



The Book Of Lamentations

Known As The
Book Of Tears

Compiled By Dr. Harold Bollinger

Lamentations

OVERVIEW:

TEARS are defined simply as “drops of salty fluid flowing from the eyes.” They can be caused by irritation or laughter but are usually associated with weeping, sorrow, and grief. When we cry, friends wonder what’s wrong and try to console us. Babies cry for food, and children cry at the loss of a pet; adults cry when confronted with trauma and death.

Jeremiah’s grief ran deep. Called the “weeping prophet,” his tears flowed from a broken heart. As God’s spokesman, he knew what lay ahead for Judah, his country, and for Jerusalem, the capital and “the city of God.” God’s judgment would fall and destruction would come. And Jeremiah wept. His tears were not self-centered, mourning over personal suffering or loss.

He wept because the people had rejected their God—the God who had made them, loved them, and sought repeatedly to bless them. Jeremiah’s heart was broken because he knew that the selfishness and sinfulness of the people would bring them much suffering and an extended exile. Jeremiah’s tears were tears of empathy and sympathy. His heart was broken with those things that break God’s heart.

Jeremiah’s two books focus on one event—the destruction of Jerusalem. The book of Jeremiah predicts it, and Lamentations looks back on it. Known as the book of tears, Lamentations is a dirge, a funeral song written for the fallen city of Jerusalem.

What makes a person cry says a lot about that person—whether he or she is self-centered or God-centered. The book of Lamentations allows us to see what made Jeremiah sorrowful. As one of God’s choice servants, he stands alone in the depth of his emotions, his care for the people, his love for the nation, and his devotion to God.

What causes your tears? Do you weep because your selfish pride has been wounded, or because the people around you sin against and reject the God who loves them dearly?

Do you weep because you have lost something that gives you pleasure, or because people all around you will suffer for their sinfulness? Our world is filled with injustice, poverty, war, and rebellion against God, all of which should move us to tears and to action. Read Lamentations and learn what it means to grieve with God.

THE BLUEPRINT

Jeremiah grieves deeply because of the destruction of Jerusalem and the devastation of his nation. But in the middle of the book, in the depths of his grief, there shines a ray of hope. God's compassion is ever-present. His faithfulness is great. Jeremiah realizes that it is only the Lord's mercy that has prevented total annihilation. This book shows us the serious consequences of human sin and how we can still have hope in the midst of tragedy because God is able to turn it around for good. We see the timeless importance of prayer and confession of sin. We will all face tragedy in our lives. But in the midst of our afflictions, there is hope in God.

1. Jeremiah mourns for Jerusalem (Lament. 1:1-22)

Jerusalem's streets, once bustling with people, are now silent. Like a widow broken with grief, she sits alone in her mourning. Once the queen of nations, she is now a slave.

[2] She sobs through the night; tears stream down her cheeks. Among all her lovers, there is no one left to help her. All her friends have betrayed her; they are now her enemies.

[3] Judah has been led away into captivity, afflicted and enslaved. She lives among foreign nations and has no place of rest. Her enemies have chased her down, and she has nowhere to turn.

[4] The roads to Jerusalem are in mourning, no longer filled with crowds on their way to celebrate the Temple festivals. The city gates are silent, her priests groan, her young women are crying—how bitterly Jerusalem weeps!

[5] Her oppressors have become her masters, and her enemies prosper, for the Lord has punished Jerusalem for her many sins. Her children have been captured and taken away to distant lands.

[6] All the beauty and majesty of Jerusalem are gone. Her princes are like starving deer searching for pasture, too weak to run from the pursuing enemy.

[7] And now in the midst of her sadness and wandering, Jerusalem remembers her ancient splendor. But then she fell to her enemy, and there was no one to help her. Her enemy struck her down and laughed as she fell.

[8] Jerusalem has sinned greatly, so she has been tossed away like a filthy rag. All who once honored her now despise her, for they have seen her stripped naked and humiliated. All she can do is groan and hide her face.

