

LAMENTATIONS

**An Explanation
with Notes and Quotes,
illustrations and Applications**

G. Michael Cocoris

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PREFACE

The purpose of this commentary is to provide a practical explanation of Lamentations. The objective is a balanced exposition—explaining the passage in context and applying its truths to life with illustrations. Some commentaries are, by design, of a technical nature, delving into the meanings of words and phrases even outside their use in the book under consideration. Those commentaries tend to ignore the context of the book and its application. Other commentaries go to the other extreme and concentrate on the application, often not fully expounding the passage. Commentaries should do both. They should offer a contextual exposition of the book and apply the truths of that book to life. Adding illustrations facilitates clarity.

First and foremost, this is a contextual exposition. The context is not just the paragraph or the chapter but the whole book. In studying any book of the Bible, the first question that should be asked is: “What is the subject of this book?” Each natural literary unit, whether a paragraph or a narrative, develops a subject. A legitimate exposition will show how the author develops his subject. That, and only that, is contextual Bible study. All details in a book must be explained in light of the message and structure of the entire book. Words only have meaning in a context. A detailed explanation of words and phrases ripped from their sentence and the broader context is not exposition. The flow of the thought of the passage in the context of the book is the message the author intends to convey.

The Bible was written for living (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Even the most brilliant explanation that stops short of the applications is an abortion of what God intended. Thus, the practical ramifications of every passage must always be considered.

The procedure of study I use is to first divide the biblical book into its natural literary units (narratives or paragraphs). Then, I analyze each unit. The analysis includes an outline of the development of thought in that unit (major points and sub-points), an explanation of each sentence, and a summary statement. After I have personally analyzed each unit, I read commentaries, deliberately reading commentaries from different theological perspectives. I credit commentators’ comments by putting their names in parenthesis, even if I had seen that point in the text during my study before I read their comments. Thus, each chapter of this material expounds a natural literary unit of the book of Lamentations.

In the process of study, I also wrote a tentative title, introduction, and conclusion as if what I was working on was a sermon. If I stumble across an illustration, I include it, but, at this point, I do not search for illustrations. I write all of this for each literary unit in the book before preaching the first sermon in the book. As a result, when I begin speaking through the book, I have the whole book in mind.

As I prepare to preach each literary unit, I may change the tentative title, introduction, and/or conclusion. I rarely change the explanation of the text. It is as I preach each unit that I search for illustrations. Again, having studied the whole book first is helpful here. I sometimes found an illustration I knew would fit better later in the book.

The introduction of each chapter briefly relates that section to life and/or the context. The captions throughout the chapters are divisions of that portion of Scripture and correspond to the main points of a sermon. The italicized headings correspond to the sub-points of a sermon. Rather than footnotes, the author’s name is in parenthesis in the text. While applications are made throughout the exposition, the passage as a whole is summarized and applied at the end.

May the Lord be pleased to use this approach to the Scripture to enlighten, encourage, and edify believers, thus glorifying His Son.

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INTRODUCTION

Lamentations has been called “an acrostic Dirge” (Scroggie), the “Wailing Wall of the Bible” (McGee), “the most neglected book in the Bible” (Wilber Smith), “an elegy written in a graveyard.”

Author

Nowhere in this brief book does the author give his name. Yet there is little doubt that the author was Jeremiah. Consider the following: 1) The book is a lament. Jeremiah wrote a lament for Josiah (2 Chron. 35:25). 2) The book was written by an eyewitness of Jerusalem’s siege, fall and destruction (Lam. 1:13-15; 2:6, 9; 4:1-12). Jeremiah not only witnessed the fall of Jerusalem but remained behind after the captives were deported (Jer. 39). 3) Elements of style are similar to Jeremiah. The similarities are striking and numerous, especially in the poetic sections of Jeremiah (*cf.* Lam. 1:2 with Jer. 40:13; Lam. 1:15 with Jer. 8:21; Lam. 1:16, 2:11 with Jer. 9:1, 18; Lam. 2:22 with Jer. 6:25; and Lam. 4:21 with Jer. 49:12). The word “daughter” occurs about twenty times in each book. The same grief over Judah’s downfall is evident in both books. 4) A strong and persistent tradition from the third century BC maintains that Jeremiah wrote the book. The superscription to Lamentations in the Septuagint says, “And it came to pass after Israel had been carried away captive and Jerusalem had become desolate, that Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented with his lamentation over Jerusalem saying.” This is also the position of the Talmud, the Aramaic Targums of Jonathan, and the early Christian writers like Origen and Jerome. Reformers, such as Calvin, and numerous commentators support this view.

Recipients

Nebuchadnezzar’s siege on Jerusalem was from January 588 BC to July 586 BC. Jerusalem fell on July 18, 586 BC and on August 15, 586 BC, the city and the Temple were burned. Jeremiah probably wrote these five elegies not long after the destruction before he was taken into Egypt (Jer. 43:1-7). So, the date is late 586 BC.

The recipients were the Jews who observed the destruction of Jerusalem (Lam. 1:12), The Lord (Lam. 1:20; 2:20; etc.), Judah and Jerusalem (Lam. 2:13; 3:40, 41, etc.) as well as Edom (Lam. 4:21-22).

Message

The subject is a lament over the destruction of Jerusalem. The term “lamentations” comes from a Greek word that means “to cry aloud.” The book consists of poems of mourning over the Babylonians’ utter destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. The message is sin brings lamentation, but God is faithful to His promise to be merciful.

Structure

The literary structure of the book of Lamentations is simple and obvious—in the Hebrew text. The book consists of five poems, one for each chapter. These five poems are acrostics. Each verse begins with a word whose first letter is successively one of the twenty-two Hebrew alphabet letters, except in chapter 3, where three verses are allotted to each letter. Four chapters were also written in “limping meter,” a cadence used in funeral dirges and, thus, most appropriate for this lament over the destruction of Jerusalem.

Isn't it strange that Jeremiah is overcome with emotion yet writes a lament as an acrostic? Doesn't that seem to give the book a touch of unreality? Not necessarily. While there is deep emotion on the part of the writer, what he writes is the product of reflection and deliberation.

I.	The First Lament: the Desolation of Jerusalem	1:1-22
II.	The Second Lament: the Destruction of Jerusalem	2:1-22
III.	The Third Lament: Distress of Jeremiah	3:1-66
IV.	The Fourth Lament: Defeat of Jerusalem	4:1-22
V.	The Fifth Lament: Desire of Jeremiah	5:1-22

Purposes

There are three purposes of Lamentations. One purpose of Lamentations is to express mourning over Jerusalem's holocaust. For better than fifty years, Jeremiah warned of coming judgment. Now, the holy city has been laid waste and desolate. God's promised judgment for sin has come, but instead of exalting over the fulfillment of his prophecy, Jeremiah mourns and weeps. Part of the purpose is to express the sorrow in Jeremiah's heart over Jerusalem's destruction.

A second purpose of Lamentations is to confess sins and acknowledge God's righteous judgment. There is not just mourning and misery, there is also confession. The attitude of the book is “we have sinned and God is holy. He is righteous to judge.”

A third purpose of Lamentations is to express hope in God's future restoration of His people. God has judged but will be faithful to His covenant promise (Lam. 3:22-23).

Summary: Jeremiah laments the destruction of Jerusalem but recognizes that God is righteous in judging and will be faithful to His people.

The lesson for us is that sin brings lament, but God is faithful to His promise to be merciful.

A THOUGHTFUL LAMENT

After a disaster, people naturally grieve, mourn, and lament. Such a reaction is often emotional. There is a place for that. There is also a more thoughtful lament. What would that look like and what can we learn from it?

The book of Lamentations is a thoughtful lament. The book consists of five poems, one for each chapter. These five poems are acrostics. Each verse begins with a word whose first letter is successively one of the twenty-two Hebrew alphabet letters, except in chapter 3, where three verses are allotted to each letter. Four chapters were also written in “limping meter,” a cadence used in funeral dirges and, thus, most appropriate for this lament over the destruction of Jerusalem.

“This acrostic [chapter 1] lament contains a variety of similar statements describing the destruction and the consequent misery of Jerusalem. Thus, the two section titles that follow describe a slight shift in viewpoint rather than a major division of the chapter into two distinct segments. In the first part (vv. 1-11), the prophet described the desolate city primarily from the viewpoint of an observer. In the second part (vv. 12-22), he personified Jerusalem, bewailing her own desolate condition.

“The terrible nature of her [Jerusalem’s] situation is communicated to the reader mainly through pictures drawn from female experience in the ancient” (Provan, cited by Constable). “The personification of a city as a woman is a common image in prophetic literature, with possible antecedents in Mesopotamian literature and successors in Greek literature—but nowhere is it developed more effectively than in the personification of Jerusalem in this chapter. Here a kaleidoscope of images turns quickly from a lonely widow to a degraded princess, to a whore, to a rape victim, to a betrayed lover, to an abandoned wife” (Berlin, cited by Constable).

“All the dirges in Lamentations express the grief of the defeated Jerusalemites. But the miserable condition of the city is most prominent in this first one, not so much what she had undergone as what she had become” (Constable).

The Lament of an Observer

Alone “How lonely sits the city *that was* full of people! *How* like a widow is she, who *was* great among the nations! The princess among the provinces has become a slave”! (1:1). The city is Jerusalem. It was great among the nations. Now, it is like a widow, all alone. It was like a princess among the provinces; now it has become a slave. It is abandoned, and like a “helpless widow,” it is “without protection” (Ryrie). “The narrator is seeking to elicit the pity of the audience right from the start” (Parry, cited by Constable).

“Jeremiah, speaking as a narrator, bewailed the abandoned city of Jerusalem that had once been so glorious and independent. This verse begins with the word ‘Alas,’ which is a cry of despair, horror, and lament often associated with funeral dirges (cf. Is. 1:21; Jer. 48:17; Ezek. 26:17). *Sitting alone* is sometimes a picture of deep sorrow and mourning (cf. 2:10; Ezra 9:3; Neh. 1:4). Now the city, personified as a woman, was as solitary as a widow and as servile as a forced laborer. It had changed in three ways: numerically, economically, and socially” (Constable).

“Jerusalem, a city which used to be close to God, has been changed by choice of significant men. They had turned away from Him when they knew Him, and now their city is under siege. There is death in the city” (Francis A. Schaeffer, *Death in the City*, pp. 17-18, cited by Constable). “The narrator is seeking to elicit the pity of the audience right from the start” (Parry, cited by Constable).

Friendless “She weeps bitterly in the night, her tears *are* on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has none to comfort *her*. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies” (1:2). Jerusalem’s lovers were “the nations in which Judah trusted, some of whom helped the Babylonians plunder Jerusalem” (Ryrie). The Hebrew word translated “treacherously” means “deal treacherously, deceitfully, faithlessly.”

“The prophet personified Jerusalem as a young girl abandoned by her lovers and betrayed by her friends (cf. Jer. 4:30; 30:14). Normally weeping gives way to sleep at night, but when it does not, sorrow is very great indeed” (Constable). “The first of the five Lamentations has one monotonous theme repeated five times: ‘There is no one to comfort[’] (1:2, 9, 16, 17, 21). In this exceptionally vivid depiction of the desolation of Zion, the city of God, this one phrase rings like the heavy gong of a funeral bell” (Kaiser, cited by Constable).

“As Jeremiah continued his personification of Jerusalem, he described her response to her desolation. While other nations enjoyed the peaceful benefits of sleep, Jerusalem found herself ‘crying in her pillow,’ bitterly lamenting her sad state. She needed the comfort of her lovers and friends, but it did not come. She had forsaken her true Lover and Friend, Yahweh, for false gods and foreign alliances. But in her hour of need her fickle friends were not to be found. They had become her enemies. She had no one to help ease her misery” (Dyer).

Captivity “Judah has gone into captivity, under affliction and hard servitude; she dwells among the nations, she finds no rest; all her persecutors overtake her in dire straits” (1:3). “The prophet then expounded on the calamity (vv. 3-6). Judah, the personified daughter of Jerusalem, had gone into exile because of the affliction and servitude that Yahweh had allowed Babylon to impose on her. She was out of the Promised Land, where God had said she would find rest (cf. Deut. 12:10; 25:19; Josh. 21:44; 23:1; 2 Sam. 7:1, 11; 1 Kings 8:56; Ps. 95). Now there was no rest for her, but only distress, as the people lived among the Gentiles” (Constable).

“The reference to Judah ... is hyperbolic: it means simply that a significant number of Judaeans went into exile.... Hyperbole is, indeed, a feature of the poem as a whole, a fact that must be borne in mind when the attempt is made to look behind the text to the historical circumstances that might have prompted its composition.... The language is impressionistic rather than scientifically precise” (Provan, cited by Constable).

Deserted “The roads to Zion mourn because no one comes to the set feasts. All her gates are desolate; her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she *is* in bitterness” (1:4). The roads to Jerusalem, formerly crowded with worshipers traveling to the Temple, were now deserted. The roads leading to Jerusalem mourn because no one is traveling to Jerusalem to keep the feast, her gates are desolate, her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness. “‘Zion’ (possibly from the Heb. *siyon*, meaning ‘Castle’) is a poetic name for Jerusalem. No Judahites came to the feasts in Jerusalem because they were in exile. Consequently, the roads mourned that pilgrims did not cover them with joyful songs. Zion’s gates missed the constant flow of people in and out of the city. The gates were where people congregated to transact business, carry out legal transactions, and socialize. The few priests and virgins left there were lonely and miserable” (Constable).

“The word Zion (1:4, 1:6) referred originally to the hill in Jerusalem on which the city of

David was built (cf. 2 Sam. 5:7; 1 Kings 8:1). Later, with the temple's construction on Mount Moriah and the ark's transfer from the city of David to the temple (cf. 2 Chron. 5:2, 2 Chron. 5:7), the hill on which the temple stood began to be called Mount Zion (cf. Psa. 20:2; 48:2; 78:68-69). The word eventually was applied to the entire city of Jerusalem, which included the city of David, the temple mount, and the western hill on which the city later expanded (51:35). The term 'Zion' is often associated with God's dwelling place whether the temple proper or the city where the temple was located. (On the Daughter of Zion, see comments on 2:1.) So in 1:4-6 Jeremiah emphasized the religious desolation in Jerusalem after the temple and its associated sacrifices and feasts, which symbolized God's presence and fellowship with His people, were destroyed" (Dyer).

Dominated "Her adversaries have become the master, her enemies prosper; for the LORD has afflicted her because of the multitude of her transgressions. Her children have gone into captivity before the enemy" (1:5). Jerusalem's enemies "had humiliated her.... The city was devoid of children since they were in captivity" (Constable). "At this point, the author reveals one of the book's most significant theological concepts: what has happened to Judah has occurred because of her sins [cf. Deut. 28:52-63]" (House, cited by Constable). "Over and over again he [Jeremiah] affirmed that the Lord Himself had decreed (1:17; 2:17; 3:37-38) and sent the calamity (1:5, 12-15; 2:1-8; 3:1, 43-45; 4:11)" (Chisholm, cited by Constable).

Humiliation "And from the daughter of Zion all her splendor has departed. Her princes have become like deer that find no pasture, that flee without strength before the pursuer" (1:6). The daughter of Jerusalem has lost her splendor. Who is the daughter of Zion? Constable says that the daughter of Jerusalem is God's daughter, who is now humiliated. Berlin says, "it is not Zion's daughter who is being addressed (Zion has no daughter) but Zion herself, who is classified as a 'daughter'" (Berlin, cited by Constable). The *NKJV Study Bible* says the expression "is an endearing term for Jerusalem that speaks of God's extraordinary love for the city (Ps. 87:2). What was her splendor? The Hebrew word translated "splendor" means "splendor, honor, majesty, glory". "Israel's glory was found in the presence of the Lord (Ps. 96:8). But that glory had been removed from the Most Holy Place (Ezek. 9:3; 10:19; 11:22)" (*The NKJV Study Bible*).

The princes of Jerusalem fled without strength and became like deer with no pasture, meaning no food. Who are the princes? Ryrie says that the "princes" are "Zedekiah's sons (Jeremiah 39:6)" (see also Barnes). Constable comments, "Zion's leaders ('her majesty'), including Zedekiah and his advisers, had fled like frightened stags that could find no pasture—even though they had been strong in the past (cf. 2 Kings 24:12; 25:4-5; Jer. 39:4-5)."

"In these verses [3-6], Jeremiah amplified the calamity that had befallen Judah and Jerusalem. Instead of dwelling securely in her own land, Judah had gone into exile. The Babylonian Captivity, which lasted from 605 B.C. to 538 B.C., forced most of the people to leave their homes and live in a strange country as slaves. The roads and gates of Jerusalem that had once been filled with pilgrims coming to worship at the appointed feasts at the temple were now deserted. The temple itself lay desolate (1:10), the priests groaned, and the feasts had been discontinued. The foes and enemies of God's people had triumphed. Jerusalem's maidens grieved (1:4), her children were captured (1:5), and her leaders (princes) fled like hunted deer (1:6)" (Dyer).

Misery "In the days of her affliction and roaming, Jerusalem remembers all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old. When her people fell into the hand of the enemy, with no one to help her, the adversaries saw her and mocked at her downfall" (1:7). "Jerusalem looked

back on better times, now that she was in exile. She remembered how no other nations came to help her—but mocked her—when the Babylonians besieged her (e.g., Ammon, Moab, and Edom). Mental anguish accompanied physical hardship” (Constable). “To this day in Bible lands, laughter does not occupy the place it does in the West.... In the vast majority of cases, laughter is linked with scorn [cf. Gen. 17:17; 18:12; Job 8:21; Ps. 126:2]” (Ellison, cited by Constable).

“As if the physical trauma were not enough, mental anguish also beset the people of Jerusalem. Jerusalem remembered all the treasures that were hers in days of old. Her present state of ruin and ridicule contrasted sharply with her former glory—and Jerusalem found no solace in remembering what once was hers. Falling into enemy hands (1:2-3, 1:5-6), she was laughed at” (Dyer).

The Cause of the Desolation

Stupendous Sin “Jerusalem has sinned gravely, therefore she has become vile. All who honored her despise her because they have seen her nakedness; yes, she sighs and turns away” (1:8). The Hebrew expression “sinned gravely” has been translated “sinned greatly” (NASB and NIV) and “sinned grievously” (ESV). The Hebrew word translated “vile” means “impure, filthiness.” As a result of Jerusalem’s stupendous sin, she became spiritually filthy, was despised by those who once honored her when they saw her, groaned, and “turned her back upon the spectators to hide herself” (Barnes). “Jerusalem’s great sinning had resulted in her becoming unclean and despised like an overexposed woman. Jerusalem had embarrassed herself; her sins and vices had come to the light” (Constable). “In the ancient world, to have one’s naked body exposed, especially the genitals, was an utter disgrace” (Parry, cited by Constable).

“The theme of Jerusalem’s sin, introduced in verse 5, is now examined more closely and ultimately becomes one of the major theological emphases of the book” (Harrison, cited by Constable).

Stupid choice “Her uncleanness is in her skirts; she did not consider her destiny; therefore her collapse was awesome; she had no comforter. ‘O LORD, behold my affliction, for the enemy is exalted!’” (1:9). The Hebrew word translated “awesome” means “wonderful, extraordinary, hard to understand” (NASB: “fallen astonishingly;” NIV: “astonishing;” ESV: “terrible”). Because Jerusalem did not consider the consequences of her choice, uncleanness was in her skirt, her collapse was astonishing, and she had no comforter. “The city had fallen because it had not considered the consequences of its apostasy (cf. Deut. 32:29; Isa. 47:7). Sin had stuck to her like dirt to the hem of a garment (cf. Lev. 5:3; 7:21). Now the enemy had gained the upper hand and there was no one to comfort her” (Constable).

“After describing *what* had befallen Jerusalem (1:1-7), Jeremiah explained *why* (1:8-11). Jerusalem had sinned greatly (1:5). The catastrophe that overtook Jerusalem was not an action of a heartless God against an innocent people. Jerusalem brought about her own destruction because of her sin. She reaped what she had sown. When she turned from God to pursue her own idolatrous ways, she did not consider her future. As is true of many individuals, Jerusalem did not seem to realize that sin leads only to death and destruction (Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 6:23)” (Dyer).

“The adversary has spread his hand over all her pleasant things; for she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary, those whom You commanded not to enter Your assembly” (1:10). The Lord allowed the Gentile Babylonians to spread their hands over her pleasant things (Hebrew: “desirable thing, pleasant thing”), meaning that He allowed those He commanded not to enter the

Temple to inner it. He “allowed the Babylonians to force their way into the holy sanctuary and so desecrate it, and to steal its treasures. Gentiles and most Israelites were forbidden from entering the temple proper; only authorized Jewish priests could do so” (Constable).

