



Lamentations 4-5

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Tape #7312
By Chuck Smith

Let's open our Bible's to Lamentations. Let me say I think that God has a special blessing for people who gather to read to study the book of Lamentations. You have to confess there's really not very much inspirational in Lamentations. Jeremiah is sort of in a state of shock at the horrible desolation of Jerusalem.

We have, in life, occasions where we see things that are so shocking that it takes a while for our minds to adjust to it and to work through it and get over it. Seeing a person who has been in a horrible accident and seeing mangled bodies as a way of putting you in a state of shock then slowly our minds begin to deal with it. We think of it and then it's so horrible we have to shut it out of our minds then we come back to it and gradually you work through these things. Jeremiah, in seeing the tremendous slaughter by the Babylonian army, the cruelty, the inhumanity, the heartlessness with which they slaughtered innocent little children indiscriminately. Old people were slaughtered. It put Jeremiah in such a shock that in the book of Lamentations he is, more or less, working through that shock.

We are prone to rightfully think of God in terms of love. That is the essence of God's nature. The Bible says that "God is love". Because we want to think of God as love and we enjoy that aspect of God's nature, it is hard for us to imagine the wrath of God and the judgement of God against those who reject his love those who receive what they justly deserve.

Now whenever I am wronged I desire justice upon the person who wronged me. If I find that someone has stolen something out of my car I can be very vengeful in my mind concerning that person. I can think of what I would have done to them had I caught them in the act and the vengeance that I would have taken had I been able to catch them. I get some kind of satisfaction in thinking of how I would have really dealt with them and dealt with them severely. When I am wronged I usually am thinking in terms of vengeance against the person who has wronged me. There is something about my nature that loves to get even. But the Bible says, "Vengeance belongeth unto the Lord. Vengeance is mine" God said, "I will repay". I can accept that except that I think that God is a little slow because I want instant vengeance. It's a totally different story if I am the one who is in the wrong. Then I want mercy and I pray for mercy. That again is part of our human nature.

Jeremiah had seen the awesome judgement of God. I am certain that it is far worse than Jeremiah ever imagined when he was telling the people what God was going to do if they did not turn to God. If they continued in their rebellion against God, if they continued in their idolatry, God had promised that horrible judgement that would come upon them as he would use the Babylonian army as his instrument of judgement. Though Jeremiah had warned them of these things, I am certain that Jeremiah had no idea of the severity of the judgement of God when it actually came. Even as I believe that we have no idea of the severity of the judgement of God when he finally judges this world for its unrighteousness, blaspheme and it's rebellion against him.

The Bible tells us about the coming judgement. The book of Revelation, for the most part, is devoted to giving us details of the coming judgement of God. Yet should a person be here when those events of Revelation take place, though we could read about them and cringe, I am certain that the actual judgement of God will be so great that people will be in a state of shock who are unfortunate enough to see that judgement of God as he meats it out upon the world in that day. So Jeremiah has seen the hand of God in judgement against the people. He's left in a state of shock. He's seeking to work through it. He brings up some of the sights and some of the scenes and some of the horrors that have impressed themselves upon his mind. No doubt they wake him up in the middle of the night in a sweat as he recalls the sights that the natural mind

recoils against and shuts off. He tries to deal with it gradually bringing back thoughts and scenes, gradually working through it.

He begins chapter four in reference to the gold of the sanctuary, the temple of God. The temple there in Jerusalem was one of the most magnificent of the ancient buildings.

HOW is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed! the stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street (4:1).

That glorious temple of God in all of its wonder and beauty has been destroyed. These marvelously carved rocks has just been dumped in the streets of Jerusalem.

The precious sons of Zion (4:2).

The young men.

comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter! (4:2).

That is, something very common and without any real value.

Even the see monsters [jackals] draw out the breast, they give suck [nurse] their young ones: the daughter of my people is become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness. The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirst: the young children ask bread, and no man breaketh it unto them (4:3-4).

