

## Lamentations

### Lesson 12

#### Key Verse

*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

—Hebrews 10:31

**Key Verse Thought:** Read the Key Verse and consider the following. After learning of the destruction of Jerusalem and the carrying away of God’s people as captives into Babylon, remind them that this was God’s judgment upon His people for breaking their covenant with Him. They had promised to obey God’s commands and follow Him. They failed! For that, there was a price to pay. They had lost their fear of God. Remember what we have learned before, that God’s people had obviously forgotten: “**The fear of the LORD prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened**” (Proverbs 10:27).

**Emphasis:** Recognize that we are to humble our hearts before the Lord, acknowledging our sin. It is then we can and understand that God never leaves His people without hope!

**Lesson Summary:** The book of Lamentations, written by Jeremiah, is a poem revealing the horrors of seeing Jerusalem and the Temple of God destroyed after a terrible siege against the city. Notice that it falls in the center of the five Major Prophets, helping us see the division in history before the captivities, and the return from captivity.

Jeremiah wrote lamentations from the perspective of a witness. He was in Jerusalem when the enemy besieged the city until it was destroyed and the people were taken captive. He began the book writing about the destruction – as if he were watching it. Soon he wrote as one who was in the middle of the suffering with the people. As we look at Lamentations in this lesson, see how the heart of Jeremiah was revealed during the destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah understood the great sin of God’s people, for he had been calling for their return to the Lord for many years. Amazingly, he still prayed for God’s mercy to be given to the people who had rejected Jeremiah’s preaching all of those years. Through the book of Lamentations, Jeremiah reveals why God’s wrath had been poured out upon His people. He also found hope that God would not forsake them forever. During his time of prayer, we recognize that Jeremiah understood that when he called out to God, God would hear and draw near. “**Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not**” (Lamentations 3:57).

#### Suggested Bible Reading to Prepare for This Lesson

- Monday: Lamentations 1
- Tuesday: Lamentations 2
- Wednesday: Lamentations 3
- Thursday: Lamentations 4
- Friday: Lamentations 5
- Saturday: Proverbs 19

#### Lamentations

1. The Distress of Jerusalem (Lamentations 1-2)
  - Jeremiah sees the affliction of Jerusalem
  - Jerusalem bemoans its condition
  - God’s anger against Jerusalem
  - The people cry unto God
2. Jeremiah’s Sorrow (Lamentations 3)
  - Jeremiah understands the wrath of God
  - Jeremiah finds hope
  - Jeremiah prays for God’s people
  - Jeremiah’s personal prayer
3. God’s Anger Understood (Lamentations 4-5)
  - The condition of Jerusalem and the Temple
  - The Gentile’s witness God’s wrath
  - Jerusalem’s prayer
  - Jerusalem’s hope

**Note:** After learning about Jeremiah for the past couple of weeks and discovering the messages he received from God for His people, we are going to look at the poem he wrote. Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations from his view, as a witness, of the destruction of Jerusalem.

### 1. The Distress of Jerusalem (Lamentations 1-2)

In our study of Jeremiah in the past couple lessons, we learned that Jeremiah constantly called the people to repentance and warned the people of coming judgment. Often he was rejected and imprisoned for his message – yet he remained faithful! Nevertheless, we found that the Word of the Lord that he preached came true – just as he believed it would. The enemy came in, took prisoners, and destroyed Jerusalem and God’s Temple. And, as if Jeremiah had not suffered enough, he witnessed his beloved city, Jerusalem, destroyed and the people taken captive. Jeremiah’s preaching had been right all along! Instead of taking pleasure in that fact, we find that he is greatly saddened. The book of Lamentations is a poem telling of that great destruction, and Jeremiah’s grief. Sadly, Jeremiah had to watch as God fulfilled all of the horrible events he had been called to warn the people about – all for their rejection of God and His commandments.

Read how Jeremiah begins his poem. “How doth the city sit solitary, *that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!*” (Lamentations 1:1). **Tributary** means “*properly a burden (as causing to faint), that is, a tax in the form of forced labor.*” Not only had the great city of Jerusalem been destroyed, but also the people had been taken captive. The mighty city of Jerusalem is in a sad state. And its people are no better. “*Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude: she dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest: all her persecutors overtook her between the straits*” (Lamentations 1:3).

