

IN &
OUT®

Lamentations

HOPE AND HEALING IN THE
AFTERMATH OF REBELLION
AGAINST GOD

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LAMENTATIONS

HOPE AND HEALING IN THE AFTERMATH
OF REBELLION AGAINST GOD

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The Aftermath of Rebelling Against God

What happens when a nation turns its back on God? When it acknowledges God but does not honor Him as God? When it twists, distorts, or even forbids the proclamation of the truths of His Word?

Oh, how timely is this study of Lamentations.

What lessons are there for you and your nation . . . and for us as individuals in dealing with the aftermath of rebellion? Of listening to false prophets? Of thinking that God will not hold us accountable for transgressing His Word and then discovering we were wrong?

How do you live with yourself? With the consequences? Reconstruct the shambles of life and make it worth living again?

Or can you?

Yes, you can, because He's a God of compassion. You just need to know how to tap into His mercies which are new every morning . . . and this you will learn in your study of Lamentations.

TAKING IT IN

A lament is an expression of grief, of mourning, of sorrow. Surely we have each been there at one time or another. Some of us more than others. We feel as if life is one continual lament. You know the feeling, don't you? The pain. The guilt for what we did, should have done, or didn't do. The crippling sorrow. The sense, often, of despair. And then to make matters worse, we think there is no sorrow like our sorrow—and a twinge of envy creeps into our hearts as we look at those who have what we've dreamed of and missed.

We will study Lamentations chapter-by-chapter over the next three weeks. Lesson 1 covers chapters 1–2, Lesson 2 covers chapter 3, and Lesson 3 covers chapters 4–5. As you begin seeing for yourself what the text says, you'll want to ask the Lord's help; He's the ultimate Author!

1. In the Appendix you will find “Observation Worksheets,” which are the text of Lamentations double-spaced with wide margins. Your first assignment is to read Lamentations 1.

a. As you read this chapter, mark the following key words in a distinctive way:

1) *Jerusalem*—Pick a color (for example, light blue) and color every reference to Jerusalem, including pronouns, in that color. Color any synonyms used for Jerusalem, such as Zion, in the same color. Jerusalem was the capital of a nation who rebelled against the Lord. If you are living in a nation that has done the same, take note!

2) *comfort*

3) *adversaries (enemies)* and any synonyms

4) *nations**

5) expressions of time,* such as *when* or *on the day of* . . .

* Throughout this workbook, an asterisk denotes a word with a suggested marking on the bookmark found on the back cover. The reverse side of the bookmark is blank. It is helpful to use this side to make a Key Word Bookmark and record each word you mark in Lamentations and how you’ll mark it each time you are directed in a chapter.

b. Now that you’ve read the first chapter, let’s see what you learned from marking Jerusalem. Of course it is a city, but a city is comprised of people.

1) Let’s look at how the city is introduced to us in verse 1. What contrasts do you see? List below what Jerusalem was and what it is now.

2) From your study of chapter 1, what is the state of Jerusalem?

- 3) Why is Jerusalem in this condition?
- 4) Who lived in Jerusalem—or is still in the city—and where are they? What is their state—how are they faring? List the various peoples below and note what the text tells you about them.
- 5) Does this chapter give you any sense of the timing of this lament—when it happened and what led up to it?
- 6) What does Jerusalem acknowledge in this chapter? By the way, did you notice the shift in pronouns in verses 9 and 11? Why the shift?

2. Read Lamentations 1 again. You might read it aloud, as hearing its words will help you remember it better.
 - a. Color or mark references to:
 - 1) the *LORD*, * including pronouns.
 - 2) the *sanctuary* (see *temple**), which is the temple where the people worshiped God. *Sanctuary* is only mentioned once in this chapter, but it will appear more later. Remember the sanctuary is the temple built by King Solomon, the son of David the second king of Israel. This is where they were to turn to and pray when they were in distress because of their sins (2 Chronicles 6–7).
 - 3) every occurrence of *transgression(s)*, * *sinned*, *rebelled*, and *wickedness*.
 - b. Now, let's see what we can learn from the references to the Lord that we marked. Read all the instructions before you begin so you don't duplicate your work.
 - 1) What does Jerusalem want the Lord to do and why? List your insights.

 - 2) What did the Lord do to Jerusalem? Does the text tell you why? If so, note it.

