

Lamentations Chapter 3

Verses 1-20

“The man that hath seen affliction”:

Jeremiah’s distress in such tragedy comes from God, referred to as “He” throughout this section.

Even the righteous experience “the rod of His wrath.

Both (in 3:1 here and in Job 34:7), “man” refers to a strong man who is beset with great affliction.

Jeremiah saw no hope of harmony, safety or wholeness.

Rather than peace and prosperity, the “derision” (Jer. 20:7; Ezek. 22:4), and degradation led to a state of resignation.

His despair, which is like his complaint (in Jeremiah 20:14-18), is evident in the metaphors he uses to describe God’s judgment, such as “flesh ... skin”, shattered “bones”, imprisonment, obstacles, animal attacks, and “arrows” shot into the heart (Psalms 51:8; 143:3).

Lamentations 3:1 "I [am] the man [that] hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath."

“The man” refers to all Israel, viewed here collectively as one person.

Similarly, Hosea calls Israel “my son” (Hosea 11:1), and Isaiah calls Israel God’s “wife” (Isa. 54:6).

In this, Jeremiah is speaking as if he were the man upon whom this calamity has come.

He is possibly showing the plight of all, through the feelings of this one man.

The rod of correction has turned to wrath.

He feels the affliction caused from that rod of correction.

Lamentations 3:2 "He hath led me, and brought [me into] darkness, but not [into] light."

Which oftentimes signifies distress, calamity, and affliction, of one sort or another: thus, the Jews were brought into the darkness of captivity.

Jeremiah to the darkness of a dungeon, to which there may be an allusion; and Christ his antitype was under the hidings of God’s face.

And at the same time there was darkness all around him, and all over the land.

And all this is attributed to God; it being by his appointment, and by his direction and permission.

"But not into light":

Meaning prosperity and joy.

The affliction still continuing; though God does in his due time bring his people to the light of comfort, and of his gracious presence, as he did the above persons (Psalm 97:11).

God is the Light.

This darkness is away from God.

Lamentations 3:3 "Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand [against me] all the day."

The course of God's providence toward me is quite altered, his hand, that is, his power, which was accustomed to being with me, and for me, against my enemies, is now turned against me.

Nor is it for a moment, or for one stroke or two, but his hand is continually against me.

God has turned away, because of their terrible sin of worshipping false gods.

Lamentations 3:4 "My flesh and my skin hath he made old: he hath broken my bones."

His flesh with blows, and his skin with smiting, as the Targum.

His flesh was so emaciated, and his skin so withered and wrinkled, that he looked like an old man.

As our Lord, when little more than thirty years of age, what with his sorrows and troubles, looked like one about fifty.

"He hath broken my bones":

That is, his strength was greatly weakened, which lay in his bones; and he could not stir to help himself, any more than a man whose bones are broken.

And was in as much pain and distress as if this had been his case; otherwise it was not literally true, either of the Jews, or of Jeremiah, or of Christ.

The flesh and bones grow old as a natural thing.

Perhaps this is speaking of the length of the punishment (70 years).

Lamentations 3:5 "He hath builded against me, and compassed [me] with gall and travail."

He hath not builded with me, increasing my prosperity, and protecting my houses, but he hath builded forts, and batteries, and castles, (military buildings), to batter down my walls and houses (Isa. 29:2-3).

"And compassed me with gall and travail":

Or with poison, venom, and misery, as some translate it.

And it seems more proper than gall and travail, which have no cognation one with another.

We are not well acquainted with the ancient dialect of other countries.

The sense is obvious, God had surrounded them with misery and calamities.

This just speaks of the troubles as being bitter in his mouth.

Travail has to do with pain.

Lamentations 3:6 "He hath set me in dark places, as [they that be] dead of old."

In the dark house of the prison, as the Targum.

In the dark dungeon where the prophet was put; or the captivity in which the Jews were, and which was like the dark grave or state of the dead.

Hence, they are said to be in their graves (Ezek. 37:12).

Christ was laid in the dark grave literally.

"As they that be dead of old":

That have been long dead, and are forgotten, as if they had never been (see Psalm 88:5).

Or, "as the dead of the world", or age; who, being dead, are gone out of the world, and no more in it.

The Targum is, "as the dead who go into another world."

The dark places, here, is speaking of Hades.

This is just saying, that Jerusalem is like Hades.

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

When in prison, or in the dungeon, or during the siege of Jerusalem.

Though the phrase may only denote in general the greatness of his troubles, with which he was encompassed, and how inextricable they were.

