

## **LAMENTATIONS**

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Lamentations chapter 4 as we continue our study through the Word of God and we finish up this book this evening. As we have seen in our previous studies of Lamentations, Jeremiah is probably sitting upon a hill, possibly the Mount of Olives, and he is seeing the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish people. It was a war zone you might say. Smoke was still rising from the burning homes, bodies were strewn all over the place and Jeremiah is weeping over what he sees.

And as we come to Lamentations chapter 4 this evening Jeremiah is going to compare what Jerusalem was like before this invasion by the Babylonians to what it is like now and it is not a pretty picture that Jeremiah is painting for us.

With that as our background, let's begin reading in Lamentations chapter 4 beginning in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us this evening as we study through His Word.

## **LAMENTATIONS 4**

### **VERSES 1-2**

1. Jeremiah opens up speaking about the gold of the Temple and the stones of the Temple and we might not think much about it but the Temple was a magnificent structure, even with the lack of care it had over the years it was still impressive.

When Solomon built the Temple listen to just some of the gold that was used in its construction. We are told in I Kings 6:19-35, **“And he prepared the inner sanctuary inside the temple, to set the ark of the covenant of the Lord there. The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high. He overlaid it with pure gold, and overlaid the altar of cedar. So Solomon overlaid the inside of the temple with pure gold. He stretched gold chains across the front of the inner sanctuary, and overlaid it with gold. The whole temple he overlaid with gold, until he had finished all the temple; also he overlaid with gold the entire altar that was by the inner sanctuary. Inside the inner sanctuary he made two cherubim of olive wood, each ten cubits high. One wing of the cherub was five cubits, and the other wing of the cherub five cubits: ten cubits from the tip of one wing to the tip of the other. And the other cherub was ten cubits; both cherubim were of the same size and shape. The height of one cherub was ten cubits, and so was the other cherub. Then he set the cherubim inside the inner room; and they stretched out the wings of the cherubim so that the wing of the one touched one wall, and the wing of the other cherub touched the other wall. And their wings touched each other in the middle of the room. Also he overlaid the cherubim with gold. Then he carved all the walls of the temple all around, both the inner and outer sanctuaries, with carved figures of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers. And the floor of the temple he overlaid with gold, both the inner and outer sanctuaries. For the entrance of the inner sanctuary he made doors of olive wood; the lintel and doorposts were one-fifth of the wall. The two doors were of olive wood; and he carved on them figures of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, and overlaid them with gold; and he spread gold on the cherubim and on the palm trees. So for the door of the sanctuary he also made doorposts of olive wood, one-fourth of the wall. And the two doors were of cypress wood; two panels”**

**comprised one folding door, and two panels comprised the other folding door. Then he carved cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers on them, and overlaid them with gold applied evenly on the carved work.”**

Make no mistake about it, the Temple of God was a magnificent structure and as we have read in I Kings it contained much gold and precious stones. But when the Babylonians came in and burned the Temple, the gold was melted and carried away to Babylon. The stones of the Temple were cast down. It was nothing more than a pile of rocks now and those rocks were scattered about the city!

2. Now as bad as that was Jeremiah now speaks of the “**sons of Zion**” or the children of Israel. And he says that they are more precious than all the gold of the Temple and yet, when the Babylonians came in they treated the people like dirt and many of the youth were lying in the streets dead, scattered about like broken bits of pottery! Worthless to the Babylonians but not to God!

Why were these “**sons of Zion**” so valuable, so precious to God? This is so important for us to understand because there is much confusion about this today and it is applied to our own lives. The only reason they were precious to God, the only reason they were valuable was because God ascribed value to them, just as He does with us.

Let me explain with this example. In my wallet I have pictures of my wife and children and grandchildren. And the only reason they are precious, the only reason they are valuable is because I ascribe value to them. To you, they are just pictures, but to me they are precious. The same is true with God as He looks upon us as His children.

3. Now in saying that I think I need to clear something up here because this idea of our worth has made it into the church and we think that we are so special, that we are something that God needs. We see this idea in the church today, this idea about our self-esteem and self-worth. The late Robert Schuller wrote a book a several years ago that was titled, “Self-Esteem, The New Reformation.” And the whole idea behind this book is that we must be of value, we must be worthy for God to die for us. He wouldn’t die for those that are not worthy?

