

Lamentations Chapters 1-2 John Karmelich

1. How many of you have ever gone through a situation so horrible, all you wanted to do is cry out, why? Now there's a positive way to open a lesson! This five-chapter book of "Lamentations" will ponder that question. Yes it is a good book to study when one is hurting. Yes it is a good book to recommend to help others deal with pain too deep for words. The book specifics have to do with the destruction of God's temple and Jerusalem being destroyed. The underlying message is this is written to help with moments where the pain is so great and no answer can explain the pain, and all we want to understand "why"? To state an obvious answer, most of the time we don't have an answer. Often all we want to do is be held and have someone to share our grief with in times like that. What Lamentations does is show us how God guides us through such moments, and how it is we can still trust Him despite the horrors we're dealing with at that moment. To give one of my favorite quotes, "This too shall pass". However, that quote still isn't a big help when we can't help but focus on the pain.
 - a) I can just hear many of you saying, "I'm not suffering that way right now. Do I really need to be depressed by reading this? I've got enough on my agenda right now!" A question to ponder is when such moments hit, where do we turn? Do we just tell people, "It's going to be ok and try to cheer them up?" A lot of it depends on the situation. I've consulted people who've dealt with the loss of someone for years. I always start by asking, "If the roles were reversed, would you want them to move on with your life, or just wallow in pain, for year after year?" When the pain first hits, people aren't ready yet to deal with it, they just want to digest it and deal with the grief. That's what Lamentations is about. God is giving us a book to turn to when pain is so great, all we want to digest the situation for awhile!
2. OK, now that I've established why we should continue, time for the "who, what, where and how" of the book. Let me get the facts out of my system:
 - a) The title of the book comes from a Latin word that essentially means "why", as is in why is it I'm suffering so bad! The Hebrew title is also essentially a translation of their word that also means "why". Anyway, even the title of this five-chapter poem tells us it deals with a wonderment of the question, "Why did God allow this to happen?"
 - b) Let me start with an interesting "fact" about Lamentations that doesn't come across in the English. The Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters. Chapters 1, 2 and 4 each got 22 verses. The first verse in each chapter essentially begins with an "A". The second verse begins with a "B". It follows the Hebrew alphabet and it's lost in translation. Lamentations is poetry as it has a musical rhythm to it as well in the Hebrew. Chapter 3 has 66 verses. It repeats the "A to Z" pattern in triplicate. Chapter 5, the concluding one, is shorter. We will get to that hopefully in a few lessons.
 - c) The next thing to discuss is the author. None is named in the poem. Jewish tradition says Jeremiah wrote it and there's good evidence for it. Centuries before Jesus was on the scene there was a Greek translation made of the Old Testament. Jeremiah is listed as the author in that version. There is an official commentary on the Jewish bible called the "Babylonian Talmud" and it lists Jeremiah as the author. Second Chronicles 35:25 tells us that Jeremiah is the author of "other laments", which is another clue to support his authorship. Because the book doesn't list an author doubters exist and those who argue for multiple authors. I lean heavily toward Jeremiah as the author simply because the details of Jerusalem's fall is pretty strongly hinted at through this "dirge" and an eyewitness was needed. For those of you who weren't with me through my Jeremiah study, he got to witness the fall of the city first hand and survived the siege of it. He was then taken to Egypt after that. Tradition is he got killed in Egypt as the Israelites were tired of hearing him preach against them!
 - d) All of that leads to the good news about this book, which I'll explain next:

3. Lamentation is, yes a dirge. To quote a famous song intro of my day, "This song is guaranteed to bring you down and then depression sets in!" However, it's not all that way. What is underlying this five-chapter dirge is the idea that "God's there through it all" or maybe "God's still guiding us in spite of the pain and rejection we're feeling at this moment ". I view this book as God listening to us as we pour out our pain to Him. He effectively responds by assuring us He's not done with our lives. This isn't all "a downer" is what I'm trying to get across here.
4. With that said, I still need to finish the "who, what when's and why's". It appears to be written at Jerusalem shortly after it fell, and before the Israelites returned to rebuild Jerusalem as told in the book of Nehemiah. We got the what (a poetic dirge). If you like dates Jerusalem got destroyed in 595BC so scholars suspect this was written shortly after that. As to the why, I've been beating that topic to death in this introduction, but essentially it's an illustration of how to best deal with what we go through our own periods of dealing with grief.
5. All of this leads us to the first two chapters. Let me ask the important question first. Why doesn't the bible just say, "Jerusalem got defeated, we're all in a bad mood, but we'll get over it." Instead, it's two chapters essentially listings all the ways they're suffering, all the things they did wrong, a few comments about why God allowed this to happen and all in all a bunch of misery. Ok what's the deal? Stop and think about the last time you were really hurting about something: It could be the death of a loved one, being in great physical pain or a loved one in horrible pain, etc. What is it we did during that time? Did we just say, "Hey get over it, it's going to be better?" Of course it didn't end in 10 seconds. Our minds and bodies need time to process the pain. We need to think about how it affects all the things around us. We may think about our sins and whether or not it is punishment from God. Bottom line is we "process" it. We think about the pain and we process what happened, why it may have happened and then what to do about it. (The what to do is the topic of Chapter 3, so hang on for that next time!)
