



English Standard Version

Lamentations

HOPE AND HEALING IN THE
AFTERMATH OF REBELLION
AGAINST GOD

IN & OUT[®]

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LAMENTATIONS

HOPE AND HEALING IN THE AFTERMATH
OF REBELLION AGAINST GOD

ISBN 978-1-62119-620-4

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1ST edition

Printed in the United States of America



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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 simply 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) *foes (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 *evildoing*.
 - 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) *destroying, laid in ruins (ruined, laid waste), wrath, fury, flaming fire*



- 3) All the references to the *booth, the house of the Lord*, the way you marked *sanctuary* in chapter 1
 - 4) *festival*. 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).



LAMENTATIONS 1

Observation Worksheet

Chapter Theme _____

HOW lonely sits the city

that was full of people!

How like a widow has she become,
she who was great among the nations!

She who was a princess among the provinces
has become a slave.

2 She weeps bitterly in the night,
with tears on her cheeks;
among all her lovers
she has none to comfort her;
all her friends have dealt treacherously with her;
they have become her enemies.

3 Judah has gone into exile because of affliction
and hard servitude;
she dwells now among the nations,
but finds no resting place;
her pursuers have all overtaken her
in the midst of her distress.

4 The roads to Zion mourn,
for none come to the festival;
all her gates are desolate;
her priests groan;
her virgins have been afflicted,
and she herself suffers bitterly.



- 5 Her foes have become the head;
her enemies prosper,
because the LORD has afflicted her
for the multitude of her transgressions;
her children have gone away,
captives before the foe.
- 6 From the daughter of Zion
all her majesty has departed.
Her princes have become like deer
that find no pasture;
they fled without strength
before the pursuer.
- 7 Jerusalem remembers
in the days of her affliction and wandering
all the precious things
that were hers from days of old.
When her people fell into the hand of the foe,
and there was none to help her,
her foes gloated over her;
they mocked at her downfall.
- 8 Jerusalem sinned grievously;
therefore she became filthy;
all who honored her despise her,
for they have seen her nakedness;
she herself groans
and turns her face away.
- 9 Her uncleanness was in her skirts;
she took no thought of her future;
therefore her fall is terrible;
she has no comforter.



- “O LORD, behold my affliction,
for the enemy has triumphed!”
- 10 The enemy has stretched out his hands
over all her precious things;
for she has seen the nations
enter her sanctuary,
those whom you forbade
to enter your congregation.
- 11 All her people groan
as they search for bread;
they trade their treasures for food
to revive their strength.
“Look, O LORD, and see,
for I am despised.”
- 12 “Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?
Look and see
if there is any sorrow like my sorrow,
which was brought upon me,
which the LORD inflicted
on the day of his fierce anger.
- 13 “From on high he sent fire;
into my bones he made it descend;
he spread a net for my feet;
he turned me back;
he has left me stunned,
faint all the day long.
- 14 “My transgressions were bound into a yoke;
by his hand they were fastened together;
they were set upon my neck;



he caused my strength to fail;
the Lord gave me into the hands
of those whom I cannot withstand.

15 “The Lord rejected
all my mighty men in my midst;
he summoned an assembly against me
to crush my young men;
the Lord has trodden as in a winepress
the virgin daughter of Judah.

16 “For these things I weep;
my eyes flow with tears;
for a comforter is far from me,
one to revive my spirit;
my children are desolate,
for the enemy has prevailed.”

17 Zion stretches out her hands,
but there is none to comfort her;
the LORD has commanded against Jacob
that his neighbors should be his foes;
Jerusalem has become
a filthy thing among them.

18 “The LORD is in the right,
for I have rebelled against his word;
but hear, all you peoples,
and see my suffering;
my young women and my young men
have gone into captivity.

19 “I called to my lovers,
but they deceived me;
my priests and elders



perished in the city,
while they sought food
to revive their strength.

20 “Look, O LORD, for I am in distress;
my stomach churns;
my heart is wrung within me,
because I have been very rebellious.
In the street the sword bereaves;
in the house it is like death.

21 “They heard my groaning,
yet there is no one to comfort me.
All my enemies have heard of my trouble;
they are glad that you have done it.
You have brought the day you announced;
now let them be as I am.

