

Dr. Leslie Allen, Lamentations, Session 3, Lamentations 1 :1-11

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This is Dr. Leslie Allen in his teaching on the book of Lamentations. This is session 3, Lamentations 1:1-11.

Here we come to our third video on the book of Lamentations.

We've been looking at the background to Lamentations and very much thinking about the world of Lamentations, the world behind it, and the traditions that it picks up and uses. And now, we come to chapter one and verse one, and we hope to get to the first half of the chapter. We should be studying verses one through eleven.

But there's still some background work that we need to do, but we'll do it in the context of the text. Now I need to say at the beginning, the book of Lamentations is a demonstration of grief work, and it's invaluable reading for anybody who grieves and for their caregivers. It lays out an agenda of tears, talk, and time for that journey through grief.

The book seems to be the script of a liturgy, a service performed to help the community of Judah come to terms with the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC and with the national catastrophe that entailed. And we have to notice too that there's a certain function that Lamentations performs, that as the shocked survivors listen, a fellow sufferer mentors them by drawing on Judean traditions of grieving, and he's weaving together pathways, trajectories of grief, guilt, and grievance, and he encourages the congregation to articulate these trajectories for themselves. To this end, he introduces a character, Zion, who represents not only a personification of the place in Jerusalem that is being destroyed but also represents the community, and Zion acts as their role model.

Then he himself, this mentor, assumes the role of a wounded healer, earning their trust as he testifies to his own wounds and how he has reacted to them. A key part of his mentoring is to provide an interpretation of the catastrophe. Appealing to the law and prophets, he discerns a two-part providential plan, first negative but eventually positive.

Finally, the congregation can reach a turning point in their grieving. They verbalize their grief as they recommit themselves to God in a soulful prayer of their own. Although human grief has infinite variety, the grief-stricken will find welcome fellow-feeling in the Book of Lamentations, while those around will find encouragement to show empathy, weeping with those who weep.

I should be using the new Revised Standard Version as I go through the text, but I also make some references to the New International Version along the way. In Chapter 1, we find the first acrostic, and I said before that it's made up of a listing, an alphabetical listing, going through the letters of the Bible. That's why it has 22 verses because there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

What the mentor needs to do here is to get the congregation to face the realities of the losses that that community has experienced. They've got to look their reality straight in the face, and they need to process this reality by painfully remembering these losses and giving expression to the need to absorb and accept what has happened. This is the process.

The narrator, who's also a mentor, is going through the losses that have been suffered by the community in this first chapter. That's very much an expression of grief. I mentioned quickly in passing last time that there are three pathways or three trajectories that keep recurring in the Book of Lamentations.

There's guilt, there's grief, there's guilt, and there's grievance. We shall find them all reappearing as we go through. They need to be rehashed and brought out again and again.

There isn't a logic to grief. It flashes to and fro between different aspects that we find appearing as part of grief. A great resource I found is a book by Gerald Sitzler called *A Grace Disguised*.

He had the terrible experience of being in a car accident, and as a result, his mother, his father, his wife, and his daughter died. There, he was left with his sons at the end, and they were grieving. He had to go through this grief.

One way he expresses how he went through that grief is as follows. He said he had a waking dream, and his mind was thinking of darkness and the setting sun, and he said, I was frantically running west trying desperately to catch it, the setting sun and remain in its fiery warmth and light, but I was losing the race. The sun was beating me to the horizon and was soon gone.

I suddenly found myself in the twilight. Exhausted, I stopped running and glanced forebodingly over my shoulder to the east. I saw a vast darkness closing in on me.

I was terrified by that darkness. I wanted to keep running after the sun, though I knew that it was futile, for it had already proven itself faster than I was. So, I lost all hope, collapsed to the ground, and fell into despair.

I thought at that moment that I would live in darkness forever. I felt absolute terror in my soul. And then he goes on to say, my sister, Diane told me the quickest way for

anyone to reach the sun and the light of day is not to run west chasing after the setting sun but to head east plunging into darkness until one comes to the sunrise.

