

# **LAMENTATIONS**



*The  
Lamentations  
of  
Jeremiah*

**G. BOOKER  
and  
T. HALTOM**

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**STALLARD & POTTER**

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*for*

**CHRISTADELPHIAN SCRIPTURE STUDY SERVICE**

17 Braemar Road, Torrens Park,  
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Phone (08) 272 2124

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## PREFACE

The Lamentations of Jeremiah form part of "all Scripture" that the Apostle Paul tells us is profitable for our development in spiritual things. There is good reason therefore, why this rarely-studied book is included in the canon of the Scriptures.

The book must surely be a witness to future generations that God means what He says when He speaks of judgement. The people of Jeremiah's day were certainly warned many times! But they could not bring themselves to really believe that God would so drastically disturb their equilibrium. It might have happened to former generations but not again; not to their generation surely and certainly not to the Kingdom of Judah with its magnificent Temple! However, Babylon did come down, Jerusalem with its wealth and glory was destroyed, and the surviving minority were carried into captivity. Even the House of the LORD was desecrated! The historical books record the event but it is only in Lamentations that the deep and prolonged anguish of the people of God is portrayed in all its passion. The book, therefore, is to be read in a sensitive attitude, with a desire to experience some of the power of the judgements of God's Word.

This exposition by Brethren G. Booker and T. Haltom is very relevant for the consideration of our generation upon whom the ends of the age have fallen. "In the way of Thy judgements, O LORD, have we waited for Thee" (Isa. 26:8). We could well emulate Isaiah's thought, for a man in accord with God's judgements, is a man prepared to meet his God. He has approved the outworking of God's justice. He has looked into the depth of human evil and seen the rightness of God's ways.

Looking into the detail of Judah's tragedy helps us to appreciate the loss experienced by a faithless people caught unawares. We shall be in the same position and worse — "weeping and gnashing of teeth" — if we neglect so great salvation presently offered. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God". Let us step aside from the unthinking, heedless world and prepare to meet our Lord.

*"It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of Yahweh".*

We trust this exposition of Lamentations may help us in preparing for our King.

The Committee,  
November, 1982.

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## FOREWORD

It is said that a music teacher once had a carefree student with a fine voice. One day in exasperation he said to him, "If I could bring you some sorrow that would break your heart, I could make you the finest singer in the world." We may be like that singer, well-versed technically in the Truth, with more than enough theoretical knowledge of the Bible — and yet something is lacking to mature us as disciples of Christ. Suffering provides that deficiency.

The Lamentations of Jeremiah are about suffering and sorrow, and heartbreak. This is not a book selected often for detailed study. But it is a book to which we may be drawn more and more as the years go by, and trials become our inevitable lot. Then "deep calls to deep", and we find the reasons for our disappointments and disillusionments in the Lamentations.

Every believer in God, at one time or another, must endure trials. How he or she responds to those trials will be of eternal consequence. Sometimes the reasons for those trials are obvious (as, for example, the sins of Judah that led to her overthrow); other times they seem to be "without rhyme or reason" (as with the long-suffering Jeremiah and especially with Jesus). But in every case, without exception, they are **necessary**, and God knows the purpose even if we do not at the time:

*"For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth. . . If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby"* (Heb. 12:6, 7, 11).

This work is divided into three major sections, progressing from most general to most specific:

1. The Book as a Whole; 2. Chapter by Chapter, and 3. Verse by Verse.

The first major section alone will provide an overview of the book. The second section will impart a feel for the progression of thought through the five separate poems, or chapters. And the third section will fill in some details for the really serious, "midnight-oil" student. It has been our experience that all three approaches are necessary for the best grasp of a book of Scripture. A knowledge of the generalities **without** detailed study produces an "acquaintance" with Scriptural principles, but never a really first-class familiarity with the Word of God. But a verse by verse approach **by itself** may give the student a wonderful view of each "tree" without his ever seeing the "forest". When his studies are "completed", he may find himself "lost in the woods", with still no notion of a final destination.

A final section contains "other perspectives" of a general and supplementary nature, not easily includible in the body of the study.

It is our prayer that this study of a little-known book of the Bible may play a part in preparing the children of God for the coming "apocalypse" of their Lord.

July, 1981

George Booker  
Troy Haltom

# CONTENTS

Foreword.....	7
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## THE BOOK AS A WHOLE

Introduction .....	11
The Title of the book .....	13
Parallel Passages .....	14
Place in the Canon .....	16
Author and Date of Writing .....	17
Jeremiah: His Life and Times .....	19
Jeremiah as a Type of Christ .....	28
The Structure of the Book .....	30
Additional Notes on the Structure .....	31
Recurring Lessons .....	33

## CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

An Outline of Lamentations .....	37
Chapter One: The Affliction of Jerusalem .....	38
Chapter Two: The Source of the Affliction .....	45
Chapter Three: Renewed Hope in Affliction .....	48
Chapter Four: The Reason for Affliction .....	54
Chapter Five: Prayer for Deliverance from Affliction .....	58

## VERSE BY VERSE

Chapter One .....	63
Chapter Two .....	79
Chapter Three .....	89
Chapter Four .....	106
Chapter Five .....	114

## OTHER PERSPECTIVES

Christ in the Lamentations .....	123
The Ecclesia in the Lamentations .....	127
Bibliography .....	133



*The  
Lamentations  
of Jeremiah*

*The Book as a Whole*



## INTRODUCTION

Acts 14:22 is a profound lesson which believers of all ages must learn:

*“We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”*

Nowhere is this tribulation more evident than in this book of sorrows: Jeremiah’s Lamentations.

*“In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem: And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king’s house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man’s house burnt he with fire. And all the army of the Chaldees, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about. Now the rest of the people that were left in the city, and the fugitives that fell away to the king of Babylon, with the remnant of the multitude, did Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carry away. But the captain of the guard left of the poor of the land to be vinedressers and husbandmen” (2 Kings 25:8-12).*

In this excerpt from Kings are presented the **facts** regarding the captivity and complete overthrow of the “kingdom of God over Israel (Judah)”; in Lamentations we are presented with the **significance** of these facts. We see not only the extremes of physical anguish and mental frustration, but the spiritual significance of the fall of God’s city — for in a sense, we are presented with cause and effect. The sins of the people, nationally, bring about the fall of the city and the nation. The city itself, once “the perfection of beauty” (Psa. 50:2) and “the joy of the whole earth” (Psa. 48:2), is fallen — from being full of people to being solitary; from princess to tributary; from greatness to widowhood. Gone are the walls and towers, symbols of God’s protection. Gone are the priests, and with them the festive and solemn worship. Gone are the prophets and with them the visions and the living word of God — all are in captivity. The land suffers the “sabbath”, or cessation, of the glory of God in full Temple manifestation.

The book of Lamentations is the expression of an almost inexpressible grief. It is portrayed in a first person manner, perhaps initially for the benefit of the survivors. Men live on best after a calamity, not by avoiding the circumstance or repressing their shock or grief, but by facing reality, and learning from the experience. This book contains tremendous sadness and grief, but also it offers hope

from lessons learned; hope and dependence on Him Who will save; **hope in affliction**.

In this book we see confession. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Jeremiah does not record excuses for his nation or to evade responsibility for the consequences he witnessed because he is not recording his own feelings but is recording by inspiration what the Spirit wanted. Yahweh had consumed Israel because Israel had turned from Him, disregarding the warnings of those He had sent to turn them from their destructive course.

In the very centre of this book is an expression of hope. Not speedy hope; not hope based upon any right of Israel; not encouragement based upon the past — it is rather a **conditional** hope. In the central chapter is seen an unnamed individual, **a sufferer who has survived**. True it is God who brings about the affliction — but His motive is a righteous one. God has done this for the ultimate greater good of the individual and of the righteous remnant. The godly survivors understand and appreciate this motive:

*"For the Lord will not cast off for ever: But though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. . . Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD" (Lam. 3:31-33, 40).*

With this in mind let us turn to the book of the "man of affliction."

## THE TITLE OF THE BOOK

The title used traditionally by the Jews is the first word of the book — “Eeyek” (according to Strong’s, but variously rendered “aichah”, “ekah”, “ekhah”), which means “How!” (The books of Moses are similarly titled by their first words in the Hebrew.) The first chapter begins:

*“How doth 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!”*

Chapter 2 begins with this same exclamation of sorrowful bewilderment:

*“How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not His footstool in the day of His anger!”*

And again, Chapter 4:

*“How is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed! The stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street! The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold . . . How are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!”*

This word “how” (Isa. 1:21; Jer. 48:17) indicates the wonder, confusion and grief of the things that had occurred. How could Judah have allowed herself to become disobedient, so placing herself in this position of judgment and tribulation — bringing about the disintegration of God’s rule in Zion and Jerusalem? This word “how” succinctly expresses the feelings of all the people: “**How** could these things have happened to us? **How** could we have let this happen?” **How?** The nation had slept through the warnings of God.

The title used in other versions is taken from the general nature of the contents. The Septuagint called the poems “threnoi”; the Vulgate (Latin) titled the book “threni” — both these words mean dirge or lament. The Rabbis titled the book “Kinoth” or elegy. Jeremiah uses this term in Jer. 7:29; 9:10, 20 and in 2 Chron. 35:25 it is used of the dirge to the memory of Josiah. The Syriac version and the Talmud also use the word for dirge or lament. The full title, “The Lamentations of Jeremiah”, is found in the Syriac, Latin and later Greek versions.

## PARALLEL PASSAGES

This is an area of study limited only by the student's own curiosity, ingenuity, and ambition. To pursue links between Scriptures can be fruitful, to a point; but it can readily be pushed beyond that point to become burdensome. Three main examples and a few passing references must suffice to illustrate the Lamentations' relationship with other passages.

First of all, Lamentations is a compilation of five elegies — poems which reflect affliction, hope and deliverance. (Some briefer examples of the elegy in Hebrew Scriptures are Amos 5:1,2; Isaiah 14:4, 5, 12; and Ezek. 19:10-14). Of the five poems: the first, second and fourth are dirges in the strictest sense; the third is a personal lament and prayer and the fifth is a national prayer.

Perhaps the best example of the funeral song is David's lamentation over Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. 1:17-27). The quickest examination reveals a number of parallels with the Lamentations:

<b>David's Funeral Dirge (2 Sam. 1:17-27)</b>	<b>Lamentations</b>
19. The beauty of Israel. <b>How</b> are the mighty fallen!	1:6; 2:1 1:1, 2:1; 4:1; 5:16
20. Lest the daughters (of the Philistines) rejoice. . .	4:21, 22
21. Anointed with oil	4:20
22. The blood of the slain The bow (of Jonathan) The sword (of Saul)	4:13 2:4; 3:12 2:21; 4:9; 5:9
23. Swifter than eagles Stronger than lions	4:19 3:10
24. Ye daughters of Israel, weep Clothed in scarlet Ornaments of gold	1:2, etc. 4:5 4:1, 2

Psalm 74 is an excellent example of a **national lament** and prayer, and has extraordinary parallels with Lamentations (so many, in fact, that some expositors have suggested a common authorship):

<b>Psalm 74</b>	<b>Lamentations</b>
1. O God, why hast Thou cast us off forever? Why doth Thine anger smoke . . . ?	3:31; 5:20, 22 2:1, 3; 4:16
2,18. Remember. . .	1:9, 11, 12, 20; 2:20; 5:1

**Psalm 74**

This mount Zion, wherein Thou hast dwelt	<b>Lamentations</b> 2:1, 15; 5:18
3. The perpetual desolations	5:18
All that the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary	1:10; 4:12
4. Thine enemies roar in the midst of Thy congregations	2:6, 7
7. They have cast fire into Thy sanctuary	1:13; 2:3; 4:11
8. (Note: The AV's "synagogue" is not, as some claim, a sure sign of post-exilic authorship — but rather a poor translation of the Hebrew "moed": same word is translated "congregation" in v.4)	
9. There is no more any prophet	2:9, 20
10. O God, how long shall the adversary reproach?	2:15
11. Thy right hand	2:3

Perhaps Psalm 69 is the best example of a **personal lament** (as Lamentations 3):

**Psalm 69**

	<b>Lamentations</b>
1. The waters are come in unto my soul	3:54
2, 14. I sink in deep mire	3:53, 55
2, 15. The floods overflow me	3:54
3. I am weary of my crying	1:2, 16; 2:18, 19
My throat is dried	4:4
Mine eyes fail	2:11; 3:48, 49
I wait for my God	3:25, 26
5. My sins are not hid from Thee	3:39, 42; 5:16
7. I have borne reproach	2:15
8. A stranger. . .an alien. . .	3:14
11. Sackcloth	2:10
12. I was the song of the drunkards	3:14, 46, 60-63
15. The pit	3:55; 4:20
16. The multitude of Thy tender mercies	3:22, 23, 32
17. Hide not Thy face from Thy servant	3:8, 44
I am in trouble	3:1, 19
20. I looked. . .for comforters, but I found none	1:2, 7, 9, 17, 21
21. Gall	3:5, 19
22-28. Imprecation against enemies	1:21, 22; 3:64-66; 4:21, 22

Among the other personal laments of Scripture, Psalm 22 may also be noted for its parallels to both Psalm 69 and portions of Lamentations, and for its applicability (along with those two portions of Scripture) to the sufferings of Christ.

Neither should we neglect to mention, in passing, the strong parallels (too diffuse to catalogue and examine here) between Job and Lamentations.

## PLACE IN THE CANON

According to one major tradition, this book is not found in the Law or the Prophets sections of the Canon, which has caused some doubt as to the Jeremiah authorship of these poems. Instead it is placed with the "Kethubim" or writings, which include the Psalms, Proverbs, and Job as well as the "megilloth" or rolls. The "megilloth" consist of Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Ruth and Lamentations. The edition commonly used in scholarly study today, Kittel's "Biblia Hebraica", is based on a manuscript of 1008 A.D. which lists the scrolls in chronological order: Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and Esther. In many manuscripts they are listed in the order in which they are used to commemorate the different Jewish festivals: Song of Songs (Passover); Ruth (Pentecost); Lamentations (the great fast of the ninth of Ab); Ecclesiastes (the feast of Tabernacles); and Esther (Purim).

The following is Schaff's description of a scene at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem: "There the Jews assembled . . . to bewail the downfall of the holy city. I saw . . . a large number, old and young, male and female, venerable rabbis with patriarchal beards and young men kissing the stone wall and watering it with their tears. They repeat from their well-worn Hebrew Bibles and prayerbooks the Lamentations of Jeremiah and suitable Psalms . . . The keynote of all these laments and prayers was struck by Jeremiah, the most pathetic and tenderhearted of prophets, in the Lamentations, that funeral dirge of Jerusalem and the theocracy. This elegy, written with sighs and tears, has done its work most effectually in great public calamities, and is doing it every year on the ninth of the month Ab (July, when it is read with loud weeping in all the synagogues of the Jews and especially at Jerusalem). It keeps alive the memory of their deepest humiliation and guilt and the hope of final deliverance. The scene of the Wailing Place was to me touching and pregnant with meaning."

A second major tradition places Lamentations immediately after the prophecy of Jeremiah. This is the order followed by the Septuagint, the Vulgate, Josephus and most of the English versions. Jerome explains this by stating that this fits with an enumeration of the Old Testament books which makes their number agree with the letters in the Hebrew alphabet; in this listing Jeremiah and Lamentations are counted as one book.



## AUTHOR AND DATE OF WRITING

Although no author's name is attached to this book in the Hebrew, there has never been any serious, reasonable doubt among Bible students concerning its authorship. Since the third century B.C., the majority of translators and commentators have acknowledged Jeremiah as the author.

Some of the "higher critics" of the past century criticize the idea of a single author, concluding instead that these poems were compiled from four or five different writers by a single editor. Others cite Lam. 2:9; 4:17; 5:7 as proof that Jeremiah did not write the book. Others have claimed contradiction between Lam. 5:7 and Jeremiah 31:29, 30 (apparently failing to remember Jer. 32:18).

However, we feel overwhelming evidence is presented to confirm Jeremiah as the single author. For example, the Septuagint begins:

*"And it came to pass after Israel had been led into captivity and Jerusalem had been laid waste, Jeremiah sat weeping, and he lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem, and he said. . ."*

This has every appearance of being a translation from the Hebrew, and apparently stood at the head of the text used by the translator. Also, Jeremiah's dungeon experience (37:15; 38:13-16) fits in well with Lam. 3:52-57.

Also compare Lam. 2:22 with Jer. 20:3: The name "Magormissabib" ("fear on every side") is Jeremiah's watchword and is found in its original form in Jer. 6:25; 20:3, 10; 46:5; 49:29; and in the plural in Lam. 2:22; perhaps Jeremiah borrowed this from Psalm 31:13. This phrase is not found anywhere else in the Bible and the word "magor" by itself is found only in Isa. 31:9. Furthermore, any good set of marginal references will yield a wealth of comparisons between Lamentations and Jeremiah — which can be followed up to good benefit.

Many analogies can be drawn between the prophecies of Jeremiah and Lamentations. Jeremiah spoke of the sins of the people and their coming desolation and tribulation due to their iniquities. He spoke of the fall of Jerusalem. He also spoke of a coming restoration and glory. In Lamentations we read an eyewitness account of the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecies of judgment from God; and we see within the book, as in Jeremiah, a bright future for those who trust, obey and fear the Lord.

The intense grief of the writer is seen throughout the book. These expressions of grief and tribulation appear to fix the date of the book's writing as shortly after

the captivity of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, 587-586 B.C., perhaps within thirty days of its fall. The fact that famine is, throughout the book, described as still prevalent (1:11, 19; 2:19, 20; 4:4) supports this also. Most of the book appears to be in the past tense. In Lamentations 4:22 it can be clearly seen that Jerusalem has already fallen:

*“The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; He will no more carry thee away into captivity.”*

The vividness of the scenes seem to indicate that Jeremiah wrote these poems while still in Judah. According to some commentaries, it was five years before Jeremiah along with other Jews left for Egypt; therefore it seems unlikely that Lamentations was written while he was there.

These words would become a warning — a reminder — **but not an epitaph!** Israel would be back!

*“Israel is a scattered sheep; the lions have driven him away: first the king of Assyria hath devoured him: and last this Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon hath broken his bones. Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria. And I will bring Israel again to his habitation”* (Jer. 50:17-19).

It should be stated, by way of conclusion to this part, that even though most of the book is in the first person and parts seem to portray a personal lament (e.g. ch.3), the style and content is determined by God’s inspired message and not by reason of Jeremiah’s feelings. We, therefore, study these Lamentations not to discover Jeremiah’s personality, but God’s message.

## JEREMIAH: HIS LIFE AND TIMES

*“The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause thee to hear My words. Then I went down to the potter’s house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in Mine hand, O house of Israel. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in My sight, that it obey not My voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them. Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good” (Jer. 18:1-11).*

The predictions made by Yahweh’s prophets are often conditional. Just as a potter exercised his prerogative to reshape his work, God as the Master Potter, may choose to do the same — He may not completely destroy His work. Yahweh may change His purpose with reference to His people when they change their conduct either for good or bad. In other words, the purpose of “prediction” can be to affect the conduct of the people to whom the “prediction” is given. If disaster is prophesied, it is a warning to turn from sin. If blessings are spoken of, it is to encourage the people to maintain an affection and loyalty for Yahweh.

The words of the prophets must be taken with utmost seriousness. Because of their function their word was always a specific word: a specific directive to a specific people, caught up in the never-to-be-repeated events of a specific time in their history. Moreover, it was very often a word that interpreted events, the events through which the people were passing or were about to pass (if the situation of their spiritual life remained unchanged), in the light of the Divine demands and promises. And this is why it is only against the background of their times that

many of the sayings of the prophets come alive — indeed, in many instances, make any sense at all.

Jeremiah was born in the year 645 B.C. approximately, in the reign of Manasseh. Judah had been a vassal of the Assyrian Empire for about 100 years.

In the year 745 B.C. Tiglath-pileser III (745-727), ascended the Assyrian throne. As he advanced toward the west, Rezin (of Damascus) and Pekah, son of Remaliah (of Israel) joined forces to repel him. They sought Judah's help, but Judah wisely refused. However, Ahaz against Isaiah's protest sent a large sum of tribute to Tiglath-pileser III to enlist his aid against Rezin and Pekah. With that gesture, Judah became dependent upon Assyria.

Tiglath-pileser III crushed the combined forces of Rezin and Pekah in 732, taking Damascus and large portions of Israel. Because she was a vassal, Judah was saved from the succeeding ravages of Shalmaneser V (727-722) and Sargon II (722-705) as they invaded what was left of Israel (Ephraim) and destroyed the capital city of Samaria (721). Judah's price was high — not only was she a pawn to a foreign power, but she was forced to recognise Assyria's gods in the Temple.

Hezekiah reversed the policy of his father, increasing his efforts toward independence, while at the same time undertaking sweeping religious reforms. However, when Sennacherib came to the throne (705-681), things came to a head; Hezekiah openly rebelled against the proud Assyrian. Sennacherib invaded Judah, reduced Judah's fortified cities, and slaughtered or deported a large number of their population. Only a last-minute angelic intervention spared Judah from complete overthrow at that time, and Sennacherib returned to other pursuits. The capital was spared and Hezekiah retained his throne, but the efforts for independence were short lived. When Hezekiah died, his son Manasseh declared himself a loyal Assyrian vassal. Hezekiah had reigned from 726-697.

Sennacherib's successors, Esarhaddon (681-669) and Assurbanipal (669-627) conquered Egypt; during Manasseh's reign (697-642) the Assyrian Empire reached its greatest physical expansion. It is no wonder the Egyptians kept things stirred up in the area of Palestine — they did not want to become subject to the Assyrians.

Under Manasseh's reign, altars to the Assyrian deities were erected within the temple confines; pagan practices of all sorts were given free rein, the fertility cult with its ritual of sacred prostitution being tolerated in the temple (2 Kings 23:4-7; Zeph. 1:4). There was a general aping of foreign fashions and ways (Zeph. 1:8) along with enormous interest in the occult. But the most barbarous of all was human sacrifice — with possibly even the king taking the lead in the proceedings (2 Kings 21:6). It is possible that with the passage of time, the people worshipped the Assyrian gods and Yahweh side by side, without recognizing that they were doing wrong. The inevitable result of such widespread apostasy is found in Zeph. 1:9; 3:1-7. Those who dared to protest were dealt with severely (2 Kings 21:16).

Assyria began to spread herself thin as a result of her conquests; she could not protect her borders. She was being threatened by various Indo-Aryan peoples to the north and the east. Chief among these were the Medes, who had pestered Assyria for over 200 years, and were now becoming potentially dangerous. Along the northern frontier, hordes of barbarians (Cimmerians and Scythians) were now established. Asshurbanipal found himself in trouble midway in his reign; Egypt, so recently conquered, could not be held. Psammetichus (664-610) of Egypt withheld tribute and seceded from the empire because of Assyria's weak situation.

Asshurbanipal's brother, who had been appointed deputy king of Babylon, rebelled against his brother in 652 B.C., aided by Elam. (Manasseh may have also rebelled at this time, thus explaining 2 Chron. 33:11-13). After a two-year siege, the rebellion was controlled. In 640, Asshurbanipal began his march of revenge. He conquered Elam, the Arab tribes, and reasserted his authority in Palestine. He died in 627.

Manasseh's son Amon reigned for two years and was assassinated (642-640). Josiah, age eight, was placed upon the throne. When Asshurbanipal died (627), there was a dispute for his throne between his two sons. This plunged Assyria into civil war, leaving her very weak. Babylon took advantage of this whole set of circumstances and sought her freedom. Nabopolassar (626-605) took the throne from Assyria in 626. In 628 B.C., Josiah had denounced the Assyrian gods, in effect declaring Judah's independence; Assyria, torn with civil strife, ceased to exercise even normal control over Palestine. With Judah now truly free for the first time in over 100 years, Josiah could carry out his reform measures.

\* \* \*

It might be well to have the following in our minds before we continue:

- 645 B.C. Jeremiah ("he whom Yahweh raises up") is born
- 639 Josiah ("Yah heals" or "Yah is the foundation")  
begins his reign, at age of 8
- 631 Josiah serves the God of David his Father
- 627 Josiah begins his reform
- 626 Jeremiah is called to the ministry
- 621 The Great Reformation
- 608 Josiah dies: Jeremiah, who has been silent for 13 years, resumes his  
prophecy
- 608 Jehoahaz ("Yah has seized or laid hold of") begins a reign which  
lasts for 3 months
- 608/597 Jehoiakim ("Yah will raise") reigns
- 597 Jehoiachin ("Yah will establish") reigns for 3 months
- 597/586 Zedekiah ("Yah is righteous") reigns
- 586 Jerusalem and Zion razed to the ground, the people taken into cap-  
tivity — Jeremiah under inspiration writes the Book of Lamenta-  
tions.

Jeremiah's life is one of the loneliest and saddest in Scripture. His personal experiences were bitter; the message of disaster he had to proclaim was depressing and unwelcome; and the times in which he lived were of unparalleled calamity. His cause was lost from the beginning, because the people would not hear him. He was everywhere hated and misunderstood. While intensely loving and grieving for his countrymen and his nation, he was despised and persecuted as an enemy and a traitor.

In a short period of 40 years Jeremiah witnessed a temporary resurgence of true worship, saw it fall victim first to Egypt (Josiah's death), then to Babylon and finally watched it destroy itself while trying to break free from Babylon. His books reflect the tragic drama of the situation. Out of his agony, and the agony of his people, comes the sombre note of lamentation.

When Jeremiah began his ministry, he and Josiah were about the same age. It is truly touching watching these two young men — prophet and king — labouring to turn the nation to righteousness as the smoldering judgments of God hovered over the land; just as two young men — a prophet and a king — John and Jesus, did in the days of the nation's final judgment.

It is notable that Jeremiah's ministry began just forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the Temple by the Babylonians, as recorded in the Lamentations. We remember that Jesus began his ministry just forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the Temple by the Romans. In each case we see a period of final probation given to the city.

Jeremiah's mission was to witness for God against apostate and worldly Judah. But his work was not only as a witness of condemnation; it had a far more glorious purpose. It was to encourage and strengthen the scattered, faithful remnant — of his own day and of all the ages since. And in our present time of crisis for the Truth, and imminent judgment, its message of comfort has great and sustaining power.

When the terrible judgments came, it would appear that God had completely rejected Israel, and that all hope was gone. But the lonely prophet with his message of eventual glory was a symbol that God was still concerned with them although they had been unfaithful, and his prophecies gave comforting assurance that those who held fast would never be forgotten, and that, though these dreadful evils should come, the latter end would be blessing and peace.

