

Lamentations 1

Read Lamentations 1:1-22. (As you do, take note of vv. 2, 9, 16, 17, and 21)

What is in common with all of these verses?

How important is “being comforted” to the well-being of the Christian?

One theme of the first lament is that there is no comfort and no one to comfort.

We can find comfort from two places: other people and from God. Both of these are removed from Jeremiah. This raises an important question, “How can one of God’s people have no comfort?”

Especially, when the prophet Isaiah had given the following message for God’s people during such a time as Jeremiah was enduring:

Isaiah 40:1-2 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare¹ is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

Often, there can be a disconnect between the truths promised to believers and their present experience of those truths. Isaiah’s words of comfort are true. And they are like a distant voice calling to every true believer. But it is also true that God has poured out anger upon his people for their rebellion. And extending comfort and anger at the same time upon the same people is not feasible. There will be a time to be comforted. But it is not at this very time.

God’s people have been rebellious, very rebellious. And God has after generations of bearing with their sin, finally brought destruction upon his own people, his own land, his own city, his own temple. And God seeks to instruct his children in the “end” of unrighteousness. Live in rebellion to me, your covenant Lord, and you will experience hopeless, comfortless, and eternal agony.

God is speaking to his covenant people:

“What you are experiencing now is as close to the eternal wrath of hell as one can experience in this life! I want its misery to sink deep into your soul. I want its misery to purify your heart. I want the experience of the withdrawal of my goodness to once again make you yearn for my presence.”

Of course, God’s purpose is to comfort his people. But it is impossible to comfort the heart that is consumed with rebellion. Only when that heart is humbled and broken can it then be comforted.

The message of Lamentations is not the final experience of God’s people. But it is the valley through which God is taking his people. Throughout history, God’s people individually have experienced the withdrawal of his presence and his just anger, but here in Lamentations we catch a glimpse of the horror of God abandoning his people corporately, as a whole body.

There have been portions of God’s visible church that have had the lamp of the Holy Spirit removed from them throughout history. But we in America have not yet experienced God’s widespread abandonment and judgment of the American church. There are still many Bible honoring congregations throughout our land. The threat of this coming season is real. Yet it is not now upon us. May Lamentations give us some insight into what it would feel like if God were to so righteously judge us.

And may it spur us on to a more determined devotion to our Lord and Savior.

Read the following sentence and reflect upon its reality.

How lonely sits the city
that was full of people!

Take a moment to imagine what the city must have looked like “full of people” and what looks like now:

The city is Jerusalem. She was the center of Jewish religious life. God’s holy temple rested there and thousands of people went up to Jerusalem several times a year to gather and worship. The city was full of beautiful things. The walls of the city were strong and majestic. The city was also booming with social life. Now it is empty and dead. Jerusalem, as a city, is lonely.

The author uses personification. The city is not a person. But throughout these laments she will be given feelings like a person. If you have ever walked through a portion of a town or city that is now largely abandoned, you may have felt this way. You can almost feel the “life” of a time that once existed but is now gone by.

I will try to remind you throughout that your images of the city and your images of the Church must be combined. There was no separation of Church and State. Jerusalem was a city. But she was also the Church.

So, take a moment and think about the gathering for worship and the excitement of a full sanctuary. Now, imagine walking into that same sanctuary and the carpet has been torn up and the walls damaged. The pulpit is gone and the banners are torn down. But mostly, imagine that there is no one who has come to worship. The sanctuary is empty.

I felt this feeling when I spent a summer in Turkey. I will give three images of which there were many. The first was the grandeur of the Hagia Sophia. The Hagia Sophia is this huge domed cathedral, built in 537 AD. When we were there, it was a museum. We were able to enter it and look around. Many of the mosaics had been torn off the walls or covered up with plaster. You could feel the sadness of the incredible building that once was the center of the worship of God’s people.

The second image was in Cappadocia. This is a desert region in the middle of Turkey south of Ankara. I visited a region of villages that were carved into the sides of hills. Homes and churches and businesses all existed, but now were largely in ruins. No one now lived there. And nearby was a city that was entirely under the ground – some six stories deep – where Christian communities would hide during seasons of raiding and persecution. I walked in these underground cities and saw the baptismal pools carved underground. My fellow Christians lived and worshipped here. Now it was abandoned.

