

The Prophets

Lesson #50

Lamentations

Outline

I. ***The Desolation And Misery Of Jerusalem (1:1-22)***

- A. Jeremiah's description (1:1-11b).
- B. The city's plea (1:11c-16).
- C. Jeremiah's lament (1:17).
- D. The city's confession (1:18-22).

II. ***The Lord's Anger With His People (2:1-22)***

- A. The casting off of people and sanctuary (2:1-9).
- B. The agony of the people (2:10-17).
- C. A call to prayer (2:18-19).
- D. The response (2:20-22).

III. ***Jeremiah's Complaint (3:1-66)***

- A. His personal sufferings (3:1-20).
- B. Consolation and hope of grace (3:21-39).
- C. A call to repentance (3:40-51).
- D. The growth of hope (3:52-57).
- E. An appeal for vengeance (3:58-66).

IV. ***Zion, Past And Present (4:1-22)***

- A. The contrast (4:1-11).
- B. The sin of priests and prophets (4:12-16).
- C. Vain hopes (4:17-20).
- D. The reversal of doom (4:21-22).

V. ***An Appeal To The Lord (5:1-22)***

- A. The affliction of the Lord's people (5:1-18).
- B. The Lord's abiding power (5:19-22).

Notes

Lamentations 1:1-22

- Jeremiah's description (1:1-11b).
 - The opening verses introduce the reader to an incredible scene. What makes it all the more horrifying is the absence of any comforting hand. Instead, the neighbors only laugh in derision.
 - The fact that God is responsible for protecting His people is why, even though the Lord has brought their suffering on them, they still call twice on Him to relieve them of their distress.

- The city's plea (1:11c-16).
 - The intensity of her suffering is brought out in the numerous references to parts of the human body in these verses.
 - The fact that God has inflicted her with these injuries intensifies their pain. Her suffering is incomparable because He -- not her earthly enemies -- has brought them on her.
- Jeremiah's lament (1:17).
 - To prepare us for Jerusalem's final confession, Jeremiah records that though Zion "stretches out her hands" in prayer, there is no comfort; for the destruction is the Lord's command.
 - Even if the rest of the nation were destroyed, the people expected Jerusalem to remain (cf. Jeremiah 24:1-10; Ezekiel 11:14-16). Abandoned by God, Jerusalem has become a "menstruous woman" scorned by all.
- The city's confession (1:18-22).
 - The city finally acknowledges the justness of her suffering. She had rebelled against a righteous husband.
 - She points out her suffering now as an object lesson to other cities. A righteous God shows His righteousness by bringing suffering on the wicked.
 - There is always reason to appeal to the Lord's mercy, so the people do so here, in spite of the justness of their punishment.

Lamentations 2:1-22

- The casting off of people and sanctuary (2:1-9).
 - The storm has passed over the poet's head. As he picks himself up and gazes on the desolation around him, he declares with the voice of faith that this has been the work of the "Lord."
 - God is depicted as a mighty, hostile warrior, armed with bow to slay at a distance and with sword for close fighting and finally burning up all that is left. He has behaved like an enemy.
 - From the temple the lament passes briefly to the city and then to the king and his ministers in exile.
- The agony of the people (2:10-17).
 - No image tugs harder at the heart than that of mothers unable to provide food for their starving children.
 - There is nothing like this desolation, nothing to which it can be compared, so that the sufferer can find little comfort in the possibility that others might understand her grief.
- A call to prayer (2:18-19).
 - Despair should drive people to God; so the poet calls Zion to prayer. The first phrase here should be translated, "Cry out from the heart, O wall of the daughter of Zion." Though the expression may seem

strange, it is a call for everything, including the ruins, to join in the prayer of anguish.

- The last part of vs. 19 bears out the interpretation that the lament describes the position after the capture of the city, not the sufferings during the siege.
- The response (2:20-22).
 - This prayer is a desperate recounting of utmost woe. The words of Jerusalem try to "put a face" on the calamity that has befallen her.
 - Since the prophets had stressed the inviolability of the temple (cf. Jeremiah 7:4), it is natural that they should gather there in its last hour.
 - The Lord has treated this people more harshly than He has ever treated a people before. In the long and cruel history of conquests and captivities, this one is the most appalling.

