

Deserved Devastation – Depending on Grace: Lessons from Lamentations
For Lion Cubs Archive –Part 2
Lamentations 2 and 3
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Lamentations 2:1-22

1 How the Lord has covered the Daughter of Zion with the cloud of his anger! He has hurled down the splendor of Israel from heaven to earth; he has not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger.

2 Without pity the Lord has swallowed up all the dwellings of Jacob; in his wrath he has torn down the strongholds of the Daughter of Judah. He has brought her kingdom and its princes down to the ground in dishonor.

3 In fierce anger he has cut off every horn of Israel. He has withdrawn his right hand at the approach of the enemy. He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire that consumes everything around it.

4 Like an enemy he has strung his bow; his right hand is ready. Like a foe he has slain all who were pleasing to the eye; he has poured out his wrath like fire on the tent of the Daughter of Zion.

5 The Lord is like an enemy; he has swallowed up Israel. He has swallowed up all her palaces and destroyed her strongholds. He has multiplied mourning and lamentation for the Daughter of Judah.

6 He has laid waste his dwelling like a garden; he has destroyed his place of meeting. The Lord has made Zion forget her appointed feasts and her Sabbaths; in his fierce anger he has spurned both king and priest.

7 The Lord has rejected his altar and abandoned his sanctuary. He has handed over to the enemy the walls of her palaces; they have raised a shout in the house of the Lord as on the day of an appointed feast.

8 The Lord determined to tear down the wall around the Daughter of Zion. He stretched out a measuring line and did not withhold his hand from destroying. He made ramparts and walls lament; together they wasted away.

9 Her gates have sunk into the ground; their bars he has broken and destroyed. Her king and her princes are exiled among the nations, the law is no more, and her prophets no longer find visions from the Lord.

10 The elders of the Daughter of Zion sit on the ground in silence; they have sprinkled dust on their heads and put on sackcloth. The young women of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground.

11 My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within, my heart is poured out on the ground because my people are destroyed, because children and infants faint in the streets of the city.

12 They say to their mothers, "Where is bread and wine?" as they faint like wounded men in the streets of the city, as their lives ebb away in their mothers' arms.

13 What can I say for you? With what can I compare you, O Daughter of Jerusalem? To what can I liken you, that I may comfort you, O Virgin Daughter of Zion? Your wound is as deep as the sea. Who can heal you?

14 The visions of your prophets were false and worthless; they did not expose your sin to ward off your captivity. The oracles they gave you were false and misleading.

15 All who pass your way clap their hands at you; they scoff and shake their heads at the Daughter of

Jerusalem: "Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?"

16 All your enemies open their mouths wide against you; they scoff and gnash their teeth and say, "We have swallowed her up. This is the day we have waited for; we have lived to see it."

17 The Lord has done what he planned; he has fulfilled his word, which he decreed long ago. He has overthrown you without pity, he has let the enemy gloat over you, he has exalted the horn of your foes.

18 The hearts of the people cry out to the Lord. O wall of the Daughter of Zion, let your tears flow like a river day and night; give yourself no relief, your eyes no rest.

19 Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord. Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint from hunger at the head of every street.

20 "Look, O Lord, and consider: Whom have you ever treated like this? Should women eat their offspring, the children they have cared for? Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord?"

21 "Young and old lie together in the dust of the streets; my young men and maidens have fallen by the sword. You have slain them in the day of your anger; you have slaughtered them without pity.

22 "As you summon to a feast day, so you summoned against me terrors on every side. In the day of the Lord's anger no one escaped or survived; those I cared for and reared, my enemy has destroyed."

Exposition of the text

Vss. 1-3 – Continued disobedience and not heeding God's warnings demand God's wrath to be outpoured on His people, the nation of Israel. Enveloped in that anger, all that once made her glorious – God's presence and blessings – is totally removed. Her securities are taken away and there is no strength from which to draw and nothing to hinder the enemy attack.

Vss.4-6 – God becomes as an enemy to His own people who have consistently ignored His truth and substituted false worship for real. So it is God who strips her of everything, physically, materially, and spiritually, that she may mourn and lament and recognize her utter hopelessness without Him.

