

Dr. Leslie Allen, Lamentations, Session 14, Lamentations 5:17-22 Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Allen, Lamentations, Session 14, Lamentations 5:17-22, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Leslie Allen's Session 14 lecture on Lamentations 5:17-22 explores the closing verses of Lamentations. The verses are analyzed, revealing a move from a general lament to a Psalm of Complaint against God. Allen highlights the negativity and challenging tone towards God in the text, aligning it with a subtype of psalm laments found in the book of Psalms. He explains how the devastation of Mount Zion and the apparent contradiction of Zion theology lead to this protest. Allen further notes that this form of challenge, though seemingly absent from Christian practice, has roots in the Old Testament and continues in Judaism, while drawing parallels to other biblical texts and human experiences to underscore the intent behind such complaints.

**2. 10 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Allen, Lamentations, Session 14 – 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_Session1
4.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Allen, Ezekiel, Session 14, Lamentations 5:17-22

Here's a briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided excerpt of Dr. Leslie Allen's lecture on Lamentations 5:17-22:

Briefing Document: Lamentations 5:17-22 - A Psalm of Complaint

Main Theme: This section of Lamentations, particularly verses 20-22, is best understood not simply as a general psalm lament, but as a specific subtype: a "psalm of complaint" against God. This involves questioning God's actions (or inactions) and expressing bewilderment and protest.

Key Ideas and Facts:

- **Shift in Tone:** Allen highlights a shift starting in verse 17. While recognizing elements of a traditional prayer lament (petition, affirmation of faith), the negativity of verses 20 and 22, specifically the "double why," signals a different type of lament. "There's such a switch here at the end of verse 16, and we seem to be starting again with verse 17."
- **Psalm of Complaint Subtype:** Citing Craig Broyles' work, Allen notes that a significant portion of psalm laments (21 out of 65) fall into this "psalm of complaint" category. These are not simply complaints about human suffering, but direct challenges to God. These psalms often feature the questions "Why?" and "How long?". "And he told us that there are 65 psalm laments. And 44 of those are general psalm laments. But 21 belong to a subtype which we can call psalms of complaint."
- **Reasons for Complaint:** Several reasons for complaints against God are found in the Psalms, these include: God's failure to answer prayers, God's absence during times of need, God's presence as a negative force, and the suffering involving humiliation.
- **Devastation of Mount Zion:** Verses 17-18 focus on the desolation of Mount Zion, a key element causing grief and questioning of Zion theology. Allen emphasizes the repeated use of the preposition "because of" to highlight the cause of their distress. He also stresses the word "shamem", often translated as "desolate" or "devastated," which is a keyword throughout Lamentations. "Because of this, our hearts are sick, and because of these things, our eyes have grown dim, then a colon. What is it? Because of Mount Zion, which lies desolate." Allen describes it

as "a valuable word because, as in the Hebrew, it covers both an objective phenomenon and then the subjective reaction, devastation."

- **Zion Theology Challenge:** The devastation of Zion directly contradicts "Zion theology," the belief that God would protect Zion and that all would be well. This creates a crisis of faith and a challenge to God's promises. "And, of course, this is a great source of grief because it cuts across centuries of history and theology and spiritual normality because over against that we have Zion theology. All is going to be well. All is going to be well for Zion."
- **Affirmation of Faith as Persuasion:** Verse 19 ("You, O Lord, reign forever...") is not simply an affirmation, but a persuasive argument: a reminder of what God *should* be, and a challenge to why He isn't acting accordingly. "This, God, is what we expect you to be. Why aren't you being it? Reigning forever. Your throne is enduring to all generations."
- **Explicit Protest:** Verses 20-22 contain the explicit protest, questioning God's abandonment and apparent rejection. The repeated questioning ("Why have you forgotten us completely? Why have you forsaken us these many days?") highlights the depth of their bewilderment.
- **Implicit Petitions:** The challenges are implicitly petitions for God to change course and act in accordance with his character and promises.
- **Chapter 3 as Warrant:** Allen argues that Lamentations chapter 3 provides a basis for the congregation's challenges in chapter 5. Chapter 3 suggests God's two-part plan (punishment followed by good), the permanence of God's covenant love, and the possibility of a "backdoor approach" to God's acceptance.
- **Tentative Restoration:** Verse 21 ("Restore us to yourself...") expresses a desire for restoration but acknowledges dependence on God's sovereign will.
- **Final Challenge:** Verse 22 ("Unless you have utterly rejected us...") ends with a strong challenge, hoping to prompt God to answer and reverse his perceived rejection. This is similar to the dynamic in Isaiah 49:14-15, where Zion claims God has forsaken her, but God responds with reassurance.
- **Christianity and Complaint:** Allen suggests that Christianity has largely abandoned the tradition of complaining to God, possibly due to its historical dominance. Judaism, on the other hand, has incorporated complaint into its practices, especially during times of persecution (as exemplified in *Fiddler on the Roof*). "Judaism has taken up a complaint and used it especially in times of

persecution. And it occurs complaint, protest to God occurs in rabbinic texts and prayers."

