

Lamentations Chapter 3 Continued

Verses 34-39

Those who fall under divine discipline are tempted to wrongfully blame God and charge Him with wrongdoing.

However, the LORD is just and fair in His judgment; He disapproves of all injustice and oppression.

Lamentations 3:34 "To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth,"

These words, with what follow (in Lam. 3:35); both depend upon the preceding, and are to be connected with them, "he doth not afflict", etc. (Lam. 3:33).

Though he lays his hand on men, he does not crush them under his feet, or break them in pieces, and utterly destroy them.

Even such, all are bound in affliction and iron.

Or, in a spiritual sense, such as are prisoners to sin, Satan, and the law, as all men by nature are.

He does not crush these to pieces, though they deserve it, at least not "all" of them.

For he proclaims in the Gospel liberty to the captives, and says, by the power of his grace, to the prisoners, "go forth", and encourages the prisoners of hope to turn to their strong hold.

And also, though he afflicts, he does no injustice to them, does not turn aside their right, or subvert their cause (Job 8:3).

Rather, these depend upon, and are to be connected with, the last clause (of Lam. 3:36); "the LORD approveth not".

As He does not do these things Himself, He does not approve of them in others; that they should use captives cruelly, trample upon them like mire in the streets, or as the dust of their feet.

Particularly, regard may be had to the Jews in Babylon, used badly by those that detained them.

For though it was by the will of God they were carried captive, yet the Chaldeans exceeded due bounds in their usage of them, and added affliction to their affliction.

Which the LORD approved not of, but resented (Zech. 1:15).

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

The Targum is, of a poor man; not to do him justice in a court of judicature.

To cause judgment to incline to the wrong side; to give the cause against a man, to give a wrong sentence.

This is disapproved of by the LORD, and forbidden by Him.

"Before the face of the most High":

Either before the most High God, he being present and among the gods, the judges, when they pass sentence.

And yet, to pass a wrong one in His presence, without any regard to Him, or fear of Him, must be provoking to Him.

Or, "before a superior", as some render it; before a judge that sits upon the bench; endeavoring by unjust charges, wrong pleas, and false witnesses, to deprive a man of his right (see Eccl. 5:8).

In the last lesson, we began on this series.

It seems Jeremiah is speaking as if he is the person this is happening to.

This is either a representative person of Jerusalem, or Jerusalem itself.

These verses are of the calamity that has come upon the people of Jerusalem.

The man has lost his right to pray, because of his repeated sin of worshipping false gods.

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

A poor man, as the Targum, which aggravates it; as by courses and methods taken in an open court, so by secret underhanded ways, to get the cause from him, and injure him or his property.

"The Lord approveth not":

Or, "seeth not"; which some understand as spoken by wicked men, who do the above things, and flatter themselves that God sees not, and takes no notice of them (Ezek. 9:9).

And others read it interrogatively, "Doth not the Lord see?"

He does; He sees all the actions of men, nothing is hidden from Him; but He sees not with approval.

He does not look upon such things with delight and pleasure, but with abhorrence (Hab. 1:13).

It is as if this person is saying, that this cannot possibly be God, because God is not against man.

That person forgets that man caused this separation.

Lamentations 3:37 "Who [is] he [that] saith, and it cometh to pass, [when] the Lord commandeth [it] not?"

That commands an event to take place, or predicts that it shall take place, and it cometh to pass accordingly.

"When the Lord commandeth it not", whenever He pleases.

Or who designs a thing, and brings his designs to effect, when the Lord is against him?

“Haughty tyrants may boast of their power as if they were equal to Omnipotence itself; but still it is God’s prerogative to bring to pass whatever He pleases.

Without any impediment, only by speaking, or declaring His purpose, that the thing should be done, as He did at the beginning of the creation (see Psalm 33:7).

And as He makes men the instruments of His vengeance when He sees fit, so He can restrain their cruelty whenever He pleases.

The truth is, not even a sparrow falls except the LORD allows it.

God is in control of His entire creation.

We can say a thing all we want to, but unless God commands it, it will not happen.

Lamentations 3:38 "Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?"

This contrasted God’s sovereign bestowal of judgment with blessing.

Jeremiah is simply stating that ultimately, all things are under God’s sovereign control (compare Job 2:10; Psalm 33:9; Isa. 45:7; Amos 3:6).

The verse gives no comfort to slanderous activity, which other Scriptures condemn strongly (Titus 3:2; James 3:9-10).

This is a question, not a statement.

The same God that is love is also the Judge.

