

The Book of Lamentations

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(2001 Study)

The following notes on the Book of Lamentations were compiled from a Bible study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 2001. They should be utilized with the following understanding:

1. Each paragraph preceded by **“Comment”** or **“Q”** (an abbreviation for **“Question”**) was introduced by someone other than Bro. Frank.
2. The original study did not follow a prepared text but was extemporaneous in nature.
3. Although the transcriber tried to faithfully, with the Lord’s help, set forth the thoughts that were presented in the study, the notes are not a verbatim rendering and, therefore, should be considered in that context.
4. Finally, Bro. Frank did not review the notes for possible errors that may have inadvertently entered the text.

With this disclaimer in mind, may the notes be a blessing as a useful study guide.

THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

(Study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 2001)

Introduction

The mechanics of the Book of Lamentations, which will be treated subsequently, are quite well known by Bible scholars. Although the mechanics alone are not that valuable, they are useful if we look behind them. To study only the mechanics is like cracking the shell of the walnut and throwing the kernel away, for the motive or purpose in back of the mechanics is far more meaningful.

We will begin by reading from Isaiah chapter 38. King Hezekiah was praying. While lying in bed, he turned his head to the wall for privacy and uttered a silent prayer. Isaiah, who was outside in an outer court, was instructed by God to go in to Hezekiah in answer to the prayer and tell him that his life would be prolonged for 15 more years. The results of the answer to Hezekiah's prayer—that is, what the answered prayer did to him—are of particular interest at this time. Isaiah 38:9-22 reads as follows:

“The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness:

“I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave; I am deprived of the residue of my years.

“I said, I shall not see the LORD, even the LORD, in the land of the living: I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world.

“Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent: I have cut off like a weaver my life: he will cut me off with pining sickness: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me. [When a weaver finishes a garment, he snaps the cord, ties a knot, and tucks the knot into the weave of the garment. The snapping of the cord represents the snapping off of the thread of life when one dies.]

“I reckoned till morning, that, as a lion, so will he break all my bones: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me.

“Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail with looking upward: O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me.

“What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it: I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul.

“O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live.

“Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. [King Hezekiah felt the sickness was retribution for things he had done earlier in his life. Feeling he should live longer, he considered the illness to be a punishment. His troubled conscience led to the prayer that was answered.]

“For the grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.

“The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth. [Notice how the first verse started: ‘The *writing* of Hezekiah king of Judah’; that is, Hezekiah made this utterance in writing. He wanted to record for posterity—for his own children, let alone for the nation, of which he was the king—a memorial of his experience so that it would be of benefit to others.]

“The LORD was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the LORD.”
[Hezekiah did the writing, and it was put to music. Now he was saying, ‘Let us sing this composition that I, as your king and your leader, have put together.’]

“For Isaiah had said, Let them take a lump of figs, and lay it for a plaster upon the boil, and he shall recover.

“Hezekiah also had said, What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the LORD?”

We first note the singing of a song to a stringed instrument. The words were used as a hymn, music was composed, and the song was sung to a stringed instrument in an orderly composition. The purpose of King David with regard to the Psalms was the same. David was the second king of Israel, whereas Hezekiah did not reign until many years later. The Psalms were put to music, giving the experiences of King David. A lot of emotion went into the writings of both the Psalms and Hezekiah. For example, the following famous Psalm, Psalm 137, is the song the Israelites sang when they were taken captive to Babylon.

“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion [and Jerusalem].

“We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. [Here is where the term ‘weeping willows’ came from.]

“For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.

“How shall we sing the LORD’S song in a strange land? [The Babylonians, who hated the Israelites, wanted mirth and song, but how could the Israelites sing in the midst of a heathen land? To do so was incompatible with the circumstances.]

“If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning [be useless].

“If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. [A lot of emotion was involved in this song. The chief joy in life should be superseded by what God has done. In other words, the desire to return to the homeland and rebuild the Temple was more important than any personal or private joy the Israelites might have in other avenues of life.]

[The Psalm ends with very interesting sentiments.] “Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.

“O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.

“Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.”

Many have questioned whether or not Jeremiah was the author of the Book of Lamentations. However, the heartfelt emotions he expressed and had Baruch record in the 52 chapters of the book bearing his name (the Book of Jeremiah) prove that he also authored Lamentations.

The Book of Lamentations is very unusual. It consists of five chapters that are specially and intentionally designed: two chapters, a third chapter in the middle, and two more chapters. The first chapter contains 22 verses, which correspond to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. (Later on, the Hebrew alphabet expanded to 24 letters, but at this time, there were only 22 letters.) Moreover, the way the verses begin follows, in order, the letters of the Hebrew alphabet: the first verse starts with the equivalent of “a,” the second verse starts with the equivalent of “b,” etc. (We are reminded of Psalm 119, called the “Song of Degrees,” which also follows the Hebrew alphabet.) The second chapter of Lamentations also has 22 verses and follows the same alphabetic arrangement. But the middle, or third, chapter has 66 verses and follows, in Hebrew, the pattern of a, a, a, then b, b, b, and so on, which is strikingly different. The fourth chapter reverts back to 22 verses and again follows the Hebrew alphabet. However, the last chapter, while it consists of 22 verses, is different from the other chapters in that it is sort of a Gregorian chant but with a Hebrew rhythm. After the first verse, there is a double cadence and then another verse of another type of rhythm followed by another double cadence, and so on. The rhythm is as follows: verse 1 (done by the cantor), verses 2-3 (quick response); verse 4 (cantor), verses 5-6 (quick response); verse 7 (cantor), verses 8-9 (quick response); etc., all the way through following a Hebrew rhythm. Although there is no book on this subject and everything we are saying is conjectural, the facts support the thoughts. The purpose of the former is that chapter 5 of Lamentations was designed to be a meaningful conclusion to the four preceding, very emotional “lamentation” chapters.

One reason for using the a, b, c format was to aid those who desired to memorize the song. While the first letter of the beginning word of each verse in Hebrew corresponded to the mechanical method, it could be a verb, an article, a noun, or some other part of speech, but the word had to start with the appropriate Hebrew letter.

Now we can appreciate how this mournful song, a soliloquy, was sung to the stringed instrument. When a string was plucked, there was a slight delay that fit in with the mood of the song and the words. So much for the mechanics and the background of Lamentations. Next we will consider Jeremiah himself. Internal evidence proves that he was the author of the Book of Lamentations.

This song could not have been composed while the city of Jerusalem was being destroyed by the Babylonians, for much of the subject matter is what Jeremiah personally witnessed when the king of Babylon besieged the city: the dreadful carnage, disease, hunger, etc. And even when Jeremiah went down to Egypt, the circumstances were not conducive to his writing Lamentations. Rather, the expressions came from a prophet in retirement, as it were, who, long after the events, was meditating on the past, reliving the experiences. Although the Bible last mentions Jeremiah in Egypt, and nothing is stated about his death or the latter part of his life, clues show that Jeremiah was in Babylon at this time rather than in Egypt. For him to write the Book of Lamentations required time and a settled condition where he could think of the mechanics.

In regard to the mechanics, Jeremiah first wrote from his heart, setting forth his feelings. Then he reviewed the writing to put it in a format that would be useful for the people’s participation. Thus he changed the wording accordingly in each sentence. For example, we could take one sentence and present it three different ways, yet be grammatically correct with each variation.

This flexibility is especially true of the Hebrew language. Therefore, we believe that Jeremiah reworked the thoughts of his heart and put them into a mechanical mode while retaining the emotions.

The Book of Lamentations

Lam. 1:1 How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!

At the beginning of chapter 1, some Bibles have the title “Jerusalem’s Misery for Her Sins.” “How doth the city sit solitary [alone], that was full of people!” The Book of Lamentations is extremely dramatic, and unfortunately, it is difficult to break up the verses in a convenient form in which there is a change of venue from one person to another. For instance, Jeremiah was viewing the city of Jerusalem as empty and was picturing the city as a woman, but he also pictured the city as a land, as ground, as a province, as a territory, and as a nation devoid of inhabitants. It was as though Jeremiah was looking at a woman who was in a mournful situation in a sitting posture with her head bowed and weeping.

While in Babylon, he wrote as if he were actually seeing the empty land “that [once] was great among the nations.” Though small, the land of Israel had had the Temple of Solomon, King Solomon’s wisdom, David’s conquering exploits such as the slaying of Goliath, and a great history. Not only had Israel been great in the sense of being powerful, but also a beauty had attached to the city of Jerusalem because the Temple, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, was there. Now the city was in ruins, and “how is she become tributary!” Instead of having a leading role, Israel was the subject of another nation and a tribute payer, being required annually to give a large sum of tribute money and taxes. She was in servitude and betrayed by all of her friends and lovers.

Lam. 1:2 She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies.

The account could not be any more dramatic and powerful. A dove is characteristically so sympathetic to the illness of its caring master that when the master dies, so does the dove. A canary in a similar situation ceases to sing. Thus an empathy seems to develop between birds (or animals) and humans in some cases. Here Jeremiah was almost like the woman. The very fact he wrote on this subject matter shows his character and why the Lord used him—and Jeremiah was faithful in that which was committed to his charge.

“She weepeth sore in the night.” Figuratively speaking, the sun was no longer shining on the woman. It was as if a spiritual darkness was beclouding the land. Because of all the circumstances surrounding the city, Jeremiah pictured it in a most mournful aspect. “Among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her”; they became her enemies.

Lam. 1:3 Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude: she dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest: all her persecutors overtook her between the straits.

Jeremiah was the prophet primarily to the two-tribe kingdom, Benjamin and Judah. The other ten tribes had been taken into captivity as retribution a century earlier, so Jeremiah was writing about Judah.

“Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude.” The conjunction “and” gives a wrong slant. Judah was taken into captivity especially because of the sins of the upper crust in oppressing the poor. Similarly Jesus, at the First Advent, criticized the ecclesiastical leadership for taking advantage of the widow and having her sign over her property to them. This same wrong practice has been done down through the Gospel Age by the religious leadership. It can even be done subconsciously in our midst by trying to influence the writing of wills of others. The rich and the powerful have many “friends,” but when the tables are turned, then a true friend is revealed. A true friend sticks like glue in time of misfortune. Because of Judah’s treatment of others, retribution had come upon her. “She dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no [spiritual] rest [particularly].”

“All her persecutors overtook her between the straits.” It is interesting to observe that wars against Israel are often conveniently scheduled to start on the nation’s holy days. This information becomes useful in interpreting certain chronology, which is not the subject matter now. Verse 3 is saying that enemies deliberately waited and timed their attacks to take advantage when Israel was in a “strait,” or circumstance not convenient for defending herself; that is, the enemy waited for a moment of weakness before making the attack. That same tactic is still used today. And instead of being impartial, the media favor the Palestinians and slant their reports to stir up attention to the wrong party.

Lam. 1:4 The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate: her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness.

Again the landscape is being described. “The ways of Zion do mourn”; that is, not only was the city of Jerusalem desolate and without inhabitant, but also there was no traffic on the roads leading into the capital. Under the Law, all males over a certain age were required to go to the Temple three times a year for holy days, but the roads leading to Jerusalem and the surrounding territory were now empty at these times. The “gates” of both the city and the Temple had been despoiled. Formerly Judah’s judges sat in the city gates.

A new thought starts with the words “her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness.” Judah’s priests were now in captivity in Babylon. Certainly they were not still in Judah, for the land was without inhabitant. Any surviving priests who had served in the Temple and any surviving princes who had served in the civil government were now in a foreign land. This sudden change of venue is hard to bring out in print, but it is a break in thought. Jeremiah turned from discussing the land to discussing mourners in Babylon who had previously been leading figures in the administration of Jerusalem. Judah’s conquerors had taken her “virgins” captive to Babylon for wives or concubines. Captors in Old Testament times used a brutal practice to determine the virgins. The point is that Judah was stripped of all decorum, inhabitants, and niceties. The Israelites in captivity were “in [great] bitterness” like Nehemiah the cupbearer, who mourned before the king (Neh. 1:1-4; 2:1-5). When the king noticed that his cupbearer was not himself and inquired why, Nehemiah prayed instantly to God for help to say the right thing. He replied in effect, “I am in mourning because the city of Jerusalem in my homeland is desolate and the gates are in utter ruin.” Nehemiah’s prayer was answered remarkably, and he was given a 12-year leave of absence to go back to Israel.

Lam. 1:5 Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper; for the LORD hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her children are gone into captivity before the enemy.

Verse 5 is self-explanatory.

Lam. 1:6 And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed: her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer.

Today most of us live an artificial life and do not see deer. The comparison of Judah's princes to "harts that find no pasture" is very pathetic. Our hearts go out to the animal creation. The Israelites were in a weakened condition; they were "gone without strength before the pursuer." Under the Romans, distances were metered and marked with mileposts, and a Roman could compel a Jew to carry luggage or some other burden to the next milepost. For refusal, the Romans could kill the person with impunity. The same type of situation existed in Babylon. The indigenous citizenry of Babylon had a superior status over the captives, and this superiority was manifested in the social and business world in various anti-Semitic ways. Even though the Jews had homes and food, they could feel the antipathy.

Lam. 1:7 Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old, when her people fell into the hand of the enemy, and none did help her: the adversaries saw her, and did mock at her sabbaths.

Before the captivity, Jeremiah had tried to tell the inhabitants of Judah that their problems were a result of not following the Lord's instruction. The "days of old" were the days of Saul, David, and Solomon. During the 513 years of the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah, very few kings received a good report. Good King Josiah was one exception.

"The adversaries saw her, and did mock at her sabbaths." The adversaries mocked the Jewish sabbaths when the Israelites were in captivity. The Jews went to Ezekiel or to some other notable in captivity to observe the sabbath, but being in a foreign land, they were mocked. Earlier, especially during the years of Israel's prosperity under Solomon, other nations envied Israel. When Moab and Ammon looked down from the hills at that time and saw all the people coming on the holy days, they did not mock. No, the mocking occurred later when Israel was in captivity and had no Temple and the Jews met in a house or by a river or standing out on the plain.

Lam. 1:8 Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed: all that honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness: yea, she sigheth, and turneth backward.

Jerusalem was removed into captivity because of grievous sinning. "All that [previously] honoured her [in the days of her glory now] despise[d] her," for they saw the Jews as a captive people in a foreign land. When the Jews in captivity reflected back on their former honor, they "sigheth, and turneth backward"; that is, they sighed and turned their heads and sobbed. Jeremiah wanted Israel to see that sin was the reason for their captivity. God was thoroughly righteous in visiting the judgment.

Lam. 1:9 Her filthiness is in her skirts; she remembereth not her last end; therefore she came down wonderfully: she had no comforter. O LORD, behold my affliction: for the enemy hath magnified himself.

The Israelites were in captivity in Babylon, and the Prophet Jeremiah did not want them to ask, "Why did this happen to me?" Many people question their own unpleasant situation as if somehow the Lord is disinterested in their circumstance. Jeremiah wrote these verses lest the Israelites in captivity forget their Jewish background and history. He wanted them to keep in remembrance why Israel had undergone the unpleasant experiences of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and the captivity in Babylon. The fault was Israel's, not God's. If the Israelites could see the proper perspective, they would realize that God had done them good in causing their present circumstance and in trying to wake them up. Even secular writers have noticed that Israel no longer has heathen religions. The downfall now of the Jewish people is business, industry, science, etc., but not different religions. Instead of making cakes to the queen of heaven and worshipping Molech, their weakness is money, power, and wealth.

Jeremiah wanted the Israelites to get back to God, the real Giver of every good and perfect gift.

“She came down wonderfully [awesomely].” The destruction was terrible. To behold the stones of the Temple being smashed, the woodwork being burned, and the gates being destroyed caused wonderment and puzzlement. Israel was brought down to a low estate where “she had no comforter.” The heathen nations even told why the Jews were in captivity, saying, “Your God has forsaken you.”

“Her filthiness is [seen] in her skirts.” A harlot was recognized back there by her forehead. Phrenology, the study of skulls, was a useful practice in the past. For instance, the faces, particularly the eyes, of immigrants who came to Ellis Island were examined by trained inspectors to detect any mental or physical illnesses. In principle, the filthiness in the skirts means that boldness in sin could be discerned in the faces of those who lived the life of a harlot and that literally their garments were soiled and wrinkled from lying down on the ground.

Notice that Jeremiah was overcome emotionally as he was writing: “O LORD, behold my affliction: for the enemy hath magnified himself.” In seeing the affliction of his people, Jeremiah called it “my affliction.” He empathetically entered into the situation much like Daniel in his prayer (Dan. 9:3-15).

Lam. 1:10 The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things: for she hath seen that the heathen entered into her sanctuary, whom thou didst command that they should not enter into thy congregation.

The enemies magnified themselves when they broke the gates and flooded into Jerusalem. Jeremiah saw the ravage and destruction wrought by King Nebuchadnezzar and his army. The enemy entered into the “sanctuary,” that is, into the Holy and the Most Holy. Seeing the ancient religion God had established in Israel being invaded by this heathen power was very traumatic for the prophet to talk about. Similarly, many Jews who experienced and survived the Holocaust break down in tears when they reminisce. The memory makes them distraught.

“She hath seen that the heathen entered into her sanctuary, whom thou didst command that they should not enter into thy congregation.” In the days of her glory, Israel had the Court of the Gentiles in Solomon’s Temple. The Gentiles were not to go beyond the court, and they obeyed. But in the destruction of Jerusalem, these restrictions were violated. Jeremiah was brokenhearted as he reflected on what he had seen.

Lam. 1:11 All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul: see, O LORD, and consider; for I am become vile.

Now Jeremiah reflected on the famine that had taken place at the time of the siege in 606 BC. To obtain bread, the Jews gave their most treasured objects. In addition to the gigantic pile of cereal, or grain, that was in the middle of the city, the elite (king, princes, and priests) had a separate supply. To get the family possessions and treasures of the people for a song, the elite doled out bread. When the supply of bread was exhausted, the elite fled the city but were captured by the enemy. The point is that even in this dire circumstance, Jews took advantage of one another “for meat to relieve the soul.”

“See, O LORD, and consider; for I am become vile.” Just as John the Revelator interjected “Amen!” upon hearing good news, so here Jeremiah said upon hearing bad news, “This is affecting me. I feel most miserable.” The last part of verse 9, “O LORD, behold my affliction: for the enemy hath magnified himself,” and the last part of verse 11, “See, O LORD, and consider; for I am become vile,” are very personal statements of Jeremiah. First, he recorded what he had beheld at the time of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, and then he told the effect the

destruction had upon him personally.

Lam. 1:12 Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.

Jeremiah was speaking about his *own* sorrow. In the Book of Jeremiah, the prophet's tears have been greatly misconstrued as being God's tears. God did not weep and bemoan the things that happened. Is there "any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger"? Jeremiah took the trouble *personally*. Daniel, another righteous man, also took Israel's experiences personally.

"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" Who was passing by? During the time Jeremiah was writing his lamentations, people noticed his behavior and wondered what was the matter with him. Those who passed by were primarily fellow Israelites. Jeremiah was in a low period. We can see that prophets, as well as Christians, sometimes have high and low emotional experiences. Therefore, to have these emotions is not necessarily wrong. Some mistakenly think the Christian should be like a stoic, who has no emotions outwardly or inwardly.

Lam. 1:13 From above hath he sent fire into my bones, and it prevaieth against them: he hath spread a net for my feet, he hath turned me back: he hath made me desolate and faint all the day.

Israel's experiences affected Jeremiah so strongly that it was like having a consuming fire sent into his bones. This *negative* fire caused depression, as contrasted with the positive fire of zeal and enthusiasm. Jeremiah was in this mood for quite a while, for the entire time that he was composing the book was a period of lamentation and very depressing thoughts with regard to the lessons upon the people. And Jeremiah was further depressed because the majority did not see the experiences the way he did.

Lam. 1:14 The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand: they are wreathed, and come up upon my neck: he hath made my strength to fall, the Lord hath delivered me into their hands, from whom I am not able to rise up.

Jeremiah likened himself to being spiritually bound up with chains. He became so emotionally involved for his people that he was suffering like the dove. The sickness was entering into him. Jeremiah knew that the Lord was punishing the people, but he entered into the experience so much that even though he was favored among the captives, he felt as if he were in disfavor. We begin to see that the Lord deals with imperfect people, and He understands their "downsitting" and their "uprising" (Psa. 139:2).

Lam. 1:15 The Lord hath trodden under foot all my mighty men in the midst of me: he hath called an assembly against me to crush my young men: the Lord hath trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah, as in a winepress.

"The Lord hath trodden under foot all my mighty men in the midst of me." Even though Jeremiah was given some preferential treatment, he was so emotionally involved with the Israelites in captivity away from their homeland that he was not at all happy in this new situation in Babylon. The "mighty men," the people of God, Jeremiah's fellow Israelites who surrounded him, were being trodden underfoot in captivity. The prophet so emotionally entered into the situation of this depressed people that he felt the Lord had done this traumatic experience to him as well as to the people.

Incidentally, Jeremiah was in the upper echelon of the priesthood. Although not a high priest,

he was a priest, and in his outspokenness, he was looked down upon in the eyes of his fellows as a traitor to the priesthood and as a traitor to the nation for his predictions that the enemy would be successful.

Jeremiah used the term “my young men.” Being in a high echelon of the priesthood, he considered the people as *his* people, even though they were really God’s people. If conscientious, those who are in high positions, such as the President of the United States, feel that Providence has put the welfare of the people into their hands. True leadership considers the prosperity of those under them. Abraham Lincoln had that attitude in his emotional makeup. Therefore, Jeremiah had a responsibility, and he fulfilled it properly.

Lam. 1:16 For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me: my children are desolate, because the enemy prevailed.

