

LAMENTATIONS

I. Title: According to *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, “The rabbis call this little book *Ekhah* (‘how’), according to the word of lament with which it begins, or *qinoth*. On the basis of the latter term the *Septuagint* calls it *threnoi*, or Latin *Threni*, or Lamentations.”

II. Date: *Halley’s Handbook* suggests that the book was composed in the 3 months between the burning of Jerusalem and the departure of the remnant to Egypt, during the time the seat of government was at Mizpah.

III. Author: Although the authorship of Jeremiah has been questioned by theologians of the school of Higher Criticism, ancient Jewish tradition ascribes the book to Jeremiah. The Jewish historian Josephus confirms this. The *LXX* introduces the book with the prefix: “And it came to pass, after Israel was led into captivity and Jerusalem was laid waste, that Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented this lamentation over Jerusalem and said ...”

Halley’s Handbook also notes: “‘Jeremiah’s Grotto’ is the name of the place, just outside the north wall of Jerusalem, where tradition says, Jeremiah wept bitter tears and composed his sorrowful elegy. This grotto is under the knoll that is now called ‘Golgotha,’ the self-same hill on which the cross of Jesus stood. Thus the suffering prophet wept where later the suffering Savior died.” If the place mentioned is, what is presently called “Gordon’s Calvary” the cave where Jeremiah sat could be the place where Jesus’ body was laid to rest and where the resurrection took place. Matthew, however, states that Jesus was buried in a new tomb that had been cut out in a rock.¹ It is possible that the cave had been there but that it had never been remodeled into a sepulcher.

IV. Place in the canon: R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, writes about the place of Lamentations in the Jewish canon: “In the Hebrew canon the book came third in the five Megilloth or Rolls, which follow the three poetical compositions in the Hagiographa or third division of the canon. Lamentations was read customarily on the night of Ab, in mid-July, when the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple was commemorated. The *LXX* placed Lamentations after the prophecy of Jeremiah and the apocryphal book of Baruch, and this position was adopted by other versions including the *Vulgate*. In the Talmud, Lamentations followed the Song of Solomon in a rearranged order of the poetical books and the Megilloth.”

V. Style: *Halley’s Handbook* states about the style in which Lamentations is written: “The book consists of five poems, four of which are acrostic, that is, each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in alphabetic sequence. This was a favorite form of Hebrew poetry, adopted to help the memory. In chapters 1, 2, 4, there are 22 verses each, 1 verse to a letter. In ch 3 there were 3 verses to each letter, making 66 in all. Ch 5 has 22 verses but not in alphabetic order.”

Jeremiah’s lamentations over Jerusalem remind me of the majestic opening chorus of Bach’s *St. Matthew’s Passion*, in which two antiphonal choirs and a single-voiced boys’ choir lament, in the voice of the daughters of Zion, the suffering and death of Jesus.

VI. The theology of Lamentations: R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, devotes a rather lengthy section to the theology of Jeremiah’s poems, of which we copy the following: “Like all truly inspired poetry, the imagery of the Hebrew lays hold on eternal values and brings them in all their splendor to the notice of mankind. The book of Lamentations is no exception to this, despite the rather obvious fact that its harmonies are written consistently in a minor key. Divine sovereignty, justice, morality, judgment and the hope of blessing in the distant future, are themes which emerge in solemn grandeur from the cadences of Lamentations. The composition is in many respects *sui generis*,² and it is perhaps this general divergence from all other Old Testament books which has prompted the view that Lamentations has little if any theological content. However, if the book of Job describes calamity and its outcome in the area of personal life, Lamentations can be said to deal with the problem of suffering at the national level, treating as it does the supreme crisis which saw the end of community life as previously experienced in Judah.

¹ Matt. 27:60

² Its own nature, unique

This latter theme is paramount in all the poems, even though each chapter can be regarded as a complete and self-contained composition. There appear to be times when the author finds it virtually impossible to believe that the promised catastrophe has at last occurred. Yet the ruined city bears mute testimony to this tragic event, and hence it falls to the author to determine as satisfactorily as he can the real meaning which underlies this dramatic reversal of the fortunes of earlier days.

In the light of Jeremiah's teachings, the reasons for the collapse of Judah are not hard to find. The author knows full well that the people of Judah had long been apostate, and that, even more seriously, they had consistently ignored the hard lessons taught by the captivity of the northern kingdom for a similar repudiation of covenantal obligations. Now that a like fate had overtaken Judah, everyone was suddenly acutely aware of the serious penalties which a righteous and holy God attached to sin.

In a real sense the poems present a vindication of divine righteousness in the light of the covenant relationship, and like the book of Job they show that God, not man, is the central figure in the drama of history. As the poems of Lamentations unfold, they make it clear that the real tragedy inherent in the destruction of Judah lies in the fact that it could almost certainly have been avoided. The actual causes of the calamity were the people themselves, who were determined at all costs to pursue the allurements of a false and debased paganism in preference to the high moral and ethical ideals inherent in the Sinai covenant.

The irony of it all lay in the fact that over the generations they had been warned time and again by various servants of God that continued indulgence in this immoral way of life would result in drastic punishment, warnings which, in the event, went unheeded. Whereas the book of Job is a theodicy which attempts to explain and justify the ways of God with men, Lamentations consists of a sad commentary on the outworking of the prophetic conviction that those who sow the wind will reap the whirlwind. The ashes of devastated Jerusalem thus testify at once to the demonstration and the vindication of divine righteousness (1:18).

The recognition of national sin as the real cause of destruction brought with it a pressing consciousness of guilt (1:18; 2:14; 3:40, *etc.*), and this in turn impels the author to make full confession of sin on behalf of the apostate people and their leaders as the first step towards claiming divine forgiveness and restoration. Even though it had been long prophesied, the severity of the blow which finally fell on Judah seems to have taken the author somewhat by surprise, and in the second poem he remonstrates with God and reproves Him for such drastic action. At the same time, however, he recognizes that divine justice is a complement to divine righteousness, and laments the grave folly of a covenanted people being so willful and indifferent as to have lived for so long in evident unawareness of that fact.

As with Jeremiah, the author sees a ray of hope permeating even the darkest cloud. Although Judah has been desolated, her plight is not absolutely beyond any expectation of restoration and renewal. Nevertheless, the nature and content of the poems are such that it is difficult to state this explicitly, though the author can always cling to the assurance that God always keeps His covenantal undertakings (La. 3:19–39). In such an internally-consistent and reliable deity it is possible to place one's trust, and in complete resignation to His sovereign will to pray that He may yet again look favorably upon His apostate people and restore them to a measure of their former greatness. Like the author of Job, the writer of Lamentations recognizes that a positive reaction to an experience of suffering is a necessary prerequisite to spiritual maturity. This awareness furnishes the basis for his expectation that, in the goodness of God, the experience of tribulation will be followed by a time of restoration and blessing (La. 3:25–30) for a truly penitent people. Such a prospect was a firm part of the covenantal relationship (*cf.* Dt. 30:1ff.), for God will not reject His covenant people completely, as Paul pointed out (Rom. 11:1ff.).

The reader should be cautioned against any attempt to discover logical doctrinal coherence or a development in theological insight between one poem and the next. While the separate poems manifest a degree of external structural control, the flow of the thought is not by any means as rigorously directed, and in fact is apt to move rather haphazardly as befits the spontaneous outpourings of a grief-stricken spirit. Yet the theological sentiments adumbrated in the poems are timeless in nature, and if the book was not actually used in some manner by the exiles in Babylonia as a means of commemorating the fall of Jerusalem (*cf.* Je. 41:14f.; Ze. 7:3), there is little doubt that it would form much the most suitable means of conveying a sense of national contrition and a reliance on the future mercies of God."

In the light of New Testament revelation there is a theological significance in Lamentations of which Jeremiah and his contemporaries cannot have had any notion. The destruction of the city and particularly of the temple can be construed as the end of God's revelation of Himself on earth. Although there is no record of the demolition of the Ark of the Covenant, its disappearance meant that the presence

of God was no longer visible on earth. It was about the cover of the ark, “the mercy seat,” that God had said: “There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.”³ The fact that that place was no longer to be found meant, in a way, the death of God on earth. The whole New Testament testifies to the fact that God did die on earth, that the death of Christ who is the embodiment of atonement is foreshadowed in the destruction of the temple and of the city of Jerusalem. As a matter of fact, in the verse in Romans that reads: “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood,”⁴ the Apostle Paul uses the Greek word *hilasterion*, rendered “sacrifice of atonement.” It is the same word the *LXX* uses in Exodus for “mercy seat.”

VII. Outline:

For the analysis of the text, we use the outline provided by R. K. Harrison in his book *Jeremiah & Lamentations*.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------|---------|
| I. FIRST DIRGE | 1:1–22 | |
| a. Jerusalem destroyed | | 1:1–7 |
| b. Destruction follows sin | | 1:8–11 |
| c. A plea for mercy | | 1:12–22 |
| II. SECOND DIRGE | 2:1–22 | |
| a. God’s hostility towards His people | | 2:1–9 |
| b. Sufferings consequent upon famine | | 2:10–13 |
| c. True and false prophets | | 2:14–17 |
| d. A tearful prayer to God | | 2:18–22 |
| III. THIRD DIRGE | 3:1–66 | |
| a. The lament of the afflicted | | 3:1–21 |
| b. Divine mercies recalled | | 3:22–39 |
| c. A call for spiritual renewal | | 3:40–42 |
| d. The consequences of sin | | 3:43–54 |
| e. Comfort and imprecation | | 3:55–66 |
| IV. FOURTH DIRGE | 4:1–22 | |
| a. Earlier days recalled | | 4:1–12 |
| b. Sin and its results | | 4:13–20 |
| c. Punishment promised for Edom | | 4:21–22 |
| V. FIFTH DIRGE | 5:1–22 | |
| a. A plea for mercy | | 5:1–10 |
| b. The nature of sin | | 5:11–18 |
| c. A plea for divine restoration | | 5:19–22 |

VIII. THE TEXT:

- | | | |
|------------------------|--------|-------|
| I. FIRST DIRGE | 1:1–22 | |
| a. Jerusalem destroyed | | 1:1–7 |

1 How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave.

2 Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are upon her cheeks. Among all her lovers there is none to comfort her. All her friends have betrayed her; they have become her enemies.

3 After affliction and harsh labor, Judah has gone into exile. She dwells among the nations; she finds no resting place. All who pursue her have overtaken her in the midst of her distress.

³ Ex. 25:22

⁴ Rom. 3:25

4 The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to her appointed feasts. All her gateways are desolate, her priests groan, her maidens grieve, and she is in bitter anguish.

5 Her foes have become her masters; her enemies are at ease. The Lord has brought her grief because of her many sins. Her children have gone into exile, captive before the foe.

6 All the splendor has departed from the Daughter of Zion. Her princes are like deer that find no pasture; in weakness they have fled before the pursuer.

7 In the days of her affliction and wandering Jerusalem remembers all the treasures that were hers in days of old. When her people fell into enemy hands, there was no one to help her. Her enemies looked at her and laughed at her destruction.

As *The Pulpit Commentary* reminds us, the language used by Jeremiah resembles Isaiah's in his prophecy about the fall of Babylon. There we read: "Go down, sit in the dust, Virgin Daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, Daughter of the Babylonians. No more will you be called tender or delicate. Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.'"⁵

The poem opens with the Hebrew word *'eyk*, meaning "how," which is typical for the beginning of a lament. The same word opens chapters two and four. David used it in his dirge over the death of Jonathan: "How the mighty have fallen in battle! Jonathan lies slain on your heights."⁶

Jeremiah describes Jerusalem as "a widow." The Hebrew word *'almanah* is generally rendered "widow," but on two occasions it refers to "strongholds" as in the verses "Hyenas will howl in her strongholds, jackals in her luxurious palaces. Her time is at hand, and her days will not be prolonged,"⁷ and "He broke down their strongholds and devastated their towns. The land and all who were in it were terrified by his roaring." In both instances *The King James Version* renders the word "desolate houses." In the fall of Jerusalem, both meanings of the word express the stark reality in a powerful way. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: "The coin struck on the taking of Jerusalem by Titus, representing Judea as a female sitting solitary under a palm tree, with the inscription, 'Judaea capta,' singularly corresponds to the image here; the language therefore must be prophetic of her state subsequent to Titus, as well as referring retrospectively to her Babylonian captivity."

The striking feature in Jeremiah's use of the image of the widow is that, although the ruins of the city and the temple speak of death, the widow is alive; it is her husband that died. *The Pulpit Commentary* warns: "We are not to press the phrase, 'a widow,' as if some earthly or heavenly husband were alluded to; it is a kind of symbol of desolation and misery." But how else can we interpret the image? After all, the destruction of the temple stands for the death of God on earth.

The Apostle Paul uses the same image in Romans, although reversing the application. We read: "Do you not know, brothers — for I am speaking to men who know the law — that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man. So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."⁸ In Paul's picture, according to the law, the widow is free to remarry after the death of her husband. But it is the widow who dies and then becomes the bride of Christ.

The glory of Jerusalem, the city that was the queen of the Middle East, has disappeared. She who once wore a crown is not a slave girl. A Dutch seventeenth-century poet describes the city of Amsterdam as sitting between the two rivers that flow through her, wearing like an empress the crown of Europe. Such, and even more, was Jerusalem when she wore the crown of glory of the presence of the Lord.

⁵ Isa. 47:1,8

⁶ II Sam. 1:25

⁷ Ezek. 19:7

⁸ Rom. 7:1-6

V.2 depicts the city weeping at night, unable to sleep, without any “lovers” to comfort her. The Hebrew word used is *‘ahab*, which means “to have affection.” Jeremiah used the word several times, sometimes referring to Judah’s idolatry and sometimes to her political affiliations. We find it in the verse: “Do not run until your feet are bare and your throat is dry. But you said, ‘It’s no use! *I love* foreign gods, and I must go after them.’”⁹ And also in: “Go up to Lebanon and cry out, let your voice be heard in Bashan, cry out from Abarim, for all *your allies* are crushed.”¹⁰ In the present context, it probably alludes more to the idols than to the allies. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, believes that the expression refers to political allies. We read: “The phrase *her lovers* was used by Jeremiah (*cf.* 22:20) for such nations as Egypt, the Transjordanian peoples, Tyre, and Sidon, with whom Judah had tried to ally against Babylonia. These friends had failed Jerusalem miserably in her hour of dire need, and some of them had actually behaved so treacherously as to contribute to her ruin by deliberately helping the Babylonians to plunder her.” Yet, Judah’s former allies, in turn, fell also victim to Babylon’s imperial aspirations.

If Judah’s tears are for her idols, she is not sorrowing about her sin of idolatry. Idols and demons provide no comfort in human suffering; only God promises to wipe away every tear.¹¹ Even if Judah’s tears were for the betrayal by her former allies, they were not tears of repentance. The Psalmist had expressed this earlier, saying: “Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them — the Lord, who remains faithful forever. He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.”¹²

In v.4 the roads to Zion are personified bemoaning the absence of pilgrims going up to Jerusalem. In days gone by, the Son of Korah had sung: “Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.”¹³ In this picture, Judah’s grief moves closer to the heart of the matter. When the Pharisees berated Jesus for accepting the people’s praise Jesus answered: “I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”¹⁴ Here the stones do cry out where the human voice is numbed with grief.

