When will God remember us?

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3 Studies in Lamentations

# Introduction to Lamentations

Lamentations is a collection of five acrostic poems expressing grief and despair at what God has done to his people. It was written shortly after Jerusalem’s siege and capture by the Babylonians in 586 BC, which led to the exile of most of God’s people. The long siege caused famine in the city. Once the Babylonians broke through the walls, starvation was followed by violent plunder and destruction. Many of the people were then dragged away to Babylon.

Worse still for the Israelites, the temple has been destroyed. They had no place to seek God, worship him, offer sacrifices, or find forgiveness. The place of God’s presence on earth was gone. Given Israel’s disobedience, the loss of the temple fit with God’s promises in Deuteronomy. If they abandoned God, he would abandon them to the nations. Their situation seemed hopeless. Neighbouring nations laughed at Israel’s fate.

# Study One – Lamentations 1 and 2

*Read Lamentations 1:1-11.*

What stands out to you?

How is the city, Jerusalem, described? (v1-7)

What was the city like in the past? (v1, 4, 7) How is her current state described?

What has she lost? (v6-7) Why has this happened? (v8-9)

What does this show us about the results of sin?

Have you ever suffered because a group of people that you belonged to did something wrong? How did it feel?

Why is verse 10 particularly sad for God’s people? What problems does this cause for their relationship with God?

God told the Israelites they could only sacrifice at the place he chose (Dt. 12:5-14). This was originally the tabernacle (large tent) where His ark was kept until the temple was built in Jerusalem and the ark moved there. When the Babylonians destroyed the temple, they destroyed the centre of Israel’s relationship with God. It was the one place they could relate to their God in obedience to his law. Its loss showed how bad their relationship with God had become.

What do the people say to God in response? (v9, v11)

How does the first half of this chapter respond to the state of Jerusalem and God’s people?

This poem contains short prayers, but in general it is a lament of Israel’s state. How might this poem help us to respond to tragic events in the world? In our lives?

*Read Lamentations 1:12-22.*

What struck you from this passage?

Who is speaking in this section? Who is the “I”?

Who has caused the city’s suffering? (v12)

What has God done to his people? (v13-15)

How is the suffering described using parts of the human body? (v13-14) What does this show about the suffering?

How should God’s people react to what has happened? (v16)

What does this show us about reacting to suffering? Are God’s people allowed to weep?

Why is there no comfort for the speaker? (v16-17, v21)

Where do the people of the city look for help? (v19)

Are there things in your life that you consider essential? What would you do if God took them away?

What does the city say to God? (v20-22)

What is the day God has announced? (v21)

How does the city connect their suffering with their enemies? (v22)

What does this show us about God’s justice?

How does remembering God’s justice help us endure suffering?

Could Jesus talk to God like this? How do we read the poem differently when Jesus is saying it?

*Read Lamentations 2:13-22.*

What stuck in your mind?

How is this poem different to the first one?

How do other people treat Jerusalem? (v15-16)

The enemies say they have defeated Jerusalem. Who is responsible? (v17)

How are God’s people told to respond? (v18-19)

Have you ever felt like this?

How do you react when everything goes wrong?

What does the speaker ask God to do? (v20-22)

How did Jesus experience the mocking and victory of his enemies? (v15-16)

How did Jesus experience this kind of suffering and destruction? Does this answer the question in verse 20?

What does Jesus’ suffering show us about our suffering? How does this help us face suffering and hardship?

Suggested Prayer Points:

* Thank God that Jesus died suffering in our place that we might live
* Pray for anyone in the group who is going through difficult times
* Pray for your church(es) that the people would be faithful to God both in the good times and the bad

# Study Two – Lamentations 3

*Read Lamentations 2:22.*

How does the second poem end?

What are you expecting to come next?

*Read Lamentations 3:1-18.*

What do you notice?

What emotions does this express? How does the speaker feel?

How is this poem similar to chapter two? How is it different?

Who is the speaker in these verses? Do these verses remind you of any other event that occurs in the Bible?

How does the speaker describe their situation? Which image stood out to you?

How is God portrayed in this part? How does he come across?

How has God cut the speaker off from help? (v7-9)

What has this suffering done to person speaking? (v17-18)

Have you ever felt this way about God? How did you express it?

*Read Lamentations 3:19-33.*

What stands out?

Has anything changed? If so, what is it?

What does the speaker say about himself? (v19-20)

Does scripture expect us to get over suffering quickly? How does this change the way we comfort friends who are grieving?

Why does the speaker have hope? (v21-22)

How does the speaker describe God? (v23-25)

Whom does God help? (v25)

What response to suffering does the speaker encourage? (v26-30)

Why should we patiently endure suffering? (v31-33)

What will God eventually do to end our suffering? What about people who live their whole lives with loss and pain?

Does God want people to suffer? (v33) What does this tell us about suffering?

When are you good at being patient? What makes you struggle with patience?

*Read Lamentations 3:34-51.*

What stuck with you?

What is God against? (v34-36) How does this change the way we live?

What is the difference between God’s words and ours? Who decides what happens? (v37-38)

How does the speaker encourage us to respond to punishment? (v40-42)

How does the speaker know that their suffering is punishment? (v42)

Most suffering is not a direct consequence of sin, but it does happen. Have you ever suffered because of your own choices?