Jeremiah was speaking, not the Lord. God was punishing the people, and “for these things I [Jeremiah] weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water.”

Lam. 1:17 Zion spreadeth forth her hands, and there is none to comfort her: the LORD hath commanded concerning Jacob, that his adversaries should be round about him: Jerusalem is as a menstruous woman among them.

Speaking figuratively, Jeremiah likened Zion to one who was begging for alms and food: “Zion spreadeth forth her hands.”

Lam. 1:18 The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment: hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity.

As a review, the contents of the Lamentations of Jeremiah are quite personal. Although the prophet was inspired in writing the book, the thoughts expressed are mostly emotional. The book was written not as a story coming to a climax but as a series of thoughts particularly about the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. The format is structured in a way that normally would not be favorable to an emotional outburst. We have suggested that originally Jeremiah recorded his feelings and lamentations in a written form, and then later, for the benefit of his people and succeeding generations, he reworked the writing into the structured form that we now find it. Chapters 1 and 2 each contain 22 verses, and the verses correspond sequentially to what was then the Hebrew alphabet. In other words, Jeremiah started verse 1 of both chapters with aleph and then went successively right through the alphabet. Of the five chapters of Lamentations, four chapters each contain 22 verses. Chapter 3, the middle chapter, has 66 verses (3 x 22 or a,a,a; b,b,b; c,c,c; etc.), so we can see that the book is highly structured. This technique was used by other Hebrews, an example being the 119th Psalm of David. It did not matter what part of speech the initial words were (a definite article, a noun, a verb, etc.) as long as they started with the proper successive letter.

As stated earlier, some Bibles head the first chapter with the caption “Jerusalem’s Misery for Her Sins.” Accordingly, the bulk of chapter 1 is Jeremiah’s emotional beholding of Jerusalem and likening it basically to a woman; that is, Jerusalem was seen as a city in the guise of a woman. In the second chapter, the prophet viewed Jerusalem from another perspective. The third chapter contains Jeremiah’s own personal emotions.

“I [Jerusalem] have rebelled against his commandment: hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow.” Jerusalem is pictured as a city speaking. The city is given a personified character in chapter 1.

“The LORD is righteous.” This statement gives the right slant. Down through the Gospel Age, the Jews of the Diaspora did not see any blame in themselves. They felt and expressed in their writings that their persecutions in the various countries in which they were dispersed were the fault of the Gentiles. However, Daniel and Jeremiah, as well as other prophets, had the proper perspective in saying, “We have sinned.” Because the nation sinned, they experienced tribulation and sorrows.

Notice the time sequence. Both the city and the Temple were now empty and in ruins, but Jeremiah pictured the city as if a woman were there, sitting in the midst of the desolation. And the woman was Jerusalem or, to use another appellation, Zion, the daughter of Israel.

“Hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity.” The Israelites who were taken into captivity in Babylon were primarily those who followed Jeremiah’s advice to get out of Jerusalem before the city was destroyed. To leave in time required courage, and the fleeing took place near the middle of the siege. Thus the city was under siege for many, many months, but in the midst, or in the last half, of the siege period of almost two years, before the famine set in, the ones who obeyed Jeremiah fled Jerusalem and went over to the enemy. Jeremiah had advised, “If you obey my words, which the Lord gave me, and peacefully go with the enemy, I guarantee that you will not be put to death.” Those who followed this counsel were spared and taken captive. Those who remained behind were destroyed in one fashion or another.

“My virgins and my young men are gone into captivity.” The city was devoid of occupants, and particularly the promising occupants. The young maidens and the young men who were taken into captivity were the hope of Israel’s future. Jerusalem had no inhabitants and was sitting in the midst of ruins. What a dramatic picture! Jeremiah was a very unusual person, considered by some of Jewish Orthodoxy as the chief prophet of the Old Testament, even rivaling Moses.

Comment: Verse 1 said Jerusalem was once a great and exalted princess among the nations.

Lam. 1:19 I called for my lovers, but they deceived me: my priests and mine elders gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls.

The “lovers” who deceived Israel before the destruction in 606 BC were Syria and Egypt. Israel had characteristically called on one of these two nations as an ally. As a buffer state, Israel was considered by many not to be a military threat to their own existence. But when a superpower is on each side, the in-between nation often uses its position as a bargaining point, siding with the country it feels will be the victor in the war and negotiating a secret understanding. In this case, the Israelites expected Egypt to assist them in their resistance against Babylon, the Chaldean power.

Historically speaking, certain smaller Semitic nations such as Ammon and Moab were also Israel’s lovers. The descendants of Ishmael and Esau were involved in Israel’s history. Even today the Arabs feel that the seed of promise went through Ishmael instead of through Isaac, so they claim the promises from that standpoint. However, the Bible clearly shows that the Messiah was to come through Isaac. After Sarah died, Abraham married Keturah and had several children, and these offspring were dispersed into Arabia, Ammon, and Moab. Thus Israel felt these other nations would come to her aid, and she sent out emissaries (she called for her “lovers”) to obtain cooperation and help—but to no avail. The fact that the Israelites worshipped Ashtoreth and Molech, gods of the surrounding peoples, and had intermarriage shows the degree of dealings Israel had with these various nations. Then, when Israel was in trouble in the 606 BC time period, the nation looked for help but found no support. And even

worse, these other nations cheered from hilltops and cooperated with the enemy when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem.

“My priests and mine elders gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls.” (The phrase “gave up the *ghost*” became a real part of the vocabulary in the Elizabethan era instead of “gave up the *spirit*.”) During the siege, an ordinance was passed whereby everyone was supposed to dispose of his food by putting it in a common heap for the benefit of the survival of the city. Although the thought is conjectural, the priests were probably excluded from this requirement of the state. Wheat, rye, and barley were not to be hoarded but were to be put in the common heap, and then each individual received his daily ration. The hope was that the city would outlast the siege of the enemy. Because the priests did not surrender their food supply, they had plenty. And of course as Levites, they had received the tithes of the people, so their larder was full. Instead of commiserating with the civilian population, which was separate from the ecclesiastical echelon, the priests kept their food supplies to themselves. This information cannot be substantiated by Biblical dictionaries or commentaries, but the assumption is reasonable based on the statement that the priests “sought their meat to relieve their souls.” Even today in Israel, the rabbinical element is excluded from military warfare. The “elders,” who were closely associated with the priests, were also excluded. In later times, the elders were called the Sanhedrin, and some of the Sanhedrin were priests. At any rate, the elders were highly influential as teachers in one capacity or another. These two elements—priests and elders—feared for themselves instead of sacrificing for those they ministered to.

In another way too, the priests had no spirit in themselves. When the enemy was besieging the city, the Israelites looked to the priests for advice. But what kind of advice could the priests give when the Lord was not speaking through them? Their own problems kept them from being a help or an aid to those they were supposed to minister to.

In addition, King Zedekiah fled from the city of Jerusalem and took food with him. Therefore, the leaders, civil and ecclesiastical, provided no support for the people. They thought selfishly of themselves and their own survival instead of praying to God, as in the days of Hezekiah when Sennacherib and his army were slain in one day. The nation should have prayed in 606 BC, and the nation should do that today in regard to the Arab situation. Throughout Israel’s whole history, the God of *Israel* has been their Helper.

Comment: Even when the enemy was about to break into the city, Jeremiah told Zedekiah, “If you surrender, the lives of you and all the people will be spared.”

Reply: The Lord gave the Israelites not only every opportunity to obey Him but also a way out, and that was true for all strata of society: the king, the princes, the priests, and the people. As a whole, the higher echelon was nonresponsive.

Lam. 1:20 Behold, O LORD; for I am in distress: my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled: abroad the sword bereaveth, at home there is as death.

Jerusalem continued to talk. “Behold, O LORD,” Jerusalem prayed. Jeremiah felt these emotions himself, but for historical purposes, he wrote dramatically to preserve the memory and all details of the destruction of the city. Similarly, Israel today is trying to perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust. Jews are impressed with the movies and the museums on the Holocaust, but the vast majority go right back to their previous life-style and do not repent.

“Behold, O LORD; for I am in distress: my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me.” When people get emotionally upset, their stomach is sometimes affected, resulting in

loose bowels. And sometimes people can feel their heart flip-flop.

“For I have grievously rebelled: abroad the sword bereaveth, at home there is as death.” In addition to reports outside the city, Jerusalem itself was desolate. There was death all around. When Jerusalem was burned with fire, survivors were taken captive and corpses were not buried, as Jeremiah had prophesied. It was also predicted that children would be killed and eaten.

Lam. 1:21 They have heard that I sigh: there is none to comfort me: all mine enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that thou hast done it: thou wilt bring the day that thou hast called, and they shall be like unto me.

The “enemies” of Israel were her former “lovers” (Moab, Ammon, Egypt, Syria, etc.). Some of them even encouraged the enemy (Babylon). In fact, the nations that should have been closest to Israel actually cheered the enemy on.

“They have heard that I sigh.” Verse 21 was written as though Jerusalem had just been destroyed. Of course Gedaliah was left in Israel with the few vine dressers, but that situation existed for only a very short time. The others killed Gedaliah after about five months and then fled to Egypt, where Nebuchadnezzar pursued them. Therefore, the city was now empty not only after the destruction of the city and the Temple but also after the removal of Gedaliah.

“Thou wilt bring the day that thou hast called, and they shall be like unto me.” What is the thought here?

Comment: Because these other nations, Israel’s former lovers, did not come to her aid, and some even encouraged the enemy, they would shortly be destroyed like Israel.

Reply: Years earlier Jeremiah had made yokes and sent out an emissary with a yoke to each of several nations (Jer. 27:1-11). When Nebuchadnezzar came down to Riblah (or Hamath), he was trying to decide which nation to destroy first: Jerusalem, Ammon, or Moab. He was inclined to go to Ammon and Moab, but all of the occult divination said to go to Jerusalem; that is, the Lord providentially overruled so that livers, tea leaves, etc., pointed in the direction of Jerusalem, contrary to what Nebuchadnezzar felt would be the wiser method. These other nations, not knowing what Nebuchadnezzar’s intentions were and that their destruction was next, cheered him on against Israel. Thus Jerusalem, the city personified as a woman, was speaking here in verse 21, “And they shall be like unto me.” The account could not be more dramatic. In his original cartoons, Disney tried to lift the morals of the people, whether they realized it or not, through the animation of such things as trees and talking animals. By personifying Jerusalem as a woman to teach needed lessons, Jeremiah was using the same principle—but of course on a much higher level.

Lam. 1:22 Let all their wickedness come before thee; and do unto them, as thou hast done unto me for all my transgressions: for my sighs are many, and my heart is faint.

Verse 22 is a continuation of the thoughts of verse 21. Although Psalm 137:1-3 was quoted earlier, we will read it again: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.” Israel is well known for singing. The Jews in Russia, for example, are famed for their joyous and skilled singing and clean type of dancing with no intermingling of the sexes. Some of the Orthodox cantors have extraordinary voices. Even under Hitler in Germany, the good singers were spared and expected to entertain during the Holocaust. We do not see too much of the singing today because that capability is utilized

in the religious realm, and with the communal spirit, their dramas are attended and seen by Jews. The point is that when the Jews were in Babylon, the Babylonians wanted them to sing.

Comment: Continuing on, Psalm 137 expresses the desire for retribution to come on the enemies of Israel. The last verse states, “Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.” This verse indicates how brutally some of the Israelites’ children were killed.

Reply: Yes, and Jeremiah also wrote of the brutality in his book. He wrote for posterity.

Lam. 2:1 How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger!

Now Jeremiah took a different stance. Instead of having Jerusalem speak, he took the part of a disinterested onlooker who was just recording observations. With this method, Jeremiah’s emotions were not as apparent. Instead of Jerusalem doing the talking and showing emotion, Jeremiah was now an observer. In the next chapter, he spoke personally.

“How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger”! If we, as Christians, have done a little something amiss and we are trying to pray and contact the Lord through the name of Jesus, a cloud may interfere. We then have to ask forgiveness in order to reestablish a closeness in prayer. Of course if we have sinned grievously, attempts at prayer would be like talking to the wall, and the communication would not get through until the proper steps of repentance had been taken. Here Jeremiah was saying that instead of the sunshine of God’s favor and face on Jerusalem, there was darkness over the land.

Notice that Jeremiah used the term “daughter of Zion,” which was still a woman, but he was now an observer. He was like an accurate historian recording all of the little details.

Comment: Lamentations 3:44 emphasizes the same point: “Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through.”

Reply: Yes, the principle is the same, and that was Jeremiah’s own experience for a while.

The prophet was observing, as an outsider, the cloud of God’s wrath. God “cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel.” The Temple had been leveled and brought down to the earth. Thus the destroyed Temple was a symbol of Israel’s being humbled and humiliated.

God “remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger!” Here the “daughter of Zion” was called God’s “footstool.” Sometimes His footstool is the city of Jerusalem, but more particularly, it is the Temple, the sanctuary, for the actual communication came in a more direct fashion from the Temple Mount.

Comment: Ezekiel 43:7 is a Kingdom setting, but it says that the soles of God’s feet will rest on the Third Temple.

Reply: Yes, and in the Book of Isaiah, the earth is called God’s footstool. The time period of the focus of attention usually determines what is meant by “footstool.” In a very broad sense, as opposed to a localized sense, the earth—the entire planet—is His footstool.

Lam. 2:2 The Lord hath swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob, and hath not pitied: he hath thrown down in his wrath the strong holds of the daughter of Judah; he hath brought

them down to the ground: he hath polluted the kingdom and the princes thereof.

“The Lord hath swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob, and hath not pitied.” It was as if a monster had come in and devoured all the inhabitants of the city, but *the Lord* had permitted the situation. *God* “hath thrown down in his wrath the strong holds of the daughter of Judah; he hath brought them down to the ground: he hath polluted the kingdom and the princes thereof.”

The literal Hebrew rendition of Lamentations is much more forceful. Not only is it more in line with the Lord’s Spirit, but also it better expresses the emotions of Jeremiah. We will review verses 1 and 2 from this standpoint. “How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger!” The wording is explicit enough, but the way the Hebrew ingeniously starts each verse with a, b, c, etc., seems to improve the rendition from our normal Western thinking. Our sentence structure is so different from the grammatical arrangement in either the Mideast or Asia. The following, therefore, will bring out some points that are missed in the English translation.

“How has clouded in his anger *Adonai!*” Right away we notice that although Jehovah is being referred to, He is called *Adonai*, a term that sometimes applies to Jesus in the Old Testament when it is used for a different purpose. What does *Adonai* signify? A concordance will say “Lord,” but *Adonai* is an affectionate term, a soft term, that implies the possessor has pity, compassion, love, and tenderness. Therefore, verse 1 is preparing us for a change. A hymn tells about Jehovah’s mercies in the past—how He was forgiving and patient in dealing with the Israelites, who continually backslid. Time after time after time, He forgave them and gave fresh opportunities to return to His favor. And so here preparation was being made for a radical change from the “God of mercy” to the “God of wrath.”

The literal Hebrew continues: “How has clouded in his anger *Adonai*, the daughter of Zion cast down, the beauty of Israel from heaven to earth, and not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger!” The word “anger” is all right here, but sometimes the Hebrew is used for other words, which have fine distinctions of meaning in the Book of Lamentations.

Verse 2 literally reads, “Swallowed up *Adonai* all the homes of Jacob.” This action was the opposite of *Adonai*. As for the One whom the Israelites looked upon as *Adonai* in their hearts, how He had changed in His dealings with them! He had swallowed up all the homes of Jacob in His *rage*, not anger. The difference between anger and rage is that anger can be controlled and held in, but rage explodes out into the open. “And destroyed the daughter of Judah; the strongholds of the daughter of Judah made he touch to earth.” In other words, God had made the strongholds to collapse to the earth. “And he has defiled the kingdom and its rulers.”

Lam. 2:3 He hath cut off in his fierce anger all the horn of Israel: he hath drawn back his right hand from before the enemy, and he burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, which devoureth round about.

God “hath cut off in his fierce anger *all* the horn [power] of Israel”; that is, Israel was made desolate. Almost everything that is stated here not only is an expression of what God did and what His emotions were but also is dramatically expressed so that it can be visually seen. For example, God “hath drawn back his right hand from before the enemy.” God was all powerful, so if He had wanted to hold the enemy in check, He could have just put out His hand of authority and stopped the invasion. But instead God allowed the enemy to have free access into the beloved city. We can visualize what is being expressed. God withdrew His *right* hand, which is usually a sign of favor.

And He “burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, which devoureth round about.” Notice the

different terms that have been used so far in this chapter: “Zion,” “Judah,” “Israel,” and “Jacob.” When the destruction occurred, Jeremiah was in the northern part of the city not far from the Damascus Gate, so he could see what was happening. He saw the enemy come in and cause despoliation. Although Jeremiah had prophesied of this coming destruction for 40 years, he was very depressed when it came. For instance, it saddened him to see the destruction of the Temple of Solomon, which was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Would not seeing the destruction similarly affect any loyal Jew, even though God gave the Temple over to the enemy? Feelings were involved.

Lam. 2:4 He hath bent his bow like an enemy: he stood with his right hand as an adversary, and slew all that were pleasant to the eye in the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion: he poured out his fury like fire.

Now Jehovah was pictured as the enemy rather than King Nebuchadnezzar. Instead of Nebuchadnezzar being the lion, the Lord portrayed Himself as the lion coming down. “He [God] hath bent his bow like an enemy.” The English rendering is pathetic. In archery tournaments, an archer pulls back his bow to shoot an arrow into a circle with a bull’s eye, but this scene was much more dramatic. The bows and arrows in time of war were a lot different from those used to hunt animals. The latter case required quick action, but in warfare, the curved bow was very taut and unyielding so that the arrows could pierce armor. Therefore, instead of pulling the bow with the arm, the archer stepped on the lower half of the bow. He used strength to pull the bow back as far as it would go, so that when it was released, the arrow went with tremendous speed like a bullet from a gun.

Jeremiah beheld a fearsome sight and became emotional. When the enemy strained with their bows, it was as if God was bending the bows, for He used the enemy as His instrument. “He stood with his right hand as an adversary.” The bow was loaded, and most people, being right-handed, used the right hand to release the arrow into flight.

The Lord “slew all that were pleasant to the eye in the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion.” What was “pleasant to the eye”? Little babies, young children, and beautiful women were all targets. The enemy had no mercy. In fact, the enemy was so angry in the initial stage of the battle that there was no thought of taking captives. No discrimination was made in the slaughter. What an emotional scene! And no doubt it was photographed for future viewing. In the Kingdom, people will say, “How dull we were not to read the Bible! God’s Word is so very powerful, and we ignored it. We just wanted to do our own thing.” Those of the world do not see the beauty of Jesus’ sacrifice and his pure motives; they have a deaf ear for God and His Son.

Not only did the enemy slay all who were pleasant to the eye, but also the slaying took place in the “tabernacle [tent] of the daughter of Zion.” Even though the Tabernacle of skins had been replaced by the Temple of wood and stone, the Temple was sometimes called a “tabernacle,” meaning a “dwelling place.” To call the Temple a “tabernacle” or “tent” softened the thought of God’s presence as in the days of old, when a rectangular box covered with skins was a much humbler structure. The word “tabernacle” has a nicer sound for the holy dwelling representing the presence of God. The “daughter of Zion,” a woman, referred to Jerusalem, as presented in the first chapter of Lamentations. She was weeping and lonely, and no one paid any attention to her. Traffic to the Temple had ceased; there was no more rejoicing. All of this language is highly symbolic. Therefore, the “daughter of Zion” was a pictorial representation of the people as a whole, from the king down to the common people, particularly as visited in Jerusalem and its immediate environs. God “poured out his fury like fire.”

Lam. 2:5 The Lord was as an enemy: he hath swallowed up Israel, he hath swallowed up all her palaces: he hath destroyed his strong holds, and hath increased in the daughter of Judah

mourning and lamentation.

Three times in this second chapter of the Book of Lamentations, it was stated that God “swallowed up” Israel: in verse 2 and twice in verse 5. Why didn’t Jeremiah say that God had swallowed up Judah?

Comment: At this point, with Judah’s being taken into captivity, the polity of the nation ended.

Reply: Yes, the nation had consisted of the ten tribes of Israel and the two tribes of Judah. The ten tribes were removed earlier, and now, when God swallowed up Judah, He had swallowed up both Judah and Israel. In other words, the term “Israel” incorporated the entire nation. Sometimes the name “Israel” represents only the ten-tribe kingdom, and sometimes it represents both. If something is “swallowed up,” nothing remains. The Temple had been leveled, the city walls had been broken down, the buildings were in ruins, the city was desolate, and the inhabitants had been swallowed up.

The mention of “palaces” and “strong holds” refers to the splendor of the city, particularly in Solomon’s day. Solomon accomplished a tremendous amount of awesome building throughout the nation, and his works were done with precision and particularity of detail. Not only was the Temple a marvel, but also the city of Jerusalem was extraordinary. Of course the “palaces” were for the king, the priests, the princes, and the nobility. All of these structures were laid waste and brought to naught.

Jeremiah used various feminine terms: “daughter of Zion,” “daughter of Jerusalem,” and here “daughter of Judah.” Notice the change of pronouns: “her palaces” but “his [that is, Israel’s] strong holds.”

God “hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation.” We are studying the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and the prophet used the word “lamentation.”

Lam. 2:6 And he hath violently taken away his tabernacle, as if it were of a garden: he hath destroyed his places of the assembly: the LORD hath caused the solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion, and hath despised in the indignation of his anger the king and the priest.