- 3) What does this chapter tell you about the Lord—His person and ways? List your observations.
 - c. According to what you have observed in Lamentations 1,
 - 1) when we sin (transgress)—who is it against? Who suffers?
 - 2) What do you think the first three lines of Lamentations 1:9 mean?
3. Read Lamentations 2:1-9 and mark the predominant person as you marked Him in Lamentations 1. When you finish, reflect on what you observed. Look at the verbs. Summarize what these verses tell us about Him. What is God's point?
4. Now observe all of Lamentations 2.
 - a. Add the following words to your Key Word Bookmark and mark them, along with the other words on your bookmark:
 - 1) God's *anger*
 - 2) *destroy, wrath, flaming fire*

-
- 3) All the references to the *tabernacle*,* *the house of the Lord*, the way you marked *sanctuary* in chapter 1
 - 4) *appointed feast*. Mark 1:4 the same way; however, don't add it to your bookmark since it's not used after chapter 2.
 - 5) *heart*
- b. Although this is considered poetic literature and there are no paragraph divisions, how would you divide this chapter by content or emphasis? Mark divisions in pencil on your Observation Worksheet and then write down the main topic of each.
5. As you think through the content of Lamentations 2, who suffers when a nation is disobedient? What groups of peoples are mentioned in this chapter? Do any escape? List your observations below.
6. Read Lamentations 2:18-19.
- a. What is the exhortation?

- b. How does this compare with Jeremiah 14:13-18 and what you've read concerning the prophets in Lamentations 2:14?
- c. Why do you think this call to grieve over sin is important?
7. Now that you have a taste of Lamentations 1 and 2, it seems a good time to explain how the book of Lamentations is laid out. There are insights into the composition and structure of this book that you could only get through an understanding of the Hebrew language. Therefore, since biblical Hebrew is not the language of most of us, we want to share with you what we have learned from others about the structure of the lamentations.¹

First, Lamentations is poetic literature.

- Lamentations is found in the last section of the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) is divided into three segments: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The last section of the Writings (containing Lamentations) is the Megilloth, which is comprised of five Old Testament books read publically on Jewish holidays.
- Lamentations is read on the 9th of Av, which commemorates the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 B.C. and A.D. 70.

Although there are different poetic styles and devices in the book, there is a specific cadence heard in the reading of the poetry that conveys the mood of its words, a mood you will quickly sense as you observe the text.

¹ Frank E. Gaebelien, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 6, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishers, 1990), pp. 697-698. Charles R. Swindoll, *Lamentations of Jeremiah (Bible Study Guide)* (Fullerton, California: Insight for Living, 1986), pp. 10-11. Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1978), pp. 352-53.

Second, Lamentations consists of five different lamentations.

- The title of Lamentations is taken from the book’s first word, *’êkâh*. This word may be translated “Alas!” or “How” and was a characteristic cry of lament or exclamation (cf. 2 Sam. 1:19; Jer. 9:19).²
- Except for Lamentations 5 each chapter is an acrostic. An acrostic uses the letters in a composition to spell a word or phrase, or, as in the case of Lamentations, it lays out the Hebrew alphabet in order.
- The Hebrew alphabet has twenty-two letters. Three of the lamentations—chapters 1, 2, and 4—consist of twenty-two verses. Each of these verses begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapters 1 and 2 have three-line stanzas while chapter 4 has only two-line stanzas.
- Lamentations 3 has sixty-six verses—three times twenty-two. It’s the crescendo of the book both in layout and in content. Each of the three lines in every stanza begins with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet from *aleph* to *tau* (A to Z in the English alphabet)! [Because of the length of Lamentations 3, we will devote one week to its study.]
- And what about chapter 5? It’s *not* an acrostic of the Hebrew alphabet but it does have twenty-two verses so it doesn’t break the mold completely!

**LIVING
IT OUT**

1. Now for application, when you make a choice, do you stop and consider the consequences of that choice? Would this change some of the decisions you made in the past? Why?

² J. F. Walvoord, R. B. Zuck, & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (1:1207). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

2. After you finish this course on Lamentations, you might consider leading someone through the 40-Minute Study on *How to Make Choices You Won't Regret*.³
3. Now, Beloved, stop and think about all you have learned about sin and about the Lord.
 - a. Does your understanding of God agree with these truths?
 - b. Do you need to correct any beliefs so they line up with the plumb line of God's Word? List them.
 - c. How does what you have observed affect your understanding of disobedience to the Word of God?
4. How does the world's view on the rights of an individual line up with the Bible? Studying God's Word inductively should help you develop a biblical worldview—see and measure everything by the plumb line of God's Word. The world teaches that one person's rights end where another's begin, that the sins of one individual don't have anything to do with another. That may be true in some cases, but as we see in Lamentations 1 and 2, the effects of sin can spill over to entire nations, not just the guilty. How does this truth affect your perspective of your family, community, or country?