How wrong a concept that is and in the end we think too highly of ourselves. The hymn goes, “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!” and not, “Amazing me, how great I am, since I first began!” The only reason we are precious to God is because He has ascribed value to us, we don’t deserve it!

In fact, Paul said in Romans 5:8, “**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**” In other words, He didn’t die for the good, the lovely, the likable, but God died for sinful, fallen, rebellious mankind and it is illustrated for us in a powerful way as Jesus said in John 3:16-17, “**For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.**”

This truly is God’s ultimate proof of His love for us. You see, Paul tells us that a person may sacrifice his life for the “right kind” of person but God didn’t die for a good person, someone who deserved it, a righteous person, but for sinners and thus, His death on the cross of Calvary is a demonstration of His rich love for us, it is the ultimate proof because we surely don’t deserve it!

Let me show you what I mean and the danger of this idea of thinking more highly of ourselves than we should. We are told,

If there is one thing the world and many in the church have in common these days, it's the psychology of self-esteem.

Christians and non-Christians alike are bombarded from the cradle to the grave with religious mantras and feel good philosophies promoting self-worth, self-love, and self-acceptance, which seem to have become society's fashionable antidote for whatever ails you.

The popular affirmations being "You just need to love and accept yourself the way you are. You just need to forgive yourself . . . You are a valuable lovable person who should feel good about yourself," The pursuit of self has become an end in itself. The self-esteem of people in a materialistic 21<sup>st</sup> century often tends to hang on the temporal including how much money one has, how successful one is, what kind of car one drives, how attractive one's face and figure is. . . . Self-esteem preaches self-love, self-promotion and self-glorification

Rather than resisting this glorification of man, a vast number of Christians have jumped on the bandwagon of humanistic psychology and set up their own cheering section, stressing the value and goodness of human beings. Countless best-selling books, numbering in the tens of millions, are now being promoted by "conservative" Christian leaders, seminaries, and counselors. . . .

John Ankerberg and John Weldon, in their pamphlet, “The Facts of Self-Esteem, Psychology and the Recovery movement,” pungently observe: “In fact the very ‘self’ that modern psychology exalts is the fallen self, whose exaltation God teaches will result in self-destruction. It is the selfism of modern psychology and culture that leads to widespread social desolation about us. . . . The psychological concept of self-love leading to esteem and the biblical concept of self-denial leading to self-enrichment are diametrically opposed. . . . The teaching of the Bible, human history and personal experience tell us that it is principally holiness that leads to emotional wholeness, and not vice versa. In fact, when emotional wholeness is pursued for itself, it rarely leads to personal holiness.” . . .

- [http://www.inplainsite.org/html/self\\_esteem.html](http://www.inplainsite.org/html/self_esteem.html)

Now some would argue that how can we love others if we don’t love ourselves? My response is that we love ourselves so much that we can’t love or help others, self gets in the way. Let me give you just a few Scriptures to show you what I mean.

First of all, we are told in Matthew 16:24, “**Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.’**” And yet, in the church today we are told to build up the flesh, think highly of yourself. Jesus said the exact opposite!

Paul makes this pretty clear in Galatians 5:24 when he wrote, “**And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**” We are told to crucify the flesh not build it up and yet how many in the church feel that it is all about them. It is no longer what can I do for the church or how can I bless them but what can the church do for me and when my needs are not met any longer I move on. That is not right!

I realize that this is hard but we all think of ourselves a lot. If I took a picture of all of you do you know the first person you would look for in that picture? You would look for yourself! Some say, "I hate myself!" I doubt that because if you truly hated yourself you would not care what you thought. But you do care. Think about it, your hair is combed, you are dressed neatly. In other words we do take care of our flesh and the church wants us to think of our flesh even more, **WRONG!**

Paul, in I Corinthians 1:29 put it like this, "**that no flesh should glory in His presence.**" We are not to exalt ourselves but the Lord. And Paul puts this into perspective for us as he wrote in Romans 12:3, "**For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.**"

What brought the Southern Kingdom of Judah down? It was their pride, yes they were into idolatry but they thought too highly of themselves and they believed God did not care what they were doing and in the end, they were wrong and went into captivity! What a lesson for us to learn, not to think too highly of ourselves, we are to crucify the flesh and not glory in what the Lord has given to us but give Him the glory!

