

## Embracing Accusations

### Lamentations 2:1-22

Intro: Lamentations 2 is probably the hardest chapter in the book so when we think about Lamentations 2 we must keep the big picture of the Bible in mind. We need to make sure we keep God's covenant in mind. This is always important but it is especially important for Lamentations. Like I said last week, we have these five poems because Israel broke their covenant with God. With Job we have a poem of the innocent suffering but in Lamentations we hear suffering because of the sin of breaking covenant with God.

So it is critical that we keep Lamentations in its covenant context. If we do not, we will have a skewed view of this book. We won't understand God's anger with His people and their punishment because what we find in Lamentations 2 are the curses given in Deuteronomy 28 carried out on Israel for breaking covenant with God.

The consequences of their sin affected the generation that followed although the future generations had not broken the covenant with God. This is the way sin works. There are consequences for sin and they will not only affect you but those around you and perhaps even generations to follow you.

Illst: Think about the consequences of sin this way. We have civil laws in our nation, state and city. So, for example, if you decided to drink and then drive and you cause a wreck and kill someone then you have not only ruined your life, you have ruined the life of the person you killed, the immediate families involved will grieve, be saddled with years of recovery, debt, and a missing family member. You will go to jail. The public will have to pay for your incarceration so tax dollars are used. It will cost you your future. You will lose your job. You will lose your family. Your family will be saddled with a very difficult financial situation. You and your family will lose your reputation. You will bear tremendous guilt. When you get out of jail it will be almost impossible to find a job. The point to this illustration is sin will cost you and it not only affects you but those around you for years to come.

This is similar to what we find in Lamentations. We find God's people have left God, they have walked away from God and broken His covenant and the natural consequences are following. They are affecting not only the immediate generation but it will severely affect generations to come. However, don't get the idea that God is passive in His dealing with His people. God is not the cosmic clock-maker who started the universe working and then stepped away from His world.

No . . . He is intimately and personally involved. His anger toward His people is out of His love for His people and His glory. God is angry and it is personal and it is an intimate anger toward those whom He loves. His bride, Israel, has committed adultery and the consequences of breaking covenant faithfulness is coming and so God's anger is not arbitrary nor is it sinful. It is righteous, sinless anger toward that which it is right to be angry.

God's anger is not like our anger. Our anger is often sinful, unjust and unrighteous. We must not confuse our anger and God's anger. We have got to come to terms with the fact that God gets angry with sin and in Lamentations 2, He is angry with the sin and the sinners.

God was not angry with His people for some insignificant sin but for committing adultery on Him. God's people had walked away from Him. The leaders of Judah had led the people away from Him. They were worshipping false gods and in particular a very horrifically terrible false god called Molech. Illst: The religion of Molech was a particularly wicked religion based on child sacrifice and here is how it worked . . .

So you see God's anger toward His people was not arbitrary but it was personal and so their suffering for their sin was personal. God's anger toward His people was also right and just anger. Yahweh said through the prophet Jeremiah that His people had left the Fountain of Living Water and hewed out cisterns that could hold no water. They were worshipping other gods, rejecting

His word, killing babies, killing prophets who preached the truth and listening to prophets who preached lies. This was the context that led to the book of Lamentations.

God's anger toward His people was completely just and righteous anger. It was punishment that fit the crime. They had committed atrocities against one another and against God. They did not love God nor did they love their neighbor.

Here is the big idea of Lamentations 2: *Suffering is an intensely personal experience that God brings into our lives so we must embrace God in depth of our pain and suffering.*

I. Experiencing God's Anger (vv. 1-10)

II. Expressing Our Anguish (vv. 11-19)

III. Embracing the Accusations (vv. 20-22)

I. Experiencing God's Anger (vv. 1-10)

In the first 10 verses of Lamentations 2 the Poet says 31 times that Yahweh has brought this calamity and suffering upon the people of Judah and Jerusalem because He was angry with them. He leaves no doubt about who brought this destruction. Let's work through the verses.

