

Lamentations 2 • The Second Step of Acknowledgment

Introduction

What is Lamentations doing in the middle of the books of the “great” prophets? To the left of it is Isaiah and Jeremiah, the greatest prophets of the time leading up to the exile of all Israel, to the right is Ezekiel and Daniel, the greatest prophets in the period of the exile, and right in the middle is Lamentations with its five little chapters. Why is it amongst the books of the major prophets? [No, it’s not just because most attribute its authorship to Jeremiah.] One way to look at it is that Isaiah and Jeremiah explain conditions **leading up to** judgment, Ezekiel and Daniel expound on the situation **after** judgment, but only Lamentations tells what it was like **during** judgment. Lamentations has been described as “the hinge on a great big door—small, but the crucial mechanism that allows the door to swing both ways”. Lamentations teaches how we should respond when we’ve experienced God’s judgment for the life-choices we’ve made and desire to be reconciled to Him. It’s a manual for the backslidden.

Observation

Lamentations is not just one long poem repeating the same thing over and over—each chapter covers a distinct topic:

- **Chapter 1: Recognition.** Those having experienced God’s judgment are finally seeing with their eyes for the first time the truth of their spiritual condition that was the cause for judgment. Nowhere in Lamentations is the name of the nation or its ruler mentioned who conquered and enslaved them; they finally recognize they were just a tool of God’s judgment which was fully justified because of unfaithfulness.
- **Chapter 3: Hope.** It is recognized that just as God and God alone is the author of judgment, God and God alone is the only source of mercy. It’s the beginning realization that everything has not yet come to an end and that there is still an opportunity to return to Him.
- **Chapter 4: The Beginning of Wisdom.** It is the point at which one learns from past mistakes, changes one’s behavior to incorporate those lessons into one’s life, and begins the process of firmly affixing one’s steps on God’s path leading to reconciliation.
- **Chapter 5: Repentance.** The work of God’s judgment is completed. The goal of His judgment is not destruction but restoration.

In chapter 2 which we’re studying here, the theme is “Acknowledgment”. Essentially this is the necessary next step after recognition, in this case acknowledgment of God’s judgment, its cause and purposes.

How the LORD has covered the daughter of Zion

With a cloud in His anger!
He has cast from heaven to earth
The glory of Israel,
And has not remembered His footstool
In the day of His anger.

²The LORD has swallowed up; He has not spared

All the habitations of Jacob.
In His wrath He has thrown down
The strongholds of the daughter of Judah;
He has brought them down to the ground;
He has profaned the kingdom and its princes.

³In fierce anger He has cut off
All the strength of Israel;
He has drawn back His right hand
From before the enemy.
And He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire

[Read v.1-3]

Q: How do v.1-2 express a two-fold judgment of God that would be particularly powerful where it concerns His people?

A: In v.1 the references “daughter of Zion”, “glory of Israel” and “His footstool” all refer to their legacy of service and worship given through the Temple, priesthood and related activities; in v.2 the references to “the habitations of Jacob”, “strongholds of the daughter of Judah” and “He has profaned the kingdom and its princes” all refer to the land and nation given to them.

Q: Why might the reference to “covered...with a cloud in His anger” be a powerful image to an Old Testament believer?

A: Whereas God’s cloud provided protection against the Egyptians when crossing the Red Sea and in the wilderness, and He filled both the Tabernacle and Temple with the cloud of His glory when they were dedicated into service, this is a way of telling them that what was at one time working **for** them is now diametrically and actively opposed **against** them, a testimony to how far they have fallen.

Lamentations 2 • The Second Step of Acknowledgment, Page 1 of 6

Consuming round about.

Q: What is probably the greater message behind the statement, “And has not remembered His footstool in the day of His anger”? (v.1)

A: “Footstool” is another name for the Ark of the Covenant (1 Chr. 28:2). Because it was obvious that the Temple could not literally hold the whole person of God, the Ark with the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies was referred to as the place where God rested His feet. The greater message is not just the withdrawal of the personal presence of the Lord, but with their breaking the covenant of the Law represented by the Ark.

Q: How does the statement, “He has profaned the kingdom and its princes” actually express what has happened to them spiritually?

A: What was at one time reckoned as sacred has now been “profaned”—literally “polluted” and rendered unsuitable by sin.