“The image is of her being raped; indeed the plural ‘nations’ may suggest that she is gang-raped. If YHWH’s wife has been raped, then not only is she dishonored, *he is also!*” (Parry, cited by Constable).

“All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their valuables for food to restore life. ‘See, O LORD, and consider, for I am scorned’” (1:11). “During the siege, the people gladly traded their valuables for food” (Ryrie). “The residents of the city did not have enough to eat, even though they had given their valuables for food. The city cried out to Yahweh to look on her despised condition” (Constable).

“Jeremiah briefly sketched two of the results that Jerusalem received because of her sin. First, Jerusalem saw her temple become desecrated—pagan nations entered her sanctuary. The building the people had falsely relied on for their security (7:2-15; 26:2-11) was now defiled before their eyes by Gentiles who were not supposed to enter it. Evidently the Jews viewed their temple as a giant talisman or good luck charm. They felt that Jerusalem was safe because God’s house was there. He might let other places be destroyed, they argued, but surely not His own house. The people learned too late that God does not hold stones in higher regard than obedience. Disobedience brings destruction. Second, because of her sin, Jerusalem experienced famine. During and after the siege, food was scarce. People were forced to barter their treasures for food to keep themselves alive (1:19; 2:20; 4:10). The futility of materialism became evident for those who had more silver and gold than bread” (Dyer).

“Verses 1-11 are the language of an onlooker. The once populated city is now a bereaved widow; the princess has become a slave, forsaken by her idols and betrayed by her allies (vv. 1, 2). The people have gone into captivity because of their sin, and no pilgrims come to worship in Zion (vv. 3-9). The precious vessels of the sanctuary have been taken by the Babylonians (v. 10), and the people suffer famine (v. 11)” (MacDonald).

“As Jeremiah stood surveying the scene of destruction that had once been a thriving city, he began his lament over her desolation. In 1:1-7, he vividly described the extent of her destruction, and in 1:8-11 he explained the cause for her destruction. Jerusalem had experienced a catastrophic metamorphosis. Jeremiah listed three ways in which the city had changed. First, her population had been decimated. The once-bustling city was now deserted. Second, her economic position had changed. The city that had once been great among the nations was now reduced to the status of a widow. The concept of widowhood is used throughout the Old Testament to depict a position of helpless despair; it is often linked with aliens and orphans as individuals who could not protect themselves (cf. Ex. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; 24:19-21; 26:13; 27:19; Isa. 1:17). Jerusalem was now destitute and defenseless. Third, her social position had changed. The queen ... has now become a slave. The city that used to rule other nations was now forced to serve the nation of Babylon” (Dyer).

What happened to Jerusalem is like what happens to a city devastated by a hurricane or an earthquake. It is affected physically, socially, and economically. Sin affects people in those areas.

The Lament of Jerusalem

“In contrast to the first half of the lament, these verses present the picture of an inside observer looking out. Verses 12-19 record Jerusalem’s call to people who had observed her desolation, and verses 20-22 contain her call to the Lord” (Constable). “It would appear that emotional and psychological progress is realized in this poem as it moves from a more distant, descriptive third-person reporting in verses 1-11 to a more personal, private first-person speech in verses 12-22” (Kaiser, cited by Constable).

“Jerusalem called out to those passing by to stop and take note of her condition. First, she focused on God’s judgment that had been poured out on her (1:12-17); then she explained that the judgment was deserved because of her sin (1:18-19)” (Dyer).

To the People “*Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which has been brought on me, which the LORD has inflicted In the day of His fierce anger*” (1:12). “Jerusalem bewailed the lack of concern that her desolate condition drew from onlookers in this classic expression of grief. Her pain was uniquely great because the Lord had poured out His wrath on her” (Constable). Jerusalem’s destruction was not a chance occurrence; it was a direct result of God’s judgment. The Lord brought it (cf. 2:1-8; 4:11; 5:20)” (Dyer).

“Verse 12 has become ‘a classic expression of grief’ and reminds us of our Lord’s lament over the same city for its stiff-necked rejection of Him. The language also fits Christ’s condition on the cross, with the hardened soldiers, religious establishment, and general populace callously watching His suffering as a public spectacle” (MacDonald).

“From above He has sent fire into my bones, And it overpowered them; He has spread a net for my feet And turned me back; He has made me desolate *And faint all the day*” (1:13). “The Lord had sent fire into the city’s bones when he allowed the Babylonians to burn it. He had captured Jerusalem as a prisoner in His net” (Constable). “The ‘net’ does not refer to a hunting implement, but to a military implement used to hold back captured men, preventing their escape. Such nets are pictured in ancient battle scenes and are mentioned by other biblical writers, for example, Ezek. 12:13 and 17:20” (Berlin, cited by Constable).

“The Lord had thoroughly desolated and demoralized Jerusalem by removing all sustenance from her. This is a picture of a thoroughly ‘demoralized community’” (Harrison, cited by Constable).

Ryrie points out, “Four figures describe the fall of the city: fire (1:13), a net to entrap (1:13), a yoke of sin on Jerusalem’s neck (1:14), and a wine press that crushes (1:15).” Dyer explains it like this, “Jeremiah used four metaphors to describe God’s work against Jerusalem. First, God’s attack was like fire, which He sent ... down into Jerusalem’s bones. This may refer to lightning bolts streaking down from the sky and striking people (cf. 1 Kings 18:38; 2 Kings 1:10, 1:12; Job 1:16; Ps. 18:12-14). Second, God’s attack was like that of a hunter who spread a net for Jerusalem’s feet. Nets were used to trap numerous animals, including birds (Prov. 1:17), fish (Eccl. 9:12), and antelope (Isa. 51:20). A net would entangle and trap an animal so that it could not escape.”

“The yoke of my transgressions was bound; they were woven together by His hands, *and thrust upon my neck. He made my strength fail; the Lord delivered me into the hands of those whom I am not able to withstand*” (1:14). “The Lord had put Jerusalem into a yoke like an ox. She had lost her freedom. Now others were controlling her, so that she could not stand by herself” (Constable). “Unchecked sin can so bind its practitioners that all power to overcome it

or the grip of those into whose hand such sinners eventually fall is spent and gone. Only by reducing sinners to such desperate straits will some eventually listen and turn. Thus grief may often work a very wonderful work that none of the goodness or blessings of God will ever effect” (Kaiser, cited by Constable).

“Third, God’s attack was like binding Jerusalem’s sins ... into a yoke which was placed over Jerusalem’s neck. A yoke tied two draft animals together to pull heavy loads. The heavy wooden crossbeam of the yoke referred metaphorically to slavery or to a burden or hardship someone had to bear (cf. Gen. 27:40; Lev. 26:13; Deut. 28:48; 2 Chron. 10:3-11; Isa. 9:4; 58:6, 58:9; Jer. 27:2, 27:6-11). Jerusalem’s sins produced the yoke of judgment under which she was bound to serve Babylon. God sapped her strength and turned her over to her enemies” (Dyer).

“The Lord has trampled underfoot all my mighty *men* in my midst; He has called an assembly against me to crush my young men; the Lord trampled *as* in a winepress the virgin daughter of Judah” (1:15). “He had removed all the strong young men from the city, and He had trodden Jerusalem down as a virgin in a winepress. He had squeezed all the life out of her” (Constable).

“Fourth, God’s attack was compared to the treading of grapes. Like grapes, Jerusalem’s young men were crushed. In His winepress, the Lord has trampled the Virgin Daughter of Judah. Harvested grapes were placed in a winepress and trampled underfoot till the juice ran out into an adjoining pit. This action became associated with the thought of complete destruction (cf. Isa. 63:1-6; Joel 3:12-15; Rev. 14:17-20; 19:15). “The Virgin Daughter of Judah” referred to Jerusalem (2:2, 2:5), which felt the effects of God’s judgment. God had summoned an army against her” (Dyer).

“Four metaphors describe God’s judgment of Jerusalem in the last four verses: fire (v. 12), a net (v. 13), a yoke (v. 14), and a winepress (v. 15)” (Ryrie).

“For these *things* I weep; my eye, my eye overflows with water; because the comforter, who should restore my life, is far from me. My children are desolate because the enemy prevailed” (1:16). “Jerusalem cried because of her condition and because no one sought to comfort or strengthen her (cf. v. 12). The people were desolate because Jerusalem’s enemy had prevailed” (Constable).

“Zion spreads out her hands, *but* no one comforts her; the LORD has commanded concerning Jacob *that* those around him *become* his adversaries; Jerusalem has become an unclean thing among them” (1:17). “All Judah’s lovers (allies) became her enemies” (Ryrie). “Rather than comforting Zion, who appealed with outstretched hands, her neighbors had withdrawn from her as from an unclean thing. Stretching out the hands is also a posture in prayer, so the idea may be that there was no divine response when the people prayed [*The NKJV Study Bible*]. The reference to ‘Jacob’ indicates that all of his descendants, not just the people of Judah, were the objects of ‘the LORD[‘s]’ chastening” (Constable). “From this point on, the Lord [‘Yahweh’] becomes a major topic of the book” (House, cited by Constable).

“Jerusalem’s explanation of God’s judgment to those passing by ended in a cry of tragic despair. In a scene of touching sadness, Jeremiah pictured Jerusalem as a broken, weeping widow (1:1) stretching out her hands to seek some condolence and aid. But no one was near to comfort; in fact, there was no one at all to comfort her (1:9, 1:21). The city was destitute and despised. Those neighbors to whom Jerusalem had turned for aid were now her foes (1:2) and viewed her as an unclean thing. The word used here (*nidâh*) referred to the ceremonial impurity associated with menstruation (cf. Lev. 15:19-20; Ezek. 18:6). Jerusalem was shunned and rejected by her erstwhile friends” (Dyer).

“The LORD is righteous, for I rebelled against His commandment. Hear now, all peoples, and behold my sorrow; my virgins and my young men have gone into captivity” (1:18). “By confessing that the Lord was right, the prophet expressed a most important truth (cf. Exod. 9:27; Deut. 32:4; Ezra 9:15; Neh. 9:33). He also confessed for the city her rebellion against the Lord’s commands.... God’s punishment of Jerusalem had been just. She mourned the loss of her young citizens who were now in exile” (Constable).

“In Judah’s confession of guilt, she acknowledged that judgment was caused by the righteous God disciplining an unrighteous people. The Lord is righteous, yet I rebelled against His command. God is not the author of evil nor is He a supreme sadist who delights in inflicting punishment on others (cf. Ezek. 33:11; 2 Pet. 3:9). But God is righteous so He does not allow sin to continue unchecked. Sin exacts a horrible price from those who enjoy its temporary pleasures. Jerusalem abandoned her God to experience those ‘pleasures.’ Now Jerusalem was paying the cost—suffering ... exile (1:3), betrayal by allies, and death by starvation [see 1:19]” (Dyer).

“The only reason men were in the place where they were in the days of Jeremiah, or are in our own post-Christian world, is that they have turned away from the propositional revelation of God and, as such, they are under the moral judgment of God” (Schaeffer, cited by Constable).

“Man does not want to accept the fact that God is angry with sin. Instead, the fact that God is love is played for all its worth. I agree that God is love, and the church certainly needs to learn to take the love of God into the marketplace of life. We have often failed to do that, but I feel that it has led to an over-emphasis on the love of God in this generation. God is righteous, and God is holy, and God is just in what He does” (J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 3:428, cited by Constable).

“I called for my lovers, *but* they deceived me; my priests and my elders breathed their last in the city, while they sought food to restore their life” (1:19). “The city had called to its political allies (i.e., Egypt and other Gentile nations) and its own leaders for help, but even the priests and elders had been selfishly taking care of themselves rather than guarding the citizens. Another interpretation is that the priests and elders were not wrong in seeking their own welfare [Parry]. The second and third lines describe another aspect of Jerusalem’s distress” (Constable).

To the Lord “See, O LORD, that I *am* in distress; my soul is troubled; my heart is overturned within me, for I have been very rebellious. Outside the sword bereaves, at home *it is* like death” (1:20). “The city was greatly distressed because of the calamity that had come upon it (though not because of the sin that caused it [Parry]. Due to its rebelliousness against Yahweh, the streets and houses had become places of death and now stood empty” (Constable). “While the city was under attack by Nebuchadnezzar’s army, those who tried to escape to freedom by breaking through the siege were cut down by swords. Those who remained in the city died of starvation and plague” (Dyer).

“They have heard that I sigh, *but* no one comforts me. All my enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that You have done *it*. Bring on the day You have announced, that they may become like me” (1:21). Jerusalem asked the Lord to bring on the day that he had announced that Jerusalem’s enemies would become like Jerusalem. Ryrie points out that the day of Babylon’s punishment was predicted in Jeremiah 50-51. “Jerusalem’s enemies had heard of her calamity and had rejoiced over it. The city wished that God’s predicted judgment of these enemies would come soon and that they would become like Jerusalem” (Constable).

“Let all their wickedness come before You, and do to them as You have done to me for all my transgressions; for my sighs *are* many, and my heart *is* faint” (1:22). Jerusalem “asked God to consider the wickedness of these nations and to take vengeance on them for their treatment of

Jerusalem—because she was weak and groaning under divine judgment for her transgressions” (Constable). “Judea prays that God will repay the wickedness of her gloating enemies, all the while admitting her transgressions amid her many sighs” (MacDonald).

“After describing her plight, Jerusalem called on God to extend His judgment to her enemies. May You bring the day You have announced so they may become like me. The ‘day’ was the ‘day of the Lord,’ which had already been announced by the prophets. This was the time when God’s judgment would extend to all the earth to avenge injustice and bring about the Age of righteousness that had been promised (cf. comments on “the day of the Lord” under “Major Interpretive Problems,” in the *Introduction* to Joel).

“Jerusalem wanted God to judge the sins of her enemies as He had judged her sins: deal with them as You have dealt with me because of all my sins (cf. 4:21-22). This did not happen at that time, but God said He would judge all nations during and after the still-future Tribulation period (cf. Isa. 62:8-63:6; Ezek. 38-39; Joel 3:1-3, 3:9-21; Obad. 1:15-21; Micah 7:8-13; Zech. 14:1-9; Mt. 25:31-46; Rev. 16:12-16; 19:19-21.)” (Dyer).

Summary: In a poem written as an acrostic, Jeremiah records a thoughtful lament over the destruction of Jerusalem because of the stupendous sin of the Israelites.

This lament contains not only what happened but also why it happened. Those who suffered divine discipline want everyone to know (1:18) the seriousness and severity of departing from the Lord. “We believe verse 18 is the focal point, for this verse pivots not only this chapter but any use made of this chapter for teaching or preaching” (Kaiser, cited by Constable). “The key verse in the Book of Lamentations [v. 18] explains the reason Jerusalem lay in ruin” (McGee, 3:426, cited by Constable).

“Jeremiah’s first dirge established the book’s theme—the sorrow of sin. Five times in 1:1-22 he noted that Jerusalem’s cries for help after her fall went unanswered—there is none to comfort her” (1:2, 1:9, 1:16-17, 1:21). The city had turned from the protective care of her God to pursue foreign alliances and lifeless idols; and now, at the time she needed the help of others most, she found herself alone—destitute and defenseless” (Dyer).

While deep emotion was involved, this lament is the product of reflection and deliberation. “In a world filled with so much sorrow and pain men and women—especially believers—must cope with grief. But how? Jeremiah, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, would aid us in coping just as he aided himself and the grieving Jewish community on the heels of one of the greatest tragedies ever to befall Israel. In one of the most tear-filled chapters of the five in Lamentations, Israel (and the believing community through the centuries) was taught about coping with grief” (Kaiser, cited by Constable).

Good grief can include such things as tears, reflection, journaling, and teaching others what you have learned. After David sinned, he wrote, “restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me by your generous spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will be converted to you” (Ps. 51:13).

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

After any tragedy, pundits start asking, “Who is responsible?” For example, suppose your house was broken into while you were away. Naturally, the thieves did it, and they are responsible for it. Then the pundit asks questions such as, “Why did the security system not work?” and “Where were the police that were supposed to have been there that day because of previous robberies?” If you dig deep enough, you might come up with an answer that would surprise you, yea, shock you!

Ancient Jerusalem was conquered, destroyed, and her people viciously slaughtered. The Babylonians did it. Then the pundit could have stepped in, asking, “why was the Army not able to defend Jerusalem? In that case, the pundit might have a point; Jeremiah had an entirely different point of view, a surprising, even shocking point of view that, no doubt, applies to some tragedies in our day.

“This lament ... describes in greater detail than chapter 1 the nature of the calamity that had befallen Judah. Whereas in chapter 1, the city is the main focus of the prophet’s sorrow, in chapter 2, it is more the temple. In both chapters, the narrator and Zion speak” (Constable). “The tone changes from shame and despair in chapter 1 to anger in chapter 2” (Berlin, cited by Constable).

The Anger of the Lord

Her Position (Glory) “How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger! He cast down from heaven to the earth the beauty of Israel, and did not remember His footstool in the day of His anger” (2:1). “The ‘Daughter of Judah’ referred specifically to the city of Jerusalem (1:15; 2:5). The city was also called the Daughter of Zion (1:6; 2:1, 2:4, 2:8, 2:10, 2:13, 2:18; 4:22) and the ‘Daughter of Jerusalem’ (2:13, 2:15)” (Dyer). Because of her sin, God covered Jerusalem with His anger like a cloud, cast down her beauty from heaven, and did not remember his footstool. “Jeremiah pictured the sovereign Lord (Heb. *’adonay*) overshadowing Jerusalem, personified as a young woman, with a dark cloud because of His anger. The Lord had cast the city from the heights of glory to the depths of ignominy (cf. Isa. 14:12). It had been as a ‘footstool’ for His feet, but He had not given it preferential treatment in His anger” (Constable).

Ryrie says, “The ark of the covenant in the Temple (1 Chron. 28:2; Psalm 99:5).” Constable says, “The footstool may be a reference to the ark of the covenant (cf. 1 Chron. 28:2; Ps. 99:5) or the temple, but it probably refers to Jerusalem, as does “the glory of Israel, though some take the latter as referring to the temple (E.g., Berlin). It was perhaps ‘cast from heaven to earth’ in the sense that this ‘glory’ had now lost its connection with heaven.”

Her Places (Cities) “The Lord has swallowed up and has not pitied all the dwelling places of Jacob. He has thrown down in His wrath the strongholds of the daughter of Judah; He has brought *them* down to the ground; He has profaned the kingdom and its princes” (2:2). In His anger, rather than having pity on the cities of Judah, the Lord swallowed them up, allowed them strongholds to be conquered, brought them down to the ground, and profaned their kingdom and princes. “The Lord had devoured the cities of the Judahites without sparing them and had overpowered their strongholds. He humbled the kingdom of Judah and its princes. Notice the

increasingly narrow focus of God's anger: from all the 'inhabitants,' to the 'strongholds' (fortified cities), to the 'princes' of the nation" (Constable).

"This destruction included the physical dwellings (2:2), palaces (2:5; cf. 2:7), and strongholds (2:2, 2:5), but it also included the land's leaders. Thus, God brought down her kingdom and its princes (2:2). King Zedekiah and the royal family were ousted from their positions of leadership" (Dyer).

Her Power "He has cut off in fierce anger every horn of Israel; He has drawn back His right hand from before the enemy. He has blazed against Jacob like a flaming fire devouring all around" (2:3). In His fierce anger the Lord cut off the horn (strength) of Israel, withdrew His protection against Israel's enemy, and like a flaming fire He devoured everything. "He also broke the strength of Israel and had not restrained her enemy. He had judged Jacob severely, as when someone burns something up (cf. Exod. 13:21-22; 15:6-7, 12; Deut. 4:24; 29:22-23; Heb. 12:29)" (Constable). "The reference in 2:3 to every horn of Israel probably also meant the royal family. A 'horn' was a symbol of strength; God removed all those to whom the people looked for guidance and leadership" (Dyer).

Her People "Standing like an enemy, He has bent His bow; with His right hand, like an adversary, He has slain all *who were* pleasing to His eye; on the tent of the daughter of Zion, He has poured out His fury like fire" (2:4). Pouring out His fury like fire, the Lord stood against Jerusalem like an enemy, bent His bow, and slew those who were once pleasing in His eyes. "He had also attacked His people like an archer and had slain them—even though they were His favored nation. The fire of His anger had burned her habitations. He destroyed everything that they valued. 'All that was pleasant to the eye' may refer to the children of Jerusalem (Parry)" (Constable).

