

THE FRIENDS OF ISRAEL TODAY

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Chris Katulka, Lamenting Leads to Light, Part 1
Lamentations

Today we are going to begin a series on the book of Lamentations. You're probably thinking... "Well, that sounds depressing, who likes to lament?" I know I don't, I'm typically a pretty optimistic person, maybe too optimistic at times... so talking about lamenting isn't fun at all, BUT, it is a necessary part of the Christian life.

No one likes to mourn, no one likes to grieve, it's sadness... because it usually means they've lost something or someone important. Lamenting is an inevitable part of one's life, at some point we all mourn. I'm reminded of what Chuck Swindoll said in his book *Starting Over*, "The hardest thing about life is that it's so daily."

Lamenting is such a part of life that the Scriptures have an entire book dedicated to it called Lamentations, where the Prophet Jeremiah mourns over the loss of something near and dear to his heart, the city of Jerusalem.

There is a beautiful painting by Rembrandt called, *Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem*. It was painted in 1630, and in this painting Rembrandt paints Jerusalem off to the side and it's burning brightly, Rembrandt pulls the brightness from the

burning city of Jerusalem to cast a sharp light on the hunched over prophet, whose elbow rests on Bible, and his countenance is numb and empty. Rembrandt captures the book of Lamentations in one glance.

Jeremiah is the author of Lamentations, begins the book with a word... a word that helps give shape to the theme of his lament, the word is this... “How?”. The Hebrew word Jeremiah used to lead his lament was typically used during Israelite funerals, lamenting over the death of a person. Poetically, Jeremiah connects this word used often in funeral to the death of Jerusalem.

“How” could it be that the capital of Israel and Judah, the place of the kings of Israel, has been reduced to rubble.

Jerusalem was destroyed in the year 586 BC, when Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian king set his focus to raze the city and destroy the sacred Temple built by Solomon.

How could it be? Flooded the mind of Jeremiah.

Now here’s what I find interesting. In antiquity if a people group lost a battle, just like Judah did, what was often put on the chopping block was the reputation of who's ever god lost the war. If Israel’s God wasn’t strong enough to defeat the Babylonian gods then

clearly Israel's God is small, insignificant, or maybe even non-existent.

Ezk 36.

Counter-cultural to the religious practices in the antiquity, Jeremiah answers the question of "how". It wasn't that God failed, it's that we failed God. Instead of believing God died when Jerusalem fell - Jeremiah places the blame on the sin of Israel upholding the holy reputation of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Listen to what Jeremiah writes in Lamentations 1:18, "The LORD is righteous, For I rebelled against His commandment." Jeremiah is saying, the Lord is in the right to judge us because we rebelled against Him and His Word... we sinned. Jerusalem fell because of Judah's sin against God.

God actually warned the Israelites of His intentions to judge them if they ever fell away 900 years before the fall of Jerusalem. In Deuteronomy 28 God told Moses, "The LORD will bring you and the king whom you set over you to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods—wood and stone. And you shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations where the LORD will drive you."

Jerusalem's fall and the banished Jewish people wasn't a surprise to God, it was prophesied 900 years prior to the event.

How could this happen?

After sending warnings and messengers and prophets, God finally used a distant nation to judge His people for their sin.

Sin has the incredible power to remove us from the joy that can only come from the author of joy, the Lord Himself. And in the same way Rembrandt painted Jeremiah in a hunched over state, sin forces us into a hunched over state of lamenting. Jeremiah writes in Lamentations 5:15, "The joy of our heart has ceased; Our dance has turned into mourning."

Lamenting over our sin isn't a worthless act, it actually has a lot of spiritual value. Lamenting becomes that bridge that leads us to the light of God's truth. Grieving over our wrongdoing puts into perspective that we not only hurt ourselves, or someone around us, but that even more importantly we sinned against God. When we lament we are stepping out in faith to ask God to act, to forgive our wrongdoing and to give us the grace to move forward. To remove that dead sin within us, and to give us the grace to live in newness of life by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Lamenting is the beginning of that act.

I want to end each message focusing on the central passage of Lamentations. Lamentations is a poem, and its poetic structure, the way the poem is laid out, focuses the attention of the reader right to the middle of the poem, which reads like this:

Through the LORD'S mercies we are not consumed,

Because His compassions fail not.

23 They are new every morning;

Great is Your faithfulness.

24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul,

"Therefore I hope in Him!"

Think about the significance of this verse, the people of Jerusalem and Judah were just robbed of everything they knew, their homes destroyed, family and friends murdered, and the remaining were carried off to a country they didn't know in judgment. And yet Jeremiah knowing the character of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob cried out in the midst of rubble and ruin... "Great is Your Faithfulness"

I think it's important for us to focus on this one thing, lamenting begins with knowing that the Lord is in the right. Lamenting begins

with us recognizing that something valuable about God, and that's even though we enjoy feeling as though we are in the right, it's God who's in the right, He's the righteous one, and He has every right to judge us... He has every right to orchestrate things according to His plan... God is in the right. And when we recognize that God is in the right, it forces us into a state of dependence, and a state of lamenting. And folks lamenting is a very powerful emotion given by God in ones spiritual life, because lamenting leads to light, lamenting leads to the light of God's truth for our life today.