

Bible Study # 87
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The Writings Series—Lamentations

This evening we **are covering Lamentations, the third of the five books of the Megillot or the Festival Scrolls.** Again, it seems that it is not frequently gone through. Yet, there is quite a bit of information in it, as I think we will take note of this evening.

The book of Lamentations is traditionally read by the Jews on the Fast of Ab. Ab is the fifth month of the sacred calendar. It comes in the summer and corresponds with our latter July/early August. The Jews have observed the ninth day of the fifth month for over 2,500 years as a national day of fasting.

According to Jewish tradition, there are five calamitous events corresponding to the five chapters of the book of Lamentations, which happened on the ninth day of the fifth month. According to tradition, there are five things that occurred.

One was the return of the 12 spies and the decree of 40 years of wandering in consequence of the rebellion of the people. That event is not dated specifically in the book of Numbers, but Jewish tradition holds that it was on the ninth day of the fifth month.

It is clearly dated from Scripture that the destruction of the first temple by Nebuchadnezzar took place on the ninth day of the fifth month. That is the second of the five calamitous events.

The third is the destruction of the second temple by the Romans in 70 A.D. Incredibly enough, both Herod's temple and Solomon's temple were destroyed on the same day, the ninth day of the fifth month, over 600 years apart in time. The Romans destroyed Herod's temple on the anniversary of the destruction of Solomon's temple.

The fourth event that the Jews take note of was the taking of Bether (a Jewish holdout, a community) by the Romans under Hadrian when 580,000 were slain. This is a Roman destruction a number of years after the destruction of the temple.

Then what is called the fifth event is the plowing of Zion like a plowed field in fulfillment of Jeremiah 26:18 and Micah 3:12. Again, the Romans did this at a later time, trying to ensure that no vestige of Jewish settlement in the Jewish

community remained. There is a prophecy in Jeremiah 26.

Jeremiah 26:18, “Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spoke to all the people of Judah, saying, “Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the temple like the bare hills of the forest.’”” This is also mentioned in the book of Micah. Micah is quoted here in Jeremiah.

Micah 3:12, the original statement was, “‘Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the temple like the bare hills of the forest.’” This is destruction of Jerusalem that the Romans brought about at a later time.

Jewish tradition focuses in on those five calamitous events that certainly focus in on problems that they were having. They read significance into the fact of the five chapters of the book of Lamentations.

The five chapters of Lamentations form what would be called a “modified acrostic.” If you remember, an acrostic is a type of poetry in the Hebrew language where each verse, or set of verses, begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet in alphabetical order. The best example of that and the easiest to follow is Psalm 119.

If you look at Psalm 119 in your Bible, you will notice that before the first set of verses there is a funny little mark; beside the mark it says “Aleph.” Then you come down and you have “Beth,” “Gimel,” “Daleth,” “He,” “Waw,” “Zayin,” “Heth.” It comes down through the Hebrew alphabet with eight verses that are assigned to each of the alphabets in the Hebrew language. The first eight verses begin with “A”; the second eight verses begin with “B,” coming down through Psalm 119. It's easy to follow because, normally, even our English Bibles have it broken with the insignias of the Hebrew alphabet. That's what is called a “perfect acrostic” because every letter of the alphabet is used. All 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet are used in order and nothing is out of place.

The book of Lamentations is what is called a “modified acrostic” because it uses that general format, but it is not perfectly developed as in Psalm 119. The first couple of chapters of Lamentations consist of 22 verses and each of those verses is arranged in acrostic fashion. Chapter 3 consists of 66 verses (3 x 22), which are arranged in a triad of verses for each letter of

the Hebrew alphabet. In chapter 3, the first three verses begin with “A”; the second three verses begin with “B,” and it comes down that way. Chapter 4 goes back to the 22 verses—again, in an acrostic. Chapter 5 of Lamentations consists of 22 verses, but each verse does not begin with a different letter of the alphabet. It has the same number of verses but does not follow that same alphabetical arrangement. The book of Lamentations is a modified acrostic. Anything of that sort has a certain mark of completion or perfection. The book of Lamentations, while on the one hand, shows the evidence of complete and total destruction, yet, because the focus is on destruction, there is not the complete perfection that we find in Psalm 119, which is in praise of God’s perfect law.

Now, we know about the book of Lamentations and we know who wrote it. We are told very specifically in 2 Chronicles 35.

