LAMENTATIONS

By Ashby L. Camp

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I. Introduction

A. The book of Lamentations is not our favorite book to study, but we need to study all of Scripture.

1. Paul says in 2 Tim. 3:16-17, "All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] so that the man of God may be proficient, having been equipped for every good work."

2. He says in 1 Cor. 10:11 that certain events involving the Israelites in the wilderness "happened to them as an example, but were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come."

3. He says in Rom. 15:4, "For as much as was written beforehand was written for our instruction."

B. As you may know, Lamentations is made up of five poems, each of which is an expression of grief over the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C. That event was a nightmare for the people of Israel, and it is chilling to read about the extreme suffering that occurred.

C. But one cannot properly appreciate the book of Lamentations without an understanding of the history that led to the judgment that is mourned in that book. So I want to take you on a chronological journey of God's relationship with Israel up to that great day of punishment. I have chosen many Scriptures to read because it is important for you to see how clearly and repeatedly God expressed himself and to see how patient he was in the face of almost constant rebellion. This is going to take two or three classes, but don't tune me out; I want you to feel the impact of this. It will have the additional benefit of strengthening your grasp of Israel's history.

1. In the Book of Exodus God began multiplying in Egypt the descendants of Abraham's grandson Jacob, who is called Israel. A new Pharaoh arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph, the son of Jacob who had been honored by a prior Pharaoh. This new Pharaoh reacted to the Israelite population increase by enslaving them. They were worked ruthlessly, and their lives were bitter. The people groaned under their slavery and cried out for rescue. Exodus 2:24 states, "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob."

2. God called Moses to return to Egypt to be used by him to deliver the Israelites from bondage. God not only forced the Pharaoh who was ruling at the time to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt, he made it so that the Egyptians gave them the silver,

gold, and clothing they asked for on the way out the door! And when Pharaoh's army came after them, he miraculously destroyed it.

3. The Israelites, however, quickly began grumbling and complaining about their situation – Ex. 15:24, 16:2, 16:7-12, 17:3.

4. Exodus 19:1-7 states (ESV): On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. [2] They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, [3] while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: [4] You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. [5]Now therefore, **if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant**, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; [6] and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that **you shall speak to the people of Israel**." [7] So Moses came and called the elders of the people and **set before them all these words** that the LORD had commanded him.

5. Exodus 32 records where Aaron, at the request of the people and in disobedience to God, made a golden calf, and the people worshiped it and sacrificed to it. This greatly displeased God, but rather than completely destroy them he sent a plague among them.

6. In Lev. 18:24-28 God tells Moses to tell the people (ESV): [24] Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, [25] and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and **the land vomited out its inhabitants**. [26] But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you [27] (for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean), [28] **lest the land vomit you out** when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you.

7. In Lev. 20:22 God tells Moses to tell the people (ESV): You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to live **may not vomit you out**.

8. In Lev. 25:18-19 God tells Moses to tell the people (ESV): [18] Therefore you shall do my statutes and keep my rules and perform them, **and then you will dwell in the land securely**. [19] The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and **dwell in it securely**.

9. In Lev. 26:3-6 Moses is to tell the people (ESV): [3] **If** you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, [4] **then** I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. [5] Your threshing shall last to the time of the grape harvest, and the grape harvest

shall last to the time for sowing. And you shall eat your bread to the full and **dwell in your land securely**. [6] I will give **peace in the land**, and you shall lie down, and **none shall make you afraid**. And I will remove harmful beasts from the land, and **the sword shall not go through your land**.

10. In Lev. 26:14-46 God tells Moses to tell the Israelites (ESV): [14] "But **if** you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, [15] **if** you spurn my statutes, and **if** your soul **abhors my rules**, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, [16] **then I will do this to you**: * * * [17] I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down before your enemies. * * * [25] And **I will bring a sword upon you, that shall execute vengeance for the covenant**. And if you gather within your cities, I will send pestilence among you, and you shall be **delivered into the hand of the enemy**. * * * [29] You shall **eat the flesh of your sons**, and you shall **eat the flesh of your daughters**. * * * [31] And I will lay your cities waste and will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your pleasing aromas. [32] And I myself will devastate the land, so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled at it. [33] And **I will scatter you among the nations**, and I will unsheathe the sword after you, and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste. [34] "Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while **you are in your enemies' land**; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its Sabbaths. * * * [40] "But **if** they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me, [41] so that I walked contrary to them and **brought them into the land of their enemies--if** then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity, [42] **then** I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. [43] But the land shall be abandoned by them and enjoy its Sabbaths while it lies desolate without them, and they shall make amends for their iniquity, because they **spurned my rules and their soul abhorred my statutes**. [44] Yet for all that, when they are **in the land of their enemies**, **I will not spurn them, neither will I abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them**, for I am the LORD their God. [45] But I will for their sake remember the covenant with their forefathers, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD." [46] These are the statutes and rules and laws that the LORD made between himself and the people of Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai.

11. The Israelites continued complaining about their situation in Num. 11:1-4, and in Numbers 14 they rebelled against the idea of taking the promise land after most of the spies that went into the land reported that the inhabitants were too strong to be defeated. As a result, God sentenced them to wandering in the wilderness for forty years (14:33). More grumbling and complaining is reported in Num. 16:11, 41, Num. 17:5, 10, and Num. 20:10. In Numbers 25 the people again engage in idolatry. Numbers 25:1-3 states: While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. [2] These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. [3] So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.

12. It is no wonder that Moses said to the people in Deut. 9:6-7, on the eve of their entering the promise land (ESV), "Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a **stubborn people**. [7] Remember and do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness. **From the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD**."

13. Moses said to the people in Deut. 4:25-40 (ESV): [25] When you father children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, **if** you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, so as to provoke him to anger, [26] I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that **you will soon utterly perish from the land** that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed. [27]And the LORD will **scatter you among the peoples**, and you will be left few in number **among the nations where the LORD will drive you**. [28] And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. [29] But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. [30] When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice. [31] For the LORD your God is a merciful God. **He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant** with your fathers that he swore to them. * * * [40] Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, **that it may go well with you and with your children** after you, and that **you may prolong your days in the land** that the LORD your God is giving you for all time.

14. In Deut. 6:13-19 Moses tells the people (ESV): [13] It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. [14] You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you-- [15] for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God--lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth. [16] "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah [where they had grumbled against the Lord in Exodus 17]. [17] You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies and his statutes, which he has commanded you. [18]And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, **that it may go well with you**, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers [19] by thrusting out all your enemies from before you, as the LORD has promised.

15. In Deut. 8:11-20 Moses tells them (ESV): [11] "Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, [12] lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, [13] and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, [14] then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, * * * [17] Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of

my hand have gotten me this wealth.' [18] You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. [19] And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that **you shall surely perish**. [20] Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, **so shall you perish**, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.

16. In Deut. 11:16-29 Moses tells them (ESV): [16] Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them; [17] then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, * * * and **you will perish quickly off the good land** that the LORD is giving you. [18] "You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. [19] You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. [20] You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, [21] that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth. * * * [26] "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: [27] **the blessing, if you obey** the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, [28] and **the curse, if you do not obey** the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known. [29] And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal.

17. Deuteronomy 27:11-13 states (ESV): [11] That day Moses charged the people, saying, [12] "When you have crossed over the Jordan, these shall **stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people**: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. [13] And **these shall stand on Mount Ebal for the curse**: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali."

18. In Deut. 28:1-67 Moses tells the Israelites in part (ESV): "And **if** you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. * * * [7] "The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you. They shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. * * * [15] "**But if** you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. * * * [25] "The LORD will cause you to be **defeated before your enemies**. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them. And you **shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth**. * * * [33] **A nation that you have not known shall eat up the fruit of your ground and of all your labors, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually, [34] so that you are driven mad by the sights that your eyes see**. * * * [36] "The LORD will bring you and your king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known. And there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone. [37] And you

shall become a horror, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples where the LORD will lead you away. * * * [41] You shall father sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours, for they shall go into **captivity**. * * * [45] "All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you till you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that he commanded you. [46] They shall be a sign and a wonder against you and your offspring forever. [47]Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, [48] therefore **you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you**, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you. [49]The LORD **will bring a nation against you from far away**, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, [50] a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young. [51] It shall eat the offspring of your cattle and the fruit of your ground, until you are destroyed; it also shall not leave you grain, wine, or oil, the increase of your herds or the young of your flock, until they have caused you to perish. [52] "They shall besiege you in all your towns, until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout all your land. And they shall besiege you in all your towns throughout all your land, which the LORD your God has given you. [53] And **you shall eat the fruit of your womb**, the flesh of your sons and daughters, whom the LORD your God has given you, **in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you**. [54] The man who is the most tender and refined among you will begrudge food to his brother, to the wife he embraces, and to the last of the children whom he has left, [55] so that he will not give to any of them any of **the flesh of his children whom he is eating**, because he has nothing else left, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in all your towns. [56]The most tender and refined woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground because she is so delicate and tender, will begrudge to the husband she embraces, to her son and to her daughter, [57] **her afterbirth that comes out from between her feet and her children whom she bears, because lacking everything she will eat them secretly**, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in your towns. * * * [63] And as the LORD took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the LORD will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it. [64] "And the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. [65] And among these nations you shall find no respite, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot, but the LORD will give you there a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul. [66] Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life. [67] In the morning you shall say, 'If only it were evening!' and at evening you shall say, 'If only it were morning!' because of the dread that your heart shall feel, and the sights that your eyes shall see.