 - a) Which reminds me, I haven't given my title yet, "Processing pain". Yes it's self-explanatory at this point, so I won't comment any further on the title.
 - b) With that said, it's time to get depressed! As you can tell, I'm doing my best to keep up a good sense of humor through this so we don't kill ourselves through the pain. The point is God will get us through pain. Until then, we need to talk it out, process it and figure if we should do something or just wait it out. That's in effect what Lamentations does: give us a forum to talk out our pain.
 - c) With that said, for the sake of those who didn't study the book of Jeremiah before starting on this one, let me give a quick recap of what's going on. It's important, as it is the setting of the tragedy this book focuses on. OK, here goes:
 - i) The nation of Israel was divided into two separate kingdoms at Jeremiah's time.
 - ii) The "north" one was called Israel and it died over 100 years prior to this time. That kingdom got conquered by the Assyrian empire.
 - iii) In Jeremiah's day the "new big bad boys" in the Middle East was a different empire called the Babylonians based out of what is Iraq today. To make it simple they did conquer the Assyrians and also conquered about everyone in the neighborhood!
 - iv) At the same time, God was ticked off at the Southern Israel kingdom, "Judah" since they were corporately ignoring God and worshipping other deities. Therefore, the Babylonians were allowed by God to wipe out Judah. Twice they conquered them and put their own people in charge. The kingdom of Judah was still rebelling. The Babylonian king "had enough of this" and laid a siege on Jerusalem. It means that the city was surround and its people mostly starve to death. That started in 597BC. Only a small number of Israelites survived including Jeremiah.
 - v) Anyway, all of that lead to the book of Lamentations. The reason for the book is to describe the horror of the fall of this city. OK, now you know!
 - d) With that said, we're ready to start on the verse-by-verse commentary on these chapters. I welcome you to join me. Hopefully it'll help you the next time you're dealing with pain!

6. Chapter 1, Verse 1: How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave.
- So why mourn over a city, as opposed to all the people who died? Keep in mind Jeremiah loved Jerusalem as he understood it represented where God's presence stood. Remember that Jesus himself "wept over Jerusalem" after He got corporately rejected. Jesus made the statement in effect how much He desired to gather all His people together in one place as Jerusalem being that place. (Matthew 23:37-39, or Luke 19:41-4). I'm convinced the ideas are related. Think what heaven is, a gathering of His people together in one place.
 - Calling Jerusalem a "queen among the provinces" is the idea that God intended that city to be the central gathering place among all the places where His people were located.
 - Pause for a moment to consider why Jerusalem is special: It has no natural resources. It is not located on a seaport or a river. It is on a hillside so it's harder to attack up a hill. What is so special about Jerusalem is simply the place where God says, "This is the spot where I want the worship of Me to be centered, so deal with it!"
 - The point here is Jeremiah realized what Jerusalem was meant to be. Now he's staring at it as it's desolate and thinking, "Why didn't His people listen? Why do His people choose to reject Him as a free choice? Why was it necessary for God to kick out His people when it's His desire to gather His people together to worship Him? If you didn't study Jeremiah, it's because Israel corporately chose to reject God and know their in the penalty box.
 - OK, one verse of sadness down for this lesson, 43 to go in this lesson!
7. Verse 2: Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are upon her cheeks. Among all her lovers there is none to comfort her. All her friends have betrayed her; they have become her enemies.
- Obviously a city doesn't literally weep. It's a metaphor of how sad the situation is. So who are the "lovers" who would have comforted her? It could return to other nations who did have friendly relationships with Israel. It could refer to the empty cities that got wiped out by the Babylonians as well, and now those places are "Anti-Jerusalem" in the sense they're not supporting Jerusalem for its feast days!
 - Imagine growing up in one town. Every year there were big town festivals for the locals and outsiders to gather. Then it gets wiped out. If it's a special place, one considers all the memories one has of why it is special. That's what's going on here.
 - Remember that Jesus is going to return one day to rule the world from there. That means we will return one day with Him. So if you've never been there, and you believe in Jesus, as God, Lord of your life and the full payment for your sins, you will be in that city when all this happens.
 - So did Jeremiah believe that the city would be rebuilt? Of course. God told him Babylon is going to be destroyed and he believed in the Messiah ruling one day. The sadness is based on wasted opportunities. His generation won't get any opportunities to corporately gather to be with God. It'd be like us Christians never being allowed to gather as a community of believers to honor God. If you're the type of person who doesn't like "church", you won't like eternity. I figured out a long time I'm going to be singing to God a lot in heaven, so I may as well get used to it now!
8. Verse 3: After affliction and harsh labor, Judah has gone into exile. She dwells among the nations; she finds no resting place. All who pursue her have overtaken her in the midst of her distress.
- As I explained in the introduction the "Southern" Israelite kingdom was called Judah. The people who survived the Babylonian onslaughts are now mostly slaves in that empire. It's why the text says "She (Judah) dwells among the nations". The "resting place" refers to the fact that Israelites can't travel to Jerusalem for its feast days.
 - Again think of someone who's lost everything. All they can do is look around and think of all that "used to be". Again, in order to get past the pain, first we need to grieve out all the things we lost. That's what's going on here.

