

LAMENTATIONS: JEREMIAH'S JOURNAL OF WOES

STUDY FIVE

Coming to Terms with God's Wrath

Selections from Lamentations 2

Why do we feel so uneasy addressing the wrath of God? What makes us cringe when we think about it? God's not cruel or arbitrary. All God's anger—all His indignation—is righteous. There's a good reason for it.

—Charles R. Swindoll

FEW might know it, but the Bible speaks often about God's wrath—His righteous indignation. That doesn't mean God is an angry deity who delights in inflicting pain. It does mean, however, that if we want to truly know God, we must acquaint ourselves with this attribute of His nature.

To ignore, deny, or sugarcoat the wrath of God muddies the gospel or, worse, gives people false ideas about the gospel—namely, that God doesn't care about sin. God *does* care deeply when people suffer because of sin.

Would a loving God turn a blind eye toward the slaughter of races, the victimization of children, or any other horror we might name? No, God hears the blood of innocents crying out for justice, and our righteous God will judge evildoers and set things right in the end. God's wrath toward evil is not limited, however, only to those evils that most humans deem "extreme."

In God's eyes and by God's standards "everyone has sinned" (Romans 3:23) in heart and mind, by word and deed, via action and inaction. Because the "wages of sin is death" (6:23), every person needs to be rescued from judgment. God sent His Son to bear our sin and offer us salvation from God's wrath by believing in Him. Without a clear understanding of God's wrath, the gospel doesn't make sense . . . and Christ's death would have been meaningless.



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The apostle Paul demonstrated the close tie of God's wrath and the gospel when he stated:

For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.

(1 Thessalonians 5:9–10 NASB)

Without Christ, we are destined for judgment. Thankfully, with Christ, we have life.

Lamentations 2, the focus of this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, compels us to come to grips with God's wrath. To understand it. To respect it. To consider how we all deserve it and would receive it were it not for Christ's death and free gift of forgiveness.

At the end, we will come to appreciate the penetrating truth: the one who is forgiven much, loves much.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a few moments to meditate upon Paul's claim regarding Scripture:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

(2 Timothy 3:16–17 NASB)

In light of Paul's words above, record a prayer below requesting God's blessing on your time in His Word.



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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Let's review the Bible study method Chuck uses when he opens the pages of Scripture. It's the same four-step process we use in these studies.

- 1) *Observation*: We read what the text says, perceiving how each word fits in sentences, how each sentence fits in paragraphs, and how each paragraph fits in the book.
- 2) *Interpretation*: We understand what the text means by delving into word studies, ancient culture, history, and theology.
- 3) *Correlation*: We compare the passage with other biblical passages that address similar topics whether they be historical, theological, or applicational.
- 4) *Application*: We integrate into our lives biblical truths and principles so that we obey Jesus' commands, believe Jesus' promises, and walk with Jesus always.¹

Keep these aims in mind as you walk through Lamentations 2.



Observation: Wrath's Calamity

When you observe Lamentations 2, pay special attention to two characteristics of this chapter.

First, notice all the imagery. Hebrew poetry contains many word pictures to make a point—often the same point. For example, Lamentations 2:9 says, “Jerusalem's gates have sunk into the ground.” The city's loss of physical protection signifies her loss of divine protection. Second, notice the numerous verbs that portray how God has acted or what God has caused in His righteous indignation toward sin.



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Observe *Lamentations 2* now and make notes on those two characteristics.

The Poet's Word Pictures	God Has . . . God Has . . . God Has

Now reflect upon the key idea behind the images and God's actions. Summarize the key idea below.

God's wrath always comes after a prolonged period of His patient warnings. His wrath is never an arbitrary explosion of uncontrolled rage. God's wrath derives from a calculated and purposeful determination to act against wrongdoing. God does not delight in wrath or its outcomes. Like Peter said, "He does not want anyone to be destroyed" (2 Peter 3:9).



