

## Lamentations Chapters 4-5 John Karmelich

1. If you asked me to name the most depressing book in the bible, it's Lamentations "hands down". It's a great book on dealing with suffering depression or just being "down in the dumps". It's not a book to encourage us when we have pity parties. It's five chapters complaining about how bad things are. So what's the conclusion of the book? In effect, it's surrender! That word "surrender" is my title for these final two chapters. Let me explain that principal as the bible describes it and why it's so significant for the Christian believer.
  - a) Believing Jesus is God and died for our sins is Step 1. What God desires after we do after that is turn our lives over to Him. I once heard the idea compared to God establishing the first necessary step of our surrender. That is, God "takes up space in our body" so to speak desiring to control the "whole thing", that is every aspect of our lives.
  - b) Consider the three chapter speech given by Jesus in Matthew 5-7. It's commonly known as "The Sermon on the Mount". The essential idea of that sermon is Jesus saying, "Hey, have you turned "this" area of your life over to God? Great what about "that" aspect? This goes on for three chapters discussing different aspects of our lives as if to ask, "Is God in charge of this part of our lives or not?" The underlying idea's about total surrender of our lives to God. To totally surrender every aspect of our live to him.
  - c) As most veteran Christians will tell you, it's a life long process. To take a classic joke told in church, "The problem with being a living sacrifice for Jesus is we keep crawling off the altar". That's why turning every aspect of our lives over to God is a lifelong process that's requiring constantly examining our lives as if to say, is God in charge or not?
2. The reason I get into all of that here, is the final 44 verses (in two chapters) of Lamentations ends with the concept of "total surrender". To be honest, these chapters are depressing as I said when I opened this lesson. It describes personal and corporate suffering of how bad things were after the destruction of Jerusalem All that the writer could do at the end was surrender his life and will to God as if to say, "You deal with this, it's too much for me to handle right now!"
  - a) I don't know about you, but I've had many moments in my life like that. The feeling that I am totally overwhelmed with my agenda or my problems or whatever's the situation that I'm facing and my only thought is "I surrender God, I can't handle all of this. I don't know what to do next!" Those are the kind of moments God drives us to. Why? Because yes, He wants total surrender of our lives over to Him. I'm convinced God does His greatest work in our lives after we hit "total surrender". That's when He says in effect, "I've been waiting for you to surrender, now watch Me work!"
  - b) My point is "surrender" is a biblical concept. It's about letting God be in charge of all parts of our lives. Yes it requires daily surrender. Yes it requires faith. Yes it requires trust. In order to start all of that, first we must accept the fact He's in charge and that means a total surrender of every aspect of our lives to Him.
  - c) What about "works"? Let's be honest if we turn our lives over to God, we still have to pay the bills and do practical things. Of course, not denying that. It's praying for God to have total control over our lives and then making the best decisions we can given whatever it is we must face at that moment. That's how "surrender" and "works" work together. To put it another way, we don't do "works" to earn God's favor, works is a "natural output" when we put our trust in God, then we just "naturally" want to do good things based on what it is we just "took in", which is God in our lives. Hope that makes sense.
  - d) I can just hear a lot of you saying, "You have no idea how bad my problems are. You have no idea how hard I've been praying. You have no idea how hard I've struggled". What I'd answer is "welcome to the club". You're not alone. Many people feel the same way as you do. God never promises us "free stuff", but to help us work through our issues.

