

## What's the Message – Lesson 76

Our study today explores the lamentations of the Jews over the fall of Jerusalem.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. O God, You have chosen us and called us, promising that You will be our God, and we will be Your people, just as it was with the house of Jacob. Yet like them, we have turned away from you and followed our own selfish desires, forsaking Your word and disobeying You. Forgive us, dear Father, and restore us to Your family because of the Saving death and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Last time we saw how the tension of being God's messenger to the house of Jacob led Jeremiah to frustration and complaints to God about his life. Yet, in spite of that, Jeremiah could still conclude that only in Yahweh was there hope for the future. Today we see more of those lamentations, as given in a book of that name, a book that traditionally is attributed to Jeremiah.

The book of Lamentations has the same historical setting as the book of Jeremiah; the decline and fall of Judah. This is summarized for us succinctly in II Kings, chapter 24, verses 18 and 19: *Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. . . . He did evil in the sight of the Lord, just as Jehoiakim had done. It was because of the Lord's anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah, and in the end He thrust them from His presence.*

And as you know, Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians were God's agent of punishment. But, did the people of Judah recognize this was being done at God's command, or did they see it as a defeat of Yahweh? Chapter one paints a sordid picture for us. In verse one we read: *How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations! She that was a princess among the cities has become a vassal. Judah has gone into exile because of affliction and hard servitude; she dwells now among the nations,*

*but finds no resting place; her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress.*

This pathos and aura of defeat has been expressed in many ways, by many nations over the centuries. But no one has said it any better than this familiar verse of chapter one: *Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow . . .* and again we hear this lament in chapter 3, verse 19: *Remember my affliction and my bitterness, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me.*

The chosen people of God had been defeated and reduced to a few captives. Who could have imagined it? The great throne and people of David had been destroyed. What could have been done to prevent it from happening? What will happen to us now? – this was the question of the day among the exiles. What we have before us is a very negative picture as the background setting for our lesson. But, Teacher, at least to this point you have always found a purpose in these events and a lesson for us. So what's the message for us to take from this book?

There is one question that was not stated. Did the exiles realize that this punishment was something they brought upon themselves, that it was their own fault? The answer is that a few of them did so realize, which is found in a few more verses that I will read. From chapter one: *Her foes have become the head, her enemies prosper, because the Lord made her suffer for the multitude of her transgressions . . . The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against His word.* And from chapter 5 verse 16: *The crown has fallen from our head; woe to us, for we have sinned!*

But, you ask, is this punishment strictly because of the people? Isn't there someone else to blame for their behavior? Yes, ever since Adam and Eve, we have preferred to blame someone else for our mistakes, and in this case there is plenty of blame to be shared, especially with their leaders. As we read in chapter 2, verse 14: *Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes, but have seen for you oracles false and misleading.*

And from chapter 4, verse 13: *This (punishment) was for the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed in the midst of her the blood of the righteous.* The point is that everyone, from the highest to the lowest shared equally in rejecting God, and putting something else first in their lives.

Now, does God use events that are out of your control to create dark days in your life? Surely there have been some already, and probably many more to come. What is the purpose of such trials? Is it not to teach you to put your trust completely and fully in God only? Has God given us an example with the history of Israel of what happens eventually when we reject Him and disobey Him? Most definitely.

But what is the lesson for us to learn here? When the darkest of days occur in your life, let me urge you to recall these verses from Lamentations, chapter 3, beginning at verse 22: *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore I will hope in Him. . . . For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though He cause grief, He will have compassion according to the abundance of His steadfast love; for He does not willingly afflict or grieve the sons of men.*

Next time we will begin our study of the prophet Ezekiel.