

BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR



Winter Quarter
December | January | February
2026-27

Bible Expositor and Illuminator

WINTER QUARTER

December 2026, January, February 2027

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LOOKING AHEAD

The main theme for this quarter's lessons is God's love. Lesson 1 introduces God's compassion as revealed to Israel as they endured the hardship of the Babylonian conquest (Lam. 3:1-3, 19-39). Isaiah proclaimed God's future deliverance for the nation that He loves (lesson 2) (Isa. 62:1-12).

The ultimate demonstration of God's love is His sending Jesus Christ into the world (lessons 3 and 4) (John 1:1-14; 3:1-21). Lesson 5 explains Jesus' role as humanity's Good Shepherd (10:1-18). He provides the ultimate example of a loving attitude and compassion in action.

Jesus gave His disciples a new commandment to follow (lesson 6) (13:31-38). The command to love one another provides a clear example for those who follow Christ. The reality of love for Christ and other people is not just some kind words. It involves obedience to Christ's commands (lesson 7) (14:15-24).

The final unit of the quarter explores what it means to live out God's love. These lessons are drawn from John's letters.

Lesson 8 builds on this requirement of loving obedience to Christ. Believers need to walk in the light and reject the ways of darkness in their pursuit of living out God's love (1 John 2:3-17). We must avoid sin, for it is the antithesis of obedience to Christ (lesson 9) (3:1-10).

Jesus provides the perfect example of how to love one another. He laid down His life for us. Lesson 10 explains that we need to follow His example in our love for one another (vss. 11-24).

Our love for God is deeply connected to our love for one another as disciples. Lesson 11 explains this concept more completely as it investigates 1 John 5:1-12.

Lesson 12 adds another element to the discussion of walking in love. Second John 1:1-13 explains that a genuine Christian can walk in love and reject false teaching. In fact, it is necessary to reject such error if we are to walk in love.

The final lesson of the quarter discusses further the need to walk in truth for those who want to love God and one another. It is crucial that we walk in hospitality and avoid following bad examples, reflecting on those who are worthy of imitation (3 John 1:1-14).

—Lynda Kopacz

PLEASE NOTE: Fundamental, sound doctrine is the objective of LifeStone Ministries, Union Gospel Press. The writers are prayerfully selected for their Bible knowledge and willingness to submit to the Spirit of Truth, each writing in his own style as enlightened by the Holy Spirit. At best we know in part only. "They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Truth-Guided Love

GLENN WEAVER

Truth has a bad reputation in modern society. Often it is dismissed as a subjective ideal that has different meanings to different people. Some view truth as intolerant, judgmental, short-sighted, and anachronistic. Too often, truth is considered the enemy of love and compassion and a voice of hatred and cruelty.

However, the Scriptures do not present truth and love as opposing concepts. Instead, truth and love are complementary ideas. It is impossible to have one without the other. Truth without love does not accurately represent the fullness of God's heart. Love without truth results in misguided feelings and actions and, in the end, fails to provide and demonstrate genuine love.

Many New Testament passages describe the close connection between love and truth. The kind of love we are discussing is not the gushy feelings for a first-grade crush or a cute puppy. The love the Bible has in mind requires that believers commit their hearts and minds to serving God and people—even, and especially if, it costs them their own lives.

The primary example of love is Jesus Christ. He is God's expression of love for humanity (John 3:16). The incarnation of the Word of God in Christ was at the center of God's plan (such as the judgment of Satan and establishing God's eternal rule over the world), but in expressing God's love for people, Christ's coming was based on the truth of humanity's situation. God proclaimed that we are sinners in rebellion against God and condemned to eternal death. God's love did not avoid

the horrible truth. He did not coddle us with feel-good language and temporal comfort. He provided what we needed at great cost to Himself.

We see from Christ's example that love focuses on the needs of others. Love does not ignore the reality of who we are, the evil acts we have committed, and our corrupt motivations and excuses. Christ came to die for sinners. We are, moreover, commanded and empowered to express this same love for others because Christ died for them no less than for us.

Christ's example shows us that love for people should be expressed by *actions* that demonstrate love. Consider John's admonition in 1 John 3:17-18. People who have this world's riches have a responsibility to care for the needs of those who are destitute.

Can we say that we have love for people when we are not willing to share what God has given us to help those who are in need? Any words of kindness that are not backed up by acts of compassion are empty. In a multitude of ways, Jesus expressed His love for us, for His disciples, and even for His enemies. Just as He suffered and laid down His life for us, we are meant to follow in "his steps" by doing the same for others (1 Pet. 2:21). First Peter 1:22 explains that faithful obedience to God's truth results in brotherly love. It should be the desire of all believers who are growing in their knowledge of God to increase in their love for people, especially toward fellow believers.

Our new and pure heart can respond properly to God and His Word, unlike the heart of stone that we possessed

(Editorials continued on page 186)

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

LAM. 3:1 I *am* the man *that* hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.

2 He hath led me, and brought me *into* darkness, but not *into* light.

3 Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand *against me* all the day.

