

# The Lamentations of Jeremiah and the God of Jeremiah

Lamentations 3:21-25

## Text:

- LA 3:21 Yet this I call to mind  
and therefore I have hope:  
LA 3:22 Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail.  
LA 3:23 They are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.  
LA 3:24 I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion;  
therefore I will wait for him."  
LA 3:25 The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,  
to the one who seeks him;



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### THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH AND THE GOD OF JEREMIAH (LAMENTATIONS 3:21-25)



**“The Prophet Jeremiah Mourning over the Destruction of Jerusalem”** is among the early works of Rembrandt in which his *leitmotif* of conceptual structure was a single or totally dominant figure that is totally bound up in the course of an historical event. Rembrandt masterfully turns an individual person, their expressions and posture, into a history painting.

Alex Tang went to Amsterdam in 2006 which is the 400 year anniversary of Rembrandt's birth. Alex saw this painting of the prophet Jeremiah in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam - Museum for Art and History and was immediately captivated.

Seated at the base of a large column, Jeremiah mourns the destruction of Jerusalem. It was an event he had prophesied. The light falls almost exclusively on the old man and his immediate surroundings.

## Sermon Statement

Justice and love comes together in our Holy God in perfect balance. The unfailing love of God goes beyond judgment to new life because He is a God of hope, love, faithfulness and salvation

## **Introduction**

I visited Rijksmuseum Amsterdam - Museum for Art and History in 2006, the 400 anniversary of Rembrandt's birth. The museum has a special exhibit of many of Rembrandt's paintings. I remember enjoying examining the paintings. It was a bitter cold day in Amsterdam but the museum was nice and warm. The painting that haunts was one about the prophet Jeemiah.

*The Prophet Jeremiah Mourning over the Destruction of Jerusalem* by Rembrandt van Rijn was completed in 1630, the same year he completed his oil on panel *Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver*, as well as *Samson Betrayed by Delilah*, *Self-portrait with Wide-open Eyes* and *The Raising of Lazarus*.

That year Rembrandt's father died. "The Prophet Jeremiah Mourning over the Destruction of Jerusalem" is among the early works of Rembrandt in which his leitmotif of conceptual structure was a single or totally dominant figure that is totally bound up in the course of an historical event. Rembrandt masterfully turns an individual person, their expressions and posture, into a history painting. Seated at the base of a large column, Jeremiah mourns the destruction of Jerusalem. It was an event he had prophesied. The light falls almost exclusively on the old man and his immediate surroundings. His bushy beard, wrinkled forehead and fur-lined cloak are depicted with great precision.

Jeremiah's pose, his head supported by his hand, is a traditional attitude of melancholy: his elbow rests on a large book which is inscribed 'Bibel' on the edge of the pages, probably a much later addition to the painting. The book is presumably meant to be his own Book of Jeremiah or the Book of Lamentations. Rembrandt is a master of light in art. The lighting of the figure

is particularly effective with the foreground and the right side of the prophet's face in shadow and his robe outlined against the rock. Jeremiah's hands rested on a few pieces of gold and silver vessels which he must have managed to salvage from the burning temple.

Away from the light, on the left in the background, was the fall of Jerusalem. The Babylonian troops of King Nebuchadnezzar II are marching into the city and putting it to the torch. These events occurred in the year 586 BC. Zedekiah, King of Judah, is standing outside the city, his head in his hands. Nebuchadnezzar ordered his eyes to be gouged out.

### **Background**

Traditions have it that the prophet Jeremiah wrote the Book of Jeremiah and Lamentations. The central theme is the fall of Jerusalem to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 BC. Jerusalem fell because of God's judgment on the Israelites who had turned away from God. The Israelites turned to idolatry and self-dependence.

