

Deserved Devastation – Depending on Grace: Lessons from Lamentations

For Lion Cubs Archive –Part 1

Lamentations – Introduction and Chapter 1

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Introduction

As we look into the Book of Lamentations, we ask ourselves: What is in this for me? In this day of God's great grace and blessing, why would we be concerned with *mourning over punishment* of the people of God in the Old Testament, when we live in the New, in the day of His grace and mercy and forgiveness?

If we believe that *all Scripture is for our benefit*, as 2 Timothy 3:16 assures us, and that 1 Corinthians 10:11 tells us the examples are given to us for our learning, then there has to be something for us from this recounting of God's response to the disobedience of His people.

There are *at least three reasons* for us to study this book and learn from it:

- 1) It causes us to clearly see how God hates sin and disobedience.  
In a day when "cheap grace" has been revealed and much that once we abhorred has become commonplace and acceptable, we need a vigorous reminder of what God really thinks.
- 2) Through the study of this book, we appreciate in a larger measure, the wonderful grace and the blessings of God to us, His children;  
how He loves us and to what great lengths He has gone to enjoy fellowship with us.
- 3) As the day of the Lord draws ever closer, we must be confident that we are not victims of the enemy but rather, he is a tool in God's hand for our chastening, that we might become holy and pure, fit and ready for our Beloved's return.

It is interesting to note the structure of this book, for its groupings are in acrostic form as though it might have been written for some national occasion. While some question the authorship of Jeremiah, the Septuagint version of the Old Testament introduces this book by saying, "*And it came to pass after Israel was led into captivity that Jeremiah sat weeping and lamenting and lamented this lamentation over Jerusalem.*"

We will follow this pattern throughout this book: first, we will read the text itself. Then we will offer an Exposition of the text, bringing clarification and giving insight into what the text actually says. That will be followed by a suggestion of the Lessons that can be gleaned from what the Israelites faced as reported in the text.

Lamentations 1:1-10

**1** How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave.

**2** Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are upon her cheeks. Among all her lovers there is none to comfort her. All her friends have betrayed her; they have become her enemies.

**3** After affliction and harsh labor, Judah has gone into exile. She dwells among the nations; she finds no resting place. All who pursue her have overtaken her in the midst of her distress.

**4** The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to her appointed feasts. All her gateways are desolate, her priests groan, her maidens grieve, and she is in bitter anguish.

**5** Her foes have become her masters; her enemies are at ease. The Lord has brought her grief because of her many sins. Her children have gone into exile, captive before the foe.

**6** All the splendor has departed from the Daughter of Zion. Her princes are like deer that find no pasture; in weakness they have fled before the pursuer.

7 In the days of her affliction and wandering, Jerusalem remembers all the treasures that were hers in days of old. When her people fell into enemy hands, there was no one to help her. Her enemies looked at her and laughed at her destruction.

8 Jerusalem has sinned greatly and so has become unclean. All who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness; she herself groans and turns away.

9 Her filthiness clung to her skirts; she did not consider her future. Her fall was astounding; there was none to comfort her. "Look, O Lord, on my affliction, for the enemy has triumphed."

10 The enemy laid hands on all her treasures; she saw pagan nations enter her sanctuary – those you had forbidden to enter your assembly.

### Exposition of the text

Vs.1 – The prophet looks over the once beautiful and densely populated city and bewails her present situation. Where once she was flourishing and useful, now she is impoverished and desolate; where once she prevailed in prominence, now she is enslaved and useless. This city that crowned all cities, once so great, now lies dethroned, debased, and debilitated.

Because she insisted on going her own way, the beautiful balance that God ordained – men and women working together, complementing and strengthening one another – no longer functions. She stands as a widow, uncared for, unprovided for, bereft of all that made life meaningful. How could this once great city of God come under such severe judgment? This degradation resulted from not keeping the condition of the covenant and then ignoring the chastening hand of God.

**Sin**, whether it be falling short of the prescribed mark, deliberately turning from truth, willfully going one's own way, or not doing what pleases Father, **must always be judged**. To the believer this judgment in grace becomes chastening.

When we refuse to embrace that chastening by turning from disobedience to obedience, we demand the *sow-and-reat* principle to be activated and in its most severe form, it becomes judgment. With believers, God always begins with chastening but with unbelievers, He beckons and pleads for them to come to Him as Savior and when they will not, the sow-and-reat principle mandates judgment (Gal.6:7,8).

Vs.2 – Though she bitterly weeps, we do well to remember that not all weeping is repentance. She is crying because her lovers have forsaken her. Those she counted on have proven false and not only does she feel betrayed, but her pride is hurt and she feels sorry for herself, as we do when our foolishness is exposed.

We need to remind ourselves that crying isn't necessarily praying though tears may accompany prayer; it is an emotional release. It is in seeking God that we become conscious of our own inabilities and failures, and the closer we come to Him the fewer walls of resistance we retain. In this brokenness and revelation, our tears flow freely.

Vss.3, 4 – Here we see the inevitable progression of chastisement. What began as affliction moved into hard labor and now culminates in exile which is separation. No longer "at home" anywhere, restlessness is continually her portion. The enemy has completely overtaken her.

It is hard for us to believe we could ever be separated from God's presence and peace, but **unconfessed and unjudged sin** will always move through this progression into the grave situation of verse 4.

