

Dr. Leslie Allen, Lamentations, Session 2, Introduction, Part 2 Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Allen, Lamentations, Session 1, Introduction, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Leslie Allen's session explores the book of Lamentations, emphasizing its roots in secular funeral laments and the Israelite prayer tradition during crises. The lecture highlights the dual need for both psychological grieving and spiritual turning to God, as exemplified by Zion's prayers within the text. **Allen draws parallels between this dual expression and African-American culture's blues and spirituals.** He analyzes lament psalms, focusing on their structure, content, and the expectation of divine response. **The discussion covers penitential psalms and those expressing complaint, underscoring Lamentations' use of these traditions.** Allen also considers the acrostic structure of Lamentations in the original Hebrew, and its psychological role in organizing grief. **Ultimately, the session provides a framework for understanding Lamentations as a means of processing profound loss and finding a path toward envisioning a future beyond despair.**

2. 12 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Allen, Lamentations, Session 2 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Major Prophets → Lamentations).



**Allen_Lam_Session0
2.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Allen, Ezekiel, Session 2, Introduction, Part 2

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. Leslie Allen's lecture on Lamentations:

Briefing Document: Dr. Leslie Allen on Lamentations, Session 2

Main Theme: The book of Lamentations navigates communal grief and crisis through a dual tradition of secular lament and spiritual prayer, ultimately aiming to move toward a resolution and envision a future beyond suffering. It draws on existing Israelite prayer traditions, including Psalms of lament (both individual and communal), psalms of repentance, and even prayers of challenge to God. The acrostic structure also provides a framework to take suffering seriously.

Key Ideas and Facts:

- **Dual Tradition of Lament:** Dr. Allen emphasizes that Lamentations operates within two essential traditions in times of crisis: a secular lament for working through grief psychologically and a spiritual lament in the form of prayer to turn to God.
- "Apart from the funeral lament, there was a prayer tradition, and there was very much an emphasis on Lamentations. There are two needs for the congregation to get through their grieving. First of all, there's the secular lament... But there's also a spiritual necessity: they have to turn to God in prayer."
- He draws a parallel to African-American culture with Blues (secular) and Spirituals (religious) as outlets for expressing suffering.
- **The Role of Prayer in Lamentations:** Prayer is central to Lamentations. Zion, the personified city, acts as a role model for the congregation, demonstrating how to pray through grievance, guilt, and ultimately, communal supplication.
- "Throughout Lamentations, there's this call to pray, and very often, it's associated with Zion, this personification of the city... She prays, and really, she's a role model for the congregation to follow. And what Zion does, the congregation is being told they must eventually do, too."
- The book progresses from individual prayers to communal prayer, culminating in Chapter 5 where the congregation responds to the call to prayer.
- Specific types of prayers are highlighted:

- Grievance (expressing unfairness and asking for intervention).
- Repentance (recognizing guilt and seeking to restore the relationship with God).
- Challenge (protesting against God, asking "Why?" and "How long?").
- **Prayer Tradition in the Psalms:** Lamentations builds upon an existing prayer tradition found in the Psalms, where a significant portion of the Psalms are laments.
- "In the psalms, very many of the psalms are, in fact, lament prayers... In fact, of the 150 psalms, 65 are laments, nearly half of them."
- These laments are categorized as either communal (focused on "we, us, our") or individual (focused on "I, me, my").
- Dr. Allen describes a typical structure of individual prayer laments: Initial Request, Problem Explained, Affirmation of Faith, Petitions, Promise of Praise. (Using Psalm 142 as an example).
- **Expected Response to Prayer:** In the Old Testament context, there was an expectation of a literal answer to prayer, often delivered through a temple prophet or priest, providing assurance that God would address the problem.
- "And an answer to prayer was more literal in the Old Testament context... Delivered by a temple prophet or priest who could speak in the name of God... And give assurance, yes, your prayer is going to be answered."
- Examples from Psalms 12 and 6 are given showing that these prayers of lament are preserved as models for those who are suffering.
- **Prayers of Complaint/Challenge:** Prayers of lament are also at times prayers of complaint to God *about* God. Dr Allen terms these "prayers of challenge" noting that 1/3 of the Psalms complain to God about God. In these psalms the questions "why" and "how long" are common.
- Dr. Allen shares a personal anecdote of protesting God following his mother's death as an example of instinctive outcry against God.
- **Acrostic Structure:** Lamentations employs an acrostic structure in Chapters 1, 2, and 4, where each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