#### VERSES 3-4

1. Jeremiah is showing us that even the wild jackals would care for their young. But there is one creature that is different and that is the ostrich. She will step on her own eggs crushing them.

(Job 39:13-17)

What is the point that Jeremiah is making here? I think he is showing us that when difficult times come, when people are desperate they will do things that they would not normally do, and that is what we see here with the people of Judah.

When the Babylonians surrounded the city of Jerusalem they cut off the food supply to the people and they began to starve to death. Bread and water were lacking, the basic necessities of life were gone, and of course the young were greatly affected by this. Mothers were just trying to survive and thus, they neglected their children and sometimes they even resorted to cannibalism!

We see that spoken of in Lamentations 4:10, “**The hands of the compassionate women Have cooked their own children; They became food for them In the destruction of the daughter of my people.**” Thus, they are like the ostrich that does not care for their young!

#### VERSES 5-6

1. Make no mistake about it, it didn't matter if you were rich or poor, you couldn't find any food. It is amazing how fast money can become worthless and yet man puts so much faith in it. Think about the utter despair we would be in if all of a sudden the supermarket shelves were empty, there was no more food. That was the Southern Kingdom of Judah and it affected everyone!



2. And Jeremiah makes the point that this judgment against the Southern Kingdom of Judah was worse than the judgment upon Sodom. Why was their judgment worse? Think about it. Sodom was destroyed in one day, it happened very quickly. On the other hand, Judah suffered for some 18 months or more and many of the people starved to death, others died of pestilence that was going through the city, and some died by the sword. It was a long and painful death for many and it was all because they refused to turn back to God, to repent of their sin!

#### VERSES 7-10

1. Some feel that the word “**Nazirites**” is better translated, “nobles.” First of all I think it can relate to those who have taken a vow to God, to consecrate themselves to God. In a sense it speaks of religion and how it can be dressed up and look good but inwardly it is empty.

If it is just speaking of the wealthy, that fits as well. You see, they are all dressed up, have all their fancy clothes, driving their convertible camel with four on the floor, whatever that means. And when judgment comes they can’t escape it!

So both the religious and the wealthy looked good until God’s judgment came and now their appearance is completely changed. They are like everyone else! Their wealth is now gone. Their beauty is taken away. They are starving to death. And, as I have said, this is the result of their turning away from the Lord and refusing to get right with Him.

2. And things were so bad that Jeremiah said it was much better to die by the sword because if you die by the sword it would be quick, the pain did not linger on as it did for those that were starving to death.

And things had gotten so bad that the women were boiling and eating their own children. They began to do things that were not normal for them to do but now it is being done out of desperation. You don't think rationally when you are starving to death; you do whatever it takes to survive!

And as we read this we are outraged, "How could they do that?" We do the same thing today and we call it "**CHOICE!**" Abortion is no different, we are just killing our children in the womb, the place where they are to grow, be protected and we cut them up, suck them out, burn them to death and we call ourselves civilized!

#### VERSES 11-12

1. As we read of the destruction of the Southern Kingdom of Judah we see that the Babylonians did that to them, they destroyed them. Well, that is not exactly accurate. You see, the Lord brought His fury upon them, He was the one that poured out His anger upon them and as we read on we will see why. But it was the Lord that did this and His instrument of this judgment was the Babylonians!

2. Now, as the other nations, as the kings of the earth look on they are in shock that Jerusalem fell! You see, they saw the hand of God upon the Jews and the city of Jerusalem. God protected His people. It was called the city of God!

In Isaiah 54:17 we read of this promise by God to His people as He said, "**No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is from Me,' says the LORD.**"

But now these people, these other nations can't believe their eyes. Jerusalem has been destroyed by the Babylonians, or really the Lord brought this upon them because of their sin and their refusal to get right with God. As I have said, we will see why in the next few verses.

