

## **What's the Point...of Lamentations?**

**Mark Garner**

*Lamentations was written after the Babylonians took Jerusalem, destroyed the temple and many other buildings, and took a large number of captives into exile. The writer, generally understood to be Jeremiah, expresses his sorrow over the fall of Judah and the Judeans' faithlessness. Yet there is also consolation in knowing that God remains compassionate and faithful. We too can find comfort and reassurance in these thoughts, whether in good times or in bad times.*

### ***Overview Of Lamentations***

In Lamentations, Jeremiah describes the fallen city with grief, sensitivity, and faithfulness to God. The book is a series of five laments, with each chapter having its particular themes. Lamentations begins with a bleak depiction of the city of Jerusalem in the wake of its capture and destruction (Lamentations 1). As dismal as the city looks, the worst desolation is the distance that its inhabitants have drifted from our Heavenly Father.

The second of the writer's laments explains that God has allowed these woes come upon the unfaithful Judeans, since God found it necessary to purify and refine his people (Lamentations 2). So Jeremiah then urges everyone to pour out their hearts like water, to acknowledge their need for God, and their need for his grace (2:19).

In the third lament, the writer bears all of the afflictions of the Judeans as his own, as he expresses the depths of his anguish; yet then, as he reflects on what has happened and on what he knows about God, he finds hope as God reminds him of truths that give him significant reassurance and direction (Jeremiah 3). He knows that "because of God's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail" (Lamentations 3:23).

The section of Scripture beginning with this verse is the best-known part of the book, with its thoughts that console us as well when our souls are downcast. God is our "portion", our daily bread, who meets the needs of our spirits. God's compassions are new every morning, and when we let him open our eyes, he will show us truth and grace in unexpected places.

In the fourth lament, Jeremiah explains that rather than relying on God and his teachings, the Judeans had trusted in worldly thinking and outward appearances (Lamentations 4). These things have been especially useless in curing their spiritual ailments and in satisfying their spirits. The prophet then describes how what they're enduring can help them understand the reasons for God allowing this to happen, what God wants them to learn from it, and how they can return to him.

After the fifth lament recaps the sufferings that the Judeans have endured, Jeremiah reminds them to acknowledge God, and let him guide them on the path ahead. The earlier laments were to help them work through the spiritual confusion and distress, and now the closing verses emphasize their, and our, need for God, our need for his grace, and our dependence on him, as well as being a humble prayer for the Lord to restore us to himself (5:19-22).

The prophet's rhetorical questions are ironic reminders of God's constant faithfulness. No matter how we may stumble or no matter how distant we may feel from God, our Heavenly Father will always hear us when we turn to him with our hearts, and ask him to cleanse us and renew us.

## **What's the Point...of Lamentations? Caleb Dillinger**

“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.”

So begins the book of Lamentations. If you did not know, “to lament” is to cry out over something that used to be good or acceptable and is now unacceptable or bad. The book “Lamentations” is so named because it is full of collected laments, meaning if you want to wake up with a smile on your face, starting your morning with this book is not going to be all that beneficial. But reading the Bible is meant for more than just adding a smile to your face. Reading the Bible should teach you about God, the world, and the relationship you have with God and the world. And few books more accurately express how we can feel about the world than the book of Lamentations.

Jeremiah is attributed as the author of Lamentations, writing it after Jerusalem fell to the attack of the Babylonian Empire. God’s people had sinned, sinned some more, and then sinned some more on top of that, and God quit protecting them from outside forces and let them suffer the consequences of their lack of faith in him. Jeremiah laments this turn of events.

A key piece to understanding Lamentations is that just because you believe God is real doesn’t grant you protection from all wickedness – sin and its consequences affect believers just as much non-believers. Further, while not everyone was wicked, the majority of wickedness still led to these results. Righteous people suffer alongside the unrighteous due to the fallenness of the world. Jeremiah appropriately laments this fact.

Lamentations also reveals the steadfastness of the faithful through the persecution and darkness. Chapter 3 highlights this: “The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him (Lamentations 3:25). While dark times are present, Lamentations reminds believers that God is still God, and there is light later on. The book concludes in chapter 5 with teachings on God’s forever reign and the need for the Lord to be the one to restore his people.

If you struggle seeing God at work in the midst of darkness, if you feel overwhelmed with life, then Lamentations will help express your hurt and point the way to the goodness of God. That is the point of reading Lamentations today.