

Aug 27-Sep 2

## **Week 35**

Continuing with Act 2, scene 8, we will begin the week with Lamentations, which is set just after the destruction of Jerusalem and was written by Jeremiah, perhaps with the help of his secretary, Baruch. Each of the first four chapters of the book is divided according to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, each verse beginning with a succeeding letter. Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 each has twenty-two verses; chapter 3, the climactic chapter describing Jerusalem's destroyers and God's compassion, has three times as many verses. Lament is a form of poetry often consisting of prayers and hard conversations with God in which gut-wrenching honesty is the norm. Yet lament is intended to lead the mourner back to God, giving clarity to the situation and pointing to hope in God's faithful love.

The week will continue with the first chapters of Ezekiel, a thirty-year-old priest taken into exile by the Babylonians in one of the first waves of deportation from Jerusalem. Ezekiel, a contemporary of Jeremiah and Daniel, ministered from 593 to 571 BC. Unlike most of the prophets, his book is not poetic. However, it is filled with symbolic imagery and dramatic enactments of God's Word.

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## **Day 1**

### **Read Lamentations 1:1-3:36**

#### **Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 10**

As you read today, watch for figures of speech, such as personification. For example, Jerusalem is spoken of as a person (see Lamentations 1). The writer's words express personal anguish; he couldn't stop crying, and his emotions were churning (see 1:12,16,20). Nevertheless, he acknowledged the rightness of God's judgment.

*Track all of God's actions recorded in chapter 2 and notice the word pictures in verses 1-9.*

The writer became very personal in chapter 3, using metaphors to describe God as a wild bear, a lion, and an archer. A metaphor is a word picture comparing two things by saying one thing is the other: "He is a bear waiting in ambush" (v. 10). (In contrast, a simile compares two things by using the word like or as.) The biggest word in this first half of the book is yet in Lamentations 3:21, designating a turning to hope. The writer focused on God's character as the source of hope.

*What are you lamenting at this point in your life? Lament is ultimately meant to lead us back to God. Turn to God in hope today.*

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**Day 2**

**Read Lamntations 3:37-5:22**

**Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 11**

Lamentations continues with an exhortation to repent and turn to God (see 3:37-42). That adversity comes from God's mouth (see v. 38) should be read in the context of verse 39: the author was speaking about punishment for sins. Chapter 4 offers a heart-wrenching description of Jerusalem's devastation. Notice that the verses here are shorter and more terse than those in chapters 1-2. The book ends with somewhat of a whimper, a plea to God for help. Hope seemed hard for the writer to grasp. Most of us have times of profound discouragement in life, tempting us to turn inward and away from the Lord during those times. Yet lament gives us a voice of prayer during those times, and God invites such prayers.

*Call to God this day, whatever your situation in life.*

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## **Day 3**

### **Read Ezekiel 1-4**

#### **Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 12**

The first three chapters of Ezekiel recount the prophet's call from God. Priests started their ministry in the temple at age thirty, but Ezekiel was hundreds of miles from Jerusalem, exiled in the land of Babylon. Chapter 1 presents a dramatic vision of God, surrounded by cherubim, angelic beings, riding on the clouds. The vision of the four living creatures represents the created order: the lion is the greatest of wild beasts, the ox the greatest of domestic beasts, the eagle the greatest of birds, and human beings the pinnacle of God's creation.

God was surrounded by his glory. The rainbow (see Ezekiel 1:28) calls to mind the flood, when God displayed his judgment and mercy (see Genesis 9:12-17). Ezekiel was to speak God's word regardless of the response and was accountable for doing so (see Ezekiel 2-3). In chapter 4 the prophet acted out the siege of Jerusalem, dramatizing what it would be like for those in Jerusalem as God's judgment fell.

