

The Prophet's Anguish and Hope

Lamentations 3

Lamentations 3:1-18 - *"I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath.*

² He has led me and made me walk in darkness and not in light. ³ Surely He has turned His hand against me time and time again throughout the day. ⁴ He has aged my flesh and my skin, and broken my bones. ⁵ He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and woe. ⁶ He has set me in dark places like the dead of long ago. ⁷ He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out; He has made my chain heavy.

⁸ Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayer. ⁹ He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked. ¹⁰ He has been to me a bear lying in wait, like a lion in ambush. ¹¹ He has turned aside my ways and torn me in pieces; He has made me desolate. ¹² He has bent His bow and set me up as a target for the arrow. ¹³ He has caused the arrows of His quiver to pierce my loins.

¹⁴ I have become the ridicule of all my people— their taunting song all the day. ¹⁵ He has filled me with bitterness. He has made me drink wormwood. ¹⁶ He has also broken my teeth with gravel, and covered me with ashes. ¹⁷ You have moved my soul far from peace;

I have forgotten prosperity. ¹⁸ And I said, "My strength and my hope have perished from the Lord."

Background Notes

Chapter 3 is the heart of the book of Lamentations. It's like an oasis in the middle of a desert of despair and discouragement. In fact, the best-known verses in the book are at the center of this oasis chapter: *"Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning. Great is Your faithfulness"* (v22-23).

What a shining beacon of truth these verses can be for God's people, especially when they are set against a dark background of hurt, grief, or seemingly hopeless hardship.

Jeremiah used the first person in this chapter, and in this way he identified with the city of Jerusalem in its sufferings under the judgment of God for the sins of the nation. In this aspect Lamentations 3 is Messianic, because it foreshadows the passion of the Lord Jesus as He suffered on the cross for our sins. *"I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath"* (v1). This certainly foreshadows our Lord's suffering on the cross, as He came under the rod of God's judgment for our sins.

Obviously, all of these verses cannot be applied literally to the Lord's suffering, such as the broken bones (v4) and broken teeth (v16) - but many of these verses do literally apply. For example, compare verse 8: *"Even when I cry and shout, He*

shuts out my prayer” with the Messianic Psalm 22:1-2: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent.”

And compare Lamentations 3:14: “I have become the ridicule of all my people—their taunting song all the day” with Psalm 22:6-7: “But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me. They shoot out the lip; they shake the head, saying, “He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him. Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!”

Doctrinal Points

1. God’s people can hope in the midst of hurts and hardships.

Lamentations 3:19-24 – “Remember my affliction and roaming, the wormwood and the gall. ²⁰ My soul still remembers and sinks within me. ²¹ This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. ²² Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. ²³ They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness! ²⁴ “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “Therefore I hope in Him!”

In verses 19-21, as Jeremiah called on the Lord to remember their affliction, the Lord caused him to remember something that gave him hope. What gave him hope? Verses 22-24 give the answer: “Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness! “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul. “Therefore I hope in Him!”

You may be thinking, “How could Jeremiah and the small remnant of Jews speak of the Lord’s mercies, His compassion, and His great faithfulness, when they were experiencing such horrible conditions in Jerusalem?” The following quote is taken from “Hope in the Midst of Hurt,” that I wrote several years ago on the book of Lamentations:

“Great is Your faithfulness! How could they say this? Where was the evidence of God’s faithfulness in such a situation? What “new compassions” were the people experiencing every morning? Jeremiah and the small number of godly Jews were able to see that **God was faithful to what He had declared in His Word.**

Over and over again God had said that He would have to discipline the nation for its sin, and God was faithful to fulfill that promise. But God had also declared through Jeremiah that He would not destroy Judah completely - even though they deserved to be wiped out and erased as a nation. (See Jeremiah 4:27, 5:10 and 5:18.) And God was faithful to that promise as well.