I discovered at that moment that I had the power to choose the direction my life would lead, even if the only choice open to me, at least initially, was either to run from the last or to face it as best I could. Since I knew the darkness was inevitable and unavoidable, I decided from that point on to walk into the darkness rather than try to outrun it, to let my experience of loss take me on a journey wherever it would lead, and to allow myself to be transformed by my suffering rather than to think I could somehow avoid it. I chose to turn towards the pain, however, falteringly, and to yield to the loss, though I had no idea at the time what it would mean.

And so, in Lamentations, you are heading into the darkness and knowing that's the only way to go, and the mentor hopes and praises that beyond that darkness, there will be light that he will speak of in Chapter 3, but until then, he can only speak of losses. And so, I think it's important to understand this narrator as he's generally called who's the main speaker, not just as a reporter or observer but somebody who is a fellow sufferer in that grieving as a fellow Judean. He, too, had experienced the fall of Jerusalem and the fall of the temple, the fall of the monarchy and the fall of everything, but he is also a mentor.

He seems to have been a priest, one suspects, who's been trained in speaking and trained in the traditions of Israel, and he can use these to plunge into the darkness with the congregation and to lead them through the darkness and eventually hopefully into a glimmer of light. This first poem falls into two halves neatly. Verses 1 to 11 and then verses 12 to 22.

When we come to verse 9, we find that this character Zion rudely interrupts in one line, and then we find that once again at the end in verse 11, she interrupts again, and the mentor gives her head from then on, and the second part of that chapter is very much concerned with what Zion has to say from verses 12 to 22. What we find in this chapter is that there are stanzas, which we call verses, which are actually stanzas with three lines, and it's the first word in the first line that goes through the order of the alphabet. Strangely, verse 7 has four lines, and we shall find the same discrepancy in chapter 2, and Hebrew doesn't seem to matter.

It wasn't perfectionist in its poetry. One characteristic is that there's a certain meter that governs most of this first chapter and most of the book, in fact, in the first four chapters, and that is what we call a limping meter. There are three accented syllables in a line, and the first half of the line has got three accented syllables, and the second half hasn't got another three. It's got only two syllables, so you feel a bit let down. It's called a limping meter, and that's characteristic of the secular funeral lament.

This limping meter is very much being let down and incorporates despair in its very sound with those two final accented syllables instead of the three that you might have hoped for. Is it something else we notice about this poem that we've mentioned before? This word how. I said that in my commentary, which I call a liturgy of grief, I translated how terrible that and that bit clumsy, but it brings out the emotional side of that particular word that it's a scream or it's a shriek, and so there's emotion expressed there.

People talk about the logic of chapter one but no there's also emotion there as well a mixture of reason and also terror in terms of these excited exclamations. As I say, we have a funeral lament here, but we shall find that there's a turning to prayer where Zion is concerned. One thing that's typical of a funeral lament is that there is reversal and contrast, and there's a commemoration of loss, and what was good is now lost.

What was good has now turned bad or isn't there anymore. We find that this is very much characteristic. There's a description of different losses all through chapter one and there's this contrast between the good old days and the bad present days when everything has changed for the worse.

This is very much characteristic of our own experience of crisis. A bereaved person is likely to say I miss him so much or I miss her so much and to be very conscious of what one has lost, so it's not surprising that here we have a catalog of losses. The first half is a catalog of human losses or social losses, people that have been lost, whereas I'm dividing the first half into two parts.

One to six are the human or social losses, and then seven to eleven material losses, material things that have been lost, and so that's the division between the two sides of this first half. Now, there are two presuppositions. We have to come back to traditions again here as we're going to encounter them in the actual text, and the first tradition relates to verses one to eleven as a whole and the second tradition only to verses one to six, and that first tradition is something that's lost, something you don't have anymore and it's what we call Zion theology, and it's very much expressed in the psalms.