9. Verse 4: The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to her appointed feasts. All her gateways are desolate, her priests groan, her maidens grieve, and she is in bitter anguish.
- a) In order for a city to survive, it needs products or services it can import/export. When I'm visiting a new city, I admit, I ponder what makes a city "tick" (exist)? What's the economy that makes people want to live there? For Jerusalem since it has no natural products, their product is in effect, religion. It's where God calls people to come together to worship Him as an entity. The shops in the old city cater to the tourists. The historical sites are there for those of Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths. The bible states that God's temple shall be a place for all nations (Based on Isaiah 56:7).
 - b) There is a saying in Israel that "all roads lead to Jerusalem" as the Romans would say all of their roads lead to Rome. My point is as Jeremiah misses the feasts, it also means a loss of all the gateways, priests and maidens that were parts of the annual festivals.
 - c) Again, think what God desires, His people gathering together to worship Him. When it's necessary for Him to put believers in the "penalty box" for failing to be a witness for Him, it also means the places set aside for such gathers are empty. That's what Jeremiah weeps over, the "wasted opportunities for us to gather to be with Him."
10. Verse 5: Her foes have become her masters; her enemies are at ease. The LORD has brought her grief because of her many sins. Her children have gone into exile, captive before the foe.
- a) Here's where we get to the heart of the matter. The fact that Israel's foes dominate tells us how low the Israelites have sunk. The only reason they even exist is God still wants them to be a witness for Him scattered in that empire. Yes some will return there one day. Still He wants us to be witnesses for Him wherever we are, except when we pause to gather as believers. Anyway, that can't happen here, thus the "grief fest".
 - b) Again, think about pain. Often we need to grieve it out of our system. Jeremiah is letting it out of his system as all that he loves is gone. I'm sure Jeremiah thought of himself as a failure because he didn't get many converts. Little did he realize how much his writings would be studied through history. My point is even in suffering we'll always find things to be grateful for, if we're willing to look for them.
11. Verse 6: All the splendor has departed from the Daughter of Zion. Her princes are like deer that find no pasture; in weakness they have fled before the pursuer.
- a) If you read the final chapter of Jeremiah, one of the stories is after about a year and a half of starvation conditions, the leaders of Jerusalem weak as they were made a run for it. It's described here poetically, being compared to a weak deer who can't run away from those who want to capture or kill it.
 - b) So why focus on all this negativity? Why didn't Jeremiah just say, you all blew it big time and now we must suffer the penalty? Why go through this endless pity party? Because in life that's how we deal with sorrow. Before we can ask God for help, first it's necessary to get out of our system, all the horrible things that occurred. That's what we got here.
12. Verse 7: In the days of her affliction and wandering Jerusalem remembers all the treasures that were hers in days of old. When her people fell into enemy hands, there was no one to help her. Her enemies looked at her and laughed at her destruction.
- a) What's one of the things one normally does when tragedy strikes? Compare the before vs. the after. If you read the details of the Israelite temple that Solomon built a few hundred years earlier in 1st Kings Chapter 6, it had lots of gold, silver and bronze. Even in the last chapter of Jeremiah it told of the Babylonians destroying what's left of the temple as it had lots of "scrap value" of the metal. My point is as the author compares the "before vs. after" aspects of the tragedy, realize that Jerusalem had a lot of wealth in the temple.
 - b) The idea of "wandering Jerusalem" is simply referring to their captivity. Those who lived in that area and were taken captive were essentially treated as slaves. I'm sure those who were taken into captivity, had to endure ridicule. "The God who controls everything can't help you in your hour of need?" is probably the essential idea of the ridicule.

- c) Let's talk about that while we're in the neighborhood. If God's guiding us, how come He doesn't help us when we're in trouble? Let's assume there's no major sin. Why does God allow so much suffering among His believers? One reason is to test us to see if we'll stand up for Him during tough times. God often allows the horrid death of believers again as a test and sometimes as a witness to other believers. Let's be honest, if there is no afterlife, I would describe Christianity as a big waste of time. Paul himself said something similar to that in 1st Corinthians 15:19. The point is God has His purpose when He does allow us to go through horrid things just liked He had a purpose for the Israelites to suffer during the point in history we're reading here. What about the Holocaust? The only good I can think of that came out of it was the "sorrow for them" allowed the modern state of Israel to exist again! As the old expression goes, "If I knew all the answers, I'd be God". OK back to it.
13. Verse 8: Jerusalem has sinned greatly and so has become unclean. All who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness; she herself groans and turns away.
- a) For those who haven't studied Jeremiah, the key sin was idolatry. That's why God wanted to put the Israelites in the "penalty box" to begin with. It worked in the sense that when it was over, Israel never corporately again committed that sort of idolatry.
- b) So who has "seen her nakedness". Picture the city after it was conquered after an eighteen-month siege. I'm sure there were lots of bodies everywhere. Again, we're getting pictures of just how bad it was in poetic form.
- c) "She herself groans and turns away". It's a poetic way of saying, things are bad and there is nothing that city can do about it. That's the point.
14. Verse 9: Her filthiness clung to her skirts; she did not consider her future. Her fall was astounding; there was none to comfort her. "Look, O LORD, on my affliction, for the enemy has triumphed."
