

## Lamentations Chapter 2

The focus on this lament shifts to God. Jerusalem had once enjoyed an exalted position, for the Lord had lived within her walls; but now He had “cast” her “down”.

Verses 1-4: Israel had disregarded its privilege as God’s chosen possession; consequently, the Lord had removed (“drawn back”), his restraining “right hand” and allowed them to be defeated (Isa. 63:10). The “horn” symbolizes strength or power.

**Lamentations 2:1 "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!"**

“How hath the Lord”: Much (in Lam. 2), depicts God’s judgment in vivid portrayals. He covered the Judeans with a cloud (verse 1), withdrew His hand of protection (verse 3), bent His bow and had slain with His arrows (verse 4), and stretched out a surveyor’s line to mark walls to be destroyed (verse 8). He will work a rebuilding of Jerusalem in the future kingdom (Zech. 2:1-13).

“The beauty of Israel”: Likely refers to Mount Zion and the temple (Psalms 48:2; 50:2; Isa. 60:13; 64:11; Ezek. 16:14; Dan 11:45).

“And remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger”: Hath not spared even the Ark itself, the footstool of the shekinah, or divine glory, which was accustomed to appear, sitting as it were, enthroned upon the mercy-seat, between the cherubim. Referring to the Ark of the Covenant as indicated by (1 Chron. 28:2; and Psalms 99:5, 132:7).

This "cloud" is speaking of a darkness that prevents their prayers from reaching up to heaven. His anger for their sins has made His ear closed to their prayers at this time. There may be a dark cloud hovering overhead, but the sun shines above that black cloud. When the cloud is gone, we can see the sunshine. The trouble is from God. His judgement has come down on the beauty of Israel. The beauty, as we discussed in the previous lesson, was centered on the temple and the worship in the temple.

**Lamentations 2:2 "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."**

He hath thrown down”: The Lord had cast down the bastions of Judah’s defense, as He told Jeremiah He would do from the outset of his ministry (Jer. 1:10).

It is the Lord who brought judgement. Babylon was the instrument He used, but God really destroyed their countryside and their cities and even their strongholds.

**Lamentations 2:3 "He hath cut off in [his] fierce anger all the horn of Israel: he hath drawn back his right hand from before the enemy, and he burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, [which] devoureth round about."**

The "right hand," the place of prominence and honor (compare 1 Kings 2:19), and is often used figuratively to emphasize vigorous action (compare Exodus 15:6, 12; Psalm 45:4; Hab. 2:16).

The "horn" symbolizes strength. Their strength, which came from God, is gone. He had stood between the enemy and Israel for all these years. Now the right hand of spiritual blessings has been removed. He (the Right Hand), did not fight Babylon for them. God is a consuming fire. When sin and disobedience to God is great, that fire burns. God is holy, He cannot look upon sin. He burns it up.

**Lamentations 2:4 "He hath bent his bow like an enemy: he stood with his right hand as an adversary, and slew all [that were] pleasant to the eye in the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion: he poured out his fury like fire."**

God sometimes appears as if he was an enemy to his people (when he is not), by his conduct and behavior. And by the dispensations of his providence they take him to be so, as Job did (Job 16:9). He bends his bow, or treads it, for the bending or stretching the bow was done by the foot; and as the Targum, "and threw his arrows at me:"

"He stood with his right hand as an adversary": With arrows in it, to put into his bow or with his sword drawn, as an adversary does. The Targum is: "He stood at the right hand of Nebuchadnezzar and helped him, when he distressed his people Israel:"

"And slew all that were pleasant to the eye": Princes and priests, husbands and wives, parents and children, young men and maids. Desirable to their friends and relations, and to the commonwealth.

"In the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion he poured out his fury like fire": That is, either in the temple, or in the city of Jerusalem, or both. Which were burnt with fire, as the effect of divine wrath and fury; and which itself is comparable to fire. Like a burning lamp of fire, as the Targum; or rather like a burning furnace or mountain (see Nahum 1:6).

God had helped Babylon destroy them. His anger was great. Even the temple was burned. Notice, "like an enemy". God is not the enemy of Israel, but is acting like one in this severe punishment of them.

Verses 5-10: In His judgment, God had become like an "enemy" (Jer. 30:14), to His people (Lev. 26:16-26, Deut. 28:20-68), bringing an end to their formal worship system. God tore down His temple ("he hath destroyed his places of the assembly"), like a farmer would tear down a temporary field hut that provided shade during harvest time. Even the "feasts", Sabbath observances, sacrifices, and the "altar" were affected by Jerusalem's fall.

