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FALLEN ASTONISHINGLY

A Survey of Lamentations

Study Outlines and Notes

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Fallen Astonishingly: A Survey of Lamentations

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FALLEN ASTONISHINGLY

A Survey of Lamentations

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FALLEN ASTONISHINGLY

A Survey of Lamentations

Study #1

Historical Setting and Literary Structure (Selected Verses)

I. TWO BASIC PRINCIPLES REGARDING GOD'S JUSTICE

- A. *Lamentations 3:33* = It is not God's will to afflict or grieve His creation, especially the pinnacle of that creation, "the sons of men." He is not vindictive. He is not capricious. He is not cruel or petty, nor is He malicious or pleased to see our suffering (cf. *2 Peter 3:9*).
- B. *Nahum 1:3* = And yet God cannot, and *will* not allow guilt to go unpunished. The same power that created everything that exists can and *will* be used to mete out justice on those who continue in unrepentant rebellion.

II. THE EXAMPLE OF ISRAEL

A. The Threat of Exile

1. *Deuteronomy 28:49-57* = Moses wrote these words in about **1410 BC**, warning the nation about exile before they even *entered* the land (and about 825 years before Babylon came and removed them from it)! The *possession* of the land was unconditional...but the *occupation* of it was very much conditioned on obedience! Note how *specific* these warnings are.
2. *2 Chronicles 6:36-39* = Solomon, at the dedication of the temple in about **960 BC**, about 375 years before Babylon came. Along with the warning, however, was a promise of restoration upon repentance.
3. *Isaiah 39:5-7* = Isaiah prophesied to King Hezekiah in about **712 BC**, about 125 years before Babylon came, that ruin and exile was on the way.
4. *Micah 1:16, 3:9-12* = Micah, around the same time as Isaiah, prophesied about coming judgment and destruction as well, and gave specific reasons for it.
5. *Zephaniah 1:4-13* = Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah, about **625 BC**, about 40 years before Babylon came. Again, he gives clear and specific reasons for the coming destruction.
6. *Jeremiah 25:3-11* = After 23 years of preaching to Judah and Jerusalem, and 23 years of hostility against that message, finally Jeremiah warned specifically what was about to happen.

B. The Threat Realized

1. The Setting of the World Stage

- a. *Nabopolassar Rebels Against Assyria*. By the seventh century BC, the Assyrian Empire, its capitol in Nineveh, was the largest and most powerful empire in the Near East. But in **626 BC**, an Assyrian court official by the name of Nabopolassar rebelled against the empire, fled, and established himself as the king of a new Babylonian empire.
- b. *Nebuchadnezzar Leads Babylon's Armies Against Nineveh*. Nabopolassar's son, Nebuchadnezzar, was given command of the Neo-Babylonian armies, and in **612 BC**, the armies of Babylon and its allies attacked and destroyed Nineveh. The remnants of the Assyrian court and armies, led by the new king Ashur-Uballit II, fled about 230 miles west along the major Assyrian trade route, to Haran.
- c. *Assyria's Armies Defeated in Haran*. Then, in **609 BC** the Babylonian alliance defeated and captured Haran as well, and a decimated and desperate Assyria fled further west to Carchemish, where they called for aid from Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt.
- d. *Pharaoh Neco Kills King Josiah*. It is at this point in the conflict that parts of the record enter into the biblical historical narratives, because in **608 BC**, on his way north, Neco was accosted by Judah's

King Josiah, who refused to let him pass any further northward. In the consequent battle at the valley of Megiddo, Neco killed Josiah (cf. *2 Kings 23:28-29*; *2 Chronicles 35:20-25*). Following this battle, Neco continued to move his armies north again, and after a brief and failed attempt to help the Assyrians retake Haran, took his stand with the embattled Assyrians at Carchemish.

- e. *The Battle of Carchemish.* The great Battle of Carchemish occurred in **605 BC**, and resulted in the complete annihilation of Assyria, and the decimation of Egypt as a world power. Babylon became the world's great superpower. Following this great victory, that same year Nebuchadnezzar moved his forces south and took control of Syria and Phoenicia. In coming south, he naturally began the process of the subjugation of Judah and Jerusalem that would ultimately culminate in the destruction and exile that had for so long been threatened.