19. In Deut. 29:22-28 Moses tells the Israelites (ESV): [22] And the next generation, your children who rise up after you, and the foreigner who comes from a far land, will say, when they see the afflictions of that land and the sicknesses with which the

LORD has made it sick-- [23] the whole land burned out with brimstone and salt, nothing sown and nothing growing, where no plant can sprout, an overthrow like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger and wrath -- [24] all the nations will say, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this land? What caused the heat of this great anger?' [25] Then people will say, **'It is because they abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt, [26] and went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they had not known and whom he had not allotted to them**. [27] Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against this land, bringing upon it all the curses written in this book, [28] and the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger and fury and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as they are this day.'

20. In Deut. 30:1-5 Moses tells the Israelites (ESV): "And **when all these things come upon you**, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind **among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you**, [2]and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, [3] then the LORD your God **will restore your fortunes** and have compassion on you, and he **will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you**. [4] If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. [5] And the LORD your God **will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed**, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.

21. In Deut. 30:15-20 Moses tells the Israelites (ESV): [15] "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. [16] **If** you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. [17] **But if** your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, [18] I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You **shall not live long in the land** that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. [19] I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, [20] loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, **that you may dwell in the land** that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."

22. Soon after Israel crossed over into the promise land, the people broke faith in that Achan the son of Carmi secretly took and kept certain valuables that God had commanded Israel to destroy (Joshua 7).

23. Afterward, God's warning was again preached to them. Josh. 8:33-35 states (ESV): [33] And all Israel, sojourner as well as native born, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark before the Levitical priests

who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, half of them in front of **Mount Gerizim** and half of them in front of **Mount Ebal**, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded at the first, to bless the people of Israel. [34] And afterward he read all the words of the law, **the blessing and the curse**, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. [35] There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them.

24. Near the end of his life, after God had given Israel many victories in the promise land, Joshua charged the people in Josh. 23:15-16: [15] But just as all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the LORD will bring upon you all the evil things, until he has **destroyed you from off this good land** that the LORD your God has given you, [16] **if you transgress the covenant** of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and **go and serve other gods and bow down to them**. Then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and you **shall perish quickly from off the good land** that he has given to you."

25. At Shechem Joshua had the people renew their commitment to God. Joshua 24:20-27 states: [20] **If** you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you **harm and consume you**, after having done you good." [21] And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the LORD." [22] Then Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." [23] He said, "Then **put away the foreign gods that are among you**, and incline your heart to the LORD, the God of Israel." [24] And the people said to Joshua, "The LORD our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey." [25] So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem. [26] And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. [27] And Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God."

26. The period when Judges ruled in Israel commenced not long after the death of Joshua (Judg. 1:1), which one can reasonably estimate occurred around 1366 B.C., and ended with the anointing of Saul as king (1 Samuel 10) around 1051 B.C.[1] Repeatedly throughout those three centuries the Israelites did evil (all ESV).

a. Judges 2:11 – And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals.

b. Judges 3:7 – And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth.

[1] See Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 146-151 and Walter C. Kaiser, *A History of Israel From the Bronze Age Through the Jewish Wars* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 178-179.

c. Judges 3:12 – And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the LORD.

d. Judges 4:1 – And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD after Ehud died.

e. Judges 6:1 – The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years.

f. Judges 10:6 – The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook the LORD and did not serve him.

g. Judges 13:1 – And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.

h. Judges 19:23 – And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing.

i. Judges 20:3 – (Now the people of Benjamin heard that the people of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) And the people of Israel said, "Tell us, how did this evil happen?"

j. Judges 20:12-13 – And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What evil is this that has taken place among you? Now therefore give up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and purge evil from Israel." But the Benjaminites would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the people of Israel.

27. In 1 Sam. 8:4-8 the people asked Samuel to appoint for them a king like the other nations had. The Lord said to Samuel (vv. 7-8, ESV), "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they **have rejected me** from being king over them. [8] According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, **forsaking me and serving other gods**, so they are also doing to you."

28. In 1 Sam. 12:14-15, Samuel told the people: [14] **If** you will fear the LORD and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, **it will be well**. [15] **But if** you will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against

the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD **will be against you** and your king.

29. The kings of the nation included many rebellious individuals who helped to lead the people astray.

a. The first king, King Saul, had his kingship and his family dynasty taken from him because of disobedience (1 Sam. 13:8-15; 1 Samuel 15). He even slaughtered the priests at Nob in his pursuit of David (1 Sam. 22:6-23).

b. The second king, King David, was a great king, but even he had a serious lapse in taking Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, and then arranging to have Uriah killed in battle (2 Samuel 11-12).

c. David's son Solomon failed to follow the Lord as David had done. 1 Kings 11:1-11 states (ESV): Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, [2] from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. [3] He had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives **turned away his heart**. [4] For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart **after other gods**, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. [5] For Solomon **went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites**. [6] So Solomon **did what was evil** in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done. [7] Then Solomon built a **high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites**, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. [8] And **so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods**. [9] And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice [10] and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the LORD commanded. [11] Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant."

d. After Solomon's death in 931 B.C., Israel divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Jerusalem was in Judah, and that is where the descendants of David continued to rule. The judgment that is the subject of Lamentations relates to the southern kingdom of Judah, so all I will say about the northern kingdom of Israel is that all of its kings were bad and that it was judged by God through the conquest by the Assyrians that was completed in 722/721 B.C.

e. 1 Kings 14:21-24 says of Solomon's son Rehoboam: [21] Now Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city that the

LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. His mother's name was Naamah the Ammonite. [22] And **Judah did what was evil** in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins that they committed, **more than all that their fathers had done**. [23] For they also built for themselves high places and pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree, [24] and there were also male cult prostitutes in the land. They did according to **all the abominations of the nations** that the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. (See also, 2 Chron. 12:1.)

f. 1 Kings 15:2-3 says of Rehoboam's son Abijam (or Abijah): Now in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam the son of Nebat, Abijam began to reign over Judah. [2] He reigned for three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Maacah the daughter of Abishalom. [3] And he **walked in all the sins that his father did** before him, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father.

g. After two good kings, Asa and Jehoshaphat, Jehoram ruled in Judah for eight years in the middle of the ninth century B.C. 2 Kings 8:18 says of Jehoram: [18] And he **walked in the way of the kings of Israel**, as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife. And he **did what was evil** in the sight of the LORD. (See also, 2 Chron. 21:6.)

h. Jehoram's son Ahaziah reigned as king of Judah for only one year. 2 Kings 8:26-27 says of him: [26] Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah; she was a granddaughter of Omri king of Israel. [27] He also **walked in the way of the house of Ahab** and **did what was evil** in the sight of the LORD, as the house of Ahab had done, for he was son-in-law to the house of Ahab. (See also, 2 Chron. 22:3-4.)

i. After Ahaziah was killed, his mother Athaliah usurped the throne of Judah, killing all her potential rivals in the royal family. She missed only the baby Joash (Jehoash) who was hidden from her (2 Kings 11) and who replaced her on the throne at the age of seven. 2 Chronicles 24:7 says of Athaliah: [7] For the sons of Athaliah, **that wicked woman**, had broken into the house of God, and had also used all the dedicated things of the house of the LORD for the Baals.

j. Joash (Jehoash) was installed on the throne around 835 B.C. at the age of seven, and Athaliah was executed.

(1) He did what was right all the days in which his protector and mentor, Jehoiada the priest, instructed him (2 Ki. 12:2), but even then the high places were not taken away and the **people continued making sacrifices and offerings** there (12:3). Joash faltered after Jehoiada's death. 2 Chronicles 24:17-19 states: [17] Now after the death of Jehoiada the princes of Judah came and paid homage to the king. Then the king listened to them. [18] And they abandoned the house of the LORD, the God of their fathers, and **served the Asherim and the idols**. And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this guilt of theirs. [19] Yet he sent prophets among them to bring them back to the LORD. These testified against them, but they would not pay attention.

(2) Joash (Jehoash) even sided with the rebels in having Jehoiada's son Zechariah, who prophesied against them, put to death (2 Chron. 24:22).

k. Joash's son Amaziah reigned from around 796-767 B.C. 2 Kings 14:3 says he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, yet not like David his father. He did in all things as Joash his father had done. 2 Chronicles 25:14-16 states: [14]After Amaziah came from striking down the Edomites, he **brought the gods of the men of Seir and set them up as his gods and worshiped them**, making offerings to them. [15] Therefore the LORD was angry with Amaziah and sent to him a prophet, who said to him, "Why have you sought the gods of a people who did not deliver their own people from your hand?" [16] But as he was speaking, the king said to him, "Have we made you a royal counselor? Stop! Why should you be struck down?" So the prophet stopped, but said, "I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this and have not listened to my counsel."

l. Amaziah's son Azariah, also known as Uzziah, reigned from around 792-740 B.C., but for the first 24 years he was a coregent with his father (who was captive for nine years in Samaria – 2 Ki. 14:13) and for the last 12 years was a coregent with his son Jotham (see Walter Kaiser, *A History of Israel* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998], 350-354).

(1) 2 Kings 15:2-5 states: [2] He was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. [3] And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done. [4] Nevertheless, the high places were not taken away. **The people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places**. [5] And the LORD touched the king, so that he was a leper to the day of his death, and he lived in a separate house. And Jotham the king's son was over the household, governing the people of the land.

