



New Every Mourning

The Lamentations of Jeremiah
Chapter Three

"The Mourning After"

A sequence of the most wonderful and powerful verses in all God's Word are to be discovered in the third chapter of Lamentations. When you are being buffeted, going through incredible suffering, it is nothing short of transforming to read,

Lamentations 3:22 Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not.

Lamentations 3:23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!"

Lamentations 3:25 The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul who seeks Him.

Lamentations 3:26 It is good that one should hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the LORD.

Underline them. Memorize them. Live them.

There are 61 other verses in this chapter. Among them are some of the most disturbing words in all of the Bible. Some of what we will read seems to border on blasphemy.

The same believer who uttered verses twenty-two through twenty-six says about God, for example, "He has bent His bow And set me up as a target for the arrow. He has caused the arrows of His quiver To pierce my loins" (v12-13).

Theologians and philosophers struggle to reconcile these two pictures of God.

I'm going to maintain that they do not need to be reconciled if we simply remember the context. The lamenter was lamenting God's dealings with His covenant nation, Judah. In the sixth century they were mostly nonbelievers involved in gross and immoral idolatry. What's more, God had been reaching out to the Jews for almost 500 years to repent of their sins or they would face the judgments promised under the Law of Moses for disobedience.

Thus the key verse in this chapter is verse thirty-nine:

Lamentations 3:39 Why should a living man complain, A man for the punishment of his sins?

What happened to Judah and Jerusalem in the sixth century was the direct result of their sin and refusal to repent. Their choices left God no choice but to judge and punish. But in His wrath against sin He remembered mercy. A remnant was spared and Israel exists to this present day.

This long chapter will not be without application for us, as Christians in the dispensation of grace. We can definitely claim the verses about God's mercy in our times of incredible suffering - not just because we want to, but because they reveal the essential nature and character of our gracious God.

On the other hand, even though we suffer - and can suffer severely - it would be wrong to think of our afflictions as the judgment of God upon us because our sins have already been judged on the Cross where Jesus took our place.

I am not the target of God's arrows. I am the target of the fiery darts of Satan. And while you may think it amounts to the same thing, since the devil can only do what God permits, it's not the same; not by a long shot.

Let's get into it. The first twenty or so verses are complaints to God about His direct role in the fall of the city and the suffering of its citizens. They present a series of illustrations.

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

Lamentations 3:2 He has led me and made me walk In darkness and not in light.

Lamentations 3:3 Surely He has turned His hand against me Time and time again throughout the day.

Lamentations 3:4 He has aged my flesh and my skin, And broken my bones.

Lamentations 3:5 He has besieged me And surrounded me with bitterness and woe.

Lamentations 3:6 He has set me in dark places Like the dead of long ago.

Lamentations 3:7 He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out; He has made my chain heavy.

Lamentations 3:8 Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayer.

Lamentations 3:9 He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked.

Lamentations 3:10 He has been to me a bear lying in wait, Like a lion in ambush.

Lamentations 3:11 He has turned aside my ways and torn me in pieces; He has made me desolate.

Lamentations 3:12 He has bent His bow And set me up as a target for the arrow.

Lamentations 3:13 He has caused the arrows of His quiver To pierce my loins.

Lamentations 3:14 I have become the ridicule of all my people— Their taunting song all the day.

Lamentations 3:15 He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drink wormwood.

Lam 3:16 He has also broken my teeth with gravel, And covered me with ashes.

Lamentations 3:17 You have moved my soul far from peace; I have forgotten prosperity.

Lamentations 3:18 And I said, "My strength and my hope Have perished from the LORD."

Lamentations 3:19 Remember my affliction and roaming, The wormwood and the gall.

Lamentations 3:20 My soul still remembers And sinks within me.

God is represented as a punisher wielding the rod; as a guide who led into darkness; as the besieger of the city. The writer represents himself as if he were thrown by God into a dungeon worse than Hades itself.

One commentator goes on to say,

He appears as a traveller whose way is blocked, and that not by some accidental fall of rock, but of set purpose, for he finds the obstruction to be of carefully prepared masonry, "hewn stones" (v9). Therefore he has to turn aside, so that his paths become crooked. Yet more terrible does the Divine enmity grow. When the pilgrim is thus forced to leave the highroad and make his way through the adjoining thickets his Adversary avails Himself of the cover to assume a new form, that of a lion or a bear lying in ambush (v10). The consequence is that the hapless man is torn as by the claws and fangs of beasts of prey.

It's dishonest for us to try to argue that Jeremiah was angry and therefore inaccurate in his representations of God. He was spot on. God *was* this way toward the Jews; He *did* these things to them.

I'm not saying we should applaud it, but when we read about God doing things like this to, say, Sodom and Gomorrah, we understand it was deserved. It doesn't make it any easier to swallow, but at least we see it as the punishment of sins.

Remember in reading Lamentations that these were mostly nonbelieving Jews. A few - like Daniel, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah - were caught-up in it but their lives were saved as God's treasure.

The next sequence of verses shines against this pitch black background. In His wrath against sin, God remembered His mercy and the unconditional promises He'd made to Abraham's descendants.

Lamentations 3:20 My soul still remembers And sinks within me.

The opening verses were Jeremiah's remembrance. Even in the light of what he was about to say, his soul would always sink within him. He took no pleasure in the death of the wicked; or in the death of innocent children who were caught in the fires. Would to God the Jews would have repented.

Lamentations 3:21 This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope.

Lamentations 3:22 Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not.

Lamentations 3:23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

I don't want to rob us of these precious verses, but in their original context they mean that God would not, He could not, consume Israel because of His faithfulness. He thus had compassion upon them and showed mercy to a remnant. Every morning Jews could be assured these things are true.