Her Palaces "The Lord was like an enemy. He has swallowed up Israel, He has swallowed up all her palaces; He has destroyed her strongholds, and has increased mourning and lamentation in the daughter of Judah" (2:5). "Yahweh had become like an enemy to His people, consuming and destroying the vast majority of them, and causing mourning and moaning among them all (cf. Lev. 26:17, 25, 34, 36-41; Deut. 28:25, 31, 68)" (Constable). "Because of this destruction, in which God seemed to Judah like a fire (2:3-4) and like an enemy (2:4-5), the people were in mourning and lamentation" (Dyer).

Her Practices (Religion) "He has done violence to His tabernacle, *as if it were* a garden; He has destroyed His place of assembly; the LORD has caused the appointed feasts and Sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion. In His burning indignation He has spurned the king and the priest" (2:6). In His burning indignation, the Lord did violence to His Tabernacle as if it were a garden that had been trampled down, destroying His place of assembly because all of the feast in the Sabbath to be forgotten in Jerusalem and spurned the king and the priest. "He tore down His own temple like a temporary booth—the kind that farmers erected in their fields for a short time and then demolished. He caused the ending of feasts and Sabbath observances in Zion and showed no regard for the kings and priests of Judah. He had made it impossible for His people to worship Him corporately" (Constable).

"God's anger was also directed against His temple: He has laid waste His dwelling like a garden. The word for 'dwelling' (*śōk*) is a variant spelling of the word for 'booth' (*sūkāh*). The thought expressed by Jeremiah is that God tore down His temple (His place of meeting) in the same way a farmer would tear down a temporary field hut or booth used to provide shade during a harvest" (Dyer).

"The Lord has spurned His altar, He has abandoned His sanctuary; He has given up the walls

of her palaces into the hand of the enemy. They have made a noise in the house of the LORD as on the day of a set feast” (2:7). “He rejected the altar of burnt offerings and the temple, having delivered the temple precincts to the Babylonians. Israel’s enemy, rather than the Judahites, now made noise in the temple” (Constable). “The feasts, Sabbath observances, all the sacrifices, and even the altar were affected by Jerusalem’s fall. The shout in the house of the Lord was actually a wailing at the site of the destroyed temple” (Dyer).

These verses [2:1-7] describe what God has done to Judah—destroyed the temple (footstool) (v. 1), swallowed up the cities (v. 2), refused to hold back the enemy, as if He Himself were Judah’s foe (vv. 3-5), treated the temple as if it were a mere garden, caused the sacrificial system to cease in Zion, and set aside both king and priest (vv. 6, 7)” (MacDonald).

Her Protection (Wall) “The LORD has purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion. He has stretched out a line; He has not withdrawn His hand from destroying; Therefore He has caused the rampart and wall to lament; they languished together” (2:8). “The Lord also destroyed Jerusalem’s walls and broke down her defenses with His ‘hand.’ What a ‘hand’ the Lord must have to be able to crush Jerusalem’s walls and defense towers!” (Constable). “Ordinarily, the builder stretches out a line to build a straight wall, but here God stretches out a line to destroy the wall. The expression implies intentional planning on God’s part, making his action seem cruel” (Berlin, cited by Constable).

Her Prophets “Her gates have sunk into the ground; He has destroyed and broken her bars. Her king and her princes *are* among the nations; the Law *is* no *more*, and her prophets find no vision from the LORD” (2:9). The Lord (2:8) also caused the gates of Jerusalem to sink into the ground, etc. “The city gates with their bars were no longer effective in keeping Jerusalem safe, and the king (Jehoiakim) and his advisers had gone into exile. The Mosaic Law now failed to govern the Israelites since they could no longer observe its cultic ordinances. Yahweh had also stopped giving His prophets revelations of His will” (Constable). “The Lord did not send them a message to comfort and sustain them” (Keil).

“Results of the destruction: leaders (*princes*) removed (2:2); palaces, strongholds, and the Temple destroyed (2:7); festivals and the Sabbath forgotten (2:6); kings and priests rejected (2:6); the wall broken down (2:8, 9); leaders exiled (2:9); the law eliminated (2:9); and prophetic messages silenced (2:9)” (Ryrie).

“Jeremiah again spoke of the leadership of Jerusalem, which was devastated by Babylon. He pictured the leaders as being like a wall around Jerusalem that used to protect the people. But just as the physical ramparts and walls around Jerusalem were destroyed (2:8-9), so her human wall of leadership was also dismantled (2:9-10). The Davidic dynasty was ousted from its throne. The king and her princes (2:2) were exiled among the nations. Without the temple the function of the priests had been rendered ineffective (2:6) so that the Law was no more. Another group of leaders, the prophets, had been so corrupted by charlatans (cf. Jer. 23:9-32; 28:1-17; Ezek. 13:1-23) that they were no longer receiving communications (visions) from God or speaking in His name (2:14). Thus every group charged by God to lead the people—the king, the priests, and the prophets—was affected by Jerusalem’s fall” (Dyer).

Her Pride (Humiliated) “The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground *and* keep silence; they throw dust on their heads and gird themselves with sackcloth. The virgins of Jerusalem bow their heads to the ground” (2:10). “The inevitable accompaniments of war: silenced *elders*, shamed *virgins*, and starving children” (Ryrie). “The most respected leaders of the Israelites had suffered humiliation and now sat on the ground with dust on their heads, signs of mourning. Girding with sackcloth and bowing to the ground also expressed grief over what

the Lord had done. Thus, the Lord broke down the old male elders of the nation and its young female virgins, representing all the people, as well as its walls. He humbled the people to ‘the ground’ as He reduced the city to ‘the ground’” (Constable).

The anger the Lord was directed against their position (glory), places (cities), power, people, places, practices (religion), protection (walls), prophets, and pride.

“The second dirge opens by focusing on the real cause for Jerusalem’s calamity. God was the One who destroyed the city and its people. In these 2:1-10 Jeremiah hammered home the reality of God’s judgment on Jerusalem because of her sin. The words Jeremiah used depict an image of God overseeing the city’s dismantling. The verb *bāla’* (‘to swallow up’ or ‘to engulf completely’) was used four times (2:2, 2:5 [twice], 2:8 [‘destroying’]), perhaps to picture the fire of God’s judgment engulfing the city itself. Jeremiah used other vivid verbs as ‘hurled down’ (2:1), ‘torn down’ (2:2), ‘cut off’ (2:3), ‘burned’ (2:3), ‘destroyed’ (2:5-6), ‘laid waste’ (2:6), ‘abandoned’ (2:7), ‘tear down’ (2:8), ‘broken and destroyed’ (2:9). These words describe the feeling of havoc and disarray in which Jerusalem found herself. God was the ‘one-man wrecking crew’ responsible for the rubble. Jeremiah explained that God’s anger (2:1 [twice], 2:3; cf. 1:12; 2:6, 2:21-22; 3:43, Lam_3:66; 4:11) and wrath (2:4; 3:1; 4:11) was directed against the strongholds of the Daughter of Judah (2:2)” (Dyer).

“To many in the ancient world, the destruction of YHWH’s temple was proof that he was not as strong as the gods of the invaders. But the poet is emphatic that weakness on God’s part was not the reason for the loss of the sanctuary—*Adonai himself* lay behind the destruction of his temple” (Parry cited by Constable).

“Even though God was exceedingly angry with Judah, His anger was not like a hidden force, incalculable and arbitrary, hitting where and when it wished without any rhyme or reason. Instead, His anger was measured out and controlled by both His love and justice. It was at once an expression of outrage against the sin, evil, and wickedness perpetrated as well as a personal note of continued caring. Had He not cared or loved so intently, He would not have troubled Himself to call His wandering sinners back to His embrace” (Kaiser, cited by Constable).

“In response to their loss of leadership, the people mourned. The mourning extended from the elders to the young women. Possibly, this is a figure of speech known as a merism, in which Jeremiah used two extremes (old men, young women) to show that *everyone*—young and old and all in between—was mourning the loss of leadership. In grief they were silent, sprinkling dust on their heads, and wearing sackcloth, both signs of sorrow and anguish (cf. Gen. 37:34; Job 2:12-13; Neh. 9:1)” (Dyer).

The Grief of Jeremiah

Starvation “My eyes fail with tears, my heart is troubled; my bile is poured on the ground because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, because the children and the infants faint in the streets of the city” (2:11). Grieving over the destruction of the people, Jerusalem, including the children and infants fainting in the street, Jeremiah’s eyes were filled with tears, his heart was filled with trouble, and his bile is poured out on the ground.

“Jeremiah had exhausted his capacity for weeping and sorrowing over the destruction of his people; he felt drained emotionally. ‘My heart is poured out’ is literally ‘My liver is poured out,’ the liver being regarded as the seat of deep emotion. The prophet observed small children and infants fainting in the streets for lack of food and drink” (Constable).

“Jeremiah cried out in anguish at the scene he had been surveying. He sketched five portraits

of Jerusalem's condition, which prompted his cry. The first sketch highlighted the starvation that had decimated Jerusalem during the siege. The saddest scenes in any war or conflict are the sufferings experienced by children. Jeremiah wept so much from inner torment that tears blinded his eyes (cf. 3:48-49). For his heart (lit., 'liver') to be poured out on the ground meant that he was fully drained emotionally" (Dyer).

"They say to their mothers, 'Where *is* grain and wine?' As they swoon like the wounded in the streets of the city, as their life is poured out in their mothers' bosom" (2:12). The infants and children say to their mother, "Where is grain and the wine?" They swoon like wounded soldiers in the streets as they lay dying on their mother's bosom. "They were dying in their mothers' arms for lack of nourishment. *Jerusalem was a place of starvation*" (Constable, italics his). "He captured the pathos of the moment as he described children and infants, who were faint (2:19), calling out for food as their lives ebbed away in their mothers' arms. Parents who loved their children could not provide even the necessities of life" (Dyer).

No Comfort "How shall I console you? To what shall I liken you, O daughter of Jerusalem? What shall I compare with you, that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion? For your ruin *is* spread wide as the sea; who can heal you?" (2:13). Seeing the ruin of Jerusalem with no hope of healing, Jeremiah asks how he could comfort and console Jerusalem. "For the first time in the book, the narrator speaks directly to 'daughter ... Jerusalem.' Jeremiah struggled to find adequate words to comfort his people because their ruin had been so devastating (cf. 1:12). Comfort was beyond the scope of human words because the devastation of the city was unparalleled. No human being could heal her—only the Lord. *Jerusalem was a place of no comfort*" (Constable, italics his).

"We endeavor to comfort our friends by telling them their case is not singular; there are many whose trouble is greater than theirs, but Jerusalem's case will not admit this argument We tell them that their case is not desperate, but that it may easily be remedied; but neither will that be admitted here, upon a view of human probabilities" (Matthew Henry).

"Lamentations is not a book of consolation; it is a book that refuses to console, keeping the moment of grief always in focus" (Berlin, cited by Constable). "The people's calamity is greater than anything the prophet can think of with which to comfort them (v. 13). 'Virgin daughter of Zion' is what the people *should* have been, not what they actually *were*" (MacDonald).

"The city's hopeless condition prompted Jeremiah to address her directly. His second sketch was of a man trying desperately to offer comfort to a grieving friend. Unfortunately, the judgment's magnitude was so severe that no comfort could be given" (Dyer).

Deceptive Preaching "Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not uncovered your iniquity, to bring back your captives, but have envisioned for you false prophecies and delusions" (2:14). Instead of delivering the truth, the message of the Lord, which would have uncovered their iniquity and prevented the captivity, the prophets of Israel delivered a false and deceptive message. "Instead of confronting the people with their sins, the false prophets had predicted peace and prosperity (Jer. 2:5; 10:15; 14:14-16; 23:9-40)" (Ryrie).

"The false prophets had misled the people (cf. Jer. 2:5; 10:15; 14:13; 16:19). They had not told them the truth that would have led them to return to God and spared them from captivity. They may still have been failing the people. *Jerusalem was a place of perverted leadership*" (Constable, italics his). "What is clear is that, instead of exposing sin so that it could be dealt with, they just painted over it to hide it from view (cf. Ezek. 13:10-16)" (Parry, cited by Constable).

"The third sketch Jeremiah drew was of false prophets hastening rather than hindering

Jerusalem's downfall. God had threatened to destroy Jerusalem because of her sin, and the prophets were supposed to announce this impending disaster and exhort the people to repent. Unfortunately, though Jeremiah and Ezekiel were faithful prophets of God, others were tickling the people's ears with rosy predictions of peace and prosperity (cf. Jer. 28:1-4, 28:10-11; 29:29-32). Jerusalem chose to ignore the true prophets' warnings and to listen to the flattering and therefore misleading lies of the false prophets" (Dyer).

Mocking "All who pass by clap *their* hands at you; they hiss and shake their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem: is this the city that is called 'the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth'?" (2:15). Jeremiah laments that those who observed what is going on in Jerusalem clap their hands, hiss, shake their heads, and mockingly say, "This is the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth!" "This is the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth!" "In chapter 1, 'Lady Jerusalem' called passers-by to observe (and grieve over) her sorrow (1:12). Now we learn that the reaction of these observers was not sorrow but shock and derision. Passersby expressed their amazement at Jerusalem's great destruction. They could hardly believe that it had been such a beautiful and happy place (cf. Ps. 48:2)... 'Clap their hands,' 'hiss,' and 'shake their heads' are terms normally associated with mocking [House; Keil]" (Constable).

"The fourth sketch pictured the victorious enemy mocking the vanquished people. The once-majestic and secure city of Jerusalem was now the object of scoffing and derision. People taunted her, poking fun at her former beauty and joy, which were now gone, and her enemies scoffingly rejoiced in their victory (3:46)" (Dyer).

"All your enemies have opened their mouth against you; they hiss and gnash *their* teeth. They say, 'We have swallowed *her* up! Surely this *is* the day we have waited for; we have found *it*, we have seen *it*!'" (2:16). All the enemies of Jerusalem hissed and gnashed their teeth, saying, "We have swallowed her up; the day we have been waiting for has arrived and we have seen it! "Judah's enemies rejoiced to see the evidence of her fall. They took pride in seeing her destruction" (Constable).

"The LORD has done what He purposed; He has fulfilled His word which He commanded in days of old. He has thrown down and has not pitied, and He has caused an enemy to rejoice over you; He has exalted the horn of your adversaries" (2:17). The truth, however, is that the Lord did what He purposed; He fulfill the promise He made years before that if Israel sinned, He would throw them down without pity and cause their enemy to overpower them and rejoice over it.

"Jerusalem's destruction was the fulfillment of the destruction that Yahweh, long ago, had told His people might come (cf. Lev. 26:14-46; Deut. 28:15-68). He was ultimately responsible for it. He had shown no mercy in judging but strengthened Judah's enemy against her and caused him to rejoice at the city's overthrow. *Jerusalem was a place of mocking enemies*" (Constable, italics his).

"Jerusalem's destruction was no act of random violence. Rather, it was a specific act by God intended to punish the long-term sins of a specific nation, Israel. Thus, this verse has a very specific frame of reference and should not be applied to every city's fall" (House, cited by Constable).

"Lest Jerusalem begins to believe her enemies' boasts, Jeremiah reminded the Jews again that the destruction was the work of *God*: He has let the enemy gloat over you; He has exalted the horn of your foes. The 'horn' (i.e., "strength"; cf. Jer_2:3) exhibited by Jerusalem's enemies in their destruction of the city was not their own. *God* gave them the ability to take Jerusalem; thus, *He* was the One who overthrew them. And He did so without pity (2:2, 2:21; 3:43) because of His people's sin" (Dyer, italics his).

Ceaseless Weeping “Their heart cried out to the Lord, ‘O wall of the daughter of Zion, Let tears run down like a river day and night; Give yourself no relief; Give your eyes no rest’” (2:18). “Their” is not identified in this verse. One possibility is it refers to Israel’s adversaries (2:17). Another option is that it is a reference to the people in Jerusalem (Barnes). Jeremiah invites the wall around Jerusalem, “as the representative of the people who had dwelt secure under its protection” (Barnes), to let tears roll down their face like a river day and night, giving them no relief or rest, that is, “continue your weeping” (Ryrie). Broken up by the enemy, it [the wall] could be their guardian no longer, but by its ruins, it might still cry unto the Lord in their behalf.

“Jeremiah’s fifth sketch pictured the remnant of the people ceaselessly wailing to God in despair because of their calamity” (Dyer). “Jeremiah called on Judah’s citizens or children, or, less likely, her enemies, to mourn perpetually because of the destruction that God had brought on her” (Constable).

“Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches; pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord. Lift your hands toward Him for the life of your young children, who faint from hunger at the head of every street” (2:19). Jeremiah urges the citizens of Jerusalem to arise in the night at the beginning of each watch to cry, to pour out their hearts like water before the Lord, and to lift up their hands toward Him for the life of the young children who faint from hunger at the head of every street. “Interrupt your sleep at the beginning of each four-hour period (a watch), into which the 12-hour night was divided” (Ryrie).

“The Jerusalemites should cry out to God without ceasing (‘at the beginning of the [three] night watches,’ that is, throughout the night as well as during the day) and ask Him to spare their children who were dying of starvation. Since He had inflicted such a deep wound on the people, He was the only One who could heal it. *Jerusalem was a place of ceaseless wailing*” (Constable, italics his).

“The phrase pour out your heart like water referred to sincere prayer. The people were to unleash their innermost thoughts and emotions and share them with God (cf. Psa. 42:4; 62:8; 142:2). There is a similarity between Jeremiah’s exhortation to the people here and his own response (recorded in home 2:11). In both cases (a) they were weeping and in torment, (b) they poured out their feelings in prayer to God, and (c) the heartrending scene of starving children was the focus of their grief” (Dyer).

“How could God allow innocent children to suffer because of the sins of their parents? Perhaps a better question would be: How could parents continue to sin knowing that God would inevitably judge them *and their children* (cf. Jer. 6:11; 9:20-21)? How could they do that to their children?” (Constable, italics his).

“It may also lead one to marvel that a renewed relationship is possible at all between God and people who ignore warnings about their children’s safety. According to 2:11-19, such a new beginning is not only possible; it is the way for the parents to redeem themselves and spare their offspring further agony” (Renkema, cited by Constable).

The Plea of Jerusalem

“See, O LORD, and consider! To whom have You done this? Should the women eat their offspring, the children they have cuddled? Should the priest and prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord” (2:20). In response to Jeremiah’s call to prayer, the people of Jerusalem ask the Lord to consider the people He has judged, adding “Should the women eat the children they have

given birth to a cuddled and should the priest and prophets be slain in the Temple?” “The siege drove some mothers to eat their children, saw priests slain in the Temple, and left bodies unburied in the streets. See note on Jeremiah 19:9” (Ryrie).

“Daughter Jerusalem” responded to Jeremiah’s call to prayer (cf. 1:11) by asking the Lord to consider who was suffering so greatly that women were cannibalizing their own newborn children to stay alive in the famine (cf. Lev. 26:27-29; Deut. 28:53-57; 2 Kings 6:24-31). Would He allow such a fate for healthy children? Would He permit the slaying of Judahite priests and prophets in the very temple of the Lord? Jerusalem seems to be trying to shock the Lord into action” (Constable).

“This last periscope is another prayer to the Lord (cf. 1:20-22). The personified city prayed a prayer with an attitude of protest—’the strongest protest against God in the entire book” (Parry, cited by Constable).

“In a cry of pain and horror, the city called on God to look and think about her calamity. The starving to death of children was a sickening twist. The siege against Jerusalem was so severe that all her inhabitants were in danger of starvation. In a shocking display of their self-preservation drive, some parents became cannibals and ate their own children. Should women eat their offspring, the children they have cared for? This action was predicted in graphic detail by Moses when he warned Israel of the consequences of disobedience to God’s Law (cf. Lev. 26:27-29; Deut. 28:53-57). This reprehensible practice surfaced only during the most desperate times (cf. 2 Kings 6:24-31). The slaughter moved beyond the children to encompass religious leaders and people of all ages. Priest and prophet alike were slain inside the temple precincts as the Babylonian army rushed in for the conquest” (Dyer).

“Young and old lie on the ground in the streets; my virgins and my young men have fallen by the sword; You have slain *them* in the day of Your anger, You have slaughtered *and not pitied*” (2:21). “People of all ages and both sexes, even the youths who were the hope of Judah’s future, lay dead in the streets because the Lord had ‘slaughtered’ them without sparing” (Constable).

“As Jeremiah picked his way through the winding streets of Jerusalem, he saw bloated corpses strewn among the rubble: young and old lay together in the dust of the streets. When Babylon finally did break through Jerusalem’s defenses, its soldiers were angry because Jerusalem had kept them at bay for 30 months. They made no distinction between age and sex; the bloodthirsty Babylonians butchered uncounted thousands” (Dyer).

