

Title: **LAMENTATIONS**
 GOD’S STRANGE WORK EXPLAINED

Text: Lamentations 3:32

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Tape # X-71b

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Introduction:

When I was a nineteen year old boy the Lord graciously caused a faithful gospel preacher to cross my path who became a lifelong friend and a man of tremendous influence in my life. Bro. Harry Graham was already a fairly old man when I met him. He had pastored a small church in Ashboro, NC for most of his adult life. Shelby and I spent many evenings in his home, with his wife, Nola, in sweet fellowship. I was never in Bro. Graham’s company that I did not learn something that helped me. How much I learned from that faithful man! What a blessing he was, and continues to be, to my life.

One night, as I sat at his feet, on his hearth, just before leaving, Harry made this statement to me—“When God deals with a sinner in mercy, he takes him to hell first.”

That is a pretty good summary of the Book of Lamentations. In this little Book of masterful poetry, the Lord God explains to us, in a vivid picture why he sends judgment upon men, specifically why he afflicts his own elect (Lam. 3:31-33).

(Lam 3:31-33) "For the Lord will not cast off for ever: {32} But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. {33} For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men."

OVERVIEW

I will come back to these verses shortly; but first, let me give you an overview of Jeremiah’s Lamentations. As I just stated, this short Book of five chapters is a masterful piece of poetry. It is written almost entirely in an acrostic, like Psalm 119. Chapters 1,

2, and 4 each contain 22 verses. Each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, going through the entire alphabet. Chapter 3 contains 66 verses. In that chapter, every third verse begins with a letter from the Hebrew alphabet, going through the entire alphabet.

As the title (Lamentations) indicates, this is a book full of grief and sorrow, grief and sorrow caused by God's judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem. The judgment Jeremiah had faithfully warned the nation of had now come to pass. The Babylonians had invaded the land, destroyed Jerusalem, and carried Israel away into captivity.

There was only a small remnant left in the city of Jerusalem. Jeremiah was among that remnant. The Book opens with weeping prophet weeping over the city and people he dearly loved, for whom he had labored faithfully all his life, as he beheld the ruins of the city. The Book begins with a burst of anguish and sorrow.

(Lam 1:1-3) "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! {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. {3} Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude: she dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest: all her persecutors overtook her between the straits."

Jeremiah seems to be on one of the hills overlooking the city. There he sat down and wept, and lamented his lamentation over Jerusalem, mourning the fall of his country. The desolation of the city by the Babylonian army is described by Jeremiah in his Book of Lamentations with all the vividness of an eye-witness.

CHRIST

Six hundred years later we see that Prophet of whom all the prophets spoke, the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior, upon the slopes of the Mount of Olives. The sight of that proud, rebellious city, doomed by their own obstinate rebellion brought such a mighty rush of compassion to the soul of our Savior that he wept aloud. The Man of Sorrows cried...

(Mat 23:37-38) "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not! {38} Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."

It is obvious, then, at the outset, that the weeping prophet was a type of our weeping Savior. There are pictures of Christ scattered throughout these five chapters. Both Jeremiah in his sorrow and Jerusalem under the wrath of God portray our Redeemer.

(Lam 1:12) "*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."

(Lam 2:15-16) "All that pass by clap *their* hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, *saying*, *Is* this the city that *men* call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth? {16} All thine enemies have opened their mouth against thee: they hiss and gnash the teeth: they say, We have swallowed *her* up: certainly this *is* the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen *it*."

(Mat 27:39) "And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads."

(Lam 3:8) "Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer."

(Mat 27:46) "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

(Lam 3:14) "I was a derision to all my people; *and* their song all the day."

(Psa 69:12) "They that sit in the gate speak against me; and I *was* the song of the drunkards."

(Lam 3:15) "He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood."

(Lam 3:19) "Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall."

(Psa 69:21) "They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."

(Lam 3:30) "He giveth *his* cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach."

(Psa 69:20) "Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked *for some* to take pity, but *there was* none; and for comforters, but I found none."

These verses clearly speak of our Savior. The language reminds us of Isaiah's prophetic words.

(Isa 50:6) "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting."

This was fulfilled by the smiting of our Lord by the soldiers when he was brought before Pilate for judgment. So this little book of Lamentations captures the agony and sorrow that was so much a part of our Lord's ministry throughout his life, particularly when he was made to be sin for us and suffered all the horror of God's infinite wrath as our Substitute at Calvary. Our Redeemer earned the title—"A *man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*" (Is. 53:3).