- a) Of course, one of the biggest dangers to life is when we fail to consider consequences for our actions. The appeal of the idolatry was "everyone else is doing it", or "what's the big deal of "playing the odds" by seeing the benefit of other gods?" The reason God holds us to a higher standard isn't to punish us or say we can't have any fun. It's the idea that He knows what's best for us. He wants us to be a witness for Him. If we as Christians start to act like "Everyone else" how are we a witness for Him? With that thought in mind, the poetry of this verse makes sense.
- b) The last part of the verse is a cry for help. It's the "Hey God, why don't you do something about all of this?" The answer is He did and that's why Jeremiah was called to preach just what God wanted the Israelites to do, turn back to Him.
- c) Let's talk for a second about when we mess up. Obviously we confess it and turn from it. Yes, we may still have to suffer the consequences or else there's no motivation to change. The important thing to me is to pray daily for His wisdom and try to consider what could happen to us (consequences) of what is say, visually appealing at the moment. The way I view life is God expects us to live by His guidelines. We're then free to make whatever is the best decision was can living under those rules. OK, then back to Lamentations!
15. Verse 10: The enemy laid hands on all her treasures; she saw pagan nations enter her sanctuary--those you had forbidden to enter your assembly.
- a) In Psalm 15 (1-5) it says in effect only those with a "clean heart" can enter God's sanctuary. Think of it as one must come to church confessing their sins (with a desire to turn from it) as well as a desire to humble ourselves before God. Now, back to Jerusalem in Jeremiah's day, the city was taken over by the Babylonians. They just wanted the "stuff" and had no respect for God's temple. In fact, Jeremiah Chapters 50-51 tell us the reason God's judging Babylon is in effect for that reason, not respecting His temple.
- b) Does this mean if we go to church with unconfessed sin or not having a good attitude we are in big trouble? Yes in the sense we have the wrong attitude. Of course many do come that way. Hopefully being in God's presence humbles us when we consider that!

16. Verse 11: All her people groan as they search for bread; they barter their treasures for food to keep themselves alive. "Look, O LORD, and consider, for I am despised."
- a) As I said in the introduction, think of the author as contemplating all the misery that did come with horrid humiliation, defeat and death. For the survivors, I'm sure they sold all they had just to get food to survive. The Israelites must have felt despised after all that.
 - b) Let's pause for a second. We're a quarter way through this. Yes I have to pick up the pace to finish this. I just want everyone to grasp why Lamentations goes on and on about this. I would say one reason is to explain how "God's side lost" and what's the consequences". I also argue it's the same way we handle grief. We "chew over it, ponder what it means as we then deal with it." With that statement made, let's continue.
17. Verse 12: "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see. Is any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me, that the LORD brought on me in the day of his fierce anger?"
- a) Every now and then I state that the can be nicknamed a "tale of two cities". That's because a lot of space is dedicated to the history, story and fate of Jerusalem and Babylon. If you're not aware, Jerusalem is meant for eternal glory as Jesus will rule from there one day. That is why it's destruction is such a big deal. It delays the inevitable. That is also why the fact the city is in Jewish hands is a big deal today, it sets the stage for His return. Of course I'm not setting dates. I'm just saying I suspect we are close to it happening as Israel as a nation is under Jewish control at the moment. I state all that here, as the author is contemplating the suffering done in the sense that Jerusalem doesn't stand at that moment, let alone the official temple structure.
 - b) So why doesn't Israel rebuild that temple? Because the spot where they believe it should go is where a famous Muslim mosque is. It would start World War 3. Whether or not it's the correct spot or not is irrelevant at the moment. The point is Israel has enough trouble without the powder keg if they rebuilt the temple. I'm convinced it will be rebuilt one day as Revelation describes it that way. When is God's business.
 - c) I've touched on "God's anger" earlier. God is always angry at sin. It's the idea of humans watching the consequences of His people being kicked out of the land that it appears God is angry at that moment as if He didn't know that was the plan all along!
18. Verse 13: "From on high he sent fire, sent it down into my bones. He spread a net for my feet and turned me back. He made me desolate, faint all the day long. ¹⁴ "My sins have been bound into a yoke; by his hands they were woven together. They have come upon my neck and the Lord has sapped my strength. He has handed me over to those I cannot withstand."
- a) Again the last chapter of Jeremiah tells us the city of Jerusalem was burned to the ground. Verse 13 is a poetic way of describing it. Verse 14 is a "why" verse: It was due to the sins of the people living there at that time that God allowed all of that destruction. If that was true, why punish the Babylonians as stated in Chapters 50-51? The answer to prove God is God and He's in charge. That's the essence of it.
 - b) The simple point here is the author is describing the horror he feels of seeing the place he loves destroyed. He knows it's due to the collective sins of the Israelites. Jeremiah knew it wasn't him personally but the lamentation is for the sins committed.
 - c) That leads us back to our suffering. I admit when things are going horribly, the first thing I do is take "spiritual inventory" to make sure there's no unconfessed sin. Remember that God is under no obligation to share with us why we're suffering. We must simply accept the fact that He's allowing it for His glory. My prayer in such times is simply, "May these lessons not be wasted!"
