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LAMENTATIONS

A 4-Week Group Bible Study

By Greg and Kayla Gibson

WEEK 1 OF 4 • GENERAL / MIXED GROUP EDITION

How Lonely Sits the City — Lamentations 1:1–22

Scripture Scope: Lamentations 1:1–22 (ESV) • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

PARTICIPANT STUDY EDITION

Synchronized Section-by-Section with the Leader Guide Edition · Includes Group Reflection Workspace

Lamentations — 4-Week Group Bible Study (Participant Study Edition)

Week 1: How Lonely Sits the City (Lamentations 1:1–22)

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- **The setting:** Written soon after Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC, the events told in 2 Kings 25, 2 Chronicles 36, and Jeremiah 39 and 52. Jeremiah warned that the city would fall; Lamentations weeps over the ruins once it has.
- **The author:** The Hebrew text does not name the author. Jewish and Christian tradition has long associated the book with Jeremiah (compare 2 Chronicles 35:25), and English Bibles place it right after his book.
- **Its form:** Five poems of grief. Chapters 1–4 are alphabetic acrostics, with verses beginning with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet (chapter 3 uses three verses for each letter). Chapter 5 has twenty-two verses, the number of Hebrew letters, without the acrostic.
- **The voices:** A narrator, the city personified as "daughter of Zion," a suffering man (chapter 3), and the whole community (chapter 5).
- **The structure:**
  - Poem 1: The lonely city with no comforter (1).
  - Poem 2: The Lord has become like an enemy (2).
  - Poem 3: The man of affliction and the steadfast love of the LORD (3).
  - Poem 4: The gold grown dim (4).
  - Poem 5: The community's prayer for restoration (5).
- **Why it matters:** Lamentations teaches God's people how to grieve honestly, confess sin, and keep praying when everything has been lost. At its theological turning point stands one of the Bible's great confessions of hope: the steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, and his mercies are new every morning (3:22–23). Jewish communities still read the book each year on Tisha B'Av, the fast that mourns the temple's destruction.

How This 4-Week Study Works

You may notice this study is shorter than our usual eight weeks. Even though we are 8weekbiblestudy.com, stretching Lamentations to eight weeks would have left it thin on content, and we never want to trade quality for quantity.

Designed for weekly small groups, mini-churches, and community gatherings (75–90 minutes per session) rather than daily homework checklists, this 4-week study walks through all five poems of Lamentations. The first three weeks each take one poem; the final week pairs the two shorter closing poems. Because each poem is a complete work, try to read the whole chapter at home before your group meets. Each week moves through six repeatable sections:

- **Section X.1 — Opening:** Sets the scene, the Week at a Glance, Head, Heart, and Hands objectives, the Opening Frame, and the Opening Entry Question.
- **Section X.2 — Historical & Literary Context:** Places the week's poem inside the structure of Lamentations and the ancient Near Eastern world.
- **Section X.3 — Movement 1:** The week's first guided passage: Guided Scripture Reading, Anchor Verses, Teaching Narrative, and Group Discussion Questions.

- **Section X.4 — Movement 2:** The week's second guided passage, following the same flow.
- **Section X.5 — Canonical Horizon:** Traces how the passage echoes across Scripture and finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.
- **Section X.6 — Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer:** Moves the week's study into everyday life, previews next week, and closes in prayer.

Key anchor verses are printed in each section for quick reference. Longer focal passages are read aloud together from the ESV.

Choosing a Bible Translation: Top 5 Translations Compared

Every English Bible translation falls along a spectrum between two primary approaches: word-for-word translation (formal equivalence, which prioritizes literal accuracy to the original phrasing and sentence structure) and thought-for-thought translation (dynamic equivalence, which prioritizes immediate modern readability by translating idioms and ideas into natural contemporary expressions). Here is how five widely used English translations compare:

- **ESV (English Standard Version) — Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Follows the wording and sentence structure of the original Hebrew and Greek closely while using modern English; well suited to close study.
  - Cons: Because it tracks the original sentence structure, some phrasing can feel more formal than everyday speech.
- **NIV (New International Version) — Balanced (Between Word-for-Word and Thought-for-Thought)**
  - Pros: Widely read; balances accuracy to the original languages with natural, everyday readability.
  - Cons: Because some idioms are rendered as modern expressions, a few literal wordplays or technical terms can be less visible.
- **NLT (New Living Translation) — Thought-for-Thought**
  - Pros: Warm and conversational; reads smoothly aloud and helps readers follow the big picture of long passages.
  - Cons: Because it prioritizes meaning over literal phrasing, it can be harder to use for close word study.
- **CSB (Christian Standard Bible) — Optimal Equivalence (Balanced)**
  - Pros: Stays close to the original words where possible while smoothing awkward phrasing into natural modern English.
  - Cons: Because it is a newer translation, some well-known verses may sound different from the wording many readers remember.
- **KJV / NKJV (King James Version & New King James Version) — Traditional Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Historic cadence that shaped English literature and church history; the NKJV updates archaic pronouns ("thee/thou") while keeping the classic rhythm.
  - Cons: Often reads like older English poetry, with complex sentences and archaic or formal vocabulary that can be harder for modern readers to follow.

This study quotes the ESV.

Greg & Kayla's Recommended Study Bibles

Having a trusted study Bible on hand is one of the best ways to go deeper as you read through Lamentations:

- **Greg's Favorite Study Bible:** The MacArthur Study Bible (ESV), which contains extensive explanatory notes beneath almost every verse, ideal for detailed study.
- **Kayla's Favorite Study Bible:** The ESV Study Bible, containing over 20,000 study notes, articles, and explanations.

The 4-Week Lamentations Study at a Glance

Week	Title & Passage	Movement 1 / Movement 2	Canonical Horizon
1	**How Lonely Sits the City** (1:1–22)	The Narrator Mourns Zion (1:1–11) / Zion Cries Out: No Comforter (1:12–22)	The Man of Sorrows and the God of all comfort
2	**The Lord Has Become Like an Enemy** (2:1–22)	God's Anger Against His City (2:1–10) / The Poet's Tears and Zion's Plea (2:11–22)	The wrath Christ bore
3	**Great Is Your Faithfulness** (3:1–66)	The Man Who Has Seen Affliction (3:1–24) / Waiting, Repentance, and Plea (3:25–66)	Steadfast love and new mercies in Christ
4	**Restore Us to Yourself, O LORD** (4:1–5:22)	The Gold Grown Dim (4:1–22) / The Community's Prayer (5:1–22)	The King who restores his people

WEEK 1 OF 4

WEEK 1 SESSION GUIDE · LAMENTATIONS 1:1–22

Week 1: How Lonely Sits the City

Scripture Scope: Lamentations 1:1–22 (ESV) • Focal Passages: Lamentations 1:1–7; 1:12–18; 1:20 • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

Section 1.1

Opening: How Lonely Sits the City (Lamentations 1:1–22)

Opening

Jerusalem has fallen. The walls are broken, the temple is ashes, and the people have been marched into exile. The first poem opens with a cry of shock: how lonely sits the city that was full of people! Once a princess among the nations, she now sits like a widow, weeping through the night with tears on her cheeks. Her allies have betrayed her. The roads to Zion mourn because no one comes to the festivals. Her children have gone into captivity.

A narrator describes her ruin, and the poet does not hide the reason: the LORD has afflicted her for her many transgressions. Then Zion herself speaks. She calls to everyone passing by: is it nothing to you? Look and see if there is any sorrow like mine. Again and again the poem repeats the same painful line: there is no one to comfort her. Yet even in her tears Zion confesses that the LORD is in the right, and she turns her cry to him.

Week 1 At a Glance

Scripture Scope	Lamentations 1:1–22 (the lonely widow, weeping with no comforter, exile without rest, roads that mourn, memory and mockery, sin and shame, the sanctuary invaded, hunger, "Is it nothing to you?", the LORD's hand, tears with no comforter, the LORD is in the right, and "Look, O LORD")
Focal Passages	Lamentations 1:1–7; 1:12–18; 1:20
Literary & Structural Anchor	Each of the twenty-two verses begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet, giving order to overwhelming grief. A narrator speaks in verses 1–11, with Zion breaking in at 9 and 11; Zion speaks in verses 12–22. The refrain of no comforter sounds five times (1:2, 9, 16, 17, 21). Grief does not deny guilt (1:5, 8, 14, 18, 20).
Big Idea	Grief can be brought honestly to the God who is just, even when no comforter is near.