2. The Exile of Judah and Jerusalem

- a. *The First Deportation.* In **605 BC**, Nebuchadnezzar had his first taste of Jerusalem. On his way south, he invaded the land and subjugated King Jehoiakim. It is very likely he would have remained in the area for a longer time, but he received sudden word that his father had died in Babylon, and so Nebuchadnezzar fled back across the desert to Babylon to secure his throne.
- b. *The Second Deportation.* After continuous acts of rebellion by Jehoiakim, and repeated efforts by the Babylonian army to bring him to heel, in **597 BC** Nebuchadnezzar decided to come against Jerusalem in person for the second time. By the time he arrived, Jehoiakim had died, and his son, Jehoiachin, had taken his place. During this second wave of deportations, the new king and all the royal court were taken back to Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar appointed the king's uncle, Zedekiah, as the new king in Jerusalem.
- c. *The Final Destruction of Jerusalem.* King Zedekiah ruled submissively for a time, but eventually, bowing to pressure from the Jews remaining in Jerusalem, he rebelled and called for aid from Pharaoh Hophra in Egypt. This rebellion precipitated Nebuchadnezzar's third and final invasion of Jerusalem. In January of **588 BC**, he returned and set a siege of Jerusalem that effectively lasted until **July 16, 586 BC**, on which day Babylon succeeded in breaking down the walls of Jerusalem. Once inside the city, he unleashed utter devastation. The city was set afire; men, women, children and infants were slaughtered in the streets; houses and shops were pilfered and set on fire, reduced to rubble and ash. And in his final act of retribution, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the great temple that had been built by Solomon nearly 350 years earlier, looting it, razing it to the ground and burning what remained to ashes. What few survivors remained were carted off the Babylon where most of them would live out the remainder of their days with the painful destruction of God's holy city literally burned into their memories.

III. THE ROLE AND RESPONSE OF JEREMIAH

A. Forewarnings Offered

1. *Jeremiah 4:1-9* = Jeremiah ministered in Jerusalem before, during and after the Babylonian conquests. This passage is just one example of how, over and over, Jeremiah prophesied a forewarning, and made an offer of reconciliation on God's behalf. But the offer was refused again and again.

B. Notice Given of Judgment Decided and Executed

1. *Jeremiah 14:7-12* = Even with Jeremiah's intercession, God assured him that the people were set in their ways, and that God's face had turned away from them. Eventually, the line had been crossed and there was no going back. The wheels had been irrevocably set into motion, and judgment was now certain (cf. *Jeremiah 25:3-11* referenced above).

C. Hope and Restoration Promised

1. *Jeremiah 29:4-14* = Yet even in the very midst of judgment, God used Jeremiah (who had prophesied of the judgment to come) to promise a restoration that would come when Judah's will had been broken and her heart was ready to repent.

D. Lament Poured Out

1. *Jeremiah 52:1-27* = This is the final word on the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians. Reading this, we remember that Jeremiah lived in Jerusalem *before, during and after* this horrific destruction. He was an eye witness of everything that occurred. He saw his people slaughtered in the streets like pigs, heard their cries for a mercy that was never granted, shuddered at the horrific shrillness of their screams as they fell. He watched the buildings burn, felt the earth tremor under his feet as their stones collapsed, smelled the smoke rising into the air around him, tasted the bitter tang of ash as it drifted back downward to dust the streets. He wandered the chaos as it unfolded around him, wondering and marveling at the totality of God's judgment over Judah's sin, and the barbarism of the Babylonians that executed this judgment. What was his response? Joy? Vindication? On the contrary. He was devastated beyond measure.
2. *Lamentations 3:43-51* = These words, and many others like them, reveal the heart of the prophet. He was not secretly pleased that the stubborn people around him had suffered like he had warned them they would. There was no, "I told you so," in his spirit. And so, the book of Lamentations is exactly that...five poems written by Jeremiah to express in written form the utter desolation of his people and their city, and the pain this caused him.

IV. THE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF LAMENTATIONS

A. Lamentations Is a Response

1. This book was not written in isolation, or for its own sake. Rather, it is Jeremiah's specific reaction to the destruction and exile brought down on the heads of his people because of their sin. It is for this reason we have spent time looking at the historical setting. Without it, the book makes no sense.

B. Lamentations Is Poetry

1. Lamentations is poetry. It therefore exhibits the key characteristic of Hebrew poetry: parallelism. Because it is poetry, it is properly grouped with the rest of the Hebrew poetry of the Old Testament (*Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes* and *Song of Solomon*). However, because it was written by Jeremiah, and is closely connected with the message of his book, it is placed beside it in the order of our English Bibles.

C. Lamentations Comprises Five Separate *Laments*

1. *Lamentations* is not actually one work, but five – five distinct, yet connected poems or *laments*. These five distinct poems are marked off correctly by the chapter divisions.
2. The first four of the five laments are actually Hebrew acrostics. This means that each successive stanza begins with the next successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. There are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet...therefore it follows that there are twenty-two connected thoughts in each acrostic. The first two laments, along with the fourth, contain one essential thought per letter of the alphabet. The third (which is the longest) contains three essential thoughts per letter, which is why it has sixty-six verses where the other three acrostics only have twenty-two. Why did Jeremiah use this literary device for such a sad and depressing collection of poetry? I think there are two reasons:
 - a. First, the device makes the thoughts easier to remember. This becomes important as we examine the content and meaning of the book. Its message was meant to be remembered, to stick in the mind and memory.
 - b. Second, the combination of an acrostic and a lament has the effect of expressing the *totality* of Jeremiah's sadness over the sin of his people, and their consequent exile. It expresses the great breadth and depth of Jeremiah's anguish, from A to Z, as it were.