 - d) That in effect is what Jeremiah is praying for here. That those who trust in God not waste the lessons He teaches us through our suffering. We may not get answers, but we should draw close to Him for guidance through it all. One reason we "lament" is to ask God why we're dealing with this "stuff". The eternal perspective can comfort us through it all!

19. Verse 15: "The Lord has rejected all the warriors in my midst; he has summoned an army against me to crush my young men. In his winepress the Lord has trampled the Virgin Daughter of Judah.
- a) The first verse is the reminder that the soldiers defending that city lost. The Babylonian's wiped out Israel's defense forces. Again this is a "cry of pain" over what was lost. We can not recover from a situation until we grieve it out of our system. Let's continue:
20. Verse 16: "This is why I weep and my eyes overflow with tears. No one is near to comfort me, no one to restore my spirit. My children are destitute because the enemy has prevailed."
- a) Speaking of grieving, I present Verse 16. Most of us have had moments in life where we're grieving so bad, nobody can say any words to make it better. We usually have to grieve it out of our systems. That's why the text goes on and on. Think how we feel when we have to deal with any sort of loss.
 - b) As a simple example, I remember getting in a bad car wreck many years ago. Another car turned right in front of me. Both cars were totaled and the other driver who I never got to met, was in the hospital. My point is I was told I just sat there for a few hours digesting all of that. I picture the author here going through that same sort of grief feeling here. Unlike me, many people died in this scenario and "the enemy prevailed". Obviously it wasn't the permanent end of Israel but for that generation it was "the end". Dealing with pain is not an easy thing no matter how big or small the matter may seem to others.
21. Verse 17: Zion stretches out her hands, but there is no one to comfort her. The LORD has decreed for Jacob that his neighbors become his foes; Jerusalem has become an unclean thing among them.
- a) It's another description of how complete the destruction of that city was. It was God's idea that all this was to occur as Jeremiah spent decades warning the Israelites to "turn or else".
 - b) Let's assume for a moment that Jeremiah is the author here. If he knew all this destruction was going to happen, why lament it? Why do all of this? One reason is he loved that city. It was where he preached for decades. Even if we see disaster coming, it doesn't mean the pain is any easier to deal with when it comes and that's what we have here.
 - c) So how did Jerusalem become an "unclean thing"? We're back to the idea that God wanted that city to be the gathering place of His people. If foreigners were running it, a good way of describing that city at that moment is an "unclean thing".
22. Verse 18: "The LORD is righteous, yet I rebelled against his command. Listen, all you peoples; look upon my suffering. My young men and maidens have gone into exile.
- a) Remember why all that suffering occurred? The Israelites collectively turned to idols. It's why all that suffering occurred even to those who were innocent of those charges.
 - b) It's the reminder that when we sin, we often hurt others around us. For example to start a lifestyle of heavy alcohol or illicit drugs hurts those who are around you. If we steal and end up in prison, it affects our families as well. It doesn't mean all are suffering is due to the consequences of sin. As I said, we should take inventory when bad things occur. The next prayer is simply that the lessons of what we go through are not wasted! That's what the author is asking here, "look upon my suffering" and consider the consequences of it.
23. Verse 19: "I called to my allies but they betrayed me. My priests and my elders perished in the city while they searched for food to keep themselves alive.
- a) Jeremiah is recalling life during the 18 months of the siege. If you don't know what a siege is, it's when an army surrounds a city and starves it out. Jeremiah's describing every man for himself as things got real bad. Even his "friends" refused to help in those days.
 - b) Again, think of dealing with a horrid situation. Often those we normally rely on won't be of any good help because they're trying to deal with the crisis themselves.
 - c) When we're dealing with the death of a loved one, we have to remember other members of the family are also dealing with it too. Often arguments will break out simply because of the "bad mood" in the room. I'm just saying "betrayal" is common in tough situations.

24. Verse 20: See, O LORD, how distressed I am! I am in torment within, and in my heart I am disturbed, for I have been most rebellious. Outside, the sword bereaves; inside, there is only death. ²¹ "People have heard my groaning, but there is no one to comfort me. All my enemies have heard of my distress; they rejoice at what you have done. May you bring the day you have announced so they may become like me.
- a) One can grasp the flavor of the misery here. On the "inside" is pain. On the outside we've got to face the death (or the problems) all around us. Often the pain is too much for us to deal with so again, the grieving is necessary to get it out of our system. I like most people have had moments of groaning where I know no one can really help me.
 - b) We even get references to enemies rejoicing over their misery. I'll just say it is not biblical to act that way. Some people enjoy seeing others suffer. It's another reason to realize there is a God who will judge all actions fairly.
 - c) I will add that as tough as the grieving process is, we shouldn't add unnecessary grieving to the list. I mean if we can get away from such people who are making it worse, do so! I know it sounds like simple advice, but sometimes we need to hear the obvious.
25. Verse 22: "Let all their wickedness come before you; deal with them as you have dealt with me because of all my sins. My groans are many and my heart is faint."
- a) Here we get the first verse of Jeremiah pleading, "Hey God, you take care of the wicked". It's as if he's saying I'm in enough pain as it is, you deal with the "gloaters". Again it's the idea of being in so much pain, it's all we can focus on at the moment and we should not be around those "making it worse".
