

July 13, 2008 by Steve Brandon



# Hope for the Hurting

## Lamentations

- 1. A Devastated City (chapter 1)**
- 2. An Angry God (chapter 2)**
- 3. A Hopeful Prophet (chapter 3)**
- 4. A Punished People (chapter 4)**
- 5. A Humble Prayer (chapter 5)**

When it comes to preaching at Rock Valley Bible Church, our regular pattern is to walk through books of the Bible verse by verse, phrase by phrase. In recent days, we have been working our way through the book of 1 Peter, taking a few verses each Sunday, seeking for God's intent in the words. This week, I counted up the number of messages that I have preached on the first four chapters of 1 Peter: 34 messages. My guess is that it will take another 5 messages or so to finish the book.

This morning, however, we're going to take a different approach. Rather than merely taking a handful of verses, I want to tackle over 150 verses in going through an entire book of the Bible this morning. The book that I want to preach to you is the book of Lamentations. My message this morning will be no less expository than usual, in that it's my aim to expose the meaning of the words of the book. It's merely that we are going to bite off a bigger chunk of Scripture than we are used to do.

My reasons for preaching this book to you are several. First of all, I'm going on vacation this week. We just finished 1 Peter, chapter 4 and I don't want to start chapter 5, only to have a break for a few weeks. Second, the book of 1 Peter has been dealing with suffering. The book of Lamentations is also a book about suffering. It will give us another look at this most important issue. Third, I believe that Jeremiah's message in Lamentations is exactly what we need to hear right now.

Lamentations is a book of sorrow. The name itself, "Lamentations," is a word that means, "cries of sorrow and grief." Many times in this book, Jeremiah writes of weeping and tears (1:2; 2:11, 18; 3:49). Many times in this book, Jeremiah writes of pain and anguish and difficulty and hardship.

This is reasonable, as it was written after one of the most terrible times in the history of Judah. Jeremiah wrote this book shortly after Jerusalem was destroyed, near the beginning of their exile in Babylon. This puts it somewhere around 586 B. C. (or shortly afterwards). At this time, Jerusalem was in ruins. The people were exiled to Babylon. It was an awful time.

The book of Lamentations isn't an easy book. It's not a book for the light-hearted. We get a taste of the horror in chapter 1. I'm calling it, ...

### 1. A Devastated City (chapter 1)

Babylon has come in and ravaged the city. It is left in ruins. Notice what Jeremiah says of Jerusalem, ...

Lamentations 1:1  
How lonely sits the city  
That was full of people!  
She has become like a widow  
Who was once great among the nations!  
She who was a princess among the provinces  
Has become a forced laborer!

At one time, Jerusalem was a thriving city. It was the capital of Israel. It was the wonder of the world. People came from all over the world to visit her, like the queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10). The temple could easily have been described as one of the ancient wonders of the world.

It is difficult to describe the glories that Jerusalem enjoyed at one time. In Solomon's day, the wealth and prosperity of Jerusalem was second to none. "All the earth was seeking the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart" (1 Kings 10:24). In his days, "the king made silver as common as stones" (1 Kings 10:27). But, four hundred years later it was all done. The glory that she had once known was all gone!

Lamentations 1:4  
The roads of Zion are in mourning  
Because no one comes to the appointed feasts  
All her gates are desolate;  
Her priests are groaning,

Her virgins are afflicted,  
And she herself is bitter.

Jerusalem had gone from the heights of glory into the depths of desolation. And she feels it. She mourns and she groans.

Lamentations 1:2  
She weeps bitterly in the night  
And her tears are on her cheeks;  
She has none to comfort her  
Among all her lovers  
All her friends have dealt treacherously with her;  
They have become her enemies.

Jeremiah is describing intense pain and great sorrow and massive affliction. And in the midst of her agonies, she has no one to comfort (verse 2). "She has no comforter" (verse 9). "Far from me is a comforter" (verse 16). "There is no one to comfort her" (verse 17).

It's one thing to go through difficulties with others to come along and comfort you. It's another thing to go through difficulties alone. No doubt, suffering alone doubled Job's sufferings.