[9] She defiled herself with immorality with no thought of the punishment that would follow. Now she lies in the gutter with no one to lift her out. "Lord, see my deep misery," she cries. "The enemy has triumphed."

[10] The enemy has plundered her completely, taking everything precious that she owns. She has seen foreigners violate her sacred Temple, the place the Lord had forbidden them to enter.

[11] Her people groan as they search for bread. They have sold their treasures for food to stay alive. "O Lord, look," she mourns, "and see how I am despised.

[12] "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see if there is any suffering like mine, which the Lord brought on me in the day of his fierce anger.

[13] "He has sent fire from heaven that burns in my bones. He has placed a trap in my path and turned me back. He has made me desolate, racked with sickness all day long.

[14] "He wove my sins into ropes to hitch me to a yoke of captivity. The Lord sapped my strength and gave me to my enemies; I am helpless in their hands.

[15] "The Lord has treated my mighty men with contempt. At his command a great army has come to crush my young warriors. The Lord has trampled his beloved city as grapes are trampled in a winepress.

[16] "For all these things I weep; tears flow down my cheeks. No one is here to comfort me; any who might encourage me are far away. My children have no future, for the enemy has conquered us."

[17] Jerusalem pleads for help, but no one comforts her. Regarding his people, the Lord has said, "Let their neighbors be their enemies! Let them be thrown away like a filthy rag!"

[18] "And the Lord is right," she groans, "for I rebelled against him. Listen, people everywhere; look upon my anguish and despair, for my sons and daughters have been taken captive to distant lands.

[19] "I begged my allies for help, but they betrayed me. My priests and leaders starved to death in the city, even as they searched for food to save their lives.

[20] "Lord, see my anguish! My heart is broken and my soul despairs, for I have rebelled against you. In the streets the sword kills, and at home there is only death.

[21] "Others heard my groans, but no one turned to comfort me. When my enemies heard of my troubles, they were happy to see what you had done. Oh, bring the day you promised, when you will destroy them as you have destroyed me.

[22] "Look at all their evil deeds, Lord. Punish them, as you have punished me for all my sins. My groans are many, and my heart is faint."

2. God's anger at sin (Lament. 2:1-22)

The Lord in his anger has cast a dark shadow over Jerusalem. The fairest of Israel's cities lies in the dust, thrown down from the heights of heaven. In his day of awesome fury, the Lord has shown no mercy even to his Temple.

[2] Without mercy the Lord has destroyed every home in Israel. In his anger he has broken down the fortress walls of Jerusalem. He has brought to dust the kingdom and all its rulers.

[3] All the strength of Israel vanishes beneath his fury. The Lord has withdrawn his protection as the enemy attacks. He consumes the whole land of Israel like a raging fire.

[4] He bends his bow against his people as though he were their enemy. His strength is used against them to kill their finest youth. His fury is poured out like fire on beautiful Jerusalem.

[5] Yes, the Lord has vanquished Israel like an enemy. He has destroyed her forts and palaces. He has brought unending sorrow and tears to Jerusalem.

[6] He has broken down his Temple as though it were merely a garden shelter. The Lord has blotted out all memory of the holy festivals and Sabbath days. Kings and priests fall together before his anger.

[7] The Lord has rejected his own altar; he despises his own sanctuary. He has given Jerusalem's palaces to her enemies. They shout in the Lord's Temple as though it were a day of celebration.

[8] The Lord was determined to destroy the walls of Jerusalem. He made careful plans for their destruction, then he went ahead and did it. Therefore, the ramparts and walls have fallen down before him.

[9] Jerusalem's gates have sunk into the ground. All their locks and bars are destroyed, for he has smashed them. Her kings and princes have been exiled to distant lands; the law is no more. Her prophets receive no more visions from the Lord.

[10] The leaders of Jerusalem sit on the ground in silence, clothed in sackcloth. They throw dust on their heads in sorrow and despair. The young women of Jerusalem hang their heads in shame.

[11] I have cried until the tears no longer come. My heart is broken, my spirit poured out, as I see what has happened to my people. Little children and tiny babies are fainting and dying in the streets.