What has God done to the speaker? How bad is their situation? (v43-48)

The speaker jumps back and forth between being one person and a group of people. What does this suggest about them? (v40-51)

What seems to be happening to their prayers? (v44) What is the speaker doing anyway?

What does the speaker want God to see? (v46-51)

How does this poem help us to endure when it feels like God isn’t listening?

*Read Lamentations 3:52-66.*

What did you notice?

What is happening to the speaker? (v52-54)

How did the speaker react? What happened? (v55-57)

How does God’s attitude towards the speaker change?

Who are the enemies of the speaker? (v52)

How does God treat the enemies of his people? (v58-66) Why was this comforting for God’s people as they went into exile?

Why does the promise of justice comfort God’s people today? Who needs it most?

How does verse 58 apply to Jesus?

How much of this chapter could apply to Jesus?

Jesus went through the whole experience of this chapter on our behalf, so that he could rescue us from the punishment for sin.

How does Jesus suffering in our place change our suffering?

When Christians suffer, is it always punishment for sin? What makes you think that?

There are various possible reasons for Christians suffering. Sometimes we are punished for when we do things wrong. However, that is not the only reason and sometimes we are seen as joining with Jesus in his sufferings. (1 Peter 4:12-19)

How does the promise of the new creation change your suffering? What difference does it make that we look forward to sharing eternity with Jesus?

Suggested Prayer Points:

* Give thanks that Jesus came and suffered so that we might have eternal life sharing in His inheritance the kingdom of God.
* Pray for anyone who has been going through a time of suffering in the group
* Pray that the hope that Jesus brings would be more and more real to us, enabling us to persevere in the difficult times

# Study Three – Lamentations 4 and 5

*Read Lamentations 4:11-22.*

What stood out to you?

Zion is the name of the mount on which Jerusalem is built; it is therefore used as another way to refer to the city of Jerusalem, the place where the temple was built.

What has God done?

How do you think or feel when the Bible describes God as being angry or wrathful? What makes you think or feel that way?

Why was the fall of Zion a shock? (v11-12)

Why did it happen? (v13) What does this show us about the cause of God’s wrath?

Why are the prophets and priests singled out? How do their jobs make them significant?

If the prophets and priests do evil, what does that mean for God’s people?

How are the prophets and priests and elders described now? (v14-16)

What are the effects of God’s wrath?

Where did Israel look for help? (v17)

Are there problems that you want earthly powers to solve? Can they?

Who is caught by Israel’s enemies? (v20)

The Lord’s anointed usually refers to kings who reigned in Jerusalem, who were from the line of David and were anointed with oil as a sign of their kingship. They were seen as particularly important because of God’s promise to David that one of his descendants would establish his kingdom for ever. (2 Samuel 7:10-16) The saviour of Israel would come from the line of kings.

How does the anointed being captured remind you of Jesus?

How is Jesus’ story different to this poem’s experience?

What else in this chapter prepares us for Jesus’ life and death?

Edom was a mountainous area just south of Israel. Its people were descended from Esau, who was also called Edom. (Gen. 25:30) Esau was the twin brother of Jacob, from whom all the Israelites were descended. Uz is a mysterious place, best known as the homeland of Job.

Who can rejoice at Israel’s humiliation? (v21) Why would they?

How does this poem (chapter four) end? (v21-22) What does this emphasise?

What warning is Edom given?

What promise is Zion given?

Based on this chapter, what is the main problem facing God’s people?

How does Jesus’ exile and death on behalf of his people resolve the problem of sin?

Those who trust in Jesus know that he has gone through the experience of exile from God. That means we will never be shut out of God’s presence or endure his fierce anger.

Do you ever think God is angry with you?

How can we remind each other that God is not angry with us?

*Read Lamentations 5*

What strikes you from this passage?

What does the speaker want God to do? (v1) Have you ever felt that God has forgotten you?

How does the speaker describe their land? (v2) Why?

How does the collapse of Israel affect God’s promises?

What is your inheritance? To what are you looking forward?

What situation are God’s people in? (v3-6)

Why has this happened? (v7) Is the speaker saying they are innocent?

Who has done wrong and what are the consequences?

What does this mean for the Israelites at the time of writing? Have they ever sinned?

Who rules over God’s people? (v8) What has happened to Israel’s leaders? (v12)

How has Israel changed? (v14-18) What parts of society have broken down?

How does the speaker describe God? (v19) How does Israel’s situation compare?

Why might God being king forever comfort a defeated Israel?

To whom is the poet talking? (v1, v19-22) What does this show about their relationship with God?

What question does the speaker ask God? (v20) Have you ever wanted to ask this question?

How can we grow in patience, as we wait for God to act?

What does the speaker want from God? (v21)

Why is this the main thing they want?

What is the alternative? (v22)

How do we know that God has not utterly rejected us? How does this help us to endure suffering?

Suggested prayer points:

* Thank God that Jesus died for our sin that we might have restored relationship with him
* Pray for anyone in the group that is struggling in their relationship with God
* Pray for the any areas of people’s lives where they feel rejected as God has never answered their prayers

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