

An Introduction to Lamentations

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Date: 02 June 2019

[0 : 00] If you were here last Sunday, you're probably up to track in the fact that we finished 2 Peter last Sunday.

And so we're beginning a new book, and most of you don't know what book that is, and so this will come as a little surprise. But if you'll please open your Bibles to the book of Lamentations. Lamentations is Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel. So right there in the midst of some of the major prophets. But if you look at the book of Lamentations, again, if you find Jeremiah, it's immediately after Jeremiah.

We're going to just do an introduction to the book. I kind of set the mood for the book, help us to understand what the message is and how we're going to approach the book. And so as we do so, we're really going to look only at verse 1 of Lamentations, although we'll be surveying as the entire book.

But let's read together Lamentations 1-1 before we pray. How lonely sits the city that was full of people. How like a widow has she become.

[1 : 14] She who is great among the nations. She who was a princess among the provinces has become a slave. Let's pray together. Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

And we pray, asking for special help as we begin a study of a new book, that you would help us to understand it. That you would have us to be firmly rooted in the truth of your word.

And to rightly discern the meaning of the book. And Lord, we pray that as we go to this book in the Old Testament, that we would see clearly its connection with the New Testament and with Christ. So Lord, we pray that you would help us with this study we ask in Christ's name. Amen. So as I said tonight, we begin a new study in the book of Lamentations. If you're not familiar with Lamentations, then my guess is most of you are not.

It's probably not the book that, I mean, you've probably pulled the room of your favorite book of the Bible. You may not, there may be no in the room who would say Lamentations. And so my guess is that it's probably a book that's largely unfamiliar to you.

[2 : 12] Maybe if you're doing the Bible reading plan and reading through the Bible every year or every two years. You may remember going through it vaguely, but it's probably not a book that's very familiar to you. But Lamentations is a communal or a national lament.

So you're probably familiar with the idea of a lament. It's a weeping, a sadness, a time of sadness for someone.

But Lamentations in particular is meant for the whole community. It's for the nation as a whole. Well, we could extend that and say, maybe we could think of the United States as a country. If all of our country was weeping together at one time, this is the kind of song or the kind of book we might go to.

Or maybe we could think of the community of the church. The church was to weep together as a church. If we lost a loved one in the life of our church and we might weep together, this is the kind of book that might help us in that.

I thought for us maybe the equivalent in our nation might be the terror attacks of 9-11. A time when the whole nation was awakened to this fact that there's been this tragedy that's happened in our nation.

[3 : 18] It was unexpected. There were innocent people who were attacked and killed. And you may remember the response afterward. There really was a time of lament in our nation for what had happened. And this is the kind of book that might flow out of an experience like that.

Now, maybe we could again relate this in spiritual terms and say, what about our sin as a nation? Maybe one day, maybe even today, we might be led to such a lament as this as we weep over the sin of the American people as a nation.

How sad a state things have fallen into. And so as I said, I want us to look at an introduction to the book in this message. I was telling Dave and Paul earlier that this is probably the most important message in the series in terms of understanding the book of Lamentations.

And seeing Christ is going to help you as we see the approach in the future weeks as we look at the book. But an introduction to the book in this message, I want to look at four things.

First, the historical background. So if it's a communal lament, what is it they're lamenting? What is the background for this book? Why are they writing it? Secondly, the literary structure. What's the structure of the book?

[4 : 32] That's going to help us understand the book as we go throughout. Then a summary of the message of the entire book. Again, that's much different than what we would normally do in spository preaching. We're looking at smaller passages.

But I want us to step back and say, what's the message of the whole book? So that when we get into the individual passages, we'll understand it. And then finally, I would like for us to close with a Christocentric perspective in the book.

How do we see Christ in Lamentations? So again, the background, historical background, the literary structure, the message, and Christ. So first, let's look at the historical background.

If you will turn with me. You can even lose your place in Jeremiah. That's okay. If you'll turn with me to 2 Kings chapter 25. It's 2 Kings 25 that gives us the historical background of the writing of the book of Lamentations.

