***Lamentations 4:12-22 The kings of the earth, And all inhabitants of the world, Would not have believed That the adversary and the enemy Could enter the gates of Jerusalem - 13Because of the sins of her prophets And the iniquities of her priests, Who shed in her midst The blood of the just. 14They wandered blind in the streets; They have defiled themselves with blood, So that no one would touch their garments. 15They cried out to them, “Go away, unclean! Go away, go away, Do not touch us!” When they fled and wandered, Those among the nations said, “They shall no longer dwell here.” 16The face of the Lord scattered them; He no longer regards them. The people do not respect the priests Nor show favor to the elders. 17Still our eyes failed us, Watching vainly for our help; In our watching we watched For a nation that could not save us. 18They tracked our steps So that we could not walk in our streets. Our end was near; Our days were over, For our end had come. 19Our pursuers were swifter Than the eagles of the heavens. They pursued us on the mountains And lay in wait for us in the wilderness. 20The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, Was caught in their pits, Of whom we said, “Under his shadow We shall live among the nations.” 21Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, You who dwell in the land of Uz! The cup shall also pass over to you And you shall become drunk and make yourself naked. 22The punishment of your iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; He will no longer send you into captivity. He will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom; He will uncover your sins!***

Tonight, Lord willing, we will finish Lamentations 4. Jeremiah continues to examine the sin of Judah and the judgement that comes as a result of that sin. Sin blanketed both the leaders and the people. Priests, princes, and the general population have fallen into rebellion against the God that has blessed them. Yet, we know that He will bless them again. God is a promise keeper. He keeps His promises even as His people break theirs. It was true then and it is true now.

Verse 12 *The kings of the earth, And all inhabitants of the world, Would not have believed That the adversary and the enemy Could enter the gates of Jerusalem* ***–*** Recall with me how often delivered Jerusalem from destruction. Time and again, He had placed His hand of protection over it. 2 Kings 19:35 is one of my favorite examples. King Hezekiah prayed long before Lamentations and we read - *And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the Lord went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses - all dead.* During this time of Lamentations, the surrounding kings would have known the history and the miraculous deliveries and would find it hard to believe that this city could fall. Of course, we know that it was not the walls or the gates or the sentries or the soldiers preserving Jerusalem, but God.

Verse 13 *Because of the sins of her prophets And the iniquities of her priests, Who shed in her midst The blood of the just.* False prophets and false teachers fed the people what their itching ears wanted to hear. Prophets like Jeremiah were not welcome, because he spoke the Truth and called for repentance. Even the priests, who were anointed by through the approval of the world and not by God, were found to pervert justice, oppress the powerless, and act violently, pridefully, lustfully, and greedily. They shed the blood of the just. They imprison the righteous. 2 Kings 24:3-4 *Surely at the commandment of the Lord this came upon Judah, to remove them from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, 4 and also because of the innocent blood that he had shed; for he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the Lord would not pardon*. Kings, princes, priests, and false prophets led the persecution of the righteous, just as in Jesus’ time. These may have been the leaders of the persecution, but let’s make no mistake that the people welcomed it. It gave them license to sin and no one called them out. Priests were to be the watchmen on the walls… then and now. Ezekiel 3:7 *But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted.* People choose their teachers. Many hear pastors as a pleasant voice with good words, but miss the lesson and never repent. Ezekiel 33:32 says *Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them.* True then. True now.

Verses 14-16 *They wandered blind in the streets; They have defiled themselves with blood, So that no one would touch their garments. 15 They cried out to them, “Go away, unclean! Go away, go away, Do not touch us!” When they fled and wandered, Those among the nations said, “They shall no longer dwell here.” 16 The face of the Lord scattered them; He no longer regards them. The people do not respect the priests Nor show favor to the elders.* ***They*** *wandered blind in the streets; They have defiled themselves with blood, So that no one would touch their garments.*Jeremiah is still describing the priests and false prophets. They have deserted the path of righteousness and following God. They are blind to good and evil. They call right wrong and wrong right. The blood of God’s servants is on them. This would make them unclean in a ceremonial sense. *They cried out to them, “Go away, unclean! Go away, go away, Do not touch us!” When they fled and wandered, Those among the nations said, “They shall no longer dwell here.”* The priests and the princes were there to protect the people, but they fled in the face of the enemy. Like lepers, these unclean priests that have deserted their duty, should announce to all – unclean, unclean, the people’s blood is upon us. *The face of the Lord scattered them; He no longer regards them. The people do not respect the priests Nor show favor to the elders.* God scattered them to foreign nations. These nations did not hold the Jewish people in esteem. Kings were blinded. Princes killed. Priests imprisoned. None are respected.