[12] "Mama, we want food," they cry, and then collapse in their mothers' arms. Their lives ebb away like the life of a warrior wounded in battle.

[13] In all the world has there ever been such sorrow? O daughter of Jerusalem, to what can I compare your anguish? O virgin daughter of Zion, how can I comfort you? For your wound is as deep as the sea. Who can heal you?

[14] Your "prophets" have said so many foolish things, false to the core. They did not try to hold you back from exile by pointing out your sins. Instead, they painted false pictures, filling you with false hope.

[15] All who pass by jeer at you. They scoff and insult Jerusalem, saying, "Is this the city called 'Most Beautiful in All the World' and 'Joy of All the Earth'?"

[16] All your enemies deride you. They scoff and grind their teeth and say, "We have destroyed her at last! Long have we awaited this day, and it is finally here!"

[17] But it is the Lord who did it just as he warned. He has fulfilled the promises of disaster he made long ago. He has destroyed Jerusalem without mercy and caused her enemies to rejoice over her and boast of their power.

[18] Cry aloud before the Lord, O walls of Jerusalem! Let your tears flow like a river. Give yourselves no rest from weeping day or night.

[19] Rise during the night and cry out. Pour out your hearts like water to the Lord. Lift up your hands to him in prayer. Plead for your children as they faint with hunger in the streets.

[20] "O Lord, think about this!" Jerusalem cries. "You are doing this to your own people! Should mothers eat their little children, those they once bounced on their knees? Should priests and prophets die within the Lord's Temple?"

[21] "See them lying in the streets—young and old, boys and girls, killed by the swords of the enemy. You have killed them in your anger, slaughtering them without mercy.

[22] "You have invited terrors from all around as though you were calling them to a day of feasting. In the day of the Lord's anger, no one has escaped or survived. The enemy has killed all the children I bore and raised."

3. Hope in the midst of affliction (Lament. 3:1-66)

I am the one who has seen the afflictions that come from the rod of the Lord's anger. [2] He has brought me into deep darkness, shutting out all light. [3] He has turned against me. Day and night his hand is heavy upon me.

[4] He has made my skin and flesh grow old. He has broken my bones. [5] He has attacked me and surrounded me with anguish and distress. [6] He has buried me in a dark place, like a person long dead.

[7] He has walled me in, and I cannot escape. He has bound me in heavy chains. [8] And though I cry and shout, he shuts out my prayers. [9] He has blocked my path with a high stone wall. He has twisted the road before me with many detours.

[10] He hid like a bear or a lion, waiting to attack me. [11] He dragged me off the path and tore me with his claws, leaving me helpless and desolate. [12] He bent his bow and aimed it squarely at me.

[13] He shot his arrows deep into my heart. [14] My own people laugh at me. All day long they sing their mocking songs. [15] He has filled me with bitterness. He has given me a cup of deep sorrow to drink.

[16] He has made me grind my teeth on gravel. He has rolled me in the dust. [17] Peace has been stripped away, and I have forgotten what prosperity is. [18] I cry out, "My splendor is gone! Everything I had hoped for from the Lord is lost!"

[19] The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. [20] I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. [21] Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this:

[22] The unfailing love of the Lord never ends! By his mercies we have been kept from complete destruction. [23] Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each day. [24] I say to myself, "The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!"

[25] The Lord is wonderfully good to those who wait for him and seek him. [26] So it is good to wait quietly for salvation from the Lord. [27] And it is good for the young to submit to the yoke of his discipline.

[28] Let them sit alone in silence beneath the Lord's demands. [29] Let them lie face down in the dust; then at last there is hope for them. [30] Let them turn the other cheek to those who strike them. Let them accept the insults of their enemies.

[31] For the Lord does not abandon anyone forever. [32] Though he brings grief, he also shows compassion according to the greatness of his unfailing love. [33] For he does not enjoy hurting people or causing them sorrow.