God does love more than any man can understand, but each of us will be judged one at a time, and punished or rewarded according to that judgement.

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

While there is life there is hope; and instead of complaining that things are bad, we should encourage ourselves with the hope they will be better.

We are sinful men, and what we complain of, is far less than our sins deserve.

We should complain to God, and not of Him.

We are apt, in times of calamity, to reflect on other people's ways, and blame them; but our duty is to search and try our own ways, that we may turn from evil to God.

Our hearts must go with our prayers.

If inward impressions do not answer to outward expressions, we mock God, and deceive ourselves.

What right does a man have to complain of punishment for the sins he committed?

The answer is, "No right at all".

God is just.

We all want His grace, but we do not want His justice.

Verses 40-41: "Turn again to the LORD":

The solution to Judah's judgment was to repent, looking to God for relief and restoration.

Reflection and confession of sin help restore people to the path of life.

For Christians to truthfully "examine" themselves and admit the ways they have "transgressed" and "rebelled" is vitally important for intimacy with the LORD.

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

Seeing God does not grieve us willingly, nor delight to crush us, though we be his prisoners, and seeing the hand of God is in these things upon us.

And that justly, to recompense our iniquities into our bosoms, instead of mourning and fretting against God, which is not reasonable, nor will be of any profit to us.

Let us examine our thoughts, words, and actions, and consider what they have been, and reform, and turn again to the LORD, by apostatizing from whom we have brought these evils upon us.

This is something that everyone living should do, and not just these Israelites.

We should all examine ourselves, and see whether we be of God or not.

Just to say we are of God, is not enough.

We must live the salvation that we have received every day.

Christianity is no good, unless it is an everyday affair.

Turn to the LORD while He can be found.

He will help us stay on the narrow path after we get there.

Lamentations 3:41 "Let us lift up our heart with [our] hands unto God in the heavens."

Let us apply ourselves unto God by prayer, often expressed under this notion in Scripture from that gesture ordinarily used in prayer.

And let us not do it in hypocrisy, but joining our hearts with our hands, praying seriously and fervently.

When we lift up our hands in praise to God in heaven, it is an outward expression of the submission to Him in our hearts.

He will judge the condition of our hearts.

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

“Not pardoned”:

God judged their sin righteously.

To be pardoned, one must truly be sorry for the sins he committed.

Rebellion is next to witchcraft.

The way to be pardoned, is to have a total change of heart.

Verses 43-51

Jeremiah was inconsolable as he lamented the devastation before him, and the sin that caused it.

“Offscouring” (3:45; translated as the verb “scrape” in Ezek. 26:4), pictures the devastated, sinful people as refuse or debris that must be removed.

God had raised Jeremiah up as a prophet to announce a way of deliverance from coming judgment, but the people would not listen.

Israel's experience should cause every Christian to consider: Or do I listen to God when He convicts me?

Do I whine or weep when judgment comes?

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

Either: thou hast covered thyself with anger, or covered thy own face with anger, so as not to look upon us to move thy pity.

Or (which is more probably the sense), thou hast covered, that is, overwhelmed, us with thy wrath.

"Thou hast slain, thou hast not pitied":

Thou hast pursued us to a fatal ruin, without showing us any pity.

Pity is not what we need.

Forgiveness and mercy is what we need.

God's judgement is carried out.

We must remember that there is a time when God has lost patience with our sin.

This is what had happened here.

God's wrath had come up in His face, and He carried out the punishment for their sin.

Lamentations 3:44 "Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that [our] prayer should not pass through."

God had covered them with wrath, overwhelming them with afflictions.

So as they had no way to escape; and whereas in this distress they had nothing else to do but only to apply themselves to God.

Figuratively speaking, He had hidden His face from them, so as they could get no comfortable sight of Him.

He was as one covered with a cloud, that could not be discerned through that shady body.

What is meant by this cloud, whether his fixed resolution to punish them, or his fresh remembrance of their sins, or his just will to be revenged on them, seems too curiously inquired.

The phrase is a metaphor, and signifies no more than that God would not hear their prayers in their distress.

All the messages, that God sent them by the prophets, were rejected.

Now, He rejects their prayers.

He has closed His ears to their requests.

Lamentations 3:45 "Thou hast made us [as] the offscouring and refuse in the midst of the people."

Had given them up into the hands of the Gentiles, the Chaldeans.

To be treated as the dirt of the streets, as the sweepings of a house; or the dross of metal; or anything that is vile, mean, and contemptible ("Offscouring" means outcast).

The apostle seems to have some reference to this passage; and his words may be an illustration of it (1 Cor. 4:13).