(2) This story of his leprosy is given in 2 Chron. 26:16-19, which states: [16] But when he was strong, he **grew proud**, to his destruction. For he was **unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense**. [17] But Azariah the priest went in after him, with eighty priests of the LORD who were men of valor, [18] and they withstood King Uzziah and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the LORD God." [19] Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censer in his hand to burn incense, and when he became angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests in the house of the LORD, by the altar of incense.

m. Amos, prophesying in the northern kingdom around 760 B.C., warned of the judgment coming on Judah for its disobedience. He declared in 2:4-5: [4]This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not turn back

my wrath. Because they have rejected the law of the LORD and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed, [5] I will send fire upon Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem."

n. After Azariah's (Uzziah) death, his son Jotham continued to reign until around 731 B.C. 2 Kings 15:34-35 states: [34] And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his father Uzziah had done. [35] Nevertheless, the high places were not removed. **The people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places**.

o. Jotham was followed on the throne by his son Ahaz. 2 Kings 16:2-4 states: [2] Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he **did not do what was right** in the eyes of the LORD his God, as his father David had done, [3] but he **walked in the way of the kings of Israel**. He **even burned his son as an offering**, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. [4] And he **sacrificed and made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree**. (See also, 2 Chron. 28:1-4.)

p. Ahaz was followed by the good king Hezekiah. He reigned from around 715-686 B.C., and it was during that time (701 B.C.) that God miraculously spared Jerusalem from capture by the Assyrians.

(1) 2 Kings 19:35-37 and Isa. 37:36-38 report that an angel struck down 185,000 Assyrians who were ready to assault the city.

(2) This great deliverance was turned by Israel into something negative in that many of them came to think that God would never allow Jerusalem to be conquered because it was his special dwelling place. In the words of Jeremiah 7:11, they came to see the temple as a "den of robbers" in the sense of a hideout, a place where the wicked could retreat to safety. They thought God's special identification with Jerusalem would provide some kind of magical or mechanical protection against any enemies regardless of how they lived.

q. Hezekiah was followed by the wicked king Manasseh, who reigned in Judah from around 696-642 B.C., the first eleven years of which was as coregent with Hezekiah. Perhaps his coregency was prompted by Hezekiah's earlier bout with a near fatal disease (2 Ki. 20:1; 2 Chron. 32:24; Isa. 38:1).

(1) 2 Kings 21:1-9 says of Manasseh: Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah. [2] And he **did what was evil** in the sight of the LORD, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. [3] For he **rebuilt the high places** that Hezekiah his father had destroyed, and he **erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah**, as Ahab king of Israel had done, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. [4] And he **built altars in the house**

of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem will I put my name." [5] And he **built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD**. [6]And he **burned his son as an offering and used fortune-telling and omens and dealt with mediums and with necromancers**. He **did much evil** in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger. [7] And the **carved image of Asherah that he had made he set in the house** of which the LORD said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name forever. [8] And I will not cause the feet of Israel to wander anymore out of the land that I gave to their fathers, if only they will be careful to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the Law that my servant Moses commanded them." [9] But they did not listen, and Manasseh **led them astray to do more evil than the nations had done whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel**.

(2) 2 Kings 21:16 adds: [16] Moreover, Manasseh **shed very much innocent blood**, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides the sin that he made Judah to sin so that they did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.

(3) 2 Kings 21:10-15 states: [10] And the LORD said by his servants the prophets, [11] "Because Manasseh king of Judah has committed these abominations and has done things **more evil than all that the Amorites** did, who were before him, and has **made Judah also to sin with his idols**, [12] therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such disaster that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. [13] And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria, and the plumb line of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. [14] And I will forsake the remnant of my heritage and give them into the hand of their enemies, and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies, [15] because they have done what is evil in my sight and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day."

(4) The Chronicler relates that Manasseh's stubborn refusal to heed the word of the prophets led to his being taken to the city of Babylon by the Assyrians. It seems that late in his reign he violated his obligations to the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal and was taken away in humiliation. This led to his repentance and faith, and the Lord graciously brought about his return to Jerusalem and restoration to the throne (2 Chron. 33:10-20). From Ashurbanipal's perspective, he may have concluded that Manasseh had been duly chastened and would no longer be a problem. See Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 435.

r. Manasseh's son Amon reigned in Judah for two years.

(1) 2 Kings 21:19-24 says of him: [19] Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Meshullemeth the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah. [20] And he **did what was evil** in the sight of the LORD, as Manasseh his father had done. [21] He **walked in all the way in which his father walked and served the idols that his father served and worshiped**

them. [22] He abandoned the LORD, the God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the LORD. [23] And the servants of Amon conspired against him and put the king to death in his house. [24] But the people of the land struck down all those who had conspired against King Amon, and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his place.

(2) 2 Chronicles 33:22-23 states: [22] And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, as Manasseh his father had done. Amon sacrificed to all the images that Manasseh his father had made, and served them. [23] And he did not humble himself before the LORD, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself, but this Amon incurred guilt more and more.

s. Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign (around 640 B.C.), and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem (2 Ki. 22:1). He was a good king (2 Ki. 22:2), and it was during his eighteenth year that the high priest, Hilkiah, reported finding in the temple the Book of the Law, which likely refers specifically to the book of Deuteronomy. Apparently, it had been removed from its place next to the ark of the covenant (Deut. 31:26) during the long reign of the evil king Manasseh and forgotten.

(1) When Shaphan the secretary read the book in Josiah's presence, Josiah was deeply convicted by what he heard (tore his clothes), and in 2 Ki. 22:13 he commanded Hilkiah and others: [13] "Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."

(2) The Lord's response came through the prophetess Huldah. 2 Kings 22:15-20 states: [15] And she said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'Tell the man who sent you to me, [16] Thus says the LORD, Behold, I will bring disaster upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read. [17] Because **they have forsaken me and have made offerings to other gods**, that they might provoke me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched. [18] But to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus shall you say to him, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, [19]because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the LORD, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the LORD. [20] Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place.'" And they brought back word to the king.

(3) Josiah embarked on a program of religious reform, but it was insufficient to stave off God's judgment.

t. Zephaniah prophesied during Josiah's reign and warned of God's coming judgment against Judah and Jerusalem. For example, he declared in Zeph. 1:4-6:

[4] "I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. I will cut off from this place every remnant of Baal, the names of the pagan and the idolatrous priests-- [5] those who bow down on the roofs to worship the starry host, those who bow down and swear by the LORD and who also swear by Molech, [6] those who turn back from following the LORD and neither seek the LORD nor inquire of him.

u. God first spoke to the prophet Jeremiah in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (Jer. 1:2), around 627 B.C., five years before the Book of the Law was found. Most of Jeremiah's written prophecies concern events after Josiah's death in 609 B.C. and before the fall of Jerusalem in 587/586.

(1) He warned the people of Judah repeatedly of the terrible judgment God was going to bring on them and suggested that even now there was hope if they would repent, but they would not. For example, Jer. 13:8-17 states: [8] Then the word of the LORD came to me: [9] "Thus says the LORD: Even so will I spoil the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. [10] This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own heart and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be like this loincloth, which is good for nothing. [11] For as the loincloth clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, declares the LORD, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory, but they **would not** listen. [12] "You shall speak to them this word: 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, "Every jar shall be filled with wine."' And they will say to you, 'Do we not indeed know that every jar will be filled with wine?' [13]Then you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD: Behold, I will fill with drunkenness all the inhabitants of this land: the kings who sit on David's throne, the priests, the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. [14] And I will dash them one against another, fathers and sons together, declares the LORD. **I will not pity or spare or have compassion, that I should not destroy them**.'" [15] Hear and give ear; be not proud, for the LORD has spoken. [16] Give glory to the LORD your God before he brings darkness, before your feet stumble on the twilight mountains, and while you look for light he turns it into gloom and makes it deep darkness. [17] But if you will not listen, my soul will weep in secret for your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears, because the LORD's flock has been taken captive.

(2) Jeremiah also makes clear that God will not eliminate Israel from the face of the earth but, in keeping with what God had said in Lev. 26:40-46, Deut. 4:29-31, and Deut 30:1-5, will bring them back to the land after a period of exile (e.g., Jer. 23:7-8, 29:10-14, 30:3, 32:28-38). **It is trust in God's faithfulness to this promise that gives the only note of hope that is sounded in Lamentations**.

v. After Josiah was killed at Megiddo in 609 B.C., his son Shallum (known as Jehoahaz) reigned for three months. 2 Kings 23:31-32 states: [31]Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. [32] And he **did what was evil** in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.

w. Pharaoh Neco replaced Jehoahaz with another of Josiah's sons, one named Eliakim, and gave him the throne name Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim reigned from 609-598 B.C. 2 Kings 23:36-37 states: [36]Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zebidah the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. [37] And he **did what was evil** in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.

x. The Babylonians took control of Palestine by 605 B.C., and Jehoiakim eventually rebelled against the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (2 Ki. 24:1), which led to a massive invasion in 598/597 B.C. Jehoiakim died probably in 598/597 and was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin (2 Ki. 24:6; also spelled Jehoiakin). Jehoiachin reigned for only three months. He surrendered to the Babylonians without a fight in order to avoid complete annihilation of Jerusalem.

(1) 2 Kings 24:8-12 states: [8] Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. [9] And he **did what was evil** in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done. [10] At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up to Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. [11] And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to the city while his servants were besieging it, [12]and Jehoiachin the king of Judah gave himself up to the king of Babylon, himself and his mother and his servants and his officials and his palace officials.