The mention of the priests and the maidens is a reference to the feasts that used to draw the pilgrims to Jerusalem. The Hebrew words used are *kohen* and *bethuwlah*, usually rendered “priest” and “virgin.” *Kohen* literally means “one officiating,” and *bethuwlah* can mean “a bride,” or also “a city.” The role the priests played in the celebration of the prescribed feasts is obvious. The maidens participated in the music, playing the tambourines. This is expressed in the Psalm that states: “Your procession has come into view, O God, the procession of my God and King into the sanctuary. In front are the singers, after them the musicians; with them are the maidens playing tambourines.”¹⁵

The eight feasts mentioned in Leviticus were: the Sabbath, Passover, the feast of unleavened bread, the presentation of the first fruit, Pentecost (the harvest feast), the Day of Atonement, and the feast of tabernacles.¹⁶ With the exception of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, all the celebrations were festive. The destruction of the temple meant the cessation of all these celebrations.

Vv.5 and 6 take a slightly different tone from the emotional outburst of the first four verses. For the first time the matter of Jerusalem’s sin is brought into focus. The Hebrew text reads: “The YHWH has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions.” Sin leads into slavery, as Jesus says: “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”¹⁷ The Greek text of that verse reads literally: “Amen, amen, I say unto you, whosoever commits sin is the slave of sin.” This kind of slavery does not only mean that the person who commits sin becomes the slave of his sinful acts, but also that Satan, the inventor of sin,

⁹ Jer. 2:25

¹⁰ Jer. 22:20

¹¹ Rev. 7:7; 21:4

¹² Ps. 146:3-9

¹³ Ps. 84:5-7

¹⁴ Luke 19:40

¹⁵ Ps. 68:24,25

¹⁶ See Lev. 23.

¹⁷ John 8:34

becomes the master of his life. And where the devil occupies the place of authority, total ruin is unavoidable.

The New International Version reads in v.5 – “The Lord has brought her grief because of her many sins.” The Hebrew word for “grief” is *yagah*, which can be used as a verb or a noun. Jeremiah uses that word five times in Lamentations, three times in this chapter and twice in chapter three. Isaiah uses it once in the sense of “tormentor” in the verse: “I will put it into the hands of your *tormentors*, who said to you, ‘Fall prostrate that we may walk over you.’ And you made your back like the ground, like a street to be walked over.”¹⁸ Zephaniah is the only prophet who uses it in a positive context, saying: “The *sorrows* for the appointed feasts I will remove from you; they are a burden and a reproach to you.”¹⁹

Grief or sorrow is a double-edged sword, depending on how we handle it. In the words of the Apostle Paul: “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”²⁰ If grief leads to repentance, as it did for Daniel, then it is God’s grief, that is “good grief.” It was Daniel’s prayer of confession that opened the way for the Israelites to return to the Promised Land. He prayed: “O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame — the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. O Lord, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have sinned against you. The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him; we have not obeyed the Lord our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets. All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you.”²¹

Verse 6 returns to the cry of the first verses. On this verse *Barnes’ Notes* comments: “Jeremiah had before his mind the sad flight of Zedekiah and his men of war, and their capture within a few miles of Jerusalem (Jer 39:4-5).” The splendor of the daughter of Zion was, however, not the presence of the royal family, but the glory of the Lord that had left the temple.

The image of the fleeing deer reminds us of the beautiful picture of the psalm the sons of Korah wrote: “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” and the part that forms its twin: “Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.”²² The psalmist saw himself as the deer fleeing toward the place of God’s presence; here the deer flees from the presence of the Lord.

The last part of v.7 reads literally in Hebrew: “and the adversaries did mock her at her Sabbaths.” *The New International Version* reads this as: “Her enemies looked at her and laughed at her destruction.” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states: “The Jews were despised by the heathen for keeping the Sabbath. Augustine represents Seneca as doing the same: ... ‘That they lost the seventh part of their life in keeping their Sabbaths; and injured themselves by abstaining from the performance of many necessary things in such times.’ He did not consider that the Roman calendar and customs gave them many more idle days than God had prescribed in Sabbaths to the Jews. The Sabbath is a most wise and beneficent ordinance.” R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments: “The reference to gloating is to nations such as Ammon, Moab and Edom, who were traditional enemies of the Israelites (*cf.* Ob. 12).”

The Pulpit Commentary, however, suggests that “at her Sabbaths” should read rather, *at her extinguishment*, stating: “The word has nothing to do with the sabbaths; indeed, a reference to these would have been rather misplaced; it was no subject of wonder to the Babylonians that the Jews celebrated a weekly day of rest, as they had one of their own.”

¹⁸ Isa. 51:23

¹⁹ Zeph. 3:18

²⁰ II Cor. 7:10

²¹ Dan. 9:4-11

²² Ps. 42:1,2; 43:3,4

b. Destruction follows sin 1:8-11

8 Jerusalem has sinned greatly and so has become unclean. All who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness; she herself groans and turns away.

9 Her filthiness clung to her skirts; she did not consider her future. Her fall was astounding; there was none to comfort her. "Look, O Lord, on my affliction, for the enemy has triumphed."

10 The enemy laid hands on all her treasures; she saw pagan nations enter her sanctuary — those you had forbidden to enter your assembly.

11 All her people groan as they search for bread; they barter their treasures for food to keep themselves alive. "Look, O Lord, and consider, for I am despised."

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on this section: "The theme of Jerusalem's sin, introduced in verse 5, is now examined more closely, and ultimately becomes one of the major theological emphases of the book. Continuing the image of a woman, the writer asserts that her former suitors have rejected her because she has become defiled through indulgence in sin. The nakedness of many EVV is surrogate for 'ill repute.' The proud female has become a fallen woman through participating in the demoralizing rites of Baal worship. She groans and turns away because she is now shunned by her erstwhile admirers."

These verses show traces of conviction of sin in the heart of those who have been led into captivity. The Judeans may have been proud of their city and temple, but they have come to the conclusion that there remains nothing to be proud of. There is irony in the fact that Jerusalem's nakedness becomes the focus of embarrassment. The Baal rites were accompanied by sexual perversion. That is now exhibited in all its repulsion. Her "filthiness" is the rendering of the Hebrew word *tum'ah*, which is also the word used for the religious defilement caused by leprosy.²³

The shame of nakedness is mentioned in connection with the first human sin. After Eve and Adam ate the forbidden fruit, we read: "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves."²⁴ God replaced their fig leaves with clothing made of animal skin. Here this covering of mercy is removed. And where there is shame there is fear.

The prayer in the latter part of v.9 is the first sign of hope in this chapter. Adam and Eve hid from the Lord because they were naked. Jerusalem turns to the Lord in her nakedness. The death of the animal that allowed its skin to be used as clothing foreshadowed God's solution to human sin in the death of Jesus Christ. That is the only hope mankind has in its sinfulness.

V.10 denotes the robbing of the temple treasures by Nebuchadnezzar. We read in Second Chronicles: "He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the Lord's temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there."²⁵

Asaph had prophesied in two of his psalms that this would happen. "Your foes roared in the place where you met with us; they set up their standards as signs. They behaved like men wielding axes to cut through a thicket of trees. They smashed all the carved paneling with their axes and hatchets. They burned your sanctuary to the ground; they defiled the dwelling place of your Name. They said in their hearts, 'We will crush them completely!' They burned every place where God was worshiped in the land."²⁶ And: "O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple, they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble. They have given the dead bodies of your servants as food to the birds of the air, the flesh of your saints to the beasts of the earth. They have poured out blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there is no one to bury the dead. We are objects of reproach to our neighbors, of scorn and derision to those around us."²⁷

²³ Lev. 14:19

²⁴ Gen. 3:7

²⁵ II Chron. 36:18,19

²⁶ Ps. 74:4-8

²⁷ Ps. 79:1-4

The Pulpit Commentary states: “In ... Deuteronomy 23:3 only the Ammonites and Moabites are excluded from religious privileges; but in ... Ezekiel 44:9 the prohibition is extended to all foreigners.” *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “Even a Jew might not enter the innermost sanctuary, which was for the priests only; but now the tramp of pagan soldiery has been heard within its sacred precincts.”

V.11 describes the condition of those who were left behind. We read about them: “Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard carried into exile the people who remained in the city, along with the rest of the populace and those who had gone over to the king of Babylon. But the commander left behind some of the poorest people of the land to work the vineyards and fields.”²⁸ They cannot have had too many treasures to bargain with. Since Jeremiah was among them, the words “Look, O Lord, and consider, for I am despised” are probably his.

c. A plea for mercy 1:12-22

12 *"Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see. Is any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me, that the Lord brought on me in the day of his fierce anger?"*

13 *"From on high he sent fire, sent it down into my bones. He spread a net for my feet and turned me back. He made me desolate, faint all the day long.*

14 *"My sins have been bound into a yoke; by his hands they were woven together. They have come upon my neck and the Lord has sapped my strength. He has handed me over to those I cannot withstand.*

15 *"The Lord has rejected all the warriors in my midst; he has summoned an army against me to crush my young men. In his winepress the Lord has trampled the Virgin Daughter of Judah.*

16 *"This is why I weep and my eyes overflow with tears. No one is near to comfort me, no one to restore my spirit. My children are destitute because the enemy has prevailed."*

17 *Zion stretches out her hands, but there is no one to comfort her. The Lord has decreed for Jacob that his neighbors become his foes; Jerusalem has become an unclean thing among them.*

18 *"The Lord is righteous, yet I rebelled against his command. Listen, all you peoples; look upon my suffering. My young men and maidens have gone into exile.*

19 *"I called to my allies but they betrayed me. My priests and my elders perished in the city while they searched for food to keep themselves alive.*

20 *"See, O Lord, how distressed I am! I am in torment within, and in my heart I am disturbed, for I have been most rebellious. Outside, the sword bereaves; inside, there is only death.*

21 *"People have heard my groaning, but there is no one to comfort me. All my enemies have heard of my distress; they rejoice at what you have done. May you bring the day you have announced so they may become like me.*

22 *"Let all their wickedness come before you; deal with them as you have dealt with me because of all my sins. My groans are many and my heart is faint."*

The Hebrew of v.12 reads literally: “[Is it] nothing to you all you that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord has afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.” There are some problems in the Hebrew that make this difficult to translate. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments: “Verse 12 has become a classic expression of grief as traditionally translated. There is some question as to how MT is to be construed, however. The first two words *low ’leekem* mean literally ‘not to you,’ and if interpreted interrogatively, as in EVV, have the sense of ‘does this not affect you at all?’ This then refers to the agony of Jerusalem’s recent experiences and the lesson which the careful observer can learn there from. If interpreted as a wish, however, the verse would begin, ‘May it never happen to you,’ which seems to be closer to the sense of the original situation than traditional renderings.”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary states: “The pathetic appeal of Jerusalem, not only to her neighbors, but even to the strangers ‘passing by,’ as her sorrow is such as should excite the compassion even of those unconnected with her. She here prefigures Christ, whom the language is prophetically made to suit, more than Jerusalem. Compare the use of the name ‘Israel’ for Messiah, Isa 49:3.” The reference in Isaiah reads: “He said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.’”

²⁸ II Kings 25:11,12

A legitimate application of this suffering to the agony of Christ on the cross, as is done in Handel's *Messiah*, makes these words into a prophetic utterance.

As applied to the suffering of Christ on the cross, it sends us also a strong message of hope. Because Jesus took upon Himself the brunt of the fierce anger of God, we will not pass through any experience that would come close to this. As Jesus said: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."²⁹ The opening words of the verse then also apply to us, asking if we could pass by this scene without being profoundly affected by it.

V.13 mentions three images that describe the suffering: fire, a net and faintness. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on this: "By employing the figure of fire, a snare and faintness, the author gives graphic expression to all the horrors of siege which have overtaken Jerusalem. The fire burns into the inner recesses of the city, the net prevents anyone from escaping, and the idea of faintness completes the picture of a demoralized community." Applied to the sufferings of Christ, the fire is the fierce anger of God upon the sins of the world that Jesus carried in His body on the cross. It burned in His bones in both physical and emotional pain to the point where He cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"³⁰ The faintness is evident in what Jesus said to His disciples in Gethsemane: "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death."³¹

The Hebrew of v.14 reads literally: "The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand: they are wreathed and come up upon my neck: he has made my strength to fall, the Lord has delivered me into their hands, from whom I am not able to rise up." "Wreathed" is the translation of the Hebrew word *sarag*, meaning "to entwine." The only other place in Scripture where the word is used is in Job's description of the behemoth: "His tail sways like a cedar; the sinews of his thighs are close-knit."³² A footnote in *The New International Version* gives the alternate reading of the phrase: "*Septuagint*: He kept watch over my sins."

The way the image represents the burden of sin is powerful. No better picture of the enslavement of sin can be imagined. When Jesus died on the cross, God gathered the sins of the world as accumulated over the centuries of world history past and to come, and laid them as a yoke or as a crown of thorns upon His Son. So the Lamb of God carried away the sin of the world. All this is beautifully expressed in Jesus' invitation to exchange our yoke for His: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."³³

V.15 continues the description of Jerusalem's defeat. Judah's army was no match for the Babylonian troops, because the Lord had withdrawn His protection from the city. Jeremiah depicts the defeat of the army as the crushing of grapes in the winepress; a familiar image of the wrath of God. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments on the last line: "Wine for the feast of Judah's foes is the blood of her men of valor trodden out in the wine press of affliction. Hence Judah weeps, uncomfited and unrevived, for her perishing children over whom her enemies have prevailed."

V.16 takes up the theme of v.2, where Jerusalem sits on the ground as a widow, weeping over the loss of her loved ones. Jerusalem needs help in lifting the curse that brought about her dismal condition.

The Hebrew word for "comfort" in this text is *nacham*, which literally means "to sigh," by implication, "to be sorry." The first time the word occurs is in the verse: "He named him Noah and said, 'He will *comfort* us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed.'³⁴ We also find it in: "He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should *change his mind*."³⁵ And Jeremiah uses it in the sense of repenting in the verse: "After I strayed, *I repented*; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth."³⁶ The New Testament equivalent is in the Greek word *parakletos*: intercessor, consoler, which is the title Jesus gives to the Holy Spirit. The word stands for a legal aid who is called to the side of an accused to plead his case in court. The term is exclusively used by the Apostle John, mostly

²⁹ John 5:24

³⁰ Matt. 27:46

³¹ Matt. 26:38

³² Job 40:17

³³ Matt. 11:28-30

³⁴ Gen. 5:29

³⁵ I Sam. 15:29

³⁶ Jer. 31:19

in reference to the Holy Spirit. In one instance the word is applied to Christ, as in the verse: “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have *one who speaks* to the Father *in our defense* — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.”³⁷ The comfort contained in the word *nacham* will only come if there is a change of mind and a conviction of sin. It is the Holy Spirit’s ministry to convict, as Jesus says: “When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.”³⁸

There is another sense in which the word *nacham* applies to the Holy Spirit and His ministry. The Apostle Paul must have had the Hebrew meaning of the word in mind when he wrote: “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”³⁹

Vv.17-22 describe the inner turmoil in the heart of widowed Jerusalem. She looked for sympathy and help from human sources who let her down completely and even rejoiced in her defeat, taking advantage of it. This leads to the conviction that her trouble is rebellion against the Lord’s command. This realization ought eventually to lead to the healing the people, the city and the land need.