- There was no mercy from God (vv. 1-5)
  - Verse 1 says, "*How the Lord in his anger has set the daughter of Zion under a cloud!*"
    - One of the signs of God's covenant love that was set on His people was the sign of His presence dwelling with His people in the form of a cloud. We can call this the cloud of blessing.
    - In Exodus the cloud of blessing was seen in His protection of His people when they were in the wilderness. His cloud of protection went before them to lead and guide them.
    - At Mount Sinai His cloud settled on the top of the mountain when the covenant was ratified. It was a cloud of glory that put fear in the hearts of the people.
    - When the tabernacle and the temple were in use God's glory dwelled as a cloud in the holy of holies.
    - The covenantal presence of God was seen in the cloud but now a cloud of darkness was over the people. *The cloud of curses and judgment had fallen on the people of God* because they had broken covenant with Him. God was still seen in the cloud but instead of His covenant love seen as mercy and protection it was a cloud of anger and judgment.
  - Verse 2 sums it up, "*The Lord has swallowed up without mercy all the habitations of Jacob.*"
    - Yahweh had withdrawn His mercy from His people and His cloud of judgment has swallowed them. This is a scary place to be with God.
- Next there was no worship of God (vv. 6-7)
  - To make matters worse Verses 6-7 tell us that Yahweh has removed the ability for His people to worship Him.
    - The temple was the place where God's people met God. Everything centered around the temple. The worship, the festivals, the celebration—life was to be centered on God but now God had rejected His altar because Israel had rejected Yahweh.
    - Psalm 74:1-8
    - It was a privilege to know and worship God. The people of Jerusalem have lost that privilege. The temple was destroyed and its walls torn down by the Babylonians. So severe was the destruction that the people could not celebrate. This is another terrible place to be with God.
- Next there was no protection by God (vv. 8-9a)

- Verses 8-9a tell us that not only was the temple destroyed but the walls of Jerusalem, the walls that protected the city from invasion were torn down. For the walls of the city to be torn down was a terrible thing for the Jews.
- Nehemiah said in Nehemiah 2:17, *"You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision."*
- Humiliation follows judgment.
- Finally there was no word from God (vv. 9b)
- The last part of verse 9 is the final straw. God has removed His presence, His mercy, His worship, His protection, and now He has removed His word. Yahweh is no longer giving them revelation from His word.
- The idea of a vision from an Old Testament prophet might mean he had a vision but most often it meant he was proclaiming the word of God by saying, *"Thus says the Lord!"* Yahweh gave those words to His prophets but now He had removed His word.
- The prophets that were prophesying during Jeremiah's day were giving false prophecies. They were misleading the people saying *all is well and there is peace with God* when the people and the king needed to hear they were rebelling against God and needed to repent. They simply told the people what they, the people, wanted to hear.

Application: Here is what we learn about God in these verses.

1. God takes sin seriously and He is still angry toward sin and sinners today. Romans 1:18 says, *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."* Yet we also know from Scripture that God is longsuffering. He is not willing that His people should perish but that they should come to repentance.
2. We do not like to think of our suffering as due to our sin but the fact is it happens and it happens more often than we may like to admit.
  - a. It may be that the suffering in your marriage is due to your sin.
  - b. It may be that the suffering in your family life is due to your sin.
  - c. It may be that your children suffering is due to your sin.
  - d. It may be that the suffering in your finances is due to your sin.
  - e. It may be that the suffering in your relationships at work is due to your sin.
  - f. It may even be that your church is suffering for your sin as well. The effects of sin are not simply contained to the person who commits them, they spread and leak all over every other relationship you have. The waves ripple out and can still destroy the lives of others whom you love.
  - g. If you are a Christian the dark cloud of God's wrath will not cover you because that cloud covered Christ in your place and for your sin. However, it does not mean your sin does not have consequences. You might not be punished for your sin but you will be disciplined for God disciplines those whom He loves.
  - h. So what are you to do? God is calling you to lament and repent. Grieve your sin and return to the Lord Jesus.
3. Friend if you are not a Christian, the question is how long will God be patient with you? You need to understand Lamentations 2. The dark cloud of God's anger toward sin and sinners will come again, the question is will that cloud cover you with His wrath or will you turn from your sin and trust Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? You see on the cross the dark cloud of God's anger and wrath toward sin and sinners fell on Jesus. When you place your faith in Christ the punishment that should be yours is

credited to Christ and the perfect life Jesus lived is credited to you. Then because Christ was raised from the dead He gives new life to His people. Have you trusted him today? Do not wait too long. You do not know when God will withdraw the possibility for your repentance. You can wait too long.