Vs.7 – Even that which she maintained as a form of religion is now inhabited by the enemy.

Vss.8-10 – Falling so far short of God's measure, even whatever she did have was destroyed, her leadership is placed in bondage with no one able to hear from God. Only silence and mourning prevail for there is no ongoing direction or revelation until we walk in obedience to our last one.

This progression cannot be ignored for God will not be mocked (cf.Gal.6:7). Because God is longsuffering, complacency may take the place of repentance and inevitably the enemy will inhabit the form of religion until spiritual destruction overtakes, revealed by silence and desolation.

Vs.11 – Remembering Jeremiah's treatment of being imprisoned by the people and religious leaders of his day, his ability to continue to love and be concerned for those people is a remarkable demonstration of God's love through him. It provides an example for us of the outworking of Jesus' truth in the Beatitudes of caring for those who despitefully use us (Mt.5:43-48).

Vs.12 – The destitution is complete right down to the infants fainting for lack of food. Surely this is true in the spiritual sense as well as literal. When we refuse to obey the Lord, we will find a lack of spiritual nourishment, as inability to feed not only ourselves, but the young ones who are placed in our care, so the innocent suffer because of the disobedience of those accountable.

Vss.13-16 – There is nothing to be said in defense of those who persist in their disobedience. There is no plea which can come forth for those who follow false prophets, not heeding God’s warnings. Now, held in derision by all who see her, the enemy is filled with laughter for he has long been waiting for this victory. He mocks all that was once beautiful and blessed. When those who have once upheld truth and righteousness live contrary to it, how very great is the fall (Mt.7:26,27).

Vss.18,19 – The blessing of being chosen as God’s special people does not nullify the obedience demanded. When we come to God’s revelation of ourselves to ourselves there is no response other than repentance, for we discover even as Christians, the reality of “Just as I am without one plea.” How desperate are we for God’s mercy? Will we cry out day and night without rest, pouring out our hearts to the only One who can help us?

Vss.20, 21 – There is no desolation worse than that which comes to those who have lost His presence by walking contrary to Him.

Vs.22 – God’s unleashed wrath is terrible, pitiless and total. We are a body and what happens to one affects all (1Cor.12;26). When one suffers judgment, it is felt by all in various degrees and ways. Families, churches, denominations and nations all are affected when the name of the Lord has been shamed.

How wonderful to remind ourselves “*But there is forgiveness with Thee*” (Ps.130:4 KJV). Yet the higher way is to keep covenant with Him – and Jesus is the only hope of that being a reality.

Lesson we can learn

A whole new scene opens before us in this chapter. Previously, we saw what had happened to the city, as Jeremiah cried, “Alas, alas, how deserted is the city.” But now we see that same city from God’s viewpoint and it is a terrorizing picture. Reading this chapter, we look in vain for anything that would appear to be mercy, love and tender compassion which we so associate with God today.

As much as we would like to skip over this, we need to come to grips with the fact that there is such a thing as God’s divine anger. How far we are removed from the faith of our fathers whose spirit of reverence said – if God’s Word says something, then woe is me if I don’t do what He says. We live in a generation of rationalization.

Not only do we rationalize God’s character but we rationalize (lessen or diminish) punishment. We think we are able to survive the moving of God’s delight in us to His displeasure. But more than survival is involved; we lose something very precious when God brings wrath and judgment upon us. When Zion is covered with the cloud of God’s anger, she is no longer covered with the cloud of His glory.

In the Book of Exodus, Israel came to the end of the road at the Red Sea. There was a wall on each side, the enemy behind, and no place to go but ahead. As God made the way, the cloud of God’s presence came behind them to separate them from the enemy. They barely reached the other side when the enemy attempted to take the same path that God had made for His people.

Success patterns entice the enemy. When God makes a way for His people, they are always successful. But the cloud that was protection for the people of God only moved with them as they were led by God and the moment the plan was fulfilled, the waters closed. That which had been an open door to Israel became death to those who perverted it.