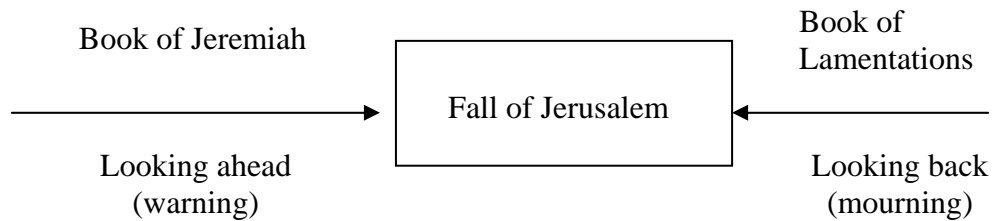
Jeremiah ministered under seven rulers

- Josiah (Judah's last Godly king)
- Jehoiakim (ungodly, scripture burning king)
- Jehoiachin (a ninety-day wonder judged by God)
- Zedekiah (Judah's last king)
- Nebuchadnezzar (Babylon conqueror)
- Gedaliah (Babylonian appointed governor of occupied Jerusalem)
- Johanan (successor of Gedaliah who was assassinated)

God's judgment on the Israelites (Judeans) was because of

- Ungodly kings

- False prophets, priests and wise men
- Idolatry of the people (return to worship of Baal)
- Refusal to listen to God

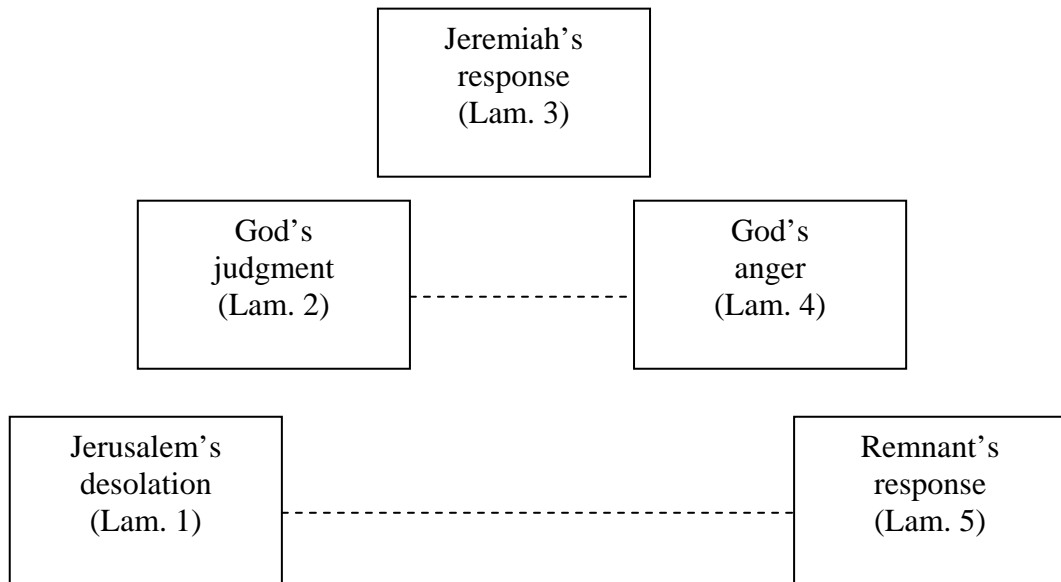


The book of Lamentations is written during the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 BC. Jeremiah was never exiled to Babylon so it shows the agony of the people left behind after the military devastation. The horrors of the conquest include

- Wholesale devastation and slaughter of kings (2:6,9; 4:20), princes (1:6; 2:2,9; 4:7-8; 5:12), elders (1:19; 2:10; 4:16), priests (1:4,19; 2:6, 20; 4:20), prophets (2:9, 20) and people (2:10-12; 3:48; 4:6)
- Starving mothers are reduced to cannibalism (2:20; 4:1)
- Judah's people are dragged into exile (1:3, 18)
- Elaborate ceremony and worship rituals came to an end (1:4, 10)

The book of Lamentation has a chiastic structure. The chiastic structure shows the main theme of the book. Though the book is mainly about God's anger and judgement, it also reveals some important attributes of God.

