

A DRIVE-THROUGH FUNERAL

In a world as busy as ours you knew it was bound to happen – an Atlanta mortician built onto his funeral home, and installed a drive-through window. There are five, 6 feet long viewing windows – each one big enough to display an open casket. Now hurried mourners can pay their last respects without even getting out of their car! Our society has gone from *fast food to fast funerals*.

In a sense we're going to copy the mortician's idea in tonight's Bible Scan.

We're going through the drive-through window to pay our last respects to a fallen kingdom. The nation Judah is in the casket. Jeremiah is the funeral director. The Jews taken captive are the mourners. The Babylonians are the grave diggers. And the funeral dirge that will guide our thoughts is *the book of Lamentations*.

On July 18, 586 BC the Babylonian invaders breached the walls of Jerusalem.

The city had been under siege for 18 months, causing the people to suffer devastating hardships. When the Babylonians entered the city they demolished the walls, burned and

leveled the temple, and captured the people.

For the next 70 years, Jerusalem and its temple lay in ruins – while the Jews were forced to live in the foreign, and idolatrous, pagan land of Babel.

This whole episode is not just history to the Jews. It's an indelible part of their national psyche. For three weeks out of every year, Jews the world over recall and relive these events. From the 17th of Tamuz until the 9th of Av – according to the Jewish calendar – from the day the walls of Jerusalem were breached until the day the temple was destroyed – the Jews fast, and mourn, and repent of their sin.

The remembrance culminates on Tisha B'Av, or the 9th of Av – the anniversary of the temple's destruction. It's a special day of repentance, and grieve over their sin. They go to the synagogue – sit on low-lying stools (a symbol of humility) – sing dirges in a mournful key – and read chapters from the book of Lamentations.

The laments of Jeremiah will should help us cultivate a humble and repentant spirit.

MORE ON LAMENTATIONS

GOD USES AN ACROSTIC

Lamentations consists of five poems – and four of the five are acrostics.

Twenty-two letters make up the Hebrew alphabet – and chapters 1, 2, and 4 consist of 22 verses. In the Hebrew Bible each verse starts with the succeeding letter of the alphabet. Chapter 3 consists of 66 verses, but it's also an acrostic. Here, every 3 verses start with the next letter in the Hebrew ABCs. The acrostic format was a tool used to help with memorization.

Chapter 5 is also 22 verses, but it's not formatted as an acrostic – and *do you know why?* ... *Well, no one else does, either.* It's one of *them there mysteries*.

THE PROSE AND THE PASSION

Jeremiah 52 actually serves as an introduction to Lamentations. It describes the fall of Jerusalem from a *historical perspective*. Lamentations covers the same event and time frame from an *emotional perspective*.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A FIRST IMPRESSION

Remember too, in the Hebrew Bible the title of each book is the first word that appears in that book. The first English word in Lamentations 1:1 is the word *"How"*.

The Hebrew translation of *how* is almost a sigh... It could be rendered, *"ah or alas."* It's a

groan of remorse. "Alas, lonely sits the city that was full of people!" You could title these 5 chapters, *"The Sigh of Jeremiah."*

Guys, get out your hankies, we're going to a funeral...

THE CADENCE OF HEBREW POETRY

Here too, is where I wish we all read Hebrew. Unlike English poetry, Hebrew poetry isn't based on rhyming words, but on posing parallel thoughts – but the Hebrew poets did make great use of meter and cadence. Hebrew poems and psalms had a chop or flow or beat to them. The cadence patterns were used by the poet to create a certain mood.

Lamentations was written in what's called a *"clipped meter"* or *"limping beat"*. This was the cadence used for a funeral dirge. The first part of the pattern was written in four beats, then the second part fell off a beat – to just three beats... Here's a sample, "Ba-ba-ba-ba *ba-ba-ba*. Ba-ba-ba-ba *ba-ba-ba...*" The effect was to produce a melancholy, mournful sound.

There were professional mourners in Israel who specialized in writing tunes with a limping beat. They were paid to sing their mournful laments at funerals. Their songs created a mood that helped the grieving pour out their grief.

Bible Scan - Lamentations 1-5

LANDMARKS AND LAMENTS

There are three landmarks in Jerusalem today that remind me of its past.

First is *The Western Wall*. It's located in the heart of the Old City, and is more often called, *The Wailing Wall*. It's the last vestige of the temple built by Herod, and destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. For the last 1930 years this rock-faced wall has been revered by the Jews. It's considered the holiest site in Judaism.