## II. Expressing Our Anguish (vv. 10-16)

Illst: In July of 2014, many people wept with Chris Gunness the spokesperson for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency as he broke down sobbing with his head in his hands during a TV interview as he told the story of the aftermath of the shelling of one of the agency's schools allegedly by the Israel Defense Force in Gaza. Fifteen Palestinian children died in the bombing. Gunness said, "*It is important to humanize the statistics and to realize that there is a human being with a heart and soul behind each statistic and that the humanity that lies behind these statistics should never be forgotten.*" This is precisely what Lamentations does for Jerusalem's children in 587 BC.<sup>1</sup>

There was unbelievable suffering going on in Jerusalem. Everyone was crying out in anguish and it was an unbearable sight! The innocent were suffering because of the sin of others. The guilty were weeping because of the horrific calamity that had come upon them. The anger of Yahweh had washed over the city, the temple and the people of the city, every man, woman and child was experience catastrophic suffering.

- The first thing we see is the unbelievable anguish at the sight of children suffering for their parents sin (vv. 10-12)
  - In verse 10 the elders sat on the ground not speaking a word but weeping, dressed in sackcloth (which is a rough material) and threw dust on their heads. This was how the ancients showed deep lament. They wanted the pain to not simply be on the inside but they wanted their behavior and dress to match how they felt on the inside. Their hearts were broken and so they dressed to show their lives were broken. From the elders to the young women everyone mourned with deep pain and sadness.
  - Verse 11 is a very vivid picture. The text says their *bile was poured out on the ground*. The Hebrew word for *bile* is *kaved*. *Kaved* is the word for *liver or liver-divination*. We might call them liver-quiver. It means they were so internally distressed that it made them vomit. They wept uncontrollably because they were so sad and sick to their stomachs.

Have you ever gotten such bad news or had such a bad thing happen to you that you literally got physically ill? You wept uncontrollably and could not catch your breath? This was what was happening.

- But why were they so sad? The last part of v. 11 tells us—the people have been destroyed. Babies dying in the streets of Jerusalem because of the severe destruction brought on by the Babylonian invasion. Verse 12 tells us that they cry to their mothers for bread and water but there is none. War wreaks such havoc that the food and water are gone. Their lament was: "*Lord no matter how justified you are to destroy Jerusalem, what have these little ones done to deserve such suffering? Lord how can you do such a thing?*"
- Yet we learn something about God in these verses. The tears of Jeremiah in this poem were the tears of God. It is commonly understood in the writings of Jeremiah that the tears of the Weeping Prophet are the tears of God.

When the Poet says, "*My eyes are spent weeping; my stomach churns; my bile is poured out on the ground because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.*" Yahweh was weeping with and for His people. Yes . . . it was His anger that was poured out on them but it broke His heart to see it done. God was just to carry it out but His heart was broken for His people at the same time.

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<sup>1</sup> Chris J. H. Wright, *The Bible Speaks Today: Message of Lamentations, The Old Testament Series* editor, J. A. Motyer, in the footnotes, p. 89.

This really is an unforgettable part of Lamentations for God's anger and His tears are mingled together. No God does not have physical eyes, a stomach and vomiting but for God He hurts like we do this deeply and even more so for the purity and perfection of who God is means His emotions are deeper and purer than ours. The physical symptoms are Jeremiah's but they point us to the deeper reality of how deep God feels for His people. How much He loves them and hurts for them even when He was the One to punish them.