D. The Laments Are Distinctive

1. **Lament One.** The first lament comprises two basic sections:
 - a. *The consequences of sin.* The first section, verses 1-11, focuses on the changes in status, condition, and situation brought about by the consequences of Jerusalem's sin. Very often in this part of the first lament, Jerusalem is typified as a woman; the pronouns *she* and *her* are used 48 times in these

- eleven verses; and verse one also describes her as a widow and a princess as well, both of which are feminine designations.
- b. *Anguish over sin's consequences.* The second section, verses 12-22, describes the woman's (Jerusalem's) reaction to, and anguish over, these changes and consequences. Here, however, the speaker becomes the woman herself, speaking in the first person. The first person pronouns *I*, *me* and *my* are used 42 times in these eleven verses.
2. **Lament Two.** The second lament also comprises two basic sections:
 - a. *God is the source of judgment.* The first section, verses 1-11, attributes the destruction of Jerusalem to *God* (rather than to *Babylon*) and describes His work in accomplishing justice and judgment. The pronouns *he*, *his* and *him* are used 36 times in these eleven verses.
 - b. *The anguish of the writer, Jeremiah.* The second section, verses 12-22, describe the anguish of the prophet Jeremiah himself, speaking in the first person. Although the first person pronouns *I* and *my* are only used 13 times in these eleven verses, the Hebrew forms of direct address are used consistently throughout: the prophet addresses the woman Jerusalem directly in verses 12-18; and then turns to address God directly in verses 19-22.
 3. **Lament Three.** Upon inspection, this lament is immediately recognizable as different than the others, most notably by its length. It comprises 66 verses, rather than the usual 22. As noted earlier, this is because the acrostic form used here contains three essential thoughts per Hebrew letter. This lament also forms the literary climax of the collection, reaching a hopeful peak in verses 21-24. The poem is exclusively the personal contemplations of the prophet Jeremiah, himself. The first person pronouns *I*, *me* and *my* are used 70 times in these sixty-six verses. The poem breaks itself into four distinct sections:
 - a. *God has afflicted me personally.* In the first, verses 1-18, Jeremiah describes the effect on his own person of what God has done to Jerusalem (remember that Jeremiah was a *part* of the nation, and lived in Jerusalem during the siege). The phrase *He [God] has* occurs 16 times in this section.
 - b. *I have hope because of God's character.* In the second section, verses 19-42, Jeremiah expresses his hope in the righteous character of God, manifested even in judgment. The prophet recognizes that what God has done is just and appropriate, and that even in view of the magnitude of God's justice poured out, the one judged has no legitimate complaint, because of what he has done to deserve it.
 - c. *I weep over the judgment of my city.* In this third section, verses 43-54, the prophet expresses the totality of Jerusalem's judgment, and his grief over it.
 - d. *My prayer of confidence.* In the last section, verses 55-66, Jeremiah offers a prayer to God specifically requesting (and expressing confidence in) God's judgment on the instrument of Jerusalem's destruction, Babylon. Though God had sent them to exact judgment, Babylon had far overreached God's intent.
 4. **Lament Four.** The fourth lament is really a single long, extended thought, encompassing several themes from the first three laments: for example, the changes brought on by sin's consequences (4:1-10; cf. Lament One) and God as the source of judgment (4:11, 16; cf. Lament Two). But there are two things that make this lament unique:
 - a. *Jeremiah speaks of Jerusalem as from the outside, rather than as one of them.* The third person pronouns *they*, *them*, *their* and *those* are used 32 times in this lament.
 - b. *Another nation is identified specifically.* Up to this point, the focus has been pretty strictly on the conflict between Jerusalem and God. Here, a warning is given to another specific nation: Edom (4:21-22). Edom also lived in that land, and was shown a temporary favor by Babylon. But Jeremiah issues a warning...if, in God's providence, Jerusalem could not escape Babylon's hand, neither could Edom. Her rejoicing would be short-lived.
 5. **Lament Five.** This lament is distinctly different from the first four in two very key ways:
 - a. *It is not an acrostic.* At first glance, it has the same number of verses as the three single-thought acrostics. But each of these comprises a single parallelism (for this reason, Lament Five is the