Point: As a visible testimony to a covenant relationship with God, He gave Israel right service and worship of Him through the Temple, priesthood and related activities, as well as the inheritance of the land itself. Since they couldn’t keep the covenant, neither would God allow them to keep the things associated with it.

Q: How does v.3 actually fit with the opening reference in v.1 to the “cloud of His anger”?

A: Having withdrawn His protection (“drawn back His right hand”), they have no power against their enemies or to prevent what is taking place, the opposite of how God’s cloud of protection and glory once worked on their behalf. Likewise, the description of God “like a flaming fire consuming round about” expresses a reversal such as the fire in the bush before Moses, the pillar of fire by night in the wilderness, coming down as fire in the Shekinah glory, etc.

Application: Judgment on the backslidden may not be limited to a loss of the things of the world, but the spiritual as well. It’s an indicator of how close one is coming to losing everything not just in this life, but the one to come.

⁴He has bent His bow like an enemy;
He has set His right hand like an
adversary
And slain all that were pleasant to the
eye;

In the tent of the daughter of Zion
He has poured out His wrath like fire.

⁵The LORD has become like an enemy.

He has swallowed up Israel;
He has swallowed up all its palaces,
He has destroyed its strongholds
And multiplied in the daughter of Judah
Mourning and moaning.

[Read v.4-5]

Q: What do the phrases “the daughter of Zion” (v.4) and “the daughter of Judah” express biblically?

A: They are a continuation of how they were used in the previous verses (1 & 2) to describe what is happening to both their spiritual service and their earthly inheritance.

Q: How is the working of the Lord expressed more literally here than in the previous verses?

A: Whereas the image of the cloud and the fire were illustrations of the withdrawal of God’s glory and protection, here it is more explicitly stated, “The LORD has become like an enemy”. (v.5)

Q: What seems to be the goal of God’s working this way?

A: As a result, His people are “mourning and moaning” (v.6), essentially brought to a spiritual state of humility and weakness.

Application: The Lord may turn all things against the backslidden if that is what it takes for them to acknowledge their true spiritual condition.

⁶And He has violently treated His tabernacle like a garden booth; He has destroyed His appointed meeting place.

The LORD has caused to be forgotten The appointed feast and sabbath in Zion, And He has despised king and priest In the indignation of His anger.

⁷The LORD has rejected His altar, He has abandoned His sanctuary; He has delivered 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 an appointed feast.

⁸The LORD determined to destroy The wall of the daughter of Zion. He has stretched out a line, He has not restrained His hand from

destroying, And He has caused rampart and wall to lament; They have languished together.

⁹Her gates have sunk into the ground, He has destroyed and broken her bars. Her king and her princes are among the nations;

The law is no more. Also, her prophets find No vision from the LORD.

[Read v.6-9]

Q: What has the focus narrowed down to in these verses?

A: The Temple and all of its associated items and activities.

Q: What actions has God taken against the things associated with their spiritual service and worship in v.6-7?

1. "...He has violently treated His tabernacle like a garden booth". (v.6)
2. "...destroyed His appointed meeting place". (v.6)
3. "...caused to be forgotten the appointed feast and sabbath..." (v.6)
4. "...despised king and priest..." (v.6)
5. "...rejected His altar..." (v.7)
6. "...abandoned His sanctuary..." (v.7)
7. "...delivered into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces". (v.7)

Point: Notice how this covers not just the Temple and the priesthood operating it, but the associated sacrifices, celebrations and rituals as well, the very things that at one time they falsely thought would protect them in spite of their actual behavior contrary to what these things represented.

Q: How would ancient Jews have understood the meaning of the reference in v.7, "They have made a noise in the house of the Lord as in the day of an appointed feast"?

A: Instead of the right sounds of the right service and worship of the Lord in the Temple which would come with the choirs, the priesthood, and all those bringing their offerings and prayers, the exact opposite is taking place—the "noise" of the enemy coming in and worshiping their own gods and the shouts of their victory over God's people. It's a way of describing the false worship of other gods and self that has taken the place of the right worship of the One True God.

Q: What does it mean in v.8, "He has stretched out a line"?