We're going to read a larger passage here, verses 1 through 21. And that will help us to understand what's going on. So let's read that together. And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came with all his army against Jerusalem and laid siege to it.

[5 : 57] And they built siege works all around it. So the city was besieged to the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. On the ninth day of the fourth month, the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land.

Then a breach was made in the city, and all the men of war fled by night, by the way of the gate between the two walls, by the king's garden. And the Chaldeans were around the city, and they went in the direction of the Arabah.

But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho, and all his army was scattered from him. Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they passed sentence on him.

They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in chains, and took him to Babylon. In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, that was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem.

And he burned the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every great house he burned down.

[7 : 11] And all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem. And the rest of the people who were left in the city, and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, together with the rest of the multitude, Nebuchadnezzar, the captain of the guard, carried into Etzal.

But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and plowmen. And the pillars of bronze that were in the house of the Lord, and the stands in the bronze sea that were in the house of the Lord, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and carried the bronze to Babylon. And they took away the pots, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the dishes, for instance, and all the vessels of bronze used in the temple service. The firepans also, and the bowls.

What was of gold the captain of the guard took away as gold. And what was of silver as silver. As for the two pillars, the one sea and the stands that Solomon had made for the house of the Lord, the bronze of all these vessels was beyond weight.

The height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits, and on it was the capital of bronze. The height of the capital was three cubits. A latticework and pomegranates, all the bronze, were all around the cap.

[8 : 29] And the second pillar had the same with the latticework. And the captain of the guard took Serea, the chief priest, and Zephaniah, the second priest, and the three keepers of the threshold.

And from the city he took an officer who had been in command of the men of war, and five men of the king's council who were found in the city, and the secretary of the commander of the army, who mustered the people of the land, and sixty men of the people of the land who were found in the city. And Ebers of Radon, the captain of the guard, took them and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. And the king of Babylon strut them down and put them to death at Riblah, in the land of Hamath.

So Judah was taken into Etzau out of its land. So that's the background for the book of Lamentations. In 587 B.C., Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon.

You gather from what we read, but the city walls were torn down. The palace and all the great houses in the city were burned. The temple even was plundered, and it was burned.

[9 : 33] All but the poorest of the inhabitants were carried off into Etzau. The poorest of the poor were left to take care of the land for the sake of the Babylonians. The book of Lamentations records the utter despair felt at that momentous time.

So it's speaking from the perspective of those who lived through this, who survived this, and what they experienced. It expresses the emotion of the realization that it was not ultimately Babylon, but God who was the power behind the destruction.

And so as we look at the Lamentation, it's not just lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem. It's lamenting the realization that God has done this to us. It's not ultimately Babylon, but God who has judged us.

Dillard and Longman in their survey say, Lamentations expresses the psychological and spiritual anguish over God's abandonment of His hostility toward them.

Now, in terms of Lamentations, we know that there were Lamentations that existed before this date, before 587 B.C. those Lamentations that we see recorded in God's Word were introduced to the community.

[10 : 52] They were used in public worship. We know that oftentimes there were multiple laments that were composed for a single event, or composed by a single author. Probably the greatest example of this we have is Jeremiah.

In 609 B.C., so that would have been before 587, by not many years, Jeremiah composed a number of laments for the death of Josiah.

So Josiah brought great reformation to the land. He had restored, in many ways, the land, and then when he died, especially when he saw what his children were like, there was this great repentance in the land.

There was this great lamentation. And so Jeremiah, we know, wrote a number of lamentations that they were given to God's people and used in public worship. So likewise, we can imagine this book is a similar kind of lamentation.

It's meant for God's people. It's meant for us to worship God even through it. And so while the book of Lamentations lists no author, it's an anonymous book, as it were, it's often attributed and thought to be written by the prophet Jeremiah.

[11 : 58] The same one that we know had just written Lamentations about Josiah's death and who was there during this event likely wrote it. And it's thought to be written during the Etzelic period, which was 70 years, but likely in the early period.