“And he [God] hath violently taken away his tabernacle, as if it were of a garden” should be, “And he violated like a garden his booth.” Christian scholars who translated the Bible from Hebrew into English were sympathetic but not necessarily very devout. Here, as sometimes happens, the scholars lost the emotional aspect. The word should be “booth,” which reminds us of the Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Booths. Those booths were temporary shelters for seven days, and at the end of the seven-day religious ceremony, they were taken down. Those of Judah had felt that Jerusalem could not be destroyed because it was Jehovah’s city and it contained Jehovah’s Temple. But the enemy was awesomely successful in defiling, despoiling, and destroying what the Jews thought was permanent. Jeremiah was saying, “That which was considered permanent was, as it were, a booth.” It was gone.

Migrant farmers often worked in the vineyards, traveling from area to area as the crops were ready to harvest. Temporary booths were used in the vineyards. In verse 6, a picture of permanence was being likened to an illusion or a dream.

Comment: The people said, “The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD,” never thinking that God would forsake the Temple or allow it to be destroyed (Jer. 7:4).

Reply: The attitude of the Israelites was similar with the Ark of the Covenant. When the Ark

was up in Shiloh, some in the ten-tribe kingdom thought victory over the Philistines would be assured if they took the Ark into battle with the Philistines. Instead the Philistines captured the Ark. The point is that with both the Temple and the Ark, the Israelites had a false sense of security. If they had been faithful to God, the security would have been permanent.

The language in verse 6 is forceful. During the growing season, a garden is tended, trellises are built, etc., but after the crops are harvested, the garden is plowed under and nothing remains. Jerusalem was a mass of ruins like a garden that had served its purpose and now was gone.

God “hath destroyed his places of the assembly.” The “places of assembly” were the Temple and the major city gates, where the judges sat. Official announcements were made and court cases heard in the city gate, which was like a building. The gate was about 50 feet deep, and inside the gate was a judgment hall.

“The LORD hath caused the solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion.” It has been estimated that at different times in Israel’s history, as many as 2 million people gathered in Jerusalem for the three major feasts. In fact, the Law required every male within a certain age bracket to attend all three feasts: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Such a large number of Jews assembled that there was not enough lodging, and many of them camped up on the hills in little tents and slept on the ground. Incidentally, the times of year in which the feasts occurred were conducive to sleeping outdoors. The early and the latter rains, for instance, were timed to avoid the feasts, but once the Israelites started to disobey, a lot of things happened. For example, Ezra gave his speech in the pouring rain, and the people had to stand for hours, getting drenched as they listened to him and the other readers.

The “solemn feasts” were the Day of Atonement and the nine days preceding, which were called the “Days of Awe.” And the Israelites had other days, not written in the Law, on which they memorialized certain events, such as when an enemy started a siege or broke into the city and when the Temple was destroyed. Stated succinctly, *the* solemn feast was the Day of Atonement, and the other solemn feasts were the days that memorialized when the enemy despoiled Israel in one form or another.

God “hath despised in the indignation of his anger the king [Zedekiah] and the priest [Seraiah].” Zedekiah was captured and taken up to Riblah, where his sons were slain and his eyes were put out. Seraiah was killed.

Q: Wasn’t Seraiah the quiet prince who helped Jeremiah?

A: Yes, but that was a different Seraiah.

Lam. 2:7 **The Lord hath cast off his altar, he hath abhorred his sanctuary, he hath given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; they have made a noise in the house of the LORD, as in the day of a solemn feast.**

In the Tabernacle arrangement, before the priest could ascend up to the Brazen Altar to make offerings, he had to ceremonially wash his hands and feet. The requirement emphasized the holiness of the altar. The Court itself was holy, but the altar was even holier. Like the Supreme Court, the altar was the highest authority to which a person could go. An individual would grab the horns of the altar and appeal to Jehovah.

“He hath given up into the hand of the enemy the walls [the protection] of her palaces.” The king and the priests had outer walls and guards for their residences. The protection of Jerusalem meant nothing when the enemy marched into the city.

“They [the enemy] have made a noise in the house of the LORD, as in the day of a solemn feast.” Instead of the usual singing, dancing, laughter, and joy of the people, there was an opposite noise of the enemy enjoying the slaughter.

Lam. 2:8 The LORD hath purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion: he hath stretched out a line, he hath not withdrawn his hand from destroying: therefore he made the rampart and the wall to lament; they languished together.

All fortifications on the part of those defending the city were brought to naught, and everything that the enemy did in the intent to destroy the city was successful. There was defeat on one side and victory on the other. For the Israelites, it was a holocaust of human and material structures.

Lam. 2:9 Her gates are sunk into the ground; he hath destroyed and broken her bars: her king and her princes are among the Gentiles: the law is no more; her prophets also find no vision from the LORD.

“Her king and her princes [heirs to the throne] are [taken captive] among the Gentiles.” King Jeconiah, one of the captives, became an important link in joining the two branches of Solomon and Nathan at the time of the 70-year captivity.

“The law is no more.” Without the Temple, there was no priesthood and nowhere to go for forgiveness under the Law. “Her prophets also find no vision from the LORD.” Of course the prophets Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel (also a priest) were spared, but the miraculous communication with the Lord at the Temple through the regular priesthood ceased.

Lam. 2:10 The elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground, and keep silence: they have cast up dust upon their heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth: the virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground.

The elders usually sat on something elevated (a stone, a chair, etc.) so that they could be seen. Now they sat on the ground, no longer being honored. In sackcloth and ashes, they were lamenting their demotion. “The virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground [in captivity].”

Lam. 2:11 Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people; because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city.

Jeremiah was speaking of his own emotions: “Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth.” As we proceed and follow through on the text, we will be able to prove that Jeremiah was speaking and was not expressing God’s emotions. Also, similar references in the Book of Jeremiah refer to the prophet’s tears, not to God’s tears. Tears from anger, joy, or sensitivity are all different. For example, God said that when someone injures or persecutes one of the Little Flock, it is like a speck of dust getting in His eye (Zech. 2:8). That type of reaction is one thing, but tears of remorse have hopelessness as a base and the crying is unrestrained. All other emotions—joy, anger, hatred, etc.—are purposed emotions with thought and regulation attached to them, even if the emotion is fury. But profuse weeping with tears would not be appropriate for God. Therefore, verse 11 expresses Jeremiah’s feelings. His eyes failed with tears, and his bowels were troubled.

Comment: Jeremiah visually saw the siege taking place and the resultant destruction.

Reply: Yes, in fact, he even saw the destruction from an elevated vantage point, so he had a

good view of what was happening. The enemy came up to where he was on the perimeter of the city outside the second wall. The Garden Tomb is located outside the city wall, and Jeremiah's Grotto is next to Golgotha, Skull Hill. What happened in the city also took place up there, but that took time. King Nebuchadnezzar was not down in Jerusalem, but he was in touch with his right-hand man, a general, through a messenger. Nebuchadnezzar gave specific instructions to spare Jeremiah's life. Jeremiah was generously given the choice of going to Babylon and receiving good treatment or staying in Israel with Gedaliah. The prophet chose to remain in Jerusalem, even though it had been gutted.

Comment: Verse 11 ties into Jeremiah's experience of how much he had witnessed of the destruction. Now he was reflecting back on what he had seen.

Reply: In his reflection, Jeremiah sometimes used the past tense, and at other times, he used the present tense, as if the action were taking place right then and there.

Comment: In the third chapter of Lamentations, Jeremiah wrote more on his emotions: "Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people. Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission, Till the LORD look down, and behold from heaven" (Lam. 3:48-50). It is clear here that Jeremiah was speaking, not God.

The bowels are related to emotions. In fact, emotions can trigger the bowels, causing diarrhea. Jeremiah's statement "My liver is poured upon the earth" describes an elimination of another kind. Not only were his bowels affected, but also he lost control of his bladder and urinated. We can see how patriotic for God Jeremiah was. The Israelites let a golden opportunity slide down the drain. For Jeremiah to have these deep feelings and then to be so mistreated by the Israelites is almost unbelievable. Here was a man who was really concerned, a national hero in the highest sense of the word. The next chapter will tell of all kinds of guff and persecution that he received daily.

Jeremiah's eyes, bowels, and "liver" were troubled "for the destruction of the daughter of my [his] people; because the children and the sucklings swoon[ed] in the streets of the city." In this case, the term "daughter of my people" would include all age categories: adults, children, sucklings, etc.

Lam. 2:12 They say to their mothers, Where is corn and wine? when they swooned as the wounded in the streets of the city, when their soul was poured out into their mothers' bosom.

Sucklings could not say to their mothers, "Where is grain and wine?" but the children could. The term "children" was much more broadly used in past times, whereas we tend to associate the term with a certain age category. The English language has many more words than the Hebrew: infants, babes, children, teenagers, young men, the more mature, and then the elderly and the old. The expression "children of Israel" was frequently used as a very broad term that could include even the old people depending on context. At the most, "sucklings" could refer to those up to eight or nine years of age, but generally the term meant those two years old and under.

Comment: Children in the past were not weaned until they were much older.

Reply: Yes, we live in a different society and culture today.

Comment: According to Young's *Analytical Concordance*, the words "swoon" in verse 11 and "swooned" in verse 12 pertain to becoming feeble.

Comment: Under the siege, a famine occurred.

Reply: Yes, and once the food was gone, the Israelites surrendered almost immediately. The situation was timed by the Lord, for the Babylonians broke through the city walls the day the food supply ran out. And the “food” included children who were boiled in a stew or roasted and then eaten by their mothers. Cannibalism was not an unusual act in the past, and increasingly so further back in time. Even in our day, mountaineers who got lost and had no food killed one of their own men and ate him.

“Where is corn and wine?” means “Where is food and drink?” Wine was the regular beverage at that time because water was scarce. Wine was also used for cooking and cleansing. A natural, self-purifying alcoholic beverage, it was even given to children.

“When they swooned as the wounded in the streets of the city, when their soul was poured out into their mothers’ bosom.” When the sucklings and children fainted from hunger, they died in their mother’s bosom. We can see what a difficult situation the famine was for mothers.

Lam. 2:13 What thing shall I take to witness for thee? what thing shall I liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? what shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Zion? for thy breach is great like the sea: who can heal thee?

The hopelessness of the situation is revealed in these verses. What testimony could Jeremiah give? “What thing shall I take to witness for thee? what thing shall I liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem?” (Notice the relatively synonymous terms Jeremiah kept using: “daughter of Zion,” “daughter of Judah,” and “daughter of Jerusalem.”) When Jeremiah saw such conditions going on, what kind of consolation could he give? If it is impossible to witness on spiritual things to a man who is drunk, the same would be true of other conditions of duress such as starving to death. Therefore, Jeremiah felt hopeless, but at the same time, even though hunger occurred all around him, he personally was providentially given food, albeit a starvation diet.

“What shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Zion? for thy breach is great like the sea: who can heal thee?” There was a breach not only in the walls but also in the Israelites’ mental and physical condition. They fainted and were helpless to resist the enemy any longer.

Lam. 2:14 Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee: and they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment.

The Book of Jeremiah mentioned Pashur and two other false prophets who prophesied smooth things. “Thy [false] prophets [plural]” indicates that the true prophets, the true Christians, and the true Jews are always a definite, distinct minority of the populace.

“They have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity.” The false prophets, not seeing that they had sinned, did not see their need of repentance.

Comment: The principle of the watchman is brought out in Ezekiel chapter 33. The false prophets did not point out the people’s sins. Having that awareness would have given the people a chance to repent and perhaps avert the coming trouble.

Reply: Today we see some strange things. For instance, the pope believes in evolution. Also, he has admitted to and asked forgiveness for persecution in the past—not, however, by the leaders but by “overzealous children” of the Roman Catholic Church.

The false prophets “have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment.” Jesus called

attention to the false burdens the Pharisees placed on the Israelites. In regard to the dietary laws and the particularity of the Pharisees over the cumin and the little seeds and over the clean and the unclean, Jesus said that they swatted a gnat and swallowed a camel. The counterpart of “false burdens” today is telling the people they have to go to Mass, repeatedly say the Rosary, light candles, etc. And by going to Confession, the people can remain in their sin, which is the real problem. The Pharisaical attitude is to wash the outside of the cup but not the inside. Priests who do not fall into line can be defrocked or deprived of giving the sacraments—two different types of banishment at the hands of the hierarchy. However, one’s position with the Lord is what counts, not one’s position before men.

Lam. 2:15 All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?

Those who passed by in going from, say, Egypt to Syria had to go through Israel whether they went on the east side or the west side of the Jordan River. The west side was more heavily trafficked at that time because the land was desolate and because the shortest route was more desirable. That route was either up the coast or on mountain roads, that is, the low road or the high road, respectively. The same was true on the east side of the Jordan except that there, going from west to east, the order was, first, the high road and then the low road. As travelers went by Jerusalem, they said among themselves, “Is this the city that men called ‘The perfection of beauty’ and ‘The joy of the whole earth’? It is now in ruins and desolate.” Moreover, they gloried in their words.

Lam. 2:16 All thine enemies have opened their mouth against thee: they hiss and gnash the teeth: they say, We have swallowed her up: certainly this is the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it.

Israel’s enemies “opened their mouth against thee: they hiss and gnash the teeth: they say, We have swallowed her up: certainly this is the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it.” Notice the emphasis on the pronoun “we,” but no one could have done anything to Israel, God’s people, unless He allowed it.

Lam. 2:17 The LORD hath done that which he had devised; he hath fulfilled his word that he had commanded in the days of old: he hath thrown down, and hath not pitied: and he hath caused thine enemy to rejoice over thee, he hath set up the horn of thine adversaries.

Verse 17 emphasizes what God did. Notice the repeated use of the pronoun “he,” which counteracts the previous use of “we” in verse 16. Jeremiah was careful not to give self-laudation. He credited the warnings given to Israel as not being done solely by him but said that other prophets before him had faithfully warned as well. Jeremiah had the right perspective, even though he was the one most prominently used in Israel at that time.

Lam. 2:18 Their heart cried unto the Lord, O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night: give thyself no rest: let not the apple of thine eye cease.

Jeremiah was urging others to see things as he saw them. He wrote Lamentations for his people so that they, too, would lament. Instead of the Lamentations of *Jeremiah*, he was hoping they would be the Lamentations of *Israel* as the people remembered what had happened—what God’s instruction had been and how He had dealt with them during their experience—as well as what would occur in the future. He was now looking back and writing for posterity. It would have been impossible for him to write in the midst of the destruction while the city was being burned and the famine was taking place. He had to be in a peaceful situation in order to write. Nor was his time in Egypt conducive to writing, so the logical place for him to write was

afterwards in Babylon. There his situation was just like the advice he had given earlier: “When you go to Babylon, do not be impatient, for you will be there for a long time.” As brutal as King Nebuchadnezzar was, he was also very shrewd, and he gave the Jews a measure of liberty while they were in captivity, as illustrated in an outstanding way by Daniel and the three Hebrews, who held high offices. Therefore, we can assume that Jeremiah was given special treatment, and his own people would now respect and heartily agree with him when he spoke.

The very fact that the chapters of Lamentations are structured alphabetically proves Jeremiah needed quiet circumstances and time for writing. Probably he lived to an old age, for his ministry, which was 40 years long, did not begin until he was at least 20 years old, and he was in Egypt for five years. The Book of Lamentations, which was like a personal testimony, was written carefully for posterity. Similarly King Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes as a personal testimony, memorializing the mistakes he had made.

“Let not the apple of thine eye cease” to cry. When we get something in our eyes, they water to clear out the foreign particle.

Lam. 2:19 Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up thy hands toward him for the life of thy young children, that faint for hunger in the top of every street.

In setting these thoughts in writing, Jeremiah was going through a traumatic experience himself. For instance, some of our soldiers were taken captive in Vietnam by the enemy and beaten and put in a four-foot cage like a bird for years so that they could not stand up or move around. Wouldn't they have traumatic nightmares when they were finally released, causing them to relive the experience? Jeremiah felt that the sorrow and trauma of the Israelite captives needed to be based on a recognition of their sin and failure to obey the Lord's instruction in times past. He also wanted them to see the justice of what had happened—the reason God had allowed what appeared to be cruel and without pity. They merited their experiences because of disobedience, and there was no fault on God's part. For these reasons, keeping the trauma in memory was beneficial to the Israelites. As they remembered the experiences, those who were rightly exercised cried and wanted to be in the proper attitude of heart and mind so that when the Lord would be forgiving, they would be in a position to be received into His presence. And thus they would learn the lesson that God is merciful to those who repent. Jeremiah put his whole heart and soul into the writing of Lamentations to really stir up the people and bring good results. Although he wrote years later, he was not just making a historical record, for he set forth the events as if they were actually happening while he wrote.

“Lift up thy hands toward him [God] for the life of thy young children [who are in captivity].” Jeremiah was urging the Israelites in captivity to give their children proper instruction and not bad counsel such as the false prophets had formerly given. Jeremiah was saying, “Having learned the lesson, turn it to your children. Try to bring them up with their hearts directed toward the Lord.”

Lam. 2:20 Behold, O LORD, and consider to whom thou hast done this. Shall the women eat their fruit, and children of a span long? shall the priest and the prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?

“Shall the women eat their ... children of a span long?” Jeremiah was speaking of women who ate their own children in the extremity of the famine. A “span” was only 9 inches long. “Shall the priest [the high priest as well as the underpriests] and the prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?”

Lam. 2:21 The young and the old lie on the ground in the streets: my virgins and my young men are fallen by the sword; thou hast slain them in the day of thine anger; thou hast killed, and not pitied.

In other words, the destruction was indiscriminate. In anger, the enemy was intent on destruction and did not want to parley over an individual because of age or beauty. The enemy accomplished what the Lord had intended. As for the relatively few who escaped, Jeremiah had given advice in his book on how to survive the trouble. Those who obeyed defected to the enemy. Based on the word of the Lord, Jeremiah had guaranteed that they would not be harmed, and accordingly, they became “traitors” and went out to King Nebuchadnezzar and were spared. Those in captivity should have gotten the lesson.

Lam. 2:22 Thou hast called as in a solemn day my terrors round about, so that in the day of the LORD’S anger none escaped nor remained: those that I have swaddled and brought up hath mine enemy consumed.

Jeremiah was saying, “The terrors I have just narrated were designed to be solemnized and memorialized with all the gory details.” Now we can see how and why some Jews at the Wailing Wall really cry in great sincerity.

Those whom God “swaddled and brought up” were consumed by the enemy. Parental instruction is very important, but today many teachers in the schools urge children to forget that instruction and to be themselves. The young people, being very impressionable, think that counsel sounds good. To use their own thinking and judgment is very appealing and sounds plausible, but the counsel is not sound. God faithfully instructed the Israelites, His people. He went on public record, sending prophets continually. Not only was the instruction available, but also it was repeated and repeated even to deaf ears. But how did the vast majority of the people react? They got tired of hearing the “doom” prophets and did not follow God’s counsel. The Lamentations of Jeremiah are a lesson for everyone—for Christians, Jews, and humanity as a whole. Good advice is not to be ignored.

Jeremiah was enjoining the Israelites to be like him and to see the trouble the way it affected him. His eyes were running down with tears, and he begged the people to think on these events. What a character Jeremiah was! He was brought up from his mother’s womb and had a soft and tender disposition, yet God said, “I will make your forehead like steel (Jer. 1:4-10,18). Jeremiah was given a schooling process. Iron is hardened by going through the furnace, through heat and cold. The Scriptures picture God as the combination of a sard stone (soft, merciful, full of pity, kind, and loving) and a diamond (just), and these are the two qualities He is looking for in His people (Rev. 4:3). Jesus manifested a soft, pliable, merciful side as well as a strict and just side, saying such things to the scribes and the Pharisees as, “You generation of vipers!”

Preface to Chapter 3

Chapter 3 is the most interesting chapter of Lamentations. The Bible privileges us with an insight into the soul of the being of three individuals: Job, Jeremiah, and David. With the exception of Jesus, such insight is not provided for any other individual, including the Apostles Paul and Peter, about whom we receive only fragmentary information. Perhaps the most introspective of the three was Job, for in chapter after chapter, he expressed at length the feelings in his soul. David was very open in the Psalms, but few people have digested and studied all of the Psalms like a book, that is, as a whole. Taking excerpts of David’s feelings from the Psalms would give us a comprehensive insight into his soul, but because his feelings come out in spurts from time to time, we forget.

To repeat, the Lord has greatly privileged us to look into the struggles of Job, Jeremiah, and

David. Even though it was the spirit of fellowship with God in the Old Testament and the spirit of sonship in the New Testament, the principles of loyalty are the same. Also, those of the Old Testament did not understand the philosophy of the permission of evil. And even in the Dark and Middle Ages, that philosophy was not really known. It is true that the Apostle Paul had a lot of understanding, but not until the Harvest at the end of the Gospel Age were the philosophy of the Ransom, the two salvations, etc., brought to light. Therefore, we are greatly advantaged with our understanding, but at the same time, we are greatly disadvantaged by living in an affluent society. Our abundant knowledge is compromised by the greater liberty of Satan and is buffeted by devious doctrines. Making our calling and election sure now is based more on overcoming mental problems, whereas in the past, the sufferings were physical, as in the case of Job, Jeremiah, and David. The latter, for example, was a fugitive for 15 years, going from place to place. We are privileged to have the books of Job and Lamentations, but they are among the books least seriously studied. Even the Book of Proverbs, which is not understood, is examined and excerpted frequently. As far as being read as a cohesive whole, the books of Numbers, Lamentations, and Job are probably the least understood and studied books. We should keep in mind that in Lamentations, the Lord has given us insight into the struggles of an imperfect person who tried to please Him, and we are told how God dealt with that individual.

Over the years, we have spoken mostly on prophecy, but we appreciate this type of study (Lamentations, Job, and Jeremiah) most of all and have thought upon these books a great deal. Now we will start our consideration of chapter 3.

Lam. 3:1 I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.