“You have invited us to a feast day the terrors that surround me. In the day of the LORD’s anger there was no refugee or survivor. Those whom I have borne and brought up My enemies have destroyed” (2:22). “There had been as much carnage in the city as there was on feast days when the priests slew large quantities of sacrificial animals. Instead of Israelite pilgrims coming to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the annual feasts, Israel’s enemies had come to Jerusalem to feast on the Israelites! Thus there were ‘terrors on every side’ (cf. Jer. 6:25; 20:3; 20:10; 46:5; 49:29)” (Constable).

“But lest anyone forget the ultimate Judge, Jeremiah again (2:17) reminded the people that God was the One wielding the sword of punishment. The Babylonians prevailed only because He let them prevail. God had warned Israel what He would do if she disobeyed Him (Lev. 26:14-39; Deut. 28:15-68) and He faithfully carried out His threat. Those whom He had loved were now destroyed” (Dyer).

“‘No one’ had escaped Yahweh’s anger, not even the children whom the city had produced when the Babylonian enemy ‘annihilated’ them. This is hyperbolic language since some people

had survived the destruction of Jerusalem. The phrase ‘the day of the LORD’s anger’ closes this second chapter poem as it opened it (cf. v. 1), ‘enclosing the whole within the embrace of divine wrath’” (Parry, cited by Constable).

“The streets are filled with the slain because God has invited the Babylonians to come as if to a feast” (MacDonald).

“Lam 1-2 bring to bear a theological stream, which is found in the type of poems found in Pss. 73—89, where the kingdom’s fall is a major theme. For example, Pss. 74 and 89 mourn the loss of the temple and the Davidic monarchy. Besides expressing shock, sorrow, and confusion, these texts have a ‘What now?’ flavor to them. In Lamentations[,] chapters 3-5 take up the ‘What now?’ theme, while in Psalms[,] chaps. 90-106 serve the same function. Both Lamentations and Psalms use lament forms to express the many types and levels of pain and outrage Israel felt” (House, cited by Constable).

Summary: Jerusalem suffered horrendous consequences of its sin because of God’s anger and divine discipline.

“Deut. 27-28 [esp. 28:25-68; cf. Lev. 26:14-39] sets forth specific consequences for sin, many of which are found in Lamentations, especially in Lam 2” (House, cited by Constable). “There are about forty descriptions of divine judgment, which fell upon every aspect of the Jews’ life: home, religion, society, physical, mental and spiritual. Some of the blackest phrases of the book appear here” (Jensen, cited by Constable).

“One of the striking features of this lament is its emphasis on God’s initiative in bringing destruction on Jerusalem and its people. Jeremiah saw Him as the One ultimately responsible for what had happened because He was angry over their sins. Many different words describing Yahweh’s hostility against His people appear in this chapter” (Constable).

“This second poem contains a new and more bitter lamentation regarding the fall of Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah; and it is distinguished from the first, partly by the bitterness of the complaint, but chiefly by the fact that while, in the first, the oppressed, helpless, and comfortless condition of Jerusalem is the main feature,—here, on the other hand, it is the judgment which the Lord, in His wrath, has decreed against Jerusalem and Judah, that forms the leading thought in the complaint, as is shown by the prominence repeatedly given to the wrath, rage, burning wrath, etc. (ver. 1 ff.)” (Keil).

“One of the reasons Lamentations is so effective in its ministry to those who are suffering is that it deals head-on with the anger of God. Although God’s anger is referred to in other chapters (1:12; 3:1, 43, 66; 4:11; 5:22), in Lamentations 2, we find a most detailed and resolute treatment of this difficult matter. In fact, before we have gone ten verses into the chapter, there are forty descriptions of God’s judgment and anger. Few if any aspects of life eluded His anger” [Kaiser, p. 59; see pp. 59-62 for an excellent discussion of God’s passibility (the quality or aptness in God to feel, suffer, or be angry) or impassibility (the denial of those qualities; cited by Constable).

“Charles Swindoll has appropriately titled this chapter ‘Words from the Woodshed.’ The focus of Jeremiah’s attention moved from the personified city of Jerusalem to the punishment inflicted by God. The first, 2:1-10, depicts God’s anger as He systematically dismantled the city in judgment. 2:11-19 contains (a) Jeremiah’s anguished cry as he wept over the destruction of the city he had loved and (b) his call for the people to cry out to God. 2:20-22 gives the people’s response, in which Jerusalem again cried out for the Lord to see her plight” (Dyer).

If we saw God’s anger, we would have a fear of God.

IN SEVERE SUFFERING, REMEMBER...

One of the consequences of severe suffering is that we tend to lose perspective. We feel isolated and alone, hopeless and helpless, forsaken and forgotten—even by the Lord. Jeremiah felt that way when he and ancient Israel were experiencing severe suffering under divine discipline. In the midst of that, Jeremiah says there’s something we should remember. What is it?

The Style “As mentioned previously, this lament is an acrostic in triplets; the same succeeding Hebrew consonant begins three verses instead of just one, as in the previous chapters. The verses are about one-third as long as most of those in the first two chapters. This chapter also differs from the others in this book in that it contains a first-person narrative of the prophet’s reactions to the sufferings he endured as the Lord’s faithful servant. It is similar to the ‘confessions’ sections in the Book of Jeremiah, where the prophet opens up and lets the reader into his heart and mind (cf. Jer. 11:18-20; 12:1-4; 15:10-18; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-10, 14-18)” (Constable).

“The chapter itself differs markedly from the first two. Instead of 22 verses, it has 66—3 verses for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The chapter also begins without the familiar “How” (*‘ēkāh*) that stands guard over 1:1-22 and 2:1-22. Instead, a first-person narrative unfolds as the writer describes his personal reaction to the suffering he has experienced” (Dyer).

The Speaker “He [Jeremiah] speaks as a representative Israelite, facing the dark and baffling ways of Providence” (Price, cited by Constable). “In parts of this chapter, Jeremiah spoke for the people of Jerusalem and Judah, as well as for himself (e.g., vv. 22, 40-47). “I am assuming that Jeremiah is the speaker, but many other individuals have been suggested: Jehoiachin, Zedekiah, an anonymous sufferer, a surviving soldier, a defeated strongman, a collective voice of the people, a prominent resident of Jerusalem, everyman, and the personified voice of the exile. (see Berlin; we know that he was a male (Heb. *geber*, v. 1), in contrast to the female voice of the city in chapter 1. (Jamieson; et al.)” (Constable).

“The identity of the subject in 3:1-66 has been disputed. Some feel that “I,” “me,” and “my” refer to Jerusalem personified (1:12-22; 2:22). However, while parts of 3:1-66 could refer to the city, other parts of the chapter must refer to an individual (cf. 3:14, 3:52-54). In fact, the parallels between this individual and Jeremiah are remarkable. Both were hated by their countrymen (Jer. 1:18-19; Lam. 3:52), were ridiculed by those they tried to help (Jer. 20:7-8; Lam. 3:63), had plots made against their lives (Jer. 11:18-19; Lam. 3:60), were cast into watery pits (Jer. 38:4-13; Lam. 3:53-58), and wept over the people’s destruction (Jer. 9:1; 13:17; 14:17; Lam. 3:48-49). Therefore it is probable that the person in question is Jeremiah himself. Yet his description goes beyond just one person to include all the people. This is most obvious in his switch from the singular to the plural (‘we,’ ‘us,’ ‘our’) within the chapter (cf. 3:22, 3:40-46). The best solution is to see the individual in 3:1-66 as Jeremiah representing all Israelites. He used his own experiences because the things he suffered represented things that many Israelites had suffered” (Dyer).

The Structure “The chapter may be divided into three sections. Jeremiah detailed his afflictions during the time of Jerusalem’s fall (3:1-18). But his knowledge of God’s ways in the midst of his affliction produced hope, not despair (3:19-40). So Jeremiah could lead Israel in prayer to God for deliverance, restoration, and vindication (3:41-66)” (Dyer).

House divided this chapter into four sections: “The first section [3:1-24] emphasizes what a first-person speaker has learned about suffering and about God’s faithfulness. The second section [3:25-39] highlights the speaker’s response to God’s sovereignty and goodness. The third section [3:40-47] calls for prayer in light of what Israel’s enemies have done, and the fourth section [3:48-66] expresses confidence in God’s positive actions on Israel’s behalf. This structure moves readers or attempts to move readers, at least, from reflective advice to confidence in God’s ultimate goodness” (House, cited by Constable).

Significance “Lam. 3:1-66 is the heart of Jeremiah’s short book. This chapter gives the book a positive framework around which the other chapters revolve. The black velvet of sin and suffering in chapters 1-2 and 4-5 serves as a fitting backdrop to display the sparkling brilliance of God’s loyal love in Lam. 3:1-66” (Dyer).

“Faithful servants of the Lord of all ages can identify with many of the prophet’s sentiments expressed here. The title of Psalm 102 could serve as an appropriate prefix to this chapter: “A prayer of the afflicted, when he is faint, and pours out his complaint to the Lord” (Constable).

The Pain of Jeremiah’s Suffering

Personally “I am the man *who* has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath” (3:1). “In a long list of metaphors, Jeremiah enumerated the many afflictions that he, as Judah’s representative, suffered at the hand of God’s wrath (2:2, 2:4; 4:11)” (Dyer). “This speaker does not address God himself but a human audience, transforming the accusation into a description of misery” (Parry, cited by Constable). “Jeremiah (the narrator; Provan) claimed to have seen much affliction because Yahweh had struck Jerusalem in His anger (cf. Job 9:34; 21:9; Ps. 89:32; Isa. 10:5). By describing himself as ‘*the* man,’ rather than *a* man, he may have been implying that he had suffered more than all in his community. The Good Shepherd’s ‘rod’ had become an instrument of torture for him, rather than one of comfort (Ps. 23:4)” (Constable).

“Thus, Jeremiah is that individual who suffers in many ways beyond all others, but he is also the representative sufferer for all Israel by virtue of his role as the prophet of the Lord who pled with, prayed for, and preached to his people Israel” (Kaiser, cited by Constable).

“He has led me and made *me* walk *in* darkness and not *in* light” (3:2). Pointing to verse 6, Constable explains this as walking in the darkness of God’s judgment rather than on the light of His blessing and presence. “Jeremiah was *confused* as he watched God seemingly reverse His past attitudes and actions. Instead of walking in the light of God’s guidance, he had been forced to stumble in darkness (3:6)” (Dyer, italics his).

“Surely He has turned His hand against me time and time again throughout the day” (3:3). “The Lord had disciplined him repeatedly for a long time, in that while He was judging Jerusalem, Jeremiah was suffering along with the people. The Lord’s ‘hand’ had been heavy upon him (cf. 1:14; 2:8)” (Constable). “God turned His hand against Jeremiah. This phrase is unique, but the concept of God’s hand was known in the Old Testament (cf. 1 Sam. 5:6; Job 19:21). God’s hand of favor had become a fist of adversity” (Dyer).

Physically “He has aged my flesh and my skin, and broken my bones” (3:4). This does not necessarily mean that Jeremiah’s bones were actually physically broken. He may be saying that is the way he felt. “God’s adversity resulted in *misery* for Jeremiah. God’s afflictions had taken their toll on his health (cf. Ps. 38:2-3): his skin and flesh were old (probably wrinkled) and his bones were broken (figuratively speaking of his inner agony; cf. Ps. 42:10)” (Dyer, italics his).

“Jeremiah’s suffering included sickness and pain, as when someone does not get enough food

to eat or breaks a bone (cf. Ps. 42:10; Prov. 5:11). Fever pains sometimes resemble the pain of a broken bone (cf. 1:13-15; 2:9, 11; Job 30:17; Ps. 32:3-4; 51:8; Isa. 38:13). He may have experienced these physical ailments, or he may have simply described his inner pain in terms of physical afflictions” (Constable).

Barnes says, “the idea is that of acute pain.” Gill explains. “His strength was greatly weakened, which lay in his bones; and he could not stir to help himself, any more than a man whose bones are broken; and was in as much pain and distress as if this had been his case; otherwise it was not literally true, either of the Jews, or of Jeremiah, or of Christ.”

Emotionally “He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and woe” (3:5). Ryrie says that in verses 4-6, “Jeremiah expresses his physical and emotional misery.” “Bitter experiences and hardship had assailed the prophet as Yahweh had judged His people (cf. Jer. 8:14)” (Constable). “These outward changes [3:4] were matched by inner bitterness (3:15, 3:19). Jeremiah was broken in body and spirit” (Dyer).

“He has set me in dark places like the dead of long ago” (3:6). Jeremiah laments that the Lord had set him in a dark place as if he were in a tomb. “Jeremiah’s existence had turned into a living death for him (cf. Ps. 143:3)” (Constable).

“He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out; He has made my chain heavy” (3:7). Referring to the NASB translation (“walled me in”), Ryrie says, “Assyrians popularized the practice of walling up prisoners so that they would die more quickly. Jeremiah, using poetic license, feels like he has experienced that torture. “The Lord had imprisoned His prophet in his affliction; he could not escape from it (cf. Job 19:8; Ps. 88:8; Jer. 38:6; Hos. 2:6)” (Constable). “Jeremiah could see no way out of his adversity. He was imprisoned and chained, so his freedom was gone” (Dyer).

Spiritually “Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayer” (3:8). “The Lord would not ease his suffering in answer to prayer (cf. Ps. 18:42; Jer. 7:16). He even discouraged Jeremiah from praying (cf. Jer. 11:14; 14:11)” (Constable). “God refused to acknowledge his prayers for help” (Dyer).

“He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked” (3:9). “It was as though the Lord had opposed Jeremiah’s progress toward restoration and made it very difficult” (Constable). “All avenues of escape were blocked” (Dyer).

“He has been to me a bear lying in wait, like a lion in ambush” (3:10). “Jeremiah felt like the Lord was lying in wait to devour him, like a wild animal (cf. Ps. 10:9; 17:12)” (Constable). “God’s actions seemed designed to single out Jeremiah for punishment. God was like a bear or lion in hiding beside the path who attacked and mauled Jeremiah” (Dyer).

“He has turned aside my ways and torn me in pieces; He has made me desolate” (3:11). “The Lord had desolated Jeremiah by opposing his ways and making him feel torn apart.

“He has bent His bow and set me up as a target for the arrow” (3:12). “Jeremiah felt as though he was a target that the Lord was shooting at and that Yahweh had wounded him severely (cf. Job 16:13)” (Constable). “Switching figures, Jeremiah said he felt like a target against which God was taking target practice (cf. Job 6:4; 7:20; 16:12-13). God had chosen him for adversity” (Dyer).

“He has caused the arrows of His quiver to pierce my loins” (3:13). Ryrie says “loins” literally means “kidneys, thought to be one of the centers of life and emotions (cf. Job 19:27; Psalm 73:21; Proverbs 23:16; Jeremiah 17:10).” “This verse completes the image of the former verse. The arrows found their target in Jeremiah’s internal organs (cf. Job 19:27; Prov. 23:16)” (Constable).

Socially “I have become the ridicule of all my people their taunting song all the day” (3:14). “The prophet’s contemporaries mocked and ridiculed him constantly. He was socially isolated in his suffering” (Constable).

Psychologically “He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drink wormwood” (3:15). “Wormwood is the name given to certain plants used for imparting a bitter flavor to some drinks; the name has no connection with either worm or wood” (Ellison, cited by Constable). “He had become full of bitter experiences, like poison, which the Lord had given him to drink (cf. 2:4; Job 9:18)” (Constable). Dyer says, “bitter herbs and gall [were] the most bitter-tasting plant in Judah.”

“He has also broken my teeth with gravel, and covered me with ashes” (3:16). “Jeremiah felt like his teeth were broken and that God had given him stones to eat instead of bread.” (Constable). “The teeth have become broken and ground down because God has given His people stones to eat as punishment for venerating the images of Baal” (Harrison, cited by Constable). “This is no *self*-humbling before God—God himself grinds the man’s teeth in the gravel and presses him down into the dust” (Parry, cited by Constable).

“You have moved my soul far from peace; I have forgotten prosperity” (3:17). “Jeremiah had forgotten what peace and happiness were like” (Constable). “It is not so much that peace has left him, more that he has been banished from the realm of peace” (Provan, cited by Constable).

“And I said, ‘My strength and my hope have perished from the LORD’” (3:18). “He had also lost his strength and his hope” (Constable). “The naming of YHWH for the first time in the poem may, in retrospect, be seen as the first glimmer of a recovery of hope” (Parry, cited by Constable).

In verses 14-18, “in a burst of vivid images, Jeremiah concluded the description of his afflictions. He was mocked and laughed at by his compatriots, filled with bitterness, trampled underfoot, deprived of peace and prosperity, and led to despair” (Dyer).

“He has indeed become a sort of ‘everyman’; that is, *us*. So we will see ourselves and our own problems with suffering. Likewise, we also argue that the individual spoken about here is no one else but the prophet Jeremiah. And because he suffered representatively as God’s delegated sufferer, he mirrors perfectly, and by divine design, another prophet who would one day also suffer as did the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 52:13-53:12” (Kaiser, cited by Constable). “This is perhaps the lowest point of the whole poem” (Provan, cited by Constable).

In verses 1-18, “alternating between I and we, the prophet draws a parallel between his own experiences and those of his people. God’s wrath is depicted under the figures of darkness, incessant blows from His hand (vv. 1-3); premature aging, broken bones, confinement in bitterness, woe, and a living death (vv. 4-6); inescapable imprisonment, unanswered prayer (vv. 7-9); animal-like ambush, target-like attack (vv. 10-12); deep wounds, derision, a diet of bitterness (vv. 13-15); broken teeth, ashes for clothing (v. 16); loss of memory, peace, and prosperity, all hope of divine help perished (vv. 17, 18)” (MacDonald).

The Prospect for Hope in Suffering

For Jeremiah “Remember my affliction and roaming, the wormwood and the gall” (3:19). “Jeremiah prayed that the Lord would remember his affliction and bitterness (3:1, 7, 15; Job 13:15)” (Constable). “Jeremiah’s condition paralleled that of Judah. His outward affliction (3:19; cf. 3:1-4) and inward turmoil (3:19; cf. 3:5, 3:13, 3:15) pushed him toward despair (my soul is downcast, 3:20)” (Dyer).

“Though pressed to the point of despair (3:19), Jeremiah had hope in the Lord’s lovingkindnesses (loyal love; see note on Hosea 2:19) and compassions (gentle, yet intense, concern, 3:22), which are new each morning and evidence of His great faithfulness (3:23)” (Ryrie). “This section [3:19-24] provides a transition from stating the extreme hardships of the past to confessing God’s faithfulness as a beginning for a new season of faith for himself and for all who will agree with his conclusions” (House, cited by Constable).

“My soul still remembers and sinks within me. This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope” (3:20-21). The Hebrew word translated “sinks” means “to sink down, be bowed down, be humble” (KJV: “humbled;” NASB and ESV: “bowed down;” NIV: “downcast”). Even though Jeremiah was experiencing affliction, bitterness, and gall, he still remembered something that humbled him and gave him hope. “As often as my soul calls them to remembrance, it is humbled or bowed down in me” (JFB). “He himself remembered something that gave him hope. The next verse explains what that was” (Constable).

“Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not” (3:22). Jeremiah remembered that because the Lord’s mercies and compassions fail not, we are not consumed. “The prophet remembered that the Lord’s loyal love (*hesed*) never ceases and that He is ceaselessly compassionate” (Constable). “In essence, *hesed* is just an Old Testament way of saying that God is gracious and God is love [cf. Exod. 34:6]” (Kaiser, cited by Constable). “That even a kernel of the people of God remains is because of the grace and love of God” (Kaiser, cited by Constable).

“Lam 3:22 agrees with one of the most extraordinary teachings in the OT. Though Israel sinned against God through idolatry, immorality, oppression, and other forms of long-term covenant adultery to such an extent that she was finally punished severely, the Lord will still start over with penitent Israelites. In other words, God’s determination to bless and heal is as thorough and unusual as his determination to punish, if not more so. The road back to the covenantal relationship may well be long and difficult, especially given the level of sin and the depth of punishment. Nonetheless, it is possible to begin” (House, cited by Constable).

“However, one thought (this I call to mind) crowded out the hopelessness that threatened to overwhelm him: Because of the Lord’s great love, we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. Judah was down but not out. God was punishing Judah for her sin but did not reject her as His covenant people. The word for ‘great love [NIV] is *hesed*, which has the idea of loyal love. God was sticking by the people He had chosen. The covenant made with Israel in Deut. 28:1-68 had not been abrogated. In fact, God’s loyal love could be seen in His faithfulness in carrying out the curses He had promised while at the same time preserving a remnant. The judgment itself was a witness to the fact that God had not abandoned His people. God’s ‘compassions’ (from *rehem*, “womb,” and in the pl. for intensity) showed His gentle feeling of concern for those who belonged to Him” (Dyer).