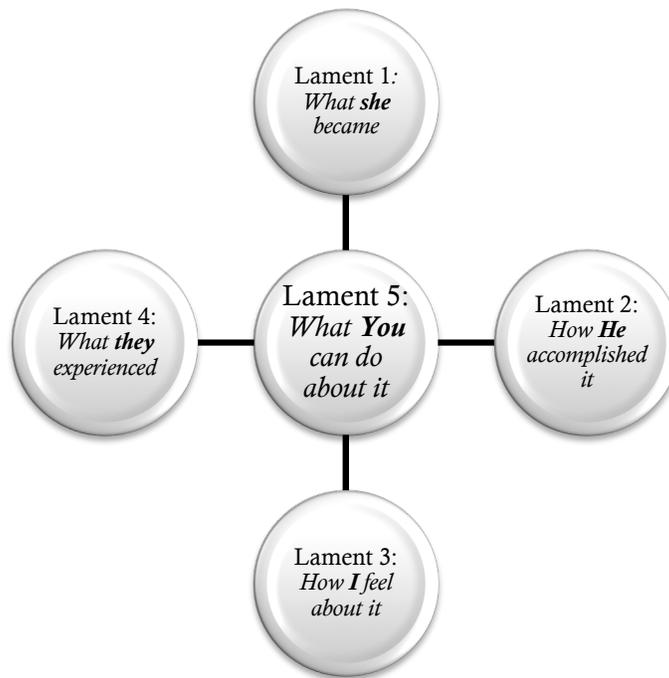
shortest of the set). There is no hint of the order and rigid structure here that accompanies the first four laments, and no specific literary device, such as the acrostic form, used.

- b. *It is chiefly a prayer.* The entire lament is an extended direct address to God from the mouth of Jeremiah. It expresses three desires for God to accomplish: Remember (5:1); Restore (5:21a); and Renew (5:21b).
6. **Summary.** The five laments, and their different foci, can be summarized briefly as follows:
 - a. *What she became* = Lament One
 - b. *How He accomplished it* = Lament Two
 - c. *How I feel about it* = Lament Three
 - d. *What they experienced* = Lament Four
 - e. *What You can do about it* = Lament Five

V. PRAYER

Summary of the Five Laments of Lamentations

Figure 1



FALLEN ASTONISHINGLY

A Survey of Lamentations

Study #2

The Lessons of Lamentations (Selected Verses)

לֹא יִהְיֶה-לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל-פְּנֵי

“Never ever will there be lesser gods against the faces.”
(Exodus 20:3)

I. THE FIRST COMMAND AND THE BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF SIN

- A. *Exodus 20:3* = (cf. *Deuteronomy 5:7*) This first command, almost obvious in its basic truth, forms the biblical bedrock for understanding the nature and definition of sin. The literal picture of the Hebrew phrase is very intimate. Picture yourself standing somewhere. Then picture God so close to you that his face is literally against yours (almost like dancing “cheek-to-cheek”). The phrase used in both referenced passages (*Exodus* and *Deuteronomy*) is identical in Hebrew. It is simultaneously a promise and a command, and it means exactly what it says. God’s promise to you is that there will never be anything lesser than His full glory and intimacy offered to you. He will never put anything between His face and yours. The command is that you show the same fealty by allowing nothing to come between your face and His.
- B. *Proverbs 3:32* = The Hebrew word translated “devious” here is *nālōz’* (נָלוֹז) and literally means *to escape from sight or to depart*. Conversely, the word translated “intimate” is the Hebrew *sōd’* (סוֹד), which means literally *a secret or a confidential discussion*. The truth of this proverb is that those who are “abominations,” those who are abhorrent to God, are such because they have escaped or departed from His sight. Something has come between their faces and His. But those who have not departed are not only called “righteous” here, but are said to be partakers of the LORD’s *secrets or confidential discussions*.
- C. *Isaiah 59:1-2* = It is **iniquity** that causes our separation from God. It is **sin** that has “hidden faces.” So what, then, is sin...and what, consequently, is the nature of repentance?
- D. *Isaiah 53:6a* = Here is the essence of sin, defined most succinctly: we have gone astray, turned aside to our own way. We have, essentially, allowed everything else to come *against the faces*.

1. The Analogy of a Heart Attack

- a. *Symptoms*. The symptoms of a heart attack may include pain in the left arm, cold sweats, anxiety, heartburn and nausea, among other things. Some symptoms may be more severe, and some less. Some may be more common, and some less. And yet if I asked you to describe a heart attack, listing these symptoms doesn’t really get at the root, does it? These symptoms, no matter their severity or commonality, are not what *defines* a heart attack...they are what *accompanies* one.
- b. *Underlying Problem*. The underlying problem is that there is a blockage of blood flow to the heart.
- c. *The Difference Between Symptoms and the Underlying Problem*. The main difference can be illustrated with two realities: diagnosis and treatment.
 - i. *Diagnosis*. A competent doctor could look at these outward symptoms, and give a fairly good guess at what is the underlying problem. With further tests, the diagnosis could be confirmed. But it is not the symptoms themselves that are diagnosed. It is the underlying cause.
 - ii. *Treatment*. Having made the diagnosis, the doctor doesn’t proceed to treat each symptom (Tylenol for the ache in the arm; Tums for the heartburn; etc.). He treats the underlying problem...the blockage. Why? Because if the doctor alleviated the symptoms without resolving the blockage, the patient would still die. He might be in less pain when he died, might even have the illusion that he’d been cured...but he would still die.