19 Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall.

20 My soul hath *them* still in remembrance, and is humbled in me.

21 This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.

22 *It is of* the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

23 *They are new every morning:* great *is* thy faithfulness.

24 The LORD *is* my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

25 The LORD *is* good unto them that wait for him, to the soul *that* seeketh him.

26 *It is* good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD .

27 *It is* good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.

28 He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne *it* upon him.

29 He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope.

30 He giveth *his* cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach.

31 For the Lord will not cast off for ever:

32 But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.

33 For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

34 To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth,

35 To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High,

36 To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not.

37 Who *is* he *that* saith, and it cometh to pass, *when* the Lord commandeth *it* not?

38 Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?

39 Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?

NOTES

The Lord's Compassion

Lesson Text: Lamentations 3:1-3, 19-39

Related Scriptures: Psalm 130:1-8; Lamentations 3:4-18, 40-66;
2 Corinthians 4:7-12; Hebrews 12:4-11

TIME: about 585 BC

PLACE: Jerusalem or Egypt

GOLDEN TEXT—"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Introduction

LESSON OUTLINE

Lamentations 3 depicts a dark moment in Israel's history. Imagine a powerful army coming to destroy your city. Disregarding human rights, the ruthless invaders kill your neighbors, leaving only a remnant of the people. Your nation and your place of worship are gone.

Imagine being led with other survivors to a land where the enemy believes their gods beat your God. Imagine discerning that God wanted you to write a poem about your experience, explaining why—against all earthly logic—you still trust in the goodness of God. Now imagine that God led you to mourn with the battered population and to encourage their trust in God.

1. **THE GRIEVING MAN'S CONFESSION**—Lam. 3:1-3
2. **THE GRIEVING MAN'S REMEMBRANCE**—Lam. 3:19-21
3. **THE GRIEVING MAN'S INHERITANCE**—Lam. 3:22-24
4. **THE GRIEVING MAN'S WAIT**—Lam. 3:25-27
5. **THE GRIEVING MAN'S LESSON**—Lam. 3:28-30
6. **THE GRIEVING MAN'S FUTURE**—Lam. 3:31-39

Exposition: Verse by Verse

THE GRIEVING MAN'S CONFESSION

LAM. 3:1 I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.

2 He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light.

3 Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day.

Jeremiah introduced himself in these verses by describing what he had seen. And what had he seen? Suffering. {We do not always know why we suffer, but Jeremiah did. He knew that centuries of covenant-breaking had led to the ultimate earthly punishment from Deuteronomy 28—destruction and exile from the Promised Land.}^{q1} God's

forewarned response to sin was wrath, not a frivolous or wild anger. Jeremiah pictured God's wrath like a rod (Lam. 3:1). The shepherd imagery may remind readers of Psalm 23, where the rod comforts, but the same shepherd also needs to discipline and teach. Jeremiah knew that both the rod of comfort and the rod of discipline came from the same hand.

Next, Jeremiah described his journey. He had been cast out as part of his nation. Again, this is what the Lord had said He would do to the nation if they persisted in covenant-breaking, having warned them multiple times concerning this. Jeremiah's journey was through darkness. Later in the poem, Jeremiah would see rays of light. Like the rod, God's hand can protect and guide or correct and punish. But at least God's hand was still there.

THE GRIEVING MAN'S REMEMBRANCE

19 Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall.

20 My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me.

21 This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.

Memories can enliven or haunt. If Jeremiah had lived in an age of mental health concerns, he might have needed counseling to deal with the memories of what he had seen. {When the Old Testament talks about memory, it is not just referring to the life of the mind. When God remembered His covenant in Exodus 2:24-25, it did not mean that it had slipped His mind but that He would act on it.}⁹² In Jeremiah 3:19, the prophet was asking God to intervene.

Jeremiah asked God to intervene in his bitterness and homelessness. His home was likely destroyed. In addition, Jeremiah 42 through 43 reported

that the prophet was taken to Egypt against both his will and the Lord's direction.

{His memories were the headwaters of his grief, so he dropped something into the headwaters that changes what flows from mind to heart to disposition: thinking about God's character. Before long, this change of mental reflection did not remove the pain, but it added a new undercurrent: hope.}⁹³ Hope is faith's future-looking relative, looking ahead to what God said He would do but has not yet done. The word for "hoping" is sometimes translated "waiting." While false prophets in Jeremiah 28 promised quick fixes, hope settles in to await healing and restoration that might come after Jeremiah's lifetime.

THE GRIEVING MAN'S INHERITANCE

22 It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

23 They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

24 The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

Why did Jeremiah have hope when most people would have given up? What did he call to mind? While we cannot read his mind, his poem used a cluster of words from Exodus 34:6-7, suggesting that he remembered God's message in Scripture.

