



# LAMENT

A TEACHING SERIES THROUGH THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

## GUIDE FOR WEEK 5

What happens when we are surrounded by destruction and overcome by grief? What do we do when our world is falling apart and we can't see past the hopelessness enveloping our souls? These aren't church questions, American questions, or new questions-they are human questions.

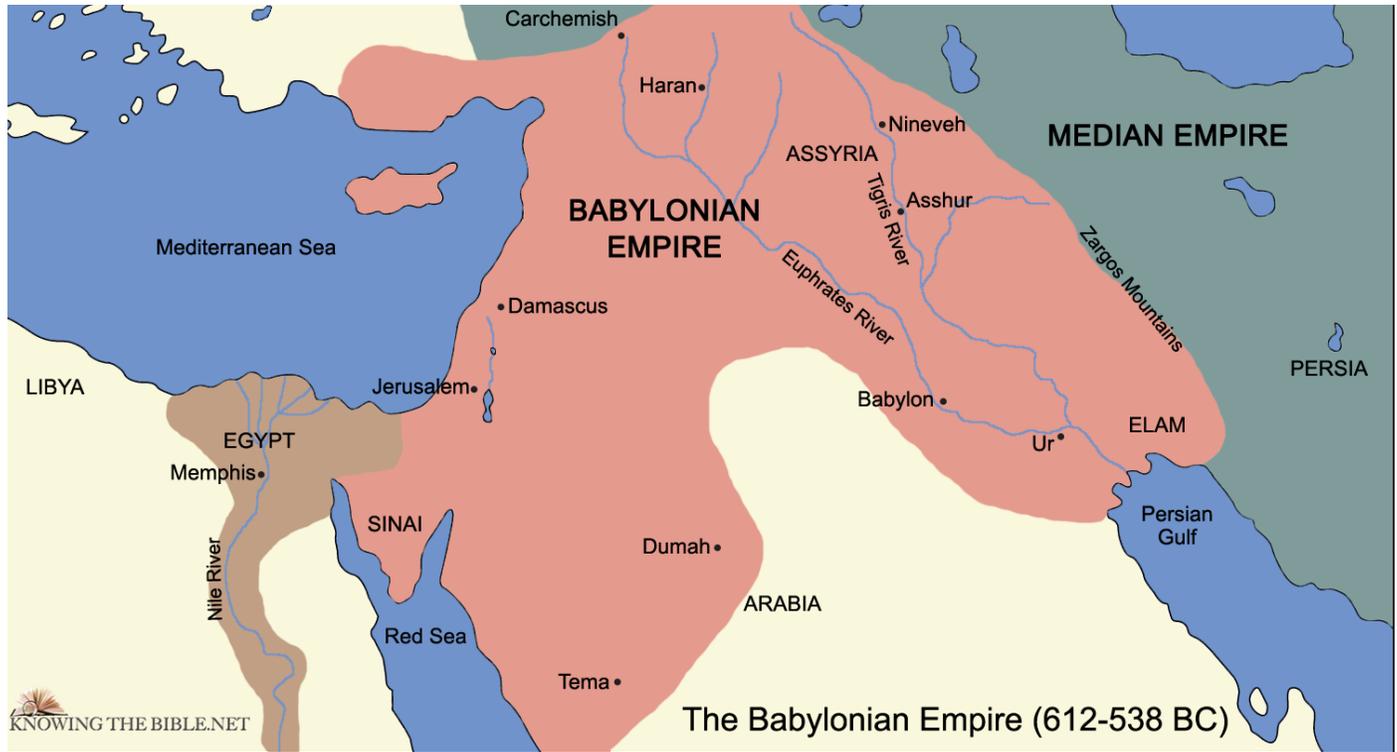
We live in a broken world and as a consequence of that brokenness, we are hurt, damaged and grieving. How do we go to God in the midst of that? This is the state of God's people as we find them in the book of Lamentations. After the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC, God's people were broken and hopeless. The promises of God seemed to evaporate and be unattainable. We meet them in the middle of their guilt, failure and defeat.

As we walk through an old book for maybe the first time, we will find that throughout five chapters of Hebrew poetry, there is space for doubt hurt and pain in our faith. There don't have to be easy answers or quick fixes in the middle of tragedy. Let us Lament together in the middle of the broken world around us.

Biblical lament, much to the relief of the "Healed Wounder," is not ultimately chaotic. To the contrary, biblical lament has a beginning and an end. While the middle may be messy, while it may seem to go on and on without relief, lament, properly understood, rests finally in the Sovereign hand of God. Eugene Peterson echoes Webb when he describes the form of Lamentations as a series of five acrostics (much like Psalm 119), literary patterns that travel the alphabet slowly, in meticulous detail, from beginning to end. Lament begins at aleph and ends at tau, proceeding with careful detail and extraordinarily honest expression through each letter. Five times in five distinct poems the writer revisits his pain, most often in communal expression, with a brief interlude for private weeping. The writer's intent is clear...every detail of pain is important. Suffering cannot and should not be wasted on quick fix alphabet dances that deny proper expression. Acrostic was used as a memory device, as Peterson points out, emphasizing that every jot and tittle of suffering be remembered and experienced.

- Chuck DeGroat

# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND



## NEBUCHADNEZZAR II

Nebuchadnezzar is a well-known character in both scripture and world history. He was the ruler of the Neo-Babylonian Empire at the height of its power. He was the ruler of the Super Power of the Middle East and a renowned builder, general and statesman. Nebuchadnezzar was the leader of the Babylonian Army who crushed Jerusalem in 586 and also is a major character in the book of Daniel.