The last image was of the amphitheater in Laodicea. In Laodicea existed the church that was lukewarm whom Jesus threatened to spit out of his mouth in the book of Revelation. To sit on the hillside where Laodicea once thrived and to only see a very few ruins! To imagine the place full of life, now only a distant memory. The loneliness could be felt. It was powerful.

The opening words of this lament give expression to the sadness and grief that must surely be felt by all who love God’s city, by all who love the Church, by all who love God’s rule on earth.

How like a widow has she become,
she who was great among the nations!
She who was a princess among the provinces
has become a slave.

I believe that the image of being a wife and being a princess should be intertwined. We usually think of a princess as one who is not yet married. But the images are loose. And by using “princess” we are taken to a magical world of royalty and beauty. It is not by accident that Disney has made a fortune on the dream of being a princess. This is one time where Disney may help us. Jerusalem was like a princess who was a jewel among the nations of the world.

To whom was Jerusalem joined in marriage? It was to the LORD. Jerusalem was the holy bride of God! But now she is a widow. God has divorced her. God has left her to her sins. And she has become like a widow – alone. But what is worse, she does not retain her status as queen. Instead, she has become a slave. A slave of whom? A slave of the nations who once admired her beauty and dignity. She has been reduced to servitude.

Her royalty was derived from her connection with the LORD of the Universe. Now that she is alone, she is reduced to the position of a slave.

Take the time to reflect upon what it would feel like to know for certain that God has abandoned you. What sort of personal despair would you feel? But do not stop there. What would you feel if you knew that God had abandoned the Church as a body. We love to recall the images of the Church as the Bride of Christ.

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Revelation 21:2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Take that lovely image. And imagine that same woman, that same Bride, plunged into the degrading position of being a slave, and without a husband to protect and care for her.

As Americans, we cherish freedom and independence. As Christians, that freedom is qualified. God is our Master. If we persist in throwing off his lordship over us and seek to be our own masters, instead of freedom and independence we will only find slavery. We will become slaves of our own sin. We will become slaves of the world. And we will become slaves of Satan himself.

It is good to remind ourselves of this fact when we feel the resistance within our own heart to his rule. The truth is this: We cannot have the perks of belonging to God while rejecting his lordship over us. O, because of the patience of our Lord Jesus, we may deceive ourselves into thinking we might have them both. But in the depths of our heart, we know this is not possible.

We are seeing in these laments the final fruit of refusing submission to God and his holy will.

The despair is not of isolated individuals. The despair belongs to all who call themselves Christians. It is a corporate despair of the entire Church.

Do you feel grief and sadness when a church closes its doors? God certainly continues to bless many congregations in our land. But do you feel the sadness when God removes his lampstand from a particular fellowship or from a denomination because of their apostasy? We do not connect our personal welfare with the welfare of the corporate church. In fact, most Christians would be content to

let the Corporate visible Church die. As long as they could maintain their personal fellowship with God. Let the Church fall, I will be fine.

There is truth in thinking that our personal relationship with God is not dependent upon the welfare of the visible Church. But there is also truth in thinking that they are connected. When the church was destroyed in Turkey, what effect did it have on the future generations of inhabitants in that land? When I spent the summer in Turkey, it was estimated that in a country of 50 million people, less than 500 Christians existed. Those are simply numbers. But they are staggering. Brothers and sisters, you do not want to see the demise of the Church in America. God will still preserve his remnant. But those who live during that time will certainly be able to relate the feelings of these laments.

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

The Church is weeping “bitterly”.

Take the time to identify with the bitterness felt. The Church was like a woman who had a good husband, but was not satisfied with him. She looked for happiness in other lovers. These men promised her more than her husband was currently giving. So, she went after them. And for a season, they seemed to deliver. But in the end, they abandoned her. They did not love her as her husband did. And now, she is without her husband and despised by her former lovers. Those false friends who promised so much are now her bitter enemies.