Exodus 32 saw Israel idolatrously invite God's judgment right after making a covenant with Him. Moses interceded for Israel—not unlike Jeremiah did in Lamentations 5. Then Moses asked to see the glory of God. In response, God passed by Moses and proclaimed His attributes in Exodus 34:6-7. He told Moses that He is full of *hesed*, or goodness and mercy. This term concerns the kind of love someone has for a person to whom he is committed.

Jeremiah remembered this attribute in verse 22, noting that God's mercies are why Israel did not end as a nation. Jeremiah knew God was committed to doing things for Israel that He said He would do in promises like Genesis 12:3, where He said He would bless the whole world through Israel.

The Lord also told Moses that He is merciful. "Merciful" relates to looking with compassion at someone in desperate need. Moses' era did not exhaust God's mercy, nor did subsequent spells of rebellion. There was enough left for Jeremiah and Jerusalem's ruins. Like the manna God gave Israel every morning, God's mercy kept arriving and getting Jeremiah through the day.

Then, finally, God told Moses that He is faithful. He is dependable and truthful. Exodus 34 uses the adjective "abundant" to describe God's goodness, but Jeremiah used the adjective to describe God's faithfulness (Lam. 3:23). God's massive commitment occurs at the exact center of the chapter's long poem and is the centerpiece of Jeremiah's hope. Goodness, mercy, and faithfulness are the gifts that the book of Exodus gave to Jeremiah when he meditated on it.

These attributes of God caused Jeremiah to say something surprising. Back in Jeremiah 32, Jeremiah bought a piece of property in a town near Jerusalem that was probably destroyed in the Babylonian invasion and uninhabitable. Any land he might have inherited from his family was likely uninhabitable too. {Jeremiah had no earthly portion, but he boldly declared that the Lord is his portion. He would probably never see his broken homeland again, but God was his home. God was enough for Moses when he could not enter the Promised Land, and He was enough for Jeremiah even though he would probably never return to the Promised Land again.}⁹⁴

THE GRIEVING MAN'S WAIT

25 The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.

26 It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.

27 It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.

Hope is future-oriented, but what about Jeremiah's present situation? His simple answer in verse 25 was that God is good to those who trust Him—not just good in the abstract sense but personally good to His people.

Verses 25-27 all start with the Hebrew word for "good." Jeremiah explained two human postures that invite the experience of God's goodness: waiting (synonymous with hope in verse 22) and seeking the Lord.

{Seeking the Lord in the Old Testament includes prayer (cf. Ps. 34:4), meditating on Scripture (cf. Ezra 7:10), depending on Him over the long journey of life (cf. Ps. 105:4), and a commitment to obeying Him (cf. 119:2).}⁹⁵ For what did Jeremiah wait? Salvation. Sometimes "salvation" refers to physical deliverance and sometimes to spiritual rescue.

Lamentations 3:27 introduced an idea that would carry through to the next section also. Jeremiah, by now an old man, offered advice to younger believers. Jerusalem's fall was not Jeremiah's first brush with suffering. Mocked, beaten, imprisoned, and left for dead—Jeremiah had an earned doctorate in suffering. So, for those reeling from this grim moment in Judah's history, he presented them with a lesson in suffering.

THE GRIEVING MAN'S LESSON

28 He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him.

29 He putteth his mouth in the

dust; if so be there may be hope.

30 He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach.

In this section, we can picture Jeremiah as a professor giving a lecture. Experience and biblical knowledge taught Jeremiah that there are different kinds of suffering: suffering in innocence, as punishment, even suffering because of the sins of others. There is more that will be explained in the application section.

For now, Jeremiah began his lesson by counseling his audience to silently acknowledge—or reflect—that God was indeed disciplining Judah. This was regardless of their role as individuals in the collective discipline.

{Years later, Daniel exemplified this posture well. In Daniel 9:1-19, Daniel read Jeremiah's prophecies, thought deeply about them, and then humbly asked God to restore Judah.}⁹⁶

Lamentations 3:29 directed its readers to the dust. Dust, in texts like Job 42:6, is an image of humbly trusting in God's difficult plans.

Why so much focus on humility? Because that is where hope grows (Lam. 3:29). When God restores people, He does so with humble believers, not with those who arrogantly avoid introspection.

{In verse 30, Jeremiah urged his followers not to resist Babylon. Like Jesus would later teach in the Sermon on the Mount, Jeremiah advised that Judah should accept disgrace from Babylon on the cheek.}⁹⁷ Verse 66 asserts that it was God's role to judge Babylon (and He would). Trusting that vengeance belongs to the Lord enabled Jeremiah to learn from his pain.

THE GRIEVING MAN'S FUTURE

31 For the Lord will not cast off for ever:

32 But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according

to the multitude of his mercies.

33 For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

34 To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth,

35 To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High,

36 To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not.

37 Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?

38 Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?

39 Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?

Jeremiah's hope (Lam. 3:31-33). Jeremiah explained his counterintuitive advice to accept suffering: God's heart. God's judgment does not last forever (vs. 31). How did Jeremiah know this? He knew the Scriptures. Alluding to Exodus 34:6-7, he explained that God is full of compassion, goodness, and mercy for them (Lam. 3:32).

