

Message #4

Lamentations 3:1-21

We begin this study by reading something that was written by J. Vernon McGee back in 1982. He wrote this in regard to Lamentations chapter 3. “Will God judge America? A great many people think not, but I think He will” (*Lamentations*, p. 431).

Many people present a concept of God that is one of total love and toleration. Many of God’s own people don’t think God would ever do anything hurtful or harmful to a nation or individual. Those who think this have probably never studied Lamentations and they have certainly never studied Lamentations 3. Self-judgment is critical to avoiding chastisement—I Cor. 11:31.

Notice carefully that there are 19 “He has” (God has) done it statements in the first 17 verses: Lamentations 3:2, 3, 4, 4, 5, 6, 7, 7, 9, 9, 11, 11, 12, 12, 13, 15, 15, 16, 16. You cannot miss this. These are things done by God to His own people.

When one considers the doctrine of the Sovereignty of God, based on what Scripture reveals and not some sentimental or emotional fuzzy feeling, one cannot help but conclude that there are things happening in this country that are coming from the sovereign hand of a sovereign God and those things are not good.

For example, the Corona virus, which has killed many people, is a calamity that has been authorized and permitted by God. His Sovereignty demands this. There is no point denying this because this is the reality of what Scripture reveals. Now the Corona virus is a very sad thing. It has devastated families and affected the world. It is a pestilence that the world can’t seem to shake.

In all of the press conferences about this, I have yet to see one doctor or politician say, we need to cry out to God for His forgiveness and grace because these kind of calamities typically are judgments of God against a nation and, in this case, against the world.

Now one of the problems with this is that most people don’t see God in negative events. Most people doubt God because bad things happen. In fact, some people doubt God’s existence because there are bad things that happen.

In all reality, He is sovereign over the bad things. What these things should do is prompt people to get right with God, but they don’t. They don’t in our day and they did not in Jeremiah’s day.

Lamentations is a book that teaches how God’s people should respond when they realize they are being hit with negatives because of their own choices. What we see here is this:

PERSONALLY EXPERIENCING THE CHASTISEMENT–CALAMITIES SENT BY GOD SHOULD CAUSE ONE TO BOW BEFORE GOD AND SEEK GOD’S GRACE AND MERCY AND FORGIVENESS.

It is mind-boggling to see some people who refuse to cry out to God even if they are on the verge of life-threatening disasters. Some of God's people, for example, go into a surgery or are hit with some major physical matter and they do not cry out to the Lord. O they may want to be put on a prayer chain and have someone else pray, but they don't do it themselves.

So far in Lamentations in chapters 1 and 2, each verse begins with a successive letter of the 22 letters of the Hebrew Alphabet. But in chapter 3, that changes.

Chapter 3 contains 66 verses. There are three verses for each letter of the Hebrew Alphabet:

Aleph - 1-3
Bet - 4-6
Gimmel - 7-9
Dalet - 10-12
He - 13-15
Waw/Vav - 16-18
Zayin - 19-21
Chet - 22-24
Tet - 25-27
Yod - 28-30
Kaf - 31-33
Lamed - 34-36
Mem - 37-39
Nun - 40-42
Samech - 43-45
Pey - 46-48
Ayin - 49-51
Tsade - 52-54
Qof - 55-57
Resh - 58-60
Sin/Shin - 61-63
Tau - 64-66

Two observations:

- 1) There are 66 verses in this chapter and 66 books of the Bible which indicates these principles are applicable from Genesis to Revelation.
- 2) Israel will read this book in Tribulation.

In this study we will analyze the first 21 verses, which cover the letters Aleph to Zayin. What is described here in these verses are the personal things Jeremiah saw and experienced as he watched what God was doing in punishing His own people.

Verse 1 (Aleph) makes it clear that Jeremiah understood all the things he experienced as coming from the hand of an angry God who was disciplining His people.

He does not try to color this or dodge this. He knew that he was seeing affliction that was sent from the hand of God. He was fully aware, as F.B. Huey said, in his commentary that God's people had experienced an "alienation from God's favor" (*Jeremiah, Lamentations*, p. 470).

If you ever suspect you have done something to get you out of favor with God, then immediately resolve it with the Lord because that can lead to major negative consequences.

What we see here is this:

WHEN GOD IS CHASTISING HIS OWN PEOPLE, THEY WILL SEE IT, KNOW IT AND EXPERIENCE IT AND IN THE MIDST OF IT THEY NEED TO CRY OUT TO GOD FOR HIS GRACE, MERCY AND FORGIVENESS.

This is fascinating. Jeremiah does not challenge the whole world to cry out to God; he challenges himself and the people of God to cry out to God.

Let's put this in a modern day illustration. Many are observing that the United States is suffering a judgment of God. Some ministers are saying as a nation we need to turn back to God. We would not disagree with that.

But Jeremiah would say I am not talking to the nation; I am talking to God's people. They need to turn back to God. The judgment against the nation is not because of heathen leadership; it is because His people have wandered away from Him. Judgment begins with the family of God and not with the lost world.