The Hebrew text of v.19 reads literally: “I called for my lovers, but they deceived me: my priests and my elders gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls.” The Hebrew word *‘ahab* means “to have affection.” Jeremiah used the word in the context of Judah’s idolatry, as in the verse: “They will be exposed to the sun and the moon and all the stars of the heavens, which *they have loved* and served and which they have followed and consulted and worshiped. They will not be gathered up or buried, but will be like refuse lying on the ground.”⁴⁰ We also find it in the opening verses of this chapter: “Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are upon her cheeks. Among all her *lovers* there is none to comfort her. All her friends have betrayed her; they have become her enemies.”⁴¹

The ally that betrayed Judah here at the critical moment is Egypt, which thought it wiser not to interfere in the siege Nebuchadnezzar had laid around the city of Jerusalem.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on v.20: “The turmoil of acute emotional disturbance was described by *mē`eh* (‘bowels,’ ‘intestines,’ ‘belly’), which the Semites regarded as the seat of emotions, and *lēb* (‘heart’), which the Semites regarded as the seat of intelligence, will and purpose. After enduring the punishments of siege and destruction, Jerusalem has apparently realized that a radically new approach to life is required, since the rebellion of former days has brought upon her a curse rather than a blessing. The prodigal daughter is finally coming to her senses. At the end of verse 20 the MT could be understood as implying that death in the house was the result of the sword. However, the Hebrew *māweq* can also mean ‘plague,’ ‘pestilence,’ as in Jeremiah 15:2; 18:21. Hence the plague has accomplished indoors what the sword has achieved in the streets. It must have been a matter of some gratification to the enemies of the Israelites (21) to know that God, who in earlier days had wrought such havoc on the foes of the Chosen People, had now recoiled in punitive wrath upon His own.”

Having turned to the Lord for consolation in v.20, Jerusalem now turns to her former human allies to receive what God has withheld, only to find that these rejoiced in Judah’s misfortune. This makes the widow plead with the Lord for revenge upon those who find sadistic satisfaction in her suffering. Jeremiah had prophesied already that God would repay Babylon. We read: “‘Before your eyes I will repay Babylon and all who live in Babylonia for all the wrong they have done in Zion,’ declares the Lord.”⁴² This gives Jerusalem hope that Edom, Moab and the others will not escape in the day of God’s visitation.

Part of the pain of Jerusalem’s suffering was in the fact that she had been singled out by God for punishment. Yet, her sins had not been different from the sins of the nations surrounding her. In the complaint in the last two verses of this chapter there is a note of questioning about God’s righteousness. She had allowed herself to be conformed to the world around her. The sins she had adopted were the sins of those among whom she had lived. Why would this make her guiltier than the others? Was God righteous in zooming in on her and let the others get off the hook? Her prayer for vengeance is a prayer for equalization. It would make Jerusalem feel better if she knew that her enemies would suffer the same fate she was undergoing.

³⁷ 1 John 2:1

³⁸ John 16:8

³⁹ Rom. 8:26

⁴⁰ Jer. 8:2

⁴¹ Lam. 1:2

⁴² Jer. 51:24

We could see these words as an imprecation. The basic flaw in Jerusalem's complaint is the questioning of God's righteousness. When Abraham, while interceding for Sodom, said to God: "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"⁴³ he did not question God's righteousness; he merely tried to understand it. But Jerusalem does question God's righteousness. If all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, why would some be punished more severely? When Aaron's sons died while bringing unauthorized fire into the sanctuary, Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke of when he said: 'Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored.'"⁴⁴ There is a special punishment for the sins of those who are closer to God. Israel and Judah had been called out of the world and its pollution. Their return to the sins of the world was a graver issue than the sins of those who were born and raised in an environment of iniquity. Jerusalem paid the price for being the vehicle of God's revelation in this world and turning to the world for her satisfaction.

II. SECOND DIRGE 2:1–22

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states: "This lament describes in considerably greater detail the nature of the calamity which has descended upon the southern kingdom. Its vividness and vitality bear the obvious marks of an eye-witness.

a. God's hostility towards His people 2:1–9

1 How the Lord has covered the Daughter of Zion with the cloud of his anger! He has hurled down the splendor of Israel from heaven to earth; he has not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger.

2 Without pity the Lord has swallowed up all the dwellings of Jacob; in his wrath he has torn down the strongholds of the Daughter of Judah. He has brought her kingdom and its princes down to the ground in dishonor.

3 In fierce anger he has cut off every horn of Israel. He has withdrawn his right hand at the approach of the enemy. He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire that consumes everything around it.

4 Like an enemy he has strung his bow; his right hand is ready. Like a foe he has slain all who were pleasing to the eye; he has poured out his wrath like fire on the tent of the Daughter of Zion.

5 The Lord is like an enemy; he has swallowed up Israel. He has swallowed up all her palaces and destroyed her strongholds. He has multiplied mourning and lamentation for the Daughter of Judah.

6 He has laid waste his dwelling like a garden; he has destroyed his place of meeting. The Lord has made Zion forget her appointed feasts and her Sabbaths; in his fierce anger he has spurned both king and priest.

7 The Lord has rejected his altar and abandoned his sanctuary. He has handed over to the enemy the walls of her palaces; they have raised a shout in the house of the Lord as on the day of an appointed feast.

8 The Lord determined to tear down the wall around the Daughter of Zion. He stretched out a measuring line and did not withhold his hand from destroying. He made ramparts and walls lament; together they wasted away.

9 Her gates have sunk into the ground; their bars he has broken and destroyed. Her king and her princes are exiled among the nations, the law is no more, and her prophets no longer find visions from the Lord.

This lament opens with the same Hebrew word *'eyk*, "how" as the previous one. The Hebrew text of the opening verse reads literally: "How has the Lord in His anger covered with a cloud the daughter of Zion." "Covered with a cloud" is one word in Hebrew: *'uwb*, meaning "to be dense or dark." This is the only place in Scripture where this word is found. *The New International Version*, in a footnote, gives an alternate reading: "How the Lord in his anger has treated the Daughter of Zion with contempt."

In the exodus of Israel from Egypt and during her desert crossing, God revealed His presence with "a pillar of cloud." We read: "By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither

⁴³ Gen. 18:25

⁴⁴ Lev. 10:3

the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.”⁴⁵ The cloud of protection has become the cloud of God’s anger. As the presence of the Lord is joy and glory for those who love and obey Him, so God’s presence is terrifying to those who hate Him. The author of Hebrews states: “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’”⁴⁶ God’s consuming fire becomes terror for sinners, as John described in Revelation: “Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’”⁴⁷

There is no hint of awareness and confession of sin in these verses. The theme is that God has killed the one He loved as in Oscar Wilde’s *The Ballad of Reading Goal*.

Israel’s splendor was not merely earthly luster; it had its origin in heaven. We read: “He has hurled down the splendor of Israel from heaven to earth. The Hebrew word used is *shalak*, which means “to throw out.” Isaiah used the word about the fall of Lucifer: “All the kings of the nations lie in state, each in his own tomb. But you are *cast out* of your tomb like a rejected branch; you are covered with the slain, with those pierced by the sword, those who descend to the stones of the pit.”⁴⁸ Jesus confirms what happened to Satan, saying: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”⁴⁹ By indulging in Baal worship, Israel shared the fate of the one who inspired that idolatry.

Most Bible scholars believe that “the splendor of Israel” is a reference to the temple and “the footstool” to the Ark of the Covenant. There are two psalms to back up this supposition: “Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy,”⁵⁰ and even clearer: “Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool — arise, O Lord, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.”⁵¹ It was ultimately the glory of the Lord that had filled the temple that constituted the splendor of Israel.

All this depicts the humiliation of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory who was crucified. He who was “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being”⁵² “made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!”⁵³ When God hurled down the splendor of Israel from heaven to earth, He in reality did this to Himself.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on the phrases “the dwellings of Jacob” and “the strongholds of the Daughter of Judah”: “RSV *habitations* refers to the places where shepherds lived with their flocks, and so would imply the open village areas of Judaea. These undefended settlements are then contrasted with the fortified towns of the next phrase. What in God’s purpose had been destined as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. 19:6) had profaned itself by gross indulgence in idolatry and immorality. Now God had achieved the final humiliation of Judah by rescinding her privileged status and reducing her to a position somewhat below that of the other nations which she had striven so desperately to imitate. In New Testament times, Capernaum was promised a share in the fate of Chorazin and Bethsaida (Mt. 11:21ff.) because she, too, had resisted the challenge of God’s redemptive works.”

The most interesting feature in v.3 is the mention of Israel’s horns. The symbol is obviously taken from the animal world. In a human setting it acquires a variety of meaning. The Hebrew word is *qeren*, which has a wider meaning than merely the object that grows on the head of some animals. The projections that were mounted on the bronze burn offering altar and on the gold altar for burning incense both had “horns.”⁵⁴ In the world of military power, the horn stood for the strength of attack or of defense as in Jeremiah’s prophecy over Moab: “‘Moab’s horn is cut off; her arm is broken,’ declares the Lord.”⁵⁵ In the

⁴⁵ Ex. 13:21,22

⁴⁶ Heb. 12:28,29

⁴⁷ Rev. 6:15-17

⁴⁸ Isa. 14:18,19

⁴⁹ Luke 10:18

⁵⁰ Ps. 99:5

⁵¹ Ps. 132:7,8

⁵² Heb. 1:3

⁵³ Phil. 2:7,8

⁵⁴ Ex. 27:1-2; 30:1-4

⁵⁵ Jer. 48:25

context of a personal life, the horn symbolized honor and rehabilitation. “Then Hannah prayed and said: ‘My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance.’”⁵⁶ In fellowship with God, the horn stood for God’s protection as in David’s psalm of praise: “The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior — from violent men you save me.”⁵⁷ It also symbolizes a clear testimony of a life well lived, as in: “He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor, his righteousness endures forever; his horn will be lifted high in honor.”⁵⁸ In Daniel’s prophecy about the various world powers of his day, the horn refers to demonic power.⁵⁹

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary gives the following outline of v.3: “The three members of v. 3 contain a climax: deprivation of the power to resist; the withdrawal of aid; the necessary consequence of which was the burning like a flame of fire. ‘To cut down the horn’ means to take away offensive and defensive power.”

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on v.4: “In an anthropomorphic passage (4) the author represents God as the strong enemy of His people, who have become antagonized by their prolonged indulgence in sin and idolatry. The same power which in times past had so often achieved wonders on behalf of the covenant nation has now been brought against it in judgment. The imagery of a tent reflects a marauding conqueror who plunders whatever attracts his attention. However, in the despoiled nation there is very little of significant worth.”

In most of the Bible the omnipotence of God is presented for our consolation, to make us realize that we have no reason to give up hope. In Isaiah’s magnificent exposition of God’s power, we read: “Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. ‘To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?’ says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God’? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”⁶⁰

But if we refuse the protection of the Almighty, His omnipotence turns against us. The Apostle Paul asks the question: “Are we trying to arouse the Lord’s jealousy? Are we stronger than he?”⁶¹

In v.5 the Lord is compared to a carnivorous animal that swallows up its prey. The Hebrew word used is *bala*, which literally means “to make away with,” or “to destroy.” Interestingly, it is used five times in Lamentations and that only in this chapter.⁶²

As *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* points out about the words “mourning and lamentation”: “There is a play of similar sounds in the original [*ta^aniyaah wa^aniyaah*], ‘sorrow and sadness,’ to heighten the effect (Job 30:3, Hebrew; Ezek 35:3, margin, ‘desolation and desolation’).”

The word translated “destroyed” in v.6 is not the same as the one mentioned above. The Hebrew word *shachath* has the meaning of “to decay,” or “to ruin.” We find it in the verse: “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence.”⁶³ It is obvious that Judah was responsible for the corruption of the temple service, yet God makes it sound as if He did this Himself. The Apostle Paul explains the principle behind this in his *Epistle to the Romans*, saying: “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish

⁵⁶ I Sam. 2:1

⁵⁷ II Sam. 22:2,3

⁵⁸ Ps. 112:9

⁵⁹ See Dan. 8.

⁶⁰ Isa. 40:21,22,25-31

⁶¹ I Cor. 10:22

⁶² See Lam. 2:2,5,8 and 16.

⁶³ Gen. 6:11

hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen.”⁶⁴ When man sins against the light he possesses, God takes away the breaks and allows him to corrupt himself.

The verse gives an allusion of what could have been. The temple service could have been as a meeting with God in a garden, as Adam and Eve experienced before they ate the forbidden fruit. The Genesis account of the fall suggests that the first couple fellowshiped with God among the trees of the garden before they sinned. We read: “Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”⁶⁵ The mention of the feasts Judah forgot to celebrate also suggests that communion with God used to be a time of rejoicing and renewal.

The Hebrew word rendered “spurned” in the last part of v.6 is *na’ats*, which means “to scorn.” In other places it is translated “treat with contempt,” as in: “not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has *treated* me *with contempt* will ever see it,”⁶⁶ or “to blaspheme” as in “‘And now what do I have here?’ declares the Lord. ‘For my people have been taken away for nothing, and those who rule them mock,’ declares the Lord. ‘And all day long my name is constantly *blasphemed*.’”⁶⁷ The king who ruled by the grace of God and the priest who stood between God and mankind reap the fruit they have sown on the field of their life.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations* comments on v.7: “Verse 7 describes the pillaging of Jerusalem at its most horrifying stage. Even the magnificent Solomon Temple, the pride of the nation for centuries, was not spared in the general destruction. The palace walls were those of the Temple complex, as indicated by the mention of the altar and sanctuary. The Temple formed part of a group of buildings, and took seven years to construct as against thirteen for the erection of the royal palace. This discrepancy might suggest that the Temple may have been intended originally to serve as a royal chapel. On the occasion being described, however, the noise (*cf.* 1:15) was that of the triumphant enemy forces, not the festal shouts of Hebrew worshippers.”

Ezekiel saw in a vision how the glory of the God of Israel left the place of revelation, the cover of the Ark of the Covenant, and moved first to the threshold of the temple, and then left the city via the Mount of Olives.⁶⁸ Jeremiah describes this as the Lord rejecting His altar and abandoning His sanctuary. When the Spirit of the Lord left the temple, the temple became a dead body, ready to decay. In the same manner, the Spirit of Jesus Christ left His body on the cross when Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”⁶⁹ The Roman soldier who then pierced His side pierced a dead body. But Jesus’ body never decayed. It was brought back to life only a few hours later.

For those who witnessed the destruction of the temple, the demolition of the altar represented the burning of the bridge to God. For them it meant that God could no longer be approached ritually. The amazing thing, however, is that God revealed Himself more clearly and in a more personal way to the prophets in exile, Ezekiel and Daniel, than He had ever done to others while the temple still stood. And about four centuries after Solomon’s altar was destroyed, God built a simple wooden altar, outside the city where the sacrifice that settled the sin issue was dealt with once and for all. Just before Jesus committed His spirit into the hands of the Father, He cried “It is finished.”⁷⁰ When God rejected His altar and abandoned His sanctuary, He merely discarded the images. He took the next step to settle the sin matter in reality and for good.

The tearing down of the wall of Jerusalem is seen as God withdrawing His hand of protection over His people. In the same way as a person would use a measuring line to construct, God uses it to destroy. The destruction is carried out in the same planned methodical way as if it is a building project. The

⁶⁴ Rom. 1:21-25

⁶⁵ Gen. 3:8

⁶⁶ Num. 14:23

⁶⁷ Isa. 52:5

⁶⁸ Ezek. 9:3;10:4;11:23

⁶⁹ Luke 23:46

⁷⁰ John 19:30

Babylonians cannot have been aware of this. They simply hacked away at the stone of the walls and the wood of the gates, not knowing that they were carrying out God's blueprint.