Week 1 Learning Objectives (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD	**Know the Shape of Lament:** Learn how Lamentations is built and how the first poem moves from description to Zion's own cry.
HEART	**Meet the Man of Sorrows:** See that Jesus wept over Jerusalem, bore sorrow for others, and gives the God of all comfort to his people.
HANDS	**Bring Grief to God:** Take one honest grief to God in prayer, and offer comfort to someone who has none.

Opening Frame: How Lonely Sits the City

Jeremiah ended with the fall of Jerusalem told once more and a captive king lifted up. For forty years the prophet warned that it would happen; now it has. Lamentations gives voice to what it felt like to walk through the ruins. The book is five poems of grief. Four of them are acrostics, with each verse or group of verses beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet, as if to grieve from A to Z. This is a 4–week study, and each week we will read a whole poem, with the two shorter closing poems together in the final week. Lamentations shows that bringing our grief honestly to God is an act of faith, not a lack of it. The question for this week: what do we do with sorrow when there seems to be no one to comfort us? Before we read together, take a moment to share with the group:

Opening Entry Question (Icebreaker)

1.1 Q1 (Opening Entry Question): Think of a place that was once full of life for you, such as a home, a school, or a church, that now sits empty or changed. What do you remember about it?

Section 1.2

Historical & Literary Context: A City Laid Waste (Lamentations 1:1–22)

Entering the World of a City Laid Waste

1. Historical Background

Babylon's eighteen-month siege (588–586 BC) brought famine; the walls were breached, and the temple and city were burned (2 Kings 25:1–10). The people were taken into exile.

2. Cultural Setting

In the ancient Near East a widow was among the most vulnerable people, without protection or provision. Judah's "lovers," the allies she relied on, such as Egypt and neighbors like Edom, failed her or turned against her (compare Obadiah; Psalm 137:7). The three pilgrimage festivals had once filled Jerusalem's roads; now they are empty.

3. Literary Structure of Lamentations 1:1–22

- **The narrator mourns Zion (1:1–11), with Zion interrupting** (1:9, 11)
- Zion cries out (1:12–22). The poem is an acrostic of twenty-two verses

4. Key Themes

Honest lament; sin and God's justice; the absence of comfort; looking and seeing.

5. Theological Considerations

Lamentations does not hide that the LORD has judged his people, nor does it hide how much it hurts. Zion confesses God's justice (1:18) and still brings her pain to him (1:20).

6. Relevant Scholarly Insights

Ancient Mesopotamian poems such as the Lament over the Destruction of Ur mourned fallen cities, often blaming gods who had abandoned them. Lamentations differs: Zion confesses her sin and appeals to the God who judged her.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.2)

1.2 Q1: Chapters 1–4 are alphabetic acrostics, ordering grief "from A to Z." Why might a grieving poet choose such a careful, ordered form?

1.2 Q2: Zion is pictured as a widow who has lost her protection and provision. What does that picture help you feel about the city's loss?

1.2 Q3: Unlike other ancient city laments, Lamentations confesses sin and turns to the God who judged. Why does that difference matter?

Section 1.3

Movement 1: The Narrator Mourns Zion (Lamentations 1:1–11)

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Reader 1: Lamentations 1:1–3** (focal passage) — The city once full of people sits lonely like a widow; she weeps in the night with none to comfort her; Judah has gone into exile and finds no resting place.
- **Reader 2: Lamentations 1:4–7** (focal passage) — The roads to Zion mourn; her enemies prosper because the LORD has afflicted her for her transgressions; her children are gone; in her affliction she remembers her precious things, and her foes mock her downfall.
- **Summary of Lamentations 1:8–11** — Jerusalem sinned grievously and her shame is exposed; she did not consider her end; nations entered the sanctuary God had forbidden them to enter; the people trade their treasures for food; Zion cries out for the LORD to look.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

Lamentations 1:1:

How lonely sits the city
that was full of people!

How like a widow has she become,

she who was great among the nations!

She who was a princess among the provinces

has become a slave.

Lamentations 1:2:

She weeps bitterly in the night,
with tears on her cheeks;

among all her lovers

she has none to comfort her;

all her friends have dealt treacherously with her;

they have become her enemies.

Lamentations 1:3:

Judah has gone into exile because of affliction
and hard servitude;

> she dwells now among the nations,
>
> but finds no resting place;
>
> her pursuers have all overtaken her
>
> in the midst of her distress.