We seldom deliberately set out to sin. It begins imperceptibly with a little compromise, a little laxness, a slight deviation. If it is not dealt with, it will always bring chastening which if ignored, leads to this

terrible situation. We live in a day when we need to indelibly imprint this lesson from history in our hearts.

Vs.5 – We are caused to know the source of our grief and servitude. God is behind it all. We are not dealing with Satan. ***Unchecked sin will be dealt with by God***, though Satan may be the tool God uses when He withdraws His protection for us from the enemy.

Vss.6, 7 – Graceless, unnurtured, strengthless and abandoned, she is tortured by remembering the preciousness of the past which makes the pain of the present even more poignant.

Vss.8, 9 – Stripped, unclean, so intolerably filthy she can't bear herself, she groans finding nowhere to turn from the scorn and taunts of those who once gave her honor.

This terrifying, despicable condition is upon her because she was unwilling to consider the future by obeying God in the present, not taking into account where her self-will would eventually lead her. The attitude of “it can't happen to me,” or “I'm too spiritual for God to do that,” will bind us to the reality of the wages of sin (cf.Rom.3:23).

Vs.10 – All that was sacred to her is now profaned by those she had considered too impure to even come near. That which she treasured the most now bears the imprint of the enemy and what was closest to her heart has become sullied and tainted in the hand of the evil one.

This then, is the awesome revelation of the result of disobedience in the face of God's marvelous grace.

### Lessons we can learn

What John saw in the Book of Revelation is actually a prophetic utterance concerning the church. He saw the bride, the New Jerusalem, adorned and made ready. The Bible says, “*The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst Come*” (Rev.22:17 KJV). The cry of the church is, “*Come quickly, Lord Jesus*” (Rev.22:20). Why is it then that Jesus tarries?

Because today it isn't the voice of a bride that is crying to Him, “Come.” It is the voice of children crying, “Get me out of this mess!” The people of America may be less prepared for His coming than any other nation.

How we love to take hold of the promises given to Israel likening her to the church. Looking back through the Old Testament at Scriptures relating to Israel as a nation, some see them literally, others both literally and spiritually, and some only spiritually.

There are those, having been taught dispensationalism, who have decided there are certain portions of the Bible that do not apply to them. However, 2 Timothy 3:16 assures us that “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable...*” (KJV).

The Bible was written over a period of 1400 years through approximately forty-four different authors all anointed by the Holy Spirit – thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament, sixty-six books in all. The Word of God became a light and a lamp (Ps.119:105). The New Testament tells us that everything that was written before this time was written as an example to us (1Cor.10:11).

We are beginning to see the correlation of God's Word, from the Pentateuch through the books of history and law, poetry, the minor and major prophets and into the New Testament. Some consider themselves “too deep” to study the Gospels. They study just the Pauline Epistles. There are others who feel they aren't mature enough to understand the Pauline Epistles, so they limit their interests to the Gospels.

The church is crying for truth and Jesus is Truth and all of Scripture reveals Him. The Spirit of revelation has been poured out to this generation. God's Word is a *now* Word.

A diversionary tactic of the enemy is to make us lethargic by causing us to believe only in a literal fulfillment of prophecy, so the church becomes a sleeping giant. Satan realizes the *positional authority* of the church better than its members. The promises made to Israel are for us when we fulfill the condition of the promise. The covenant promises are ours only when we keep covenant with the covenant-maker.

The sleeping giant must awaken today.

The Book of Lamentations is made up of five poems and each one is self-contained. In Hebrew, this book was called *Eykhah*, meaning "how" or "woe" or "alas." To give understanding to "how" or "woe" or "alas," they gave it the name Lamentations.

Some teachings today declare that you must never be sad. You must never mourn. Everything is yours because you are a King's kid! We tend to embrace truth in extremes.

We learned about prayer, so we put our faith in prayer. Then we were taught about praise and we turned to that – to the exclusion of prayer. In that extreme, we praised and often looked down at those who were weeping over the world and the church and said, "You don't have the joy." But, Jesus said, "*Blessed* [in an enviable position] *are they that mourn for they shall be comforted* [they shall be called to his side]" (Mt.5:4 KJV).

There we were, sitting in the boat of faith, rowing down the stream of God's glory with the oar of prayer, going in circles! So we dropped that oar and said, "We do not need to pray any more." And we picked up the oar of praise – and went around in circles again in the opposite direction! What would have happened had we taken both oars together? Prayer and praise would have balanced the boat as we progressed toward maturity.

This Book of Lamentations is the mourning of someone who had awakened from the sleeping giant who so many times had been forewarned by God's prophets of impending judgment. The people would not believe that God would do that to them because of His love for them. Rather than receiving God's truth, they killed the prophets who brought it.

Now, look at the history of the United States. A group of Christian people stood on the soil of this great nation and said, "God has given this land to us and all who are breathing will give thanks to Him for every fruitful thing He's given us. We will worship God." And they did. As time went on, the United States had "In God we trust" stamped on all coins and paper money. Every country on earth began to receive currency from this nation. What a testimony went forth stamped on that money! But it has become less true with time.

