hands;
 Elders were not respected.
 13 Young men worked at the grinding mill,
 And youths stumbled under [loads] of wood.
 14 Elders are gone from the gate,
 Young men from their music.
 15 The joy of our hearts has ceased;
 Our dancing has been turned into mourning.
 16 The crown has fallen from our head;
 Woe to us, for we have sinned!
 17 Because of this our heart is faint,
 Because of these things our eyes are dim;
 18 Because of Mount Zion which lies desolate,
 Foxes prowl in it.

The land allotted to them by lot (Jos 18:10), which they have possessed for many centuries, is now in foreign hands (verse 2). Their homes, where they have always lived, are now the possession of aliens. The pious Israelite would never give his land to a fellow man (1Kgs 21:1-3; cf. Isa 5:8), let alone to a stranger. Now they are strangers in their own land. This is intolerable. The loss of their “inheritance” is great and deeply painful.

The remnant consists of orphans and widows (verse 3). The law takes particular care of them. But even before the fall of Jerusalem this is not acted upon and after the fall it is even worse. Any earthly support is taken away. The men are killed or carried away. Also in a civil sense, they are orphans

and widows, because their king is no longer there. Even in a religious sense it is true, for because of their sins they feel forsaken by the LORD.

When Moses describes the land where the LORD is bringing His people when they are right in front of it, he speaks of “a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills” (Deu 8:7). But that water, to which they have had such free and ample access, is no longer theirs. They must now buy it (verse 4). The wood to prepare food is also no longer freely available; they must buy it. Wells and forests are in the hands of the enemy. It all speaks of loss of freedom. They are in bondage (cf. Exo 5:6-7).

Besides loss of possessions, of fathers and husbands, of food and freedom, there is also loss of rest (verse 5). Their pursuers are at their necks, that is, they are being persecuted and hunted restlessly. It is like the condition of slavery in Egypt when they also had to work harder and harder.

Instead of turning to the LORD, they expected their help from Egypt (Isa 31:1; Eze 16:26,28) and Assyria (Hos 5:13) (verse 6). They have submitted to Egypt is literally they have given Egypt a hand. To give the hand means to agree with and also solemnly promise (cf. 2Kgs 10:15; 1Chr 29:24; 2Chr 30:8).

The condition is certainly the result of what the forefathers did (verse 7; Exo 20:5; Num 14:18). But see also verse 16, for without it this verse would be an incomplete truth. We too must be aware that we have sinned. As the condition is today, we bear the consequences of the past, but we have also done our part. Both verses together give us the cause of the present condition.

Slaves of the king of Babylon rule over them, and they have no one to help them escape the enemy’s grasp (verse 8). Israel, meant to be a “kingdom of priests” (Exo 19:6), has become a Canaan, a “servant of servants” (Gen 9:25).

They have tried at the risk of their lives during the siege to get food outside the city (verse 9). Hunger rages and draws its marks across their bodies, which are ravaged by violent fevers (verse 10). Their skin is the skin of a dying person.

The women in Zion and the virgins in the cities of Judah were brutally ravished by the soldiers (verse 11). The leaders, the princes, have died a horrible death (verse 12). The elders, who should be approached with reverence, have been treated without any respect, that is, cruelly and with contempt.

The young men must give their strength in the service of the enemy (verse 13). They must turn the millstone like animals to grind grain for the enemy (cf. Jdg 16:21). Boys are given a load of wood to carry so heavy that they stumble under the loads. It may be that this refers to turning the wooden rod of the upper millstone. Those who were once the hope of Judah have become slaves.

The gate, the place of justice, is empty. There is no more justice by the elders (verse 14). In young men, usually characterized by joy, joy is totally absent. Wisdom, justice and joy, which characterize a prosperous community, have disappeared.

Joy and elation that were once experienced here are no longer there because the heart no longer knows joy (verse 15). Instead of expressions of joy, one is plunged into mourning. One of the consequences of committing sin is that joy is gone. David experienced that after his sin with Bathsheba. Confession brings that joy back (Psa 51:7-8,12).

That the crown has fallen from their head means that Jerusalem has lost the honorable position and dignity she had before (verse 16). This is because of their own sins which they now confess. They pronounce the “woe” to themselves with an exclamation that they have sinned.

The cause of all the sorrow and affliction and their eyes so full of tears that they cannot see with their eyes is the desolation of Zion (verses 17-18). Those who look at what was once so wonderful and valuable and now lies in ruins have great pain in their heart. It is the same way for God with regard to creation. If foxes prowl in it, it means that the city is depopulated (cf. Neh 4:3).

Lam 5:19-22 | Supplication for Restoration

*19 You, O LORD, rule forever;
Your throne is from generation to generation.*

20 Why do You forget us forever?

Why do You forsake us so long?

21 Restore us to You, O LORD, that we may be restored;

Renew our days as of old,

22 Unless You have utterly rejected us

[And] are exceedingly angry with us.

The book ends with the prayer of these verses. We do not hear the LORD speak in this book, but we hear the God-fearing one speak to the LORD in a prayer of hope. The LORD will rebuild His temple. Although faith knows and trusts that it will happen and that the LORD will do it, it still begs that it will happen.

The faith of the remnant turns its eye away from the ruins and looks upward. The remnant knows: the “LORD rules forever” (verse 19), His throne is not destroyed, but is unassailable and unshakable. We see in the throne the Lord Jesus. He remains forever (Psa 45:6; 102:12). Everything may change, He does not. World empires alternate. Only God’s power remains and is exalted above that of all earthly rulers. He remains in complete control over everything. The remnant firmly believes this, and so they continue to hope that He will once show His power for good to them for their deliverance.

The remnant clings to the promises of the LORD (verse 20). They express it as a demand that the LORD will not forget them forever after all, even if He must forsake them for so long because of their sins.

Faith sees that true conversion is only possible when it comes from the LORD (Jer 31:18c,33-34; Eze 36:25-27). There is conversion here in a double sense: literally, physically, back to the land, but also spiritually, back to the LORD. This can and will happen by virtue of Christ’s work on the cross. When He returns, it will take place. Then there will be a total renewal, outward and inward.

With verse 22 the prayer ends and so does the book. This does not express despair, but hope. It is the conviction that the LORD will not let His people go, that He will not undo His election. In this cry to the LORD lies the firm confidence that He remembers His people according to His promises.

He does not reject them completely. A remnant will remain. Nor does His anger last forever, for when there is repentance and conversion, His anger ceases. The remnant will experience this in an impressive way. When they have come to repentance and conversion, they will sing: "For His lovingkindness is everlasting" (Psa 136:1-3).

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