 - b) The good news is we're half way home. If you made it this far, it's downhill from here!
26. Chapter 2, Verse 1: How the Lord has covered the Daughter of Zion with the cloud of his anger! He has hurled down the splendor of Israel from heaven to earth; he has not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger.
- a) Let me start with a quick lecture on clouds. If you've ever been in a fog bank, we can't see very well. Clouds, well "make things foggy". Whenever there's an "appearance of God in the bible clouds are usually mentioned. Again the idea we can't fully understand what the plans of God are, or fully understand His nature, so "clouds" are good word picture to use in such situations. When Jesus was "transformed" and God spoke, it mentions clouds (See Matthew 17:5 for that.) When Solomon prayed and God answered, clouds were there. (1st Kings 8:10). Clouds were there God's glory was leaving the temple. (See Ezekiel 10:3.)
 - i) OK now you know more about the bible and clouds than you ever care to know! I mention all of that here as we have "the cloud of his anger". The idea is again that we can't fully comprehend God, but at times we can see aspects of His work. Yes, I am describing the destruction of Jerusalem, but to be honest, when we go through our own tragedies, it can feel like God's anger is at work. So when things go bad, does it mean God's angry at us? Who knows? The answer is we're to use our lives as a witness for Him no matter what we're dealing with. We can ask Him one day!
 - b) The next thing to notice is Lamentations calls Jerusalem (or His temple) "His footstool". It refers to a place where one "works over". It's the idea that God didn't create the world for us to just enjoy life. He created it for us to glorify Him through it. So if the world as well as His temple is so important to Him, why did He allow it to be destroyed? The answer is His people ignored Him so if they don't keep it up, what happens? Decay and destruction occur. Remember that a church is not the building, but the people who occupy it. All that I'm saying is when "we" decay from a lack of worship of the God we were meant to serve in the first place, decay and destruction are a "natural by product of that action.
 - c) With that said, think of this verse as simply a word picture of trying to describe the horror of people turning their back on God and He says in effect, "If that's what all of you want, I will co-operate and destroy this place since "You don't want Me in the first place!" Yes the action can't be permanent as God needs to rule there one day, but you get the idea!

27. Verse 2: Without pity the Lord has swallowed up all the dwellings of Jacob; in his wrath he has torn down the strongholds of the Daughter of Judah. He has brought her kingdom and its princes down to the ground in dishonor.
- Keep in mind from the author's perspective, it wasn't the Babylonians who caused all that damage as much as the fact that God allowed it to occur. Yes He did hold the Babylonians for the damage, but underneath all of that, God allowed it. Yes that's old news to us. Why point that out here? It's to keep our focus on God. The best way to handle pain is to try to think of the eternal perspective. That's what is happening here.
 - The text mentions the kingdom (Judah) and it's leaders being wiped out. It's simply a way of measuring the damage done. OK, that's obvious too. Let's move on.
28. Verse 3: In fierce anger he has cut off every horn of Israel. He has withdrawn his right hand at the approach of the enemy. He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire that consumes everything around it.
- The word "horn" in the bible is associated with power. The same way animals with horns do use them as their source of power. The idea is all the "power" that Israel had without a "hand of God" helping them got wiped out. OK John, why state all of this obvious stuff? I would say it's simply to get our minds on the eternal perspective as to why it occurred.
 - Let me put it this way, thinking about God in His Holiness (i.e., perfection) reminds us of how imperfect we are and how much we messed up. But what if our problems don't have anything to do with sin? It's still a reminder that God's perfect and allows it ultimately for His purpose, even if we don't get to understand it in this lifetime.
29. Verse 4: Like an enemy he has strung his bow; his right hand is ready. Like a foe he has slain all who were pleasing to the eye; he has poured out his wrath like fire on the tent of the Daughter of Zion.
- The damage here is being compared to God as if He is pulling on a bow and fire arrows at us for maximum damage. So if God loves us as He claims, why inflict the worst damage? The answer is, what choice do they (we) have? It's as if God's saying, "I'm warning you, I am warning you again, I'm inflicting some damage to get your attention. I've now have to inflict maximum damage as if to say, "I'm not to be messed with and I keep My word that I am not to be ignored!"
 - So why doesn't God "inflict" maximum damage on us? If He did, none of us would live a long time since none of us are perfect. I'm convinced God does allow ministries to die, as well as people to die to prove His point of He's not to be messed with. We get in the book of Acts a married couple who "die on the spot" for lying to the church (Acts 5). My point's simply that I don't want to take a chance and "go there" as the consequences are too great!
30. Verse 5: The Lord is like an enemy; he has swallowed up Israel. He has swallowed up all her palaces and destroyed her strongholds. He has multiplied mourning and lamentation for the Daughter of Judah.⁶ He has laid waste his dwelling like a garden; he has destroyed his place of meeting. The LORD has made Zion forget her appointed feasts and her Sabbaths; in his fierce anger he has spurned both king and priest.
- I warned you in the lesson introduction, this doesn't get any better! We get into the "why" questions more in Chapter 3. The first two chapters are about dealing with grief. Here in these verses we get more description of the horror that occurred when Jerusalem fell. The fall of that city meant the destruction of all it's great structures, places of meetings. It also meant the feast days and Sabbath rest celebrations came to an end.