Little by little the Church compromises with the world. She lets go of her loyalty to the Scriptures. Adopting the thinking of the world seems somehow better. She likes the praise and esteem of the world when she begins to think like them. She is pulled away from the LORD by her desire for friendship with the world. Her thinking becomes more and more like that of the world. She would rather ignore the warnings of God’s displeasure than be considered foolish by the world.

But God’s patience does not last forever. God brings in the Babylonians to ransack his own people. It is brutal! Those who deceived God’s people are now showing their true colors.

And because God is the one behind the cruelty of the Babylonians, there is no one to comfort Jerusalem. And she is alone with her tears and bitterness.

We are not told whether her bitterness is directed towards God or somewhere else. But bitterness is present, for sure.

Consider the parable of the prodigal son. He had surely made a mess of his life. In the parable, he represents the Church of that day, or what would soon become of her should she reject her Lord and Savior – Jesus Christ.

As those reading the parable, we are to feel compassion for the prodigal. It is easy to disdain the one who has made a wreck of their life. “He made his bed, let him lie in it.” “He is only getting what he deserves.” These statements are true enough, but they do not reflect the humility that acknowledges that we are not all that different from the one who has wrecked his life.

If a person, or a church, remains defiant in their rebellion, it is hard to have compassion. But what if, like the prodigal, she is weeping in bitterness and regret? Do you walk by her in disdain? Or do you feel some compassion?

Lamentations is written to the Church, to those who belong to Jerusalem. As low as Jerusalem has fallen, there ought to be a yearning for a reversal of her fortunes. It is not right to disdain the Church, for in disdaining her, they are disdaining themselves – their own hope.

The Church in America is not doing well. There are still good churches. But there should be more. And they should be fuller. It saddens me to see good churches relatively empty. Unless God mercifully sends revival, and the Church earnestly seeks that revival in prayer, I fear we will see the Church in America become a wasteland. You cannot individually fix this. But it is surely right to grieve – to lament. We may not yet be abandoned into Exile. But if we think that it is impossible for God to bring upon the American Church what he brought upon Jerusalem, we are foolish.

Romans 11:17-20 ¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root¹ of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. ¹⁹ Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe.

Read Lamentations 1:3-6.

Redemption and healing can only come upon the heels of a true acknowledgment of the situation.

3 Judah has gone into exile
 because of affliction and hard servitude;
 she dwells now among the nations,
 but
 finds no resting place;
 her pursuers have all overtaken her
 in the midst of her distress.

Before looking at the meaning of the whole of verse 3, it is important to deal with the meaning of one preposition.

Judah has gone into exile “because of” affliction and hard servitude.

Because it seems obvious that exile implies affliction one can be confused by the translation “because of”.

The Hebrew preposition is very flexible in its meaning.

!mi (min) from, out of, more than.

The English translations are varied:

following affliction
under affliction,
After affliction

Each of these are possible. And all reflect some association between the affliction and the exile. Only the translation “because” creates a causal association. But even if we adopt the ESV (because) as most accurate, it seems that the relationship is one of association.

I will try to illustrate what I believe is the intended meaning: There could possibly be other reasons why God’s people would move out of the Promised Land. Abraham moved to Egypt because of a famine in Israel. So, it is possible to ask that question: Why are God’s people living in Babylon? The answer seems obvious, but the preposition “because” makes it absolutely clear. They are living in Babylonian exile because they have been pressed into it by the Babylonians. They did not go to Babylon because they wanted to. They were forced to go there as slaves of the Babylonians.

This would call to remembrance that it was because of slavery to the Egyptians that God first called his people out of Egypt under Moses. This would add to the hopelessness of the situation. After almost 1,000 years of history, we are no better now as a people than when we were languishing in Egypt.

Judah is the tribe of David, the tribe that hung on longer than the northern 10 tribes. But now, she too is in exile. Even the good churches no longer exist.

How is the life dwelling among the nations describe?

What does it mean to have no “rest”?

Contrast the thought of your enemies pursuing and overtaking you with the comforting thought of God’s covenant love pursuing after you.