2. The Symptoms of Sin and Its Proper Diagnosis

- a. *The Symptoms*. The symptoms of sin are listed several times by Paul in his letters:
 - i. *Romans 1:18-32* = Note that Paul begins by addressing the root problem, which is the rejection of God, the turning of the heart and face away from Him. As a result of this turning, God gives people over (vv. 24, 26, 28) to all manner of wicked behavior, as listed in verses 29-31.
 - ii. *1 Corinthians 6:9-10* = Another list of symptoms.
 - iii. *Galatians 5:19-21* = Another list.
 - iv. *Colossians 3:5* = Another list...but NOTE! Paul says that all these symptoms amount to one problem: *idolatry*. This is the same thing he said in *Romans*, as noted above.
- b. *A Blockage*. Like a heart attack, the root and underlying problem that defines sin is a blockage: rather than a blockage of blood flow to the heart, sin is the placement of a blockage *against the faces*, that is, between my face and God's. This is why it is the first commandment given in the covenant made at Sinai, and the first of the Ten. When we allow a blockage *against the faces*, we have begun to pursue our *own* agenda (not God's), and work to achieve it by our *own* devices (not God's). We make *ourselves* God, and turn to whatever pleases us, as though this was our prerogative. And also like a heart attack, if the symptoms of sin (i.e., individual *sins*) are all that is addressed, the sinner will still face judgment.

E. The Nature of Repentance

1. *It Is a Turning*. If *sin*, at its root, is a *turning away*, it is obvious that repentance then is a *turning back*. The New Testament word for *repent* is μετανοέω (*metanoēō*), and it literally means a turning of the mind. It indicates that I turn my face back toward God and away from self and everything else. It involves the removal of the blockage *against the faces*.
2. *It Involves the Root of the Problem Rather than the Symptoms*. Often we think of repentance in terms of a *specific* sin symptom. If I have stolen something, for example, a repentance of this specific sin involves regret, reconciliation and restitution. But although there *is* a place for this kind of narrowly-focused repentance (especially in the life of a believer), it is not by itself the solution to the problem because, having failed to address the root disease, I still exhibit a great many other *symptoms* that will all have to be addressed individually. And now I am treating symptoms rather than the problem. I may look and feel better on the outside, but inside I am still sick. I may appear righteous on the outside, but inwardly I am self-righteous. I may look holy outwardly, but my soul is still facing judgment. The *repentance* necessary for salvation is one that looks at the life in total, as a whole, and the modus operandi of my entire existence, and recognizes the error of idolatry that I am perpetrating against the one and only God. Then, having recognized the error, it involves a turning of the mind and will. It is this kind of inward *turning* to which Jeremiah calls Judah (cf. *Jeremiah 4:1-4*; see also *18:11-12*; *Ezekiel 33:11*; *Joel 2:12-13*). And it was Judah's failure to heed that call that resulted in her judgment. The consequences of this failure are the impetus that moved Jeremiah to write the *Lamentations*.

II. THE LESSONS OF LAMENTATIONS

- A. *Sin Disrupts Fellowship with God*. One basic principle expressed most plainly through Jeremiah's laments is that sin creates a blockage in fellowship between God and people. Even Israel, uniquely chosen by God as His special people, experienced a loss of fellowship with their covenant God. This is almost self-evident. A *turning to* self and the world involves a *turning away from* God, allowing lesser "gods" to come *against the faces*. By definition, this breaks the intimate fellowship with God.
 1. *Lamentations 2:1* = Jeremiah here describes the change in relationship very clearly. The glory of Israel was heavenly in God's eyes, but He has now cast it to earth. Israel was His footstool, denoting intimacy and position...but now He has forgotten it.
 2. *Lamentations 5:3* = In one of the saddest statements of the text, Jeremiah says that the inhabitants of Judah have "become orphans without a father." The intimacy was gone, the relationship severed.