### The chiasm structure of Lamentations



Right in the middle of the book, amongst all the desolation and judgements is this few wonderful passages – Lam. 3: 21-25. Jeremiah reminds us that

LA 3:21 Yet this I call to mind  
and therefore I have hope:

LA 3:22 Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail.

LA 3:23 They are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.

LA 3:24 I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion;  
therefore I will wait for him."

LA 3:25 The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,  
to the one who seeks him;

### **Attributes of God**

1. God of hope (3:21, 24-25)
2. God of love (3:22)
3. God of faithfulness (3:23)
4. God of salvation (3: 22-23)

#### God of hope (3:21)

Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:

#### Action words

- call to mind (remember)
- hope

#### God of love (3:22)

<sup>LA 3:22</sup> Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail.

#### Action words

- great love
- not consumed
- never fail

#### God of faithfulness (3:23)

<sup>LA 3:23</sup> They are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.

#### Action words

- new every morning
- faithfulness

A new start. Every morning is a new beginning after a night of darkness.

#### God of salvation (3: 24-25)

I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him;

### Action words

- wait
- hope
- seeks

### Seeks for God as David did in Psalm 16

#### Psalm 16

A *miktam* of David.

PS 16:1 Keep me safe, O God,  
for in you I take refuge.

PS 16:2 I said to the LORD, "You are my Lord;  
apart from you I have no good thing."

PS 16:3 As for the saints who are in the land,  
they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight.

PS 16:4 The sorrows of those will increase  
who run after other gods.  
I will not pour out their libations of blood  
or take up their names on my lips.

PS 16:5 LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup;  
you have made my lot secure.

PS 16:6 The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;  
surely I have a delightful inheritance.

PS 16:7 I will praise the LORD, who counsels me;  
even at night my heart instructs me.

PS 16:8 I have set the LORD always before me.  
Because he is at my right hand,  
I will not be shaken.

PS 16:9 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;  
my body also will rest secure,

PS 16:10 because you will not abandon me to the grave,  
nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

PS 16:11 You have made known to me the path of life;  
you will fill me with joy in your presence,  
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

### **Our response**

In difficult and adverse times, we have to remember as Jeremiah did that God is a

- God of hope (3:21, 24-25)
- God of love (3:22)
- God of faithfulness (3:23)
- God of salvation (3: 22-23)

I have written my response to Rembrandt painting:

“The painting has a powerful effect on me. As I gaze on Jeremiah’s face and hands, I felt the pain and disappointment of a man who served God but met with much opposition and ridicule. No one listened to him. Everyone did what seemed right in their own eyes. Jeremiah had talked and scolded and cajoled but it all fell on deaf ears. And because of this, he had to watch as his beloved country was sacked, Jerusalem burnt and the temple destroyed. He had failed as a prophet of the Lord to convince his people. Though the fault was not his, the guilt must have weighted heavily on his mind. The guilt and the pain of a prophet as revealed in this painting.

The painting also spoke to me of the many parents who had to watch their children go astray. They have tried their best to teach them right from wrong. However, that is no guarantee that the children will follow and make correct informed decisions. I am sure the pain in the hearts of these parents resonates with the lamentation in Jeremiah’s heart. The guilt and pain of these parents as reflected in this painting.

The painting also revealed to me the heart of God. How the heart of God must have been broken by the people He loved. He loved so much that He was

willing to send His only Son to die for them. These people were so fickle minded and ungrateful. He had given opportunity after opportunity to return to Him yet they continued to spurn Him. They have chosen to chase after other gods who promised immediate gratification. The same pain and sorrow in His heart as reflected by Jeremiah and the newly blinded Zedekiah. The pain of the broken heart of God as ingrained in this painting.

Often, we take for granted, God's love for us. Looking at Rembrandt's painting is a graphic reminder of the danger of taking His love and God, Himself for granted."

Soli Deo Gloria