- i) My point is when we hit those hard moments, we pray for His wisdom and then it is simply a matter of making the best decisions we can with what's in front of us. I am a big believer in not isolating one self in such tough times. Churches and those in counseling are there to help us when we face tough decisions. If we just sit there and feel sorry for ourselves, we're not focusing on solving the problem. One of my favorite expressions is, "God gave us a brain use it!" Hope that helps!
- 3. All of that tragic discussion leads us perfectly to the final two chapters of Lamentations. We'll see mostly verses about how bad everybody is suffering. There are a few about the condition of that world in general, and even a verse or two about other people, but for the most part, it's listing the ways people are suffering. To warn you the text gets a little gross at times. Cannibalism and rape are listed as ways people survived. Bottom line is Chapter 4 is mostly about suffering. Chapter 5 changes a little as we get into the surrender issue. It's hinted at through the chapter and stated as such in the end of the chapter. There's even a glimmer of hope at the end of the chapter.
  - a) The conclusion of this five-chapter dirge is essentially, "Hey God, do something". We are still you're people. Yes, we deserve all of this. Yes, many innocent people suffered due to our sins. However we're still "you're people", so there must a glimmer of hope in spite of all this pain. While not stated, but implied is the idea that God never abandons us even if we abandon Him. God never stops reaching out to people because He created us and He wants us to have a relationship with us. That's what God "gets" out of creating us. That's why we can have hope in spite of all this horrid stuff that God's still there desiring we do draw close to Him in spite of however we've suffered.
  - b) Think of life this way. As bad as any of us have suffered, at the worst it's equal or less of a life of suffering than what these Israelites felt. God's effectively saying to us, "I know that things aren't going well in your life. I know there are problems and things you can't fix. I am asking you to trust Me anyway. I promise to give you peace through your problems as I guide your life for My glory. That's the essence of the Lamentations message.
  - c) With that said, it's time for the details. Yes it's going to be tough as the verses go through a lot of suffering, but there is good news at the end after we've totally surrendered what is their and our situation over to Him. OK then, let's begin.
- 4. Chapter 4, Verse 1: How the gold has lost its luster, the fine gold become dull! The sacred gems are scattered at the head of every street.
  - a) What Jeremiah is describing is the gold from the temple. When the Babylonians destroyed the temple, they took away anything of value. What I suspect is as they stripped the gold off the temple walls, some gold plated stones were left on the streets. What was beautiful to look at was now fading and scattered around the area where the temple once stood.
  - b) And we should care because? The temple represented where God's presence was. It's the idea that when we've not obedient to God (corporately) we suffer for that.
  - c) As I read through the first bunch of verses in this chapter, another thought hit me. One of the reasons Jeremiah is describing how bad things are, is realizing the greatness Jerusalem had at one time. It wasn't the biggest nation, but David and Solomon built it up into what was respected and feared in the Middle East. A few hundred years later, it's in rubble. So as we read about the horrors of how bad things area, consider how far the Israelites fallen and realize it's due to disobedience to God. That alone is a good argument to support the idea of total surrender to Him.
- 5. Verse 2: How the precious sons of Zion, once worth their weight in gold, are now considered as pots of clay, the work of a potter's hands!
  - a) From the building materials of the temple we move to the Israelites themselves. The idea is God's people (that's you and me folks) are precious to Him. Obviously God did punish them for disobedience. That leads to the question does God punish His people? Yes based on what we're seeing here. Obviously we're not "kicked out" for every mistake we'll make or else we wouldn't be alive very long. Gratitude for His grace is appreciated for that.

- i) Still, one has to realize that God's use discipline is always a factor. So how can we tell if our suffering is due to God's punishment or not? We don't know. All we do know is all things (including the bad ones) work for God for His people.
  - b) So you know the idea of "potter's work" is the idea of clay pots. A broken clay pot doesn't have any value and is left as trash or reused. The idea is a word picture of comparing life as "used to be" fine gold and fine jewels now being useless pots.
- 6. Verse 3: Even jackals offer their breasts to nurse their young, but my people have become heartless like ostriches in the desert. <sup>4</sup> Because of thirst the infant's tongue sticks to the roof of its mouth; the children beg for bread, but no one gives it to them.
  - a) One of the things you're going to grasp in these final two chapters is how "low" the people living in Jerusalem sunk before it fell. Survival became so desperate that it was every man for themselves, so to speak. The word picture compares a desert animal (a jackal) that still helps their young by feeding them their breast milk. The contrast is an ostrich who lays its eggs and abandons them. That animal has the instinct to do the same one-generation after the other. The point again, is things sunk so low, people abandon their own children. So what is the solution when things get that low? Obviously it starts with surrender. When we read these verses, we read of people abandoning God and "stuck with consequences".
  - b) So what do we do when horrid things happen? Surrender our will to God, ask Him to be a guide to our lives, pray for wisdom and boldness and then make the best decisions that we can. If one door closes, try another. That's all we can do. Hopefully things won't be a horror like these verses. The good news today is there are good charities that exist around the world that help in times of starvation. OK enough depression from these verses, let us move on to the next one!
- 7. Verse 5: Those who once ate delicacies are destitute in the streets. Those nurtured in purple now lie on ash heaps.
  - a) Again, the thing to grasp from the first part of the chapter is the contrast between the days "long ago" versus how bad things are now. When things are at their worst, we'll recall the times in our lives when things were better. We'll think, "I used to have money to do this or that or I had the freedom to go here or there, but now our lives have fallen apart. Many of us can relate to some sort of horror when we don't see any solution in sight. These verses are given examples as such. From "eating delicacies to destitute", or "wearing purple (the color associated with royalty) now living in ash heaps". I'd say that's brought low. When I hear people complain about their problems or ask for a handout (cases of people who do refuse to do anything productive with their lives), I realize that "down in the dumps" is to begin with a mental state of mind. Yes being poor is literal. Yes it's tough to live that way. As I stated in the last verse, the solution begins with surrender, trust, prayer and making the best decisions we can given the situation in front of us.
  - b) I've talked to people in horrid situations who've said they've prayed hard about it but still nothing made it better. The problem is prayer without surrender doesn't work. Often we must accept our situation for a period of time until it gets better. Sometimes we just enjoy complaining and are not willing to do the "footwork" to make it better. I have yet to see a situation that can't be improved by simply "surrendering, asking God for wisdom as well as boldness and then moving forward "trying things" to make it better.
  - c) Sorry for my rant here. Part of being in the ministry is one has to deal with people having "pity parties" and trying to help them through it in try to give them a better perspective.
- 8. Verse 6: The punishment of my people is greater than that of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment without a hand turned to help her.
  - a) Time for a quick theological question. Sodom was destroyed fairly instantly due to the sin of rampant and uncontrolled homosexuality. Scholars state it was located in the Dead Sea area. My question is how is the punishment of Jerusalem "worse than that" when that city did have survivors and again, it is a thriving city today as the capital of Israel?