A little group, they're not consecutive. There's a little group of psalms that we call Songs of Zion, and there are Psalms forty-six, forty-eight, and seventy-six. These psalms are saying how wonderful Jerusalem is and how it's the city of God, and God is going to bless it forever and defend it forever, and they are wonderful psalms praising God.

It's a type of hymn praising God for what we call Zion theology. All is going to be well with Zion, and we find that in another book, too. We find it in the book of Isaiah that in the pre-exilic part of the book of Isaiah, within chapters one to thirty-nine, there's a celebration of Zion preserved from the Assyrians.

It looked in 701 in Hezekiah's reign as if Jerusalem would fall to the Assyrians, and indeed it was blockaded by Sennacherib, but then it was all over, and the Assyrians retreated, and this, for Isaiah, is a celebration of Zion theology. And then in Second Isaiah there's a resurgence, an exilic series of texts now. There's an implicit admission that Zion theology didn't work out but there's the promise it's going to work out in the future.

In the post-exilic section from Isaiah 46 onwards, there's a look forward to the Zion tradition being re-established. But here we're at the beginning of the exilic period and that Zion tradition has been lost and Jerusalem has fallen. It's not God's favorite city after all and God hasn't been taking care of it after all.

He's let it go to the Babylonians and how can this be this wonderful Zion theology? And implicitly, verses one to eleven are cutting across the claims of Zion theology and saying they haven't worked, have they? They haven't worked. Among the congregation there was this expectation it ought to have worked. There was this belief, there was this value set upon Zion.

I said earlier that one part of grief is acknowledging that one may have to change one's expectations. Certain expectations have not worked and one eventually needs another set of expectations that are going to work and another set of values in place of the values that have led one astray. And so there we are.

There's this need to get beyond that part of the belief system that hasn't worked. To get beyond those expectations and to move forward to a new set of expectations. It's not in chapter three that we come to what those new expectations are that are presented by the mentor to the congregation, but at the moment, one is moving through the darkness and very much appreciative of loss.

And no more so than in verses one to six, the social losses before we come to the material losses. And here's another presupposition that we encounter in the text now: a principle of solidarity. Somebody has said that there are collectivist nations that say we, whereas there are non-collectivist nations that say me.

And in the West, we individualize all the way through. We're a lot of individuals, and we find it troublesome to try and live as a society, and we don't agree with each other because it's me that counts. But in Africa and in Asia there's more a collectivist point of view.

You belong to the community. You belong to the family. You belong to the clan.

You belong to the tribe. You belong to the nation. Have alliances with other nations.

And you cling to all these solidarities. This is what makes life meaningful. And you fit yourself in as an individual into these collectivist feelings.

And so, in engaging in verses one to six in social loss there's this extra factor that makes it much more meaningful and much more tragic in the case of these Judeans who have lost so many personal aspects of their lives, social aspects, human aspects, social aspects around them. Verse one. How lonely the city that once was full of people is.

Lonely is very much the keyword for verses one to six. The social human losses. Lonely.

Lonely is very much a tragic word. It is for all civilizations, even for our individual civilizations such as we live in. But it's for Judah it was particularly overwhelming to be lonely.

There are a number of psalms, individual lament psalms, that complain of loneliness that they cannot take. We notice this word sits the city. And we came across that posture of sitting as mourning behavior.

And so, this is something we have to appreciate. And so, there's a personification from the very start of the city. And she's addressed as she.

She's spoken of as she goes through the chapter. She compares it to a widow. Zion is mentioned as a woman in this personification.

I was teaching lamentations recently, and a woman came up to me during the break and asked why Zion was personified as a woman. Why not a man? Oh, I said, I hadn't thought to explain that. That's a very good question. And I'll take that up with the class in the next hour.

And so, I explained to the class that there are only two genders in Hebrew, masculine and feminine. And everything has to be either masculine or feminine. There is no neuter.

You have to make do with the two genders. The word city is actually a feminine word. Zion and the names of cities like Zion or Jerusalem are traditionally regarded in terms of women.