Like a hedge about a vineyard, or a wall about a city, which could not easily be gotten over.

He hath made my chain heavy":

His affliction intolerable.

It is a metaphor taken from malefactors that have heavy chains put upon their legs, that they may not make their escape out of prison.

Or, "my brass"; that is, chains, or a chain made of brass; so the Targum, "he hath made heavy upon my feet fetters of brass."

Just as there was no way of escape during the battle, there is no way of escape from this trouble now.

"Chain" speaks of captivity.

The captivity was hard.

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

"He shutteth out my prayer" (compare verse 44).

God's non-response to Jeremiah's prayers was not because Jeremiah was guilty of personal sin (Psalm 66:18); rather, it was due to Israel's perpetual sin without repentance (Jer. 19:15).

God's righteousness to judge that sin must pursue its course (Jer. 7:16 and see note there; 11:14).

Jeremiah knew that, yet prayed and wept (verses 48-51), and longed to see repentance.

God's wrath was so great, He shut His ears to the prayers of these people.

All of the shouting and crying would be of no help.

God is not listening.

Lamentations 3:9 "He hath enclosed my ways with hewn stone, he hath made my paths crooked."

Not with a hedge of thorns, or mud walls, but with a fence of stones.

And these not rough, and laid loosely together, but hewn and put in order, and well cemented.

The Targum is, with marble hewn stones, which are harder than common stones, and not so easily demolished.

This may respect the case of the prophet in prison, and in the dungeon, and in Jerusalem, when besieged.

Or in general his afflictive state, from whence he had no prospect of deliverance; or the state of the Jews in captivity, from which there was no likelihood of a release.

"He hath made my paths crooked":

Or, "perverted my ways"; so that he could not find his way out, when he attempted it.

He got into a way which led him wrong; everything went cross and against him, and all his measures were disconcerted, and his designs defeated.

No one step he took prospered.

The straight and narrow path leads to God.

This person has chosen the crooked path.

He cannot blame God for what he did himself.

The stone speaks of the strength of his enclosure.

Lamentations 3:10 "He [was] unto me [as] a bear lying in wait, [and as] a lion in secret places."

For its prey, which seizes on it at once, and tears it in pieces; such were the Chaldeans to the Jews by divine permission.

"And as a lion in secret places":

Lurking there, in order to take every opportunity and advantage, and fall upon any creature that comes that way.

The same thing is signified here as before (see Hosea 5:14).

The bear and the lion tear their prey apart, before they eat them.

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

The meaning is, "God, as a lion, lying in wait, has made me turn aside from my path, but my flight was in vain, for springing upon me from His ambush, He has torn me in pieces."

"Desolate":

Or, astounded, stupefied that he cannot flee.

The word is a favorite one with Jeremiah.

God will not stop someone who is determined to live in sin.

The ways, in the verse above, belong to the person Jeremiah is speaking for.

They are not God's ways.

This way leads to total destruction.

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

Which is put for all the instruments of war.

The Chaldeans were archers, and shot their arrows into the city.

"And set me as a mark for the arrow":

As a target to shoot at; signifying that God dealt with him, or his people, as enemies, the object of his wrath and indignation.

And if he directed his arrow against them, it must hit them; there was no escaping his vengeance (see Job 7:20).

The target is the one who has sinned over and over.

Once God has targeted you, there is no getting away.

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

That is, he hath made his judgments to pierce the most inward parts of the nation; or, he hath mortally wounded me.

"To enter into my reins":

That is, into the midst of his land and people, or into the city of Jerusalem.

Or these affected his mind and heart as if so many arrows had stuck in him, the poison of which drank up his spirits (Job 6:4).

"Reins" have to do with the heart of man.

This then, is speaking of the arrow going into the heart.

Lamentations 3:14 "I was a derision to all my people; [and] their song all the day."

To all the wicked among them, who made themselves merry with the prophet's griefs and the public judgments.

"And their song all the day":

Hebrew, גִּיטָהֶם, their instrument of music.

The word, says Blaney, "is commonly rendered their song.

But I rather think it means a subject upon which they played, as upon a musical instrument, for their diversion."

"Derision" means mockery, scorn or contempt.

God certainly had been a song to His people.

Now they are drowned in sorrow.

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

Or "with bitterness"; instead of food, bitter herbs.

The allusion perhaps is to the bitter herbs eaten at the Passover, and signify bitter afflictions, sore calamities, of which the prophet and his people had their fill.