The siege lasted for eighteen months during which time they had run out of food and the people were starving to death. As we move down he will describe more the scene of the people in the state of starvation. It was so bad that it caused people to become unnatural. One of the most natural and instinctive things is the care and concern of a mother for its offspring. Rather it be in the animal kingdom or with man there is that bonding between a mother and child, a natural bonding, an instinctive kind of a bonding between a mother and child. I think that nursing creates a very special bonding between a mother and their child. He points out that even the jackals nurse their offspring, wild animals of the wilderness. They come to the nest they made for the offspring and they will nurse their offspring.

Now the ostriches is pointed out in the Bible as a peculiar bird because it speaks about the ignorance of the ostrich or how it doesn't really take thought of his offspring at all. The ostrich lays its eggs in the sand and forgets about it. The warmth of the sand incubates the ostrich eggs and the mother never goes back to check and see how the little one is doing. They are off on their own. There is one thing, the ostrich will lay a few eggs and leave them near the eggs that have been buried in the sand so that when the little ostriches come out they at least have some food from the other eggs that the ostriches left there. The ostrich never goes back to check the eggs to see if the little ostriches have hatched, they just forsake it. The Bible speaks of this unnatural characteristic of the ostrich in some of the proverbs.

Here are the mother's of Israel that have become more like ostriches in that they are turning against even their little infants, their offspring. "The tongue of the nursing child cleaves to the roof of his mouth for thirst" (4:4) of course the mothers are starving to death. When a woman is starving her milk dries up and there is nothing there for the baby. It's a very pitiful and sad condition indeed. The little children were asking for bread but there was no bread. Can you imagine how that would be if you had absolutely nothing and your children were hungry and begging for bread but you have nothing to give to them. The site of this and the memory of this is haunting the prophet as thinks of the horrible famine that was in the city of Jerusalem prior to the Babylonians breaking through the walls.

They that did feed delicately (4:5).

Those who used to dine in the best places, the gourmets.

are desolate in the streets: they that were brought up in scarlet (4:5).

Those who had wealth and all of the delicacies of wealth.

embrace dunghills. For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, (4:5-6).

As he compares what happened to Jerusalem he says it was actually worse than what happened at Sodom. What happened to Sodom happened instantaneously. It was a fiery judgement of God that wiped out the city but it was wiped out in a day. What happened to Jerusalem happened over a prolonged period of time. The longer it went the worse it got until eighteen months without fresh supplies, the city was in such a deplorable state of starvation, it was a slow lingering kind of a death the people experienced as they slowly starved to death.

For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown in a moment, and no hands stayed on her (4:5).

They were just wiped out immediately.

Now he's speaking of the young men, the athletes.

Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire (4:7).

Strong, polished, fit bodies were the young men. By the end of this siege,

Their visage [faces] is blacker than a coal; (4:8).

Black as a result of starvation.

they are not known in the streets: their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick (4:8).

The leathery hard, bony, bodies rather than those healthy, fleshly, muscular bodies had wasted away as a result of the starvation to where they looked like skeleton sticks.

They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger: (4:9).

At least if you're slain with a sword it's over in a hurry but being killed by famine is a terrible way to die.

for these pine away, (4:9).

Those that are hungry.

for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field (4:9).

Slowly death by starvation.

The hands of the pitiful women have sodden [boiled] their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people (4:10).

This is one of the things that stuck in his mind that was just unthinkable. The horror of it was so great. The recoiling of the thought of boiling their own children for food.

The LORD hath accomplished his fury: (4:11).

In the book of Hebrews it tells us that those that despise the Law of Moses in the Old Testament were killed if there were two or three people who witnessed against them, that they had despised or spoke blasphemy against the Law of Moses. He said,

“If those who spoke against the Law of Moses were killed because of the witness of two or three people, of how much worth punishment you suppose the person will be accounted worthy who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of his covenant where with he has sanctified an unholy thing and who has done despite to the spirit of grace?”

In other words, under the Mosaic Law, a person who would blaspheme or speak evil of it could be put to death. How much worse do you suppose the punishment would be for that person who has really despised Jesus, his sacrifice for their sins upon the cross, counted the blood of his covenant of unholy things and who have despite to the spirit of God's grace.

