

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

LAMENTATIONS 3-5

Today, there's drive-through window at the fast food restaurant - a drive-through window at the pharmacy - there's a drive-through window at the laundromat...

But now there's a drive-through window at the funeral home. The Adams Funeral Home in Compton, CA has installed a drive-through window. Mourners no longer have to get out of their cars and enter the building - they can pay their respects by just driving-up.

Melancholy music plays over the outside speaker.

I've heard these drive-through windows at mortuaries have become so popular people are *just dying to try it!*

Well, in a sense this is what we have in the book of Lamentations... The nation Judah is in the casket. Jeremiah is the funeral director... And we're driving-by... all the while we're watching Judah lie in state, and listening to a mournful dirge - Jeremiah's lament.

The Babylonians had *invaded the land, ravaged the city of Jerusalem, burned the Temple, shackled the people, and were now hauling them off to Babylon.*

And Jeremiah was sitting in his grotto - a cave in a hill north of Jerusalem, just above the road leading from Jerusalem to Babel... and there Jeremiah wept bitter tears as he watched his beloved people pass-by in chains as they were being led away into exile.

Remember chapters 1, 2, and 4 are acrostics.

Each chapter consists of 22 verses - each verse begins with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet.

Chapter 3 is also an acrostic, but a triple acrostic. Every three verses begin with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Tonight, we'll begin in Chapter 3.

Verse 1, **"I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath."** Chapter 3 is the most intimate of Jeremiah's poems. In fact, at times it's hard tell if he's speaking personally, or on behalf of his suffering flock.

Understand, Jeremiah is not indifferent and aloof. He's not some hardened moralist quick to cast judgment. He's not a critic detached from those he's criticized. Jeremiah has shared the plight of his people.

The prophet had known for many years that the nation's judgment was written in stone. The Jews were headed toward an inevitable destruction. He had encouraged the people to surrender. *To resist the Babylonians was to fight the hand of Almighty God.*

Yet Jeremiah didn't thunder these warnings in a condescending way. He was one of the people until the bitter end. Jeremiah was the captain willing to go down with his ship. The tears that rolled down his cheeks weren't crocodile tears! They bubbled up from his heart. The nation's sufferings were his sufferings.

He writes, **"He (that is, God) has led me and made me walk in darkness and not in light. Surely He has turned His hand against me time and time again throughout the day."** It

seemed as if God picked a team and refused to choose Jeremiah. That's how he felt...

It was as if God had led him down a dark alley, then just left him there hanging... abandoned, rejected.

Of course, *how we feel* isn't always *how things are*...

God had not forsaken Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 1 we're told that God chose Jeremiah before he was born. And he had remained faithful to him for all his life long.

But here, in Jeremiah's heart it's *not God speaking*, it's *not even the prophet speaking*... His pain is speaking and when pain speaks it says crazy things!

In his commentary on Job, "[Pains Hidden Purpose](#)," author Don Baker writes this about pain, "[Pain speaks a strange language - it plays funny tricks on us. It makes us think things, and say things, and even believe things that are not true. When pain begins to bore its way through human flesh and into the human spirit, and then just sit there and hurts and hurts, the mind becomes clouded and the brain begins to think strange thoughts like... 'God is dead, or He's gone fishing, or He just doesn't care.'](#)" Pain was having this kind of effect on Jeremiah. It was attacking his faith.

It reminds me of the little country church where the members gathered for what was called "*a testimony meeting*." It was a time for everyone to share what God was doing in their lives. One the church members that night was Uncle Ephraim. His body had been bent and crippled with arthritis. The ole boy could barely move.

He was the only person not to share a testimony. So the pastor decided to call on him, “**Brother Ephraim, suppose you tell us what the Lord has done for you...**”

The old geezer stood up on his wobbly knees, and said, “**Pastor, He’s might near ruint me.**” And this is the problem with pain. Rather than realize that this sinful, fallen world is man’s fault. Pain causes us to blame our troubles on God, which only exacerbates the problem.

Judah’s suffering was a direct result of their own sin.

Yet Jeremiah’s pain continues to speak, verse 4, “**He has aged my flesh and my skin, and broken my bones.**” Jeremiah’s ministry had been difficult. For forty years he’d tried to shepherd a rebellious people.