The Targum is, "with the gall of serpents;" (see Job 20:14).

"He hath made me drunken with wormwood":

With wormwood drink; but this herb being a wholesome one, though bitter, some think that henbane, or wolfsbane, is rather meant, which is of a poisonous and intoxicating nature.

It is no unusual thing for persons to be represented as drunk with affliction (Isa. 51:17).

Bitterness, literally, with bitteresses; i.e. bitter troubles.

A reminiscence of (Job 9:18).

Wormwood means a state or source of bitterness or grief.

From an unused root supposed to mean to curse (regarded as poisonous, and therefore accursed).

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

"Broken my teeth with gravel":

This refers to the grit that often mixed with bread baked in ashes as was common in the East (compare Prov. 20:17).

It appears, this has to be connected to the scripture that says:

Matthew 7:9 "Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?"

God has given him up as a son.

He has broken his teeth with gravel.

"Ashes":

Have to do with repentance and humiliation.

It appears, He has disowned him.

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

From the time the city was besieged by the Chaldeans, and now the people was carried captive.

Who could have no true peace, being in a foreign land, in an enemy's country, and out of their own, and far from the place of divine worship.

Nor could the prophet have any peace of soul, in the consideration of these things, the city, temple, and nation, being desolate, though he himself was not in captivity.

"I forgot prosperity":

Or "good"; he had been so long from the enjoyment of it, that he had lost the idea of it, and was thoughtless about it, never expecting to see it any more.

Obedience brought peace and prosperity.

Disobedience brought a curse.

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

The prophet relates the gloomier and discouraging part of his experience, and how he found support and relief.

In the time of his trial the LORD had become terrible to him.

It was an affliction that was misery itself; for sin makes the cup of affliction a bitter cup.

The struggle between unbelief and faith is often very severe.

But the weakest believer is wrong, if he thinks that his strength and hope are perished from the LORD.

God will not give strength or hope, to those who rebel against Him.

Verses 19-27

Jeremiah's mind-set changed when, instead of remembering the "wormwood" and "gall" (symbolizing the bitterness of judgment and the horrible taste it left in the mouths of all who endured it), he remembered God's "faithfulness" (Deut. 7:9; Psalm 73:26).

That the Lord's "compassions" never fail helped him move from despair to hope.

This is the faith that made it possible for him to say, in the midst of all of the grief and ruin: Now "I have hope".

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

The miserable affliction of him and his people; the remembrance of which, and poring upon it continually, caused the despondency before expressed.

Though it may be rendered imperatively, "remember my affliction, and my misery"; so the Vulgate Latin and Syriac versions.

And Aben Ezra observes, that the words may be considered as a request to God, and so they seem to be.

The prophet, and the people he represents, were not so far gone into despair, as to cast off prayer before God; but once more looked up to him, beseeching that he would, in his great mercy and pity, remember them in their distressed condition, and deliver out of it.

For none could do it but himself.

"The wormwood and the gall":

Figurative expressions of bitter and grievous afflictions (Lam. 3:5).

Lamentations 3:20 "My soul hath [them] still in remembrance, and is humbled in me."

That is, according to our version, affliction and misery, compared to wormwood and gall.

But the words, "my soul", are fetched from the next clause, where they ought to stand, and this to be rendered, "in remembering thou wilt remember"; or, "thou wilt surely remember".

And so expresses the confidence of the prophet, and his firm belief, his faith and hope increasing in prayer, that God would in much mercy remember his people, and their afflictions, and save them out of them.

"And is humbled in me":

Both under the afflicting hand of God, and in view and hope of his mercy.

Though rather it should be rendered, "and" or "for my soul meditateth within me"; says or suggests such things to me, that God will in wrath remember mercy (see Psalm 77:7).

So Jarchi makes mention of a Midrash (ancient commentary), which interprets it of his soul's waiting till the time that God remembers.

Verses 21-33

The relentless sorrow over Judah's judgment drove Jeremiah to consider the grace, mercy, and compassion of God.

The tone of his thinking changed dramatically.

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

"This I recall":

The prophet referred to what followed as he reviewed God's character.

We see in this, a reflective prayer.

This is looking back with repentance knowing that God will receive his prayer.

This is the only hope he has.

Verses 22-23

These verses embody the central thesis of the book.

When God dealt with His sinful people He exhibited His “compassions”.

The word translated “mercies” conveys God’s love for His covenant people (see the notes on 1 Sam. 20:14-17 and Jer. 2:2).