The name Jeremiah has become in the world proverbial for a pessimist. But we should know Jeremiah better than this. The world hates those who call attention to its wickedness and folly, and who raise their voice to warn of the judgments that will come upon it. But the duty of the watchmen is clear, whether in Jeremiah's day or ours:

*"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins" (Isa. 58:1).*

Jeremiah found he could not hold back: He must speak as God commanded:

*"Then said I, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His Name. But His Word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (Jer. 20:9).*

The Jews of Jeremiah's day were typical of human nature in every age. They recognised that he was sent by God, yet they still blindly hated him for his faithful testimony, and resented his forebodings of judgment. Jeremiah lived in the day of the formation of the great image of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2) — the kingdom of men; we live in the days of the end of this great image, and the time heralding the construction of that great Kingdom of God. People do not change — they do not really want to hear about the end of this system, because they think it would mean the end of pleasure for them; they are sometimes willingly ignorant of the true pleasure that awaits those who serve the true King.

When the Book of the Law was discovered in Josiah's reign, it is likely that he read of the evils which Moses had prophesied would come about if the Jews neglected God. He sent to inquire of God what he might do to avert this judgment. God's answer was that it was too late; the calamities were on the way. However, because Josiah was faithful and God-fearing, they would not come in his day. Thus the first fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah concerning a northern invader, may have been averted because of Josiah and the resurgence in his day of Judah's right worship. (The Scythians passed by Palestine. However, the Babylonians would not.) While he lived Josiah indeed did God's will, so that —

*"All his days the children of Israel departed not from following the LORD"*  
(2 Chron. 34:33).

Not only did he cleanse Judah, but he was also instrumental in reducing idolatry in Israel.

As a result of what he read in the book, Josiah kept a last, great Passover feast in Jerusalem. The Passover was serene and peaceful, for it commemorated God's blessings upon His children, and deliverance from slavery. But God's blessings and forbearance were to cease, and Judah was to be delivered into slavery again. God had taken the yoke of Egypt from Israel's shoulders, and was about to replace it with the Babylonian yoke of iron because of their disobedience (Lam. 1:14).

Though for a time there was a great show of piety on the part of the people, they failed to be truly transformed by God's Word. It appears that the reform only brought about a superficial righteousness or change. God is not and will not be mocked by hypocritical worship. The people had once more rallied around a human leader and failed to recognise their true leader — God; when Josiah died the people once more turned from Yahweh. Josiah met his death thirteen years after the great Passover at the hands of Pharaoh Necho. Josiah delayed Necho long enough to prevent him from arriving in time to assist Assyria in recovering from Babylon, in a sense sealing Judah's fate (God-decreed) as an imminent victim of the newly arrived power (Babylon). God's Word also states that

the righteous Josiah had been taken away from the evil to come — a very sobering warning, had the Jews listened (2 Kings 22:18-20).

It is recorded that Jeremiah renewed his ministry by lamenting for Josiah. Well he might, for he above all others would realise that with Josiah's death, the last curtain fell on the happiness and well-being of Judah. The nation now had 23 appointed years of existence left — and they were to be a terrible 23 years. The most prominent part of Jeremiah's ministry now begins. He seems to have enjoyed an easy enough life up till now, but now he finds himself at increasing variance with the nation and its rulers as they head for destruction.

\* \* \*

The people made Jehoahaz, [Josiah's son] king — but he lasted only three months. The king of Egypt took him prisoner and set up his brother Jehoiakim in his stead. He reigned for eleven years, and Jeremiah had much to do with this ungodly, hateful man. In the first year of his reign, God commanded Jeremiah to stand in the temple court and proclaim to all the people that came there, that unless they put away their wickedness God would make the Temple a desolation and the city a curse —

*"I [will make] this city as Tophet (byword, contempt). . . the Valley of Slaughter" (19:12, 6).*

The fifth year of Jehoiakim was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, and a very significant year. Jeremiah tells the people that they have not hearkened to the Lord (25:3). Judah now has eighteen years left. At this time Jeremiah understands that the captivity is to last for seventy years, to fulfill the "sabbaths" which Judah has profaned.

Jeremiah is commanded to write these things in a book, and his faithful aide Baruch does so and delivers it to Jehoiakim. When a few sentences are read, the king seizes the book and begins to tear the pages, and cut them with a knife, and cast them in the fire. The same is to be done to the children of Judah themselves, as Ezekiel prophesied (ch. 5). They were so set in their ways that Jeremiah records:

*"Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king nor any of his servants that heard all these words" (36:24).*

This seems to be the point at which the nation's doom was finally sealed. Each step of wickedness led them deeper and deeper into the pit.

Because of his prophecy, Jehoiakim seeks out Jeremiah, but the "LORD hid him" (36:26). At this time, Jeremiah rewrote his book, this time "adding many more words" (36:32). For his insulting manner, Jehoiakim receives the message that he is to be given the burial of an ass.

Now that his final written testimony of God has been nationally rejected, a new phase begins. Jeremiah is commanded to keep himself separate from this people, as a witness of their rejection by God. He is forbidden to join with them either in mourning or in feasting. He found himself in the same isolated position as the



faithful find themselves in the world today. God often used the personal lives of the prophets in this way — as living examples and object lessons. Like Jeremiah, God's people today are required to manifest a striking difference in their lives from the surrounding world, so that they will be unmistakable beacon-lights of the Truth. The way may seem hard, often demanding, but the believer must remember God's words of encouragement—

*“Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee” (1:8).*

Jeremiah was told that the people would not hearken, but would simply intensify their anger and resentment against him. Finally, the time came when he was forbidden to pray for them (14:11, 12). It had now come to this! All opportunity for the nation has passed; they are doomed. However, there would always be a remnant drawn out, so Jeremiah continued to preach and warn.

Nebuchadnezzar has made his first invasion, and still they do not listen to Jeremiah. In addition to this, Jehoiakim's reign was troubled with plundering by the surrounding nations. God slowly reduced Judah to ashes — Jehoiakim along with it. He dies and suffers the final indignity of an ass's burial. Jehoiachin reigns for three months and is carried away captive to Babylon. But in that three-month period he leaves behind a definite record — he did evil in the sight of God.

Finally comes Zedekiah — weak, cowardly, evil Zedekiah — called by Ezekiel a “profane, wicked prince”. Zedekiah was not as bitter toward Jeremiah as Jehoiakim had been, but as disasters came upon Judah with increasing frequency, he came to hate Jeremiah.

The better and more righteous of the people had been carried to Babylon, as was shown in the vision of the figs (ch. 24). The very good figs are those like Daniel whom God had caused to be taken to Babylon, to escape the final dreadful days of the city. If we are found watching we will escape the final days of judgment on this wicked age. Jeremiah sent a letter to the captives in Babylon (ch. 29), telling them to seek the peace of the city, and to wait patiently upon God, to pray to Him and trust in Him. His words here are certainly for our benefit, for we are in practically the same position in the world today — “strangers and pilgrims”, with “no continuing city.” While the false prophets are promising peace and safety and revival in two or three years, Jeremiah promises the captives that they are to be in captivity for seventy years — but also that God will bring about a reversal, a return. God would not cast off His people forever.

In the final years of the kingdom, Zedekiah plots with Egypt against Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar decides that there is only one solution — complete destruction of Jerusalem and Judah. His army comes and besieges Jerusalem; the details of the suffering are to be found in Lamentations. Zedekiah sends for Jeremiah; God's answer is harsh:

*“Deceive not yourselves . . . the Chaldeans shall fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire” (37:8, 9).*

Jeremiah is then cast into a filthy dungeon (after being beaten), where he remained many days. We are now in the ninth year of Zedekiah. The city has eighteen months left. Again Zedekiah asks:

*“Is there any word from the LORD?”*

Again the answer comes:

*“Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon”* (v.17).

Jeremiah is released from the dungeon, but again the princes demand that he must die. He is lowered into a cistern, and left there to die. (He must be about 60 years old at this point.) He is then rescued by Ebed-melech, Zedekiah’s servant; and he stays in the prison court for the remainder of the siege. Here he witnesses the happenings of which he writes in Lamentations. The Babylonians enter the city and destroy the Temple — which had become a symbol of lip-service and outward ceremony (let us learn the lesson here). Later, against his will, Jeremiah is taken to Egypt by the few who remain in the land. We are not told in Scripture how, when, or where he dies.

The people had rejected the admonitions of the Spirit-inspired prophet. The Kingdom of God on earth is rent. The glory departs Israel, only to return momentarily in the person of Jesus Christ at his first advent. The long Gentile night has begun.

*Look down, O God, with pitying eye,  
And view the desolation round;  
See what wide realms in darkness lie,  
And hurl their idols to the ground.*

*With gentle beams on Zion shine,  
Raise up her kings, restore her priests,  
And, by Thine energy divine,  
Let sacred love o'erflow their feasts.*

*Then shall each age and rank agree  
United shouts of joy to raise:  
And Zion, made a praise by Thee,  
To Thee shall render back the praise.*

## JEREMIAH AS A TYPE OF CHRIST

Each of the Old Testament prophets may be considered as in some way typifying Christ, for they were all God's spokesmen. They all sought to turn their countrymen from their ways of sin, and all were received by the majority with hostility and contempt.

Several things in the life and writings of Jeremiah, however, are especially indicative of Christ and his mission. In his birth and calling, Jeremiah certainly resembled Christ and his miraculous origin:

*"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee . . . Then the LORD put forth His hand, and touched my mouth . . . and said unto me, Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth" (1:5, 9).*

Jeremiah because of his teaching fell into such disrepute that he likened himself to "a lamb that is brought to the slaughter" (11:19). In this also we see Christ in prophecy (Isa. 53:7) and fulfillment (1 Pet. 3:18; 2:20-24; John 1:29). Jeremiah by his preaching incurred the special displeasure of his own kindred (12:6), again as Christ (Psa. 69:8; John 1:11).

Chapters 7 through 9 present several allusions to the experiences of Christ. Jeremiah, just as his greater successor, was faced with deep-rooted wickedness, found especially among the religious leaders, the priests and elders of the community. In his efforts to reform a cynical, hypocritical priesthood, and to cleanse the Temple of its idolatry, he firmly pointed forward to Christ. In these three short chapters we find the following familiar phrases:

*"Is this house, which is called by My Name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD. . . They (the priests) have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, saying, Peace, Peace, when there is no peace . . . In the time of their visitation, they shall be cast down . . . No grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree."*

One of the reasons Jeremiah was hated was that he taught the Jews to humble themselves before the Babylonians, realising that this was God's way to chasten them for their wrongs (Jer. 37:8-12). He was therefore despised by the haughty "patriots". In the same way Christ's teachings of humility and submission were scorned by many Jews of his time who felt Rome's yoke must be cast off. Both

Jeremiah and Jesus saw that true peace and true freedom could come only through obedience under God's hand, a "bearing of the yoke" (Lam. 3:27) and a patient waiting (v.26).

Lastly, Jeremiah's lament for his people (9:1) evokes great similarities to Christ and his lament for the judgments to come upon his stubborn generation. The whole of the book of Lamentations is this type of sustained sorrow. And it is a sobering exhortation and warning to us. God has always given His people instructors and ample warning to change their ways. If His people refuse to listen, judgment is certain.

Jeremiah typifies Christ and his reward — and our future reward as well: Jeremiah was at last put into prison (37:15), where he sank into the mire, just as Christ was killed by those he came to help, and was placed in the prison house of death. Jeremiah was freed from his prison, typifying the resurrection and immortalization of Jesus:

*"So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon" (38:13).*

The last few chapters of Jeremiah deal with the destruction of Babylon and her allies in the last days (the last days of the kingdom of Judah). Christ also will bring judgment upon spiritual Babylon and her allies in the last days (of the kingdom of men), at which time the lamentations for the Hope of Israel will be at an end, when mourning will be turned to joy — for the saints and the faithful Jews.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Each chapter is divided into 22 stanzas (verses), except chapter 3, which has 66 ( $3 \times 22$ ). Chapters 1 through 4 are alphabetic acrostics, with one stanza (in chapter 3, three stanzas) for each letter of the 22-character Hebrew alphabet. In chapter 1 the letters are in order. In chapters 2 through 4 they are in order with the exception of two letters: the sixteenth and the seventeenth characters ("ayin" and "pe") are transposed.

These transpositions have long puzzled scholars; some have invented ingenious exegetical "reasons" for the reversals. However, recent archaeological finds in Israel and the Sinai confirm a previously unproven scribal tradition in which "pe" — "ayin" was the correct order. It now appears that this local Israelite variation in letter order was often used during the period when the Book of Lamentations was written.

Chapter 5 is not an acrostic, but it does contain 22 lines (rather than stanzas), probably corresponding to the 22 Hebrew letters. It is possible that this less rigid structure represents the deepened intensity of grief; perhaps Jeremiah was so grieved as he wrote that he did not tarry to keep the same "literary" form he had previously followed.

In chapters 1 through 3 each stanza contains three lines, with the exceptions of 1:7 and 2:19, which contain four lines. Chapter 4 contains 2-line stanzas. In chapter 3 all three lines of each stanza begin with the same letter and each line carries a verse number, comparable to Psalm 119 — an eightfold acrostic.

The acrostic is common among the Old Testament writings. One purpose was that it was very helpful to memory. The acrostic style also denotes completeness of thought — in that each letter of the alphabet suggests its own thought, all with the same basic message. This aid of the acrostic is of course lost to us in translation (although at least one translator has attempted the acrostic form in English).

Other acrostics are found in Psalms 9-10 (together), 25, 34, 37, 111, 112 and 145, and Prov. 31:10-31. The prophet Nahum opens his book with a partial acrostic.

A significant feature of the Hebrew poetry is the constant repetition of similar thoughts, with only slight variations in meaning between one phrase and the next:

*"He will visit thine iniquity: He will discover thy sins. . ."*

*"The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their music. . ."*

Such phrases as these contribute wonderfully to the beauty of Jewish poetry, and they show how well adapted it is to be translated into other languages — where it still maintains its depth and richness of expression. Of course, one must never forget that this is not just literature or prose or poetry, but also and especially the expression of the mind and purpose of Almighty God.

It has already been stated that the original word for “lamentations” refers to a dirge. Chapters 1, 2 and 4 are elegies or dirges. In the Hebrew form of poetry, a dirge or lament is usually concluded with a prayer. We find a prayer at the end of chapters 1 and 2, and a statement at the close of chapter 4 which resembles the prayer of chapter 1. Rather than include a prayer at the close of chapter 4, it is possible the prophet, caught in the sorrow and woe of the picture of afflicted Zion, concludes not just the one elegy but the entire book with a prayer (the whole of chapter 5). This would be appropriate, for the book as a whole is an elegy.

## ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE STRUCTURE

The Book of Lamentations has occupied a prominent place in the study of Hebrew meter, because of its acrostic form in the first four chapters. Its meter, however, seems to set it apart from other forms and varieties of Hebrew verse — it is easily distinguished from other Hebrew verse. This uniqueness stresses our conviction as to the divinity behind the authorship: it is not, as some modern critics allege, just Hebrew poetry.

A few comments on the parallelism found in this book should be given at this time. A brief mention was given earlier; here is another example:

*“Our land is turned over to strangers;  
Our houses, to foreigners” (5:2).*

Of the 266 lines in the book, 162 exhibit parallelism. Of more significance is the fact that chapter 5 reflects this characteristic in 19 of the 22 lines; and two of these lines that do not in themselves reflect this, are parallel to each other — 5:9 and 5:10. This represents either 86% or 95% usage of this form in chapter 5. In chapters 1 through 4, this usage is found in 59% of the lines. Since Jeremiah did not use the acrostic form in chapter 5 perhaps he chose parallelism to emphasise his points.

Another interesting point involved the usage of the pattern phrases “daughter” (Hebrew “bat”) or “virgin daughter” (“betulat bat”). These phrases occur 20 times, remarkable in that they only occur 45 times in all the other portions of the Hebrew Scriptures (and perhaps even more significant, 16 of the 45 additional occurrences are found in Jeremiah). The phrase “bat ammi” (literally, daughter of my people) occurs eight times in Jeremiah — the only other instances outside of Lamentations, with one exception (Isa. 22:4).

Lamentations uses “daughter of Zion” seven times; “virgin daughter of Zion” once; “daughter of my people” five times; “daughter of Judah” twice; “virgin daughter of Judah” once (these last two are found nowhere else in Scripture);

“daughter of Jerusalem” twice; and “daughter of Edom” once. These occurrences make explicit the personification of the people or city as a woman, a figure used so often by God of His people.

“Daughter(s)” — “bat” or “banot” — may also signify satellite settlements of a major urban centre, like Jerusalem. Psalm 9:14 refers to the “gates” of the daughter (“bat”) of Zion, clearly indicating a town of some sort (see also Psalm 48:11; 97:8; Isa. 10:32; and Josh. 15:45, 47 — where the same word occurs). These “banot” were dependent commercially, politically and socially on the “mother” city — a concept echoed in Gal. 4:26 and Rev. 17:5 to cite two diametrically opposite examples.

All of these points on the structure, rather than detracting from the divinity of the book, seem to strengthen it. God chose to use a form which could be easily remembered; and Jeremiah was the man of God to write this book for Him. The fact that poetry rather than prose was chosen adds to the thought that this book was written for all (including the children!) to be able to memorize. Verse is easier to memorize than prose, and easier still when the sequence of lines follows a set pattern. God wanted this book, with its principles and memories and horrors and hopes, to be remembered.



## RECURRING LESSONS

Several lessons recur often throughout this book. The most obvious is this: That we may see, in the plight of Jeremiah and Judah, both the sufferings of Christ and the persecutions and trials of the saints in this Gentile world. We are the saints, the people or nation whom God has separated to bear His Name, and ultimately to bear His glory — if we are worthy. But we have not been separated to a life of ease or luxury. Instead we have committed ourselves to the loss of worldly possessions and honours and to chastisement at the hand of our Father in Heaven —

*“Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us:  
consider, and behold our reproach!”* (5:1)

We well know that—

*“No chastening for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous”*  
(Heb. 12:11).

Therefore, may we have the wisdom and foresight to realise our weakness and to lean on the mercy of God—

*“Arise, cry out in the night:  
in the beginning of the watches  
pour out thine heart like water  
before the face of the Lord”* (2:19).

And we learn at last that nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ (Rom. 8:38). We must accept chastisement in order to be true sons; Paul tells us that God chastises us for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness (Heb. 12:10):

*“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us  
a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”* (2 Cor. 4:17).

Another point amply demonstrated is that all nations and their affairs are controlled by God (Dan. 2:21; 4:17, 25) according to His purpose with Israel. Israel—both natural and spiritual — may “give the hand” to the Egyptians and Assyrians at the present time (5:6). She may be trodden down by “Edom” for now (4:21). But when God has waited long enough, the respective fortunes of Jew and Gentile will change quite drastically, and God will elevate His people and render unto the others—

*“A recompense. . . sorrow of heart, and thy curse. . .”* (3:64-65).

Paul told the brethren at Corinth that—

*“ALL THINGS are for your sakes”* (2 Cor. 4:15).

Jesus told his listeners of certain times being shortened—

*“For the elect’s sake.”*

If we would only let this truth sink into our hearts, never could we become discouraged or feel neglected!

Finally, the principle of responsibility to God is emphasised throughout Lamentations. The practical and Scriptural belief is that the sorest punishment is visited upon those who are most responsible — that is, those who have the most knowledge. To whom much is given, much will be required in the day of God’s visitation. The nation of Judah was more responsible to God than were the other nations of their time—

*“You only have I known of all the families of the earth:  
therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities”* (Amos 3:2).

This sense of being known of God is explained in Psa. 147—

*“He showeth His Word unto Jacob,  
His statutes and His judgments unto Israel.  
He hath not dealt so with any (other) nation:  
and as for His judgments, they have not known them”* (vv.19-20).

The Jews who refused to heed God’s messengers, and who followed their own evil inclinations — neglecting His testimony — received the sorer punishment befitting their status—

*“For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of My people  
is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom,  
that was overthrown as in a moment,  
and no hands stayed on her”* (4:6).

Sodom had been exceedingly wicked, but her punishment was swift, and therefore less painful than that of Judah—whose final sufferings were intense and drawn-out (4:8-10).

*“If God be for us, who can be against us?”* (Rom. 8:31)

This can be a wonderful assurance, but the solemn, sobering truth is that the God Who fights for us may very well come to fight against us — as He fought against Jerusalem (2:5-7). It is for us to ponder this carefully, and to put ourselves in the place of Judah—

*“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples (Gr.  
‘types’): and they are written for our admonition . . .”* (1 Cor. 10:11).

*“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?”* (Heb. 2:3).

The central thought of Lamentations is found precisely in the centre of the

book. The proper climax is 3:19-36. Of these verses 31-33 must be singled out particularly—

*“For the Lord will not cast off forever:  
But though He cause grief  
yet will He have compassion  
according to the multitude of His mercies.  
For He doth not afflict willingly  
nor grieve the children of men.”*

The book progresses from an early feeling of shame and bewilderment to a growing awareness and appreciation of God’s presence and His hand in man’s affairs — both to chasten and to save. What man finds difficult to remember is that disobedience inevitably brings chastisement. The non-repentant will suffer the judgments, woes and desolations brought by God. The faithful remnant are repentant, accepting chastisement as a necessity for building character, knowing that—

*“God will not forget in need  
the man that trusts in Him indeed.”*

Zion, who mourns her desolation and weeps sorely in the night (1:2), is in the end comforted by the birth of new sons, whose days are renewed as of old (5:21).

Patience, endurance and godliness are characteristics of the true Israelite. The true Israelite offers a confident prayer of deliverance from the oppressor and a longing prayer for justification and glorification. Sorrow gives way to a new hope—

*“Weeping may endure for a night,  
but joy cometh in the morning” (Psa. 30:5).*

In the analysis, note the emphasis on “affliction”, and the progression: Jerusalem’s affliction (ch.1) is brought by God (2) and is necessary (3) because of her persistent apostasy (4), but she will at last be delivered from affliction (5). Note also the succession of prayers at the ends of the chapters, growing in length and intensity until culminating in the extended prayer, filling **all** of ch. 5 (see notes on structure).

*The  
Lamentations  
of Jeremiah*

*Chapter by Chapter*

# AN OUTLINE OF LAMENTATIONS

## Chapter 1: The *AFFLICTION* of Jerusalem

*"There is none to comfort her."*

- 1-11: The lament of the city.
- 12-15: God's fierce anger
- 16-17: "For these I weep"
- 18-19: "The LORD is righteous"
- 20-22: Jerusalem's **PRAYER**

## Chapter 2: The Source of the *AFFLICTION*

*"Yahweh hath done this."*

- 1- 9: Just judgments of the Lord
- 10-14: Tears of affliction
- 15-17: Jerusalem's enemies rejoice
- 18-22: Jerusalem's **PRAYER**

## Chapter 3: Renewed Hope in *AFFLICTION*

*"Wherefore doth a living man complain?"*

- 1-18: Darkness, affliction, derision
- 19-21: The desired effect: a remnant saved
- 22-30: The Lord's mercies, service and separation
- 31-33: The central theme: Chastening is necessary and helpful
- 34-36: "The LORD approveth not"
- 37-41: A **living** man should not complain
- 42-66: **PRAYER**—
  - We transgressed (42-54)
  - But judge my cause (55-66).

## Chapter 4: The Reason For *AFFLICTION*

*"For the sins of her prophets. . ."*

- 1-12: Contrast of sons of Zion: fine gold to earthen pitchers
- 13-16: Sins of the leaders
- 17-20: Vain hopes
- 21-22: The cup passes to Edom

## Chapter 5: **PRAYER** for Deliverance From *AFFLICTION*

*"Behold our reproach."*

- 1-15: "See our reproach"—disgrace
- 16-18: "The crown is fallen"
- 19-22: The everlasting throne: a hope of renewal

## Chapter 1

# THE AFFLICTION OF JERUSALEM

*"There is none to comfort her."*

Jeremiah, by the Spirit, is of course the speaker throughout this chapter, but his words in the second section are as the words of the suffering Jerusalem, the "daughter of Zion" (vv.12-22). This type of presentation has been used for two reasons: first-person, present-tense speech increases the excitement, and impact of the narrative. Secondly, Jeremiah felt the regrets of his people — and even their sins — so keenly that they became an intimate part of his own being and an integral part of God's revelation here recorded.

Jeremiah is sorrowed by the desolation of the people, burdened with the grief of the intense suffering of the nation. He had tried for many long years to warn them, to recall them to their holy covenant with God. But only a few had ever paid attention.

Jeremiah behaved similarly to Moses and the apostle Paul — two other Jews who lamented the actions of their brethren so strongly, and who sought their benefit so urgently, that they were willing to jeopardise their own positions before God. In Exodus 32:32 we find Moses interceding for the forgiveness of the people's sins:

*"...And if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written."*

Paul expresses the same sentiment for his stiff-necked brethren:

*"For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:3).*

All three of these men—Jeremiah, Moses and Paul — stand therefore as fitting types of the greatest of all Jews, the Lord Jesus Christ. At his first appearing, Jesus told his apostles to go "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel". But the people would not accept the teachings of the teacher of Nazareth. Jesus, lamenting the coming desolation of Jerusalem, cried:

*"O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem! Thou that killest the prophets,  
and stonest them which are sent to thee! How often would  
I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen*

*gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*

*Behold, your house is left unto you desolate"* (Matt. 23:37, 38).

What magnificent compassion! So here in Lamentations, in Jeremiah's concern for a wayward nation, we see pictured the concern of the Son — and the Father — for us. What a wonder this is! that one, so undefiled and separate from sinners as Christ, should care for others, so prone to every evil thought and deed as we are:

*"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. . .*

*And he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors"* (Isa. 53:4, 12).

With his death and resurrection came the New Covenant (mentioned by Jeremiah —31:31-34) — and with the new covenant God extended His purpose to include the Gentiles, those who were 'afar off'. The distinction between the natural Jew and Greek was removed:

*"God, Who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ*

*. . . For through him we both (Jew and Gentile) have access by one Spirit unto the Father"* (Eph. 2:4-18).

How thankful we should be that Jesus is not ashamed to call us brethren. He who did no sin is indeed a faithful High Priest for us who walk unworthily, if we repent and turn again to him:

*"For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted"* (Heb. 2:18).

Should this not also be a lesson for us? Our feelings and affection for the brethren and sisters should be such that we suffer when they suffer, and rejoice when they rejoice.

Throughout this first chapter of Lamentations one point stands out — man's helplessness in his forsaken condition. Until a realisation had come that these judgments were a result of disobedience, not only was there no comfort in the world but there was none from God — and this is true desolation.

Neither can "any man by any means redeem his brother" from his sins (Psa. 49:7). Seven times is this truth made clear in Chapter 1;

*"None to comfort . . . no comforter"* (vv.2, 9, 17, 21)—this, an unusual form, occurs elsewhere only in Eccl. 4:1.

*"She findeth no rest"* (v.3).

*"None did help her"* (v.7).

*"The comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me"* (v.16).

The great truth of man's inadequacy finds a rightful place in this first chapter. It is fitting that we must first realise and acknowledge our need for a Redeemer (as the people of Judah do in later chapters) before anything can be done to remedy our otherwise hopeless situation.