3. *James 4:4-10* = The same principle is described in the New Testament. But James says that, because of God's grace, we can restore the fellowship by humbling ourselves, drawing near, cleansing our hands and purifying our hearts.
- B. *Sin Invites God's Judgment.* Perhaps the most severe lesson of *Lamentations* is that sin brings judgment. The book repeatedly, and in various ways, describes the destruction and desolation brought on by Judah's sin. It is also completely unambiguous about the source of that destruction: it was God.
1. *Lamentations 2:8-9* = These verses, along with many, many others in the *Lamentations*, describe God's initiative in bringing judgment.
 2. *Galatians 6:7* = Paul says that people will harvest what they plant.
 3. *2 Peter 3:7* = Peter says that the world in which we now live is also being held in reserve for judgment. And yet, the Lord tarries. Why? Because He does not want *any* to perish (cf. 3:9).
- C. *Sin Destroys Human Relationships.* Another of Lamentation's lessons is that sin has a destructive effect on the relationships between people and nations.
1. *Lamentations 1:1* = The city was full of people. Now she is lonely. She was great among the nations. Now she is like a widow. She was a princess. Now she is a slave. This verse, and others like them, are very instructive. They all detail a change in status as a consequence of sin. But note that every illustration deals with a *relational* change. *Verse two* of the same chapter says that her lovers now will not comfort her. Her friends have become her enemies. Sin destroys relationships. It alters the way we relate to one another.
 2. *1 John 1:6-7* = Note that the apostle John gives us the solution to restoring these relationships. The essence of the solution involves a restoration of intimacy with God.
- D. *The Right Response to Sin is Grief and Repentance.* When the Word spoken by God shows us our sin in such a way that there is no denying and no defense, we become keenly aware of the prerogative of the offended God to judge us without mercy. The right response to this truth is fear, grief and humility. But when that same Word offers us His unmerited grace and reconciliation, the *only* right response is meekness, acceptance and repentance.
1. *Lamentations 2:18-19* = The intensity of the cry to be offered is emphasized. We are to give ourselves no rest, and no relief. We are to weep and pour out our hearts. This is no maudlin melody offered at the end of a cheap piece of badly-acted cinema. This is the desperate and genuine heart cry of one who knows that his sin has put him in a helpless place.
 2. *Lamentations 3:39-41* = Jeremiah encourages his readers to return to God. We have turned away, and faced a fitting judgment for it. Now we heed the call and turn back.
 3. *2 Corinthians 7:8-10* = The sorrow prompted by God in view of our sin produces REPENTANCE.
 4. *Luke 18:9-14* = The heart-cry of the tax collector was for *mercy*, because he recognized that his *sin* made him *unworthy* of it. And this man was justified.

III. THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

- A. *You Are a Sinner.* Like the Jews living in Jerusalem, you have *turned away* from God and sought your own way, effectively placing yourself on God's throne in your own heart. Your daily walk consists of making decisions based on *your* agenda and *your* inclinations. It does not consist of any consideration of God's will for your plans and methods (cf. *Romans 3:23*). You have thus allowed something to come *against the faces*.
- B. *Your Turning Away Has Invited God's Judgment.* Because you have willfully broken fellowship with God and turned to your own devices, you, like Judah, have invited God's judgment and destruction (cf. *Romans 6:23*). And like Judah, this threat of judgment is real, its fulfillment inevitable (cf. *Luke 13:1-9*).
- C. *God Has Satisfied His Justice Through Christ.* Christ who was without sin bore *our* sin and paid for it with His life. God's wrath was thus diverted, poured out on Christ so that we would not have to bear it (cf. *1 Peter 2:22-25*; *2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 20-21*).

D. *Acceptance of This Payment Requires Two Things.*

1. *Repentance.* Turn back. Return to God. Remove the blockage *against the faces*. Or put another way, you have been placing things between your face and God's. Now, place God's face back between you and the other things. It's a matter of reorganizing priorities in view of your guilt and God's mercy. It's a matter of sorrow over the offense you've perpetrated against God.
2. *Faith.* This word involves the ideas of believing and trusting. And this *faith* manifests itself as both a *crisis* and a *process*, a moment of decision and a lifetime of commitment.
 - a. *The Crisis.* This crisis comes at the moment of repentance. I have made a *turning* back to God. I have put Him back in His rightful place on the throne. And in that moment, I *trust* for the first time that Christ's substitution as a sacrifice for me was sufficient to guarantee my pardon. At the moment of confrontation with my sin, I trust in God's mercy and the means it has provided for my reconciliation, and I simultaneously *stop* trusting in my *own* way to accomplish that (cf. *Romans 1:16-17, 3:28; Ephesians 2:8-9*)
 - b. *The Process.* Then, having committed myself to trusting in His grace as sufficient, I now begin to live a life characterized by that trust. This is part and parcel of my repentance. I have turned from trusting my own way, and now I am trusting God's way for my life. Now, when I have decisions to make, I trust God's will and wisdom. Now, when I have a behavior to change, I trust God's standard to be right (cf. *Galatians 2:20*).