“They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (3:23). God’s mercies and compassion (3:22) are new every morning because great is God’s faithfulness. “There are new evidences of Yahweh’s lovingkindness and compassion every day that testify to His great faithfulness (cf. Ps. 36:5, 7). His daily provision of manna for the Israelites in the wilderness was only one example of this. In this verse, Jeremiah addressed God Himself” (Constable).

“Could Judah push God so far that He would finally abandon her forever? Was God’s supply of loyal love and compassion limited? Jeremiah’s answer was no. God’s “loving-kindnesses” (NASB) are new every morning. God offered a fresh supply of loyal love every day to His covenant people. Much like the manna in the wilderness, the supply could not be exhausted. This

truth caused Jeremiah to call out in praise, Great is Your faithfulness. He was taken back by the limitless supply of God's grace offered to him. Because of this, Jeremiah resolved to wait for God to act, bringing about restoration and blessing. He could trust God despite his circumstances because he now understood how inexhaustible was God's supply of loyal love" (Dyer).

"The word translated 'compassions' draws attention to God's emotional response to the needs of His people [cf. Gen. 43:30; 1 Kings 3:26]. The terms rendered 'love' [or "lovingkindness"] and 'faithfulness' are closely related in meaning [cf. Ps. 89:24; 92:2; 98:3; Hos. 2:19-20]. They refer to God's devotion to His covenant people and to the promises He made to them" (Chisholm, cited by Constable).

"The startling fact about this announcement is that it is made against one of the bleakest backgrounds in the Old Testament. It would be as if someone had stood up in one of the prison camps of the Third Reich and announced loudly: 'Great is God's faithfulness.' That might seem ludicrous enough to bring the scornful sneer of every destitute soul confined to those barracks" (Kaiser, cited by Constable).

"This verse was, of course, the basis for the classic Christian hymn 'Great Is Thy Faithfulness' by Thomas O. Chisholm (b. 1866). It has also inspired modern composers (e.g., 'The steadfast love of the Lord never faileth; His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning, new every morning; Great is Thy faithfulness, oh Lord, great is Thy faithfulness')" (Constable).

"**'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I hope in Him!'**" (3:24). "Jeremiah's recollection of God's character transformed his attitude (cf. v. 18). He reminded himself that Yahweh was his portion. Consequently, he had hope (cf. Num. 18:20). By calling the Lord his portion, the prophet was comparing Yahweh to an allotment of land that provides the necessities of life (cf. Ps. 16:5-6; 73:26; 119:57; 142:5)" (Constable). "To have God for our portion is the one only foundation of hope" (Jamieson, et al., cited by Constable).

For Others **"The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him"** (3:25). "Having experienced an 'attitude adjustment,' Jeremiah now proceeded to offer some wise advice on suffering and how to handle it, in verses 25-39.... In verses 25-27, the *tet* stanza of this poem, each word not only begins with the same Hebrew *letter* but with the same Hebrew word: *tob*, 'good'" (Constable). "Those who wait for the Lord and seek Him eventually experience His goodness.... It is only after one has focused on God, rather than on one's own suffering, that he or she can provide real help for others who are suffering" (Constable). "While we wait for him by faith, we must seek him by prayer. Our seeking will help to keep up our waiting" (Henry, cited by Constable). "Not God's love, but his anger is a passing phase" (Hillars, cited by Constable).

"It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD" (3:26). "Waiting for the Lord's deliverance silently is a good practice (cf. Ps. 37:9; Hos. 12:6; Zeph. 3:8; Rom. 8:25; Gal. 5:5). But this advice seems to run contrary to the approach taken in the rest of the book where there is anything but silence. Perhaps Parry is correct that "it is not a *literal* silence that the man is recommending but an attitude of expectant trust" (Parry)" (Constable).

"It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth" (3:27). "Likewise, shouldering the heavy burden of God's revealed will in one's youth is a good thing. Other views of the 'yoke' in view are the yoke of sin (House), and the yoke of suffering (Keil; Provan). However, all three of these things could have been in the writer's mind since they are so closely related. The speaker's point seems to be that it is (normally) easier for young people to bear a burden than it is for older people" (Constable). "Early discipline begets mature dependability" (Price, cited by Constable).

“Let him sit alone and keep silent, because *God* has laid *it* on him” (3:28). “Such a person should bear his burden alone, with trust and without complaining, since God has placed it on him (cf. Ps. 39:2; 94:17). I do not think that Jeremiah meant that we should suffer in deliberate isolation from other people, but that if we have to suffer alone, it should be with an attitude of humility” (Constable). Him

“Let him put his mouth in the dust there may yet be hope” (3:29). Ryrie states that the expression “his mouth in the dust” is “a typical Oriental way of exacting total submission. “The expression [‘Let him put his mouth in the dust’] is derived from the Oriental custom of throwing oneself in the most reverential manner on the ground, and involves the idea of humble silence, because the mouth, placed in the dust, cannot speak him” (Keil). “The sufferer should also humble himself since there is hope that God will help him. ‘Perhaps there is hope’ may seem to suggest that there may be no hope forthcoming, but it is probably an acknowledgment that God is sovereign and cannot be manipulated into operating on our timetable” (Constable).

“Let him give *his* cheek to the one who strikes him, *and* be full of reproach” (3:30). To “give the cheek” is “a sign of unconditional surrender (see Micah 5:1 and Luke 22:64)” (Ryrie). The Hebrew word translated “reproach means “reproach, scorn, reproach (resting upon the condition of shame, disgrace).” “The afflicted do well to yield to the antagonism of others and to allow others to heap reproach on them, rather than retaliating (cf. Mt. 5:39; 26:67; Lk. 22:64; Jn. 18:22; 19:3)” (Constable). “Many take patiently afflictions from God, but when man wrongs them, they take it impatiently. The godly bear resignedly the latter, like the former, as sent by God (Ps. 17:13)” (Jamieson; et al., cited by Constable).

The Reason “For the Lord will not cast off forever” (3:31). “The Lord’s rejection of His own is only temporary (cf. Jer. 3:5, 12). This is the reason (‘for’) why the sufferer should adopt the attitude just advocated in the previous verses” (Constable). “God gets *no pleasure* from inflicting pain on people—his judgments are not the way he *wants* to relate to humanity but are his response to human sin. Punishment is an ‘alien’ work of God given reluctantly and after numerous warnings” (Parry, cited by Constable).

“Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies” (3:32). “Compassion and loyal love will replace grief eventually (cf. Job 5:18; Ps. 30:5; Isa. 54:8)” (Constable).

“For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men” (3:33). Jeremiah explains (“foreclosed”) that the Lord does not afflict nor grieve the children of men willingly (Hebrew: “from the heart;” ESV). “The expression ‘he does not afflict from the heart’ is the high watermark in Lamentations’ understanding of God.... The angry side of his nature, turned so unflinchingly against Jerusalem, is not the determinative factor in the divine purposes. Begrudgingly, regretfully, if there is no other way toward his higher purposes, he may unleash the forces of evil, but ‘his heart’ is not in it [cf. Isa. 28:21] (Gottwald, cited by Constable).

“This stanza [vv. 31-33] contains perhaps the most profound theological insight of the whole book, and its location is perhaps no coincidence. *Right at the literal center of the book of Lamentations is an appreciation of the being of YHWH as the ground of hope*” (Parry, cited by Constable).

“To crush under one’s feet all the prisoners of the earth” (3:34). In verses 34-36, “the Lord disapproves of injustice in its many forms and of the brutal oppression of prisoners (cf. Ps. 69:33; 146:7; Isa. 42:7; Luke 4:18)” (Constable). “Neither does God approve of wanton cruelty inflicted by one man on another. Three examples are given: the treatment of prisoners of war; the procuring an unjust sentence before a legal tribunal acting in the name of God (see Ex. 21:6); and

the perversion of justice generally” (Barnes).

“To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth. These words, with what follow in 3:35, either depend upon the preceding and are to be connected with them, “he doth not afflict,” &c. Lam. 3:33; though he lays his hand on men, he do not crush them under his feet, or break them in pieces, and utterly destroy them, even such, and all such, as are bound in affliction and iron; or, in a spiritual sense, such as are prisoners to sin, Satan, and the law, as all men by nature are; he does not crush these to pieces, though they deserve it, at least not “all” of them; for he proclaims in the Gospel liberty to the captives, and says, by the power of his grace, to the prisoners, go forth, and encourages the prisoners of hope to turn to their strong hold: and also, though he afflicts, he does no injustice to them, does not turn aside their right, or subvert their cause, Job 8:3; or rather these depend upon, and are to be connected with, the last clause of 3:36; ‘the Lord approveth not’: as he does not do these things himself, he do not approve of them in others; that they should use captives cruelly, trample upon them like mire in the streets, or as the dust of their feet; particularly regard may be had to the Jews in Babylon, used ill by those that detained them; for though it was by the will of God they were carried captive, yet the Chaldeans exceeded due bounds in their usage of them, and added affliction to their affliction, which the Lord approved not of, but resented, Zech. 1:15” (Gill).

“To turn aside the justice *due* a man before the face of the Most High” (3:35). The Lord does not approve (3:36) of people turning aside justice. God disapproves of any attempt to deprive a person of his rights” (Ryrie).

“Or subvert a man in his cause the Lord does not approve” (3:36). Home “Neither does God approve of wanton cruelty inflicted by one man on another. Three examples are given: the treatment of prisoners of war; the procuring an unjust sentence before a legal tribunal acting in the name of God (see Ex. 21:6); and the perversion of justice generally” (Barnes).

“Who *is* he *who* speaks and it comes to pass, *when* the Lord has not commanded *it*”? (3:37). “Nothing can happen without God’s knowledge (see Isaiah 45:7)” (Ryrie). “The plans of those who anticipate a particular future only come to fruition if the sovereign Lord ordains them” (Constable).

“*Is it* not from the mouth of the Most High that woe and well-being proceed”? (3:38). In other words, “The Most High is the ultimate source of all good and bad things” (Constable).

“Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins”? (3:39). “Jeremiah wondered how anyone could complain against God, since all ‘living’ (alive after Jerusalem’s destruction) human beings, or anyone for that matter, are sinners and therefore deserve divine punishment” (Constable).

In verses 19-39, “with a prayer to God to remember his bitter plight, yet with lingering depression over his misery (vv. 19, 20), the prophet gets his eyes off himself and onto the Lord. Hope is revived when he remembers that the LORD’s mercies and compassions are new every morning and that His faithfulness is great (vv. 21-24). He cites lessons learned in the school of affliction: it is good to wait quietly for the Lord’s deliverance and to submit to His yoke early in life (vv. 25-27); to accept divine chastening and human blows and insults without talking back (vv. 28-30); God’s rejection is neither final nor causeless; His compassion and mercies will always follow (vv. 31-33); the LORD does not approve of oppression, injustice, or the denial of rights (vv. 34-36); He is sovereign, His Word prevails, all things serve His will; to complain when He punishes sin is senseless (vv. 37-39)” (MacDonald).

“The God who brought the cursings spoken of in Deut. 28:1-68 would also bring about the restoration promised in Deut. 30:1-20. In the meantime, God’s people needed to develop the

proper attitude toward their afflictions. Jeremiah wrote seven principles about the nature of Israel's affliction: (1) Affliction should be endured with hope in God's salvation, that is, ultimate restoration (3:25-30). (2) Affliction is only temporary and is tempered by God's compassion and love (3:31-32). (3) God does not delight in affliction (3:33). (4) If affliction comes because of injustice, God sees it and does not approve of it (3:34-36). (5) Affliction is always in relationship to God's sovereignty (3:37-38; cf. Job 2:10). (6) Affliction ultimately came because of Judah's sins (3:39). (7) Affliction should accomplish the greater good of turning God's people back to Him (3:40).

"Jeremiah was able to place his (and Israel's) affliction in proper perspective by remembering how it related to God's character and His covenant with His people. Judah's afflictions were not cruel acts of a capricious God who delighted in inflicting pain on helpless people. Rather, the afflictions came from a compassionate God who was being faithful to His covenant. He did not enjoy making others suffer, but He allowed the afflictions as temporary means to force Judah back to Himself. So Jeremiah ended this section by exhorting the people, Let us examine our ways ... let us return to the Lord. God's affliction was designed as a corrective measure to restore His wayward people (Deut. 28:15-68). It was designed to force the people to return to the Lord (Deut. 30:1-10)" (Dyer).

The Prayer of the Suffering

"The condition of the prophet (3:1-18) and the character of God (3:19-40) prompted Jeremiah to pray. This next section is in two parts. In the first part (3:41-47) the prophet exhorted the people to confess their sins to God because of their suffering. This section was written in the plural ('we,' 'us,' 'our'). In the second part (3:48-66) Jeremiah remembered God's personal deliverance after his cry; this prompted Jeremiah to call on God to judge his enemies. This section was written in the singular ('I,' 'me,' 'my'); it represented Jeremiah as the model for Judah. As God rescued Jeremiah and judged his enemies, so God would rescue Judah and judge her enemies if she would call on Him.

"This prayer flows out of the exhortation in 3:40. Judah's return to the Lord would be accomplished through prayer. As she turned toward heaven, she would acknowledge that she had sinned and rebelled. The nation's troubles—being under God's anger (cf. 2:1, 2:3, 2:6, 2:22; 3:43), having unanswered prayer, being rejected like scum by the nations, and being scoffed at (cf. 2:16)—stemmed from her disobedience to God. All her terror and pitfalls, ruin and destruction resulted from rebellion against God's covenant. When Judah would realize the awful consequences of her sin, she would finally admit her guilt" (Dyer).

Of the People "Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the LORD" (3:40). "Jeremiah counseled self-examination, repentance, and returning to the Lord. Was the people's suffering due to sin? Silence (vv. 26, 28) and trust (vv. 24, 29) are not enough. Repentance (v. 40) should follow recognition of sin (v. 39)" (Constable).

"Let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven" (3:41). "Leading his community, Jeremiah lifted up his heart, as well as his hands, to God in heaven; his praying was heartfelt, not just formal" (Constable).

"We have transgressed and rebelled; You have not pardoned" (3:42). "The first step in repentance is confession. Jeremiah and his people had transgressed the covenant (cf. 1:5, 15, 22) and had rebelled against the Lord (cf. 1:18, 20), and He had not pardoned their sin but allowed them to experience judgment" (Constable). "The way of blessing is found in self-examination

and turning back to the LORD. Unconfessed sin is not pardoned” (MacDonald).

“You have covered *Yourself* with anger and pursued us; You have slain *and not pitied*” (3:43). The Lord was angry with Israel because of their sin, pursuing them with divine discipline and slaying them without pity. “The Lord had become angry over the sins of His people and had pursued them in judgment, slaying them without stinting” (Constable).

“You have covered Yourself with a cloud, that prayer should not pass through” (3:44). Furthermore, the Lord had refused to answer prayer. The Lord had blocked Himself off from His people, as a cloud blocks the heavens, so their prayers would not affect Him (cf. 2:1; Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11-12). “Nowhere in Lamentations, and perhaps in the entire Bible, is God’s refusal to be present more strongly expressed” (Berlin, cited by Constable).

“You have made us an offscouring and refuse in the midst of the peoples” (3:45). Jeremiah tells the Lord that He has made them an offspring and a refuge in the midst of other nations. Ryrie says that an offspring is “something rejected and unfit for use (see 1 Cor. 4:13). “The Lord had made the Judahites as scum (Heb. *sehi*), namely, rejected as unfit for use (cf. 1:7-8; 2:15-16). This Hebrew word occurs only here in the Old Testament. This is how the other nations regarded them. Judah’s enemies had also spoken against her (cf. 2:16)” (Constable).

“All our enemies have opened their mouths against us” (3:46). Jeremiah complains that all of their enemies have opened their mouths against them. Gill comments, “Like lions and other beasts of prey, to devour us; or in way of scorn and derision; pouring out their reproaches upon us, and scoffs at us, for our religion, and the worship of God, and on account of present miseries and distresses.”

“Fear and a snare have come upon us, desolation and destruction” (3:47). Jeremiah adds that fear, snare, desolation, and destruction had come upon them. “The results of God’s judgment for the Judahites had been panic. They had stumbled into pits that ensnared them. Devastation and destruction had become their allotment” (Constable).

Of Jeremiah “My eyes overflow with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people” (3:48). Jeremiah says that his eyes overflowed with rivers of tears because of the destruction of the Judahites. “Jeremiah wept profusely and unremittingly because of the destruction that the Judahites had experienced (cf. 2:11; Jer. 9:1; 14:17)” (Constable).

“In 3:48, Jeremiah abruptly shifted from the plural to the singular. Lam. 3:48-51 provides a transition from the people’s confession (3:41-47) to Jeremiah’s example (3:52-66). As the people confessed their sin and then waited for God to respond, so Jeremiah continued to weep (2:11) and pray until the Lord would look down from heaven and see. God promised to restore Israel when she called on Him from her captivity (Deut. 30:2-3). So Jeremiah vowed to continue calling for God’s restoration of His people till the event actually happened” (Dyer).

“My eyes flow and do not cease, without interruption, till the LORD from heaven Looks down and sees” (3:49-50). Jeremiah goes on to say that his eyes would flow with tears without ceasing or interruption until the Lord saw the suffering and sent relief. “He would do this until the Lord acknowledged the plight of His people by sending them some relief” (Constable). “The man’s eyes see and weep. But YHWH does not see (as indicated by the fact that he has not acted to save) [cf. vv. 44, 50]” (Parry, cited by Constable).

“My eyes bring suffering to my soul because of all the daughters of my city” (3:51). Jeremiah says that the tears in his eyes brought suffering to his soul because of what he saw happening to the people of his city, Jerusalem. “Here “the daughters of my city” may refer to the dependent villages surrounding Jerusalem that the foe also took” (Jamieson; et al., cited by Constable). “Or ‘the daughters’ could refer to the young women of Jerusalem (House). Both

interpretations fit the context, and it is probably impossible to tell which meaning was in Jeremiah's mind when he wrote this statement" (Constable).

In verses 43-51, "the subject reverts to the sufferings of Jeremiah and his people. God had pursued and slain without pity, cut Himself off from their prayers, and made them the scum of the earth (vv. 43-45). All their enemies were mocked, while God's people experienced fear, danger, and destruction. The devastation of his people caused the prophet to weep without interruption (vv. 46-51)" (MacDonald).

"My enemies without cause hunted me down like a bird" (3:52). Jeremiah felt that his enemies were hunting him down like people hunt birds, only they're doing it without cause. "Here Jeremiah began to tell his own story (cf. vv. 1-18), in order to encourage his fellow sufferers. The prophet's enemies had pursued him mercilessly, through no fault of his own, as hunters track a bird" (Constable).

"The change in the man's attitude found in 3:19-24 has affected the way in which he perceived his situation. It is interesting that now, in this final section, he no longer speaks of YHWH as his enemy but rather as the one who can deliver him from his human enemies. The recovery of hope has not led him to deny that YHWH is the ultimate cause of his distress, but it has led to a shift in emphasis. The focus now is on the immediate cause of his sorrow (his human enemies) and on God as his savior" (Parry, cited by Constable).

"After vowing to pray for the people till God reversed their fortunes, Jeremiah related circumstances from his own life, which were examples for them. As Judah was afflicted, Jeremiah was also afflicted. As she was to cry for relief, so Jeremiah cried for relief. God's deliverance of Jeremiah was then a prelude to the deliverance He would bring the nation" (Dyer).

"Jeremiah's ministry during Judah's final days created many enemies. The people from his own hometown plotted to kill him (Jer. 11:18-23), and everybody at the temple demanded that he be executed (Jer. 26:7-9). He was beaten and thrown into prison as a traitor (Jer. 37:11-16), and was later, near the end of Nebuchadnezzar's siege, lowered into a muddy cistern to starve to death (Jer. 38:1-6). Jeremiah probably referred to this last incident in 3:53-55" (Dyer).

"They silenced my life in the pit and threw stones at me" (3:53). Jeremiah says his enemies silenced his life by tossing him in a pit and throwing stones at him (38:6). "They silenced him by placing him in a pit and covering its mouth with a large stone (38:1-6; Gen. 37:24)" (Constable).