“*Neither does the Lord remember His footstool in the day of His anger*” (vs.1). A footstool often represented the ark of the covenant, the place where the Lord’s presence dwelt. In essence, during this

present day of Jeremiah's life, they said, "Lord, You're related to us by covenant. You can't do this." But we forget there are conditions to every covenant. To David He said, "If your sons will obey Me like you obey Me; if they'll walk in My ways, there shall never fail to be a man from your loins who is seated upon the throne."

What happens to a covenant when it is broken on one side – our side? It means He no longer has to keep covenant with us. How glad I am that Father knows we could never keep our end of the bargain, so He provided that perfect spotless Lamb who will not only keep our responsibilities but God's as well. He will satisfy God completely and His blood seals us into an everlasting relationship with Father. What does that have to do with punishment?

Do we really believe God has put us in some kind of "hothouse" as a protection from Satan or anguish or pain? Do we really believe that because we are Christians we have been set apart from ever having negative experiences? Was it really lack of faith that caused Jesus Christ to go through what He did? Was it lack of faith that caused Paul to go through the negative experiences of his life?

Imagine Paul with some of our theology today. They stoned him and left him for dead outside the city (Ac.14:19). We would accuse him of not having faith. We would somehow get him back together and send him on to Rome. When the ship fell apart someone would say he went out of the will of God. And when a viper grabbed hold of him while he was building a fire (Ac.28:3ff), there would be one to say, "This man is really not of faith." And when he was placed in prison, we would say, Peter had enough faith to be led out by an angel (Ac.12:7ff), but this man just sits chained to a Roman guard for years. He surely can't be the man of God he claims to be (cf.2Cor.11:23ff).

No, we are not immune to problems while only the Christians who don't obey God go through some things. Thousands of godly men and women have been beaten and imprisoned and burned, who with their last breath have sung, "All hail the power of Jesus' name," while the crowd scoffed and said that if they really believed in Jesus' name, they wouldn't die.

Dear church, we dare not be lulled into the lethargic position of the Laodicean church saying, "We've been good. We've got the blood of Jesus and everything is going to be fine." This is the day when the Lord is once more going to shake everything that can be shaken.

God is shaking our doctrine. He's doing it so we will know our true doctrine. There has never been more *mixture* in teaching in the church than there is today. Why? That He may do us good! It's not the devil. The Lord may let him growl, but he is only a tool in God's hand.

The mixture doesn't mean that God has forgotten His covenant or that we are no longer filled with His glory. It does mean we need to be sure of what we believe and why we believe it so we can stand firm; so that if the written Word is removed, the Truth will remain in our hearts.

When the cloud of His anger comes, we lose the cloud of His glory and His presence. He swallows us up and tears us down so we also lose His tender compassion. When God swallows us up in His love, that kind of consumption is a joy and delight to believers and causes us to be *totally yielded* to whatever is His desire.

But when God throws us down, consumes us, and swallows us in that way, it is the fire of destruction that destroys and brings to dishonor. He has cut off every horn, which almost always speaks of authoritative power and strength. Every strength in Zion was destroyed. God's displeasure causes us to lose our power and authority in Him.

This message doesn't come forth to cause fear but rather to *admonish us* so that we can understand before time and position ourselves in the Word of the Lord to be strong and put on the whole armor of God.

But another fear is coming to men and women even in the body of Christ. Leaders are trembling in fear of famine and lack of finances and situations that man has created. There is a fear of the prophetic word and it is part of the judgment that is coming to the house of God. Christians are in fear because they don't continue to grow and they are ministering on a level beyond their living.

"He has withdrawn His right hand" (vs.3). The hand of the Lord is many things to us, such as provision, protection, and chastening. In this particular place it speaks of the protection of the Lord being withdrawn (Ezr.8:22). How often we minimize or take for granted God's protection. Sometimes we feel as though we have earned a right to have God as a bodyguard because we asked Jesus to be merciful and save us. It is as though we hired Him since that day to take good care of us and He had better do it.