IV. THE MESSAGE OF LAMENTATIONS FOR BELIEVERS

- A. *Remember.* By reading *Lamentations*, we remember where we have come from and from what God has saved us. We recognize the destruction for which we were headed. It is simultaneously a book of sad and awful recollection, and joyful and awestruck recognition of restoration.
- B. *Reflect.* When we read *Lamentations*, we reflect on the horror of sin and its horrific consequences, both in our lives and in the lives of those involved with us.
- C. *Return.* *Lamentations* also is a great encouragement for us to willingly root out and forsake any sin that remains in our lives. When we see the reaction of God against sin, it inspires in us a desire for holiness borne of gratitude for salvation, reconciliation and restoration. It is a constant call to renewed repentance. It ignites a passion inside of us to allow nothing *against the faces*.

V. PRAYER

Nothing Between
Charles A. Tindley (1905)

*Nothing between my soul and my Savior,
Naught of this world's delusive dream.
I have renounced all sinful pleasure;
Jesus is mine, there's nothing between.*

Refrain

*Nothing between my soul and my Savior,
So that His blessed face may be seen.
Nothing preventing the least of His favor.
Keep the way clear! Let nothing between.*

*Nothing between, like worldly pleasure;
Habits of life, though harmless they seem.
My heart must not from Him ever sever.
He is my all, there's nothing between.*

Repeat Refrain

*Nothing between, like pride or like station.
My self or my friends will not intervene.
Though it will cost me much tribulation,
I am resolved! There's nothing between.*

Repeat Refrain

*Nothing between, even many hard trials.
Though the whole world against me convene,
Watching with prayer and much self-denial
I'll triumph at last! There's nothing between.*

Repeat Refrain

FALLEN ASTONISHINGLY

A Survey of Lamentations

Study #3

Lamentations and Ephesians (Selected Verses)

I. REVIEW/INTRODUCTION

- A. We have worked through a very short survey of Jeremiah's *Lamentations*, and have seen that there are several lessons to be learned from this short but intense book. For example, the book tells us of:
1. The consequences of sin;
 2. The call to repentance; and,
 3. The mercy of God in restoration.
- B. And I have repeatedly stated that we were approaching *Lamentations* in preparation for a detailed study of *Ephesians*. I promised that there were connections. Today, I want to examine those connections.

II. LAMENTATIONS AND EPHESIANS

A. The Contrast

1. *Cursed vs. Blessed*
 - a. *Deuteronomy 28:15-68* = As we noted a couple of weeks ago, this passage details the threat of cursing that would come upon Israel for disobedience and disloyalty to their covenant. Nine times in these 53 verses Moses uses the word "cursed." And we further noticed that the captivity described in Jeremiah, and mourned over in *Lamentations*, is the direct fulfillment of this prophetic passage in *Deuteronomy* (cf. *Jeremiah 11:3*). *Lamentations*, then, is a book about *cursing*.
 - b. *Ephesians 1:3* = *Ephesians*, on the other hand, is a book about *blessing*. The first paragraph of the body of the letter is really a great exposé on the incredible blessings we have in Christ. In that paragraph, there are at least six specific blessings described, that are ours because we are in Christ.
2. *Poor vs. Rich*
 - a. *Lamentations 4:1-10, 5:1-9* = *Lamentations* discusses at some length the *poorness* brought about in Judah as a result of sin.
 - b. *Ephesians 1:7* = *Ephesians*, on the other hand, makes repeated references to the *riches* we have as the church, in Christ (cf. 1:18, 2:4, 2:7, 3:8, 3:16).
3. *Law vs. Grace*
 - a. *Deuteronomy 27:26* = (cf. *28:15*) *Lamentations* gives us the fulfillment of what happens when people live their lives under the authority of the Law. The modern comparison would include legalistic religion and secular morality. The result of living according to these things is death and destruction.
 - b. *Ephesians 2:1-9* = *Ephesians*, on the other hand, describes the life that comes to us through grace (unmerited favor). The word "grace" is used twelve times in *Ephesians*. The simple truth is this: law = death, grace = life.
4. *In the Flesh vs. In Christ*
 - a. *Romans 6:20 – 7:6* = Paul here describes the contrast of being bound to the Law and being bound to Christ (especially *7:5-6*). Judah, under the Law, had no chance of ever keeping that Law. The flesh is incapable of adhering to any real system of spiritual purity (cf. *7:14, 18*). Even those who manage to keep an external morality find that the inside is rotten to the core. Paul here gives the problem...and the solution (*7:24-25a*).