So shortly after, even as you read the book, you get the sense of just how, maybe I could say how fresh the wound is, how it still hurts so bad.

And so it's likely written shortly after the events of the book and probably by the person of Jeremiah. So that's the historical background that we're looking at of the book. Now, how about the structure of the book?

Don't you love it when the pastor says you can lose your place? And then I say, if you're looking at the book of Lamentations, if you still kept your place there, if you just scan the book, you can probably pick up some of the unique elements of the structure of the book of Lamentations. If there's, for Sunday school, I'd really challenge you some of this to identify it. But just for a second, skip through the book and see how many chapters does each, I'm sorry, how many verses does each chapter have?

[13 : 07] I mean, even as you look at that, you begin to get a sense of, oh, there's real structure to the book. One of the things that you will miss reading it in English is that every chapter, excuse me, four of the five chapters form an acrostic.

And the acrostic is based on the Hebrew alphabet, which is why all of the chapters have either 22 verses or some multiple of 22. So if you're looking at it, you may catch that there's 22 verses in each chapter, except for chapter three.

And we're going to talk about why that is. So chapter two, chapter one and chapter two, each begin, each have 22 verses and each verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

And across it, just like we would, A, B, C, D, going down the Hebrew alphabet. And then we get to verse, when we get to chapter three, it has 66 verses. And the reason for that is the poetic structure is different.

The line is, it's composed out of a single colon instead of a tricolon. So it ends up being, you have three verses that each begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

[14:16] And then the next three verses begin with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. So you have the same pattern and if you look even, you can compare that chapter three is almost the same, is that same size as chapter one and chapter two.

And so there's no great additional link to it even though it has more verses. It's just each, the lines of poetry are much smaller in this and the acrostic is repeated in each of those lines.

So three times. And so you have 66 verses but you have a chapter that's exactly the same or almost exactly the same length as the other ones. Then chapter four continues the same pattern as chapter one and two.

Twenty-two chapters. I said it again. Twenty-two verses. Each beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And then you get to chapter five. In chapter five, you'll notice two things.

One, maybe you'll notice three things. If you just scan it, twenty-two verses just like all the other chapters. But look at the length of it. It is far, far shorter than any of the other chapters in the book.

[15:20] And in addition, there's no acrostic. So, again, imagine the structure. You have four chapters. There's a highly structured, poetic element of acrostic, acrostic.

A more complicated acrostic in chapter three. Back to the normal acrostic. In chapter five, you have no acrostic whatsoever. And so, obviously, that begs the question, doesn't it? Why is there no acrostic in chapter five?

Well, I think what's being communicated in Lamentations is as we read the book, we see there's this great structure. There's this beauty to the book. And then as you get to chapter five, there's chaos.

You lose the structure, the beauty that's there in the book. Now, again, if this was Sunday school, I might ask you to respond. Why do you think that is? What is the writer communicating? Well, I think he's, Jeremiah's intended to give us a sense of the declining state of the city that ends in chaos. It's all the structure. There's all the beauty of Jerusalem. But when you get to the end, things have declined. The chapter's shorter. The cross is lost. The beauty of the poetry's gone. And now it's just free-flowing.

[16:30] And so, the book itself is meant to represent a lamentation. The destruction of the city of Jerusalem. Likewise, as we go through the book, each chapter represents a different voice or maybe we could say a different perspective.

So we read verse one of Lamentations one, but Lamentations one is sometimes seen as the outside view. It's looking on the city of Jerusalem from the outside and kind of discussing what's happened.

Lamentations two is the inside view. Those who are inside the city, who lived through the siege, what did they experience? Lamentations three, and we're going to talk about this, is really an important chapter, but it presents an upward view, a view of looking toward God.

Lamentations four is an overall view, taking in everything. And then Lamentations five is meant to point us to the future, a future view. So each chapter kind of presents a different perspective. And as we look at it as a whole, we get a sense of the message of what's being communicated.

And that's what I want to look at next is what is the message of the book? The book of Lamentations wrestles with the question of corporate or communal suffering. How do we suffer together as a people?

