

The Lamentations of Jeremiah

Lesson 2

Lamentations 2:1-22

The content of Lamentations Chapter 1 deals with the sorrowful condition of Jerusalem in the months after its destruction on August 4th, 586 BC. The once bustling city which welcomed visitors for festivals almost every month of the year saw no visitors during the two major holidays normally scheduled in the months of September and October. The traditional festivals celebrated in Jerusalem for the past 418 years ended on that fateful Sunday morning in August.

The content of Lamentations Chapter 2 deals with the sorrowful condition of the city leading up to and including that appointed day of destruction in August of 586 BC.

Zion – Temple – Ark

Lamentations 2:¹ How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion / With a cloud in His anger! / He has cast from heaven to earth / The glory of Israel, / And has not remembered His footstool / In the day of His anger.

The Temple in Jerusalem lay in ruins on the ground, not one stone upon another. Nebuchadnezzar marched through the city on Sunday morning, August 4, 586 BC to destroy the city, its walls, and its Temple. Sent by the Lord, Nebuchadnezzar brought the cloud of the Lord's anger on the Holy City. The glory of Israel – the Temple, no longer protected by the Lord - found itself crushed in the siege. The footstool – The Ark of the Covenant, once the resting place of the Lord behind the Holy of Holies in the Temple - no longer interested the Lord on that fateful Sunday, the anger of the Lord covered the city of Zion with destruction.

Destruction Allowed

Lamentations 2:² The Lord has swallowed up; / He has not spared / All the habitations of Jacob. / In His wrath He has thrown down / The strongholds of the daughter of Judah; He has brought *them* down to the ground; / He has profaned the kingdom and its princes.

The appointed day arrived and the wrath of the Lord allowed the destruction of Jerusalem, its people and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The gentile invasion trod on the Jewish holy sites, profaning them while the gentile army carried away into exile the potential future kings.

The Lord's Right Hand Withdrawn

Lamentations 2:³ In fierce anger He has cut off / All the strength of Israel; / He has drawn back His right hand / From before the enemy. / And He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire / Consuming round about.

Before the Israelites left the wilderness in 1405 BC, the Lord promised to protect them in the conquest of the Promised Land with His right hand. With that hand He would fight for them. On the day of the destruction of the Southern Kingdom, the Lord drew back His right hand so the enemy could successfully slay them and destroy all the homes and cities.

The Lord, the Enemy

Lamentations 2:⁴ He has bent His bow like an enemy; / He has set His right hand like an adversary / And slain all that were pleasant to the eye; / In the tent of the daughter of Zion / He has poured out His wrath like fire.

Just as an archer bends the bow to attach the string, sets the notch of the fiery arrow in place and aims it at the target, so too, the Lord aims His wrath at the people of the kingdom He loved. Whatever the arrow hits, it burns.

Morning and Moaning

Lamentations 2:⁵ The Lord has become like an enemy. / He has swallowed up Israel; / He has swallowed up all its palaces, / He has destroyed its strongholds / And multiplied in the daughter of Judah / Mourning and moaning.

Although they thought they knew the Lord in 586 BC, the people of the Southern Kingdom really did not know Him. They thought of the Lord as their friend, but He knew them not because they knew Him not. Time was up. The Lord swallowed up His own people who had become His enemies, and all they could do was mourn and moan.

Traditions Gone

Lamentations 2:⁶ And He has violently treated / His tabernacle like a garden *booth*; / He has destroyed His appointed meeting place. / The LORD has caused to be forgotten / The appointed feast and Sabbath in Zion, / And He has despised king and priest / In the indignation of His anger.

All the regulatory traditions set by the Lord through the Mosaic Law no longer meant anything to Him. The people changed the Lord's purpose for His feasts, Sabbaths, kings and priests; therefore, He did away with the designated traditions.

Abandoned Sanctuary

Lamentations 2:⁷ The Lord has rejected His altar, / He has abandoned His sanctuary; / He has delivered into the hand of the enemy / The walls of her palaces. / They have made a noise in the house of the LORD / As in the day of an appointed feast.