## Verses 1-11: THE LAMENT OF THE CITY

Here is portrayed the loneliness and solitude of Jerusalem. Her “lovers” have become her enemies. She is left alone, with only the memory of her previous greatness. The trials of the whole nation are personified in the city, for it was the heart and centre of national life — the place chosen by God from the beginning (Deut. 12:10, 11; 2 Chron. 6:6), the capital, the place of the Temple, the dwelling of the King and the High Priest, the place where God’s glory had been so long manifested, and where the Ark of God had rested.

“How doth the city sit solitary. . .” (v.1). Isaiah 3 specifies an enormous number of “fashionable” characteristics which the wayward daughters of Zion exemplified, to the disgust of their God. The primary significance of a majority of those is adulterous activity with the world — in a spiritual sense (not only is apparel meant there, but ideas as well). A self-destructive concern for philosophical frills and baubles, for the “wisdom of the world” instead of the only valuable adornment — “the hidden man of the heart . . . a meek and quiet spirit” (1 Pet. 3:4) — has left the city in such condition. Therefore Isaiah says,

*“She being desolate shall sit upon the ground”* (Isa. 3:26).

Centuries later, the Romans used this same figure when they struck medals celebrating the destruction of Jerusalem: the “Judea Capta” — portraying a woman sitting under a palm tree, overshadowed by a proud and upright soldier.

Jerusalem made **herself** desolate by forsaking her husband — her true helper. Instead she depended upon her “lovers”, other nations and their gods — where are they now? (1:2) Her streets had become as empty and lifeless as her national spiritual state.

All the pains associated with widowhood (v.1) were Judah’s — an absence of God’s visible favor and protection; sorrow and grief; a pitiful feeling of helplessness:

*“Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth”* (Joel 1:8).

A woman is never as alone, never as desolate, never as helpless as when she has lost her husband; when there are “none to comfort her.” Whether conscious or unconscious of the fact, she was dependent upon him for many necessary things. Israel was dependent upon God for all. She forsook God and He, having taken the “glory” from Israel, left her as a widow. Jerusalem lay defiled, helpless and desolate.

*“Hath a nation changed their gods,  
which are yet not gods?  
But My people have changed their glory  
for that which doth not profit”* (Jer. 2:11).

“She weepeth sore in the night” (v.2). The “night” is the eclipse of the Jewish





*Judaea Capta* coin. A bronze sestertius struck in Rome in 71 A.D. to commemorate the Roman victory over Judea. The coin bears two figures flanking a palm tree: on the left, an upright Roman soldier; on the right, a seated, mourning woman symbolizing defeated Judea. The inscription around the two figures is IUDEA CAPTA. The reverse of the coin depicts Vespasian, the Emperor of Rome, surrounded by his Latin title.

light in the heavens, but especially a time when God's Word and His presence was removed. Jeremiah had prophesied to them of a time when he would weep in secret (in safety, protected), witnessing that which the Lamentations describe. He had pleaded with them, speaking the words of the Lord:

*"Give glory to the LORD your God,  
before He cause darkness,  
and before your feet stumble  
upon the dark mountain,  
and, while ye look for light. . ."* (13:16).

They had it all the time, but they wouldn't realise it until the glory departed; and even then only a few would be aware of what had brought about this trouble.

What a sad set of circumstances — can we visualise our departure from the Truth to such an extent as this, individually? How about as a brotherhood? We have **no natural immunity** to the disease of sin. We have **no natural light** to dispel the darkness which surrounds us like a thick veil. Tears of rejection will change or avail nothing. May we not be cast down to the ground in sorrow and humiliation.

## Verses 12-15: GOD'S FIERCE ANGER

God's judgments are sure and complete upon those who remain in their transgressions. Ample warning is given to the possible penitent: mercy is exercised, but true justice is the necessary end. And in the case of Judah and Jerusalem, "the Lord hath afflicted them for the multitude of their transgressions." The city recognises from Whom these judgments come and why they have come. "The LORD hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce (fiery-heated) anger. The yoke of my transgressions is bound by His hand: for I have rebelled against His commandment." To the nations around her it must have appeared to be merely the invasion of one nation by the armies of another. But with the "eye of faith" it is seen to be the direct intervention of the Most High, with the intention of specific punishment for specific sins.

The fallen daughter of Zion speaks a pitiful but challenging message to the mockers who pass by:

*"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?  
behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow,  
which is done unto me,  
wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger"*  
(1:12).

This scene demonstrates the utter indifference of the Gentiles to the plight of the Jews, indeed their hostility; it also demonstrates the indifference which was the response of men to the sufferings of Christ:

*"All that pass by the way spoil him:  
he is a reproach to his neighbours"* (Psa. 89:41).

*“And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself” (Mark 15:29-30).*

### **Verses 16-17: “FOR THESE I WEEP”**

The terrible afflictions naturally inspire grief, both to those who suffer and to those who only witness the sufferings.

1. Zion spreads her hands in prayer to God. But her efforts are made useless by her many sins and her unchanged attitude:

*“And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean . . . Learn to do well . . .” (Isa. 1:15-17).*

2. Perhaps Zion spreads forth her hands merely in lament and travail — with no thought of prayer — as Jeremiah prophesied (4:31):

*“For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, and the anguish as of her that bringeth forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion, that bewaileth herself, that spreadeth her hands saying, Woe is me now! . . . For my soul is wearied because of murderers.”*

### **Verses 18-19: “THE LORD IS RIGHTEOUS”**

Zion here begins to acknowledge her sins. “The LORD is righteous”; it is His hand in the affair which has brought such judgments upon Jerusalem. This thought is to be developed more fully in ch. 2 and succeeding chapters. This recognition will lead at last to conversion and repentance.

God is inherently good (Rom. 1:17; Matt. 19:17; Rev. 16:5-7; 19:2; Psa. 129:4). Man on the other hand is inherently evil (Jer. 17:9; Eccl. 8:11; 1 Cor. 2:11; Matt. 15:18, 19). These two facts are the cardinal points of the Bible’s teaching. As God tells us, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:9).

It is essential for us to grasp this thought at the very beginning — and thus to respect God’s supremacy and, at every turn, to beware of ourselves and our own thoughts and ideas. An important part of God’s righteousness is His justice and severity upon the wicked, and it is well to remember this.

To be firmly established in the conviction that God is right even when things look all wrong; that if there is fault it is all on man’s side; that where there is affliction it is due and just and essential — **that** is the very core of faith!

### **Verses 20-22: JERSUALEM’S PRAYER**

Here is Jerusalem’s first petition to God, having recognized her rebellion. She realises that in her widowhood, only God can give her true comfort, and she turns

to Him. She asks that her enemies be punished for their wickedness as she has been punished for her transgressions (compare 3:64-66; 4:21). This is not a prayer of self-vindication; the prayers of the saints should be that the wickedness of man be brought low and that God's Name be sanctified on the lips of all men.

## Chapter 2

# THE SOURCE OF THE AFFLICTION

*“Yahweh hath done this”*

The second poem follows a similar pattern to that of the first: the first 10 verses recapitulate the suffering of Jerusalem, and the last 12 form a dramatic soliloquy by the “Daughter of Zion.” A superficial reading of these verses will not make this quite so obvious as it is in the first chapter, but it is a very convincing reading to treat it as such.

In ch. 1, the central theme was the helplessness of Israel — “None to comfort her”. But in v.18 of that chapter, there was recognition of God’s hand in her desolation — which continues as the main theme of this chapter. In the first chapter, the thought “None to comfort her” occurs seven times; in the second, the “Lord” (“Yahweh” — **Companion Bible**, Appendix 32) is mentioned by name seven times as the One Who “hath done this” (vv. 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 17, 20). Once, in v.16, Jerusalem’s enemies boast proudly, “We have swallowed her up.” But they, as all others outside the understanding of God, have misinterpreted the forces and the reasons behind the history of the Jews. God has thought only to punish the nation temporarily, as a necessary part of His overall plan. Then He must cleanse them and establish them, for they are His peculiar people, and He cannot utterly cast them away, because of His promises to their fathers. The promises to the fathers were made immutable by oath, as Paul reminds us. Nevertheless, their punishments (and their recognition of it as coming from God) are essential.

In this chapter, Jeremiah speaks too as the voice of the righteous remnant — who lament the fate of Zion (vv. 13, 14), but who never cease to arise and call upon God to remember His people (vv. 18-20).

### Verses 1-9: JUST JUDGMENTS OF YAHWEH

Israel had been forewarned that they were to be made desolate if they did not turn from their wicked imaginations — but they chose to stay with their “evil devices”. Yahweh, the Master Potter, has sole power over the clay. If the vessel is marred, it must be either destroyed or reshaped. This is God’s decision with respect to people and nations. The King of Babylon accomplished the destruction of Jerusalem, but he was only a tool in the hands of God (Dan. 4:25; Isa. 45:1). These things must be a lesson for us; Paul thinks so for he picks this idea up and

uses it in his letter to the Romans (9:21-24; ch. 11). God will reshape us **if** we can be remolded; He will break us, and blot us out **if** we continue in sin — “For if he spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.”

In this section is described, in turn, the destruction of every **outward** form of true worship in Israel. The picture becomes distinctly clear, that nothing is so abominable in God’s sight as an attempt to worship Him by people who, in all their lives, are living at enmity with Him.

### Verses 10-14: TEARS OF AFFLICTION

Verse 10 is a transitional verse; it paints a picture of the elders of Zion sitting on the ground in a state of despair, contemplating the inevitability of evil, rather than seeking counsel.

The ravages of war are terrible. Ezekiel told how Jerusalem was to be taken and suffer by fire, the sword and finally exile. The children of Judah were shown by sign that they were to face famine and pestilence. This would surely bring tears of sorrow to those who witnessed these things — particularly those who had heard the warnings of the prophets.

Jeremiah had reason to weep also, for the fact has begun to dawn on him, that his generation of Jews, whom he loved, were never to fulfill the glorious and exalted calling to which God had called them. Their high aspirations, like their once magnificent temple, now lie in the ashes.

### Verses 15-17: JERUSALEM’S ENEMIES REJOICE

The scorn, anger and exultation of Jerusalem’s enemies call forth from the daughter of Zion a plea for compassion (this is almost a refrain of 1:12). One of the more grotesque characteristics of human nature is the compulsion to “kick a man when he’s down.” As if the physical torment were not enough, ridicule now adds mental anguish.

As in the first poem, so here also there is hope expressed amidst desolation and despair — and along with it, a growing insight into God’s dealing with His children: “**The Lord** hath done that which **He** had devised” (v.17).

### Verses 18-22: JERUSALEM’S PRAYER

Israel’s ignorant enemies scorn her — but there is left in her a true remnant who pray for deliverance and the fulfilment of the “hope of Israel”. This is not only a picture of Jeremiah’s day, but of our day as well. We may take the words of Psa. 120:6 as our own — as we cry to God—

*“My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace.”*

Although the daughter of Zion was abused by her enemies, the true author of her misery was God Himself! Here was the element of hope — that it was

preferable to fall into the hands of the living God rather than into those of men (2 Sam. 24:14). If suffering must indeed come as a chastisement for past sins, then there was hope with God that the punishment might be mitigated by repentance. And so, in an amazing paradox, the Destroyer might become also the Healer!

*“He who hides his sins shall not prosper,  
but he who confesses and forsakes them, shall have mercy”*  
(Prov. 28:13).

## Chapter 3

# RENEWED HOPE IN AFFLICTION

*“Wherefore doth a living man complain?”*

“I am the man that hath seen affliction!” said Jeremiah as he now takes up his lament, placing himself in the position of his erring brethren — just as Christ would do (Introduction to ch. 1): “Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth” (Heb. 12:6). The same process of correction which Jeremiah and the faithful of his countrymen had to undergo is designed for the faithful of **all** ages. But throughout all affliction is this one overriding thought: “Great is Thy faithfulness . . . The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him” (vv.23, 25). God’s faithfulness is seen in this chapter in two different ways: in mercy and sustenance **now**, and in a sure reward in the **future**.

### Verses 1-18: DARKNESS, AFFLICTION, DERISION

“The Lord is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). In each of the first four chapters, the early verses chronicle great affliction. However, these early verses serve only as a preliminary feature — to introduce to us the greatness of God’s mercy upon His chastened children.

In the phrase “I am the man” (v.1), Jeremiah speaks for his nation Israel — God’s “firstborn” (Exod. 4:22), who is afflicted, with the purpose of calling back the wicked (Ezek. 33:11). Yahweh is touched by this as well (v.33; Isa. 63:9). He will pity those who learn from their sufferings and return to fear Him (Psa. 103:13). In speaking of himself, Jeremiah speaks for Jesus as well — and as a type of him and all the saints, for whom Jesus is the primary example to follow. Jesus was the only-begotten of the Father (John 1:14, 3:16) — and thus the “firstborn”. He was afflicted (Isa. 53:4), and he learned obedience by the things he suffered, even to death (Heb. 5:8; Phil. 2:5-8), being rewarded by his Father in becoming the “firstfruits of them that sleep” (1 Cor. 15:20).

The “rod” of God’s wrath (v.1) is an expression for correction (Job 37:13), and tribulation:

1. God used Babylon as His rod to punish Israel, just as He had previously used Assyria as the “rod of His anger” (Isa. 10:5, 15).



2. Christ suffered and died because, like all of Adam's descendants, he was of flesh, with all the susceptibilities of the flesh. Federally, he died for **all** men (by "crucifying the flesh" even before his physical death, he demonstrated endurance in affliction, seeking not his own will and desires but those of his Father) if those men will identify with this man of affliction by a life of "dying". But the "rod" of God's correction was not used upon him, since he never sinned — never violated the purpose which was entrusted in him. If we will accept the affliction of chastisement and training and character building, the "rod" of the affliction of God's "wrath" will not be forthcoming.

"He turned His hand against Me all the day" (v.3) is similar in thought to "I will turn My hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy sin . . ." (Isa. 1:25). The pure metal, salvaged through the long purging process, is to be kept for use; the dross will be cast away as worthless. Dross is the refuse of smelting of precious metal through intense heat. Figuratively it is used of what is base or worthless (Ezek. 22:18, 19; Psa. 119:119). The "furnace" of affliction is purging us — we will either come out of this furnace reflecting the brightness of the pure metal, that is, the image of Christ; or we will be cast away as unfit for future use.

The phrase "He hath set me in dark places" (v.6) can have a threefold interpretation: (1) The grave, as in a political death (Ezek. 37:2); (2) A dungeon, as where Jeremiah was placed (v.53; Jer. 37:16); and (3) Christ's death and burial (Matt. 27:66).

The phrase "As they that be dead of old" can be rendered as "they that have been dead since ancient times". Perhaps the idea that he is trying to convey is that he has been forgotten, as though he had been dead a long time. This brings to mind Ezekiel 37 and the national resurrection of Israel. From 586 B.C. to the present, Israel has not had a king reigning upon the throne of David. The kingdom has been "dead" a very long time.

### **Verses 19-21: THE DESIRED EFFECT: A REMNANT SAVED**

It is surely no coincidence that in the first 18 verses of black despair, God's name is not mentioned at all until the end of the last verse. (The nearest Jeremiah comes is to refer to God with "He" and "His" — until v.17 when God is addressed as "Thou"). But it is at this point of despair that hope rises, and comfort and consolation strengthen the prophet. It was surely the mention of God's Memorial Name in v.18 that effected the transformation. For "Yahweh" is a God who remembers His promises, and will one day fill the earth with His glory (Num. 14:21; Isa. 11:9), no matter what interruptions may prevail in the meantime.

To fulfill God's purpose, a repentant and forgiven remnant must be saved. Although speaking of an earlier captivity, Psalm 137 is illustrative of this Divine principle. Through bitterness and suffering and adversity, the Jew learns to turn to God:

*“By the rivers of Babylon,  
there we sat down, yea, we wept,  
when we remembered Zion. . .  
How shall we sing the Lord’s song  
in a strange land?  
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,  
let my right hand forget her cunning;  
if I do not remember thee,  
let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth;  
if I prefer not Jerusalem  
above my chief joy” (vv.1, 4-6).*

The Jews who returned from the 70 years captivity in Babylon were a much more disciplined and righteous band than those who had been originally carried there. The rebels, the half-hearted, the greedy, and the idolators had been left behind — often of their own free will.

In the same way, when God brings the Jews back to Israel in the period after Christ’s return, He will purge out the rebels (Ezek. 20:38; Zech. 13:9). The Jews will return to their homeland with a renewed spirit, cleansed at last from their heathen associations, and much the better as a nation for their two millennia spent in division and scattering. Already those Jews who have returned to the land have begun to demonstrate this renewal and rededication to Jerusalem, although they still know only to trust in themselves and not in God.

Again, the lesson to us may be stressed: God is constantly bringing discomforts and hardships and challenging decisions upon us (but not in punishment, for the punishment of spiritual Israel has been set aside for a special time) to instruct us, to turn us in the right direction. His chastenings upon His children are as gentle proddings. If we will but yield to them, we will be directed in the right paths. The Book of Lamentations is the ideal representation of that “godly sorrow which worketh repentance not to be repented of” (2 Cor. 7:10).

“This I recall in my mind; therefore have I hope” (v.21). Examination and evaluation are the tools of the man of reason; no matter what circumstances he finds himself in, he will seek the cause and the desired effect. How wonderful that God cares enough to remind us of our high calling! It is a confirmation that He is there; and if He is there, there is always hope. Jeremiah, the righteous remnant, Christ, and the saints all have known that all things work together for good to God’s elect. What a **privilege** to be chastised! For then we are not illegitimate, but we are truly sons!

## **Verses 22-30: THE LORD’S MERCIES, SERVICE AND SEPARATION**

These few verses demonstrate the attitude of life for Jeremiah and the righteous in view of God’s hand upon them. In the same sense it is prophetic of the life

which Christ led, and the lives of all true believers in the ages since — a reliance upon the Lord's mercies, a patient faith and hope, and a bearing of God's yoke. These verses form the most sublime of exhortations. Here is the heart, the core, of Lamentations' comfort and instruction for us.

"The LORD'S mercies" (v.22) in the Old Testament are invariably connected with God's promises, or covenants. "Mercy" and "covenant" are used alongside one another in Psa. 89:28. In v. 1 of that psalm the author says:

*"I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever:  
with my mouth will I make known Thy faithfulness to all generations..."*

The mercies of God he identifies in vv.3, 4 and throughout the psalm:

*"I have made a covenant with My chosen,  
I have sworn unto David My servant,  
Thy seed will I establish for ever,  
and build up thy throne to all generations."*

God's covenants of promise (to Adam, to Noah, to Abraham and the fathers, and to David) were the only channel through which God's forgiveness and mercy might come to His people. The Law of Moses could only convict man of his sins for failing to keep it perfectly. But the promise of an everlasting inheritance in the land of Canaan implied very definitely a forgiveness of past sins leading to immortality. **Law** will not in the end bring us life; but **mercy** will! All of God's various temporary blessings are only types of that one great future blessing.

God's compassions are "new every morning" (v.23) for God watches over His servants always. Man must sleep, but God is always awake, never withdrawing His life-giving spirit for the benefit of all flesh. The Angel of His Presence keeps us (Isa. 63:9). Remember the fresh manna from heaven which the Jews found **every morning** except the Sabbath, without fail (Exod. 16:15, 35; Num. 11:9). In the Lord's prayer we are taught to pray, "Give us this day our **daily** bread". Like the manna in the wilderness: this daily bread points to the **True Bread from heaven**, the Truth of God, His promises which shall never fail, to give us encouragement **each day**!

"The LORD is my portion" or "inheritance" is the exact meaning of the name of Jeremiah's father, Hilkiah. Again, this bears a direct relation to God's promises:

*"The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance  
and of my cup: Thou maintainest my lot . . .  
For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell;  
neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.  
Thou wilt shew me the path of life:  
in Thy presence is fulness of joy;  
at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore"* (Psa. 16:5, 10, 11).

In conjunction with this is seen the hope of a resurrection to eternal life, first of Christ and then of all those "in Christ".

“The LORD is good unto them that wait for Him” (v.25). The righteous are pictured by Isaiah as saying, in their time of deliverance, “We have **waited** for Him (Isa. 25:9; 30:18). The same thought is found in the New Testament:

*“Ye turned from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come. . .”* (1 Thess.1:9, 10).

More is implied in these verses, however, than a simple passing of time now in expectation of receiving the promise at Christ’s return. A “watchman” of God was not only to wait, but to observe keenly the signs of the times, and to watch himself and keep his garments unspotted (Isa. 21:7-12; Ezek. 33:1-9). He was not to waste his opportunities, but to redeem the time, because the days were (and are!) evil (Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5). And finally, he was to wait patiently and without complaint (James 5:7), not seeking his reward in this world, but in the age to come.

“Waiting for the Lord” has always implied a separation from evil. The way of true holiness has always meant a “sitting alone” (v.28). “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful” (Psa. 1:1). Jeremiah — though preaching to all his neighbors — was to maintain a distinct and different lifestyle. The references to separation from the ways of the world are so numerous throughout Scripture: Deut. 22:10; 2 Cor. 6:14, 17; Heb. 7:26; James 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:11, 12; 1 John 2:15-17; 3:1; 4:5; 5:19; Gal. 6:14; John 17:6-9.

### **Verses 31-33: THE CENTRAL THEME: CHASTENING IS NECESSARY AND HELPFUL**

This fact has been covered sufficiently in previous comments. Indeed, it seems to be the main message of the entire book:

*“Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby”* (Heb. 12:11).

“For the Lord will not cast off forever” (v.31). The gospel of the kingdom is intimately connected with the “hope of Israel”, as Paul shows (Acts 28:20). God’s deliverance of the natural Jews from their enemies is related to, and concurrent with, the deliverance from mortality of His saints.

“For He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men” (v.33). In Isa. 28:21 the prophet comments upon a “strange work, a strange act” of God. The “strange work” is evidently performed upon the Jews (“that dwell in Jerusalem”— v.14), and it involves judgments. This work appears peculiar to the unenlightened Gentile, but it is eminently necessary for the Jews’ preparation. This affliction of His children is necessary, but in itself it gives God no pleasure. Neither does the death of the wicked give Him pleasure (Ezek. 18:32; 33:11), for He is not willing that **any** should perish (2 Pet. 3:9) — but sadly, it is necessary

that many do. God will vindicate His most Holy Name. He will be gracious at last to those who love Him, but He must of necessity be vengeful upon those who hate Him, or are indifferent toward Him.

### Verses 34-36: “THE LORD APPROVETH NOT”

God cannot approve of certain things, and — much as He may hate to destroy even the wicked — it must be done to erase their ways from the earth; the earth must ultimately be filled with only those things which glorify Him (Num. 21:14; Isa. 11:9), and to this end He is working.

Note the things of which God disapproves — and thus by implication what pleases Him: These are things that **men** might regard as very mundane matters, matters of small consequence one way or the other. **God** considers them very important: the simple code of behavior found in the book of Proverbs, the essential day-to-day acts of goodness and justice (which often God alone sees). It was the weight of seemingly minor violations of His law, over a long period, that eventually caused God’s mercy to be exhausted. These sins (vv.34-36) are what brought the horrors of the Babylonian invasion. Shall such “minor” offences as gossip and “clever” business practices cause **us** also to be driven from God’s presence?

### Verses 37-41: A LIVING MAN SHOULD NOT COMPLAIN

Under the hand of God’s chastening, the sons are commanded to “turn again”. “Wherefore doth a **living** man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?”

Two examples answer this question:—

1. The nation of Israel, once politically dead (v. 6), is alive today because of God’s direction of world affairs (Ezek. 37:10). All things are for their benefit.
2. We who were once “afar off” among the Gentiles, **dead** in trespasses and sins, have been made “alive” (Eph. 2:13; Rom. 6:13) in Christ (Gal. 2:20), and are now God’s sons (1 John 3:1-3), enduring chastening (Heb. 12). Can we ever complain in view of what we would have been if God had **not** called us to the Truth? Let us, as Paul did, glory in tribulation, “knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed . . .” (Rom. 5:3-5).

### Verses 42-66: PRAYER

“We have transgressed” (vv.42-54), but “Judge my cause” (vv. 55-66). Two things are essential for us to do before God will hear our prayers and take our cause for His own:

1. We must realise our sinful condition, and
2. We must repent and seek to change our ways.

This prayer is a gradually unfolding realization of the ways of God, and His boundless love and compassion toward those who trust in Him.

## Chapter 4

# THE REASON FOR AFFLICTION

*“For the sins of her prophets. . .”*

The third chapter of Lamentations is really the high point of the book. In the last two chapters Jeremiah returns to a further consideration of the pitiful state of Zion, due to her continuing apostasy. However, these last two chapters are distinct from the first two in that they tell of sincere repentance, and they outline more clearly the coming deliverance “to turn back the captivity” of Israel (4:21, 22).

Here we have one of the most moving and horrifying pictures of suffering and famine which inevitably followed the invasion of Judah. There is the terrible portrayal of famine, and consequent cruelty, as those that remained behind struggled frantically to survive (vv.4, 5).

### Verses 1-12: CONTRAST OF SONS OF ZION: FINE GOLD TO EARTHEN PITCHERS—

The most precious possession — the greatest natural resource of any nation — is its people. Thus, the sons of Zion are symbolised by gold and precious stones. A nation’s vitality is determined by the condition, motivation, and loyalty of its citizens. This was especially true of Judah, for their national economy was as strong as their faithfulness to God. When the sons of Zion were faithful, they were precious in God’s eyes and He became their staff and shield. When they were unfaithful, God became the rod of correction to them, and they became base in His eyes. They were removed from their place of pre-eminence over the nations and like a shattered piece of pottery they were broken and scattered.

In times of stress people often lose whatever “godliness” they might possess. Israel, for example, had become lower than animals with respect to responsibility to their young (2 Kings 6:25-29). This is a picture of futility — even depravity, brought about by great tribulation. The city’s inhabitants, once the picture of health, became spiritually and physically “withered”.

“How is the gold become dim!” (v.1): Gold is used throughout the Bible as a symbol of faith — a **tried faith** in God, as gold that has passed through the fire and been purified (1 Pet. 1:7; Job 23:10). Thus, gold or faith is the basis for the

kingdom of God, both in the past and in the future. In Jeremiah's time, true faith had all but completely disappeared, and thus the kingdom was removed from the "daughter of Zion" (Ezek. 21:25-27). The gold became dim (dark) because of impurities.

Gold was found in abundance in Solomon's temple, but Nebuchadnezzar's hordes made short work of it (1 Kings 6:22; 2 Kings 25:9, 10).

"How is the most fine gold changed!" This is a reference to a deed of Solomon, but it is typical of the lack of faith in God common to most men and most times — especially so to Jeremiah's time. Solomon possessed 300 gold shields (1 Kings 10:17) — symbols of faith in God (cp. Eph. 6:16 — "the shield of faith"). But he unwisely used his wealth to buy leagues with other nations, and thus to glorify the flesh and his own ingenuity. This did not profit him, and after his death Shishak of Egypt removed the remainder of the gold shields during the reign of Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:26, 27). And Rehoboam replaced the shields of gold with shields of brass — or copper — denoting trust in man. The fine gold was changed!