A: This is a repeated biblical metaphor of something being measured by God's standard. (Is. 28:17, 34:11; Eze. 47:3; Amos 7:7-8; Zech. 1:16, 2:12, 4:10) It's the biblical way of stating that everything taking place is not just under God's control but according to a very detailed plan. From an earthly view it may be confusing and seem chaotic, but from the heavenly perspective it is actually ordered and according to plan.

Q: How do we know that the physical judgments taking place were parallel to equally powerful spiritual judgments?

A: It was not just the "sanctuary" (v.7), "palaces" (v.7), "rampart and wall" (v.8), "gates" (v.9) and "bars" (v.9) which were destroyed, but "her prophets find no vision from the LORD". (v.9) The removal of the physical reflects the removal of the spiritual.

Q: How does the statement, "The law is no more" (v.9) probably reflect both on the literal loss of "her king and her princes" and the spiritual loss of "her prophets" who no longer have a message from the Lord?

A: The Law was the rule of both civil and religious life for the people which is now gone with the removal of "her kings and her princes", while the role of prophets was to call people back into obedience to the Law through whom God has ceased speaking. Just as the earthly aspect of God's Law is broken and they are now owned by an enemy, so the spiritual aspect has ceased to operate and all that is left is deception.

Application: They had to be shown how their spiritual service and condition was completely void and broken by experiencing the literal things associated with that service being completely voided and broken by God Himself.

¹⁰The elders of the daughter of Zion
Sit on the ground, they are silent.
They have thrown dust on their heads;
They have girded themselves with
sackcloth.

The virgins of Jerusalem
Have bowed their heads to the ground.

¹¹My eyes fail because of tears,
My spirit is greatly troubled;
My heart is poured out on the earth
Because of the destruction of the daughter
of my people,

When little ones and infants faint
In the streets of the city.

¹²They say to their mothers,
“Where is grain 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.

¹³How shall I admonish you?
To what shall I compare you,
O daughter of Jerusalem?
To what shall I liken you as I comfort
you,

O virgin daughter of Zion?
For your ruin is as vast as the sea;
Who can heal you?

¹⁴Your prophets have seen for you
False and foolish visions;
And they have not exposed your iniquity
So as to restore you from captivity,
But they have seen for you false and
misleading oracles.

¹⁵All who pass along the way
Clap their hands in derision at you;
They hiss and shake their heads
At the daughter of Jerusalem,
“Is this the city of which they said,
‘The perfection of beauty,
A joy to all the earth’?”

¹⁶All your enemies
Have opened their mouths wide against
you;
They hiss and gnash their teeth.
They say, “We have swallowed her up!
Surely this is the day for which we
waited;
We have reached it, we have seen it.”

[Read v.10-12]

Q: What is this describing?

A: The ultimate low place of sorrow over what has taken place focusing exclusively on what is taking place in the present.

Q: How do the people mentioned in these verses compare to those mentioned in previous verses?

A: We have been progressively moving from the very top of society—kings, princes, priests, etc.—to the mainstream rank and file members—elders, mothers, children, etc. Ultimately it gets even personal for Jeremiah the author of Lamentations who, beginning in v.12, expresses his profound sorrow for what he is witnessing.

Q: What might be a lesson to be learned by the fact that there seem to be those suffering who were not the cause for what has taken place?

A: The consequences of sin often extend beyond affecting just us alone; our behavior has a far-reaching effect on those around us. (Example: The consequences of drug addiction or alcoholism are never confined to just the addict or alcoholic alone, are they?)

Application: The consequences of sin can have an extended effect to those around us. Part of the process God uses forces the backslidden to face the reality not only of what they have done to themselves, but to others as well.

[Read v.13-16]

Q: When someone is going through severe hardship, what is usually said to try and bring some comfort to the sufferer?

A: Often the sufferer is given examples of those who have had it worse, or those who overcame a similar situation, and that soon it will be over and everything is alright.

Q: How is Jeremiah in v.13 therefore frustrated?

A: There are no examples of similar suffering to compare this to (“To what shall I compare you?”) because no one has been so close to God and then fallen so far away. “For your ruin is as vast as the sea” is a dramatic way of stating how unbelievably huge the problem is, and “Who can heal you?” a rhetorical question describing the hopelessness from an earthly perspective in terms of how big the problem really is.

Q: How does v.14 express a root underlying cause leading up to all of this?

