

### Jerusalem's Misery and Desolation

#### Lamentations 1

**Lamentations 1:1-11** – *“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! <sup>2</sup> 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.*

*<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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.*

*<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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.*

*<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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!”*

*<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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.”*

#### Background Notes

Our “Talks from Lamentations” naturally follow our “Talks from Jeremiah” and are part of the same series for two reasons:

- a. We believe that the prophet Jeremiah was the author of Lamentations. This is the traditional view, and the evidence supports it.
- b. Lamentations describes the conditions of Jerusalem after the Babylonians conquered the city in 586 BC, in fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecies.

Most likely, Lamentations was written in or soon after 586 BC, after Jerusalem fell and while the suffering of the Babylonian siege still continued. As the name suggests, Lamentations was a series of five laments, or “funeral dirges,”

that described the desolation and destruction of Jerusalem and the miserable condition of its remaining inhabitants after the city fell to the Babylonians.

Lamentations was written in Hebrew poetry, and most translations, present all five chapters in the form of Hebrew poetry. Notice that chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 are 22 verses long, and chapter 3 is 66 verses long (3 times 22). This is important because four of these laments are acrostic poems. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Verse 1 begins with “aleph,” the Hebrew “A,” and every succeeding verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In chapter 3, which has 66 verses, every triplet of verses starts with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Verses 1-3 of chapter 3 all begin with the Hebrew letter “aleph” or “A”. Verses 4-6 all begin with the Hebrew letter “bet” or “B” and so on. Chapter 5, although it is Hebrew poetry with 22 verses, is not an acrostic poem.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Lamentations contains specific details of the desolation and destruction of Jerusalem.

In verses 1-2, what a contrast between what Jerusalem once was, and what she had become - a desolate and destroyed city. She was once like a princess, great among the nations. Now she was like a widow in mourning, weeping alone in bitterness, because all the foreign nations (pictured here as her friends and lovers) had forsaken her, and had even turned against her. Judah was scattered and exiled in Babylon, away from her land of rest (v3). The roads to Jerusalem were now deserted, no longer filled with happy worshipers going up to Jerusalem for the Jewish festivals (v4).

Why did the Lord allow such a bad situation that even the children were herded away as captives? Verse 5 gives the answer: *“the Lord has afflicted her because of the multitude of her transgressions.”* Judah’s leaders were gone, either killed or taken captive (v6). In captivity the Jewish people could only remember better days. Now they were mocked because of Jerusalem’s desolation and destruction (v7).

In verses 8-9, once again the primary reason why God allowed Jerusalem to become despised and desolate. The reason was that Jerusalem had sinned greatly. The people had committed spiritual adultery and apostasy (v8-9). The city was devastated, the Temple was desecrated and destroyed, and all the Temple treasures were gone. Why? Because God’s people had allowed idolatry to run rampant in the land (v10).

Just to survive, the people had to trade or give away all their own personal treasures. Conditions were so bad during the siege of Jerusalem, that even cannibalism was practiced - as a matter of survival (Lamentations 4).

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**2. Lamentations contains prophetic implications of the coming Messiah and the future godly remnant.**

**Lamentations 1:12-18** - *“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. <sup>13</sup>“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. <sup>14</sup>“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. <sup>15</sup>“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. <sup>16</sup>“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.” <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>“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.”*

Verses 1-11 described the desolate condition of Jerusalem from the viewpoint of an eyewitness observer, whom we believe was Jeremiah. In verses 12-22 Jeremiah personified Jerusalem lamenting her own desolate condition. In these verses, notice the personal pronouns: “I”, “me” or “my” were used as personified Jerusalem cried out in her desolation and destruction. After the description of her desolate condition in very vivid terms in verses 12-17, Jerusalem acknowledged her sin and God’s righteousness (v18).

**Lamentations 1:19-22** - *“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. <sup>20</sup>“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. <sup>21</sup>“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. <sup>22</sup>“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.”*

In verses 19-20, personified Jerusalem again acknowledged that her dreadful condition, including her selfish priests and leaders, was the result of her sin and rebellion. Personified Jerusalem longed for the day when the Lord’s promised judgment against the enemies of His people will come to pass in verses 21-22.

Remember, our doctrinal point for this half of the chapter is: **Lamentations contains prophetic implications of the coming Messiah and the future godly remnant.** Where are these prophetic implications in Lamentations 1? There are several:

- a. Just as Jeremiah lamented over the sad and desolate condition of Jerusalem, so our Lord mourned over the Jerusalem that had rejected her Messiah (Matthew 23:37-38). Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.
- b. A second prophetic implication is in the lament in Lamentations 1:12 - *"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."*

In Handel's well-known oratorio, "Messiah," this verse is applied to Jesus Christ and His sufferings on the cross. As Jerusalem suffered the judgment of God because of her sins, so the Lord suffered the judgment of God because of **our** sins. He underwent the wrath of God – *"the day of His fierce anger"* - as our Perfect Substitute.

- c. A third prophetic implication in Lamentations 1 is the sorrow of the remnant of godly Jewish people in the future. They will recognize that their nation's desolate and sorrowful state down through the years was because of their rejection of their Messiah.

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## Practical Application

### Think ahead!

This is good advice for all areas of life, but it's especially good advice in reference to our relationship to God. Thinking ahead is something Judah and the people of Jerusalem definitely did **not** do. Look back again at verse 9: *"She did not consider her destiny, therefore her collapse was awesome."* Jerusalem reaped what she had sown.

What about us? Have we thought ahead? I trust that you have become a Christian and your ultimate destiny is secure. But what about your life right now – your life as a believer? Are you thinking ahead as to what will really have been worthwhile, when your life comes to an end? Are you *"laying up treasure in Heaven"* by giving of yourself – your time, your talents, your treasure - to the Lord and His Kingdom now? *"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"* (Matthew 6:20-21).

Some believers have even caused shipwreck of their lives because they live only for the present.

### Think ahead!