"The stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street." Stones are often representative of people; and the type of stone determines the type of person intended. Peter's profession of faith in the Messiahship of Jesus is called a "rock" (Matt. 16:16) — the sturdy foundation of the Holy City (Rev. 21:14), the stones of God's sanctuary or temple — because all the "stones" of that eternal city will have professed the same faith as Peter. They will be "lively (or living) stones" built up around Christ — the "chief cornerstone" (Isa. 28:16; Psa. 118:22; Acts 4:11), the "rock" in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:1-4). Thus Jeremiah is here bewailing the righteous.

"How are they esteemed as earthen pitchers" (v.2). Those who **might have been** precious stones and fine gold instead failed to please God; and they were to be broken, as in Jer. 19:11 and Isa. 30:14.

Man is an earthen vessel, made by God (Jer. 18:6; Rom. 9:21). He must be filled — or fill himself — with the "treasure" of God's knowledge (2 Cor. 4:6, 7), or else he will be destroyed as vessels of wood and earth (2 Tim. 2:20).

## Verses 13-16: SINS OF THE LEADERS

It is natural, when seeking to place the blame for Judah's apostasy, to turn first to the leaders: the prophets (such as the deceitful Hananiah — Jer. 28) and the priests (This is certainly a warning to any of those who aspire to be leaders in the Ecclesia). The "prophets" of Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's time spoke smooth words, and promised good fortune for all. They professed a cheery outlook when God's true prophets foresaw darkness and punishment. Ezekiel warned against such prophets, and promised that they would be held accountable for failing to "declare the whole counsel of God" in warning of punishment to come:

*"But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet,*

*and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand"* (Ezek. 33:6).

The true watchman must sound an early warning when sin threatens, even though those he arouses from their slumber may be ungrateful. It is better to risk offending man than to offend God (Acts 4:19; 5:29).

### **Verses 17-20: VAIN HOPES**

These verses imply first of all that the common people were in a great measure responsible also for the downfall of Judah. They were deceived by their leaders, it is true; but they **willingly** allowed themselves to be deceived. They are condemned for their false trust, and for their ears which itched to hear "smooth things" (Isa. 30:10).

These verses also stress the vain hopes in which Judah trusted — the nation that could not save them, the ruler that could not save them, the beliefs that could not save them, the false sense of security that could only hasten their doom.

"The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD" (v.20) — To whom was Jeremiah referring? Perhaps there are several answers:

1. Josiah, the last righteous king of Judah, and a type of Christ in many ways, but who had died 608 B.C. (2 Chron. 35:25).
2. Zedekiah, Judah's last king, and the centre of their feeble hopes, although a wicked man — who was carried captive.
3. Prophetically: Christ, the only true hope of Israel (Luke 24:21), who was slain (Luke 19:14), leading to the dispersion of 70 A.D.

"He was taken in their pits"—

1. The "pit" of nations — from 588 B.C. to the present time.
2. Death, which Christ suffered (Luke 24:25, 26) to deliver others from the same "pit" (Psa. 107:20).

"Of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen"—

1. The Jews' false hopes in the kingship of Zedekiah.
2. The true hope found in Christ, fulfilled in vv.21, 22 — when Israel is cleansed (Zech. 13:1).

### **Verses 21-22: THE CUP PASSES TO EDMO**

The "daughter of Edom" (v.21) had allied herself with Babylon against Judah (Obad. 11; Joel 3:19; Psa. 137:7). Edom may symbolise "all nations" (in Isa. 34 the two are used interchangeably). "Edom", as "Adam", is the Hebrew word for "red", or "flesh". Thus it is a fitting designation for those last great fleshly powers of Gentile times who will oppress Israel: the Arabs (some of whom occupy



the ancient territory of Edom) and the Russian “Reds”. These are the powers to be destroyed by Christ and the “saviours” who come up on Mount Zion (Isa. 63:1; Obad. 21).

“Edom” is said to dwell in the land of Uz. “Uz” signifies “wisdom, advice, counsel” — its citizens were famed for their learning — typical of all Gentile enemies of Israel, who boast in the “wisdom of this world” (Jer. 9:23) but are blind to the one “hope of Israel”.

## Chapter 5

# PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE FROM AFFLICTION

**“Behold *our* reproach.”**

Again, as in the earlier chapters, Jeremiah dwells at length upon the details of the siege and the captivity. There is by now no doubt to the Jews that God is behind this whole affair; neither is there any doubt as to His reason (v.16). Indeed, the whole chapter is a sustained prayer to God — in every verse acknowledging His authority and power — and calling upon Him to intervene on behalf of His people. This is the elegy which traditionally closes every Hebrew lamentation (see the introduction).

### **Verses 1-15: “SEE OUR REPROACH”—Disgrace**

After considering the terrible condition of the city and realising the cause of this great tribulation, the remnant is depicted as coming before God in PRAYER. “Behold our reproach, O Lord.” What condition had they been left in! The land which “they” had tilled, the homes “they” had built, the cattle “they” had acquired were no longer theirs. The water and the wood which were once free had to be bought. The number of their valiant men had diminished. Everything “they” had, had been given to them by God — and now He had taken it away. Their women were violated, the men of power were abased, the yoke of bondage was once more borne upon Israel. The people were helpless, unable to stop the fulfilment of the captor’s desires. The city that once had seen David dance in the streets because God was there, now takes up a song of mourning because He has departed. Because they had turned from God in their wantonness, God had turned from them.

As we witness these judgments, we still want to keep in mind God’s preservation of a faithful remnant, who endured these tribulations and grew by them, through the acknowledgement that they were totally and completely helpless without God.

“Remember” (v.1) — compare 1:20; 2:20; 3:19. Yahweh will remember the sufferings of the Jews. He will also remember the sufferings of the saints — as He did those of Christ:

*“Remember, LORD, the reproach of Thy servants;  
how I do bear in my bosom the reproach of all the mighty people;  
wherewith Thine enemies have reproached, O LORD;  
wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of Thine anointed”*  
(Psa. 89:50, 51).

As James says, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). The prayer of Hezekiah, when Jerusalem was threatened by the Northern Host, is a prime example (Isa. 37:14-20). We are commanded to pray, in the same way, for the peace of Jerusalem (Psa. 122:6), to “remember the Lord afar off, and let Jerusalem come into our minds” (Jer. 51:50).

“Behold our reproach” — our shame, disgrace. The word “reproach” is from a root meaning “autumn” or “ripeness” — signifying the **fulness** of iniquity, reaping what has been sown (v.7). Jeremiah, true to his feeling for the “hope of Israel”, places himself among those who have grievously sinned.

“Our fathers have sinned, and are not” (v.7). The nation has at last recognised the reason for God’s heavy hand upon them, the same hand which fell upon their fathers. Compare the words of Zechariah, spoken 70 years later:

*“Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?  
But My words and My statues, which I commanded My servants the  
prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned and  
said, Like as the LORD of Hosts thought to do unto us, according to  
our ways, and according to our doings, so hath He dealt with us”*  
(Zech. 1:5, 6).

“We have borne their iniquities.” The Jews, similarly, had in Christ’s time, filled up the measure of their fathers (Matt. 23:32). Although it is a Scriptural principle that every man bears the responsibility for his own deeds, it is still true that **national** sins are often unpunished for a time, and judgment is stored up until a later date, when it all falls at once (Gen. 15:13-16; 1 Kings 21:26). Such was the case with the kingdom of Judah: the iniquities of the past — as well as their own — finally were laid upon the one generation of Jeremiah’s time.

“We gat our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the wilderness” (v. 9). Contrast this with the fortunes of the Jews who spent 40 years in the wilderness, where they gathered bread every day as they found it as the dew upon the ground. They had “no lack”. Also, the famine of bread in Jeremiah’s time was only the type of the far worse famine — the famine of God’s word (Amos 8:11, 12). There were still prophets to speak to Israel, but most refused to hear — and thus suffered the hardships of a “famine” upon themselves while the bread of life lay on the table before them!

**Verses 16-18: "THE CROWN IS FALLEN"—**

In the first verses of this chapter, the disgrace of the Jews was the principal subject. In this section is stressed the fall of the nation, and its degradation during the long period of Gentile dominion:

*"And they shall fall by the edge of the sword,  
and shall be led away captive into all nations;  
and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles,  
until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled"* (Luke 21:24).

In two senses the "crown" had fallen (v.16)—

1. The crown is a symbol of royalty — which was fallen (Ezek. 21:26; Psa. 89:39; Hos. 3:4) because Israel had rejected God to rule over them (as in 1 Sam. 8:7).
2. The crown symbolises obedience to the Truth (Rev. 2:10; 3:11), dedication and priesthood (Exod. 28:36-38) — which were grievously lacking.

**Verses 19-22: THE EVERLASTING THRONE:  
A HOPE OF RENEWAL**

The previous section dealt with the overthrow of the Jewish throne. That is contrasted in this section with the sureness of God's throne and God's crown. This final chapter is a prayer in itself, a fitting conclusion to Lamentations. These last verses are a prayer within the prayer — a final summation of thought, a climactic entreaty to God — for all times and for all peoples who have experienced affliction at His hand:

*"Turn thou us unto Thee . . . renew our days as of old."*

*Oh, How is Zion's glory gone!  
And vengeance, like a flood,  
Hath quenched her power, and not a stone  
Marks where her temple stood.*

*How are thy streets, Jerusalem,  
By careless strangers trod!  
And crush'd thy once bright diadem,  
Before the wrath of God!*

*O Lord, look down with pitying eye  
Upon Thy ancient race;  
And bring Thy promised mercy nigh  
And show Thy saving grace.*

*Oh, bring Thy scatter'd sheep again,  
And feed them as of old;  
Let Christ o'er all his people reign,  
One Shepherd and one fold.*

*The  
Lamentations  
of  
Jeremiah*

*Verse by Verse*

.

## CHAPTER 1

### VERSE 1:

**“How doth the city sit solitary** (‘deserted’ — N.I.V.),  
**that was full of people”**; Compare Isa. 3:8.

Well-known among students of ancient history is a medal struck by a Greek artist of the Roman Court to commemorate the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and Vespasian in 70 A.D. It is called “Judea Capta” (“Judah Subjected”), and it depicts a powerful soldier standing triumphantly over a helpless woman, who sits destitute upon the ground. How did this come about? Let us ask ourselves and learn the answer well. It came about because Judah neglected its true strength — the Lord their God.

What do we naturally think of when we hear the words “many people”? Ideas that come to mind are a party, or a market place — people milling around, laughing, joking and empty of serious thoughts. This is how Isaiah pictured this same city, Jerusalem — “full of stirs, a tumultuous city, a joyous city” (Isa. 22:2); a city, in fact, thoroughly opposed to the Divine will, and heedless of her impending punishment:

*“And in that day did the Lord GOD of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: And behold (instead) joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die”*  
(Isa. 22:12, 13).

To those who thought in their hearts, “Peace and safety”, came instead sudden destruction (1 Thess. 5:3) by the wrath of God: “I will make your cities waste . . . desolation”, He had threatened through His prophet Moses (Lev. 26:14-16, 31-35). But the people had continued to delight themselves in every imaginable form of wickedness until it was too late (Note the summary of Nebuchadnezzar’s destructions in Jer. 52:12-23 — and remember that he was merely God’s “servant” — Jer. 25:9 — to perform this).

**“As a widow”**: The city of Jerusalem had lost her husband, her lord and her protector (Jer. 2:2). All of the pains associated with widowhood were her’s — an absence of her “husband’s” favor and protection; sorrow and grief; a pitiful

feeling of helplessness (Isa. 54:6; Hos. 3:3, 4).

Again, let us remember why such things came upon Jerusalem:

*“Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves (i.e., into slavery), and for your transgressions is your mother put away”* (Isa. 50:1).

*“Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you”* (Isa. 59:2).

**“She that was great among the nations”:** Israel, in its beginning as a kingdom, was lavishly praised by Hiram of Tyre (“this great people” — 1 Kings 5:7) and the queen of Sheba, who saw Solomon’s wealth (1 Kings 10). The united kingdom of Solomon’s time must have been very nearly unsurpassed in commerce and power. And the kingdom of Judah continued to prosper at times in the years following the division of the kingdom.

**“Princess among the provinces”:** Especially in the times of David, Solomon, and Hezekiah, neighbouring countries served Jerusalem and Judah (1 Kings 4:21; 2 Chronicles 9:26; 32:23).

**“How is she become tributary”:** We are perhaps too accustomed to viewing Judah, during the period of the kings, as having much less majesty and authority than she actually had. Only when we realise what a magnificent position she once occupied, can such a phrase as this have its proper effect upon us. Just as God brought the splendour of Egypt and Babylon to the dust, so was He able to humble Judah. The word “tributary” refers to **personal** servitude (the same word as in Josh. 16:10; 17:13). Compare Lam. 5:8, 13, 16. The princess had become a “slave” (NIV), a “vassal” (RSV).

## VERSE 2:

**“She weepeth sore in the night”:**

The Hebrew is most expressive: “Weeping she weepeth”. Her one occupation is weeping. The night is a darkness in the Jewish “heavens”, or ruling places. For 2500 years, Jerusalem has been trodden down. And she will continue to be so “until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). “Night” such as we see it in the world around us is assuredly a time of weeping and sorrow — for the natural Jews, who must battle ceaselessly with their many enemies.

For the saints as well, it is a time of mourning, for the bridegroom is still away (Luke 5:35). But the night in which we weep is a time for watching as well:

*“Watchman, what of the night?”* (Isa. 21:11).

As followers of Christ, we must not allow the “night” to lull us into slumber:

*“We are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others, but let us watch and be sober”* (1 Thess. 5:5, 6).



“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psa. 30:5). Joy will come to us if we are truly looking for and earnestly desiring the day of our Lord’s return. “Arise, cry out in the **night**” (Lam. 2:19).

*“I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem,  
which shall never hold their peace day nor night;  
Ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence,  
and give Him no rest, till He establish,  
and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth”* (Isa. 62:6, 7).

The night around is dark indeed. How are we using our time? Are we searching fruitlessly for pleasure in the dark shadows of the night? Or are we behaving ourselves as “children of the light” — soon to dawn over all the earth? “Behold, the bridegroom cometh” (Matt. 25:6).

#### **“Her tears are on her cheeks”:**

The cheek is used scripturally as a symbol of persecution and submission — “Turn the other cheek” (Matt. 5:39). For Abraham’s natural seed today, the persecution is endured involuntarily. For us, Abraham’s true seed and heirs according to the promise, submission must be given freely, lovingly. For we know that whatever we might endure now is merely God’s schooling for our future:

*“We glory in tribulations also. . .”* (Rom. 5:3).

**“Among all her lovers. . .”:** Solomon inadvertently planted the seeds which led to Judah’s prostitution among the nations. He loved many strange women (1 Kings 11). And these indiscretions led in short order to idol worship in the land and his very condoning of it. Furthermore, it led to political alliances of convenience with Gentile nations, rather than a single-minded faith and trust in God.

Later Judah trusted upon Egypt (Jer. 2:36; Isa. 30:7; 36:6), Babylon (Isa. 39:3, 4) and Edom and Moab. Her alliances with such peoples is painfully reminiscent of the great whore, “with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication” (Rev. 17:2).

**“All her friends have dealt treacherously with her,  
they are become her enemies”:** All her flirtations were of no avail. As

Ezekiel prophesied,

*“Therefore, O Aholibah (or Jeruslaem, v. 8), thus saith the Lord GOD;  
Behold, I will raise up thy lovers against thee. . .”* (Ezek. 23:22).

None of Judah's former friends came to her aid. Edom (Lam. 4:21, 22; Obad. 11, 12; Psa. 137:7) and Ammon (Ezek. 25:3, 6; Jer. 40:14), who should have helped Judah, rejected even their ties of kinship and turned against her.

The Jews had rejected the strong arm of God, and they had chosen instead to lean on the friendly surrounding nations. These remained friendly only as long as it was advantageous to their own interests. When the Babylonians threatened, Jerusalem learned the lesson of Prov. 19:6, 7:

*"Many will intreat the favour of the prince:  
and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts.  
All the brethren of the poor do hate him:  
(For Judah was 'poor' in faith and thus poor in strength)—  
how much more do his friends go far from him?  
he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him."*

Let us learn this lesson well: No amount of preparation or planning or building of barns — or diplomacy — can take the place of trust in God. Riches will be lost or spent, youth and strength will evaporate, friends will desert us when most needed, and — at last — life itself will be taken from us. Our only deliverance, then, is found in the words of Paul:

*"For our conversation (or our life, our treasure, and our hope) is in heaven;  
from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. . ."*  
(Phil. 3:20).

### VERSE 3:

**"Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction,**

**and because of great servitude"**: Whether this phrase refers to Judah's sins (afflicting the innocent — Jer. 2:34), Judah's punishments (i.e., v.2), or both, is not completely certain. Any of these would be appropriate.

**"She dwelleth among the heathen"**: When God maintained Israel as a separate nation, she was constantly straining at His bonds to return to the practice of the heathen nations around her. This was notably true for Moses' generation, which had just left Egypt. At last Israel's wish was realised — in a much different way than expected: her eminence was taken away, her people "perished among the heathen", and they that were left alive "pined away in their iniquity in their enemies' land" (Lev. 26:36-39).

**"She findeth no rest"**: "And among these nations thou shalt find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest . . . And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee . . ." (Deut. 28:65, 66).



**“Her persecutors (‘pursuers’—RSV) overtook her**

**between the straits”:** The idea is that Israel, as a wanderer by God’s decree, finds herself trapped by thieves in a narrow pass, with no escape in sight. Perhaps this is a reference to the capture of Zedekiah and his captains, as they tried to escape from Jerusalem “between the two walls” (Jer. 52:7; cp. Lam. 4:18, 19).

**VERSE 4:**

**“The ways of Zion do mourn”:** The roads leading to Jerusalem were empty, since none came to the solemn feasts (2:6). But contrast this picture of desolation with the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the future kingdom:

*“And an highway shall be there, and a way, and  
it shall be called The way of holiness . . . And  
the ransomed of the LORD shall return”* (Isa. 35:8, 10).

**All the land** was to mourn:

*“The earth mourneth, and fadeth away. . .  
because they have transgressed the laws. . .”* (Isa. 24:4, 5).

Jeremiah had promised the same punishment — in Jer. 9:11 and 33:10-12. But again, the desolation is contrasted with the future blessedness of the same “ways of Zion”:

*“Again, in this place, which is desolate without man and without beast. . .  
shall be an habitation of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down . . .  
(when) the Branch of righteousness shall grow up”* (Jer. 33:12, 15).

The “ways of Zion” **mourned** because of the wickedness of their inhabitants. But they will **rejoice** when Christ as king turns ungodliness from Jacob, and Israel leads the nations up to Jerusalem (Rom. 11:26, Zech. 8:22-3).

**“None come to the solemn feasts”:** The three annual feasts, which all the men of Israel were to attend — the Passover, Pentecost (the firstfruits), and the Feast of Tabernacles. But these, of course, ceased with the captivity:

*“He hath violently taken away His tabernacle. . .  
he hath destroyed His places of the assembly. . .  
The LORD hath caused the solemn feasts. . .  
to be forgotten in Zion”* (2:6).

**“All her gates are desolate”:** Compare Jer. 14:2. In eastern cities in Biblical times, the gates of a city were the main places of commerce — as well as of legal and social activities (5:14; Ruth 4:1; Job 29:7; Prov. 31:23). They would be especially alive during the various feasts.

**“Her priests sigh”:** The priests, supposedly the spiritual leaders of Judah, are condemned in 4:13-16, for their grievous iniquity. Perhaps they “sigh” because of the famine (vv.11, 12, 18-20).

**“Sigh”:** The Hebrew word for “sigh” appears also in vv. 8, 11 and 21.

**“Her virgins are afflicted”:** Compare 5:11, 13. The RSV follows the LXX in amending the text to read “. . . have been dragged away”. The virgins are mentioned as playing upon instruments on certain times of joyful celebration (Exod. 15:20; Jer. 31:13; Psa. 68:25).

#### VERSE 5:

**“Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper”:** This is just as Moses had warned the children of Israel, that if they disobeyed God,

*“The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. . .  
He shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail”* (Deut. 28:43, 44).

**“Her children are gone into captivity before the enemy”:** The “children of Zion” were carried away by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 52:28-30), but these same children, called the “children of Rachel”, “shall come again from the land of the enemy” (Jer. 31:16) in the last days.

#### VERSE 6:

**“And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed”:** The priestly garments of Aaron and his sons were given them “for glory and for beauty” (Exod. 28:2). The beauty which they represented was the beauty of righteousness and holiness. This type of beauty had departed from the promiscuous daughter of Zion; she no longer maintained the “ornament of a meek and a quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1 Pet. 3:4).

The inner beauty had departed. Therefore it was left for God next to remove the external beauty, which had been meant to signify the righteousness of the Jews: the temple, the throne, the priesthood, and the religious services all departed.

The greatest beauty which the Jews possessed was God’s personal presence in their midst:

*“Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion:  
for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee”*  
(Isa. 12:6).

*“God is known in her palaces for a refuge”* (Psa. 48:3).

This, sadly, was also taken away at the time of the captivity. The glory of Yahweh departed in successive stages — from the sanctuary, and then from the city, until it came to the Mount of Olives on the east of Jerusalem, from whence it disappeared (Ezek. 9:5; 10:4; 11:22, 23).

We must note again, as we have before, that God will restore what He has taken away. The same glory of God will return, in a time of much greater happiness than the time of its removal. In the last days, “his feet shall stand upon the Mount of Olives” (Zech. 14:4). The glorious company of saints, led by Christ, will approach the city (Isa. 63:1; Song 3:6, 7). This is what Ezekiel is referring to when he speaks in Ezek. 43:2, 5:

*“The glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east (‘the sun’s rising’ — Rev. 16:12). . . and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house.”*

**“Her princes are become like harts that find no pasture”:** David, in Psa. 42:1, presents a picture of a hart panting after water in a dry and thirsty land. This is the picture intended here. The land of Israel has figuratively become a desert: the “water of life”, the true knowledge and fear of God, has vanished.

Also, the hart symbolizes timidity and meekness. The strong princes of Judah have become no better than cowards — who flee from their enemies, as did Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:5; Jer. 39:5). Those who once walked with great dignity and authority now run like hungry and frightened deer, not even looking behind to their children who depended upon them (Jer. 47:3).

#### VERSE 7:

**“In the days of her affliction and of her miseries  
Jerusalem remembered all her pleasant things  
that she had in the days of old,  
when her people fell into the hand of the enemy,  
and none did help her:  
the adversaries saw her,  
and did mock at her sabbaths”:** See 2:15-17:

*“All that pass by clap their hands at thee. . .  
Is this the city that men call The perfection  
of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?. . .  
He hath caused thine enemy to rejoice over thee. . .”*

At this time, the sabbaths had no religious services. The service which has always set the Jews apart from surrounding peoples, more than any other, is the commemoration of the Sabbath. Thus the cessation of this was the target of much scorn. But, of course, this curtailment was the work of God — as is explained in Jer. 25:8, 11. Judah had not observed her sabbaths as she should have, when she had the chance. Therefore, God forced her to observe the sabbath rest for 70 years:

*“Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, Because ye have not heard My words. . . this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.”*

#### VERSE 8:

**“Jerusalem hath grievously sinned,**

**therefore she is removed”**: Jerusalem — or the nation of Judah — is presented here as a woman, a wicked adulteress, who has forsaken Yahweh her true husband (Isa. 54:5; Hos. 2:2) and who has sinned among her many lovers (v.2).

Thus, Judah is likened to a woman legally and ceremonially “unclean” (NIV) under the Law (vv.9, 17; Lev. 12:2; 15:19), who is to be separated from the people.

The marginal rendering of this passage offers a different idea, though related to this: “She is become a wandering”. Jeremiah used the same phrase in Jer. 34:17, where the Jews’ future dispersion is meant:

*“I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.”*

**“All that honoured her despise her,**

**because they have seen her nakedness”**: Exposure of one’s body was, to the Hebrews, a terrible disgrace — a shame they felt much more deeply than most modern peoples would. Stripping was thus part of the punishment meted out to a prostitute (Ezek. 16:35-39; 23:29), and it is used, metaphorically, of the punishment of nations (Isa. 47:2, 3; Lam. 4:21; Nah. 3:5).

Israel’s glorious garments of holiness (cp. Aaron’s garments, in Exod. 28) were removed, leaving her — as the Laodiceans — “poor and blind and naked” (Rev. 3:17). The Jews had forgotten their own clothing — the guilt was their own:

*“Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?*

*Yet my people have forgotten Me days without number”* (Jer. 2:32).

The lessons for us from Israel’s experiences are well worth noting: our conduct is always obvious to the aliens around us, and they judge all Christadelphians by us. Furthermore, they judge God by our example. We are God’s representatives to the world, and as such we bear a tremendous responsibility. If we live our faith honestly, letting our light shine before men, then the Gentiles will glorify God because of us (1 Pet. 3:1). But if we are seen to be less than we proclaim to be, we will have the opposite effect on our friends and neighbors.

Also, we must take steps to cover the “nakedness” of our sins. We have done this first in baptism, by “putting on Christ”, “putting on the new man of righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24). Then we must continually strive to keep our garments pure and spotless, looking to God for forgiveness when we fail, so that we will be properly dressed when we are called to appear at the marriage feast.

**VERSE 9:**

**“Her filthiness is in her skirts”:** This filthiness is, first of all, the same as the legal impurity of v. 8 (cp. Jer. 13:27), the defilement of her spiritual adulteries. But also it is the blood of her victims:

*“Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents. . .”* (Jer. 2:34).

In this persecution of the innocent (Matt. 23:34, 35), including Christ, Jerusalem bears a close resemblance to the other “holy city” (so-called), “Babylon the Great” and her hideous system:

*“And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus”* (Rev. 17:6; 18:24).

**“She remembereth not her last end”:** “She took no thought of her doom” (RSV). That is, she did not remember what God had threatened would be her end — the desolation she is experiencing here. God had pleaded incessantly for her to change her ways, but to no avail (Deut. 32:29; Isa. 65:2). Again, Jerusalem is comparable to “Babylon” of the Apocalypse, in her stubbornness:

*“And thou saidst, I shall be a lady forever: so that thou didst not lay these things to thy heart, neither didst remember the latter end of it”* (Isa. 47:7; cp. Rev. 18:7).

**“Therefore she came down wonderfully”:** The verb “*yarad*” (to come down) is used of the humiliation of persons in Ezek. 30:6 and Isa. 47:1. Why was Israel humbled? “Because their tongue and their doings are against the LORD” (Isa. 3:8). This was just as God had said, in Jer. 13:17, 18.