“Swallowed up”: indicates that the entire land suffered (Amos 4:6-13).

**Lamentations 2:5 "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."**

Who formerly was on their side, their God and guardian, their protector and deliverer, but now against them. And a terrible thing it is to have God for an enemy, or even to be as one; this is repeated, as being exceeding distressing, and even intolerable. Mr. Broughton renders it, "the Lord is become a very enemy"; taking "*caph*" for a note of reality, and not of similitude.

"He hath swallowed up Israel": The ten tribes, or the Jewish nation in general. As a lion, or any other savage beast, swallows its prey, and makes nothing of it, and leaves none behind.

"He hath swallowed up all her palaces": The palaces of Zion or Jerusalem. The palaces of the king, princes, nobles, and great men; as an earthquake or inundation swallows up whole streets and cities at once (Lam. 2:2).

"He hath destroyed his strong holds": The fortified places of the land of Israel, the towers and castles.

"And hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation": Exceeding great lamentation, for the destruction of its cities, towns, villages, and the inhabitants of them.

"Mourning and lamentations" have to do with repentance. The Lord has done this to cause them to repent. It is such a shame, they did not listen to the warnings they were given.

Verses 6-11: Tragedy comes to everything and everyone through sin. The account mentions the temple or tabernacle where Israelites came to worship (verse 6), feast and Sabbaths (verse 6), His altar and holy places (verse 7), city walls (verse 8), the law (verse 9), and children in the family (verse 11).

Verse 6-7 (compare 1:4).

**Lamentations 2:6 "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."**

The courts where the people used to assemble for worship in the temple; or the synagogues in Jerusalem, and other parts of the land.

"The Lord hath caused the solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion": There being neither places to keep them in, nor people to observe them.

"And hath despised, in the indignation of his anger, the king and the priest": Whose persons and offices were sacred, and ought to be treated by men with honor and respect. But, for the sins of both, the Lord despised them himself, and made them the object of his wrath and indignation, and suffered them to be despised and ill used by others, by the Chaldeans. Zedekiah had his children slain before his eyes, and then his eyes were put out, and he was carried in chains to Babylon, and there detained as a captive all of his days. And Seraiah the chief priest, or, as the Targum here has it, the High Priest, was put to death by the king of Babylon. Though not only the persons of the king and priest are meant, but their offices also. The kingdom and priesthood ceased from being exercised for many years.

It appears the people were still going through the motion of worship in the temple, but their hearts were far from God. God allowed the temple and everything in it to be destroyed, to show His utter rejection of anything they might offer. The king and the priest were probably even guiltier than the people. The priest should have seen that the worship was holy. They had been worshipping false gods, while at the same time going through rituals to Him. God will not allow the worship of any false god. It is better not to sacrifice at all, than to do it out of obligation and not love. God destroyed the temple. His heart was broken. His people had abandoned Him.

**Lamentations 2:7 "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."**

"Noise ... house of the Lord ... day of a solemn feast": A shout of triumph in the captured temple resembled the joyous celebrations in the same place at the solemn feasts.

The "noise in the house of the Lord" was not a cause for worship but a cause for wailing as Israel had to listen to the Babylonians celebrate their victory.

God did this because it reminded Him of His people gone astray. He had wanted to be their God, and for them to be His people. They had broken the covenant. God will not accept worship of Him that is not sincere.

**Lamentations 2:8 "The LORD hath purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion: he hath stretched out a line, he hath not withdrawn his hand from destroying: therefore he made the rampart and the wall to lament; they languished together."**

When God "stretched out a line", He intended to "destroy" His city. Jerusalem had been measured, marked and numbered for judgment.

This line that the LORD had stretched, is speaking of a separation of the people. Those who follow God are on one side, and those who have worldly lives and worship false gods on the other side. There is desolation in Jerusalem, because they were on the wrong side of the line. We need to carefully weigh everything that is going on here. Christians, awake! Do not straddle the line. Get over on God's side and stay there. God will examine our works and some will not pass the test (read 1 Cor. 3:12). Some of us will have our works burn up in the fire of God. All of

these things that we read in Lamentations, and the rest of the Bible, are for us to learn from. We must not make the same mistakes they did here, or we will have the same problems they did.

