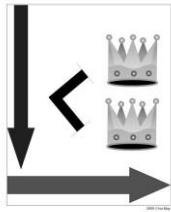


Week Thirty-five: Lament Over the Death of a Kingdom - Lamentations 1-5



Overview

When God promised Adam and Eve a seed who would crush the head of the serpent, He planned a people through whom He would send that Seed. When He called Abraham, He promised, “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). The iron furnace of Egypt prepared Abraham’s descendants to follow Moses’ leadership. Forty years in the wilderness unified them as a people and prepared them to enter into the land that God had promised to Abraham. In the Law, God gave the people a promise of blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). They began well under Joshua’s leadership, but they soon fell into idolatry and sexual sin after his death. A succession of judges led Israel to demand a king like the nations around them. King Saul was self-serving, while King David followed hard after God. He desired to build a temple for the Lord, but God assigned the task to his son Solomon. Solomon began well by building the temple that David envisioned. Sadly, he failed to follow God all the days of his life, and after his death the kingdom divided. The ten tribes of Israel suffered under twenty evil kings and then went into Assyrian captivity. Only a handful of the twenty rulers who led Judah during their 345-year history followed the LORD. Eventually, they also suffered captivity by the Babylonians.

The prophet Jeremiah’s ministry began under Josiah’s reign and lasted for years after the Babylonians had destroyed the temple and the city of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Many believe that he penned the book of Lamentations. This eyewitness account of the Babylonian invasion and Jerusalem’s destruction captures the devastation of a people and their land. Lamentations also expresses the author’s broken heart over a people bent on rebellion and their judgment by God. Jeremiah witnessed the death of a kingdom.

Lamentations employs an easy to memorize form (an acrostic). Chapters one, two, and four contain 22 verses that begin with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter three contains sixty-six verses, grouped in threes according to the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter five contains twenty-two verses, with no acrostic structure.

Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson, participants will understand that, though it grieves Him to do so, God fulfills His promises to judge His disobedient and rebellious covenant people. Further, the judgment of God always precipitates deep grief over sin, and how both sin and judgment diminish God’s people.

Key Truths

God warns His people far in advance regarding the consequences of continued disobedience.

Those who experience the judgment of God also encounter deep grief over their sin and the consequences of their sin.

Though God keeps His promise regarding judgment, He often offers hope in the midst of judgment.

Lesson Outline

A lament - a passionate expression of grief or sorrow after a death of a loved one in the form of a poem or song. The Book of Lamentations provides a funeral dirge composed to grieve over the death of a Judah as a kingdom.

1. **The Death of Jerusalem and the Exile of her People.** Moses had warned Israel nearly nine hundred years earlier that continued rebellion against God's covenant would not end well for them:
 - Leviticus 26:23-25a, 29, 31-33 - "And if by these things you are not reformed by Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you, and I will punish you yet seven times for your sins. And I will bring a sword against you that will execute the vengeance of the covenant . . . you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters I will lay your cities waste and bring your sanctuaries to desolation, and I will not smell the fragrance of your sweet aromas. I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it. I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste."
 - Deuteronomy 28:49a, 52a, 53, 62-63 - "The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth . . . they shall besiege you at all your gates until your high and fortified walls, in which you trust, come down throughout all of your land . . . you shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom the LORD your God has given you, in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you . . . You shall be left few in number, whereas you were as the stars of heaven in multitude, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God. And it shall be, that just as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good and multiply you, so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you and bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess."

Jeremiah connects Judah's rebellion and her destruction to the curses of Leviticus and Deuteronomy:

- "For the LORD has afflicted her because of the multitude of her transgressions" (Lam. 1:5b).
- "The LORD is righteous, for I rebelled against His commandment" (1:18)
- "I have been very rebellious" (1:20b).
- "The LORD has done what He purposed; He has fulfilled His word which He commanded in days of old. He has thrown down and has not pitied, and He has

caused an enemy to rejoice over you; He has exalted the horn of your adversaries” (2:17).