(2) The prophet Ezekiel was among those who were taken captive to Babylonia with Jehoiachin in 598/597 B.C. Jehoiachin fared relatively well in Babylon. He was freed after 37 years of captivity when Evil-merodach succeeded Nebuchadnezzar as king of Babylonia (2 Ki. 25:27-30) and enjoyed the favor of the king.

(3) Despite the waves of Judean exile to Babylonia, the prophets never lost hope in the continuation of the Davidic line, and Jehoiachin remained the critical link (Jer. 23:5-6; Ezek. 34:23-24, 37:24; Hag. 2:23; Zech. 4:6-9, 6:9-15). This is the Jeconiah listed in the genealogy of Christ in Mat. 1:11-12. (There are a number of possible ways to square his being in the genealogy of Christ with the curse given in Jer. 22:28-30.)[2]

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[2] Jeremiah 22:28-30 says of Coniah (= Jehoiachin) (ESV): "Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah." The question is how this can be squared with Mat. 1:11-12 which traces the genealogy of Jesus, who has been given David's throne (Lk. 1:32), through Jeconiah (a nickname for Jehoiachin). Here are some possibilities.

a. There is evidence that Jehoiachin repented and that any generational curse subsequently was removed. After the strong words directed toward Jehoiachin in Jer. 22:24-30, the prophet reports in Jer. 52:31-34 (see also 2 Ki. 25:27-30) the special favor that was shown to Jehoiachin after decades in prison. This striking reversal of circumstances suggests a change of Jehoiachin's heart. Further evidence is provided in Hag. 2:20-23 in which God says he will make Zerubbabel, Jehoiachin's grandson, like his *signet ring*. This reverses the language of the curse in which he told Jehoiachin that even if he were a *signet ring* he would be cast off. Based on these texts, Rabbinic literature is filled with references to Jehoiachin's repentance and his subsequent restoration. See, e.g., Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus Vol. 4* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 100-102.

y. From captivity Ezekiel prophesied repeatedly of the severe judgment that was about to befall Jerusalem.

z. After taking Jehoiachin captive in 598 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar installed Josiah's son (Johoiachin's uncle) Mattaniah as a puppet king in Jerusalem and gave him the throne name Zedekiah. After a number of years, Zedekiah foolishly initiated a rebellion against the Babylonians, which resulted in a furious retaliation. This culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 587/86, following a lengthy siege of the city (2 Kings 24:17 - 25:26). **This is the event mourned in the book of Lamentations**.

(1) 2 Kings 24:18-19 states: [18] Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. [19] And he **did what was evil** in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done.

(2) 2 Chronicles 36:12-16 says: [12] He **did what was evil** in the sight of the LORD his God. He **did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet**, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD. [13] He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God. He **stiffened his neck and hardened his heart** against turning to the LORD, the God of Israel. [14] All the officers of the priests and the people likewise were **exceedingly unfaithful**, following all the **abominations of the nations**. And they **polluted the house of the LORD** that he had made holy in Jerusalem. [15] The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. [16] But they **kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets**, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy.

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b. The curse may have applied only to Jehoiachin and his immediate descendants. Here's how Michael Brown argues the point (p. 98):

> A command is given (v. 30) in the pl. (*kitbu*, write!) to record that he will be *'ariri*, childless (see Gen. 15:2, and note esp. Lev. 20:20-21, where being *'ariri* is a curse for an unauthorized union), yet v. 28 spoke of his offspring while 1 Ch 3:16-17 states that he had seven sons. The explanation for this is found in the rest of v. 30, which should be understood in light of the presumed ardent hope and desire of the people of Judah -- in their land and in exile -- that this son of David, or one of his sons, would be restored to the throne. God says it will not happen, the emphasis being on "his lifetime" (in which he'll not succeed) and the lifetimes of this sons, none of whom would reign on the throne, making it as if he was childless (so NIV). In keeping with this, the divine promises to the line of David are not renewed until the days of Zerubbabel, his grandson (see Hag 2:20-23, and . . . Jer 52:31-34).

c. The curse may refer only to the actual, *biological* descendants of Jehoichin and not to *legal* descendants who were adopted into his line. Jesus had no human father, but he was a legal descendant of Jehoiachin through his legal father Joseph. This is the approach suggested in Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992) 277.

d. The curse may be restricted to a descendant reigning from a physical throne *in Judah*.

D. The Fall

1. The fall of Jerusalem is reported in 2 Ki. 25:1-21, 2 Chron. 36:17-21, and Jer. 39:1-10 and 52:1-30.

2. Archaeological notes

a. Lachish Ostraca

(1) In 587 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar came against Judah again, this time destroying Jerusalem. Jeremiah 34:7 refers to Nebuchadnezzar's final campaign against Judah in 587 B.C. and mentions that Lachish and Azekah were the only fortified cities in Judea other than Jerusalem still holding out against Nebuchadnezzar's assault. Azekah is 18 miles southwest of Jerusalem, and Lachish is 11 miles south of Azekah.

(2) In 1935 and 1938, British excavator J. L. Starkey discovered in the ruins of Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir) 21 ostraca, which are broken pieces of pottery. On some of these ostraca messages had been written during the time of Jer. 34:7 when Nebuchadnezzar's army was advancing on Jerusalem. Most of the Lachish letters appear to be dispatches from a Jewish subordinate named Hoshaiah to his commander Yaush in Lachish (though there is some dispute about his location). Hoshaiah apparently was stationed at an outpost and was responsible for interpreting the fire signals from Azekah and Lachish during that time. Lachish Ostracon IV includes: "And let my lord know that we are watching for the signals of Lachish, according to all the indications which my lord hath given, for we do not see Azekah."

b. Babylonian Prism – 2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 39-41, 43, and 52 mention Nebuzaradan as the captain of the Babylonian guard. A prism found in Babylon and published by E. Unger in 1938 lists Nebuzaradan (Nebuzeriddinam) as a member of Nebuchadnezzar's court. The Hebrew term for the office he occupies is a loan word from Akkadian that literally means "cook," but in some contexts the activities of this person are the functions of a high state official, so something like "captain of the guard" is correct.

c. Nebo-Sarsekim Tablet – Jeremiah 39:3 is best translated as saying that Nebo-Sarsekim (NIV, NET), a chief officer of Nebuchadnezzar, was present at the fall of Jerusalem.[3] In 2007 Michael Jursa, an associate professor at the University of Vienna, was searching in the British Museum for Babylonian financial accounts. He deciphered the cuneiform inscription on a small tablet that had been uncovered in the 1870s and acquired by the museum in 1920. It was a receipt dated to the 10th year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, which makes it 595 B.C. The receipt was for a gift of gold made to a temple in Babylon, located about a mile from modern Baghdad. The donor identified in the receipt is Nebo-Sarsekim, Nebuchadnezzar's chief eunuch.

[3] See comments in Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37-52*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 84-85. This reading is confirmed by Jursa's discovery.

E. The Book of Lamentations

1. Lamentations has five chapters, each of which is a poem expressing grief over the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C. That event was a nightmare for the people of Israel, and it is chilling to read about the extreme suffering that occurred, but I hope you now can see that Israel left God no choice. He warned them clearly and repeatedly about the consequences of their rebellion against him and bore with them through generations of rejection, but they refused to heed his pleas. In faithfulness to his promise, God finally destroyed the city and took the people captive.

2. The first four poems (first four chapters) are acrostics, alphabetical poems. This, of course, does not come through in an English translation.

a. The Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters, and chapters 1, 2, and 4 each have 22 stanzas (which later became verses). The first verse begins with the first letter of the alphabet, and each verse thereafter begins with the successive Hebrew letter. Chapter 3 has 66 stanzas/verses. The first three begin with the first letter of the alphabet, the second three begin with the second letter, and so on throughout the 22 sets of three. Chapter 5 is not an acrostic, but it has 22 verses of one line each.

b. It is speculated that the acrostic form here symbolizes completeness, that the poem covers the painful subject from *aleph* to *taw* (A to Z).

c. Interestingly, in the acrostics in chapters 2-4 the letters *'ayin* and *pe* are reversed from the traditional alphabetic order which is used in chapter 1. Mark Boda says in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings* (p. 399) that there is evidence that both arrangements of the alphabet were acceptable in Israel at the time. He thinks this makes it difficult to believe the same person composed all the poems, but perhaps the switch after chapter 1 was another expression of instability.

3. A tradition that predates the first century A.D. attributes the book to the prophet Jeremiah, but Lamentations is silent about its authorship. Jeremiah could have composed the book, as he was a great prophet who delivered other laments (2 Chron. 35:25) and was an eyewitness to Jerusalem's fall, but there is no way to be confident that he did. Whether it was Jeremiah or another inspired writer, the author (1) appears to have been an eyewitness to the events, (2) was a profound theologian who understood the causes of the judgment, (3) was a poet of great skill, and (4) was someone who loved his country.

4. Lamentations was composed in the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem, but it is not clear how soon afterward. The vivid impressions in the first four chapters and the emotionally charged nature of the laments have convinced most scholars that the book was written soon after the fall when the events were still fresh in the poet's mind.

II. The Text

A. Chapter 1

1. Jerusalem was, of course, the commercial and religious center of the nation of Judah. It was the heart of the nation's identity. As reported in 2 Ki. 25:1-21, when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, after a lengthy siege of the city (some 18 months), they killed people, burned down the temple and every significant house in the city, broke down the city's walls, took the items used in the temple, and carried all but the poorest people into exile in Babylonia.

