

=SMALL BOOKS OF THE BIBLE=

Lesson 5

Lamentations

AUTHOR: Jeremiah

THEME: “Jeremiah, His Heart Broken, Cries for His People Who Had Been Judged by God According to Jeremiah’s Prophecies.”

INTRODUCTION: Lamentations consists of five chapters. Each of these is a separate, complete-in-itself poem and has a distinct subject, but all are under an all-inclusive plan. The prophet is weeping over the ruin of his country. He had seen all of this coming and had foretold it as being inevitable. He had prophesied the overthrow of the city. He then witnessed its overthrow, and now he is shaken in soul by the desolation he sees. What Jeremiah had predicted now lies before him in exact fulfillment. Every statement of the coming doom is now a sad fact in the heaps of ruins that lie about him on every side. God had given him messages picturing the judgment that was to befall them. Jeremiah now sees a city that is ruined and a temple that is destroyed. As he views it, his soul is stirred to the depths. He sees unbelievable suffering.

The common theme of the Lamentations is the terrible fate that befell Jerusalem when the Chaldeans captured the city in 588 B.C. and carried away its inhabitants. It has been the custom for the Lamentations to be read in the synagogue on the ninth day of Ab, the anniversary of the burning of the temple. This is a very ancient fast day, so the Lamentations were, no doubt, designed for this occasion. When read, it was accompanied by fasting and weeping to commemorate the misery out of which the people had been delivered.

Now let us notice the practical lessons of such a book.

- I. IT IS IMPORTANT TO HEED THE PREACHING OF THE MAN OF GOD. Jeremiah warned them. He had warned them with the proper spirit. His was not the stern rebuke of a tyrant; his was the loving warning of a brokenhearted prophet. (Teacher, stress to the pupils the importance of heeding the preaching of the man of God.)
- II. SADNESS COMES WHEN REMEMBERING BETTER DAYS AFTER JUDGMENT HAS COME. Notice Lamentations 1:7. Here is Jerusalem, besieged, destroyed and scattered. What will the people do? They remember! They remember days when the temple was up and the city was beautiful. They remember the blessings of God when they walked with God and kept His commandments. One of the sad things about a life of sin is the awful remembrance of better days when people walked with God.
- III. SIN TAKES AWAY BEAUTY. Notice in Lamentations 1:6 the words, “all her beauty is departed.” Someone has rightly said that the best beauty course in all the world is a dedicated life. The best physical training in all the world is a pure, dedicated life for God. A nation loses her beauty when she turns from God. Individuals lose their beauty when they turn from God.
- IV. GOD’S PEOPLE SHOULD NOT REJOICE WHEN SIN IS PUNISHED IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS. Jeremiah could have said that he warned the people and that it was not his fault. He could have even been happy that God punished them, and therefore, his prophecy came true. You will recall that Jonah was discouraged because he had prophesied that Nineveh would be destroyed in 40 days. When Nineveh repented and was not destroyed in 40 days, Jonah was a little discouraged about it. Not so with Jeremiah! Look at some of the passages that show his heart was broken because of the sin of the people. Notice especially Lamentations 2:11a, “Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth.” Jeremiah was heartbroken because his prophecies had come true. Oh, God, give us broken hearts and tears!
- V. EVEN IN SUFFERING, THE LORD IS MERCIFUL. Notice Lamentations 3:22-25. Particularly notice verse 22, “It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.” Yes, though people are judged, we can go to the person who is being judged and tell him that God still loves

him and that God's mercies are new every morning. In the life of the Israelites, they had been judged because they refused to go into the Promised Land. They were cast into the wilderness for 40 years to die. In spite of this fact, manna came from Heaven and was gathered by the Jews every morning. God gave them water from the rock in Horeb. Their shoes did not wear out. Yes, they had sinned. They had refused to do their best for God. God had judged them, but He had not forgotten them.

- VI. WHEN THE SINNER IS JUDGED BY GOD, HE CAN NEVER TURN BACK TO THE FORMER LIFE. Think of Samson and his usefulness, and yet, after his great sin, he was not used by God as he once was. Think of those in the Bible who sacrificed the opportunity to do a great work for God because of great sin. Oh, yes, God still loved them, and God still blessed them, and for that matter, God cared for them and supplied their needs, but they were never quite the same as before. (Teacher, warn the young people and the children that once the milk is spilt, there is no way to regather it. One of the saddest things is to lament over opportunities once offered, but rejected, which cause the judgment of God to come.)
- VII. PEOPLE WHO LAMENT CAN BE A GREAT HELP TO OTHERS. Because of David's testimony, millions of people have avoided the sins that David committed. People who have sacrificed great opportunities often regret that their lives are wasted and that they can do nothing now for God. There is one thing, however, that they can do that no one else can do: They can warn the young people and prevent many tragedies in the lives of others. This is a ministry particularly unique to those who have gone so far that they cannot be used to their fullest. This is what Solomon did in Ecclesiastes as he warned the youth not to follow in his footsteps.

Consistency does pay off. Once a farmer came to the pastor and said, "I am a farmer. This year I planted my crop on Sunday. I fertilized my crop on Sunday. I worked my crop on Sunday. I harvested my crop on Sunday, and this October I had the best crop I ever had. Now what do you have to say to that, Pastor?" The pastor replied, "Dear brother, remember this: God does not always pay off in October." This is so true. Sometimes God's mercy is patient. He is longsuffering. He does not want to punish us, and so His punishment is stayed until we get the idea that it will not come, but come it will. May we avoid this judgment by giving our lives to God! Along with those who have already been judged by God and whose lives have been wrecked, may we be busy warning those who have not lived as many years so that their dedicated, useful lives can substitute for the wasted lives of older people.