All of chapter 1 is spent on describing the horrors of the desolation that has taken place. Should you choose to take the time, you could read through these verses and see the extent of their affliction. These words aren't hard to understand. You can read them for yourself. But, a big question at this point is, "Why?" "Why would the Lord reject His people?" (1:15). The question is answered three times in chapter 1.

Lamentations 1:5  
Her adversaries have become her masters,  
Her enemies prosper;  
For the LORD has caused her grief  
Because of the multitude of her transgressions.

Lamentations 1:8  
Jerusalem sinned greatly,  
Therefore she has become an unclean thing.

Lamentations 1:18  
The LORD is righteous; For I have rebelled against His command.

The reason why Jerusalem has been destroyed and her people have been taken into exile is because they have sinned against the LORD. And now, they are paying the consequences of their sin. They are exiled to Babylon, where they have become slaves in a foreign land (1:3, 5, 6). They have not been faithful to their God. And so, God has handed them over into the hands of their enemies.

It isn't like Israel wasn't warned. The book of Jeremiah was written before Babylon came and destroyed them. It contains 52 chapters of warning to Judah of what would happen to them if they refused to follow the LORD. But, they refused. And so, God was angry with them. In the middle of verse 11, we see Jerusalem crying out to the LORD in her distress. She says, ...

Lamentations 1:11-12  
See, O LORD, and look,  
For I am despised."  
Is it nothing to all you who pass this way?  
Look and see if there is any pain like my pain  
Which was severely dealt out to me,  
Which the LORD inflicted on the day of His fierce anger.

This leads nicely into chapter 2, which I have entitled, ...  
2. An Angry God (chapter 2)

The reason there was (1) A Devastated City (chapter 1) is because there was (2) An Angry God (chapter 2). God is the One who brought the devastation upon these people. We see this clearly in the first few verses of chapter 2. Notice how many times the words, "anger" and "wrath" occur in these verses.

Lamentations 2:1-6  
How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion  
With a cloud in His **anger!**  
He has cast from heaven to earth  
The glory of Israel,  
And has not remembered His footstool  
In the day of His **anger.**

The Lord has swallowed up; He has not spared  
 All the habitations of Jacob  
 In His **wrath** He has thrown down  
 The strongholds of the daughter of Judah;  
 He has brought them down to the ground;  
 He has profaned the kingdom and its princes.  
 In fierce **anger** He has cut off  
 All the strength of Israel;  
 He has drawn back His right hand  
 From before the enemy  
 And He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire  
 Consuming round about.  
 He has bent His bow like an enemy;  
 He has set His right hand like an adversary  
 And slain all that were pleasant to the eye;  
 In the tent of the daughter of Zion  
 He has poured out His **wrath** like fire.  
 The Lord has become like an enemy  
 He has swallowed up Israel;  
 He has swallowed up all its palaces,  
 He has destroyed its strongholds  
 And multiplied in the daughter of Judah  
 Mourning and moaning.  
 And He has violently treated His tabernacle like a garden booth;  
 He has destroyed His appointed meeting place  
 The LORD has caused to be forgotten  
 The appointed feast and sabbath in Zion,  
 And He has despised king and priest  
 In the indignation of His **anger**.

God is patient with all men. But, there reaches a point, when God says, "No more" and unleashes His wrath and anger. Like blowing into a balloon, there is a point in which the balloon will burst! God's patience had reached a boiling point with Jerusalem. In the first six verses here in chapter 2, we see God's anger and wrath mentioned 6 times! Though God is the God of Israel, He became "like an enemy" (verses 4, 5) and destroyed Jerusalem.

We must note Jeremiah's language in these words. It's not merely that God allowed the destruction of Jerusalem. No, God Himself takes full responsibility for the destruction of Jerusalem. Consider Jeremiah's language in some of the verses in chapter 2. In all of it, it is God's doing that Israel is in the situation they are in.

"The Lord has swallowed up; He has not spared" (verse 2).  
 "He has thrown down" (verse 2).  
 "He has brought them down" (verse 2).  
 "He has profaned the kingdom and its princes" (verse 2).  
 "He has cut off" (verse 3).  
 "He has drawn back" (verse 3).  
 "He has burned in Jacob" (verse 3).  
 "He has bent His bow" (verse 4).  
 "He has set His right hand like an adversary" (verse 4).  
 "He has slain" (verse 4).  
 "He has poured out His wrath" (verse 4).  
 "He has swallowed up Israel" (verse 5).  
 "He has destroyed it strongholds" (verse 5).