His life had been filled with conflict and combat... *jail time, dungeons, beatings, he was tortured in the stocks...* And all he endured had worn him down...

His skin was weathered and scarred. His broken bones had never been set, which caused them to heal crookedly. His body was disjointed. I’m sure he had back problems, and walked with a limp. Jeremiah probably looked twenty years older than his actual age.

He accuses God in verse 5, “**He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and woe. He has set me in dark places like the dead of long ago. He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out; He has made my chain heavy.**” He felt as if God was his enemy.

Recall in Chapter 20 Jeremiah had tried to resign, but he couldn’t... “**Then I said, ‘I will not make mention of Him, nor**

‘speak anymore in His name.’ But His Word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not.”

God did hem Jeremiah in... He had a passion for God’s Word and God’s people he could never shake.

Jeremiah got tired **IN** serving the Lord, but He never got tired **OF** serving the Lord. He felt *hedged in* by his external circumstances. But in reality he was *wedged in* by a love for God’s Word and a passion to serve.

Again Jeremiah’s pain talks in verse 8, “**Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayer.**” What a very human verse... *Have you ever felt this way?* You were praying, but God isn’t listening. You wondered if there was anyone else on the other end of the line...

“**He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked. He has been to me a bear lying in wait, like a lion in ambush. He has turned aside my ways and torn me in pieces; He has made me desolate. He has bent His bow and set me up as a target for the arrow.**” *Have you ever felt that life was target practice and that you were the target!?*

“**He has caused the arrows of His quiver to pierce my loins. I have become the ridicule of all my people - their taunting song all the day. He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drink wormwood.**” People who view Christian ministry as a rewarding career need to beware. It wasn’t very affirming for Jeremiah.

Ministry for the prophet was a bitter experience. He became the whipping boy for those who defied God.

For forty years the Jews demonstrated their rebellion against God by turning on His prophet Jeremiah.

And this is the price that a servant of God sometimes has to pay. Don't be surprised when it happens to you... 2 Timothy 3:12 tells us, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

Verse 16, "He has also broken my teeth with gravel, and covered me with ashes." Imagine eating dinner with a mouthful of gravel. Jeremiah suffered greatly.

"You have moved my soul far from peace; I have forgotten prosperity." His life has been so full of pain, for so long, he doesn't recall what prosperity is like.

"And I said, "My strength and my hope have perished from the Lord." Remember my affliction and roaming, the wormwood (which means "bitterness") and the gall. "My soul still remembers and sinks within me."

Even though God had NOT forsaken Jeremiah, it's obvious that the prophet felt as if He had. Jeremiah was pretty depressed over the state of his people.

But something flips in Jeremiah's thinking in verse 21, "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope..."

Suddenly, God penetrates his darkness with a ray of hope. *And God has a way of doing this in our lives.*

When we're down for the count and darkness has all but engulfed us, a light from God can pierce the dark.

And here's the shining thought that breaks through, verse 22, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not."

It dawns on Jeremiah it could've been worse! God would've been justified in wiping the Jews off the face of the Earth and damning them all to the pit of hell. *If I spent some time enumerating their sins, you'd agree.*

But that's not the fate God assigned to His people.

God had mercy! His rebellious people were not consumed. God would oversee the nation's survival.

Often we mourn over the difficulties we face, rather than rejoice over the trouble we've escaped. We like to lick our wounds, but think of all God has spared us!

Even though God's judgment is needed at times, it's always tempered with mercy. *Thank Him for His mercy!*

And Jeremiah says of God's mercy, "They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."

It amazes me, God is such an extravagant lover!

He can't even judge us without also reminding us how much He *cares about us and is deeply devoted to us*. God will take us to the woodshed for a spanking, but there comes another day. The sun will rise again...

As the psalmist cries out, Psalm 30:5, "For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."

I love verse 22, *“His compassions fail not.”* Oh, we fail. Often, we fall short. But God’s compassions never fail. They *sustain us, and hold us, and keep us going...*

It’s good to remember what Teddy Roosevelt once said, *“Success is never final, and failure is never fatal; it’s courage that counts.”* One defeat doesn’t a season make... Hank Aaron hit 755 home runs, but struck out 1,383 times. The guy we call *“The Home Run King”* struck out twice as many times as he hit a homer.