2 Chronicles 35:1, “Now Josiah kept a Passover to the Lord in Jerusalem, . . .”

Verses 18-19, “There had been no Passover kept in Israel like that since the days of Samuel the prophet; and none of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as Josiah kept, with the priests and the Levites, all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this Passover was kept.”

Verse 20, then we are told, “After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by the Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him.”

Verse 23, “And the archers shot King Josiah; and the king said to his servants, ‘Take me away, for I am severely wounded.’”

Verses 24-25, we are told, “. . .So he died, and was buried in one of the tombs of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. Jeremiah also lamented for Josiah. And to this day all the singing men and the singing women speak of Josiah in their lamentations. They made it a custom [KJV, “ordinance”] in Israel; and indeed they are written in the Laments [KJV, “Lamentations”].”

We are told that Jeremiah lamented for Josiah, and this was something that was sung all the way down to the time when Chronicles was written—to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. It had been made an ordinance, or a law, in Israel and was written in the Lamentations.

Where do we find the Lamentations? Well, when you turn to the book of Lamentations, the full title (KJV) of it is, “The Lamentations of

Jeremiah.” We have the setting here in the book of Chronicles.

2 Chronicles 34:1-3, you remember the story, “Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images.”

Verse 14, “Now when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord given by Moses.”

Verse 16, “So Shaphan carried the book to the king, . . .”

Verse 19, “Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Law, that he tore his clothes.”

Verse 24, God’s response to Josiah is, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants, all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah. . . .’”

Verses 27-28, “‘because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and against its inhabitants, and you humbled yourself before Me, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you,’ says the Lord. ‘Surely I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place and its inhabitants.’”

At the time of Josiah, there was a great reform movement in Judah. It was the last of the great reforms. Josiah grew up under the tutelage of Hilkiah the priest.

Jeremiah 1:1, you read, “The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests. . .” Jeremiah’s father was Hilkiah, the same Hilkiah the priest that brought up Josiah (2 Chronicles 34:9; 2 Kings 22:1-8). There was a close personal connection. Jeremiah and Josiah basically grew up together. They were very close in age. Josiah was perhaps two or three years older than Jeremiah. They grew up together under the tutelage and the guidance of Jeremiah’s father who was God’s priest in those days. When Josiah came of age (at age 20), he began to assume full authority of his kingship. There had

been a council of regency prior to that time. Josiah began a reform movement that was the most zealous reform period that Judah had ever experienced.

The temple had fallen into disrepair to the point that the Book of the Law had been lost. It had been years and years since anybody had read the Bible. As the temple was cleaned, the Book of the Law was found where it had been hidden. It had been hidden away to protect it at an earlier time during the period of idolatrous kings; it had been lost. When they came in and thoroughly cleansed the temple, the Book of the Law was rediscovered and it was read to Josiah. It was read, and this would specifically refer to the blessings and curses found in the book of Deuteronomy. Josiah knew that they were “off track,” but he hadn’t realized how badly. When all the curses of the books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus were read, then they realized the dire straits they were in. God had mercy and He said, ‘As long as Josiah lives I will not bring these curses on the nation. But once he is dead all these things are going to happen because the nation has forsaken Me.’

Well, when Josiah died, it was more than just the lament for a righteous king. There was the realization that the only thing that stood between the nation and total destruction and calamity was King Josiah. The prophecy had been made years before that once Josiah was dead, all of these things would come about.

In the aftermath of the death of Josiah, Jeremiah wrote this lament. It was written in poetic fashion. It was written to be sung and is chanted in the synagogues, sort of like a funeral dirge. It was a prophecy of the destruction that was going to come upon the nation.

The destruction that came upon Jerusalem in the time of Nebuchadnezzar is the original fulfillment of this book. The destruction that came upon Jerusalem at the time of Nebuchadnezzar was a type of the even more total destruction that came upon Jerusalem in 70 A.D. at the hands of the Romans. Jesus spoke of that destruction in Matthew 24, Luke 21 and Mark 13. Jesus spoke of that destruction and prophesied of it, but He made it very clear, in Matthew 24 and the other accounts, that the destruction that was going to come upon Jerusalem was, in itself, merely a type of the Great Tribulation that was going to come upon Israel. The Great Tribulation that was going to come is the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jeremiah 30:7). It was going to come at the end of the age, setting the stage for His return.