They're feminine nouns. Feminine nouns. And so, when you want to personify, you naturally think of a woman.

There's a bit more to it than that, but that's enough to be going on with. And so, there is this empty city. And it had been the capital of the nation.

After 586, it wasn't the capital after all anymore. Mizpah, up in the tribe of Benjamin's territory. That was the new capital, not Jerusalem.

It had been a metropolis full of people as the capital of Judah, but no longer so. And she's compared with a widow. How like a widow she has become.

She was great among the nations. And widow, you might think that speaking in marital terms, some commentators say, well, compare the fact that elsewhere in the prophets especially, the covenant relationship was portrayed in terms of a marriage, and Yahweh was the husband. And now Zion had lost a husband.

Yahweh, God. But no, it's more a socialized sociological comparison. Widows tended to be down and out in Judean society and Israelite society without a man to back them up.

And the book of Ruth is a commentary on that. Two widows were struggling for existence, struggling to survive in a man's world. And the only way out is for the younger one to get married.

And that's the only way forward. So, this is a sociological reference. A widow was very often a needy person in need of charity.

And there we are. And so, it's a wretched situation to be in. She was once great among the nations.

In Palestine, there were a number of small nations. And Judah tended to be regarded as the leading nations. Back in 593, there was a conference.

There was fear of attack from the Babylonians. And so, the little nations grouped together. And where did they meet? In Jerusalem.

All the other nations sent envoys to Jerusalem, which was where this international conference was held, and we're told about it in Jeremiah 27. So, Jerusalem was an important place in Palestine.

And Judah was important among the Babylonian imperial promises. And then she that once was a princess among the provinces. Yes, the importance of Judah among the provinces has become a vassal.

Literally a forced laborer. Somebody who's forced to do work that one doesn't want to do. And so there's very much an expression of loss here.

This is the first expression of loss. Turning back to Sitzer, a grace disguised, he has a reference to loss. Loss creates a barren present, as if one were sailing on a vast sea of nothingness.

Those who suffer loss live suspended between a past for which they long and a future for which they hope. They want to return to the harbor of the familiar past and recover what was lost. Good health, happy relationships, and a secure job.

Or they want to sail on and discover a meaningful future that promises to bring them life again. Successful surgery, a second marriage, a better job. Instead, they find themselves living in a barren present that is empty of meaning.

Memories of the past only remind them of what they have lost. Hope for the future only taunts them with an unknown too remote even to imagine. Memories of the past do bring joy, as I've discovered, but it takes time for memories to comfort rather than torment.

And so, the first stanza, verse one, is this general statement of loss. And then it's going to get particular. What were the types of losses? And verse two picks up the losses of political allies.

It starts with an exclamation, an emotional exclamation, in this personification. She weeps bitterly in the night with tears on her cheeks. Something you can visualize.

Among all her lovers, she has none to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her. They've become her enemies.

And those nations who gathered in 593 to that conference under King Hezekiah in Jeremiah 27, they'd either been conquered or they'd gone over to the enemy as the only option. And they no longer supported Judah. And Judah was left alone without those allies to bring comfort or help.

They all took Babylon's side now, either willingly or by force. And so, no comfort, no comfort. All through chapter one, there's this depiction of a lack of comfort.

And this is an aspect of aloneness. It's an aspect of solidarity that was missing, and grief needs others to emphasize and take one's side and hold one's hand, as Job's friends did in Job chapter two. But here is Jerusalem isolated, left to sorrow alone.

And then, in verse three, the exile of fellow Judeans. This, as I say, this book is intended for those who were left behind in Judah. But many of their friends and relatives had been sent on that long trek up north and then east and down south to Babylon into deportation, exile.

Judah has gone into exile with suffering and hard servitude. She lives now among the nations and finds no resting place. A new set of nations is now over in Mesopotamia.

Her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress. And that last line in that third stanza is the rounding up of people. Come here, you can't escape.

Join the march. You're included. You've got to go to Babylon and leave your home.