{Another reason judgment would not last forever is that, as Ezekiel 33:11 asserts, God does not take pleasure in meting out death and judgment on the unrepentant. Jeremiah expressed this beautifully. Lamentations 3:33 asserts that the Lord does not afflict willingly.}⁹⁸ The heart refers to the seat of one's emotions. When Jesus described His heart in Matthew 11:28-30, He used words like "meek" and "lowly." In His justice, He also judges but not with pleasure of heart. Similar to Jesus' invitation to come to Him in verses 28-30, Lamentations 3:33 refers not merely to the Lord's disposition toward Israel but to all image bearers.

Jeremiah's case (Lam. 3:34-36). Jeremiah now reviewed why God punished Judah. Verses 34-36 read like a highlight reel from the preexilic prophets, now summarized to remind Judah deserved destruction and exile. In verse 34, Jeremiah used a word from

Isaiah 3:15 to describe how prisoners were beaten and crushed, which Isaiah blamed on civil leaders. {Jeremiah experienced this during an unjust imprisonment in Jeremiah 38.}⁹⁹

The next reminders that Jeremiah provided allude to Amos 2:6-8 and Habakkuk 1:3-4. In Lamentations 3:35, Jeremiah described manipulation of justice by bribery. In verse 36, he described corruption in court.

According to Lamentations 3:35, these sins were done “before the face of” the Lord. What the perpetrators thought was covered by the chain of command was seen, assessed, and judged by the highest authority.

Verse 36 says that the Lord did not approve of what was done among His people, using a word that can also be translated as “to see.” The Lord’s sight often refers to His gracious attention, as in Psalm 138:6, when He saw the lowly. The track record of Jerusalem did not invite God’s gracious attention but His just judgment.

Jeremiah’s questions (Lam. 3:37-39). Jeremiah rounded out this section with three rhetorical questions. First, the leaders of Judah spoke and acted to build a culture that padded their pockets, but their words did not have the final say. That should haunt the unrepentant and give hope to the repentant. Neither corrupt Judah nor conquering Babylon would decide the fate of Jerusalem because the Lord is the Great King. They could not speak into existence their vision for the world, but God can, does, and ultimately will.

The second rhetorical question is whether good and calamity are both permitted by God. The answer is yes. He allows both pleasant conditions and unpleasant ones. People cannot always know why He allows certain conditions at certain times—though Jeremiah knew in this case—but believers can know that nothing occurs without His

permission. That equips believers to endure both the good and the bad.

The final rhetorical question in verse 39 is why anyone who is disciplined would complain. Readers may think that Jeremiah was complaining throughout his book. Was he contradicting himself? No, for there are good and bad complaints in the Bible. We can raise our hand to God in an inappropriate “rebellious fist.” On the other hand, it can be entirely valid to raise our open hands to God in a plea for mercy or understanding. {Like Jeremiah, believers under God’s discipline can cry out to Him, expecting His power to repair their lives.}¹⁰⁰

—Matthew Swale

QUESTIONS

1. How did Jeremiah understand why the people suffered?
2. What does it mean that God “remembers” something (Lam. 3:19)?
3. What happened to Jeremiah’s thinking as he reflected on God’s character?
4. What was Jeremiah’s portion and home?
5. What does it mean to seek the Lord?
6. What other prophet read the writings of Jeremiah?
7. How did Jeremiah counsel his followers to respond to Babylon’s domination?
8. How did Jeremiah know that God’s judgment would not last forever?
9. How did Jeremiah personally experience oppression?
10. How can believers experiencing discipline respond to God?

—Matthew Swale

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

This Sunday begins our study of the love of God. No one among us can begin to fathom the love of God, but we will endeavor in these lessons to grasp a little bit about God's great love for us.

Our first four lessons focus on God's love that moved Him to send His Son as our Savior. We begin in Lamentations 3 by exploring God's compassion, which is the basis for sending His Son. Ask the Lord to help you in all these studies to communicate God's love.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to understand the nature of God's compassion and loyal love toward us.

Principle: to realize that God's compassion is the basis for sending His Son to be our Savior.

Application: to remember daily God's loving compassion and faithfulness to us.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

A key word in our Bible study today is "compassion." How would you describe or define compassion? (Allow for response and add these thoughts as needed.) Compassion is a strong commitment of sympathy and concern for people who are suffering difficulty or misfortune. A desire to help such people is only a beginning; biblical compassion is so much more.

As we approach the Christmas season, we focus on God's love that sent His Son to be our Savior. What prompted the Lord to do this? He knew our great need, had compassion for us, and desired to help us. Compassion is what motivated God to send His Son. Today we will learn more about God's compassion from Lamentations 3.

DEVELOPING THE LESSON

1. Jeremiah's lament (Lam. 3:1-3).

The prophet Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations as he "lamented" over the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the Jews to Babylon, both of which were due to their disobedience (cf. 2 Kings 25). We get a glimpse of that situation in Lamentations 1 and 2. (Read or have a student read Lamentations 1:1-3; 2:1, 10, 11.)

