

Dr. Leslie Allen, Lamentations, Session 9, Lamentations 3:34-51 Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Allen, Lamentations, Session 9, Lamentations 3:34-51, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Leslie Allen's session on Lamentations 3:34-51 explores the book's message of suffering, repentance, and hope for the Jewish people. The session begins by examining God's reluctance to afflict, contrasting it with the reality of the people's suffering under occupation. Allen analyzes temporal clauses describing injustice and oppression, suggesting they reflect the contemporary struggles of the post-siege community, highlighting the perversion of human rights. He interprets verses 37-39, addressing the question of divine ordination of suffering and the legitimacy of complaint. The session emphasizes the importance of repentance, referencing the story of the Israelite's complaints and the experience of Elie Wiesel and Alcoholics Anonymous to show a proper posture toward God. Allen finishes by analyzing the mentor's grief over the fate of the young women, seeing it as a result of helplessness and the result of the experience of the congregation.

2. 13 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Allen, Lamentations, Session 9 – 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
9.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Allen, Ezekiel, Session 9, Lamentations 3:34-51

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from Dr. Leslie Allen's Session 9 lecture on Lamentations 3:34-51.

Briefing Document: Lamentations 3:34-51 (Session 9, Dr. Leslie Allen)

Overall Theme: This section of Lamentations shifts focus from the past devastation of Jerusalem's siege to the present suffering of the congregation under military occupation. It explores themes of injustice, human rights violations, theodicy (addressing God's justice in the face of suffering), repentance, and the vital need for genuine confession to restore a relationship with God. The mentor identifies himself with the congregation and encourages them to confess their sins and return to God.

Key Ideas and Points:

- **God's Unwillingness to Afflict:** Building on the previous section, Allen emphasizes that God doesn't "willingly" (from the heart) afflict people (referencing Ezekiel 18:23, 32 and 2 Peter 3:9). God's actions, even those that appear harsh, have a purpose.
- "He does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone."
- **The Present Distress: Injustice and Occupation:** The focus moves to the contemporary situation of the congregation in a post-war, occupied country. They are facing injustices and human rights abuses.
- "Instead, it seems to be looking at the contemporary situation of the congregation... they were in post-war conditions. But trouble still abounded because now they were in an occupied country and they were under military occupation."
- "When all the prisoners of the land are crushed underfoot, when human rights are perverted in the presence of the Most High, when one's case is subverted, does the Lord not see it?"
- **"Does the Lord Not See It?" (Lamentations 3:36):** This question is central. Allen explores different interpretations:
- **Question of Interrogation:** "Does the Lord not see it?" Implying a plea for God's intervention. Allen leans towards this interpretation.

- **Statement of Accusation:** "The Lord does not see." Some interpret it as an accusation that God is blind to their suffering, a path Allen rejects.
- **Statement of Disapproval:** "The Lord does not countenance." God does not approve of the injustice.
- Allen favors the first, suggesting that "the Lord does not see it" means He *is* taking notice with a view to doing something about it, aligning with other uses of the verb "see" in Lamentations.
- **The Importance of Grievances:** Allen draws a parallel to Isaiah 10, where God acknowledges Judah's grievances against Assyria (who over-punished them) and promises to punish Assyria in turn. God is just and will deal with the injustices.
- "So, this powerful God, he knows all about it, and he will not stand for this denial of human rights. God is on your side."
- **Judgment and Salvation (Verses 37-39):** Allen sees this as a return to the pattern of judgment and salvation established earlier in Lamentations.
- He analyzes the problematic word "if" in verse 37 ("Who can command and have it done *if* the Lord has not ordained it?"). Allen suggests an alternative reading where "if" is omitted, changing the meaning to emphasize God's sovereignty and pre-exilic prophetic revelation.
- He ties "good and bad" coming from God's mouth (v. 38) back to pre-exilic prophecy (Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah) that foretold both judgment and eventual salvation.
- Allen interprets verse 39 ("Why should anyone who draws breath complain about the punishment of their sins?") as a call to recognize their sin and find comfort in being survivors, chosen for a purpose.
- **Legitimate vs. Illegitimate Complaint:** Allen makes a critical distinction between two types of complaints based on the Pentateuch:
- **Illegitimate Complaint (Numbers 11:1):** This is a rejection of God's provision and a denial of their own sinfulness. God reacts strongly against this. "God says, no, how dare you complain? And he regards it as an illegitimate complaint."
- **Legitimate Complaint (Exodus 15 & 16, Numbers 16):** Complaints about genuine needs (food, water). God responds by providing.