[34] But the leaders of his people trampled prisoners underfoot. [35] They deprived people of their God-given rights in defiance of the Most High. [36] They perverted justice in the courts. Do they think the Lord didn't see it?

[37] Can anything happen without the Lord's permission? [38] Is it not the Most High who helps one and harms another? [39] Then why should we, mere humans, complain when we are punished for our sins?

[40] Instead, let us test and examine our ways. Let us turn again in repentance to the Lord. [41] Let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven and say, [42] "We have sinned and rebelled, and you have not forgiven us.

[43] "You have engulfed us with your anger, chased us down, and slaughtered us without mercy. [44] You have hidden yourself in a cloud so our prayers cannot reach you. [45] You have discarded us as refuse and garbage among the nations.

[46] "All our enemies have spoken out against us. [47] We are filled with fear, for we are trapped, desolate, and ruined." [48] Streams of tears flow from my eyes because of the destruction of my people!

[49] My tears flow down endlessly. They will not stop [50] until the Lord looks down from heaven and sees. [51] My heart is breaking over the fate of all the women of Jerusalem.

[52] My enemies, whom I have never harmed, chased me like a bird. [53] They threw me into a pit and dropped stones on me. [54] The water flowed above my head, and I cried out, "This is the end!"

[55] But I called on your name, Lord, from deep within the well, [56] and you heard me! You listened to my pleading; you heard my weeping! [57] Yes, you came at my despairing cry and told me, "Do not fear."

[58] Lord, you are my lawyer! Plead my case! For you have redeemed my life. [59] You have seen the wrong they have done to me, Lord. Be my judge, and prove me right. [60] You have seen the plots my enemies have laid against me.

[61] Lord, you have heard the vile names they call me. You know all about the plans they have made— [62] the plots my enemies whisper and mutter against me all day long. [63] Look at them! In all their activities, they constantly mock me with their songs.

[64] Pay them back, Lord, for all the evil they have done. [65] Give them hard and stubborn hearts, and then let your curse fall upon them! [66] Chase them down in your anger, destroying them from beneath the Lord's heavens.

4. God's anger is satisfied (Lament. 4:1-22)

Lament. 4:1-22

How the gold has lost its luster! Even the finest gold has become dull. The sacred gemstones lie scattered in the streets!

[2] See how the precious children of Jerusalem, worth their weight in gold, are now treated like pots of clay.

[3] Even the jackals feed their young, but not my people Israel. They ignore their children's cries, like the ostriches of the desert.

[4] The parched tongues of their little ones stick with thirst to the roofs of their mouths. The children cry for bread, but no one has any to give them.

[5] The people who once ate only the richest foods now beg in the streets for anything they can get. Those who once lived in palaces now search the garbage pits for food.

[6] The guilt of my people is greater than that of Sodom, where utter disaster struck in a moment with no one to help them.

[7] Our princes were once glowing with health; they were as clean as snow and as elegant as jewels.

[8] But now their faces are blacker than soot. No one even recognizes them. Their skin sticks to their bones; it is as dry and hard as wood.

[9] Those killed by the sword are far better off than those who die of hunger, wasting away for want of food.

[10] Tenderhearted women have cooked their own children and eaten them in order to survive the siege.

[11] But now the anger of the Lord is satisfied. His fiercest anger has now been poured out. He started a fire in Jerusalem that burned the city to its foundations.

[12] Not a king in all the earth—no one in all the world—would have believed an enemy could march through the gates of Jerusalem.

[13] Yet it happened because of the sins of her prophets and priests, who defiled the city by shedding innocent blood.

[14] They wandered blindly through the streets, so defiled by blood that no one dared to touch them.

[15] "Get away!" the people shouted at them. "You are defiled! Don't touch us!" So they fled to distant lands and wandered there among foreign nations, but none would let them stay.

[16] The Lord himself has scattered them, and he no longer helps them. The priests and leaders are no longer honored and respected.

[17] We looked in vain for our allies to come and save us, but we were looking to nations that could offer no help at all.

[18] We couldn't go into the streets without danger to our lives. Our end was near; our days were numbered. We were doomed!

