

Lamentations: "O Jerusalem, Who Can Heal You?"

Great Is Her Loneliness

Lamentations 1

An introduction to Lamentations...

Laments in the OT are loud expressions of _____. Lamentations is the only book in the Bible that contains only laments. They come in the form of poems and there are five of them—five funeral laments as the author loudly grieves over the destruction of Jerusalem.

Lamentations is a postscript to the Book of Jeremiah. His prophesies finally became the kingdom of Judah's and her great city's reality, and Jeremiah is broken up about it. He is deeply grieving her fate.

The author is not named in the book, but there are both internal evidence and historical indications that Jeremiah wrote it. For example, the Septuagint, which is the ancient Greek translation of the OT, introduces Lamentations 1:1 in this way: "And it came to pass after Israel was taken captive, and Jerusalem made desolate, that Jeremiah sat weeping, lamenting with this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said [in verse 1]: 'How lonely sits the city that was full of people!'"

Jeremiah, known as "the weeping prophet," saw it coming. In fact, for over forty years, he faithfully prophesied that this judgment would come. But instead of listening to God's prophet, they severely persecuted him for preaching judgment on them for their unrepentant sin.

We need to understand something: Yahweh God chose Israel to be His wife. They entered into a covenant of marriage with promises, one to the other, of faithfulness. And He loved her with His entire being. And she loved Him back. It was a beautiful, faithful, holy marriage relationship between God and His people. So in Jeremiah 2:1, "The word of the LORD came to me [Jeremiah], saying, 'Go, and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD, "I remember the devotion of your youth, your _____ as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord."

But in time, Israel became unfaithful to God. She cheated on Him myriads of times. And God asks why in Jeremiah 2:5: "What wrong did your fathers find in me, and went after worthlessness, and became

worthless? ¹¹ Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. ¹² Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, ¹³ for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water. ²⁰ For long ago I broke your yoke and burst your bonds; but you said, "I will not serve." Yes, on every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down like a whore.

The background of Lamentation is 2 Kings 24 and 25. In 586 B.C., Jerusalem has been captured by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon just as God had promised...*if she didn't repent*. And Judah is taken into foreign captivity. Lamentations was written shortly after Jerusalem's fall. And the prophet, who has the heart of God, is in deep mourning.

Sometimes we can be lulled into thinking that God is beyond being hurt. We know He can get angry, but He's God, so, contrary to Scripture, He's above being hurt by puny human beings (John 11:35; Luke 19:41-44; Ephesians 4:30). Before God's anger is God's grief. In Lamentations, God's heart is hurt over the unfaithfulness of His wife, and over what she has forced Him to bring upon her for her incessant unfaithfulness.

How lonely sits the city!

1. What has happened to her? (1-5a)

Verses 1-2: Jeremiah personifies Jerusalem, likening her to a once beautiful wife. She was loved by her Husband, and did He ever bless her with power, privilege, and prestige. She was God's holy city! She was God's bride! And that beautified her beyond description.

But look at her now... She's like a widow who lost her Lover. And she finds herself crying in her pillow, bitterly lamenting her awful loss. But she's also portrayed as an adulterous. She had forsaken her true Lover, Yahweh God, for false gods and foreign alliances. And in her time of great need, she was forsaken, and she has none to comfort her (2; 9; 16; 17; 21), for her gods and her alliances became her enemies.

Verses 3-5: "Zion" represents the place where Yahweh _____— Jerusalem, but especially Mount Zion, the mount on which the temple

was built. **What happened to her?** She went from way up here—the apple of God’s eye, to way down here—how lonely sits the city!

2. Why has it happened to her?

- She failed to _____ (5b-6).

God’s holiness was so offended by Judah’s incessant, unrepentant, “multitude of transgressions,” that He finally afflicted her, and Babylon was His human instrument of affliction. Jerusalem brought this on because she would not turn from her sins.

- She failed to _____ (7).

Have you ever said to yourself, “What have I done?!” Perhaps it was after a terrible betrayal of trust. An unfaithfulness to your bride or groom. Even an adultery. Or perhaps against your God, it was a spiritual adultery in the form of some kind of idolatry. You put something or someone before God, or even in the place of God. And on the wrong side of the thing, you ask yourself that awful question...

- She failed to _____ to her future (8-10).

When she turned from her Divine Husband to pursue her spiritually adulterous ways, she took no thought of her future. What is it about what’s *out there* compared to what’s *up there*? The pursuit of the here and now with little or _____ thought of the forever after with God?

- She failed to _____ God’s justice (11-13).

God’s anger is always righteous because God is always _____. He has always been. He always will be. It is His essential nature. Therefore, His just anger is always justified!

- She failed to _____ the inevitable (14-17).

The inevitable: they reap what they sow. There are terrible consequences of her sins. Steven Smith: “Following God is not easy, but the price of obedience is a bargain compared to the _____ of rebellion. Avoiding sin costs less than repenting of sin.” Even with repentance, there are often lasting consequences.

3. What does she understand now?

- **The Lord is in the _____ (18-20).**

She finally gets it and confesses it: because He is altogether righteous, He is in the right in not allowing incessant sin to continue unchecked.

- **The Lord keeps His _____ (21-22).**

If they broke the marriage covenant that they willingly entered into with God, there was an awful promise kept. Jeremiah 25: "The word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened... Although the LORD has persistently sent to you all his servants the prophets, saying, 'Turn now, every one of you, from his evil way...and dwell upon the land that the Lord has given to you... Then I will do you no harm. Yet you have not listened to me, that you might provoke me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm. Therefore...this whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and [you] shall serve the king of Babylon 70 years" (3-11). And now, behold, God brought the day He announced!

How lonely sits the city...

There is nothing lonelier than asking the question, "What have I done?" too late for reconciliation and restoration. Chuck Swindoll: "[Lamentations] is a reminder that sin, in spite of all its allurements and excitement, carries with it heavy weights of sorrow, grief, misery, barrenness, and pain. It is the other side of the 'eat, drink, and be merry' coin."

Gary Thomas: "In the 19th century, Marie d'Agoult left her children to follow after the most famous pianist of her day, composer and virtuoso Franz Listzt. After the ardor of her infatuation cooled and the reality of missing her children set in, Marie is said to have made this observation: 'When one has smashed everything around oneself, one has also _____ oneself.'" Are you in the process of smashing everything because of unrepentant sin? If you are, then in the end, you will also smash yourself, and ask, "What have I done?" too late.

Turn in here now. "Today is the day of salvation," the day of reversing your course through confession and repentance. Say with the city of Jerusalem, "The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against His Word."