"He cried to God for deliverance from the pit where he was facing certain death. Some feel that the pit could also be a double reference to both the cistern and the grave or sheol (cf. 2 Sam. 22:5-6; Ps. 18:4-5; 69:1-2, 69:14-15; Jonah 2:5-6). Probably Jeremiah's experience in the physical pit brought to mind the Hebrew concept of the pit of death. One cannot push the metaphorical image too far, however, because the phrase and threw stones at me (3:53) would be meaningless if the pit referred only to death. If one were sinking in the pit of death, why would he care if people were throwing stones at him? But if he were trapped in a physical cistern, this could pose a real danger, as it did for Jeremiah" (Dyer).

"The waters flowed over my head; I said, 'I am cut off!'" (3:54). Because the water was flowing over his head, Jeremiah thought he would drown. "This description could be a continuation of the metaphor of the previous verse. The 'pit' is a frequent symbol of the place of death (Ps. 28:1; 30:3; 88:5; 143:7; Prov. 1:12). Or Jeremiah may have been relating his actual experience" (Constable). "Hunted down like a bird, stoned in a pit, engulfed by water, the prophet thought the end had come (vv. 52-54)" (MacDonald).

"I called on Your name, O LORD, from the lowest pit" (3:55). From the lowest part of the pit, Jeremiah called on the Lord. "Jeremiah prayed to the Lord out of his desperate condition (cf.

Ps. 88:7, 14; 130:1; Jon. 2:1-3)” (Constable). “Prayer is the breath of the new man, sucking in the air of mercy in petitions and returning it in praises; it is both the evidence and the maintenance of the spiritual life” (Henry, cited by Constable).

“You have heard my voice: ‘Do not hide Your ear from my sighing, from my cry for help’” (3:56). Jeremiah tells the Lord that He has heard his voice and asked that He not hide His ear from his suffering nor refused to hear his cry for help. “He believed the Lord had heard his prayer, and he begged that the Lord would pay attention to his petition and grant him deliverance” (Constable). “Jeremiah’s plea for deliverance from the pit was answered” (Dyer).

“You drew near on the day I called on You, and said, ‘Do not fear!’” (3:57). Jeremiah reminds the Lord that when he called on Him, He drew near and reassured him that he should not fear. “In the past, the Lord had heeded Jeremiah’s prayers and had given him hope. The Lord had come to his rescue and had redeemed (delivered) him from destruction (cf. Lev. 25:25-28, 47-54; Ruth 4:1-12). This is the first and only time in Lamentations that God speaks to the sufferers and gives evidence of hearing and answering their prayers. Significantly, His words were: ‘Do not fear!’” (Constable).

“You came near when I called You. God intervened on Jeremiah’s behalf and rescued him from certain death in a muddy cistern (cf. Jer. 38:7-13). So Jeremiah was a living example to Judah of God’s loyal love and faithfulness (3:22-23)” (Dyer).

“O Lord, You have pleaded the case for my soul; You have redeemed my life” (3:58). Jeremiah says to the Lord that he had pleaded his case for his soul and delivered him. “The Lord had not only comforted Jeremiah with His words, but he also acted to rescue him from his distressing situation. The Jerusalemites would have been encouraged and strengthened by God’s responses to Jeremiah. The Lord had listened to him, had drawn near to him, had comforted him, and had redeemed him. Might not He do the same for them?” (Constable).

“No greater testimony can a sinner offer to God than to say, in thanksgiving, ‘Thou hast redeemed my life’ (3:58)” (Jensen, cited by Constable). “Here is a hint of the light of the New Testament gospel in the dark pages of the Book of Lamentations. The only way that God would be able to *plead the case* of His people was if He Himself paid for—or redeemed them from—their sinfulness” (*The NKJV Study Bible*).

“O LORD, You have seen *how* I am wronged; judge my case” (3:59). Jeremiah tells the Lord that He sees how he has been wrong and asks Him to judge his case. “Jeremiah knew that Yahweh had seen his affliction. He asked that He would judge him, knowing that the Lord would be fair. Though God had redeemed him, his enemies had not yet been punished” (Constable). “Jeremiah then called on God to vindicate him before his enemies, those in Judah who opposed him” (Dyer). I

“You have seen all their vengeance, all their schemes against me. You have heard their reproach, O LORD, all their schemes against me. The lips of my enemies and their whispering against me all the day” (3:60-62). Jeremiah reminds the Lord that He had seen the vengeance, schemes, reproaches, and whispers of his enemies against him. “The prophet’s enemies plotted against him constantly” (Constable). “God had seen... the wrong done to Jeremiah—their vengeance... their plots... their insults, and their mocking” (Dyer).

“Look at their sitting down and their rising up; I *am* their taunting song” (3:63). Jeremiah asked the Lord to look at the sitting down and rising up of his enemies and listen to their taunting song. “He called on God to witness all that his enemies were doing and how they had mocked him (cf. v. 30)” (Constable).

“Repay them, O LORD, according to the work of their hands” (3:64). Jeremiah asked the Lord to repay his enemies based on what they had done. “Jeremiah believed, as he requested, that the Lord would pay his enemies back as they deserved (cf. 1:21-22; Ps. 28:4; 2 Cor. 3:17)” (Constable). Ryrie says, “Jeremiah’s enemies were paid back when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem (Jeremiah 52:7-11, 24-27).”

“Jeremiah also asked God to pay them back what they deserve. This was fulfilled historically when Nebuchadnezzar entered Jerusalem. The leaders responsible for rejecting and persecuting Jeremiah were punished by Babylon (cf. Jer. 39:4-7; 52:7-11, 52:24-27). The parallel to Jerusalem was obvious. She too was persecuted by her enemies (3:46-47); but she could be confident that God would vindicate her before her enemies if she would turn to Him” (Dyer).

“Give them a veiled heart; Your curse *be* upon them”! (3:65). Jeremiah asked the Lord to give his enemies a veiled heart and let His curse be upon them. “He would harden their hearts and so bring judgment on them” (Constable).

“In Your anger, pursue and destroy them from under the heavens of the LORD” (3:66). Jeremiah asked the Lord to pursue his enemies and destroy them in His anger. “The heaven of Jahveh is the whole world, over which Jahveh’s authority extends; the meaning, therefore, is ‘Exterminate them wholly from the sphere of Thy dominion in the world,’ or, Thy kingdom” (Keil).

“Jeremiah prayed and believed that the Lord would pursue his enemies anywhere they might go—and destroy them in His anger! The Lord did this to many of Jeremiah’s personal enemies when the city fell to the Babylonians (cf. Jer. 39:4-7; 52:7-11, 24-27), but here the prophet was appealing for a judgment of the Babylonians for destroying Jerusalem. These imprecations voiced Jeremiah’s longing for God to vindicate His righteousness. They express his zeal for the honor of the Lord and His kingdom, and they reflect God’s own attitude toward sin and impenitent sinners (Kaiser)” (Constable).

“Perhaps because of their status as the Chosen People, the Jews were always sensitive to abuse and injury inflicted from outside, whatever the source. Consequently, they found it impossible to overlook these hostile acts, with the result that the imprecations that they hurled at their enemies, while typical of such Near Eastern utterances, seem to possess an unexpected and unusual degree of vindictiveness (cf. Ps. 137:9)” (Harrison, cited by Constable).

“He asks the LORD to consider how he has been mistreated—the vengeance, schemes, reproach, insults, gossip, and taunts against him—and to judge his case. Righteousness demands that his enemies be punished, cursed, pursued, and destroyed (vv. 58-66). “A veiled heart” (v. 65), as in “when Moses is read, a veil lies on their [the Jews’] heart” (2 Cor. 3:15), probably does not refer to ‘hardening, but blinding of the heart, which casts into destruction’” (MacDonald).

Summary: Even in this severe pain of divine discipline, believers should remember that there is hope because of God’s faithfulness and pray accordingly.

“Several commentators consider Lam 3 the theological heart of the book This decision is appropriate in many ways, for this chapter sets forth the book’s clearest expression of God’s character and attitude toward the suffering nation. This chapter also provides the nation its most extensive instruction on how to relate to the Lord at this point in its history. He [the writer] stresses the nature of suffering, the character of God, the way to think through the implications of suffering in relation to God’s character, and the way to pray after the suffering has been mentally, spiritually, physically, and emotionally ‘digested.’” (House, cited by Constable).

“How could the writer be stating what he does in the book and not be upset with God? How can God be good in view of human suffering? The answer is that in the middle of all that suffering, God is faithful, merciful, and the one to whom people can turn and know that he is a good and merciful God” (Stephen J. Bramer, ‘Suffering in the Writing Prophets (Isaiah to Malachi),’ in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, p. 156, cited by Constable).

“As long as we contemplate our troubles, the more convinced we will become of our isolation, our hopelessness, our inability to extricate ourselves from the present trouble. But when we focus on the Lord, we are able finally to rise above, rather than to suffer under, our troubles” (*NKJV Study Bible*).

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father
There is no shadow of turning with Thee
Thou changes not, Thy compassion’s, they fail not
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be

Great is Thy faithfulness
Great is Thy faithfulness
Morning by morning, new mercies I see
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me

Summer and winter, springtime and harvest
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love

Great is Thy faithfulness
Great is Thy faithfulness
Morning by morning, new mercies I see
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Great is Thy faithfulness
Great is Thy faithfulness
Morning by morning, new mercies I see
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father

THE SURPRISING CAUSE OF DIVINE DISCIPLINE

If I were to tell you that a group of believers were under divine discipline and ask you what you thought the cause might be, you would, no doubt, say, “Sin.” There is no question that that is true, but beyond that, there are some surprises in some cases of divine discipline. For example, God disciplined Israel, and when Jeremiah tells the tale, he traces the cause to the Lord’s anger. There is also what might be called another surprise. Somewhere between individual sin and God’s anger, there is often another cause. Jeremiah discusses it in Lamentations 4.

“The fourth lament is similar to the second one, in that they both describe God’s judgment of Jerusalem and Judah” (Constable).

“The lamentation over the terrible calamity that has befallen Jerusalem is distinguished in this poem from the lamentations in chap. i. and ii., not merely by the fact that in it, the fate of the several classes of the population is contemplated, but chiefly by the circumstances that the calamity is set forth as a well-merited punishment by God for the grievous sins of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. This consideration forms the chief feature in the whole poem, from the beginning to the end of which there predominates the hope that Zion will not perish, but that the appointed punishment will terminate, and then fall on their now triumphant enemies” (Keil).

“The tone [of Lam. 4] is more matter-of-fact’ exhibiting ‘a relaxation of the more intense emotion of the earlier poems [with an absence of] the vividness imparted there by the dramatic appearance of various speakers and especially by the personification of Zion ‘[Delbert]. Now that the zenith of emotion and theology has been reached in Lamentations 3:22-24, the intensities of the ‘front steps’ to that focal point [i.e., chapters 1 and 2] may now be eased and a time provided for quietly ‘mopping up’ what remains of the grief process” (Kaiser, cited by Constable).

“As in the first three poems, two voices are found in chapter 4. The narrator appears in vv. 1-16, 21-22; and the people of Zion in vv. 17-20. In other respects, however, the fourth poem is quite different from these. It is considerably shorter, each stanza is divided into two rather than three lines; there is no prayer to God, who is referred to only in the third person; and it ends on a note of assurance (v. 22a)” (Provan, cited by Constable).

“Lam. 4:1-22 parallels the judgment discussed in 2:1-22. After describing the response of an individual in the midst of judgment (3:1-66), Jeremiah again returned to survey the scene of the calamity in Jerusalem. He contrasted the conditions in Jerusalem before and after the siege (4:1-11), explained the causes for the siege (4:12-20), and gave a call for vindication from Zion (4:21-22)” (Dyer).

Conditions During the Siege

“This dark section of the poem consists of two parallel parts (vv. 1-6, 7-11). The Judahites had become despised (vv. 1-2, 7-8), and both children and adults (everyone) suffered (vv. 3-5, 9-10). This calamity was the result of Yahweh’s punishment for sin (vv. 6, 11)” (Constable).

“The stark reality of Jerusalem’s judgment was brought into sharp focus by comparing her present condition with that before the fall. Several scholars have seen a parallelism between 4:1-6 and 4:7-11 (see the chart). Both sections are written to point to the same conclusion—

Jerusalem’s present calamity is God’s punishment for her sin (4:6, 4:11)” (Dyer).

Value of the sons of Zion becomes despised 4:1-2	Value of the princes becomes despised 4:7-8
Little children and adults suffer. 4:3-5	Little children and adults suffer. 4:9-10
Conclusion: calamity is God’s punishment. 4:6	Conclusion: calamity is God’s punishment. 4:11

The Temple “How the gold has become dim! How changed the fine gold! The stones of the sanctuary are scattered at the head of every street” (4:1). Jeremiah laments that the goal of the temple has changed and become dim the stones of the tabernacle are scattered in the streets. “This lament resumes the characteristic ‘How’ or ‘Alas’ (Heb. *’eka*) introduction (cf. 1:1; 2:1). The gold and precious stones that had decorated the temple no longer served that function. The gold was now dirty, and the gems had been torn from their mountings” (Constable).

The People “The precious sons of Zion, valuable as fine gold, how they are regarded as clay pots, the work of the hands of the potter”! (4:2). The inhabitants of Jerusalem, who are as valuable as fine gold, are treated as if they were clay pots. “Time Jeremiah compared the precious inhabitants of Jerusalem (cf. Exod. 19:5-6) to gold and gems. They now lay in the streets of the city, defiled and dead. The enemy had regarded the citizens of Jerusalem, who were more valuable to it than gold, as worth nothing more than earthenware pots. The Chaldeans had smashed many of them. Earthenware pottery was of such little value in the ancient Near East that people would not repair it but simply replaced it”(Constable).

“Jeremiah compared Jerusalem to dull gold and cast-off gems. Then he explained his figurative Language. The ‘gold’ and ‘gems’ were the precious sons of Zion, the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In their former glory, they had been as precious as gold, but they were now considered as pots of clay. Clay was common in Palestine; nearly all vessels were made from it. Clay pots were abundant, but their value was little. If one broke, it was thrown out, and a new one replaced it. Similarly, the people of Jerusalem, God’s precious people, had become worthless” (Dyer).

“For those who esteemed themselves as high-quality gold, the kind of experience which reduced them to the level of base metal in the opinion of their enemies was of harrowing psychological and spiritual proportions” (Harrison, cited by Constable).

In verses 2-4, “in the siege of Jerusalem, children received worse treatment than the offspring of animals (see 2:19)” (Ryrie).

The Children “Even the jackals present their breasts to nurse their young; but the daughter of my people is cruel, like ostriches in the wilderness” (4:3). Jeremiah laments that even jackals nurse their young at the breast, but the people of Jerusalem treated cruelly like ostriches in the wilderness. “The people of Jerusalem had become as heartless as wild ostriches. Mother ostriches seem unconcerned about their young, for they lay their eggs in the sand where they may be trampled (see comments on Job 39:14-18)” (Dyer).

“The horrors of the siege of Jerusalem had turned the once-compassionate women of Judah into selfish creatures unwilling to give of themselves for the welfare of their young. Like ostriches that do not care for their offspring (cf. Job 39:14-18), these women had abandoned and even eaten their children. They behaved worse than loathsome jackals, which at least nurse their young. The children were suffering because of the sins of their parents” (Constable).

“Jeremiah then turned from the people in general to the children in particular. The treatment

of children by their mothers during the siege was worse than that expected of loathsome animals. Jackals, found throughout the Mediterranean area, traveled in packs. They were associated with areas of desolation and destruction (cf. Isa. 35:7; Jer. 9:11; 10:22; 49:33; 51:37; Mal. 1:3). Yet even jackals nourished their offspring while the cries of the children of Jerusalem for bread and water went unheeded by their parents” (Dyer).

The Infants “The tongue of the infant clings to the roof of its mouth for thirst; the young children ask for bread, *but no one breaks it for them*” (4:4). Infants were dying of thirst and children were dying of starvation. “Infants in Jerusalem during the siege did not have enough to drink or eat because their parents were looking out for their own needs first (cf. 2:11-12, 19)” (Constable). “These ‘infants are so weak from starvation that they no longer cry when hungry [cf. Job 29:10 Ps. 137:6; Ezek. 3:26]” (Berlin, cited by Constable). “Infants and children were dying of thirst and starvation (2:19)” (Dyer).

The Wealthy “Those who ate delicacies are desolate in the streets; those who were brought up in scarlet embrace ash heaps” (4:5). The wealthy, who once ate delicacies and wore scarlet, are desolate in the street and embrace ash heaps. “The rich people who were accustomed to eating delicacies had to try to survive by finding anything at all to eat in the streets. The royal and wealthy among the people resorted to ash heaps for food (cf. Job 2:8)” (Constable). “Another constant in the siege was that those who used to eat well were now destitute, and princes (those nurtured in purple, royal clothing) were lying in ash heaps, probably in sickness (cf. Job 2:8)” (Dyer).

“The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, with no hand to help her”! (4:6). The punishment for the sins of Jerusalem is greater than this punishment for the sins of Sodom in that Sodom was overthrown in a moment. “Jerusalem’s sin and punishment were both greater than Sodom’s. God overthrew Sodom quickly, whereas the siege of Jerusalem lasted 18 months” (Constable). “Jerusalem was more sinful not because of extreme sexual sin but because of extreme covenant unfaithfulness, though at times the two concepts merge” (House, cited by Constable).

Ryrie says the meaning of the last phrase, “with no hand to help her,” is unclear. It may mean that Sodom’s destruction was directly from the hand of God rather than through human hands, or it may mean that it was so sudden that there was no time for anyone to wring his hands (i.e., no time to panic).” “The last line (‘no hands were turned toward [or wrung over] her’) is unclear. It could mean that no one came to Jerusalem’s aid during her siege. Or it could mean that no onlookers mourned over Jerusalem’s siege. But it probably means that no human enemy subjected Sodom to a long siege, but a human army did lay a long siege on Jerusalem—which was worse” (Parry, cited by Constable).

“Jeremiah ended the first stanza of this fourth dirge by comparing Jerusalem to Sodom. But Jerusalem’s punishment was worse than Sodom’s because (a) Jerusalem’s punishment was protracted while Sodom’s was short (in a moment), and (b) Jerusalem’s came despite assistance from Egypt while Sodom had no assistance (without a hand ... to help)” (Dyer).

The Devoted “Her Nazirites were brighter than snow and whiter than milk; they were more ruddy in body than rubies, *like sapphire in their appearance*” (4:7). The Nazirites living in Jerusalem were once brighter than snow and whiter than milk, but in the siege of Jerusalem, they were more muddy in body than rubies; they were like sapphires in their appearance. The Hebrew word translated “Nazirites” means “consecrated, devoted one, Nazirites.” Ryrie says these were the nobles, adding, “Leaders became emaciated for lack of food, and parents ate their own

children.” Constable, however, says, “Some of the residents had dedicated themselves to the Lord and were of the highest quality of people. Perhaps they were Nazirites (cf. Num. 6:1-21). However, even *they* had become victims of the siege and had suffered terribly along with the ordinary citizens” (Constable, italics his). “Jeremiah’s second stanza (4:7-11) paralleled his first (4:1-6), but the illustrations here are heightened and narrowed for effect. The ‘sons of Zion’ (4:2) are now called the princes (2:2, 2:9). The leaders of the city suffered the same fate as everyone else” (Dyer).

The people mentioned in this verse (“Nazirites”) were probably neither Nazirites nor leaders but simply people who had dedicated themselves to the Lord (see “the just” in 4:13).

“*Now their appearance is blacker than soot; they go unrecognized in the streets; their skin clings to their bones, it has become as dry as wood*” (4:8). Since the appearance of even those who were consecrated to the Lord was blacker than soot, their skin clung to their bones, and it was dry as wood, they were unrecognized in the streets. “Their fine complexions and healthy bodies had become black and shriveled” (Constable). “Their fine complexions and healthy bodies did not escape the ravages of Babylon. They too saw their skin darken (become blacker than soot) and grow taut (shriveled) as their bodies became racked by hunger and emaciated (5:10)” (Dyer).

“*Those slain by the sword are better off than those who die of hunger; for these pine away, stricken for lack of the fruits of the field*” (4:9). Those who died suddenly by the sword were better off than those who died slowly of hunger because those who died of hunger pined away gradually starving to death. “Some of the people had died in battle, but others had starved to death. Those who had died by the sword were more fortunate because a swift death is better than a gradual one” (Constable).

The Women “The hands of the compassionate women have cooked their own children; they became food for them in the destruction of the daughter of my people” (4:10). Women, who were otherwise compassionate, ate their own children to survive. “Previously compassionate women boiled their own children and ate them to sustain their lives during the rigors of the siege (2:20; Lev. 26:29; Deut. 28:52-57; 2 Kings 6:25-29; Jer. 19:9)” (Constable). “The children who had been starving (4:4-5) were now victimized by their parents. The gnawing pangs of hunger (c1:11, 1:19) finally drove compassionate women into cannibalizing their own children” (Dyer).