2. Lamentations 1:1 begins with a mournful acknowledgement that the once-thriving city was now devastated and largely deserted. Though Jerusalem was once a great city among the nations, she was now like a widow in that she was lonely and experiencing the pain of loss. This great city that had once ruled nations such as Moab and Edom during the reigns of David and Solomon has now been made a slave.

3. The trauma is so great that in v. 2 she weeps bitterly through the night. This is a deep, inconsolable grief and suffering. All the pagan nations with which she had formed alliances, trusting that they would get her through the storms of international politics, were nowhere to be found; they were no source of comfort to her.

a. As Jeremiah had told King Zedekiah in Jer. 37:3-10: [3] King Zedekiah sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah, and Zephaniah the priest, the son of Maaseiah, to Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "Please pray for us to the LORD our God." [4] Now Jeremiah was still going in and out among the people, for he had not yet been put in prison. [5] The army of Pharaoh had come out of Egypt. And when the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard news about them, they withdrew from Jerusalem. [6] Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet: [7] "Thus says the LORD, God of Israel: Thus shall you say to the king of Judah who sent you to me to inquire of me, 'Behold, Pharaoh's army that came to help you is about to return to Egypt, to its own land. [8] And the Chaldeans shall come back and fight against this city. They shall capture it and burn it with fire. [9] Thus says the LORD, Do not deceive yourselves, saying, "The Chaldeans will surely go away from us," for they will not go away. [10] For even if you should defeat the whole army of Chaldeans who are fighting against you, and there remained of them only wounded men, every man in his tent, they would rise up and burn this city with fire.'" Perhaps it's not surprising that Jeremiah was imprisoned soon thereafter.

b. In fact, Judah's so-called friends proved to be nothing of the sort. They sided against her as soon as they judged it expedient to do so.

4. The preposition in the first clause of v. 3 (*min*) is better taken in a temporal sense rather than in a causal sense as in ESV. The point is that after a time of hardship and forced servitude as a Babylonian vassal following the assault in 598/597 B.C., Judah entered an even worse state with the exile in 587/586 B.C. She has been removed from the promise land and finds no rest; life is now nothing but danger and

turmoil. The attempt of Jerusalem's men of war to flee after the city's walls had been breached was thwarted by the Babylonian pursuit (2 Ki. 25:4-6).

5. In v. 4 the roads to Jerusalem that once were filled with pilgrims coming to the religious festivals now mourn because they are deserted. The gates of the city through which throngs once entered are now desolate. The priests groan because the temple, which was the center of their life and activity, has been destroyed. And the city's virgins, the young girls who have yet to marry, grieve (have been afflicted) because they now face a greatly increased prospect of never marrying and having a family.

6. Verse 5 notes that Judah's foes had triumphed over her, having become her master and prospered at her expense, and spells out why that happened: "because the LORD has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions." This was God's promised punishment for their defiance and unfaithfulness. The city's inhabitants, her children, have gone into exile.

7. Verse 6 says that all the majesty had departed from God's daughter Jerusalem, his beloved and precious city (the genitive force of the construct being appositional so that daughter and Zion are one and the same – see House, 352). It had gone from something grand to a wreck. The city's once-great rulers and leaders had been reduced by the siege to something like starving deer. Having put the city in peril by refusing to heed Jeremiah's advice to surrender (Jer. 38:17), they fled the city but lacked the strength to avoid their pursuers.

8. Verse 7 says that as Jerusalem suffered in exile she remembered all the great things that were hers in a prior day, things that had been lost because of her rebellion. When she was conquered, she was alone, and her enemies gloated over her defeat and mocked her downfall.

9. Verse 8 begins with the declaration "Jerusalem sinned grievously." And as a result, God punished her, a result of which is that she went from being desirable and honored by nations and other cities to being filthy and despised. The once great city was humiliatingly defeated, like having one's private parts exposed before the world, so that all she could do was groan and hide her face.

10. The city's uncleanness, its incompatibility with God, is (supplying present rather than past tense verb, e.g., NKJV, NJB) "in her skirts" in the sense it was now out in the open where everyone could see it. Jerusalem took no thought of her future, lived as though there would never be a day of reckoning, and therefore has experienced this terrible fall. Her suffering is so great, that at the end of v. 9 she calls to the Lord to behold it.

11. Verse 10 laments the plundering of the temple by pagans. Not even Israelites who were not priests could enter the temple, but the fury of God against Jerusalem was so great that he made her watch the temple be treated with the kind of disrespect toward him that they had exhibited.

12. In addition to this mental anguish, verse 11 refers to the starvation the people of Jerusalem endured during the siege of the city and probably thereafter. They groaned as they were forced to search for bread and were so hungry that they would surrender their most prized possessions in exchange for food to stay alive. The verse ends with another cry to God to see the depths of her suffering: "Look, O Lord, and see, for I am despised."

13. In v. 12 Jerusalem calls on those passing by her ruins to take note of the magnitude of her sorrow which had been inflicted on her by the Lord in the day he fulfilled his promise of judgment.

14. Verse 13 says that God brought destruction on the city, fire into its bones, and spread a net to trap any who attempted to flee thus turning them back into the fire. The city was demoralized, left stunned and faint.

15. Verse 14 states that God turned Jerusalem's transgressions into a yoke upon its neck. In other words, he delivered the city to its enemy for exile because of their rebellion against him.

16. Verse 15 says that God rejected Jerusalem's fighting men, meaning he chose for them to be defeated. He summoned an assembly, the Babylonian army, to crush them. Jerusalem was trodden as in a winepress, which "represents the crushed resistance and the defenders' lifeblood shed like grapes crushed in a winepress" (House, 455).

17. In v. 16 Jerusalem sobs over her judgment, and there is no one to comfort her. Those who lived in the city, her children, likewise are emotionally devastated because the enemy prevailed against them.

18. Verse 17 expresses again that there is no one to help relieve Jerusalem's suffering. As part of her judgment, she stands isolated and despised by other nations.

19. Verse 18 confesses expressly that God is right to have brought this devastating judgment. The inspired poet has Jerusalem declare, "The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word." But then the city calls all peoples, all the nations, to recognize the magnitude of her suffering which includes her young men and women having gone into captivity.

20. Verse 19 acknowledges that when she called to the nations in which she had trusted for safety, they did not respond, contrary to what she had been led to believe. The situation in the city was so dire that priests and elders starved to death while trying to find food to stay alive.

21. Verse 20 is another expression of suffering directed to God. Jerusalem is in distress, her stomach churns, and her heart is wrung within her because, as she again

confesses, "I have been very rebellious." Terror and death stalk the city inside the houses as well as in the streets; there is no safe haven.

22. According to v. 21, Jerusalem's suffering has become well known, but the result has been rejoicing over what God had done to her rather than comfort. She notes that God had brought upon her the judgment he had long promised, and then asks that he now bring her enemies to account.

23. Verse 22 continues that appeal. It reminds me of Habakkuk's second complaint to God in Hab. 1:12 – 2:1. He first wants to know how God can allow the evil in Judah to continue, and God tells him he is raising up the Babylonians to punish them. Habakkuk then wants to know how he can use a nation more wicked than Judah to punish Judah, and God lets him know that he will judge Babylonia after it serves his purpose in judging Judah.

B. Chapter 2

1. The second poem begins with an exclamation of how God's anger had engulfed Jerusalem like a cloud; his wrath is everywhere. That city, which was the splendor of Israel, was the exalted site of God's special presence, but God had now cast it down from its glorious position. He did not remember the city, or more specifically the temple, in the sense that he poured out his wrath upon it.

2. Verse 2 says that God showed no mercy to Judah when he brought his judgment. He swallowed up cities of Judah, broke down the strongholds of Jerusalem, and brought down in dishonor the kingdom and its rulers.

3. The description of Judah's destruction continues in v. 3. God cut down the might of Israel by withdrawing his protection and thus allowing them to be steamrolled by the Babylonians, and he consumed the nation like a fire.

4. Verse 4 acknowledges that it was God who, through the instrumentality of the Babylonians, shot the arrows and killed people's loved ones. His fury burned against them like a fire.

5. Verse 5 says that God became like an enemy. In executing his judgment by means of the Babylonians, he swallowed up the nation and its palaces and destroyed all its strongholds. His punishment resulted in great mourning and lamentation in Jerusalem.

6. Verse 6 refers to the fact God's judgment included the destruction of the temple, his "booth" or dwelling place. It was leveled and devoid of habitation like a garden (Provan, 65). In doing so, Yahweh brought to an end the annual festivals and the Sabbath observances, which included burnt offerings in the temple (2 Chron. 2:4; Numbers 28-29). In his fierce indignation, God showed contempt for king and priest alike, expelling them from the city and into exile.

7. The point is reinforced in v. 7. God disowned his altar and sanctuary, delivering the temple into the hands of the Babylonians. The sound of that pagan army celebrating in the Lord's temple epitomized God's judgment of Judah.

8. Verse 8 emphasizes that it was the Lord who determined to destroy Jerusalem; this was not simply the result of Babylonian imperialism. God measured the city for calamity, and it was he who caused the city's defenses, rampart and wall, to grieve over their collapse.

9. Verse 9 says the gates of Jerusalem were broken and sunk into the ground. The city was bereft of kings and princes, those surviving being in captivity, and there was "no law" in the sense there were no priests giving priestly instruction. And in the time referred to in the lament, whatever prophets were left in Jerusalem found no vision from the Lord to direct the people. Recall that Jeremiah lived in Mizpah after Jerusalem's fall (Jer. 40:1-6) and was later taken to Egypt after Gedaliah was murdered.