These walls and gates would eventually make place for the wall and gates of the New Jerusalem, which the Apostle John describes as: "It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."⁷¹ And of the city as a whole, he says: "It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal."⁷²

b. Sufferings consequent upon famine 2:10-13

10 The elders of the Daughter of Zion sit on the ground in silence; they have sprinkled dust on their heads and put on sackcloth. The young women of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground.

11 My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within, my heart is poured out on the ground because my people are destroyed, because children and infants faint in the streets of the city.

12 They say to their mothers, "Where is bread and wine?" as they faint like wounded men in the streets of the city, as their lives ebb away in their mothers' arms.

13 What can I say for you? With what can I compare you, O Daughter of Jerusalem? To what can I liken you, that I may comfort you, O Virgin Daughter of Zion? Your wound is as deep as the sea. Who can heal you?

The elders, *zaqen* in Hebrew, are the people of leadership in Israel. They date from the time when Moses delegated some of his authority to those who were considered people of importance. During the desert crossing, God put some of Moses' spirit upon them. We read: "The Lord said to Moses: 'Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.'"⁷³

Here they sit on the ground in silent lament like Job's friends when first confronted with his suffering. We read in Job's story: "When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was."⁷⁴

The elders and the virgins, symbolizing the state, sit on the ground in silent mourning. As *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes, "No words can express their sorrows: small griefs are eloquent, great ones dumb." Their sorrow is too great for words.

In v.11 *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests the translation: "My liver is poured upon the earth," stating: "A violent emotion being supposed to occasion a copious discharge of bile." The Hebrew word used is *me'ah*, which modern translations render with "heart," *The King James Version* generally renders it "bowels." R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations* writes: "The AV reference in verse 11 to *bowels* and *liver* (NEB *bowels, bile*) is to acute emotional disturbance (*cf.* 1:20). In particular the liver (MT *kābed*, 'heavy'), which is actually the weightiest organ of the human body, was held in antiquity to be one of the locales of psychic life, being associated with profound emotional reactions, generally of a depressive nature. AV and RSV render liver here by *heart*, with similar affective functions in view. The sadness described has been occasioned by reminiscence about the terrible fate which overtook young children during the siege of Jerusalem, a theme which recurs in verses 19–21 and 4:4,10. The harrowing scenes described here are obvious marks of an eye-witness, who seems to have been so utterly appalled and revolted by them as to be incapable of eradicating them from his memory. As the children gasped out their

⁷¹ Rev. 21:12-14

⁷² Rev. 21:11

⁷³ Num. 11:16,17

⁷⁴ Job 2:11-13

last pathetic breaths they were pleading for food, MT *corn and wine* designating normal sustenance (*cf.* Dt. 11:14). Even while they were crawling among the rubble, searching for scraps of food, they collapsed in their tracks and died. In their extremity the children sought the kind of security which they had known as infants, and in this helpless posture they expired from hunger. This pathetic and tragic scene stands in stark contrast to the ideal of happy, carefree children playing in the streets of Jerusalem, a situation which is promised when the nation is restored (Zc. 8:5.)”

The “eye-witness” speaking here is obviously Jeremiah. The fate of children described here brings the horror of the Babylonian invasion to a peak. The adult population had brought this punishment upon themselves because of their idolatry. But the young children had done nothing to merit this kind of end. They were the innocent victims of the sins of the fathers.

This scene of defenseless children dying in the arms of their mothers is the most heartrending image in the whole book. And this is what happened before the actual destruction of the city and the temple, as the picture describes what happened during the siege. It is this clip of what newscasters would call “human interest” that accentuates the horror even more than the death of the city and the temple. The wound that is “as deep as the sea” is the pain of the mothers with dead children in their arms. Death is always horrible, but this is horror at its worst.

c. True and false prophets 2:14-17

14 The visions of your prophets were false and worthless; they did not expose your sin to ward off your captivity. The oracles they gave you were false and misleading.

15 All who pass your way clap their hands at you; they scoff and shake their heads at the Daughter of Jerusalem: "Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?"

16 All your enemies open their mouths wide against you; they scoff and gnash their teeth and say, "We have swallowed her up. This is the day we have waited for; we have lived to see it."

17 The Lord has done what he planned; he has fulfilled his word, which he decreed long ago. He has overthrown you without pity, he has let the enemy gloat over you, he has exalted the horn of your foes.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes about this section: “The author takes up the censure of the contemporary *prophets*, a theme which had formed such an important element of Jeremiah’s message. Here also the prophets are made to bear a large share of the responsibility for the fate which has come upon the nation. Instead of confronting the people with the implications of the covenantal relationship, the prophets had proclaimed a completely false message of peace and future prosperity ... As a result they were encouraging the inhabitants of Judah to indulge in immoral Baal worship at the expense of ignoring righteousness and the ethical ideals of the Sinai covenant, despite the severe warnings of Amos, Hosea and others. Because the prophets had failed to expose and castigate national sin, they were held responsible in large measure for the irreversible trend towards destruction and exile. To describe the utterances of the false prophets as misleading oracles was the most devastating form of criticism possible. Their intrinsic worthlessness had already been demonstrated in practical terms by the sheer progress of events. Now, to add insult to injury, the malicious glee which the enemies of Jerusalem experienced (15) was expressed by a variety of contemptuous gestures ... David’s capital had been the proud boast of its inhabitants for centuries (*cf.* Ps. 50:2), but now their praises had been made to recoil on them in the form of taunts. The long-smoldering resentment of Judah’s enemies could now be given full expression over her helpless, prostrate form.”

The shame of Judah and Jerusalem projected prophetically what would happen to the Lord of glory at the moment of His humiliation. We read when Jesus hung on the cross: “Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, ‘You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!’ In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. ‘He saved others,’ they said, ‘but he can’t save himself! He’s the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’ In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.”⁷⁵ But those who mocked there were not Israel’s enemies.

⁷⁵ Matt. 27:39-44

The Adam Clarke's Commentary states about “[The Lord hath done that] This and Lam 2:16 should be interchanged, to follow the order of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet; as the sixteenth has pe (פ) for its acrostic letter, and the seventeenth has `ayin (ע), which should precede the other in the order of the alphabet.” R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, adds: “The normal order of the Hebrew consonants `ayin and pe in the acrostic structure of the poem is reversed in verse 16, as in the two subsequent dirges, for unknown reasons.”

Moses had predicted what the consequences would be if the Israelite nation would cease to pay attention to God’s Word and lose themselves in pagan idolatry. What happened here had been on the books for centuries. We read Moses’ prophecy in Deuteronomy: “The Lord will drive you and the king you set over you to a nation unknown to you or your fathers. There you will worship other gods, gods of wood and stone. You will become a thing of horror and an object of scorn and ridicule to all the nations where the Lord will drive you. You will sow much seed in the field but you will harvest little, because locusts will devour it. You will plant vineyards and cultivate them but you will not drink the wine or gather the grapes, because worms will eat them. You will have olive trees throughout your country but you will not use the oil, because the olives will drop off. You will have sons and daughters but you will not keep them, because they will go into captivity. Swarms of locusts will take over all your trees and the crops of your land. The alien who lives among you will rise above you higher and higher, but you will sink lower and lower. He will lend to you, but you will not lend to him. He will be the head, but you will be the tail. All these curses will come upon you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the Lord your God and observe the commands and decrees he gave you. They will be a sign and a wonder to you and your descendants forever. Because you did not serve the Lord your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the Lord sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you. Because of the suffering that your enemy will inflict on you during the siege, you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the Lord your God has given you.”⁷⁶

V.17 states that God had planned this horror, which is not the same as making Him the author of it. The responsibility was with those who had made the wrong choices, both the perpetrators and the victims. History would repeat itself in the event that is the culmination of defeat and victory, which is the crucifixion of the Lord of glory. After healing the crippled man at the temple gate, Peter said in a speech following the incident: “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see. Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you — even Jesus.”⁷⁷

d. A tearful prayer to God 2:18-22

18 *The hearts of the people cry out to the Lord. O wall of the Daughter of Zion, let your tears flow like a river day and night; give yourself no relief, your eyes no rest.*

19 *Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord. Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint from hunger at the head of every street.*

20 *"Look, O Lord, and consider: Whom have you ever treated like this? Should women eat their offspring, the children they have cared for? Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord?*

21 *"Young and old lie together in the dust of the streets; my young men and maidens have fallen by the sword. You have slain them in the day of your anger; you have slaughtered them without pity.*

⁷⁶ Deut. 28:36-48,53

⁷⁷ Acts 3:13-21

22 "As you summon to a feast day, so you summoned against me terrors on every side. In the day of the Lord's anger no one escaped or survived; those I cared for and reared, my enemy has destroyed."

These verses take us back again to the time before the city was taken and destroyed. The siege is still going on as the people are dying in the streets. How unimaginably horrible the situation was is evident from the cry: "Should women eat their offspring, the children they have cared for? Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord?" This proves that the siege had not really changed the moral concept of the people in the city. If they would have cried out to the Lord, the mothers would not have been able to slaughter their own children for food.

According to v.18, the people do cry out to the Lord. But this is not the cry that saves them from the wrath that comes upon them. Their repentance came too late to profit them. It may be that, because of their ineffective tears, the walls take over the lament that humans ought to have intoned. This is the opposite of what Jesus said to those who criticized Him for accepting the adulation of the crowd: "'I tell you,' he replied, 'if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.'"⁷⁸

Bible scholars have had a problem with the walls of Jerusalem weeping. Some translations simply omit the words. *The Revised Standard Version*, for instance, reads: "Cry aloud to the Lord! O daughter of Zion! Let tears stream down like a torrent day and night! Give yourself no rest, your eyes no respite!" *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests that something is wrong in the transmission of the text. We find the Hebrew word *chowmah*, "a wall of protection," only in this chapter of Lamentations. And earlier we read: "He made ramparts and walls lament; together they wasted away."⁷⁹ Jeremiah seems to be rather consistent in the poetical image he uses. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states: "For the concept of God as a protective wall cf. Zechariah 2:5. Jerusalem is now weeping in abject sorrow because she has neglected to 'let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream' (Am. 5:24; RV). She is instructed to continue her weeping (RSV *your eyes no respite*), MT has 'do not let the pupil of your eye cease,' the 'pupil' (AV, RV *apple*) being a surrogate for the whole eye. It described a part or the whole of its functions, and regarded it as an organ of extreme sensitivity." The reference in Zechariah reads: "'And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,' declares the Lord, 'and I will be its glory within.'" ⁸⁰

V.19 continues Jeremiah's advice to the citizens of Jerusalem to wake up to the reality of their fate. There was some weeping, as we saw, but it was for the wrong reasons and addressed to the wrong source. Not all tears are tears of repentance. As the Apostle Paul wrote: "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."⁸⁰ It is this "godly sorrow" that Jeremiah wanted to see, the weeping that would at least have saved the lives of innocent children.

It sounds as if Jeremiah holds God responsible for the horror of cannibalism that was practiced in the besieged city. The prophet must have been familiar with Moses' prophetic warning that such things would happen if the people refused to obey the Lord. Moses had said centuries earlier: "The most gentle and sensitive woman among you — so sensitive and gentle that she would not venture to touch the ground with the sole of her foot — will begrudge the husband she loves and her own son or daughter."⁸¹ It was Judah's decision to ignore the Lord that made Him give them over to their own animal desires. All God did was pull the breaks.

V.22 reminds us of the gruesome invitation to the birds to feast upon the dead bodies of the slain in Revelation. We read: "And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, 'Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.'"⁸² In connection with that ghastly picture, I believe that God borrows images from our human world on purpose to impress upon us the incongruence. It reveals what humanity has done to God's creation. In a way, we may see this as an example of divine irony. We must remember that what is shown there is a parable. There are no vultures that fly through space and no angel stands on the sun. The picture represents a spiritual reality. Furthermore, the image in Revelation depicts a situation that has not occurred yet, neither in the spiritual realm, nor anywhere else. This is an announcement of judgment to come. And God's announcements of judgment are always meant to be acts of grace, because they leave the door open for

⁷⁸ Luke 19:40

⁷⁹ Lam. 2:8

⁸⁰ II Cor. 7:10

⁸¹ Deut. 28:56

⁸² Rev. 19:17,18

conversion. God hopes that people who are still alive will get the mental picture of the vultures cleaning off their corpses and that they will call to God to prevent this from ever happening. That is the reason this picture is painted so realistically.

The fall of Jerusalem, however, was not a future event that could be avoided; it was history past when Jeremiah wrote these words. It was also an image of the greatest horror still to come, the death of the Lord of glory upon the most cruel instrument of torture ever invented.

The words “those I cared for and reared” are probably spoke by Jeremiah as representing the city of Jerusalem, as if she were the mother or nurse who swaddled the infant. The Hebrew word *taphach* literally means “to flatten out or extend as a tent.” In that sense Isaiah uses it in: “My own hand laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand *spread out* the heavens; when I summon them, they all stand up together,”⁸³ which is the only other time the word is used in Scripture. Jerusalem is like a mother who remembers her children as the helpless babies she nursed and who are no longer alive.

III. THIRD DIRGE 3:1–66

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states about this chapter: “This lament takes the form of an acrostic in triplets, each alphabetic consonant supplying the first letter of each sentence in the strophe and constituting a highly elaborate arrangement. The sequence of the thought does not follow this pattern, however, but traverses the various groupings in a fashion encountered previously. In many respects this elegy crystallizes the basic themes of Lamentations, and as a foreshadowing of the passion of Jesus Christ has definite affinities with Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22.

It may seem strange and artificial to us that a description of suffering would be put in such an elaborate poetical form. We tend to think that this takes away from the spontaneity of the expression. We believe that pain and poem do not go together. Yet, some composers have put to music poems that mourn the death of a child. That raises the question if there can be beauty in suffering.

The Pulpit Commentary, in its introduction to the book, observes about this: “It differs from all the other elegies in its peculiar exaggeration of the alphabetic form, since it not merely distinguishes a single verse by one of the Hebrew letters, but a whole triplet of verses. This evidently hampers the poet in the expression of his thoughts; — the third is the least rhythmical and the least poetical of all the Lamentations. In contents, too, it differs to a remarkable degree from the other elegies. Instead of describing the calamities of the nation, the writer points, or seems to point, to himself. ‘I am the man that hath seen affliction,’ he begins, and he continues to speak of himself as the great sufferer except in vers. 22, 47, where he passes into a description of the circumstances of the nation, and only refers to himself as a member of the community (‘Let us search and try our ways,’ etc.). His account of his own sufferings reminds us, by its highly colored phraseology, of certain of the psalms which purport to be the utterances of an individual, but which contain many phrases which are hyperbolic in the mouth of an individual Israelite. In the case of this third Lamentation, as well as in that of this important group of psalms, we seem irresistibly driven to the inference that the writer (whether Jeremiah or another) adopts the *role* of a poetical representative of the Israelitish people, or at any rate of the pious believers who formed the kernel of that people. This accounts for the curious alternation in ch. 3. of expressions which point to an individual Israelite with those which distinctly refer to the people, and for the seemingly extravagant character of the former, and also for the fondness which the author betrays for the great poem of Job, the hero of which is, in the intention of the writer (to be carefully distinguished from the intention of the traditional narrative), obviously a type of the righteous man in affliction.”

a. The lament of the afflicted 3:1-21

***1 I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.
2 He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light;
3 indeed, he has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long.
4 He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones.
5 He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship.
6 He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead.***

⁸³ Isa. 48:13

7 *He has walled me in so I cannot escape; he has weighed me down with chains.*
 8 *Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer.*
 9 *He has barred my way with blocks of stone; he has made my paths crooked.*
 10 *Like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in hiding,*
 11 *he dragged me from the path and mangled me and left me without help.*
 12 *He drew his bow and made me the target for his arrows.*
 13 *He pierced my heart with arrows from his quiver.*
 14 *I became the laughingstock of all my people; they mock me in song all day long.*
 15 *He has filled me with bitter herbs and sated me with gall.*
 16 *He has broken my teeth with gravel; he has trampled me in the dust.*
 17 *I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is.*
 18 *So I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord."*
 19 *I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall.*
 20 *I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.*
 21 *Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:*

In this chapter Jeremiah identifies himself with the city and the nation as a whole to the point where he can describe what happened to those as a personal experience. This allows him to make the physical pain the people suffered into a spiritual experience in the same way the Apostle Paul identified himself with the suffering of Jesus Christ. Paul believed that identification with Christ's sufferings was part of the Christian experience. He wrote to the Christians in Rome: "Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."⁸⁴ And to the Corinthians he wrote: "For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort."⁸⁵ His personal testimony was: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."⁸⁶

But for Paul, as for us, becoming one with Jesus in His pain and agony is the beginning of a new life. It is like going through the night to the dawn of a new day. For Jeremiah the night was endless. There was no ray of light shining in the east. The hope does not appear until the next section of this chapter.