The language continues on and on through verse 9. You need to catch this. The destruction of Jerusalem didn't merely "happen" as if by chance. Jeremiah had prophesied for forty years against Judah against their sin and the coming judgment, unless they repented! Without repentance, their destruction came to pass, just as Jeremiah had prophesied.

And now, looking back, Jeremiah identifies their distress as the punishing hand of God upon an obstinate people. Near the end of chapter 2, Jeremiah spells it out clearly.

Lamentations 2:17  
 The LORD has done what He purposed;  
 He has accomplished His word  
 Which He commanded from days of old  
 He has thrown down without sparing,  
 And He has caused the enemy to rejoice over you;  
 He has exalted the might of your adversaries.

Though God has cast them off, there is hope. It comes in chapter 3. We have seen (1) A Devastated City (chapter 1) and (2) An Angry God (chapter 2). And now, we come to ...

### 3. A Hopeful Prophet (chapter 3)

And this is where I hope that you will find encouragement this morning. Chapter 3 is the pinnacle of this little book. In chapters 1 and 2, Jeremiah describes the horror of the situation. In chapter 3, he gives us hope in the distress. Chapters 4 and 5 are like chapters 1 and 2, it's more horror and a plea for help. And so, everything climaxes here in chapter three.

Chapter 3 isn't only the pinnacle in content. It is also the pinnacle in structure. It doesn't come across in the English text, but in the Hebrew text, this couldn't be clearer. If you look carefully at chapter 1, you will find there 22 verses. If you look at chapter 2, you will find 22 verses. When you come to chapter 3, you will find 66 verses. And then, both chapters 4 and 5 have 22 verses. This isn't an accident. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

Each verse in chapter 1 begins with the different letters of the alphabet in sequential order. (Verse 1 begins with the letter Aleph, which is the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Verse 2 begins with the letter Beth, which is the second letter in the Hebrew alphabet. This continues on down to verse 22, which begins with the letter Tav, which is the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet.) Chapter 2 is just like this. Chapter 4 is just like this. (Chapter 5 breaks this rule, but it still has 22 verses).

Now, when you come to chapter 3, it's a bit different. The first three verses start with Aleph. The next three verses start with Beth. The change would startle the Hebrew reader of these verses to focus our attention upon the middle of the book. Furthermore, what is most curious is that the hope section comes in the middle of chapter 3, which we will get to in a few moments.

In the first and last sections of chapter 3, Jeremiah speaks of his own distress. What has happened to Jerusalem has happened to his own heart. He has felt it personally. In verse 1, he writes, "I am the man who has seen affliction because of the rod of His wrath." You can read the first 16 verses of chapter 3 and feel the pain in Jeremiah's heart. He feels the oppression upon his own soul. He views God as ...

- ... his enemy (verse 3).
- ... the One who has tortured him physically (verse 4).
- ... the One who has tormented him emotionally (verse 5).
- ... the One who has led him into depression (verse 6).
- ... the One who has stopped his every step (verses 7, 9).
- ... the One who has forsaken him, not hearing his prayers (verse 8).
- ... the One who filled him with fear and tore him limb from limb (verses 10-11).
- ... the One who shot arrows at him, which have landed and pierced his soul (verses 12-13).
- ... the One who made his life miserable (verses 14-15).
- ... the One who humiliated him (verse 16).

The climax comes in verses 17-20. It would be good to read these verses slowly.

Lamentations 3:17-20  
My soul has been rejected from peace;  
I have forgotten happiness.  
So I say, "My strength has perished,  
And so has my hope from the LORD."  
Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness.  
Surely my soul remembers  
And is bowed down within me.

At this point, we see Jeremiah as low as He can go. But, low is a good place to be. Isaiah 66:1 says, "To this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word." See, God looks with favor upon those who have come to an end of themselves.