- He connects the complaint in Lamentations 3:39 to the "illegitimate" type, a refusal to acknowledge their sins. Allen references Elie Wiesel and the importance of maintaining faith even while deploring suffering.
- **Call to Penitential Prayer (Verses 40-41):** This is the crucial "altar call." The only way forward is through acknowledgement of guilt and self-examination. There's a need to return to God and confess sins.
- "The thing to do is to acknowledge guilt by self-examination. As a result, you will confess your sins and return to the Lord."
- Allen stresses the need for sincerity: "Let us lift up our hearts as well as our hands to God in heaven." It can't just be outward show; there must be inward change. He connects this back to 2:19 (pouring out your heart).
- He describes this as the "Old Testament's backdoor to God's grace," a way back through conscience and confession.
- **The 12-Step Program Analogy:** Allen draws a parallel to Alcoholics Anonymous, specifically steps 4 (moral inventory) and 5 (confession), to illustrate the importance of taking responsibility and confessing wrongs.
- **Model Prayer (Verses 42-47):** Allen sees this as a suggested model for communal lament and penitential prayer. While it's patterned on psalm lament prayers, it's missing petitions for help and affirmations of trust.
- The prayer acknowledges their transgression and rebellion and God's anger.
- "We have transgressed and rebelled, and you have not forgiven."
- It also acknowledges that they are "filth and rubbish among the peoples" and that their enemies have opened their mouths against them.
- Allen points out the alliteration in verse 47 ("Panic and pitfall... devastation and destruction") as a powerful way to emphasize the extremity of their suffering.
- **The Wounded Healer (Verses 48-51):** The mentor (speaker) identifies himself with the congregation, expressing his own grief and suffering. He mentions the concept of the "wounded healer" and how experiencing similar pain allows him to connect with and help the congregation.
- "My eyes will flow without ceasing, without respite, until the Lord from heaven looks down and sees."

- **Grief Over the Fate of Young Women (Verse 51):** The mentor highlights his particular grief over the fate of the young women in the city, likely referring to the sexual violence they suffered during the occupation. He feels helpless because he couldn't fulfill his traditional male role of protector. This foreshadows direct mention of the raping of the women in Chapter 5.
- "My eyes cause me grief at the fate of all the young women in the city... those foreign soldiers leaped on and raped, and it caused him so much grief."

In essence, this passage of Lamentations calls for genuine repentance and acknowledgment of sin as the only path toward restoration with God. It acknowledges the depth of suffering while emphasizing God's ultimate justice and potential for mercy.

4. Study Guide: Allen, Ezekiel, Session 9, Lamentations 3:34-51

Lamentations 3:34-51 Study Guide

Key Concepts & Themes

- **God's Apparent Inaction:** The tension between God's justice and the suffering of the people. The question of whether God sees the injustice occurring in the post-war occupation.
- **Repentance and Forgiveness:** The necessity of confession and repentance as a precondition for God's forgiveness and restoration. The idea that the people need to take the first step before God can move from punishment to salvation.
- **Legitimate vs. Illegitimate Complaint:** Differentiating between complaints that acknowledge sin and seek restoration, and complaints that reject God's will and explanation of their circumstances. Drawing a comparison to the complaints of the Israelites in the wilderness.
- **The "Wounded Healer":** The mentor's personal suffering as a source of empathy and credibility in guiding the congregation toward repentance.
- **The Double Prophetic Message:** The dual nature of God's message through the prophets: judgment for sin, followed by the promise of salvation and restoration if repentance occurs.
- **Communal Lament and Penitential Prayer:** Understanding the structure and elements of a communal lament, with an emphasis on the inclusion of penitential elements, acknowledging sin and seeking forgiveness.
- **The Mentor's Role:** Understanding the mentor's role as a leader, a guide, and one who identifies with the suffering of the people. He encourages repentance and suggests a model prayer.

Quiz

1. According to Allen, what are the three possible interpretations of the phrase "Does the Lord not see it?" in Lamentations 3:36?
2. How does the mentor in Lamentations 3:34-36 shift the focus from past disasters to the present situation of the congregation?