“For we know him who has said vengeance is mine. I will repay saith the Lord and again it is a fearful thing to fall in the hands of the living God”.

He speaks of the fiery indignation of God's wrath whereby he will consume his adversary. Jeremiah has seen it, it's awesome. He is still in shock over it.

The LORD hath accomplished his fury; he hath poured out his fierce anger, and hath kindled a fire in Zion, and it hath devoured the foundations thereof [the city] (4:11).

The city was burned to the ground.

The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem (4:12).

Many times, in the history of Jerusalem, the city was attacked but it was a very strongly fortified city. God had always come to the rescue. About a hundred years earlier the Assyrian army came against Jerusalem, a huge number of troops. It looked like there was no chance for Jerusalem against the superior forces of the Assyrians. The Lord said, “Stand still and watch my salvation. This battle is not yours, it's mine”. In one evening a hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrians were smitten with a strange malady and died. The Bible says, “The angel of the Lord went through the camp and smote the Assyrians.” In the morning there was all these corpses, a hundred and eighty-five thousand. So that those who were still alive fled for their lives back to Assyria.

As a result of God delivering Jerusalem over and over through the history the rumors spread among the other nations that caused them to believe that Jerusalem was invincible. They had all of these stories about the God of Jerusalem had defended them against all of these odds in times past and they felt that Jerusalem was invincible. There were the stories of the invincibility of Jerusalem.

The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem. For the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her, They have wandered as blind men in the streets, they have polluted themselves with blood, so that men could not touch their garments (4:12-14).

Because the priesthood became polluted, the prophets, their sins and the iniquities of the priests. It's a tragic thing when you have a polluted priesthood. Those are the men who are suppose to be the spokesmen to God, who represents God to the people, the priests, ministers and prophets; when they begin to live in

iniquity, in sin it is a tragic condition. He speaks of how they took advantage of people. They shed the blood of the just in the midst of her.

There are some people who pose as ministers and as ministries who want to dominate and control other people's lives. A new book recently is out called "Ministries that abuse". I guess there is something in the psychological makeup of some people who love to be berated and mistreated. I look at this guy on television, not very much because I can't handle it and my blood can boil in a hurry. He sits there smoking his cigar glaring at the screen and saying, "I'm not going to say anything until you call in and send in money" and then he shows you all of the horses that he is buying with the money you send in. I can't understand the mentality of the person who would go to the phone and call up and pledge money to that guy. They must be masochist because he's constantly on their cases. As I say, there must be something within the psychological nature of some people, thank God not me, who like to be told how horrible they are.

The prophets have become corrupted. They began to smoke cigars and glare at people on television. "They have wandered as blind men in the streets" (4:14), they weren't spared by the Babylonians. They were among those that saw this horrible carnage. According to the law, if you touch a dead body or if you got blood on you, you were considered ceremonially unclean. You could not enter the sanctuary of God until you have gone through a cleansing process. So these men who were once the priests and prophets of God were splattered by the blood by those who were slain, they were around these dead carcasses.

They cried unto them, Depart ye; it is unclean: depart, depart, touch not: (4:15).

They were like lepers who were required to cry "unclean, unclean" when anybody approached them thus those who were once prophets and priests.

when they fled away [from the city] and wandered, they said among the heathen, They shall no more sojourn there (4:15).

Never again will they live in Jerusalem.

The anger of the LORD hath divided them; he will no more regard them: they respected not the persons of the priests, they favoured not the elders (4:16).

The enemy came in and had no respect for the religious leaders.

AS for us, our eyes as yet failed for our vain help: in our watching we have watched for a nation that could not save us (4:17).

In the dilemma and in the whole siege the king had called for the Egyptians to help. They were waiting and hoping that the Egyptian army would come up and relieve them from this siege. They were trusting in man for their deliverance but the deliverance never came. So the prophet had earlier said, "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help" and here their trust in Egypt for their deliverance never materialized. So it is when we put our hope in man rather than in God. Man will so often fail us and leave us desolate whereas God never fails. It is better to put your trust in God than your confidence in man. It's better to put your trust in God than your confidence in princes. So our eyes failed, we watched, watched and watched for the Egyptians to come to deliver but they never made it.