Remember back for a minute as to why God executed His wrath upon His people:

11. Zedekiah *was* one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. 12. And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD his God, *and* humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet *speaking* from the mouth of the LORD. 13. And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel. 14. Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. 15. And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: 16. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till *there was* no remedy. 17. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave *them* all into his hand. 18. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all *these* he brought to Babylon. 19. And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. 20. And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: 21. To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed

her sabbaths: *for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.* (2 Chronicles 36:11-21)

After remembering this, see the following: “... for the LORD hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her children are gone into captivity before the enemy” (Lamentations 1:5b). Also understand, “Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed: all that honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness: yea, she sigheth, and turneth backward” (Lamentations 1:8). The glorious city of Jerusalem is no more – for the “multitude of her transgressions.”

Notice that Lamentations chapter one verses one through eleven was written from the third person. Jeremiah was writing about Jerusalem, describing its condition. In Lamentations chapter one verses twelve through twenty-two, the voice is changed to the first person. It would seem that the city of Jerusalem, itself, is speaking, bemoaning its condition.

At the end of the first half of chapter one, see the transition: “All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul: see, O LORD, and consider; for I am become vile” (Lamentations 1:11). We can read that it goes from “her” and “they” to “I.” We can see in the change of voice that Jeremiah not only understands the condition of Jerusalem from God’s position, but as an Israelite from Jerusalem, Jeremiah experienced the great sorrow in his own heart and life. See if you recognize that concept in the following verse. “*Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger*” (Lamentations 1:12). The destruction in Jerusalem was very personal to Jeremiah. Remember that Jeremiah is considered the “Weeping Prophet” for expressing his great sorrow. “For these *things* I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me: my children are desolate, because the enemy prevailed” (Lamentations 1:16). However, in all of this, see what he declares. “The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment: hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity” (Lamentations 1:18).

In Lamentations chapter two verses one through twelve, we see God’s anger against Jerusalem described. Read how this begins. “1. How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, *and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger!* 2. The Lord hath swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob, and hath not pitied: he hath thrown down in his wrath the strong holds of the daughter of Judah; he hath brought *them* down to the ground: he hath polluted the kingdom and the princes thereof” (Lamentations 2:1-2). God was revealing to His people that it was not Babylon that did this – it was God:

5. The Lord was as an enemy: he hath swallowed up Israel, he hath swallowed up all her palaces: he hath destroyed his strong holds, and hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation. 6. And he hath violently taken away his tabernacle, as *if it were of a garden*: he hath destroyed his places of the assembly: the LORD hath caused the solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion, and hath despised in the indignation of his anger the king and the priest. 7. The Lord hath cast off his altar, he hath abhorred his sanctuary, he hath given up 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 a solemn feast. (Lamentations 2:5-7)

Read what the people asked. “18. Their heart cried unto the Lord, O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night: give thyself no rest; let not the apple of thine eye cease. 19. Arise,

cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up thy hands toward him for the life of thy young children, that faint for hunger in the top of every street” (Lamentations 2:18-19). There was a cry for the people to cry out to the Lord – to save the city of Jerusalem (“the apple of thine eye”), if for no other reason, for the sake of the young children that suffered. But understand there would be no escape. “Thou hast called as in a solemn day my terrors round about, so that in the day of the LORD’S anger none escaped nor remained: those that I have swaddled and brought up hath mine enemy consumed” (Lamentations 2:22).

**A Deeper Path:** The book of Lamentations is a collection of five poems. The Hebrew alphabet has twenty-two letters. The chapters 1, 2, and 4 each have twenty-two verses. Each of these verses corresponds with a Hebrew letter, and these chapters are written in an acrostic in the original language. Chapter 3, the center of the book of Lamentations, has sixty-six verses. In this center chapter, each of the Hebrew letters is repeated three times. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 all end with a prayer. Chapter 5 also contains twenty-two verses and *is* a prayer.

Jeremiah so sympathized with God and with his own people, that we can see twice the agony in the heart of Jeremiah. In the New Testament, remember that some thought Jesus was Jeremiah who had come back to life. “13. When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? 14. And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias (Jeremiah), or one of the prophets” (Matthew 16:13-14). Jeremiah’s heart toward God’s people can easily be compared to the heart Jesus had for God’s people. “37. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! 38. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate” (Matthew 23:37-38).