CSB Psalm 23:6 Only goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in¹ the house of the LORD as long as I live.^{2a}

What is happening to Judah is the opposite of the Covenant Promises!

Instead of wide open spaces, God’s people are pressed into hard service and squeezed into misery in every direction.

Picture a defeated foe lying on the ground and the conqueror continuing to torture his defeated foe.

4 The roads to Zion mourn,
 for none come to the festival;

The roads to Zion mourn. This is personification. Why would the roads be mourning?

The roads leading into Jerusalem would be full of pilgrims entering the city during the Great Feasts to worship Yahweh. There is a whole section of the Psalms that were used by travelers as they were on the roads leading into the city. Now, the roads have no one on them, at least not any of God’s people.

all her gates are desolate;

It is not entirely clear if the gates are those of the city or those of the temple. But either way, they speak of no worshippers.

Maybe we need to combine the sadness of the first several weeks of the Pandemic where no one was attending Church services with the picture of playoff baseball with no fans in the stands. Of course baseball games do not matter like empty churches. But if you have ever parked several blocks from a baseball game and walked up to the gates you understand the electric atmosphere.

Picture the many times of fellowship and the laughing and fun that have been had at Faith Church. Now picture the doors hanging off the hinges and windows barred shut. This is a sad picture.

her priests groan;

Why, in particular, would the priests groan?

The temple worship was where they found their life purpose. The very reason for their existence was taken from them. If you read the book of Ezekiel, you will find that he was a priest. It was terrible for the priests to not have temple worship.

her virgins have been afflicted,

The image of virgins is more than young women. They typify those who are young and innocent. They are those who have not corrupted themselves with the world. It is metaphorical of those who would have wanted to come to worship. But now cannot. They have been dragged away.

and
she herself suffers bitterly.

The “she” in this verse is again Jerusalem. She is personified as a woman suffering bitterly. What if Church buildings could feel? What do those buildings feel that are lying empty, or used now for some other non-religious purpose?

The population in America continues to grow. And yet, many churches lie empty. Truly sad.

5 Her foes have become the head;

The head is that which rules and is given honor.
Jerusalem had been the head. Now her enemies rule over her.

her enemies prosper,
The promise of the Covenant is that God's own people would prosper:

Deuteronomy 29:9 Therefore keep the words of this covenant and do them, that you may prosper¹ in all that you do.

But instead of Israel prospering, Israel's enemies are prospering. Evil unbelievers are prospering while God's own people are languishing.

Why is this happening? Why are the enemies prospering?
Has God lost his strength?
Are these enemies stronger than Yahweh?

because the LORD has afflicted her
for the multitude of her transgressions;
her children have gone away,

captives before the foe.

The prosperity of unbelievers is a by-product of God's judgment upon his own people for their many sins.

This verse makes completely clear that Yahweh is the source of Israel's afflictions. They may have come at the hands of the Babylonians, but God stood behind Babylon.

Was God moved to inflict such devastation upon his people for only a few sins?

God in his holiness would be just to destroy us for one sin. Ananias and Saphira makes this point clear. They lied to the Holy Spirit and God strikes them down. Yet, God's typical response is to display much patience with his people over many years. The Fall of Jerusalem occurs after many generations of sin and wickedness. It was not after one, or a few, but lots and lots of "unrepented sins."

The suffering of Christians (individually or corporately) does not always have a moral cause. But to think that it may never have a moral cause is unbiblical. It is not right for us as fellow sinners to point fingers when other Christians suffer – like the friends of Job thinking that he had some hidden sin for which he was suffering. But the hard reality is that God does use suffering to discipline his people.

Our culture does not believe in God or his righteous discipline for moral evil. Rampant sexuality outside of the confines of a marriage – one man and one woman. Repeated acts of dishonesty and failure to keep one's word. Disrespect for legitimate human authorities. Stealing and coveting. Murdering of innocent children. None of these matter to our culture. There is no God to ever righteously discipline or condemn.

But, in the place of God's discipline comes their own. Those who continue to burn fossil fuels are being disciplined by Mother Earth in the form of increased hurricanes and more devastating wildfires. It makes me cringe.