In the revelation of the Father, it is quite the opposite. The Word says, "If you keep your eyes on Me, if you will put your hope and trust in Me, I will never let go of you. I will never let circumstances prevail against you. Doors will open before you that no man can shut (cf.Is.22:22; Rev.3:7). *But if you don't keep your eyes on Me, if you put your eyes on other things, other nations or other gods, My hand will be heavy upon you.*"

When anyone is my enemy, I have lost a friend. Think what it would mean if we lost *His* friendship. What a joy and privilege is ours right now to step boldly into His presence and commune with Him as friend-with-friend.

As this becomes reality to us, we can understand that old hymn of the church, "Sweet Hour of Prayer." It can become to us, not merely a sweet hour, but days, nights and weeks of prayer: communion so rapturous that we can see ourselves as the hymn says, rising to new realms and looking back saying, "Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer." Not that communion is over but it becomes endless and time is no more. What a loss is ours when God is angry.

Verse 5 says there is destruction of the stronghold and an increase of mourning, meaning a loss of strength and a loss of joy. The call to the church is one of difficulty and responsibility as we stand before the rest of the body, saying, "This is the way it's done and the strength He is in me, He will be in you." When our heavenly bridegroom speaks in the Song of Solomon to His beloved, He says, "Your breasts are beautiful." He is telling the church she is able to nurse, to reach out to the babies and say, "Here, let us teach you the ways of the Lord," so they are nurtured and enabled to grow.

In that same wonderful book the bride says, *"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth"* (S/S1:2 KJV). That means we must be face-to-face with Him so that He may impart His Word to us. What close communion!

Calling the church His garden, His spouse, He speaks of the vast difference in each one. There's a variety of color and fragrance. From time to time, He blows on that garden and the fragrance wafts up to Him and delights Him. But in Lamentations 2:6, He has laid waste His garden and destroyed the place of His meeting.

How do you lay waste a garden? You plow it under.

We lose our fruitfulness and fellowship with Him. All that He planted, cultivated and watered to bring forth praise, honor and reverence to Himself is destroyed because we wouldn't respond to Him. His intention was that every wind, the breath of the Holy Spirit breathing upon us, whether of adversity or of His blessing, would bring forth from our lives a fragrance, sweet incense to His nostrils.

But we griped and complained and became angry. We rebelled and turned to other gods and other places and watered down every word of God until He declared it necessary to plow us under.

This is culminated in verse 7 by even a forgetting of an appointed feast, a losing of worship. God has taken away her power and protection, and taken away His laws and His message, removing all purpose and direction for living, all spiritual vision.

Today we have the highest suicide rate that has ever taken place in this country reaching even to young children. Not just the poor and ignorant, but also the educated and prosperous have cried out, "What is there to live for?"

It seems like everyone is going their own way. Schools can't agree on their curriculum; churches can't agree; nobody likes each other; and everyone teaches a different thing. There is no one you can trust. So, self-destruct has set in. It always will when we depart from God's truth.

"*There is a silence of the elders and the young women*" (vs.10). There's a lack of wisdom. Young ministers are not elders. We have put such a premium on youth; we have lost the wisdom that can only be imparted through time. Wisdom doesn't just come through revelation but through living experience. It seems that just when a man becomes useful, we set him on a shelf and say, "Thanks a lot for your sixty-five years," when really it's time we need him to feed us. About the time we need the older women to share valuable things they have learned, we shut our ears to them and say, "It's a new day. What worked for you won't work for us." How tragic it is when God silences the elderly.

Young women in the Bible usually represent song and beauty and enthusiasm. We see how quickly there can come a lack in godly beauty, enthusiasm, and the song of the Lord in exchange for demonstration and flaunting; a mimicry of what once was beautiful and real and precious. Because we see this, we tend to shut the door on the real. But we must not let the counterfeit panic us.

There is the genuine Spirit of God who has been outpoured upon the church that is making crybabies stand up and be strong. "*The righteous are as bold as a lion*" (Pr.28:1). The true anointing is beautiful and touches lives, but when it is *faked* it becomes obnoxious and we don't want any part of it. When that happens, we often go back to something that's less than God wants for us. This is devastating to the church and it calls for lamentation.

There must also come a lamenting for the body of Christ at large. How long has it been since you prayed for other countries of the world?