#### VERSES 13-16

1. As the spiritual leaders went so did the nation and these were false prophets leading the people away from God. And as God looks at these spiritual leaders He sees them as unclean, polluted with the things of this world and they were leading the people down that same path.

And notice what the Lord charges them with, **MURDER!** Not only were they unjust in the way that they treated people, but they committed murder because they lead the people away from the Lord, they were not preaching the Word of God but their own ideas!

Any time the spiritual leaders become corrupt and their morals deteriorate, it is the beginning of the end for that nation. And yes God does hold His spiritual leaders accountable for how they led, but the people are also to be responsible to what they are following. We are not to follow leaders by blind faith but according to what the Scriptures say. We are to check out what these teachers are saying and see if it matches up with the Word of God.

And when the city of Jerusalem fell, they were seen as unclean as they have been defiled with blood! Yes, when things were going well they were the people to go to and listen to but when judgment came, they were the outcasts because all that they were saying did not come to pass; there was no peace and prosperity any longer!

2. Because they are not worthy of their office the Lord no longer regards them as prophets, priests, and elders nor do the people show these leaders the respect and favor which the dignity of their office would normally evoke. And thus, these spiritual leaders were like hirelings, only interested in themselves and not the welfare of the people. They told the people what they wanted to hear, they tickled their ears and that only works for a time. When the judgment of God fell upon them and the nation the people no longer respected these spiritual leaders. They saw them for who they really were; wolves in sheep's clothing, they were false prophets! I wish many in the church would wake up to the false prophets that are leading them away from God and shun them, distance themselves from them instead of embracing them!

#### VERSE 17

1. Instead of turning back to the Lord the Southern Kingdom of Judah looked to Egypt for help. They went to the world instead of the Lord and that will never work, it will never bring the deliverance that they needed or that we need if we go to the world for our help!

As much as Egypt tried to help, the Babylonians put them down and they were no help to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. There was one occasion that Pharaoh did try and make an attempt to come to the aid of Jerusalem but his forces were driven off by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar and in the end Jerusalem's hope that Pharaoh Hophra could defeat the Babylonians proved vain. The troops of Nebuchadnezzar returned to the siege finally breaking through the walls of Jerusalem and destroying the city and the nation!

Listen to what the Lord said in Jeremiah 37:6-10 regarding their attempt to escape this judgment by going to others for help, by going to the world to deliver them. We are told, **“Then the word of the LORD came to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Thus you shall say to the king of Judah, who sent you to Me to inquire of Me: ‘Behold, Pharaoh’s army which has come up to help you will return to Egypt, to their own land. And the Chaldeans shall come back and fight against this city, and take it and burn it with fire.’” Thus says the LORD: “Do not deceive yourselves, saying, ‘The Chaldeans will surely depart from us,’ for they will not depart. ‘For though you had defeated the whole army of the Chaldeans who fight against you, and there remained only wounded men among them, they would rise up, every man in his tent, and burn the city with fire.’”**

God warned them and they refused to listen, they listened instead to the false prophets, the imagination of their own hearts and they ended up going into captivity because of it!

#### VERSES 18-20

1. What a dismal picture this is as the Southern Kingdom is falling to the Babylonians. Keep in mind that Jeremiah is looking back at what has taken place already, the city is destroyed and he is sitting on a hill overlooking the city, remembering what took place!
  
2. As he looked back at those final days Jeremiah and the people realized it is over, they are going into captivity. It was so bad as the Babylonians had surrounded the city, cut off their food supply and thus, they could not leave the protection of the city because the enemy was waiting for them.

Now some did try and escape and when they did try and escape, they were being hunted down like wild animals. They had no chance, and God did warn them not to fight against Babylon for this judgment was coming. But they refused to listen and paid the consequences of their actions.