31. Verse 7: The Lord has rejected his altar and abandoned his sanctuary. He has handed over to the enemy the walls of her palaces; they have raised a shout in the house of the LORD as on the day of an appointed feast.
- Among the things that got destroyed was the temple itself (which I've already discussed to death) and the walls of the palaces as well as the city. The verse is describing how the Babylonians cheered in triumph when it should have been a time of celebration.

- b) Does this mean Jerusalem fell on a specific feast day? Don't think so. I'm sure a lot of the feasts had to be missed during the siege. In that sense, it occurred. Think of a time when we are in pain. Do we still do our normal "Christian rituals"? No and we're excused. All I am saying is a time of mourning is also a time of interruption of normal events!
- c) All of this leads to a verse I was looking forward to tackling:
32. Verse 8: The LORD determined to tear down the wall around the Daughter of Zion. He stretched out a measuring line and did not withhold his hand from destroying. He made ramparts and walls lament; together they wasted away.
- a) In this verse, the walls of the city were torn down. That leads to a discussion of politics in the United States at the time of this writing. It's a debate over whether or not there should be a wall to keep people out. A lot of the debate is pure "politics". Those who oppose the President don't want him to succeed, so if he wants "this", many say no. Others don't want it simply because they want illegal immigrants to come for "cheap labor". My point is that a wall is built as a source of protection. Cities have been walled since the earliest days that man has existed. The nation of Israel built a wall around the country in recent times and it has cut way down the number of suicide bombings. My simple point is walls work if it is the desire to protect the citizens and keep "undesirables" out of an area.
- b) With that in mind, the Babylonians destroyed the city walls. (The one's today in Jerusalem were built in the 16th century.) The Babylonians tore down the city walls to punish them for rebellion. It's to say, "Don't mess with us. We will destroy your city!" But didn't God allow all of this? Of course. Why? Again, it started with the fact the Israelites reject God from ruling over their lives and "it went downhill from there!"
33. Verse 9: Her gates have sunk into the ground; their bars he has broken and destroyed. Her king and her princes are exiled among the nations, the law is no more, and her prophets no longer find visions from the LORD.
- a) Meanwhile "the destruction continues". The death of Jerusalem means all the ways that it looked for protection (bars used to protect walls and entrances) were destroyed. Those in leadership was gone. The reading of God's law was no more. There were no prophets in the city since well, it was destroyed.
- b) As I said in the introduction, part of the mourning process is contemplating what was lost as well as the changes. Often before we can deal with the change, we got to think about it. That's the essential idea here.
34. Verse 10: The elders of the Daughter of Zion sit on the ground in silence; they have sprinkled dust on their heads and put on sackcloth. The young women of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground.
- a) "Dust on the head" and "sackcloth" are a traditional middle-east way of showing grief. The text then mentions the young women bowing their heads to ground. It meant for them no big wedding in Jerusalem or enjoying the freedom of not being slaves to Babylon. All that I'm getting at is "everyone is suffering due to the pain".
- b) When we deal with tragedy, it's usually bigger than just us. Again thinking about how it's affecting everyone around us helps as we contemplate what to do about it.
35. Verse 11: My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within, my heart is poured out on the ground because my people are destroyed, because children and infants faint in the streets of the city.
- a) Jeremiah was known as the "weeping prophet". This verse is one of the reasons why I will argue it was him that wrote this dirge. Jeremiah didn't say, "Hey everybody I warned you, now everybody deal with the pain because you refused to listen to me". He understood it meant the end of life as He knew it as well as the end of living united as God's people for a time while they're in the "penalty box". The text also mentions all the innocent people, (i.e., the children) who were hurt by this. Let's be honest times of extreme famine meant it was a time where people literally ate their "dead young" to survive.

36. Verse 12: They say to their mothers, "Where is bread and wine?" as they faint like wounded men in the streets of the city, as their lives ebb away in their mothers' arms.
- a) This verse is from the point of view of children who didn't understand why they're going through all this suffering. Realize in that culture, children drank wine mixed with water. Again the author is contemplating all the horror that occurred essentially because they as a nation collectively turned from God. If nothing else, it's a reminder to not mess with the God we worship or consequences do come!
37. Verse 13: What can I say for you? With what can I compare you, O Daughter of Jerusalem? To what can I liken you, that I may comfort you, O Virgin Daughter of Zion? Your wound is as deep as the sea. Who can heal you?
- a) Here is the author thinking, "What can I do? Death is all around me? Dying bodies are in the streets. The desire to turn to idols was so great nothing could cure it." After a chapter and a half Jeremiah (I just assume he's the author) is finally asking, what could God have done differently? It's not as if God didn't warn them.
 - b) When Rome was going to destroy Jerusalem realize Jesus warned them. The Holocaust in Germany had "warnings" as well as some Jewish people "saw the writing on the wall" and made an escape from there. Why God allowed it is in effect His business.
 - c) The point here's simply that there's nothing anyone can do to comfort people when it gets that bad. All we can do is weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15) to comfort people.
38. Verse 14: The visions of your prophets were false and worthless; they did not expose your sin to ward off your captivity. The oracles they gave you were false and misleading.
