

## LAMENTATIONS I

## THE SOLITARY CITY

The Book of Lamentations was composed by the prophet Jeremiah after the city of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. It consists of five separate dirges, similar to David's song of sorrow over Jonathan and Saul; but Jeremiah's lamentations are not over particular persons, but over his country and its chief city. They were composed for a time which was to be spent in penitence and sorrow. Jerusalem was in ashes; the majority of her inhabitants were captives in a foreign country; and a long, deep wail of national distress had been heard throughout the land. Therefore, the prophet desired to lead the sorrowing ones to a proper knowledge of their guilt, and then to confidence and hope in Him Who alone could raise them from their fall. In the most touching words, he describes the afflictions of his people; and then he pours forth the pleadings of his soul for the Lord's mercy and compassion to be poured upon them.

In that same fixed attitude of grief which Michaelangelo has immortalized in his famous sculpture of the Weeping Prophet, we may well suppose that he mourned the fall of his country. In this first dirge of lamentation, the prophet's words are portrayed as being spoken by the daughter of Zion, who bewails the destruction of the city, the nation, and the Temple. The song is divided into two equal parts – the first of which (verses 1-11) describes the wretched condition of the once-magnificent city. The daughter of Zion describes herself as sitting down like a solitary widow. She pines in sadness because her children have forsaken her, and her friends have become her foes. Her inhabitants and those of the whole country have gone into captivity, but there they find no rest. And now the highways leading to Zion are full of mourning. All her gates are desolate, for no one goes up to her solemn feasts. Her priests, therefore, sigh; and her young maidens, who formerly sang and danced at her national festivals, are now full of bitter grief and sorrow. The sorrowful daughter of Zion now thinks of former times, but the remembrance of them only increases her distress. And the bitterest ingredient in her cup of suffering is that all this has come upon her because of her own sins; she has been brought low because of her own transgressions. Such is the strain of the first part of this song of sorrow, and we have no sympathy with the person who remains unmoved by such mournful calamities. Jeremiah sets us a good example of the pity and sympathy that we ought to feel for the woes of others; he teaches us to weep with those who weep. Nor are opportunities for showing such emotions scarce, even in our own times! Cries of sorrow and distress still rise from the lips and hearts of thousands of men, women, and children of the human race.

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Jeremiah laments the miserable condition of the city of Jerusalem – verses 1-11
- ❖ Jerusalem is represented as a captive woman, lamenting and seeking the mercy of God – verses 12-22



The sorrowful situation has now been stated; and now, in verses 12-22, the lamentation begins. Jerusalem, personified as a captive woman, still speaks. She calls aloud, and says, "Do ye not observe what has befallen me?" "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" she asks (verse 12). "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." This is a summons to all who are passing by to look upon Zion's grievous sorrow and consider it. She rightfully pleads for a share in the pity and compassion of all who beheld her in her sorrows.

But even in the days of the Old Testament, there was a great correspondence between the long-awaited but as-yet-unknown Messiah and the patriarchs, prophets, and people of God. Their sufferings were (as one writer has put it) "forerunning figures of the great sufferings of the Son of God." Doubtless, Zion's sorrows exceeded all other sorrows, but they were only a prophetic picture of those griefs which were fully experienced by Christ when He hung upon the cross of shame!

Let us take a few moments to pursue this thought a little further. If there is anything in all the world that ought to interest a person, it is the death of Christ! Yet we find well-educated persons spending year after year in sorting out butterflies, beetles, and gnats; or in listing out the various orders of seashells; or in digging into the earth and seeking to discover what strange creatures once walked the land or swam in the vast seas. We find people occupied with things of no practical importance, and yet the story of God Himself is thought to be too small a trifle for "intelligent minds" to dwell upon. O how sad it is that even the sufferings of Christ do not attract the attention of people; for generally, if we hear any sad story of the misfortunes of our fellow creatures, we are greatly interested. Why does not the whole world stretch out her hands and say, "Come and tell us of the God that loved us, and came down to our low estate, and suffered for us and for our salvation!" Christ's death and sufferings ought to interest us, even if they do nothing more. But should it not be much more than merely interesting? Should it not excite our admiration? You cannot read of a man sacrificing himself for the good of another human being without immediately feeling that you wish you had known that fine fellow. And you instinctively feel that you would do anything in the world to serve him. Is it nothing to you that Jesus should die for sinful humans? O why is it that such a Savior – so lovely and so admirable – is forgotten by the majority of mankind, and is nothing to them?

*Lord, we give thanks that as we study the lamentations of Your people, we may remember that Jesus arises to have mercy upon His Church, and that He gives comfort to all who mourn! Amen.*