Before the Lord allowed Nebuchadnezzar to enter the city, He left the Ark of the Covenant behind the Holy of Holies and the people did not even notice His departure.¹² He waited at the threshold of the door. The Lord moved to the gate and then out to the mountain while the priests went about their duties, not even noticing the lack of His presence that had radiated above the Holy of Holies' curtain.

Stretched Out Line

Lamentations 2:⁸ The LORD determined to destroy / The wall of the daughter of Zion. / He has stretched out a line, / He has not restrained / His hand from destroying, / And He has caused rampart and wall to lament; / They have languished together.

How did the Lord justify the onslaught of His great wrath upon Jerusalem and the entire Southern Kingdom? He stretched a line in their midst. In construction projects,

¹² Ezekiel 10-11

craftsmen use a taut string covered in colored chalk to snap a perfectly straight line. They string a taut line from one end of a wall to the other to ensure its straightness. They hang a string with a pointed weight at the end to ensure its plumbness. The straight line pulled taut from side to side or hung straight down, immediately shows the errors of the craftsman's work. The Lord's straight line, stretched taut against the deeds and actions of the Southern Kingdom, showed the sinful errors of the nation's ways.

No Law, No Vision

Lamentations 2:⁹ Her gates have sunk into the ground, / He has destroyed and broken her bars. / Her king and her princes are among the nations; / The law is no more. / Also, her prophets find / No vision from the LORD.

The people broke under the weight of the Lord's wrath, but so did the walls, bridges, roads, homes and palaces of the kingdom. Because they had no kings, princes or law, the Lord would not address them in a vision from 586 BC until after 536 BC when Cyrus the Great allowed the Jews to return from exile to their land.

Bowed to the Ground

Lamentations 2:¹⁰ The elders of the daughter of Zion / Sit on the ground, they are silent. / They have thrown dust on their heads; / They have girded themselves with sackcloth. / The virgins of Jerusalem / Have bowed their heads to the ground.

Nebuchadnezzar left only the old, poor and ignorant in the land, those of no use to the Babylonian Empire. The elders of Jerusalem who survived the siege and defeat could do nothing but mourn the death of their kingdom with their heads bowed to the ground.

Jeremiah's Testimony

Lamentations 2:¹¹ My eyes fail because of tears, / My spirit is greatly troubled; / My heart is poured out on the earth / Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, / When little ones and infants faint / In the streets of the city.

Jeremiah saw the siege of Nebuchadnezzar that knocked the city of Jerusalem to the ground. He saw the babies as they cried to nurse their mothers, not understanding the dire destruction around them. Starving, they fainted as their mothers ran through the streets.

Famine in the Siege

Lamentations 2:¹² They say to their mothers, / "Where is grain and wine?" / As they faint like a wounded man / In the streets of the city, / As their life is poured out / On their mothers' bosom.

The mothers prepared the meals for the families, but during the siege of the kingdom, little food existed. The children cried, "I'm hungry Momma," but the mothers could not do a thing to satisfy their needs. Mothers nestled the little ones to their bosoms and perhaps cried back to the children, "It will be all right, we will eat in just a little bit. Please don't cry my child. They are coming, they're coming. We don't want them to find us. Please don't cry. Shhh."

Ruin, Vast as the Sea

Lamentations 2:¹³ How shall I admonish you? / To what shall I compare you, / O daughter of Jerusalem? / To what shall I liken you as I comfort you, / O virgin daughter of Zion? / For your ruin is as vast as the sea; / Who can heal you?