- b) There are a couple of theories to explain this verse. One is the idea the suffering we gather took place in Sodom was quick so there was no lingering suffering. What I consider to be a better explanation is simply the idea that Jerusalem had more knowledge about God, so they had more accountability. Remember that Jerusalem fell because that city collectively turned to idolatry to a point where God said, "There's nothing more I can do, so I've got to wipe this place out as a matter of mercy".
  - c) For example I told you the text here mention rape and cannibalism that took place in the final days of Jerusalem. Sodom went "down to fast" to have that as punishment.
9. Verse 7: Their princes were brighter than snow and whiter than milk, their bodies more ruddy than rubies, their appearance like sapphires. <sup>8</sup> But now they are blacker than soot; they are not recognized in the streets. Their skin has shriveled on their bones; it has become as dry as a stick.
- a) We continue the "things were so good back then and so horrible" now analogies as we get into these two verses. OK, let me ask the tough question first. Why do must we deal with all this depression. Why not just say things were horrible and "that's that"? Why does the text go on and on about this? Stop and think about when you were "down in the dumps". Did it go away in 10 seconds? Grant it, our promises may not be as bad as the destruction of everything around us, but still our problems hurt and we have to deal with it.
  - b) Remember why Lamentations are here. It's not just to relate to the fall of Jerusalem. It's so we can have a place to turn to when we deal with our own sorrows. It shows us how He's going to guide us through such pain and how to turn those things over to Him.
  - c) Anyway on these specific verses, they discuss Jerusalem's leaders as being very healthy. I would then say they "looked like death". Again, it's a "before versus after" picture. When we go through our own tragedies, often we list the before and after to measure what was the damage is done. That's what Jeremiah is doing here. Why? In order to turn it over to God, first we have to consider what it is we're turning over, thus "the damage report".
10. Verse 9: Those killed by the sword are better off than those who die of famine; racked with hunger, they waste away for lack of food from the field.
- a) I've said all my life that however I die, I hope it's as pain free as possible. That's Jeremiah's point here. Those who die quickly by a sword obviously suffer much less than those who died from famine.
  - b) So why point that out? I believe because lots of people there did die horribly. So why did God allow that? The answer is He warned them to turn to Him or face the consequences.
  - c) As for the rest of us, I can't explain suffering. I just know that eternity is longer than what we must face in this life, so all we can do is honor God as we go through whatever we got to deal with in this lifetime. However, I'm "preaching to the choir" so I'll move on.
11. Verse 10: With their own hands compassionate women have cooked their own children, who became their food when my people were destroyed.
- a) OK, I've been promising cannibalism this whole lesson. Here it is. So you know it's not as if they cooked them alive. It's having dead bodies lying there and people ate them so as to live a little longer. It's a horrible picture and we'll move on from there.
  - b) Stop and consider the fact that God warned the Israelites to turn from Him or suffer in the ways being described in Lamentations. If nothing else, we should remember God expects obedience from those who trust in Him as Lord. If this doesn't scare you, nothing will.
  - c) So are you saying if we disobey God, we'll be eating our dead children? No, but I'm sure we will suffer as God will do what He has to, in order to get our attention.
12. Verse 11: The LORD has given full vent to his wrath; he has poured out his fierce anger. He kindled a fire in Zion that consumed her foundations.
- a) I've stated a number of times the idea of God getting angry. He's not someone who has an emotional high one moment, angry the next and fine the next. Only from our perspective can we sense if God is angry at something and even then we don't know if it's God or just a "coincidence". Obviously in this case we know it's God as Jeremiah said it'd happen!