Furthermore, God had revealed through the prophet Jeremiah that the nation would return from its captivity in Babylon after 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11 and 29:10). Every day that went by in which the faithful remnant was still preserved

was a day closer to the fulfillment of that prophecy. In fact, even the sunrise of each new day was a token of God's continuing compassions, because they knew that God had declared as long as the sun came up each day, the nation would live on (Jeremiah 31:35-36). They also knew that God's promised Messiah, the Savior for all mankind, would come some day through their nation (Jeremiah 23:5-6).

Because God had been faithful to His promises in the past, they could trust confidently in God's promises for the future. In the midst of all their hurts, they could find hope that God had not forsaken them – because **they knew He would be faithful to His Word!** How encouraging all this can be for us as well! God's people can hope in the midst of hurts and hardships." (You can read the entire essay on our website, growingchristians.org)

Several commentators have pointed out that in verses 25-40, Jeremiah expressed seven divine principles on the nature of affliction - for Israel in that day, and also for God's people at all times.

- a. Affliction can be endured because there is hope in God's restoration (v25-30).
- b. Affliction is only temporary, and it is tempered with God's compassion (v31-32).
- c. God does not delight in affliction (v33).
- d. God does not approve of affliction caused by injustice (v34-35).
- e. Affliction is always under the sovereign control of God (v37-38).
- f. Affliction can be the result of sin, as in Judah's case (v39).
- g. Affliction should cause people to turn back to the Lord (v40).

There we have seven divine principles as to the nature of affliction for God's people. God's people can hope in the midst of hurts and hardships.

2. God's people can pray in the midst of pains and problems.

Jeremiah's prayer on behalf of the people of Judah and Jerusalem is found in verses 41-66. He used plural pronouns as he recalled and confessed the sins of the nation (v41-47).

Notice the sad effects of sin, in the life of a nation or an individual:

- a. The Lord is angry (v43).
- b. Our prayers are not answered (v44).
- c. We are unfit for God's use as His witnesses (v45-46).
- d. Our lives are filled with panic and pitfalls, devastation and destruction (v47).

Lamentations 3:48-54 - *"My eyes overflow with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people. ⁴⁹ My eyes flow and do not cease, without interruption, ⁵⁰ until the Lord from heaven looks down and sees. ⁵¹ My eyes bring*

suffering to my soul because of all the daughters of my city. ⁵² Without cause, my enemies without cause hunted me down like a bird. ⁵³ They silenced my life in the pit and threw stones at me. ⁵⁴ The waters flowed over my head. I said, "I am cut off!"

Notice the intense pain that Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, was experiencing! Just as Jeremiah prayed to the Lord in the midst of his pain and suffering, so we too should turn to the Lord in times of pain and grief. The Lord **does** hear and He **does** care - even though at time it may seem that He has forgotten us. Maybe we need more confession of our sin in our prayers.

Jeremiah used his own life of hardship as an example of what Judah was going through at that time (v52-54). Remember how the people tried to kill Jeremiah, and they put him in stocks like a criminal (Jeremiah 20 & 26)? Remember how the people cast Jeremiah into a muddy cistern (Jeremiah 38)? In verses 55-66, Jeremiah recalled his cry to the Lord for help in those dark times, and that the Lord had delivered him. Furthermore, God judged Jeremiah's personal enemies when the Babylonians came in and conquered Jerusalem. In the same way, if Judah had followed Jeremiah's example, and had they turned back to the Lord and called upon the Lord, they would have been delivered.

These verses also call to mind the prayers of the godly remnant during the future Tribulation period. In the midst of their pain and hardship, the Lord will hear from Heaven, He will deliver them, and He will judge the enemies of restored Israel. In every age, God's people can pray in the midst of pain and problems.

Practical Application

Give the younger generation the challenge of hard work!

Verse 27 is very practical: *"It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth."*

You've heard the expression: "Hard work never hurt anyone." This verse goes further. It says that hard work (even including hardship) is actually good for the younger generation. Hard work strengthens and toughens and matures young people.

It's not good for young people to be given everything without having to work for it! So whether it's your children or your students, give them challenges that take some hard work! Yes, give them chores around the house – but how about a challenge like memorizing the books of the Bible, or learning some chapters of Scripture, or washing the car for an elderly neighbor (without looking for pay!).

Give the younger generation the challenge of hard work!