Hey, we might fail, but God’s love never fails.

Despite our sin and failure - despite being deserving of judgment - great is God’s faithfulness. God keeps yearning for us, and reaching out to us. At times we might quit on God, but He refuses to quit on us. Until you’re dying breath God will never give up on you!

And notice, God’s mercies *“are new every morning.”*

God’s compassions are always fresh and innovative, *and allocated daily.* He relates to us in a stream of creativity. He doesn’t just dump a reservoir of blessing into your life. Instead he gives you access to the spigot and invites you to come daily to receive His grace.

Receiving God’s blessing is like collecting manna. He gave out daily portions. It kept you coming back.

And there is no one else like God. As much as you might enjoy being with someone, there comes a point when they become boring. No one is interesting enough to hold your attention forever - *except the Lord.*

Joseph Newton writes, "Only God is permanently interesting." God's love is like a vintage wine. It keeps getting better with time. God blows us away day after day with how much He loves us and cares for us.

Ephesians 2:7 tells us one of God's chief concerns in heaven will be to show us the riches of His grace and kindness. Apparently, it'll take all eternity for God to reveal all the dimensions of His compassion toward us.

The word translated "*compassions*" in verse 22 is the Hebrew "*racham*" which means "*to fondle or caress, to love by touching.*" Implied is that God wants us to know His love, not just *intellectually*, but *experientially*.

His Spirit can touch us in a myriad of new, wonderful ways. *Let God caress you. Let Him warm your heart. Let His Spirit wrap His arms around you.* Let's stop floundering in our failure, and focus on God's love.

Verse 24, "*The Lord is my portion,*" says my soul, "*Therefore I hope in Him!*" The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him."

God was judging His people at the moment, but soon His painful work would be done, and God would return to bring healing. That's why they needed to wait!

There are two dangers in the Christian life. **First**, is sulking in sorry when God is ready to do a new work.

But the **second** mistake is the opposite. At other times we can rush repentance. "*Ok, I sinned yesterday, now I'm ready to be restored right now!*" But there are lessons tied to our suffering that take time to unfold.

In Jeremiah 25:11 God predicted that Judah would serve the Babylonians **seventy years**. God had a new start planned for His people, but they needed to wait.

He wasn't working according to their schedule. God had His own timetable. Before He began *His renovation*, God first needed to finish *His demolition*.

God does a new work in us, but first old strongholds have to come down. And repentance is the wrecking ball God uses, but it takes time. We have to be patient.

This is why Jeremiah says, verse 26, **"It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord."** This is a good thing... this is beautiful... *not a kicking and screaming*, but *a quiet waiting* on God...

Jeremiah isn't talking about reluctantly, begrudgingly waiting on God - tarrying only because we have no other choice. *But a calm, reliant, restful, quiet waiting.*

He also says, **"It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth."** It's been said, **"The best time to solve a minor problem is before he grows up."** And it's true that it's best to learn discipline and self-control early in life.

Learn to wait on God when you're young, and you'll avoid faults when you're older and more is at stake.

Verse 28, **"Let him sit alone and keep silent, because God has laid it on him..."** Jeremiah is saying don't rescue a man who's being chastened by the Lord.

Leave him alone. Let him learn his lessons. Don't interfere with what God is doing in a person's life.

At times we rush to a friend's rescue prematurely, and we rob them of the lessons they could've learned.

Jeremiah says in verse 29, "let him put his mouth in the dust - there may yet be hope. Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him, and be full of reproach." When God spans us, we should submit.

God's discipline always has a reason attached. It's best to roll with it and learn what he's trying to teach.

"For the Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly (that is, *for no reason*), nor grieve the children of men." God isn't a sadist. He takes no pleasure in grieving His kids. He won't provoke without a purpose.

Jeremiah adds, "To crush under one's feet all the prisoners of the earth, to turn aside the justice due a man before the face of the Most High, or subvert a man in his cause - the Lord does not approve." He spans us not to *sink a ship*, but to *redirect its course*.

He spans us to spare us!

Verse 37, "Who is he who speaks and it comes to pass, when the Lord has not commanded it?" God always has the final say. No one trumps the Lord.

"Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that woe and well-being proceed? Why should a living man complain, a man for

the punishment of his sins?" God is never wrong. His chastening is always just and right.