It has implications for us. The events that are described in the book of Lamentations have had literal fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the Romans. But when you put it together with Matthew 24, the book of Lamentations looks way down to the time yet future. It is, in reality, a prophecy of the Great Tribulation. It is a prophecy of the events that are going to occur to this nation in just a matter of a few years. The destruction that came upon Jerusalem was a type; Jerusalem is used over and over as a type to prophetically represent the entire nation of Israel. Jerusalem was the only capital that all the 12 tribes had and acknowledged. Jerusalem ultimately will be the capital of all 12 tribes in Tomorrow’s World. The things that happened to Jerusalem were a type.

Matthew 24 makes it plain if you look at what Jesus responded to.

Matthew 24:3, “...the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’”

The question that the disciples specifically asked in Matthew 24 was, ‘What is going to herald the coming of the Messiah in power and glory? What is going to herald the end of this age?’ Jesus then began to answer and speak the words of Matthew 24 predicated on that question—the question of what events would herald His return. What events would herald the end of this age? Of course, the events that occurred to Jerusalem at the hand of the Romans were merely a type and were representative of the kinds of things that will come about.

Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book X, Chapter 5, verse 1 tells us, specifically, that Jeremiah composed the book of Lamentations upon the death of Josiah, the last righteous king of Judah. When the premature death of Josiah came, it was not only for this beloved king that lamentation was made but also for the calamities that had been prophesied to befall the nation after his death.

The prophecies of Lamentations look forward to the Great Tribulation, of which earlier calamities on the Jews were merely a type of what ultimately will happen to all of Israel. All of Israel ultimately will lament their sins and will be able to reap God’s mercy, His forgiveness and His restoration. The book of Lamentations in the Hebrew Bible is entitled “Qiyah,” which literally means, “How?” That is the first word of the book.

Lamentations 1:1, KJV, “How does the city sit solitary, that was full of people! How is she become as a widow! She that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary [a slave]!”

The book of Lamentations opens with the question, “How?” That is the name by which the Jews have customarily called it.

As we open, it clearly sets the stage that is descriptive of what happened to Jerusalem, but it is also descriptive of what is going to be the state of our nation in just a matter of years. It’s hard for us to realize as we look around at the seeming peace and security. We look around at the level of material prosperity we have, and it’s hard for the reality to really “come home” to us that we are living on borrowed time in this country. The events that are described in the pages of this Book (the Bible) are going to occur. Then it’s going to be, ‘How? How has all this happened?’

Verse 1, “...who was great among the nations! The princess among the provinces has become a slave!” The nation that was at the top, how has it become the bottom? Of course, the answer to that “How?” is exactly what’s described here.

We have lost sight of the fact that the blessings that we have and experience are the results of God’s blessing and benefit. The blessings that God has given our people are because of the obedience of Abraham and the promises that God made to him.

When you go back and read the prophecies of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, it is very apparent that we are living in those days and some of those very things are coming about. It was brought out that we would go from being the lender to becoming the borrower (Deuteronomy 28:44). We have experienced, in just a few years, being the world’s greatest creditor nation to now becoming the world’s greatest debtor nation. We find ourselves increasingly in trouble and increasingly sick. The prophecies bring out that we are sick from the head to the foot (Isaiah 1:5-6). We are sick from the top to the bottom, and it’s not something that just getting a new congress or a new president is going to solve because our problems ultimately are spiritual problems. They are problems of a lack of morality and a lack of the things that are necessary.

So, how has she become a slave?

Verse 2, “She weeps bitterly in the night, her tears are on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has none to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become

her enemies.” That is what we are going to find. Those nations that we think we have bought—our friends, our great allies, Germany and Japan, the nations of Europe, Russia—“All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies.”

Verses 3-6, “Judah has gone into captivity, under affliction and hard servitude; she dwells among the nations, she finds no rest; all her persecutors overtake her in dire straits. The roads to Zion mourn because no one comes to the set feasts. All her gates are desolate; her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness. Her adversaries have become the master; her enemies prosper; for the Lord has afflicted her because of the multitude of her transgressions. Her children have gone into captivity before the enemy. And from the daughter of Zion all her splendor has departed. Her princes have become like deer that find no pasture, that flee without strength before the pursuer.”

Verse 8, “Jerusalem has sinned grievously, therefore she has become vile.”

God describes the events that are going to come about. He describes the calamities that are going to occur.

We are told, “the Lord has afflicted her because of the multitude of her transgressions.” There’s a reason why these things are going to occur.

Galatians 6:7, it says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”

Proverbs 14:34, we are told, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” This is what we find in our nation and in our people.