Lamentations 3:24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!"

Lamentations 3:25 The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul who seeks Him.

Lamentations 3:26 It is good that one should hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the LORD.

Regardless the absolute horror of what happened in Jerusalem, a surviving Jew could encourage his or her heart that God was their portion, and that they ought to wait, seek, hope, and go on waiting to see the "salvation of The Lord" - which in their case meant the ultimate, final fulfillment of His plan to establish them as His capital nation on the Millennial Earth.

We need to move rapidly through the rest of the chapter. Verses twenty-seven through thirty-nine establish that God is, in fact, longsuffering with mankind in their sin. He works to bring you to salvation from your youth.

Lamentations 3:27 It is good for a man to bear The yoke in his youth.

Lamentations 3:28 Let him sit alone and keep silent, Because God has laid it on him;

Lamentations 3:29 Let him put his mouth in the dust - There may yet be hope.

Lamentations 3:30 Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him, And be full of reproach.

Lamentations 3:31 For the Lord will not cast off forever.

Lam 3:32 Though He causes grief, Yet He will show compassion According to the multitude of His mercies.

Lamentations 3:33 For He does not afflict willingly, Nor grieve the children of men.

Lamentations 3:34 To crush under one's feet All the prisoners of the earth,

Lamentations 3:35 To turn aside the justice due a man Before the face of the Most High,

Lamentations 3:36 Or subvert a man in his cause - The Lord does not approve.

God afflicts, but He is hoping to evoke repentance.

Lamentations 3:37 Who is he who speaks and it comes to pass, When the Lord has not commanded it?

Lamentations 3:38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That woe and well-being proceed?

Lamentations 3:39 Why should a living man complain, A man for the punishment of his sins?

God must act when sin goes unconfessed and there is a refusal to repent. If you're a parent - Do you look forward to spanking your child? Of course not; but you do it; you must, if you love them.

If they complain, do you not tell them to choose obedience next time?

Verses forty through forty-seven show that the Jews refused to repent.

Lamentations 3:40 Let us search out and examine our ways, And turn back to the LORD;

Lamentations 3:41 Let us lift our hearts and hands To God in heaven.

Lamentations 3:42 We have transgressed and rebelled; You have not pardoned.

Lamentations 3:43 You have covered Yourself with anger And pursued us; You have slain and not pitied.

Lamentations 3:44 You have covered Yourself with a cloud, That prayer should not pass through.

Lamentations 3:45 You have made us an offscouring and refuse In the midst of the peoples.

Lamentations 3:46 All our enemies Have opened their mouths against us.

Lamentations 3:47 Fear and a snare have come upon us, Desolation and destruction.

- Verses forty and forty-one are what they should have done. It was what God was urging through His prophets for 500 years.
- Verses forty-two through forty-seven are what God had to do because of their refusal to repent.

Lamentations 3:48 My eyes overflow with rivers of water For the destruction of the daughter of my people.

Lamentations 3:49 My eyes flow and do not cease, Without interruption,

Lamentations 3:50 Till the LORD from heaven Looks down and sees.

Lamentations 3:51 My eyes bring suffering to my soul Because of all the daughters of my city.

Lamentations 3:52 My enemies without cause Hunted me down like a bird.

Lamentations 3:53 They silenced my life in the pit And threw stones at me.

Lamentations 3:54 The waters flowed over my head; I said, "I am cut off!"

This reads like a summary of Jeremiah's experience for forty years serving God, trying to reach these people.

Lamentations 3:55 I called on Your name, O LORD, From the lowest pit.

Lamentations 3:56 You have heard my voice: "Do not hide Your ear From my sighing, from my cry for help."

Lamentations 3:57 You drew near on the day I called on You, And said, "Do not fear!"

Lamentations 3:58 O Lord, You have pleaded the case for my soul; You have redeemed my life.

Lamentations 3:59 O LORD, You have seen how I am wronged; Judge my case.

Lamentations 3:60 You have seen all their vengeance, All their schemes against me.

Lamentations 3:61 You have heard their reproach, O LORD, All their schemes against me,

Lamentations 3:62 The lips of my enemies And their whispering against me all the day.

Lamentations 3:63 Look at their sitting down and their rising up; I am their taunting song.

Lamentations 3:64 Repay them, O LORD, According to the work of their hands.

Lamentations 3:65 Give them a veiled heart; Your curse be upon them!

Lamentations 3:66 In Your anger, Pursue and destroy them From under the heavens of the LORD.

Jeremiah suffered, both *more* and *less* than the Jews whose city and Temple were destroyed.

- He suffered more because, in addition to having to endure the siege, the destruction, and captivity, he was hated and persecuted by the very people he was called to minister to. And the destruction of the city and Temple would be felt much stronger by him as a believer than the others.
- He suffered less in the sense that God was his portion. He heard God say, "Do not fear!" God redeemed his life, considering it a treasure, a spoil of the war. Jeremiah had a sense that God would vindicate him ultimately and totally.

If you are a believer, you can relate to Jeremiah (or Daniel or Ezekiel). You suffer both more and less than nonbelievers as you seek to share with them the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And while verses twenty-one through twenty-six were written to the Jews, they reveal the heart of God to anyone, to everyone.

Along those lines let me suggest something. In verse twenty-two we read, "through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed."

There is a better, preferable, translation. The ESV says, "the steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end..."

It's not that God has to endure us because He happens to be merciful - as if He'd rather just blot us out!

No, it's that He loves us so much that new mercies are always available by which we are maintained or restored to His grace.