[17:42] And it gives a voice to mournful loss, agonizing pain, ongoing misery. And so in many ways we could just stop and say it can be a comfort to us when we're facing sorrow and tribulation, where we're in a point of lamentation to know that we're not alone, that God's people have suffered in the past and we can lament together.

So one purpose is acknowledgement that God's judgment against Jerusalem and to acknowledge that it was God who has judged Jerusalem and a move to intercede, to ask God to restore his people.

And so acknowledging that God has done it and asking God to intercede. If I were to try to point this to a message, a central message of Jeremiah, I might say the faithfulness of God.

And that's probably what I'll be focusing on in my messages is God's faithfulness. But what's interesting about it, the way God's faithfulness is presented in Lamentations is God has judged Jerusalem because God's faithful.

God had warned he was going to judge Jerusalem. The prophets were sent to warn them to repent or he would send these foreign countries against them. And so God's done what he's promised he would do.

[19:00] Our God is faithful. That's not the way we like to think of God's faithfulness, is it? Right? We don't like to think, oh, if I sin, God's faithful to judge me. But that's what the book's presenting.

God has been faithful. He's done what he said he would do. But how does that lead us to hope? We also know that if we repent, if we turn to God, he will receive us and he will restore us.

And so there's this looking back and saying, God's faithful to judge, but God's also faithful to restore. And so there's this future look as well. So the other major purpose I'd say behind the graphic descriptions of loss and suffering is to produce hope in God.

Can we trust God? Think of even the covenant promises. there would always be a king from David's line to reign on the throne. They just watched the exile and the execution of the king.

The destruction of the throne. Who's going to reign on the throne? Has God's faithfulness ceased? Are his promises no more? Can we still trust that God's going to keep his promises?

[20:09] Can we hope in God at all? I think this message is especially seen in chapter 3. And I would argue that chapter 3 is the focal point of the book.

I know how we write English literature and how we tend to read books. We tend to wait for the climax of the book at the very end of the book. We've talked some already about the poetic structure of Lamentations, how it's done.

And I think Lamentations does move us to a point of chaos at the end. And there's a message in that. But as we see the poetic structure, the five chapters that are arranged in a certain order, I would argue that chapter 3 is the focal point.

Chapter 3 is where the central message is. Maybe we can picture concentric circles working outward. Chapter 3 is the center and we move outward and outward. Chapter 4 and 2 and then chapter 1 and chapter 5.

And so chapter 3 is the focal point. That's hard for us sometimes to read because especially as we preach to the book, I'm going to say that the message that's the primary message carried in the book is in chapter 3.

[21:10] But then we keep on going to chapter 4 and chapter 5 and our tendency is to think well we're going to get to the point of the book at the end of the book. And I don't think that's how Jeremiah has written the book. And so he wants us to see hope especially in chapter 3.

So let me just read to you three verses from chapter 3. You're welcome to look there. This is Lamentations 3 22 through 24. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion says my soul therefore I will hope in Him.

I said chapter 3 was the central message of hope but I would argue even what we just read is really the most important verses even in that chapter. It's pointing us to the message of the book. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

Don't God's people need to hear that sometimes? When we're suffering? When we as a nation are where we are? When we see tragedy? Has God's steadfast love ceased?

[22:17] Does He have fickle love like I have? No. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. This morning included.

The morning when we're besieged, when we're starving to death. we're going to read and it's going to be hard. I said already it's graphic but chapter 2 even speaks of mothers who eat their infants who died of starvation because they have to survive.

They have to eat. And so they turn to cannibalism of their own family. And so that's the kind of thing we're talking about here. Is God still faithful? Does God still love us?

How can He let us go through this if He still loves us? His mercies are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. And again that faithfulness is displayed even in judgment but also in hope.

So the Lord is my portion and says my soul therefore I will hope in Him. And so we see a message in the midst of lamentations that God's still faithful. His love never ceases.