**Lamentations 2:9 "Her gates are sunk into the ground; he hath destroyed and broken her bars: her king and her princes [are] among the Gentiles: the law [is] no [more]; her prophets also find no vision from the LORD."**

When the wall is gone, the gates fall. This is like the hedge of protection we Christians have around us. To anger our God as they have here, would remove our hedge of protection. We could not withstand the devil if our hedge was gone. God has stopped sending them His messages through His prophets. Judgement day came. God has suspended His law and His prophecies. They did not keep the law, so He just took it away from them.

**Lamentations 2:10 "The elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground, [and] keep silence: they have cast up dust upon their heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth: the virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground."**

All of these activities express the depths of grief (compare 2 Kings 19:1; Job 2:8, 12).

"Sackcloth and throwing of dust on their heads" show extreme mourning. They had been wrong about Jeremiah's prophecy, and now they are afraid to say anything for fear it too, would be wrong. Perhaps if they did speak, no one would listen, because they had misjudged Jeremiah. The elders had been held in great respect, because of their experience. They feel they have given terrible advice, and they have.

Verses 11-14: the "liver" was regarded as the seat of emotions and emphasizes the intensity of Jeremiah's grief. Imagine the greatest devastation in a time of war or drought, and that a sense of what lay before Jeremiah, all because Jerusalem had not heeded his prophet words. He was a man whose heart was broken by the rebellious sins of this people and the tragedies of his times.

Verses 11-12: This description of Babylon's invasion depicted the reality of a hungry child dying in its mother's arms as a result.

**Lamentations 2:11 "Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people; because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city."**

The internal organs were considered by the Hebrews to be the centers of the emotions. "Liver" and heart (verse 18), are often used as set terms in parallel lines of Hebrew poetry, and in other literature of the ancient Near East.

This is Jeremiah weeping, but in a sense, he is speaking of Jerusalem as well. All of the prayers they can pray, will not stop the trouble, because God is not listening to them. "Swoon", in this case, would mean to pass out from weakness.

**Lamentations 2:12 "They say to their mothers, Where [is] corn and wine? when they swooned as the wounded in the streets of the city, when their soul was poured out into their mothers' bosom."**

Not the sucklings who could not speak, nor were used to corn and wine, but the children more grown. Both are before spoken of, but these are meant, even the young men of Israel, as the Targum. And such as had been brought up in the best manner, had been used to wine, and not water, and therefore ask for that as well as corn. Both take in all the necessaries of life; and which they ask of their mothers, who had been used to feeding them, and were most tender of them. But now not seeing and having their usual provisions, and not knowing what was the reason of it, inquire after them, being pressed with hunger.

"When they swooned as the wounded in the streets of the city": Having no food given them, though they asked for it time after time, they fainted away, and died a lingering death. As wounded persons do who are not killed at once, which is the more distressing.

"When their soul was poured out into their mothers' bosom": Meaning not the desires of their souls for food, expressed in moving and melting language as they sat in their mothers' laps, and lay in their bosoms. Which must be piercing unto them, if no more was designed; but their souls or lives themselves, which they gave up through famine, as the Targum; expiring in their mothers' arms.

The children are asking for food, but there is no food. They die from starvation in their mother's arms.

**Lamentations 2:13 "What thing shall I take to witness for thee? what thing shall I liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? what shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Zion? for thy breach [is] great like the sea: who can heal thee?"**

The sum of this verse is, that the miserable condition of the people was both incomparable and incurable. There was no people whose miserable condition was in any degree parallel to the misery of the Jews. It is some comfort to persons in misery to consider that others are and have been, as miserable as they, but the prophet had not this topic from whence to fetch an argument of comfort to the Jews. There were none to whom he could liken them, nor was there any present cure for them. Their breach was like a sea-breach, where the waters come in with such a torrent that while the tide abates there is no making any bank of defense against them.

Jeremiah was still praying for them. Jeremiah has forgotten how cruel they had been to him, even putting him in chains. "Breach" means fracture or ruin. This break is from God, man cannot mend the break.

**Lamentations 2:14 "Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee: and they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment."**

“Foolish things for thee” (as Jer. 23:16-17 indicates), these lies spoke of peace and comfort, not judgment (compare Jer. 23:30-40), to see how such lying led to destruction.

One sign of false prophets is that they avoid confronting sin (“Have not discovered ... iniquity”). And instead prophesy only happy “causes of banishment”.