Lam. 3:2 He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light.

Lam. 3:3 Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day.

The first three verses of this chapter should be read as a whole or as a triad, for the structure is a,a,a; then b,b,b; etc. Jeremiah was referring to his personal experience, and we will be looking into his soul. In other chapters, Jeremiah spoke on behalf of the nation of Israel but not here in chapter 3. In chapter 1, Jeremiah looked at Israel, and the nation did all of the talking as a woman. Jeremiah simply did the recording and did not speak at all. In chapter 2, Jeremiah did all of the talking about Israel. But now, in the third chapter, Jeremiah was speaking about himself.

Q: Are Jeremiah's words in chapter 3 directly related to incidents such as his imprisonment and his being put into the dark miry pit, or do they just metaphorically describe his whole physical experience?

A: Practically all of his experiences are in fragments of the chapter. Even today children who undergo very traumatic or depressing experiences have scars for life that cause disturbing dreams from time to time. Similarly, Jeremiah's experience in the miry pit scarred his soul, as we will see.

"I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath." Jeremiah did not understand the permission of evil, but he had faith in God as the good and great Creator. He reasoned as the Pastor did in the beginning of the *First Volume* in thinking about the Creator. If we, as created beings, have any principles of good, etc., then God would have those qualities in the highest degree possible. From that standpoint, faith gives us confidence like an anchor to the unseen Creator. As with Job, Jeremiah's experiences affected him physically—he was in stocks, he was under house arrest, he was in a pit, he was spat upon, etc. Chapter 3 concentrates on Jeremiah's experiences, whereas in the Book of Jeremiah, his experiences are scattered, and we could easily pass over them without fully retaining them in memory.

“He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light.” We have light, for we have the divine plan. How wonderfully the Christian Church has been favored with understanding that the faithful ones of old did not have! This realization should shame us. Paul said the earth is like an amphitheater to angels and men, including the Ancient Worthies even though they are in the tomb.

Q: Hebrews 11:13 reads, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” Therefore, wouldn’t the Ancient Worthies have had light?

A: Yes, but along another line. We were talking about God’s personal dealing with us. For instance, we must have faith from time to time that God is pleased with us and loves us. But Christians do have ups and downs, especially as they mature, and our trials are essential for crystallization of character. To have great confidence all our Christian walk is not character building.

Q: But how would Hebrews 11:13 apply to Jeremiah?

A: The Ancient Worthies knew that when Adam sinned, God clothed him with skins; that God recognized the lamb of Abel; that God promised the seed of woman would bruise the serpent’s head; etc. Although they could not look ahead, these events of the past gave suggestions, and faith filled in the gap. Don’t we surmise and speculate too with known things and hope that the speculation is a proper extrapolation? Each Christian, to one degree or another, does this in connection with the leadings in his life. Abraham personally had more information, whereas Jeremiah was used in a different way. The Lord treats individuals in various manners for different positions.

“Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day.” The expression “all the day” means “every day.” In other words, Jeremiah’s daily or continued experience was one of hardship in serving God, yet his faith withstood the trials. How amazing and wonderful!

It is important for us to enter into Jeremiah’s mood and feelings. These were his reflections many years later, and just as reliving the experiences in late life was very real to him, so it should be to us.

Lam. 3:4 My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones.

Jeremiah’s experiences had affected him physically, so that he aged beyond his years. The breaking of his bones, as well as his flesh and skin being made old, happened, for instance, when he was put in the stocks. The stocks were not padded to ease suffering to the neck, wrists, and ankles. Also, to portray a prophecy, Jeremiah wore a heavy wooden yoke for a period of time, and then that yoke was changed to one of iron. In another experience, he was put into a pit by his enemies, and we can surmise that he received bruises and broken bones. The pit was about 30 feet deep.

Lam. 3:5 He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail.

Since Jeremiah was serving obediently, he wondered why Jehovah was treating him this way. Now we will start to see how the scarring of Jeremiah’s soul kept coming into the account. In verse 3, Jeremiah said that God’s hand was against him every day. Here in verse 5, Jeremiah said that God built against him, for he experienced an accretion of hardship. We would never do such things to another person, but God does them for our eternal welfare. When the Gospel

Age is over, all of the Little Flock will be thankful for whatever experiences they went through. They will publicly testify and thank God for being a hard Father and treating them that way—as some fractious and disobedient sons have said in late life when they turn back to the Lord.

“He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail.” Jeremiah could not get the pit experience out of his mind, but faith counteracted it. We cannot develop faith unless doubt is an opponent; that is, faith needs exercise to get strong and to develop muscles, and doubt creates the exercise. The content of this chapter is tremendous and very, very unusual.

Lam. 3:6 He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old.

“He hath set me in dark places.” Again Jeremiah was reflecting on the pit experience. When the cover was placed on the cistern, no sunlight could penetrate the darkness. “As they that be dead of old” refers to the tomb, especially a mausoleum type of tomb. A cistern is a buried mausoleum, as it were. The experience kept coming back to Jeremiah. Through this account, we get valuable lessons about God’s treatment of His people, which is oftentimes very severe. Even Jesus was under the heavy hand of God. Such experiences are beneficial, for they create and crystallize character. Years ago Bro. Robert Krebbs spoke about the trial of our faith being more precious than gold. “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:6,7). The Pastor said the *proof* of our faith is more valuable than gold, but Bro. Krebbs took the standpoint that the *trial itself* is more precious than gold. What is important is how we meet the trial, for a trial can either defeat us or help us.

Comment: After Hebrews chapter 11 on faith, Hebrews 12:11 in the Revised Standard Version says, “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been [rightly] trained by it.”

Reply: The Bible says of Jesus, “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and ... be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11). Even Jesus experienced periods of wonderment, but in looking back, he is completely satisfied and sees the need and reason for his sufferings.

Lam. 3:7 He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out: he hath made my chain heavy.

Jeremiah was “hedged about” when he was in the stocks. His feet and hands were held fast, and the discomfiture was so great that he could not even scratch an itch. In addition, his “chain” was heavy during the weeks that he was under house arrest. Jeremiah went from one experience to another.

Joseph is another example of one who was under house arrest. Although the head of the prison took advantage of Joseph’s administrative capabilities and appreciated his thinking and thus had him keep the prison, Joseph was in chains and could only shuffle about. The fetters hurt his feet (Psa. 105:17,18). It is a privilege to have this invaluable information.

Lam. 3:8 Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer.

Jeremiah was again referring to the pit. He mentioned the pit in each of the first three triads, showing that the memory came back time and time again. In the experience, he cried out, “Help! Save me! Take me out of this pit. Is there no friend?” His shouts and his prayers just echoed back on the stone. He heard his shouts in the cistern, but up above, there was silence.

Comment: With each individual, God knows just how long to let a trial continue.

Reply: A trial is like a crucible. The dross has to be removed from the silver or the gold, but overheating or applying heat for too long can ruin the metal. God knows when to say “enough.”

We should identify with Jeremiah and enter into his trial—as if we are going through the experience with him NOW. We should forget what happened later and go through his groanings with him and feel his emotions. He wrote Lamentations with a purpose, and that purpose will be revealed later. For now, we should empathize with his sufferings. Most study is too superficial—it is just a reading lesson, whereas true study includes meditation and reflection. Many brilliant people with profound knowledge in their head really have just an accumulation of facts. The point is that unless we empathize with Jeremiah, we cannot learn the lessons in depth. In this very special chapter, God privileges us to look into the soul of a being, and subsequently we will see how God’s hand was in the experience. To reveal His hand prematurely would detract from what Jeremiah was suffering. The prophet purposely wrote the chapter in the order in which we are reading it, and we will lose much if we rush through the reading, desiring a quick question and answer.

Comment: The situation is comparable to when we have just done a work for the Lord and the result is a severe trial. We cry out, “Why, Lord? Didn’t I do what you wanted?”

Reply: Yes, that is the struggle. And it is astounding that we are favored with the knowledge of the permission of evil.

“When I cry and shout, you shut out my prayer” (paraphrase). Jeremiah wanted to be heard. When he prayed, it seemed as if God did not listen. “God shutteth out my prayer. I can’t get my prayer up to Him from the depths of the cistern.”

Lam. 3:9 He hath inclosed my ways with hewn stone, he hath made my paths crooked.

“He hath inclosed my ways with hewn stone.” Jeremiah was still referring to the echoing of his shouts against the stone of the cistern. The sound reverberated back.

“He hath made my paths crooked.” Now Jeremiah was reflecting on his daily life. His lamentations went back and forth, back and forth, but he could not get the pit, the stocks, and the imprisonment out of his mind. The opposite of a crooked path is one that is straight and smooth. There is no question that the Ancient Worthies would have been Little Flock had they lived in the Gospel Age. We feel very small when we see their greatness. Truly they were the heroes of faith.

Comment: Not only did they see the wicked prosper and flourish and not have the understanding we are blessed with, but also they did not have the precious promises in regard to the divine nature.

Reply: Jesus’ bringing life and immortality to light was very meaningful (2 Tim. 1:10). Even though the Ancient Worthies had light, “light is sown for the righteous” (Psa. 97:11). As a seed is put in the ground and completely buried, so light was buried in the Old Testament. True, its buds did come up little by little in the Old Testament, but the fruitage of the path of the truth has been revealed in the Gospel Age.

Lam. 3:10 He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places.

The next triad is verses 10-12. The bear springs out suddenly from a covert place and stands up on its two feet to surprise a victim. In this posture, the bear is a huge animal. As the victim is

paralyzed with fear, the bear hugs its prey. And the lion roars to surprise its victim. The *surprise* of the trial or the experience with evil (such as an earthquake or an explosion, for example) is what is overwhelming.

Lam. 3:11 He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces: he hath made me desolate.

“He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces.” We can see that Jeremiah was struggling here. Notice that there are no rays of hope yet, so we are agonizing with him. This way, hopefully, his experiences are now in our memory. A saying is, “Easy in, easy out,” but if something penetrates memory, we are better able to retain it. Our faulty memories can be improved by meditation and reflection.

“He hath made me desolate.” Jeremiah’s down period continued. When the joy comes later on in Lamentations, we will understand as he did and get the lesson he got.

Lam. 3:12 He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow.

Job spoke similarly, using different words. Jeremiah’s agony makes us appreciate the philosophy of the permission of evil and how unusual and unique it is. The permission of evil was known in Ephesus, the first stage of the Church, and it is known today in Laodicea, the last stage of the Church, but of course early Christians did not realize that the Kingdom was two thousand years in the future.

Since we are blessed with having the whole Bible, the standard for making the Little Flock is high. God expects a great deal from us, but we should not be discouraged as long as our faith is strong and it gets renewed. “The just shall *live* by faith” (Rom. 1:17). A good part of faith is reflection.

“He hath bent his bow, and set me [my heart] as a mark for the arrow [that is, for target practice].” The barbs were the insults directed at Jeremiah. He wrote Lamentations for Israel’s benefit, not realizing that it would also benefit the Gospel Age Church. “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples [examples]: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world [age] are come” (1 Cor. 10:11).

Comment: Jeremiah’s trials came from his own people. The equivalent for us today would be persecution from other Christians. It was hard for Jeremiah to understand the insults because he loved his people.

Lam. 3:13 He hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins.

Lam. 3:14 I was a derision to all my people; and their song all the day.

Jeremiah continued to write in a down period. His feelings were all negative about the things he had suffered in his service to God. “He [God] hath caused the arrows [plural] of his quiver to enter into my reins [kidneys, that is, the very soul of Jeremiah’s being].” As stated already, the arrows were the nasty remarks, the derisions, of those who opposed him. In other words, Jeremiah’s faithfulness to what God had instructed him to do caused a reaction of derision and mocking from the Jewish people. Jeremiah went back to the source of his suffering as being God for telling him what to do. The people even made up songs and little sayings to ridicule him. Incidentally, people today sometimes shamelessly sing sacrilegious ditties about the faithful ones of the past such as Noah.

Q: The King James margin has “sons” as an alternate translation for the word “arrows.” Is “the sons of his quiver” a proper thought?

Comment: According to Young's *Analytical Concordance*, that Hebrew word can be translated either "sons" or "arrows," for another Scripture uses that same word with another Hebrew word and renders it "son of the bow" and also "arrow." Therefore, the arrow is a son of the bow, and "son" is just an abbreviation of that relationship.

Reply: Yes, the Hebrew word can be translated either "arrows" or "sons," and the context shows that the mocking words were like arrows. Also, Jeremiah was addressing the sons of men, saying in effect, "The rebuttals from the sons of men are what I am experiencing."

God had told Jeremiah what to say, and the words were strong. When the prophet talked, his words were like penetrating arrows, and the people reciprocated. Their rebuttals derided him, perhaps calling him an old fool or saying he was out of his mind. They may have even ridiculed something about his personal appearance. And they made up ditties. Snide remarks and slanders were purposely uttered loud enough for him to overhear. Now Jeremiah was saying to God, "I have tried to be faithful in my ministry, and I keep getting derisive remarks."

This negative experience was a daily occurrence when, for instance, Jeremiah walked into a new area and gave an unfavorable public announcement. Except for some personal remarks made on certain occasions, as recorded in the Book of Jeremiah, we have no specific information on these daily experiences, but snide remarks were made about the prophet every day in one form or another. What is bad about a snide remark is that the victim cannot even answer it because it is directed to others, whereas a direct remark can be rebutted.

Lam. 3:15 He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood.

Wormwood is a very strong purgative.

Q: The NIV reads, "He has filled me with bitter herbs and sated me with gall." Is the thought that what Jeremiah both ate and drank was bitter?

A: Yes, as the next verse will show. "Sated" means to get an overabundance or an overdose.

Lam. 3:16 He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, he hath covered me with ashes.

When Jeremiah was under house or prison arrest, his teeth were "broken ... with gravel stones." Some of his tormentors fed him cornmeal, for instance, and deliberately mixed stones in with the meal, unbeknownst to Jeremiah. Being very hungry, Jeremiah ate the food, but as he chewed, some of his teeth were broken by the gravel stones. All kinds of mischief were purposely done to him. Onlookers watched for his reaction and then laughed when Jeremiah broke a tooth. Sadistic tricks were played on him for the amusement of the populace, who roared with laughter at his discomfort. We can see that Jeremiah's reward for faithfulness in the future will be significant. He was a major prophet in more ways than one. For the many indignities that he suffered, he will be appropriately rewarded in the Kingdom, even though that reward will be on the human plane to start with.

Comment: His tormentors will correspondingly experience shame in the Kingdom.

"He hath covered me with ashes." Being a real patriot himself, Jeremiah was so emotionally distraught with the experiences of his people that no doubt when certain things were done, he voluntarily clothed himself in sackcloth and ashes. As the Book of Jeremiah shows, his empathy for his people was so strong that he wept on multiple occasions, in addition to clothing himself with sackcloth and ashes. A possible alternate meaning is that when he was helpless in the stocks, ashes were dumped over him, but knowing Jeremiah's character, we would not be

surprised that he sincerely and voluntarily put on sackcloth and ashes to try to get the people emotionally involved with the enormity of the sins they were committing.

Lam. 3:17 And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgot prosperity.

“Thou hast removed my soul far off from peace”; that is, Jeremiah’s soul was greatly troubled and emotionally disturbed. Although we cannot mathematically state what the prophet had in mind, we can surmise certain things. When our soul is at peace, we can praise and thank God and think on pleasant things, but when our soul is troubled, the opposite is true. Jeremiah’s daily experiences were very unusual. In fact, some of the ancient Hebrew scholars considered Jeremiah to be the greatest of all prophets.

“I forgot prosperity.” The alternate meaning of “prosperity” is “good” (see King James margin). If our spirit is troubled, it is hard to think of peaceful and pleasant things. Everything is colored by the mood frame at the time.

Lam. 3:18 And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD:

In this down period, Jeremiah began to feel a lack of the power that he had in normal times when delivering messages at the gate.

Comment: No matter how strong an individual is, years of persecution and ridicule eventually wear him down.

Reply: Yes, the time element was an additional factor.

Lam. 3:19 Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall.

The word “remembering” tells us that after a long ministry, Jeremiah was looking back on his past experiences of patient endurance and long-suffering. He was remembering his affliction and misery, “the wormwood and the gall.” He was saying what these experiences now meant to him. At the time he was going through the experiences, he did not see their value, but now he saw them as a blessing.

Lam. 3:20 My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me.

Lam. 3:21 This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.

Jeremiah was not only emotional by nature but also a very strong personality. When he lectured, he had to raise his voice. Speaking in a loud voice came naturally because he was quite a powerful person at the start of his ministry, but he was worn down over the years. This verse is another evidence among perhaps five other clues that the Book of Lamentations was written in a time of reflection when he was in the retirement mode of his life. Jeremiah had a 40-year ministry, of which much is recorded, but we have no details of the last period of his life except for Lamentations. He was looking back on what he had endured and thinking, “I needed that lesson, and now the Lord has helped me.” How did God help Jeremiah? The enemies of Israel provided for his comfort and his leisure so that he could sit down in quietness and compose the structured Book of Lamentations.

The Apostle Paul did the same thing in another way. Throughout his Christian life, he had wanted to write the Book of Hebrews, and doing so became his last work. It was on his heart to write the book, but he was so active in preaching the gospel and his persecutions were so frequent that he finished the Book of Hebrews probably when he was in prison. For two years in Rome, the center of iniquity of that day, Paul was treated not as a humiliated prisoner but as

a prisoner with private quarters. While there, before he was beheaded, he finished his masterwork. In addition, some of Caesar's household came to him and were converted. He could not go out and preach, but people came to him.

Jeremiah had a similar situation. Now, at the end of his life, he could soliloquize and reflect and see that the past experiences were needed. In fact, as we will see, he even thanked the Lord for taking his head and shoving it into the ground, as it were. Now he could see that the Lord tests *faithful, zealous* individuals almost to the breaking point—not quite but almost. (The Great Company class also receive trials, but their testing is not because of faithfulness to the same degree.) That testing hardens the steel so that in the future, when everything is changed and there are no more temptations, they will praise God at being found worthy to inherit whatever good thing He had specifically purposed for them when they were originally selected.

Comment: Jesus learned obedience by the things that he suffered, even unto his death on the Cross. God prepared him for the special office.

Reply: Yes, Jesus will have the highest office in the universe under God for eternity. Many of the twelve apostles, excluding the Apostle Paul, were family. We do not think that all twelve were the greatest of all beings who ever existed, but they will be at the top of the list during the Kingdom Age. After the Kingdom Age is another matter, for there are others. Of course Paul, Peter, and John were exceptional but not all twelve. During the Kingdom Age, Jeremiah will be only a spokesman, a puppet, an earthly servant of one of the apostles. After the Kingdom Age, Jeremiah's position will be much higher. The Pastor made some remarkable statements at the end of his life. One such teaching was that at the end of the Kingdom Age, the Ancient Worthies will receive spirit nature. That would be a logical change because all of mankind who live on into eternity will also be perfect, and the Ancient Worthies were *more than overcomers*.

Q: Was John the Baptist, who was on the scene contemporaneously with the apostles, a greater individual in God's sight? Would he have been part of the Little Flock if he had been born later or if he had not been selected for his particular purpose?

A: Yes. The apostles will be given greater honor in the Kingdom Age, but surely John the Baptist, Moses, and others of the Ancient Worthies will be greatly honored afterwards. The Lord's hand is not shortened by our thinking of the Gospel and the Millennial Ages. As humans, we are very limited. We cannot even walk through a wall in our thinking, figuratively speaking. The Scriptures are slanted to our thinking, but God has other things in store after the Kingdom Age. God created the universe, but has the great Creator stopped creating? No, He has other things in mind. We are in the beginning of infinity, if we can determine what that is.

Lam. 3:22 It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

This next triad covers verses 22-24. Notice that the word "hope" is here, and it was in the previous triad as well. "Therefore will I hope in him" (verse 24). "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope" (verse 21). It seems to be a spiritual law that faith, hope, and love are the three steps. We can have faith and the hope of making our calling and election sure on this side of the veil—we hope we are of the class that the Lord is really looking for—but we must develop *God's love, His thinking* on the subject, the *agape* love of the Bible, not man's common concept. What is God's love? It is to love righteousness and to hate iniquity (Psa. 45:7; Heb. 1:9). Hatred is one aspect of love. Love for God and hatred for Satan go hand in glove. God's love and God's hate beautifully amalgamate. David wanted "perfect hatred," and so did Jeremiah (Psa. 139:22).

We want to reach the point of development and crystallization in *God's love*. If we are one of

the chosen and are faithful, He has been trying to develop His love in us as much as is possible in imperfect vessels. We cannot do the things that we would like to do, but when His love is created in the imperfect vessel as far as it can go, then the individual is ready for the new spiritual body. None of us can presume to have reached that point because that is God's decision. We can only do the best we are able and leave the results with the Heavenly Father. The Apostle Paul would have made his calling and election sure much earlier, for he showed an unbelievable zeal, but he was kept, preserved, for the benefit of others. He proved that he was a crystallized character. Consider all of his sufferings. If we were almost stoned to death, would we be ready for more persecution right away? Would the stoning diminish our ministry? It is hard to realize how anyone could endure the things he experienced and then start out fresh, like dynamite, again and again. The Lord knows who such characters are, and the best we can do is hope.

The next step beyond hope is deliverance. Hopefully, we will be members of the Little Flock. We must run as though there is only one prize. "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain" (1 Cor. 9:24). If we come in second, we do not make the high calling.

Comment: In verse 21, Jeremiah told us how to have hope under severe affliction. He said, "This I recall to my mind." It wasn't that he had never had hope before, and it wasn't that he hadn't had the experiences to produce the hope. Before severe afflictions come, it is important for us to study and develop this hope so that when we are under heavy trial, we will recall our previous experiences and providences and have hope.