Lamentations 1:8-11, “Jerusalem has sinned grievously, therefore she has become vile. All who honored her despise her because they have seen her nakedness; yes, she sighs and turns away. Her uncleanness is in her skirts; she did not consider her destiny; therefore her collapse was awesome; she had no comforter. ‘O Lord, behold my affliction, for the enemy has magnified himself!’ The adversary has spread his hand over all her pleasant things; for she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary...All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their valuables for food to restore life. ‘See, O Lord, and consider, for I am scorned.’”

It seems very farfetched in this land to believe the time is going to come when we are going to experience food shortages or when we are going to experience the things it describes here.

“All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their valuables for food.” We are going to

experience that. We are going to see the time when people are going to be desperate for food in this land. Hopefully, we won't see a whole lot of that because if we are faithful to God, God does promise that He will take the Philadelphia Church to a place that we term "a place of safety," a place of protection.

Revelation 12:14, "But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent."—A place to be nourished and shielded from the onslaught of the Great Tribulation.

Let's notice a little bit about how we refer the events of this book to the Tribulation. This book clearly deals with events of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C. and later the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. But there are real implications for the future Tribulation; this is made plain in several places.

To begin with, let's look in Jeremiah 30:7-8 and see why we would attach some of these prophesies.

Jeremiah 30:7-8, ""Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in the day," says the Lord of hosts, "that I will break his yoke from your neck, and will burst your bonds; foreigners shall no more enslave them.""

Notice, "that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble." Here is a time of incomparable trouble, a time called "the time of Jacob's trouble."

Matthew 24:21, let's notice, ""For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.""

Now, Jeremiah 30:7 talked about the fact that it was a time of incomparable trouble. You can't have two times of worst trouble than ever.

Jeremiah 30:7, yet, "that day is great, so that none is like it."

Matthew 24:21 says it is a time of, "...great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be." If you have a day that is so terrible that there's none like it, and you have a day that's spoken of as being a terrible time such as has never been since the beginning of the world, then you are obviously speaking of the same period. You can't have two times that are both worse than anything else. Luke 21 deals with the same matter.

Luke 21:20-23, ""But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people.""

We, again, have reference to the same time period. When you go through the book of Lamentations, it is clear that the description describes the same thing—this time of complete destruction. It describes this time of incomparable difficulty and adversity.

We continue in Lamentations.

Lamentations 1:14-22, ""The yoke of my transgressions was bound; they were woven together by His hands, and thrust upon my neck. He made my strength fail; the Lord delivered me into the hands of those whom I am not able to withstand. The Lord has trampled underfoot all my mighty men in my midst; He has called an assembly against me to crush my young men; the Lord trampled as in a winepress the virgin daughter of Judah. For these things I weep; my eye, my eye overflows with water; because the comforter, who should restore my life, is far from me. My children are desolate because the enemy prevailed.' Zion spreads out her hands, but there is no one to comfort her; the Lord has commanded concerning Jacob that those around him become his adversaries; Jerusalem has become an unclean thing among them. 'The Lord is righteous, for I rebelled against His commandment. Hear now, all peoples, and behold my sorrow; my virgins and my young men have gone into captivity. I called for my lovers [I called my allies], but they deceived me; my priests and my elders breathed their last in the city, while they sought food to restore their life. See, O Lord, that I am in distress; my soul is troubled; my heart is overturned within me, for I have been very rebellious. Outside the sword bereaves, at home it is like death. They have heard that I sigh, with no one to comfort me. All my enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that You have done it. Bring on the day that You have announced [proclaimed], that they may become like me. Let all their wickedness come before You, and do to them as You have done to me for all my transgressions; for my sighs are many, and my heart is faint.""

It describes the destruction and calamity. Clearly, Jerusalem represents all of Israel. It faces captivity because of serious sins and rebellion against God's law.

Verse 5, "the Lord has afflicted her because of the multitude of her transgression."

Verse 8, "Jerusalem has sinned grievously,"

Verse 18, "The Lord is righteous, for I rebelled against His commandment." The calamities and the captivity are because of the serious sins and rebellion against God's law.

As we look at Lamentations 1:20, we find that there are not only going to be those who die as victims in warfare, but those not involved in the warfare will face starvation and disease epidemics.

Lamentations 1:20, "See, O Lord, that I am in distress; my soul is troubled [KJV, "inwards burn"]; my heart is overturned within me, for I have been very rebellious. Outside the sword bereaves, at home it is like death." There is warfare abroad and death, famine and disease at home. There are many afflictions and many difficulties. Clearly, the prophecies reach beyond simply Jerusalem.