Whenever sin is committed, an innocent person suffers. Sinners never think their sin affects anyone but themselves, but it always does! The sin of a teenager receiving a ticket for driving over the speed limit costs the innocent parent. The sin of drug abuse that lands a person in the hospital costs the innocent family members their time and their money as they try to save the life of that loved one. The sin that leads to death costs some innocent person the loss of a loved one and the price of the burial. The sin that throws a dad in prison costs the innocent child one parent and creates the struggle for the innocent spouse to make ends meet. Sin always cost an innocent person something. The breach of the Israelites' relationship with the Lord reached such great proportions that its only remedy consisted of the ruin of the kingdom seemingly as vast as the sea, and that destruction caught many innocent people in its path, leaving no one to comfort and no one to heal. The Lord begged the nation to repent with every prophet He sent and the leadership of the kingdom refused. No one could heal them.

False Visions - Oracles

Lamentations 2:¹⁴ Your prophets have seen for you / False and foolish visions; / And they have not exposed your iniquity / So as to restore you from captivity, / But they have seen for you false and misleading oracles.

When the Lord shows a prophet a vision of some upcoming event, He lets the prophet see the scene played out in what we would call a daydream. The prophet then tells the people what he saw in the vision. When the Lord shows a prophet a dream, He plays the scene out the same way except the dream occurs while the prophet sleeps.

When the Lord reveals something through an oracle, no scene plays out. The Lord tells the prophet word-for-word what He wants the people to hear. In the case of the Southern Kingdom, from the time of King Manasseh, the multiple false prophets fed foolish visions and misleading oracles to the people. Those same prophets, who should have directed the people away from their sins, led them into their great sins by telling lies. As prophets, they needed to prophesy. If the Lord did not reveal anything to prophesy, they made up prophecies.

Joyful Neighbors

Lamentations 2:¹⁵ All who pass along the way / Clap their hands *in derision* at you; / They hiss and shake their heads / At the daughter of Jerusalem, / "Is this the city of which they said, ' / The perfection of beauty, / A joy to all the earth?'"

As in the first lament, here too, Jeremiah mentions the joy of the kingdom's neighbors, happy to see the supposed perfection of God's beauty in shambles. The kingdom chided them when they suffered under the thumb of another power; therefore, it seems only fair that they now chide the kingdom in its distress.

Joyful Victors

Lamentations 2:¹⁶ All your enemies / Have opened their mouths wide against you; / They hiss and gnash *their* teeth. / They say, "We have swallowed *her* up! / Surely this is the day for which we waited; / We have reached *it*, we have seen *it*."

Jeremiah survived the destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of the kingdom and continued to minister for five months. He saw the victors go to their camp at the end of the day with spoils from the siege to celebrate. The siege on Sunday morning, August 4th, 586 BC began three years before as King Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. The victory on that day seemed sweet to the men of Babylon; it was a day they had longed to see. After three years, those Babylonian soldiers wanted to see their families back in their home country. As victors, they could plan their reunion with their loved ones.

Accomplished His Word

Lamentations 2:¹⁷ The LORD has done what He purposed; / He has accomplished His word / Which He commanded from days of old. / He has thrown down without sparing, / And He has caused the enemy to rejoice over you; / He has exalted the might of your adversaries.

Jeremiah foretold the destruction in 620 BC, 34 years before its occurrence, but the Southern Kingdom did not heed the warning.¹³ Additionally, the Lord Himself told the Jews of this destruction before He led them out of the wilderness to take the Promised Land.¹⁴ Had they heeded the prophecies, that day could have been avoided.

Tears

Lamentations 2:¹⁸ Their heart cried out to the Lord, / "O wall of the daughter of Zion, / Let *your* tears run down like a river day and night; / Give yourself no relief, / Let your eyes have no rest.

With the destruction came the time for heartache and tears. It was time for crying. The Lord caught them in their sin and punished them justly. The punishment rightly brought about remorse and tears. Tears should continue to flow from their eyes until the Lord sees fit to return the exiles to the land. Only the presence of continuous tears can show their true remorse for their years of idolatrous and sinful behavior.

Cry to the Lord

Lamentations 2:¹⁹ "Arise, cry aloud in the night / At the beginning of the night watches; / Pour out your heart like water / Before the presence of the Lord; / Lift up your hands to Him / For the life of your little ones / Who are faint because of hunger / At the head of every street."