22 “Let all their evildoing come before you,
and deal with them
as you have dealt with me
because of all my transgressions;
for my groans are many,
and my heart is faint.”



LAMENTATIONS 2

Observation Worksheet

Chapter Theme _____

- HOW the Lord in his anger
has set the daughter of Zion under a cloud!
He has cast down from heaven to earth
the splendor of Israel;
he has not remembered his footstool
in the day of his anger.
- 2 The Lord has swallowed up without mercy
all the habitations of Jacob;
in his wrath he has broken down
the strongholds of the daughter of Judah;
he has brought down to the ground in dishonor
the kingdom and its rulers.
- 3 He has cut down in fierce anger
all the might of Israel;
he has withdrawn from them his right hand
in the face of the enemy;
he has burned like a flaming fire in Jacob,
consuming all around.
- 4 He has bent his bow like an enemy,
with his right hand set like a foe;
and he has killed all who were delightful in our eyes
in the tent of the daughter of Zion;
he has poured out his fury like fire.



- 5 The Lord has become like an enemy;
he has swallowed up Israel;
he has swallowed up all its palaces;
he has laid in ruins its strongholds,
and he has multiplied in the daughter of Judah
mourning and lamentation.
- 6 He has laid waste his booth like a garden,
laid in ruins his meeting place;
the LORD has made Zion forget
festival and Sabbath,
and in his fierce indignation has spurned king and priest.
- 7 The Lord has scorned his altar,
disowned his sanctuary;
he has delivered into the hand of the enemy
the walls of her palaces;
they raised a clamor in the house of the LORD
as on the day of festival.
- 8 The LORD determined to lay in ruins
the wall of the daughter of Zion;
he stretched out the measuring line;
he did not restrain his hand from destroying;
he caused rampart and wall to lament;
they languished together.
- 9 Her gates have sunk into the ground;
he has ruined and broken her bars;
her king and princes are among the nations;
the law is no more,
and her prophets find
no vision from the LORD.



- 10 The elders of the daughter of Zion
sit on the ground in silence;
they have thrown dust on their heads
and put on sackcloth;
the young women of Jerusalem
have bowed their heads to the ground.
- 11 My eyes are spent with weeping;
my stomach churns;
my bile is poured out to the ground
because of the destruction of the daughter of my people,
because infants and babies faint
in the streets of the city.
- 12 They cry to their mothers,
“Where is bread 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 What can I say for you, to what compare you,
O daughter of Jerusalem?
What can I liken to you, that I may comfort you,
O virgin daughter of Zion?
For your ruin is vast as the sea;
who can heal you?
- 14 Your prophets have seen for you
false and deceptive visions;
they have not exposed your iniquity
to restore your fortunes,
but have seen for you oracles
that are false and misleading.



- 15 All who pass along the way
clap their hands at you;
they hiss and wag their heads
at the daughter of Jerusalem:
“Is this the city that was called
the perfection of beauty,
the joy of all the earth?”
- 16 All your enemies
rail against you;
they hiss, they gnash their teeth,
they cry: “We have swallowed her!
Ah, this is the day we longed for;
now we have it; we see it!”
- 17 The LORD has done what he purposed;
he has carried out his word,
which he commanded long ago;
he has thrown down without pity;
he has made the enemy rejoice over you
and exalted the might of your foes.
- 18 Their heart cried to the Lord.
O wall of the daughter of Zion,
let tears stream down like a torrent
day and night!
Give yourself no rest,
your eyes no respite!
- 19 “Arise, cry out in the night,
at the beginning of the night watches!
Pour out your heart like water
before the presence of the Lord!



Lift your hands to him
for the lives of your children,
who faint for hunger
at the head of every street.”

- 20 Look, O LORD, and see!
With whom have you dealt thus?
Should women eat the fruit of their womb,
the children of their tender care?
Should priest and prophet be killed
in the sanctuary of the Lord?
- 21 In the dust of the streets
lie the young and the old;
my young women and my young men
have fallen by the sword;
you have killed them in the day of your anger,
slaughtering without pity.
- 22 You summoned as if to a festival day
my terrors on every side,
and on the day of the anger of the LORD
no one escaped or survived;
those whom I held and raised
my enemy destroyed.