6 From the daughter of Zion all her majesty has departed.
 Her princes have become like deer that find no pasture;
 they fled without strength before the pursuer.

The daughter of Zion refers to the present generation.

The majesty of Jerusalem has departed: This could refer to her splendor. Or it could be a reference to Yahweh himself. He has always been the true glory of Jerusalem. He is the glory of the Church. She does not possess her own innate glory. She derives it from Christ.

Ezekiel makes very clear that before the destruction of Jerusalem, Yahweh departed from her.

Now that God has departed, the human rulers have become cowards.
Deer have one great ability. They know how to run from danger. They never stand and fight.

Jerusalem's rulers are no longer standing to fight. They are running. Only they do not possess the strength needed to escape. They are overtaken by their pursuers.

I consider myself a ruler and a protector of God's Church. What will keep me from running like a deer?

1. Previous saints cared enough to give me the precious jewels of the Faith.
2. Current saints need these truths now more than ever. And I need them.
3. Future saints will need a biblical, Reformed Church to exist.

The majesty of the Church at large may be waning. But we are called to keep fighting. And we believe that as we fight for the Church, God will continue to supply strength to us. No one person can fix the Church. But we can continue to strive to do our duty. We can seek faithfulness to the One who has been faithful to us.

I do not want to be among the “princes” who have fled like deer. I know my own weaknesses and seasons where the forces of evil have threatened to overcome me. But as long as God gives strength, I will continue to fight.

Pray to God for your own resolve to fight against sin and to fight for the growth of the Church.

Read Lamentations 1:7.

- 7 Jerusalem remembers in the days of her affliction and wandering
all the precious things that were hers from days of old.

When her people fell into the hand of the foe,
and
there was none to help her,
her foes gloated over her;
they mocked at her downfall.

In the first half of verse 7, what makes Jerusalem's present time of affliction and wandering all the more terrible?

There is a decided difference in the depth of despair of the person who has fallen from a great height compared to the person who has only ever known misery.

What additional factor that makes the present suffering worse is that there are those who remember better days. Maybe those who are older can remember the reforms of Josiah. Or maybe it is the walls of the city remembering.

Read Lamentations 1:8-9a.

- 8 Jerusalem sinned grievously;

The English captures the meaning, but does not give the force of the Hebrew.

'ha'j.x'(aj.xeÛ
Chetey Chateah

A more literal translation might read: Jerusalem sinned sins.

The Hebrew root means to miss the mark.

Jerusalem did not miss the mark by a little bit. She missed it by a mile.

What was the result of Jerusalem's many sins?

therefore she became filthy;

This word for filthy is only used here in Scripture. But its connection is to the blood flow of menstruation. Not that the menstrual cycle is morally evil, but this is a metaphorical picture of the corruption of sin.

The terrible sins of Jerusalem have had the effect of corrupting her beauty. Rather than honor, she is now despised – and for good reason.

all who honored her despise her,
for they have seen her nakedness;
she herself groans and turns her face away.

To see her nakedness is more than simply seeing an unclothed body. There was a time when Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed. To see one's nakedness is to have the evil of their heart exposed:

ESV Isaiah 47:3 Your nakedness shall be uncovered, and your disgrace shall be seen. I will take vengeance, and I will spare no one.

Notice that it is not simply others who see Jerusalem poorly. (Her shame was public, visible for all to see: that is what it means that her uncleanness was in her skirts) She is also disgusted with herself. She groans and turns her face away.

How could this happen?

9 Her uncleanness was in her skirts;
she took no thought of her future;
therefore her fall is terrible;
she has no comforter.

She took no thought of her future.

Sin always demands that you think only of the present. Righteousness considers the end of one's actions. But Jerusalem was consumed with the life in the moment. And so she fell.

And she has no one to comfort her.

Read Lamentations 1:9b-15.

Jerusalem cannot even look at herself. And yet, to our astonishment, she wants Yahweh to look! But it is not the disgrace and the filthiness that she wants Him to behold. What does she call Yahweh to look at?