- “We have transgressed and rebelled” (3:42a).
 - “The LORD has fulfilled His fury . . . because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed in her midst the blood of the just” (4:11a, 13).
2. **The Destruction and Desecration of a Property** - “How lonely sits the city that was full of people How like a widow is she, who was great among the nations” (1:1a).
- Roads - “The roads to Zion mourn because no one comes to the set feasts” (1:4a)
 - Gates - “Her gates are desolate” (1:4b); “Her gates have sunk into the ground” (2:9); “The adversary and the enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem” (4:12).
 - Sanctuary - “The adversary has spread his hand over all her pleasant things; for she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary” (1:10); “The LORD has spurned His altar, He has abandoned His sanctuary; He has given up the walls of her palaces into the hand of the enemy. They have made a noise in the house of the LORD as on the day of a set feast” (2:7).
 - Splendor - “And from the daughter of Zion all her splendor has departed” (1:6).

The city and temple whose purpose was to bear God’s Name have been destroyed.

3. **The Demotion of a People** - “The princess among the provinces has become a slave” (1:1b); “Her adversaries have become the master, her enemies prosper; for the LORD has afflicted her because of the multitude of her transgressions” (1:5).
- Elders and priests - “My priests and My elders breathed their last in the city, while they sought food to restore their life” (1:19); “The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground and keep silence; they throw dust on their heads and gird themselves with sackcloth” (2:10); “The people do not respect the priests nor show favor to the elders” (4:16; 5:12).
 - Princes - “Her princes have become like deer that find no pasture, that flee without strength before the pursuer” (1:6); “The LORD has swallowed up and has not pitied . . . He has profaned the kingdom and its princes” (2:2); “Her king and her princes are among the nations” (2:9); “Princes were hung by their hands” (5:12).
 - Prophets - “Her prophets find no vision from the LORD” (2:9); “Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not uncovered your iniquity, to bring back your captives, but have envisioned for you false prophecies and delusions” (2:14); “Because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed in her midst the blood of the just” (4:13).
 - Virgins - “Her virgins are afflicted” (1:4); “The virgins of Jerusalem bow their heads to the ground” (2:10b).
 - Mothers and babies - “They say to their mothers, ‘Where is grain and wine?’ As they swoon like the wounded in the streets of the city, as their life is poured out in

their mothers' bosom" (2:12); "We have become orphans and waifs, our mothers like widows" (5:3).

The people who bore God's Name now bear the shame of their sin and judgment.

4. The Despair of a Prophet

- Tears - "My eyes fail with tears, my heart is troubled; my bile is poured on the ground because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, because the children and the infants faint in the streets of the city" (2:11); "My eyes overflow with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people. My eyes flow and do not cease, without interruption, till the LORD from heaven looks down and sees. My eyes bring suffering to my soul because of all the daughters of my city" (3:48-51).
- Physical, psychological, social, and spiritual hurt - "He has aged my flesh and my skin, and broken my bones. He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and woe. He has set me in dark places like the dead of long ago. He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out; He has made my chain heavy. Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayer. He has blocked by ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked. He has been to me a bear lying in wait, like a lion in ambush. He has turned aside my ways and torn me in pieces; He has made me desolate" (3:4-11); "I have become the ridicule of all my people—their taunting song all the day long" (3:14). "You have moved my soul far from peace; I have forgotten prosperity" (3:17); "My enemies without cause hunted me down like a bird. They silenced my life in the pit and threw stones at me" (3:52-53).
- Hope - "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope" (3:21); "'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'Therefore I hope in Him'" (3:24); "For the LORD will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies" (3:31-32).

The prophet who warned the people both wept in grief and rejoiced in hope.

Application - What does this lesson teach about God? Man? Sin? Redemption? *God warns His people in advance regarding the consequences of disobedience. Because He is just He must judge them. The passage of time between God's warnings and His judgment tempts men to continue in their rebellion and disregard the consequences.*

Paul warns those who despise God's goodness and patience, "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" (Rom. 2:4). Once God sends final judgment it is too late to repent.

Peter also warns those who despise God's goodness and patience, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

Summary

God speaks about coming judgment for a long period of time before He moves in judgement.

God acts slowly but surely.

God reveals both His goodness in allowing man time to repent and His justice when He moves finally in judgment.

Discussion Questions

The writer of Proverbs likens the one who “has no rule over his own spirit” to “a city broken down, without walls” (Prov. 25:28). How do the lessons of Lamentations apply to individual believers today?

What lessons can churches learn from the destruction of Jerusalem? How are churches like the citizens of that city?

While God always saves believers by grace through faith, what role does obedience take in enjoying the blessings of God and experiencing the curses of God?