Overall Significance: Allen's lecture emphasizes the importance of understanding Lamentations 5:17-22 as a courageous and theologically grounded expression of protest against God in the face of overwhelming suffering. It also raises questions about the role of lament and complaint in contemporary Christian faith.

4. Study Guide: Allen, Ezekiel, Session 14, Lamentations 5:17-22

Lamentations 5:17-22 Study Guide

Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. According to Allen, what makes Lamentations 5:17-22 "uncharted territory" compared to the rest of the book?
2. What two questions are characteristic of Psalms of Complaint?
3. Why, according to Allen, is there a complaint against God in Lamentations 5?
4. Give three examples of complaints against God found in the Psalms.
5. What does the phrase "our eyes have grown dim" mean in Lamentations 5:17?
6. Why is the desolation of Mount Zion a shocking circumstance?
7. In what way can the affirmation of faith in verse 19 be seen as a form of protest?
8. What is Zion theology, and how does it relate to Lamentations 5?
9. According to Allen, in what three ways does Chapter 3 give a warrant to the congregation's appeals and challenges in Chapter 5?
10. What is the significance of the mentor's statement in Lamentations 3:31: "The Lord will not reject forever"?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Lamentations 5:17-22 is "uncharted territory" due to the negativity expressed in verses 20 and 22, which take the form of complaints against God. This is a different approach than the general psalm lament, which typically seeks God's help without such explicit questioning of God's actions.
2. The two questions characteristic of Psalms of Complaint are "Why?" and "How long?" These questions express protest and bewilderment rather than seeking information; they reflect a sense that the suffering is excessive and unbearable.
3. Allen argues that the complaint against God in Lamentations 5 arises from the post-war situation and the continued suffering of the people. Despite the end of

the siege of Jerusalem, the harassment continues, leading to a sense that their objective grief is unending.

4. Examples of complaints against God found in the Psalms include: God has failed to answer long and fervent prayers; God is absent when needed most; and God is present only as a negative force. Additionally, the suffering involves humiliation or is otherwise excessive.
5. The phrase "our eyes have grown dim" in Lamentations 5:17 is an idiom signifying a failure to understand what is happening from God's perspective. It refers to a spiritual blindness or lack of comprehension regarding the reasons for their suffering.
6. The desolation of Mount Zion is a shocking circumstance because it contradicts centuries of Zion theology, which promised that all would be well for Zion. The devastation creates a crisis in terms of expectation and belief, questioning where God stands in relation to Zion.
7. The affirmation of faith in verse 19 ("But you, O Lord, reign forever; your throne endures to all generations") can be seen as a form of protest because it highlights the contrast between what God is expected to be (a reigning, enduring presence) and what the people are experiencing (forsakenness and rejection). It implicitly challenges God to live up to those promises.
8. Zion theology is the belief that God's kingship is closely associated with the temple in Zion, promising protection and prosperity for Jerusalem. In Lamentations 5, the desolation of Zion and the suffering of its people directly contradict this theology, leading to questions and complaints about God's faithfulness.
9. Chapter 3 gives a warrant to the congregation's appeals and challenges in Chapter 5 in three ways: by spelling out God's two-part plan of punishment followed by good, by pointing to the permanence of God's covenant love, and by referencing the backdoor approach to God's acceptance after confessing sin.
10. The statement "The Lord will not reject forever" means that despite the current appearance of complete and utter rejection, there is an affirmation that this is temporary, and there is hope that God may turn from anger to mercy and salvation.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the use of the word *shamem* ("devastated") throughout the Book of Lamentations. How does its use contribute to the overall message of the book?
2. Compare and contrast the "general psalm lament" with the "psalm of complaint." How does Lamentations 5:17-22 fit into either or both of these categories?
3. Discuss the role of Zion theology in Lamentations 5:17-22. How does the passage challenge or reaffirm traditional beliefs about God's relationship with Zion?
4. Explain the concept of "challenging God" as it relates to Lamentations 5:17-22. Is such a challenge appropriate in prayer? Why or why not?
5. Examine the parallels between Lamentations 5:17-22 and other biblical passages, such as Psalm 22, Psalm 89, and Isaiah 49:14-15. What do these parallels reveal about the nature of faith in times of crisis?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Lament:** A passionate expression of grief or sorrow; in a biblical context, often a prayer expressing sorrow over a disaster or personal suffering.
- **Psalm Lament:** A type of psalm that expresses grief, sorrow, or complaint, typically including a petition for God's help.
- **Psalm of Complaint:** A subtype of the psalm lament that includes explicit complaints or accusations against God, questioning God's actions or faithfulness.
- **Zion Theology:** A set of beliefs and traditions centered on the importance of Mount Zion (Jerusalem) as the dwelling place of God and the symbol of God's covenant with Israel.
- **Shamem (Devastated):** A Hebrew adjective and verb used throughout Lamentations to describe the objective ruin and subjective feelings of desolation experienced by the people.
- **Exegesis:** Critical interpretation or explanation of a text, especially of scripture.
- **Intertextuality:** The relationship between texts, especially literary ones.
- **Mentor:** An experienced and trusted adviser.
- **Congregation:** a group of people assembled for religious worship.
- **Sovereignty:** Supreme power or authority.