The lands around them, that had treated them with such great respect, have no respect for them now.

They are abandoned by their God.

They have no friends.

Lamentations 3:46 "All our enemies have opened their mouths against us."

Like lions and other beasts of prey, to devour us.

Or in way of scorn and derision; pouring out their reproaches upon us, and scoffs at us, for our religion, and the worship of God, and on account of present miseries and distresses (see Lam. 2:16).

Their enemies are speaking badly of them because of their obvious sin against their God.

Lamentations 3:47 "Fear and a snare is come upon us, desolation and destruction."

They had so many fears now, it is hard to know where to start.

They were afraid of starving or being killed.

They had never known fear, because of the protection God had provided.

Now, He is not fighting for them.

They have nothing.

All is lost.

Verses 48-51

The summary of Jeremiah's sorrow.

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

Denoting the greatness of his grief and trouble at the afflictions of his people, and the vast profusion of tears on that account. Here the prophet speaks in his own person, expressing the anguish of his soul he felt, and the floods of tears he shed.

"For the destruction of the daughter of my people":

For those that were slain of them, or carried captive (see Jer. 9:1).

Lamentations 3:49 "Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission,"

The prophet was deeply affected upon the prospect of this evil before it came (Jer. 9:1).

And was now much more affected when he saw the judgment was come; he wept plentifully and constantly.

As for their sins which had brought these judgments upon them, so for the judgments themselves, as indications of God's displeasure and wrath against them for their transgressions.

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

Disperses and dissipates the cloud that was about Him; shines forth and manifests Himself, and looks favorably upon His people, and delivers them out of their troubles.

This the prophet was in hope of, and was waiting for; but, till it came to pass, could have no rest and comfort.

The crying is at first like a river for the amount of tears shed.

Then the tears begin to dry up and began to be just a trickle.

He has determined to cry out until God looks from heaven, and hears the prayers.

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

Or, "Mine eye" causes pain to my soul, I.e., maketh my soul ache, because of the sad fate of the maidens (Lam. 1:4, 1:18).

"Because of all the daughters of my city":

Our margin tells us that it may be also read, "more than all the daughters of my city"; according to which the sense is, that he was more affected with the state of Jerusalem than the most tenderhearted woman that had lived in it.

But it is as well, if not better, in this place rendered causally, showing the reason of his deep affliction, i.e., all those miseries he had seen fall upon all the Jewish nation, or upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

The things he sees with his eye is breaking his heart.

Verses 52-63:

"My enemies":

Jeremiah's description of persecution sounded much like the time when his enemies at the palace had cast him into a cistern (compare verse 53; Jer. 38:4-6).

God reassured him in answer to prayer (verse 57), and redeemed him (verse 58), by sending Ebed-melech to rescue him (compare Jer. 38:7-13).

Jeremiah pleads for justice to be rendered on those enemies (verses 59-63).

Verses 52-66

The prophet speaks on behalf of his suffering people, with a call for justice.

This is an appeal to God's righteous character.

God's ultimate purpose would be accomplished, and it would include a day of reckoning for those who opposed the LORD and His people.

Jeremiah recalls that the LORD had told him not to "fear" (Isa. 41:10).

The faithful can be sure of God's presence and help, although deliverance happens on His schedule instead of theirs.

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

That is weak and helpless, fearful and timorous; that flees from place to place when pursued.

So it was with the prophet, or rather with the people of the Jews he represents.

For here and in the following verses he speaks not only of himself, but of them.

Who, when they fled out of the city, were chased and pursued by the Chaldeans, like a bird, till they were taken (see Jer. 52:7).

"Without cause":

Which may be connected with the word "enemies".

So the Targum; who were so without cause.

They had done them no injury, to make them their enemies; or, without reason, pursue and chase them in the manner they did.

Sometimes, birds are chased just for the sport.

This is just saying that the cause was not the one's who were chasing.

The cause was God's.

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

Jeremiah was both in a prison and in a dungeon, where he was deprived of the society of men, as if he had been dead.

And he was in danger of losing his life; but whether any respect is had to it here is not certain.

It seems rather to respect the people of the Jews in captivity, who were deprived of their rights and liberties, and of the comforts of life; and were like dead men in their graves, to whom they are compared (Ezek. 37:11).

But since Jeremiah was not dead, nor did he die in the dungeon, Jarchi's sense seems best, and agrees with what follows; and is confirmed by the version of others, who render it, "they shut up my life in the dungeon".

"And cast a stone upon me":

To see if he was dead, or to prevent him from rising.