³ Kay Arthur, David Lawson, B.J. Lawson, *How to Make Choices You Won't Regret* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2003).

5. What is the cry, the prayer to the Lord in Lamentations 2? What does this say to you?
6. Finally, Beloved, why don't you write out your own lament for your nation. It does not need to be in poetic form. It can be a prayer. Or, if words are not your thing, what about a sketch or a composite of pictures or articles that show the state of affairs or your concerns about the nation in which you live? Or it might even be a letter to the editor.

As a point of discipleship, remember we live in a culture that is quick to accuse anyone of judging if they feel scrutinized. So much so in fact that even the church is often afraid to talk about sin. Yet 1 Corinthians 5:6 says, “. . . Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?” As members of the body of Christ, we have a calling to preach Christ crucified to those outside the church, but we must confront sin within it so that it does not spread (like leaven). Hold each other accountable, have hard conversations when necessary, and praise God that you have brothers and sisters who love enough to confront with truth!

LAMENTATIONS 1

Observation Worksheet

Chapter Theme _____

HOW lonely sits the city

That was full of people!

She has become like a widow

Who was *once* great among the nations!

She who was a princess among the provinces

Has become a forced laborer!

2 She weeps bitterly in the night

And her tears are on her cheeks;

She has none to comfort her

Among all her lovers.

All her friends have dealt treacherously with her;

They have become her enemies.

3 Judah has gone into exile under affliction

And under harsh servitude;

She dwells among the nations,

But she has found no rest;

All her pursuers have overtaken her

In the midst of distress.

4 The roads of Zion are in mourning

Because no one comes to the appointed feasts.

All her gates are desolate;

Her priests are groaning,

Her virgins are afflicted,

And she herself is bitter.

5 Her adversaries have become her masters,

Her enemies prosper;

For the LORD has caused her grief

Because of the multitude of her transgressions;
Her little ones have gone away
As captives before the adversary.

- 6 All her majesty
Has departed from the daughter of Zion;
Her princes have become like deer
That have found no pasture;
And they have fled without strength
Before the pursuer.
- 7 In the days of her affliction and homelessness
Jerusalem remembers all her precious things
That were from the days of old,
When her people fell into the hand of the adversary
And no one helped her.
The adversaries saw her,
They mocked at her ruin.
- 8 Jerusalem sinned greatly,
Therefore she has become an unclean thing.
All who honored her despise her
Because they have seen her nakedness;
Even she herself groans and turns away.
- 9 Her uncleanness was in her skirts;
She did not consider her future.
Therefore she has fallen astonishingly;
She has no comforter.
“See, O LORD, my affliction,
For the enemy has magnified himself!”
- 10 The adversary has stretched out his hand
Over all her precious things,
For she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary,
The ones whom You commanded
That they should not enter into Your congregation.

- 11 All her people groan seeking bread;
They have given their precious things for food
To restore their lives themselves.
“See, O LORD, and look,
For I am despised.”
- 12 “Is it nothing to all you who pass this way?
Look and see if there is any pain like my pain
Which was severely dealt out to me,
Which the LORD inflicted on the day of His fierce anger.
- 13 “From on high He sent fire into my bones,
And it prevailed *over them*.
He has spread a net for my feet;
He has turned me back;
He has made me desolate,
Faint all day long.
- 14 “The yoke of my transgressions is bound;
By His hand they are knit together.
They have come upon my neck;
He has made my strength fail.
The Lord has given me into the hands
Of *those against whom* I am not able to stand.
- 15 “The Lord has rejected all my strong men
In my midst;
He has called an appointed time against me
To crush my young men;
The Lord has trodden *as in* a wine press
The virgin daughter of Judah.
- 16 “For these things I weep;
My eyes run down with water;
Because far from me is a comforter,
One who restores my soul.
My children are desolate
Because the enemy has prevailed.”

- 17 Zion stretches out her hands;
There is no one to comfort her;
The LORD has commanded concerning Jacob
That the ones round about him should be his adversaries;
Jerusalem has become an unclean thing among them.
- 18 “The LORD is righteous;
For I have rebelled against His command;
Hear now, all peoples,
And behold my pain;
My virgins and my young men
Have gone into captivity.
- 19 “I called to my lovers, *but* they deceived me;
My priests and my elders perished in the city
While they sought food to restore their strength themselves.
- 20 “See, O LORD, for I am in distress;
My spirit is greatly troubled;
My heart is overturned within me,
For I have been very rebellious.
In the street the sword slays;
In the house it is like death.
- 21 “They have heard that I groan;
There is no one to comfort me;
All my enemies have heard of my calamity;
They are glad that You have done *it*.
Oh, that You would bring the day which You have proclaimed,
That they may become like me.
- 22 “Let all their wickedness come before You;
And deal with them as You have dealt with me
For all my transgressions;
For my groans are many and my heart is faint.”