In verse three, in that second line, she lives now. Yes, the new RSV and also the NIV miss the fact that it literally sits and it's this mourning posture. The exiles went to Babylon.

They, too, were mourning as well as those left behind. And finding no resting place. We talked about that before, that this is an intended reminiscence of Deuteronomy 28 and verse 65, which looked ahead to a terrible future where a nation that abandoned their covenant God would find itself in great distress and exiled, in fact, from its homeland.

There is no resting place. And this is very significant. It's the first hint.

You've got to take Deuteronomy 28 into account. Perhaps there's some meaning in that chapter for us that we can apply to this whole situation. Then, in the fourth stanza, there's religious loneliness, which has a religious significance to loneliness.

Zion had been the place of festivals three times a year, and people would come thronging; pilgrims from all over the land would come thronging to Jerusalem. But now no longer, now no longer. The temple was destroyed.

And here was the congregation gathered, I think, for this liturgy in the ruined courtyard of the temple, but feeling very much alone. The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to the festivals. And there's this personification of the roads that the pilgrims took.

All the gates are desolate and they're ruined. They're knocked down. Yes, those city gates, but they're also mourning.

And this is a word of mourning as well. Her priests groan. Those who used to conduct the festivals with great hymns, now they're groaning.

Her young girls grieve and her lot is bitter. The young girls, how do they feature in this picture here? Because women did not take part in religious services. They had no oral part.

But they did play some part. And there's a verse in Psalm 68 and verses 24 and 25, which speaks not of the temple service but of the processions that pilgrims would join in going up to the temple before the service. And Psalm 68, verse 24, your solemn processions are seen, O God, back in the good old days, the processions of my God, my King into the sanctuary, the singers in front, the musicians last, between them, girls playing tambourines.

And so, it makes me think of the girls in the Salvation Army playing their tambourines and joining this in this procession. And they at least could take some part. But not now.

Not now. They lost their jobs, these young girls. They lost their chance for musical expertise.

The young girls left in Zion were grieving. And so, there's a religious significance to this loss that we find here. And then, in verse 5, there's a switch now.

We shall see in the middle of this stanza that her foes have become the masters, and her enemies prosper because the Lord has made her suffer for the multitude of her transgressions. Her children have gone away, captives before the foe. In the first and third lines of this stanza, we find that there is a loss there.

Her foes have become the masters. Literally, they've become the head. And once again, there's an echo of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 28:44 spoke of the enemies becoming the head. And so, there's this hint again, which refers to Deuteronomy 28. And also, in the last line, her children have gone away, captives.

These, too, go away as prisoners. It's a deliberate echo of Deuteronomy 28:41. And so, hints again that there is some tragic meaning to this grief.

There is some significance that can be explained theologically. And that's explained in the middle, the middle line because the Lord has made her suffer for the multitude of her transgressions. I think the NIV has sins, but neither of them is adequate.

Sin is a general word. Transgression means going over a line you shouldn't go over. But it's literally acts of rebellion.

Rebellion against God. And that's the thought there. And so, in the fall of Jerusalem, there was not only a political rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar, but it was also a rebellion against God himself for which Jerusalem had to be punished.

And so, there's this theological use of this political term to rebel, rebels against God. This is why this has happened. And at last, we've come to some meaning.

That meaning, that interpretation of the catastrophe, is leaning back on Deuteronomy 28 and says, here's a sad and tragic expectation that you hadn't taken into account your loss. And this is why this is happening, in point of fact. And so, what we've had is we've gone through the trajectory of grief, this pathway of grief, commemorating the losses, but now, at this point, we have a trajectory of guilt coming onto the scene alongside that grief.

Then we move on to the last type of loss. I think this is the loss of the monarchy, the loss of the royal Davidic tradition, which had been so much part of Jerusalem's tradition. From daughter Zion has departed all her majesty.

I think that's a good word in the new RSV. And it reflects the fact that often this word, the Hebrew word for majesty, is used in a royal context. Her princes have become like stags that find no pasture.