### Compare Jeremiah with Jesus:

- Both were hated without cause: “Mine enemies chased me sore, like a bird, without cause” (Lamentations 3:52). Compare that with the following: “But *this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause*” (John 15:25). See also the following verse in the Old Testament that was speaking of Jesus when He came: “They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, *being* mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then I restored *that* which I took not away” (Psalm 69:4).
- Both were ridiculed by leaders: “I was a derision to all my people; *and* their song all the day” (Lamentations 3:14). Compare that with the following: “And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put *it* upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!” (Matthew 27:29) and “Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save” (Mark 15:31). See also the following verse in the Old Testament that was speaking of Jesus when He came: “They that sit in the gate speak against me; and I *was* the song of the drunkards” (Psalm 69:12).
- Both were rejected by family: “18. And the LORD hath given me knowledge *of it*, and I know *it*: then thou shewedst me their doings. 19. But I *was* like a lamb *or* an ox *that* is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, *saying*, Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered. 20. But, O LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I revealed my cause. 21. Therefore thus saith the LORD of the men of Anathoth, that seek thy life, saying, Prophesy not in the name of the LORD, that thou die not by our hand: 22. Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, I will punish them: the young men

shall die by the sword; their sons and their daughters shall die by famine: 23. And there shall be no remnant of them: for I will bring evil upon the men of Anathoth, *even* the year of their visitation” (Jeremiah 11:18-23). Compare that with the following: “1. After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him. 2. Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand. 3. His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. 4. For *there is* no man *that* doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world. 5. For neither did his brethren believe in him. 6. Then Jesus said unto them, **My time is not yet come: but your time is alway ready.** 7. **The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.** 8. **Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come”** (John 7:1-8).

Remember these things as we continue in our look at Jeremiah’s Sorrow.

## 2. Jeremiah’s Sorrows (Lamentations 3)

At the heart of Lamentations, chapter three, we read Jeremiah’s prayer in his grief. He begins with his personal affliction. “*I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath*” (Lamentations 3:1). Jeremiah begins to express his grief before God. He understands the rod of correction, but does not enjoy the sufferings of it! He continues to pour out his heart in grief, understanding that he, along with all of God’s people, were under the wrath of God. It seemed miserable and almost unbearable to Jeremiah! (See Lamentations 3:2-19).

But after pouring out his heart before the Lord, see what he realizes – even in what seems to be his darkest hour. “20. *My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me.* 21. *This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope*” (Lamentations 3:20-21). He had humbled his heart before the Lord, and when he did that in the heart of this chapter, he found a great hope.

22. *It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.* 23. *They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.* 24. *The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.* 25. *The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.* 26. *It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.* ... 31. *For the Lord will not cast off for ever:* 32. *But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.* (Lamentations 3:22-26, 31-32)

Do those verses remind you of anything? Do you remember the song “Great is Thy Faithfulness” we often sing? This hope should be for all people, not just the Israelites who had failed so miserably. Still today, God’s people fail miserably. They find themselves under the disciplining hand of God. However, even there, one can find hope – just as Jeremiah did!

Jeremiah continues with this thought. “*Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD*” (Lamentations 3:40). All of this has brought his heart and mind to where God wanted it to be – to “*turn again to the LORD.*” Notice that he said, “*Let us search and try our ways.*” This is the continuation of his prayer to God, appealing to God first for his nation who had sinned and turned from God (see Lamentations 3:40-51). But the further we read, Jeremiah turned from praying for all of the people to a personal prayer to God for himself. “*I called upon thy name, O LORD, out of the low dungeon*” (Lamentations 3:55). Often times, it is easy to understand that God’s people in general are a sinful people that need to return to the Lord. And many times, while we begin our prayer for others, God turns our attention to the dire need in our

own hearts – just as Jeremiah did for the rest of chapter three. See what he immediately recognized once he began to pray for his own need in his life. “56. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. 57. Thou drewest near in the day *that* I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not” (Lamentations 3:56-57). God not only heard his cry, God drew near to him.

**A Deeper Path:** Try to recognize how Jeremiah’s life, and the people of Israel, are to be great examples for us of a people who went through heavy chastening of the Lord (called the wrath of God often in the Old Testament). See how this compares to what God still does with His children. “5. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: 6. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. 7. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? ... 11. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Hebrews 12:5-7, 11). Jeremiah found it grievous, but through it all, he drew closer to God.

During Jeremiah’s prayer in Lamentations chapter three, we understood that he finally got to the point where he called out to God, and Jeremiah then understood that God heard him. “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22). Today, we are to draw near to God, understanding that not only does He hear, but God can also remove all sin from our hearts and lives.

God waited a long time for His people to turn from their sin and return to Him. “8. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse *your* hands, ye sinners; and purify *your* hearts, ye double minded. 9. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and *your* joy to heaviness. 10. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (James 4:8-10). We today, are to do the same thing. However, we should never wait as long as God’s people did. It was not until they lost everything and were carried captive that they began to seek after God.