During World War II, our president prayed for grace and protection, giving God the glory for this great nation's successes. Then an insignificant little nobody made her way through the courts of our country and prayer was taken out of our schools. The spirit of antichrist was turned loose at that time, but the church didn't worry. She slept on, singing, "Jesus Loves Me" and "Let's Just Praise the Lord." We failed to see why grace was abounding more and more (Rom.5:20).

Science triumphed and we sent two men to the moon. They were so overwhelmed by the magnificent sight that the only way they could describe it was by reading Genesis 1:1. "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*" (KJV). When they returned to earth, they were reprimanded privately and publicly for using the Bible to describe science, in the fear that those who did not believe in God or His Word might be offended. These changes have taken place in less than fifty years. Are we more prepared today to deal with these kinds of happenings than we were fifty years ago?

Historically, we know God judged Israel several times. When enemies besieged Israel and took her captive, it was *allowed by God for chastisement*. The Bible tells us that there are times when God, in anger, hides Himself from His people awaiting their repentance and subsequent turning back to Him. Our sins have separated us from God (Is.59:2). The Scripture declares, “*If My people which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land*” (2Chr.7:14 KJV).

We don't like admitting we have sinned. The United States sends out more missionaries than any country on earth (true when written in the late 1980s). Our money and our prayers support them – and because of that we simply sit back and are careless and sleepy and unconcerned with anything that speaks of righteousness or holiness. In fact, we are afraid of the word holiness because of some of the extremes of the past.

God is not playing games! We have heard that said over and over in the past few years. What do we think it means? Our little game says, “He'd never allow judgment to come to us; we are His people.” Israel carelessly tested God in disobeying His covenant believing that because He had betrothed Himself to them, they had nothing to fear (Ezk.16).

I wonder if we have any idea why we are so lonesome these days. Why is there such a longing in us? We go to prayer and don't know what to pray. We still love Him, but in such a selfish way as to demand what we want when we want it, without repentance, without humility, and without discerning and determining our need to turn from *our* ways to *His*.

Some years ago, some friends took me to the historic site of the slave market in South Carolina. As they pointed out the auction block, I had a vision of how we place Christ upon it to be a slave to people: to heal them, to set marriage problems straight, to increase finances, and to do for us whatever we felt we wanted or needed. Have we descended to a level where we auction Him off? “Here's Jesus – just take Him and He will meet your every need.” No one worships a servant. **He is Lord** – we are His servants!

For a period of time, He “winked at” or willfully looked away from our ignorance and *His mercy* held back the judgment due to those who knowingly refused to walk in His direction. But it's a new day, a day of warning.

Let's heed the admonition to grow up and apply the Word. God has provided pastors and teachers, books and tapes by the thousands. The day has come for Him to expect a return from what He has invested in us.

We are on the brink of a new dimension of God's revelation. I believe Isaiah 60:1 is going to be fulfilled in the church. “*Arise, shine for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee*” (KJV). The glory of God has risen. We have already seen it externally. The blessing has come down. He has sent the Holy Spirit to endue us with power from on high, and now the Spirit lives within us – He is internal.

The truth of “*The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me*” (Ps.138:8 KJV) is where we are. We are the generation in a transition that is taking place so gradually that unless we wake up immediately, without even being aware, we will set a pattern of weakness and failure for the next generation.

Never has a generation known so many changes: scientifically, financially, and spiritually. God has broken through every denominational, racial, and social wall: Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Jews have all gathered together for worship. Did God do this so we could declare our lack of prejudice?

God has put His Spirit within us to make us strong. Some of us think that because we've been stripped of everything we own, or we have an illness, or we are persecuted, that we have known the depths of judgment and the end of chastening.

The enemy often diverts us with the unimportant. We consider it great victory merely to survive. True victory is when in honesty I can say, "*None of these things move me*" (Ac.20:24 KJV) from faith in my Lord – from revealing God's glory.

While we rejoice in every victory won, Lamentations is not a picture of one person's problem: a marriage falling apart, or a body being sick, or someone not having enough faith for material gain. This is a lesson concerning a nation, the church, betrothed to God Himself by His choosing, in whom He has placed the *cleansing agent of His Holy Spirit* to prepare her for Jesus' return.

Do you want to know when Jesus is coming back? When the Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!" Surely we are saying that. But it's not the true Bride speaking. We are not mature enough to be married. *Just as Israel*, we would divorce Him every time we don't get our own way.

God begins to withdraw from us and we get lonely. What do we do when we get lonely? *The same thing Israel did*. We seek new lovers. They looked at Egypt and Edom and Moab (Jer.2:36; 3:3; 4:30; 22:20-22; 30:24). They began to bring them in and everybody loved them – for a while. Egypt said, "This is good that we can be one again." What we are calling unity, many times, is compromise.

God is looking for a bride, the *church within the church*, made up of men and women in whom the Spirit of God dwells, who have been given a hunger, who know God has called and ordained them and set them aside for a divine purpose. They are His, and nothing else will satisfy – then He starts moving away. Why would God ever move away from His people?

Let's illustrate it this way. Suppose a church service lacks spiritual life. We cry out, "O God, come down in our midst," and He says, "I'm not coming down, you come up!" But we won't. If He leaves, we just look around to see what is working in other places and try that. We become gimmick-oriented. But God doesn't pay attention to the gimmicks. *He seeks worshippers* (Jn.4:23).

