

## Introduction

[Lamentations 3](#) represents a shift in the tone of the book of Lamentations. Many who otherwise might be unfamiliar with the content of Lamentations likely know verses 22-24 of [Lamentations 3](#) very well.

Thus far in Lamentations, there have been almost no significant signs of **hope** for God's people. This changes in [Lamentations 3](#). While the pain of Jerusalem's fall is still present, hope begins to dawn on the horizon.

As Christians, we know that the Bible teaches us to hope. But knowing something is true, and sensing experiencing it in your own life are two very different things. What [Lamentations 3](#) teaches is that we should be patient as we wait for the hope of the LORD and ultimately find our hope *in* the LORD.

[Lamentations 3](#) breaks down into three parts:

1. verses 1-18 offer another report on the devastation that God has wrought on Jerusalem.
2. verses 19-24 offer a reflection on the goodness of God
3. verses 25-66 offer three different responses to the character and judgements of God: Confession, Exhortation, and Prayer

## Report on the Works of God (vv. 1-18)

Like [Lamentations 1-2](#), the beginning of [Lamentations 3](#) is another report on the destruction of Jerusalem.

These verses speak as though an individual is recounting from firsthand experience all that happened to Jerusalem when it fell.

But just as Jerusalem was personified as a lady in [Lamentations 1-2](#), this individual man is standing in for the entire community. He gives a highly symbolic report of the destruction to describe just how terrible the loss has been for God's people.

One of the symbols picked up in these verses is that of "the shepherd". Verses 1-2 state, "***I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath; he has driven and brought me into darkness without any light;***"

In [Psalm 23](#), the rod and staff of God were comforting tools that led the David beside still waters. Here in Lamentations, the opposite has occurred. The rod does not comfort but brings wrath and drives the people into darkness.

This imagery continues in verses 10-11 where God is described as a "***bear lying in wait,***" and "***a lion in hiding;***" The poet writes that God "***turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces***"

Lions and bears were the exact animals that David, when he was a shepherd defended his flock from. David went out as the shepherd and defeated the lion and the bear from devouring his flock.

Of course, David became a shepherd of Israel when he became king and defended the flock of Israel from the lions and bears that threatened them on every side. David's shepherding mirrored the shepherding of God who is the shepherd of Israel; keeping His flock in His hand and protecting them from danger on every side. But in Lamentations everything gets inverted. God is no longer a shepherd to Israel but now he is the bear and the lion coming to devour.

The language in these opening verses allude to all the covenants that God had made. Only they are unravelling. His covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David are all symbolically being undone in these verses. Because Jerusalem broke covenant with God, the covenant benefits and protections are being removed. Jerusalem has come under the sword of foreign powers, and God's people have been taken into exile.

As the poet describes how things have gone so incredibly wrong he pulls no punches. He looks at the situation and he draws the appropriate conclusions: "We are under God's wrath, and we are completely undone."

- › You should seek to emulate this pattern in your own life and we as a church should seek to emulate it in our life together. Do not seek to sugar coat the scenario. Look your own predicament in the eye. Look your own sin in the eye and call a spade a spade.
- › God is in the business of bringing salvation to the deepest and darkest of pits. Indeed His light shines all the brighter in the darkness. So don't sugar coat your sin or your situation. Bring it to God in all honesty. He already knows and He is already ready to hear and act for His people.

## Reflection on God (vv. 19-24)

The next thing the poet does is pause and reflect.

Even though the poet speaks of his soul being bowed down within me in verse 20, in verse 21 he says that he is still able to hope.

And the reason he is able to hope is displayed in the famous verses of 22-24.

***“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.””***

The reason he is able to have hope has everything to do with the character and goodness of God and very little to do with any change to his circumstances. Moreover, in verse 21 he forces himself to call to mind the character of God. This is just like what the psalmist does in [Psalm 42](#) when he asks of his own soul: ***“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation”*** ([Ps. 42:5](#)).

- › In order to contemplate the goodness of the character of God, one needs to be able to snap out of the stupor of their own despair. In other words, you need to preach to yourself. Remind yourself that God is good and despite your sin or difficult circumstance, ***the love of the LORD never ceases and his mercies never come to an end and great is His faithfulness.***

If you watch any sports, you often see athletes doing just this kind of thing. As a critical moment approaches in a competition, they speak to themselves. Whether it is a basketball player about to take a game-winning free-throw or a golfer about to attempt a put to win a major championship, you can often see

them speaking to themselves in order to bolster themselves up in the heat of the moment.