Verse 17 *Still our eyes failed us, Watching vainly for our help; In our watching we watched For a nation that could not save us.* Jeremiah now returns to the lament. Verses 12-16 revealed the leaders responsible for this terrible situation. Judah had made agreements with Egypt, but this worldly hope failed. They watched so hard for worldly salvation, sending gifts to the Pharoahs, that their eyes failed. Egypt was a hireling. God was the true Owner. The people sought salvation from a nation that could not save.

Verses 18-20 *They tracked our steps So that we could not walk in our streets. Our end was near; Our days were over, For our end had come. 19 Our pursuers were swifter Than the eagles of the heavens. They pursued us on the mountains And lay in wait for us in the wilderness. 20 The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, Was caught in their pits, Of whom we said, “Under his shadow We shall live among the nations.”* ***They****tracked our steps So that we could not walk in our streets. Our end was near; Our days were over, For our end had come.* The enemy is so close that there is no safety in the streets. It’s not even safe to look out the front door. The end is near. Ruin is at hand. God has completely undone the defenses. As in the end days of Babylon, when the hand appeared and wrote upon the wall. Judah has been weighed in God’s scales and found lacking. Moses in Deuteronomy 28:49 says *The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand.* 700 years later, God brings that curse to bear - *Our pursuers were swifter Than the eagles of the heavens. They pursued us on the mountains And lay in wait for us in the wilderness.* The enemy chases whether in the mountains or the flatlands and fields. The people of Judah have nowhere to run. *The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, Was caught in their pits, Of whom we said, “Under his shadow We shall live among the nations.”* Of course, we know that Zedekiah is captured and blinded by the Babylonians, before being taken into captivity. As long as Zedekiah remained, the people had hope. Kings were often compared to trees in scripture. People rested in the shade of their protection.

Verses 21 *Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, You who dwell in the land of Uz! The cup shall also pass over to you And you shall become drunk and make yourself naked.* ***Rejoice*** *and be glad, O daughter of Edom, You who dwell in the land of Uz! The cup shall also pass over to you And you shall become drunk and make yourself naked.* This is an expression similar to if Jeremiah had said – laugh while you can Edom. Your day is coming. Of course we know that he who laughs last laughs best. The Jews remain. The Edomites are no more. The cup of affliction will come to Edom. Edom, we remember, were the descendants of Esau. In Jeremiah 49:10 we read - *But I have made Esau bare; I have uncovered his secret places, And he shall not be able to hide himself. His descendants are plundered, His brethren and his neighbors,* ***And he is no more.***

Verse 22*The punishment of your iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; He will no longer send you into captivity. He will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom; He will uncover your sins!* In this last verse, Jeremiah pronounces gracious mercy upon Israel while pronouncing judgement upon Edom. He will deliver Israel from the captivity and deliver on His promise for Salvation through Jesus, the descendant of Jacob. He will not forget the sins of Edom, the descendants of Esau. Promises made by God 1300 or so years earlier will be kept 700 years later in the fully God, fully man person of Jesus Christ.

Likewise, God will not forget His children, when a nation turns it’s back on Him. He remembers those called by His name as surely as He remembered His children in Egypt. Though times may be perilous, we must continue to seek His Face and cry out for His mercy. Exodus 2:23-25 *Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. 24 So God heard their groaning,* ***and God remembered His covenant*** *with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. 25 And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them.* God remembered His promise then. God remembers His promise now. We may suffer many persecutions, trials, and tribulations in this world, but we have a promise of a home in heaven when our work on this earth is done.