3. Explain the significance of the phrase "in the presence of the Most High" in Lamentations 3:35.
4. What is the problem with the question posed in verse 37, "Who can command and have it done if the Lord has not ordained it?" How do some commentators attempt to resolve this problem?
5. According to Allen, how does the word "complain" in Lamentations 3:39 relate to the complaints of the Israelites in the wilderness?
6. Explain the distinction between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" complaints, using examples from the Pentateuch.
7. According to Allen, what are the two actions the mentor asks the congregation to take in Lamentations 3:40-41?
8. What is the "backdoor to God's grace" that Allen mentions in relation to repentance in the Old Testament?
9. According to Allen, what are the typical elements found in the psalm lament prayer?
10. Explain the significance of the mentor's grief over the "fate of all the young women in the city" in Lamentations 3:51.

Answer Key

1. The phrase can be interpreted as a question (Does the Lord not see it?), a statement that God does not see (or is blind), or a statement that the Lord does not countenance (approve of) the injustice.
2. The mentor focuses on the congregation's current experience of being under military occupation, facing injustices and the perversion of human rights, rather than dwelling on the past destruction of Jerusalem. He's addressing their present-day reality.
3. This phrase emphasizes the all-seeing nature of God and that injustices are occurring before an omniscient God, thus suggesting that God is aware of the suffering and will eventually act justly. It is intended to offer reassurance and consolation.
4. The Hebrew text does not include the word "if," which changes the meaning. Some commentators interpret it as affirming God's power and asking rhetorically if the Lord has not ordained events, thus emphasizing God's sovereignty.

5. The word "complain" is used in a negative sense, similar to the Israelites' illegitimate complaint in Numbers 11, where they rejected God's provision of manna. It suggests a rejection of God's will and an unwillingness to acknowledge their sin.
6. Legitimate complaints express a genuine need and seek God's provision (e.g., complaints about lack of food/water in Exodus and Numbers), while illegitimate complaints reject God's provision and express discontent with God's plan (e.g., Numbers 11: rejecting the manna and longing for Egypt).
7. First, test and examine their ways, which involves self-examination and acknowledging their guilt. Second, lift up their hearts as well as their hands to God, which involves sincere repentance and genuine turning back to God.
8. The "backdoor to God's grace" refers to approaching God through conscience and confession, acknowledging sin and seeking forgiveness as a path to restoration, even when one has not followed the "front door" approach of good behavior and intent.
9. The typical elements found in the psalm lament prayer are a negative reference to God, negative references to what human enemies are doing to the people, and the confession of sin.
10. This grief highlights the vulnerability of women in the occupied city and the mentor's own powerlessness to protect them. It may also reflect a deeper sense of the trauma and injustice experienced by the community.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the role of the "wounded healer" concept in Lamentations 3:34-51, focusing on how the mentor's personal experiences contribute to his ability to guide the congregation toward repentance.
2. Compare and contrast the different interpretations of Lamentations 3:36 ("Does the Lord not see it?") and discuss the theological implications of each interpretation.
3. Discuss the significance of the mentor's emphasis on the need for repentance in Lamentations 3:34-51. How does he connect repentance to the possibility of future forgiveness and restoration?

4. Explain how the mentor uses historical examples, such as the complaints of the Israelites in the wilderness, to illustrate the importance of acknowledging sin and adopting the right attitude toward God's judgment.
5. Explore the connection between Lamentations 3:34-51 and the "double prophetic message" of judgment followed by salvation. How does the mentor use this message to offer hope to the suffering congregation?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Lament:** A passionate expression of grief or sorrow, often in the form of a poem or song.
- **Repentance:** Sincere regret or remorse for one's sins, accompanied by a turning away from sin and a desire for forgiveness.
- **Confession:** The act of acknowledging and admitting one's sins, often to God or to another person.
- **Steadfast Love:** A term used to describe God's unwavering love and faithfulness to his people, even in the face of their sin and disobedience.
- **The Most High:** A title for God that emphasizes his omnipotence and supreme authority.
- **Wounded Healer:** A concept that suggests that healers who have experienced suffering themselves can be more effective in helping others who are suffering.
- **Prophetic Revelation:** Communication from God through prophets conveying messages, warnings, or promises.
- **Pre-Exilic:** Referring to the period before the Babylonian exile of the Jewish people in the 6th century BC.
- **Post-War Conditions:** The state of a society following a war, often characterized by political instability, economic hardship, and social disruption.
- **Penitential Prayer:** A prayer expressing remorse for sins and seeking forgiveness.