# MONDAY

5:1 O LORD, reflect on what has happened to us;  
consider and look at our disgrace.

5:2 Our inheritance is turned over to strangers;  
foreigners now occupy our homes.

5:3 We have become fatherless orphans;  
our mothers have become widows.

5:4 We must pay money for our own water;  
we must buy our own wood at a steep price.

5:5 We are pursued—they are breathing down  
our necks;  
we are weary and have no rest.

Biblical Studies Press. (2005). The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible (La 5:1–5). Biblical Studies Press.

## DIG DEEPER

Psychological closure for the community remains outside the range of this set of poems. It lay much further ahead and could not yet be achieved, so traumatic were the experiences they had undergone and were still undergoing. The modern preoccupation with closure impatiently rushes the sufferer to a premature conclusion. Closure must be allowed to take its own time. It is marked by eventual acceptance that is able to integrate previous suffering into one's life. However, there is still a rawness about the suffering of the fifth poem. Fresh wounds have brought their own resented pain. The poem cannot write a closed chapter on grief. Here is a lesser, but necessary, intermediate goal, to make contact with the God of Israel as a foundation for eventually rebuilding a life beyond devastating grief. Initiating such prayer was not an easy step for the shattered group to take, but, taking to heart the promptings in the earlier poems, the congregation managed to do so, presumably via its own representative(s). Their verbal participation is significant in itself, since, as has been said of grieving widows, "until they can talk, they have not really started on the road to recovery" (Caine 1974, 140). "No pain is so devastating as the pain a person refuses to face, and no suffering is so lasting as suffering left unacknowledged" (Gravitz and Bowden 1987, 37). So this articulation marks a turning point within grief, the first sign of a positive movement beyond suffering in silence and toward eventual coping. It is a response to the call for a turning point that Berges has recognized in the second poem, *Get up* in stanza 19. The book of Lamentations refers to three such milestones encountered in the human experience of suffering. The first two lie outside the congregation's experience and are features of the mentor's testimonies in the third poem. In lines 21–24 he testified to a light bulb going off in his mind. He realized that, sufferer though he was, he was a survivor, thank God. Then in line 57 he recalled another time when he was given a message that his previous prayer for help would be answered, though it did not mean his crisis was over. A turning point represents a new stage, a long-awaited readiness to start to move forward in some respect. C. S. Lewis wrote the final chapter of his chronicle of grief after reaching not closure but a turning point that was both gradual and sudden, already going on when first noticed, like the coming of daylight. It was a mixed experience. On the one hand, he was feeling a fresh stage of pain from the "amputation" of his loss. On the other hand, he found himself envisioning a more positive future (1976, 71, 75). Anne Brooks reached a similar point after her bereavement: "Most of the time I really am not fine, but not so bad . . . although the pain, when it comes, is still as intense" (1985, 30). And Francis Bridger testified about his turning point: "This is not the end. It is not the beginning of the end. But it is the end of the beginning" (2004, 112). Catherine Sanders (1999, 87–102), assessing the turning point in the grief process, describes it more as a transitional beginning, the taking of an initiative that moves beyond withdrawal. Here the still-suffering community is at last able to pray for a change for the better. To be exact, the poem itself is not the turning point but evidence of a turning point, which was a cognitive siding with the mentor and with Zion, a commitment to their joint perspective.

Allen, Leslie C. (2011-09-01). *A Liturgy of Grief: A Pastoral Commentary on Lamentations* (pp. 146-147). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

# TUESDAY

5:6 We have submitted to Egypt and Assyria  
in order to buy food to eat.

5:7 Our forefathers sinned and are dead,  
but we suffer their punishment.

5:8 Slaves rule over us;  
there is no one to rescue us from their power.

5:9 At the risk of our lives we get our food  
because robbers lurk in the countryside.

5:10 Our skin is hot as an oven  
due to a fever from hunger.

5:11 They raped women in Zion,  
virgins in the towns of Judah.

## DIG DEEPER:

DTS-Andy Stanley, The Relationship of The OT and NT  
50 Minutes

<https://voice.dts.edu/tablepodcast/old-testament-new-testament-relationship/>

Biblical Studies Press. (2005). The NET Bible First Edition;  
Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible (La 5:6–11). Biblical  
Studies Press.

# WEDNESDAY

5:12 Princes were hung by their hands;  
elders were mistreated.

5:13 The young men perform menial labor;  
boys stagger from their labor.

5:14 The elders are gone from the city gate;  
the young men have stopped playing their music.

5:15 Our hearts no longer have any joy;  
our dancing is turned to mourning.

5:16 The crown has fallen from our head;  
woe to us, for we have sinned!

5:17 Because of this, our hearts are sick;  
because of these things, we can hardly see through our  
tears.

## DIG DEEPER:

Current Issues in OT Scholarship

<https://voice.dts.edu/article/current-issues-in-old-testament-scholarship/>

Biblical Studies Press. (2005). The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible (La 5:12–17). Biblical Studies Press.

# THURSDAY

5:18 For wild animals are prowling over Mount Zion,  
which lies desolate.

5:19 But you, O LORD, reign forever;  
your throne endures from generation to generation.

5:20 Why do you keep on forgetting us?  
Why do you forsake us so long?

5:21 Bring us back to yourself, O LORD, so that we may  
return to you;

renew our life as in days before,

5:22 unless you have utterly rejected us  
and are angry with us beyond measure.

## DIG DEEPER:

Can Your Theology Handle Lamentations?

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/erik-raymond/can-your-theology-handle-the-book-of-lamentations/>

Biblical Studies Press. (2005). The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible (La 5:18–22). Biblical Studies Press.