Lamentations 2:3, "He has cut off in fierce anger every horn of Israel; He has drawn back His right hand from before the enemy. He has blazed against Jacob like a flaming fire which devours all around." It says, "He has cut off in fierce anger all the horn of Israel." "Horn" is used as symbolic of a king, a nation or a kingdom. Here, we find not merely the horn of Judah but the horn of Israel.

Again, chapter 2 opens with "How?"

Lamentations 2:1-3, "How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger! He cast down from heaven to the earth the beauty of Israel, and did not remember His footstool in the day of His anger. The Lord has swallowed up and has not pitied all the inhabitants of Jacob. He has thrown down in His wrath the strongholds of the daughters of Judah; He has brought them down to the ground; He has profaned the kingdom and its princes. He has cut off in fierce anger every horn of Israel; He has drawn back His right hand from before the enemy. He has blazed against Jacob like a flaming fire which devours all around."

This perhaps describes the destruction of even nuclear and atomic weapons that burn like a flaming fire.

Verses 5-6, "The Lord was like an enemy. He has swallowed up Israel, He has swallowed up all her palaces; He has destroyed her strongholds, and has increased mourning and

lamentation in the daughter of Judah. He has done violence to His tabernacle, as if it were a garden; He has destroyed His place of assembly; the Lord has caused the appointed feast and Sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion. In His burning indignation He has spurned the king and the priest."

It describes the calamity and affliction that is going to come and how God has caused Israel to be swallowed up.

Verse 6, KJV, "And He has violently taken away His tabernacle, as if it were of a garden:" The marginal rendering for "tabernacle" is "hedge." "He has violently taken away His hedge, as if it were of a garden."

In ancient times, hedges were often used as walls to enclose gardens. Thorn hedges were planted and trimmed. They grew and made a very formidable wall because they were difficult to penetrate and kept out creatures that would come in to destroy the garden. In effect, what God is saying is that He is going to remove the hedge that He's set about our nation. We have been hedged about like a choice garden. I don't think we realize the extent to which that has been the case.

We have never experienced full-scale warfare in terms of foreign nations on our soil. When you look around the world and see the extent to which warfare has been fought on the territory of various nations—when you look throughout Europe, Africa and the world—you realize we have been protected from that here in this country. It's been as though there were a hedge about us and Britain in the same way.

There's not been a successful landing on the British Isles in almost 1,000 years—since William the Conqueror in 1066, which was actually a migration of Israelites. Since that time, there has never been an enemy landing that had any success there in the British Isles. They've not experienced that sort of invasion. The Spanish tried it with the Spanish Armada and was destroyed off the coast. Napoleon tried it and he couldn't do it. The Kaiser tried it in World War I; Hitler tried it in World War II.

God has set a hedge about our people. We have not experienced the kind of things that other nations have, but God says He is going to remove the hedge. He is going to remove the protection that has been set about us; He is going to remove that protective wall. The events that are going to occur are going to make the ears tingle of whoever hears it (Jeremiah 19:3).

It continues in chapter 2 speaking of "How?"

Verse 8, “The Lord has purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion.”

Verse 10, “The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground and keep silence; they throw dust on their heads....”

Verse 12, “They say to their mothers, ‘Where is grain and wine?’ As they swoon like the wounded in the streets of the city, as their life is poured out in their mothers’ bosom.” It describes the famine and calamities that are going to come. It talks of little children wasting away.

Verses 13-14, “How shall I console [margin, “bear witness to”] you? To what shall I liken you, O daughter of Jerusalem? What shall I compare with you, that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion? For your ruin is spread wide as the sea; who can heal you? Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not uncovered your iniquity, to bring back your captives, but have envisioned for you false prophecies and delusions.”

The false prophets haven’t told the truth. They haven’t uncovered the iniquity. Our land is filled with false prophets—individuals who appoint themselves to proclaim and announce to the nation—but they haven’t uncovered the iniquity, the lawlessness and the sin. They haven’t focused on the real problems.

Verse 19, “...Lift your hands toward Him for the life of your young children, who faint from hunger at the head of every street.”

Verse 22, “You have invited as to a feast day the terrors that surround me. In the day of the Lord’s anger there was no refugee or survivor. Those whom I have borne and brought up My enemies have destroyed.”