5. FAQs on Allen, Ezekiel, Session 9, Lamentations 3:34-51, Biblelearning.org (BeL)

Lamentations 3:34-51 FAQ

- **What is the significance of Lamentations 3:33 in relation to God's actions described in the following verses (3:34-51)?**
- Lamentations 3:33 states that God does not willingly inflict suffering. This verse provides a crucial context for understanding the lament that follows. While verses 34-51 describe instances of immense suffering and injustice experienced by the people, 3:33 reminds the reader that this suffering is not God's inherent desire, but rather a consequence of other factors, such as the people's sins and the actions of their enemies. It also provides hope that the current situation may change through repentance.
- **In Lamentations 3:34-36, what specific circumstances are being lamented, and how do they relate to the post-siege situation?**
- These verses lament the injustices and oppressions experienced by the people in the *post-siege* environment. They specifically refer to the crushing of prisoners, the perversion of human rights, and the subversion of justice. These are not simply memories of the siege itself, but present-day realities under military occupation. The people are experiencing a new kind of distress, marked by the denial of basic rights and the inability to find redress for their grievances within the existing power structures.
- **How does the speaker interpret the question posed in Lamentations 3:36, "Does the Lord not see it?"**
- The speaker argues that the question "Does the Lord not see it?" should indeed be taken as a question, implying that God *does* see the injustices and oppression. The alternative interpretation, "The Lord does not see," which suggests God is blind or indifferent, is considered less likely. The speaker supports the interpretation that God sees but *does not approve* of what is happening. The emphasis is that God takes notice of these problems with the intention of intervening and addressing them.

- **What is the significance of referring to God as the "Most High" in Lamentations 3:35?**
- Referring to God as the "Most High" (Omnipotent God, All-Seeing God) emphasizes God's power and sovereignty, particularly in contrast to the apparent powerlessness of the afflicted people. It serves as a reminder that even amidst injustice and oppression, God is still in control and is aware of what is happening. It provides a sense of reassurance that God, as the ultimate authority and champion of justice, will eventually intervene and rectify the situation.
- **What is the meaning and importance of Lamentations 3:37-39, particularly in relation to the concept of divine judgment?**
- Lamentations 3:37-39 discusses the relationship between divine decree and human suffering. The passage emphasizes God's sovereignty over all events, good and bad. It questions why humans should complain about the punishment of their sins. This encourages the people to acknowledge their sins and accept the punishment as a necessary consequence. It is also noted that Verse 37 refers back to pre-exilic prophecy as a warrant for the mentor's policy.
- **In Lamentations 3:39, what is the significance of the word "complain" and how does it relate to the complaints of the Israelites in the wilderness?**
- The word "complain" in verse 39 is significant because it carries a negative connotation, similar to the complaints made by the Israelites in Numbers 11. This type of complaint is seen as a rejection of God's will and provision, rather than a genuine expression of need. The speaker contrasts this with the legitimate complaints about lack of food and water, where God provided solutions. The complaint about the punishment of sin is considered illegitimate because it denies the people's own wrongdoing.
- **How does the speaker connect the call to penitential prayer in Lamentations 3:40-41 with the steps taken in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)?**
- The speaker draws a parallel between the call to self-examination and repentance in Lamentations 3:40-41 and the 12-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous. Specifically, step 4 (making a moral inventory) and step 5 (admitting the nature of one's wrongs) are seen as mirroring the call to acknowledge guilt, confess sins, and return to God. Both situations emphasize the importance of taking responsibility for one's actions as a necessary step toward healing and restoration.

- **What specific suffering does the mentor focus on in Lamentations 3:48-51, and how does this connect to the concept of the "wounded healer"?**
- In Lamentations 3:48-51, the mentor expresses his profound grief and sorrow, particularly focusing on the fate of the young women in the city who have been raped by the invading soldiers. This highlights the specific trauma and humiliation experienced by the community in the aftermath of the siege. This connects to the concept of the "wounded healer" in two ways. The speaker is overwhelmed by the suffering he sees, but also recognizes that his own past experiences of suffering, which are on par with what the congregation experienced, allow him to empathize deeply with the congregation, and help him act as a tool to help them return to God. The fact that he too has suffered gives him credibility and allows him to guide the congregation toward healing and restoration.