"O LORD,
behold my affliction,
for the enemy has triumphed!"

10 The enemy has stretched out his hands
over all her precious things;
for she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary,
those whom you forbade to enter your congregation.

11 All her people groan as they search for bread;
they trade their treasures for food to revive their strength.

"Look,
O LORD,

and
see,
for I am despised."

She wants God to take pity on her. She is not suffering unjustly. But she is suffering. And even though she is experiencing God's righteous anger, she continues to count upon his pity and compassion!

Covenant Lord, I am truly suffering. My enemy is standing in triumphant glee over me. He is mocking the precious things (a reference to the temple and its furniture.)

And the people of Jerusalem are famished and groaning in their hunger. Like Esau, they trade that which is eternally valuable to somehow satisfy their hunger.

In a way that I am not at liberty to describe, I have watched as someone I loved received harsh treatment that was deserved. My heart was in terrible torment as I was both in agreement and moved to pity.

I think this must have been what occurred in the heart of the father in the parable of the prodigal son. The son was experiencing great torment. He was not receiving anything that he did not deserve. And yet, the father was moved with pity and compassion.

I believe that the prayer for God to "look" is the first ray of faith in the book of Lamentations. Rather than running and hiding, there is the call for God to behold.

In contrast to asking God to behold him, she now talks to her enemies:

12 "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?
 Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow,

Jerusalem is despised. But she continues to believe that Yahweh will be moved by her pitiful state. In contrast, her enemies are "indifferent" to her suffering. And she challenges the indifference of the world. Instead of indifference, they should recognize that no other suffering is "like" her suffering. Her sorrow is unique. And she goes on to describe why:

which was brought upon me,
which the LORD inflicted
on the day of his fierce anger.

Jerusalem's sorrow was the result of Yahweh's fierce anger.
God was not being soft on his children.

13 "From on high he sent fire;
 into my bones he made it descend;

God had sent fire down upon Sodom and Gomorrah. But now his fire was not just sent upon Jerusalem, it was sent down into her bones. The burning went down deep. It was more than a flesh wound. God's anger is felt into the very depths of his being.

he spread a net for my feet;
he turned me back;

Jerusalem tried to run from the pain. But God caught her feet in the net and brought her back to endure the fullness of the pain he was inflicting.

he has left me stunned,
faint all the day long.

This outpouring of anger has left Jerusalem stunned and in an ongoing weakened condition. She has no strength to fight against the anguish within her.

14

"My transgressions were bound into a yoke;
by his hand they were fastened together;
they were set upon my neck;
he caused my strength to fail;
the Lord gave me into the hands of those whom I cannot withstand.

Instead of sin being merely something that we choose to do "or not do" at will. Sin has now taken hold of Jerusalem. Satan has taken dominion of the Church. She is powerless to oppose those who are committed to her destruction.

Yahweh is forever promised as the one who will strengthen his people in times of need. But now, God actually causes her strength to fail. Jerusalem is powerless now that God has abandoned her to her enemies.

If we will not take God's yoke upon us, then we will be bound to our sin. They will forever be a burden that will weigh us down and destroy our strength.

15

"The Lord rejected all my mighty men in my midst;
he summoned an assembly against me
to crush my young men;
the Lord has trodden as in a winepress the virgin daughter of Judah.

Jerusalem had been protected by "mighty men" in the past. But rather than having the wisdom to know that these mighty men were only the fruits of God's strength, Jerusalem thought that the strength was in the mighty men themselves. But when God took their strength, they were incapable to defend Jerusalem from the enemy.

The strength of Samson comes to mind. He had great strength to deliver God's people. But that strength was not really his own. It came from God alone.

The "virgin daughter of Judah" is likely a reference to Judah as the tribe that maintained purity after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom. She was the remnant that could not be destroyed. But God has now trodden her in the winepress of his wrath.

Read Lamentations 1:16-17.

16

"For these things I weep;
my eyes flow with tears;
for a comforter is far from me,
one to revive my spirit;
my children are desolate,
for the enemy has prevailed."