- Next we see the unbelievable anguish because they were beyond healing (v. 13)
  - The Poet is aghast at the depth of Jerusalem's wound. The Hebrew word *ruin* (ESV) it also translated *wound*. *Wound* is probably a better translation because the last line of verse 13 refers to the "*wound being as deep as the sea; who can heal you?*"
  - The sin of the people has resulted in a wound that was incurable. They were beyond help or human ability to heal so they might as well be dead. The only source of healing now was God and He had left them.
- Next we see the unbelievable anguish because their leaders had misled them (v. 14)
  - In verse 14 the leaders are indicted and especially the prophets who gave false revelation and said it was from God. The prophets were saying God was going to save them, He was going to restore their former glory and His former glory so just keep believing, keep doing what you're doing.
  - The truth is the leaders should have been exposing the sins of the people and calling them to repent but they were not doing that.
  - The rhetorical question in verse 13 leads us to this correct answer in verse 14. Who can heal you? Only God can heal you. When people leave God they must return to God and in order to return to God they must repent. They must change directions and the leaders were not leading in a change of direction. Jeremiah was leading in a change of direction and calling the people to repent and they persecuted him for his ministry with the people.
  - Application: What a lamentable thing it is for leaders to mislead people but especially those in leadership in the church! Sexual abuse scandals are dominating the headlines today. It seems every day some leader from some walk of life is being accused of sexual abuse. The church is not exempt from this sin and it is rightly being exposed. Sadly the victims are the ones who are making the accusations and not the leaders themselves. The leaders have concealed their sin and now finally the victims are coming forward. May God have mercy on us so that the church will not tolerate these sins and we will return to Him.
- Next is the unbelievable anguish of their enemies rejoicing over their suffering (vv. 15-16)
  - Verses 15-16 are the final humiliation. Babylon's boast was that they had devoured Jerusalem. They were mocking the city of God. The children die in the streets, the leaders speak lies and call it truth, the last hope of human help has turned on them and so they are fully and finally beyond healing.
  - God had become their enemy and there was nowhere to hide and nowhere to turn except back to God.
- Finally the call to express unbelievable anguish to God (vv. 17-19)
  - Verses 17-19 are the result of the people of God being hemmed in on every side. They had left God and now God had cut off every way of escape and brought them back to Himself. God had said through Jeremiah in Jeremiah 2 that Israel had forsaken the Fountain of Living Water and hewed out cisterns from themselves to find their own water of life. Now Yahweh had broken every cistern in which they were trying to find life.

Then later in Jeremiah 5, Jeremiah says to God, "*O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You have struck them down, but they felt no anguish; you have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent.*" What is happening here? Israel had been disciplined but they still refused to return to Yahweh.

Later in Jeremiah 5:18-19, Yahweh says, "*But even in those days, declares the LORD, I will not make a full end of you. <sup>19</sup>And when your people say, 'Why has the LORD our God done all these things to us?' you shall say to them, 'As you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve foreigners in a land that is not yours.'*"

When we get to this part of Lamentations 2 we are finally hearing the cry of anguish and mourning over sin and its consequences. These people had to be hemmed in on every side by their rebellion in order to see they had forsaken the Fountain of Living Water. They were ready to embrace their sin.

- This leads us to our last point and we will make application after this last point.