10. The tremendous grief of the remaining people is portrayed v. 10. From the elderly family leaders to the young virgins, every element of society suffered under God's wrath. The elders sit in silence among the rubble, wearing sackcloth and sprinkling dust on their heads, which were common mourning practices in ancient times. The virgins bow their heads to the ground, overcome by grief and humiliation.

11. The poet's own grief is expressed in v. 11. He has cried until he can cry no more. His insides are churning, and he literally says that his liver is cast down to the ground. The liver was viewed as the seat of emotions, which is why some English translations render it heart. The point seems to be that he is feeling as low as one can feel because of the destruction and the tremendous suffering that has gone with it, one example being that infants and babies faint in the streets from lack of food.

12. He adds in v. 12 that the little ones cry out for sustenance as they collapse in the streets like wounded men and as they die in their mothers' embrace.

13. Verse 13 expresses the degree of Jerusalem's suffering by suggesting it is incomparable. Her devastation, loss, pain, and sorrow are beyond comprehension. Her ruin is so great, as vast as the sea, that she is beyond healing, certainly beyond healing through any human wisdom or effort.

14. Verse 14 puts a large measure of blame for Jerusalem's suffering on the false prophets who presented as the word of God reassuring lies about the people's relationship with God. Rather than exposing the people's sin that they might repent and be restored to God, these so-called prophets chose to be "politically correct," to give the people what they wanted to hear rather than the truth they needed to hear.

15. In v. 15 all those who pass by the devastated city mock and ridicule her. They ask if this burned-out pile of rubble is possibly the great Jerusalem, the city in which Judeans took such pride.

16. In v. 16 Jerusalem's enemies rail against her and celebrate her demise.

17. Verse 17 again notes that all that happened to Jerusalem was according to what the Lord had promised long ago. He was faithful to his word of judgment which he executed through the instrumentality of the Babylonians.

18. Verse 18 says (there are translation issues) that the people cried to the Lord, but it obviously was too late. The cup was filled, and God's wrath was poured out without pity. The poet then urges the city to pray with extraordinary sincerity and fervor, presumably in hope of now stemming the suffering.

19. He continues in v. 19 urging Jerusalem to cry out in the night, to pour out her heart like water before the Lord, and to lift her hands to him for the lives of her remaining inhabitants, which includes the literal children among the group.

20. In v. 20 Jerusalem (or perhaps the poet himself) calls on the Lord to respond to the depth of her suffering. She asks who has ever been dealt with so severely, noting that women had been (and/or were being) reduced to eating their children (as God had warned – Lev. 26:29; Deut. 28:52-57) and that priests and prophets had been killed in the temple (where they probably fled for refuge in the mistaken belief that God would protect them there).

21. In v. 21 she adds the fact young and old lie dead in the streets and that young women and young men had been killed by the sword as God slaughtered the people without pity.

22. She says in v. 22 that in the Babylonian assault God had summoned to her a host of terrors and on the day of his wrath had, speaking hyperbolically as can be expected in poetry, killed all who had grown up within her.

C. Chapter 3

1. The poet establishes in v. 1 that he is speaking as a representative of those who suffered the wrath of God in Jerusalem's fall. He is "the" man (not just "a" man) who has seen affliction under the rod of God's wrath. He is the personification of those who suffered. He says in vv. 2-3 that God drove him into the darkness of despair and strikes him again and again the whole day long; there is no relief.

2. Verse 4 suggests he suffered the effects of starvation and the pain of broken bones. He says in vv. 5-6 that God surrounded and enveloped him in bitterness and hardship, that he made him dwell in an undesirable circumstance, in darkness, like those long dead have done (*Sheol* often being portrayed as a place of darkness).

3. This representative recipient of God's wrath stresses in vv. 7-9 that there was no escape from his affliction. God had walled him in, bound him with heavy chains, and put large stones in the path of any escape. As he cried out to God in his suffering, his prayer was blocked out.

4. The experience of God's judgment was so horrific that he speaks of it metaphorically in vv. 10-12 as God having torn him to pieces like a bear or lion; he destroyed him. God pulled back his bow and targeted the arrow right at him.

5. He says in vv. 13-15 that God metaphorically emptied his quiver into his kidneys and that as a humiliatingly vanquished Judean he is an object of mocking and ridicule from people everywhere. God has filled him with bitterness, referring not to a bitter attitude but to the bitter experiences of the judgment, a point he emphasizes by saying God sated him with the bitter plant wormwood.

6. In vv. 16-18 he analogizes the terrible experience of God's wrath to God's breaking his teeth with gravel stones and *trampling him in the dirt* (NIV, NET). His soul has no peace, and he has forgotten what happiness even is. His endurance and his hope have been stamped out "from the Lord," meaning they have been extinguished by the punishment that has come from the Lord.

7. And yet on the heels of that proclamation of utter despair, he calls out to God in v. 19 to remember his suffering. He says in v. 20 that his soul continually remembers his terrible state and is bowed down within him, probably meaning that he is downcast or despondent. But in that state, he says in v. 21 that he calls to mind something that is a ray of light, a basis for hope.

8. In vv. 22-24 he identifies the ray of light as God's character. It is because of God's great or steadfast love for them that *they are not consumed* (KJV, ASV, NIV, NKJV, ESV note; involves a textual issue), wiped as a people from the face of the earth. Instead, they will receive from him another of his countless acts of mercy, acts renewed every day, when he is faithful to his promise to return a humbled, penitent remnant to their homeland. As horrific as this judgment is, as black as everything appears, God can be counted on to keep his word regarding restoration and renewal. Yahweh is his "portion," meaning he is enough to satisfy him, and therefore he will live trusting in the fulfillment of his promise.

9. Verses 25-27 contain several assertions of faith. He says Yahweh is good to those who wait for him, those who trust in him to fulfill what he has promised, and to the person who seeks him, the person who really wants to know who he is. He says it is good for one to wait quietly, meaning to wait with a sense of calm assurance, for the salvation of the Lord. And he says it is good for a man to bear suffering in his youth, presumably because he will have the benefit of God's lesson for the remainder of his life.

10. In vv. 28-30 he tells the man undergoing God's punishment to bear it in silence, to accept it as God's judgment, and to repent with his face in the dirt given that there may still be hope of God's favor in his life. This includes submitting to the blows and insults of their captors.

11. He says in vv. 31-32 that this acceptance and submission occurs in light of the fact that God, who causes grief through his punishment, will not cast the people off forever but will have compassion by restoring them in accordance with his steadfast love as he has promised. The point of v. 33 seems to be that God is not *looking to punish* people but is driven to do so by their sin. (Now, once he decides to punish, he does so unflinchingly, which is why he says in Deut. 28:63 that he will "take delight" in bringing ruin upon them and destroying them. He "takes delight" in the objective sense of how he executes the punishment not in the subjective sense of his preference.)

12. Verses 34-36 give examples of social sins of which Judah was guilty, specifically oppression and injustice, sins that contributed to the necessity of God's judgment. Habakkuk said of Judah in the latter part of the seventh-century B.C. (Hab. 1:4), "So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted." And in Jer. 22:15-16, not many years before the fall of Jerusalem, the prophet rebuked King Jehoiakim declaring, [15] "Do you think you are a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. [16] He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? declares the LORD." God disapproves of abusing the lowly prisoners of the land and cheating the people out of justice.

13. Verses 37-39 repeat that the Babylonian conquest was decreed by God in punishment for their sin. And since they were being punished for their sin, they have no grounds for griping about it. They were reaping their just desserts. This is doubly true for those God has allowed to remain alive.

14. Verses 40-42 are an appeal to the people to examine their ways and to repent. He tells them to lift their hearts and hands to God in prayer, confessing their blatant rebellion and acknowledging that their punishment was for their sin.

15. In vv. 43-45 he declares that God pursued them in his righteous anger, killing them without pity. He turned a deaf ear to their prayers and through their defeat made them like scum and garbage in the estimation of the nations.

16. Verse 46 refers to the rejoicing, mocking, and ridicule they are receiving from all their enemies. Verse 47 is a general statement of the disaster they experienced as panic, pitfall, devastation, and destruction. He recounts in v. 48 how much he has cried because of Jerusalem's fall.

17. In vv. 49-51 he says he will continue crying until the Lord takes note of their suffering, meaning acts to alleviate it. In v. 51 he says his eyes cause him grief because by them he has witnessed the terrible things that have happened in the city.