Do you remember the parable that Jesus told of the Pharisee and tax collector? The Pharisee boasted of his goodness. He didn't sin. He fasted. He paid tithes of all his income. The tax collector groaned in his distress. He stood far away with his eyes low to the ground. All he could muster up was, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" Jesus said, "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:9-14).

It may be this morning that you have been brought low, because the Holy Spirit has convicted you of your sin. I encourage you to cry out to Jesus, who alone can save you from your sin. Cry out to Him, "Lord Jesus, be merciful to me, the sinner!" And the promise of the Scripture is true, "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21).

It may be that you have been brought low through some trials that have come through your life. Perhaps this morning finds you like Jeremiah, feeling rejected, forgetting what happiness feels like, having no strength, and having no hope. If this is you this morning, then take hope. Jeremiah found hope in the Lord during these difficult days. And if He could find help in a bleak situation, then you can too.

It may be this morning that you come with very few trials in your life. If this is your circumstance, then I exhort you to learn from Jeremiah, because troubles and hardships are coming upon your life. And it's best to learn about them now, so that you may find what to do in the day

of distress.

Lamentations, chapter 3, verse 21 is what you ought to do in the day of distress. The whole book turns right here in chapter 3, verse 21. It's right here that Jeremiah begins to preach to Himself. When the Psalmist was in great despair, he preached to Himself. "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God" (Psalm 42:11).

When Jeremiah was in despair, he preached to himself. This is what he said, "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope."

Do you want to have hope in a dreadfully difficult situation, then think upon what Jeremiah says. "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope." What do you recall to mind, Jeremiah?

Lamentations 3:22-23  
The LORD's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease,  
For His compassions never fail.  
They are new every morning;  
Great is Your faithfulness.

I suspect that most of you have heard these verses before. They are often quoted in the Christian world, because they speak so well of God's character. We sing, "Great is Thy Faithfulness" often at Rock Valley Bible Church. But, catch these words this morning in context. Jeremiah is as low as you can go. His city is wiped away. His home is wiped away. He knows many that have died at the hands of the Babylonians. And then, he says, ...

Lamentations 3:22-23  
The LORD's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease,  
For His compassions never fail.  
They are new every morning;  
Great is Your faithfulness.

Here's the pinnacle of Jeremiah's hope! It's in the character of God. God's lovingkindnesses never cease. Like waves coming upon the sea shore, God's lovingkindness continues to pass over us and drenches us in His love. God's compassions never fail. Like the pull of gravity upon our body, God's compassions are always upon us. God's compassions will fail just as soon as you find yourself drifting upward, having lost the grip of gravity upon your life.

When the sun rises in the morning, and when we awake from our sleep refreshed, so also are God's lovingkindnesses and compassion new and fresh. The shelves at Wal-mart get stacked every night with new merchandise. So also does God's kindness and mercy get stacked every night, so that when the morning dawns, it's a new day and the LORD comes to us with grace.

When the sun goes down at night, we can reflect upon His faithfulness to sustain us for another day. Aren't these verses good? Don't they bring joy to your soul?

I remember talking with a friend of mine who commented on the song, "Great is Thy Faithfulness." He told me, "I like the words, but I don't like the tune. It sounds to me like a funeral dirge." I believe his observations to be correct. But, this isn't bad. It's exactly what Lamentations is about. Lamentations is a funeral dirge. How important it is to know, so that when difficult times come, you will be able to remind yourself of God's lovingkindness in your difficult days.

I once heard a pastor speak of the importance of singing the truth into the heart, so that in days of distress, the truth of God will easily be brought to mind. This pastor told of making a hospital visit to a woman whose baby had just died. He came into the room and found the baby's body being held by this mother. Obviously, at such a moment, it is very difficult for any mother. But, she had been grounded in singing great doctrine. She said, "Let's sing the doxology." So, they sang, right there in the hospital room, ...

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.  
Praise Him all creatures here below.  
Praise Him above the heavenly host.  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

This is where this woman found hope. A similar hope is found in Lamentations 3:22-23, especially in the day of distress. Please realize this, church family, in your greatest hour of need, there is hope in the character of God. There is hope in the promises of God.