Jeremiah had been faithful for 40 years, and now that divine providence had favored him in doing something his heart was set on—writing the Book of Lamentations—his hope was advanced a little more. Paul expressed the feeling when he said, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:8). Before that, he had stated, "I count not myself to have apprehended [obtained]" (Phil. 3:13). And the Scriptures admonish us not to be like a soldier who feels he has fought the battle and can take off the armor (1 Kings 20:11). Paul came to the point where he could say, "Henceforth there is laid up for me," and some do have this experience on this side of the veil. Jesus had the experience only at his last breath, when he uttered the triumphant cry, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). Before this cry, he called out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). Jesus had ups and downs in Gethsemane, but he ended with a *loud* cry of triumph from a *weakened* body. Very few have that experience (and we are not saying that all of the Little Flock have it), but these examples are powerful. If God can make a camel go through the eye of a needle, then He can make something out of us imperfect beings; otherwise, He would not have called us to start with. Therefore, it is possible for all of us to make our calling and election sure. The only problem if we fail is us.

It is important to examine our goals. To excel in anything in the natural world—science, sports, music, or whatever—requires a person's all. And the individual must have the hope of succeeding. The spiritual race is similar.

Lam. 3:23 They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

Q: How are the Lord's compassions "new" every morning?

A: We are not always aware of His compassions. In looking back, Jeremiah came almost to the breaking point many times. Imagine his being in a dungeon, shouting and praying with water coming down on his head and body, and nothing happened—just silence. At the last minute, when he was ready to expire, the lid was removed, and a black man called down to him (Jer. 38:6-13). Jeremiah was also put in stocks. Although many experiences go almost to the

breaking point, the individual, if rightly exercised, gets stronger and stronger according to the spirit, even if he gets weaker and weaker according to the flesh.

Comment: Verse 22 said it is of God's mercies that we are not consumed and that His compassions fail not. Every morning that we wake up and have another day is a compassion.

Reply: Jesus said, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:34). Although Jeremiah started out each day, he did not necessarily feel happy when he woke up, but the Lord gave him the strength not to give up. The danger for the New Creation is to give up, for going back on one's consecration results in oblivion, Second Death. Patient endurance and hope are necessary. Jeremiah was given hope and comfort in being able to finish his ministry as he desired.

Lam. 3:24 The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

Now Jeremiah's spirit was more at rest. His whole ministry was a yo-yo of ups and downs, of good news and bad news. For instance, he prophesied, "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31). Now, at this later portion of his life, Jeremiah was inhibited from doing some of the things he had done earlier, but he could write and give his last thoughts. The Lord blessed him in this endeavor.

Lam. 3:25 The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.

Lam. 3:26 It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.

Lam. 3:27 It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.

Jeremiah was near the end-time period of his ministry, and he was looking back on his past life. He had already categorized his groanings and hard experiences in life and told how the Lord had schooled him in what he felt was a very severe manner but had not "consumed" him (Lam. 3:22). In verse 19, Jeremiah started to talk about the good things in his experience with regard to how the Lord had dealt with him. As he continued to soliloquize about his past life, he was seeing the results of the schooling he had received while ministering the strong message to others. Jeremiah could now see his character development, but in the busy affairs of life—when he was in the dungeon, when he was in the stocks, when he was preaching an uncomplimentary message, etc.—he did not have the luxury of reflecting on the Lord's providences. As another example of his active ministry, when the king burned up Jeremiah's scroll, the prophet had to write the whole message again (Jer. 36:20-23,27,28).

"The LORD is good unto them that wait for him." Jeremiah waited a long time, and we sometimes wait for years for certain things. He was not talking about waiting for just a few hours, days, or months.

"The LORD is good ... to the soul that seeketh him." In other words, Jehovah is good to the consecrated of all ages, past and present. The Lord specifically deals with the consecrated in a personal manner, giving them custom-tailored experiences whether or not they realize that fact.

Beginning with verse 19, the Book of Lamentations has helpful Scriptures for expressing condolences or encouragement to brethren. Notice the repeated use of the word "good" in verses 25-27. The advice is beneficial: It is good for those who wait, it is good for those who hope, and it is good for one to consecrate at a relatively young age in life.

Comment: Verse 25 mentions waiting for the Lord, and then verse 26 couples that waiting with hope. If we waited without hope, it would be an entirely different situation.

Similar to the way Jeremiah's scroll was thrown into the fire, Tyndale's Bible was burned. But was Tyndale discouraged? No, he started all over again and looked for another printer. Sometimes he would be a third of the way through, and the Papists would hear about his work and destroy it again. But Tyndale just kept persevering until the Bible was completed.

Q: Was that the circumstance where Papists were buying up copies of the Bible to destroy them, but the revenue from the purchases was used to print more and better Bibles? The persecution was providentially overruled for a better result than was originally intended.

A: Yes. Imagine Tyndale's going through all that effort only to have the work destroyed, but he felt compelled to continue on, nevertheless. Jeremiah had the same experience.

One cannot have the luxury of tracing the past in the midst of busyness. Therefore, the compassions being new every morning are to be thought of in a little different way than is usually considered (verse 23). "Morning" is the time when the reason for an experience dawns upon our mind, the time when our mind is opened to understand an experience. We may have experiences for days, months, or years. Then something happens that enables us to see the reason, and we thank God for the way things went. It is good to wait and to hope and to give our heart to the Lord in our youth.

"It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD." Jeremiah put quiet waiting and hope together. Paul spoke similarly in Romans 5:3-5, putting patience and hope together: "We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience [patient endurance]; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us." And the Apostle James said, "Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:4).

Lam. 3:28 He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him.

Lam. 3:29 He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope.

Lam. 3:30 He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach.

The common denominator for verses 28-30 is being still, quietness. One cannot speak much when his mouth is in the ground. "He sitteth alone and keepeth silence," waiting to see the Lord's hand or leading. Sometimes that leading is not manifested as clearly or as quickly as our fleshly mind would like, but we are to wait. While verses 25-27 said, "It is good to wait and hope," Jeremiah was saying in effect, "Being put to silence is good too." Advice given to the Christian is that if we are smitten on one cheek, we are to turn the other cheek too. The principles of the Lord's dealings with the people of old were the same as those in the Gospel Age. The hope is different—we have a higher hope—but the training experience is the same. Whether we think of verse 28 as being God sitting alone, apart from us and not communicating certain things that we desire, or whether God puts us in the experience of sitting alone, the silence works both ways. Silence is a needful experience.

"He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope." The Lord deals with us in ways in which we cannot intelligently fathom some of the details, but He does not deal with the world that way. Except in extraordinary experiences, God does not crush the unconsecrated and put their mouth in the dust to give them an object lesson in a special way. The

unconsecrated are not being trained; they just have a general experience with evil. The world's philosophy is, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Disease and sickness are common to the world and are not a particular experience, as they would be with the consecrated.

Comment: The Apostle Peter said, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (1 Pet. 5:6).

Reply: Yes, the Lord uses that method.

Comment: Job 42:6 reads, "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." When we see our mistakes and the downward trend in our nature, it is a good experience to want to get everything straightened out with the Lord.

Reply: Yes. Although Job's words were much longer, they are similar to those of Jeremiah in Lamentations. Job uttered these words after God revealed Job was His servant. The three supposed advisers, or comforters, had to repent and go to Job to ask for forgiveness before God would even answer their prayers. Because God did not say anything to Elihu, some think he represents a mysterious personage, perhaps the Lord Jesus, but that is not the case. Elihu pictures the Great Company, and the revelation to the Great Company class will come later. The world of mankind will not fully appreciate right and wrong, good and evil, until they enter the age beyond the Kingdom Age. Then they will look back and see why God delivered them. Similarly, the Great Company class will not appreciate the fact too much that they get spirit life until after they are delivered and can look back. Only a few get this benefaction of appreciation before they expire, for it is relatively rare. Not until Jesus cried on the Cross, "It is finished," did he finally grasp the full significance of why God had forsaken him. Gethsemane was a back-and-forth experience. Continued back-and-forth experiences are called "tribulation."

"He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him." As consecrated Christians, we are not supposed to murmur or repine at what the Lord's providence shall permit. We do not know what experiences lie ahead, but we are to accept them whatever happens. In Job's case, his wife said, "Curse God, and die, and your troubles will be over" (Job 2:9). But Job faithfully bore the experience, and we read of the "patience of Job" as an example for the Christian (James 5:11). No matter how hard the experience, we are to quietly bear with the Lord's providence rather than to burst out and say and do things that would alter our destination; that is, we should be careful lest we say too much. Jeremiah had dedicated his life to serving God, and now he was beginning to understand.

Comment: God said to Israel, "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength" (Isa. 30:15).

Jeremiah "putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope"; that is, *he submitted* to the Lord's putting his face in the dust. From two perspectives, this statement was true. Not only did God put Jeremiah's face in the dust, but Jeremiah suffered the experience. The faithful ones of the Old Testament did not understand the permission of evil, but they did think, "God has some purpose or reason for allowing this experience." A trial brings out faith in the rightly exercised individual. Faith develops by questioning the things that seem to be very disquieting. Faith is exercised in times of doubt. Stated another way, doubt is the atmosphere in which faith, if dormant in us, has to exercise itself so that we will submit to the experience rather than give up hope. If we give up, there is no hope. If we change our course of thorough consecration to the Lord, untoward results will follow. And so one patiently waits in an experience, not knowing, but faith and hope—spiritual muscles—are developed under difficult experiences.

The Apostle Paul enunciated many of these principles. Unfortunately, many do not appreciate

the equality of the Old and the New Testaments. Both are the Word of God, but many feel they do not want all of the history and the chronology. The Old Testament contains approximately three times as much information as the New Testament. God reveals His character and dealings in both. The “[two] wings of the living creatures ... touched one another”; that is, there is a tender, affectionate, delicate relationship and tie between the Old and the New Testaments (Ezek. 3:13).

Comment: The same lesson was shown when Abraham did not separate the backbone of birds that were offered in sacrifice (Gen. 15:10).

“He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him.” The natural thing is to retaliate, but we are not to render evil for evil. Submissiveness is a necessary experience to develop the character the Lord is looking for in His people.

“He is filled full with reproach.” We see Jeremiah’s faithfulness when we consider all of his experiences, even being spit upon, for he was submissive and did not talk back. He did not complain, for he realized that God wanted to manifest his true character. Did Jeremiah love the Lord his God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength? The principle of God’s proving an individual applied in both the Old and the New Testaments. Jeremiah understood that God was proving him, but he did not understand the philosophy. Nevertheless, he concluded that if God permitted the experiences, he must need them. He even confessed his sins at times, saying, “I must have done something wrong to merit the experiences.” But no matter how hard the experience, he did not blame God.

Lam. 3:31 For the Lord will not cast off for ever:

Despite the long, hard experiences, Jeremiah had little deliverances during his life. For example, while in the pit, he could not get his prayer through, and then finally a door opened and the prayer was answered. He was put in stocks, but he was also removed from the stocks. He was placed under house arrest, but the king allowed him to go out in the courtyard. When the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, his life was spared. Months and months of trial were followed by one day of deliverance or momentary relief. But now, at the end of his life, Jeremiah’s attitude was, “Thank God, I can now see that I needed those experiences. God is truly merciful.”

Lam. 3:32 But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.

It is interesting that Jeremiah first said, “The Lord does not cast off forever.” Then he added, “Though he causes grief, yet he has compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.” That was a statement of *faith* because Jeremiah did not see the multitude of mercies until the end of his career. Now he was reflecting back on his experiences. Yes, he went through a hard trial in the pit, for instance, but God did not consume him entirely in that experience. He was almost consumed, but then the door opened. The Book of Lamentations is very informative about the Lord’s technique in dealing with those whom He loves in any age.

Lam. 3:33 For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

Aside from what is written, we do not fully know how much knowledge Jeremiah had. Jesus said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad,” so we know the Ancient Worthies had some information (John 8:56). They had tidbits of information in regard to a better resurrection and a better hope, but they could not see too clearly. Speaking from an earthly or temporal standpoint, Jeremiah said that God “doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.” The Ancient Worthies did believe in a resurrection; they had hope of a future life. They believed that God had something better in reservation for them when the

Kingdom would come.

In mentioning the multitude of God's mercies, Jeremiah thought somewhat the way we do in the following sense. Some, if not all, of us consecrated in a more formal contract because we saw the character of God. We saw not only that He was merciful to us but also that there is a hope for mankind, the principle being, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). That love, compassion, and interest affected us and made us feel that we should consecrate. Why wait until the Kingdom Age comes with the hope of everlasting life? First, we had duty love for God. We felt that it was our duty to consecrate because of what God had done for us.

Lam. 3:34 To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth,

Verses 34-36 continue the same theme, mood, and frame of thinking of the prior triad, so that the six verses are like a double triad.

The "prisoners of the earth" are those in the grave. The grave is likened to a prison house. The Lord will use his key to unlock the doors of hell and death so that the prisoners, the world of mankind, can come forth.

Lam. 3:35 To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High,

Lam. 3:36 To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not.

Jeremiah was allowed liberty to express his own thinking. His words were not stated as a "thus saith the LORD God." The same is true of the Book of Proverbs, in which King Solomon wrote advice. God thought the advice was so good that He had it preserved for posterity. The thoughts of Jeremiah were also preserved. Even though the thoughts were not directly out of His mouth, God was saying in effect, "You have the right thinking, Jeremiah. I agree with what you have written." Even this attitude was compassionate—to allow Jeremiah this expression to unburden his heart in fullness.

If people see that they did not make themselves or evolve, but that they were created, they should think that their Creator had a purpose in making so many beings who can think, reason, and pray to an unseen God, etc. God will make sure the world of mankind gets the answer to that thought. And God wills that all will come to a knowledge of the truth; that is a blanket promise (1 Tim. 2:3,4). Judas died the Second Death, but he came to a knowledge of the truth that Jesus is the Messiah. He was there and saw Jesus, so he had enough knowledge to be guilty of the betrayal. Mankind in the Kingdom will have the same type of knowledge—that Jesus is the Messiah—and they will be worthy of Second Death if they do not appreciate that knowledge. When Satan comes in the Little Season at the end of the Kingdom, those who forget what they were instructed under Jesus, the Messiah, and allow themselves to be deceived will go into Second Death. Satan will come in the flesh and lead the nations to Jerusalem, where he will be destroyed. He will get out of his prison, but he will be forced down here; that is, he will be forced *downward*, not upward. God's will is done in heaven, so Satan will not be allowed to go in that direction.

Comment: In Ezekiel 33:11, God said, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

Reply: Yes, and in Deuteronomy 30:19, Moses said, "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live."

Comment: In regard to the thought that God does not turn aside the right of a man or subvert his cause, Jesus said in Matthew 12:20, “A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.”

Reply: Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man (Heb. 2:9). In this age, we are responsible, for the Lord has opened our minds to see and to appreciate His Word and that Scripture. The “right of a man” is that Jesus tasted death for every man, not just for the Christian in the Gospel Age. He died for all, but not all will benefit fully from the Ransom. When mankind comes forth from the grave in the Kingdom Age, each will have the *opportunity* to gain life, but there will be failures. Restitution, or reinstatement to life as Adam had it in perfection before he sinned, is an inherent right for all mankind. We had that right before we consecrated, but we gave up the opportunity for restitution. A higher calling is available now. It is not God’s method to subvert a man in his cause; to do so, He “approveth not.”

God said, “I ... create [cause] evil” (Isa. 45:7). God causes both evil and good, but “evil” in that context means calamity or judgment. God tempts no man with evil (James 1:13). God does not subvert; man has a choice. We can assent and approve of good, and we can disapprove of evil. It is wonderful that we were not made robots, being remanded to good or evil.

“To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not.” God proves us to see whether we love Him, but that is a testing and not a tempting with evil. The word “tempt,” or “try,” has a good as well as a bad aspect, but we usually think of the bad connotation. The word “tempt” has just as many facets of information on the good side as it has on the bad side. God does not subvert; He warns what the result of disobedience will be. If we willfully disobey, we have committed ourselves in the doing of it and, therefore, cannot complain about the results and say God is unjust. The same principle applied to Adam. Adam knew in advance that the result of disobedience would be death. Jeremiah was saying, “When God tempts a person, it is for the person’s good and not to subvert or turn him aside.”

Lam. 3:37 Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?

Verses 37-39 are a relatively complete thought by themselves. Jeremiah continued to review his ministry of 40 years and the very hard experiences he went through. Now he had the luxury of drawing lessons from his past ministry and life, hoping to pass them on to faithful Israelites who would succeed him, but of course the writings were specially “for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the age are come” (1 Cor. 10:11).

Although the translators have tried, as faithfully as possible, to put the Hebrew in understandable English, the wording is a little different from what we are accustomed to in the Western world, so it could be misunderstood. The NIV helps us to understand verse 37: “Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it?” Jeremiah probably had in mind the false prophet who had claimed to speak a “thus saith Jehovah” in uttering a prophecy contrary to Jeremiah’s. He predicted that Jerusalem would not be destroyed and that the invaders would return to their homeland, and he emphatically stated that Jeremiah was wrong in his understanding of the Lord’s counsel. At first, it seemed as if the false prophet was correct because King Nebuchadnezzar withdrew his forces upon hearing that the Egyptians were marching north. (The king considered Egypt to be a greater potential enemy than Israel.) However, shortly afterward he returned and besieged the city of Jerusalem. In the final analysis, Jeremiah was proven correct.

Lam. 3:38 Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?

In other words, the Lord’s hand is not shortened. He can command calamities to occur on those who are disobedient as well as blessings on the obedient. The “evil” here is not moral evil

but calamities.

Lam. 3:39 Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?

Comment: Anyone who is guilty should not complain when he is punished.

Reply: When the Temple and the city of Jerusalem were destroyed, we can be sure that many individuals faulted the divine judgment as being too severe. This attitude has been a problem down through history, particularly with the nation of Israel, whose commentators on Scripture usually blame their problems on the Gentiles. Down through the Gospel Age, the Jews did not see the Diaspora as a punishment but, rather, considered it an injustice committed against them as a people. Of course unjustifiable acts of anti-Semitism were inflicted on the Jewish people, but those acts were secondary or relatively superficial to the real meaning of the Diaspora. One of the explanations for the trouble is Leviticus chapter 26, which lists calamities that would come for disobedience. And that is what happened with many of the captivities during the Period of the Judges. God warned additionally that if the Israelites continued in their errant ways, they would be punished seven times for their sins.

Comment: Micah 7:9 gives the proper repentant attitude for the punishment of sins: “I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.”

Reply: Yes, Micah was speaking on behalf of his people. In regard to Jesus’ trial, Pilate tried to reason with the Jewish people, but they cried, “Crucify him, crucify him” and “Let his blood be upon us, and upon our children.” Even though Pilate was not a tender-hearted individual, for he had been instrumental in violently putting down an earlier rebellion by the Jews, he could see that jealousy was the unjust basis for demanding the death of Jesus.

Notice the interesting insertion of the word “living”: “Wherefore doth a *living* man complain ... for the punishment of his sins?” In listening to the words of Jeremiah during his ministry, a person with rational sense could see that the criticisms the prophet voiced publicly as God’s mouthpiece were justified. And those who heard Jeremiah speak were living witnesses of punishment coming for sin. They did not have to look back into their past history and say, “Oh, yes, we merited judgment because of what our fathers did.” They could see that the destruction of Jerusalem came because of the sins of the current generation. The living generation could testify not only that Jeremiah was a true and authentic prophet of the Lord but also that the Lord, through Jeremiah, had given them opportunity to pursue the right path and thus avoid the trouble. Jeremiah had appealed to the reasoning of three different classes, namely, kings and princes, the religious leaders, and the common people. Therefore, the rulers of the nation of Israel prior to the destruction of 606 BC were all guilty. Not only did the Lord condemn the three classes for not properly reacting, but also He had first told them, “If you obey me now, even at this late date, and confess your sins, I will not destroy the city.” Zedekiah was personally given a similar message: “If you, as the king of the nation, will publicly confess, I will not destroy the Temple and the city.” Thus all three classes were given opportunity, but all of them failed to obey. Repentance, humility, and admission of guilt are the opposite of complaining about a judgment.

Lam. 3:40 Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD.

Verses 40-42 begin in the plural, “Let us,” “Let us,” and “We.” Like Daniel, and even Moses to a certain extent, Jeremiah included himself as being part of the sinful class. Jeremiah thus manifested the great leadership quality that he possessed. It is a peculiar thing, however, that once transgression takes place, whether in mankind or in womankind, if that transgression is

harbored for a time, the backward path of retracing one's path becomes more and more remote. In fact, the possibility becomes relatively impossible except with a confession of the guilt, which is hard to do. Imagine Jeremiah saying, "Let us search and try *our* ways, and turn again to the LORD."

Lam. 3:41 Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.

"Let us lift up our *heart* [in prayer] ... unto God," and not just the hands in superficial prayer, which is easy to do. Both heart and hands can be lifted in prayer, but the heart is the most important.

Lam. 3:42 We have transgressed and have rebelled: thou hast not pardoned.

"Thou hast not pardoned" was not a criticism. Jeremiah was saying, "God is justified in not pardoning our sins because we did not lift up our hands and hearts in repentance."

Lam. 3:43 Thou hast covered with anger, and persecuted us: thou hast slain, thou hast not pitied.

Verses 43-45 show that the Lord was displeased with the people of Israel. Anger, a manifestation of displeasure, brought justifiable persecution that resulted in many being slain. What about the statement "Thou hast slain, thou hast not pitied"? God set a standard early in the Pentateuch to the effect that He does not desire to destroy men. He does not take pleasure in destroying the wicked, but their destruction is a necessity. God said to the nation of Israel, "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life" (Deut. 30:19). He wanted them to choose the right thing—life—so the terms He laid down originally were very favorable. He led the nation *as a Father*, yet very few responded. Fortunately, some did.