“The sick irony is that the children were the means by which the women would survive into the future (by caring for them as they got older and by surviving them), and yet to survive, the mothers must eat their own means of survival. One may assume that the mothers only ate the children who were already dead, but even so, one could hardly imagine a more shocking and sickening image to serve as a climax to the description of the famine in vv. 1-10” (Parry, cited by Constable).

“We look back and think how horrible this was, but today, many mothers are having abortions, actually murdering their babies. If we don’t want a baby, we must take responsibility for our actions before a baby becomes a reality. God has made us capable of having babies and when one has been conceived, it is His intention for that child to come into the world. The moment the child is conceived, he is a *person* and to abort a pregnancy is the murder of a human being” (McGee, cited by Constable).

Causes of the Siege

The Anger of God “The LORD has fulfilled His fury, he has poured out His fierce anger. He

kindled a fire in Zion, and it has devoured its foundations” (4:11). Jeremiah declares that the fury and anger of the Lord is the cause of the fire in Jerusalem that devoured its foundations. “Jeremiah now turned from the suffering to its source. Yahweh had executed His wrath by punishing Jerusalem (cf. 1:12; 2:2-4, 6; 3:1). Like a fire, His anger burned among His people (2:3). Ironically, He consumed the city with fire. Even though the Babylonians were the instrumental cause of the destruction, the Lord was the efficient cause of it. The stone ‘foundations’ of the city obviously could not be burned away; this may be hyperbole. Or it may reference the city’s human foundations: its leading citizens” (Constable).

“Jeremiah concluded this second stanza [4:7-11] by again pointing to the Lord as the source of Zion’s punishment (1:12-17; 2:1-8; 5:20). Jerusalem was experiencing God’s wrath (2:2, 2:4; 3:1) and fierce anger (1:12; 2:3, 2:6) for her sin. God’s judgment was like a fire (2:3) that had raced out of control in Jerusalem, engulfing the entire city. Both the superstructure and foundations had been destroyed” (Dyer).

“The kings of the earth, and all inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem” (4:12). The kings of the earth and the population of the world would not have believed that the adversary and enemy of Jerusalem would ever have entered their gates. “The overthrow of Jerusalem had surprised the leaders and people of other nations. Invaders had forced their way into it in the past (cf. 1 Kings 14:25-28; 2 Kings 14:13-14; 2 Chron. 21:16-17), but the citizens had rebuilt and strengthened its defenses (2 Chron. 32:2-5; 33:14). In Jeremiah’s day, it appeared impregnable, especially to the people of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam. 5:6-8)” (Constable).

“Jerusalem’s fall in 586 B.C. exposed their false assurance and illustrated a theological truth of Scripture: Sinful and rebellious people, even if outwardly associated with the covenant community and the promises of God, should not presume on His protection” (Chisholm, cited by Constable).

“Jerusalem was a mighty fortress that had seemed secure. The city had been entered by invading armies on a few occasions previously (cf. 1 Kings 14:25-28; 2 Kings 14:13-14; 2 Chron. 21:16-17). But its defenses had been rebuilt and strengthened (cf. 2 Chron. 32:2-5; 33:14), and a water supply into the city was established with the digging of Hezekiah’s tunnel. So, by Jeremiah’s time, the kings considered the city impregnable. Yet God allowed it to be captured” (Dyer).

The Sins of the Religious Leaders “Because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed in her midst the blood of the just” (4:13). Jerusalem was seized because of the sins of the religious leaders, the prophets and the priest, who shed the blood of the just and the streets of Jerusalem. “Jerusalem’s overthrow had come because her religious leaders, represented by the priests and the false prophets, had perverted justice and forsaken the Lord’s covenant. They had even put people to death who did not deserve it, including Jeremiah’s contemporary: the prophet Uriah (Jer. 26:20-23)” (Constable).

“One cause of Jerusalem’s siege and fall was the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests. The leaders who had been placed as mediators between God and the people had become corrupt. Instead of promoting righteousness and stressing faithfulness to God’s covenant, these men had shed ... the blood of innocent people and therefore were defiled with blood” (Dyer).

“They wandered blind in the streets; they have defiled themselves with blood, so that no one would touch their garments” (4:14). These religious leaders (4:13) wandered blindly in the streets, defiling themselves the blood of the just (4:13) with the result that no one would touch their garments. “Some of these spiritually blind leaders had apparently lost their physical

eyesight during the siege and had to wander in the streets blind. They had shed innocent blood, and now blood stained their garments. Instead of being resources for the people under siege, they had become individuals to avoid because of their uncleanness” (Constable).

“They cried out to them, ‘Go away, unclean! Go away, go away, do not touch us!’ When they fled and wandered, *Those* among the nations said, ‘They shall no longer dwell *here*’” (4:15). The people of Jerusalem shouted to the religious leaders, “Go away, you unclean, do not touch us and the people of other nations said, “Do not dwell here.” The false prophets and priests of Judah (4:13), when their true character was recognized, were treated like lepers (cf. Lev. 13:45-46)” (Ryrie). “Like lepers, they warned others to stay away from them (cf. Lev. 13:45-46). They wandered away from their own people, and even the pagans did not want them living among them (cf. Deut. 28:65-66). In Scripture, leprosy often illustrates the ravages of sin and death” (Constable).

“As the false prophets and their followers had ‘wandered’ blind with infatuated and idolatrous crime in the city (vs. 14), so they must now ‘wander’ among the heathen in blind consternation with calamity” (Jemieson; et al., cited by Constable).

“They were so polluted with sin that they were treated like lepers. Amazingly, the prophets and priests were actually shunned as unclean lepers and were forced out of the covenant community (cf. Lev. 13:45-46)” (Dyer).

“The face of the LORD scattered them; He no longer regards them. *The people do not respect the priests nor show favor to the elders*” (4:16). The face (Hebrew: “face, presence”) of the Lord scattered and no longer recorded the priest and the elders and the people where they were scattered did not respect them. “The ‘presence’ of Yahweh had scattered these leaders because He had no regard for them. Consequently, other nations would show no respect for their *presence*. They also failed to honor those who should have received honor in Judah, people like the priests and the elders of the people. The ‘presence of the LORD’ had scattered them” (Constable, italics his). “God scattered Jerusalem’s leaders (priests and elders) because they had led the people into sin” (Dyer).

The Sin of the People “Still our eyes failed us, *watching* vainly for our help; in our watching we watched for a nation *that could not save us*” (4:17). The people of Jerusalem looked for a nation to save them, but they looked in vain. The sin of the people was they did not trust the Lord but looked to others to rescue them. Ryrie says the nation was Egypt (Jer. 37:5-7). The Jerusalemites had looked for help to appear and save them, but none came either from man or from God. Their expectation that another nation might come to their aid, such as Egypt, proved vain (cf. Jer. 34:21; 37:7)” (Constable).

“If the first cause of Jerusalem’s siege was the sin of the prophets and priests (4:13-16), the second cause was the futility of foreign alliances. Instead of trusting in God, Jerusalem had turned to Egypt for protection from Babylon” (Dyer).

“They tracked our steps so that we could not walk in our streets. Our end was near; our days were over, for our end had come” (4:18). Instead of a nation coming to help (4:17), people attack them so that when they could no longer walk in their streets, they realized that their end was not only near and over; it had come. “They” evidently refers to the Babylonians. This is the first reference to Israel’s enemies in the book. The residents of Jerusalem could not even walk the streets of their city because the danger was so great during the siege. After the walls were breached, they knew that their end was near” (Constable). “In vain, she watched for a nation that could not save her. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel had warned against the futility of trusting in Egypt for protection (Jer. 37:6-10; Ezek. 29:6-7)” (Dyer).

“Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the heavens. They pursued us on the mountains and lay in wait for us in the wilderness” (4:19). The people of Jerusalem said that their enemies were swifter than eagles, that they pursued them in the mountains, and that they laid wait for them in the wilderness. Quote Judah’s enemies swiftly pursued the Jews around the countryside as well, not allowing any of them to escape (cf. 2 Kings 25). They chased them wherever they sought to hide, on the mountains or in the wilderness, like an eagle pursuing its prey” (Constable). “That false hope brought only bitter grief when Babylon’s armies, swifter than eagles (cf. Hab. 1:8), finally captured Jerusalem, pursuing those who tried to escape, and the end came” (Dyer).

“The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was caught in their pits, of whom we said, ‘Under his shadow we shall live among the nations’” (4:20). The king, who was anointed by the Lord and was their very breath, was captured by the enemies of Jerusalem and the people, instead of living in Jerusalem, lived among the nations under the shadow of the king. Ryrie says that the anointed of the Lord was “King Zedekiah who tried to escape but was captured, blinded, and taken to Babylon (Jer. 39:2-7).” “The enemy even captured the Davidic king, Zedekiah, who was as the very breath of life to the Judahites. The Judeans had evidently hoped to live under his authority in captivity, but now he was blind and in prison (2 Kings 25:4-7; Jer. 39:1-10 52:7-11)” (Constable).

“The third cause of Jerusalem’s siege and fall was Zedekiah, her king. Zedekiah was the Lord’s anointed. The word ‘anointed’ (*māšīah*) was used of the kings of Israel because oil was poured on their heads to indicate that they were set apart for their task by God (cf. 1 Sam. 10:1; 16:1; 1 Kings 1:39-45; 2 Kings 11:12). When Jerusalem fell, Zedekiah tried to escape toward the Jordan River and Ammon (Jer. 39:2-7) but he was caught in the enemy’s traps. His children were killed and he was carried away in chains. The leader Jerusalem looked to for security (her very life breath and her shadow) was powerless to protect her” (Dyer).

“This section gives three causes for the siege: the sins of the priests and prophets (vv. 13-16), reliance on foreign alliances (vv. 17-19), and the capture of Zedekiah (v. 20)” (Constable).

MacDonald’s summary: “The prophet compares the former glory and the present pitiful condition of Jerusalem. The temple is destroyed, mothers desert their young (vv. 3, 4), people die of hunger (v. 5), the punishment is prolonged (v. 6), the princes are unrecognized in the streets (vv. 7, 8), cannibalism prevails even among compassionate women (v. 10), and the city that was considered impregnable has fallen (v. 12). It was all caused by the sins of her prophets ... the priests, and the people (vv. 13-16). They looked in vain to Egypt for their help (v. 17). The Babylonians besieged them suddenly (vv. 18, 19), and King Zedekiah, the anointed of the LORD, was captured (v. 20).”

Hope Following the Siege

“4:21-22 comes right out of the blue! The tone of chapter 4 has been to focus on the absolutely dire situation in Jerusalem, and by 4:20, the audience is left with the distinct feeling that the end has come. Suddenly, from left field, comes what has the feel of a prophetic oracle proclaiming divine judgment on Edom for its treatment of Judah and an end to Judah’s exile” (Parry, cited by Constable). “The author just quoted [Parry] went on to suggest that the mention of ‘the LORD’s anointed’ (King Zedekiah) being ‘captured in the pits’ (v. 19) may have recalled Jeremiah’s release from a pit and his ultimate redemption (3:53-58) and given him hope” (Constable).

“Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, *You* who dwell in the land of Uz! The cup shall also pass over to you and you shall become drunk and make yourself naked” (4:21). Jeremiah informs the people of Edom who were rejoicing over Jerusalem’s demise, that the cup of judgment shall pass to them making them drunk and naked. “Although *Edom* was allotted the rural areas of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek. 25:12-14; Obad. 11-14), she would eventually drink the *cup* of God’s wrath” (Ryrie). “And The Edomites, related to the Judahites, were rejoicing over Judah’s destruction (cf. Ps. 137:7; Jer. 49:7-22; Ezek. 25:12-14; 35), but the same fate was sure to overtake them (Deut. 30:7). They would have to drink the cup of Yahweh’s judgment and would lose their self-control and self-respect (cf. Judah’s condition in 1:8-9)” (Constable).

“After the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar allotted the rural areas of Judah to the Edomites as a reward for their political neutrality and as a recognition of the active help which they had provided for Chaldean military units during the final days of the campaign (cf. Ezk. 25:12-14; Ob. 11-14)” (Harrison, cited by Constable).

“The land of Uz, Job’s country, was either a part of, near or another name for Edom (cf. Job 1:1). This is the first and only time in the book that the writer identified a specific enemy of Jerusalem by name. Some scholars take ‘Edom’ as a personification of Israel’s enemy. E.g., Berlin” (Constable).

“Because of God’s covenant with Israel (Deut. 28-30), the people could hope for vindication. The last two verses in 4:1-22 draw a contrast between Israel and her Gentile enemy Edom. Edom took an active role in promoting Jerusalem’s fall to Babylon (cf. Ps. 137:7; Jer. 49:7-22; Ezek. 25:12-14; 35:1-15). (On Uz, see comments on Job 1:1.) Edom’s crimes against her ‘brother’ Jacob (Deut. 23:7) represented the actions of all the nations that profited at Jerusalem’s expense. God had noted their actions and would punish those nations for their sin, exactly as He had said He would do (Deut. 30:7). Though Edom rejoiced and was glad over Jerusalem’s calamity, the bitter cup would someday be passed to her (1:21-22). Drinking from a cup pictured being forced to undergo judgment (cf. Jer. 25:15-28). As God was judging Jerusalem in Jeremiah’s day for her sin, so He would also judge Edom (and, by extension, all Gentile nations) for their sins. Jerusalem could look forward to restoration, but Edom could only expect judgment (Obad. 1:4, 1:15-18, 1:20-21)” (Dyer).

“*The punishment of your iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; He will no longer send you into captivity. He will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom; He will uncover your sins*”! (4:22). Jeremiah concludes by saying that the punishment for the sins of the people of Jerusalem is now complete; the Lord will no longer send them into captivity but will uncover and punish the sins of Edom. “Significantly, the last Hebrew word in this fourth acrostic poem is *tam*, which means ‘completed.’ Zion’s prayers had been answered (cf. 1:21-22; 3:61-66)” (Constable).

“Jerusalem’s punishment had reached its end; the exile would not last forever. But God would still punish Edom for her sins. They would ‘swap places.’ Zion had drunk from God’s cup of wrath, but now Edom would. Zion had been stripped bare, but now Edom would be. Zion’s punishment had been completed, but Edom’s was yet to come” (Parry, cited by Constable).

“The closing note of certainty (v. 22a) as to Zion’s bright future is most remarkable to the reader who had read this far in the book. It is but an interlude, however, a point of calm in the midst of the storm. The fifth poem will find us once again in the midst of questions and doubts” (Provan, cited by Constable).

“The daughter of Edom rejoiced over the fall of Jerusalem, but she will be punished severely

and her sins laid bare. Zion will be restored” (MacDonald).

Summary: The causes of God’s judgment of Jerusalem were His anger, the sins of the spiritual leaders, and the lack of faith on the part of the people, but there is hope that their enemies would be judged.

The surprise in this case of divine discipline is that the cause was the spiritual leaders. Those who were supposed to lead people to divine blessing ended up being a cause of divine discipline.

How does this apply to believers today? “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” (Heb. 10:26-27). This willful sin is abandoning the Christian faith and returning to Jewish ritual. It is “departing from the Living God” (Heb. 3:12). When the sacrifice of Christ has been rejected, no other sacrifice is adequate. All that remains is a fearful expectation of judgment (Heb. 10:27). This fiery indignation will devour the adversaries (Heb. 10:27). The word fire has made some conclude that the judgment is hell, but fire is used concerning believers in 1 Peter 1:7 and 1 Corinthians 3:15. This passage in Hebrews is definitely referring to believers because 1) it says “The Lord will judge His people” (Heb. 10:30), 2) the author includes himself (“we” in 10:26), and this passage is connected to the previous passage, which is to believers (“for” in 10:26).

Look at the previous passage that consists of three exhortations to believers. “let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience” and their “bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:22). Believers are to come to God believing they are certain they have access to God because The imagery is borrowed from the Levitical ceremonies. As the people were sprinkled with blood at the ratification of the Mosaic Covenant (Ex. 24:8), believers have their evil conscience sprinkled with the blood of Christ. “Bodies washed with pure water” is symbolic of cleansing. The point is that, having been cleansed of inward guilt and outward impurity, we are to draw near certainty of access.

The second exhortation is, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Heb. 10:23). Believers are to beware of departing from the Living God (3:12). They are to hold fast to their expectation of the future. They should hold on without wavering.

The third exhortation is “Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:24-25). Believers should not only hold fast themselves, they should help other believers do the same.

The reason for these three exhortations is if they departed from the living God, that is, forsake Christianity, there’s no other way to be cleansed of their sin; the only thing they have looked forward to is divine discipline. So to avoid the judgment of Hebrews 10, which is like the judgment of Lamentations 4, hold fast your profession of faith, draw near to God with confidence, and minister to others.

HOW TO PRAY DURING DIVINE DISCIPLINE

When believers step out of line, they can experience divine discipline (1 Cor. 11:30). That discipline can sometimes be slight and sometimes severe. Regardless of the severity, believers need to know how to pray when they are in the midst of it. The most severe example of divine discipline in the Old Testament is recorded in Lamentations. Chapter 5 is a prayer in the midst of divine discipline that is a model for us.

“This poem, like the one in chapter 3, contains verses of only two lines each (or one line in the Hebrew text). It is the only non-acrostic chapter in the book, though, like chapters 1, 2, and 4, it consists of 22 verses, having been built around the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. The doleful *qinah* meter is also absent in this chapter, giving it a somewhat more positive tone. However, 45 words end in the Hebrew letter ‘u’ (in all verses except 19), giving the chapter a mournful tone when read aloud in Hebrew. The chapter is more of a prayer than a (communal) lament, though its content focuses on the pitiful condition of the Judahites because of Jerusalem’s fall. One person speaks throughout” (Constable).

“The prophet’s final dirge breaks the pattern established in his earlier laments. The acrostic pattern and *qinah* meter are not used. In fact, the entire chapter is more properly a prayer than a lament. Chapters 1-3 each close with a prayer to the Lord (1:20-22; 2:20-22; 3:55-66), but no prayer is included in 4:1-22. Therefore it is possible to see 5:1-22 functioning as the prayer following 4:1-22 and serving as the book’s concluding prayer” (Dyer).

“The absence of the usual prayer (1:20-22; 2:20-22; 3:58-66) at the end of Lamentations 4 is now supplied by the fifth chapter as a whole. It is this final touch that gives unity and completes the book for when all is said and done we rest our case for relief and healing from suffering when we commit it to God in prayer” (Kaiser, cited by Constable). “The best fruit of anyone’s mourning is his praying to God” (Jensen, cited by Constable). Jeremiah’s prayer, which he voiced for his people, contains two petitions, namely, that God would remember the plight of His people (vv. 1-18), and that He would restore them to their promised covenant blessings (vv. 19-22; cf. Deut. 30:1-11)” (Constable). Ryrie says verses 1-18 are a description of the affliction, disgrace, and despondency of the Jews under their Babylonian captors.

A Plea for Remembrance

Loss of Respect (Reproach) “Remember, O LORD, what has come upon us; look, and behold our reproach”! (5:1). “Jeremiah called on Yahweh to remember the calamity that had befallen His people and to consider the reproach in which they now lived (cf. 3:34-36). The humbled condition of the Judahites reflected poorly on the Lord because the pagans would have concluded that He was unable to keep His people strong and free. Jeremiah implied that if Yahweh remembered His people, He would act to deliver them (cf. Exod. 2:24-25; 3:7-8)” (Constable).

“Lam. 5:1 introduces the prayer. The remnant called on God to remember the indignities they had suffered and to look at their present disgrace. Jeremiah had already indicated that God notices such atrocities (3:34-36). Therefore the people’s call was not just for God to see what had happened (for He sees everything: cf. Prov. 15:3), but rather that God see *and act* on their condition” (Dyer, italics his).

“This verse has been called ‘perhaps the most insistent prayer found in the Old Testament’” (Renkema, cited by Constable). The speaker called on God to ‘remember,’ ‘look,’ and ‘see,’ the reproach of His people. Since God is fully aware of all things, these urgent pleas should be understood as requests that He act on behalf of His people” (Bergant, cited by Constable).

Loss of Property “Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens, and our houses to foreigners” (5:2). Jeremiah reminds the Lord that their inheritance, the land, had been turned over to aliens and their houses to foreigners. “The Promised Land, Yahweh’s inheritance to His people, had passed over to the control of non-Israelites (Jer. 40:10; 41:3). Their homes also had become the property of alien people (cf. Ezek. 35:10). These conditions represented a larger breakdown of Israelite society in general, since occupying the land was foundational to the nation’s life” (Constable).