If anyone was thinking of telling the afflicted to "look on the bright side" or "It could be worse" or "Don't be so gloomy and pessimistic", their lack of compassion is anticipated: I have good reasons to weep.

A quick summary is given of the pain:

- A comforter is far from me – It is not just that she has no present comfort, but can see it coming. She knows that true comfort is far removed. I am not going to be revived anytime soon.
- My children are desolate (a state of bleak and dismal emptiness.)
- The enemy of Jerusalem has prevailed. He has won. I have lost.

17 Zion stretches out her hands,
but
there is none to comfort her;
the LORD has commanded against Jacob
that his neighbors should be his foes;
Jerusalem has become a filthy thing among them.

There is a switching from first to third person that occurs throughout the chapter. Jerusalem has express her comforter being far from her. Now that expression is confirmed: there really is none to comfort her.

Zion (Jerusalem) has stretched out her hands to the nations around her. But God has commanded that these surrounding nations should not give her any help. Neighbors would become foes. Instead of gaining a mutual benefit from surrounding neighbors, they now look on her as filthy. They want nothing to do with her.

Read Lamentations 1:18.

18 "The LORD is in the right,
for I have rebelled against his word;

Verse 18 is the definitive moment in chapter 1!

By stating "the LORD is in the right", she is making more than a statement of fact. It is a declaration of faith and an act of submission. The natural cry of an unbelieving heart is, "Why have you done this to me? What have I done to deserve this?" And the heart that continues to contend with God seeks to defy God and his judgments. When a child is disciplined correctly, the goal is for the child to know why he is being disciplined and to acknowledge that the discipline is appropriate. But an obstinate child will refuse to admit their parent is doing what is right.

The admission, "for I have rebelled against his word;" is wonderful as well. The human and sinful tendency is to justify one's actions – to soften or even deny the severity of the rebellion. Rarely is one willing to admit the core of the problem – rebellion exists within the heart. It is normal to try to explain to others why the behavior is not so bad after all. But Jerusalem has been brought to the place where rebellion is openly acknowledged.

And there is a clear acknowledgment that the rebellion has been against God's Word. The written Word of God is so stubborn and unbending. But that does not keep us from wanting to bend it. If we can bend the word, then our rebellion does not seem so obvious. But God's Word does not budge. And when we are under God's just anger, we must come to accept that his judgment is just. We are the ones who have rebelled.

Now, you might be tempted to think that this discipline of God is a permanent discipline – one that endures forever. But even at this point, that is not its intent. Lamentations is the expression of despair. It is deeper than any one person's despair. It is the despair of a whole people who are living under God's righteous anger. We are not at this point as a Church. But getting some sense of what it would be like is very helpful. And we can find true insight into the necessary change in heart attitude that is the

prerequisite of true transformation. Only when we take seriously the seeds of rebellion that exist within our own hearts will we quit making excuses and deal honestly with our sin.

Sometimes it feels like the cries of this book are too depressing to dwell upon. They surely are not to be our constant meditations. But we should know that this is the destination for all who bear God's name yet stubbornly persist in rebellion to his Word. God is gracious to put in his word a description of the despair of those who travel the path of rebellion.

Whether we are at rock bottom, or somewhere along that path, we must come to the place where we acknowledge our rebellion and the rightness of any anger that we feel from God.

Why do you think that she then calls upon the peoples to reconsider her suffering?

but
hear, all you peoples,
and
see my suffering;
my young women and my young men have gone into captivity.

Many reasons are possible. But one key reason is this: If God is willing to judge his own people with such terrible suffering, does this not speak to his great justice? God does not play favorites. He does not overlook unrepentant sin.

And if God is just to judge his own people, does it not also follow that he will most assuredly judge the nations who also continue in rebellion? Of course he will.

Read Lamentations 1:19.

19 "I called to my lovers,
 but
 they deceived me;
 my priests and elders perished in the city,
 while they sought food to revive their strength.

Those who led God's people astray are referred to as "lovers". They have encouraged false worship. They have made promises of peace and contentment and happiness. But their words were nothing more than lies.