A: True prophets of God are like evangelists to the backslidden, calling them to repent of their sin and return to God’s Word. Because the people instead chose false prophets, they were deceived by “false and misleading oracles” whose false message had not “exposed your iniquity”.

*“An appalling and horrible thing
Has happened in the land:
The prophets prophesy falsely,
And the priests rule on their own authority;
And My people love it so!
But what will you do at the end of it? (Jeremiah 5:30-31)*

Lamentations 2 • The Second Step of Acknowledgment, Page 4 of 6

Q: How do v.15-16 express an additional and unfortunate side effect of someone's spiritual failure?

A: It's not just that their spiritual witness is destroyed, but what unbelievers suspected about the hypocrisy of the backsliders' lives seems to have come true, that it never seemed genuine and it would never last. Just as the backslidden arrive at their condition by embracing false beliefs, to the non-believers witnessing the results falsely assume their own ways are therefore confirmed.

Application: *The situation for the backslidden is unlike any other human condition of suffering because it is brought about by willful deception where personal sin is concerned.*

¹⁷The LORD has done what He purposed;
He has accomplished His word
Which He commanded from days of old.
He has thrown down without sparing,
And He has caused the enemy to rejoice
over you;
He has exalted the might of your
adversaries.

¹⁸Their heart cried out to the LORD,
“O wall of the daughter of Zion,
Let your tears run down like a river day
and night;

Give yourself no relief,
Let your eyes have no rest.

¹⁹Arise, cry aloud in the night
At the beginning of the night watches;
Pour out your heart like water
Before the presence of the LORD;
Lift up your hands to Him
For the life of your little ones
Who are faint because of hunger
At the head of every street.”

²⁰See, O LORD, and look!

With whom have You dealt thus?
Should women eat their offspring,
The little ones who were born healthy?
Should priest and prophet be slain
In the sanctuary of the LORD?

²¹On the ground in the streets
Lie young and old;

My virgins and my young men
Have fallen by the sword.

You have slain them in the day of Your
anger,

You have slaughtered, not sparing.

²²You called as in the day of an appointed
feast

My terrors on every side;

And there was no one who escaped or
survived

In the day of the LORD's anger.

Those whom I bore and reared,

[Read v.17-19]

Q: How does v.17 summarize the heart of the matter in question?

A: It is full acknowledgment that everything happening, regardless of its perceived earthly source, is actually 100% from the Lord: “...done what He purposed...which He commanded...He has thrown down...He caused...He has exalted the might of your adversaries”.

Point: *Nowhere in Lamentations are the Babylonians or any earthly tool of God's judgment mentioned because everything is ultimately carried out at the Lord's direction. It is very similar to what takes place in Job when the Lord restricts the boundaries of Satan's actions.*

Q: How are v.18-19 actually the right response to having finally achieved the right acknowledgment of God's sovereignty over all things?

A: This is a very dramatic picture of repentance, the sincere acknowledgment of the consequences for one's own sin—“Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord”.

Application: *Right spiritual acknowledgment is achieved when we ascribe to Him the authority and source behind the earthly tools of His judgment. This acknowledgement always first takes material shape in the form of sincere repentance from the heart.*

[Read v.20-22]

Q: How might these closing verses serve as a kind of “moral to the story” when it comes to the issue of great, personal unfaithfulness and sin?

A: Even when we arrive at the point of true acknowledgment of God as the source of the judgments we're experiencing, our choosing to follow false teachings/prophets so as to avoid the real issues involve, and even though we ultimately sincerely and finally repent as proof of achieving true spiritual acknowledgment, the **consequences** for sin may not automatically and immediately go away.

Application: *Forgiveness and spiritual reconciliation may be ultimately achieved but do not automatically mean that there are no continued consequences for sin.*

My enemy annihilated them.

Overall Application

Q: How does Lamentations provide a stark contrast to the whole of what took place in the book of Jeremiah?

A: The recognition which took place in Jeremiah was never accompanied by right acknowledgment of either the personal spiritual condition or God as the Source of what was taking place.

It is not enough to merely recognize that God is doing something, but to personally acknowledge that both His sovereignty and righteousness is working in a way directly proportional to our disobedience and its inevitable consequences. Lamentations is a picture of what happens to a repeatedly disobedient child who time and again proves to be unresponsive to discipline and therefore, for the sake of the child's very life, must experience the most dramatic actions that are only ever taken as the very last resort.