Comment: The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was merciful because had the people been permitted to continue on indefinitely, they would have crystallized their characters in a reprobate sense. Jesus said it will be more tolerable for those of Sodom and Gomorrah in the resurrection than for those of Capernaum (Matt. 10:15; 11:21-24). The same principle that applies to spiritual Israel also applied to natural Israel, "What son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" (Heb. 12:7). If God had just washed His hands of Israel and the people had continued in their sins, many might have become incorrigible. Therefore, knowing there will be a resurrection, God was merciful in bringing a judgment on Israel, for the people will have a much better chance of obtaining life in the Kingdom Age.

Reply: Bro. Oscar Magnuson pursued that theme in years past and said that if we had been there and witnessed the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, our words should have been, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are thy ways." If that sentiment was not our thinking in seeing the destruction, there was something wrong with us.

Lam. 3:44 Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through.

"Thou has covered thyself with a [dark, unfavorable, impenetrable] cloud, that our prayer should not pass through." Generally speaking, a dark cloud in Scripture is one of disfavor and judgment, and a white cloud is one of blessing. Instead of saying that prayers do not pass through a dark cloud, we might say the heavens are like brass, meaning that the prayers deflect back. A cloud can deafen or mute prayers, but brass is even stronger in that it causes prayers to bounce back.

Comment: The hymn "Sun of My Soul" contains the words, "O may no earth-born cloud arise to hide thee from thy servant's eyes."

Reply: Yes, the cloud can be viewed from two different perspectives. From the Christian's standpoint, transgression is an *earth*-born cloud. From God's standpoint, He causes a cloud when the Christian's heart attitude is inappropriate.

Lam. 3:45 **Thou hast made us as the offscouring and refuse in the midst of the people.**

The word "people" should be "nations": "Thou hast made us as the offscouring and refuse in the midst of the [surrounding] nations." Moab and Edom in particular manifested contempt for Israel. The Palestinian attitude toward Israel today is similar. There is no real prospect of peace because of the ingrained, hardened attitude.

Comment: The NIV reads, "You have made us scum and refuse among the nations." We think of the modern-day expression "scum of the earth."

Lam. 3:46 **All our enemies have opened their mouths against us.**

Verse 46 harmonizes with verse 45. The "people," or nations, who were Israel's enemies opened their mouths against the Israelites.

Lam. 3:47 **Fear and a snare is come upon us, desolation and destruction.**

A snare is a trap to catch an animal. Fear, desolation, and destruction were a process, a progressive experience. Fear was bad enough and so was desolation, a feeling of being set aside, but destruction was the climax.

Q: Was the snare the fact that the Israelites did not believe Jeremiah when he said the Babylonians were coming down? The Israelites certainly had plenty of warnings.

A: It is one thing to be warned in advance, and it is another thing not to heed the warning. Then came the fulfillment, and the enemy was outside, cutting down the food supply, etc. At that point, fear set in. Now the Israelites thought back and remembered what Jeremiah had said about the city and the Temple being doomed to destruction, as well as the people. And in this mode, the people became paralyzed. Paralysis is one of the dangers of fear. With its roar, the lion uses the tactic of fear to capture a prey. Fear is a very powerful emotion that affects primarily the knees at first and then the bowels.

Lam. 3:48 **Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people.**

Of course the speaker was Jeremiah. His comment sounds exaggerated, but evidently, we are being given insight into the character of the prophet. He was very emotionally involved, and he wept profusely. Some of the other individuals God dealt with had similar temperaments. For instance, the Apostle Paul mentioned the intensity of his concern and prayers for the welfare of those he ministered to in his travels. On occasion, he even wept for them. How very touching!

Comment: Jeremiah's attitude will bring shame to his generation, for when the people come out of the grave, they will find out how much he cared for them.

Reply: Yes, that is right, for prayer is usually private, not public. Public prayers should be short and meaningful, but private prayers can be as lengthy as we want. Remember the importunate widow who wanted her petition to be heard before the judge (Luke 18:1-6). He kept ignoring her, so she persisted. Finally, the judge granted her request for a favor for justice because he

wanted to get rid of the pest, as it were. The lesson is that persistency in proper prayer brings results.

Q: Why did Jeremiah frequently use the phrase “the daughter of my people,” and not just “my people”?

A: One reason would be to avoid repetition. In the Book of Lamentations, Jeremiah used the phrases “the daughter of Judah,” “the daughter of Jerusalem,” “the daughter of Zion,” “the daughter of my people,” and even “the daughters [plural] of my city” (verse 51). The use of the plural “daughters” immediately catches our attention. The term “the daughter of my people” shows another facet of Jeremiah, namely, that he meditated long and hard on the written word of previous prophets. Somehow he had access to the record because he used the vocabulary of others.

When Jesus spoke emotionally during his ministry, he similarly uttered some exact expressions of the Old Testament in a spontaneous fashion, showing not only his previous experience as the Logos, which helped to make his mission down here a success, but also the intensity of his involvement. Even with us, such expressions come out when least expected because in thinking on a subject, we subconsciously adopt the language of the Scriptures, the Word of God.

Comment: In an earlier Jeremiah study, we discussed verse 48 here in Lamentations as being proof that the crying in the Book of Jeremiah was done by the prophet himself and not by God, as some have believed. The phrase “the daughter of my people” is the key to the interpretation, for Jeremiah often used these words to refer to the daughter of *his* people, that is, Israel (Jer. 8:22; 9:1; 14:17).

Reply: Yes, the fact that the prophet was doing the crying can be proven in the Book of Jeremiah and also in Lamentations. The triad containing verse 48 continues. Notice the rest of the verses in the chapter. The context clearly shows that Jeremiah was speaking, and in particular, the triads of verses 46-48 and 49-51 plainly negate the thought that God was doing the crying. Jeremiah was speaking of his own personal experience.

Lam. 3:49 Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission,

Lam. 3:50 Till the LORD look down, and behold from heaven.

Jeremiah’s eye trickled unceasingly with tears until Jehovah looked down from heaven. “Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not.” Jeremiah’s eyes flowed with tears until God heeded his cry. How profound that God should favor us with this insight into the heart of Jeremiah! With one another, we can see only the outward appearance, whereas the Lord looketh on the heart. However, with both Job and Jeremiah, we, too, can look on the heart, for the thoughts of their hearts have been opened to us in the Scriptures. Of course anyone who will be of the Little Flock would have sterling qualities. Of the four main apostles, John was most affected emotionally in this way, and yet that was not the case before his conversion. Before John and James were begotten by the Holy Spirit, they wanted fire to come down from heaven and destroy the Samaritans, who were not amenable to Jesus’ teachings. John and James Zebedee were called “sons of *thunder*.”

Lam. 3:51 Mine eye affecteth mine heart because of all the daughters of my city.

The translators had a dilemma, for the Hebrew word translated “heart” is “soul.” Jeremiah’s “eye” (what he witnessed in his people) affected his soul. For those who have an emotional makeup, the sight of distressing things very much affects both heart and soul.

Q: Is the account saying that Jeremiah mourned for quite a while at the time the situation was occurring, but now, years later, in reflecting back on what had happened, he was again emotionally affected?

A: Yes. He was revealing his attitude in giving the warnings a number of years earlier and getting nothing in return but a slap in the face. The Jewish people misconstrued his motive as being a traitor. He had advised, “When you see the enemy coming down, I guarantee, because the Lord told me so, that if you desert over to the enemy, your life will be spared. You will go into captivity, but your life will be spared.” The people considered this advice to be proof that Jeremiah was a traitor. Jeremiah got flack for delivering the message the Lord had given him, but his message was sound. Those Jews who listened to Jeremiah at that time could easily have thought he was vindictive and that he hated Israel because of his dire predictions, but if, with honest hearts, they had listened to the *content* of his criticism over a period of time, they would have seen that the criticism was thoroughly valid and that it was not the all-absorbing theme of his ministry. God sent Jeremiah to talk *sense* to the people of Israel, not nonsense or soft words, which the false prophets used to tickle the ears.

Comment: The people should have considered that the words came from God and were not Jeremiah’s own thinking, but they did not make the discernment.

Reply: Jeremiah frequently preceded his message with “thus saith Jehovah,” but after a while, the people thought the prophet was talking, not God. Of course with the false prophets also claiming a “thus saith Jehovah,” the term was demeaned. Similarly today, when people frequently and commonly say, “God bless you,” they demean their words. And even worse, some curse and yet say, “God bless you.” The content is important.

“Mine eye affecteth mine heart because of all the daughters of my city.” In verse 48, and consistently earlier in Lamentations, Jeremiah used the expression “the daughter [singular] of my people,” likening the people to a woman. But in verse 51, we notice that Jeremiah used “the daughters [plural] of my city [singular],” that is, the daughters of Judah, which is a radically different thought. Instead of likening Judah to a figurative daughter, Jeremiah was now referring to what he had actually seen. When an enemy captured a city, the women were usually raped. Regardless of whether the women were virgins or married, the invading forces considered the satisfaction of their lust to be part of the reward of being a soldier. When a Roman army seized a city, its soldiers took whatever they wanted as booty, and the general did not object. In other words, the Israelite “daughters” were violently dealt with. When the Jews withstood the siege (just as they did many years later in AD 69-70), the Roman army was so incensed that they wanted to indiscriminately butcher everyone—men, women, and children. Because Israel had thumbed its nose at the Roman Empire on different occasions, the Roman army especially hated the Jews and had come down to punish them. Having a long list of grievances, the Romans meant business this time. They considered the Jews to be an independent-minded, intractable people, and they did not like the Jews’ attitude toward Roman servitude. Other nations were more submissive.

Jeremiah was providentially given a vantage point, a grandstand seat, as it were, from which to view the destruction of Jerusalem by the enemy. He was under house arrest but in the exact spot on the north part of the city where the enemy came down. How wonderful that now, after all that had happened, Jeremiah could see the wisdom of Almighty God in permitting the destruction! Jeremiah could see that God has in mind the long-term interest and welfare of His people—and not necessarily just the Little Flock. God wants to give life to those who surrender their heart to Him. Israel had deaf ears for Jeremiah’s messages, and now the prophet saw the need for the destruction of the city by the Babylonians.

Jeremiah was speaking about his concern for his people. Starting with verse 52, he reverted

back to his own experience. The third chapter began with what Jeremiah did. Then all of a sudden, sandwiched in the middle of the chapter, was the experience again of Israel. We are given a wonderful insight into Jeremiah's thinking as it occurred. When our memory is scored, whether for good or for evil, the thoughts remain, and they come back and back and back. The Book of Lamentations was written not only from the heart but spontaneously. Jeremiah wrote as he felt, and he was very gifted in recording his feelings. We are given the pleasure and the wonderful reward of having insight into an individual who really pleased God. In fact, Jeremiah is considered by a minority of Jews to be even greater than Moses.

Lam. 3:52 Mine enemies chased me sore, like a bird, without cause.

What is the illustration of enemies chasing Jeremiah "like a bird, without cause"? Hunters shoot birds without cause. It is not that the bird annoys the hunters but that the hunter wants to show off or develop his skill. The bird is innocent.

Psalm 35:7 illustrates the same principle with a pit and a land animal: "For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which ... they have digged for my soul." First, a pit is dug. Then bamboo rods (or something else) and leaves are placed over the pit so that an unsuspecting animal will fall into it. Like the bird, the animal is innocent.

Lam. 3:53 They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me.

Lam. 3:54 Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off.

When Jeremiah was down in the dungeon and saw a stone cover being placed over the opening, he had the sensation of his life being cut off. "They [my enemies] have cut off my life." However, as bad as that experience was, the second part of the dungeon experience was even worse—but why? The stone being placed over the opening by his enemies was one thing, but when waters flowed over Jeremiah's head, it was as if the God of nature was forgetting him. The purpose of a cistern is to collect the rain that gushes into it, and of course Jeremiah's enemies hoped he would drown. And in a dry season, a person enclosed in a cistern would starve to death.

When the waters flowed over Jeremiah's head, he said, "I am [really] cut off [now]." The experience was double: first, the enemies, and then nature. Jesus had a similar sensation momentarily when he cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Verses 52-54 describe three negative sensations when Jeremiah was put in the dungeon. Paraphrased, they are as follows: "My enemies chased me"; "they have cut off my life"; "waters flowed over my head." The next three verses describe the lesson that God intended.

The fact that Jeremiah kept reliving the dungeon experience shows the depth of the trauma he experienced. Soldiers in combat can have flashbacks and nightmares years later in times of peace. A sound can trigger strange reactions and cause them to have the same experience all over again.

Lam. 3:55 I called upon thy name, O LORD, out of the low dungeon.

Out of the depths of the dungeon, Jeremiah called upon Jehovah.

Lam. 3:56 Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry.

Notice the past tense in verses 55-57: "I called," "Thou hast heard," and "Thou drewest." Of course Jeremiah was talking about a past experience, but the cadence helps us to get a better

feel of his emotional experience.

Lam. 3:57 *Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not.*

“Fear not” is the joyous note. The following are other examples of “fear nots” in Scripture. Jesus said to the disciples in the storm on the Sea of Galilee, “Fear not, little flock” (Luke 12:32). After Jesus’ resurrection, the angel said to the women who came to the tomb, “Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified” (Matt. 28:5). An angel told Zacharias, “Fear not, ... for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John” (Luke 1:13).

Jeremiah said earlier that he called out and there was no answer. Being shut in by the hard walls of the dungeon, his cries and prayers reverberated and bounced back with no answer for some time. In this traumatic experience, Jeremiah’s character became crystallized. He was in water and muck at the bottom of the dungeon. (Incidentally, the cistern was draining water off the land, and in the process, sediment entered the cistern, creating muck.) What a terrible experience for Jeremiah! Not only was he in water, but the mud was holding him. He was in that condition for perhaps a couple of days before his prayer was answered. When the Ethiopian uncovered the opening, he may have called down, “Fear not,” for he knew that Jeremiah’s enemies had put him in the cistern with the intent of silencing his voice (Jer. 38:6-13). The cutting off was a dreadful experience, so we can imagine Jeremiah’s reaction when the black man called down, “Fear not, Jeremiah.” Jeremiah would have said, “It’s the Lord. My prayer is answered!” Even though the deliverance was marvelous, the experience of being down in the cistern scarred Jeremiah’s memory, and he mentioned it time and time again in the Book of Lamentations.

Comment: Sometimes when we are strengthened and encouraged by our brethren or by thoughts expressed in a discourse or in a study, we feel the Lord has answered our prayers by giving us peace and a sense of His nearness.

Reply: Yes, sometimes the Lord’s presence is very discernible, and at other times, our dullness prevents recognition. God does many things for us that we do not fully appreciate. However, if we were down in a pit, it would not be hard to realize the Lord was answering our prayer when comfort and release came. Certain extreme experiences definitely score our brain.

Jesus told us to forgive one another from the heart when we are trespassed against, but there is the following qualification (Matt. 18:35). We are to rebuke the brother, and *if he says, “I’m sorry; I repent,”* then we must forgive him from the heart (Luke 17:3). However, if a brother who has done something truly damaging does not repent, we are not to be insensitive doormats. When the brother manifests that he is sorry for what he did, we should respond with the proper heart condition and rejoice to see the change. And these principles apply even if the brother trespasses against us seven times in a day (Luke 17:4). In fact, we are *obligated* to forgive from the heart, as the Lord’s Prayer expresses. “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us” (Matt. 6:12,14,15). As long as one goes through the process or formality of saying “I’m sorry,” even if he is not really sorry, we are to accept the apology as if it is sincere. We do not have the liberty to judge that the apology is superficial.

“Thou drewest near *in the day* that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not.” Several times Jeremiah used the phrase “in the day” as a time frame (Lam. 1:12; 2:1,21,22). He used past tense because he was writing in late life, many years after the destruction of Jerusalem. He was reflecting back to the day, that is, “in the day.” In other words, the “day” that the Lord answered Jeremiah’s prayer was not the very next day. By reading accounts in the books of Chronicles, Kings, and Jeremiah, we can extrapolate that Jeremiah was in the dungeon for a little period of time, not just for one day.

Comment: The words of the Ethiopian Ebed-melech to the king give a sense of the time frame when Jeremiah was cast into the dungeon. “My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city” (Jer. 38:9). Jeremiah was in the dungeon for a while.

Comment: Psalm 69:1-3 is a good cross-reference: “Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God.”

Reply: When we look back and reflect, we tend to compress the actual time period, but while we are going through the trauma, minutes seem to be hours. We lose the perspective of time.

Lam. 3:58 O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life.

Lam. 3:59 O LORD, thou hast seen my wrong: judge thou my cause.

Lam. 3:60 Thou hast seen all their vengeance and all their imaginations against me.

When we go through a hard experience, we usually ask, “Did I do something wrong to merit the situation?” The Apostle Peter said that if our sufferings are because of right doing, the truth, etc., we can rejoice but not if they are because of wrongdoing (1 Pet. 2:19,20). When Paul and Silas were severely beaten and put in prison, what did they do? They sang hymns afterward, rejoicing because they were suffering for the truth (Acts 16:22-25).

Jeremiah admitted that he had made some mistakes: “O LORD, thou hast seen my wrong: judge thou my cause.” If, like Jeremiah, we were put down into a dungeon, we would want to know the reason—why God was permitting the experience. While Jeremiah admitted to making mistakes, he also knew he had enemies, and he began to get persuaded that on the whole, he had tried to do what the Lord wanted. “Thou hast seen all their [my enemies’] vengeance and all their imaginations [plots] against me.” He had rebuked the nation as God wanted, but he admitted to needing some cleaning up himself. Such inspection was a logical and natural reaction under the circumstances. For instance, a Christian might want to know, Am I of the Little Flock or of the Great Company? Remember, the Great Company are tribulation saints. A number of years ago, an unconsecrated person who listened to testimonies in his home from time to time said, “These must all be tribulation saints because they tell about nothing but their problems.” Of course that was a wrong perspective, but it illustrates the point. In time of trial, we may ask ourselves, Is God still dealing with me? Have I been faithful? If we are honest, we know that “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). Jeremiah did admit frequently that there was some wrong in him, but he knew in his heart he loved God. And he knew his enemies hated him without cause.

Job was accused by his three comforters: “You must have done something wrong. Look at all that has happened to you. Confess your sins.” As Job searched his heart, he revealed many things about his own thinking. He felt that while he was imperfect, he had honestly tried to serve God. The very fact he could not find any real substantial wrong and would not confess bothered his comforters. Jeremiah also searched his heart, and we should do the same. Such introspection of an honest heart is good schooling while under pressure. “Am I straying? Am I losing my zeal?”

Comment: Jeremiah 11:19,20 is appropriate here: “But I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, saying, Let us

destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered. But, O LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I revealed my cause.”

Q: In verses 59 and 60, was Jeremiah saying the following? “Here is what my enemies have done to me. I have confessed my faults to you, O LORD. Now judge my situation.”

A: Yes.

Lam. 3:61 Thou hast heard their reproach, O LORD, and all their imaginations against me;

Lam. 3:62 The lips of those that rose up against me, and their device against me all the day.

Comment: In verse 61, the word “imaginations” has the thought of “machinations.”

Comment: Verse 62 shows the premeditation of Jeremiah’s enemies.

Lam. 3:63 Behold their sitting down, and their rising up; I am their music.

Comment: Earlier in this same chapter, Jeremiah said, “I was a derision to all my people; and their song all the day” (Lam. 3:14).

An expression similar to “Behold their sitting down, and their rising up” is used elsewhere in Scripture, showing that God is the Author of the Bible, even though it was written through different personalities. David wrote that God knows our “downsitting” and our “uprising.” “Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; thou understandest my thought afar off” (Psa. 139:2). “Downsittings” are in the nighttime, and “uprisings” are in the daytime. Evil people imagine or devise on their beds how they can defraud others for monetary or other reasons. When they go to bed, instead of sleeping, they think about the mischief they will do, the money they will make, etc., the next day. Therefore, their “sitting down,” or “downsitting,” is premeditation for evil purposes. In contrast, the Christian’s “downsitting” and “uprising” should be favorable. God thoroughly knows them in both the negative and the positive sense. As we meditate on the Scriptures at night, our thoughts are generally beautiful, joyous, and even ecstatic at times.

In the context of verse 63, Jeremiah was saying, “Lord, you are familiar with what my enemies are devising both night and day.” Like David, Jeremiah wanted “perfect hatred”; he wanted his enemies to be cut off from the land of the living if they were incorrigible. David wrote, “I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies” (Psa. 139:22). “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living [forever], and not be written with the righteous” (Psa. 69:28).

Comment: In Lamentations 3:48-50, Jeremiah was crying about his people. His emotionalism showed he had a good balance of sensitivity for them while, nevertheless, seeing that the judgment on Jerusalem was necessary because the people would not change and repent.

Reply: Yes. In chapter 4, the next chapter, Jeremiah pursued that balanced theme. Although the society was preponderantly evil, there was some good. He reflected on the gems in the midst of the evil society.

Lam. 3:64 Render unto them a recompence, O LORD, according to the work of their hands.

Lam. 3:65 Give them sorrow of heart, thy curse unto them.

Lam. 3:66 Persecute and destroy them in anger from under the heavens of the LORD.