They hunt our steps, (4:18).

That is, they track us.

that we cannot go in our streets our end is near, our days are fulfilled; for our end is come (4:18).

It is over; there is no help.

Our persecutors are swifter than the eagles of heaven: they pursued us upon the mountains, they laid wait for us in the wilderness. The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was taken in their pits, (4:19-20).

That is, caught in their trap.

of we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen (4:20).

He calls to Edom their perennial enemy who was rejoicing at their fall.

Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, that dwellest in the land of Uz; the cup also shall pass through unto thee; thou shalt be drunken, and shalt make thyself naked. The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; he will no more carry thee away into captivity: he will visit thine iniquity, O daughter of Edom; he will discover thy sins (4:21-22).

In other words, it's all over for the daughters of Zion. The punishment has been complete but yours is yet to come, as he addresses the Edomites.

The last and final Lamentation of Jeremiah when he is calling upon the Lord.

REMEMBER, O LORD, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach (5:1).

Calling now for God, for God's help.

Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our house to aliens (5:2).

We think of passing on our inheritance to our children and we seek to lay up an inheritance for them. We hopefully will leave to them an inheritance that they might be blessed by what God has done for us. The inheritance, rather than to the children, the wealth was stolen by the enemy, by the strangers and their houses by aliens.

We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows (5:3).

It hit every family. Either the parents were slain or the children were slain or a husband were slain. Mostly, of course, the men were wiped out and they were left as orphans and fatherless and widows.

We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us (5:4).

They had to buy their water, a cup full of water. You wonder in situations like that where everybody is in the same dire straits and yet there are always those who will try to take advantage of someone else and sell them water when they are dying of thirst. Take advantage of the person's thirst. Yet what are you going to do with the money? The Babylonians will come in and take the money anyhow. What is it in the perversity of our nature that when in disaster there are those who are always seeking to capitalize even on disaster? Rather than everybody banding together and working together for the common good they choose the perversity of human nature that will seek to take advantage of another person's weakness or need to profit themselves off of someone else's need.

Our necks are under persecution: (5:5).

The idea of the neck being under a yoke as they would yoke an oxen. They've had to put their necks under this persecution.

we labour, and have no rest. We have given the hand to the Egyptians, and to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread (5:5-6).

Almost sold themselves just for bread.

Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities. Servants have ruled over us: there is none that doth deliver us out of their hand (5:7-8).

They say the worst tyrants in history are slaves who became rulers, servant's rule over us. There is, I guess, within that mentality of resentment of being a servant so when they get in the position of power they wheeled power not remembering what it was to be a slave and under that kind of bondage. They desire to get even with the world and they become the worst tyrants in history. Look at those leaders who were the worst tyrants were those who were once slaves who now rule.

We gat our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the wilderness (5:9).

The city was encircled. Sometimes at night they would sneak out and try to go out to the fields where there was the wheat. Within the city there was no agriculture. It was all out in the field surrounding the city. So they would sneak out at night to wheat out into the field in order to make bread and of course to sneak back into town without being caught by the enemy, by the Babylonians. They were surrounding the outside.

Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine (5:10).

One of the horrible effects of famine is the skin turning black as you are ready to die.

They ravished the women in Zion, (5:11).

It is so common in warfare where the enemy troops, and it's true in the modern days as in ancient war, when the enemy conquered the city the women are raped. Here the women were ravished in Zion.

and the maids in the cities of Judah (5:11).

Horrible inhumanity of man to man is just something that I have a hard time dealing with. I can't understand how people could be so cruel and inhumane to another human being but such is the case.

Princes are hanged up by their hand [thumbs]: the faces of elders were not honoured. (5:11-12).

They took the princes and hung them by their hands. The old men, they didn't honor them, usually there was a respect for age but they did not respect them.