In chapter 3, we come to Jeremiah's personal lament over the city and his people. Even though he had remained true to the Lord and had tried to warn the people, he still had witnessed the terrible affliction caused by God's wrath (vs. 1). In addition, Jeremiah thought God had brought him into a time of darkness and had turned His hand against him.

2. Jeremiah's confidence (Lam. 3:19-24). Jeremiah remembered his affliction, misery, and bitterness (vs. 19), and he was bowed down ("humbled") under that burden (vs. 20). Yet he still expressed confidence and hope in the Lord (vs. 21). What gave him such hope was his remembrance of God's mercies and compassions. God's mercies kept Him from totally consuming His people, and His compassions never failed. Those mercies were indeed new every morning (vs. 23).

When Jeremiah remembered God's mercies and compassions, he broke out with the encouraging words "Great is thy faithfulness," a phrase we all cling to and a song many know and love to sing. (If you desire, sing a couple of stanzas of this hymn.) In verse 24, Jeremiah affirmed that the Lord provided all he needed ("my portion"), which gave him hope for the future.

3. Jeremiah's waiting (Lam. 3:25-30).

Recalling God's mercies and compassions enabled Jeremiah to quietly wait

for God to renew His work with His people and once again show His goodness to them (vss. 25-26).

In verses 27-30, Jeremiah observed that affliction is best borne in one's youth so that he can learn lessons that will help him in the future. He described the proper approach to affliction as sitting alone and keeping quiet, not questioning God, putting his face in the dust so as not to complain, and allowing himself to be smitten and reproached.

4. Jeremiah's hope (Lam. 3:31-39).

Jeremiah's confidence in the Lord and waiting on Him led him to endure affliction and have hope for the future. He stated three reasons why he had such hope.

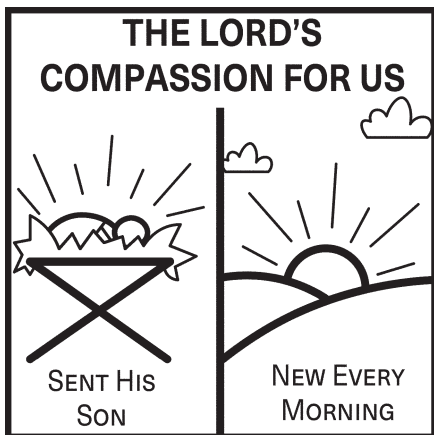
- He knew the Lord would not cast off His people forever but would show them His compassion again (vss. 31-32).
- He knew the Lord did not afflict "willingly" or without a cause (vs. 33).
- He knew the Lord did not approve of those who crush others (vs. 34), deny their rights (vs. 35), or deprive them of justice (vs. 36).

Jeremiah concluded by affirming that the Lord, who allows all things that happen (vs. 37), graciously blesses and justly punishes (vs. 38). In view of this, can anyone rightfully complain about the Lord's punishment for their sins (vs. 39)?

Twice in this Scripture passage, Jeremiah referred to God's compassion (vss. 22, 32). At the beginning of our study, we described God's compassion as His strong commitment of sympathy and concern for us and a desire to help us. God showed His compassion to us by sending His Son as the sacrifice for our sins. And He continues to show His compassion to us every day by helping us in our times of need.

ILLUSTRATING THE LESSON

God's compassion brought about His Son's birth, and we know that His compassion is renewed every morning.



CONCLUDING THE LESSON

(In this section of the lessons this quarter, we suggest you sing or read in unison a verse or two of a song that corresponds to the unit theme and helps focus your attention on God's love. We will also give another concluding idea you can use. For this first unit, we suggest the Christmas carol "Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne" [Elliot]. You may have this carol in your hymnal. If not, the song is in public domain, which allows you to photocopy it. Sing or read the first two verses of this song, which emphasize Christ's coming.)

We have focused today on God's compassion. He had concern for us as lost sinners deserving of hell and acted by sending His Son to pay for our sin. Let us take time to thank God for His great demonstration of compassion. (Ask two people to lead the class in prayer, thanking the Lord for His compassion in sending Christ.) How can you demonstrate compassion to others this week?

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week, we will examine Isaiah 62 and its promise of the coming salvation through the Messiah.

—Don Anderson

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. The Lord's wrath can be so overwhelming that we feel deep darkness, and we feel far removed from His presence (Lam. 3:1-3).
2. No matter the bitterness of our affliction, we are not without hope (vss. 19-21).
3. God's wrath may bring despair, but His great love keeps us from being utterly consumed (vs. 22).
4. On our worst day, God is ever faithful (vs. 23).
5. We should humbly accept God's punishment for our sins (vss. 28-30).
6. God's people have no reason to complain when they are punished for their sins (vss. 31-39).

