

Sunday Message Notes – Better Bible Reading in 2026

Lamentations: Refusing Erasure

Overview – It was formerly thought by scholars that Jeremiah was the author. But, modern scholars argue each of the five chapters has a different author. Lamentations was written “**between**” – the temple was destroyed in **586 BCE** – and then rebuilt in **516 BCE** (Lamentations was written between 550-538 BCE). So, Lamentations was written “between” – in a season when there was no temple and when the people were in exile.

1st Temple Judaism (c. 1,000 BCE - 586 BCE).

2nd Temple Judaism (516 BCE- 70 CE).

Ch. 1 — Mourns.

Lamentations 1:16 — “For these things I weep; my eyes flow with tears...”

Chapter 1 gives voice to Jerusalem’s grief, loneliness, and devastation.

Ch. 2 — Accuses.

Lamentations 2:5 — “The Lord is like an enemy; he has swallowed up Israel...”

The lament turns from grief toward a raw accusation of God’s judgment and apparent rejection.

Ch. 3 — Struggles with Hope.

Lamentations 3:21–23 — “Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed...”

Hope doesn’t erase the suffering; it emerges in the middle of it.

Ch. 4 — Reflects: What are the ruins trying to teach us about ourselves?

Lamentations 4:13–14 — “But this happened because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests...”

The ruins become a mirror: the destruction forces the community to reckon with its own corruption, injustice, and failures.

Ch. 5 — Pleads / Prays.

Lamentations 5:1 — “Remember, Lord, what has happened to us; look, and see our disgrace.”

Lamentations 5:21 — “Restore us to yourself, Lord, that we may return; renew our days as of old...”

A communal prayer: “God, remember us. See what has happened. Hear us.”

So, a simple progression could be:

Ch. 1: “We grieve.” → Ch. 2: “We question God.” → Ch. 3: “Can we still hope?” → Ch. 4: “What must we learn from what happened?” → Ch. 5: “Remember us.”

I. Introduction – “Identity Theology”: When Being Right Becomes More Important Than Telling the Truth

A. When theology becomes intertwined with identity - questioning interpretation feels like questioning ourselves.

1. The “flat-earth” conspiracy. The Bible uses ancient poetic language about the heavens:

“He stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in” (**Isaiah**

40:22). We know the earth is not flat – we have been out of the earth’s atmosphere and seen with human eyes that earth is a sphere.

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2. **The question is: Can our faith survive acknowledging that?** Or do we need the Bible to be culturally, scientifically, and historically superior to every other text because our **sense of superiority depends on it?** This is where identity theology becomes dangerous.

II. Lamentations Challenges Identity Theology

- A. The Hebrew name is 'Ekhah—"How?" Or "How lonely sits the city that once was full of people!" — **Lamentations 1:1**
-**How** did Jerusalem fall?
-**How** did the Temple—the center of Israel's worship—become rubble?
-**How** did God's people become refugees and exiles?
Babylon destroyed Jerusalem in **586 BCE**.
- B. **And now Israel has a theological crisis:**
If our God is God, how did our God let this happen?
Lamentations neither dodges nor sanitizes the question. **It tells the truth.**

III. Lamentations Lets God's People Talk Back to God

- A. Listen to the language: "The Lord has become like an enemy." — **Lamentations 2:5**
And: "The Lord has done what he purposed." — **Lamentations 2:17**
The poet is not simply blaming Babylon. The poet is wrestling with God's responsibility for the catastrophe.
- B. **Unlike Job**, there is no satisfying divine explanation at the end.
1. The book concludes: "Why have you forgotten us completely?" — **Lamentations 5:20**
The book ends with the question still hanging in the air. **Why?** That's Scripture.
A **question mark** is Scripture. **Grief** is Scripture. **Anger** is Scripture. **Trauma** is Scripture.

IV. Why Preserve This Book?

- A. Israel could have cleaned up the story. They could have said: "Let's emphasize God's victory." "Let's focus on the good things." "Let's not dwell on the destruction." "Let's not give our enemies the satisfaction." Instead, they preserved a book that remembers **their defeat**.
Why?
If you erase the pain, you erase part of the people.
- B. Lamentations is Scripture's refusal to say: "Let's move on."

V. This Matters for Black History: Remembering the Whole Story

- A. Lamentations refuses to let suffering disappear into a footnote.
It does not rush past the pain. It remembers the injustice and the grief.
It gives language to people who have lived through devastation.
- B. Black history is a story of extraordinary achievement, but it is also a story of pain.
We cannot tell the story of Black achievement without also telling the story of what Black people had to overcome. Lamentations teaches us that remembering is an act of truth-telling.
- C. Lamentations Gives Voice to People Living in the Ruins
The ruins remain in the text.
The grief remains in the text.
The questions remain in the text.
The voices of those who suffered remain in the text.

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That is important for how we remember Black history.

Lamentations reminds us that the ruins have a testimony.

VI. Lamentations cannot be reduced to emotional chaos.

A. The poetry is highly structured, organized alphabetically around the Hebrew alphabet (called an acrostic).

1. Letter by letter. The writers take an experience too painful to comprehend and give it structure. It's as if they are saying: **"I need every letter I have to tell you what happened to us."**

VII. Jesus Doesn't Conceal Lament

Jesus says: "Blessed are those who mourn." — **Matthew 5:4**

Jesus weeps: "Jesus began to weep." — **John 11:35** (Lazarus).

Jesus weeps over Jerusalem: **Luke 19:41**

And on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" — **Matthew 27:46**

Jesus gives us permission to tell the truth about suffering.

World BEHIND the Text: Lamentations belongs to a much older Ancient Near Eastern (or Afro-Asiatic) tradition of mourning destroyed cities and temples: Sumerian laments for Ur, Nippur, and Sumer date to roughly 2000 BCE—some 1,400 years before Lamentations.

World OF the Text: Lamentations creates a profound tension with later Calvinist readings. The "LORD has done what he purposed" (**Lam. 2:17**) and portrays Babylon as an "instrument" of divine judgment. Yet, Scripture refuses to let "instrument" become an excuse for oppression—Isaiah calls Assyria "the rod of my anger" (**Isa. 10:5–6**), yet immediately says God will judge Assyria for its arrogance (**Isa. 10:12–15**). This raises a critical question for Calvinist interpretations of **Romans**: Paul's reference to God having "raised up" Pharaoh (**9:17**, echoing **Exodus 9:16**) and **9:20–23**, where Paul uses the potter (God) as crafting "vessels of honor and dishonor." Does divine sovereignty mean that whatever happens—including oppression—must be understood as exactly what God intended and therefore beyond protest? This is an unsettling, honest query: if God raises up the oppressor for divine purposes, can we still hold the oppressor morally responsible for the suffering he causes?"

Lamentations demands an answer: "Why have you forgotten us completely?" (**Lam. 5:20**).

Paul complicates a simplistic reading of **Rom. 9 and 11** and culminates not in resignation to suffering but in God's mercy toward all (**Rom. 11:32–36**). For communities shaped by slavery, colonialism, racism, and other forms of oppression, this distinction matters profoundly: **"God is sovereign" must never become a theological way of telling the oppressed that their oppression was therefore God's will.**

Lamentations gives us permission to stand in the ruins and say: God may be sovereign, but this still hurts, this still matters, and this still demands to be named.

The world IN FRONT the Text: asks us to hear Lamentations in our own moment: when painful histories are being sanitized, softened, or erased, this ancient book reminds us that telling the truth about suffering is itself an act of resistance—and that a people cannot fully heal from what they are pressured to forget.

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