The word “faithfulness” comes from a root meaning “be permanent, secure, and reliable”.

From this comes the associated idea of genuine faith; hence, the verb can be translated “believe” (Gen. 15:6).

The word here is often translated “faith” but literally means “firmness” or faithfulness.

Thus, it is used of the faithfulness of God Himself (Psalms 36:5; 40:10; Lam. 3:23), and of the need for the believer likewise to be faithful in his life and in his service to God (2 Chron. 19:9; Psalm 119:30; Prov. 12:22).

The word root stresses that real faith is more than inner belief, even more than whole-souled committal.

It is a condition of the soul marked by such a stable character and an attitude of total trust that the believer’s whole life is saturated with consistent, responsible service to God (compare 1 Sam. 26:23; Psalm 37:3-6).

From the biblical standpoint, true faith results in faithfulness in one’s life.

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

“Mercies”:

This Hebrew word, used about 250 times in the Old Testament, refers to God’s gracious love.

It is a comprehensive term that encompasses love, grace, mercy, goodness, forgiveness, truth, compassion and faithfulness.

Reflecting back has reminded him of the loving care of the LORD.

He realizes the only reason he is not dead, is because of the mercies of God.

God never stops loving.

He just wants us to love Him in return.

Lamentations 3:23 "[They are] new every morning; great [is] thy faithfulness."

These compassions of God are renewed day by day, to declare the great faithfulness of God in fulfilling his many promises made for mercy to his people.

This is still speaking of the mercies of the LORD being sufficient for each day.

Lamentations 3:24 "The LORD [is] my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him."

“Portion” pictures God as One who supplies security.

Land and wealth can bring a measure of temporary economic stability, but having the LORD as one’s portion provides lasting and genuine security.

Times may be terrible on the earth, but the LORD is the blessed hope of the believer.

He is life eternal.

Verses 25-27

Because God is “good” to those who patiently trust Him for divine deliverance, His people can patiently bear up under His “yoke” of discipline.

The God who brought cursings due to Israel’s unfaithfulness (Deut. 28:15-68), would also bring about promised restoration (Deut. Chapter 30).

Until then God’s people would have to endure their affliction with “hope” in God’s “salvation”, the ultimate restoration.

Lamentations 3:25 "The LORD [is] good unto them that wait for him, to the soul [that] seeketh him."

For the enjoyment of him as their portion in this world, and in that to come.

For his presence, here and hereafter; which they are sometimes now deprived of, but should wait patiently for it.

Since he has his set time to arise and favor them with it; to such is he "good" communicatively, and in a special way and manner.

They that wait for him shall not be ashamed, or disappointed of what they expect.

They shall renew their spiritual strength, and grow stronger and stronger.

They shall inherit the earth, the new heavens and the new earth.

Enjoy many blessings now, and have good things laid up for them hereafter.

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard (Isa. 49:23).

Perhaps some regard may be had to the coming of Christ in the flesh, which the saints then expected, and were waiting for in faith and hope.

To whom the LORD was good and gracious in due time, by performing the mercy promised them (Isa. 25:9).

"To the soul that seeketh him":

That seeketh him aright; that seeks him by prayer and supplication; that seeks him in his house and ordinances, where he is to be found.

That seeks him early, in the first place, and above all things; that seeks him earnestly, diligently, with his whole spirit, heart, and soul.

That seeks his face, his favor, grace, and glory, and all in Christ, through whom all are to be enjoyed.

God is good to such souls; he is a rewarder of them in a way of grace; with himself, as their shield and exceeding great reward.

With his Son, and all things freely with him; with his Spirit and graces, and with eternal glory and happiness; such find what they seek for, Christ, his grace, and eternal fire.

The Lord never forsakes them, nor the work of his hand in them, and they shall live spiritually and eternally (see Heb. 11:6).

Seek, and you shall find.

Of course, this is speaking of seeking God.

To wait for the LORD shows that we believe He is, and that He rewards those who wait for Him.

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

Jeremiah's observation resembles those of other saints who have experienced great grief of soul (Hab. 2:20; 3:17-19; Job 40:3-5; Psalms 37:7; 73:23-27; Isa. 26:3; 2 Cor. 1:7; 2 Thess. 3:5).

Jesus is the hoped for Savior, of all those who wait for Him.

Lamentations 3:27 "[It is] good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth."

"The yoke in his youth":

This speaks of the duty from God, including disciplinary training that Jeremiah received in his youth (compare Jer. 1:6-7).