LAMENTATIONS 2

Observation Worksheet

Chapter Theme _____

HOW the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion

With a cloud in His anger!

He has cast from heaven to earth

The glory of Israel,

And has not remembered His footstool

In the day of His anger.

2 The Lord has swallowed up; He has not spared

All the habitations of Jacob.

In His wrath He has thrown down

The strongholds of the daughter of Judah;

He has brought *them* down to the ground;

He has profaned the kingdom and its princes.

3 In fierce anger He has cut off

All the strength of Israel;

He has drawn back His right hand

From before the enemy.

And He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire

Consuming round about.

4 He has bent His bow like an enemy;

He has set His right hand like an adversary

And slain all that were pleasant to the eye;

In the tent of the daughter of Zion

He has poured out His wrath like fire.

5 The Lord has become like an enemy.

He has swallowed up Israel;

He has swallowed up all its palaces,

He has destroyed its strongholds

And multiplied in the daughter of Judah

Mourning and moaning.

- 6 And He has violently treated His tabernacle like a garden *booth*;
He has destroyed His appointed meeting place.
The LORD has caused to be forgotten
The appointed feast and sabbath in Zion,
And He has despised king and priest
In the indignation of His anger.
- 7 The Lord has rejected His altar,
He has abandoned His sanctuary;
He has delivered into the hand of the enemy
The walls of her palaces.
They have made a noise in the house of the LORD
As in the day of an appointed feast.
- 8 The LORD determined to destroy
The wall of the daughter of Zion.
He has stretched out a line,
He has not restrained His hand from destroying,
And He has caused rampart and wall to lament;
They have languished together.
- 9 Her gates have sunk into the ground,
He has destroyed and broken her bars.
Her king and her princes are among the nations;
The law is no more.
Also, her prophets find
No vision from the LORD.
- 10 The elders of the daughter of Zion
Sit on the ground, they are silent.
They have thrown dust on their heads;
They have girded themselves with sackcloth.
The virgins of Jerusalem
Have bowed their heads to the ground.

- 11 My eyes fail because of tears,
My spirit is greatly troubled;
My heart is poured out on the earth
Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people,
When little ones and infants faint
In the streets of the city.
- 12 They say to their mothers,
“Where is grain and wine?”
As they faint like a wounded man
In the streets of the city,
As their life is poured out
On their mothers’ bosom.
- 13 How shall I admonish you?
To what shall I compare you,
O daughter of Jerusalem?
To what shall I liken you as I comfort you,
O virgin daughter of Zion?
For your ruin is as vast as the sea;
Who can heal you?
- 14 Your prophets have seen for you
False and foolish *visions*;
And they have not exposed your iniquity
So as to restore you from captivity,
But they have seen for you false and misleading oracles.
- 15 All who pass along the way
Clap their hands *in derision* at you;
They hiss and shake their heads
At the daughter of Jerusalem,
“Is this the city of which they said,
‘The perfection of beauty,
A joy to all the earth?’”

- 16 All your enemies
Have opened their mouths wide against you;
They hiss and gnash *their* teeth.
They say, “We have swallowed *her* up!
Surely this is the day for which we waited;
We have reached *it*, we have seen *it*.”
- 17 The LORD has done what He purposed;
He has accomplished His word
Which He commanded from days of old.
He has thrown down without sparing,
And He has caused the enemy to rejoice over you;
He has exalted the might of your adversaries.
- 18 Their heart cried out to the Lord,
“O wall of the daughter of Zion,
Let *your* tears run down like a river day and night;
Give yourself no relief,
Let your eyes have no rest.
- 19 “Arise, cry aloud in the night
At the beginning of the night watches;
Pour out your heart like water
Before the presence of the Lord;
Lift up your hands to Him
For the life of your little ones
Who are faint because of hunger
At the head of every street.”
- 20 See, O LORD, and look!
With whom have You dealt thus?
Should women eat their offspring,
The little ones who were born healthy?
Should priest and prophet be slain
In the sanctuary of the Lord?

- 21 On the ground in the streets
Lie young and old;
My virgins and my young men
Have fallen by the sword.
You have slain *them* in the day of Your anger,
You have slaughtered, not sparing.
- 22 You called as in the day of an appointed feast
My terrors on every side;
And there was no one who escaped or survived
In the day of the LORD'S anger.
Those whom I bore and reared,
My enemy annihilated them.