The allusion is to the putting of stones at the mouths of dens and dungeons, caves and graves, to keep in those there put.

This is all intertwined with Jeremiah, and the city he loved so.

He speaks as if he is that city and that people, and yet as if part of this was things he suffered himself.

Jeremiah was put into a cistern and left to die.

Lamentations 3:54 "Waters flowed over mine head; [then] I said, I am cut off."

As in a pit or dungeon, where there is not only mire and clay, but much water, into which persons being put, sink, and are covered therewith (see Psalm 69:1).

This is to be understood metaphorically of the waters of afflictions, which overflowed and overwhelmed the people of the Jews.

Jarchi interprets it of the nations of the world, as much people are often compared to waters.

And here the Chaldeans may be particularly intended, whose army overflowed the land of Judea.

And like a mighty torrent, carried away the people, and wealth of it, and brought them into troubles, which were like deep waters.

"Then I said, I am cut off":

While the waters are only up to a man's loins, he does not think of himself as being in danger; but there is hope of his wading through, and getting out.

But when they rise above his head, his hopes are gone.

He reckons it all over with him, and that he is just perishing, and his life in the utmost danger.

There being scarcely any probability or possibility of saving him; so it was with these people.

Jeremiah had been cut off when he was held prisoner, but this is probably speaking of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was cut off from God.

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

As in times past, so in the present distress; when all hope was gone, and all help failed, still there was a God to go to, and call upon.

"Out of the low dungeon":

Or "dungeon of lowness"; the lowest dungeon, the deepest distress, a man or people could be in.

Yet then and there it is not too late to call upon the LORD; and there may be hope of deliverance out of such an estate by Him.

Jeremiah was held in the cistern, and they had to take ropes to pull him out.

Undoubtedly, he cried to God during this time.

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

Either in times past, when he cried unto him, and was delivered.

And this was an encouragement to call upon Him again in such extremity, who had shown Himself to be a God hearing and answering prayer; hence it follows:

"Hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry":

Turn not a deaf ear to me, who hast been accustomed to hear me heretofore; stop not thine ear at my cry now, at my prayer, which he calls his "breathing".

Prayer is the breath of a soul regenerated by the Spirit, and is a sign and evidence of life, when it is spiritual.

In it a soul pants after God, and communion with Him, and salvation by Him.

Some render it, "at my gasping"; or "panting", for breath; just ready to expire, unless immediate help is given.

Or else, the whole of this refers to the present time, when the LORD heard and answered, not only the first clause, but this also.

Which may be rendered, not by way of petition, but affirmation, "thou didst not hide thine ear at my breathing, at my cry".

And this agrees both with what goes before, and with what is expressed in (Lam. 3:57).

Lamentations 3:57 "Thou drewest near in the day [that] I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not."

When persons draw nigh to God in a way of duty, and particularly in this of prayer, and calling on His name; He draws nigh to them in a way of grace and mercy, and manifests Himself to them, and works salvation for them.

The Targum is, "thou didst cause an angel to draw near to deliver me in the day that I prayed unto thee:"

"Thou saidst, fear not":

Any of thine enemies; or that thou shouldest not be delivered from them (see Isa. 41:10; see note on Jeremiah 23:23).

God heard Jeremiah, and answered him back, to fear not.

Jeremiah is now crying out for the people of Jerusalem, and wants God to give him the same attention as He did when he was in the cistern.

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

"Thou hast redeemed my life":

Jeremiah said this to encourage others to trust God.

There is no doubt at all that God spared Jeremiah's life in this war with Babylon, and even when the people had turned against him and imprisoned him.

God saved Jeremiah's life.

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

Or, "my perverseness"; not that he or they had been guilty of; but the wrong that was done to him and them by their enemies.

How perverse and ill-natured they had been to them; how badly they had used them; what injuries they had done them.

None of which escaped the omniscience of God, to which the appeal is made.

And upon this follows a petition.

"Judge thou my cause":

The present one; as thou hast pleaded and judged many already.

Do me justice, right my wrongs, and save me from mine enemies; and let it appear to all the world my cause is just, and they are in the wrong.

He is pleading for Jerusalem.

His cause is in behalf of the people of Jerusalem.

Lamentations 3:60 "Thou hast seen all their vengeance [and] all their imaginations against me."

The spirit of revenge in them; their wrath and fury, and how they burn with a desire of doing mischief; as well as their revengeful actions, carriage, and behavior.

"And all their imaginations against me":

Their secret contrivances of mischief, their plots and schemes they devise to do hurt unto me.