There are at least 18 negative things that Jeremiah was experiencing as a result of God's anger against His own people. Israel was experiencing this and so was Jeremiah:

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE #1 – Jeremiah was living life in darkness. **3:2 (Alef)**

Verse 2 makes it clear that God had driven away His people from His blessings and direction. He literally was responsible for making their lives one of doom and gloom.

When God's people get out of fellowship with God, the Scriptures will not light up their souls. Things will be dark and gloomy because God is causing it. Only one way out of this and that is to go to God and do honest business with Him. Admit the sin and cry out for His grace.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE #2 – Jeremiah believed God was against him all the time.
3:3 (Alef)

There was absolutely no relief or let up in God's relentless anger. Jeremiah sensed this. He sensed that God was not his ally. When God reaches this point of anger, life will not be good.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE #3 – Jeremiah's body lacked health. **3:4 (Bet)**

Jeremiah believed that God caused him to be wasting away. His physical affliction and infirmity broke Jeremiah. God can and will zap the physical strength out of a person. Undoubtedly there are weaknesses and sicknesses in the lives of some of God's people because they will not deal honestly with sin before Him.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE #4 – Jeremiah was surrounded with bitter things and hardships. **3:5 (Bet)**

The yoke of a relationship with God is easy and light unless one gets into sin, then life becomes a heavy burden. Jeremiah felt abandoned and alienated from God. He was surrounded by trouble and trials with no relief.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE #5 – Jeremiah was surrounded by darkness and death. **3:6 (Bet)**

Life was negative, gloomy and dark. When a believer sins against God, there will be a darkness and gloominess and a deadness to life until it is resolved. In fact, as **verse 6** says, it is God who is causing the life to be like that.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE #6 – Jeremiah was boxed in with no way out. **3:7 (Gimel)**

Jeremiah felt like God had built a wall around him and chained him down in affliction. There was no chance of escape. There was nothing Jeremiah could do to get out of this except go the God. You cannot get out of this by going to a counselor, or by medication, or by relocation.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE #7 – Jeremiah's prayers were not answered. **3:8 (Gimel)**

When things reach a point when God stops answering the prayers of His own people, it is scary and dark. One of the real indications that we are not right in our relationship with God is that He stops answering our prayers.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE #8 – Jeremiah could not walk in a straight direction. **3:9 (Gimel)**

Whatever direction Jeremiah moved, he was blocked from experiencing the blessings of God. He didn't even know where he was going or the direction he was taking. It was as if he were walking through life on a crooked path.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE #9 – Jeremiah saw God as a threatening bear and lion. **3:10 (Daleth)**

God seemed to be a bear or lion ready to pounce and attack him. He did not see God as his protector, but as a predator.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE #10 – Jeremiah had been torn to pieces. **3:11 (Daleth)**

God was not blessing Jeremiah, He was tearing him. Jeremiah viewed God as coming against him to tear him to pieces. God was not his friend, but an angry foe.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE #11 – Jeremiah was the target of God's anger. **3:12 (Daleth)**

Jeremiah saw himself as a target for God's anger. God's people would be very wise to fear the Lord. When we fail and sin, we would be very wise to be afraid of what God might do if we do not face it.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE #12 – Jeremiah was hit and hurting deep in his inward parts.
3:13 (He)

God was not allowing Jeremiah to have peace in his soul. There was nothing but turmoil.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE #13 – Jeremiah was mocked by all people. **3:14 (He)**

Now we would naturally think that one of the things Israel would have thought about would be the fact that if we don't own our sin and confess it and turn from it, God will judge us and part of that judgment will mean we will end up being a joke to this world. They will see that God took us out of our land and destroyed our city and Temple and they will get a good laugh at this.

Jeremiah found himself the object of mockery and ridicule. So not only was he experiencing great hardships, but the people were laughing at him.

One of the things that should prompt us to deal immediately with sin is so that we do not end up a mockery and a joke in this world. If we don't deal with sin, God can and will cause us to be people that others talk about and laugh.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE #14 – Jeremiah's life was bitter filled with bitter things.
3:15 (He)

God can fill a life with good things and sweet things, and He can also fill a life with bad things and bitter things. The determining factor is facing sin and turning from it.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE #15 – Jeremiah lived in constant fear. **3:16 (waw)**

When we get out of fellowship with God, because we have failed and sinned, we live in constant, cowering fear of what God might do. We will be humiliated and scared.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE #16 – Jeremiah had no peace and no happiness. **3:17 (waw)**

Don't miss this; God is the One doing this to His own people. He is taking away their peace and happiness.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE #17 – Jeremiah had no strength and no hope. **3:18 (waw)**

Refuse to face sin as a believer and you will lose your strength and your hope.

POTENTIAL EXPERIENCE #18 – Jeremiah has memories of hopeful possibility. **3:19-21 (Zayin)**

What God was doing to His own people left Jeremiah depressed. But there was a memory he had that gave him some hope.

That memory was of a compassionate God who would forgive His people if they were to acknowledge their sin and turn from it.

PARTING THOUGHTS:

- 1. God is a patient God who gives His people plenty of time to face, confess and turn from their sin, but if they refuse to do that He can and will pull the plug on His blessings.**
- 2. God can and will cause negative things to hit His own people and they will not be able to get out of it.**
- 3. God wants His people coming to Him and admitting the truth so they can experience His grace.**