**VERSE 10:**

**“The adversary hath spread out his hand**

**upon all her pleasant things”:** Called “precious” (RSV) or “desirable things” (margin). See note v. 6 (“All her beauty is departed”). This includes the vessels of the temple, called “goodly vessels” (or “vessels of desire” — mg.) in 2 Chron. 36:10, 19. Some of these vessels were brought to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar; the others were destroyed when God’s house was burned. Jeremiah himself had predicted these things (Jer. 15:13; 20:5).

**“For she hath seen that the heathen entered into her sanctuary,  
whom Thou didst command**

**that they should not enter into Thy congregation”:** Compare Deut. 23:3, 4. In her life, the daughter of Zion had ignored the intents of such commands as these and had mingled freely with aliens and set up their gods in Yahweh’s house (e.g., 2 Kgs. 21:7). She thus brought these punishments upon herself.



**VERSE 11:**

**“All her people sigh, they seek bread;  
they have given their pleasant things for meat**

**to relieve the soul”:** Again, the reference is to the famines of a besieged city, Jerusalem (see Jer. 37:21; 38:9; 52:6). To make things worse Jeremiah prophesied of a dearth (Jer. 14:1-6).

**“Pleasant things”:** Same word as v.10.

**“I am become vile”:** “I am despised” (RSV, NIV). Here is the beginning of Israel’s recognition of her guilt, to be seen more fully in v.18 and in ch.2. The narrative is interrupted by an outburst of the voice of the personified city — a desperate cry from one overcome by grief and despair.

**VERSE 12:**

**“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?  
behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow,  
which is done unto me,  
wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger”:**

Compare 2:15. The fallen daughter of Zion speaks a challenging message to the mockers who pass by. This scene demonstrates the utter indifference of the Gentiles to the plight of the Jews, and often their hostility (Psa. 89:41).

This is really a condemnation of the Gentiles, because of their complete lack of understanding of the “hope of Israel” (Acts 28:20). “Hath God cast away His people, whom He foreknew?” (Rom. 11:1) The unenlightened Gentile would answer, “Yes!” — and thus dismiss Paul’s words to the Roman brethren:

*“Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved. . . for this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins” (Rom. 11:25-27).*

It is true that the Lord has afflicted Israel. But it is also true that “Salvation is (still) of the Jews” (John 4:22). In the last days, God plans to correct her and teach her His truth and place her in the most eminent position among the mortal nations of Christ’s kingdom, as the “first dominion” (Mic. 4:8). Then ten men shall take hold of the skirt of a Jew; to go with him to worship his God (Zech. 8:20-23).

**“To crush my young men”:** Compare 3:34; 5:13.

**“As in a winepress”:** Another common symbol of God’s judgments (Isa. 63:2, 3; Rev. 14:19; 19:15; Joel 3:13). This figure implies a **ripeness** for punishment. It is a vivid, even a gruesome symbol — the blood squeezed out of bodies like juice squeezed out of grapes.

This figure of speech implies also that those to be punished belong to God — that He is the Owner of the vineyard, so to speak, and that He is the Master of all

(4:4; 17:4; 21:12). The fire from above is the “consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29) of God’s judgment, the fiery two-edged sword of God’s word — to divide soul from spirit, to try and perfect men, and to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart (1 Pet. 1:7; Heb. 4:12, 13). The wicked cannot stand such a searching fire, and it prevails against them. But a righteous remnant survives this “fire in their bones” (Jer. 20:9, for example), and emerges more fit for God’s use.

**“He hath spread a net for my feet”:** A figure of speech found also in Ezek. 12:13; Hos. 7:12 and Jer. 50:24. But the Jews made their own trap; they could not blame God for any unjust actions. They caught themselves in the net of their own sins. This is pictured in Prov. 1:16-18:

*“For their feet run to evil,  
and make haste to shed blood.  
Surely in vain the net is spread  
in the sight of any bird.  
And they lay wait for their own blood:  
they lurk privily for their own lives.”*

And also in Prov. 5:22:

*“His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself,  
and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.”*

**“He hath turned me back”:** He hath **confused** them (cp. Psa. 35:4; 70:2, 3; Isa. 42:17), giving them over to a reprobate mind (Rom. 1:28), sending upon them strong delusion (2 Thess. 2:11), because they never appreciated the privilege they had once possessed.

**“He hath made me desolate”:** See v. 1 and Isa. 3:26. A picture of utter, hopeless misery — “There is none to comfort her”. The same word is used of Tamar after her humiliation by Amnon (2 Sam. 13:20).

#### VERSE 14:

**“The yoke of my transgressions”:** This represents, first of all, Israel’s burden of sin, pressing down heavily upon its shoulders. The “yoke” was slavery, from which the children of Israel had been freed in Moses’ day (Lev. 26:13) — just as we are freed from the yoke of slavery to sin at baptism.

But another “yoke” was waiting for them in Jeremiah’s time: Babylon’s “yoke of iron” (Deut. 28:48; Jer. 28:14). This yoke was the work of God’s “servant” Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 25:9), and it was to be accepted humbly as a chastening from God (Jer. 37:8-12). But the Jews fought against receiving the yoke, and thus the hand of God became firmer and firmer upon them.

For **us**, the saints, there is the lesson here to submit ourselves meekly to our Father and His chastening (Heb. 12:5, 6, 11) — to seek to learn the lessons He

might teach us. For this reason, the same symbol of the yoke is used particularly in relation to us:

*"It is good for a man that he bear the yoke  
in his youth" (Lam. 3:27).*

And Jesus tells us:

*"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in  
heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:29).*

**"They are wreathed":** i.e., "twisted together" or "entwined", speaking of the strength of the cords of the yoke.

**"From whom I am not able to rise up":** "They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him . . ." (Psa. 49:6, 7). For those among the Jews who might learn the lesson from their condition: "My (i.e. God's) strength is made perfect in weakness. . . Therefore I (Paul) take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in persecutions. . . for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:9, 10).

#### VERSE 15:

**"The Lord hath trodden under foot all my mighty men**

**in the midst of me":** God fought against Jerusalem (2:5, 7). Judah's "heroes" were captured in the midst of the city (2 Kings 24:14-16) or else they fled in fear (25:4).

**"An assembly against me. . .":** A solemn assembly called by God, as a feast (Lev. 23:4). The enemies of Israel are called to witness and partake of the sacrifice of Israel herself, upon her own altar — Jerusalem:

*"Woe to Ariel, to Ariel (sig. 'God's altar'), the city where David  
dwelt. . . And I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege  
against thee. . . the multitude of all the nations that fight against  
Ariel. . ." (Isa. 29:1, 3, 7).*

Other passages also represent Yahweh's judgment upon Israel and other nations as sacrificial feasts (Zeph. 1:7, 8; Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 39:17-20; Isa. 34:6).

**"To crush my young men":** Compare 3:34; 5:13.

**"As in a winepress":** Another common symbol of God's judgments (Isa. 63:2, 3; Rev. 14:19; 19:15; Joel 3:13). This figure implies a **ripeness** for punishment. It is a vivid, even a gruesome symbol — the blood squeezed out of bodies like juice squeezed out of grapes.

This figure of speech implies also that those to be punished belong to God — that He is the Owner of the vineyard, so to speak, and that He is the Master of all

flesh, and that He has the right to tread them down. Jeremiah amplifies this in Jer. 14:17 by saying that the virgin daughter of his people is “trodden down” by sword and famine.

In Lam. 1:15, Israel is trodden down “as in a winepress” by God. In 4:21, 22, “the daughter of Edom” is marked out to receive retribution (as a “cup”) for her part in this treading-down of Israel. And, finally, in Isa. 63:2, 3 the particulars are given: Edom’s “cup” is produced from the treading of the winepress by the One who is “mighty to save” His people Israel!

#### VERSE 16:

**“For these things I weep”:** See more in 3:48, 49.

**“My children”:** See 5:13.

**“Desolate”:** See 1:13.

#### VERSE 17:

**“Zion spreadeth forth her hands”:**

1. Zion spreads her hands in prayer to God (cp. Exod. 9:29; 1 Kings 8:22, 38). But her efforts are made useless by her many sins and her unchanged attitude (Isa. 1:15-17).
2. Or perhaps Zion spreads forth her hands merely in lament and travail — with no thought of prayer, as Jeremiah prophesied in Jer. 4:31.

**“Jerusalem is as a menstruous woman”:** Legal defilement (see vv. 8, 9; Lev. 15: 19-27), but also a type of moral and spiritual defilement, an “unclean” state (Lam. 4:15). See also Ezekiel 36:17:

*“When the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way and by their own doings: their way was before me as the uncleanness of a removed woman.”*

But even in the depths of their filthiness, the Jews will be offered the promise of being cleansed and healed by God:

*“For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them” (Ezek. 36:24-27).*

*“In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech. 13:1).*

**VERSE 18:**

**“The Lord is righteous;**

**for I have rebelled against His commandment”:** Literally, “His mouth” (same word as in Job 39:27; Prov. 8:29). God is inherently good (Rom. 1:17; Matt. 19:17; Rev. 16:5-7; 19:2; Psa. 129:4). Man is inherently evil (Jer. 17:9; Eccl. 8:11; 1 Cor. 2:11; Matt. 15:18-19). These two facts are cardinal points of the Bible’s teaching.

Israel is more responsible to God than the other nations: “You only have I known. . .” (Amos 3:2); “He sheweth his word unto Jacob. . .” (Psa. 147:19). Thus Israel has sorer punishment from God (see 4:16). Again, the lesson is very strongly outlined for us, as we see these punishments upon Jerusalem in 590 B.C. (and 70 A.D.). Just as the Jews at Mount Sinai, we have trembled before God and promised to do whatsoever He has commanded. Shall we meet the same fate as they did, and as their descendants did at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and Titus? “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” (Heb. 2:3) For us, who know God’s laws and commands, there awaits the sorer punishment of the “many stripes”.

**“Hear, I pray you, all people”:** Again, it is stressed that the lesson of Jerusalem’s fall is for all people who seek to serve God (cp. v.12). These things happened for “our admonition” (1 Cor. 10:11).

**“Behold my sorrow”:** Or “suffering” (RSV, NIV).

**VERSE 19:**

**“My lovers”:** See notes on v.2.

**“My priests and my elders”:** The ones to whom the Jews looked for spiritual leadership and direction were the most deeply mired in iniquity. They bound heavy (and unnecessary) burdens, and grievous to be borne, and laid them upon the shoulders of their followers; but they themselves made no effort to carry them (Matt. 23:4). The blind leading the blind, all fell into the ditch. See more in v.4; 2:20; 4:7-9; 5:12.

**“While they sought their meat to relieve their souls”:** See notes, v.11.

**VERSE 20:**

**“Abroad the sword bereaveth”:** Those who tried to flee for protection, possibly in Egypt, met certain death (Jer. 9:21, 22; 14:18; Ezek. 7:15). They could not escape God.

**“At home there is as death”:** Famine, pestilence for those who remained and tried to resist Nebuchadnezzar (v.11; Jer. 9:21; 2 Kings 25:3), for they were resisting God.

**VERSE 21:**

**“There is none to comfort me”:** The **seventh**, and final, time that this thought is expressed (vv.2, 3, 7, 9, 16, 17, 21), for in the next chapter a remnant in Zion begins to realize that their help and comfort will surely come, from God (2:18, 19).

**“They shall be like unto me”:** This is the fearful but wonderful promise, spoken of more fully in 4:21, 22 in connection with “Edom”, a symbol of all Israel’s enemies who rejoice at the misfortunes of the “hope of Israel”. It was literally Edom who said of Jerusalem, “Rase it, rase it, even to the foundations thereof. . .” (Psa. 137:7). From the time it turned against its former friends, Edom travelled slowly downward in esteem and power among the nations, becoming subservient to Babylon and Rome, losing its former territory and being forced to dwell among the Jews, and at last being annihilated by the Roman conquerors. In contrast to the nations of Moab and Ammon, Edom is the scene of “**perpetual desolations**”. Her fate, with no chance for repentance, stands as a type of all the “Edoms” at the present time who will remain unchanged in their hostility toward Israel. “For the day of the LORD is near upon **all** the heathen” (Obad. 15). “I will curse him that curseth thee” (Gen. 12:3). See also Joel 3:19; Zech. 12:2, 3; Jer. 25:29.

**VERSE 22:**

**“Let all their wickedness come before Thee”:** As great Babylon will come into remembrance before God, “to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath” (Rev. 16:19). The souls of them who are slain cry with a loud voice, “How long?” (Rev. 6:10). But God is patient: it may appear that retribution will never come, but it is certain:

*“For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry” (Hab. 2:3).*

**“For my sighs are many, and my heart is faint”:** But then, **all** hands will faint, and every man’s heart will melt, when the day of the Lord is at hand upon “Babylon” and her allies (Isa. 13:6-8).

## CHAPTER TWO

### VERSE 1:

#### **"How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion**

**with a cloud in His anger":** The cloud was a beacon of God to lead His people through the wilderness (Exod. 13:21). But this leadership and care and protection is withdrawn here. (cp. 3:44: "Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through.")

The "cloud" that God uses to cover Judah is Babylon:

*"A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong" (Joel 2:2).*

This is the same figure as that used prophetically by Ezekiel in speaking of the Northern Host in the latter days:

*"And thou shalt come up against My people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land. . ." (Ezek. 38:16).*

God uses Babylon as a cloud to "enshroud in gloom" (Roth.) the ruling bodies of Israel, the "sun" and "stars" of the Jewish "heavens" (as in Ezek. 32:7, 8).

Notice the accumulated effect of the verses in which **God Himself** is pictured as chastening His people; it is overwhelming (Lam. 1:13-15; 2:1-8; 3:1-19 are examples). Jeremiah did not pile verse upon verse without a purpose. He desired his people to know that the worst feature of all in their calamity was their alienation from God (2:1, 6, 7; 3:17, 18, 31, 33, 49, 50; 5:20, 22).

**"And cast down from heaven":** Judah loses her place of pre-eminence: "She that was great among the nations. . ." (1:1). (It is interesting to note that Babylon, whom God used to accomplish this, experienced the same fate soon thereafter, when "Lucifer" was cast down by the Medes and Persians — Isa. 14:12; Jer. 51:53. cp. Matt. 11:23; Luke 10:18).

#### **"The beauty of Israel":**

1. This refers especially to God's temple: "the beauty of holiness" (or "glorious sanctuary", margin) of Psalms 29:2. See also Psalms 74:7; 96:9; Isaiah 60:7; 64:11 ("our beautiful house, where our fathers praised Thee"); and Ezekiel 24:21 ("the desire of your eyes"). The temple was the center of Jewish religious and

national life. It was the sanctuary, the retreat, the resting place of the true ruler of Judah — Yahweh (see notes, 1:6, 10).

2. Also, the “beauty of Israel” may well symbolize those persons who should have been stones and pillars in God’s spiritual temple (1 Pet. 2; Heb. 3:6), but who were discarded as of no value, like her king and princes (e.g. 2 Sam. 1:19).

**“Remembered not His footstool”:** Similarly, God’s footstool is, most simply, the place where His “feet” will stand — i.e., Jerusalem (Zech. 14:4). It is also a designation of the ark of the covenant. In 1 Chron. 28:2, the two (ark and footstool) are mentioned synonymously. And in Psa. 99:5 and 132:7, the listeners are commanded to “worship at his footstool.” In 1 Sam. 4:21 the ark of God is called the “glory of Israel” (cp. Psa. 78:60, 61; Ezek. 43:7; Isa. 60:13).

The ark had been placed by Solomon in the Most Holy Place of his temple (1 Kings 8:1-9). It disappeared from history when Nebuchadnezzar defiled and burned the temple. This was fitting, since the ark represented God’s glory, which was seen by Ezekiel to depart from Jerusalem at the same time (see 1:6).

We could have no more vivid presentation of the lesson: The presence and the favor of God, **at one time**, is no guarantee of its permanence. We must never assume, because God used us at one time, that He can never reject us. If He spared not the “natural branches”, let us take heed — we too are expendable (Rom. 11:21)!

## VERSE 2:

**“The Lord hath swallowed up”:** Meaning to “consume” or to “destroy utterly”; the verb appears also in vv.5, 8 and 16.

**“Habitations”:** “Pastures” (Roth.). The word refers to the open plains and hills, the dwellings of the shepherds of Israel — thus showing that Nebuchadnezzar’s influence was not confined merely to the city (Jer. 52:16).

**“The strongholds of the daughter of Judah”:** “Take away her battlements, for they are not the LORD’s” (Jer. 5:10). But the strongholds of Judah were more than walls and towers of stone: The “strongholds” of flesh, which men trust in rather than in God, are pride and stubbornness and the wisdom of men. God established Jeremiah as His prophet “over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy” (Jer. 1:10). Paul, alluding to this and similar verses from the Old Testament, speaks of the same power of God “to the pulling down of strongholds”:

*“Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor. 10:5).*

The walls of Judah were only symbolic of the real opposition to God, found in the minds of the men of Judah: haughtiness and self-will, a stiff neck.



**“He hath polluted** (‘profaned’ — Roth.) **the kingdom”**: Which had been sanctified unto God:

*“Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt:  
Thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it.  
Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause  
it to take deep root, and it filled the land. . .  
Why hast Thou then broken down her hedges, so  
that all they which pass by the way do pluck her?”* (Psa. 80:8, 9, 12)

Why did God do this? Why did He **profane** His crown (Psa. 89:39)? The answer is as before: Judah was responsible; she had first of all polluted herself, and her day had finally come, “when iniquity (would) have an end. . . I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: And it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is, and I will give it him” (Ezek. 21:25, 27).

### VERSE 3:

**“He hath cut off in His fierce anger**

**all the horn of Israel”**: The horn is a symbol of strength, either in a nation’s ruler or her army (cp. v. 17; 1 Sam. 2:1; Psa. 92:10; 112:9).

**“He hath drawn back His right hand**

**from before the enemy”**: God’s right hand, or His might, had been holding back or restraining Babylon; but He now releases her.

**“He burned against Jacob like a flaming fire,**

**which devoureth round about”**: Just as the **fiery** serpents had been released upon the Jews who complained and murmured against God (Num. 21:6). God is a “consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29), Who manifests Himself in fiery judgments upon the wicked (as in Mal. 4:1; 2 Thess. 1:8). His fire devours round about, but God never allows it to consume completely the bush of Israel — as He showed in sign to Moses (Exod. 3:2) — for these Jews are His special plant (Isa. 5:7) and He will not make a full end of them (Jer. 31:11).

### VERSE 4:

From v. 4 through v. 7, the theme is that **THE LORD IS THE ENEMY OF ISRAEL**. He is the One Who brings “evil” upon His people (Amos 3:6)!

**“He stood with His right hand as an adversary”**: He was in the obvious posture of an adversary, standing and with a weapon in the right hand. There is a strong irony here, in that God’s right hand is often spoken of in Scripture as the hand of help and deliverance.

**“Tabernacle”**: Hebrew “o’hel” — signifying a temporary dwelling, a modest structure, or a “tent” (RSV, NIV). This does **not** refer to Solomon’s temple.

**VERSE 5:**

**“Lamentation”:** From a root meaning “groaning” or “sorrow”, but **not** the same word as in the title.

**VERSE 6:**

**“And He hath violently taken away His tabernacle”:** Not the same word as in v.4. From the margin it may be seen that this word means a booth (RSV) or shed, as that built for the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (Isa. 1:8). This feast had celebrated the bountiful harvests of the land (Lev. 23:39), now taken away. Also, it had celebrated, in the past, deliverance from slavery in Egypt (Lev. 23:43). But alas, a new period of slavery is here beginning!

**“As if it were of a garden”:** Omitting the italicized words, this reads simply: “as a garden”. Israel was once God’s **garden**, well-tended and watered (Psa. 80; Isa. 5). Now Israel is seen as a mere hut, isolated and besieged in the midst of a desolate vineyard (Isa. 1:8; 3:26).

The metaphor, of course, is the ease with which a disciplined army might destroy a garden (or a hut in the garden). It is recorded that Titus with his Roman army so destroyed Gethsemane in the siege of Jerusalem.

**“He hath destroyed His places of the assembly”:** The temple and the synagogues (Psa. 74:7, 8). See note, 1:4.

**“Sabbaths forgotten”:** The land was forced to observe her sabbaths 70 years (see 1:7; Jer. 25:11).

**“The king and the priest”:** See 4:16, 20; 5:12.

**VERSE 7:**

**“Sanctuary”:** See note, 2:1.

**“They have made a noise in the house of the LORD”:** Oh, but what a noise! Instead of the exalted tones of trumpet and cymbal, there is the discordant clanging of weapons and armor! Instead of sweet voices singing forth glorious praise, there are strident cries of brutish warriors!

**“Solemn feast”:** See note, 1:15: “an assembly”.

**VERSE 8:**

**“The Lord hath purposed. . .”:** Yahweh hath done this, not the “we” (v.16) of Israel’s enemies. The central thought of this chapter.

**“He hath stretched out a line. . .”:** Thus signifying a **measured** period of chastisement, which ended in 70 years (Jer. 25:11, 12), was resumed in 70 A.D., and will end forever when “the times of the Gentiles” are finally and conclusively

fulfilled (Luke 21:24), i.e., when “the set time to favor Zion” arrives (Psa. 102:13). (This same idea of a **measured** period of time is expounded in **Eureka**, vol. 2, p.595 — a discussion of Rev. 11:1).

The figure of a measuring line, to discover defects in the building, appears also in Amos 7:7-9; 2 Kings 21:13; Isa. 28:13, 17; 34:11.

## VERSE 9:

**PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING:** all fell (compare 4:12-16)!

**“Gates”:** See 1:4.

**“Sunk into the ground”:** A vivid figure for complete disappearance.

**“Bars”:** The same word is used often in the description of the tabernacle — see especially Exod. 26 and 36. Neither the gates nor the bars were found sufficient when the Almighty resolved to lead the Chaldeans into His city.

**“The law is no more”:** It had been reduced to a hollow shell by the speculations of the priests and people, weakened by the growth of paganism — which had been planted by various kings from even as early a time as Solomon (1:2, notes). See Ezek. 7:26, 27 and Hosea 3:4 (“For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim”).

Jeremiah perceives that the Jewish law has, in essence, come to an end now that it has no physical habitation. This is also the argument, at a much later date, employed by Paul when writing to the Hebrews. The imminent destruction of the Jewish temple and the dissolution of the Jewish nation was God’s way of declaring the Law no longer valid.

**“Her prophets also find**

**no vision from the Lord”:** The false prophets, like Hananiah (Jer. 29:2-4), who opposed Jeremiah. Cp. Psa. 74:9, Ezek. 13:3, 4, 9.

## VERSE 10:

**“The elders of the daughter of Zion**

**sit upon the ground”:** See 1:1 and Isa. 3:26. Mourning and deep distress, despondence — as Job’s friends (Job 2:13).

**“And keep silence”:** No words are adequate to express their sorrow.

**“They have cast up dust upon their heads”:** Josh 7:6; 1 Sam. 4:12; 2 Sam. 13:19; Neh. 9:1; Job 2:12. An enactment of the original curse: **“Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return”** (Gen. 3:19)!

**VERSES 11, 12:**

Compare vv. 19, 20 and 4:3, 4, 9, 10.

**"My liver is poured upon the earth":** The liver is figurative of the seat of the emotions (cp. Job 16:13 — "He poureth out my gall upon the ground"). It is the source of bile, or bitterness (Heb. "mara", Ruth 1:20). Thus, it represents a bitter feeling evoked by the destruction of God's people. See 3:5, note; Psa. 62:8.

**VERSE 12:**

**"Their soul was poured out**

**into their mothers' bosom":** Seeking nourishment from the dry breasts of their exhausted mothers, they silently breathed out their lives. Such sorrows, almost unutterable! Can we still be shaken from our comfortable lethargy, to be moved — **really** moved — by such a spectacle? Or have we been taking life too easy for too long? A God Who could allow such sufferings in the past could well allow them again. Let us remember Christ's words about AD 70:

*"Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved" (Matt. 24:22).*

**VERSE 13:**

**"What thing shall I liken to thee?":** There is a beautiful little echo of this plaintive cry in a customary phrase of Jesus. Jeremiah, surveying the misery of Jerusalem, can find nothing to compare. But Jesus, surveying the wonder and joy of God's Kingdom, can ask, "Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God?" (Luke 13:20). As our troubles may be great, so are the tender mercies of the Father. Where sin abounds, grace does much more abound (Rom. 5:20); and in that thought is supreme consolation for the faithful.

**"Thy breach is great":**

- (1) "Destruction" or "ruin" ("The LORD hath broken forth, as a breach of waters. . ." — 2 Sam. 5:20), as Jeremiah had prophesied (Jer. 14:17).
- (2) Also, the great gulf between Israel and Yahweh, brought about by Israel's sins: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God" (Isa. 59:2).

**"Like the sea. . .":** Signifying vast extent and depth.

**"Who can heal thee?":** Who can heal thy wounds (both physical and moral)? Indeed, "thy bruise is incurable (i.e., by mere man), and thy wound is grievous. . . (but) I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD. . ." (Jer. 30:12, 17). This is the central theme of the Lamentations, expressed in 3:31, 32:

*"For the LORD will not cast off for ever:  
But though He cause grief, yet will He  
have compassion according to the multitude  
of His mercies."*

**“Who can heal thee?”** To ask such a question is to answer it. Through the long ages there has been only one answer; there **can** be only one answer. But poor deluded man will continue to try everything else first. He will seek out every “physician” — only to find his condition worse (Mark 5:26) — before he will think to turn to the One who can truly heal. Then, if he is wise, he will turn his back on the wreckage of all his past hopes:

*“Lord, to whom shall we go? **Thou** hast the words of eternal life”* (John 6:68).

#### VERSE 14:

**“Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things”** (‘false and deceptive visions’ — RSV) **for thee”**: **“Thy prophets”**, not God’s prophets. Men like Hananiah (v.9; Jer. 29) were “prophets of the deceit of their own heart” (Jer. 23:26), who preached “smooth things” (Isa. 30:10) and “inventions” (Eccl. 7:29), and who caused the people to err (Isa. 9:15, 16).

The common people here are to blame as well as the leaders, because they consented to follow them and failed to censure their counsellors. So finally, through repetition and following the course of least resistance, they came to believe the lies of their leaders (2 Thess. 2:11, 12).

**“Foolish things”**: Hillers and others suggest a slight textual emendation, to read “whitewash”. The sense, of course, would be that of Ezek. 13:10-16 (cp. 22:28): false prophets of peace (Jer. 23:17) being compared with dishonest builders covering up a rickety wall with whitewash!

**“They have not discovered thine iniquity”**: They promised life and blessing to the wicked (Ezek. 13:22) and failed to declare the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:26, 27). If they had not been afraid to expose the nation’s iniquities, there might have been time to repent and ward off the captivity. They should have behaved like Isaiah:

*“Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins”* (58:1).