Lamentations 3:61 "Thou hast heard their reproach, O LORD, [and] all their imaginations against me;"

Their reproachful words uttered against the prophet and his people, against God Himself.

Their spiteful language, their taunts, and scoffs and jeers.

"And all their imaginations against me":

Those he not only saw, as they appeared in their actions; but heard them, as they were expressed by their words.

Yea, they were manifest to him, while they were only in silent thought, forming in the mind.

This is against Jerusalem.

"Me":

Is Jerusalem here.

God sees all.

He does not overlook anything.

It is as if Jeremiah is pleading with God that they have suffered enough.

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

This is to be connected with the preceding words; and expresses the same thing in different language.

The sense is, that the LORD heard the words which dropped from the lips of His enemies.

Their sarcasms, flouts, and jeers; their bitter reflections, severe invectives, and scornful language.

"And their device against me all the day":

Or, "their meditation of ill against me"; or, "their speech", or discourse; which all turned upon the same topic.

Schultens derives the word from the Arabic word which signifies to mock and scoff, or pursue anyone with ironical and satirical expressions; and so may intend here scornful, insulting and reproachful language.

The lips are mentioned, because it pertains to words coming from their mouths.

Lamentations 3:63 "Behold their sitting down, and their rising up; I [am] their music."

Elsewhere, the phrase is a comprehensive expression for all a man's occupations (compare Psalm 139:2; Isa. 37:28).

I am their music; or "music maker"; as Samson was to the Philistines; the matter of their mirth; the subject of their song; and the object of their derision.

Jeremiah again, is pleading for God to be aware of their daily hardships.

The only good they hear is from Jeremiah and he is like music in their ears.

Verses 64-66

Jeremiah's spoken curse is paralleled in many psalms in which the author is so immersed in God's will that he rightly longs for the vindication of God's righteousness as well as the punishment of the enemy.

This prayer of Jeremiah for divine vengeance would be answered in Babylon's fall (compare Isa. Chapters 46-47; Jer. chapters 50-51; Dan. Chapter 5).

It would also have its ultimate answer at the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11-15).

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

The Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions render this, and the following verses, not as petitions, but as prophecies of what should be.

But they seem rather to be expressed by way of request; and here, that God would deal with them according to the law of retaliation, and requite them according to what they had done.

That He would do to them as they had done to the LORD's people, and others.

And this is ordered to be done particularly to the Chaldeans, or Babylonians (Jer. 50:15).

Recompence means to make amends to (someone), for loss or harm suffered.

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

Rather, blindness or hardness; literally, "a veil" covering their heart, so that they may rush on to their own ruin (Isa 6:10; 2 Cor. 3:14-15).

"Thy curse unto them":

This should rather form a separate interjectional clause, "Thy curse upon them!"

This is asking for Babylon to be judged for their sins they committed against Jerusalem.

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

As they have persecuted the people of God, do thou persecute them.

And never leave pursuing them until thou hast made a full end of them, as the effect of vindictive wrath and vengeance.

"From under the heavens of the LORD":

Which are made by Him, and in which He dwells.

Let them not have the benefit of them, nor so much as the sight of them; but let them perish from under them (Jer. 10:11).

We are not to avenge ourselves.

God will take vengeance on those who have sinned.

He is the Judge.

Jeremiah is speaking for Jerusalem here.

They will not take vengeance, but want God to.

Lamentations Chapter 3 Continued Questions

1. Why has the man lost his right to pray?
2. Who caused the separation between God and man?
3. Who is in control of everything?
4. Wherefore doth a living man _____?
5. What is one thing that all living should do?
6. When we lift up our hands to God in heaven, it is what?
7. To be pardoned, one must be _____.
8. Pity is not what we need. We need _____ and _____.
9. Why does there seem to be a cloud between their prayers and God?
10. Who has lost respect for these Israelites?
11. What were some of their fears?
12. Why are the tears like a river, in verse 48, and just a trickle in verse 49?
13. What is breaking his heart in verse 51?
14. Who is verse 53 speaking of?
15. Where had he called upon the name of the LORD from?
16. God answered Jeremiah's prayer by telling him to _____.
17. Whose life is verse 58 speaking of?
18. Who is Jeremiah pleading for?
19. What does it seem Jeremiah is pleading about in verse 60 and 61?
20. What does lips indicate in verse 62?
21. Why does Jeremiah call himself their music?
22. What does "recompence" mean?
23. Who does Jeremiah ask God to judge?

24. Who is the only one to avenge?