They took the young men [as slaves] to grind, (5:13).

That is to grind at the mills.

and the children fell under the wood (5:13).

They piled these heavy loads of wood on the little children who actually fell under the load of the wood that was laid upon them.

The elders have ceased from the gate, (5:14).

Always in the gate you'd see the old men, the elders, the wise men of the city. They would be there to judge in cases but they are no longer in the gate.

the young men from their musick (5:14).

They are no longer there their music.

The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning. The crown is fallen from our head: (5:15-16).

The glory that once was.

woe unto us, that we have sinned! (5:16).

That we might realize the horrible consequences of sin. It is better to understand and know it now and to forsake sin rather than to discover the horrible consequences of sin.

For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim. Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it (5:17-18).

The city is now desolate and empty. The wild animals are moving in and taking over, feeding on the carcasses and the debris that is left.

Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever, thy throne from generation to generation (5:19).

We've perished, the city is desolate and people are taken away but the Lord remains, he remains forever his throne. The throne is empty now, the king has been cast out but the throne of God is still occupied, his throne from generation to generation.

Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time" (5:20).

It seems like time is relative. Einstein discovered that I suppose got a Nobel Prize for realizing that time was relative. I knew that from the time I was a kid, time is relative. My mom used to make me practice the violin for an hour. That was the longest hour in the day. If I was having fun, time would fly. Having so much fun, how time flies. If you're going through a painful experience, going through real suffering, it seems like time just stands still and it seems like forever. As they were going through this period of suffering it seemed like time was standing still and that God has forgotten forever. He has forsaken for such a long time and thus the prayer.

Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old (5:21).

Take us back to the old days and the old relationship to the joys and blessings that we once knew as we once walked with you. Turn us Lord back to you, the prayer of the prophet.

But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wrath [angry] against us (5:22).

The mournful Lamentations. I think that God has a special blessing for those who go through this book of Lamentations. It's not easy; there is not much inspiration there. So God bless you. It's a sad and dreadful thing. There's a lot that we can learn and must learn. For they who do not learn from history are bound to make the same mistakes. If you forsake God, God will forsake you. If you turn from God, God will turn from you. If you, in your desperate need, seek the help of man rather than the help of the Lord, your condition is only going to worsen. God, though he is a God of love, the other side of the coin is that when his love is rejected and spurned by man and people are doing those things in rebellion against God's rule in their lives they will inevitably suffer the consequences of their actions. They will not be forgiven but you will pay the price for the things that you have done. Sin has its own inevitable consequence and you will suffer the consequences of sin if you do not ask forgiveness and forsake that sin. It will destroy you ultimately.

We move into the book of Ezekiel next week. I must confess that I enjoy Ezekiel very much, especially coming out of Lamentations. It's sort of good to get into Ezekiel. He's a prophet that is really filled with many great insights. He's an interesting character. God calls him to do some really fascinating, interesting sort of bizarre things but his prophecies are so right on, especially as he begins to prophecy concerning our days, the days in which we live. As we get into that aspect of these prophecies you'll find them extremely fascinating. Then he actually moves in beyond our days, he prophesies the things that are yet future but are very close. Things that we can begin to see even now the makings of them as they are about ready to come to pass. We have a lot of interesting studies ahead for us in the book of Ezekiel.

I rejoice that we are out of Lamentations and now moving on into Ezekiel. You've been through the heavy, now stay for the goodies as we move on into this prophecy.

Shall we stand?

We are going to get into flying saucers and everything else as we move into Ezekiel. We'll take a look at flying saucers and speculate on what is possibly a real phenomenon that people are observing and if so what it actually is. Ezekiel describes the UFO's and he tells us what they are. It's a fascinating book and a lot of interesting insights in it.

Father we thank You for Your Word and even the heavy parts that teach us Lord the importance of walking in Your way. So we ask Lord that You will bless now, as we enter this new week, watch over us and guide us with Your hand. May our hearts be open to the prompting of Your Spirit that You might lead us Lord in Your path, for Your glory, in Jesus name.