We find the prophets of Israel have not correctly analyzed the cause of the nation’s problems. They haven’t given solutions; they have held out false hopes and answers. We, again, see the destruction that is talked about, “the day of the Lord’s anger.” God is going to allow this nation to suffer the consequences. He’s going to allow us to reap what we’ve sown.

Galatians 6:7, the scripture says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” That is very much the case.

Lamentations 3:1-2, “I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath. He has led me and made me walk in darkness and not in light.”

Verses 6-8, “He has set me in dark places like the dead of long ago. He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out; He has made my chain heavy. Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out

my prayer.” He is speaking of the state the nation gets into.

Verses 14-15, “I have become the ridicule of all my people, and their taunting song all the day. He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drink wormwood.”

Verse 17, “You have moved my soul far from peace; I have forgotten prosperity.” The nation is going to experience some of those things. God’s mercy is what will protect us from even further total destruction.

Verses 18-20, “And I said, ‘My strength and my hope have perished from the Lord.’ Remember my affliction and roaming, the wormwood and the gall. My soul still remembers and sinks within me.”

Verse 22 describes, “Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not.”

It is because of God’s mercy that we aren’t consumed. God’s mercy is all that’s going to stand between our nation and total, complete destruction. He is going to allow that destruction but is going to save a remnant. It describes, in poetic fashion, the calamities that are going to come.

Verses 23-27, “They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I hope in Him!’ The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth.”

It is speaking of the fact that there are lessons that are going to be learned; there is discipline that is going to have to be brought on this nation. God ultimately is our portion. He’s the One who is going to be there to deliver us. All these destructions that are described are things that are just almost beyond the limit of what we can imagine.

Lamentations 2:20 even makes reference to cannibalism. That sounds horrible, but if you read Josephus’ account, “The Siege of Jerusalem,” you find that there were things like that happening in the final days of the siege of Jerusalem. There were people who were reduced to that level of depravity. Jesus made it very plain in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 that the events that are going to occur at the very time of the end are going to far supersede even the events that occurred in Josephus’ day and time. When God corrects, God corrects in love and in mercy. Even when God removes His hedge and allows Satan’s wrath to be poured out in the Great

Tribulation and God Himself pours out His wrath in the Day of the Lord, God's punishment and chastening is motivated by God's love. If God didn't love our people, if God didn't love and care for us, He would not deal in the way that He does to bring our people to repentance. It makes it very plain here in Lamentations 3.

Beginning in verse 30, we notice one or two verses that even could have a reference to Christ and His crucifixion.

Verses 30-36, "Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him, and be full of reproach. For the Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. To crush under His feet all the prisoners of the earth, to turn aside the justice due a man before the face of the Most High, or subvert a man in his cause—the Lord does not approve."

God does not desire to see calamity, affliction and terrible things. God desires our good.

Verse 40, "Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord..." This is what we have to do.

Verses 41-43, "let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven. We have transgressed and rebelled; You have not pardoned. You have covered Yourself with anger and pursued us; You have slain and not pitied."

Verses 45-47, "You have made us an offscouring and refuse in the midst of the peoples. All our enemies have opened their mouths against us. Fear and a snare have come upon us, desolation and destruction."

Verses 55-59, "I called on Your name, O Lord, from the lowest pit. You have heard my voice: 'Do not hide Your ear from my sighing, from my cry for help.' You drew near on the day I called on You, and said, 'Do not fear!' O Lord, You have pleaded the case for my soul; You have redeemed my life. O Lord, You have seen how I am wronged; judge my case."

Verse 64, "Repay them, O Lord, according to the work of their hands." God is going to deal with the events that are going to occur. There are going to be punishments that are going to come because of disobedience, but God ultimately is going to deal with the nations that have punished and mistreated Israel.

Lamentations 4 opens with this lament:

Lamentations 4:1-2, "How the gold has become dim! How changed the fine gold! The stones of the sanctuary are scattered at the head of every street. The precious sons of Zion, valuable as

fine gold, how they are regarded as clay pots, the work of the hands of the potter!"

It describes a time when physical wealth will be regarded as worthless because of its inability to deliver from the Great Tribulation. Read some of the prophecies where it talks about how people will lament and mourn and how the gold and the silver will be cast to the moles and the bats and go into the caves (Isaiah 2:20). People put their trust and confidence in so many of these things. People put their trust and their confidence in physical things to deliver them. They are going to find that those physical things are not the answer. Unless we are looking to God, unless God is our Deliverer and the One whom we are counting on, we are going to find ourselves in a situation where we can't deliver ourselves. We are not going to be able to buy our way out.

James 5:1-3, "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days."