18. Having just spoken of the tremendous pain and grief that God's judgment on Jerusalem produced, I think the poet in vv. 52-66 balances that with a personal example of the kind of evil that brought God's wrath. In other words, I think he is now relating his personal mistreatment in Judah as an illustration of the nation's rebellion to reinforce the justice of God's judgment. That horrific and gut-wrenching punishment was from another side the vindication of the victims of Judah's wickedness.

a. We see in vv. 52-54 that the poet had been persecuted unjustly, thrown into a pit and stoned to the point he was at the brink of death, the point of saying "I am lost."

b. Verses 55-57 say that he called out to God in that most dire situation and that God responded, telling him not to fear. God delivered him from the deadly peril in which evil men had placed him.

c. Verses 58-60 recount what the poet said back at that time of deliverance. He praised God for having taken up his cause, for redeeming his life, and called on Yahweh to administer justice in his case, to act in judgment knowing how he had been victimized by evil people.

d. Verses 61-63 continue the poet's words from the time of his deliverance. He says that God knew how they had acted toward him and thus how deserving they were of judgment.

e. I think vv. 64-66 speak of God's judgment as repayment of all Judah's evil, that which was done to the author personally being merely an example. I take the imperfect verbs as present progressives[4] meaning that God *is repaying* them according to the work of their hands. He *is giving* them anguish of heart (see NRSV and NET) and his curse *is* on them in the sense of being experienced by them. He *is pursuing* them in anger through their exile and ongoing suffering and, speaking hyperbolically, *is destroying* them from under his heavens (see, e.g., Deut. 4:26, 6:15, 28:20, 28:63).[5]

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[4] Mark D. Futato states in *Beginning Biblical Hebrew* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 64, "The present progressive imperfect is used for expressing an **ongoing situation in the present**, best translated in English with a present progressive tense." The examples he provides are "he is seeking," "he is writing," and "he is ruling." He adds, "The context will determine whether the use of an imperfect is future or present progressive." Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi state in *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 56-57:

> In general, the imperfect views actions, events, or states from the inside, meaning that the situation is underway or in process. The speaker or writer views the situation as still continuing, in the process of accomplishment, just taking place, or imminent. The imperfect may assume an indicative mood so that the speaker or writer makes an objective statement, which, however, makes no reference to the beginning or the end of the situation.

[5] Alternatively, one could take the imperfects as pleas to repay the perpetrators, to give them a distraught heart, and to pursue them (as in NET footnotes). In that case, it is a continuation of the poet's words from

D. Chapter 4

1. Verse 1 refers to the destruction of the temple. Its gold has figuratively grown dim, has changed so as to lose its preciousness, in conjunction with the scattering of its holy stones throughout the city.

2. He says in v. 2 that in the conquest of Jerusalem the precious inhabitants of the city have been regarded as being as of little value as clay pots, which were proverbial for their cheapness.

3. Verse 3 says that the situation in Jerusalem was so dire that at least some of the women became cruel toward their own young in the sense they acted selfishly toward them out of a sense of self-preservation. In so doing, they compared unfavorably to jackals and were acting like ostriches which were noted for the neglect of their young (e.g., Job 39:16).

4. He refers in v. 4 to the fact the nursing infants were so weak from starvation, so thirsting for life-sustaining milk, that they no longer cried when hungry. (The image of the tongue sticking to the mouth portrays individuals as unable to make a sound.) Children old enough to speak beg for food, but food is so scarce that no one gives them anything.

5. Verse 5 points out that wealth and privilege did not make one immune from the horror of the assault. Those who once feasted on delicacies died in the streets of starvation just like others. Those who once wore the finest clothes sought food in the garbage heaps just like others.

6. Verse 6 says that the iniquity of Jerusalem was greater than the sin of Sodom, the proverbial city of evil. Sodom was overthrown in a moment without a hand being laid on it whereas Jerusalem endured an eighteen-month siege and a period of slaughter after the wall was breached.

7. Verse 7 speaks of Jerusalem's leaders or nobility (lit. Nazirites, which is here taken as one set apart by rank or distinguishing qualities) as men of impressive appearance. They *looked like* nobility.

8. But v. 8 says that now they are unrecognizable due to the effects of starvation. They were like skeletons wrapped in shriveled, discolored skin, like the nightmarish victims of Hitler's concentration camps.

9. Verse 9 points out that those killed by the sword were better off than those left to die of slow starvation.

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the time of his deliverance, which pleas have now been answered in God's judgment of all of Judah's evil in the destruction of Jerusalem.

10. The situation in Jerusalem became so desperate that compassionate women were reduced to the unthinkable act of boiling their own children and eating them! God had warned them long ago that their rebellion would bring about this precise result (Lev. 26:29; Deut. 28:52-57). Perhaps they were only eating them after they died, in which case they might be tempted to hasten their deaths by withholding sustenance (v. 3), which could be rationalized as an act of compassion (putting them out of their misery).

11. On the heels of that most gruesome portrait of distress, verse 11 declares that this was the wrath, the hot anger, of God poured out on the city. He burned it down to the ground.

12. Verse 12 says it was the belief of both kings and people of the world (stated hyperbolically in universal terms) that an enemy could not take a resistant Jerusalem by force. Though its walls had been broken down roughly 200 years earlier by the king of Israel (2 Ki. 14:11-14; 2 Chron. 25:20-24) and the city had surrendered on several occasions,[6] the episode with the Assyrians in 701 B.C. apparently created widespread doubt that the city as currently fortified could be breached by force.

13. The city fell not because of some inadequacy in her physical defenses or the might of Nebuchadnezzar but because God was punishing her for rebellion. He here singles out the sins of her prophets and iniquities of her priests who shed the blood of the righteous, probably meaning they were complicit in the shedding of innocent blood in that they enabled or emboldened the perpetrators by failing to represent God accurately to them. They neglected or concealed or lied about God's will and his anger with the people's disobedience and thus shared in the murders by contributing to the climate of lawlessness in which they occurred.

14. With Delbert Hillers and Iain Provan, I think v. 14 is saying *the people* (rather than the prophets and priests from v. 13) were left to wander blindly because of the failure of the prophets and priests and as a result became thoroughly defiled, incompatible with God, in that they either participated in murderous acts or, like the prophets and priests, were implicated in the evil conduct by their toleration or support of it.

15. The picture of v. 15 seems to be the *people of the nations* objecting to unclean Jerusalem's continuing presence among them and the city being removed through its people becoming fugitives and wanderers in the exile.

16. Verse 16 makes clear that it was Yahweh himself who removed the city, scattered its inhabitants, and notes that he will ignore them in their plight (regard

[6] This is apparently what happened when Shishak came against Rehoboam in the late-tenth-century B.C. (1 Ki. 14:25-28) and when the Philistines and Ethiopians came against Jehoram in the middle of the ninth-century B.C. (2 Chron. 21:16-17). It clearly is what happened when Jehoiachin surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar in 598/597 B.C.

them no longer). As evidence of that fact he mentions that *their captors* showed (verb is third person plural) no honor to the priests and no favor to the elders. In other words, even those of standing in the community suffered.

17. Verse 17 refers to the people having watched in vain for Egypt to rescue them from Nebuchadnezzar's assault. I mentioned previously Jer. 37:3-10 in which the Lord warned those in Jerusalem not to be deceived into thinking Egypt would deliver them.

18. I think v. 18 is saying that in the late stages of the siege the leaders restricted some of the people for fear they would desert to the enemy. The poet solemnly notes that their end had come.

19. Verse 19 refers to the capture of the fleeing fighting men after the Babylonians breached the city wall.

20. Verse 20 speaks of the capture of King Zedekiah. The hope the people had that the Davidic king, the Lord's anointed, would preserve their nation was dashed with his fleeing and capture.

21. Verse 21 is a sarcastic invitation to Edom to rejoice over Jerusalem's fall coupled with a reminder that God's judgment is also in store for Edom.

22. Verse 22 says (taking the perfect as a "prophetic perfect" as in NIV and NET; see also Provan, 123) that Judah's exile certainly will come to an end as God has revealed; it will not be extended beyond that time. But whatever lay ahead for Judah, Edom will be punished for its sins.

E. Chapter 5

1. Verse 1 is another appeal to God to notice their humiliation and suffering.

2. Verse 2 refers to the fact their land and homes are now occupied by aliens and foreign troops.

3. He says in v. 3 that the people have become like orphans and widows, which expresses their sense of vulnerability and defenselessness against those now controlling their land. They are at the occupiers' mercy, and life as a conquered people is difficult.

4. Verse 4 says that they must pay for necessities like water and wood, things that once were abundant and free for the asking.

5. Verse 5 seems to express (there are translation issues) the sense of living under a constant threat of harm from the occupying victors. Their pursuers are

breathing down their necks, are constantly on the verge of doing something to them. That ever-present threat keeps the Judeans dancing to occupiers' tune, which leaves them weary and without rest.

6. Verse 6 is notoriously difficult to interpret. I think it is a comment on the severity of the situation in Jerusalem after the conquest. The inhabitants were so desperate that they were willing to bear the humiliation of making an almost certainly vain appeal for food to their enemies, symbolized by the traditional enemies Egypt and Assyria.

7. Verse 7 refers to the fact the sins of past generations of Judeans contributed to God's judgment of Jerusalem, so to that extent the present generation was *bearing the consequence* of past generations' sins. That is different from being *punished* for those sins. If, for example, husband and wife murderers were banished to a remote island as punishment for their crime, the children born to them on that island would live there as a consequence of their parents' crime but not as punishment for it. As Paul House remarks (p. 486), "It is theologically essential to maintain a distinction between being punished for another's sins and experiencing the evil consequences of that person's sins." But, of course, the present generation was itself guilty and was being punished for its own sin, as the poet makes clear in v. 16.

8. The statement in v. 8 that "slaves rule over us" simply may be a proverbial way of saying they are in a disastrous state of governance (e.g., Prov. 30:21-23) by virtue of Babylonian rule. If the intent is literal, "slaves" could refer either to Babylonian or Judean slaves who had been put in charge. The second clause expresses hopelessness: there is none to deliver us from their hand.

9. Verse 9 seems to be suggesting that excursions into the countryside in search of food were fraught with danger, whether from attacks by marauders or the deadly nature of the wilderness in general.

10. Verse 10 reports the effect of famine on them. I think the more likely meaning of the first clause is "Our skin is (or has become) black as an oven" (see KJV, ASV, and NRS). The discoloration of skin in connection with starvation was mentioned in 4:8.