Unity among ourselves replaces a oneness with the Lord until those with whom we've shared unity turn on us. They never did satisfy us. Our churches grew in number. We sent missionaries into all the world. Our social outreach became a credit. But, deep down inside us is one cry: "If I could just be with Him." When your lover is gone, no one fills the gap. The Bible says *Israel was like a widow* (vs.1).

Verse 4 tells us her *feasts are abandoned*. Feasts to the Jewish people in that day were times of great joy. In Nehemiah 8, they read the Word and the people stood and listened all day long. Then they brought out those who would give the understanding of the Word and when people understood, they began to cry as they recognized their guilt. After a period of weeping, the leader stepped out and said, "It's good that you cry and that you understand this, but it's time now to grasp that the *joy of the Lord is your strength*, so let's have a feast."

It's feasting time when we come together in great gatherings and meetings with revelation of Him being shared. It's feasting when we are alone with Him partaking of His life and blessings. Lamentations declares all this has ended for Israel because of judgment.

Billy Graham said, "If God does not bring judgment to America, He must issue a pardon to Sodom and Gomorrah." Our feasts are already being abandoned or *replaced by counterfeit* sessions held in His name but *void of His presence*. Thank God this is not true of all gatherings. Yet, judgment has begun in the house of God.

God is determined to reveal the counterfeit. We are learning the difference in that one is like sounding brass and tinkling cymbals and the other has the clarion call of a trumpet that declares, “God is in this place. Let the people praise Him!”

“*All her beauty is departed,*” says verse 6, meaning the beauty of God’s glory has slipped away. When you first learned to love the Lord, a common question was, “What has happened to you?” It was the “glow-rey” of the presence of your lover, the one to whom you were espoused. Your walk, talk, and glow represented the Lord. Your plans and goals all revolved around Him. How long has it been since anyone asked you?

“*The Philistines be upon thee, Samson.*” He had already told Delilah his secret, but the Bible says, “*He wist not that the Lord was departed from him*” (Jdg.16:20 KJV). Why didn’t he know that the Spirit was gone? Because every time he needed God, He was there. Samson didn’t take his commitment seriously, not really believing that God would take away his strength because of his breaking covenant. So when the Philistines were upon him, he thought all he had to do was shake himself as before and the strength would come. *And we think the same.* But he couldn’t and we can’t either. He was a prisoner and powerless because of disobedience.

We have paid the tremendous price of powerlessness in the church because we have refused the walk of purity and obedience, even as Samson. We ignore holiness, perfection, righteousness, and purity. We feel we can simply add God to our lives.

We are hearing more about freedom today than ever before and yet we are in bondage to the very word freedom! Concerns for success, wealth, and excellence have risen above the primary concern to please Him and to *be to Him* a glory. This becomes the believer’s bondage.

The true freedom of Israel was that everywhere she went, God made a way for her to pass. Though Israel confronted troops that were many times greater, these large armies stepped aside to let God’s people through. They were free to walk anywhere in enemy territory because they were walking under the guidance and direction of God. The enemy didn’t fear Israel; but they feared the God of Israel!

Do we have enough of God in us to threaten anyone? When Jesus approached demons they cried, “Leave us alone,” but are they afraid of us or do they sit beside us in church, not at all disturbed by religion? They may be more comfortable there than in other places because *religion* is their territory.

The beauty of God’s glory, the beauty of freedom, the beauty of joy and fellowship with God had departed from Israel. They no longer had fellowship with others and neither can we. This is an ultimate situation. Lamentations is the expression of this and we are looking at the progression towards the ultimate. We are not quite there, but oh, church, we’re on the way.

True unity will come to the church when we are in love with Jesus; when He is our focus, and our goal is one because we are one with our God. “*The light of the body is the eye*” (Mt.6:22 KJV). You become full of whatever you keep your eyes on. The body of Christ has been too full of the body of Christ and not the Christ of the body!

Is our focus on our programs, our failures, our successes, or our platform? It is time to become aware of the fact that I can’t make a corporate change in the church until there’s a change in me. My desire to please Him must be greater than my desire to please man. His applause drowns out all the accolades of mankind. He is both lover and Lord. There is nothing optional about it.

Israel lost fellowship with her God and consequently she lost testimony. The priests couldn’t minister any more, only groan. The maidens couldn’t minister, only grieve. They could sing as captives but it was music void of joy (Ps.137:1-4).

Israel lost the beauty of holiness, sanctification, and the beauty of the law as well. “*The enemy laid hands on all of her treasures; she saw pagan nations enter her sanctuary*” (vs.10). That previous treasure was taken by the profane hands of those God had forbidden to enter the place of His presence.

Sadly, we have seen the law negatively. We read the “thou shalt” and the “thou shalt not” and reveal ourselves irresponsible by declaring we are free from the law.

Jesus said, “I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Mt.5:17). Does that mean that because I am in Christ I don’t have to keep any rules? No. It means Jesus knew that no man could ever keep the law, so He came and fulfilled it, enabling fulfillment of the law in Him.

The law is for our protection and to lead us to God. We see others who are walking close to Him and we long to know Him that way. We will, if we keep His commandments (Jn.14:21). Israel lost the law thinking it was unimportant. These losses kept increasing and soon the beauty of acceptance was lost. Everyone on earth accepted the Jews, even those who hated them, because they knew that they were God’s people. They were accepted without even wearing a banner. They were known by the God over their lives. He was their banner (Jehovah Nissi).

