



# New Every Mourning

The Lamentations of Jeremiah  
Chapter Two

## "All Nations Under God"

Let's talk about nations.

God establishes all the nations of the world. Paul the apostle said, "From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live" (Acts 17:26).

God has a rather simple approach in His dealings with the nations He establishes:

Jeremiah 18:6 "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the LORD. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!"

Jeremiah 18:7 The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it,  
Jeremiah 18:8 if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.

Jeremiah 18:9 And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it,

Jeremiah 18:10 if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.

A good summary of that is the simpler statement of Proverbs 14:34, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

The seriousness of practicing righteousness is understood when you read Psalm 9:17:

Psalm 9:17 The wicked shall be turned into hell, And all the nations that forget God.

I'm focusing on God's ways of dealing with nations because it helps make better sense of what happened to the Jews when Jerusalem fell in 586BC. The catastrophe that befell them at the hands of the Chaldean army of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was quite awful. In the account we will be reading tonight, in Lamentations chapter two, we encounter things like the cannibalism of children by their parents.

The catastrophe is directly attributed to God. It isn't that He allowed it; **He accomplished it.**

Our immediate reaction can be, "How can God do that to His own people?" The answer is that He was dealing with Israel as a **nation** - *not* as individual, saved Jews who were His children.

Just because the nation of Israel is called His elect nation, or God's chosen people, it doesn't mean every Jew was or is saved.

When God made His promises to Abraham He specified there would be three groups of people who would spring forth from Abraham and be considered his descendants:

1. Abraham would have physical descendants, or we might say natural descendants, who would be the ethnic people we call Jews. These especially descend from Isaac through Jacob as the twelve tribes.
2. Among these natural descendants some would also become spiritual descendants; i.e., they would believe God and He would save them.
3. In the New Testament we see a third group who are not naturally descended from Abraham but who are nevertheless called his spiritual descendants. These are saved Gentiles.

We are therefore reading the record of God's discipline against a nation of mostly nonbelievers. As a nation they had done evil in His sight and He had come to destroy them.

Remember, too, God's longsuffering. He had been holding off His judgment for many years. I've been saying forty years as we are going through Jeremiah; but the truth is the Jews had been disobeying God for at least 490 years.

During that time He had sent famines and droughts and pestilence; He had sent His prophets to make clear what was happening and why. The Jews only hardened their hearts all the more. By this time they were involved in gross idolatry which included the sacrifice of their infant children.

Sadly, the believers in Judah - men like Daniel and Ezekiel and Jeremiah - were caught in the judgment of God. But, as we've seen, God was working in and through them. He considered their lives His spoils of this war.

All of what I just said needs to be kept in mind as we read this chapter. God's dealings with Israel were, on the one hand, no different than Him judging Assyria, or Babylon, or Medo-Persia, or Greece, or Rome.

On the other hand, in His judgment He remembered mercy, and kept a remnant of saved Jews safe to fulfill the destiny of their nation.

The first nine verses depict the destruction of Jerusalem from Heaven's perspective. It was God who did it.

Lamentations 2:1 How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion  
With a cloud in His anger! He cast down from heaven to the earth  
The beauty of Israel, And did not remember His footstool In the  
day of His anger.

Lamentations 2:2 The Lord has swallowed up and has not pitied  
All the dwelling places of Jacob. He has thrown down in His wrath  
The strongholds of the daughter of Judah; He has brought them  
down to the ground; He has profaned the kingdom and its princes.

Lamentations 2:3 He has cut off in fierce anger Every horn of  
Israel; He has drawn back His right hand From before the enemy.  
He has blazed against Jacob like a flaming fire Devouring all  
around.

Lamentations 2:4 Standing like an enemy, He has bent His bow;  
With His right hand, like an adversary, He has slain all who were  
pleasing to His eye; On the tent of the daughter of Zion, He has  
poured out His fury like fire.

Lamentations 2:5 The Lord was like an enemy. He has swallowed up Israel, He has swallowed up all her palaces; He has destroyed her strongholds, And has increased mourning and lamentation In the daughter of Judah.

Lamentations 2:6 He has done violence to His tabernacle, As if it were a garden; He has destroyed His place of assembly; The LORD has caused The appointed feasts and Sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion. In His burning indignation He has spurned the king and the priest.

Lamentations 2:7 The Lord has spurned His altar, He has abandoned His sanctuary; He has given up the walls of her palaces Into the hand of the enemy. They have made a noise in the house of the LORD As on the day of a set feast.

Lamentations 2:8 The LORD has purposed to destroy The wall of the daughter of Zion. He has stretched out a line; He has not withdrawn His hand from destroying; Therefore He has caused the rampart and wall to lament; They languished together.

Lamentations 2:9 Her gates have sunk into the ground; He has destroyed and broken her bars. Her king and her princes are among the nations; The Law is no more, And her prophets find no vision from the LORD.

Let's concentrate on two major ideas in those verses. The first has to do with the Temple. The "footstool" of The Lord mentioned was the ark of the covenant with its mercy seat cover. Also mentioned was the tabernacle - the inner room of the Temple. There was mention of the altar and the sanctuary, too.

In other words, God destroyed the Temple. This is significant because the nonbelieving Jews thought that they were safe, and could sin all they wanted, because God would never destroy (or allow to be destroyed) the Temple. They thought of it as a kind of magical or lucky charm that automatically protected them.