[23 : 23] So when we're going through tragedy and suffering God's faithful. He still loves us. His mercies are new every morning. Even in what I'm going through I have to depend on God's mercy today even as I did when things were going well.

He's my portion. He's my hope. When you're losing your family when you're losing your home when you're carried off in exile when you've got nothing left what do you have left?

The Lord. He's my portion. I still have the Lord. Therefore I will hope in Him. And so that's where lamentations is meant to direct to some point is to hope in God in the midst of tragedy and suffering and lament.

Now I want to spend some time in going through I see the message of lamentations presented in four parts and I'm going to touch on each of those parts Lord willing as I have time but let me just start by saying so four parts to the message of lamentations the first part is that calamity has come. Every single chapter even chapter 3 is filled with vivid expressions of Jerusalem's destruction.

God's people have been carried in exile many of the descriptions depict a city under siege especially chapter 2 how could God's people His temple His chosen city meet such an end such destruction just think for a minute this is Zion this is that city that's celebrated in the Psalms God's city God's place how could this happen and what we see is that the calamity is the fulfillment of what was foretold and what was warned of by the prophets so God is faithful to keep His promises maybe not in the way we would always want God to be faithful the way we think of God's faithfulness but in truth we're really thankful that God is faithful it's like the parent who says if you do that again you're going to have a spanking and then they do it again and guess what the parent does it well there's faithfulness there maybe that's not the maybe the discipline wasn't what we look for but the reality is we have someone we can trust we know that He's faithful we see that the glory of God has left the city it's really a fulfillment of Ezekiel chapters 8-11 the suffering is universal we could look at

[25 : 58] Lamentations chapter 5 11-15 it describes different people in the city from the richest to the poorest from all different aspects of life they all are suffering as a result of this calamity and so we get a message that calamity has come in the past we're encouraged that encourage that it will come to all God's people there's going to be times that we all will face calamity and so we need to hear the message of a book like this it may not be as severe as what Jerusalem faced what Judah faced in this destruction but the reality is it may be we don't know what God has in store for us and so God's word is meant to equip us to prepare us for whatever we may face one day O. Palmer Robertson has said the modern heresy of health and wealth as the assured possession of all God's people all the time must be firmly repudiated on the basis of the truth of God's word and the repeated experience of God's people and so lamentations is a slap in the face to maybe we could say the modern day heresy that's so rampant in America it's not health and wealth that's promised to God's people

God's people throughout all history have faced calamity and that's the reality of what's presented to us in the word of God 1 Peter 4 12-14 and verse 19 says beloved do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you but rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed if you're insulted for the name of Christ you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to the faithful creator while doing good so calamity has come and for us we can apply that that calamity will come for us as well secondly sin has caused it it is the sinfulness of God's people that has brought this calamity upon them every single chapter in Lamentations contains a confession of sin again O Palmer Robertson says sin removes any basis for complaint against the Lord never again never has the Lord mistreated a single one of his creatures much less his own children whatever chastening a person undergoes in this life it is far less than his sin deserves it's powerful and Lamentations is telling us that it's the sin of God's people that's brought this about Israel's sin is especially heinous it's greater than Sodom in Lamentations 4-6 we see that even mentioned it's greater than the sin of Sodom because there's greater illumination they had the prophets they knew God had a relationship with him Matthew 11 23-24 Jesus says for the mighty

works done in you had been done in Sodom it would have remained until this day but I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you and so with greater knowledge with greater illumination comes greater responsibility and so here are God's people who did not repent when they were warned to repent and now calamity has come upon them because of their sin they rebelled against God and his word so calamity has come sin has caused it thirdly God has ordered it again almost every chapter shows us this