Teaching Narrative: The Narrator Mourns Zion

1. The Lonely Widow (Lamentations 1:1)

A crowded city sits alone; a princess becomes a slave.

2. Weeping with No Comforter (Lamentations 1:2)

Former allies have become enemies.

3. Exile Without Rest (Lamentations 1:3)

Judah dwells among the nations and finds no resting place.

4. Roads That Mourn (Lamentations 1:4–6)

Empty festivals, groaning priests, and children gone into captivity, because of her transgressions.

5. Memory and Mockery (Lamentations 1:7)

She remembers what was lost.

6. Sin, Shame, and the Invaded Sanctuary (Lamentations 1:8–11)

Told in brief, with care. Zion breaks in to ask God to look.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.3)

1.3 Q1: "How lonely sits the city that was full of people!" (1:1). Why does the poem begin with a cry of shock rather than an explanation?

1.3 Q2: "Among all her lovers she has none to comfort her" (1:2). Why do the things and alliances people lean on apart from God fail to bring lasting comfort in crisis? (Personal reflection may remain private, with full freedom to pass.)

1.3 Q3: Judah "finds no resting place" (1:3). Why does upheaval leave people deeply unsettled—and why is recognizing that restlessness not a sign of failed faith? (Personal reflection may remain private, with full freedom to pass.)

1.3 Q4: The poet says plainly that "the LORD has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions" (1:5). How can grief and honest confession sit side by side?

1.3 Q5: In the middle of the narrator's description, Zion breaks in to cry to the LORD (1:9, 11). What does it mean that the first words Zion speaks are a prayer?

Section 1.4

Movement 2: Zion Cries Out: No Comforter (Lamentations 1:12–22)

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Reader 1: Lamentations 1:12** (focal passage) — Zion calls to everyone passing by: is it nothing to you? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow.
- **Summary of Lamentations 1:13–15** — The LORD sent fire into her bones, spread a net for her feet, and bound her transgressions into a yoke; the Lord rejected her mighty men and crushed her young men.
- **Reader 2: Lamentations 1:16–18** (focal passage) — For these things she weeps; a comforter is far away; Zion stretches out her hands, but none comforts her; she confesses that the LORD is in the right, for she has rebelled.
- **Summary of Lamentations 1:19** — Her allies deceived her, and her priests and elders perished while searching for food.
- **Reader 3: Lamentations 1:20** (focal passage) — Zion asks the LORD to look, for she is in distress; her heart is wrung within her, for she has been very rebellious.
- **Summary of Lamentations 1:21–22** — Her enemies rejoice at her trouble; she asks God to deal with them as he has dealt with her.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

Lamentations 1:12:

“Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?
Look and see

if there is any sorrow like my sorrow,

which was brought upon me,

which the LORD inflicted

on the day of his fierce anger.

Lamentations 1:16:

"For these things I weep;
my eyes flow with tears;

for a comforter is far from me,

one to revive my spirit;

my children are desolate,

for the enemy has prevailed."

Lamentations 1:18:

"The LORD is in the right,
for I have rebelled against his word;

but hear, all you peoples,

and see my suffering;

my young women and my young men

have gone into captivity.

Teaching Narrative: Zion Cries Out: No Comforter

1. Is There Any Sorrow Like Mine? (Lamentations 1:12)

Zion calls to passers-by to look and see.

2. The LORD's Hand (Lamentations 1:13–15)

Fire, a net, and a yoke. Told in brief, with care.

3. Tears and No Comforter (Lamentations 1:16–17)

She stretches out her hands, and no one comforts her.

4. The LORD Is in the Right (Lamentations 1:18–19)

Confession in the middle of pain.

5. Look, O LORD (Lamentations 1:20–22)

Zion turns her grief and her enemies over to God.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.4)

1.4 Q1: "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow" (1:12). How do people often pass by the suffering of others, and why?

1.4 Q2: "For these things I weep; my eyes flow with tears; for a comforter is far from me" (1:16). What has helped you most when you felt that comfort was far away?

1.4 Q3: Zion stretches out her hands, but no one comforts her (1:17). What keeps communities from noticing people who are grieving or in material need, and how can believers offer patient presence alongside practical care? (Sharing is optional.)

1.4 Q4: "The LORD is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word" (1:18). Why is it significant that Zion can say this while still in pain?