—James M. Leonard

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why would God discipline people so harshly that they feel driven away from His presence (Lam. 3:1-2)?
2. Are there ways to discern if your hardships are punishments for your sins?
3. What value is there in ruminating and reflecting on your painful hardships? Explain verses 19-20.
4. How does God's great faithfulness encourage you through bitter trials and tribulations (vss. 22-23)?
5. How does the reality that "the Lord is my portion" (vs. 24) lead someone to hope or wait for Him?
6. How does knowing that all calamities come through the hands of the sovereign God help us cope (vs. 38)?

—James M. Leonard

ILLUSTRATED HIGH POINTS

He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light (Lam. 3:2)

As a young person, I used to feel left out during testimony time. I grew up in a Christian home, and I had several generations of Christian relatives to look to. I did not ever feel that I had been "rescued," like so many of my peers. I have loved Jesus for as long as I can remember. This used to bother me, as I felt that I did not have a compelling testimony.

Yet God had His yoke around my neck at a young age, and therefore, He guided me away from many situations that may have hurt me. Now that I am an adult, I can see that it is much better to be protected than to be rescued. I am grateful that the Lord came into my heart before I could get too lost in the world.

It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth (vs. 27)

As a young adult, I was on the receiving end of a surprise birthday party. Some friends blindfolded me and put me into a car. We drove for a while and then stopped. I was led into a building. It was so quiet that I felt frightened. When they took my blindfold off, it was pitch-black dark. I thought something was wrong with my eyes, but it was not time for me to see everyone, so the basement lights were off. Then the lights switched on, and I could see all my friends standing there smiling.

God is leading us through the darkness of our fallen world and will bring us into His eternal light. How lovely will it be to fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ and be with Him forever!

—Maura Todd

Golden Text Illuminated

"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Standing on the Mount of Olives and looking down over the city of Jerusalem can take your breath away. The view of the prophet Jeremiah, though, was not breathtaking; it was heart-breaking. He saw a city in smoking ruins, the temple destroyed, homes ransacked, and lives shattered. The wrath of God fell on a rebellious people in the form of a prolonged captivity.

Yet in the darkest seasons of life, God's message of mercy shines through as Jeremiah wrote, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." These words, penned amid catastrophe, reveal three unshakable pillars of hope that still stand firm today.

The first pillar is found in the words "we are not consumed." In life, we all experience what one author called a severe mercy. God can save or destroy; those are His divine prerogatives. He did not destroy the nation of Israel but put them in a time-out for seventy years instead. God's judgment, though severe, was tempered by mercy. Like a refiner's fire that purifies rather than destroys, the Lord's discipline aimed to restore, not annihilate, His people.

Even in our own lives, how often have we deserved judgment but received God's mercy instead? Robinson, the hymn writer, captured this truth: "Streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise" (*Come, Thou Font of Every Blessing*).

The second pillar of hope is the concept that God's mercies are "new every morning." This speaks to the renewable

nature of God's compassion. Watching darkness give way to light and knowing that each sunrise brings fresh mercies from our Lord's inexhaustible supply encourages us and fills us with hope.

In the Exodus account, God supplied fresh manna each morning. There was no stockpiling for another day. The Lord tells us to ask God for "our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). Some capture the spirit of this with the saying "No Bible, no breakfast." They are serious about starting each day with fresh messages of mercy from God's Word.

The third pillar of hope is the pinnacle of Jeremiah's statement "Great is thy faithfulness." You do not have to live too long in this old world to realize that man's faithfulness is faulty at best. Promises break, friends forsake, and faithfulness flakes. Yet God's faithfulness is as changeless as it is timeless.

God's faithfulness is firm, steadfast, and dependable. His faithfulness might be pictured as a mighty oak standing in the fiercest of storms. Israel's continued existence is a testimony of His faithfulness. Despite their complaining in the wilderness and their continued idolatry, Israel saw that the Lord remained faithful to His covenant with them.

These three pillars—God's grace that preserves, His mercy that renews, and His unchanging faithfulness that sustains—stand just as firmly today as they did when Jeremiah was weeping over the smoking rubble of Jerusalem. While we may not face the ruins of our city or nation, we do often face devastating trials that threaten all we hold dear. Yet each new sunrise assures us that the Lord's compassions never fail.

—Gene Kissinger

Heart of the Lesson

God's love is a simple yet profound truth about His nature. Because of His love, God sent a Savior, Jesus, who loves the world. He empowers His followers to live out His love in every aspect of life.

The beloved temple in Jerusalem lay in ruins after Babylon's sweeping invasion. Lamentations was written in an acrostic format using consecutive Hebrew letters to express grief and to lament Judah's unrepentant idolatry. Suffering strips away false beliefs until the truth of the Lord's compassion shines through (3:1-3, 19-39). When we grieve, our hearts need an anchor of *hope* in God's steadfast love.

1. Honestly acknowledge affliction before the Lord (Lam. 3:1-3). Grief causes tangled emotions. Do not minimize your feelings with a superficial "I'm fine" when someone asks how you are. Grief is necessary, so acknowledge the pain of loss.