J. Sidlow Baxter, in *Explore the Book*, states about these verses: "Here, at the heart of this five-fold memorial, we have the prophet's own sorrow. So sensitively is his own spirit identified with his people, so afflicted is he in all their afflictions, that in some verses it could be either the prophet himself, or the personified nation speaking; the words are so true of both. The background throughout, however, is that of Jeremiah's own personal suffering."

Throughout his whole ministry as a prophet, Jeremiah had moments of deep despair, which caused him to consider abandoning his call. At one point he had cried out: "O Lord, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot."⁸⁷ At that point the destruction of Jerusalem had not taken place yet. His despair had been caused by the mentality of the people and the acts that would lead to judgment.

The essence of Jeremiah's pain here is the realization that not the Babylonians had destroyed the temple and the city, but God had done this Himself. It is like a person who undergoes torture by an enemy and discovers that it is God who afflicts him. The question of how a God of love can do this to someone is what adds to the pain.

⁸⁴ Rom. 8:17,18

⁸⁵ II Cor. 1:4-7

⁸⁶ Phil. 3:10,11

⁸⁷ Jer. 20:7-9

In his prophecies, Jeremiah had proclaimed that Nebuchadnezzar was used by God to punish Judah for her sins. God had called the king of Babylon “My servant Nebuchadnezzar.”⁸⁸ This made Jeremiah say that what the Babylonians had done was the rod of God’s wrath. There is a way in which seeing the hand of God in painful experiences sublimates those experiences. That is what Paul did when he called himself “the prisoner of Christ Jesus” or “a prisoner for the Lord.”⁸⁹ But Jeremiah found no relief in the discovery that it was God who had done this to him and to the nation. If he could have seen how he prefigured Christ in His suffering, he would certainly have found the consolation the Apostle Paul experienced.

Jeremiah’s suffering was the result of identification. He had not been taken into captivity like Daniel or Ezekiel. For a while he even stayed in Israel. Later he was taken to Egypt against his will. But he sees himself as being driven away. The point of reference here is the place where God had revealed Himself. For Ezekiel and Daniel to be removed physically from the place of God’s revelation only made God’s revelation more awesome. None of the pre-exilic prophets ever had visions of God’s glory the way Ezekiel and Daniel received them. Jeremiah did not share in that kind of experience. God continued to speak to and through him, but not in the same spectacular manner.

In the description of the physical effect the altered circumstances had upon him, Jeremiah may have reached back to the way he had been treated by the local authorities before and during the siege. The experience of being thrown into an empty cistern where he was slowly sinking in the mud⁹⁰ must have done to Jeremiah physically what the destruction of the temple and city did to him emotionally and spiritually. The nightmares that followed that episode returned with even more devastating effect. He felt himself sinking in the mud, surrounded by the thick walls of the cistern, the cover of which effectively shut out all rays of light. People who suffer from an emotional breakdown can identify with Jeremiah’s cistern experience.

In v.10 Jeremiah knows himself to be out of the pit but that does not mean an improvement in conditions. He does not find himself any safer outside the cistern than inside. The bear and the lion are there, ready to jump on him and drag him away to their lair. Like Job, who said to God: “If I hold my head high, you stalk me like a lion and again display your awesome power against me,”⁹¹ Jeremiah sees God as the hunter who is out to kill him. Like Job also, Jeremiah is unable to recognize the source of the evil he sees and feels. Like Job, Jeremiah never read the first chapter of his own biography. Yet, he must have been familiar with Job’s biography. He could have known that the God he saw was not the God he knew. Or rather, although he was God’s prophet and had spoken God’s word “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness,”⁹² he did not recognize God when He came to him in his suffering.

In vv.13-21 Jeremiah reaches back to all the painful experiences of his prophetic office, remembering the crises he passed through from one moment to another. When God called him, He had said: “Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land — against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you.”⁹³ Yet, mighty prophet that he was, his faith never measured up to God’s promises. His old doubts now come back and haunt him as his prophecies have been fulfilled.

But the enemy had not been able to pick up all the seed of God’s Word on the wayside. At the end of his prayerful complaint some of God’s promises come back to life and Jeremiah says: “Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope.” Jeremiah may be surrounded by death, but God is the God of the living, not of the dead. As Jeremiah was pulled out of the cistern before by Ebed-Melech the Cushite,⁹⁴ so God pulls him up here.

b. Divine mercies recalled 3:22-39

⁸⁸ See Jer. 25:9; 43:10.

⁸⁹ Eph. 3:1; 4:1; Philem. 1,9,23

⁹⁰ See Jer. 38:6-13.

⁹¹ Job 10:16

⁹² Jer. 31:3

⁹³ Jer. 1:17-19

⁹⁴ Jer. 38:11-13

- 22 *Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.*
 23 *They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*
 24 *I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."*
 25 *The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him;*
 26 *it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.*
 27 *It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young.*
 28 *Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him.*
 29 *Let him bury his face in the dust — there may yet be hope.*
 30 *Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace.*
 31 *For men are not cast off by the Lord forever.*
 32 *Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love.*
 33 *For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.*
 34 *To crush underfoot all prisoners in the land,*
 35 *to deny a man his rights before the Most High,*
 36 *to deprive a man of justice — would not the Lord see such things?*
 37 *Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it?*
 38 *Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?*
 39 *Why should any living man complain when punished for his sins?*

As *Barnes' Notes* observes, "Verses 22-42 are the center of the present poem, as it also holds the central place in the whole series of the Lamentations. In them the riches of God's grace and mercy are set forth in the brightest colors, but no sooner are they ended than the prophet resumes the language of woe."

The two important Hebrew words in v.22 are *cheqed* and *racham*. *Cheqed* is the word *The King James Version* renders so beautifully with "lovingkindness." *Racham* means "compassion," but it has the extended meaning of the mother's womb, cherishing the fetus. It expresses the unequalled warmth and intimacy a mother feels toward her unborn child. The Hebrew text reads literally: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not."

The change of emotions is nothing short of a miracle. The only way Jeremiah can have experienced this hope of renewal is because he had a vision of the character of God. He remembered how God had shown His lovingkindness to him in the past and he realized that God's attributes are eternal. Even surrounded by death in its most cruel form, he realized that God is life and he sensed the hope of resurrection. No Hebrew word expresses this hope better than *racham*. As the mother's womb is an emblem of hope and new life, so God's compassion is the solid foundation of renewal and glory. There is no greater miracle on earth than the birth of a baby. It is like the dawn of a new day. "New every morning" expresses hope in an unparalleled way. Jeremiah experienced God's love and mercy as he had gone through a night of suffering and saw the first rays of light on the horizon. "The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day."⁹⁵

The basis of Jeremiah's confidence and hope is in the fact that the Lord is his portion. The Hebrew word is *cheleq*, which in this context means "inheritance." Being of priestly descent, Jeremiah must have remembered God's word to Aaron, "You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites."⁹⁶ Now as the physical inheritance in the Promised Land has become obsolete, the spiritual reality of God's Promised Land came into full focus.

"Therefore I will wait for him" is the translation of the Hebrew "Therefore will I hope in Him." The Hebrew word used is *yachal*, which means "to wait," "to be patient." There is a close connection between the renewal of God's lovingkindness every morning and Jeremiah's waiting. The sun comes up every day; night is never endless. We may be impatient for the dawn to break, but our emotional condition does not speed up or slow down the process. The revelation of God's lovingkindness and compassion is just as secure as the laws of the universe. We can be sure, yet, waiting is one of the hardest things to do. When David sang in one of his psalms: "I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in

⁹⁵ Prov. 4:18

⁹⁶ Num. 18:20

the land of the living,” he added: “Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”⁹⁷ It takes strength of heart to wait for the Lord.

The Hebrew text of vv.25 and 26 reads literally: “The Lord [is] good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him. [It is] good that a man should both hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.” *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The thought of the verse is that of ... Psalm 37:7.” That text reads: “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.”

It seems strange to us that v.27 suggests that there is particular merit in suffering while young. The Hebrew word *’ol* literally means “a yoke” as worn by cattle. With two exceptions,⁹⁸ however, it is used in Scripture in a figurative sense. The first use is in Isaac’s blessing for Esau, in which he says: “You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But when you grow restless, you will throw his *yoke* from off your neck.”⁹⁹ *Barnes’ Notes* states: “By bearing a yoke in his youth, i.e. being called upon to suffer in early age, a man learns betimes the lesson of silent endurance, and so finds it more easy to be calm and patient in later years.” *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* interprets it as “the yoke of the Lord’s disciplinary teaching (Ps 90:12; 119:71).” The commentary states: “Calvin interprets it, the Lord’s doctrine (Matt 11:29-30), which is to be received in a docile spirit. The earlier the better; because the old are full of prejudices (Prov 8:17; Eccl 12:1). Jeremiah himself received the yoke both of doctrine and chastisement while he was still ‘a child’ (Jer 1:6-7).” *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “The thought of this verse reminds us of ... Psalm 119:71. Youth is mentioned as the time when it is easier to adapt one’s self to circumstances, and when discipline is most readily accepted. The words do not prove that the writer is young, any more than vers. 9 and 100 of Psalm 119 prove that the psalmist was an aged man.” The text in Ps. 119 reads: “It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.”

If we interpret “yoke” simply in the sense of discipline, the application makes more sense. The problem remains, however, that the context is suffering. Suffering early in life does not necessarily condition a person for painful experiences in later years. The opposite is often the case. The advice in Ecclesiastes “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, ‘I find no pleasure in them’” may shed some more light on this text.

Vv.28-30 continue to elaborate upon the yoke of the youth. Jeremiah may be giving his personal testimony in these verses, in which case the “yoke” may refer to the burden of his prophetic ministry. *The Book of Jeremiah* reveals that Jeremiah’s call often turned out to be a burden for him, too heavy to bear. At one place the people ask Jeremiah about “the oracle of the Lord.” We read: “When these people, or a prophet or a priest, ask you, ‘What is the oracle of the Lord?’ say to them, ‘What oracle? I will forsake you, declares the Lord.’ If a prophet or a priest or anyone else claims, ‘This is the oracle of the Lord,’ I will punish that man and his household. This is what each of you keeps on saying to his friend or relative: ‘What is the Lord’s answer?’ or ‘What has the Lord spoken?’ But you must not mention ‘the oracle of the Lord’ again, because every man’s own word becomes his oracle and so you distort the words of the living God, the Lord Almighty, our God.”¹⁰⁰ The Hebrew word used for “oracle” is *massa* which literally means “a burden.” It is the same word used in “This is what the Lord says: Be careful not to carry a *load* on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem.”¹⁰¹ Jeremiah’s struggle with the prophetic message he had been ordered to preach is best expressed in his own words. We read: “O Lord, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, ‘I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,’ his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. I hear many whispering, ‘Terror on every side! Report him! Let’s report him!’ All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying, ‘Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him.’”¹⁰²

There is in Jeremiah’s words here a lot of New Testament truth that Jesus preached also. Jeremiah needed the comfort of Jesus’ words about the exchange of His yoke for the burdens we bear. Jesus gives

⁹⁷ Ps. 27:13,14

⁹⁸ Num. 19:1,2; Deut. 21:3

⁹⁹ Gen. 27:40

¹⁰⁰ Jer. 23:33-36

¹⁰¹ Jer. 17:21

¹⁰² Jer. 20:7-10

the invitation: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”¹⁰³ And the advice to turn the other cheek originates with Jeremiah. Jesus said: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”¹⁰⁴

To Jeremiah, however, turning the other cheek meant disgrace. The Hebrew word used is *cherpah*, which has the meaning of something that causes shame. It is the word Rachel used at the birth of Joseph: “Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, ‘God has taken away my disgrace.’”¹⁰⁵ Turning the other cheek in the sense Jesus mentions is no disgrace but grace.

The word “for” in v.31 gives the reason for the attitude prescribed in the previous stanza. There is a time limit to God’s discipline. It is not a means of total rejection but a way to bring the sinner to his senses. David expressed this beautifully in one of his psalms: “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.”¹⁰⁶ In drawing a line from heaven to earth and from east to west, David puts the sign of the cross on the sins we confess as a guarantee of God’s compassion in forgiving our sin.

Vv.34-36 depict in powerful words the cruelty with which the Babylonians had treated the Judeans. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations* comments: “In verses 34–36, the supreme justice which characterizes God’s nature is illustrated by reference to human dignity and individual rights under the law. God will not condone the abusing of prisoners (*cf.* Ps. 69:33), and makes the releasing of captives one of the most important aspects of the work of the divine Servant (*cf.* Ps. 146:7; Is. 42:7), as Christ pointed out in His first sermon in Nazareth (Lk. 4:18).” Yet, the first impression cruel treatment leaves upon the victims is that God does not see it. How could God see and not do something about it? Habakkuk struggled with this, crying out: “How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, ‘Violence!’ but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. O Lord, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O Lord, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish. Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?”¹⁰⁷

The realization that God is almighty and omniscient leads to the conviction that nothing on earth can happen without His specific permission. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes about vv. 37,38: “True, God does not desire our misfortunes. But equally true is it that they do not happen without his express permission (comp ... Isaiah 45:7; ... Amos 3:6).” The references of Isaiah and Amos read respectively: “I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things” and “When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it?” Yet, it is ultimately man that causes the disaster, both in creating the sinful conditions that call for annihilation, and in carrying out the destruction. If we want to complain about something, we ought to complain about our sin, not about God’s punishment.

V.37 makes reference to the creative character of God’s Word. As the Psalmist sings: “Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.”¹⁰⁸ The same creative power is evident in God’s punishment for sin. That is the reason Jeremiah says in v.38: “Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?” The Hebrew of v.38 reads literally: “Proceeds not out of the mouth of the most High evil and good?” The Hebrew word for evil used here is *ra`*. The first time that word is used in Scripture is in the

¹⁰³ Matt. 11:28-30

¹⁰⁴ Matt. 5:38,39

¹⁰⁵ Gen. 30:22,23

¹⁰⁶ Ps. 103:8-14

¹⁰⁷ Hab. 1:2,3,12,13

¹⁰⁸ Ps. 33:8,9

verse: “And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground — trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”¹⁰⁹ This does not make God the author of evil, although He did create the tree that bears that name. Evil came about when the first human pair decided to disregard God’s warning not to eat of the tree of good and evil. The question is not whether God created evil, but whether He could have created man in His image without giving him the power of choice.