Jeremiah wanted his enemies to receive just deserts, that is, “according to the work of their hands.” We can judge a tree *by* its fruits, but we cannot judge a tree *before* its fruits. In other words, deeds manifest character. In the past, Billy Graham said that we cannot stop the birds from flying over our heads, but we must not let them nest in our head. If they do nest, they will produce deeds, which are the outward manifestation. Jesus said that to look upon a woman with lustful intent is committing adultery; that is, it is very dangerous to think on evil things because the thoughts will produce fruitage. The longer evil thoughts stay in our minds, the more dangerous they are, for they are certain to be manifested. God has allowed the permission of evil. He could have judged everyone long in advance, but He wanted people to manifest by deeds what they truly are. Thus He has permitted evil to justify His own thinking. How do we know that God has love? We know He has this attribute because He sacrificed His Son. In allowing Jesus to die on behalf of mankind, God rewarded Jesus with the *first place* below Him *forever*. (Of course the Holy Spirit is excepted, for the order is God, His Spirit, and Jesus.) God truly loved His Son, and Jesus would not have been fitted to be second in the universe without the experiences that showed his loyalty and proved it by deeds. The ultimate deed was dying on the Cross for mankind. The wisdom of why God allowed Jesus to suffer will not be seen by the world until later. For that reason, of the four attributes, wisdom is always seen last. For example, the face of wisdom (represented by the eagle) was on the back part of the head of each living creature, or cherub, in Ezekiel’s visions (Ezek. 1:10; 10:14). As Emperor of the universe, God did not have to manifest His love by deeds, but we are thankful that He did so.

“Give them sorrow of heart, thy curse unto them.” Jesus said to Judas, “That thou doest, do quickly” (John 13:27). Of course Jesus knew he had to die at 3 p.m. to fit the type, but what Judas premeditated was a condition of heart, a weakness in his character. Jeremiah was saying that he wanted the destruction of his enemies hastened if they were of an evil, incorrigible disposition. The Scriptures show that many people are incorrigible and will not get life in the next age in the sense of retaining it. In the Kingdom Age, all will get the opportunity for life who did not have light in the present age, but the sinning of an unconsecrated person against real light in the Gospel Age—a minority scenario—is a completely different story. The true character of the majority of the evil ones will not be manifested in this life. They will come forth from the grave, but they will perish like the sand of the sea at the end of the Kingdom Age (Rev. 20:8,9). Judas merited Second Death in the Gospel Age because he saw and heard Jesus; that is, he received a sufficiency of light to make him fully responsible. For the great bulk of mankind, the Kingdom Age is designed to show whether or not a person is loyal to God.

Jeremiah wanted the day to come when those of an evil disposition would be removed from the face of the earth. The purpose of the Kingdom Age is to cleanse the human race. Those who pass the test of the Little Season and go beyond the Kingdom Age will never die, even though mortal.

We would not want mercy extended to a person who truly is incorrigibly wicked. In the Dark Ages, people were put in dungeons for years, tortured by the rack, and subjected to all kinds of the most exquisite, unbelievable torture. Priests used the civil authorities to perform the executions and to carry out the atrocities. No mercy was shown to the screams of torture. We would not want those who orchestrated and performed that torture to be forgiven, for they are incorrigible. It is true that they will be given the opportunity for life in the Kingdom if they did not have sufficient light previously, but we look forward to the day when they will be cut off. The Lord’s Prayer for God’s Kingdom to come will be fulfilled at the *end* of the Kingdom Age, when God’s will is done on earth as in heaven and the earth is cleansed.

“Persecute and destroy them in anger from under the heavens of the LORD.” This destruction

will take place in the Kingdom Age. God “hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man [Jesus] whom he hath ordained” (Acts 17:31). Those who refuse to listen to the voice of “that prophet” will be cut off (Acts 3:23).

The smiting of the image will be immediate, definite, and sudden; it will scatter and blow away the kingdoms of this earth. Then the stone will grow and grow until it fills the whole earth. The growing process will take place down through the Kingdom Age. In one sense, the stone will grow when the Kingdom is inaugurated, but it will continue to grow when those in the tomb come forth. The stone will grow until it fills the earth and all evil is displaced. Then, at the end of the Millennial Age, the stone will become God’s Kingdom. The hymn goes, “How His plan His wisdom shows.”

Lam. 4:1 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.

“How is the gold become dim!” Jeremiah likened the good individuals of the nation of Israel, called “the precious sons of Zion” in verse 2, to gold that had dimmed and stones of the sanctuary that had been poured out at the time the city was laid desolate. Even if Daniel, Noah, and Job had been present in Jerusalem at that time, the Lord would not have spared the destruction, for the situation had come to the point of no return and vengeance was to be visited upon the city, the Temple, and the inhabitants (Ezek. 14:14,20). The books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel tell us that even the good individuals, whom God loved, would have a traumatic experience. Of course Jeremiah had advised the people to desert to the enemy and submit, but to do so meant leaving everything. The city of Jerusalem would not be spared, and the inhabitants would have very trying circumstances, even the small “holy remnant” that existed in Jeremiah’s day. Those comprising that righteous remnant were likened to gold, but they had changed and become “dim.” Similarly, when Israel was taken out of Egypt, God spoke of the nation in the most favorable terms and told how He had dealt with them like a little baby, but in the final analysis, it was the younger generation who entered the Promised Land. All of the others proved to be unfaithful and disobedient in one fashion or another except for Moses, Joshua, and Caleb.

As Bro. Oscar Magnuson pointed out many years ago, verse 1 can be spiritualized, for there is a parallel with new creatures at the end of the Gospel Age. The gold represents the divine nature, that is, those who have the hope of the high calling. In the present life, we are tentatively possessors of the divine nature on a trial basis. Unfortunately, with sin all around us, some who possess this hope become contaminated and perish. To repeat, some of those who have these holy aspirations go down the drain.

The righteous element of Jeremiah’s day took his advice and went out to the enemy. God spared Jeremiah, Baruch, the Ethiopian eunuch, and some others whose names are not mentioned, all of whom went into Babylonian captivity.

Lam. 4:2 The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!

For thousands of years, gold has been at the top of the mineral list, and earth, or clay, at the bottom. Here the earthen vessel is spoken of unfavorably, for Jeremiah said the gold was brought down to the level of *human* working. God made the gold. Gold in the earth is a product of nature’s God—it cannot be manufactured—but man uses the clay to make pitchers and other vessels.

Comment: Similarly, the materials comprising the image in Daniel chapter 2 were listed in descending order, gold being the head and clay being the feet.

When the stones were assembled in proper order, there was a beautiful Temple. Now it was leveled and disarranged. Stones that had been cut, shaped, chiseled, and fitted nicely together without cement or hammer were lying in the streets of Jerusalem like rubble. The lesson for Christians is to maintain fellowship, communication, and closeness together as coals of a fire in order to keep the truth bright and shining in our hearts.

Lam. 4:3 Even the sea monsters draw out the breast, they give suck to their young ones: the daughter of my people is become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness.

Although verse 3 is part of the triad with verses 1 and 2, it is a radical change. First, the precious element was discussed, but now the nation of Israel was being considered in a larger or broader sense. Sea monsters “give suck to their young”; that is, huge creatures such as whales nurture their young ones and are careful and delicate in their concern. Even the fearsome sea monsters that are destructive and eat other fish manifest a tenderness and solicitude for their young. In contrast, the “daughter of my [Jeremiah’s] people,” that is, the Israelites who were in the crucible, were the opposite toward their young. Stated another way, the Israelites were, in reality, like monsters. Jeremiah was drawing a comparison and a unified lesson here—just like the stones, the rubble, the gold, and the clay. The sea monsters were tender and solicitous, while the people, who should have been tender and solicitous, were monsters. Jeremiah was emotional, but the Heavenly Father, through the Holy Spirit, was drawing very deep lessons through terse statements.

The ostrich in the wilderness is described in the Book of Job: “Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks? or wings and feathers unto the ostrich? Which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in the dust, And forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them. She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not hers: her labour is in vain without fear; Because God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding” (Job 39:13-17). It is fairly well known that the ostrich leaves its eggs after laying them in sand or loose soil. Other birds such as the chicken sit on their eggs and stay with them until they hatch. Since the ostrich only lightly covers its eggs with sand, a person or animal can easily step on the eggs and crush them. The ostrich’s lack of concern for its young seems to contradict nature. Jeremiah was saying that generally speaking, the Israelites were cruel like the ostrich in the wilderness.

Comment: The end of the Job citation, “Because God hath deprived her [the ostrich] of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding,” is one proof that God designed all of the animals, birds, fish, and insects to teach lessons.

Reply: Yes. An ostrich is like a turkey, which also lacks wisdom. In fact, those who raise turkeys commercially have all kinds of problems. Sometimes when a turkey is hungry, it does not remember where or how it obtained food the previous time, so farmers have developed ingenious arrangements to counteract this lack of memory. Turkeys have trouble remembering how to satisfy even basic instincts.

All animals, birds, fish, and insects were created with object lessons that will last for eternity. Some of the creatures are very complicated and look like monstrosities, such as those with multiple legs, for example, but lessons are there. Thus the Great Creator has laid the foundation for mankind to learn many instructive lessons.

Lam. 4:4 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.

Lam. 4:5 They that did feed delicately are desolate in the streets: they that were brought up

in scarlet embrace dunghills.

Lam. 4:6 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 as in a moment, and no hands stayed on her.

We are given multiple lessons here with regard to principles that go into operation. Verses 4-6 harmonize with the first three verses but are a further revelation in a more understandable fashion of ways in which the “daughter of my people” became cruel. Verses 4-6 show how that cruelty was manifested. When their own children begged for food, the Israelites ignored them (verse 4). Those who had grown up with refinements were brought down to basic instincts (verse 5). The human being is the highest form of animal. Man has a head with noble understanding and the capability to worship an unseen Creator, but he has a flesh body. From a high position of refinement, education, intelligence, etc., the people were brought down to basic instincts like animals that do not know where their next meal is coming from. The people became so self-centered that they even ignored the cries of their young ones.

Many years ago some journalists went into the Warsaw Ghetto at the time the Nazis had cordoned it off, and they surreptitiously took pictures of Jews. The pictures showed people walking along the streets past dead bodies—even those of husband, wife, or child—without emotion. Because of the trauma, they were walking like zombies, and their feelings had become dulled and numbed. The Jews in the ghetto were an example of how people can be reduced to animal instincts.

“They that were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills.” As an illustration, before communism collapsed in Russia, the people in the major cities prospered more than those living in the country. The Communists took food from the people in the country, leaving them with very little to eat in hard times. As a result, for survival, the people in rural Russia went to the garbage dumps to find small pieces of meat and bread. And that is the thought of “embrace dunghills [garbage dumps].” Jews who had lived delicately were reduced to this level. Imagine seeing this event in the future as it actually happened! The permission of evil on earth has been so dramatic that when it is shown to people on other planets in the future, the people will not want to sin. In other words, they will vicariously experience what they see. Along another line, how much more the Crucifixion will be appreciated when the real event is replayed! The people will actually see Jesus being nailed to the Cross and his subsequent solicitation for his mother. It has truly been said, “A picture is worth a thousand words.”

Notice how the triad ends up: “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 as in a moment, and no hands stayed on her.” The destruction of Sodom was a much better situation than the punishment that came upon the Jews in 606 BC because the former was sudden by comparison. It is like comparing a long, drawn-out painful death by cancer to a brief heart attack or stroke.

The crucible was designed to be an everlasting lesson. Even though the nation of Israel as a whole is not God-fearing today, the experience back there had one beneficial still-lasting effect in that Israel worships only one God. The nation no longer worships the gods of other nations. But that is only the first step. Thousands and millions of years into the future, this lesson will be of much greater magnitude because the Lord wants a clean universe. Never again will evil be permitted, and anyone who sins beyond the Kingdom Age will be instantly cut off. Thus sin will never prosper again. The Pastor ingeniously said that Second Death will always exist, whereas Adamic death will be destroyed. In the future, sin will be dealt with immediately, and the forceful lessons of the permission of evil on earth will help people make the right choice to live everlastingly.

The high calling will cease at the end of the Gospel Age, that is, after accomplishing its purpose. However, the Bible has other benefits that will help future generations to walk the straight way. We have estimated, on pure speculation, that in the final analysis, probably half of the people of earth will never be worthy of life, whether they are among the consecrated in the Gospel Age or in the Kingdom. Beyond the Kingdom Age, however, very few will sin in the universe. The holy angels will live forever because they went through a crucible experience that proved the mettle of their character (Luke 20:36). But humanity has not had their test yet, and the Lord's plan of giving a stark lesson with the permission of evil is the best possible way. Those of mankind who enter the ages of ages will have passed their crucial test, and they will never die, but those who have not yet been created are another story. They will be born with free will, and their only experience will be like that of Adam *but with knowledge of the permission of evil*. Adam knew that he was sinning, but he disobeyed for his wife's sake because he could not think of living without Eve. He knew what he was doing and, therefore, believed he would be punished.

If someone willingly steps in front of a train going at top speed, he knows he will die. Similarly, any disobedience beyond the Kingdom Age by yet-uncreated beings will result in death, and some may foolishly disobey. After all, look at Satan, who had tremendous knowledge. And Judas went into Second Death, even though he had not received the Holy Spirit. We are given little pictures that the purpose of the Kingdom Age is to awaken mankind not to a knowledge of the truth and the divine plan but to the knowledge of obeying Jesus. All will know that he came from the dead; his resurrection will be seen and known. Judas was fully responsible because he had intimate knowledge of Jesus. No one could go into Second Death before Jesus.

Comment: Responsibility for light is always the principle in any age. Ezekiel chapter 16 likens Israel to Sodom, and verse 48 states, "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters." Israel's sins may have ostensibly looked the same as Sodom's, but the nation was more responsible because the nation had the light of the Law and the prophets.

Reply: Yes, people are not created as robots.

Comment: Verse 6 reads, "The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment." The word "punishment" was used in both cases, but the first five verses of this chapter described the disobedience of Israel, which was under the tutelage of God, whereas Sodom was not. We are reminded of the judgment to come on Christendom in the near future. We think the judgment will be relatively quick, but three or so years will seem like a rather long time for the experience of the world under the troublous conditions. It is comparable to the one-year siege of Israel, which was a long time compared to the instantaneous judgment on Sodom. The principle is that those who have light get the greater punishment.

Q: If there is the possibility of death in future creations, how do we harmonize the thought of Isaiah 11:9, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my [God's] holy mountain [Kingdom]?"

A: The pronoun "they" is the clue. "They" are the ones already created here on earth, not the ones to be created in the future on other planets.

Q: In the ages to come, the Scriptures tell us there will be no more sorrow or death. Does that promise apply throughout the universe?

A: Suppose there are 20 trillion people and one person dies. The percentage is minuscule. A lot of Scriptures speak positively but are meant to be understood in a modified sense. One

example is that the Flood is not universal. The point is that there will be no more Adamic death and related sorrow. The Scriptures under consideration apply to the creation here on earth.

Comment: With free will, there is always choice, that is, an “either/or” situation.

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

Lam. 4:8 Their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets: their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick.

Lam. 4:9 They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger: for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field.

In telling of the Nazarites, verses 7-9 give a further clue of a holy remnant that existed back there. Israel’s Nazarites were purer than snow at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. In the New Testament, Jesus likened the scribes and the Pharisees to “whited sepulchres,” a false element, but here Jeremiah was talking of a true element (Matt. 23:27). While the Nazarites became black and like a stick, etc., the account does not say they were without mercy or cruel. Their experience is being described. The Book of Ezekiel tells us that even if Daniel, Noah, and Job had been there, God would not have spared the city, yet some individuals were spared such as Jeremiah, Baruch, and the Ethiopian eunuch Ebed-melech.

Consider the Great Company class, who are virgins, but because they are *foolish* virgins, they will have to go into the great Time of Trouble. They will not be spared the great tribulation but will have hard experiences. However, if they continue with loyalty of heart—that is, even though they did not have a sufficiency of zeal to be more than overcomers, if they maintain their faith—they will get future life on a spirit plane, but the indication is that some will not get life. “Remember Lot’s wife” is a warning to the Great Company class that fear is dangerous (Luke 17:32).

Comment: It has been said that after the Little Flock is off the scene, certain Scriptures will become more meaningful to the Great Company. It seems that this chapter of Lamentations will be appropriate at that time and will very much fit the Great Company, for they will be experiencing the great Time of Trouble and the gold will have dimmed for them, but there is still hope if they just hold fast.

“They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger: for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field [that is, for hunger, for want of sustenance].” Those who were slain by the sword died a sudden and violent death, which was preferable to slow starvation. And who knows? Some of us may die suddenly and violently. It is harder to maintain patient endurance in long, drawn-out trials. “In your patience possess ye your souls” (Luke 21:19). Under the crucible of experience, patience is a necessary characteristic. Think of Job’s trial and temptation for relief when his wife said, “Curse God, and die” (Job 2:9). People sometimes commit suicide as a way out, but that is very dangerous for the consecrated.

Lam. 4:10 The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people.

In the extreme trouble, some of the Israelite women even ate their own children, as prophesied back in Moses’ day. “And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat” (Lev. 26:29).

Comment: Since the great Time of Trouble will be worse than anything the world has

experienced to date, we should be aware of these dreadful happenings in the past in order to realize how severe the future trouble will be.

Reply: Yes, we get some idea of the character of the trouble of the near future.

Lam. 4:11 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.

Jeremiah was writing several years after the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. “The LORD hath accomplished his fury ... [and] his fierce anger.” God kindled a fire that “devoured the foundations thereof.” In having a contest with the false prophets of Baal, Elijah built an altar of stones, and the fire of God’s acceptance consumed the stones, the very foundation. God’s fury and anger were necessary in 606 BC because of Israel’s hardness of heart and refusal to hearken to instruction.

Lam. 4:12 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.

Why would “the kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world ... not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem”? Not only were Israel’s fortifications formidable, but also Jehovah had always protected and taken care of the Israelites. Moreover, the false prophets had said that Jerusalem would not be captured.

Lam. 4:13 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,

Israel’s false prophets and priests were responsible for shedding the blood of the just in the midst of Jerusalem, the capital. Of course the bloodguilt kept accumulating right up to AD 70, when all the righteous blood from Abel to Zacharias was requited (Matt. 23:35).

Lam. 4:14 They have wandered as blind men in the streets, they have polluted themselves with blood, so that men could not touch their garments.

The polluted prophets and priests wandered as blind men in the streets, and men could not touch their garments because of the principle “touch not the unclean thing” (2 Cor. 6:17).

Lam. 4:15 They cried unto them, Depart ye; It is unclean; depart, depart, touch not: when they fled away and wandered, they said among the heathen, They shall no more sojourn there.

The NIV reads, “‘Go away! You are unclean!’ men cry to them. ‘Away! Away! Don’t touch us!’ When they flee and wander about, people among the nations say, ‘They can stay here no longer.’” The RSV reads, “‘Away! Unclean!’ men cried at them; ‘Away! Away! Touch not!’ So they became fugitives and wanderers; men said among the nations, ‘They shall stay with us no longer.’”

Q: Were the priests no longer to stay in the Temple precincts?

A: That was the principle. The pollution was the reason for the destruction of the Temple, and the burning down to the very foundation had a purging and cleansing effect. All priests were lumped together. When the destruction occurred, the Lord had accomplished His purpose of purging the priests. Earlier God had repeatedly warned the people through Jeremiah.

Q: Were surrounding nations speaking this way about Israel?

A: Yes, that could be the thought, as brought forth by the translators. Verse 15 is rather abstruse. If the people of the surrounding nations knew a little about Israel's purpose and past history and then saw the utter ruining of Jerusalem, they would think that the destruction was perpetual and that there was no more hope. But God had promised a restoration.

Q: Could verse 15 be referring to those who fled into heathen nations trying to escape instead of following Jeremiah's advice to submit to the enemy? Being unwelcome, they were eventually hunted down.

A: The bulk of those who fled to surrounding territories went to Ammon, but they returned to the homeland when Nebuchadnezzar generously set up a temporary government under Gedaliah to preserve the vines and the land. However, the Jews assassinated Gedaliah and were subsequently destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Both of the above thoughts about surrounding nations are logical possibilities as an explanation of verse 15, and both are correct as far as giving helpful lessons of principles in operation. Incidentally, King Nebuchadnezzar had a quick temper and was cruel, but the other side of his character was genius.

Lam. 4:16 **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.**

Jehovah no longer regarded the people because they did not respect the priests or favor the elders. "The ancient and honourable, he is the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail" (Isa. 9:15). In other words, the ancient prophets and priests were honorable—they started out good—but in time the priesthood and the prophets deteriorated with the exception of the prophets whom God spoke through. All the light and the training afforded to the Israelites by true priests and prophets were of no avail. For example, Jeremiah, a true prophet, was outnumbered by false prophets. We are not given as much information about the names and the identities of the true priests except in combination. For instance, Ezekiel, the son of Buzi the priest, was both priest and prophet. Jeremiah was also a priest, being the son of Hilkiyah. The point is that as a class, numerically speaking, the kings, priests, and prophets were not faithful. But throughout the Old Testament history of Israel, there were always some who were loyal, and that principle is very helpful in understanding certain portions of the nation's history.

Q: Wouldn't the people living contemporaneously with Jeremiah and Ezekiel have known that these two prophets were priests?

A: Yes, but the people did not recognize them as such. All true prophets were known, but generally speaking, they were not highly regarded, for they were outnumbered and were on the outside as outcasts.

Comment: Isaiah 9:13-16, the context of the verse already quoted, explains the situation of not respecting the persons of the priests and not favoring the elders. "For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the LORD of hosts. Therefore the LORD will cut off from Israel head and tail, branch and rush, in one day. The ancient and honourable, he is the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail. For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed."

Lam. 4:17 **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.**

Jeremiah was now speaking: "As for us [fellow Jews], our eyes as yet failed for our vain help." Like Daniel, he identified himself with the people, even though he was faithful (Dan. 9:3-19).

“We [the Israelites] have watched for a nation [primarily Egypt] that could not save us.” The Israelites hoped that Egypt would come to their aid and save them at the time of the 606 BC holocaust.