- a) The book of Jeremiah was full of mentions of false prophets saying in effect, "Everything is going to be ok". In fact, every single New Testament book in one way or another warns of false prophets. Yes they wasted the Israelites time here and they have through history.
 - b) OK why do they exist? Some for the fame or financial rewards. Some sincerely believe it was a message from God. The truth is demonic forces want to work to discourage us from being a good witness for God and therefore false prophets exist. Jesus said we'd recognize them "by their fruit" (Matthew 7:16). The point being what they teach will be obvious if it is compared to His word.
39. Verse 15: All who pass your way clap their hands at you; they scoff and shake their heads at the Daughter of Jerusalem: "Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?" ¹⁶ All your enemies open their mouths wide against you; they scoff and gnash their teeth and say, "We have swallowed her up. This is the day we have waited for; we have lived to see it."
- a) These two verses focus on Jerusalem's destruction from the Babylonians perspective. It's saying, "Hey, you guys claim to have the God of the whole world protecting you. You've claimed your city is the "perfection of beauty" and the place where the God will rule over the whole earth". Well now that you're conquered, what do you have to say now? This is the time where God's enemies think they've won big! There have been many moments in history like this yet Israel stands today. As I've said before, one of my favorite T-shirts in Israel lists all the countries and empires that have come and gone, and states the fact Israel is still standing today. The point for you and me is when we through grief, keep in mind the fact that God "gets the last laugh".
40. Verse 17: The LORD has done what he planned; he has fulfilled his word, which he decreed long ago. He has overthrown you without pity, he has let the enemy gloat over you, he has exalted the horn of your foes.
- a) We're still reading this from the enemy's perspective. It's saying, "you went down for the count because it was God's will. He let the enemies of His people gloat. The horns (power) of the enemy won. OK John, we know all of this, why emphasize it? It's to remind us that when God's "enemies" triumph in effect it's our fault for failing to be His witness for Him. As the saying goes, "I've seen the enemy and it is us!"

- b) I recall a speech given some years back by a prominent Hollywood film producer on why that industry is so secular. He said in effect, "We didn't abandon Christianity, Christianity abandoned us!" (The guy who said it was Jewish by birth). His point is a lack of influence of how people should act is the reason the industry is what it is. Are there people in that industry who are strong Christians? I personally know some! The point is when we turn from God the "enemies do have their moments of gloating as we read here!
- c) Hang tight, we're almost there!
41. Verse 18: The hearts of the people cry out to the Lord. O wall of the Daughter of Zion, let your tears flow like a river day and night; give yourself no relief, your eyes no rest.¹⁹ Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord. Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint from hunger at the head of every street.
- a) In these verses, we see the first signs of saying, "Hey everyone despite the damage done, I would say it's time we weep to God not just for what's done, but for repentance." Realize it took this event to get the Israelites to collectively realize how bad they're turned away. I have to ponder of course, what's it going to take for you and me, to "draw close to Him" in every aspect of our lives as I read this.
- b) Try to picture yourself standing in a city full of dead bodies. Picture the walls of that city as well as all the buildings being torn down. What can we do? Cry out to God is the only thing I can think of. Yes we can question why God allowed it and in this case we get it. I am sure most of us have asked at least once in our lives, "Hey God why are you allowing "this" to occur? We don't always get answers. All we can do is turn to Him and say help. He promises to be a God of all comfort and He's never failed to comfort me when I must deal with tragedies in my life.
42. Verse 20: "Look, O LORD, and consider: Whom have you ever treated like this? Should women eat their offspring, the children they have cared for? Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord?²¹ "Young and old lie together in the dust of the streets; my young men and maidens have fallen by the sword. You have slain them in the day of your anger; you have slaughtered them without pity.
- a) I've touches earlier on cannibalism but didn't use that word. I've touched on the fact the priests and prophets no longer exist as the city no longer exists. Again picture yourself in a city full of dead bodies and ask, "Hey God, why?" His answer back then was nobody is listening to His warnings and this is what's necessary. His response to us is we live in an entire world cursed by sin and we must deal with the consequences of it. Despite all that pain, God's saying, "I'm here to comfort you through it. I'm going to win in the end. I'm (God) am asking you to trust Me in spite of what's occurring at this moment. This book is here to help us grieve and deal with the pain.
43. Verse 22: "As you summon to a feast day, so you summoned against me terrors on every side. In the day of the LORD's anger no one escaped or survived; those I cared for and reared, my enemy has destroyed."
- a) Sometimes we look at a situation and wonder, "Where was God?" If He loves us why did He not prevent the damage done? That's like God asking, "Do you want free will or not?" Yes God has a purpose for allowing His people (Yes that's you and me) to go through lots of horrid things often just so we can be a strong witness for Him through it all.
- b) With that thought in mind, let's turn to God in prayer. Enough suffering for one lesson!
44. Heavenly Father, while we are grateful for all that You've done for us, we're also painfully aware that You allow us to go through all sorts of horrid things. Sometimes it's to drive us closer to you. Sometimes it's to teach us things. Sometimes it's the painful reminder of how You expect us to be a witness for You. Sometimes we don't know. All we know is You expect us to be Your witness. Help us to rely on Your power so that we can use our lives for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.