SUBSTITUTION

If you read these chapters with care, you cannot avoid seeing that Jeremiah assumed the sins of his people as his own sins and spoke of God's judgment as that which had fallen upon him for sin. As it was with Jeremiah in the typical picture, it was with our Savior in reality. Our all-glorious Christ, as our sin-atonement Substitute, was made to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:21). He was cursed that we might be blessed (Gal. 3:13). He died for us, the Just for the unjust, that we might be made just and live forever.

DIVINE JUDGMENT

Throughout these five chapters, we are taught that judgment is the work of God, the righteous retribution of God upon men because of wilful rebellion and sin. And we are taught that all for whom the Lord God has reserved mercy are made to acknowledge that God's righteous judgments are just that—righteous and just.

Chapter 1—In the first part of chapter 1 Jeremiah speaks of Jerusalem as a woman bereft of her husband and children. In the second part Zion speaks, and bewails her misery, identifying himself with the people, their sins, and the judgment they had earned. She acknowledges that her punishment is from the Lord, and confesses "*The Lord is righteous; I have rebelled*" (1:18).

Chapter 2—In chapter 2 the prophet gives a remarkable description of the ruin of Jerusalem. No less than 48 times in these 22 verse, Jeremiah declares that all the things Judah suffered was God's work.

Chapter 3—In chapter 3 Jeremiah again ascribes the judgments that befell the city as the work of God. Twenty-two times he asserts that fact. Again, he makes the miseries of the people his own. Out of the midst of the misery he stays himself upon the Lord's faithfulness and his unfailing compassion, and asserts

unhesitatingly that, “*He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men*” (3:33).

Chapter 4—In the fourth chapter God’s fearful judgments are again described. “*The Lord hath accomplished his fury*” (4:11)

Chapter 5—In the fifth chapter it is not the prophet who speaks, not the substitute, but the people. Chapter five shows us what happens when the Lord God brings sinners to repentance. He brings his elect down to hell that he might cause them to cry to him for mercy, confessing their guilt and sin, before the holy, sovereign Lord God. That is what we see here.

(Lam 5:1) "Remember, O LORD, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach."

(Lam 5:15-17) "The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning. {16} The crown is fallen *from* our head: woe unto us, that we have sinned! {17} For this our heart is faint; for these *things* our eyes are dim."

(Lam 5:19) "Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation."

(Lam 5:21-22) "Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. {22} But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us."

THEW MESSAGE

Now, turn back to chapter three and let me show you the message of this Book. Remember, the judgments described here did not fall upon the Philistines, the Ammonites, or the Moabites. The people here severely afflicted, brought into terrible bondage, were the children of Israel, God’s covenant people. They were brought down that they might be brought up. They were abased that they might be exalted. They were laid low that they might be lifted up. In all things that physical nation, the physical seed of Abraham, was representative and typical of God’s elect, the spiritual seed of Abraham, the Israel of God.

• **Here is our hope** (3:21-25).

(Lam 3:21-25) "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. {22} *It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. {23} They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. {24} The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. {25} The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.*"

• **Here is God's counsel** (3:26-30).

(Lam 3:26-30) "*It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD. {27} It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. {28} He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. {29} He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope. {30} He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach.*"

• **Here is the explanation of God's strange work** (3:31-33).

Has the Lord God brought you down to hell? Has he sey his holy wrath in your heart? Has he made you to see that you are a child of wrath, deserving eternal damnation in hell? Has he convinced you that if you should right now fall into everlasting torment, that is exactly what you deserve? If so, listen carefully. This was written in the Book of God for you.

(Lam 3:31-33) "For the Lord will not cast off for ever: {32} But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. {33} For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men."

Salvation is obtained by simple, childlike faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But any faith that does not arise from a felt need of Christ and is not accompanied by a genuine conviction of sin is not true faith.

- . No Conviction – No conversion
- . No misery – No mercy
- . No grief – No grace

All who know the Lord God in the experience of his saving operations of grace freely acknowledge and frankly confess that God is strictly righteous in the exercise of his grace and truly gracious in his righteous judgments (Ps. 32:1-4; 51:1-5). These are the things that Jeremiah learned by deep, painful experience and recorded in this third chapter of Lamentations for our learning and comfort. **I want us to focus our attention on verse 32.** In this verse the Holy Spirit calls our attention to three things by the pen of his prophet.

- . God’s strange doing – “But though he cause grief.”
- . God’s sweet delight – “Yet will he have compassion.”
- . God’s sovereign design – “According to the multitude of his mercies.”

Proposition: Before God shows mercy he causes grief; and both works of grace, the grief that precedes it and the mercy that follows, are according to God’s sovereign, eternal purpose.

