

LAMENTATIONS: JEREMIAH'S JOURNAL OF WOES

STUDY SEVEN

Ugly Scenes of Utter Humiliation

Selections from Lamentations 4

Those in Jerusalem who were given leadership responsibilities let the people down. They lied to them. They misrepresented the truth. And they called a lie, truth. God assigned more guilt to them for their misuse of authority. Jeremiah, however, proved himself faithful. Regardless how others responded to Jeremiah, he always told the truth. That took commitment. He wasn't looking to be popular.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

FOLLOWING Jesus must never devolve into mechanical rituals—like heartless singing or thoughtless rehearsing. Jesus-followers must avoid placing their faith in God's gifts rather than God Himself. Disciples need to be careful not to confuse personal aspirations with divine intentions.

True worshipers, instead, aim their hearts at God's person, submit their wills to God's plan, and shape their minds with God's Word.

Such traits picture an authentic, vibrant spiritual life. But most people in Jeremiah's day portrayed an altogether different image: they trusted gold over God, politics over prayer, empty talk over honest walk. The Lord of Hosts had had enough. In 586 BC, He put an end to their vanities.

Jeremiah preserved the ugly scenes, and it doesn't get any uglier than Lamentations 4. Nevertheless, vital truth awaits those who patiently excavate this chapter for divine wisdom, which we'll do in today's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Think over these words from the original hymnal of God's elect, the psalter:

*Oh, the joys of those who do not
follow the advice of the wicked,
or stand around with sinners,
or join in with mockers.
But they delight in the law of the LORD,
meditating on it day and night.
They are like trees planted along the riverbank,
bearing fruit each season.
Their leaves never wither,
and they prosper in all they do.
But not the wicked!
They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind.
They will be condemned at the time of judgment.
Sinners will have no place among the godly.
For the LORD watches over the path of the godly,
but the path of the wicked leads to destruction. (Psalm 1)*

Use Psalm 1 above as well as what you've already learned in Lamentations to guide your time of prayer as you begin this study.



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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Two verses, elsewhere in the Old Testament, capture theological foundations that undergird Lamentations 4. These verses are:

*When the godly are in authority, the people rejoice.
But when the wicked are in power, they groan. (Proverbs 29:2)*

*Unless the LORD builds a house,
the work of the builders is wasted.
Unless the LORD protects a city,
guarding it with sentries will do no good. (Psalm 127:1)*

Summarize the key ideas in these verses and how they might anticipate what you will soon read in Lamentations 4.

As we will see, the wicked rulers led the whole city of Jerusalem to trust in the city's prestige and longevity, power and prosperity. Even with prophetic warnings and unmistakable facts about Babylon's encroachment, the people took repose in a bed of lies.

God is the God of truth. No lies. He made humanity to reflect His truth-telling and truth-believing character. So He does not let lies march on and on. There will always come a time when He says *ENOUGH!*



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Observation: The Gold Has Lost Its Luster

Biblical authors often used contrasts to make their points. Jeremiah in Lamentations used this rhetorical device in combination with images to emphasize just how destitute Jerusalem had become. The images include gold, children, princes, and eagles. Be warned, the scenes are ugly.

Pay attention to those images and contrasts as you observe *Lamentations 4*. Note below what you find interesting, key ideas, and even puzzles which you may want to explore further.¹

Did you notice the contrast at the very end? Jeremiah contrasted God's posture toward Edom and Zion in *Lamentations 4:21–22*. Summarize this contrast and note how Jeremiah inserted hope in these verses.

It took faith and courage for Jeremiah to warn the people of Edom that their time of judgment would come. Jeremiah knew that God would hold the Edomites accountable for their moral debauchery, hostile striving, and giddy delight over Jerusalem's downfall . . . because God is not only the God of Jerusalem and Israel but the Lord of heaven's armies who will judge all the earth.



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Interpretation: Misplaced Trust

A key theme in this chapter revolves around misplaced trust. The inhabitants of Jerusalem foolishly put their trust in sacred structures, ear-pleasing teachers, nonchalant spiritual leaders, and political alliances.

Take a moment to review those verses that speak of this misplaced trust: *Lamentations 4:1, 12–13, 17, 20*. Carefully *study* and meditate upon their errors. What did they do that led to God's judgment? Clearly, the church is not a political entity like ancient Judah, but how might we today keep from making similar errors in our relationship with God as ancient Jerusalem had done?

In short, the inhabitants of Jerusalem simply took God out of their sights. They failed to understand a most essential truth about God: God is a personable God who seeks a personal relationship rather than an impersonal, religious transaction.



Correlation: This Man Should Die

Let's explore two scenes from the majestic book of Hebrew prophecy: Jeremiah. These two scenes picture how the spiritual authorities condemned truth-telling Jeremiah and exalted truth-garbling Hananiah. These two scenes also illustrate the wrongs for which God eventually judged Jerusalem.

Read *Jeremiah 26:7–11* and *Jeremiah 28*. How do these narrative scenes illustrate the theological truths couched in the poetry of Lamentations 4?



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Jeremiah feared God more than he feared hostile people. Jeremiah trusted God more than he trusted the deceptions of the human heart. Jeremiah spoke to the people so they might turn to the God behind the speaker rather than fawn at the feet of the speaker himself.



Application: Two Traits from Jeremiah's Life

To wrap up this study, let's consider the godly example of Jeremiah. Chuck Swindoll extracted two traits from Jeremiah's life that apply to all Jesus-followers today. Reflect upon them below.

- 1) *Regardless how others responded to him, Jeremiah always told the truth.* He uttered straight talk. That takes commitment because many will not want to hear God's message.
- 2) *Regardless what others did to him, Jeremiah never retreated.* He never ran scared of the pain. That takes courage because many will use a fist to silence the messenger.

Which of the two connect with your situation in life right now? Articulate below how the Spirit, through this study of Scripture, is prompting you to respond to His message. Get specific. Record your appropriate faith-response below.

God told Jeremiah, "I called you to live at your best, to pursue righteousness, to speak truth, to sustain a drive toward excellence." Sure, Jeremiah got discouraged from time to time. I realize it's easier to be average, to live without enthusiasm. Easier, but not more fulfilling. God calls you, follower of Jesus, to a life of special purpose far beyond what you're capable of living in your own power. Difficulties will come. Don't quit! —Chuck Swindoll



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for Jeremiah's example, for his faith, and for his words. Divine truth drips even from his laments. Help me to learn from them. Help me to learn from his experience. I believe, Lord, but I need You to strengthen me where I'm lacking. I want to tell the truth. I don't want to retreat. In Christ's name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To review Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website [sts.insight.org](https://www.sts.insight.org) or grab a *copy* of the book for your library. Chuck also uses the *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. It's one of his favorite Bible study tools.