I read this week a portion of Charles Bridges, who wrote in his classic work entitled, "The Christian Ministry." He wrote, "Difficulties heaped upon difficulties can never rise to the level of the promise of God." [U](#) If your difficulties seem to be mounting upon you. Please realize, that they can never stack higher than the promises of God. When in your greatest hour of despondency, this is what you need to preach to yourself.

Lamentations 3:22-23  
The LORD's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease,  
For His compassions never fail.

They are new every morning;  
Great is Your faithfulness.

Jeremiah's preaching continues in verse 24, ...

Lamentations 3:24

"The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I have hope in Him."

These are amazing words. They are amazing because it's not like there is any hand of deliverance that Jeremiah sees on the horizon. The situation is completely helpless. Babylon has come in and wiped out the city. They have wiped out the army. They have wiped out the government. They have taken many of the leaders and influential people back to Babylon. His city is decimated. Buildings are burned down. People have been killed and left for the vultures to eat. As Psalm 79:4 acknowledges, the Babylonians "have poured out their blood like water round about Jerusalem; and there was no one to bury them." And yet, Jeremiah says, "The LORD is my portion. Therefore I have hope in Him" (3:24).

Jeremiah's thoughts here are a little bit like Job, "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). Later, Job said, "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him" (Job 13:15). This is like Habakkuk's famous words, ...

Habakkuk 3:17-18

Though the fig tree should not blossom  
And there be no fruit on the vines,  
Though the yield of the olive should fail  
And the fields produce no food,  
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold  
And there be no cattle in the stalls,  
Yet I will exult in the LORD,  
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

To bring this into our modern vernacular, we might say, ...

Though oil prices be \$20 per gallon,  
Though the price of food is tripled,  
Though the stock market completely fail,  
Though I lose my job,  
Though I lose my house,  
Yet I will exult in the LORD,  
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

Can you make such a statement? These sorts of statements can only be made by people of faith. And when Jeremiah said, "The LORD is my portion. Therefore I have hope in Him" (3:24), it wasn't because he knew that God was going to deliver Jeremiah from the hand of the enemy. In fact, there was no promise of deliverance.

Jeremiah, himself, had prophesied that the horrors of the Babylonian captivity would be 70 years. This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years" (Jer. 25:11). And when the exile took place, Jeremiah was an old man, having prophesied in Judah for some forty years. And so, it wasn't for physical deliverance that Jeremiah hoped. Rather, he was hoping in God to carry him through the difficulties.

And yet, be encouraged. It is possible to live victoriously through hardships. Consider how Jeremiah continued, ...

Lamentations 3:25-31

The LORD is good to those who wait for Him,  
To the person who seeks Him.  
It is good that he waits silently  
For the salvation of the LORD.  
It is good for a man that he should bear  
The yoke in his youth.  
Let him sit alone and be silent  
Since He has laid it on him.  
Let him put his mouth in the dust,  
Perhaps there is hope.  
Let him give his cheek to the smiter,  
Let him be filled with reproach.  
For the Lord will not reject forever.

There is hope in those last words, "The Lord will not reject forever" (verse 31). God had made a covenant with the people of Israel. Though

they are in exile. The exile will last only 70 years. And then, God will bring the people back into the land.

This was God's promise. This is what He accomplished through Ezra and Nehemiah. The reason why God brought them back into the land is stated clearly in the next verse, ...

Lamentations 3:32  
For if He causes grief,  
Then He will have compassion  
According to His abundant lovingkindness.

Jeremiah knew of God's goodness and grace that is coming later. And though suffering comes now, the glory will come later. William Cowper said it well, ...

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace.  
Behind a frowning providence,  
He hides a smiling face. [\[2\]](#)

God's perspective on causing grief appears in verses 33 and following, ...

Lamentations 3:33-36  
For He does not afflict willingly Or grieve the sons of men.  
To crush under His feet All the prisoners of the land,  
To deprive a man of justice  
In the presence of the Most High,  
To defraud a man in his lawsuit--  
Of these things the Lord does not approve.

In other words, when God brings His hand of judgment upon others, it isn't because He is a cosmic killjoy who derives a sadistic pleasure out of seeing others suffer. When the Lord afflicts, His justice is what drives Him to do so. But, His heart grieves at the same time.