Because they were neglecting true worship, God took away all the institutions of their worship that they were observing in hypocrisy. Without any altar or tabernacle; without the priests; would they still worship Him?

It's a reminder that The Lord is interested in worship from our hearts. The old adage is still true: The heart of worship is worship from the heart. It does no good to go through the outward motions of worship if our hearts are far from Him - and especially if we are committing sin openly, habitually, while still calling on the name of The Lord, thinking He won't do anything to discipline us.

The other major idea - or major *image* we might say - is The Lord as their "enemy," bending His bow to shoot them. Even though it was the Chaldeans who battered the walls and burnt the city, God says it was Him. He wasn't simply allowing it; He was accomplishing it.

This isn't a case of "Why do bad things happen to good people?," or to God's people. This was more like God judging Sodom and Gomorrah.

Yes, believers were caught up in it; but in a world in which sin exists because God's longsuffering waits and gives space for repentance, the suffering of believers among nonbelievers is going to be inevitable.

The next group of verses in our chapter try to express inexpressible grief.

Lamentations 2:10 The elders of the daughter of Zion Sit on the ground and keep silence; They throw dust on their heads And gird themselves with sackcloth. The virgins of Jerusalem Bow their heads to the ground.

Lamentations 2:11 My eyes fail with tears, My heart is troubled; My bile is poured on the ground Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, Because the children and the infants Faint in the streets of the city.

Lamentations 2:12 They say to their mothers, "Where is grain and wine?" As they swoon like the wounded In the streets of the city, As their life is poured out In their mothers' bosom.

Lamentations 2:13 How shall I console you? To what shall I liken you, O daughter of Jerusalem? What shall I compare with you, that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion? For your ruin is spread wide as the sea; Who can heal you?

We are right to be horrified at the suffering that came upon the innocent children. But why do blame God for it when the real problem was the sin of the people? Should God have ignored the fact they were sacrificing their own children already to the fires of idolatry?

Whenever we see anything along these lines, anywhere in the world through history, we ought to be reminded of the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

Lamentations 2:14 Your prophets have seen for you False and deceptive visions; They have not uncovered your iniquity, To bring back your captives, But have envisioned for you false prophecies and delusions.

They had the Word of God, as well as true prophets, but preferred the words of lying prophets who told them their sin wasn't really sinful. One of the gravest errors a society can make is to call sin and evil 'good.'

Lamentations 2:15 All who pass by clap their hands at you; They hiss and shake their heads At the daughter of Jerusalem: "Is this the city that is called 'The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth'?"

Lamentations 2:16 All your enemies have opened their mouth against you; They hiss and gnash their teeth. They say, "We have swallowed her up! Surely this is the day we have waited for; We have found it, we have seen it!"

Lamentations 2:17 The LORD has done what He purposed; He has fulfilled His word Which He commanded in days of old. He has thrown down and has not pitied, And He has caused an enemy to rejoice over you; He has exalted the horn of your adversaries.

The Jews were supposed to be revealing the glory of God to the other nations. They were God's plan of evangelism. If they wouldn't do it from a position of obedience to God that He could bless, He would show His mighty power to the nations through His discipline.

Lamentations 2:18 Their heart cried out to the Lord, "O wall of the daughter of Zion, Let tears run down like a river day and night; Give yourself no relief; Give your eyes no rest.

Lamentations 2:19 "Arise, cry out in the night, At the beginning of the watches; Pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord. Lift your hands toward Him For the life of your young children, Who faint from hunger at the head of every street."



It took this much for them to turn to face The Lord. He had tried everything else. Tried everything else for nearly five centuries!

Lamentations 2:20 "See, O LORD, and consider! To whom have You done this? Should the women eat their offspring, The children they have cuddled? Should the priest and prophet be slain In the sanctuary of the Lord?

Lamentations 2:21 "Young and old lie On the ground in the streets; My virgins and my young men Have fallen by the sword; You have slain them in the day of Your anger, You have slaughtered and not pitied.

Some parents became cannibals and ate their own children. This action was predicted centuries earlier by Moses when he warned Israel of the consequences of disobedience to God's Law (Leviticus 26:27-29; Deuteronomy 28:53-57).

People have an amazing propensity for ignoring not only warnings but very real danger. Then they blame God when, all the while, He told them what was inevitable should they sin.

Lamentations 2:22 "You have invited as to a feast day The terrors that surround me. In the day of the LORD's anger There was no refugee or survivor. Those whom I have borne and brought up My enemies have destroyed."

God would much rather have seen His people gathered to one of Israel's solemn feasts. Instead they forced Him to gather together terrible enemies to consume them.

Since we're talking about nations, what can we say about the United States?

Well, we are not a major player in Bible prophecy, and that by itself is concerning.

It doesn't mean some horrible judgment is on the horizon. It could be that the rapture of the church changes world politics more than we can imagine. We are hardly a Christian nation but when the rapture occurs a great number of people will be removed. It could be that those left must join with Canada and Mexico to form a North American Union.

The United States is not Israel. We are a nation God has raised up. Righteousness will exalt us. Sin is a reproach that invites God to remove us.

We must stand for righteousness; but the first place to do it is right in our own lives, and in the corporate life of the church. Judgment should begin in the house of God (Peter said).

I don't say that as a rebuke, but as a reminder to look within before we look around. The immorality of the world is to be expected. The immorality of the church, of Christians, is not to be expected.

Let's get back to our first love and remain there and see our nation change one servant at a time.