- b. *Ephesians 1:1* = In contrast, the letter to Ephesus was written to those who are faithful *in Christ*. This phrase and its equivalents are used thirty times in *Ephesians*. The contrast is plain (cf. *Galatians 5:16-24*).
- B. The Parallel**
1. *Judah*
- a. *She Ignored Her Warning*
- i. *Jeremiah 25:1-11* = Here Jeremiah chastises the nation and tells them that because of repeated warnings, and Judah's repeated recalcitrance, judgment is impending.
- α. *Lamentations 1:9* = Jeremiah states very clearly that Judah lacked foresight. She did not consider her future. She thought the consequences for sin were far off into the future (cf. *Isaiah 39:1-8*, where King Hezekiah has the same response). Why was God so slow to bring that promised judgment? He was giving her time and opportunity to repent (cf. *Jeremiah 18:11; Ezekiel 33:11*).
- β. *2 Peter 3:1-10* = The same is true today. God is not slow. He is *patient*. But man does today what he did then. He interprets the *patience* of God as *impotence* (cf. *Psalms 50:21*).
- b. *Judgment Came*
- i. *2 Chronicles 36:15-21* = This passage tells not only what happened, but *why* it happened. Warnings that had been repeated out of compassion, Judah repeatedly ignored.
2. *The Ephesian Church*
- a. *She Ignored Her Warning*
- i. *Acts 20:32-35* = Before his arrest in Jerusalem, Paul addressed the Ephesian elders. He warned them against false teachers and their doctrines. He also warned them against the wanton worldliness and the pursuit of earthly riches that so plagued and characterized the city by which they were surrounded. This church was taught by Paul, by Timothy, by the Apostle John, and probably by the Apostle Peter for a short time as well.
- ii. *1 Timothy 1:3* = Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to set things in order. In that context, he instructed Timothy to refute the false doctrine that godliness is a means to financial gain (6:3-10).
- iii. *Revelation 2:1-7* = Even Christ Himself wrote a letter to Ephesus, commending them for good doctrine, but reproving them for having left their *first love*. Contextually, I think it is clear that what they left was the love of the *riches* they had in Christ; and they left that love because they were drawn and enticed by the love of earthly riches that existed in that wealthy, pagan city. Note the threat of Christ to remove that church from existence if it failed to heed the warning.
- b. *Judgment Came*
- i. Where is the Ephesian church today? In fact, where is the city in which it was located, a city that had been so wealthy and influential in that ancient world? It is not much of a stretch to apply *Lamentations 1:9* to Ephesus, and specifically to the church in that city. All that emphasis on good, sound doctrine profited them nothing, did it? Remember our study about *lonely knowledge* a few weeks ago?
- C. The Warnings**
1. *1 John 2:15-17* = The Apostle John, also writing to Ephesus and the surrounding region, told them (and us) not to be in love with the world, or its riches. Since *Ephesians* is a book about the *riches* we have in Christ, we have the opportunity to be inundated with that truth, and to fall in love all over again with what we have by His grace. And if we put all our stock in one, we will neglect the other. That can be a negative reality, or a positive one. Pursuing earthly wealth results in neglecting the pursuit of heavenly wealth. Conversely, pursuing heavenly wealth results in neglecting the pursuit of earthly wealth (cf. *Matthew 6:19-33; James 4:1-4*).

2. *James 1:19-27, 2:14-26* = Just as knowledge without wisdom is lonely, and the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is useless.

III. EXHORTATION

- A. *Hear the Warning.* Tonight you have heard the examples of Judah and Ephesus. You have heard the warnings.
- B. *Consider Your Future.* I want to encourage you to give thought to your future...you have probably already settled the matter of your eternal future, but consider your more immediate future. So you're going to heaven. Good. What will your path entail? Obedience, blessing and peace? Or will you be dragged to heaven kicking and screaming, as it were? Think about what your life looks like right now as you sit here. Are you living in active obedience and submission, putting into practice what you read and intake from the Word? If so, praise God! Keep going! But if not, then think about the consequences for that kind of living. Are they acceptable to you?
- C. *Be Single-Minded.* If you have tasted of Christ's goodness, why are you hesitating? Remember Elijah's words to Israel (cf. *1 Kings 18:20-21*). If you haven't already, start today. Put all the other aspects of your life in their place, so that you can put God in His. It is a matter of priority.
- D. *Heed the Message.* As we approach, starting next week, an in-depth study of *Ephesians*, commit yourself to learning and to applying what you learn. Be willing to be broken. Allow the Word to cut, to break, to sever, to divide...and then to heal.
 1. *Hosea 6:1-3* = Commit yourself to the process, and allow the Great Physician to do what He does best!

IV. PRAYER

There Is a Healing Branch That Grows

Text: *Albert Benjamin Simpson* (1843-1919)

Music: *Thomas Hastings* (1784-1872)

There is a healing branch that grows
Where every bitter Marah flows.
This is our health-renewing tree:
"I am the Lord that healeth thee."

There is an old appointed way
For those who hearken and obey.
Above the gate these words we see:
"I am the Lord that healeth thee."

There is an ordinance that has stood
Since Israel crossed the parted flood.
It stands today for you and me:
"I am the Lord that healeth thee."

There is a great Physician still
Whose hand has all its ancient skill.
At His command our sin will flee:
"I am the Lord that healeth thee."

FALLEN ASTONISHINGLY
A Survey of Lamentations

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