The prophet honestly confessed the people's misery resulting from their disobedience and idolatry (vs. 1). He described it as being led into the pervasive darkness of God's chastening reproof (vss. 2, 3).

Trouble is not always God's design; sometimes it results from living in a fallen world. Regardless, suffering can sift us through God's loving hand to achieve growth in godliness (cf. Heb. 12:4-11).

The apostle Paul described feelings of perplexity similar to those the prophet expressed: feeling troubled, broken, besieged, trapped, heavy, uncertain about the future, and near despair (cf. 2 Cor. 4:7-12; Lam. 3:4-18). Such experiences are not foreign to God's people. Remember, God's hands of reproof are extended from sheltering arms of love.

2. Order your thoughts in the Lord's compassion (Lam. 3:19-24). When memories brought little comfort (vs. 20), prayer became Jeremiah's lifeline (vs. 21). He recalled the Lord's compassion that is anchored in hope (vs. 22).

Our golden text is about hope amid suffering. God withheld the severest judgment and extended great mercy. Such unfailing compassion is protective, like a mother's womb protecting her child (vs. 22). Steadfast and firm, God is faithful and daily sustains His children (vss. 23-24).

3. Pursue God by quietly waiting for Him (Lam. 3:25-33). God's goodness strengthens His people with hope (vs. 25) as they patiently await the Lord's rescue and restoration (vs. 26). God desires wholehearted devotion. Learning this in youth saves one from needless heartache (vs. 27).

Troubles should prompt us to re-evaluate our lives (vs. 28). Even though Judah's enemies humiliated them (vss. 29-30), Jeremiah acknowledged the Lord's merciful compassion in upholding them (vss. 31-33).

4. Trust God's righteous justice (Lam. 3:34-39). At times, evil seems defiant and unnoticed, and justice perverted (vss. 34-36), but the Lord sees, knows, and both permits calamity and brings good (vss. 37-38). So resist complaining about God's chastening hand (vs. 39) and humbly align yourself with God's purposes. He exalts the humble in due time (cf. 1 Pet. 5:6-7).

Every day this quarter, pray Paul's prayer for growth in the knowledge of the depth, height, width, and length of God's love (Eph. 3:14-19). Keep a journal of how you see God's love at work. As you do, you will anchor deeply in hope.

—Gregory H. Sergent

World Missions

“Mark” (a pseudonym) and his wife were veteran missionaries who had spent years involved in missions among Muslim people. A series of steps brought them back from Asia after nearly two decades of ministry, and they settled into a quaint North American town that would be their home for many years.

They soon discovered that their town and the greater region in which it was located were receiving hundreds of refugees who were displaced because of hardships and dangers caused by conflicts across the world. They came from many places, but Mark and his family found themselves drawn to several related families that had arrived from Syria. These families had seen the hardship of war; one family barely escaped with their lives from a bombing that had destroyed their home. Some had lived in camps in neighboring countries, where they waited to find out if they would receive status as refugees. Under such circumstances, they were often taken advantage of by local authorities.

The families who had arrived in this small town were deeply grateful for the opportunity to start their lives anew in North America. They had experienced a situation not unlike the deep mourning that Jeremiah communicated through the poetry of the short book of Lamentations. As Jeremiah gazed with tear-filled eyes at the ruins of his nation around him, the prophet expressed his hope in God. God’s mercies, he reminds us, are “new every morning” (Lam. 3:23). These Syrian friends were grateful to be in a land of relative safety and freedom, but would they know the true freedom that can be found only in Jesus?

Mark and his family began building a real friendship with these refugee families. Mark was straightforward in

sharing the gospel with them but did so carefully, using his knowledge of their culture and background so that his message would have the greatest likelihood of being accepted. During long exchanges over meals, coffee, and tea, he was able to share the story of his own miraculous coming to faith in Jesus. He and his wife told their new friends of miraculous events they had experienced, and they shared the Scriptures with them. They were also able to use a Bible study app that included recorded readings of Bible passages in the Arabic language.

When the mother of one of the families went to the hospital to give birth to a daughter, she and her husband asked Mark and his wife to look after their older children. With the parents’ permission, the couple brought the children to church, where they received special appreciation from church members. The love and hospitality went the other way too. Mark’s father passed away during the COVID crisis. When his refugee friends heard the news, they quietly showed up at their house with pots of food, showing their love through hospitality. On all of these occasions, they would ask Mark and his wife to pray for them and for their family members still in danger in Syria.

Other believers have also been involved in the refugees’ lives. One of these Christians introduced the family to a video series about Jesus, and they have been watching with fascination as they have been continually drawn to Jesus. They have also continued to allow their children to attend church on Sunday mornings. While they integrate into life in their community and seek to bring family members to join them, they are being drawn to the One who is the true source of hope.

—Matthew Friedman

The Jewish Aspect

Many Christians are surprised and frustrated by the Jewish people's overall lack of response to the gospel message. "How," they ask, "can they fail to see the connections between Old Testament Messianic prophecies and the coming of Jesus?"