3. I always find it interesting that when things get tough the leaders end up leaving. Some of you may remember when the Costa Concordia, a cruise ship hit some rocks and sank off the coast of Tuscan coast a few years back. Let me share with you what the captain did or said he did and then I will share with you what the King of Judah did when the Babylonians invaded. We are told,

The cruise-liner captain accused of abandoning ship after it struck rocks off the Tuscan coast . . . Friday has reportedly claimed he could not lead the evacuation because he slipped and fell into a lifeboat while helping passengers leave the stricken vessel.

Captain Francesco Schettino said it was an accident that he left the Costa Concordia, according to Italian press reports. “The passengers were pouring on to the decks, taking the lifeboats by assault,” he was quoted as telling a judge during a hearing to determine whether he should be held in custody on charges of manslaughter and abandoning ship.

“I was trying to get people to get into the boats in an orderly fashion. Suddenly, since the ship was at a 60-70 degree angle, I tripped and I ended up in one of the boats. That’s how I found myself in the lifeboat,” Schettino said.

- <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/18/costa-concordia-captain-stricken-cruise-ship>

You gotta love his excuse! It is like the mobster who pleaded not guilty for shooting a guy 57 times saying it was an accident, “I was just cleaning my gun!”

Here we see the King of Judah, Zedekiah try to escape with his family. But he was captured in the plains of Jericho and brought to Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon who was in Riblah. And there Zedekiah saw his sons killed and then the King put out the eyes of Zedekiah so the last thing he saw was the murder of his sons, and then he was taken away captive to Babylon where he spent the remainder of his life. He did not stay with his people; he did not care about them, but just for himself like the captain on the Costa Concordia! He ran for his life and in the end he lost because you can't run from God!

#### VERSE 21

1. Keep in mind that the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, hated the Jews. And this is a little sarcastic here as they are rejoicing over the destruction of Judah but in the end the Edomites would be the ones destroyed by God. Judah will be restored. One writer gives us this perspective of what took place with the Edomites and when Jerusalem fell. He wrote,

Edom and Judah were traditional enemies. During the western rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar in 589 B. C. Edom had remained loyal to the Chaldean king. When Jerusalem was going through her death throes Edom had acted in a most hostile and haughty way. Edom's sin began with indifference. She showed no concern over what was befalling her neighbor. From indifference Edom went on to rejoice over the destruction of the people of God.

At some point the Edomites actually entered the weakened and helpless city of Jerusalem. They had reveled and caroused in the Temple mount. They had even helped the Chaldeans capture the poor fugitives who tried to escape the calamity of their nation (Obad 10-16). Ezekiel mentions that Edom tried to annex some of Judah's territory at this time (Ezek 35:10-12).

- James E. Smith, An Exegetical Commentary on Lamentations, p. 29

2. Here is something that I think we also need to look at. Do we celebrate in the misfortunes of others, especially our enemies? Do we say things like, "They are only getting what they deserve!"? That is what the Edomites were doing and God held them accountable for their actions. The Lord basically told them, "Enjoy your gloating while it lasts because it is not going to last too long!"

Paul said in I Corinthians 13:4-8a, "**Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. . .**" We are to love people with the love of Christ and here in I Corinthians chapter 13 is the definition of that Agape love that is to flow from us.



VERSE 22

1. Remember, the captivity was to awaken them out of their spiritual sleep. They were blinded to the things of God and God used this judgment to get their attention. And He did. They went into captivity as idol worshipers and they came out men and women of God. They learned their lessons about idolatry but today they are once again far from God as they have rejected the Messiah, Jesus Christ. But one day, at the end of the Tribulation Period, the nation of Israel will come to that saving faith; their sins will be forgiven as they come to Jesus, the Messiah, the One who came to take away the sins of the world!

2. As this chapter comes to an end we see Jeremiah speak of the judgment against the Edomites. You can't escape the judgment of God apart from Christ!

**LAMENTATIONS 5**VERSES 1-3

1. They lost everything in this judgment. All had been taken away from them and they were like orphans, widows, they had nothing as they were taken away captive to Babylon. And for those few that remained in the land, they also had nothing left. Food was even hard to find! And you see this plea to God for help.