- "In the Hebrew, it's very obvious when you look at the Hebrew text that most of the poems are expressed in an acrostic form... they go all through the letters of the alphabet, one by one, and it's very striking."
- This is interpreted as representing the totality of grief. In chapter 3, the acrostic signals a new totality, envisioning a future beyond grief. While Chapter 5 drops the acrostic form, it retains 22 lines in remembrance of it.
- Eugene Peterson's view is presented: "The acrostic is a structure for taking suffering seriously... The unthinkable is itemized... the acrostic organizes grief, patiently going over the ground step by step, insisting on the significance of each detail of suffering."
- **Psychological Phases of Grief:** Dr. Allen connects Lamentations to the psychological phases of grief, including numb shock, denial, recollection, emotional outbursts, evaluation, and finding meaning.
- Lamentations seeks to guide people through these phases, helping them accept what has happened, articulate their losses, and ultimately, find a way forward.
- He highlights that while "closure" in the sense of forgetting is impossible, the goal is to place the loss in a comfortable place within oneself, allowing life to continue.
- A turning point is needed in the grieving process, characterized by envisioning a more positive future despite the continued pain. Lamentations, particularly Chapter 5, represents this turning point.
- **Numb Shock and Denial:** Dr. Allen identifies the importance of Lamentations for a people experiencing numbed shock and denial, emphasizing the need to break the "deadlock" of unacceptability. He suggests that the reaction of the "kings of the earth" (4:12) magnifies this initial shock experienced by the Judeans.
- Allen describes grief counselors observations regarding reactions to the destruction of the NY World Trade Center on 9/11 as being, "pale and zombie-like, not able to focus their eyes on what has happened."

4. Study Guide: Allen, Ezekiel, Session 2, Introduction, Part 2

Lamentations: A Study Guide

Key Concepts

- **Secular Lament:** A non-religious expression of grief, often associated with funeral traditions. It is a necessary psychological process of working through grief.
- **Spiritual Lament (Prayer):** Turning to God in prayer as a means of expressing grief and seeking divine intervention during a crisis. In Lamentations, this is often associated with Zion.
- **Zion:** A personification of the city of Jerusalem, used in Lamentations as a role model for the congregation in expressing grief and turning to God in prayer.
- **Prayer of Grievance:** Expressing feelings of injustice, unfairness, and suffering to God in prayer. This involves a frank and honest communication of one's pain and struggles.
- **Prayer of Guilt:** Acknowledging and repenting for wrongdoing in the sight of God. This type of prayer focuses on seeking forgiveness and restoration of the relationship with God.
- **Communal Prayer:** A prayer offered on behalf of the entire community, addressing shared suffering and seeking collective healing and restoration.
- **Individual Prayer:** A prayer offered by an individual, focusing on personal struggles, sickness, alienation, or other personal crises.
- **Psalms of Lament:** A significant portion of the Psalms (nearly half) that express grief, sorrow, and complaint to God. They serve as models for how to approach God during times of suffering.
- **Psalms of Repentance (Penitential Psalms):** Psalms that focus on confessing sins and seeking forgiveness from God, both on an individual and communal level.
- **Prayers of Challenge:** Psalms that express complaint or protest to God, questioning God's actions or inaction during times of suffering. They often include the questions "Why?" and "How long?".
- **Wisdom Teaching Tradition:** A tradition found in the Psalms that draws on wisdom literature (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes) to offer guidance and instruction, often in a sermon style.

- **Acrostic Form:** A literary device used in Lamentations (chapters 1, 2, and 4) where each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, possibly to emphasize the totality of grief.
- **Numb Shock:** The initial phase of grief, characterized by disbelief, denial, and an inability to process the reality of the loss.
- **Recollection and Reliving:** The process of remembering and articulating what happened, recognizing the range of loss, and expressing the associated emotions.
- **Evaluation and Meaning-Finding:** The attempt to understand the significance of the loss and to find meaning in the suffering, often involving letting go of old expectations and assumptions.
- **Closure:** The process of placing the lost relationship or experience in a comfortable place within oneself so that one can carry on with life, accepting the loss without it being an all-consuming focus.
- **Turning Point:** A moment in the grieving process where the pain is still felt, but a more positive future can be envisioned, leading to a resolve towards change.

Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What are the two types of lament traditions discussed in the lecture?
2. How does Zion function in the book of Lamentations?
3. What is the main difference between prayers of lament and penitential psalms?
4. Why might prayers of challenge be considered "embarrassing"?
5. What is the significance of the acrostic form in Lamentations?
6. According to Peterson, how does the acrostic form assist in processing grief?
7. Describe the initial phase of grief, "numb shock," and why is it important in understanding Lamentations?
8. What role do emotional outbursts play in processing grief, according to the lecture?
9. What does it mean to "find meaning" in what has happened, and why is it a valid exercise for Lamentations?