*God has also given his Word to us. We are to speak it to those who are far away from God and need repentance. Will you be faithful in speaking the Word today?*

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**Day 4**

**Read Ezekiel 5-8**

**Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 13**

The focus today is on God's severe judgment on Jerusalem for its practice of idolatry. The day begins with another dramatization, Ezekiel shaving his head and beard. The prophet burned a third of the hair, slashed a third of it with a sword, and scattered a third to the wind. His actions dramatized God's punishment of the Israelites. Yet the prophet was to tuck a few strands of hair into the fold of his robe, showing that God would keep a remnant of the people for himself.

Ezekiel 8 relates a vision given to Ezekiel about fourteen months after the vision of Ezekiel 1. As the elders of Judah gathered in Ezekiel's home in Babylon, a heavenly being took Ezekiel by the hair and flew him to Jerusalem. Then the being took the prophet to four different places in Jerusalem, showing him the horrible abominations being committed there. The vision drove home the reason God was bringing such severe devastation to the land.

*Severity of judgment is in proportion to the depth of sinfulness. The punishment fits. Think about the fact that we struggle with God's judgment, questioning its "fairness," because we do not understand the seriousness, darkness, and destructiveness of sin.*

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## **Day 5**

### **Read Ezekiel 9-12**

#### **Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 14**

The first three chapters continue an extended vision in which the Spirit of God had transported Ezekiel to Jerusalem. Watch for the theme of the remnant in these chapters. Chapter 9 presents a vision of slaughter in Jerusalem. The wicked people in Jerusalem had murdered lots of people and worshiped other gods, so they would be destroyed.

We have seen the centrality of God's presence as a key theme in the Old Testament. In Ezekiel 10 God left the temple. The cherubim in this chapter were angelic beings around God's throne. Chapter 11 speaks of judgment on the corrupt leaders of Jerusalem but also promises restoration (read Ezekiel 11:19 in light of 2 Corinthians 3:3).

In chapter 12 the prophet dramatized the exile from Jerusalem in two ways. The dramas served as prophecies of what was about to happen to the people in Jerusalem and the land of Israel.

*Meditate on Ezekiel 11:19-21. The condition of the heart is central to the prophet's message. What is the condition of your heart today?*

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**Day 6****Read Ezekiel 13-16****Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 15**

Notice several things about our reading today. False prophets, who prophesied from their own imaginations, were condemned in chapter 13. The sin of idolatry is a primary focus in these chapters, and God is deeply concerned about the condition of the heart.

The readings for the week end with two parables, one short and the other rather long. The parable of the vine depicts the uselessness of Jerusalem; it was good only for burning (see Ezekiel 15:1-8). The parable of the adulterous wife presents, perhaps, the most graphic word picture of idolatry and unfaithfulness in all Scripture (see Ezekiel 16). Jerusalem, rescued by God and adorned in beauty, had become a lustful, brazenly promiscuous woman. She used God's gifts to attract her adulterous lovers. Unlike a prostitute, she paid others to have sex with her and spread her sexual favors far and wide. God would punish her. Amazingly, the section ends with the hope of a new covenant God would establish.

*Faithfulness begins with the condition of the heart. Examine your heart today. Is it soft toward God, or is it soft toward sin and unfaithfulness?*

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## **Day 7**

### **Reading Summary for Week 35**

In Lamentations, we've joined with a skillful and emotional poet who described Jerusalem's devastation, brought about by the Lord's wrath. Yet he poured out his personal expression of grief. In Ezekiel, we've entered the world of a young man who was ripped from home and deported several years before the final exile to Babylon. Then God called him as a prophet. His stunning visions of God's glory and strange symbolic actions spoke to his own times as well as to people down through the centuries.

### **Prayer/Meditation**

O God of Ezekiel, you are full of glory and majesty. So often I think about you only at the personal and intimate level. Thank you for giving the prophet a vision of you that goes far beyond my own experience. I worship you. Instead of trying to figure you out, I ask you to overwhelm me. How awesome you must be to appear with "a gleam like amber, with what looked like fire" (Ezekiel 1:27)! How glorious that "the brilliant light all around was like that of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day" (v. 28)! Amen.

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