VERSES 4-6

1. Keep in mind that after the Babylonians captured the Southern Kingdom of Judah they took most of the people back to Babylon with them. But some of the people did remain in the land, the elderly, the weak, the sick, those who basically couldn't cause too much trouble. And Nebuchadnezzar placed Gedaliah as the governor overseeing these people. And things were still so bad that they had to pay even for water. The Babylonians were a ruthless people!

And the other nations took advantage of the situation they were in, they would help them with bread but they had to pay for it!

VERSES 7-9

1. Yes their fathers had sinned and were leading the nation into a downward spiral, but this generation was by no means innocent. They too had a choice to make, to repent of their sins and get right with God or continue down this path that led to death and destruction. And we know which path they took, and they got exactly what God promised them.

We see this played out for us in Jeremiah 16:10-13 where we are told, **“And it shall be, when you show this people all these words, and they say to you, ‘Why has the Lord pronounced all this great disaster against us? Or what is our iniquity? Or what is our sin that we have committed against the Lord our God?’ then you shall say to them, ‘Because your fathers have forsaken Me,’ says the Lord; ‘they have walked after other gods and have served them and worshiped them, and have forsaken Me and not kept My law. And you have done worse than your fathers, for behold, each one follows the dictates of his own evil heart, so that no one listens to Me. Therefore I will cast you out of this land into a land that you do not know, neither you nor your fathers; and there you shall serve other gods day and night, where I will not show you favor.’”**

Make no mistake about it; you are responsible for your own sins. That is what we are told in Ezekiel 18:19-23, **“‘Yet you say, ‘Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?’ Because the son has done what is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes and observed them, he shall surely live. The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live. Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?’ says the Lord God, ‘and not that he should turn from his ways and live?’”**

That choice remains for people today, to turn to the Lord and live or to reject Him and die in your sins. Tragically we see in the church today people who want to blame their actions on others. No one forced you to do anything, it was your choice and thus, you are responsible for your actions!

2. And we see how the social structure of the society was turned upside down and slaves were now ruling over the people. And I'm sure as bad as they were once treated; they returned that upon these people. And the Babylonians could care less for what was going on; as long as they were fighting amongst themselves they weren't fighting against Babylon.

3. Trying to obtain food to eat was difficult as we have seen. There was no protection for the people. As they went out to gather food, these nomads would come and take it from them or kill them. It was very dangerous, but what could you do, you needed to try to find some food, you needed to eat! And because of a lack of food they had to try and purchase it from others and many times there was no money and they had to sell themselves into slavery just to obtain food to eat!

#### VERSES 10-15

1. They were dying of pestilence and famine. Their women were raped and brutalized. Their princes were hung by ropes. The young men were grinding at the millstone, which was a woman's job but they had these young men doing it. The Babylonians were a brutal people and they were trying to demoralize the Jews who remained in the land and they were doing a good job.

The city gate is where the elders and the judges would gather to hear cases and make judgments. But the gates were gone, the city destroyed, and chaos was filling the streets. There was no law anymore.

In fact, there was no respect for anyone! All sections of society were affected, they all were suffering, no one escaped this. And God did not want any of this to happen, He warned them but they refused to listen and now they are reaping what they have sown!

And this city that was once filled with the joy of the Lord, filled with dancing and celebrations, has now turned into a city of mourning! The music had stopped. There was no joy, no dancing any longer.

And you can understand why all this celebration is gone, why there was no joy in the land. You see, true joy that is expressed in action only comes from a relationship with God. In Psalm 95:1-3 we read, **“Oh come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the LORD is the great God, and the great King above all gods.”**

But they had turned from the Lord and that joy they once had was now gone. The circumstances of life have changed and now there is only mourning as Jerusalem was an ash heap and the people were like the walking dead!

VERSE 16

1. The Southern Kingdom of Judah has lost its position of power and glory and the reason for that loss is seen here, “**... Woe to us, for we have sinned!**” That is the problem and it does seem like they are recognizing their problem, their sin has brought this upon them. And it is one thing to recognize your sin but you have to go further and repent. You have to turn from your sin and back to the Lord. Just knowing you are sinning does nothing for you if you don't repent!