5. FAQs on Allen, Ezekiel, Session 14, Lamentations 5:17-22, Biblealearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions About Lamentations 5:17-22

1. How does Lamentations 5:17-22 differ from the rest of the book of Lamentations and general psalm laments?

This section marks a new start, shifting focus from the immediate occupation to the broader devastation of Jerusalem and the Temple. Unlike typical psalm laments that simply describe a crisis and ask for God's help, this passage expresses negativity and complaint directed *at* God, questioning His abandonment and anger. It aligns with a specific subtype of psalm known as "psalms of complaint."

2. What are "psalms of complaint" and how do they relate to Lamentations 5:17-22?

"Psalms of complaint" (identified by Craig Broyles) are a subtype of psalm lament where the speaker voices a complaint *against* God, not just about external circumstances or enemies. These psalms often contain questions like "Why?" and express a sense of bewilderment and protest against God's perceived inaction or negative actions. Lamentations 5:20-22 echoes this format with its double "Why?" questioning God's forgetfulness and abandonment.

3. What specific complaints against God are found in the Psalms, and how are these echoed in Lamentations?

Common complaints in these Psalms include: God's failure to answer prayers, God's absence when needed most, God's presence only as a negative force, the believer's impending death and termination of their relationship with God, and suffering that involves humiliation. Lamentations, particularly in the recognition of devastation, echoes these themes, especially the sense of God's absence and the feeling of excessive, ongoing suffering after the initial devastation.

4. What is the significance of the phrase "Mount Zion which lies desolate" in Lamentations 5:18?

The desolation of Mount Zion (referring either to the city of Jerusalem including the temple or specifically to the Temple Mount) is a vivid and shocking reminder of the disaster. It signifies not only the physical destruction but also a crisis in the expectation of "Zion theology" – the belief that all will be well for Zion, as God's kingship was associated with it. Its ruined state creates a conflict between past beliefs and present reality, prompting protest and challenge to God. The Hebrew adjective *shamem*, meaning "devastated," is a key term throughout Lamentations that captures both the objective destruction and the subjective emotional reaction to it.

5. How does the affirmation of faith in Lamentations 5:19 ("You, O Lord, reign forever...") function within this context of complaint?

The affirmation of God's eternal reign serves a dual purpose. While it reflects a general trust in God, in the context of a complaint it takes on a *persuasive* role. It reminds God of what He is *expected* to be – a reigning, enduring sovereign – and implicitly challenges Him to act in accordance with that nature. It questions why God isn't fulfilling these expectations, contrasting the theological ideal with the harsh reality.

6. What is the nature of the "challenge" presented to God in Lamentations 5:20-22?

The challenge is presented in the form of questions and a final statement. The questions "Why have you forgotten us completely? Why have you forsaken us these many days?" express bewilderment at God's apparent absence. The final statement, "Unless you have utterly rejected us and are angry with us beyond measure," acts as the ultimate challenge, pushing God to respond and disprove this possibility, motivating God to change his negative purposes to positive ones. The hope is that God will negate the statement and provide an answer.

7. What theological basis does the congregation have for making such a bold challenge to God?

The challenge builds upon theological foundations established earlier in Lamentations, particularly in chapter 3: (1) the concept of God's two-part plan (punishment followed by blessing), implying a plea for the "good" to happen; (2) the permanence of God's covenant love; and (3) the opportunity for repentance and acceptance after confessing sin. These factors create an expectation that God will act differently and restore the people.

8. What is the overall message and significance of Lamentations 5:17-22, and what lessons can be applied to Christianity today?

Despite its negative tone, this section expresses a hope for restoration and a challenge to God to act according to His promises and character. It is not simply despair but a desperate appeal rooted in faith. The lesson for Christianity is the importance of allowing room for honest complaint and protest within prayer and faith. It is crucial to acknowledge the legitimacy of questioning God in times of suffering, rather than suppressing such feelings in the name of reverence. Just as Judaism has incorporated such expressions into its tradition, Christianity can benefit from creating space for authentic dialogue with God, even when it involves challenge and complaint.