The young people are crying for bread and wine (vs.12). They need something stronger than they're getting. What if there were no parents in the church to care for and nurture them? Is that perhaps the situation we see today? Could this be why new religions and cults have been so successful in the United States? They have given the youth a cause; something to commit to. Because the church hasn't, we lost almost a whole generation of young people who tramped the streets looking for something to give to only to find the futility of such a war. So they turned to drugs and whatever other escape was available.

Church, we must wake up! It's time to stop watering down the Word of the Lord. Instead of compromise, we must say, "If you are going to be a part of Jesus Christ, this is what it's going to cost you." It won't drive people away; it will draw them. It's what they are crying for – a *real* cause.

Jeremiah weeps for the people because they are in a condition of unrevealed sin. And who didn't reveal it? The priests, the elders, the teachers, the fathers and the mothers. We are frightened of the very word sin. We water it down by saying something like, "That probably wouldn't be pleasing to the Lord."

What is sin? What are young people hearing in their churches? Today's church may say, "Nothing is sin unless it is sin to you." That's heading for a fall! We must awaken to God's Word. We must let them know that there are some things that absolutely *defile* mankind. There are things God says are enmity against Him and have no part with Him. Some things are just plain sin and iniquity. Carelessness

becomes lawlessness and lawlessness is rebellion and "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft" (1Sam.13:23 KJV).

When things are going well, we become proud. And the enemy triumphs because of our failures and scoffs that God has done this. It is fair. And there will be a completeness in His punishment, a fulfillment of His wrath.

We must cry out to God because of our individual sins as well as our corporate sins (vvs.18-22). We must begin to deal with God earnestly and repent with tears. We need to cry out continually without rest during the trial when everything seems hopeless. There's nothing wrong with crying; repenting from our innermost beings until all the filth is out of our lives and we have been made right with God.

Let the Holy Spirit reveal each sin. Name them to God and bring them, each one, to the cross. Don't leave until they are covered by the blood of Jesus and then you can lift up your hands, not only in surrender, but in praise and adoration and thanksgiving to a God who is holy.

Father God, thank You for the greatness of Your love which speaks to me in this way. Thank You for Your Word and Your Spirit that gives me understanding. I bless You for the Spirit of conviction that has not been withdrawn and I ask for courage to respond so that I may stand pure and undefiled in your sight and be unwavering in that certainty so that I will not be pushed into false guilt and condemnation by the words of people. I praise You for the shaking of all that I believe so I may know what is truly of You. I am not asking You to separate me from all these things but rather strengthen me so be able to stand in the midst of them for the glory of God. Amen.

Lamentations 3:1-66

1 I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.

2 He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light;

3 indeed, he has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long.

4 He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones.

5 He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship.

6 He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead.

7 He has walled me in so I cannot escape; he has weighed me down with chains.

8 Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer.

9 He has barred my way with blocks of stone; he has made my paths crooked.

10 Like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in hiding,

11 he dragged me from the path and mangled me and left me without help.

12 He drew his bow and made me the target for his arrows.

13 He pierced my heart with arrows from his quiver.

14 I became the laughingstock of all my people; they mock me in song all day long.

15 He has filled me with bitter herbs and sated me with gall.

16 He has broken my teeth with gravel; he has trampled me in the dust.

17 I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is.

18 So I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord."

19 I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall.

20 I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.

21 Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:

22 Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.

23 They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

24 I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

25 The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him;

26 it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

27 It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young.

28 Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him.

29 Let him bury his face in the dust-- there may yet be hope.

30 Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace.

31 For men are not cast off by the Lord forever.

32 Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love.

33 For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.

34 To crush underfoot all prisoners in the land,

35 to deny a man his rights before the Most High,

36 to deprive a man of justice-- would not the Lord see such things?

37 Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it?

38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?

39 Why should any living man complain when punished for his sins?

40 Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord.

41 Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven, and say:

42 "We have sinned and rebelled and you have not forgiven.

43 "You have covered yourself with anger and pursued us; you have slain without pity.

44 You have covered yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can get through.

45 You have made us scum and refuse among the nations.

46 "All our enemies have opened their mouths wide against us.