And given what we deserve, we can't complain.

"Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord; let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven. We have transgressed and rebelled; You have not pardoned." Of course, the Jews failed to give God a reason to pardon. They failed to repent.

Verse 43, "You have covered Yourself with anger and pursued us; You have slain and not pitied. You have covered Yourself with a cloud, that prayer should not pass through. You have made us an offscouring and refuse in the midst of the peoples. All our enemies have opened their mouths against us. Fear and a snare have come upon us, desolation and destruction."

And Jeremiah responds, "My eyes overflow with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people. My eyes flow and do not cease, without interruption, till the Lord from heaven looks down and sees. My eyes bring suffering to my soul because of all the daughters of my city." The weeping prophet weeps.

It's said, "Laugh, and the world laughs with you. Weep and you weep alone. For this sad old earth must borrow its mirth, but it has trouble enough of its own."

It's more popular to laugh than to weep. Even when sin abounds and trouble is on the horizon, people like to bury their head in the sand and party hearty.

Jeremiah though was a realist. He saw the people's sins and weeped accordingly. With the dismal plight of our society we could be a little more like Jeremiah.

Verse 52, "My enemies without cause hunted me down like a bird. They silenced my life in the pit and threw stones at me." He's recalling his persecutions.

"The waters flowed over my head; I said, "I am cut off!" I called on Your name, O Lord, from the lowest pit.

You have heard my voice: "Do not hide Your ear from my sighing, from my cry for help." You drew near on the day I called on You, and said, "Do not fear!"

Jeremiah holds himself up as an example to the nation. At his lowest point he cried out to God for help.

And God heard his cry. He drew near and calmed his fears. God didn't immediately take Jeremiah out of the pit, but He came by his side, and helped him endure.

And if God did this for the prophet, He'll do it for the people. If Judah cries out to God He'll come to her aid.

It'll be seventy years before He lifts Judah out of her pit and returns her to the land, but in her captivity he'll come alongside her, remove her fears, and help her endure. **God always gives His people peace in the pit.**

"O Lord, You have pleaded the case for my soul; You have redeemed my life. O Lord, You have seen how I am wronged; judge my case. You have seen all their vengeance, all their schemes against me. You have heard their reproach, O Lord, all their schemes against me, the lips of my enemies and their

whispering against me all the day. Look at their sitting down and their rising up; I am their taunting song.” Jeremiah brings up his enemies and how they mistreated him.

“Repay them, O Lord, according to the work of their hands. Give them a veiled heart; Your curse be upon them! In Your anger, pursue and destroy them from under the heavens of the Lord.”

Chapter 4, “How the gold has become dim! How changed the fine gold!” 1 Chronicles 22:14 tells us King Solomon used 100,000 talents of gold in the building of the OT Temple. Conservatively speaking - with a talent weighing 75 pounds - that amounts to 3750 tons of gold. At today’s prices - say \$1000 an ounce - that’s \$120 billion worth of gold - an amazing treasure.

Movies are made about Solomon’s lost gold!

Of course, when the Babylonians burned the Temple they plundered the gold. What little remained looked tarnished, and ashen... *“The gold was now dim!”*

“The stones of the sanctuary are scattered at the head of every street.” The stones of the Temple were scattered. You could find a few on every street corner.

When the Babylonians burned the Temple much of the gold melted and filled the crevasses between the stones. That’s why her soldiers moved the stones off one another and scattered them, to retrieve the gold.

And the plight of Jerusalem’s gold was a metaphor of what happened to the people. *“The precious sons of Zion, valuable*

as fine gold, how they are regarded as clay pots, the work of the hands of the potter!" The Jews had been God's "golden boy" - but no longer.

The golden vessels were diminished into clay jars.

Sin strips a human being of his dignity, and robs him of his self-worth. Sin cheapens and degrades us. This is what it did to the Jews and their city of Jerusalem.

Now from verse 3 through the end of Chapter 4, the Prophet recalls the final days of the siege. The Babylonian army had cut off Jerusalem for 18 months.

Verses 3-10 describes the famine in the city.

Verses 11-16 records the plight of the false prophets.

Verses 17-22 recounts the Jews of Jerusalem who looked for help that never came. The other nations in whom they trusted to deliver them, let them down.