[19] Our enemies were swifter than the eagles. If we fled to the mountains, they found us. If we hid in the wilderness, they were waiting for us there.

[20] Our king, the Lord's anointed, the very life of our nation, was caught in their snares. We had foolishly boasted that under his protection we could hold our own against any nation on earth!

[21] Are you rejoicing in the land of Uz, O people of Edom? But you, too, must drink from the cup of the Lord's anger. You, too, will be stripped naked in your drunkenness.

[22] O Jerusalem, your punishment will end; you will soon return from exile. But Edom, your punishment is just beginning; soon your many sins will be revealed.

5. Jeremiah pleads for restoration (Lament. 5:1-22)

Lord, remember everything that has happened to us. See all the sorrows we bear! [2] Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our homes to foreigners. [3] We are orphaned and fatherless. Our mothers are widowed. [4] We have to pay for water to drink, and even firewood is expensive. [5] Those who pursue us are at our heels; we are exhausted but are given no rest. [6] We submitted to Egypt and Assyria to get enough food to survive. [7] It was our ancestors who sinned, but they died before the hand of judgment fell. We have suffered the punishment they deserved!

[8] Slaves have now become our masters; there is no one left to rescue us. [9] We must hunt for food in the wilderness at the risk of our lives. [10] Because of the famine, our skin has been blackened as though baked in an oven.

[11] Our enemies rape the women and young girls in Jerusalem and throughout the towns of Judah. [12] Our princes are being hanged by their thumbs, and the old men are treated with contempt. [13] The young men are led away to work at millstones, and the children stagger under heavy loads of wood. [14] The old men no longer sit in the city gates; the young men no longer dance and sing.

[15] The joy of our hearts has ended; our dancing has turned to mourning. [16] The garlands have fallen from our heads. Disaster has fallen upon us because we have sinned. [17] Our hearts are sick and weary, and our eyes grow dim with tears. [18] For Jerusalem is empty and desolate, a place haunted by jackals.

[19] But Lord, you remain the same forever! Your throne continues from generation to generation. [20] Why do you continue to forget us? Why have you forsaken us for so long? [21] Restore us, O Lord, and bring us back to you again! Give us back the joys we once had! [22] Or have you utterly rejected us? Are you angry with us still?

MEGATHEMES

THEME: Destruction of Jerusalem

EXPLANATION:

Lamentations is a sad funeral song for the great capital city of the Jews. The temple has been destroyed, the king is gone, and the people are in exile. God had warned that he would destroy them if they abandoned him. Now, afterwards, the people realize their condition and confess their sin.

IMPORTANCE:

God's warnings are justified. He does what he says he will do. His punishment for sin is certain. Only by confessing and renouncing our sin can we turn to him for deliverance. How much better to do so before his warnings are fulfilled.

THEME: God's mercy

EXPLANATION:

God's compassion was at work even when the Israelites were experiencing the affliction of their Babylonian conquerors. Although the people had been unfaithful, God's faithfulness was great. He used this affliction to bring his people back to him.

IMPORTANCE:

God will always be faithful to his people. His merciful, refining work is evident even in affliction. At those times, we must pray for forgiveness and then turn to him for deliverance.

THEME: Sin's consequences

EXPLANATION:

God was angry at the prolonged rebellion by his people. Sin is the cause of their misery, and destruction is the result of their sin. The destruction of the nation shows the vanity of human glory and pride.

IMPORTANCE:

To continue in rebellion against God is to invite disaster. We must never trust our own leadership, resources, intelligence, or power more than God. If we do, we will experience consequences similar to Jerusalem's.

THEME: Hope

EXPLANATION:

God's mercy in sparing some of the people offers hope for better days. One day, the people will be restored to a true and fervent relationship with God.

IMPORTANCE:

Only God can deliver us from sin. Without him there is no comfort or hope for the future. Because of Christ's death for us and his promise to return, we have a bright hope for tomorrow.

An invitation is given to open your heart's door.

Rev. 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

Holy Bible: Living Bible Translation

Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print