It is as Psalm 89:38-48 says, “**But You have cast off and abhorred, you have been furious with Your anointed. You have renounced the covenant of Your servant; you have profaned his crown by casting it to the ground. You have broken down all his hedges; you have brought his strongholds to ruin. All who pass by the way plunder him; he is a reproach to his neighbors. You have exalted the right hand of his adversaries; you have made all his enemies rejoice. You have also turned back the edge of his sword, and have not sustained him in the battle. You have made his glory cease, and cast his throne down to the ground. The days of his youth You have shortened; you have covered him with shame. How long, LORD? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your wrath burn like fire? Remember how short my time is; for what futility have You created all the children of men? What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave?**” These

are the consequences of sin!

VERSES 17-20

1. I can't imagine what Jeremiah was feeling. Spending some 40 years warning them of this judgment and now it has come to pass. And as he looked over the city of Jerusalem this was an overwhelming sight to behold. He loved the city of God. He loved the people of God, the Jews. And now this! Not only was Jeremiah overwhelmed by what he saw, but Jeremiah knew that the captivity that came upon his people would last 70 years!

You see, God already warned him back in Jeremiah chapter 25 beginning in verse 1 where we are told, **“The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying: ‘From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, this is the twenty-third year in which the word of the LORD has come to me; and I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, but you have not listened. And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear. They said, ‘Repent now everyone of his evil way and his evil doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD has given to you and your fathers forever and ever. Do not go after other gods to serve them and worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands; and I will not harm you.’ ‘Yet you have not listened to Me,’ says the LORD, ‘that you might provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt. Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Because you have not heard My words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,’ says the LORD, ‘and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants,**

**and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations. Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.**” Jeremiah 25:1-11. And I’m sure Jeremiah recognized that he would never see the beauty of this city in his lifetime, and he is overwhelmed by it all.

#### VERSES 21-22

1. Yes, God was angry with His people, but that anger would not last forever. It is as Psalm 30:5 says, **“For His anger is but for a moment, his favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”** God’s chastening is short-lived; it will come to an end. He loves us so much that He doesn’t want us to continue down a path leading to destruction. So He will chasten us to bring us back to the place of fellowship with Him, which brings joy in our life.

2. Now for the Southern Kingdom of Judah, this was a very black period in their history! And the reality of this is it all could have been avoided. If they only listened to the voice of God, repented of their sins, but they didn’t and judgment did come upon them.

I wonder if America is paying attention and learning from this example of what can happen to a people who followed God and have now turned away! Many years ago Daniel Webster made this statement and listen carefully because I think we are seeing this fulfilled in our lifetime and not in a good way. He wrote,



If religious books are not circulated among the masses and the people do not turn to God, I do not know what is to become of us as a nation. If truth be not diffused, error will be. If God and His Word are not received, the devil and his works will gain the ascendancy. If the evangelical volume does not reach every hamlet, the pages of a corrupt and licentious literature will. If the power of the gospel is not felt through the length and the breadth of the land, anarchy, misrule, degradation, misery, corruption, and darkness will reign without mitigation or end.

- Daniel Webster

Is that not a picture of what has happened to America since we have turned from the Lord as a nation or as President Obama said, “We are no longer a Christian nation!” That is not a good thing! The solution to that problem is really simple, **“Woe to us, for we have sinned.”** Not only recognizing that but repenting and returning to the Lord. That is what is needed. It was needed for the Southern Kingdom of Judah and it is needed for us today!

3. Now I don’t want to close this study on a sad note because there is a happy ending. God did bring His people back into the land once again, just as He promised them. And Psalm 126 was written commemorating that event, as the people of God returned home. And listen to the joy they had as they are returning to the land that God had given them.

We read beginning in verse 1 of Psalm 126, **“When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, ‘The LORD has done great things for them.’ The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad. Bring back our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the South. Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”**

If your walk is not right with the Lord, He wants to bring you back; all you need to do is come to Him and ask Him to forgive you and to help you walk down His path that leads to righteousness. He will do that for you. And you too will not believe what God has in store for you as you walk with Him. There will be joy in your heart, a song on your lips and a dance in your step. Won't you taste and see that the Lord is good?