The miracle in v.39 is in the words “living man.” Since the topic in these verses is human sin and death is the punishment for sin, the word “living” means a breakthrough of grace. Jeremiah referred to this miracle earlier with the words: “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.” The only reason sin does not kill us is because Jesus took our place in death so we can take His place in resurrection.

c. A call for spiritual renewal 3:40-42

40 Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord.

41 Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven, and say:

42 "We have sinned and rebelled and you have not forgiven.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments here: “A life which has never been laid open in penitence before God has little permanence in eternity. Because the covenant with Israel is of an eternal nature, the nation is bidden to take spiritual stock and turn in penitence to its God. Once true repentance is in evidence, the just punishments which have been imposed can be expected to be abrogated and the nation restored to a measure of favor with God. These elements were fundamental to the message of Jeremiah, but Judah has had to endure the agony of captivity before becoming aware of their validity. The prerequisites for a rewarding spiritual relationship with God remain unchanged, however, and it is up to the people of Israel, as His vassals, to renew their long-standing neglect of the covenant responsibilities.”

The Hebrew word translated “search” is *chaphas*, which means “to seek,” but it also conveys the idea of “to conceal oneself.” In that meaning we find it in the verse: “So Saul *disguised* himself, putting on other clothes, and at night he and two men went to the woman. ‘Consult a spirit for me,’ he said, ‘and bring up for me the one I name.’”¹¹⁰ The suggestion in v.40 is not only to the act of sin, but also to the cover up. It seems the two always go together. As soon as Adam and Eve had sinned, they tried to cover up the nakedness of their souls. Confession always consists in the removal of the cover. As soon as we confess our nakedness to God, He covers us with the righteousness of His Son, as He did to Adam and Eve when He gave them the skin of an animal for clothing.¹¹¹ This reminds us of Paul’s words to the Corinthians: “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”¹¹²

Jeremiah urged his compatriots to call upon God, confessing the sins of the nation, saying “We have sinned and rebelled and you have not forgiven.” That prayer could only be prayed after soul searching and introspection. Normally the Old Testament believer would bring a sacrificial animal to the altar as he lifted up his hands to God in prayer. After the destruction of the temple such a sacrifice was no longer an option. It would take the remaining years of captivity before Daniel prayed the prayer of confession voiced here by Jeremiah.¹¹³

The words “you have not forgiven” are not a reproach to God, but a confession that God had been right in meting out the punishment Judah deserved for her sin of idolatry.

Some of Jeremiah’s prayer is reflected in the remarks the Apostle Paul makes in connection with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. We read: “Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.”¹¹⁴ Our prayers of confession are

¹⁰⁹ Gen. 2:9

¹¹⁰ I Sam. 28:8

¹¹¹ Gen. 3:2

¹¹² II Cor. 3:18

¹¹³ See Dan. 9:5-14.

¹¹⁴ I Cor. 11:27,28

based on the sacrifice that was brought in our behalf; they require the same kind of introspection Jeremiah advises here.

The difference between examining one's way and trying them is in the realization of what one has done and how that compares to the will of God. It is impossible for man to understand the depth of sin unless the Holy Spirit convicts. Like Isaiah, we do not realize that we are lost until we are confronted with God's glory. Then we become conscious of the fact that sin means falling short of the glory of God.¹¹⁵

d. The consequences of sin 3:43-54

43 "You have covered yourself with anger and pursued us; you have slain without pity.

44 You have covered yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can get through.

45 You have made us scum and refuse among the nations.

46 "All our enemies have opened their mouths wide against us.

47 We have suffered terror and pitfalls, ruin and destruction."

48 Streams of tears flow from my eyes because my people are destroyed.

49 My eyes will flow unceasingly, without relief,

50 until the Lord looks down from heaven and sees.

51 What I see brings grief to my soul because of all the women of my city.

52 Those who were my enemies without cause hunted me like a bird.

53 They tried to end my life in a pit and threw stones at me;

54 the waters closed over my head, and I thought I was about to be cut off.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on these verses: "The awareness of deprivation and utter despair as expressed here typifies the conditions antecedent to all genuine spiritual conversion. There is an increasing sense of the awfulness of sin in the sight of a just and holy God; the kind of barrier which it has erected between a man and his Maker, and the absolute inability of an individual to surmount this obstacle and achieve his own salvation. This latter must be by faith, not works, both under the law (*cf.* Hab. 2:4) and under grace (Eph. 2:8f.). The ineffable Deity who dwells on clouds of light cannot be swayed by the pleadings and laments of the sinner (44) until the sins which have caused God to withdraw and turn a deaf ear (*cf.* Is. 59:2) have been truly and fully confessed and expiated. The nation's recognition of itself as offscouring (so must EVV) employs a descriptive term *s^ahi*, occurring only here in the Hebrew Bible, and in the context denotes anything rejected as unfit for use. Its New Testament counterpart (I Cor. 4:13) is equally rare, depicting the suffering of the apostles. The stark tragedy of such a humiliating situation is that it has actually happened to a nation which had boasted for so long about its God. Now this very source of national strength has recoiled in horror against the sins of the people, and in punishing them has made the Israelites an object of ridicule in the Near East."

Twice in these verses Jeremiah states "You have covered yourself." That is the translation of the Hebrew verb *cakak*, meaning "to entwine as a screen," or "to fence in." The first time the verb occurs in Scripture is in the verse about the construction of the Ark of the Covenant: "The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward, *overshadowing* the cover with them. The cherubim are to face each other, looking toward the cover."¹¹⁶ Interestingly, in one of the Psalms the opposite is stated about God: "He wraps himself in light as with a garment." When God gives us the impression of being hidden it is not because He has gone in hiding, but we have. Sin gives us that illusion. When Adam sinned, it was God who called to him "Where are you?"¹¹⁷

The nation that God intended to be a kingdom of priests and a royal nation had become the scum and refuse of the world. The Hebrew words used are *cechiy* and *ma'owc*, both having more or less the same meaning of "garbage." This is the only place in Scripture where *cechiy* is used and *ma'owc* only occurs here and in the last verse of this book: "Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may return; renew our days as of old unless you have *utterly rejected* us and are angry with us beyond measure."

The alphabetic order in vv.46-48 is disturbed. Chronologically, these verses all ought to have begun with the letter *v* *Ayin*, but they begin with the letter *pe*.

¹¹⁵ Rom. 3:23

¹¹⁶ Ex. 25:20

¹¹⁷ Gen. 3:9

V.46 states more briefly what we read in an earlier chapter, “All your enemies open their mouths wide against you; they scoff and gnash their teeth and say, ‘We have swallowed her up. This is the day we have waited for; we have lived to see it.’”¹¹⁸ There also the alphabetic order had been reversed.

Jeremiah uses pictures of the animal world in which a predator chases and catches another defenseless creature. The haunted animal runs for its life but falls in the snare set up by human beings. The images are taken from a fallen and sinful world. In God’s perfect creation the lion and the lamb would feed together, but sin has opened the door for panic and death. The image emphasizes the fact that Judah suffers the consequences of her sin.

This causes the prophet to weep uncontrollably, particularly “because of all the women of my city.” “Women” is the translation of the Hebrew word *bath*, which has the basic meaning of “a daughter.” But it can also mean “the apple of the eye.” As such it is used in the verse: “For this is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘After he has honored me and has sent me against the nations that have plundered you — for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye,’”¹¹⁹ although the word occurs in a slightly different form there. The Hebrew picture is much richer than any English translation can convey. It speaks of sensitivity, as the mention of the eyeball conveys, and also of weeping, which is an emotion in which they eye plays a major role. That which is “the apple of the eye” for Jeremiah is also the same for God. Jeremiah could not see what Zechariah would see a century later, that God was weeping over the fall of Jerusalem. And His tears were actually bigger than Jeremiah’s. We read about Jesus, “As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes.’”¹²⁰

e. Comfort and imprecation 3:55-66

55 I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit.
56 You heard my plea: "Do not close your ears to my cry for relief."
57 You came near when I called you, and you said, "Do not fear."
58 O Lord, you took up my case; you redeemed my life.
59 You have seen, O Lord, the wrong done to me. Uphold my cause!
60 You have seen the depth of their vengeance, all their plots against me.
61 O Lord, you have heard their insults, all their plots against me—
62 what my enemies whisper and mutter against me all day long.
63 Look at them! Sitting or standing, they mock me in their songs.
64 Pay them back what they deserve, O Lord, for what their hands have done.
65 Put a veil over their hearts, and may your curse be on them!
66 Pursue them in anger and destroy them from under the heavens of the Lord.

In these verses Jeremiah compares the fate of Judah and Jerusalem with his own experience when he was thrown in the cistern and sank into the mud.¹²¹ The prophet gives us the details of the prayer he then prayed, which are withheld in *The Book of Jeremiah*. God heard his prayer at that time and sent Ebed-Melech, the Cushite to deliver him. Jeremiah does more here than merely asking that the Lord answers in a similar manner for the benefit of the whole nation. He must have understood why God had allowed him to go through that life-threatening experience. It conditioned him to become the intercessor he shows himself to be in this book of *Lamentations*. In this also Jeremiah becomes a type of Christ, about whom the author of *Hebrews* states: “We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.”¹²²

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations* comments here: “Despite the realization that the nation has suffered because of its obdurate sin, there still lingers the feeling that some injustice has been done (59). Perhaps because of their status as the Chosen People the Jews were always sensitive to abuse and injury inflicted from outside, whatever the source. Consequently they found it impossible to overlook these hostile acts, with the result that the imprecations which they hurled at their enemies, while typical of

¹¹⁸ Lam. 2:16

¹¹⁹ Zech. 2:8

¹²⁰ Luke 19:41,42

¹²¹ Jer. 38:6

¹²² Heb. 4:15

such Near Eastern utterances, seem to possess an unexpected and unusual degree of vindictiveness. Here the writer, acting representatively for the nation, submits his case to the supreme Arbiter of human affairs. Even though he is aware that the punishment and degradation of Judah has resulted from a prolonged disavowal of the covenant obligations, he can still throw himself upon the mercy of the Judge and expect to hear a pronouncement that is just and equitable ... Here the author is praying for the punishment of those who have been the agents of divine anger upon Israel, not so much because of the destruction which they have wrought, but because of the malicious delight which they took in executing their task, and in making Israel the subject of their taunt-song.”

The Hebrew text of v.56 reads literally: “You have heard my voice: do not hide your ear at my breathing, at my cry.” The Hebrew word translated “breathing” is *revachah*, which can also mean “relief.” As such it occurs in the verse: “But when Pharaoh saw that there was *relief*, he hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said.”¹²³ In the context in which it is found here, it reminds us of Paul’s observation about prayer: “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”¹²⁴

Going back to his previous experience in the cistern, Jeremiah reminds the Lord of the words He spoke to him at that time: “Fear not.” Fear must have been a normal emotional reaction to the horror of destruction the survivors witnessed. It must have haunted them for years in their dreams. The trauma was kept alive for years. Jeremiah prays that a fresh encounter with God would heal the emotional damage. Survivors of Nazi concentration camps know what the experience is about. War destroys more than cities; it damages human lives that cannot be rebuilt that easily. “Fear not” is the password into God’s presence. It was the first thing an angel would say to any human being to whom he appeared. Jeremiah says here to God: “Say it again to us.”

In vv.58-60 Jeremiah continues to equate the destruction of Jerusalem with his experience of being thrown into the cistern. He does this to the point where it is difficult to distinguish between the past and the present. “Uphold my cause” and “their plots” can hardly refer to the cistern incident.

The Pulpit Commentary states about these verses: “The reference is still to a former state of things which came to an end. It would make this plainer if we were to alter the rendering, *Thou didst plead... thou didst redeem*. The speaker likens his case to that of a poor man who is opposed at law by a rich oppressor, and who, for want of an advocate, will, to all appearance, become his victim. Suddenly Jehovah appeared and supplied this want. Such are God’s ‘wonders of old time.’” And *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: “Jeremiah gives his conduct, when plotted against by his foes, as an example how the Jews should bring their wrongs at the hands of the Chaldeans before God.”

In reality Jeremiah’s enemies who plotted to murder him and the Chaldeans who destroyed the city are not the actual enemy. The truth remains that behind all human hatred is the archenemy of God. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”¹²⁵ It was Satan who had enticed God’s chosen people and led them to commit idolatry; it was he who tried to punish them for it. Yet, at the same time it was all in God’s hand.

We don’t know whether Jeremiah had been mocked in popular songs during the time he prophesied in Jerusalem, prior to its fall. It may be that the prophet had become the butt of jokes in the same way as modern day politicians become material for comedians. We don’t know either if the Babylonians composed music about the defeat of the Jews. We know their taunt from one of the psalms, where we read: “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’”¹²⁶

In praying for God’s vengeance upon Babylon, Jeremiah asks God to curse them by putting a veil over their hearts. The Hebrew uses the word *meginnah*, which is derived from the word *magan*, “to shield.” *The King James Version* renders the verse: “Give them sorrow of heart.” *The New Living Translation*: “Give them hard and stubborn hearts.” Since this is the only place in Scripture where the word occurs it is

¹²³ Ex. 8:15

¹²⁴ Rom. 8:26,27

¹²⁵ Eph. 6:12

¹²⁶ See Ps. 137:1-3.

difficult to determine its precise meaning. What is clear is that Jeremiah invokes a curse upon his enemies. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments: "They shall have a callous heart, covered with obstinacy, and thy execration. The former is their state, the latter their fate. This is the consequence of their hardening their hearts from thy fear."

Paul uses the same image, applying it to the Jews who refused to accept the Gospel. We read: "But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts."¹²⁷ This cover is the blanket sin spreads upon every human heart to keep out the light that God wants to shine upon us. In the words of the Apostle Paul: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."¹²⁸

The curse Jeremiah wants God to put upon the enemy is that the door of salvation will remain closed for them; that God would keep them in the condition in which they already were. In that way they would stand condemned at the Day of Judgment without hope of leniency.

IV. FOURTH DIRGE 4:1-22
a. Earlier days recalled 4:1-12

1 How the gold has lost its luster, the fine gold become dull! The sacred gems are scattered at the head of every street.

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!

3 Even jackals offer their breasts to nurse their young, but my people have become heartless like ostriches in the desert.

4 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.

5 Those who once ate delicacies are destitute in the streets. Those nurtured in purple now lie on ash heaps.

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.

7 Their princes were brighter than snow and whiter than milk, their bodies more ruddy than rubies, their appearance like sapphires.

8 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.

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.

10 With their own hands compassionate women have cooked their own children, who became their food when my people were destroyed.

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.

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.

It appears that this section pertains mostly to conditions prior to the fall of Jerusalem, while the siege was still going on. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations* comments here: "The figures of *gold* and *sacred stones* (1) are used to depict the populace of Judah. Whereas other nations were relegated to the level of base metal, Israel considered herself to be composed of pure gold and precious stones. But due to a sad reversal in national fortunes, this lofty self-estimate has been changed suddenly. The gold has lost its luster, and the sacred stones have been scattered indiscriminately in the streets among the dirt and rubble. The twofold figure of the pillaging of the Temple and the slaughter of the desperate defenders of Jerusalem is a vivid reminder of the events narrated in 2 Kings 25:9, Jeremiah 52:12-23 and Lamentations 2:19. For

¹²⁷ II Cor 3:14,15

¹²⁸ Eph. 2:1-3

those who esteemed themselves as high-quality gold, the kind of experience which reduced them to the level of base metal in the opinion of their enemies was of harrowing psychological and spiritual proportions.”