### 3. God’s Anger Understood (Jeremiah 4-5)

As we look at Lamentations chapter four, we find a comparison of the beautiful city Jerusalem had been, and what a wasted land it became after the invasion of Babylon. Especially understand how sad it was that the Temple of the Lord had been destroyed. “How is the gold become dim! *how* is the most fine gold changed! the stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street” (Lamentations 4:1). Remember that all of the Temple had been overlaid with gold (see 1 Kings 6:22). The Temple was completely destroyed. Read also the description of the great famine the people had endured while Babylon had besieged the city, encompassing it. “The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirst: the young children ask bread, *and* no man breaketh *it* unto them” (Lamentations 4:4). The rich had now become poor (see Lamentations 4:5). The destruction of Jerusalem had been a long and painful. It had taken years. Jeremiah compares this lingering death of Jerusalem to the sudden and complete destruction of Sodom. “For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands stayed on her” (Lamentations 4:6). Jeremiah felt this destruction was much worse! And it was – for Jerusalem’s sins were far greater! They had God and His Words, yet they had rejected Him and rebelled against Him. “The LORD hath accomplished his fury; he hath poured out his fierce anger, and hath kindled a fire in Zion, and it hath devoured the foundations thereof” (Lamentations 4:11). For the breaking of the covenant they had made with God, God had accomplished His fury.

Read that the Gentile nations were a witness to what God was doing among His people. “The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem” (Lamentations 4:12). Moreover, the world could see why God had allowed the destruction of His beloved city. “For the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her” (Lamentations 4:13). It was because the leaders of God’s people had sinned greatly, for they had not led the people to follow after God. Although the prophets and priests were guilty of blame, so were the people. “The anger of the LORD hath divided them; he will no more regard them: they respected not the persons of the priests, they favoured not the elders” (Lamentations 4:16). Even though the priests and many of the prophets failed miserably to lead them in the correct way, it was still the people’s choice to disobey God and His commands. Just because the leadership was bad, it did not necessarily mean the people could not choose to follow God. The same should apply in our world today. Just because the leadership in many churches is failing miserably and the leaders in the world system seem to be failing just as badly, that should not mean that each individual person should disregard God and His Word. People still have the choice to follow after God and the things of God.

The people even watched and waited for a Gentile nation to come and deliver them from the fury of God. “As for us, our eyes as yet failed for our vain help: in our watching we have watched for a nation that could not save us” (Lamentations 4:17). But they watched in vain. Moreover, when the Edomites rejoiced over the destruction of Jerusalem, God promised their destruction (see Psalm 137:7 and Lamentations 4:21-22).

Understand that Lamentations chapter five is a prayer, and the speaker is Jerusalem. Read Lamentations 5:1-18 to understand fully the grievous state of God’s people and the city of Jerusalem. Then see what they acknowledged. “Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation” (Lamentations 5:19). No matter what happened to God’s people, God is unchanging and would remain on His throne forever. Lamentations ends with a prayer for God to never forget His people, but to, “Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old” (Lamentations 5:21). Yet they also understood God’s anger against his people. “But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wrath against us” (Lamentations 5:22).

**A Deeper Path:** Recall a few verses that God’s people must have remembered.

- “Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses” (Psalm 107:28).
- “Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved” (Psalm 80:7).
- “Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old” (Psalm 25:6).

God would hear His people – if they would only turn again to God and cry out to Him. In the next quarter of our study, we will see as God hears His people in captivity, and allows them to return home.

We today, have that same hope. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). And we should always remember the following verse. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31).

**Reinforcement:** Jeremiah allowed us to understand his heart as he wrote the book of Lamentations. Not only did we see that he understood God’s heart during this time of judgment upon Jerusalem, but we also saw that Jeremiah related with the people who were enduring this great time of affliction. Knowing the life of Jeremiah, one would find it difficult to see why once he began to pray for God’s people, he

recognized sin in his own heart and life. We never read where he failed to do what God asked of Him, enduring much suffering and rejection, yet he understood he was a sinful man. It was a joy to watch as he prayed for God's people, and recognized that he too, was in need of prayer. Many a Christian today would benefit patterning their prayer life after Jeremiah's prayer! For all Christians need to remember that it is a daily choice to follow after God and His ways. And so many Christians forget! We witnessed as God's people forgot, and the great judgment that came upon them. Lamentations should be a reminder that no matter what, God never left His people without hope!

**Closing:** It would be good to close with a short prayer reinforcing today's lesson. Always include any prayer requests you may have. *Today, pray that we will always humble our hearts before the Lord, acknowledging our sin, and understanding that it is God who gives us our hope!*