10. How does the turning point impact a person's grief?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The two lament traditions are **secular lament**, which is a psychological working through of grief often associated with funeral traditions, and **spiritual lament (prayer)**, which involves turning to God in prayer to express grief and seek divine intervention. These traditions are both vital to healing from a communal or individual tragedy.
2. Zion is the **personification of Jerusalem** and serves as a **role model for the congregation** in expressing grief and turning to God in prayer. The congregation is urged to follow Zion's example.
3. Prayers of lament focus on the **sufferer's situation and call for God to act**. Penitential psalms, on the other hand, focus on **confessing sins and seeking forgiveness from God**, recognizing a broken relationship due to human wrongdoing.
4. Prayers of challenge can be considered "embarrassing" because they **question or protest against God's actions**, which conflicts with the common Christian tradition of respectful submission and acceptance of God's will. They involve expressing dissatisfaction and bewilderment directly to God.
5. The acrostic form in Lamentations, where each verse starts with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, possibly **emphasizes the totality of grief**. It represents a comprehensive and exhaustive expression of suffering.
6. Peterson says the acrostic form of Lamentations is a structure for **taking suffering seriously**. The acrostic pattern maintains a posture of attention.
7. "Numb shock" is the **initial phase of grief** characterized by **disbelief, denial, and an inability to process the reality of the loss**. It's important in understanding Lamentations because the book aims to break the deadlock of this unacceptability and encourage movement beyond it.
8. Emotional outbursts, such as prayers of grievance, play a vital role in **articulating the losses and pain associated with grief**. They allow for the expression of feelings like injustice and unfairness, helping to immerse oneself in the suffering and begin processing it.
9. "Finding meaning" involves **understanding the significance of the loss and evaluating the assumptions that must be let go**. For Lamentations it is an

attempt to find genuine rather than invented meaning of the losses the community experiences.

10. A turning point, while not negating the pain of grief, allows for a **more positive future to be envisioned**. This leads to a **resolve in the direction of change**, signifying a shift from solely focusing on the past to looking towards the future with hope, and can lead to closure.

Essay Questions

1. Explore the parallels between the dual tradition of secular and spiritual lament in ancient Israelite culture and the expressions of suffering in African-American culture through blues and spirituals.
2. Discuss the different types of prayers found in the Psalms (lament, repentance, challenge) and how they are reflected in the book of Lamentations.
3. Analyze the significance of the acrostic form in Lamentations, considering its literary and psychological implications in expressing and processing grief.
4. Outline the psychological phases of grief discussed in the lecture and analyze how they are evident (or implied) in the structure and content of Lamentations.
5. Examine the concept of a "turning point" in the grieving process and discuss how it is represented (or not) in the final chapter of Lamentations.

5. FAQs on Allen, Ezekiel, Session 2, Introduction, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Here is an 8-question FAQ based on the provided text:

FAQ on Lamentations and Grief

- **What are the two traditions that are essential for a congregation to get through their grieving process, as discussed in the context of Lamentations?**
- The congregation needs both a secular lament and a spiritual lament. The secular lament is a means of working through grief psychologically. The spiritual lament involves turning to God in prayer, expressing grievance, guilt, and seeking repentance.
- **How does the book of Lamentations emphasize prayer, and what role does Zion play in this?**
- Lamentations emphasizes prayer through various calls to prayer within the text. Zion, often personified as the city, serves as a role model for the congregation. Zion's prayers, particularly expressions of grievance, are intended to guide the congregation in their own prayers. The book shows different kinds of prayers, including prayers of guilt and repentance. Ultimately, the mission of prayer is accomplished in chapter 5, where the congregation takes its turn to pray.
- **What are the two types of lament prayers found in the Psalms, and how do they differ?**
- There are communal and individual lament prayers. Communal laments (25% of lament psalms) are on behalf of the community suffering at the hands of enemies, using "we," "us," and "our." Individual laments (75% of lament psalms) reflect a personal crisis such as sickness or social alienation, using "I," "me," and "my."
- **What is the typical structure of an individual prayer lament as exemplified by Psalm 142?**
- The typical structure includes: (1) an initial request to God, (2) an explanation of the problem or crisis, (3) an affirmation of faith in God, (4) a cluster of petitions or prayer statements, and (5) a promise of praise to God if the prayer is answered.

- **Besides prayers of lament, what other type of prayer is found in the psalms, and how does it contrast with the prayers of lament?** Prayers of repentance or penitential psalms are also found in the psalms. They contrast with the typical lament prayers because they recognize broken relationship with God and need for re-acceptance.
- **What are "prayers of challenge," and how do they manifest in the Psalms and potentially in Lamentations?**
- Prayers of challenge are extreme prayers of lament that express complaint to God about God. They often include questions like "Why?" and "How long?" reflecting bewilderment and protest against perceived divine injustice. These prayers challenge God directly and express frustration with the current situation.
- **What is the significance of the acrostic form used in Lamentations 1-4, and how does it relate to the content of the book?**
- The acrostic form, where each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, points to totality. In chapters 1, 2, and 4, it emphasizes the totality of the grief and suffering. In chapter 3, it suggests a new totality, envisioning a happier future beyond grief. The acrostic is a structure for taking suffering seriously and organizing grief.
- **What are the psychological phases of grief that can be recognized in Lamentations, and how does Lamentations attempt to address them?**
- The phases of grief include numb shock/denial, recollection and reliving of the events, emotional outbursts, evaluation and finding meaning, saying goodbye to old expectations, and ideally, reaching a turning point and closure. Lamentations addresses these phases by articulating the losses, encouraging emotional expression, seeking meaning in suffering, and ultimately pointing towards a future beyond grief, even if full closure is not achieved. The text tries to break the "deadlock" of numb shock.