- b) The important lesson here is the fact that disobedience to God's desires comes with a price for such disobedience. It could be suffering for our sin. It could be loss of an opportunity to be a witness for Him or some other form of punishment. The simple point here is God's not to be messed with.
  - c) As to the literal meaning, again, Jeremiah saw Jerusalem destroyed and "put two and two together".
13. Verse 12: The kings of the earth did not believe, nor did any of the world's people, that enemies and foes could enter the gates of Jerusalem.
- a) If one studies the history of Jerusalem from the time David first conquered it, which was a few hundred years earlier, neither the Assyrians the Egyptians or anyone else could think it would be totally destroyed. When the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom, the army they had surrounded Jerusalem. The story is told in Isaiah and in 1st Kings how that army was destroyed in one night by an angel. (2 Kings 19:35 and Isaiah 37:36). This verse says Jerusalem wasn't conquerable, but it had a reputation. I know the Southern Kingdom did lose a few wars, but Jerusalem never was conquered all that time. When we read how it got destroyed in Jeremiah and here in Lamentations, it shocked the "world". Why? It is explained in Verse 13. Speaking of which:
14. Verse 13: But it happened because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed within her the blood of the righteous.
- a) The city didn't fall because of the strength of the Babylonian army. When God destroyed the Assyrian army in one night 185,000 soldiers died. I've been pounding the point that it was due to their sins that God allowed that to happen. That's old news now. What's new here is specific people to blame: Her prophets and priests. Specifically the reference is to the false prophets who were probably saying things like, "Don't worry their army will go away soon. Continue with your lives as is, as God will rescue us". In effect, we're reading of the price paid for false prophet preaching.
  - b) So why is "everyone" to blame if the focus is on false prophets? Why didn't God just zap them dead and that's that? First it makes me ponder if some will suffer more in hell than others when I think about this. The other issue is people believed them as opposed to the preaching of Jeremiah or reading what the bible says. The Israelites living there then did corporately commit the sin of turning to other gods, so yes the false prophets are to blame but so are the citizens in general.
  - c) OK John this is depressing and we have a long way to go. Why go through all of this? It's to consider all the possible sins we can commit as we turn every aspect of our lives over to Jesus. In effect a lot of this is like the "Sermon on the Mount" in that concept.
15. Verse 14: Now they grope through the streets like men who are blind. They are so defiled with blood that no one dares to touch their garments. <sup>15</sup> "Go away! You are unclean!" men cry to them. "Away! Away! Don't touch us!" When they flee and wander about, people among the nations say, "They can stay here no longer." <sup>16</sup> The LORD himself has scattered them; he no longer watches over them. The priests are shown no honor, the elders no favor.
- a) Verse 14 begins with "Now they". The "they" has to refer to the previous verse. Jeremiah is not done picking on the false prophets. These were the guys who were highly thought of by the Israelites before the city fell. Those false prophets offered hope that they're lives wouldn't end. Are their false prophets in Christianity today? Yes, many preach that hell isn't real and we can just be "good people" and be saved that way. I'm convinced that the most common false idea today is we can go to heaven because our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds. That's not Christianity but that's what most people believe. Therefore I'd say a lot of false preachers exist if that's the most common view in the world today.
  - b) The reason I'm getting into all of this, is because these verses show the "fate on earth" of a false prophet. They suffered then and the one's that exist today will suffer eternally. Yes I could say they suffered then based on these verses.

