

Lamentations

- Background
 - By Jeremiah
 - About 586 BC
 - Five funeral poems for Jerusalem upon its destruction
 - Jeremiah preached repentance and prophesied destruction for the 37 years before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.
 - The church is now the Israel of God (Romans 9:6 – 8, Galatians 6:16).
 - In what ways can we apply the history of Israel, and specifically the destruction of Jerusalem, to the church? (Note: Look for generalizations, not a roadmap)
- The desolation of Jerusalem (chapter 1)
 - Previously a great nation
 - (1) Great among the nations, prince among provinces.
 - (2, 19) Had allies (which was a mistake)
 - (6) Splendor has departed
 - (7) The pleasant things of old
 - Israel was able to recover and become great after each disaster of the past due to:
 - Agricultural exports
 - Position on trade routes
 - Merchant marine fleet from Ezion-Geber to East Africa and India
 - The descriptions of past greatness were not exaggerated.
 - Does the church have the inherent resources of Israel to enable fast recoveries?
 - Rather than lamenting the loss, recognize that the ability to recover was built in.
 - Reasons for downfall
 - (2) Treacherous allies
 - (5) The Lord afflicted her for her multitude of transgressions
 - (8) Sinned gravely
 - (9) Did not consider her destiny
 - (12) The fierce anger of the Lord
 - (14) The yoke of my transgressions
 - (18) Rebelled against His commandments
 - (20) Very rebellious
 - Why does the church not grow exponentially? Why does the societal influence of the church tend to self-destruct?
 - Rather than focusing on the errors of the past, learn and move on.
 - Realize that worldly baggage is a yoke.
 - Consider our unrealized destiny (destiny is a lot bigger than “potential”)
 - Worse than the loss
 - (2, 9) None to comfort
 - (16, 17) The comforter is far from me
 - What promises does God make about comfort?
 - Israel’s requests
 - (9) Behold my affliction
 - (10) The nations enter the sanctuary
 - (20) See, O Lord, that I am in distress
 - (21) Bring on the day that you have announced, that they may be like me

Lamentations

- (22) Do to them as You have done to me
- Israel's appeal to God seems self-centered.
- Remember that God restored them to Israel as promised, so their less-than-ideal lament was close enough.
- An appeal by the church for restoration should focus on the fact that God loves us like a parent loves children, or as Jesus loves His bride. "Behold my affliction." Be confident that, despite past performance, God will be merciful.
- To the observer
 - (12) Learn from what happened to me
 - (18) Behold my sorrow and learn
 - Use the disasters of 2000 years of church history as an appeal to outsiders. Note: this works around the barrier that holds many back from investigating the church. Acknowledge the barrier and tell about the promises that were missed.
- The Lord has destroyed that which He had favored (Chapter 2)
 - God's favor may turn to anger
 - (1) Daughter of Zion, beauty of Israel, His footstool
 - (3) He has drawn back His right hand
 - (4) Slain those who were pleasing in His eye
 - (6) Done violence to His tabernacle, destroyed the place of assembly, feasts and Sabbaths forgotten, spurned king and priest
 - (7) Spurned His altar, abandoned His sanctuary
 - (9) The Law is no more, her prophets find no vision (false prophets, see v14)
 - Lessons for the church
 - Although the church is "favored" of God, the need may arise for God to destroy its favorite things to get back on track.
 - Israel sincerely believed they were representing God but went far afield.
 - Their focus was on comfort, beauty, and rituals.
 - God could do this again if the weeds begin to overcome the wheat.
 - (10) The people mourned rather than being angry with God
 - Why do people get angry with God?
 - What should be our response when the church is not all we think it should be?
 - (12) The innocents do not understand where the food has gone.
 - Picture what new Christians feel when the church is headed downhill.
 - New Christians turn to those who caused the catastrophe for food.
 - How shall I console you?
 - (13) Who can heal you?
 - (14) Your iniquity was concealed from you.
 - (14) The captives can be brought back.
 - Only a strong dose of reality (truth, the essence of God) will heal this illness.
 - (17) God did what He promised: see Deuteronomy 28:15 – 28:68
 - Call to repentance
 - (18 – 19) Pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord.
 - Mourn and appeal for relief. God heard Israel in this way several times, in Exodus and in Judges. They did not first make themselves right and approach God correctly. They merely laid out their troubles and let God fix it.