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Interpretation: The Reasons of Wrath

In this chapter, Jeremiah speaks about the reasons behind God's wrath. We'll explore that topic as well as God's emphatic declaration that He orchestrated Babylon's desolation of Jerusalem. Remember to consult your Bible study *tools*, such as the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* which is one of Chuck's favorites.

Hollow Words

Look at *Lamentations 2:13–14*. Explain the significance of these two verses and how they relate to our subject of God's wrath.

Not even Jerusalem's prophetic class—those privileged with spiritual authority—heralded divine truth. Instead, most of them tickled ears to gain applause and esteem and shekels. Our hearts naturally bend away from God. So everyone must actively abide in God's Word to keep on God's path. The Israelites veered off that clear path . . . and how great was their crash!

God's wrath is always judicial. Every time His wrath appears, there's good reason for it. He's expressing His righteous indignation. He's administering justice. Also, God's wrath is something people choose for themselves. God is not wishing that any would perish.
—Chuck Swindoll



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The Hand Holding the Hammer

God wanted to ensure that everyone knew it was He who, ultimately, orchestrated Babylon's decision to destroy Jerusalem. How did Jeremiah express this truth in *Lamentations 4:16–17*? Why would God want everyone to know that He stood behind Babylon's assault? To answer this question, consider how God's righteousness correlated directly with Israel's faithlessness.

In eternity past—before creation—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit existed together as God three-in-one. Anger and wrath had no place . . . only the rapturous expression of joy, love, and peace.

Amazing to think how we can join that divine dance because of the Father's love, the Son's forgiveness, and Spirit's power. At the end of all things, God's judgment will have been fully expressed. In the new heaven and earth, the redeemed will forever enjoy all the good things of the Alpha and Omega.



Correlation: Whoever Believes in the Son Has Eternal Life

Recall how ancient Israel's physical experiences with God's promises and warnings signified spiritual realities. God displayed His righteousness in His physical destruction of Jerusalem when its people rejected Him. This display resembled the spiritual death we all inherit and earn due to our sinful nature and willful rejection of God.



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We all need God's gift of forgiveness. Jesus secured that forgiveness and offers it to anyone who desires it. John 3:36 captures these truths powerfully. Read this [verse](#). Meditate on it and, below, expand upon the significance of each phrase and explain how the verse as a whole correlates with the truth we learned in Lamentations 2.

Our choices in this life carry consequences far weightier than most realize. Enjoying and following the Son before our death means we will eternally enjoy Him after death. Whoever dies without the Son endures eternity without the Son. Jesus called this the "second death" (Revelation 2:11).

What gratitude surges in those who have the key of knowledge that opens the door to eternal paradise! What urgency we feel to spread that message of God's free gift of eternal life through Christ Jesus!

Application: Cry Out to God

Sometimes a Bible passage contains imperatives that we can theologically translate into directives for following Jesus in our day. Chuck places our attention on Lamentations 2:18–19 which states,

*Cry aloud before the Lord. . . .
Let your tears flow like a river
day and night. . . .
Pour out your hearts like water to the Lord.*

Every consequence of ignoring or rejecting God proves devastating, worthy of our tears. It breaks the heart of God more than it breaks ours.



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As ambassadors of Christ, we pray that Christ restores. He hears our prayers. Take time now to pray—very specifically—for those in your life, city, and country who are hurting themselves by rejecting God. Record below the names of those for whom you are praying.

Because of Jeremiah's lament, we can more deeply appreciate the severity of God's wrath as well as treasure His love and forgiveness. Now, let yourself delight in wondrous amazement as did the apostle John who wrote:

See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are!
(1 John 3:1)



A FINAL PRAYER

Take a few more moments to reflect upon the truths you learned in this study. Plant them in your heart and let them take root as godly convictions. Write a fitting prayer below to end your time in Lamentations 2.

ENDNOTE

1. To review Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org or grab a *copy* of the book for your library. Chuck also uses the *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. It's one of his favorite Bible study tools.