- c) So if Jeremiah is lamenting the fall of the city, why mention the "bad dudes" who fell due to this action? Why have a handful of verses about them? Maybe it's simply because he cared for the lives of all people and it hurt him to see people who've turned from God.
  - d) OK John, we get the idea that people suffered. We get the idea that we have to watch for false prophets and God will deal with them too. Again, why go on and on about this? It's a bit repetitive don't you admit? Yes. However one has to think of it as "taking inventory" of the damage. In hindsight I'm realizing "taking inventory" would be a good alternative title for this lesson. When we are suffering we need to consider all the things that happen in order to understand how to deal with it. Think of these chapters as Jeremiah digesting all that's occurred. Yes he's going to surrender it all to God, but even to do that one has to consider all that occurs. That's why we're going through all of this. OK then!
16. Verse 17: Moreover, our eyes failed, looking in vain for help; from our towers we watched for a nation that could not save us.
- a) Most scholars argue the "help" refers to Egypt. When the Babylonians were "knocking on the door" the Israelites were looking to Egypt to help them. Babylon didn't conquer them until after Jerusalem was destroyed. What I visualize is when the Babylonian army were surrounding Jerusalem, the lookout towers were looking for troops to come from Egypt to help the Israelites in that city. Bottom line is when God's judgment comes down, we can't expect anything to change that other than repentance from sin.
17. Verse 18: Men stalked us at every step, so we could not walk in our streets. Our end was near, our days were numbered, for our end had come.
- a) I'm guessing that when the city was under siege some were defecting and others watched to see who was defecting. I'm also sure arrows were flying in the city from the army that was parked around the city. Bottom line is the Israelites knew the "jig was up" and did not turn themselves over to the Babylonians as God told them to do.
  - b) So why recall this fact? Part of it was to understand why there were so many dead bodies in the streets. Part of it was to let it sink in how bad the effects of sin and disobedience to God plays out. Bottom line, all bad news.
18. Verse 19: Our pursuers were swifter than eagles in the sky; they chased us over the mountains and lay in wait for us in the desert.
- a) Meanwhile Jeremiah is still focused on the people who destroyed Jerusalem. The idea of these verses is essentially "escape" didn't work. Even if some did manage to get out of the city, the verse implies they were caught. If you read the last chapter of Jeremiah, it tells of how the "royal court" tried to escape and they got caught. The point is all that suffering of the fall of Jerusalem affected those who tried to escape as well.
19. Verse 20: The LORD's anointed, our very life breath, was caught in their traps. We thought that under his shadow we would live among the nations.
- a) OK, who's "The LORD's anointed?" Yes it usually refers to the Messiah (Jesus as we refer to Him), but in this case it refers to God's "chosen". One of the points I'm pounding here's the fact that being God's anointed comes with a price, that is He expects obedience. Yes I have pounded that point home a lot, so I won't continue it here. For my newcomers, let's just say that being saved is only "step one". My lessons are designed to discuss what God wants us to do now that we're saved. That's what much of the bible focuses on.
  - b) Anyway Jeremiah is lamenting the fact that because Israel was His "anointed" despite the threats of punishment they thought they'd be spared. The scary part for you and me is if they can be wiped out for disobedience, what does that say about us Christians?
20. Verse 21: Rejoice and be glad, O Daughter of Edom, you who live in the land of Uz. But to you also the cup will be passed; you will be drunk and stripped naked.
- a) All of a sudden the topic switches to "the neighbors". This is Jeremiah thinking, "Hey bud, don't worry, you'll get yours soon enough". If you don't know the land of Edom also got conquered by the Babylonians shortly after Jerusalem went down for the count.