Jews today flock from all over the world to pray at the *Wailing Wall*. The place is a reminder of the grief, hardship, and ruin of their past. But the mere fact they can come to the wall is also a sign of hope – *God has not abandoned His people – they've been restored to the land - He will make them great again.*

Jews who come to the Wall write prayers on slips of paper, fold them, and stick them in the crevasses between the stones. The rabbis even have an international 1-800 number that people can call or fax a prayer to the Wailing Wall.

The book of Lamentations has been called "*The Wailing Wall of the Bible*". It gives expression to the grief, mourning, and loss Jews have felt throughout their history. It puts to a melancholy tune the consequences of their failures.

Another landmark in Jerusalem with ties to the book of Lamentations is just north of the city's walls. Outside the Damascus Gate there is a stone quarry used by King Solomon to cut stones for the construction of the Temple. In one of the rock walls of the quarry is a large cut-out known as *Jeremiah's grotto*.

At the time of Jeremiah this cavern in the rock overlooked the trade route that headed northward out of town. The Jews that survived the brutal Babylonian siege and were taken prisoner to Babylon, left the city along this road.

Tradition has it, that Jeremiah sat in the grotto and watched his countrymen be led away in chains. In the grotto he grieved, and wept, and lamented over what had happened to God's people. There, he penned his Lamentations.

Which reminds me of a third Jerusalem landmark.

For me it's no accident that Jeremiah's grotto was in the shadow of a hill called "*Calvary*". Jeremiah the *Suffering Prophet* wept near the place where Jesus the *Suffering Servant* died. Jeremiah suffered *with* the people. Jesus suffered *for* the people. Indeed, both Jeremiah and Jesus reveal God's broken heart over our sin.

Harry Ironside writes, "The God of Israel was no cold, indifferent spectator of the anguish, humiliation, and pains of His chosen people. His holiness demanded that He chasten them for their iniquities... but His heart was grieved for them still, as a loving father is sorely pained in his correction of a wayward son."

When my brother and I were kids, and my dad had to spank us he'd always say, "Son, this going to hurt me a lot worse than it's going to hurt you." I always thought, "*Sure, easy for you to say!*" I never believed him, until I became a dad myself. Now I know, nothing grieves a father's heart more than to be forced to discipline his child. Lamentations is a glimpse at God's broken heart.

Devotion Box - Do You Want to be like Jesus?

Notice too, Jeremiah says, "The yoke of my transgressions". Understand, the transgression of these people had nothing to do with Jeremiah. For 40 years He remained faithful to God. They weren't being judged for Jeremiah's transgressions. So why does He say "my transgressions"? Here is the heart of a true intercessor. He loves people so much He's willing to identify with their suffering and plight.

I believe this is why certain people mistook Jesus for Jeremiah. Remember, at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" They answered, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah..." Like Jeremiah, Jesus also identified with our sin, and suffered in our place. People saw in Him the same compassion they remembered in Jeremiah.

I'm good at pointing out people's sin – Jesus is good at picking up people's sin. I'm good at scorning. He's good at saving. Somehow Jeremiah understood that, and wanted to be like Jesus. How much do we really want to be like Jesus?

The book of Lamentations has been called "the wailing wall of the Bible"

Devotion Box - Consider Your Destiny

Lamentations 1:9 tells us, "she did not consider her destiny; therefore her collapse was awesome... ." Here were people with a severe short-sightedness.

It reminds me of the short-sighted sky diver making his first solo jump. Nothing had gone right all day - he overslept and missed breakfast – his car ran out of gas making him late to the air strip – he got nauseated on the plane's ascent. And when he jumped, and pulled his rip cord, his parachute didn't release. Of course, he pulled the emergency cord, but the chute still didn't open. That's when he thought, "Man, nothing's gone right today. I'll bet they're late picking us up."

Likewise it was said of Judah, "she did not consider her destiny... ." She refused to admit her sin had consequences.

When you choose a road you choose a destination. If you don't want to go to Macon, don't travel south on I-75. Head south on 75 and you can tell yourself the whole time you're not going to Macon – you can laugh at the suggestion – you can even believe you're the exception to the rule – but give it a couple of hours and you're going to arrive in Macon – like it or not. Get on the road and the destination is unavoidable.

Likewise, it's not difficult to figure out where you're going to end up in life. Get on a road headed away from God, and you'll end up in misery and regret. You can tell yourself it won't happen - laugh at the suggestion - even believe you're the exception to the rule – but keep going long enough in that direction and the destination is certain. The road away from God leads ultimately to hell.

Guys, we think life is some great mystery. *Where will the road of life take us?* It's not hard to figure out. Look further down the road you're on – where does it end? Every road has a destiny. Is it headed toward God, or away from God?