“Through the use of the first person (‘we,’ ‘us,’ ‘our’), the people described (5:2-10) the general conditions of suffering brought about by Babylon. The land of Judah had been parceled out to foreigners. Babylon assumed dominion over the land, and its occupying forces were stationed there (Jer. 40:10; 41:3). In addition, nations surrounding Judah appropriated or annexed some of her land for themselves (cf. Ezek. 35:10)” (Dyer).

“Verses 2 through 18 contain a list of complaints. Petitions in verses 1 and 21-22 frame this section, and so make it clear that the purpose of the list is to attract the Lord’s interest so that He will act. Verses 2 through 10 describe economic conditions, verses 11 through 14 humiliations, and verses 15 through 18 summarize the community’s sorrow” (Parry, cited by Constable).

Loss of People “We have become orphans and waifs, our mothers are like widows” (5:3). Jeremiah describes to the Lord, the position of the people as being orphans, waifs, and widows. The Hebrew word translated “waifs” means “nothing, not, naught” (NASB: “without a father;” NIV and ESV: “fatherless”). “Because the Lord no longer protected and provided for the people, they had become virtual orphans. They had lost their rights as well as their property. Jewish men had become defenseless, and Jewish mothers had become as vulnerable as widows, having lost their protection. Social structures had broken down, and the people were vulnerable targets for exploitation.

“Besides losing their property, the people also lost their rights. Their new taskmasters were cruel despots who cared little for them. The men were as defenseless as the orphans and fatherless and the women were as vulnerable as widows. In Israel, orphans and widows were the most helpless people in society (1:1). They had no one to stand up for their rights or to ensure that justice was done. Under Babylon’s rule, Judah had no rights or means of protection. She was the vanquished enemy, and Babylon her cruel overlord (cf. Hab. 1:6-11)” (Dyer).

Loss of Provisions “We pay for the water we drink, and our wood comes at a price” (5:4). Jeremiah laments before the Lord that they had to pay their captives (Ryrie) for the water and wood. “The extent of their oppression was evident in their having to purchase water and firewood, commodities that were normally free” (Constable). “Babylon’s rule over Judah was severe. The Jews now had to pay for the water they drank and the wood they used for cooking” (Dyer).

“They pursue at our heels; we labor and have no rest” (5:5). Jeremiah tells the Lord that they are being pursued, worked to death, and have no rest. “The Judahites’ enemies were trying to squeeze the life out of them (cf. Josh. 10:24; Isa. 51:23). They had worn them out with their heavy demands and taxes (cf. Deut. 28:65-67; Ezek. 5:2, 12” (Constable). “Both in Judah and in Babylon the Jews found no rest from their pursuers. Persecution and fear dogged their every footstep (cf. Deut. 28:65-67; Ezek. 5:2, 5:12)” (Dyer).

“The mention of rest, of course, reminds us, like the mention of ‘inheritance’ in v. 2, of the theological significance of what has happened. God had promised the Israelites that they *would* have rest in the promised land, especially rest from enemies (e.g. Dt. 12:10). It is also, one suspects, intended to remind God of this” (Provan, cited by Constable).

“We have given our hand to the Egyptians and the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread” (5:6). Jeremiah goes on to tell the Lord that they had to appeal to the Egyptians and the Assyrians to be able to eat. “Even to get enough food to live, the people had to appeal to Egypt and Assyria for help. This may refer to Judah’s earlier alliances with these nations that proved futile (cf. Ezek. 16:26-28; 23:12, 21). Or perhaps the writer used Assyria as a surrogate for Babylonia (cf. Jer. 2:18). The point is that Judah could no longer provide for herself but had to beg for help from her Gentile enemies” (Constable).

“Still another reason accounted for Judah’s calamity. She submitted to Egypt and Assyria to get enough bread. The words translated ‘submitted to’ (*nāṭannû yād*) literally mean ‘to give a hand to’ or ‘to shake hands.’ The phrase implies the idea of establishing a pact or treaty (cf. 2 Kings 10:15) and often refers to one group surrendering or submitting to a more powerful group or person as part of a treaty (1 Chron. 29:24; 2 Chron. 30:8; Jer. 50:15). Judah had pledged her allegiance both to Egypt and Assyria in her history, for the sake of national security (cf. Ezek. 16:26-28; 23:12, 23:21)” (Dyer).

Loss of Freedom (Punishment) “Our fathers sinned and are no more, but we bear their iniquities” (5:7). Jeremiah laments before the Lord that their forefathers had sinned and were no more, but the present generation had to bear the consequences of their sin. “The present generation of Judeans was bearing the punishment for the sins that their fathers, who had long since died, had initiated. They had continued and increased the sins of their fathers. Jeremiah rejected the idea that God was punishing his generation solely because of the sins of former generations (Jer. 31:29-30). His contemporaries had brought the apostasy of earlier generations to its worst level, and now they were reaping its results” (Constable).

“Judah’s past leaders (fathers) shifted their allegiance between countries, and their fickleness ultimately destroyed them. Their sin brought their death, and their survivors bore their punishment. The present generation was not claiming to be suffering unjustly for their forebears’ sins (5:16), but saw their punishment as a logical conclusion to their ancestors’ folly. Their forefathers’ willing submission to godless nations was now bearing bitter fruit” (Dyer).

“Servants rule over us; there is none to deliver us from their hand” (5:8). Jeremiah observes before the Lord that servants were ruling over them and there was none to deliver them from the oppression. “Even slaves among the oppressors were dominating God’s people, and there was no one to deliver them. Only the poorest of the Judahites remained in the land following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., but even the lowest classes of Chaldeans were dominating them” (Constable). “Babylon appointed cruel taskmasters; men of low degree were exalted and the people of Judah were forced to submit to them: Slaves rule over us” (Dyer).

“Israel, once a ‘kingdom of priests’ (Exod. 19:6), is become like Canaan, ‘a servant of servants,’ according to the curse (Gen. 9:25). The Chaldeans were designed to be ‘servants’ of Shem, being descended from Ham (Gen. 9:26). Now through the Jews’ sin, their positions are reversed” (Jamieson; et al., cited by Constable).

“Christian readers, often more interested in individual spirituality or ecclesial practices, regularly miss the significance of the political suffering in Lamentations. But it is clear that Jerusalem’s *political* decimation is a major focus of the poetry” (Parry, cited by Constable). “The poetry bears witness to the horror of political meltdown and, indirectly, to the goodness of

political stability. It testifies to the real, concrete human suffering that follows social collapse” (Constable).

“We get our bread at the risk of our lives, because of the sword in the wilderness” (5:9). Jeremiah tells the Lord that they got their bread at the risk of their lives because of the military might in the wilderness. “It had become life-threatening for the Judahites even to acquire essential food because their enemies tried to kill them when they traveled to obtain bread” (Ellison, cited by Constable). “The severe conditions and scarcity of food prompted the people to take desperate means for survival. Probably the sword they had to brave was carried by the bands of roving desert nomads through whose area the people of Judah had to travel in order to buy bread (i.e., ‘food’)” (Dyer).

Loss of Physical Health **“Our skin is hot as an oven, because of the fever of famine” (5:10).** Jeremiah tells the Lord that their skin was hot as an oven because of the fever produced by the famine. “Famine had resulted in fever, which had given the people’s skin a scorched appearance” (Ellison, cited by Constable). “The Jews’ skin was feverish because of their lack of adequate food (4:8)” (Dyer).

Loss of Protection (Rape) **“They ravished the women in Zion, the maidens in the cities of Judah” (5:11).** Jeremiah laments before the Lord that the invaders raped women in Jerusalem and in the cities of Judah. “The enemy had raped the women and girls in Jerusalem and Judah. This was a common way for soldiers in the ancient world to humiliate their enemies and hurt them physically. It showed that the defeated could not even defend their women” (Parry, cited by Constable).

“Respected princes had experienced the most humiliating deaths, and the enemy gave no respect to Judah’s elderly. Since Nebuchadnezzar evidently did not torture his victims (cf. Jer. 52:10-11, 24-27), it may be that the Chaldeans strung up the princes by their hands or on stakes—after they had died—to dishonor them (cf. Deut. 21:22-23)” (Keil).

“In these verses [11-14], the subject switches from the first person to the third person (‘their’). After speaking of their general conditions of suffering (5:2-10), the people described its effects on different groups of individuals. No element of society escaped the ravages of judgment. The first group mentioned who suffered the horrors of foreign occupation were the women of Jerusalem (Zion) and the virgins ... of Judah. Women who survived the Babylonian assault on their cities were mercilessly raped by sadistic soldiers. In a scene of savage brutality, repeated by many conquering armies throughout history, the victors went on a wanton spree of lustful revenge against defenseless women” (Dyer).

Loss of Respect (Humiliation) **“Princes were hung up by their hands, and elders were not respected” (5:12).** Jeremiah tells the Lord that the invaders of Israel hung up the dead bodies of the leaders after they were killed and treated the elders with disrespect. “Hanging the bodies after execution was an added indignity” (Ryrie). “The city’s leaders also felt the fury of the Babylonians. Princes were hung up by their hands. Those responsible for leading Judah’s rebellion against Babylon were tortured to death in this cruel way. Possibly this was a form of crucifixion since hanging and impaling victims on stakes was the usual method of execution used during that time. Elders were also tortured” (Dyer).

“Young men ground at the millstones; boys staggered under loads of wood” (5:13). In his prayer before the Lord, Jeremiah says that the young men were forced to grind grain at millstones and young boys staggered under the load of wood they were forced to carry. “To grind grain, considered to be women’s work (see Judges 16:21), was demeaning for men” (Ryrie). “Young men had to grind grain like animals, or servant women (cf. Judg. 16:21), and small children

buckled under the loads of firewood that the enemy forced them to carry” (Constable).

“The young men who survived the Babylonian attack were enslaved. Because of the shortage of domestic animals in Palestine (probably because most had been eaten during the 30-month siege), men were forced to perform tasks usually done by animals. Men turned the millstones (as Samson was also forced to do, Jdg. 16:21) to grind grain, and boys were forced to carry large loads of wood needed in the city. Those who were Judah’s hope had been reduced to the status of slaves” (Dyer).

Loss of Pleasure “The elders have ceased *gathering at the gate*, and the young men from *their music*” (5:14). Jeremiah also tells the Lord that the elders of Jerusalem had ceased to gather at the gate to conduct business and the young men of Jerusalem had ceased to participate in music. “Elders no longer sat at the town gates dispensing wisdom and justice, and young men no longer played music, bringing joy and happiness into the people’s lives. These were marks of the disappearance of peaceful and prosperous community living conditions” (Constable).

“Wisdom, justice, and happiness had departed from the city. The city gate, where the elders used to gather, was the place of justice and wisdom. Disputes between individuals were taken to the wise elders. But with the departure of the elders (5:12), the wisdom and justice normally available to the Jews were gone. Even the music of the young men had ceased. Music was associated with joy and happiness (cf. Ps. 95:1-2), and Judah had nothing to rejoice about now as her people suffered under the harsh hand of Babylon” (Dyer).

“In these verses [5-14], the people bewail the terrible conditions that have come upon them—the high cost of necessities (v. 4); the forced labor (v. 5); the oppression (v. 8); the famine and danger (vv. 9, 10); the atrocities committed against maidens, princes, and elders (vv. 11, 12); hardships for young men, boys, and elders (vv. 13, 14)” (MacDonald).

“The joy of our heart has ceased; our dance has turned into mourning” (5:15). Jeremiah asks the Lord to remember that the joy of their hearts has ceased and their dancing his turn to morning. “Joy had left the hearts of the people, and they mourned so sadly that they could not bring themselves to dance. The eventual result of sin is the absence of joy” (Constable). “A veil of gloom hung over Jerusalem. The joy and revelry that had once been there was replaced by sadness and mourning” (Dyer).

Loss of Pride “The crown has fallen *from our head*. Woe to us, for we have sinned”! (5:16). Jeremiah tells the Lord that the crown had fallen from their heads and exclaims that woe is upon them because of their sin. “The fallen *crown* illustrates Jerusalem’s lost glory” (Ryrie). “The crown figuratively represented the glory and majesty that had belonged to Jerusalem. That glory was now gone. It was lost because of sin” (Dyer).

“A crown was a symbol of honor and glory. God’s blessing and authority, also symbolized by a crown, had departed from the head of the nation. The crown may also allude to Israel’s king. All these conditions marked the nation because it had sinned against Yahweh. She suffered under His judgment. But she acknowledged that these conditions were the consequences of her sins, and she bewailed her calamity: ‘Woe to us’” (Constable).

The loss of Peace “Because of this our heart is faint; because of these *things* our eyes grow dim” (5:17). Jeremiah confesses to the Lord that because of His judgment, their hearts are faint and their eyes have grown dim. “Divine judgment had demoralized and devastated the people” (Constable). “The people were faint from hunger, and their eyes were dim from tears (2:11; 3:48-49)” (Dyer).

“Because of Mount Zion which is desolate, with foxes walking about on it” (5:18). Jeremiah reminds the Lord that they lost their peace and are devastated because Jerusalem is desolate with

wild animals walking on the streets. “The bustling activity of a once-thriving city had given way to desolate ruins inhabited only by wild animals. Judah had only herself to blame for her present condition of desolation in which wild jackals (4:3) prowled” (Dyer).

“The climactic reason for grief was the desolation and abandonment of ‘Mount Zion.’ Wild foxes (or unclean jackals) prowled on the now-desolate holy place, which formerly had been the site of God’s throne on earth, full of people, and the venue of many joyful celebrations. No wonder the Israelites’ hearts were ‘faint’ (sapped of vitality) and their eyes ‘dim’ from weeping” (Constable).

“Because of all these horrors, Judah’s joy had ceased, her dance had become mourning, the crown had fallen from her head, and Mount Zion lay desolate” (MacDonald).

A Plea for Restoration

Praise “You, O LORD, remain forever; Your throne from generation to generation” (5:19).

In spite of all that is happening to them, Jeremiah acknowledges that the Lord sits on his sovereign throne forever. “The basis for this call was God’s eternal sovereignty.... Judah was not suffering because her God had been defeated by the stronger gods of Babylon. Judah’s God was the only true God, and *He* had caused her calamity (1:12-17; 2:1-8; 4:11). Yet this same God who brought about her destruction also had the power to bring about her restoration—if He chose to do so” (Dyer).

“The writer now turned from reviewing the plight of the people to consider the greatness of their God and to appeal to Him. Jeremiah acknowledged the eternal sovereignty of Yahweh and praised Israel’s true king. Judah was not suffering because her God was inferior to the gods of Babylon, but because sovereign Yahweh had permitted, even orchestrated, her overthrow” (Constable). “Without a doubt, verse 19 is the central point around which the circle of the content of this chapter was drawn” (Kaiser, cited by Constable).

“In 5:19-20, the writer carefully chose his words to summarize the teaching of the entire book by using the split alphabet to convey it. Verse 19 embraces the first half of the alphabet by using the *aleph* word (‘you’) to start the first half of the verse and the *kaph* word (‘throne’) to start the second half. This verse reiterates the theology of God’s sovereignty expressed throughout the book. He had the right to do as He chooses; humans have no right to carp at what He does. Wisdom’s teaching grappled with this concept and God’s speech at the end of the Book of Job, which does not really answer Job’s many sometimes querulous questions, simply avers that the God of the whirlwind cannot be gainsaid (Job 38-41). Job must accept who God is without criticism. Then Job bowed to this very concept (42:1-6). Now the writer of Lamentations also bowed before the throne of God accepting the implications of such sovereignty.... One reason there is no full acrostic in chapter 5 may be that the writer wanted the emphasis to fall on these two verses near the conclusion of the book. In so doing, he has adroitly drawn attention to the only hope for people in despair” (Heater, cited by Constable).

“The historical Kingdom of God in Israel may be interrupted; the nation may abide for many days without a mediatorial king; but there is nevertheless a Kingdom of God which continues without any hiatus or diminution” (Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 24).

Perplexity “Why do You forget us forever, and forsake us for so long a time”? (5:20). Jeremiah asks why the Lord has forgotten and forsaken them for so long. “In view of God’s sovereignty, the prophet could not understand why the Lord waited so long to show His people mercy and restore them. It seemed as though He had forgotten all about them (cf. v. 1).

“The knowledge of God’s ability to restore the nation prompted the people to ask two questions. Because of the nature of Hebrew parallelism, these two questions should be viewed synonymously. To forget about Judah would be to forsake her to her present condition of suffering. The use of ‘forget’ here is the opposite of ‘remember’ in 5:1. God cannot ‘forget’ anything. This figure of speech means to forsake or abandon the people *as though* He has forgotten them. The people were asking God why He had abandoned them for so long. Significantly, Moses employed the figure of God, remembering His covenant so that His people would confess their sins (Lev. 26:40-42). So the people of Judah were calling on God to fulfill the remainder of His covenant promise” (Dyer).

Plea “Turn us back to You, O LORD, and we will be restored; Renew our days as of old” (5:21). Jeremiah requests that the Lord turn them back to Himself, restore them, and renew them as they used to be. “In context, this is a call to restore both the land of Israel and the blessings of the covenant (Deut. 30:1-10)” (Dyer).

“Verses 21 and 22 amplify the creedal statement in verses 19 and 20. Jeremiah prayed for Yahweh’s restoration of the nation *to Himself*. Only His action would result in restoration. The prophet cried out for the renewal of the nation to its former condition of strength and blessing. But primarily, he asked for a restored *relationship* with Yahweh” (Constable, italics his). “God is the only source of true revival” (Price, cited by Constable).

“The specific action the people requested was, Restore us to Yourself ... that we may return. The people wanted to be restored to the blessings of God’s covenant, which included being restored to the land of Israel (Lev. 26:40-45; Deut. 3:1-10). Their ultimate hope for restoration was God’s faithfulness to His covenant promises. Thus, the Book of Lamentations ends on a note of hope. In spite of severe suffering because of her sin, Judah had not been abandoned as a nation. God was still sovereign, and His covenant with Israel was still operative despite her disobedience. The hope for the nation was that if she would call on God and confess her sin, He would protect her during her captivity (3:21-30) and would ultimately restore her as a nation to covenant blessing (5:21)” (Dyer).

“Unless You have utterly rejected us, *and* are very angry with us”! (5:22). Jeremiah adds unless in His anger, the Lord has utterly rejected them. “The only reason the Lord might not restore Israel was *if* He had fully and permanently rejected His people because He was so angry with them. By mentioning this possibility at the very end of the book, Jeremiah led his readers to recall God’s promises that He would *never* completely abandon His chosen people” (Constable, italics his). “Unless God had utterly rejected the nation (which He vowed never to do; Lev. 26:44; Jer. 31:31-37), the people could depend on Him to answer their request” (Dyer).

“Because this last verse of the book is so negative, many Hebrew manuscripts of Lamentations end by repeating verse 21 after verse 22. It also became customary, when the Jews read the book in synagogue worship, for them to repeat verse 21 at the end (Parry) [Ryrie]. They also did this when they read other books that end on a negative note (i.e., Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, and Malachi)” (Constable).

“In many Hebrew manuscripts, verse 21 is repeated after verse 22, apparently so that the book will end with a note of hope rather than gloom. Actually, as Keil notes, a right understanding of verse 22 makes such a repetition unnecessary: ‘This conclusion entirely agrees with the character of the Lamentations, in which complaint and supplication should continue to the end,—not, however, without an element of hope, although the latter may not rise to the heights of joyful victory, but, as Gerlach expresses himself, ‘merely glimmers from afar, like the

morning star through the clouds, which does not indeed itself dispel the shadows of the night, though it announces that the rising of the sun is near and that it shall obtain the victory” (MacDonald).

Summary: The way to pray in the midst of divine discipline is to express your situation to the Lord, acknowledge His sovereignty, and plea for restoration.

“The theological message of Lamentations may be summarized as follows: God’s angry disciplinary judgment of His people, while severe and deserved, was not final” (Chisholm, cited by Constable). “In view of God’s promises to Israel, He would not abandon the nation completely. He would bless them in the future (cf. Lev. 26:44; Jer. 31:31-37; Rom. 11:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:13). Nevertheless, the focus of this book is on the misery that sin produces, not the hope of future deliverance” (Constable).

“When our great nation was founded during the period from 1775 to 1787, the following statement by Benjamin Franklin was still widely accepted: ‘The longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of the truth that God governs in the affairs of men.’ Unless a marked change takes place in the United States of America, it’s doomed just as sure as was ancient Babylon” (McGee, cited by Constable).

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