1.4 Q5: Zion ends by asking God to look at her distress and to deal with her enemies (1:20–22)—without receiving an immediate answer in the poem. How does handing both unresolved pain and justice over to God guard believers from bitterness or assuming every hardship reflects personal sin? (Personal reflection may remain private.)

Section 1.5

Canonical Horizon: The Man of Sorrows and the God of All Comfort

Tracing the Thread Across Scripture

Zion's cry, "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?" points to Jesus, the man of sorrows, who wept over Jerusalem and bore our griefs, and to the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction (2 Corinthians 1:3–4). Turn to each passage as the connections are traced.

1. Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41–44; 23:28–31)

Jesus wept over the city and foretold its destruction, and on the way to the cross he told the women of Jerusalem to weep for themselves and their children.

2. The Cry of 1:12 Heard at the Cross (Isaiah 53:3–4; Matthew 27:39)

As a canonical pattern—not a direct prediction—Christians have long heard 1:12 alongside the cross, where Jesus, the man of sorrows, bore grief for others while passers-by mocked.

3. Another Helper and the God of All Comfort (John 14:16–18; 2 Corinthians 1:3–4)

Jesus promised the Spirit, and God comforts us in all our affliction so we can comfort others.

4. Mourners Comforted (Matthew 5:4; Revelation 21:2–4)

Those who mourn will be comforted, and in the new Jerusalem God wipes away every tear.

Anchor Verse (ESV)

> **Lamentations 1:12:**
>
> "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?
>
> Look and see
>
> if there is any sorrow like my sorrow,
>
> which was brought upon me,
>
> which the LORD inflicted
>
> on the day of his fierce anger.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.5)

1.5 Q1: "And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it" (Luke 19:41). What does Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem reveal about God's heart toward broken cities and grieving people? (Personal reflection may remain private.)

1.5 Q2: God is "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction" (2 Corinthians 1:3–4). How does this answer the refrain of no comforter in Lamentations 1?

1.5 Q3: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). How does Jesus' promise affirm real mourning rather than rushing mourners past unresolved sorrow? (Personal reflection may remain private, with full freedom to pass.)

Personal & Group Application (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD The first poem pictures Jerusalem as a lonely widow with no one to comfort her, yet Zion confesses that the LORD is in the right and turns her grief to him.

HEART	Jesus wept over Jerusalem, bore sorrow for others, and gives his people the God of all comfort.
HANDS	Faith brings honest grief to God, confesses sin without denying pain, and notices those who have no one to comfort them.

Section 1.6

Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer

Application

Take a few minutes to move this week's study into everyday life. Discuss these three questions together and write down what you want to remember:

1.6 Q1: What grief, large or small, will you bring honestly to God this week?

1.6 Q2: What quiet, practical ways can believers draw near to someone who feels overlooked or in need—without offering easy clichés or prying? (Personal plans may remain private.)

1.6 Q3: How can a study group become a safe place where people can lament honestly—or stay silent—without being rushed or pressed to explain their pain? (Sharing is always optional.)

Looking Ahead to Next Week

Recap: In Week 1, we heard the lonely city weep with no comforter and confess that the LORD is in the right.

Transition: Next week, the second poem presses into the hardest question: who did this? The answer is that the Lord himself has acted like an enemy, and the poet weeps as he calls Zion to pour out her heart.

Week 2 Overview — The Lord Has Become Like an Enemy (Lamentations 2:1–22): Movement 1, God's Anger Against His City (2:1–10), covers the Lord's judgment on his temple and city. Movement 2, The Poet's Tears and Zion's Plea (2:11–22), covers the poet's grief, the false prophets, and the call to cry out. The Canonical Horizon traces the wrath Christ bore.

Focal Readings to Preview

- Lamentations 2:1–8
- Lamentations 2:13–19

My One Concrete Step for the Week Ahead

Write down or name aloud the specific rhythm, boundary, or conversation you want to practice before next week's gathering:

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by inviting each person to share a one-sentence takeaway or prayer request, then pray together along these lines:

Closing Group Prayer

God who sees our sorrow, we bring you our grief. We confess that we often pass by the suffering of others. We pray for those who are lonely, widowed, displaced, or grieving, and for survivors of abuse and war. Thank you for Jesus, who wept over Jerusalem and bore our sorrows. Send the comfort of your Spirit to all who feel that there is no one to comfort them. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.