They had been taught to worship God and serve Him only, but that became one more *ignored law*. We too, have difficulty in maintaining pure – nothing added – worship. As we look around, we can see polluted worship in many churches. Pollution is the result of not obeying God. Matthew 22:37 says, “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*” (KJV).

Time concerns or personal prejudices may pollute our worship. Singing, when inspired by the Holy Spirit, becomes a beautiful song of the Lord. He births it in us and the harmony and melodious effect bursts forth from us unto Him. Someone in charge sees that we’re off our time schedule and takes control by saying, “Well, praise the Lord. Isn’t this wonderful? Let’s just give Him a clap offering.”

Why is it so much easier to applaud Him than to praise Him? Because when you applaud, you’re doing one of two things. You’re either asking for a performance or you’re thanking for what you have already received. You can be in the audience *watching* rather than being personally involved. Singing in His presence often leads to silence in His presence where He is in control and we are responders.

If as Israel, we refuse to see our need to obey God’s laws just because He is our God, or refuse to repent of our lawlessness, we will invite great days of desolation in our country.

This is the day God is dealing with His people individually. May we be wise enough to agree with Him and turn to Him. We are not being called upon to have martyr faith. These are days when we are expected to have Christian faith that stands for Christian principles, righteousness, and holiness, and a ready willingness to repent when we fall short.

Many strong Christians today are underground Christians – they’re strong because they have to be. Many have endured persecution and paid a great price for their faith. May God help us to become strong before we have to become an underground church. In that strength we can stand, and in standing be declaring to our children and the world that **He is worth it all**. There is strength in Jesus Christ and with joy we serve Him and are His people and the recipients of His continual blessings.

### Lamentations 1:11-22

**11** All her people groan as they search for bread; they barter their treasures for food to keep themselves alive. "Look, O Lord, and consider, for I am despised."

**12** "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see. Is any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me, that the Lord brought on me in the day of his fierce anger?"

**13** "From on high he sent fire, sent it down into my bones. He spread a net for my feet and turned me back. He made me desolate, faint all the day long.

**14** "My sins have been bound into a yoke; by his hands they were woven together. They have come upon my neck and the Lord has sapped my strength. He has handed me over to those I cannot withstand.

**15** "The Lord has rejected all the warriors in my midst; he has summoned an army against me to crush my young men. In his winepress the Lord has trampled the Virgin Daughter of Judah.

**16** "This is why I weep and my eyes overflow with tears. No one is near to comfort me, no one to restore my spirit. My children are destitute because the enemy has prevailed."

**17** Zion stretches out her hands, but there is no one to comfort her. The Lord has decreed for Jacob that his neighbors become his foes; Jerusalem has become an unclean thing among them.

**18** "The Lord is righteous, yet I rebelled against his command. Listen, all you peoples; look upon my suffering. My young men and maidens have gone into exile.

**19** "I called to my allies but they betrayed me. My priests and my elders perished in the city while they searched for food to keep themselves alive.

**20** "See, O Lord, how distressed I am! I am in torment within, and in my heart I am disturbed, for I have been most rebellious. Outside, the sword bereaves; inside, there is only death.

**21** "People have heard my groaning, but there is no one to comfort me. All my enemies have heard of my distress; they rejoice at what you have done. May you bring the day you have announced so they may become like me.

**22** "Let all their wickedness come before you; deal with them as you have dealt with me because of all my sins. My groans are many and my heart is faint."

### Exposition of the text

Vs.11 – The picture of hopelessness and degradation focuses on the unbearable loneliness of being ignored. Perhaps worse than open hatred, no one considers – no one cares – no one comforts. This is barren existence indeed. There is nothing to satisfy. Driving hunger becomes the greatest force and blinds to true values. No price is too great to pay for so little satisfaction.

Vss.12, 13 – This is nothing less than the anger of the Lord bringing incomparable suffering like fire penetrating to the bones. Constant entanglement prevents escape. What frustration!

Vss.14, 15 – These verses reveal that no sin is unregarded – not one slips by – but all of them, forgiven, become in God's hand a binding force weighing down and sapping strength. God hands us over to the power of the enemy, allowing no one to rise to our defense. He is jealous over the one who was to belong only to Him. God's anger is most fierce against the one betrothed in purity to Him, for she has compromised her virginity and made light of that perfect relationship with Him.

Vss.16, 17 – Expressed here is the abject loneliness and emptiness, the total inability of living apart from God. Can we understand the horror of such existence? Spirit, soul and body – the totality of being – are meaningless apart from God's active life within.

Vss.18, 19 – The Lord is righteous. We need to look again at His wonderful love and care given on our behalf, culminating in the very pouring out of His life that we might escape wrath, and experience the joy of knowing Him, loving Him, being cared for by Him.

He has provided everything for life and godliness (cf.2Pet.1:3). Abundant mercy and grace are ours *if* we do not turn to our own way and spurn His graciousness and extravagant love.

Yes, the Lord is righteous. The richness of that thought penetrates the depths of our beings until the very thought of the next word – *yet* – causes us to fall before the high and holy One with a cry for mercy and grace.

Rebellion causes separation from His presence. Rebellion causes the betrayal of allies. Rebellion causes famine for priests and elders, and therefore, suffering for others.

