

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL *continued*

inescapable maze! *“It is just with God to make those who walk in the crooked paths of sin, crossing God’s law, walk in the crooked paths of affliction, crossing their designs”* (Matthew Henry).

[4] THE HOSTILITY: TARGETED BY THE WEAPONRY OF WAR; 3:10-15. The picture of the Lord’s hostility and obstructiveness is intensified as He is now pictured as **(a) a wild Animal (3:10-11)** which mauls, but does not kill and leaves him motionless, terrified and stupefied (*“desolate”*); and as **(b) an enemy Archer (3:12-13)**. As Philip Ryken put it: *“God was the predator; Jeremiah was the prey.”* The archer recalls **2:4:** (i) *Direction* is indicated (*“set me as a mark for the arrow”*), as is (ii) *Penetration* (the arrow pierces to his kidneys (*“reins”*), and (iii) *Derision*, because this assault on Jeremiah provokes his fellow countrymen to laugh at him due to his continued faith in the Lord, (iv) *Consumption*, compelled to eat *“bitter herbs”* (cf. **Exodus 12:8; Num. 9:11**) and *“wormwood”* (cf. **Job 9:18**).

[5] THE DESPONDENCY: DOWN IN THE DUMPS OF DESPAIR; 16-18. These verses rank among some of the saddest and gloomiest of all. **(a) THE REFERENCE TO DESPAIR, 3:16:** desperately scavenging for any source of food and picking up small stones from the ground along with previously discarded scraps; **(b) THE REACTION TO DESPAIR, 3:17: Loss of Peace**, indicating all round health and happiness, was an especially important concept to Israel; plus **Loss of Prosperity** followed. **(c) THE DECLARATION OF DESPAIR; 3:18:** total loss of confidence. However, with the first mention of *“The LORD”* (Jehovah) by name, the Dawning of a New Day begins.

MEETINGS TODAY



- Morning Worship – 11.30am:
6th Message in the Lamentations Series: “Up Close And Personal.”
- Evening Service – 7.00pm:
“The Biggest Opportunities in Life.”
Soloist – Leah Middleton.



PROGRESS AMONG THE YOUNG

The past week has served up many blessed encouragements in the work of God in Martyrs among the young. The Sunday School attendance reached 22 pupils with the addition of a further six last Lord’s Day morning. The Explore and Reach meetings in Martyrs on the Monday night have been rising since the beginning of this new term from an initial 70 to 85 and then to 88; parents who were present at ‘Little Ones’ on Thursday morning indicated that a further five of their children would be attending the meetings on Monday nights. This is a particular answer to the specific prayer we have been concentrating on, that the Lord would help us develop linkages throughout the work in the Martyrs. Tuesday evenings in Taughmonagh also show an increase in numbers: Joel Harrison, who leads the Reach on Tuesday, and Matthew Nelson who assists him, would be especially appreciative of the help of some other young people in these meetings, especially now that 20+ young people are coming to be instructed in the Word of God. If you are available – or know someone else who would be interested – please indicate this as soon as possible. Your help will be highly valued!



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Lamentations 3:1-18.

In the Great War, the City of Belfast built ships, assembled munitions and – most of all – provided men, inc. 46,000 volunteers. 375 men who died on 1st July 1916 at the Somme were from the city of Belfast. The story of William Kerr and his Protestant friends from Forthriver Gardens gives a personal touch to these statistics. This personal effect also appears in **Lamentations 3** where the sufferings of the people are depicted in the experience of a single person (“I” and “me” throughout). Matthew Henry suggests that the title of **Psalm 102** applies to this chapter: “*A prayer of an afflicted man when he is faint and pours out his lament before the Lord.*”

[1] THE SUMMARY: UNDER THE ROD OF GOD’S WRATH. The word “*man*” in **3:1** is not the ordinary term for a male, but a rarer word which describes a man at the peak of his physical (or spiritual, cf. **Psalm 40:4**) power – that time when he is most competent to direct and secure his own affairs. But even he is no match for the punishment of the Lord. The “*rod*” has an important place in the Lord’s gracious dealings with us. For this very rod that is “*the rod of His wrath*” (cf. **Isaiah 10:5**) is also the rod of His comfort and strength (cf. **Micah 7:14; Psalm 23:4**). While the poet is not conscious of any intimacy with the Lord, and cannot escape from the all-pervasive and constricting control God has over his life, it is worth noting that when God is angry with His people it is not an action in His hatred to destroy us, but one in His love to correct us (cf. **Hebrews 12:10-13; Romans 11:22**). The moment we realise it is the Lord and, as a result, “*are brought to a fresh consciousness of our sin, genuine repentance and a cry for forgiveness, ‘Then it is that wrath gives place to mercy: punishment is disarmed by pardon.’*”

[2] THE ENMITY: DOWN IN THE DUNGEON OF DEATH. Various figures are used to depict how Jeremiah was

sent by his God downwards into the dungeon of death:

(a) THE SHEPHERD, directing into darkness; 3:2: “*Led me*” and “*brought me*” have the force of driven and speaks of the direction and control of animals (cf. **Psalm 80:1**); but here the Lord is no longer the Shepherd who brings His people to abundant green pastures and leads them beside still waters (**Psalm 23:2**); rather His wrath brought them into darkness.

(b) THE CHARIOTEER, pursuing along his entire pathway; 3:3: no matter how much the hapless victim turns and twists to escape, his pursuer corrects the line to keep up. Though this appears constant, it must be remembered there is always a kind heart behind the strong hand.

(c) THE TORTURER, exhausting our energy; 3:4: a term to describe threadbare clothes – “*made old*” – is here applied to bodies (cf. **Job 13:28**). “*... He hath broken my bones*” expresses how the body has been drained of the strength needed to stand upright or be active.

(d) THE BESIEGER, building up bitterness; 3:5: “*Gall*” is an unidentified wild plant which was extremely bitter to the taste; “*travail*” described the rigours of Israel’s wandering through the wilderness (**Exodus 18:8; Numbers 20:14**).

(e) THE GRAVEDIGGER, dragging him into the dungeon/domain of death; 3:6: “*Dark places*” refer to more than imprisonment in dungeons that do not admit any light; they also include the grave (**Psalm 88:6, 18; cf. Psalm 143:3**). Jeremiah felt that the depth of his distress was such that no one cared; he was virtually living in the grave.

[3] THE CAPTIVITY: TRAPPED IN THE MAZE OF MISERY. He has **(a) SEALED THE EXIT, 3:7**, with a wall and chain. “*When the Lord imposes maximum security conditions, then it is futile for mere humans to attempt to get away.*” (John Mackay). He has **(b) SHUT DOWN THE ENTREATY, 3:8**, The Lord is like a jailer who refuses to listen to his entreaty (cf. **Job 19:7; 30:20; Isaiah 59:2; Psalm 66:18**). He has **(c) STRENGTHENED THE ENCLOSURE, 3:9:** by the use of “*hewn stone*,” which denotes carefully chiselled material, thoughts of deliberation and permanence appear. To make “*my paths crooked*” (lit. “*turned his paths*”; made them impossible to walk in), signified that life has become an