I. First, Jeremiah mentions **GOD’S STRANGE DOING** – “*But though he cause grief.*”

He acknowledged the fact that the Lord our God is the first cause of all things. He performs all things for his people. He works all things together for good to his elect. The doctrine of God’s universal providence is not some secret doctrine hidden in the obscure pages of one of the minor prophets. It is a doctrine taught and illustrated throughout the Bible. It is obvious in the history of every child of grace and the confession of every sinner who is taught of God.

A. When you read this third chapter of Lamentations, you understand that Jeremiah was a man who had experienced terrible grief in his soul; but, being a man of God-given faith, **he**

understood and acknowledged that the cause of all his grief was the Lord his God – “*Though he cause grief.*”

The prophet of God acknowledged God in all his ways, and owned him as the origin of all things. Twenty-two times, referring to his woes in verses 1-17, he said, “God did it!”

- When he was afflicted, he said it was by the rod of God’s wrath (v. 1).
- When his soul was brought into bondage, he said God had hedged him about and put a chain upon him (v. 7).
- When his soul was bought into bondage, he said God had hedged him about and put a chain upon him (v. 7).
- When he was overwhelmed with grief, he said, He “hath pulled me in pieces” (vv. 8-19).
- When he was, by these things brought to utter hopelessness in himself, he found hope in the Lord God (vv. 21-31).

Oh, blessed, blessed, blessed are those sinners who have been brought down to utter hopelessness in themselves that they might find hope in the Lord God!

a. **The basis of hope is the Lord God himself** (vv. 21-25).

(Lam 3:21-25) "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. {22} *It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. {23} They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. {24} The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. {25} The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.*"

- (1.) His abundant mercies!
- (2.) His unfailing compassions!
- (3.) His great faithfulness!
- (4.) His infinite fullness (v. 24).
- (5.) His saving goodness!

b. **The only thing an utterly helpless, hopeless sinner can do for God's salvation is wait** (v. 26).

c. **The place where a sinner ought to wait and must wait for God's salvation is in the dust of repentance before the throne of grace** (vv. 27-31). We must...

(Lam 3:27-31) *"It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. {28} He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. {29} He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope. {30} He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach. {31} For the Lord will not cast off for ever:"*

- (1.) Bear the yoke of guilt – Conviction (v. 27).
- (2.) Personally do business with the Almighty (v. 28).
- (3.) Make our headquarters in the dust (v. 29) – Repentance.
- (4.) Justify God in our own condemnation (v. 30).
- (5.) Look to God in Christ for mercy (v. 31) – The Publican!

B. This is what Jeremiah is teaching us. I cannot explain it to folks who have not experienced it. But **this is the experience of every heaven born soul.** There is a felt darkness and confusion in the soul when God convinces a sinner of his personal vileness and hell worthiness.

This is the grief Jeremiah is talking about. It is a spiritual grief caused in the soul by God.

1. **We recognize that every event of providence that brings grief is God's work.**

a. He brings the cloud over the earth as well as the sunshine (Gen. 9:14). If there were no clouds, you would never see a rainbow!

b. He makes peace and creates evil in the earth (Isa. 45:7).

2. **But the eye of faith also sees that spiritual grief and sorrow are the works of God's hands.** God's holy displeasure

with sin is seen everywhere. It must be experienced and acknowledged.

a. When Adam sinned in the garden, God made him feel his hot displeasure (Gen. 3:17-19).

b. When God gave his law at Sinai, the thunder and the darkness, and the trembling made known his displeasure with sin in a way that Israel felt it and heard it.

c. And when God comes to a sinner in saving operations of grace, the very first thing he does is make that sinner to know his displeasure. God will never give grace where he does not cause grief (John 16:8-12).

“When sin is not felt and hated, salvation will never be enjoyed. Where wrath has not been dreaded, love will not be experienced. The heart that is a stranger to misery must be a foreigner to mercy.” (Thomas Bradbury).

Do you remember what I told you Bro. Harry Graham taught me?—“When God deals with a sinner in mercy, he takes him to hell first.” (Harry Graham).

(John 16:8-11) "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: {9} Of sin, because they believe not on me; {10} Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; {11} Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged."

C. This is God's strange doing, his strange work. He causes grief so that he may bestow grace!

He created “*the waster to destroy*” (Isa. 54:16) all earthly, creature comfort, to bring us down to hell (Ps. 107), so that we might look to the crucified Christ and find all comfort for our souls in him alone.

. **God's dealings with Ephraim** (Hos. 5:14 – 6:3).