11. Verse 11 refers to the rape of Judean women that followed the conquest. This was typical retribution inflicted on defeated people in ancient times. The loss of family protection and social structures would leave women vulnerable to such abuse long afterward.

12. Verse 12 refers to other consequences of the conquest. Leaders were tortured and executed publicly and elders were shown no respect by the arrogant victors.

13. Verse 13 says that young men and boys became slave laborers, forced to serve their conquerors.

14. Verse 14 indicates that normal community life has ceased. The older men no longer made decisions and conducted business at the city gate, and the young men no longer enjoyed their music.

15. Verse 15 says that the people's once joyful hearts, their celebrations that involved dancing, have now been turned to mourning.

16. Verse 16 states expressly that Jerusalem has lost its glory and honor, symbolized by its crown, because its people have sinned.

17. Verse 17 says that a consequence of all that is involved in this catastrophic downfall (vv. 2-16) is that their heart has become sick and their vitality and joy in living has been sapped (that seems to be the sense of eyes having grown dim).

18. Verse 18 says that the sickness of heart and loss of vitality and joy in living is for Jerusalem, which now lies desolate, so much so that jackals prowl over it.

19. Verse 19 is a declaration of God's eternal reign. He is no less on the throne in Jerusalem's destruction than in Israel's days of glory.

20. Verse 20 is the poet's appeal to God, by way of a question, to decide that they had been punished enough. It is a cry of the sufferer that there be no more.

21. The hope expressed in v. 21 is that God in his mercy will restore them to himself, that he will restore them to a prior state of fellowship and blessing.

22. There is much uncertainty regarding how to understand the final verse. The translation by Paul House (454, 470-472), who follows the Jewish scholar Robert Gordis, makes good sense to me: "even though you have indeed rejected us and have been exceedingly angry with us." If that is correct, the poet is acknowledging that his plea for restoration is made in the face of the rejection and anger they have experienced because of their sin. As such, it reflects the hope of 3:31-32. Though God has punished, has caused grief, he will, according to his word, thereafter have compassion.

III. Theological Reflections

A. God is faithful to his word, including his word of judgment.

1. God told the people of Israel during the Exodus and the time of wandering in the wilderness that there would be dreadful consequences if they were unfaithful to him, and he recorded those warnings in Scripture for all subsequent generations to learn. But after rebelling for centuries and still remaining in the promise land, the people of Judah deceived themselves into thinking that God would not make good on that promise. They mistook his patience, his forbearance, as an indication that he would not keep his word of judgment.

2. God has promised in his holy word that Jesus Christ is going to return and at that time the entire world will be judged through him. The faithful, those who in penitence have trusted in Christ, will be eternally blessed, whereas all who have not embraced Jesus, and thus stand at judgment in their sin, will endure eternal punishment.

a. Jesus declared in the parable of the net in Mat. 13:49-50: [49] So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous [50] and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

b. This truth of judgment is repeated in the parable of the wheat and the weeds (Mat. 13:24-30, 36-43), the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Mat. 20:1-16), the parable of the faithful or unfaithful servant (Mat. 24:45-51; Lk. 12:42-46), the parable of the ten virgins (Mat. 25:1-13), the parable of the talents and the minas (Mat. 25:14-30; Lk. 19:11-27), and the parable of the sheep and the goats (Mat. 25:31-46).

c. Recall Jerusalem's lament in Lam. 1:15: "The Lord rejected all my mighty men in my midst; he summoned an assembly against me to crush my young men; **the Lord has trodden as in a winepress the virgin daughter of Judah**." Revelation 14 speaks of the harvest of the earth that will occur at the end of the age. In v. 19 the condemned are thrown into "the great winepress of the wrath of God." Verse 20 states: "And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia" (about 184 miles). Revelation 19:15 identifies the Lord Jesus as the one who will tread that winepress. It says that the Lord on his return "will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty."

d. Jesus says in Mat. 25:41 that at the final judgment the condemned will be sent to "the eternal fire **prepared for the devil and his angels**." We see in Rev. 20:10 that in that fire the devil "will be tormented day and night forever and ever." Rev. 20:15 states, "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

3. God will be faithful to this word of judgment. He will judge mankind in his time regardless of who says or thinks otherwise. As Peter says in 2 Pet. 3:8-9: "But do not let this one thing be concealed [from] you, beloved, that with [the] Lord one day [is] like a thousand years and a thousand years [are] like one day. [9][The] Lord is not slow concerning the promise, as some regard slowness, but is patient toward you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance."

B. As declared in Heb. 10:31, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." The agony of God's judgment is portrayed powerfully in the poetry of Lamentations. When God pours out his wrath, it will be utter misery for those who

receive it. Those who ignore that fact or deceive themselves about God's judgment will forever exist in the sorrow of Lamentations.

C. People must repent while there is time. Once the judgment of God comes, it is too late. One is left at that time to reap the consequence of one's choices. And given that there is no changing one's fate between the time of death and the final judgment at Christ's return, as the parable of the rich man and Lazarus makes clear (Lk. 16:19-31), repentance is always a matter of utmost urgency.

IV. Israel's History from the Exile to Christ

A. The poems of Lamentations mourn the devastating conquest of Jerusalem that occurred in 587/586 B.C. and the associated exile to Babylonia of all but the poorest of the city's inhabitants.

B. In 539 B.C., in keeping with the prophecy given well over a century earlier and recorded in Isaiah 44-45, the Persian Cyrus entered Babylon and established himself as the king of a new world empire. In the first year of his reign, reckoned from 538-537,[7] he authorized the Jews to return to Palestine and to rebuild their temple. He even returned the sacred vessels that had been seized from the temple by Nebuchadnezzar and agreed to finance partially the reconstruction from the royal treasury.

C. The first group of Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Sheshbazzar, Zerrubabel, and Jeshua (alternate form of Joshua). It is often assumed they arrived back in 537 B.C., but it could have been a year or more later than that.[8] They promptly set up the altar in its former place and resumed the offering of sacrifices amid the temple ruins.

D. In the second year after their arrival in Jerusalem, they laid the foundation for a new temple, but then opposition from the local residents and neighboring communities, especially the Samaritans, caused the work to grind to a halt. The temple was still in ruins in 520 B.C., more than a decade later, when the prophets Haggai and Zechariah motivated the people to resume the work. They completed the new temple in 516 B.C.

E. Little is known of the history of Jews in Palestine from this point until Ezra led the second wave of returning exiles in 458 B.C., some fifty-eight years after the temple was built. In 445 B.C., thirteen years later, Nehemiah came to Jerusalem from Babylonia to help restore it. After serving as governor for 12 years, he returned to Persia in 433 B.C. and a short time later returned to Jerusalem for a governorship of unknown length. That is the end of inspired O.T. history of Israel.

F. The Intertestamental Period

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[7] See, e.g., Edwin Yamauchi, Ezra-Nehemiah, Expositor's Bible Commentary, 595.

[8] See, e.g., Andrew E. Steinmann, "A Chronological Note: The Return of the Exiles Under Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-2)," *JETS* (Sept. 2008).

1. Following Nehemiah's death (probably in the 420s), the Jews continued to live under the Persian Empire. In 333 B.C., however, Alexander the Great began to engage the Persians militarily, and by 331 B.C. he had gained control of the Persian Empire. This ultimately led to the widespread adoption of Greek culture throughout the Empire.

2. Following Alexander's death in 323 B.C., his kingdom was divided among his four generals. Ptolemy I gained Egypt and Seleucus I gained Syria and Mesopotamia, but for some years there was contention between them for control of Palestine. The Ptolemies succeeded in controlling Palestine until 198 B.C., at which time it fell into the hands of the Seleucid rulers.

3. From 198-165 B.C. Palestine was under Seleucid control. In 175 B.C. Antiochus IV Epiphanes began to rule and sought to force the Jews to adopt Greek ways which were contrary to their religion. This sparked a successful Jewish revolt, which began in 166 B.C., known as the Maccabean Revolt (named for one of its prime figures, Judas Maccabeus).

4. Beginning in 142 B.C., Simon completed the work of his brothers Judas Maccabeus and Jonathan in securing for Israel autonomy and freedom from paying tribute (even if not independence from Syrian influence and authority). This autonomy endured until the Roman intervention in 63 B.C. This period of relative autonomy is generally referred to as the Hasmonean Kingdom or Hasmonean Rule.

5. In 63 B.C. the Roman commander Pompey took control of Jerusalem. Julius Caesar defeated Pompey in 48 B.C. and was then murdered in 44 B.C. In 42 B.C. Antony defeated Cassius and appointed Herod (an Idumean) tetrarch of Judea. Around 40 B.C., during another political uprising in Israel, Herod went to Rome where he was designated king of Judea. The revolt was put down and Herod's rule firmly established in 37 B.C. He continued to reign until he died in 4 B.C., not long after the birth of Jesus Christ.[9]

[9] The oddity of Jesus being born around 6 B.C. ("B.C." stands for "before Christ") is the result of a mistake by Dionysius Exiguus, the Roman monk who in A.D. 525 instituted the practice of dating events from the birth of Jesus. He figured that Jesus was born 753 years after the founding of the city of Rome. This translates to 1 B.C. because there was no year 0 in the calendar. But Jesus was born before Herod the Great died, and since most scholars now believe that Herod died around 750 years after the founding of Rome (which translates to 4 B.C.), Jesus' birth must be moved to around 748 years after the founding of Rome (which translates to 6 B.C.).