They fled without strength before the pursuer. Princes are not the best translations. It's really royal officials, not members of the royal family, but royal officials are what princes often mean.

And so, it's an echo of the palace and the whole monarchical system, but it's departed. And then, for the first time in that first line, we get this term: daughter Zion, daughter Zion. And that word daughter simply indicates a female personification, that Zion has been regarded as a woman.

And capitals, cities, and nations, when they're personified, they are often graced with that word daughter to indicate they're personified as a woman. And so there we are. There are those losses that we experience.

And so, it's quite complex. These first six verses, we've got a funeral lament here, which is a secular tradition introduced with this scream or shriek, Echa! And then this contrast between the past and the present, and this limping meter, three plus two. Yes, a secular funeral lament, but religion has come in through the back door, as it were.

And in striving for meaning, you don't stay with meaning, even this funeral lament. And there's a sort of a hybrid going on, being created, in that there's this theological angle. Because old expectations have gone, and there was one expectation that they hadn't borne in mind.

Part of the tradition, Deuteronomy 28, that the fate of Israel, when it departs from its covenant God. And so, here it imports some meaning and some interpretation, and there is some real significance in it. It was not completely bewildering.

It could be explained. We've had a number of the grief processes, grief behavior, being expressed here. The mourning rites, sitting, and the tear in verse one, the tearfulness in verse two, and then the grieving actions in verse four.

And there's this review of loss, so many different kinds of loss. But there's a beginning of this search for meaning. Part of that grief process, going beyond the loss, is to find a search for meaning so as to understand the disaster, if it's at all possible.

And you have this series of quotations, Deuteronomy 28, and then the spelling out, in the middle of verse five, for the first time. Then there's this belief system coming to the floor, but it's a tragic belief system now, that has to be accepted. We found the two trajectories, grief over loss and then guilt, suggested in the Deuteronomy 28 references and then stated in the middle of verse five.

And in a literary focus on Zion, as a personified figure, Zion stands for the place itself, which had suffered so much physical destruction. It also stands for the congregation, or what the congregation should be, a role model, and what the congregation experienced in their disasters. As I think I've said before, Zion is going to function as a role model for the congregation, and Zion responds in the way that the congregation is going to need to respond in turn.

And so, in verses seven to eleven, we turn to material losses. And we might say, well, surely one could take that in one stride. Material losses, material things, they don't matter much.

But really, if you think about it, there are many material things that become part of us, an extension of ourselves, and we only have to be burglarized, and have some things taken to realize, oh, how can I live without such and such a thing? And it's terrible to think that part of oneself is being lost and taken away by the burglar, in point of fact. And so, material losses, they're mentioned three times. And you have verse seven, precious things, all the precious things that were hers in time of old.

And then, in verse ten, once again, enemies stretch out their hands over all the precious things. And then the NRSV lets us down, because the same Hebrew word is translated treasures in verse eleven, they trade their treasures for food. The NIV keeps treasures for all those three examples.

And so, here are the three examples of material losses. And there's this yearning for what's being lost. How can one live without these things? Verse seven, Jerusalem remembers.

Yes, there's this need to remember and bear it in mind. You can't forget it. It's always breaking news, what you've lost.

In the days of her affliction and wandering, all the precious things that were hers of old. The days of her affliction, how about wandering? Well, psychology books on grief mention restlessness. That when you're grieving, you can't concentrate on anything, and your mind keeps flitting to and fro, and is concerned with different types of loss.

And this wandering seems to be a better psychological term, restlessness. And so there's this commemoration of these loss of precious things, taken by the enemy as spoils. The soldiers weren't paid very much on the understanding that when the land was captured, the city was taken; you could have whatever you liked and seize a Rolex watch off somebody's hand that is yours now because you were the conqueror.

And so there is this reversal that they experience, looting. But more so than that, as part of their grief, when her people fell into the hand of the foe, and there was no one to help her, the foe looked on mocking after her downfall. And sometimes, when one suffers a loss, there's humiliation as part of that.