Finally, in verses 37 and 38 we see the stabilizing force in all of Jeremiah's thinking. It is the sovereignty of God. It is the absolute sovereignty of God. Look first at the two rhetorical questions that Jeremiah asks, ...

Lamentations 3:37-38  
Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass,  
Unless the Lord has commanded it?  
Is it not from the mouth of the Most High  
That both good and ill go forth?

In other words, God is in complete control. Ultimately, it is the Lord who brings all things to pass. He's the One who raised up the Babylonians. He's the One who gave them the victory. He's the One who led them to carry away many Israelites into exile.

I say this often, and I'll say it again. When experiencing the struggles of life, there will be two factors which will stabilize you through those times. The first is the greatness of God (which comes here in verses 37 and 38). The second is the goodness of God (which Jeremiah brought up in verse 25). The greatness of God will stabilize you, because nothing is outside of His control. No matter how bad it gets, it is no worse than God intends. The goodness of God will stabilize you, because He is good to those who "wait for Him" (verse 25). No matter how bad it looks, God's purposes toward you will be for your well-being.

Do you believe this? If these truths sustained Jeremiah in his distress, they will be able to sustain you in your distress. Believe it. Trust it. Rejoice in it.

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In verse 39, Jeremiah turns into Jeremiah the preacher, giving a testimony of God's saving ways in his own life. He begins with an exhortation, ...

Lamentations 3:39-40  
Why should any living mortal, or any man,  
Offer complaint in view of his sins?  
Let us examine and probe our ways,  
And let us return to the LORD.

In light of our sins, none of us can offer complaint before the Lord. If God would deal with us in the full measure of His justice, we would be done. So, let us examine our ways and turn to Him. In the midst of your troubles, He is your only hope. Jeremiah found hope in the Lord. For

the sake of brevity, let's skip down to verse 55, where we read, ...

Lamentations 3:55-58  
I called on Your name, O LORD,  
Out of the lowest pit.  
You have heard my voice,  
"Do not hide Your ear from my prayer for relief,  
From my cry for help."  
You drew near when I called on You;  
You said, "Do not fear!"  
O Lord, You have pleaded my soul's cause;  
You have redeemed my life.

When Jeremiah called to the Lord, the Lord was ready to answer (verse 56). He didn't save Jeremiah out of His distresses. But, he did preserve Jeremiah through His distresses. "Do not fear!" says the Lord (in verse 57). But, Jeremiah's deliverance was through the Lord.

We have seen, (1) A Devastated City (chapter 1); (2) An Angry God (chapter 2); (3) A Hopeful Prophet (chapter 3); And now, we come to chapter 4, ...

#### **4. A Punished People (chapter 4)**

Chapter four continues the lament, with more detail about how bad it was for those in Jerusalem. The focus here isn't so much upon Jerusalem the city, as it is upon the people, who experienced great hardship. For our purposes, we were merely look at a few verses from chapter 4, which will help to give a flavor of the entire chapter.

Lamentations 4:4-6  
The tongue of the infant cleaves  
To the roof of its mouth because of thirst;  
The little ones ask for bread,  
But no one breaks it for them.  
Those who ate delicacies  
Are desolate in the streets;  
Those reared in purple  
Embrace ash pits.  
For the iniquity of the daughter of my people  
Is greater than the sin of Sodom,  
Which was overthrown as in a moment,  
And no hands were turned toward her.

We see the children starving. We see the former kings living on the streets. We see the cause: the sin of the people, which is worse than the sin of Sodom. The description only gets worse in verses 9 and 10.

Lamentations 4:9-10  
Better are those slain with the sword  
Than those slain with hunger;  
For they pine away, being stricken  
For lack of the fruits of the field.  
The hands of compassionate women  
Boiled their own children;  
They became food for them  
Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.

We see here the severe famine that the war with Babylon has caused. There is no food. Conditions were so bad, that those alive wish that they had died by the sword, then, their suffering would be finished. Conditions were so bad, that loving mothers even ate their own children to stay alive. The war scene is described in verses 18 and 19, ...