Until the time of modern nuclear warfare and radioactivity, it was hard to understand James 5:3. Gold doesn't rust as we normally think of it.

James 5:3, KJV, but it says, "Your gold and your silver is cankered; the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire." This is talking about becoming contaminated by radioactivity and then describes the consequences—it will burn like fire. There are going to be people who have heaped up gold and think they have really prepared. They are going to find that their pile of gold becomes radioactive and will burn right through them. "Your riches are corrupted." These things are not going to deliver in the day of God's wrath.

It's important to understand that there's only one way that is going to bring us through the events and the calamities of the years ahead, and that involves being close to God.

Lamentations 4:4-6, "The tongue of the infant clings to the roof of its mouth for thirst; the young children ask for bread, but no one breaks it for them. Those who ate delicacies are desolate in the streets; those who were brought up in scarlet embrace ash heaps. The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, with no hand to help her!"

God says, “the iniquity of the daughter of My people,” speaking of the remnant. “The daughter of My people” is a reference to the last generation. “The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of My people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom.” Are we concerned about some of these things?

Why, just a matter of a couple of weeks ago, our “esteemed” governor issued an executive order making sure that all the sodomites have full protection here in the state of Louisiana, saying that’s not grounds for any sort of termination of employment or anything of that sort. It was very quietly put into operation through an executive order. Increasingly, as a nation, we view that and say, ‘One lifestyle is just as good as another. Who is to say that this is wrong?’ Well, we are going to find out.

God says Sodom was overthrown as in a moment. We have a lot less excuse than Sodom and Gomorrah. There’s scarcely a home in this nation that doesn’t have a Bible somewhere in it. We have gone so far from any Biblical standard of morality that it’s as though we’ve lost sight that there’s such a thing as right or wrong. God makes plain, these events are going to come and the calamities are going to come. The punishment that God is going to visit on Israel is going to be greater than the punishment on Sodom, and what He rendered on Sodom was pretty great.

Verse 10, it describes the destruction, “The hands of the compassionate women have cooked their own children; they became food for them in the destruction of the daughter of my people.” Horrible things!

Verses 11-12, “The Lord has fulfilled His fury, He has poured out His fierce anger. He kindled a fire in Zion, and it has devoured its foundations. The kings of the earth, and all inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem...” It’s going to be just amazing to people that we are going to be conquered and overthrown.

Verses 13-16, “because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed in her midst the blood of the just. They wandered blind in the streets; they have defiled themselves with blood, so that no one would touch their garments. They cried out to them, ‘Go away, unclean! Go away, go away, do not touch us!’ When they fled and wandered, those among the nations said, ‘They shall no longer dwell here.’ The face of the Lord scattered them; He no longer regards them. The people do

not respect the priests nor show favor to the elders.”

Verses 19-20, “Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the heavens. They pursued us on the mountains and lay in wait for us in the wilderness. The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was caught in their pits, of whom we said, ‘Under his shadow we shall live among the nations.’”

Verse 22, “The punishment of your iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; He will no longer send you into captivity. He will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom; He will uncover your sins!” Again, there is a focus on what God is going to do. God doesn’t get pleasure out of punishing people.

Lamentations 3:33 says, “For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.” God doesn’t enjoy it. God does not delight in those things at all.

In some ways, Lamentations 5 is sort of a prayer that ends the book.

Lamentations 5:1-2, “Remember, O Lord, what has come upon us; look, and behold our reproach! Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens, and our houses to foreigners.”

It talks about the fact of our people Israel becoming dispossessed in their own land. ‘Our inheritance is turned over to aliens [strangers].’ Increasingly we are seeing this as we see the influx of peoples pouring in. We see the fact that much of our national wealth is bought up by various peoples—the Japanese, the Arabs and various ones.

Verses 2-4, “Our inheritance [that we received from God] has been turned over to aliens, and our houses to foreigners. We have become orphans and waifs, our mothers are like widows. We pay for the water we drink, and our wood comes at a price.” We are going to find that we are going to undergo rationing—everything from fuel to water. We are going to find that these things become increasingly dear and things become increasingly difficult.

Chapter 5 describes the famine and captivity that are characteristic at the time of the Great Tribulation. We will see it as we go through more of chapter 5.

Verses 5-8, “They pursue at our heels; we labor and have no rest. We have given our hand to the Egyptians and the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread. Our fathers have sinned and are no more, but we bear their iniquities. Servants rule over us; there is none to deliver us from their hand.”