- b) The question of course, is why bring up the nation of Edom (just southeast of Israel) now? Again, the main topic of this section is about "assessing the damage". Maybe Jeremiah is thinking about the "extent of the damage" outside of Israel. Maybe it's just thinking about a traditional enemy and what'll happen to them. The next verse is the answer and yes I'll explain:
21. Verse 22: O Daughter of Zion, your punishment will end; he will not prolong your exile. But, O Daughter of Edom, he will punish your sin and expose your wickedness.
- a) The bible says, "Judgment begins in the house of God" (1st Peter 4:17). The idea is He will discipline His people in order to them or other believers closer to Him. For people and the nations that refuse to turn to Him, it's worse! So what's worse than the city associated we associate with God being destroyed along with everyone there? Eternity away from Him! I'm sure there were saved people among all that damage. Even if there wasn't, that event has led to others turning to God. With nonbelievers, it is eternal and that is in effect, what we're seeing here.
- b) OK folks half way through this final lesson on Lamentations. We'll make it!
22. Chapter 5, Verse 1: Remember, O LORD, what has happened to us; look, and see our disgrace.
- a) OK enough "assess the damage" verses. Here we get the focus back on God. In a sense, it is the beginning of the "surrender" concept. This is Jeremiah saying, "Lord, you've driven us as low as we can go. We're disgraced beyond comprehension. Please help us."
- b) Yes Jeremiah knew the captivity would only be for 70 years. Still prayer is needed for the Spirit of God to work to "drive people" back to Him. That's the motivation. However, he's just getting warmed up in Verse 1.
23. Verse 2: Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens, our homes to foreigners.
- a) OK, back to "assessing the damage". Jeremiah states the fact that Jerusalem and all Israel for that matter are now in the control of other nation. Yes it's stating the obvious. What is underlying this and much of this section is a call for God to work.
- b) So if that's the case, why pray the "obvious"? The idea is if we want to surrender, we must tell God what it is we're surrendering! Of course God knows. We're reminding ourselves of how "low we've sunk" and that we require a power greater than ourselves so as to start anew with God guiding our lives.
24. Verse 3: We have become orphans and fatherless, our mothers like widows. <sup>4</sup> We must buy the water we drink; our wood can be had only at a price. <sup>5</sup> Those who pursue us are at our heels; we are weary and find no rest. <sup>6</sup> We submitted to Egypt and Assyria to get enough bread.
- a) Speaking of praying out our troubles, Jeremiah continues that idea here. He explains that they are living as if they have nothing. To be a widow or an orphan meant desolation for people living in that culture. The Israelites got "nothing for free" but had to work even for the basics. They've got to submit to the nations around them just for survival.
- b) OK John, this is horrible. We get that. You don't have to pound it over our heads. Tell us why we should care here? It's not about feeling sorry for people who lived 2,500 years in the past! It's about when we feel "down in the dumps" we must turn those thoughts over to God as if to say, "We can't handle this, help!" It's saying yes we messed up badly, but at this point all we can do is turn our lives completely over to you.
- c) As you like to say then what? What if we're already devout Christians and the bottom has fallen out so to speak? As I said earlier, pray for wisdom, trust that He's guiding us as we make the best decisions we can given what's in front of us. The Israelites here had to work hard to survive at this point but in effect that's what they're doing, putting their trust back in God's hand and trying to survive as best they can.
25. Verse 7: Our fathers sinned and are no more, and we bear their punishment.
- a) Think about how often families have to suffer due to the mistakes or sins of the parents? I know this is an age-old problem. We can curse our fathers forever, but it doesn't solve the problem. Again, prayer for wisdom, trust God and make the best decisions we can.

- b) I guess what I'm getting at here is feeling sorry for ourselves doesn't help. We're reading about innocent people bearing the punishment for others. That's a common thing in life. My point is complaining to dead people won't help. Taking action and trying to make the best of the situation is all one can do.
26. Verse 8: Slaves rule over us, and there is none to free us from their hands.
- a) Just when you think this can't get any worse, it does. Don't worry, there is a little over a dozen verses left. I warned you in the opening of this sermon that Lamentations is by far the most depressing book in the bible. It is here to give us perspective when our world is falling apart around us. So if this "isn't your right now", at the least consider what is being said here for some perspective the next time we go through our own crisis in life.
- b) So who were the slaves? It appears the survivors of the siege were now under the control of other Babylonian slaves. Bottom line, it's really bad news. The thought continues:
27. Verse 9: We get our bread at the risk of our lives because of the sword in the desert.
- a) The verse implies that the surviving Israelites had to risk their own lives just to get food to survive. And you thought your problems were bad? Remember the underlying point is to trust God in the worst of circumstances, surrender the situation to Him and let Him guide us as we make the best decisions we can given the situation in front of us!
28. Verse 10: Our skin is hot as an oven, feverish from hunger.
- a) Translation: Fever. Lack of food and malnutrition is causing fevers. This is before aspirin existed let alone hospitals. People died from this. Again, we're describing the situation as to grasp the scope of the damage.
- b) If you think that's bad, look at the next verse.
29. Verse 11: Women have been ravished in Zion, and virgins in the towns of Judah.
- a) Translation: Rape. I don't really need to add to the horror of that picture.
30. Verse 12: Princes have been hung up by their hands; elders are shown no respect. <sup>13</sup> Young men toil at the millstones; boys stagger under loads of wood. <sup>14</sup> The elders are gone from the city gate; the young men have stopped their music.
- a) Again, it's getting obvious that Jeremiah is listing ways people are suffering all around as he is describing how Jerusalem got destroyed. Survivors are not respected. People have to work hard just to survive. There's no "fun" to be had. Those who were in charge were killed as Verse 12 implies.
- b) So why describe all of this horror in such detail? What's the benefit? First and foremost, I would say it's about the danger of turning from God. If you know the Old Testament as it tells Israel's history, they went from great power under King David to this state. The point is it's a slow and painful downhill ride when a society turns from God. In a sense, this has been repeated all through history as civilizations have fallen. All one can do when we are at that low of a state is surrender to God and move on the best we can.
31. Verse 15: Joy is gone from our hearts; our dancing has turned to mourning.
- a) Not much to say here. If you've read the whole lesson this is an obvious conclusion. The whole situation has "gone to pot" so all one can do is mourn, which is what Lamentations is, pondering why all this happened.
32. Verse 16: The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned!
- a) Notice the lack of blame on the Babylonians. Give Jeremiah credit for saying the Israelites have brought this on themselves for collectively turning to other gods. Keep in mind that a priest is to draw people closer to God. By writing a detailed poem of how those people suffered and then end it with "we have sinned" is effectively saying, "Hey folks, you want to blame someone for what's going on? As a famous cartoon said, "I have seen the enemy and it is us!" What about the verse about "our parents made us suffer". That's the effect of sin. It causes others around us to suffer as well as ourselves.
- b) As we get close to wrapping up this book, notice we're starting to deal with surrender. It's saying "Hey God, we messed up. May we learn from this and draw closer to You!"