(Hosea 5:14-15) "For I *will be* unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, *even* I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue *him*. {15} I will go *and* return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early."

(Hosea 6:1-3) "Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. {2} After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. {3} Then shall we know, *if* we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter *and* former rain unto the earth."

. **Eliphaz to Job** (Job 5:17-18).

(Job 5:17-18) "Behold, happy *is* the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: {18} For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole."

It is my prayer that God will bring you to grieve over your sin. Those who are grieved by God, God alone can gladden. Do what it will, the world cannot comfort when God convicts. "*Blessed are they that mourn.*"

Illustration: My own experience.

II. That, I hope, will explain God's strange doing. But I must move on. *Secondly*, Jeremiah speaks of **GOD'S SWEET DELIGHT** – "*Yet, will he have compassion!*"

How sweet! How blessed! "*Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion!*" He who wounds us will heal us. God, who makes us to know and feel our ruin, will also make us to know his remedy for our ruin in Christ. "*He will have compassion!*"

A. What is compassion!

Compassion is co-passion. It is sympathy with the sufferings and sorrows of others. It is exhibited in making one's self a companion with sufferers and mourners.

1. **The unfailing compassions of the Triune God are made known to sinners in the gospel** (Eph. 1:3-14).

- a. The Father's election!
- b. The Son's redemption!
- c. The Spirit's call!

When hell gaped for me as its coveted prey, when Satan roared against my soul until my very heart quaked and trembled, God almighty, in sovereign grace interposed himself. He stepped in between my soul and hell. And, instead of pouring out upon me the wrath that I know I fully deserved, he showed me that he had spent his wrath against me upon his dear Son, and embraced me in the arms of his everlasting love! (Eph. 2:1-4).

2. **Nothing moves God to compassion but his own purpose of grace and the sovereign inclination of his own love.**

- . Ps. 86:15
- . Romans 9:11-18

B. The Lord God sends his messengers of compassion to sinners (2 Chron. 36:15).

(2 Chr 36:15) "And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place:"

- . His Son to redeem (1 John 4:10).
- . His servants to proclaim (Isa. 40:1-2).
- . His Spirit to convince (John 16:8).

C. Who can read the biographies of the earthly life of the incarnate God, and doubt his compassion toward sinful men?

- . The fainting souls (Matt. 9:35-36).
- . The hungry multitude (Matt. 15:32).

- . The blind eyes of poor men (Matt. 20:34).
 - . The cry of a poor leper (Mk. 1:40-41).
 - . The widow of Nain (Lk. 13:15).
 - . The Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30-35).
1. Our great God is full of compassion toward his sinning people (Ps. 78:38).
 2. Our great Savior is a compassionate High Priest (Heb. 5:2).
 3. The Holy Spirit of grace is a Spirit of compassion (Eph. 4:30 – “*Grieve*” requires compassion).

III. Thirdly, Jeremiah speaks of GOD’S SOVEREIGN DESIGN.

He causes grief that he might have compassion “*according to the multitude of his mercies.*” Did you ever notice how those words “*according to*” are used in the Scriptures to explain God’s works of grace for and in his people?

- . Predestination (Eph. 1:11).
- . Spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3-4).
- . Redemption and forgiveness (Eph. 1:6-7).
- . Supplied needs (Phil. 4:19).
- . Grace to help (Eph. 4:7).
- . Divine providence (Rom. 8:28).

Everything God does or allows to be done is by design. He says, “*My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure*” (Isa. 46:10). He purposes! He performs! He perfects! Hell itself and all its influences do no more than serve his purpose!

Great is the mystery, truly great
That hell’s designs should hell defeat.
But here eternal wisdom shines,
For Satan works what God designs!

That misery of sin that God brings by conviction is the forerunner of mercy, which God purposed to perform in

eternity. Felt misery for sins we have committed is a hopeful sign that the mercy is near which God predestinated!

Let me wrap this message up by telling you about God's mercy.

A. Lot called it magnified mercy (Gen. 19:19).

B. Nehemiah called it “Manifold mercies” (Neh. 9:27) - Mercy for sinners of every kind and clime.

B. Jeremiah here calls it multitudinous mercy. What a revenue of mercy there is in God! He is “rich in mercy” (Eph. 2:4). “He delighteth in mercy” (Mic. 7:18). God's multiplied mercies remove our multiplied miseries.

- . Eternal mercy!
- . Sure mercy!
- . Forgiving mercy (Ps. 51)!
- . Daily mercy!

Application: Isaiah 55:7

(Isa 55:7) "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."

Illustration: The Handkerchief