### III. Embracing the Accusations (vv. 20-22)

- Before we work through these verses, let me ask you a question. How would you respond if there were no easy or quick resolutions for your suffering? What if there was no resolution at all for it? How would you respond? What would you do? What would you pray? How would you talk to God about all that was going on? I think these next verses give us some insight to these questions.
- Now with that in mind, let's look at these last three verses. Verses 20-22 are hardest verse in this chapter so let's make sure we keep them in context of the chapter. Look back at v. 19. In v. 19, the Poet gives Lady Zion instructions on how to pray a prayer of lament that would move her to repent. She was learning how to *spill her guts to God in brutal honesty*. She was learning how to be honest with God and embrace His accusations. *Since God knows everything, shouldn't we be honest with Him about how we feel and shouldn't our lament lead us to repent when we have sinned?*
- These last three verses are emotionally charged and confront God with the pain and suffering His people have endured at His own hands. This prayer is a summary of the suffering that has taken place in vv. 1-17.
- Listen to the instructions the Poet gives Lady Zion in verse 19
- Verses 20-22 are a dark prayer of lament
  - Verse 20:
    - "*Look, O LORD, and see!*": We heard similar words in Lamentations 1:9, 20. It is like she is saying, "*Lord listen to me. Aren't you paying attention to what is happening to me?*"
    - Next we hear three sharp rhetorical questions directed at God:
      - "*With whom have you dealt thus?*" God had dealt with pagan nations this way but never His covenant people. This is a cry of: *Lord do you even know who you are treating this way? It is us! We are your people! Your children, the apple of Your eye. How could You?*"
      - "*Should women eat the fruit of their womb, the children of their tender care?*" This question goes to the depth of the destruction. The children are no longer crying in the streets they are now being eaten by their mothers. The destruction has gone on so long that now the maternal instinct of the mothers has turned to pure survival and the most reprehensible crimes are being committed.

- *"Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord?"* Although the prophets and priests are the ones who lead the people astray, the Lady Zion laments their destruction. She does not celebrate the demise of wicked leaders; she mourns them before the Lord.
- Verse 21:
  - In verse 21, Lady Zion lays the death of the young and old, the generations to come at the feet of the Lord. Yes Babylon invaded but she is about to see Yahweh behind Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Judah. *"The people are piled in the streets Lord, don't you care?"*
- Verse 22:
  - The prayer began with energy and sharp accusations, it ends with all her energy spent and her tears continuing to flow. You can just hear the ache in her heart as she says, *" . . . no one escaped or survived; those whom I held and raised . . ."* She is broken. Lady Zion has reached the bottom. She has completely poured out her heart in the darkness and with a dark lament before the Lord. She turned to the only One who could heal her—Yahweh. She is spent. She has fully embraced the accusations of the Lord. Now she is ready and in Lamentations 3 we will see what happens to her but before we do let's bring Lamentations 2 to a close.

#### Conclusion/Application:

What do we learn from Lamentations 2?

- Do you ever get angry with God? Verses 20, 21 and 22 are Lady Zion expressing her anger toward God for all that has happened. Remember God is silent in Lamentations. The structure of the whole book is inspired and therefore I believe God is listening to the hurt, pain, grief and anger of His people. He is letting them pour out their souls to Him. Just spill their guts in prayer. We need to be able to do this in faith and trust of the One who is sovereign over our circumstances and suffering.

God is glorified when we turn to Him for help and hope. God loves to renew His people when they come to him with honest prayers, spilling their guts to Him and seeking life in Him. The only thing that might change in the situation as God's people pour out their hearts to Him is them. He may not change their situation or remove the hardship when His people come to Him and wait on Him and trust in Him even in their pain God will glorify Himself in their lives. He will give comfort and peace. He will meet them in their pain for He is no stranger to pain.
- Here are some questions for small group discussion and/or personal reflection this week: Suppose you have a friend who is going through a very dark time of suffering and suppose you are sitting across from him/her having coffee and you hear the horrible things they have been through, their anguish and pain—how would you help them?
  - a. First keep in mind all suffering is not a result of a person's sin. Many people suffer because they have been sinned against so be careful to not default to their sin. Yes the world is broken and sin affects us all but some people are simply sinned against like these girls abused by the gymnastics' doctor at Michigan State.
  - b. So . . . how would you help a person who is in the darkness of suffering? What would you say to them? How would you guide them to pray? Could you guide them to write a prayer of lament? Perhaps you might ask them to take a pen and paper and, like Lamentations follows the Hebrew alphabet, you might have them write 26 verses of lamenting that describes their suffering, pain and anguish. Jeremiah gave much thought to his poems as he poured out his heart to the Lord. Perhaps they can give concentrated and deep thought about how to express their suffering, anguish and anger and yet still trust God.