33. Verse 17: Because of this our hearts are faint, because of these things our eyes grow dim <sup>18</sup> for Mount Zion, which lies desolate, with jackals prowling over it. <sup>19</sup> You, O LORD, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation.
- a) Verse 17 is saying in effect, "We give up. We look at the situation and realize we are in big trouble. We can barely stand to see let alone assess the situation." If you don't know, Mount Zion is a nickname for Jerusalem. Where God's temple stood at that moment was only a place where wild animals roam.
  - b) Here's the key point: Despite all of this horror, "God still reigns". That's what surrender is all about. It's saying in spite of all this horror, He's still in charge and we must accept that fact in order to be a witness for Him.
  - c) So if things are that bad, why not just give up? Why acknowledge God after we've dealt with something that horrible? In a sense, what choice do we have? As I like to state, the purpose of living is to glorify God with our lives. When we mess up, and we all do, then we confess our sins, and in effect start over. That's what Jeremiah is praying for here. It's a horrid situation but all one can do is surrender, acknowledge God's still God, He is still ruling over the world and He is in charge whether we like what's going on or not.
  - d) In effect it's saying, "Look God's God, accept it no matter how good or bad things are!"
34. Verse 20: Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long?
- a) The natural epilogue question is, "Hey God, if You're God and we're Your people why do You forsake us?" For those Israelites it was due to their collective sins. I'd be willing to bet when we feel forsaken it's also due to sin. Could it be He's just testing us? Yes, but all that means is He's seeing if we'll still honor Him as God when life is going horrible!
  - b) The mistake we make is we want God to be a genie in a bottle, to make us rich, successful or whatever. The great mistake we make is we're here to do His will, not vice versa.
  - c) That leads to the next tough question: How can we do His will when life is falling apart as it is in Lamentations? The answer is we are still to praise Him in spite of the pain that we're dealing with. Of course. Praise isn't just singing hymns. It's about honoring God in all that we do. It's about constantly turning our lives and our wills over to Him. It's about yes, surrender.
  - d) All of that leads us here to Verse 20. Yes it can feel like God's forsaken us. To use another classic Christian expression, "If we don't feel close to God, who moved?" The point is the "one who moved" is usually us. Yes there are times God tests us and goes silent, but there are also times where we compromise on how God expects us to live for Him. That's when "stuff happens" and we drift away from Him and we feel forsaken.
  - e) So if things are falling apart, why go back to God? In effect what choice do we have? God still reigns whether we like it or not. So when the bottom falls out in our lives, despite the suffering what God wants us to do is "surrender". It's about acknowledging He is still the God of our lives and we need to still draw close to Him despite the "damage".
35. Verse 21: Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may return; renew our days as of old <sup>22</sup> unless you have utterly rejected us and are angry with us beyond measure.
- a) So why end the lamentation like this? (Yes it's the end of the book). Why ask, "God restore us unless you've utterly rejected us? The plea's to come to God not based on whatever we claim is our "good work" but only based on His grace. Can God be "angry with us beyond measure" like Verse 22 asks? If we refuse to surrender our lives to Him, I'd say yes. If we are willing to surrender our lives to Him no matter how low we've sunk, I'm positive that He'll still reach out to us. I've seen it happen too many times in life to believe otherwise. I am positive no one is beyond His reach if we're willing to totally surrender to Him.
  - b) Grant it, all that surrender may not change our situation. If we're suffering from a horrible disease we may still be suffering after we surrender. God never promises us eternal life on this planet and suffering is a part of this world. What He does promise is His peace as we deal with our situations.