The prophets in the verse above, are false prophets. The visions they said they had seen, were not of God. They were either from their imagination or from the devil. A true prophet would have told them of their iniquity and tried to get them to repent. They added to the reason for the banishment.

Verses 15-17: Jerusalem’s tabernacle, as the earthly dwelling place of the glory of the Lord, was established as (“The joy of the whole earth”; Psalm 48:2). But now the city, and the people it represented, had become the object of scorn (Jer. 18:16), among her enemies. Lest Jerusalem begin to believe her enemies’ boasts, however, Jeremiah reminds them that the destruction was the work of God: (“The LORD hath done [that] which he had devised”).

**Lamentations 2:15 "All that pass by clap [their] hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, [saying, Is] this the city that [men] call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?"**

Travelers that passed by and saw Jerusalem in ruins, clapped their hands at it, by way of rejoicing as well pleased at the sight. This must be understood, not of the inhabitants of the land, but of strangers, who had no good will. Though they seem to be distinguished from their implacable enemies (Lam. 2:16).

"They hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem": By way of scorn and derision; hereby expressing their contempt of her, and the pleasure and satisfaction they took in seeing her in this condition.

"Saying, is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?" A complete city, a most beautiful one for its situation. For its fortifications by nature and art; for its spacious buildings, palaces, and towers. And especially for the magnificent temple in it, and the residence of the God of heaven there, and that pompous worship of him there performed. On account of all which, and the abundant blessings of goodness bestowed upon the inhabitants, they had reason to rejoice more than all the men of the world besides. As well as they contributed many ways to the good and happiness of all nations. This is what had been said by themselves (Psalm 48:2). And had even been owned by others; by the forefathers of those very persons that now insult over it. So the Targum, "is this the city which our fathers that were of old said?"

The shame of Jerusalem was great. All of the countries had always thought of them as perfect in the sight of God. The beauty of their temple was well known throughout the lands. Jews from many countries came there to worship in the temple. At one time, the Queen of Sheba came to

behold with her own eyes the magnificence of Jerusalem. As great as the blessings had been from God, now was the shame.

**Lamentations 2:16 "All thine enemies have opened their mouth against thee: they hiss and gnash the teeth: they say, We have swallowed [her] up: certainly this [is] the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen [it]."**

The various actions and gestures here all express derision. They occur in the "taunt" literature of the Old Testament (Jer. 19:8; 25:9; Zeph. 2:15).

It was as if they had waited, hoping the blessings of God would remove so they could devour her. For such a great nation to be swallowed up made them feel very important.

**Lamentations 2:17 "The LORD hath done [that] which he had devised; he hath fulfilled his word that he had commanded in the days of old: he hath thrown down, and hath not pitied: and he hath caused [thine] enemy to rejoice over thee, he hath set up the horn of thine adversaries."**

All that occurred was under the sovereign control of the "Lord" (compare Deut. 28:15, 45; Jer. 51:12; Zech. 1:6; and see the note on Jer. 46:1).

He hath fulfilled his word": The enemy that gloats (in verses 15-16), should recognize that the destruction was the work of a sovereign God. This verse is the focal point of the chapter (Jer. 51:12).

God had been patient and longsuffering toward these people He loved. He gave them prophets, like Jeremiah, to warn them over and over. They had been amply warned what would happen if they did not repent. This is a fulfillment of His Word. It is God's strength that the Babylonians won with. God set up the horn (strength), of their adversaries.

Verses 18-22: Even though the punishment was deserved this appeal reveals the great violence, desperation, and sorrow that attends immense suffering.

**Lamentations 2:18 "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."**

"Wall of the daughter of Zion": The penetrated walls of Jerusalem cried out in anguish that they had been breached by the Babylonians.

The heart here, is the heart of the people of Jerusalem. God had been that wall of protection for them. Now the wall is gone. Tears like a river, just shows the abundance of tears shed. Jerusalem had been the apple of God's eye.



**Lamentations 2:19 "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."**

That is, O daughter of Zion, or congregation of Israel, as the Targum; who are addressed and called upon by the prophet to arise from their beds, and shake off their sleep, and sloth, and stupidity, and cry to God in the night season. And be earnest and persistent with him for help and assistance. Aben Ezra rightly observes, that the word used signifies a lifting up of the voice both in singing and in lamentation. Here it is used in the latter sense; and denotes great passion and earnestness in crying unto God, arising from deep distress and sorrow, which prevents sleep.