Q: Would a related thought be that nominal Christendom looks to the world for help?

A: Yes, that would be true when we spiritualize the principle. And consider Israel today. The nation looks to the United States, the superpower, instead of to the Lord. Back there Egypt was regarded as a superpower until the king of Babylon laid the nation waste. Secular history does not record this destruction, but the Bible does.

Lam. 4:18 They hunt our steps, that we cannot go in our streets: our end is near, our days are fulfilled; for our end is come.

The enemy had now breached the walls and was hunting the people. Verse 18 expresses a spirit of somber realization of defeat.

Lam. 4:19 Our persecutors are swifter than the eagles of the heaven: they pursued us upon the mountains, they laid wait for us in the wilderness.

The enemy seemed to read the Israelites' minds when they attempted to escape. In every way, the enemy had the advantage—in greater mobility of arms and travel, in anticipating what Israel would do next, etc. When the Jews tried to escape, the enemy was right there to capture them. Everything seemed to be against the Jews.

Lam. 4:20 The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen.

The Jews who were spared by being taken into Babylonian captivity following the 606 BC destruction lived among the heathen enemy under the shadow of God's protection. Jeremiah had advised that those who were taken to Babylon should build houses and be content, for they would be there a long time. The Prophet Ezekiel had great influence among the Jews already in captivity, as well as among the ones who went into captivity in 606 BC, and those in the proper heart condition listened intently to his prophecies. The promise was that the Lord would providentially have a sanctuary for them in heathen places.

Earlier it was thought that Jerusalem could not be conquered, for militarily speaking, relatively few people could defend the city against a multitude. However, God prospered the king of Babylon to be successful in accomplishing His purpose, namely, the capture and destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

The Jews in Babylonian captivity were very disappointed in this new change that came upon them. In spite of God's promises, they thought they would survive the captivity under duress. Spiritually speaking, they lacked nourishment as a people, and it took a little time for them to digest the fact that they would be under God's shadow while living in the midst of the land of the heathen.

From another standpoint, the nominal king of Israel could be considered the nominally anointed of the Lord. King Zedekiah tried to escape but was captured in Jericho and taken up to Riblah, which was north of Israel. At first, Nebuchadnezzar indicated Zedekiah was to be killed, but instead his sons were slain in his sight. Then Zedekiah's eyes were put out and he was imprisoned. The Jews may have heard that the king was taken to Babylon, but they did not know he was blind. Since Jeremiah had predicted that the king would go to Babylon but not see it—a seeming contradiction—many of the people concluded Zedekiah would never go

to Babylon. However, the king was taken to Babylon but without his eyesight.

Comment: There is a strong lesson here because while Jerusalem was under siege, Zedekiah had asked Jeremiah what to do. Jeremiah gave good advice, but the king disregarded it. Had the king turned himself in, the nation would have been spared.

Reply: Yes, the proposition is recorded in Jeremiah 38:14-24. The king, the princes, and the people all got an opportunity, but they made the wrong choice on a unique occasion of decision making.

Lam. 4:21 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.

Edom would get her just deserts for being so sympathetic to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Lam. 4:22 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.

“The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; he will no more carry thee away into captivity.” This portion of verse 22 was favorable to Israel, for God was saying through Jeremiah that there would be no future captivity. The translators should have put a period after the word “captivity.” Then the rest of the verse would read: “He [God] will visit thine iniquity, O daughter of Edom; he will discover thy sins.”

This account reveals a lot of history that is not seen on the surface. In the days of King Jehoiakim, Jeremiah made yokes to symbolize coming captivities of various nations. With regard to the punishment of Edom, the capital of that nation seemed to be more impregnable from capture than even Jerusalem solely because of its peculiar situation in the mountaintops. Near the end of the Book of Jeremiah, the prophet began to speak of the fate of other nations. Jeremiah was to be a prophet “against the Gentiles” (Jer. 46:1). The prophecies started with Egypt and included the Philistines, Moab, Ammon, and Edom. Universally, some of Jeremiah’s prophecies have been misunderstood, and there has been little interest in the particularities of the military situation. When King Nebuchadnezzar came down, he had animals cut and their entrails examined with the question “Should I go to Ammon, or should I go to Israel?” He wanted to go to Ammon, the easier way, but his false signs kept pointing to Jerusalem, so he followed them. God had predicted that the king of Babylon would go to Jerusalem. Against his judgment, Nebuchadnezzar went to the harder nation first, and God gave him success.

At the time, Israel looked to Egypt for help. The siege against Jerusalem was relaxed while Nebuchadnezzar went down to Egypt and broke the arm of Egypt the first time. It took Nebuchadnezzar a year and a half to destroy Israel. After that, he returned to Babylon to regroup his forces, and five years later he ended up in Egypt. This gives us a timetable. Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt and made it desolate, killing all except those who were amenable and sympathetic to Jeremiah, who had gone down to Egypt previously. Those Jews who were allowed to survive were then taken to Babylon.

What did Moses do when he led the children of Israel out of Egypt? He wanted to go through Edom, but the Edomites refused to give permission, even though Moses and the children of Israel promised not to take the Edomites’ bread, water, etc. Therefore, Moses had to go around Edom, but then the Israelites encountered and had to fight the next enemy, the king of Moab, with whom Balaam associated. Moab was laid waste.

King Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon after destroying Israel and then came down again five years later and destroyed Egypt. In the second invasion of the breaking of the arm of Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar also defeated Edom. The order of defeat was Egypt, Philistia, Moab, and Ammon. Then Nebuchadnezzar went back to Babylon and regrouped before he came down again with the intent of defeating Edom. In other words, he captured Edom last—the nation thought to be impossible to capture.

The point of the above explanation is that Nebuchadnezzar did visit Edom, as he said he would, but not right away. The king came down the way he originally intended and captured and destroyed Ammon. Then he was able to put into operation the former strategy he had for defeating Edom, and he was successful. God raised up Nebuchadnezzar, calling him His “servant,” and the king went down the route he had previously premeditated to use (Jer. 25:9). He conquered Ammon and then the seemingly impossible Edom, which dwelled up in the nest. With Edom’s defeat, Nebuchadnezzar had conquered everything south of Babylon. Jeremiah tells us that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Egypt, and this information is not found in history books. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar was more brilliant than Caesar and Napoleon, yet he is given the least recognition.

Q: Does verse 22 mean that the writing of Lamentations occurred after the destruction of Egypt, Philistia, Moab, and Ammon but just before the destruction of Edom?

A: Yes. There are clues that Jeremiah lived a long life and ended up in Babylon.

Lam. 5:1 Remember, O LORD, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach.

We will briefly discuss the circumstance that prevailed at this time. Jeremiah’s ministry was about 55 years long. He prophesied for 18 years, from the thirteenth year of King Josiah’s reign until his death. To that are added the 11 years of Jehoiakim and the 11 years of Zedekiah. Jeremiah was alive at the time Jeconiah was raised from prison to partake of meals at the king’s table, and this event occurred in the thirty-seventh year of the Jeconiah captivity, or 15 years after the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 52:31). The figures, at least to that particular period of time, total 55 years (18 + 11 + 11 + 15).

Since Jeremiah could not have written the Book of Lamentations during the siege of Jerusalem in 606 BC or when he was down in Egypt, the book had to be written sometime subsequently. Clues show that he eventually ended up among the exiles in Babylon. In fact, there is evidence that he may have died in the vicinity of Lake Urmiah up near Turkey in what is now northern Iran.

Lamentations is a very structured book, and as previously said, each verse was alphabetized in sequence. This last chapter is no exception, and it contains 22 verses just like chapters 1, 2, and 4, with the middle chapter, chapter 3, having 66 verses.

With this fifth chapter, verses 1-5 are the first natural sequence. The time setting or the circumstances were that Judah was in exile at this time. “Remember, O LORD, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach [in exile].”

Lam. 5:2 Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens.

The term “our inheritance” refers to the homeland that the exiled Jews formerly occupied, i.e., the land of Canaan. The extent of Israel’s property prior to the 606 BC destruction included Lebanon as well as what is Israel today. Their homeland was “turned to strangers” and their “houses to aliens.” The thought is not that the aliens resided in the empty houses still in the land of Israel, for many houses had been destroyed and the land was desolate. Rather, the

Babylonians exploited the land in Israel by taking whatever they wanted for use in their own homeland of Babylon. The land of Israel was completely at the disposal of the captors. Succeeding verses will tell how the land was exploited.

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

The great bulk of the males had been slain, so fathers and husbands were lacking. The few males who were taken into captivity are enumerated at the end of the Book of Jeremiah (Jer. 52:28-30). Generally speaking, the women were spared in 606 BC, for they departed from the city at the advice of Jeremiah: "If you want to live, my advice is to desert to Nebuchadnezzar's fold. If you leave the city, I guarantee that your life will not be taken from you, but you will become a captive in a foreign land." The lives of those who took Jeremiah's advice were preserved, whereas those who stayed in Jerusalem were all massacred. Jeremiah, who was just outside the wall when the city fell, was spared, as were Baruch and Ebed-melech, the black man who had let down the rope to pull Jeremiah out of the cistern. The mothers were widows because of the loss of the males, their husbands.

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

This is an interesting verse, for it is evidence of the exploitation of the mineral and other wealth that still existed in desolate Israel and Judah. The Babylonians cut down the trees for wood and then took it back to Babylon and sold it. Incidentally, Babylon had a shortage of trees except for Nebuchadnezzar's Hanging Gardens, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The Jews in captivity had to pay for wood; that is, they had to buy wood from their own homeland.

The water was secured from Lebanon, in which were the headwaters of the Jordan River. The water was very fresh at that source. The Babylonians exploited the water by making the Jews pay for it. How ironic that the produce and the material wealth which still existed in the desolated land were sold to the Jews. The situation was very humiliating—it was like swallowing spittle, as it were.

Lam. 5:5 Our necks are under persecution: we labour, and have no rest.

Generally speaking, the few males in captivity, who included those taken captive previously in the desolation of the northern kingdom, were used for menial labor, which included manually turning millstones to grind food. In other words, the males had to do long hours of laborious, servile work. The Babylonians exploited them for their own pleasure and use.

In summary, verses 1-5 describe the situation and the emotions of the Jews who were then in captivity. Jeremiah wrote in a structured or codified form that involved the alphabet for the sake of memory. In Psalm 119, David used a similar technique of alphabetizing with the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet that existed in his day. (The alphabet was changed to 24 letters at a much later time in history.) The point is that Jeremiah used a structured form because Lamentations was written to be used by posterity.

We recently saw an audiovisual of current conditions in Ghana, Africa. In one particular scene, perhaps 20 black children showed their schooling by reciting or chanting in unison the different books of the Old and New Testament. Their enunciation was remarkably distinct.

Lam. 5:6 We have given the hand to the Egyptians, and to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread.

We will consider verses 6-8 together because although Jews were still in captivity, the time setting was different from that of the first five verses; that is, the time setting went back to the

condition that existed in Israel prior to the 606 BC desolation and subsequent exile. It went back into the people's past history and sins.

How had Israel "given the hand to the Egyptians"? Not too long ago in our country, a handshake was like a mini-covenant or the signing of an agreement. A handshake was used for trade and for making alliances in business and commerce. In regard to the nation of Israel, there were different degrees of giving the hand to the enemy. Israel had "given the hand" to both Egypt and Assyria, who were traditional enemies. Notice the sequence. First, the Israelites cooperated with Egypt, and then later they found it convenient to deal with the Assyrians. It was expedient for the Jews to do so in order to be "satisfied with bread."

Q: In a previous generation, the fathers had made an alliance with Egypt and Assyria. Did Jeremiah now see that the alliance was a sin because it showed the Israelites' lack of faith and their not relying on the Lord?

A: Yes. Whether the Israelites were under a judge or a king, they wandered in time from the paths of truth and sinned. For example, good King Josiah was slain in battle by the Babylonians after he made a covenant with the Egyptians.

Lam. 5:7 Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities.

Jeremiah was mentioning a very depressing mood. Ever since the Exodus from Egypt, the story of the Israelites was a sad one of wandering from the righteous paths the Lord had begged them to follow in order to have blessings.

Lam. 5:8 Servants have ruled over us: there is none that doth deliver us out of their hand.

The Israelites' past experience was that "servants have ruled over us." That was their condition both in the period of the Judges and in their current Babylonian captivity. Now Jeremiah was coming back to their present condition in Babylonian exile. The disobedience of the people of God, who were in covenant relationship with Him, had brought very undesirable circumstances. They were experiencing the fruits of their disobedience.

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

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

Lam. 5:11 They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of Judah.

Lam. 5:12 Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honoured.

Lam. 5:13 They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood.

For convenience' sake, we will consider verses 9-13 as a unit. Jeremiah digressed and was reminiscing on the actual conditions that existed while Jerusalem was under siege and that he had *personally* witnessed.

"We gat our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the wilderness." One of the problems was the food supply, which became more and more limited as the siege was prolonged. At great peril, young men were sent out at night to gather food outside the ring of captivity and then to return with crumbs, as it were, to try to preserve the lives of the people until the siege would end. Many of the young men were caught and slain. The same situation occurred with the Warsaw Ghetto in more recent times. When the ghetto was surrounded by

the Nazis, the Jews dug tunnels so that the physically capable ones could get outside the cordon and obtain food for the others. Of course some of them were caught and slain in their fight for survival.

“Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine.” The skin darkens when one dies of famine. It becomes leathery and often swells up depending on age and other circumstances. Verse 9 refers to the terrible famine, and verse 10 gives the natural result of lack of food under the siege of 606 BC.

“They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of Judah.” When the Babylonians broke through the walls of Jerusalem, they were rewarded for their efforts in the siege. Having been away from their families for a long time, the soldiers satisfied their lusts on the women of Jerusalem and chose maidens to take back to their homeland as captives. Thus the women were exploited. Like verses in many of the Psalms, verse 11 is a couplet.

Comment: We are reminded of Zechariah 14:2, a prophecy of conditions in Jerusalem during Jacob’s Trouble: “For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished.”

Reply: The saying “History repeats itself” is very true. In a broad-brush study, we find that history does repeat itself, for it seems that each generation has to learn personally what others have learned in their life’s experience.

“Princes are hanged up by their hand.” When the Babylonians broke through the walls, they took the heirs-apparent—those of nobility—and hung them by their hands. In the meantime, King Zedekiah and many of the army had fled and were going down to Jericho. In the similar desolation of AD 70, the Romans crucified the Israelite men on the outer wall of Jerusalem. Thus the Jews’ cry in regard to Jesus more than 35 years earlier was vividly fulfilled: “[Let] his blood be on us, and on our children” (Matt. 27:25). Instead of the Jews being hung by their hands, the desolation of AD 70 was even more horrible with crosses being erected on the wall.

“The faces of elders were not honoured.” The males were all treated alike with no distinctions of office being recognized by the captors.

“They [the enemy] took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood.” In Babylon, the enemy utilized and exploited for practical purposes both those who deserted at Jeremiah’s advice and the few others who were taken captive. The young men were used in servile positions, and the children had to do whatever they could. Not only was the wood so heavy that the children fell under it, but also to carry a gallon jug of water was a heavy burden for a young child. Lamentations is an unusual, touching requiem that has been preserved for history.

In the severity of the famine, many Jewish children were killed, and some were even eaten by their own mothers and fathers. The 606 BC desolation was a very sordid memory, but the permission of evil in this macabre sense seems to be almost necessary to slam the lesson home, to penetrate our dull minds. All yet-unborn beings who will inhabit the universes in the future will see a most vivid and dramatic exhibition of the permission of evil and how contagious, infectious, pervasive, and degrading sin is.

In the earlier captivity, King Nebuchadnezzar took the cream of the crop back to Babylon. For example, included among the captives were Daniel, the three Hebrew children, King Jehoiachin, the queen, and the princes. It is true that the king was put in prison, but his life was spared. In the 606 BC captivity, very few were spared and taken captive.

Lam. 5:14 The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their music.

Lam. 5:15 The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning.

Verses 14-18 are a soliloquy of the effect of sinning; they give the product, the fruitage of error of conduct.

The Sanhedrin was no longer sitting in judgment. As captives in Babylon, the Sanhedrin did not have any honorable position. The circumstance of the Prophet Ezekiel was a little different in that the elders went to his house and sat, but they certainly did not render judgment at the city gates. We can be sure no Jewish judges sat in any of the 100 gates of Babylon.

“The young men [ceased] from their music” reminds us of Psalm 137:1-4. They had hung their harps on the willows, but the Babylonians wanted them to sing songs. The Jews’ reaction was, “How can we sing a joyful song under the circumstances with Jerusalem in desolation,” etc. By nature, the people in the Mideast are a little different than we are here in America. The Israelites of the past were similar to the Russians in temperament. Russian and Jewish music has a different beat than the African or American beat. The nearest thing we used to have was country folk dancing, which was rather joyous to behold.

Comment: An example of how the Israelites were given to emotion and expressed their joy in spontaneous dancing is David’s dancing before the Lord when the Tabernacle was taken up to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:12-14). Now, here, their dance being turned into mourning, an opposite experience, shows that they were depressed and sad at heart.

Lam. 5:16 The crown is fallen from our head: woe unto us, that we have sinned!

Notice the exclamation point properly inserted by the translators. Collectively speaking, the crown falling from the head signified the loss of the Temple and the fall of the city of Jerusalem. Even foreigners had noticed that Jerusalem was a unique and impressive city, let alone the Temple.

Individually speaking, the people of the 606 BC destruction were not recognized in any sense for their personal worth. They felt the loss of God’s favor. The crown falling from their head can also refer to the crown being removed from King Zedekiah. In other words, verse 16 has multiple applications: the Temple, the city, and the king.

Lam. 5:17 For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim.

The crown falling from the head, the ceasing of music and joy, the lack of recognition of the elders—for all these things, their heart fainted and their eyes became dim.

Lam. 5:18 Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it.

The foxes’ walking upon the ruins of the Temple and the city was like adding insult to injury. The “foxes” were actually jackals. In the ruins, the jackals had nice stone holes for homes that did not crumble like soil or wood. Similarly, when a ship sinks in the ocean, fish lay claim to it for a home. Their ready-made cubicles are more substantial than what they themselves could make, and they no longer have to dig down in the mud or go under a rock. Compared to the previous beauty of Zion situated upon the hill, the utter desolation of ruins and brambles with jackals and other creatures taking possession of the city was ironic and macabre.

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

There is a principle here. “Thou, O LORD [Jehovah], remainest for ever [that is, He is the *ever-living* God]; thy throne [is] from generation to generation.” This verse reminds us of God’s stability and endurance. The Christian is advised by the Apostle Paul to put his anchor within the veil in the Most Holy, which is the most secure place of rest and stability. We are to cast our anchor in there and hang onto the rope. Jeremiah was contrasting the endurance of God with the former verses of the insecurity, undesirability, forlornness, and unhappiness of the Jews’ current situation in exile. The only hope for them now was to cast in their anchor to the ever-living God. “You, O Jehovah, remain. You are our only hope.”

Lam. 5:20 Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?

“Wherefore dost thou ... forsake us [for] so long [a] time?” This part of verse 20 is another tidbit of information indicating that Jeremiah himself lived a considerable time beyond the destruction of Jerusalem. Therefore, he personally could say “so long time” in captivity. His ministry was at least 55 years long, and he lived even longer, for the 55 years must be added to his age when he became a prophet of the Lord. As a priest, his public ministry began at age 30, which was the thirteenth year of the reign of King Josiah. Therefore, he was 85 years old and lived well into the period of the Babylonian captivity.

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

Lam. 5:22 But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us.

How fitting that Jeremiah concluded the Book of *Lamentations* on a *sad and depressing* note. “Thou art very wroth against us.” In order for the people to get the conviction of sin and wrongdoing, it was better to end the book this way than to end on a note of retrieval. The purpose of the Book of Lamentations was to press home the point “we have sinned.” Jeremiah’s including himself in the culpability reminds us of Daniel, who did the same in his prayer (Dan. 9:3-6). Jeremiah was exemplary.

The older orthodoxy of Israel thought of Jeremiah as the greatest of the prophets. To show how much he was esteemed, we will turn to three Scriptures.

1. 2 Chronicles 36:21, “To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of *Jeremiah*...”
2. 2 Chronicles 36:22, “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of *Jeremiah*...”
3. Ezra 1:1, “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of *Jeremiah*...”

Three times “the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah” is emphasized. Jeremiah’s influence is also shown in the Book of Zechariah, and it affected Daniel as a person. The scroll of Jeremiah was very, very meaningful.

Q: Could the first clause in the King James Version for verse 22, “But thou hast utterly rejected us,” be a question as in the Revised Standard Version and the King James margin: “Hast thou utterly rejected us?”

A: In the Hebrew, it is a delicate nuance as to whether a question or a statement is intended under certain circumstances, and therefore, we do sometimes have the liberty of either interpretation. However, a statement seems to be the proper thought here. Remember, as already said, this is the Book of *Lamentations*, and its purpose was different. It was not like the

Book of Ezekiel, which gave a ray of hope, or the Book of Isaiah, which ended favorably. Even Jeremiah concluded his regular book with hope. The purpose of this book was to end on a note of despair, sorrow, mourning, and introspection. Stated another way, the purpose was to stick the arrow into the heart of the individuals of the nation, as if to say to them, "Now what are you going to do about the situation?" Jeremiah did say in verse 21 that God can do miracles. "Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned" was a ray of hope, but no answer was forthcoming.

There is at least a partial updated application of the Book of Lamentations for our day. Some of the thoughts of the Prophet Jeremiah seem likely to be the sentiments of the Holy Remnant at the time of Jacob's Trouble. Prior to God's deliverance, the situation will look utterly hopeless, and overtones of such discouragement are seen in this book.