However, continuous tears will not be enough; they must cry to the Lord day and night with lifted hands, totally abandoned to Him, their only hope.

¹³ Jeremiah 4:28

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 28:16-68

Eat Offspring, Priest and Prophet Slain

Lamentations 2:²⁰ See, O LORD, and look! / With whom have You dealt thus? / Should women eat their offspring, / The little ones who were born healthy? / Should priest and prophet be slain / In the sanctuary of the Lord?

Judah had already seen these women's drastic measures to survive played out. He had also seen the priests and prophets slain in the Temple on the day of its destruction and the Lord foretold both before they left the wilderness in 1405 BC.

Leviticus 26:²⁹ Further, you will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters you will eat.

Deuteronomy 28:53 "Then you shall eat the offspring of your own body, the flesh of your sons and of your daughters whom the LORD your God has given you, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you.

Deuteronomy 28:56-57 "The refined and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground for delicateness and refinement, shall be hostile toward the husband she cherishes and toward her son and daughter, and toward her afterbirth which issues from between her legs and toward her children whom she bears; for she will eat them secretly for lack of anything *else*, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you in your towns.

The precedent of women eating their young occurred in 892 BC, 306 years before. Ben-hadad, king of Syria attacked the city of Samaria and a famine occurred at the same time. In distress, two women entered into an agreement to eat their children as seen in the following passage.

2 Kings 6:²⁸ And the king said to her, "What is the matter with you?" And she answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give your son that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.'"²⁹ "So we boiled my son and ate him; and I said to her on the next day, 'Give your son, that we may eat him'; but she has hidden her son."

During the three-year siege of Nebuchadnezzar, supplies could not enter the city and the people starved in their struggle to hold off the enemy. Judah saw children eaten. He also saw the priest and prophet killed in the Temple. The innocent suffered because of the corporate sin of the kingdom.

Lie in the Street

Lamentations 2:²¹ On the ground in the streets / Lie young and old; / My virgins and my young men / Have fallen by the sword. / You have slain *them* in the day of Your anger, / You have slaughtered, not sparing.

Judah also saw the death of the city and the nation as the dead of all ages lay in the streets, all at the instruction of the Lord. The corporate nation sinned and the corporate nation paid the penalty. Those who rebelled in the kingdom died in the streets when Nebuchadnezzar's men breached the walls.

Lamentations 2:²² You called as in the day of an appointed feast / My terrors on every side; / And there was no one who escaped or survived / In the day

of the LORD'S anger. / Those whom I bore and reared, / My enemy annihilated them.

Under the Mosaic Law, the Lord set the appointed feasts which included daily (Lev 23), weekly, monthly, and yearly festivals with great stress placed on the regular observance of them in every particular element.¹⁵

The regular festivals:

1. The Weekly Sabbath¹⁶ - Every 7th Day
2. The Seventh New Moon, or the Feast of Trumpets¹⁷ - Tishri 1st
3. The Sabbatical Year¹⁸ - Every 7th Year
4. The Year of Jubilee¹⁹ - Every 50th Year

The great feasts:

5. The Passover – Nisan 14th
6. The Feast of Pentecost, or of Weeks – 50th Day after the grain harvest started
7. The Feast of Tabernacles, or of Ingathering - Tishri 15th

However, Judah saw August 4th, 586 BC as another appointed day by the Lord, one that would bring an end to all the other appointed feasts, bring judgment upon them and send a remnant into exile.

¹⁵ Num 28:1-8; Ex 29:38-42; Lev 6:8-23; Ex 30:7-9; Ex 27:20

¹⁶ Lev 23:1-3; Ex 19:3-30; Ex 20:8-11; Ex 31:12

¹⁷ Num 28:11-15; Num 29:1-6

¹⁸ Ex 23:10, 11; Lev 25:2-7

¹⁹ Lev 23-35; Lev 25:8-16; Lev 27:16-25