

Week-1

The Book of Lamentations

“God Loves You Anyway”

The Book of Lamentations is a sequel to the Book of Jeremiah. For fifty-two chapters Jeremiah weeps because of the prophetic revelations God is giving him of the impending Babylonian conquest. The Book of Jeremiah ends with the prophet still in the land of Judah after most of the people had been taken away as captives. He then apparently migrated to Egypt, and according to tradition, was martyred there. Other scholars tell us Jeremiah eventually went to Babylon to preach to the people of Judah he loved so much, while some think he spent his last days in the land of Judah.

The Book of Lamentations is well named. The “weeping prophet” is still crying because the land has been conquered and the people he loves so much who were not massacred have been taken away as captives and slaves to a distant land. One of the problems he addresses in Lamentations, which was also addressed by other prophets like Ezekiel and Daniel, was the fact that they could not be near the temple. The Jews believed the temple of God was where the presence of God lived. His divine presence actually dwelt in the Holy of Holies of the temple in Jerusalem. There is a sense in which the Temple was God’s address for these devout prophets. This is why the prophet Daniel faced Jerusalem when he prayed. Where was God now for His people who were living in Babylon? Jerusalem was literally the city of God to them, and they felt separated from their holy city and their Holy God.

Jeremiah’s Grotto

Jeremiah wrote the Book of Lamentations while sitting in a grotto on a hill. There is a place there today called the “Grotto of Jeremiah”, which is on a hill called “Golgotha”. In the divine providence of God, Jeremiah’s grotto, or cave, was on the hill of Calvary, where Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world. We will see the significance of that providence as we get into the message of Lamentations.

The Literary Form of Lamentations

As literature, Lamentations is a masterpiece of poetry, containing five poems, or elegies, in its five chapters. Each chapter is a separate poem, and four of these are acrostic poems. In an acrostic poem, the first verse begins with the first letter of the alphabet; the second verse begins with the second letter of the alphabet; and so on. But as beautiful as the literary form of this book is, the inspired message of the book is what earns it a place in God’s Word.

That inspired message centers around the tragedy of the Babylonian conquest and captivity. The message is described graphically and with great emotion: “What can I say for you? With what can I compare you, Oh Daughter of Jerusalem? To what can I liken you, that I may comfort you, Oh Virgin Daughter of Zion? Your wound is as deep as the sea. Who can heal you?” (Lamentations 2:13) Jeremiah’s vivid description of Jerusalem after the Babylonian conquest graphically profiles the horror of what it was like when a city was conquered by an empire like the Babylonian Empire.

About the time we think this book is all sadness and despair, as he did in his prophecy, Jeremiah surprises us with a beautiful Messianic prophecy of hope. You may remember that Job did the very same thing at the peak of his suffering. (Job 19:25,26) In the third chapter of his Lamentations, in the depth of his despair, Jeremiah receives a marvelous prophetic revelation: “It is only because of the

LORD's great love that we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him. The LORD is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.'" (22–26)

The message of hope revealed to Jeremiah was this: God never stops loving us! When we sin, He loves us anyway. Our hope is in the love of God. Jeremiah told the captives as they were led away to Babylon, "Do not glory in your riches, your strength, your wisdom, or your education. Glory in God. You must come to know God and find your fulfillment in Him. You can know God by trusting in His unconditional and never failing love and mercy. God now makes Jeremiah know that we cannot win His love by a positive performance and we cannot lose His love by a negative performance. God never, never, never, stops loving us.

Proof of God's Love us

In the third chapter of Lamentations, we also read, "Who can speak and have it happen if the LORD has not decreed it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come? Why should any living man complain when punished for his sins? Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD. (37–40)

As Jeremiah expresses this great hope, he shares a truth we discovered in the Book of Job, that good times and hard times both come from God. (Job 2:10) This truth is also taught by Solomon, who preached that we should be glad when we are living in a time of prosperity. But, in the day of adversity, we should recognize that God has made the one as well as the other. He precedes this teaching by telling us that that it is better to go to a funeral than to a festival, because at a funeral you think about eternal values. You think about the fact that you are going to die. You think about God, life, the purposes and the meaning of life. (Ecclesiastes 7:2,14)

Remember that the people of God were incurable idolaters. Their sin of idolatry knew no bounds, and this included the corrupt priests and false prophets. But the message of Jeremiah and the captivity prophets also contained this hope: God loves you too much to watch you waste away, day after day after day living in sin. God is not going to let that happen to you because you are His people.

The devotional application for us is that when God chastises us for our sins, that chastisement is a confirmation of our identity as the children of God. As parents, we would discipline our children if we saw them doing wrong, precisely because they are our children. We would not discipline other children in the neighbourhood because they are not our children. The author of the Book of Hebrews writes, that this kind of chastisement is a proof that the Lord is our Heavenly Father and He loves us. (Hebrews 12)