**“But they have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment”**: The “burden of the Lord” was the cause of punishment. The false prophets offered the counsel of “lightness”, or indifference, thus calling God a liar. But God said, “Every man’s word shall be his burden; for ye have perverted the words of the living God. . .” (Jer. 23:32-36). The true cause of banishment was persistent apostasy, and the following of wicked leaders.

**VERSES 15, 16:**

The scorn, anger and exultation of Jerusalem's enemies and conquerors. See notes, 1:12.

**"All that pass by**

**clap their hands at thee**": In this instance, the clapping of hands represents contempt, as also in Job 27:23.

**"They hiss and wag their head"**: As the Jews did to Jesus at his death (Matt. 27:39; Mark 15:29).

**"The perfection of beauty,**

**the joy of the whole earth**": The quotations are from Psa. 50:2 ("Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined") and Psa. 48:2 ("Beautiful for situation — or 'elevation': cp. Zech. 14:10; Psa. 68:15, 16 — the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion . . . the city of the great King").

This also recalls the prophecy of Isaiah:

*"Is this your exultant city, whose origin is from days of old?"* (23:7, RSV).

As always, God's enemies see only the present. They fail to comprehend the vast changes to be made in the future — as guaranteed by God — such as the exaltation of mount Zion and Jerusalem in the Millennial Age (Isa. 2:2-4; 24:23).

**VERSE 16:****"All thine enemies**

**have opened their mouth against thee**": As roaring and ravening beasts (Job 16:9, 10 and Psa. 22:13 — the latter prophetic of the treatment of Christ).

**"We have swallowed her up"**: A false boast. See notes, v.8. Mic. 4:11-13 speaks of the Gentiles' hatred of the Jews, their ignorance of God's purpose, and their eventual overthrow — at the same time that the "daughter of Zion" is lifted up. Finally, see Zeph. 2:8, 9.

**VERSE 17:**

**"He hath caused thine enemy to rejoice over thee"**: "To gloat over you" (NIV). Compare Psa. 38:16 and 89:42.

**"The horn"**: See v.3, note.

**VERSE 18:**

The previous verses (15 and 16) contain the ignorant scorn of Israel's enemies, while this verse pictures a true remnant of "Israel" praying for deliverance and the fulfillment of the "hope of Israel". This is not only a picture of Jeremiah's day, but of our day as well.

Gottwald translated the first phrase: “Cry aloud to the Lord, **the Wall** of the daughter of Zion”, with an allusion to Zech. 2:5 for the notion of God as a protective wall for His city and His people.

**“Let tears run down like a river”**: Hebrew “nahal”: a “torrent”, or mountain stream, rushing down its rugged gorge.

**“Give thyself no rest”**: “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (Psa. 122:6). “Ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, and give Him no rest, till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (Isa. 62:6, 7).

**“The apple of thine eye”**: Literally, the “daughter of thine eye” — that which the eye gives birth to; i.e., tears. The same expression occurs also in Psa. 17:8.

#### VERSE 19:

**“Arise, cry out in the night”**: The “night” is the time for mourning, because darkness is upon the nations, and God’s plan for His people is obscured (see notes on “night”, 1:2).

**“In the beginning of the watches”**: The Jewish tradition was three night-watches of four hours each (Judges 7:19); the Roman, four watches of three hours each (Matt. 14:25; Mark 13:35).

**“Lift up thy hands toward Him”**: A common posture in prayer (Psa. 28:2; 134:2; 141:2; 1 Tim. 2:8). Jeremiah goes a step further in Lam. 3:41 when he says: “Let us lift up **our heart with our hands** unto God in the heavens.” Is this a posture we should adopt?

#### VERSE 20:

**“Behold, O LORD, and consider**

**to whom Thou hast done this”**: Again the truth of the Jews’ awesome responsibility to God (and our responsibility as well) is emphasized: “**You** only have I known. . . therefore I will punish **you**. . .” (Amos 3:2).

**“Shall the women eat their fruit,**

**and children of a span long?”**: As actually happened (4:10; Jer. 19:9). The famine of the siege here brought such almost unimaginable horrors as this.

**“Children of a span long”**: Several different renderings are suggested— none of which change the sense of the passage appreciably: i.e., “children they have raised” (Hillers), “children of their care” (Keil); “children whom they must still carry” (Smith).

**“The young and old lie**

**on the ground in the streets”**: Compare 2 Chron. 36:17.

**“Thou hast killed and not pitied”**: This may be true of those who deserved no

pity, but God is never unrighteous or unfair. There is still discernible here in this statement the attitude of complaint and bitterness. But “God does not **willingly** afflict. . .” All suffering is brought about for an ultimate purpose, and God will have achieved that purpose if the sufferer is led to repentance and righteousness (see 3:33, notes).

**VERSE 22:**

**“As in a solemn day”:** See notes, 1:15.

**“My terrors round about”:** Unreasoning fear (as Isa. 24:17, 18). This expression, “magor-missabib”, is Jeremiah’s watchword (Jer. 6:25; 20:3, 10; 46:5; 49:29).

**“Those that I have swaddled and brought up**

**hath mine enemy consumed”:** For this reason, Jeremiah was commanded to take no wife “in this place” (Jer. 16:2-4). Compare Luke 23:39, 40.

“Swaddling-clothes” were bandages which were tightly wrapped around a newborn baby — apparently to keep it quiet and to encourage the growth of straight limbs (Job 38:9; Ezek. 16:4; Luke 2:7, 12).



## CHAPTER THREE

**Verses 1-18:** DARKNESS, AFFLICTION, DERISION, but “The Lord is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

### VERSE 1:

#### **“I am the man”:**

1. Jeremiah speaks for his nation Israel — God’s “firstborn” (Exod. 4:22), who is afflicted, with the purpose of calling back the wicked (Ezek. 33:11).
2. Jeremiah speaks for Jesus as well — and as a type of himself and all the saints, for whom Jesus is the primary example to follow. Jesus was the only-begotten of the Father (John 1:14; 3:16) — and thus the “firstborn”. He was afflicted (Isa. 53:4), and he learned obedience by the things he suffered (Heb. 5:8; Phil. 2:5-8), being rewarded by his Father as the “first-fruits of them that sleep.”

**“That hath seen”:** “To see” in Hebrew idiom often means ‘to experience’ (Jer. 5:12; Psa. 16:10; Eccl. 8:16).

**“That hath seen affliction by (‘under’—RSV) the rod of His wrath”:** The rod is an expression for correction (see Job 37:13, where “correction” is the identical word as “rod” here), punishment, and tribulation.

1. God used Babylon as His rod to punish Israel, just as He had previously needed to use Assyria as the “rod of his anger” (Isa. 10:5, 15). Note Rev. 11:1 and Lam. 2:8, notes — where the punishment of Israel is seen to be only of a limited duration.
2. Christ suffered because of his fleshly nature, which made him susceptible to temptations and because his death was necessary to save himself as well as others. But the “rod” of God’s correction was not used upon him, for he never sinned. However, those in Christ — the saints, the multitudinous Christ — do feel this rod of correction. The promise to David speaks of the Messiah, and God tells him:

*“I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. . .”* (2 Sam. 7:14).

The second part of that verse, however, can scarcely, if at all, be applied to Christ:

*"If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men. . ."*

This part of the verse seems definitely to apply to believers in Christ, whom God will correct as children. The Psalmist, in referring to this verse (2 Sam. 7:14), alluded to its plural application (see Psa. 89:30, 32; cp. Paul in 2 Cor. 6:18; Gal. 3:29).

"The man that has seen affliction" has gained knowledge of some of the deepest facts of life. He can scarcely help being wiser—and more sympathetic and thoughtful of others — than he was before the pain came. And if he thankfully receives the affliction as sent from God, and meant for his good, then he will become by the Divine discipline more righteous than he would ever have been otherwise. The fruitful branch, when it is pruned, becomes even more fruitful.

#### VERSE 2:

**"He hath led me, and brought me into darkness":** Most versions have "he has driven me into. . ." The "darkness" is the darkness of night (1:2), of the grave, and of the eclipse of the Jewish "star" in the "heavens" (2:1). See vv. 53-55; compare Amos 5:18.

#### VERSE 3:

**"He turned His hand against me all the day":** The Hebrew idiom expresses repeated action. "And I will turn My hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy sin. . ." (Isa. 1:25).

#### VERSE 4:

**"My flesh and my skin":** Israel's **fleshly**, natural ways; her trust in her own strength and the strength of her Gentile friends, such as Egypt.

**"Hath He made old":** The verb means "to waste away", or "to wear out by rubbing", and is used of old clothes.

**"He hath broken my bones":** Hezekiah compared God with a lion: "As a lion has He broken my bones" (Isa. 38:13). (The bones of an old person are easily broken).

#### VERSE 5:

**"He hath builded against me":** A siege — vv. 7-9.

**"Gall":** Bitter sorrow (as in Jer. 8:14). Compare Jesus in Psa. 69:21 and Matt. 27:34 ("Vinegar mingled with gall"). The word appears again in Lam. 3:19.

#### VERSE 6:

This whole verse is a direct quotation from Psa. 143:3, a psalm of David beseeching God's help in time of trouble — easily attributable prophetically to the Lord Jesus in the calamity of his crucifixion.

**“He hath set me in dark places”:** Dark, cave-like sepulchres (cp. Psa. 88:6). This may signify either:

1. The grave, “hades”, as in a political death for Israel (cp. Ezek. 37:2); or
2. A dungeon, as where Jeremiah was detained (v.53; Jer. 37:16); or
3. Christ’s death and burial (Matt. 27:66).

**“As they that be dead of old”:** Or, “they that have been dead since ancient times” — Men have always died, due to Adam’s sin (Rom. 5:12), from the very beginning; and nations also “die” (Isa. 14:9-11), since God rules in them (Dan. 4:17, 25) and since only the Kingdom of God will be perpetual.

#### VERSE 7:

**“He hath hedged me about”:** In the past, God had fenced Israel with a fiery wall of protection (Exod. 14:19, 20; Zech. 2:5); and He will do so again in the future (Zech. 9:8; Isa. 4:5; 60:18).

But, during the time of Jeremiah, Israel had sinned grievously, and the hedge became a hedge of thorns (as in Hos. 2:6, 7), and a prison (cp. Job 19:8), symbolizing God’s purpose of correction with His people (which they cannot alter), leading (eventually) to their return to Him, their Husband.

Every life is surrounded by divine limitations — God hedges us all about, in one way or another. For one there may be physical limitations — of health or disability or advancing age. Another might feel most severely the limitation of poverty; another yet, the lack of education. If we accept our Father’s will, then we will accept, and graciously live with, the “hedges” He has imposed upon us. But if we fret and grumble and batter against these “fences” and “chains”, then we are rebelling against God and neglecting our unique opportunities to do the good which God has placed within our own power. As one brother expressed it, we must do what we can, with what we have, where we are. We are not responsible for what we cannot do, nor for what we do not have, nor for where we cannot go.

**“My chain”:** Literally, “fetters of bronze”. Compare “the yoke of my transgression” (1:14). And see also 5:5.

#### VERSE 8:

**“Also when I cry and shout,**

**He shutteth out my prayer”:** Cp. v.44. Also, compare Christ when he was “forsaken” by his Father (Psa. 22:1, 2; Matt. 27:46).

#### VERSE 9:

**“Hewn stones”:** Which fit together tight and make a stronger barrier than ordinary stones.

**“He hath made my paths crooked”:** Note also Isa. 63:17:

*“O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear?”*

The true picture is that God was long-suffering for a time, but then He allowed and even encouraged Israel to harden her heart even further. See note, 2:13 (“He hath turned me back”).

#### VERSE 10:

**“A bear lying in wait”**: One of the 4 world-empires, and a ruler over the Jews, was the Medo-Persian Empire, “a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had 3 ribs in the mouth. . .” (Dan. 7:5).

Remember also that the bear is a common emblem of Russia.

**“As a lion”**: The symbol of Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon (Dan. 7:4).

#### VERSE 11:

**“He hath made me desolate”**: Astonished, stupefied, terrified. Note Isa. 3:26, Matt. 23:38 (“Your house is left unto you desolate”).

#### VERSE 12:

**“As a mark (‘target’ — NIV) for the arrow”**: God first of all spoke to His people by the prophets, charging them with their sins and “marking” them for judgment. Arrows are often figurative for disease (Job 34:6; Ps. 91:5) or other sorrows sent by God (Deut. 32:23).

#### VERSE 13:

**“He hath caused the arrows (lit., ‘children’) of His quiver**

**to enter into my reins”**: Then, after the warnings, came the actual judgments. See Job 6:4; 7:20; 16:12, 13; Ps. 38:2.

#### VERSE 14:

Compare 2:15; Ps. 22:6, 7; Matt. 27:39-44.

**“I was a derision (‘laughingstock’ — NIV) to all my people”**: Especially, note Christ’s experiences (Ps. 69:12) — “His **own** received him not” (John 1:11); “No prophet is accepted in his **own** country” (Luke 4:24).

**“Their song all the day”**: Verse 63; Jer. 20:7.

#### VERSE 15:

**“He hath filled me with bitterness”**: Bitter herbs (Exod. 12:8) of sorrow and grief.

**“He hath made me drunken with wormwood”**: To fulfill Jeremiah’s prophecy (Jer. 9:15).

**VERSE 16:**

**"He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones":** Gravel and grit from the fire, in the bread baked in ashes — thus implying extreme poverty and hardship. Compare Prov. 20:17:

*"Bread of deceit is sweet to a man;  
but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel."*

Jesus figuratively contrasts bread and stones in Matt. 7:9.

**"He hath covered me with ashes":** mourning at the loss of fleshly strength and glory (cp. Jer. 6:26; Job 2:8). The RSV and Rotherham have "made me cower in ashes".

**VERSE 17:**

**"And Thou hast removed my soul far off from peace;**

**I forgot prosperity":** Every good, every form of prosperity had been snatched away. Wherever he looked, he found nothing but chaos and privation and suffering. Compare Psa. 120:6, 7.

**VERSE 18:**

**"And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD":** It may have seemed this way to Jeremiah and his contemporaries, but this is a hasty statement — as we see from vv.21-25. It may happen to any of us that, when troubles pile up, we might say in our haste and despair that all is vanity (Psa. 116:11).

**Verses 19-21: THE DESIRED EFFECT: TO SAVE A REMNANT.** Through bitterness and suffering and adversity, the Israelite learns to turn to God:

*"By the rivers of Babylon,  
there we sat down,  
yea, we wept,  
when we remembered Zion  
. . . How shall we sing the Lord's song  
in a strange land?  
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,  
let my right hand forget her cunning;  
if I do not remember thee,  
let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth;  
if I prefer not Jerusalem  
above my chief joy" (Psa. 137:1, 4-6).*

The Jews who returned from the 70 years captivity in Babylon were a much more disciplined, righteous band than those who had been originally carried there. The rebellious, the half-hearted, the greedy and the idolators had been left behind

— often of their own will.

In the same way, when God brings the Jews back to Israel in the period after Christ's return, He will purge out the rebels (Ezek. 20:28; Zech. 13:9). The Jews will return to their homeland with a renewed spirit, cleansed at last from their heathen associations, and much the better for their 2000 years spent in division and scattering.

#### VERSE 20:

**“My soul hath them still in remembrance,**

**and is humbled in me”:** The greatest sorrow in affliction is the remembrance of better times.

#### VERSE 21:

**“This I recall in my mind;**

**therefore have I hope”:** This is the first gleam of **real** hope. The righteous remnant of Jeremiah's time now realizes fully that these judgments are the hand of God — that, if they seek to obey Him, He will watch over them, and help them, and their hardships will become only chastenings from their Father. Indeed, if they were not chastened, they would be illegitimate and not sons (Heb. 12:8).

**Verses 22-30: THE LORD'S MERCIES, SERVICE, SEPARATION:** These few verses demonstrate the attitude of life for **Jeremiah and the righteous** — in view of God's hand upon them. In the same sense it is prophetic of the life which **Christ** led, and the lives of **all true believers** in the ages since; a reliance upon the Lord's mercies, a patient faith and hope and a bearing of God's yoke.

#### VERSE 22:

**“The LORD'S mercies”:** The word “mercies” in the Old Testament is invariably connected with God's promises, or covenants. “Mercy” and “covenant” are used alongside one another in Psa. 89:28, and in v.1 of that psalm, the author says:

*“I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever:  
with my mouth will I make known Thy faithfulness to all generations. . .”*

The mercies of God he identifies in vv.3, 4 — and throughout the psalm:

*“I have made a covenant with My chosen,  
I have sworn unto David My servant,  
Thy seed will I establish for ever,  
and build up thy throne to all generations.”*

**“It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed”:** Note the lesson of Rom. 9:21, 22 — that God is the Maker of His vessels and has absolute power over each one, to destroy or to save.

With special reference to the whole Jewish nation, God has preserved them due to His covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:3). He will never make a full end of them (Jer. 30:11), for His own Name's sake (Ezek. 36:22).

**VERSE 23:**

**"They are new every morning":** God watches over His servants always. Man must sleep, but God is always awake — never withdrawing His life-giving and life-sustaining Spirit for the benefit of all flesh. The angel of His presence keeps us (Isa. 63:9). Weeping may endure for a night, and that night — while we lie in darkness — may seem endless. But in the fresh morning of God's grace there will come renewal and joy (Psa. 30:5).

*New every morning is the love  
Our wakening and uprising prove;  
Through sleep and darkness safely brought,  
Restored to life, and power, and thought.*

*New mercies each returning day  
Around us hover while we pray;  
New perils past, new sins forgiven,  
New time to serve our Lord in Heaven.*

*The daily round, the common task,  
Will furnish all we ought to ask,—  
Room to deny ourselves; a road  
To bring us nearer to our God.*

*So may we in our waking hours  
Our Master serve with all our powers;  
And while we serve, O may we be  
As thou wouldst have us — more like thee!*

**VERSE 24:**

**"The LORD is my portion":** This is the exact meaning of the name of Jeremiah's father, Hilkiah — "Yahweh is my inheritance". Again, this bears a direct relation to God's promises, as in Psa. 16:5, 10, 11. In conjunction with this is seen the hope of a resurrection to eternal life, first through Christ and then in all those "in Christ". Along the same lines, compare Deut. 4:20; 9:29; 32:9; Eph. 1:11.

How comforting it is to remember, in the midst of loss or difficulty, that Yahweh is our "portion". Jeremiah stood in the midst of a devastated city and a desolate land. All around him, his fellows had lost their "portions" — homes, families, communities, possessions of every sort. Those "portions" that are only natural and material are all reduced to the same vanity at the last, and the man who trusts in them has only wasted his time and guaranteed his ultimate disappointment. But the life that has God for a "portion" has the surety of hope and satisfaction at the last, and contentment even now — at the prospect of that inheritance. We are saved by hope. The process is yet far from complete, but it is our right and privilege to rejoice that our "portion" is in God's hands, and that our hope will surely appear in the appointed time (Col. 3:3, 4).

**VERSE 25:**

**"The LORD is good unto them that wait for Him":** The righteous are pictured by Isaiah as saying, in their time of deliverance, "We have waited for him" (Isa. 25:9; 30:18). The same thought is found in 1 Thess. 1:9, 10. More is implied in these verses, however, than a simple passing of time now in expectation of receiving the promises at Christ's return. A "watchman" of God was not only to wait, but to observe keenly the signs of the times, and to watch himself and keep his garments unspotted (Isa. 21:7-12; Ezek. 33:1-9). The Hebrew verb here (in Lam. 3:25) is "to wait eagerly", or "to crave".

**"To the soul that seeketh Him":** "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him: and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:6, 7).

**VERSE 26:**

**"Hope":** "Hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. 8:24, 25).

**"Quietly wait":** With no murmurs or complaints. Job (Job 1:21, 22) and Jesus (Matt. 26:63; 27:12; Isa. 53:7) were exemplary in such patient waiting.

**"The salvation of the LORD":** The same as the name of "Joshua" (or "Jesus" in the Greek). A man should wait for Jesus. The patriarch Jacob did this (Gen. 49:18).



**VERSE 27:**

**“It is good for a man that he bear**

**the yoke in his youth”:** The “yoke”, to be accepted humbly by the faithful (Jer. 37:8-12), was the yoke which Christ later offered — meekness and lowliness in the world’s estimation (Matt. 11:29).

Also, it is important that we begin to bear this yoke in our youth if possible. Youth is the time for establishing life-long ambitions and habits. It is also the time for high hopes, when we may fail to understand the utter futility of seeking fame and riches. The things learned in our youth will be the most easily remembered when harder times come. For these reasons, Solomon says:

*“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them. . .”* (Eccl. 12:1).

Jeremiah himself was called to God’s service at a time when he considered himself as yet “a child” (Jer. 1:6, 7), but he soon learned to “put away childish things” (1 Cor. 13:11).

Such an attitude as this is important in view of the nearness of our Lord’s return, as well as the shortness and uncertainty of mortal existence at any time:

*“The days of our years are threescore years and ten:  
And if by reason of strength they be fourscore years,  
yet is their strength labour and sorrow:  
for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.  
So teach us to number our days,  
that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom”* (Psa. 90:10, 12).

**VERSE 28:**

**“He sitteth alone”:** The way of true holiness has always meant a separation from the paths of the wicked. Jeremiah was to maintain a distinct and separate life. At last, even the appointed time for approaching his countrymen ceased, and God told him, “Return not unto them” (Jer. 15:19). We are commanded to be separate from the ways of the world (Deut. 22:10; 2 Cor. 6:14, 17; Heb. 7:26; James 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:11, 12; 1 John 2:15-17; 3:1; 4:5; 5:19; Gal. 6:14; John 17:6-9).

**“Because He hath borne it upon him”:** Literally, “because He (i.e., God) has laid the burden upon him.” It would be useless and impractical to remain separate from the world if God had **not** commanded it and if He had **not** laid it upon us. From a natural standpoint, the best way to make gains in this life would be by a close association and communion with the world and all its activities. But our aims, and our attitudes, must be different from the world around us.

**VERSE 29:**

**“He putteth his mouth in the dust”**: Figurative subjection and humility (2 Chron. 33:12; cp. Mic. 7:17; Psa. 72:9). Here is a man so subdued in obedience, that he will bear whatever God may lay upon him without complaint, because he truly has hope.

**“If so be there may be hope”**: “There may yet be hope” (RSV, NIV).

**VERSE 30:**

**“He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him”**: Compare Jesus in Matt. 5:39 (principle) and in Matt. 26:67 and 1 Pet. 2:19-24 (practice). Also see Isa. 50:6 and Job 16:10.

**“He is filled full of reproach”**: See Psa. 69:9, 20.

**VERSE 31:**

**“For the LORD will not cast off forever”**: The gospel of the kingdom is intimately connected with the “hope of Israel”, as Paul shows (Acts 28:20). God’s deliverance of the natural Jews from their enemies is related to, and concurrent with, the deliverance (to immortality) of His saints. Note carefully Rom. 11:1-6, 25-27; 1 Sam. 12:22; Jer. 31:37; and Hos. 14:4.

**VERSE 32:**

**“The multitude of His mercies”**: See notes, v. 22.

**VERSE 33:**

**“For He doth not afflict willingly**

**nor grieve the children of men”**: This “affliction of the sons of men” is tragically necessary, but it gives God no pleasure. Neither does the death of the wicked give Him pleasure (Ezek. 18:32; 33:11), for He is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9) — but it is necessary to vindicate God’s holy name. He will be, at last, gracious to those who love Him, but He must of necessity be vengeful upon those who reject Him.

**VERSE 34:**

**“To crush under His feet”**: A reference to the oppressions of the Babylonian and Assyrian conquerors (Eastern monarchs crushing slaves beneath their feet are common sights on wall murals and decorations in capital cities and palaces). But men may “crush” their fellows underfoot in many other ways as well (cp. vv.35, 36).

**“The prisoners of the earth”**: “prisoners in the land” (NIV) — i.e., Israel, the Jews were the apple of God’s eye. Perhaps also a reference to the prisoners of the

pit wherein is no water, the prisoners of sin and death and the grave, debtors to the law and the servants of sin (Zech. 9:11, 12).

**VERSE 35:**

**“To turn aside the right of a man”:** Perversion of justice in a court, as was perpetrated upon Jesus.

**VERSE 36:**

**“To subvert a man in his cause”:** Going further, even the private wrongs, devious and secretive acts, gossip and slander. Even of these. . . (see Psa. 15).

**“The Lord approveth not”:** Or, by the margin, “the Lord ~~seeth~~ not”, in the sense of Isa. 59:15 and Hab. 1:13:

*“And the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment.”*

*“Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.”*

Such verses as these show the way in which God will not see wicked works. In other words, He will not condescend to behold them forever, but will soon make an end of all such deeds.

**VERSE 37:**

**“Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commanded it not?”:**

*“My (God’s) counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure”* (Isa. 46:10).

God is always watching even the sparrows and controlling all events to His satisfaction. There are no such things as “good luck” or “bad luck” for the saints. Everything is in God’s hands (cp. Psa. 33:9).

**VERSE 38:**

**“Out of the mouth of the Most High**

**proceedeth not evil and good?”:** God’s works are all done in goodness. He controls events to benefit Israel and His elect, although this may not always be clearly discernible. Sometimes we may “receive evil” (in the sense of misfortune) for a time (Job 2:10; James 5:10), but not above what we are able to bear.

Also, note that the author of evil in this sense is not some supernatural being with horns and hooves and pitchfork. God says, “I create evil” (Isa. 45:7). “Shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?” (Amos 3:6).

**VERSE 39:**

**“Wherefore doth a living man complain,  
a man for the punishment of his sins?”:**

1. The nation of Israel, once politically dead (v.6), is alive today because of God’s direction of world affairs (Ezek. 37:10). All things are for their benefit.
2. We — who were once “afar off” among the Gentiles, **dead** in trespasses and sins — have been made “alive” (Eph. 2:13; Rom. 6:13) in Christ (Gal. 2:20), and are now God’s sons (1 John 3:1-3), enduring chastening (Heb. 12). Can we ever complain in view of what we would have been, if God had not called us to the Truth? There is no **real** misfortune for the child of faith, and there is no **ultimate** evil, **except unrepented sin!** Let us then, as Paul did, glory in tribulation. . .

*“knowing that tribulation worketh patience: and patience, experience;  
and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed”* (Rom. 5:3-5).

**VERSE 40:**

**“Let us search and try our ways,  
and turn again to the LORD”:** see Zech. 1:4-6; Hag. 1:5; Joel 2:12; Ruth 1:21, 22; Jer. 18:11, 12.

It is instructive to observe the progress of the thoughts and feelings of “the man that hath seen affliction”. At first he can see only his misfortune. Then, choosing the wisest course, he calls upon God for deliverance. In doing so, and even before deliverance comes, there comes to him first the reawakening of faith. The sufferer is now able to see God’s mercies everywhere, even in the sufferings he has felt. The contemplation of God’s mercies assures him that his afflictions must be for a purpose, and that they must be temporary. Thus, they must not be complained of. So finally is the suffering servant led to reflection, self-examination, and — if necessary — repentance and rededication.