Youth seem to bear up to troubles better, than those who are older.

Verses 28-33

A state of submission is illustrated here ("sitteth alone and keepeth silence ... He putteth his mouth in the dust ... giveth [his] cheek"), as the repentant one looks to Yahweh in obedient trust.

One of the chief reasons believers can live hopefully in times of despair or discipline is because of the LORD's "compassion.

He doth not afflict willingly" those He loves.

God always desires reconciliation and wholeness for His people (Psalm 94:14).

Lamentations 3:28 "He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne [it] upon him."

Our English Annotations supplying that, makes the connection clear, It is good for a man that he sit alone (Jer. 15:17).

Not doing what he doth to be seen of men, but sitting alone, and when he is alone suppressing the mutinies of his spirit, and keeping his soul in subjection to God.

Because God hath humbled him by his rod, humbling himself to his will.

"And keepeth silence, because he hath borne it on him":

Or, "took it on him"; either because he took it upon him willingly, and therefore should bear it patiently; or because he (God), hath put it upon him, and therefore should be silent, and not murmur and repine, since he hath done it (Psalm 39:9).

This is speaking of not fighting the troubles that come.

The best thing to do, is sit quietly and soon it will pass.

In this particular case, the troubles came because of sin.

The best thing to do, is take the punishment and wait for better times.

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

“Mouth in the dust”:

A term which pictures submission.

This is expressing the same thing, as the slang statement we hear today of eating dirt.

This is a way of submitting to the punishment.

There is hope of forgiveness, if he submits to the punishment.

Lamentations 3:30 "He giveth [his] cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach."

“Giveth his cheek”:

The Lord Jesus did this (compare Isa. 50:6; 1 Peter 2:23).

These words recall Jesus’ instructions to forbear bravely in the face of persecution (Matt. 5:39; compare 1 Peter 2:19-24; 3:17-18).

To smite the cheek was a way of showing vent up anger.

Jesus said, if someone smite you on the one cheek, turn the other to him also.

This is showing meekness to extreme.

Lamentations 3:31 "For the Lord will not cast off for ever:"

The truly penitent that put their trust in him, and sincerely desire and seek reconciliation with him: though he may for a time appear to estrange himself from them, yet he will certainly return to them.

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

As he sometimes does in his own people; by convincing them of sin, and producing in them godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto life.

By correcting and chastising them for it, and by hiding his face from them; all which are grievous to them.

"Yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies":

His mercies are many, both temporal and spiritual, and his compassion is answerable.

Which he shows to his people by an application of pardoning grace, through the blood of Christ.

By sympathizing with them under their afflictions, and delivering from them.

By granting them his gracious presence, and restoring to them the joys of his salvation.

All which is not according to their merits, but his mercies.

Verse 31 is a glorious promise to those who have grieved God.

God will forgive, if they continue to seek forgiveness.

We do know that after 70 years, God does just that.

Verses 33-47

God had a just basis for judgment.

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

He does not afflict any willingly (literally, "from His heart," that is, as if He had any pleasure in it, Eze 33:11), much less the godly (Heb 12:10).

In the Hebrew, it is, "He doth not afflict from his heart".

That is, with pleasure and delight; or (which seemed the best sense to me) not from his own mere motion without a cause given him from the persons afflicted.

God loves His children.

"He has no desire to punish them.

He gave them every opportunity to repent and turned from their sin.

It was only after years of warning that this trouble came upon them.

2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Lamentations Chapter 3 Questions

1. Whose plight is Jeremiah showing in this chapter?
2. _____ is the Light.
3. Why had God turned away?
4. Verse 5 is speaking of troubles, as being _____ in his mouth.
5. What are the dark places of verse 6?
6. The captivity was _____.
7. Why would all the shouting, crying, and praying not help?
8. The _____ and _____ path leads to God.
9. What is verse 10 saying about the bear and lion?
10. Whose ways are spoken of in verse 11?
11. Who is the target of God's arrow?
12. "Reins" have to do with the _____ of man.
13. What does "derision" mean?
14. What is the "bitterness" of verse 15?
15. What does "wormwood" mean?
16. What do the "ashes" mean?
17. Obedience brought _____ and _____.
18. What brings him hope?
19. Why were they not consumed?
20. The _____ is my portion.
21. What does it show, when we wait for the LORD?

22. _____ is the hoped for Savior.
23. What does "putting his mouth in the dust" mean?
24. What promise is spoken in verse 31?