FEELING, FAITH, AND FACT

In Lamentations 3:1-20 Jeremiah describes his darkest days, and the grim feelings that flooded his soul. Even for a spiritual giant and faithful servant like Jeremiah there were moments when God felt distant – even against him.

Sometimes as Christians we assume we should be effervescing with joy, abounding with faith and confidence, exuding peace at all times – and we feel guilty when we're not. We obviously haven't been reading our Bibles. Heroes of Scripture battled moments of doubt and fear and discouragement.

Philip Yancey writes in *“Reaching For the Invisible God”*, “In my childhood I heard the old Scottish chorus, ‘*Cheer up, ye saints of God, there’s nothing to worry about, nothing to make ye feel afraid, nothing to make ye doubt.*’ I like the robust spirit of the song, especially if the singers roll their ‘r’s” in a Scottish brogue. Now though, as I look at the words I wonder if the writer read the same Bible I read, a book whose heroes stagger from one daunting crisis to the next.”

As believers we're now picking up impulses and input from heaven – and that causes us to rejoice - but nowhere does it say that heavenly influence will immunize us from the harshness of the fallen world in which we live. Guys, no matter how spiritual we become this earth is still full of thorns and thistles. Our flesh is still fallen - our minds still influenced by hormones and happenstance.

Jeremiah is not writing a glowing testimonial with sugary, syrupy sweet accounts of time with God. He won't make *poster boy* for the abundant life seminars. He's being real and honest and brutally frank about how he feels.

We could use a little of his honesty. When I admit my feelings and get 'em out in the open God begins to deal with those feelings, and builds in me a faith that transcends those feelings. If you don't feel joy, there's no need to pretend.

Look at how Jeremiah feels - He's hummed and discouraged. Verse 3, “Surely He has turned His hand against me time and time again throughout the day.”

Verse 4, “He has aged my flesh and my skin, and broken my bones.” He's saying that serving the Lord has aged him. In essence, Jeremiah is pointing to his head saying, “See these gray hairs? The Lord put 'em there.” He also says in verse 7, “He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out...” Verse 8, “Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayer.”

Now, are Jeremiah's statements true? *Of course not*, and I'm certain if you pressed him on these points he'd admit God still hears and answers prayer. But his pain has distorted his perspective. Pain does that. Pain is like a spiritual cataract that clouds and mars our vision. It tints our outlook on life and God.

It reminds me of the country church and the testimonial meeting that was in progress. Everyone shared what God was doing in their life except ol' Uncle Ephraim. Ephraim was an elderly man whose body was bent over with arthritis. He was so debilitated he could barely walk. Finally the preacher said, “Brother Ephraim, suppose you tell us what the Lord has done for you!” The old geezer stood on his wobbly legs and shouted, “Brother, He's mighty near ruind me.”

Pain causes us to blame God for our troubles and difficulties. We accuse God of creating our suffering. We forget sin and a fallen world has played a major role.

Look at Jeremiah's words in verses 12-13, “He has bent His bow and set me up as a target for the arrow. He has caused the arrows of His quiver to pierce my loins.” The imagery is painful. Jeremiah is accusing God of hitting below the belt. Jeremiah lets it all hang out. He vents exactly how he feels. Understand, he's not signing a doctrinal statement – he's just being honest with his feelings.

We get a little uneasy when people express negative feelings and doubts about God – as if man's doubt somehow threatens God. But God Himself is not afraid to let people speak honestly. We read of Jeremiah's feelings because God saw fit to record them in Scripture – it was as if He was saying, *it's okay to say you hurt*.

Verses 21-23 pull Jeremiah out of the pit of depression, “This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the LORD'S mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.” Jeremiah reaches up out of his confusion and grabs hold of a truth.

It's always truth that rescues us from our feelings. Trust in feelings and you'll wobble. But hang on to God's truth, and your feet will remain on solid ground.

Here's a poem that illustrates my point, *“Three men were walking on a wall, Feeling, Faith, and Fact. When Feeling got an awful fall, then Faith was taken back. So close was Faith to Feeling, that he stumbled and fell too. But Fact remained and pulled Faith back, and Faith brought Feeling too.”*

Notice the fact that rescues Jeremiah - *God's mercies*. “Through the LORD'S mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.” Jeremiah had been looking at the cup *half empty* rather than *half full*. He's seen his share of dark days, but he's still alive to tell the story. Apparently, God's mercies had not abandoned him.