I'm just going to read some verses from the book of Lamentations chapter 1 verse 5 the Lord has afflicted her chapter 1 verse 12 look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow which was brought upon me which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger in Lamentations 3 chapters 1 through 16 excuse me verses 1 through 16 we see a personalized expression of God being the source of the destruction God's personalized we see him going and destroying the city he's directly involved in what God's people suffered then in chapter 4 verse 11 the Lord gave full vent to his wrath he poured out his hot anger and he kindled a fire in Zion that consumed its foundations chapter 4 verse 16 the Lord himself has scattered them he will regard them no more no honor was shown to the priest no favor to the elders and so this is really an important message as hard as it is for us to comprehend at times they're removing the responsibility as it were from Babylon Babylon was the tool but God was the hand that moved the tool it's God who's brought the destruction upon us so ultimately it's God that we have to deal with it's God that we have to repent before he's right in what he's done in bringing that upon us okay so calamity has come sin's caused it God's ordered it and the fourth point is yet there's hope yet there's hope God has a purpose in the destruction and he does not tend the utter destruction of his people is that principle the remnant I feel like we're maybe doing things out of order you may remember some years ago we did Ezra and Nehemiah we see the restoration of the remnant back to Jerusalem now we're seeing the destruction that preceded that but God has a point he's going to restore his people and the people as they return are going to be purified people they're going to be people who have seen their own sin they repented before the Lord and they don't want to go back that direction again and so while the ending of Lamentations is not one of praise there's a message of hope throughout the book especially chapter 3

[31 : 44] I would even argue I think I do in a little bit but chapter 5 even in some way points us to hope there's assurance that God does not abandon those who turn to him for hope they appeal to God for help expecting that he will forgive and restore Lamentations 3 25-26 we read the Lord is good to those who wait for him to the soul who seeks him it is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord just imagine what that means as he says that just picture yourself there some of your family has died your neighbors your home has been destroyed the temple has been destroyed you're carried off into exile and you're told it's good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord Isaiah has told us when the salvation is going to come it's not for 70 more years but we're to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord but the point is we can trust God the prophets told us that the city would be destroyed if God has told us through the prophets that we will be restored we can trust it the book ends with a closing prayer in chapter 5 while there are questions to the extent of hope that's expressed in the prayer itself the prayer demonstrates an utter dependence upon God we end by praying to God trusting that God will hear and answer our prayer we're dependent upon God but as I've said already chapter 3 carries the message not necessarily the ending of the book and the message is one of hope so God's compassion for his people is greater than his anger with them

I think we have to remember that as well we can count the blessing of the fact that we know that if you're a Christian there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus our condemnation has been poured out on Christ but I think we need to be reminded as well that God's anger at our sin as a Christian it's not greater than his compassion that he has for us he's poured out his anger and his wrath upon Christ and he's shown us compassion because of his covenant faithfulness he will show them compassion if they repent again this is chapter 3 31 and 32 for the Lord will not cast off forever but though he calls grief he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love we have this picture of God that he's abundant in steadfast love he's overflowing in steadfast love for his people and that's meant to encourage us so again in summary calamity has come sin has caused it God has ordered it yet there's hope and so

I want to close just by looking helping us to see Christ in the book of Lamentations and have that in perspective as we go into this book so as we think about that message calamity has come upon

Jesus our sin has caused it God has ordered it and that's the only source of our hope so again I think this directly can apply to Jesus calamity has come upon Jesus our sin has caused it God has ordered it but that is the only source of hope for us I think I think I know Jesus is the only person who was completely sinless who was completely undeserving of this type of calamity and we read in 2nd Corinthians 5:21 yet for our sake he made him who knew no sin to be sin that we might become the righteousness of God in Acts 4:27-28 we read for truly in the city there were gathered together against your holy servant

Jesus whom you anointed both Herod and Pontius Pilate along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place so we see that it's our sin we see that God's ordered it the suffering of Israel at the time of the exile anticipates the suffering of Christ at the cross for Israel the sin was their own whereas with Jesus the sin is not his it's our sin for which he faces calamity in my study of the book I thought maybe one helpful way of looking at this we almost always think of when we look for Christ we're looking to the New Testament I want to for a second just Isaiah 53 I think lays out the same model for us Isaiah 53 calamity has come upon Jesus he was despised and rejected by men a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief that's verse 3 our sin caused it verses 4 and 5 of Isaiah 53 surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows but he was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities

God has ordered it chapter 4 the first sentence we esteemed him stricken smitten by God and afflicted yet he's the only source of hope in the last verse in chapter verse 5 of Isaiah 53 says upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with his wounds we are healed so even in Isaiah 53 we see the same message calamities come upon Jesus God's caused it excuse me our sin has caused it God has ordered it but that's the only source of our hope that he would face such calamity another message just in closing that I want us to see in the book is that suffering does not always come in proportion to our sin sometimes the righteous suffer and the sinner prospers even as I discussed health and wealth before there's this idea sometimes of it's called retribution theology but basically you can look at a person's life and if their life looks blessed then oh they must be righteous and if they're suffering then oh they must be a sinner it's what we see in the book of Job and I think we see here in this passage that suffering or this book suffering is not always a result or in proportion to our sin sometimes the righteous suffer sometimes sinners prosper here in this book it's God's people who are suffering they're the ones who are under siege they're the ones who are being murdered and carried in exile while Babylon is prospering you may remember even Habakkuk as he in the future looks to what's going to happen he questions almost as it were God really?

[38:08] you're going to use Babylon? they're more sinful than we are why aren't you punishing their sin? and God's answer is there'll be a time to punish their sin but now's your time they're my chosen instrument so God's purposes are often beyond our searching out we're not always going to understand how about we're rarely going to understand why God does the things he does and so in the midst of our suffering especially it's not usually the best time for us to begin evaluating why God do this?

the point isn't always to know the purpose behind why God did it we're meant to hope in God we're meant to trust him in the midst of the suffering that we face and though as I've said already the suffering may not always be in proportion to sin yet we know that all sin will ultimately be punished either in Christ or the sinner God is just we may not live to see that justice carried out in our lifetime but God is just and all things will be made right and so the hope expressed in this book finds partial fulfillment in the restoration of the land following the exile although the temple is rebuilt it does not reflect its former glory and the people left expecting more we saw that in Ezra and Nehemiah how disappointed the people were so the promise of hope that God will restore his people what I'm getting at is was it fulfilled during Ezra and Nehemiah's day my answer would be no that that wasn't the fulfillment of the hope they were looking for the hope they were looking for was ultimately fulfilled in Christ that he would restore and give us eternal hope now just as a warning some of the suffering and lamentations is hard to read but we must remember that the gospel depicts an eternity for those who are without the righteousness of Christ in much more horrific details than what's expressed in this book even if it's hard to read we have to understand that hell is far worse and the gospel also speaks of an eternal city that is imperishable undefiled and unfading so the contrast is that we're looking to an eternal city a city whose architect and builder is God it has foundations

whose designer and builder is God

Hebrews 11 10 so because of Christ there's coming an end to suffering and I want to just close by pointing us to Christ in that way relation 21 4 tells us he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away so my encouragement for you as we look at the book of lamentations is we're all going to face calamity we will all face suffering but we're taught in the book to hope in God in the midst of suffering and ultimately we can rest in the fact that Christ has come the hope that we long for has come and the promise for all those who trust in Christ is that there's coming a day when we will be in his eternal city in his presence and he will wipe every tear from our eyes let's pray together dear Heavenly Father we all have known some experience of suffering we've known calamity Lord we may yet know calamity even worse than we've already known Lord we pray that you would fortify us that you would prepare us for that and that our hope would be in your steadfast love and your mercies that are new every day Lord may that be what we cling to in the midst of suffering in the midst of tragedy and heartache and Lord we pray that you would comfort our hearts and that we would set our sights not upon our city our home even our family as much as we may love those things but that you Lord would be our portion forever that we would delight in your steadfast love that our hope would be in you and that we would know that nothing nothing that we could face in this life can separate us from your love that's in Christ may that be our hope in the midst of suffering and Lord we pray that you would fortify our souls to face suffering and tragedy and calamity with the truth of your word we pray this in Christ's name amen now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace and believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope amen amen