Deception is so easy to recognize in others. But it is so powerful in our own eyes. But now that the suffering has come, it is as if a veil has been lifted. In the pit of despair Jerusalem now sees clearly. She feels shame over having been so fooled.

This deception has not been in a few individuals. It is pervasive of the whole people. Either the priests and elders were themselves caught up in the deception, or they have been removed forcefully. Either way, they are no longer present to guide the people into truth. Some have become absorbed in their own troubles. They do not have the strength to help others. They are dealing with their own trials.

Read Lamentations 1:20.

20 "Look,
 O LORD,
 for I am in distress;

my stomach churns;
my heart is wrung within me,
because I have been very rebellious.
In the street the sword bereaves;
in the house it is like death.

The cry of verse 11 is again repeated. "Look, O LORD, for I am in distress." When you are suffering as Jerusalem is, you do not simply cry a prayer once and forget it. The churning of the stomach is something most of us have experienced at one time or another. This is the constant turmoil of Jerusalem. Her heart is wrung within her. In public, or in private, there is no peace. And she has no one to blame but herself.

The cry is for relief. Even though the judgment is deserved, there is still the hope of relief. There is a belief that God will still be moved by the suffering itself of his own people.

Read Lamentations 1:21.

21 "They heard my groaning,
 yet
 there is no one to comfort me.
 All my enemies have heard of my trouble;
 they are glad that you have done it.

In contrast to the hope of God's compassion, Jerusalem expects no pity whatsoever from her enemies. The hear and see of the misery of God's people. They are only happy about it. There is no pity in their hearts. And they do not make the connection that what is happening to God's people will also be brought upon them. Their pride prevents them from seeing their own future.

You have brought the day you announced;
now let them be as I am.

It is from the place of acknowledging the justice of God's anger against us, that we can pray, "let them be as I am." God has announced from the beginning that rebellion cannot exist in his kingdom. It will most certainly be judged.

22 "Let all their evildoing come before you,
 and
 deal with them as you have dealt with me
 because of all my transgressions;
 for my groans are many,
 and
 my heart is faint."

"Let all their evildoing come before you" is a prayer for God, as Judge, to try their case as he has tried his own people.

1 Peter 4:17 For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

"deal with them as you have dealt with me" How has that been?
With absolute justice.

It is good to pause at the end of such a terrifying lament to consider how we must apply this lament who place our hope in Jesus Christ.

First, Jesus bears this suffering. Of course, he was not himself rebellious. But he bore our rebellion. And as he hung on the cross, he endured the suffering of God's just wrath. It is possible that Lamentations may give us the greatest insight into the internal suffering of Christ as he bore our sins. As we contemplate the intricacies of Jesus' sorrows, let us appreciate what he has done for us.

The final words of the chapter, "his groans were many and his heart was faint" surely were true of our Savior as he bore our sins.

As Christians, we should be thankful for double imputation. Our sins were imputed to Christ and his righteousness was imputed to us. This is the beauty of the doctrine of substitution. May we rejoice through a living faith in Jesus Christ.

Secondly, we should see in this lament what the death of rebellion looks like. Where does it begin. In salvation, we experience the death of the heart of rebellion. This does not mean that the remnants of our rebellious nature are completely eradicated. It does mean that this is the work of Jesus Christ. He hung on the cross for more than substitution. He also carries us to the cross with him that we might die with him. The fall of Jerusalem was a foreshadow of the death of God's people. God binds us all over to disobedience that he might have mercy upon us all.

All who are in Christ have been crucified with him. That means the death of our rebellion. This death is definitive when we are converted, yet it is still incomplete in this life. The death blow has been dealt. But the fight to put our rebellion to death remains life-long. For those who humbly submit under God's love and discipline, the completion of the task is sure. When we see him face to face, the last remnants of rebellion will fall away.

All who have this hope, continue to fight against sin. We continue to wrestle with the sinful desires within. We fight against lingering impatience. We fight against anger. We fight against slanderous thoughts. We fight against judgmentalism. We fight against our pride and jealousy and covetousness. We confess our sins to God. We even welcome his discipline knowing that we often need it.