**VERSE 41:**

**“Let us lift up our hearts with our hands**

**unto God in the heavens”:** There must be no hypocrisy in prayer (v.48; Psa. 86:4; 1 Tim. 2:8; and Joel 2:12). The blood of Christ must be sprinkled upon our **hearts**, and our **consciences** must be washed and purified. External rites and practices are of no value unless they are accompanied by an internal change (Heb. 10:22). God — and Christ the righteous judge — can discern our true thoughts and intentions (Heb. 4:12, 13).

**VERSE 42:**

**“Thou hast not pardoned”:** Probably because their transgressions and rebellions have not ceased, and because they have been bitter when suffering chastise-

ment. But they will change their attitudes and their ways, and then God will pardon.

**VERSE 43:**

**“Thou hast covered. . .”:**

Compare the thought in 2:1 and the thought in the following verse.

**VERSE 44:**

**“Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud”:** The “cloud” is the sins of the people, causing God to hide His face from them (Isa. 59:2) — “I will not hear” (Zech. 7:13).

**VERSE 45:**

**“Thou hast made us as the offscouring and refuse in the midst of the people”:**

1. The Jews, a proverb and byword (Deut. 28:37);
2. The saints, of which Paul is an example: “as the filth of the world” (1 Cor. 4:13).

**VERSE 46:**

**“All our enemies have opened their mouths against us”:** See 2:16, 17 and 4:16,17.

**VERSE 47:**

**“Fear and a snare”:** The same combination appears in Jer. 48:43 and Isa. 24:17. “Panic and pit” (Hillere) suggests the alliteration of the original.

**“A snare”:** The wicked’s own snare (1:13; Prov. 1:16-18).

**“Desolation”:** Devastation, “to lay waste” — as in Isa. 37:26.

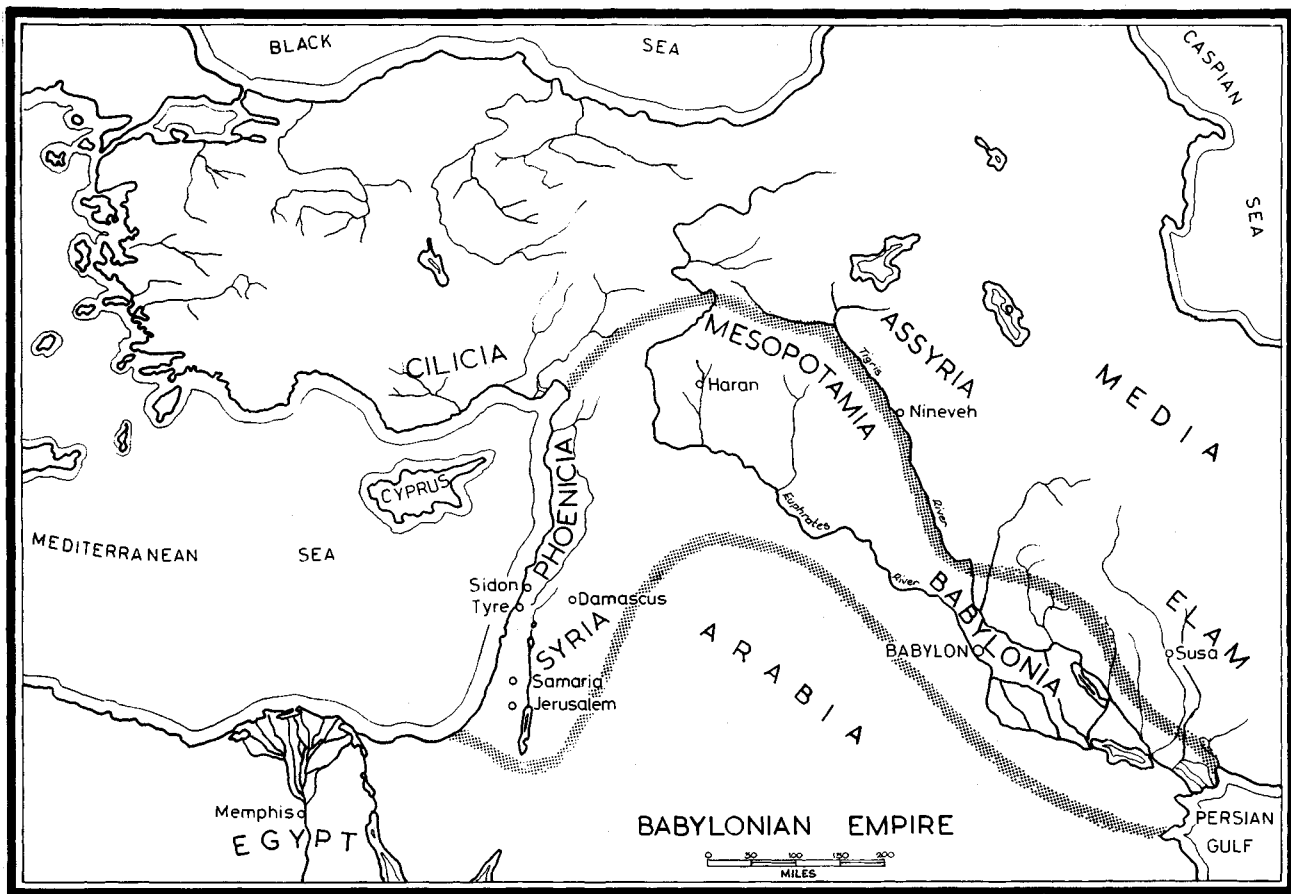
**Verses 48, 49:** Tears of humble, honest appeal: “Rend your hearts” (Joel 2:13). Compare Christ: “Strong crying and tears” (Heb. 5:7). See also Jer. 9:13 and Psa. 119:136.

**“Rivers of water”:** Compare 1:16; 2:18; Jer. 9:1; Psa. 137:1.

**“The daughter of my people”:** The seed of Abraham. See the words of Christ in Matt. 23:37-39.

**VERSE 49:**

**“Trickleth down”:** Better, “poureth down” (cp. 2:18).



**VERSE 50:**

**“Till the LORD look down,  
and behold from heaven”:** That is, until God hears the groaning of the prisoners (cp. v.34; Psa. 102:20). We should “give him no rest. . .” (Isa. 62:6, 7; Luke 18:1-8). Also, see Isa. 63:15; 64:1. Though God is high and exalted, yet He can have respect for those who are lowly (Psa. 113:4-6).

**VERSE 51:**

**“Mine eye affecteth mine heart”:** “Affect” is translated “abuse” in 1 Sam. 31:4 and “mock” in Num. 22:29. What he saw caused discomfort and grief to his heart.

**“All the daughters of my city”:** 1:4, 18; 2:10, 21.

**VERSE 52:**

**“Mine enemies chased me sore, like a bird, without a cause”:** Compare the symbolism in Prov. 1:17 and Psa. 11:1. Heedlessly, in sport, out of greed. But God has sent them (Jer. 16:16). Compare Jeremiah and Jesus: “They hate me without a cause” (Psa. 35:19; 69:4; John 15:25).

**VERSE 53:**

**“They have cut off my life in the dungeon,  
and cast a stone upon me”:** As done to:—

1. Jeremiah himself, because of his unpopular warnings (Jer. 37:16), and
2. Jesus (Matt. 27:66).

**VERSE 54:**

**“Waters flowed over my head”:**

1. For the Jews, dead among the nations, waters symbolize the powers that oppressed them (Isa. 8:7; 17:12; Rev. 16:12).
2. Jonah, praying to God from the fish’s belly, says, “The floods have compassed me” (Jonah 2:3). In this state, Jonah typifies the Lord Jesus, three days and nights in the grave (Matt. 12:40; 16:4).
3. For Christ and the saints, the “waters” also are “floods of ungodly men” (Psa. 18:4).

**“I am cut off”:** I am as good as dead (Psa. 88:5; Isa. 53:8).

**VERSE 55:**

**“I called upon Thy name, O LORD”:**

*"I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and He heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and Thou heardest my voice" (Jonah 2:2).*

In the same way, Christ knew his Father would not forsake him in the grave:

*"For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption" (Psa. 16:10).*

#### **VERSE 56:**

**"Thou hast heard my voice:**

**hide not Thine ear at my breathing, at my cry":** An implication throughout of a resurrection to life eternal, the only true hope.

**Verses 57-60:** This section is typical of the latter days when Gentile enemies enter Israel. Then will Yahweh fight for His city Jerusalem (Zech. 14:3). Israel will then mourn for Christ — whom they have slain (Zech. 12:10).

**"Fear not":** See Isa. 41:10, 14; 43:1, 2. Also see Rev. 1:17 and Dan. 10:12. This beautiful counsel is recalled in the words of Jesus (Mark 5:36) and Paul:

*"God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7).*

So much of our lives can be taken up with fears if we allow it. . . fears for our families, for our livelihoods, fears of violence, fears of disease, fears of death — sometimes, perhaps, nameless fears that paralyse action and stifle prayer. How often we need the reminder of these simple words: "Fear not". God is for us — so who can be against us?

*"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).*

#### **VERSE 59:**

**"Judge (or 'uphold' — NIV) Thou my cause":** God is a righteous and a fair judge, but we know also that He has promised to forgive us our sins and clothe us with His righteousness — if we have truly tried to serve Him with our hearts.

#### **VERSE 60:**

**"Thou hast seen all their vengeance**

**and all their imaginations against me":** Compare the Assyrian (Isa. 10:7), Joseph's brethren (Gen. 50:21), Jesus's enemies (Acts 2:23), and Russia (Ezek. 38:11, 12).

#### **VERSE 63:**

**"Behold their sitting down, and their rising up":** Hatred of God's people,



manifested in **all** their activities — which is the idiomatic sense of this phrase (Psa. 139:2; Isa. 37:28; Deut. 6:7).

**“I am their musick”**: I am the subject of their derisive, mocking songs (v. 14; Job 30:9; Psa. 69:12).

**Verses 64-66**: These verses do **not** indicate a vengeful, grudging attitude as proper in God’s servants. Rather, they merely illustrate an understanding and respect for God’s purpose as set forth in His word. Judgments are necessary upon the heathen; this is the only way they will be converted (Isa. 26:9). “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord” (Rom. 12:19; Deut. 32:35).

These verses therefore are simply another expression of the sentiments which Christ taught us to pray: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth. . .” (Matt. 6:10).

#### **VERSE 64:**

This verse is taken from Psa. 28:4, and is repeated by Paul against Alexander the coppersmith in 2 Tim. 4:14.

#### **VERSE 65:**

**“Give them sorrow of heart”**: Literally, “give them a covering”, or a “vail” — which can signify blindness (as Isa. 6:10; 2 Cor. 3:15), “strong delusion” (2 Thess. 2:11; Rom. 1:28), or drunkenness in battle against the Lord’s hosts (Ezek. 38:21).

#### **VERSE 66:**

**“Persecute and destroy them in anger**

**from under the heavens of the LORD”**: God’s dominion is the whole earth, i.e., all the land under the whole heaven (Dan. 7:27).

## CHAPTER 4

### VERSE 1:

**“How is the gold become dim!”:** Gold symbolizes faith — a *tried* faith in God, as gold that has passed through the fire and been purified (1 Pet. 1:7; Rev. 3:18). Thus, gold — or faith — is the basis of the kingdom of God, both in the past and in the future. In Jeremiah’s time, true faith had all but completely disappeared, and thus the kingdom was removed from the “daughter of Zion” (Ezek. 21:25-27). The gold in short, became “dim”.

**“How is the most fine gold changed!”:** This is a reference to the deeds of Solomon and Rehoboam (see 1 Kings 10:17; 14:26, 27).

**“The stones of the sanctuary”:** “The holy stones” (RSV), perhaps the gems of the breastplate (Exod. 28:17-21). This is figurative language; the literal gold and precious stones would never be discarded or ignored by the avaricious Babylonians. What *was* scattered about in the streets were the young children dying of hunger (see v.2 and 2:19)!

### VERSE 2:

**“How are they esteemed as earthen pitchers”:** Those who *might have been* precious stones and fine gold instead failed to please God, and like cheap pottery they were to be broken, as in Jer. 18:2-6; 19:11; and Isa. 30:14 (compare 2 Tim. 2:12).

### VERSE 3:

As in Isa. 1:3 and Jer. 8:7, the people of Israel are compared, and that unfavorably, to animals.

**“Sea monsters”:** By which the A.V. translators (so also those of the NEB) must have meant whales. But the Hebrew “tannin” may signify several different beasts — either of the water or the land. Since these particular “tannin” give suck to their young, some mammal must be intended here. Suggestions of various translators include “jackals” (RSV, NIV, and as in Isa. 13:21), “she-wolves” (Keil), and “wild dogs” (Roth.).

**“The daughter of my people is become cruel”:** The Jews were compelled by



God's mercy (Exod. 34:6, 7) to show mercy to others (Matt. 22:37), but they failed, becoming covetous and proud (as in 2 Tim. 3:2-4), "without natural affection" (Rom. 1:31).

**"Like the ostriches in the wilderness ('desert')":** The ostriches are cannibals, eating their young (cp. Job 39:13-18). See Lam. 2:20 and 4:10 for the depth of the cruelty of Israel.

Even contemptible beasts of prey suckle their young, but the mothers of Israel under the pressures of the siege and famine behaved like the ostriches, notoriously indifferent toward their offspring (see Deut. 58:53, 56, 57).

#### VERSE 4:

See 1:11 and 2:11, 12.

#### VERSE 5:

How fragile and unstable is "high society", then and now! How sad that so much time and thought and wealth is given over to the cultivation of "good taste" — dress, furnishings, art and food — while the "weightier matters" of truth, justice and mercy are ignored! But some day (and it will be soon) the tables will be turned!

**"They that did feed delicately":** "Those who feasted on dainties" (RSV). Isa. 3:16-26 and Amos 6:3-7 provide the details for the same general condemnation of Israel: their sumptuous mode of life.

**"Scarlet":** The garments of the wealthy (2 Sam. 1:24), connected with sin in Isa. 1:18.

**"Dunghills":** Better, "ash heaps" (RSV; NIV). Or "garbage" (Hillers), as though searching for food.

#### VERSE 6:

**"For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom":** Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed swiftly (Gen. 19:24), but the final pangs of Jerusalem were intense and drawn-out (vv.8-10). Their deeds were the same (Isa. 1:9, 10; Ezek. 16:46-50), but the responsibility of the Jews was far greater (Amos 3:2; Matt. 11:23, 24: see the introductory notes). The lesson is for us too (Heb. 2:3; Luke 12:47). We are just as responsible to God — perhaps more so — than were these Jews.

**"That was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands stayed on her":** Sodom was directly destroyed by God. But Jerusalem was left to human hands — a much worse fate, as witnessed by David's

choice of God's punishment over man's punishment (2 Sam. 24:14) and Christ's reference to Sodom's judgment (Matt. 10:15; 11:24).

Sodom was "overthrown as in a moment", yet Jude speaks of Sodom and Gomorrah "suffering the vengeance of **eternal** fire" (v.7). This apparent contradiction is easily explained in that the **effect** of the fire (i.e., absolute annihilation), but **not** the literal flames, was indeed eternal!

#### VERSE 7:

The **former** state of Israel. This refers to holiness and dedication — Israel's former state of mind toward God. Contrast this with v.8.

**"Her Nazarites"**: "Separated ones" (Num. 6). Compare Amos 2:11, 12 and Jer. 35 (the Rechabites). The entire nation had once been this way: reverent and healthy (cp. David in 1 Sam. 16:17, Daniel in Dan. 1:8-15, and Christ in Song 5:10).

**"Polishing"**: From a Hebrew word "gazar", meaning "to divide".

#### VERSE 8:

**"Their visage is blacker than a coal"**: Symbolic of distress and depression (Job 30:25-31), mourning and famine (Rev. 6:5, 6).

In Joel 2:6, to "gather blackness" means literally to "grow pale" (as in Nah. 2:10 also), in fear of coming judgments.

#### VERSE 9:

Hunger and starvation, being prolonged, were worse than immediate death.

#### VERSE 10:

The privations of the siege bring out the worst in men and women (cp. 2:20; Jer. 19:9; Lev. 26:29; Deut. 28:56; 2 Kings 6:26-29). The darkness of this scene accentuates the brightness of Zechariah's "Kingdom" promise, that the streets of this very city Jerusalem will one day be full of boys and girls at play (8:5).

**"Sodden"**: "Boiled" (RSV).

#### VERSE 11:

**"The LORD hath accomplished His fury;  
He hath poured out His fierce anger,  
and hath kindled a fire in Zion,  
and it hath devoured**

**the foundations thereof"**: Jerusalem was besieged approximately 18 months (2 Kings 25:1-3). A literal fire is mentioned in 2 Chron. 36:19, but fire is also a common symbol of any destruction (Jer. 21:14; Deut. 32:22).

**VERSE 12:**

**"The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world,  
would not have believed  
that the adversary and the enemy**

**should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem":** Wonderment, as in Deut. 29:24-28; Psa. 48:4-6; and Rev. 18:9, 10. The gates of Jerusalem had been saved by Hezekiah's **faith** (Isa. 36 and 37), but that faith had lasted only as long as that righteous king had lived. The once-fine gold was dim, the faith was gone (v.1). Judah trusted in idols, and thus relinquished her peculiarity and became as other nations, which God destroyed by Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:35). The elaborate fortifications which had been built by Uzziah, Hezekiah and Manasseh to protect Jerusalem were useless before the Babylonians.

**VERSE 13:**

**"The sins of her prophets,**

**and the iniquities of her priests":** The "prophets" and priests, supposedly the spiritual leaders of Israel, bore the greatest burden of guilt (Hos. 4:6-10; Isa. 9:14-16; they caused the people to err) because of their idolatry and injustice.

**"That have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her":** As they almost did to Jeremiah (Jer. 26:7, 23), and as they did in fact to the other prophets (2 Chron. 24:21; 2 Kings 21:16; Matt. 23:31, 37) and to Christ (Luke 23:22, 23).

**VERSE 14:**

**"They have wandered ('staggered') as blind men in the streets":** They were blind leaders of the blind (Matt. 15:14; 23:16), in such a pitiful condition that they did not even realize their "blindness" (cp. Rev. 3:17).

**"They have polluted themselves with blood":** They made no effort to cleanse their ways. They were ministers of God's sanctuary, which they thoughtlessly polluted (Zeph. 3:4), worshipping "other gods" (Jer. 19:4-6), and polluting at last all the land by their idolatry (Num. 35:33).

The only remedy was for God to require their blood, or deaths.

**VERSE 15:**

**"They cried unto them":** The "they" are the men of v.14, who could not so much as touch the garments of the prophets and priests. See R.S.V.

**"Depart ye . . . unclean . . . touch not":** An allusion to the leprous defilement of Lev. 13:45.

**"They shall no more sojourn there":** The type of Jew represented by the wicked priests and prophets became despised by his people and refused even by the

Gentiles among whom he fled. So again with Jewry's present religious leaders (Zech. 13:3-6).

**VERSE 16:**

**"The anger of the Lord hath divided them":** "Scattered" (RSV).

**"They respected not the persons of the priests":** The "they" here are the Babylonian invaders. Even the most barbarous of the Gentiles could see the hypocrisy of the Jewish priests (5:12).

**Verses 17-20:** This section describes the sins of the Common People. They were deceived by their leaders, condemned for false trust and for itching ears which wanted only to hear "smooth things" (Isa. 30:10).

**VERSE 17:**

**"As for us":** Jeremiah speaks for the commoners, the poor of Israel, those without a shepherd whose part Christ took.

**"In our watching we have watched":** Rotherham has, rather descriptively, "In our Watchtower have we watched". In this verse Jeremiah is recalling actual events during the siege.

**"A nation that could not save us":** Egypt (Isa. 36:6; Jer. 37:7), was neither willing nor able to help Israel when the crunch came — as, in the end, all Gentile nations will be unwilling or unable to help her.

**VERSE 18:**

**"They hunt our steps":** See 1:13 and 3:52.

**VERSE 19:**

**"Our persecutors are swifter**

**than the eagles of heaven":** Eagles are used as a symbol of Babylon in Jer. 4:13 and of Rome in Deut. 28:49.

**"They pursued us upon the mountains":** As they did Zedekiah (Jer. 39:4, 5; 52:8, 9).

**VERSE 20:**

**"The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD":** To whom was Jeremiah referring? Perhaps there are several answers:

1. Josiah, the last righteous king of Judah, and a type of Christ in many ways, but who had died 608 B.C. (2 Chron. 35:25).
2. Zedekiah, Judah's last king, and the center of their feeble hopes, although a

weak and wicked man — who was carried captive (2 Kings 25:4-7).

3. As typical of later days, Christ himself, the only true hope of Israel (Luke 24:21), who was slain (Luke 19:14), leading to the dispersion of 70 A.D.

**“Was taken in their pits”:** “Destruction” (Psa. 107:20):

1. The “pit” of nations — from 588 B.C. to the twentieth century, a political “burial”.
2. Death, which Christ suffered (Luke 24:25, 26) to deliver others from this same “pit” (Psa. 107:20).

**“Of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen”:**

1. The nation’s sad, unrealized hopes in the kingship of Zedekiah.
2. The true hope found in Christ, fulfilled in vv. 21, 22 — when Israel is cleansed (Zech. 13:1).

#### VERSE 21:

The “cup” is passed to “Edom”: compare the notes, 1:15, 21, 22.

**“Daughter of Edom”:** Which allied itself with Babylon against Judah (Obad. 11; Joel 3:19; Psa. 137:7).

“Edom” may symbolize “all nations” (as in Isa. 34, where the two are used interchangeably). “Edom”, like “Adam”, is related to the Hebrew words for “red” (the color of sin) and “flesh” (the seat of sin). Thus it is a fitting symbol for that last great fleshly sin-power to oppose Christ’s kingdom, the Russian “Reds” and their allies — who will be destroyed by the “saviours” upon the mountains of Israel (Obad. 21; cp. Isa. 63:1).

Of course, the ancient territory of Edom is currently occupied by the modern nations of Jordan and Saudi Arabia, nations that with their Arab allies may yet play a significant part in the developing affairs of the last days.

**“That dwellest in the land of Uz”:** “Uz”, the territory of righteous Job (Job 1:1), signifies “wisdom, advice, counsel”. The citizens were famed for their learning, and thus are typical of all Gentile enemies of Israel, who boast in the “wisdom of this world”, but are oblivious to the one “hope of Israel”.

**“The cup also shall pass through unto thee”:** Judgments, as in Psa. 11:6; 75:8; Jer. 49:12; Rev. 14:10; 16:19 — “rendered double” (Rev. 18:6). The exact sentiment was earlier expressed by Jeremiah 25:15.

**“Thou shalt be drunken, and shalt make thyself naked”:** The association of drunkenness and self-exposure occurs also in Gen. 9:21, 22 and Hab. 2:15, 16. In the spiritual sense, Israel had become “drunken” in arrogance and worldliness,



and she thereby uncovered the “nakedness” of her sin. Now she sees the same fate awaiting her neighbor Edom.

**VERSE 22:**

**“The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished”:** Compare Isa. 40:2: “Her warfare is accomplished . . . her iniquity is pardoned . . .” The Jews have received recompense enough for their sins, and they will now be healed in Christ’s kingdom (Zech. 1:13-16, 13:1; Rom. 11:23).

**“He will no more carry thee away into captivity”:** The Israelites, gathered back to the Holy Land (Mic. 2:12; Zeph. 3:19), become the first dominion (Mic. 4:6-8), sanctified unto God (Ezek. 37:26-28). See also Jer. 30:11; 31:10, 31-34; 33:15, 16; Zech. 8:4, 5.

**“He will discover thy sins”:** “He hath stripped the veil from off thy sins” (Roth).

## CHAPTER 5

Various Greek texts entitle this elegy “A Prayer”. Other manuscripts add “of Jeremiah”.

### VERSE 1:

**“Remember”:** Compare 1:20; 2:20; 3:19. The Lord will remember the sufferings of the Jews. He will also remember the sufferings of the saints — as He did those of Christ (cp. Psa. 89:50, 51).

As James says, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). The prayer of Hezekiah is a prime example (Isa. 37:14-20). We are commanded to pray, in the same way, for the peace of Jerusalem (Psa. 122:6).

**“Behold our reproach”:** Our shame, disgrace (RSV, NIV), and infamy. From a root word meaning “autumn” or “ripeness” — perhaps signifying here the **fulness** of iniquity, as the wicked finally reap what has been sown (v. 7, notes; Gal. 6:7). Jeremiah, true to his feeling for the “hope of Israel”, places himself among those who have sinned grievously. In a true spirit of brotherliness, he accepts partial responsibility for the sins of his countrymen.

### VERSE 2:

**“Our inheritance is turned to strangers”:** The inheritance is the promised land (Gen. 13:15; Lev. 26:5, 6), a land of milk and honey (Exod. 3:8; Lev. 20:24), given only temporarily and conditionally to the nation of Israel — if they followed God (Jer. 3:19).

But the same inheritance is promised eternally to us: still, “our inheritance” may be also “turned to strangers” if we are rejected at the judgment seat (Matt. 25:41).

### VERSE 3:

**“We are orphans and fatherless”:** God had been the Father to the Jews (Psa. 68:5; 103:13; Jer. 31:9, 10), but no longer.

**VERSE 4:**

The Jews, as a result of the captivity, are now so degraded that they must buy from usurping strangers what was once their own property.

**“We have drunken our water for money”:** Judah is forced to **buy** her water, because she had rejected the true and living “water” (Isa. 8:6; 55:1; John 4:10; 7:37); that is, she had rejected God, the fountain of living waters (Jer. 2:13, 18; 17:3).

**“For money”:** Contrast Isa. 55:1: “Without money”. This is the invitation of the gospel (Rev. 21:6; 22:1, 17), which the Jews had spurned.

**VERSE 5:**

**“Our necks are under persecution”:** The Jews, a stiff-necked people (2 Chron. 30:8; Isa. 48:4), were down trodden (Psa. 66:12; Isa. 51:23). Compare 1:14; 3:34; 4:19.

**VERSE 6:**

**“We have given the hand”:**

1. In submission, as in Jer. 50:15.
2. Or in begging: “We have extended the hand.” What a come-down from the days when “Thou shalt lend to others, but thou shalt not borrow” (Deut. 15:6)!
3. Or in agreement: “We have made a pact with. . .” (Hillers). Compare Ezek. 17:18 and thoughts in Jer. 2:18, 36 and Hosea 7:11; 12:1. Perhaps all three ideas may find a place in a comprehensive view of this verse, and of Israel’s many-sided relationship with her neighbors.

**“To the Egyptians”:** After Josiah’s death (circa 608 B.C.), Egypt deposed his son Jehoahaz, and crowned Jehoiakin (2 Chron. 36:3, 4).

**“To the Assyrians”:** Or to Babylon, which occupied their former lands (cp. Jer. 2:18). Also, a type of the “Assyrian” from the north in the last days, who will have consolidated all the old empires: Russia!