And that humiliation is a secondary part of suffering. It's not what has actually happened but how people regard you when something has happened. And here there's this mockery.

And all through lamentations, there's both the primary suffering and the secondary suffering, which makes it worse. And it comes out again in verse 8, Jerusalem sinned grievously, so she has become a mockery. All who honored her despise her.

They have seen her nakedness. She herself groans and turns her face away. There's this sort of humiliation and shame running through this verse.

This nakedness is stripped of all she had, stripped of these precious things, and she feels so naked as a result. But there's this admission by the narrator, by the mentor, it's to do with sin. Jerusalem sinned grievously.

So, we're coming back to the point of verse 5, this element of guilt alongside the element of grief. And then in verse 9, as we go through, there's a metaphor that's used. Her uncleanness was in her skirts.

She took no thought of the future. Her downfall was appalling with none to comfort her. And we have a metaphor here.

It's menstrual blood that's staining the clothes. And this would cause, in Hebrew ritual, it would cause ritual impurity. But here is a metaphor for wrongdoing.

It's a sin of the beginning of verse 8, put in metaphorical terms. Along with that went no thought for the future, no forethought of the consequences of sinful actions that it was going to lead somewhere worse, that God would punish eventually. There was this moral short-sightedness.

But then we have an interruption. Zion breaks in. Oh Lord, look at my affliction for the enemy has triumphed.

And that word triumph is literally acting big, acting big, throwing their weight around. The enemy has thrown their weight around. It's about Babylon going too far.

And here, there's a new trajectory coming in, which we should see often, the trajectory of grievance. It's not fair, God. The enemy has sinned as well.

We will discuss this a little bit later and explain what's happening in greater depth. But there's this grievance that comes out in this little mini-prayer. And then, in verse 10, the narrator carries on.

Enemies have stretched out their hands over all their precious things. She's even seen the nations invade her sanctuary, those whom you forbade to enter your congregation. This is another scriptural reference.

And the reference here is to Deuteronomy 23. And it is plainly mentioned as a reference here in the text. And Deuteronomy 23 says, No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord, even to the tenth generation.

None of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. And then it gives the reason why. And the text is speaking in itself literally of admission to worship.

But here, it's taken in a different sense. It's speaking of the enemies. And it's not only the Babylonian army, but they're all detachments from local nations, including local nations in that Palestinian area, including the Ammonites and Moabites, no doubt, invading the sanctuary, not now to worship, but to destroy and to deface.

And so here again, this grievance of Zion in that little prayer at the end of verse 9 is explained by the narrator in verse 10 as very much a religious sin against God and going against the direct will of God. And so, this is brought before God as a grievance.

And then, in the third case, verse 11, there's the trading of treasures for food, trading of precious things for food.

I remember I was sent to St. Petersburg in 1997 to teach at the Baptist Academy. And I was taken around St. Petersburg. And there, in the main street, there were old men and old women holding out precious heirlooms, watches, and necklaces.

And it was a time of great economic stringency for Russia. And they weren't paying out the Social Security, which the old people were used to. And so, they were ransacking their treasures and trying to get money so they could buy food.

This is very much the situation in that one has to get rid of those precious things in order to survive to get food. And this was very much a factor in that siege, that 18-month siege. And then, once again, Zion breaks in.

Oh Lord, look and see how worthless I've become. And once again, this is the secondary factor of suffering. Not what's happened but the social consequences of what's happened.

The humiliation that people are looking down at me now. And this is so hard to take. And so they bring this sense of worthlessness to God and say, we need your help.

We need your compassion. And so here is Zion speaking. And these are meant to be words to be shared with the congregation and eventually expressed by the congregation.

This is where we are. And we have to relate to God and bring all these things to God. And only that way is our future life.

Next time, we'll read the second half of the chapter verses 12 through 22 and that's what we should be studying.

This is Dr. Leslie Allen in his teaching on the book of Lamentations. This is session 3, Lamentations 1:1-11.