

I see you! Lamentations 2

In Lamentations 1:1–11, the reporter/narrator (possibly Jeremiah) describes Lady Zion's appalling plight. His voice is dispassionate, lacking sympathy even. By means of an early reference to 'all her lovers' (Lam 1:2), he establishes that she is promiscuous. She 'sinned grievously,' he says, 'therefore she became filthy' (Lam 1:8). When he describes her rape (Lam 1:10), his sympathy is more for her children than for her.

Now, in Lamentations 2:1–10, he moves closer to Lady Zion; so close, in fact, that he can look into her eyes and *see* her trauma. His perspective has changed; now he is deeply moved. Just as Lady Zion attributed her affliction to 'the LORD' – for example, *he* did it all, *his* hand did it, *he* caused, *he* sent, *he* spread, *he* rejected, *he* summonsed and *he* trod (Lam 1:12–15), now the reporter does the same, saying *the LORD* did it – *he* cast, *he* forgot, *he* swallowed up, *he* cut down, *he* withdrew, *he* burned, *he* shot and *he* killed (Lam 2:1–8).

On a material level, the LORD did not ravage Jerusalem; the Babylonians did! The Babylonian army invaded: *they* slaughtered, *they* raped and *they* looted. *Their* siege created famine; *their* swords pierced her young men. *They* invaded her towns, *they* tore down the walls, *they* torched the dwellings and *they* took captives.

Read: Lamentations 2:1–10.

Discuss:

- Why does God take all the blame when the Babylonians committed all the crime?
- Can God be blamed for evil, simply because he lets it happen?
- How do you think severely persecuted believers might struggle with this question?
- How might the devil exploit this spiritual struggle to attack and weaken a vulnerable, traumatised believer? (cf. Eph 6:16).

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While the reporter does not directly accuse Yahweh of injustice or wrongdoing, his indignation and distress over Lady Zion's plight are palpable.

In verses 11–19, the reporter describes his own emotional response to Lady Zion's suffering. Overwhelmed, *he weeps* uncontrollably (v. 11). The scene before him of famine-ravaged infants dying in their mother's arms (v. 12) makes him physically ill so that *he vomits* (v. 11). Her 'ruin is vast as the sea', such that he wonders if anyone could heal her (v. 13). *He laments* that her false prophets misled her when they should have led her to repentance (v. 14). *He is appalled* at how the passers-by mock her and rejoice over her plight (vv. 15–16). *He acknowledges* that Yahweh has merely done exactly what he said he would do: that is, in the absence of repentance he has punished her rebellion (v. 17).

Read: Lamentations 2:11–17.

Discuss:

- Have you ever had a similar experience, where, by coming close to someone who is suffering, you have been transformed from a dispassionate observer into a compassionate advocate and comforter?
- Are you or are you not a better person for this experience? Explain your answer.

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After encouraging Lady Zion to weep and grieve (v. 18), the reporter – now her comforter – implores her to pray: 'cry out in the night' (at the beginning of each night watch – i.e. four times); 'Pour out your heart like water to the Lord'; 'Lift your hands to him'; and, just in case she feels reluctant to talk to God, he adds '*for the sake of your children* who are perishing' (v. 19).

Read: Lamentations 2:18–19.

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Having come so close as to *see* her pain and share her sorrow, the reporter has earned himself a hearing. Accepting his advice and in response to his appeal, Lady Zion cries out to Yahweh (vv. 20–22).

Read: Lamentations 2:20–22.

Discuss:

- How do you think Lady Zion felt to have this once-dispassionate reporter come alongside her, *see* the enormity of her suffering and then become her comforter?
- Why is it so important for sufferers to have (a) a witness?, and (b) a comforter?
- What stops us from being witnesses and comforters to those who suffer?
- Are these reasons and excuses reasonable or not?

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In Lamentations 2:13 after declaring that Lady Zion’s suffering is without precedent, beyond comparison and ‘vast as the sea’, the reporter asks: ‘Who can heal you?’ It is clear from verse 14 that the prophets can’t heal her, for they are useless false prophets. It is clear from verse 15 that the passers-by can’t heal her, for they are useless too, interested only in mocking, gawking and rubbing salt into her wounds. It is obvious from verse 16 that her enemies aren’t going to heal her, for they are totally unrepentant, celebrating her fall. Then, though he has named Yahweh as her abuser, he exhorts her to pray.

Discuss: Why would the reporter recommend prayer, when has named Yahweh as the abuser?

Lady Zion launches into prayer, imploring Yahweh (yet again) to *look* and *see*. In verse 20, she asks Yahweh three strategic questions; each designed to elicit a response:

- ‘With whom have you dealt thus?’ (ESV)/‘To whom have you done this?’ (NKJV)
- ‘Should mothers eat the children they have nurtured?’
- ‘Should priests and prophets be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord?’

Discuss:

- What is the answer to the first question? *Who* is the afflicted one? *Who* is ‘Lady Zion’? (*For answers, see Jeremiah 2:2 and 12:7.*)
- The next two questions are rhetorical – that is, the answer is not in doubt. *Of course* mothers should not eat their children! *Of course* priests and prophets should not be slaughtered in the sanctuary! These scenarios are unthinkable! What do you think Lady Zion is *hoping* to achieve by asking Yahweh these questions?
- On what does Lady Zion rest her hope?

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Discuss: Christians are not immune from trials, hardship, persecution and suffering. *Who* are we as Christians? (*For answers, see 1 Pet 2:9–10, 1 Jn 3:1a; Rev 19:6–8.*) *Might* we have reason to *hope* in the LORD?

Laments – that is, prayers of pain and protest – reject denial by confronting reality. They reject numbness by embracing raw emotion. Laments reject passivity by crying out in an act of resistance. They declare that things are definitely *not* alright. Laments give due respect to pain and tears, just as God does. **Read:** Psalm 56:8.

Lamentations 1 and 2 advocate genuine connection with those who suffer. We must do more than look. We must come closer; we must get alongside and *see*. We must bring comfort through our witness and our prayers. We must help sufferers find God through the fog. By this means, we – the Body of Christ – connect with one another throughout the world and with our head (the LORD). This is true spiritual unity.

Discuss: Is worship real if tears and expressions of pain are not permitted (either officially or unofficially)?

Task: Choose one Christian person or group that is presently suffering severe persecution (see the Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin <http://rlprayerbulletin.blogspot.com.au> for contemporary cases).

Discuss: What might this believer (or these believers) be feeling, thinking and fearing? What might they need physically, emotionally and spiritually? *See* their pain! Do not pass them by! *Cry to the LORD* for them now!