Vss.20-22 – We need to be stirred to repentance when sins' results bring pain to us. In admitting our sin, in turning from it and willingly taking the blame we deserve, we honestly recognize that no one else is the cause of our difficulties. True humility is birthed within us before the holy God. It is only then that we can commit our persecutors to God for His dealings in their sins.

### Lessons we can learn

God wants to bring us to the place where we pray: “Come, Holy Spirit, I need You.” It is preparation time so we will not be panicked or paralyzed no matter what future circumstances may come.

In His faithfulness God never brings calamity or trouble to a land or to an individual without first preparing and supplying every ingredient necessary to stand. Both Scripture and history reveal that God has always had His prophets to forewarn and reveal whatever needed to be done to be in readiness for events ahead.

We have known in our generation some tremendous and traumatic changes and with them is the return of the prophetic message. Today we are hearing the voice of the Lord, not just sermons. What we are hearing is that we must understand the difference between the holy and the profane, and that as the bride of Christ we are to make ourselves ready (Rev.19:7).

The days ahead may not be as smooth sailing as the present. It is time to take inventory of all the details of our lives to be sure that they are in line with what He is saying.

We see a shaking and are beginning to understand in a small way the truth of Hebrews 12:26,27: “*Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven [signifying] the removing of those things that are shaken*” (KJV). And in verse 28, He tells us why He would do such a thing – that we might find the immoveable Kingdom.

Sometimes when God begins to reveal what He wants to us, we presume we understand and move on to make it happen on our own instead of listening in faith and allowing Him to bring it to pass. So, He must shake, through persecutions and conflicts, *all that we have done on our own to fulfill His word* in order that His true and lasting work is accomplished.

He will have a kingdom of priests (Ex.19:6). Some in the body heard this and, like a child grabbing a present and tearing off the wrappings before the designated time, they began to confer on individuals their responsibilities to build the Kingdom of God. But, the truth is, we cannot build His Church or His Kingdom. The only thing we can do to further the Kingdom of God on earth is to recognize it.

Lamentations is the cry of Israel in a negative situation. This can become the cry of the church today before that same situation happens to her. Instead of waiting until we are in the throes of persecution, conflict, and confusion, as they are in this book, we are privileged to have it laid before us so that we might lament over the condition of the church and the world *now* and prevent the chastening and shaking that would otherwise be necessary.

We are not the first people to read and study this book. Lamentations was read in its entirety in the Jewish synagogue on the ninth of Ab (which would be our July) in remembrance of the destruction of both Herod's and Solomon's Temples.

We need to understand that there is a purpose, a reason for this destruction as there is for everything that God in His wisdom destroys.

*“All her people groan as they search for bread; they barter their treasures for food to keep themselves alive”* (vs.11). It hardly seems possible that this could be a reality as we look over the past years when we have had the bread of the Word so lavishly served to us. And yet, there is a hunger for truth in God's people today that is seemingly insatiable. Many go from church to church and meeting to meeting trying to find *bread that satisfies* and they are coming up empty-handed. Is it possible that we have gone to meetings and, in essence said, “Serve the bread and we'll see whether we'll stay another month or so”?

When the children of Israel were finally ready to enter the Promised Land, one of the first instructions Joshua gave them was, *“Prepare vittles”* (Josh.1:11 KJV). For forty years they had not had to prepare food and now, overnight, all had changed. Has it been thus for us?

We must learn how to prepare our food. We don't need to starve. If we don't learn how to do this, we will barter our treasure for food. We want so much to eat the food that others have prepared, we exchange what we have found in God by making promises of commitments that are demanded by those at whose table we are eating.

We dare not use ignorance of how to study the Word as an excuse for utilizing only what others make available. It is not Bible School education of knowledge of the original languages that enables us to understand God's Word, but *personal acquaintance and relationship* with the Author.

We can open the Bible and ask the Holy Spirit to come and be our teacher, requesting that our eyes be opened to see Jesus in every book in the Bible. With so many useful versions on the market today, there is no excuse for not understanding it. So, do not barter for food. Don't bargain. Don't compromise. The psalmist cried: *“I have walked in mine integrity”* (Ps.26:1 KJV). That is a right relationship with God, myself, and my brothers and sisters, and a right relationship before the world. No hidden compromise there. And as I open the Word of God, it becomes fresh manna to me.

A passionate cry comes forth in verses 12-17. *“Doesn't anyone care?”* How can this suffering go uncomforted? There is nothing more painful than being ignored when caring is so desperately needed. It compounds the hurt already felt.

This trouble is from God! It burns like fire, catches like a net, produces pain and faintness like sickness, and burdens like a yoke. Oppressing, wearying and hindering free action, it just carries us about, and who cares? Can this really be from the Lord?

Our misconceptions about God often cause us to bring Him down to our level so we can handle Him. We don't really want Him to be God of all, but rather someone who will just be the good to replace any bad that comes to our lives. But He is Lord. He is God. He is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, the Alpha and Omega.

Every name for God in His Word tells us something about God Himself. How often we limit God to just one facet of His being. Because we have been so blessed with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we may tend to think He is only Holy Spirit. But not only is He Spirit, He is Jesus; He is God, holy and almighty. If we don't begin to understand the magnitude of our God, we won't be able to understand judgment.