"In the beginning of the watches": This would seem to be most naturally explained as referring to the first watch of the night. When most are wrapped in their first and sweetest sleep, the daughter of Zion is to "arise and cry." Others explain, "At the beginning of each of the night watches;" i.e. all the night through. Previously to the Roman times, the Jews had divided the night into three watches (compare Judges 3:19). Pour out thine heart like water; i.e. give free course to thy complaint, shedding tears meanwhile. The expression is parallel partly to phrases like "I am poured out like water" (Psalm 22:14), partly to "Pour out your heart before him".

"For the life of thy young children that faint for hunger in the top of every street": Pray for them, that they might have food and sustenance, to preserve them alive. Who, for want of it, were ready to swoon and die in the public streets. In the top of them, where they met, and where was the greatest concourse of people, and yet none able to relieve them. (Psalm 62:8). In the top of every street; rather, at every street corner (Lam. 4:1).

Their hands were lifted up towards heaven to get help from God. They have forgotten the dark cloud between them and heaven. God is not hearing their prayers. The tears are in vain. Famine is in the land.

**Lamentations 2:20 "Behold, O LORD, and consider to whom thou hast done this. Shall the women eat their fruit, [and] children of a span long? shall the priest and the prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?"**

"Behold, O Lord, and consider": The chapter closes by placing the issue before God.

"Women eat their fruit": Hunger became so desperate in the 18 month siege that women resorted to the unbelievable, even eating their children (4:10; Lev. 26:29; Deut. 28:53, 56-57; Jer. 19:9).

Israel's descending to cannibalism during a siege had been prophesied of old. It was a hideous picture of the outworking of self-will, idolatry, and total debasement (compare Lev. 26:29; Deut. 28:53; see note on Jeremiah 19:9).

The innocent children and babies, just a few inches long, have suffered in this punishment as well as the men. In fact, it seems they were even eating their children in some cases. That is what is intended by eating their fruit. The priest and the prophets were slain. Jeremiah was an exception to that.

**Lamentations 2:21 "The young and the old lie on the ground in the streets: my virgins and my young men are fallen by the sword; thou hast slain [them] in the day of thine anger; thou hast killed, [and] not pitied."**

“The day of thine anger”: This describes the complete slaughter (as does 2 Chron. 36:17).

There are dead bodies everywhere, not just from the war but from the famine as well.

**Lamentations 2:22 "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."**

As my people were accustomed to being called together from all parts in a solemn day, when they were to meet at Jerusalem from all parts of Judea. So now by thy providence my terrible enemies, or terrible things, are by thee called together against that holy city, whither thy people were accustomed to being called to thy solemn worship. Thou hast made me as a great mother to bring up many inhabitants that were my children, and now the enemy hath consumed the far greater number of them.

At the command of God, even the Babylonian army had assembled at Jerusalem. This time the assembling was for the destruction of Jerusalem. The wrath of God was poured out through the Babylonians on God's people. They were killed and carried away captive. God had brought them up as His children, but they had rebelled.

## **Lamentations Chapter 2 Questions**

1. What is the "cloud" of verse 1 speaking of?
2. What is the "footstool" of verse 1?
3. The Lord has swallowed up all the habitation of \_\_\_\_\_.
4. What does the "horn" symbolize?
5. The right hand of \_\_\_\_\_ has been removed.
6. What does God do, when He looks upon sin?
7. God is not the enemy of Israel, but is \_\_\_\_\_.
8. "Mourning and lamentations" have to do with \_\_\_\_\_.
9. He hath violently taken away what?
10. Why did God allow the temple to be destroyed?

11. In verse 7, the LORD hath cast off His \_\_\_\_\_.
12. What kind of worship will God not accept?
13. What is the line in verse 8?
14. How will our work be tested?
15. When the wall is gone, the gates \_\_\_\_\_.
16. What would happen to the Christian, if his hedge was gone?
17. Why did God suspend the law?
18. What does sack cloth and the throwing of ashes on the head show?
19. Why are the elders silent?
20. Describe Jeremiah's condition in verse 11.
21. What are the children asking their mothers for?
22. What happens to these children?
23. What does "breach" mean?
24. Who are the prophets in verse 14?
25. Where did their visions come from?
26. What did the people passing do, when they saw the destruction of Jerusalem?
27. How had God shown His patience to Jerusalem?
28. There were so many tears, they were like a \_\_\_\_\_.
29. Who had been the apple of God's eye?
30. Why had they lifted their hands toward heaven?
31. What terrible things were happening to the tiny babies?