47 We have suffered terror and pitfalls, ruin and destruction."

48 Streams of tears flow from my eyes because my people are destroyed.

49 My eyes will flow unceasingly, without relief,

50 until the Lord looks down from heaven and sees.

51 What I see brings grief to my soul because of all the women of my city.

52 Those who were my enemies without cause hunted me like a bird.

53 They tried to end my life in a pit and threw stones at me;

54 the waters closed over my head, and I thought I was about to be cut off.

55 I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit.

56 You heard my plea: "Do not close your ears to my cry for relief."

57 You came near when I called you, and you said, "Do not fear."

58 O Lord, you took up my case; you redeemed my life.

59 You have seen, O Lord, the wrong done to me. Uphold my cause!

60 You have seen the depth of their vengeance, all their plots against me.

61 O Lord, you have heard their insults, all their plots against me—

62 what my enemies whisper and mutter against me all day long.

63 Look at them! Sitting or standing, they mock me in their songs.

64 Pay them back what they deserve, O Lord, for what their hands have done.

65 Put a veil over their hearts, and may your curse be on them!

66 Pursue them in anger and destroy them from under the heavens of the Lord.

Exposition of the text

Vss.1-20 – If we are to learn to intercede as Jesus did and as Paul did, we must be able to *feel* the devastation of those who no longer sense His presence, protection, and provision. Whether guilty or not, Jeremiah identifies with all who are now exposed and devastated. Verses 55-66 prove his concern and faith.

This chapter begins in the first person, no longer dealing with “them” and “their experience” but with “I am the one.” As God’s wrath exposes the depths of sin, I recognize my involvement.

Constant stumbling, blind alleys and confusion overtake me. Everywhere I turn, I am stymied and defeated by the hand of Almighty God. I am withered and strengthless, unable to function normally. Every circumstance is filled with bitterness and overwhelming difficulty. I am like the living dead. Imprisoned by inescapable circumstances, held down by heaviness, my prayers don’t even “hit the ceiling.” There is nowhere to turn and every direction is a maze of frustration. Like a hunted animal, I have been stalked, caught, and torn apart and am in constant pain. My mind and emotions are excruciatingly dying a slow death. I am a joke to all who see me; my only nourishment is bitterness and harassment. The depth of my being is raw and exposed. What should be food turns to stone in my mouth destroying even my ability to eat. I’m not only humiliated but totally trampled on and left in the dirt. There is no such thing as peace or prosperity. Everything that gave my life meaning is now totally missing.

Vs.21 – Thinking on this hopelessness causes complete dejection and yet – there is truth that renews hope.

Vss.22-26 – The truth is God Himself. Because He is love, I am not annihilated and so faithful is God that daily His mercy is poured out to me even in the midst of His punishment.

Musing on His love, not only comforts me, but enables me to include you as well. When God is all we want, then we can wait for His goodness by seeking Him and hoping in Him without being frantic, confident His deliverance will come. *“Rejoice not against me O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me”* (Mic.7:8 KJV).

Vss.27-30 – Youth especially (chronologically and spiritually) need that discipline and God allows it when it’s needed. The discipline of silence, humility of hope, submission to mistreatment and misunderstanding will produce the character needed in our lives. Remembering. . .

Vss.31-39 – God is not sadistic; suffering and pain do not bring Him pleasure and His love is there through it all. Surely, He is righteous to punish sin, so there is no basis for us to complain.

Vss.40-50 – These things should cause us to re-focus, to see, and to admit our sins and to turn from them, fully aware they actually are against God and that we need to be forgiven. In it all or behind it all is God, allowing our calamity, using the enemy until we come to the place of awareness and confession. It is God we must deal with, not bad luck, irascible people, or the devil.

Vss.51-57 – It is only as we call to God rather than complain that we will hear His comforting, “Don’t be afraid.”

Vss.58-66 – When we confess our guilt and turn from our self-righteousness to our only Redeemer, then we can ask God to deal with our enemies in righteousness and justice.