Perhaps the most beautiful part of these verses is the end that states “**the LORD is my portion...therefore I will hope in him.**”

In [Psalm 16](#) David writes, “The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup;” ([Ps 16:5](#))

In [Psalm 73](#) Asaph writes, “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” ([Ps. 73:26](#))

What our our passage here and these Psalms show is that when we remind our souls to consider the character and goodness of God, we are reminded that *He* is our great reward. Our heart, our flesh, and as was the case in Lamentations, our cities may fail, but God is the strength of our heart and our portion forever.

## Response to God (vv. 25-66)

The final 41 verses are the response to God based on all that has come before.

How does one respond to God on the basis of both His judgements and His character?

The response of these verses is: Confession, Exhortation, and Prayer.

## Confession in Response to God (vv. 25-39)

In verses 25-26 the poet states that, “**The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.**”

In this posture of waiting, the poet makes several confessions about what is appropriate for man to do in light of who God is and how God works in the world. He speaks of **sitting in silence when a yoke is laid upon him, putting his mouth in the dust** and **giving his cheek to the one who strikes him.**

These things should draw our attention to some of the things Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus speaks of turning the other cheek and going the extra mile. The reason one should do these things is because of verses 31-33. **God doesn't cast off forever. Even though he causes grief, he will have**

**compassion according to his steadfast love. The affliction that God brings is not to grieve us.**

The heart of the confession comes in verse 39 where the poet declares: “**Why should a living man complain, a man, about the punishment of his sins?**”

Christians are able to wait patiently for the LORD under great difficulty because they know two things:

- a. We are sinners who deserve only judgement.
- b. Because of His grace and mercy, God will one day make all things right and have compassion according to his steadfast love.

As Paul states in [2 Cor 4:17](#) “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,”

This basic Christian confession puts the proper perspective on all suffering.

## Exhortation in Response to God (vv. 40-51)

The second response in verses 40-51 is that of exhortation.

In verses 40-41 the poet calls upon the community to: “**test and examine [their] ways and return to the LORD.**” **And to “lift up [their] hearts and hands to God in heaven.”**

Then in the rest of the section he recounts how bad things are. God has made himself inaccessible by “**wrapping himself with a cloud**” and “**all the enemies of the people bring devastation.**”

We live in a day where the church has turned to a therapeutic approach to Christian ministry. The chief goal is to bring comfort and good feelings to the people of God. As with all misguided approaches to the Christian faith, there is truth in the therapeutic approach. Seeking to align your life and your thinking with what the Bible teaches can and should bring a measure of psychological well-being to your life. It isn't hard to read reports of the extremely high levels of depression and psychological confusion in our society. As a Christian minister I am often tempted to first think or say, “If only they would do or think ‘x, y, or z’ like the Bible teaches, then they wouldn't have this problem.” And that may be true. However, sometimes, what is called for is not the offering of solutions in

order to bring a therapeutic outcome, but rather an exhortation to examine your ways before the LORD and to lift up your hearts and hands to God in heaven. As the prophet Joels says, “who knows whether God might not turn and relent.”

## Prayer in Response to God (vv. 52-66)

Our passage concludes with a prayer in verses 52-66.

In many ways, the language of this section is reminiscent of more language from the Psalms where David and others speak of being in the pit and having waters close in over their head.

And in verses 55-57 we read, “***I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit; you heard my plea, ‘Do not close your ear to my cry for help!’ You came near when I called on you; you said, ‘Do not fear!’***”

And in verse 59 we see the request of the poet as he asks God to “***judge his cause***” and to “***repay them according to the work of their hands***” and to “***pursue them in anger***”.

## Conclusion

In this poem there is a whole movement from despairing of the circumstances, to reflecting on God’s character to responding to God in confession, exhortation, and prayer. This poem represents a shift in Lamentations as a whole. In the first two books, there were almost no signs of hope, but in [Lamentations 3](#) there is much more hope. When one reads through Lamentations, you learn that the bigger picture can often offer hope even when the immediate circumstances are seemingly hopeless.

As Christians we serve the Alpha and the Omega. Our God knows the end from the beginning. And because of this, we can live in hope in the darkest of circumstances.