The answer to that question is complicated. It is true that some Jewish people—mainly those educated in the details of Judaism—are conversant with the Old Testament but do not accept that Scripture passages concerning a coming Messiah describe Jesus. For most Jewish people, that is not the primary issue. The primary issues for Jewish people are related to *identity* and *history*. Many Jewish people also face significant theological issues at a basic level, a fact that we will address in a different lesson.

The Scripture passage for this week is from Lamentations 3. The prophet Jeremiah wrote Lamentations as a set of five acrostic poems mourning the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

Like many such events in the integrated elements of Jewish national and religious history, the event carries echoes for many Jewish people even today. Orthodox Jewish people in particular will fast for *Tisha B'Av*, the Ninth of Av. Traditionally, that was the date for the destruction of both temples (in 586 BC and AD 70). While this period involves mourning and self-reflection, it is not as prominent or universally observed as the fast of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

The Jewish people suffered greatly due to the destruction of the temples and the exile. A good deal of further suffering took place at the hands of people who claimed to be Christians, which makes it more complicated for some Jewish people to consider the gospel.

Jewish people's suffering at the hands of Christians began quite early in church history. In his *Dialogue with Trypho* (circa AD 150), Justin Martyr suggested that God gave circumcision to the Jewish people to mark them for persecution because they rejected Christ.

The Jewish people suffered under the persecution of others in antiquity as well, including in Muslim nations. The long Jewish memory of persecution, however, has tended to focus on suffering under Christians because of:

1. the Inquisition in Spain, which included forced conversion of Jewish populations there;
2. the abuses associated with the Crusades; and
3. the vicious pogroms (religiously motivated massacres) into the twentieth century in Central and Eastern Europe.

The Holocaust, perpetrated by the Nazis in Germany, is regarded by many as "Christian," although the Nazis sought a return to ancient Nordic paganism.

In the past few years, and especially in the wake of the terrible massacre on October 7, 2023 in Israel, a wave of anti-Semitism and hatred for Jewish people has surged globally. Many Jewish people have genuinely appreciated Christians who have shown empathy, standing with and weeping with those who weep (Rom. 12:15).

Consider how you could initiate conversations with Jewish neighbors, friends, or colleagues. Meditate on the passage from Lamentations 3, and consider how Jewish people might see the hope in the heart of the book (vss. 21-26).

—Matthew Friedman

Guiding the Superintendent

The tension between the holy God and disobedient humans permeates history. Worse yet, rebelliousness often comes from within the Lord's covenant community. God often mercifully withholds judgment; at times, however, He righteously pours wrath on the guilty. The Judahites received many warnings regarding their disobedience, but their recalcitrance ultimately resulted in God's judgment on them when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC.

The book of Lamentations contains profound reflections on tragedy conveyed through stylized poetry. Each chapter is a well-crafted poem, and all except the closing chapter are acrostics, with each section beginning with the subsequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

DEVOTIONAL OUTLINE

1. Affliction and judgment (Lam. 3:1-3). Writing from an eyewitness standpoint, Jeremiah sympathized with Jerusalem. He communicated that it is acceptable for God's people to express agony while suffering, even if agony comes from divine discipline.

One theme throughout the Bible is the Day of the Lord, a time of judgment. Lamentations 3:1-3 alludes to this day by connecting judgment and darkness. The theme appears in the New Testament from an eschatological perspective, indicating that historic smaller-scale outpourings of God's wrath were a preview of the final judgment.

2. Hope and mercy (Lam. 3:19-24). But things must not stop there. Hope is a critical ingredient of the biblical message. In verse 21, the writer remembered his reason for hope, which then leads into the golden text, Lamentations 3:22-23. The Lord's mercies are "new every morning." We can see God's faithfulness.

Note the word "mercies." The underlying Hebrew word, *hesed*, refers primarily to God's graciousness and is one of the key descriptors of His character in the Old Testament. Thus, God's very character is the foundation of hope. The writer acknowledged that God acted compassionately out of His love and grace toward His people.

The poet's earlier depression turned to joy as he realized that God's compassions are "new every morning," and the poet joyfully declared that the Lord was his source of meaning and joy and the only foundation of hope (vss. 23-24).

3. Discipline and compassion (Lam. 3:25-39). Joyful hope brings the realization that patient endurance paired with humility through the season of discipline will result in a greater blessing. God loves His people, and even when they suffer, He will ultimately show compassion (vss. 31-33).

CHILDREN'S CORNER

Lamentations 3 is an intense passage concerning God's judgment in dealing with His people and can even be frightening for children. It can be important to emphasize, as Jeremiah did, that God offers mercy, even amid discipline. Difficulties may come because of sin or disobedience, or they may just come because of circumstances beyond our control. Help those in your class, whether small children or older youth, to see that God's discipline does not mean that God is abandoning them. The theme appears in the New Testament from an eschatological perspective, indicating that historic smaller-scale outpourings of God's wrath were a preview of the final judgment.

—Alex Jovanovic