Judah may have had an inflated opinion about herself, but God had indicated that He considered her to be a treasure in His sight. He had said to the people at the foot of Mount Sinai: “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”¹²⁹ And from Jesus’ parables we gather that God considers mankind to be His treasure in a field and a pearl of great value.¹³⁰ We must remember that Jeremiah’s lamentations are God’s lamentations over the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. In the Babylonian invasion the pearls were cast to the swine.

Man owes his intrinsic value to the fact that he is created in God’s image and likeness. It was sin that reduced us from precious gold to clay and dust. The Gospel message will ultimately restore luster to the gold, but in our present condition we remain jars of clay. As the Apostle Paul puts it: “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”¹³¹

This Gospel message was hidden from Jeremiah’s eyes. The only thing he could see through his tears was that the glory had faded and the precious stones were scattered like pebbles.

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary states: “The prophet contrasts, in various affecting instances, the wretched circumstances of the Jewish nation, with the flourishing state of their affairs in former times. Here they are compared to gold, *zaahaab*, native gold from the mine, which, contrary to its nature, is become dim, is tarnished; and even the fine, the sterling gold, *ketem*, that which was stamped to make it current, is changed or adulterated, so as to be no longer passable. This might be applied to the temple, but particularly to the fallen priests and apostate prophets.”

This faded glory shows itself in the corruption of the human heart. God calls them “heartless.” The Hebrew word *‘akzar* refers to deadly violence. It is sometimes rendered “cruel.” Moses used the word in describing apostate Israel: “Their wine is the venom of serpents, the *deadly* poison of cobras.”¹³² Judah sin of apostasy made her behave unnaturally to the point where jackals compared favorably to her. “Jackal” is the translation of the Hebrew word *tanniyn*, which is originally applied to a marine or land monster. We find the word in the verse: “So God created *the great creatures of the sea* and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind.”¹³³

The jackal is compared favorably to Judah, but Judah is compared to an ostrich, about which God had said to Job: “The wings of the ostrich flap joyfully, but they cannot compare with the pinions and feathers of the stork. She lays her eggs on the ground and lets them warm in the sand, unmindful that a foot may crush them, that some wild animal may trample them. She treats her young harshly, as if they were not hers; she cares not that her labor was in vain, for God did not endow her with wisdom or give her a share of good sense. Yet when she spreads her feathers to run, she laughs at horse and rider.”¹³⁴

Children are always hardest hit in crises (v.4). They are also least able to understand the reason of what happens to them. Childhood experiences of privation and loss of loved ones mar people for life. And many children perish in war and never make it into adulthood. The people in v.5 are adults who had been used to a life of comfort and luxury. The destitute ones are those who survived, those on the ash heap are the dead who were denied a descent burial. “Ash heap” is the rendering of the Hebrew word *‘ashpoth*, which *The King James Version* renders “dung hill.” One of the gates of Jerusalem was called “the Dung Gate.”¹³⁵

About the comparison of the fall of Jerusalem with the destruction of Sodom, R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments: “Although *Sodom* (6) had been proverbial for its wickedness among the Hebrews, that sinful city had been destroyed in a comparatively brief period, and thus did not suffer prolonged agonies. For her far more serious crime of rejecting covenant mercies, Jerusalem must seemingly endure a proportionately greater chastisement. This sentiment carries with it a great deal of poetic pathos, however, and should thus be related carefully to the distraught attitude of the author. It is precarious to

¹²⁹ Ex. 19:5,6

¹³⁰ Matt. 13:44,45

¹³¹ II Cor. 4:7

¹³² Deut. 32:33

¹³³ Gen. 1:21

¹³⁴ Job 39:13-18

¹³⁵ Neh. 2:13

postulate the concept of ‘degrees of sin,’ since all wrongdoing is abhorrent to God, however insignificant man might happen to regard certain aspects of it. There are, nevertheless, degrees of culpability, as the penal legislation of the Law made clear (cf. Am. 3:2; Mt. 5:32ff.; Lk. 12:47f., etc.), but the nation had been slow to accept its responsibilities in this respect. Again, while the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC was carried out with appropriate thoroughness by the enemy conquerors, there is no evidence that it was perpetrated with any greater degree of competence than was normal for the period. In any event, much of the suffering and hardship associated with the reduction of Jerusalem could have been avoided by a formal surrender of the city to the enemy, a procedure which Jeremiah had recommended. Here again, however, the same willful and obdurate spirit which had rejected divine mercies time and again brought upon itself its just desserts by insisting that Jerusalem be defended to the last.”

Vv.7 and 8 describe what the siege had done to the “princes.” The Hebrew word used is *naziyr*, which the older versions render “Nazirites,” the modern ones “princes.” It is unlikely that this pertains to the members of the royal family. During the earlier raids on Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar had taken most of those into captivity¹³⁶ and Zedekiah’s sons were executed when the king was captured and sentenced.¹³⁷ Jeremiah probably describes any young men with striking physical appearance who used to grace the streets of Jerusalem. The siege and famine had reduced those to miserable creatures whose skin stuck to their bones. Sin had eliminated youth and its beauty.

Vv.9 and 10 continue to describe conditions during the siege. The one-and-a-half year period in which the population slowly starved to death brought out the worst in human nature. Those killed during sporadic breakouts were probably celebrated as heroes. Jeremiah states here that they were definitely better off than those who were starving, those who died a little bit every day. As a Dutch poet expressed, “Hard death comes in soft beds.”

Moses had predicted in gruesome detail the moral decline that would be the result of disobedience to the law, which would turn social human beings into cannibals. We read: “Because of the suffering that your enemy will inflict on you during the siege, you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the Lord your God has given you. Even the most gentle and sensitive man among you will have no compassion on his own brother or the wife he loves or his surviving children, and he will not give to one of them any of the flesh of his children that he is eating. It will be all he has left because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege of all your cities. The most gentle and sensitive woman among you — so sensitive and gentle that she would not venture to touch the ground with the sole of her foot — will begrudge the husband she loves and her own son or daughter the afterbirth from her womb and the children she bears. For she intends to eat them secretly during the siege and in the distress that your enemy will inflict on you in your cities.”¹³⁸

The Hebrew text of v.11 reads literally: “Yahweh has accomplished his fury; he has poured out his fierce anger, and has kindled a fire in Zion, and it has devoured the foundations thereof.” Those foundations were the moral foundations of society. Paul’s description of the wrath of God upon the gentiles who sinned against the light they possessed can be applied here to the people of Judah: “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. Therefore God gave them over to the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.”¹³⁹ When morality is no longer seen as an absolute and becomes subject to private interpretation, morality dies.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on this: “The outpouring of divine anger constituted the long-promised punishment for the deliberate and sustained rejection of the covenantal provisions. The resultant work of desolation in Judah had been as comprehensive as the scope of divine blessing could have been for an obedient and holy nation. The people had not come to God for life (cf. Jn. 5:40), and therefore death had overtaken them. Their trust had not been in God their Rock, but in the imagined physical impregnability of Jerusalem. Although the hill of Zion was so difficult of access as to make a military assault upon the city an extremely difficult and costly affair, the fact that Jerusalem had been conquered twice since it was first settled by the Jebusites would have hardly led pagan kings to think

¹³⁶ Dan. 1:3

¹³⁷ II Kings 25:7

¹³⁸ Deut. 28:53-57

¹³⁹ Rom. 1:18, 24-26

that it was completely impregnable (12). What the author seems to be describing here is the false confidence of the citizens of Jerusalem, who imagined that potential enemies considered the site as immune to reduction as they themselves did, thus making the same mistake as the Jebusites of earlier days (2 Sa. 5:6-8). Be that as it may, the very fact that the pagan adversaries of Judah were being used by God as instrument for the punishment of His disobedient and idolatrous people meant that there was no natural obstacle significant enough to bar their advance.”

b. Sin and its results 4:13-20

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.

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.

15 "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."

16 The Lord himself has scattered them; he no longer watches over them. The priests are shown no honor, the elders no favor.

17 Moreover, our eyes failed, looking in vain for help; from our towers we watched for a nation that could not save us.

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.

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.

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.

One of the problems in this section is that, while describing the fall of Jerusalem, the picture drawn is of the conditions of the city during the siege. We must make allowance for Jeremiah's poetic license to explain this discrepancy. The reference to the shedding of blood is probably to the murder of Uriah son of Shemaiah, who, like Jeremiah, prophesied in the name of the Lord and was murdered by order of King Jehoiakim.¹⁴⁰ But Jeremiah speaks of more than one murder. He probably means that they are responsible for all the loss of life during the siege and after the fall of the city. The eyes of the citizens have been opened to the fact that they are the ones that were responsible for the disaster. The prophets had prophesied that the city would not fall to the Babylonians and the priests had not stood in the gap before the Lord to save the nation. Now they are considered as lepers, outcasts of society, untouchables.

In saying that the Lord has scattered them, Jeremiah moves in and out of the siege picture to condition after the fall of the city. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on v.17: "Calvin translates, 'While as yet we stood as a state, our eyes failed,' etc. But Lam 4:18 shows that it is not past, but present evils which cause their eyes to fail. Explain, therefore, as above, As yet our eyes fail (in looking) for our vain help - i.e., in looking to a people for help whose help is vain, who cannot help us (Isa 30:7, 'The Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose')." *The Pulpit Commentary* adds: "To the very last the Jews leaned on 'that broken reed,' Egypt (... Isaiah 36:6); how vain that hope would be Jeremiah had already told them (... Jeremiah 37:7,8)." The references of Isaiah and Jeremiah read respectively: "Look now, you are depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which pierces a man's hand and wounds him if he leans on it! Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who depend on him" and: "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of me, 'Pharaoh's army, which has marched out to support you, will go back to its own land, to Egypt. Then the Babylonians will return and attack this city; they will capture it and burn it down.'"

The reminder that the people were looking to Egypt and other nations for help against Babylonia instead of looking to the Lord, puts the blame for the disaster on the whole population. No one trusted God alone for his or her protection. Their idols failed them as well as their allies.

V.19 probably refers to the capture of Zedekiah and the army that was with him.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Jer. 26:20-23

¹⁴¹ Jer. 52:6-9

V.20 contains several surprises. Bible scholars are unanimous in applying the text to King Zedekiah, as a type of Christ. The Hebrew word used to describe him is *mashiyach*, “anointed,” “Messiah.” *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: “The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken - our king, with whose life ours was bound up. The original reference seems to have been to Josiah (2 Chron 35:25), killed in battle with Pharaoh-necho; but the language is here applied to Zedekiah, who, though worthless, was still lineal representative of David, and type of Messiah the ‘Anointed.’ Viewed personally, the language is too favorable to apply to him. Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen - under him we hoped to live securely, even in spite of the surrounding pagan nations (Grotius). *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “The words are metaphorical, suggesting that Zedekiah was hunted like a wild animal, and driven into the pitfall.”

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary accepts the interpretation of Zedekiah being the Messiah, but condemns the language used. We read: “The shadow under which they thought they should live proved like that of Jonah’s gourd, which withered in a night. He that was the anointed of the Lord was taken in their pits, as if he had been but a beast of prey; so little account did they make of a person deemed sacred and not to be violated. Note, When we make any creature the breath of our nostrils, and promise ourselves that we shall live by it, it is just with God to stop that breath, and deprive us of the life we expected by it; for God will have the honor of being himself along our life and the length of our days.”

How much Zedekiah can be seen as God’s anointed is an open question. He was not the next in line as one of David’s descendants, as Jehoiakim was, but had been appointed by Nebuchadnezzar. Regardless of the immediate interpretation of the text, to see this as a prophecy about Christ seems to be quite legitimate. Isaiah foretold Christ’s involvement in the distress of mankind in a way that fits Jeremiah’s description: “In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.”¹⁴² And the two who traveled with Jesus to Emmaus, expressed to Him the same feeling of despair as Jeremiah here: “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.”¹⁴³

c. Punishment promised to Edom 4:21,22

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.

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.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations* comments here: “The command to *rejoice* (21) is a rather derisive reference to the short-lived satisfaction which the Edomites can expect to enjoy as a result of the Chaldean conquest of their hereditary enemy. The Edomites had been the bitter adversaries of Judah for centuries and the prophets pronounced judgment upon her for maintaining this attitude of hostility (Am. 9:12; Ob. 10-16; Je. 49:7-22; Ezk. 25:12-14; 35:15). Edom had apparently refused to join any alliance with Judah and Egypt against the Babylonians. After the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC, Nebuchadnezzar allotted the rural areas of Judah to the Edomites as a reward for their political neutrality, and as a recognition of the active help which they had provided for Chaldean military units during the final days of the campaign (*cf.* Ezk. 25:12-14; Ob. 11-14) ... The temporary ascendancy of Edom will vanish once the retribution and destruction promised by the prophets overtakes her, for whereas the Israelites will be free from future punishment, Edom still has to drink the cup of divine wrath. When this latter event finally occurred, the Israelites could interpret it as an indication of the commencement of their own restoration to divine favor.”

The joy of the Edomites is mentioned in one of the captivity Psalms: “Remember, O Lord, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. ‘Tear it down,’ they cried, ‘tear it down to its foundations.’”¹⁴⁴ This complete lack of compassion, this pleasure in the misfortune of others would cost them dearly.

The animosity between Israel and Edom goes back to the birth of the twin brothers, or even before. We read about Rebecca’s prayer and the birth of the twins: “The babies jostled each other within

¹⁴² Isa. 63:9

¹⁴³ Luke 24:19-21

¹⁴⁴ Ps. 137:7

her, and she said, ‘Why is this happening to me?’ So she went to inquire of the Lord. The Lord said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.’ When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob.”¹⁴⁵

God had chosen Jacob over Esau before their birth. The jostling of the babies in Rebecca’s womb turned out to be more than the normal experience a mother has during pregnancy. There was a fight going on between God and His opponent, between light and darkness in the womb of this expecting mother. An eternal conflict was fought out in a human body.

From a human standpoint, God’s choice would not have been our choice. The rugged Esau generates more sympathy in us than slick deceitful Jacob, who even tried to trip his brother in birth, grasping his heel. Yet, at the end God said to Israel through Malachi: “‘I have loved you,’ says the Lord. ‘But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’ ‘Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ the Lord says. ‘Yet I have loved Jacob, ‘but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.’ Edom may say, ‘Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins.’ But this is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the Lord. You will see it with your own eyes and say, ‘Great is the Lord—even beyond the borders of Israel!’”¹⁴⁶

“You will be ... stripped naked” is the rendering of the Hebrew “you will make yourself naked.” The Hebrew word used is *‘arah*, which has the basic meaning of “to be bare,” or “to empty.” The first time the word is used in Scripture is in the encounter of Eliezer with Rebecca, where we read: “So she quickly *emptied* her jar into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels.” It is not the same word that is used in the verse “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.”¹⁴⁷ At the end of her history, Edom would be left empty and bereft of all that constitutes the glory of a nation. God would turn “his mountains into a wasteland and leave his inheritance to the desert jackals.” According to *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, “In 300 B.C. Mt. Seir with its capital Petra fell into the hands of the Nabataeans.”

For the Judeans, the Babylonian captivity would not be the end of their history. Jeremiah had prophesied that their punishment would end after seventy years,¹⁴⁸ but Edom would cease to exist.