Lamentations

- In church history, we have tended to try fixing the church by fixing morality rather than mourning and appealing for relief.
- Jeremiah's lament: righteous in the midst of evil (chapter 3)
 - (1 – 18) Jeremiah has had a bad time throughout his career as a prophet
 - (2) I have walked in darkness and not light
 - (3) Surely He has turned his hand against me
 - (5) Surrounded with bitterness and woe
 - (7) He has hedged me in so I cannot get out
 - (8) He shuts out my prayer
 - (12) He has set me up as a target
 - (14) I have become the ridicule of all my people
 - (15) He has filled me with bitterness
 - (17) He has moved my soul far from peace
 - (19 – 29) Therefore I have hope!
 - Jeremiah knew that his misery was not his fault, but that he was caught in the situation. He had hope because he continued to trust God.
 - (22) Despite defeat and deportation, “we are not consumed.” Remember mercy.
 - (25) Wait and seek
 - (27) See James 1:2
 - Does the church tend to have hope in misery?
 - When does the church experience this kind of misery?
 - Historically, what has the church done in times of misery?
 - (30 – 36) Do the right thing; this will pass
 - (31) For the Lord will not cast off forever
 - (32) He will show compassion
 - (33) He does not afflict willingly
 - The church needs to remember that God's nature is to be merciful. God does not afflict people because it is part of His nature, but because He had to do it to reach His objective of a big family that will last.
 - (37 – 39) Perspective
 - (37) God's God and I'm not.
 - (38) Well-being also comes from God
 - (39) If you are reading this, you are still alive.
 - (40 – 66) Examine ourselves. Repent. Appeal to God.
 - (40 – 42) Know where you are in the process – reaching out to God but not yet pardoned.
 - (43 – 48) Repentance, Part 1
 - (44) My prayers can't even get through.
 - Review the situation
 - (49 – 54) Repentance, Part 2
 - Review remorse
 - Until the Lord of heaven sees
 - (55 – 58) Repentance, Part 3
 - You drew near on the day I called to you
 - You have redeemed my life

Lamentations

- (59 – 66) Repentance, Part 4
 - Ask God to avenge you on the bad folks.
 - Give them a veiled heart
- The depth to which Israel has sunk (chapter 4)
 - Contrasts
 - (1) The stones of the Temple now block city streets
 - (2) The value of an Israelite was gold, now clay
 - (3) The animals care for their offspring, the Israelites cannot
 - (5) Those above the cares of life now grieve
 - (6) Greater punishment than Sodom
 - (7) Beautiful princes now ugly
 - (8) The slain are better off than the hungry
 - Remarkable depths
 - (12) Even traditional enemies did not believe the loss
 - (13) The priests and prophets declare themselves unclean
 - (17) We watched in vain for help from an ally
 - (19) We were pursued to the end
 - (20) Resignation
 - (21) Edom will suffer the same fate
 - (22) But Israel will not suffer this again
 - Applications for the church
 - The promise of restoration was announced by both Isaiah and Jeremiah long before the destruction. Despite the devastation and captivity, the faithful can have hope.
 - Even when the church is doing badly, we have hope. Those who need to hear will hear.
- An appeal for restoration (Chapter 5)
 - Remember, O Lord, what has come upon us
 - (2) Foreigners have possession of the promised land
 - (3) We are like orphans and widows
 - (4) Our poverty is deep
 - (10) The fever of famine
 - (11) The people are mistreated
 - (15) Joy has departed
 - We know why this happened
 - (7) The iniquity of the fathers and ourselves
 - (16) We have sinned
 - The appeal
 - (19) Glorify God
 - (21) Turn us back to you
 - Applications for the church
 - The distress of the modern church may be deep, acknowledge it and appeal to God that He take care of it.
 - Don't curse those who lead the church astray; take responsibility and appeal to God.

Lamentations

- Don't sink deeper by trying to fix the church by human means; appeal to God to turn us back.