Lamentations 4:18-19  
They hunted our steps  
So that we could not walk in our streets;  
Our end drew near,  
Our days were finished  
For our end had come.  
Our pursuers were swifter  
Than the eagles of the sky;  
They chased us on the mountains,  
They waited in ambush for us in the wilderness.

It's a terrible scene. You ask, "Why did this happen?" Because the people were sinful and were receiving their just punishment. That's what verse 11 explained, ...

Lamentations 4:11  
The LORD has accomplished His wrath,  
He has poured out His fierce anger;  
And He has kindled a fire in Zion  
Which has consumed its foundations.

Verse 22 says that their punishment had been completed. Jerusalem received exactly what they deserved. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Those in Jerusalem received the wages of their sin.

We don't need to dwell here much longer. We need only say, "Do you think that you have it bad?" Your circumstances are nothing compared to the circumstances of Jeremiah's day. And if He found hope in the Lord, you can find hope in the Lord in your circumstances."

Finally, let's look at my last point, ...  
5. A Humble Prayer (chapter 5)

You can see the prayer begin in verse 1, ...

Lamentations 5:1  
Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us;  
Look, and see our reproach!

These words are a plea to the Lord for Him to remember them. These were God's covenant people.

Verses 2-18 are a description of the difficulties that they are facing. Consider them carefully.

Lamentations 5:2-18  
Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers,  
Our houses to aliens.  
We have become orphans without a father,  
Our mothers are like widows.  
We have to pay for our drinking water, Our wood comes to us at a price.  
Our pursuers are at our necks; We are worn out, there is no rest for us.  
We have submitted to Egypt and Assyria to get enough bread.  
Our fathers sinned, and are no more;  
It is we who have borne their iniquities.  
Slaves rule over us; There is no one to deliver us from their hand.  
We get our bread at the risk of our lives  
Because of the sword in the wilderness.  
Our skin has become as hot as an oven,  
Because of the burning heat of famine.  
They ravished the women in Zion,  
The virgins in the cities of Judah.  
Princes were hung by their hands; Elders were not respected.  
Young men worked at the grinding mill,  
And youths stumbled under loads of wood.  
Elders are gone from the gate, Young men from their music.  
The joy of our hearts has ceased;  
Our dancing has been turned into mourning.  
The crown has fallen from our head; Woe to us, for we have sinned!  
Because of this our heart is faint,  
Because of these things our eyes are dim;  
Because of Mount Zion which lies desolate, Foxes prowl in it.

Things are bad. But, again, there is hope. There is hope in the sovereignty of God. If He would so choose, all will be well.

Lamentations 5:19-22  
You, O LORD, rule forever;  
Your throne is from generation to generation.  
Why do You forget us forever?  
Why do You forsake us so long?  
Restore us to You, O LORD, that we may be restored;  
Renew our days as of old,  
Unless You have utterly rejected us

And are exceedingly angry with us.

This book ends in despair. Jeremiah asked, "Why have you forgotten us?" He feels the effects of God forgetting them. Why? Because of their sin. The closing verse ends with the despair of being rejected by God, who is angry with those in Judah.

So bad is the despair, that the Jewish people don't often end the reading of Lamentations with verse 22. Instead, they repeat verse 21, "Restore us to You, O LORD, that we may be restored." [3] This is our only hope as well. It's for God to restore us, that we might be restored to Him. What a great prayer. It's a humble prayer that we all ought to pray.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on July 13, 2008 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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[1] Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, p. 175.

[2] William Cowper, *God Moves In A Mysterious Way*.

[3] H. L. Ellison wrote about this in his commentary on Lamentations with these words, ...

Already in Zechariah 7:3, 5; 8:19, we find that the destruction of the temple on the seventh day of the fifth month (2 Kings 25:8-9) was remembered by an annual fast. (This was transferred in the second century A. D. to the ninth day of the month and has since then commemorated the two destructions of the temple and the crushing of Bar Kochba's revolt in A. D. 135. It is called Tisha b'Av.) ... It is understandable that when Lamentations is read in the synagogue, especially on Tisha b'Av, v. 21 is repeated at this point so that the reading will not end on such a sad note. (The Expositors Bible Commentary, volume 6, pp. 697, 733).