Obviously, there are times when God brings judgment on a nation, a denomination, churches and families, as well as individuals. It is because of His great love that this happens. The people here in verses 12-17 are saying, "*I know I have to go through this, but doesn't anybody care?*" How Jesus understands this cry.

Jesus came to this earth and preached, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Mt.4:17 KJV). He walked with His disciples for three-and-a-half years knowing that one of them would betray Him. One day He turned to them and said, "*My heart is indeed sorrowful unto death. Will you come with Me into the garden to pray?*" They walked into the garden together and Jesus said, "*I'm going to go a little further.*"

Peter, James, and John went on with Him, perhaps because they had a little more experience than the others and He needed those to be with Him who had greater faith to believe God could do anything. So, they found their spot to pray and Jesus went a little farther and began to pray to Father. He prayed for an hour with great concern. (It may have been that wonderful prayer of John 17.).

Then He began to think about what was ahead for Him. **He was not afraid to die.** He didn't fear the cross or the beatings or the scoffing. He wasn't saying, "O Father, I don't want to go through this because it will hurt." The one dread He had was that He knew if He fulfilled the whole plan of His calling, He would have to become the thing that God hated. He had to *become sin* in order to become the perfect Lamb – and that was the ultimate dread of His life.

He prayed for an hour and was so weak from it that He felt the need of someone to strengthen Him. So He went back to those whom He trusted and they were asleep! (*How like them we are.*). When He came they awakened and He asked, "*Couldn't you wait with Me even one hour?*" They were sorry and they had excuses of weariness, etc. One writer says they slept for sorrow. What a great escape sleep can be!

With their verbal dedication ringing in His ears, Jesus went back to prayer. Perhaps He said something like this. "Father, I have known fellowship with You forever. I have been in Your glory and in Your throne. I have been willing to come down and be made flesh and dwell among men. I have been willing to be tested in every point as they will be tested. I have been willing to keep the law and fulfill it. I have been willing to do all of this, but Father, isn't there some way that I can be Your perfect Lamb and pay the price without having to become that which is repulsive to Your very nature?" And Father said, "No, Son, there is no other way." Jesus' response was, "*Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt*" (Mt.26:39 KJV).

Weakened beyond anything any of us have ever known, for we have never yet shed blood in our prayer concerns, Jesus went back to His brethren looking for strength to endure the hour of trial. When His brethren failed Him, God dispatched an angel to do what the brethren should have done.

When we see members of the body going through what we so lightly call the "dealings of God," we dare not take a careless and aloof attitude saying, "God knows what He's doing," and ignore them. Never have they needed us more than at that moment.

Whenever God used a nation to judge His people by besieging or capturing them, it was He who put it in their hearts. God would say to that nation, "Go after My people and you will win." So they would, telling Israel, "Your God said that we're going to take you." But the Lord would always add, "But woe unto you, nation."

Yes, it was the dealings of God, and we are seeing it today. God is unmasking things right before our eyes. We have seen misappropriation of funds and much, much more. The tendency is to join with others against those involved and in essence kill them because they are wounded and are bringing a bad name to the church. But **woe to those that do!**

Job's three friends were trying to restore him to a right relationship with God. The problem was, they had already made up their minds what his problem was and were insisting that he admit to it. But Job knew better and in his integrity responded that he was already rightly related to God.

Sin is not always the reason we must undergo the chastening, disciplining hand of God. His heart is always filled with love and concern toward those He is dealing with and we also must learn God's compassion. That is what was symbolized in the eating of the insides (purtenance) of the Passover lamb (Ex.12:9). We must lay our own concerns (innermost bowels, yearnings, womb) on the altar and then partake of His bowels of concern or we will only be moved by our own sympathy or judgment.

We can't listen to people's problems and then spend sleepless nights under a heavy burden. Though it appears "spiritual," we will quickly burn out. Jesus said, "*My yoke is easy and My burden is light*" (Mt.11:30). There are times of travail in prayer, but it's not under our burden for a situation. It is when the Lord births a concern and we are faithful to pray, that we know release from the burden and fruit is brought forth.

God is asking us what we will do about the people who are under His judgment. Immaturity says, "I feel terrible for them," but maturity responds as a son, "Whatever God says to do, I will do." The Holy Spirit must birth the concern in us to pray that God will clean up His church and cause us to know righteousness.

We have seen the position of the Israelites in the past and our need in the present. We've heard the passionate pleading in this chapter and now beginning with verse 18, penitent praying starts with the acknowledgment of God's righteousness.

His righteousness is difficult for some of us to understand it. It is an outward display of holiness. It is goodness; it is purity; it is the character of God. The Bible character is holy and He tells us to be holy because He is (1Pet.1:16).

In response to our cry to know Him, He places His hand on us for chastening. And when He does, many people will leave us alone. In fact, if they could, they would erase our names from the Lamb's Book of Life. They are sure we must have done something awful. But we are not dealing with people; we are dealing with God.

It is very important to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit so that if we see someone hurting we can say, "I believe that what is going to come out of this is going to be beautiful. I believe the cry of your heart is to know God and you will; and during this preparation, I will hold your hand."

God is calling for an awareness in His church that He is Lord. He is God and the only cry that can come forth is, "Lord, yes, we have rebelled." Every time I want to do it my way, I rebel. But there is forgiveness with Him.