- c) That's why we surrender, so He will guide us, use us and give us His peace through all of the things we have to deal with in this life. That's the conclusion of Lamentations, that we turn our lives over to Him in spite of whatever horror we face in this life.
  - d) Finally let me say in conclusion that if you can handle Lamentations, the rest of the bible's "downhill" in comparison. Hope you appreciate this study for all it teaches and when you have your own day of life falling apart may it be a source of comfort for us as well. For all the other times in our lives, may we study this little book to realize God's always there for us when we surrender to Him and let Him guide our life. On that positive thought, I will end in prayer.
36. Heavenly Father, despite all that we have to suffer in this life, we thank You that You separated us to make a difference for You. You never promise a pain free life, but You do promise joy with all we must deal with in our lives. Give us the strength and power so we can make a difference for You as You desire. May we trust in Your power and not our willpower as we make decisions with our lives that glorify You. Grant us the wisdom to make good decisions for you and help us as we deal with our own moments of suffering in this lifetime. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

## 1. Supplement: Bibliography

"If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." (Isaac Newton)

Without prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all these commentaries are useless. My prayer as I prepare these lessons was for God to show me the things He wanted me to learn, and second, the lessons He wanted me to pass on in my writings. I have quoted many sources throughout these lessons. If any of these writers appeal to you, I invite you to read or listen to them further via the places listed below. I have also quoted other sources not listed, and those names are usually listed in the lessons. These other authors were usually quoted from the materials listed below and taken from those sources.

First and foremost, the greatest commentary on the bible is the bible itself. Here are the bible versions I use in preparation of my lessons. I mostly quote The New International Version (NIV), Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society; The New King James Version (NKJV), Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.; The King James Version (KJV) (no copyright on that version); the English Standard Version. (ESV). The copyright information for the ESV is in point #7 below. The Living Bible (TLB) Copyright © 1971, 1986 by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189; "The Message" copyright © 1993 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved. All the bible text used in these lessons (except the ESV) is taken from Parsons Software: Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1999, Parsons Technology, Inc., all rights reserved and from Zondervan Reference Software (32-bit edition) Version 2.6, Copyright © 1989-1998 The Zondervan Corporation.

Here are the commentaries I have referenced over these lessons. The specific commentaries on Jeremiah are listed first, and then bible-wide commentaries. They're listed in alphabetical order by author. References to audio commentary means the information was gathered via the Internet in MP3® Format, unless otherwise stated:

1. Commentary on Lamentations by Bob Davis. They are available for free in MP3® format at <http://northcountrychapel.com/studies/>.
2. Commentary on Lamentations by David Guzik. It is available for free in text format. The web address is [http://www.enduringword.com/library\\_commentaries.htm](http://www.enduringword.com/library_commentaries.htm) Mr. Davis quotes a lot of famous authors from the 19th and 20th Century on these books and I've used some of those quotes.
3. The English Standard Version Study Bible; Copyright (2005-2009) The Standard Bible Society. The version itself is copyrighted 2008 by Crossway Bibles, a publication of "Good News Publishers".
4. The Expositor's Bible Encyclopedia, Zondervan Publications, (via CD-ROM 1998 release). This is a multi-volume encyclopedia with notes on every bible verse. It is available through Zondervan. Paperback books are published on individual Bible books from this same source.
5. The Life Application Bible, Zondervan Publishing: [www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm](http://www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm).
6. The MacArthur Study Bible with commentary by John MacArthur Nelson Bibles (1997) ISBN: 0849912229.
7. I also refer sometimes to J.P. Moreland apologetic ministry which is at [www.jpmoreland.com](http://www.jpmoreland.com) and Greg Koukl's apologetic ministry, which is Stand to Reason at [www.str.org](http://www.str.org) I also quote from Dennis Prager on many Jewish issues. He is a nationally syndicated radio broadcaster. See [dennisprager.com](http://dennisprager.com).
8. My apology if I have quoted someone else and I have forgotten to include them in this list.
9. Also grateful for "Google" and "Wiki" web site to look up specific facts stated in these lessons.