The last phrase of v.22 reads literally in Hebrew: “He will visit your iniquity, o daughter of Edom, He will discover your sins.” The Hebrew word used here is *galah*, which means “to denude.” We find it in the verse that describes Noah’s drunkenness: “When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay *uncovered* inside his tent.”¹⁴⁹ When Adam and Eve sinned, God covered their nakedness with a skin of an animal that had been killed by way of atonement.¹⁵⁰ Here that sacrificial cover is taken away and sin is exposed in all its ugliness.

The verdict of Edom pertained to what she had done to Israel and Judah. God took that as a personal insult. Jesus explains that God considers as sin our disregard for His atonement. This is clear from what He says about the coming of the Holy Spirit: “When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”¹⁵¹

V. FIFTH DIRGE 5:1-22

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, introduces this chapter with: “While this dirge contains twenty-two verses, the alphabetic acrostic arrangement has not been followed, in contrast to the

¹⁴⁵ Gen. 25:22-26

¹⁴⁶ Mal. 1:2-5

¹⁴⁷ Gen. 3:7

¹⁴⁸ Jer. 29:10

¹⁴⁹ Gen. 9:21

¹⁵⁰ Gen. 3:21

¹⁵¹ John 16:8-11

structure of previous laments. The chapter comprises a confession of sin and a recognition of the abiding sovereignty of God. Since it is more strictly a prayer than a lament, its spontaneous and personal character may have made it less amenable to a stylized acrostic arrangement than the preceding laments.”

a. A plea for mercy 5:1-10

- 1 Remember, O Lord, what has happened to us; look, and see our disgrace.**
2 Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens, our homes to foreigners.
3 We have become orphans and fatherless, our mothers like widows.
4 We must buy the water we drink; our wood can be had only at a price.
5 Those who pursue us are at our heels; we are weary and find no rest.
6 We submitted to Egypt and Assyria to get enough bread.
7 Our fathers sinned and are no more, and we bear their punishment.
8 Slaves rule over us, and there is none to free us from their hands.
9 We get our bread at the risk of our lives because of the sword in the desert.
10 Our skin is hot as an oven, feverish from hunger.

The opening line reminds us of Ethan’s Psalm that prophesies the sufferings of the Messiah: “O Lord, where is your former great love, which in your faithfulness you swore to David? Remember, Lord, how your servant has been mocked, how I bear in my heart the taunts of all the nations, the taunts with which your enemies have mocked, O Lord, with which they have mocked every step of your anointed one.”¹⁵²

“Disgrace” is the rendering of the Hebrew word *cherpah*, “reproach.” It is used in the section that tells of the circumcision of the Israelites at Gilgal at the end of their desert journey. We read: “Then the Lord said to Joshua, ‘Today I have rolled away the *reproach* of Egypt from you.’ So the place has been called Gilgal to this day.”¹⁵³ It is as if the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem had left the Israelites uncircumcised, excluded from God’s covenant. “Gilgal” means “rolled away.” The incident, described in Joshua, foreshadows Jesus’ resurrection when the stone was rolled away from the tomb. The disgrace, on the other hand, prefigures the rejection of the Messiah, not only by the people, but particularly by God, as is evident from the cry “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”¹⁵⁴ How could God not remember that!

The author mentions seven factors that constitute disgrace: (1) loss of the Promised Land, (2) loss of parents and spouses, (3) privation of basic commodities (water and firewood), (4) persecution, (5) loss of rest, (6) loss of freedom and (7) hunger.

The Hebrew words for “aliens” and “foreigners,” used in v.2, *zuwr* and *nokriy*, carry with them a connotation of adultery. It speaks of those who have turned away from fellowship with God. It describes both Israel and Judah’s condition prior to captivity as well as the mindset of the invaders of the land. It was the possession of the Promised Land that made Israel a nation. Losing the place of God’s rest meant a loss of identity.

The death or captivity of most males in the nation left behind a remnant of orphans and widows. This meant a total breakup of family life. It also meant a loss of role models that would guide young people to recognize the fatherhood of God.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on v.4: “The Jews were compelled to pay the enemy for the water of their own cisterns after the overthrow of Jerusalem. Or rather, it refers to their sojourn in Babylon: they had to pay tax for access to the rivers and fountains. Thus, ‘our’ means the water which we need, the commonest necessary of life.”

V.5 reads literally in Hebrew: “Our necks [are] under persecution: we labor [and] have no rest.” R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentation*, observes that the text presents certain difficulties in translation. He suggests the rendering “We are pursued to your very necks,” and comments: “While the meaning is uncertain, it may allude to the ancient practice of a victor placing his foot on the neck of a prostrate enemy to symbolize complete subjugation.” Joshua did this with some of the captured kings during the conquest of Canaan. We read: “When they had brought these kings to Joshua, he summoned all the men of Israel and said to the army commanders who had come with him, ‘Come here and put your feet on the necks of these

¹⁵² Ps. 89:49-51

¹⁵³ Josh. 5:9

¹⁵⁴ Matt. 27:46

kings.’ So they came forward and placed their feet on their necks.”¹⁵⁵ Here the roles are reversed and the conquerors have become captives.

V.6 probably refers both to those who have been taken into captivity and to the poor who were left behind. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments here: “Starvation awaits the Jews unless they submit to one or the other of their hereditary foes. Some escape to Egypt and ‘give the hand’ (*i.e.* surrender ... Jeremiah 1:15) to the lords of the fertile Nile valley; others acquiesce in the fate of the majority, and sue for the alms of the Babylonians.”

V.7 speaks about more than the sinful nature a child inherits from his parents. There is an allusion to the first of the *Ten Commandments*: “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.”¹⁵⁶ People who practiced idolatry opened themselves up to the influence of evil spirits who could stay in a family from generation to generation.

In the phrase “Slaves rule over us,” the Hebrew word used is *ʿebed*, meaning “a servant.” The first time that word is used in Scripture is in the curse Noah pronounced on the son of Ham, when the latter had mocked his father: “Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of *slaves* will he be to his brothers.”¹⁵⁷ R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes here: “Judean society after 587 BC had become disrupted to the point where class distinctions were meaningless. Consequently anyone who courted the favor of the occupying Babylonians could exercise some modest degree of civil authority.”

On v.9 Harrison comments: “A real threat to livelihood came from marauding bands (9), whether of Babylonians or Bedouin Arabs, who preyed upon unsuspecting villagers attempting to obtain a little food from nearby fields.”

V.10 reads literally in Hebrew: “Our skin like an oven was black because of the terrible famine.” In the previous chapter we read: “Their skin has shriveled on their bones; it has become as dry as a stick.”¹⁵⁸ Job complained: “My skin grows black and peels; my body burns with fever.”¹⁵⁹ And the psalmist sang: “Though I am like a wineskin in the smoke, I do not forget your decrees.”¹⁶⁰ The Hebrew word, translated “black” is *kamar*, which literally means “to intertwine or contract,” or “to shrivel with heat.” It also conveys the feeling of yearning for something, as in “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is *aroused*.”¹⁶¹ The verse suggests both the physical condition and the accompanying emotions of a famine.

b. The nature of sin 5:11-18

11 Women have been ravished in Zion, and virgins in the towns of Judah.

12 Princes have been hung up by their hands; elders are shown no respect.

13 Young men toil at the millstones; boys stagger under loads of wood.

14 The elders are gone from the city gate; the young men have stopped their music.

15 Joy is gone from our hearts; our dancing has turned to mourning.

16 The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned!

17 Because of this our hearts are faint, because of these things our eyes grow dim

18 for Mount Zion, which lies desolate, with jackals prowling over it.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on this section: “The author again comments upon the terrible retribution which the nation has brought upon itself. Having been betrayed by the ‘slaves’ who had risen to power, the princes had been further dishonored by being suspended in mid-air with their hands bound together. Even youths and children had been coerced into doing heavy manual work

¹⁵⁵ Josh. 10:24

¹⁵⁶ Ex. 20:3-5

¹⁵⁷ Gen. 9:25

¹⁵⁸ Lam. 4:8

¹⁵⁹ Job 30:30

¹⁶⁰ Ps. 119:83

¹⁶¹ Hos. 11:8

because of the disrupted state of society (13). Whether or not this was part of a pattern of forced labor imposed by the conquerors is uncertain from the text. It was demeaning for young men to grind grain, this being women's work (*cf.* Jdg. 16:21). The place where the elders and judges sat in earlier days to dispense judgment is now desolate (14). National dignity and prestige (16) have been lost because of the persistent rejection of the covenantal obligations. This image completes the concept of degradation of Israel, and assesses the cause of her downfall with complete accuracy. The realization that sin must inevitably result in punishment has promoted the author to intercede in behalf of his people. A graphic picture of the desolation which has overtaken the once-populous Mount Zion is conveyed by the image of prowling *jackals* (18)."

"Ravished" in v.11 is the rendering of the Hebrew word *`anah*, which has the basic meaning of "looking down upon someone," or "to abase oneself." The first time the word is used in Scripture is in the prophecy God gives to Abraham about the future fate of Israel in Egypt: "Then the Lord said to him, 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and *mistreated* four hundred years.'" ¹⁶² It is also found in Sarah's treatment of Hagar, in the verse: "'Your servant is in your hands,' Abram said. 'Do with her whatever you think best.' Then Sarai *mistreated* Hagar; so she fled from her." ¹⁶³ Moses had predicted that Israel's conqueror would treat her women that way. We read: "You will be pledged to be married to a woman, but another will take her and ravish her." ¹⁶⁴ There can be no doubt about it that in many cases this would amount to rape. *The New Living Translation* puts it bluntly as: "Our enemies rape the women in Jerusalem and the young girls in all the towns of Judah."

No one was exempt from cruel treatment by the conquerors. The enemy made no distinction between sex, age or rank; all were treated with the same brutal brutality. The scene probably describes the first few days after the fall of the city before the temple was burned and the city walls were torn down, before the population was taken into captivity.

Bible scholars differ in their interpretation of the words "Princes have been hung up by their hands." *The Adam Clarke's Commentary*, for instance, states: "It is very probable that this was a species of punishment. They were suspended from hooks in the wall by their hands till they died through torture and exhaustion. The body of Saul was fastened to the wall of Bethshan, probably in the same way; but his head had already been taken off. They were hung in this way that they might be devoured by the fowls of the air. It was a custom with the Persians after they had slain, strangled, or beheaded their enemies, to hang their bodies upon poles, or empale them." *Barnes' Notes* interprets it: "After the princes had been put to death their bodies were hung up by the hand to expose them to public contumely." *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, referring to Grotius, believes it simply means that "Princes were hung by the hand of the enemy." *The Pulpit Commentary* shares this interpretation. That commentary continues: "Impalement after death was a common punishment with the Assyrians and Babylonians. Thus Sennacherib says that, after capturing rebellious Ekron, he hung the bodies of the chief men on stakes all round the city." *The Living Bible* and *The New Living Translation* both render the phrase: "Our princes are being hanged by their thumbs."

The Hebrew text of vv.14 and 15 reads literally: "The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their music. The joy is ceased; our heart has turned our dance into mourning." The elders in the gate represent the legal system and the music and dance the entertainment and relaxation. ¹⁶⁵ Both pictures denote the death of the city. The picture reminds us of the judgment the angel pronounces over Babylon in Revelation. We read there: "The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again."

V.16 turns from the place to the person. God created man to be the crown of His creation. As David sang in the psalms: "You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor." ¹⁶⁶ Sin has taken away the crown. It has severed fellowship with God, who revealed Himself on Mount Zion. The place of revelation turned into a desert, physically, emotionally and spiritually. The jackal is one of the most repulsive creatures. Isaiah used the image of the roaming jackal to depict the fall of Babylon. "She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherd will rest his flocks there. But desert creatures will lie there, jackals will fill

¹⁶² Gen. 15:13

¹⁶³ Gen. 16:6

¹⁶⁴ Deut. 28:30

¹⁶⁵ Rev. 18:22

¹⁶⁶ Ps. 8:5

her houses; there the owls will dwell, and there the wild goats will leap about. Hyenas will howl in her strongholds, jackals in her luxurious palaces.”¹⁶⁷ Jeremiah prophesied the same about Jerusalem: I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals; and I will lay waste the towns of Judah so no one can live there.”¹⁶⁸

c. A plea for divine restoration 5:19-22

19 You, O Lord, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation.

20 Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long?

21 Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may return; renew our days as of old

22 unless you have utterly rejected us and are angry with us beyond measure.

Lamentations ends with a prayer that recognizes the hand of God in the terrible things that happened to the nation of Israel. It also expresses the inconsistency of what happened on earth with the reality of God’s presence and character in heaven. The Hebrew text of v.19 reads literally: “You, o Yahweh, remains forever; your throne from generation to generation.” The word used is *yashab*, which has the primary meaning of “to sit down.” In almost every case it is translated “to dwell,” as in the verse: “So Cain went out from the Lord’s presence and *lived* in the land of Nod, east of Eden.”¹⁶⁹ It occurs also in “The One *enthroned* in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.”¹⁷⁰ *The New King James Version* reads: “You, O Lord, remain forever; Your throne from generation to generation.” *The New Living Translation*: “But Lord, you remain the same forever! Your throne continues from generation to generation.” *The New International Version*’s “reign forever” seems to take some liberty with the text.

The gist of the opening phrase is astonishment about the incongruence between the character of God and the events on earth. Habakkuk expressed this in similar fashion, saying: “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?”¹⁷¹

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “The poet wishes to suggest that the idea seems to him inconsistent with the covenant relationship of Jehovah towards Israel. May we not compare a striking passage in Isaiah which should probably be rendered thus: ‘A wife of one’s youth, can she be rejected? saith thy God’ (... Isaiah 54:6)? Both passages express, in a most delicate way, the incredulity of the writers with regard to the absolute rejection of Israel.”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments on the final verses of this book: “God is the only source of true revival ... In the Hebrew this is more probably a final query: Wilt Thou utterly reject us? In other words: ‘Surely you cannot cast us off and be angry with us forever!’ God will not always chide. Or as another prayed: ‘In wrath, remember mercy’ (Hab 3:2).”

The two important Hebrew words in v.20 are *shakach*, “to forget,” and *azab*, “to forsake.” The first occurs in Isaiah’s exclamation: “Can a mother *forget* the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may *forget*, I will not *forget* you!”¹⁷² This answers Jeremiah’s complaint quite effectively here. “Forsake” *azab* first occurs in the verse: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”¹⁷³ It is also David’s cry in one of his psalms: “My God, my God, why have you *forsaken* me?”¹⁷⁴ which Jesus uttered on the cross: “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”¹⁷⁵ That cry from the mouth of the Son of God answers Jeremiah’s question. It puts the cross at the center of the whole book of Lamentations. It is God’s answer to all the “whys” in the world.

¹⁶⁷ Isa. 13:20-22

¹⁶⁸ Jer. 9:11

¹⁶⁹ Gen. 4:16

¹⁷⁰ Ps. 2:4

¹⁷¹ Hab. 1:13

¹⁷² Isa. 49:15

¹⁷³ Gen. 2:24

¹⁷⁴ Ps. 22:1

¹⁷⁵ Matt. 27:46

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations* concludes his comments on this book with the observation: “Several Old Testament prophecies conclude on a negative or inauspicious note (*cf.* Ec. 12:14; Is. 66:24; Mal. 4:6), as does Lamentations. Consequently in synagogue readings it became customary to conclude such compositions with a repetition of the preceding verse, so that under these circumstances verse 21 would be read again after verse 22.” Let’s do that also:

“Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may return; renew our days as of old.” Amen!

Toccoa Falls, GA. 10/27/2008