We must begin with the awareness that God is righteous. How do we know that? Because Jesus brings a revelation of Him. In everything Jesus did and in everything He said His motivation was that He might reveal to the church the Father. Yet we don't see Him as Father, we see Him as "daddy." We crawl up on His lap, stroke Him a little bit, and tell Him all of our wants and troubles.

As we mature and grow up in Jesus, we want all the blessings but we don't want the responsibilities that accompany the blessings. For maturity the church is going to have to have a revelation of the Father and

when we do, we will move into worship. We will ask God to deal with our enemies, set us apart and make us to be His Bride, to cleanse and make us holy. This will come only as we progressively understand who God is!

When we see God the Father, we will see Him as the Righteous One who will not compromise with sin. We will see that we cannot pray over, under, or around His Word for He is true to every Word that is there. The indwelling Holy Spirit causes us to know that our holy God is fair.

The rewards that we reap from God's dealings are so precious and fulfilling that when they are over, we cannot but cry, "*Oh, thou who judges with equity*" (cf.Ps.98:9 KJV).

But what about what He's asking from us during the time of His dealings? We can decide that we want to walk with Him, to come up higher in Him, and to eat fresh bread from Him. We know that He will have to exert pressure to expose things buried deep within us so that He may deliver us. For we have cried to Him, "*I have sinned against Thee*" (cf.Ps.51:4).

Otherwise, we will turn to everything and everyone *but God* in that time. We know that it's wrong to blame God so we wait until others deal imperfectly with us and then we become angry at them. But it is sin to sing, "He is Lord" and then put our lives in their hands by saying, "Look what they've done to me."

Is Jesus Lord? Is He God Almighty? Then is He not in control? If our answer is yes to these, then what is happening is *allowed by Him for our purifying*. We cannot blame others, but still our cry must be, "It is fair." God is not love because He is God Almighty. God is God Almighty and we are most fortunate that He is also a God of love. There is no one higher or wiser or greater. There is no power or greater authority than His.

Daniel lived during the time of the Book of Lamentations. He was captured and taken to Babylon as a young man and certainly had all kinds of feelings about what had happened. He could have thought, "I was anointed and chosen of God. How come this has happened to me?" But his attitude was, "This is a *marvelous opportunity* for me to stand in a non-compromising position."

There is coming a day of judgment and it is beginning in the house of the Lord (cf.1Pet.4:17). The whole principle of judgment is based on our choices. We can choose to judge ourselves – if we do, we will not be judged (1Cor.11:31). We can be judged among God's people, if we will allow it and turn to God. But if we will not judge ourselves, and if we will not allow God to judge us among His people, then we will be judged with punishment in the wrath of God.

How many of us will be a Daniel? Will we be an Isaiah or a Jeremiah? What did they do? They prophesied the truth of God's judgment before it came to pass. It's not a popular thing to do but if we could pick up the vision of the need to purify ourselves before God has to shake us any further, what could happen in the body of Christ? We would see new babies being born into the family of God. And lay-people would be capable of being spiritual parents. There would be a whole new church birthed during this interim period.

But we would rather hear and talk faith and prosperity than clean up our lives. Certainly we are going to have prosperity and power and blessing in such measure that the whole world will see God through us and encounter Him in us, but that can only happen when we begin to *individually respond* to the cleansing work God wants to do in us today.

Oh, that we might cry out as a John the Baptist, or an Elijah, "Lord, clean us up. Bring holiness and righteousness and let it rule and reign in our lives." The Holy Spirit is challenging the church today, "Judge yourselves."

In response to that cry, we look at ourselves and say, “God, I’ve fallen short here; I’m not so good there; I’m asking for help in the other place.” When we do, we know the blessing of the divine hand of God instead of His chastening. But there *are* times of chastening.

What will be our response to those who go through it? Can we restore such a one to grace? Can’t we stand beside them in faith and prayer when they don’t have any faith and cannot pray?

We believe there is going to come a restoration. It’s been promised to Jerusalem. It’s been promised to the church. Every chapter has a *hope* but there’s a *great responsibility* on the people to lay hold of that hope and do the part that is ours to do. If we can begin to see this, we will understand why we are called to lament.

How long has it been since we have really lamented over the condition of our lives? The opposite of lamenting is rationalizing. “I’m not what I ought to be, but in comparison with others and with my past, I’m doing pretty well.”

It’s time for us to grow up and say, “O God, it isn’t myself I’m failing so much as it is You, the One Whom my soul adores.”

Peter always made great commitments to Jesus. He was the first to volunteer for anything, but didn’t carry through. Jesus told him that Satan had desired him, that he might sift him as wheat (cf.Lk.22:31). “*Nevertheless, Simon, I’ve prayed for you.*” What did He pray? Was it that Simon would not go through the fire and trials? Not know sorrow or pain? No, He prayed that *his faith would not fail*.

If I pray with my own concern, I would ask for the removal of others’ trials. How often have we done just that – prayed people out of the very trial that would have accomplished the most in their lives?

We need to learn how to pray, don’t we? We need to learn how to *hear the voice of God* and *respond* to it – not until your trials are over, or until your church gets big, or until finances are outpoured again, or until your bodies are all healed – but “*until Christ is formed in you*” (Gal.4:19 KJV).