J Vernon McGee titles this section of Lamentations, "When Tomorrows Become Yesterdays." It's a flash back on the experiences of the Hebrews under-siege.

Verse 3, "Even the jackals present their breasts to nurse their young; but the daughter of my people is cruel, like ostriches in the wilderness." Ostriches lay eggs in what's called a "dump nest." It's a communal nest holding up to 60 eggs. All but one of the ostriches go about their business, while the one sits on the eggs.

Most ostriches lay their eggs, and then forget about them. Thus, their reputation as *heartless parents*.

And Judah was also heartless and cruel toward her young. Famine was so severe the kids went hungry.

“The tongue of the infant clings to the roof of its mouth for thirst; the young children ask for bread, but no one breaks it for them. Those who ate delicacies are desolate in the streets; those who were brought up in scarlet embrace ash heaps.” The once privileged people, the upper-crust, are now homeless and hungry.

“The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, with no hand to help her!” Judah’s judgment was more severe than Sodom’s. She was a recipient of greater blessing and revelation - with privilege comes responsibility.

In Luke 12:48 Jesus teaches the same, “For everyone to much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.” This was true of the Jews.

Verse 7, “Her Nazirites (the word actually refers to princes or nobles) were brighter than snow and whiter than milk; they were more ruddy in body than rubies, like sapphire in their appearance.” The dignitaries were privileged people. Normally, their diet heightened their appearance. It kept their skin clearer and healthier.

“Now their appearance is blacker than soot; they go unrecognized in the streets; their skin clings to their bones, it has become as dry as wood.” The nobles of Judah were an ashen color. They were nothing but skin and bones. They had shriveled up and withered away.

The famine took it’s toll on all within the walls.

“Those slain by the sword are better off than those who die of hunger; for these pine away, stricken for lack of the fruits of the field.” It would’ve been better to die in battle, *by the sword*, than to starve to death. A quick death was better than a long drawn-out agony.

“The hands of the compassionate women have cooked their own children; they became food for them in the destruction of the daughter of my people.”

The siege made normally nurturing moms cook their own children. How terrible! Desperate situations make for desperate people. This starvation was unbearable.

And this certainly gives new meaning to the phrase, “Kids Meal.” They became “Jake and Potatoes” people.

Hey, to lighten the mood a bit, how about a few cannibal jokes... Did you hear of the two cannibals eating a clown? One said to the other, “*Does this taste funny to you?*”... What did the cannibal get when he was late getting home for dinner? *The cold shoulder.*

What do cannibals do at weddings? *They toast the bride...* What does a cannibal call a sitcom star? *A TV dinner...* Hear about the cannibal who had a wife and *eight* kids... which brings us back to our text...

Verse 11, “The Lord has fulfilled His fury, He has poured out His fierce anger. He kindled a fire in Zion, and it has devoured its foundations. The kings of the earth, and all inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem - because of the

sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed in her midst the blood of the just.” The unthinkable happened to Jerusalem because of her evil leaders.

“They wandered blind in the streets; they have defiled themselves with blood, so that no one would touch their garments. They cried out to them, “Go away, unclean! Go away, go away, do not touch us!”

When they fled and wandered, those among the nations said, “They shall no longer dwell here.”

The face of the Lord scattered them; He no longer regards them. The people do not respect the priests nor show favor to the elders.” Because of their terrible sin the religious and civic leaders in Jerusalem had lost *the respect of the people and the blessing of God.*

It sounds like the state of politics in today’s America.

Verse 17, “Still our eyes failed us, watching vainly for our help; in our watching we watched for a nation that could not save us.” Rather trusting God the Jews had put their trust in Egypt, but the Egyptians never came.

“They tracked our steps so that we could not walk in our streets. Our end was near; our days were over, for our end had come. Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the heavens. They pursued us on the mountains and lay in wait for us in the wilderness.”

Remember in Jeremiah 52, once the walls were breeched, King Zedekiah tried to escape the city. He was captured in the Judean wilderness near Jericho.

Verse 20, “The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was caught in their pits, of whom we said, “Under his shadow we shall live among the nations.”