**VERSE 7:**

**“Our fathers have sinned, and are not”:** The nation has at last recognized the reason for God’s heavy hand upon them, the same hand which fell upon their fathers. Compare the words of Zechariah, spoken 70 years later:

*“Your fathers, where are they? . . . and they returned and said, Like as the LORD of Hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us” (Zech. 1:5, 6).*

**“We have borne their iniquities”:** The Jews, similarly, had in Christ’s time filled up the measure of their fathers’ iniquity (Matt. 23:32). Although it is a Scriptural principle that every man bears personal responsibility for his own deeds (Ezek. 18:20), it is still true that **national** sins are often unpunished for a time, and judgment is stored up until a later date, when it all falls at one time (2 Kings 24:21; Exod. 20:5; Jer. 32:18; Gen. 15:13-16). Such was the case with the kingdom of Judah.

#### VERSE 8:

**“Servants (‘slaves’) have ruled over us”:** This always happened when Israel forgot their one true Ruler — Yahweh. They did not heed Joshua’s command to drive out the Canaanites (Josh. 16:10), who remained in the land throughout the period of the judges, and mightily oppressed them.

One of the four things which the earth cannot “bear” is “a servant (slave) when he reigneth” (Prov. 30:21, 22) — a sad fact evidenced again in Israel’s history when those ruthless Roman “slaves”, the **Edomite** (Idumean) Herods, reigned!

This verse may also be a reference to the governors who evidently were soon to begin ruling in the land (Neh. 5:15).

#### VERSE 9:

**“We gat our bread with the peril of our lives**

**because of the sword of the wilderness”:** Contrast this with the fortunes of the Jews who spent 40 years in the wilderness, where they gathered bread each day; they found it as the dew upon the ground! They had “no lack”.

The famine of bread in Jeremiah’s time was only the type of the far worse famine — the famine of God’s word (Amos 8:11, 12). There were still prophets to speak to Israel, but most refused to hear — and thus brought the hardships of a “famine” upon themselves.

#### VERSE 10:

**“Our skin was black”:** Affliction, persecution, wandering (Song 1:5, 6; Psa. 119:83; Lam. 4:8), famine (Rev. 6:5, 6).

**“Like an oven”:** Egypt was symbolized by an iron furnace (Deut. 4:20). A similar thought is intended here: the fiery persecution of the Jews. Likewise, the Psalmist, in 119:83, pictures himself as a bottle, or a wineskin, blackened by the smoke.

#### VERSE 11:

**“They ravished the women in Zion,**

**and the maids in the cities of Judah”:** This was predicted in Deut. 28:30, 32 and Jer. 6:12. Israel’s latter-day enemies will also do this (cp. Zech. 14:2); but God

sees and remembers (v. 1), and such deeds will be punished (as in Isa. 13:16; Psa. 137:7-9).

**VERSE 12:**

**“Princes”:** The nation of Israel (which signifies “a prince with El”).

**“Princes are hanged up by their hand”:** Probably impaling after death. Thus, falling under a curse (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13).

**“The faces of elders were not honoured”:** See 4:16.

**VERSE 13:**

**“They took the young men to grind”:** A low menial task, usually assigned to female slaves (Exod. 11:5; Isa. 47:2) or other women (Matt. 24:41). The Philistines could think of no greater degradation with which to torment their blinded former nemesis-Samson (Judges 16:21).

**VERSE 14:**

**“The elders have ceased from the gate”:** Counsel (as Ruth 4:1), as well as social and commercial activity (as Job 29:7; Prov. 31:23), had ceased.

**VERSE 15:**

**“The city of confusion is broken down”** (Isa. 24:7-11). cp. Jer. 7:34 and Psa. 30:11.

**“Our dance is turned into mourning”:** Now was the “time to weep” (Eccl. 3:4), as Nehemiah was to mourn when he later saw the city lying waste (Neh. 2:2, 3).

But “joy cometh in the morning” (Psa. 30:5), and “they that sow in tears shall reap in joy” (Psa. 126:5, 6).

**VERSE 16:**

**“The crown”:** In two senses the “crown” had fallen:

1. The crown is a symbol of royalty, which had been overthrown (Jer. 13:18; Ezek. 21:26; Psa. 89:39; Hos. 3:4).
2. The crown symbolizes obedience to the Truth (Rev. 2:10; 3:11), and dedication and priesthood (Exod. 28:36-38).

**VERSE 17:**

See 1:22 and 2:11.



**VERSE 18:**

**“Because of the mountain of Zion”:** The centre of all true Jewish hopes (Isa. 2:2-4; 24:23; Psa. 133:3).

**“The foxes walk upon it”:** Compare Psa. 63:10. “Jackals” (RSV, NIV), unclean scavengers, representing the unclean nations who “walk upon” the hope of Israel.

**VERSE 19:**

**“Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever;**

**Thy throne from generation to generation”:** This is the one means by which the Jews’ sorrowful condition may be changed: God’s kingdom was once on earth (1 Chron. 28:5; 2 Chron. 13:8), and it will be re-established (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Acts 1:6; 14:16) as His throne (Jer. 3:17).

**VERSE 20:**

**“For ever”:** Literally, “for the age” (see, for example, Dr. Thomas’ exposition in *Eureka*, vol. 1, pp. 127-130). The age is evidently **this age**: the time of the Gentiles, the prophetic period now drawing to a close.

**VERSE 21:**

A quotation from Jer. 31:18.

**“Turn Thou us unto Thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned”:** True humility at last! A recognition that, as the punishments came from God, so forgiveness must come from **Him** as well, and repentance and renewal of purpose, by **His** grace and strength, will follow. It is vain to lament the past if our grief does not help us to make the future better, by seeking help from the one unfailing Source.

**“Renew our days as of old”:**

*“And He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years”* (Mal. 3:3, 4).

**VERSE 22:**

In the Hebrew manuscripts, verse 21 is usually repeated after verse 22 — so as to close the book on a more hopeful note (the same type of repetition is found in printed editions of some Hebrew Bibles at the end of Isaiah, Ecclesiastes, and Malachi). But a fuller understanding of verse 22 makes such an editorial addition superfluous.

**“But Thou hast utterly rejected us;**

**Thou art very wroth against us”:** This verse has been poorly translated. It

implies an utter, complete rejection of the Jews for all eternity — which is perhaps what orthodox translators would like — but which is certainly not in harmony with the rest of Scripture (see, for one example, 3:31-33, notes).

Some translators simply render this verse as a question. Note the RSV, the margin of the AV, and Keil. Rotherham translates it:

*“For though Thou hast not utterly rejected us,  
Thou art wroth with us exceedingly.”*

And Goodspeed renders it in this way:

*“If Thou wert to reject us completely,  
Thou wouldst be going too far in Thine anger  
against us.”*

God would not be going too far for just deserts, but too far according to His previous utterances. Such a proposal would be out of harmony with all the promises of God. Moses said that God would raise unto Israel a leader like unto him, whom they would hear.

They rejected this leader when he came the first time, but their hearts will be turned from stone to flesh when he returns in power and glory; when their pride and self-confidence has been abased before the latter-day enemy, and when God fights for them as in the day of battle. Then shall they open the gates of their hearts unto him:

*“Lift up your heads, O ye gates;  
even lift them up, ye everlasting doors;  
and the King of glory shall come in . . .  
The LORD of Hosts,  
He is the King of Glory” (Psa. 24:9-10).*

Then, shall they say:

*“BLESSED IS HE THAT COMETH IN THE NAME OF THE LORD.”*



*O! Mourn ye for Zion, her beauty is faded,  
Her joy is departed, her glory is fled:  
The light and the hope of her prospects is shaded:  
She wanders in darkness, her comforts are dead.*

*Oh! pray ye for Zion: though sad and forsaken,  
Though scorned and derided, despised and forlorn;  
The truth of Yahweh, our God, is unshaken,  
Her night shall but usher a glorious morn.*

*Oh! Labor for Zion, though now, in her blindness,  
She knows not her Saviour, Messiah, and Lord;  
Yet, guided by mercy, the life-tones of kindness  
Shall win her full ear to the voice of His word.*

*Oh! watch ye for Zion; the day-spring is breaking,  
Her night has been gloomy, but shortly will end:  
Her long-promised Shepherd, His lost sheep is seeking,  
The heart of the rebellious nation will bend.*

*Oh! hope ye for Zion; salvation is near,  
And brighter than morn's rosy glow shall be seen;  
The great Sun of Righteousness soon shall appear;  
The beam of His glory shall gladden the scene.*

*Rejoice ye for Zion! Yahweh has spoken;  
Jerusalem's outcasts shall yet be restored;  
The bonds of the fetter-bound slave shall be broken,  
And Judah set free at the word of the Lord.*

*The Book of  
Lamentations  
Other Perspectives*

## CHRIST IN THE LAMENTATIONS

In an introductory section we briefly dealt with Jeremiah as a type of Christ. Insofar as the Lamentations portray Jeremiah as a suffering servant, “called” to his mission even from his mother’s womb (Jer. 1:5, 9), a “lamb brought to the slaughter” (11:5, 9), who yet prays for his nation and weeps at their sorrows (9:1) . . . insofar as this, at least, Lamentations is also a prophecy of the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Also (and especially in the long poem — Lam. 3) the book does what the Psalms do: it presents a “biography” of Christ centred on his thoughts rather than his deeds.

In the panorama of Jeremiah’s poetic vision, certain verses stand out as “cameos”, or “vignettes”, of Christ. There is not so much a progressive development (indeed, Lamentations scarcely yields itself to this in **any** case) as there are delicate glimpses, here and there, of “the man who hath seen affliction” (Lam. 3:1). Any one such, by itself, may not seem significant; but set them beside one another as so many strokes on a canvas, and finally a poignant picture emerges.

**LAM. 1:12:** *“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?”*

Heedlessly the world passes by, on roads bound for nowhere. They pause only to jeer or to shrug. Almost never are any arrested and convicted by the spectacle of one whose sorrow exceeds the sorrow of all others. Has God indeed afflicted him? Is he suffering the wrath of God?

*“And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors (citing Isa. 53:12). And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the Temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross” (Mark 15:28-30).*

Is it nothing to us, to see such a man? Does the thought of his sufferings arrest us in our headlong flights through this “vanity fair”? Do we examine ourselves? Do we repent? Do we rededicate ourselves? Or do we instead take the bread and the wine with a practical air, a ritual completed, a minor appointment kept and then forgotten until next week? Is it **nothing** to us?

**1:16:** *“For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water.”*

(Compare 2:11, 18; 3:48). Here was a man who was never far from tears, a man

who went often to the “house of mourning”, and laid to heart what he learned there (Eccl. 7:2). He wept at the tomb of a friend (John 11:35). And he wept over a city grown hard and calloused, a city soon to echo with the cries, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” (Matt. 23:37). Can we “weep” with this man? Can we find the wisdom he found in sorrow? Can we, like him, submit our characters to the perfecting process of suffering (Heb. 5:7-9)? Can we, as he asked, take up our “crosses” and follow him? Let us spurn forever the false gaiety, and the foolish laughter that masks an empty heart. And let us learn more of this man of sorrow. If we do, then out of our sorrow there will come at last a blessed and lasting joy:

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy” (John 16:20).*

**1:17, 18:** *“His adversaries”* are *“round about him”* . . . and yet *“the LORD is righteous”*.

Jesus was not being punished for his own sins, but in his sufferings God was demonstrating that the “flesh of sin” deserves only death. In the death of His sinless Son, God was declaring Himself righteous (Rom. 3:25). And He was showing us what **we**, as sinners, deserve!

Consider the awesome character of this man. His adversaries gather round him, to laugh and mock. He is enclosed by darkness, almost as though forsaken by his Father. And yet this righteous man responds only with a profound and absolute faith. In the wide swirling ocean of dark temptation, the Saviour stands as a rock and a beacon. “Not my will but **Thine** be done.” “**Thou** art holy.” “**The Lord** is righteous.”

**1:21:** *“All mine enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that Thou hast done it: Thou wilt bring the day that Thou hast called, and they shall be like unto me.”*

It was starkly and tragically true. Forty years later, the hills surrounding Jerusalem were covered with Roman crosses, and on each one hung a Jew who had rejected his crucified Messiah!

**2:22:** *“Thou didst invite us to the day of an appointed feast my terrors on every side”* (RSV).

The “appointed feast” was no doubt the Passover. The time of the Passover came, and the guests arrived at the feast. But, in an enormous irony, the “guests” were “terrors on every side” — bulls and lions and fierce dogs (Psa. 22:12, 13, 16), snarling and tearing and devouring the Passover “lamb”! And Jesus was the “feast”, the “lamb”! “This bread is my body; this cup is my blood.” “For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.”

**3:1:** *"I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath."*

"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, **smitten** of God, and afflicted" (Isa. 53:4).

**3:5:** *"He hath. . . compassed me with gall and travail"* Psa. 69:21; Matt. 27:34.

**3:6:** *"He hath set me in dark places."*

And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour (Lk. 23:44).

**3:7:** *"He hath hedged me about". . . with thorns?*

Jesus was the "ram" caught in the thicket, the sacrifice provided by Yahweh (Gen. 22:13, 14), hedged about by a crown of thorns.

**3:8:** *"Also when I cry and shout, He shutteth out my prayer." "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"* (Psa. 22:1; Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34).

**3:9:** *"He hath enclosed my ways with hewn stone."*

*"And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock; and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre"* (Mark 15:46).

**3:12, 13:** *"He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow. He hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins."  
"They pierced my hands and my feet"* (Psa. 22:16).

**3:14:** *"I was a derision to all my people; and their song all the day."*

**3:27:** *"It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth."*

The yoke that Jesus bore from his youth was a lifetime of perfect obedience to the will of God. "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart" (Psa. 40:7, 8; Heb. 10:7-9). This is why Jesus could say that his yoke was easy, and his burden was light (Matt. 11:28, 29)! This is why he could offer it to us to share with him! Because it was a pure delight to do the Father's will! Is it so with us?

**3:28:** *"He sitteth alone and keepeth silence."*

The perfect man, Jesus Christ, walking not in the way of sinners (Psa. 1), who was **separate** from sinners, holy, harmless, and undefiled (Heb. 7:26, 27).

**3:29:** *"He putteth his mouth in the dust."*

Jesus was led away to Golgotha, bearing on his beaten and bloody shoulders the stake on which he as "serpent" would be lifted up (Num. 21:9; John 3:14; 12:32). He bore also, in his sorrow, the burden of our sins. He was exhausted,

more exhausted than words could tell, and he stumbled and fell. The rough, heavy wooden beam was too much for him. He lay there in the dust. And the words of the curse were emblazoned across the scene:

*"Thou art cursed. . . upon thy belly shalt thou go,  
and dust shalt thou eat. . ."* (Gen. 3:14).

**3:30:** *"He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled with reproach"*  
Compare Isa. 50:6; Matt. 5:39.

**3:31-33:** Here, "buried" in an obscure corner of the Old Testament, is God's reason for the atonement! He does not **willingly** afflict His children. Although He must cause grief — even to His beloved Son — there is a surpassing and eternal purpose. God causes grief **so that** He, the **Righteous One**, might then **righteously** have compassion on sinners! Who could ask for anything more? Praise be to God!

**3:40-42:** A righteous man is afflicted, chastened, smitten, and then crucified. Is it nothing to us? What is the result? What **should be** the result?

*"Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD. . .  
We have transgressed, and have rebelled."*

A righteous man is crucified, and sinners repent! A righteous man dies, and sinners are born again! "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

**3:52-57:** Here is death, and burial (v.53). But, as with Abel, the "blood" of the righteous calls out of the earth (vv.55, 56) — not this time for vengeance, but for redemption. Let us make that cry ours:

*"Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon Thee:  
Thou saidst, Fear not."*

## THE ECCLESIA IN THE LAMENTATIONS

In our previous section, we examined some of the verses that prophetically portray Christ in the Lamentations. We know that the sufferings of Christ are a pattern for us. We should never contemplate these sufferings dispassionately, but rather we should enter as intimately as possible into their spirit.

Paul spoke of himself as suffering on behalf of the brethren at Colosse — for which they rejoiced (Col. 1:24). He spoke also of both himself and the Colossians “filling up that which is behind (‘completing that which is lacking’ —RSV) of the afflictions of Christ . . . for his body’s sake, which is the ecclesia.” It seems an extraordinary, even an impossible idea — that Christ’s “perfect” sacrifice is still lacking something! Yet it is true. We, who constitute the “body” of Christ, must fill up the measure of the crucifixion of the flesh with its lusts and desires. We, the “body”, must finish what Christ the “head” began!

*“For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation (‘comfort’—RSV) also aboundeth by Christ . . . (and if) we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer. . . and our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation” (2 Cor. 1:5-7).*

We the apostles, says Paul, suffer because Christ our Lord and Master suffered. And we suffer because we know it is the only pathway to the comforts, the consolations, of his kingdom. And so, Paul continues, ‘we set you, the believers, a pattern for your own lives. We desire that you will follow in our steps — not because we enjoy seeing your afflictions — but rather because, for you as for us, the cross must precede the crown, and it is only through tribulation that any of us shall become as our Lord and enter his kingdom’.

Why else must we endure trials as followers of Christ?

*“For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Why, we felt we had received the sentence of death. . .”*

How could a merciful God, Who knows and even controls all our circumstances permit a man like Paul — or any other child of His — to fall into such distress?

*“ . . . But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead; He delivered us from so deadly a peril, and He will deliver us; on Him we have set our hope that He will deliver us again”* (2 Cor. 1:8-10, RSV).

Such a paradox, and yet it is true! Our weaknesses help us draw closer to an All-powerful God; our failures bind us more tightly to One who is all-victorious!

*“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong”* (2 Cor. 12:9, 10).

We can scarcely leave this example of Paul without considering one further passage:

*“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death”* (Phil. 3:7-10).

Saul the Pharisee was an accomplished man, “righteous”, ambitious, proud. He had intelligence, wealth, and an exalted position — all at a young age. The world was his! But all those things that were “gain” to him, all the “plusses” on the balance sheet of his life, all these he gladly threw over — so that he might follow Christ. For Paul the Apostle, there came to be only **one** ambition in life: **“to know Christ”**.

But surely (one may ask) this Paul, with 30-odd years “in the Truth”, already **knew** Christ? So why does he express his desire in such a way — “that I **may** know Christ”? It is because “knowing Christ” is a lifetime’s goal; there is no plateau where the traveller may safely stop and pitch his tent! To “know” Christ is to know the power of his resurrection, which is, as one brother expressed it, “the **moral** and **spiritual** implications of Christ’s death and resurrection”. To “know” Christ is to be made “conformable to his death”, being buried with him in baptism, and then ever after being dedicated to reproducing the life of Christ in one’s own life, in putting to death the lusts of the flesh. To “know” Christ is to be a partaker of his sufferings — **this** is true and Biblical “fellowship”; it is not easy, but it is the only worthwhile goal of all human existence: “to know Christ and the fellowship of his sufferings”.



Accepting this as our challenge in life, is there anything in the book of Lamentations that exhorts and encourages us along that way?

The Judah of Jeremiah's day was a nation that **appeared** to worship God. They pointed to their services in pride — their deeds of "righteousness" were numerous. But their **hearts** were not in that worship! It was all a vain show and a pretence!

*"Trust ye not in lying words, saying ye are the 'temple' of the LORD. . . Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; and come and stand before Me in this house, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by My Name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?" (Jer. 7:4, 8-11).*

They were thieves, because they stole service from God. They spent time and money on that which catered to their own lusts, and justified it all by standing periodically in the Temple and "singing" their own righteousness. What hypocrisy! What vanity! What blindness! But are their shortcomings so much greater than ours, that we can afford to feel confident with the comparison?

*"Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the LORD which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD" (Jer. 9:23, 24).*

Judah was materialistic, infatuated with "the world", ever seeking more and more money, more and more pleasure, more and more power — "children" in their "playpens", oblivious to the impending storm. The time of testing came for God's ecclesia, in the days of Jeremiah, and they failed.

We will fail also, when **our** time of testing comes, if we have not used these peaceful, prosperous times to study, to pray, to work for God, and to prepare ourselves for what is surely coming on the earth.

Can we see ourselves — the Ecclesia of God — in Lamentations?

1:2: *"She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks: Among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her: All her friends have dealt treacherously with her. They are become her enemies."*

Who are **our** "lovers" and "friends"? What do **we** trust in? Our bank accounts? Our homes? Our retirement plans? Our insurance policies? . . . Or **God**?

Israel trusted in Gentile alliances, and thought they would give her security. But

they deserted her. And when it was too late, she discovered **God** had deserted her too!

*“Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. . . Seek ye the kingdom of God. . . sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”* (Luke 12:15, 31, 33, 34).

Israel’s Gentile alliances had been her undoing. We must guard against similar alliances (2 Cor. 6:14-18). Perhaps the most insidious of such “unequal yokings” are those that masquerade as prudence and diligence in business, and “commendable” ambitions to “get ahead” in education and material things and work promotions. All of these can dull our spiritual sensibilities as surely and quickly as alien courtship and marriage, or the grosser forms of “worldliness” — because they too force us to become more a part of **this** world than we need be.

**2:10:** *“The elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground, and keep silence: they have cast up dust upon their heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth”.*

A sorrowful picture, of mourning and despondency. We are reminded of a recent circular letter, signed by a number of English brethren, lamenting the apathetic attitude of the brotherhood. This apathy is reflected, they say, in Bible reading decline, lack of campaign workers, lack of personal witnessing, ever-increasing materialism, declining contributions to the work of the Truth, and falling standards in dress and entertainment. What can be done? Is it already too late? When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth? A “storm” is coming, that will sweep away the “refuge of lies”, the “houses” built on the shifting sands of materialism, and the pseudo-disciples who cry, “Lord, Lord”.

**3:19-21:** *“Remembering mine affliction and my misery. . . my soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.”*

Perhaps our salvation—as a community—will only come through the afflictions of the last days, which are even now looming on the horizon. Trials and afflictions, financial set-backs, and even persecution might accomplish for us what peace and prosperity have not — that is, humble repentance and rededication and trust in God alone, before it is too late.

**3:22:** *“It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not.”*

The trials, when they come, will not be for our destruction, if we repent. The trials will serve to turn us back to God, as we in our weakness and ineptitude recognize the only Source of hope and trust.

His compassions then will be like the manna in the wilderness, “new **every morning**” (v.23). When our bank accounts and our careful plans for tomorrow have all failed, **then** we may really learn how to pray, “Give us **this** day our **daily** bread”, and how to say, “If the Lord will, we will do such-and-such.” When the very fabric of our society begins to crumble, and there is literally no place to hide, **then**—if not before — we may learn to say, with sincerity: “The LORD is **my** portion . . . therefore will I hope in **Him**” (v.24).

**3:27:** *“It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.”*

All these lessons must not be lost on the young, especially. When we are young, we can lay the solid foundations that will sustain us in the years ahead, when trials and hard times and illness will come (Eccl. 12:1). But if we squander the opportunities of our youth, we have no guarantees — there may be no second or third chances.

**3:31-33:** *“For the LORD will not cast off for ever: But though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.”*

We may be assured that God will cause us grief to chasten us—so that we might examine, and then amend, our ways. When that chastening comes, will we submit and learn thereby, or will we instead complain? “Wherefore doth a **living** man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?” (v.39).

We are **even now** “alive in Christ” (Eph. 2:13; Gal. 2:20). We are **even now** God’s children, and our future will be wonderful beyond imagining (1 John 3:1-3). How could **we**, of all people, ever complain, even in the midst of trials — which, as Paul says, are no more than light and momentary afflictions (2 Cor. 4:17)?

**5:1-4:** Is it far-fetched to suppose that, in His mercy, God might bring such reproaches on His Ecclesia before it is too late? Loss of homes and wealth, break-up of families, destitution. . . But the flesh’s failure can become the Spirit’s successes. And if we as God’s children need the lesson reinforced that we are still “strangers and pilgrims” on the earth, with no permanent dwelling-place, and no “fine prospects” in this wicked generation — then, most assuredly, God will see that it is done.

Jeremiah’s assistant, Baruch, provides an interesting example. Baruch was a faithful servant of God, but (like us?) he was not above a bit of petty grumbling. His complaint (and remember, **every** complaint is really a complaint against God!) went like this:

*“Woe is me now! For the LORD hath added grief to my sorrow;  
I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest”* (Jer. 45:3).

Baruch was very much like most of us. He wanted to have his cake, and eat it

too. He wanted to see God's purpose fulfilled in the earth, but he wanted a good measure of personal comfort in the meanwhile. In short, he wanted God **and** "mammon"!

God's answer to Baruch was blunt:

*"Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up" (v.4).*

Do you think, God said, that everything in this age should minister to **your** comfort? I have greater purposes to accomplish, and you are just one small piece of a large operation. Do you expect that I'm going to shake the foundations of your world, and topple all worldly institutions, while you escape unscathed?

*"And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not: for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the LORD: but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest" (v.5).*

So it will be for us, brothers and sisters. We live at the end of an age, on the brink of a volcano. A time of testing is coming, to prepare us for Christ's return, and to teach us that we can place no trust in anything around us, but only in God. Do we seek "great things" for ourselves in this crumbling world? **It is already too late.** Let us pray God to spare only our lives.

Do we seek comfort now? It is a delusion. Do we somehow have the idea we can recline in our easy chairs and stare at our wide-screen color televisions, until the limousine comes to take us away to the kingdom? It is not to be, and the sooner we are rid of such fantasies the better!

*"And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man"*  
(Luke 21:34-36).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Among numerous Bible commentaries and translations consulted, several provided some help, especially with alternative renderings, i.e.:—

- **Keil and Delitzsch** on Lamentations, by C. F. Keil
- **Anchor Bible** (Lamentations), by Delbert Hillers
- **“Speaker’s Commentary”** (Lamentations), by R. Payne Smith
- **Studies in the Book of Lamentations**, by Norman K. Gottwald
- **The Companion Bible**, by E. W. Bullinger
- **Revised Standard Version (RSV)**
- **New International Version (NIV)**
- **Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible (Roth.)**

In addition, we have consulted Christadelphian writings — both books and magazines — wherever they referred to the Lamentations (which was, unfortunately, not very often). We mention specifically those studies which contribute something to the book as a whole:

1. E. F. Higham, “The Lamentations of Jeremiah”, a series running in **The Berean Christadelphian** from September, 1953 (Vol. 41, no. 9, p. 270) through May, 1954 (Vol. 42, no. 5, p. 154).
2. John Lockyer, “The Book of Lamentations”, 4 articles in **The Christadelphian**, Vol. 115 (July through October, 1978).
3. Derek Brook, “The Lamentations of Jeremiah”, **The Testimony**, Vol. 32, no. 378 (June, 1962), p.202; no. 379 (July, 1962), p. 221.

The words of the hymns pertaining to the “Desolation of Israel” are taken from **The Christadelphian Hymn Book** of 1874.