Lamentations 3:1-66

- His personal sufferings (3:1-20).
 - The opening section paints a graphic picture of personal humbling at the hands of the Lord. The notion that the Lord disciplines through personal hardship is found in Job (9:33-34; 21:9).
 - In "my strength is gone" in vs. 18, "strength" indicates "glory" rather than strength. Both for the prophet and for Israel, hope in the Lord was their glory; when that is gone, they are on the level of the pagans round about. Jeremiah's mention of "the Lord" breaks the spell of misery that has bound him.
- Consolation and hope of grace (3:21-39).
 - The current suffering endured by Jeremiah and his fellow Israelites is similar to the enslavement in Egypt, so they should be encouraged by the Exodus to hope in the possibility of a similar salvation (cf. Psalm 77:1-21).
 - As the sun rises every morning, the Lord will faithfully show love and mercy to His people. The sufferer must endure, realizing that the Lord will not show one without the other.
 - The Lord is being true to His divine character when He punishes sin. Jeremiah was honest enough with himself to realize that the present sufferings are deserved punishment. Therefore, he should not complain of unjust treatment.
- A call to repentance (3:40-51).
 - The people agree that complaint is out of place. They must examine their ways, i.e., what they have done. They lift up not merely their hands, the normal position for petition, but the whole inner person ("our heart") to God; no mere formal prayer is involved.

- The people's confession reminds Jeremiah of their sufferings and then even more of his own (cf. Jeremiah 9:1; 14:17).
- Jeremiah's tears flow like rivers from his eyes. These are perennial streams, not just seasonal wadis which flow only when it rains. His pleading for Israel will continue until God responds.
- The growth of hope (3:52-57).
 - Agony over the fate of his people reminds Jeremiah of his own fate (cf. Jeremiah 18:18).
 - This evoked from him an appeal to the Lord for rescue, an appeal which the Lord has acknowledged only verbally so far.
 - Much like Abram between age 75 and 100, Jeremiah is having to live totally in faith, without having seen the fulfillment of what has been promised.
- An appeal for vengeance (3:58-66).
 - God's protection over Jeremiah in the past is an adequate basis for confidence in the future. For the sake of his people, Jeremiah has abandoned everything, even the consolations of family life and children (Jeremiah 16:1-4).
 - Although God gave him some of the most glowing pictures of Israel's restoration, including the promise of the new covenant, there is no indication that God gave him a glimpse of life beyond the grave. It must have been a heavy burden of rejection and ingratitude to bear into Egypt.

Lamentations 4:1-22

- The contrast (4:1-11).
 - Jeremiah describes in haunting beauty the devastating reversals of fortune suffered by the people. This section is full of contrasts.
 - The grief sweeps over those who watch, seeming to drown them in its wake. This is worse than the suffering experienced by the people of Sodom. There, death came swiftly; here, it is agonizingly and horrifyingly drawn out.
- The sin of priests and prophets (4:12-16).
 - The priests should have been purifying with sacrificial blood, but instead they have defiled with the blood of the righteous. They have made the people unclean when they should have been cleansing them.
 - These priests, along with the elders of the various households and clans, should be the most honored individuals in the community. Instead, they are dishonored and out of favor.
- Vain hopes (4:17-20).
 - The blindness of those who have gone into exile is matched only by that of those who are left at home. Hoping against hope, they have

looked for Egypt's help almost to the last moment (Jeremiah 37:3-10).

- One notices an immediate shift in speakers in vs. 17. The people of Jerusalem's comments express their despair, but also the underlying problem of a misdirected faith, which led to their destruction.
- The fierce anger of the Lord is made more understandable when one steps back and notices the objects of the people's faith in their moment of despair. They are looking to some other nation to save them.
- The reversal of doom (4:21-22).
 - The vain hopes are gone, and only the stark reality remains. To Edom, who stands for all the enemies of Judah (cf. Isaiah 34; Ezekiel 35), Jeremiah says, in effect, "Rejoice while you can, for judgment is coming to you also."
 - Their nakedness involves shame and revelation of sins, but it also implies slavery (cf. Isaiah 47:2-3). The consolation for Zion is that she has received all the punishment she can (cf. Isaiah 40:2); there can be no more exile.

Lamentations 5:1-22

- The affliction of the Lord's people (5:1-18).
 - The opening verses contain many allusions to Israel's early history. The initial appeal to the Lord is that He remember their situation.
 - From 2 Kings 24:14; 25:12 and Jeremiah 39:10 we learn that most of those left in Judah were the very poor, who were expected to keep the fields and vineyards in order. No foreign settlers were brought in, though there is little doubt that this was Nebuchadnezzar's intention, overruled by God. So vs. 4 probably refers to the heavy taxation that has to be paid if the survivors are to live.
 - Several verses express the appalling state of affairs. Each segment of the nation's social fabric suffers shame and despair.
 - This leads to a wide swing in the pendulum of their emotions. Such a swing suggests great agitation in the hearts of the people. There is a momentary turn toward repentance with a general admission of guilt.
- The Lord's abiding power (5:19-22).
 - The "throne" is the visible symbol of kingly rule. Jeremiah returns to the plea with which the lament began. "Remember" is taken up by "forget"; "consider and behold" by "forsake."
 - The lament closes on a note of uncertainty. The concern is that the Lord has rejected them completely. The people of Israel -- with few exceptions -- had so failed to grasp God's revelation that an experience parallel to the bondage in Egypt and a new exodus were needed to prepare Israel for the appearance of her Messiah and the world's Savior.