It talks about the whole social structure turned upside down, the fact that our forefathers have

sinned and we are reaping the consequences. There are consequences that come, and we are reaping the consequences for the sins of those who have gone before—those who have not properly looked to God and put to practice His laws in their lives. The nation is experiencing the consequence.

Verses 9-12, “We get our bread at the risk of our lives, because of the sword in the wilderness. Our skin is hot as an oven, because of the fever of famine. They ravished the women in Zion, the maidens in the cities of Judah. Princes were hung up by their hands, and elders were not respected.”

It describes the rape, the pillage and the destruction that is going to come.

Verses 13-16, “Young men ground at the millstones; boys staggered under loads of wood. The elders have ceased gathering at the gate, and the young men from their music. The joy of our heart has ceased; our dance has turned into mourning. The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned!” These things are going to come to pass.

Verses 19-22, “You, O Lord, remain forever; Your throne from generation to generation. Why do You forget us forever, and forsake us for so long a time? Turn us back to You, O Lord, and we will be restored; renew our days as of old, unless You have utterly rejected us, and are very angry with us!”

Note here, at the end, it focuses on God’s power and mercy and our need to be protected, to be brought back and brought to repentance.

It says, “You, O Lord, remain forever; Your throne from generation to generation.” God is there. When our people find themselves at the very bottom, when they find themselves cut off from God, when they find themselves languishing in the concentration camps of the future, they are going to begin to take up this lament. They are going to begin to look to God and to seek God.

Isaiah 27:13, we read, “So it shall be in that day that the great trumpet will be blown; they will come, who are about to perish in the land of Assyria, and they who are outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem.”

God ultimately is going to deliver our people; but there is going to be a tremendous lament. There are going to be tremendous and terrible problems and calamities that come upon our nation and upon our people.

The book of Lamentations sets the stage. Jeremiah wrote this lament at the time of

Josiah’s death. It was a direct prophecy of the events that were going to transpire over the next few years in Judah and in Jerusalem. It was a book that set the stage and a prophecy of the events of 70 A.D.—the destruction of Jerusalem. Yet, when you go through Matthew 24, it’s very, very evident that the events of 70 A.D. are merely a type of a far greater destruction. It is far greater because it will occur on a far greater scale. These things are going to come to pass. We have lived in a land that has been so blessed. We have really had an artificial isolation and prosperity. We have not had to experience so many of the things that other nations and other peoples have experienced.

The book of Lamentations is a poetic book. It puts the events in poetic fashion. It focuses on and looks forward to the terrible calamities that are going to occur. These things aren’t pleasant to think about. People like to put it out of their minds and forget about that. We have to understand that one-third of the Bible is prophecy and many of these prophecies focus in on the events of our time and on out ahead. God gives us these warnings. Some of these warnings ultimately are going to be focused on by the entire nation. People don’t want to hear this message. They don’t want to hear these things, but God is going to bring it to pass.

There’s a tremendous amount that is packed in here. God inspired Jeremiah to write these things and inspired it to be preserved for us. God ultimately is the source of mercy. There are going to be calamities that are going to occur. It is not because God is cruel. The Tribulation really represents Satan’s wrath. The Tribulation is made possible because God removes the hedge from around our people. What happens, in effect, is that God says, ‘You don’t appreciate the protection that I have given you. You don’t want Me; you don’t want My ways; you don’t want My protection. Fine! I will remove those things and you will be on your own.’ This means, of course, that just as when God removed the hedge around Job, he was wide open to the attack of Satan. So, when God removes the hedge around our nation and our people, we will be wide open to the attack that Satan will stir up.

The Beast power is arising right now; even as we speak this evening, there are events that are going on in Europe. Incredible events! Events that just a matter of a few years ago, seemed so far off and so remote. We are sitting on the threshold of the culminations of so many of these events that the Bible focuses upon.

Hopefully, as we had a chance to go through and to look a little bit at the book of Lamentations, we can realize that there really is a tremendous amount that God has packed in there. There are events that have a great deal of significance for us today and represents things upon which we need to focus. Some of these things are unpleasant. We don't like to focus on things that are unpleasant. But these things are there for a warning. They are there for an admonition.

Acts 10:34, "...God shows no partiality." (KJV, "God is no respecter of persons.") If we don't learn the lesson of the things that God has inspired to be recorded, we ultimately will reap the consequences that come.

Next Bible study we will go through the book of Ecclesiastes, the fourth of the five Festival Scrolls.