Lessons we can learn

The painful position of sin is pictured for us in the first 20 verses of chapter 3. God's wrath is allowing this to be experienced. While we don't like to look at such things, it is necessary to reaffirm our belief that God's attitude toward sin never changes or wavers.

Walking and living in darkness is the dreadful experience of not knowing or seeing the path ahead, the inability to see pitfalls and enemies that lurk in the shadows, and therefore fear and uncertainty are constant companions. Darkness is the lack of understanding the purpose for living; an aimlessness and frustration engulfs life.

While God's hand is against us continually, His heart is not against us even while this takes place, for His desire is to bring us back to Himself.

Verse 4 speaks of being disabled and unable to help ourselves. We who have always been so self-sufficient are now totally dependent on whatever comes along.

Bitterness and hardship surround us and wall us in so that there is no freedom, only constant limitation. The freedom we are pursuing – "I can do it myself, my way" – becomes our prison. The unlimited life, which we expected to be free of rules and responsibilities, turns inside out and hems us in on every side.

We carry a heavy load and are weighed down. The burden of existence is almost more than we can bear and our way is blocked no matter which way we turn. When we try to pursue a straight course, we find it crooked before us.

We are beaten and bruised, left without help. We are targeted by God for His arrows which never miss their mark (vs.12). Others look at us and laugh at our condition. Our food is gravel which breaks our teeth. We are deprived of peace and prosperity; depression engulfs us. We are not only deprived of physical and material well-being, but even more painful is the mental and emotional stress.

The traumas of disharmony, the torture of emptiness, the torment of loneliness become normal existence. And the worst of it all: "Even when I call out or cry out for help, He shuts out my prayer." The physician knows the value of the suffering and allows it to persist until the appointed time when it will produce the desired result, that true healing may come.

But there is hope in the Lord. The stirring of remembrance kindles hope (Ps.143:5). We had forgotten that we are ever only alive because of the Lord's love toward us and the fact that we still exist no matter how miserably, means He hasn't given up on us.

This reminds us of His unchanging character so we know that daily His compassions are renewed, His faithfulness unfailing. Surely, He is worth waiting for, not for what He will do, but for Himself. He is good to those whose hope is in Him not just in what He gives. He is good to those who seek *Him*, not just a way out.

It does take discipline to wait for the Lord but if we do it in confidence, not issuing Him ultimatums and throwing tantrums as the young so often do, it will produce a maturity level that can understand the necessity of the punishment and submit to it as just and purposeful.

When we get to the place that we are willing to examine our ways and test them, the treatment is beginning to bring healing. In this healing, we recognize that we deserve our suffering and repent for our sin.

As we pursue God's justice our hearts are enlarged to weep for those who suffer because of us. We are aware of what we have brought upon others by our stubbornness, rebellion, and self-concern. We are

brought to a place of true humility before God and it is only then that we can ask for judgment on our enemies, not in anger, but in a plea for God's righteous judgment.

Because we see much of the same sin and problems in America as well as the church, it seems likely that we may experience similar judgments as those declared in this book.

If that is true, we as the forerunners of the Lord, the *church within the church*, those who have an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying now to the church, are going to have to be able to stand during those times when men's hearts fail them for fear. When persecution or judgment comes, people turn to people.

If people can't turn to God today, they aren't going to turn to Him during times of calamity. Instead, they will turn to us and say, "You're a church person. Help us."

If we are doubting our relationship with the Lord or the Lord of our relationship, we will not be able to respond with conviction concerning God's character and purposes.

We must learn some things. God is saying, "*Quit you like men and be strong*" (1Cor.16:13KJV), which means, "Grow up and act like an adult!" Once we've won a battle, we need to get ourselves together to fight again. We don't like that. We want to camp between battles.

But if we are to be forerunners, we must be those who can stand during wave after wave of difficulty with an answer for every man that asks us the *reason of the hope that is within us* (1Pet.3:15), in readiness and in the fear of the Lord.

Because of this, we are being forced to make some decisions now. We must deal with God for we are judged by His Word. God wants us to allow the Holy Spirit's revelation of sin and weakness to bring us to cleansing and purity today, so when judgment comes upon the body of Christ at large, we will be strong through it.