Here’s some vivid imagery. Judah was the anointed of the Lord, but rather than trust the Lord, her king ran from the Babylonians - and to no avail. *“The breath of our nostrils... was caught in their pits (or traps).”*

Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the land of Uz (Job was from the land of Uz, a Edomite city)! The cup shall also pass over to you and you shall become drunk and make yourself naked.”

Edom rejoiced over the demise of her arch-rival, Judah. How ironic, she didn't know she would be next!

The Babylonians later invaded the land of Edom.

Verse 22, “The punishment of your iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; He will no longer send you into captivity. He will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom; He will uncover your sins!”

Chapter 5 like chapters 1, 2, and 4 also contains 22 verses. But this is the only chapter that was not written in an acrostic... *and we have no idea why.* But it is a fitting end to Lamentations. It’s a prayer of repentance!

“Remember, O Lord, what has come upon us; look, and behold our reproach! Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens, and our houses to foreigners.

We have become orphans and waifs, our mothers are like widows.” A *“waif”* is a stray - either a stray person or stray

animal. Jeremiah is in essence saying, the entire nation of Judah had become homeless.

“We pay for the water we drink, and our wood comes at a price.” For a citizen of the land the water and wood are free - they are for the taking. Only a slave, or a foreigner would be required to pay for water and wood.

Judah had become a stranger in a strange land.

“They pursue at our heels; we labor and have no rest. We have given our hand to the Egyptians and the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread.” Again, these were nations they thought would come to their rescue.

They were wrong! They should’ve trusted the Lord.

“Our fathers sinned and are no more, but we bear their iniquities.” Many Jews were born in Babylon.

Recall the Jewish captivity lasted seven decades.

In essence, the Babylonian Jews were suffering in exile, outside their land, because of their parent’s sin.

Verse 8, “Servants rule over us; there is none to deliver us from their hand.” The Jews in Babylon were at the lowest rung of the social ladder - the servant of servants... “We get our bread at the risk of our lives, because of the sword in the wilderness. Our skin is hot as an oven, because of the fever of famine.” Try to exist without the proper nutrients and it weakens your immune system. You become more prone to disease.

Infection is a side-effect of famine conditions...

And here's another atrocity the Jews suffered at the hands of the Babylonians, "They ravished the women in Zion, the maidens in the cities of Judah." The marauding troops swept into the city and raped the women - the wives and daughters of Jerusalem.

"Princes were hung up by their hands, and elders were not respected. Young men ground at the millstones; boys staggered under loads of wood." They were humiliated, and tortured, and brutally murdered.

"The elders have ceased gathering at the gate, and young men from their music." The leaders of a city always met in the gate. It was the city hall of ancient times. But not so in a city under siege. It was vacated.

"*And the young men (had ceased playing) their music.*" The Jews are a soulful people. They love their music. They enjoy gathering to play, sing, and dance.

But the pop music of Jerusalem in Jeremiah's day had been replaced by his funeral dirge - a lamentation.

"The joy of our heart has ceased; our dance has 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 grow dim; because of Mount Zion which is desolate, with foxes walking about on it." Here near the close of the book there's a breakthrough. The first step in overcoming a problem is to admit that problem.

Here the Jews get honest. They wail, "*Woe to us, for we have sinned!*" It's only when we confess our sin for what it is,

and cease with our excuses - it's when we put down a period, then God can start a new sentence.

Confession and repentance is 90% of the battle.

Verse 19, “You, O Lord, remain forever; Your throne from generation to generation. Why do You forget us forever, and forsake us for so long a time? Turn us back to You, O Lord, and we will be restored; renew our days as of old, unless You have utterly rejected us, and are very angry with us!” Of course, that was not the case. God would restore Judah just as He said!

In Jeremiah 31 God made a New Covenant with His people. He said as sure as the sun rises in the AM, and the moon appears in the PM, God will sustain Israel.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of God's faithfulness to Judah - He did bring them back.

Just as there were three deportations of Jews to Babylon, three waves of Jews returned - in 535 BC under Governor Zerubbabel - in 458 BC led by Ezra the priest - and 444 BC with Nehemiah the wall builder.

The next two books of the Bible we'll study deal with the Jews living in Babylon. During their seventy years of captivity two Jews have a profound impact for God inside Babylon. A *civic leader named Daniel* and a *religious leader named Ezekiel*. Next Wednesday we'll begin the bizarre exploits and revelations of Ezekiel.