God is faithful. He loves us with a love we don't deserve, and can't defeat. You can't quench His love. His mercy just keeps coming. Despite our circumstances God's mercies are new and available, each and every morning. The Hebrew word translated in verse 23 “compassions” means *“to cuddle or caress, to love by touching”*. The world might beat you up physically, but God comes to you spiritually with healing touches, and fresh displays of mercy.

Here's our problem: we get upset because we look for comfort in the realm of logic. We want an explanation. We need to understand our dilemma. But that's not always where God meets us. He wants to comfort us in the realm of faith. He wants us to trust Him despite our confusion – our pain – our emotions – our feelings – when we do He fills us to overflowing and we taste His mercies.

“The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “Therefore I hope in Him!”

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org
For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: www.calvarychapel.org/stonemountain/biblescan.htm

Calvary Chapel Announcements - February 11, 2001 - The latest issue of LikeMinds explains our building project and how you can get involved.. Our Dad & Daughter Banquet is scheduled for February 15, 7:00, register tonight.. The next Pastors' Prayer is February 18 at 5:30.. An appreciation luncheon for all police officials and firefighters, February 18, at 1:00.. Servants Retreat for anyone who wants to be more involved in ministry at CC, March 9-10, at FFA Camp in Covington.. Check out today's Announcement Sheet for our Calvary Connection Home Fellowships.
Next Bible Scan - February 18 - Ezekiel 1-35

"Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." -Lamentations 3:22-23

Bible Scan
Memory
Verse

Devotion Box - The Necessity of Repentance

Lamentations 3:27 is Jeremiah's advice to young men, "It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth." In other words, youth is the time to learn your lessons, not prove how much you know.

"Let him sit alone and keep silent, because God has laid it on him; let him put his mouth in the dust." A young man needs to shut up and listen. Rather than raise the roof, he's better off eating dirt. Be humble.

For "There may yet be hope. Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him, and be full of reproach." If you learn your lessons, and receive God's discipline... if you prove humble, and repentant, and teachable there may yet be hope for you.

Jeremiah promises in verse 31, "For the Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies." God's discipline is but for a moment - His blessing is for all eternity.

Jeremiah affirms God's sovereignty in verse 38, "Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that woe and well-being proceed?" God issues both *woe and wellness*. "Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?"

As one man confessed, "I have no problem with the idea of God sending people to an eternal hell - what I don't understand is why God doesn't send everyone." We've all sinned and deserve God's punishment. We owe our forgiveness to the mercy found in Jesus!

Verse 40 tells us, "Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the LORD..." A repentant attitude is the proper response to all that's happened to Judah. It's also a necessary requirement for you and me if we want to live and thrive in a relationship with God.

JEREMIAH: THE RENAISSANCE MAN

In Lamentations 1:16 Jeremiah says, "For these things I weep; my eye, my eye overflows with water..." His tears are dripping again. Remember, Jeremiah was called "*the weeping prophet*".

He was a man with *tough skin*, but a *soft heart*. His tears stayed close to the surface. He was a strong man, a brave man, a bold man - but he wasn't afraid to feel and care - and let people know it. Jeremiah was a true renaissance man. A model for men today. He was a combination of steel and velvet - of toughness and tenderness.

OUR KNIGHT IN SHINING ARMOR

In Lamentations 1:9 we're told Judah "did not consider her destiny; therefore her collapse was awesome - and note the consequences... she had no comforter." No wonder she had no comforter - Judah turned from trusting in the one, true God - the only reliable comforter available - to depending on powerless, impotent false gods.

It reminds me of the evil king who captured the beautiful princess and put her in an ugly dress. *I mean a real gag-a-maggot dress!* Every day the princess gazed out the window waiting on her knight in shining armor to come to her rescue. But the evil king laughed, "No knight is going to rescue a damsel in *dis dress*."

Jesus is our knight in shining armor, but He comes to the rescue of only those people who've trusted in the cross, and clothed themselves in His righteousness. If you choose to go your own way, and trust in your own efforts, and carve out your own goodness - *the knight won't rescue you in that dress!* In His eyes it's an ugly dress. Isaiah 64:6 tells us, "all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags..."

Devotion Box - With Enemies Like This Who Needs Friends?

Lamentations 2:5 tells us, "the Lord was like an enemy. He has swallowed up Israel." Twice in this chapter Jeremiah says the Lord is like an enemy.

Remember, as a kid how often you concluded your parents were your enemy. Every time they interfered with your plans, or administered some discipline - you thought they hated you - they were against you. Now you see they were acting in love, and in your best interests. They were your best friend, but at the time they seemed like your enemy.

We can make the same mistake with God's discipline. He's not against you - He loves you. He's not your enemy. He's your very best friend. Trust Him.