

HOME STUDY



Winter Quarter

December | January | February 2026-27

Large-Print Edition

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WINTER QUARTER

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A Family Trait

BLAKE HENRIQUES

This quarter's theme focuses on one of the most comforting themes in the entire Bible: the love of God. God's love is not the same thing as mere tolerance. To equate these two would undo the entire story that the Bible tells from Genesis to Revelation. Why?

While God is arrestingly compassionate, He is also perfectly holy. God cannot, and will never, tolerate human sin, injustice, and idolatry. Because of His amazing love, Jesus suffered a horrible death to kill sin's power over those who believe. Then He rose from the grave so that believers could live forever in His holy presence.

That God is simultaneously loving and holy must guide the way we read our lesson texts over the next thirteen weeks. Our study will be divided into three units. Unit 1 (lessons 1-4) will kick off our study of God's love by relating it to the theme of God's salvation (deliverance). In lesson 1, we will examine a poem of hope from Lamentations, a book that, given its name, is overall dark, dismal, and filled with grief. We will learn that even when our affliction in this life is due to our own sin, God is faithful to draw near to hear our repentant words of lament and to deliver us. In lesson 2, we will learn from Isaiah that God's salvation has a variety of different dimensions. The most fundamental aspect is our being cleansed from sin. Even so, God's salvation is also highly concerned with the reversal and renewal of our practical, bodily circumstances. Salva-

tion, properly understood, is as much a material and physical reality as it is an inward and spiritual reality.

Beginning in lesson 3, we will shift our focus to the New Testament, particularly the writings of the apostle John, and to the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Lesson 3 will confront us with the mystery of the eternal Word of God taking on a human body to save and redeem human bodies from the curse of death. God created all things through Jesus and recreates all those who place their faith in Him out of sheer, abundant grace. In lesson 4, Jesus Himself shows us the way of God's salvation. By faith we are adopted or rebirthed into God's family by the Holy Spirit. In this lesson, we will read afresh perhaps the most famous verse in the Bible, John 3:16. We will consider its larger context. In so doing, we will deepen our appreciation for God's overwhelming, sacrificial love for us through Jesus.

In the second unit (lessons 5-8), we will examine the theme of Jesus' love for the world in John's writings. For John, the word "world" can mean two different things, and we will need to pay attention to which meaning he intended in each instance. The first sense of the word "world" is broader than the second. By it, John meant the whole created order, which God created and declared very good in Genesis 1:31. God loves His creation and desires to save it from death in its entirety (cf. John 3:16). Yet God's intention to

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honor individual human choice to accept or reject Him gives rise to the second sense of the word “world.” This is a reference to the subset of God’s human creation that persists in rebellion against Him and treats His messengers—and His Son—with hostility. John 1:10 provides a helpful example of both uses of the word “world” in tandem. We understand the first two occurrences of “world” in this verse in the broader sense of God’s good creation, while the third occurrence takes a more narrow meaning.

Without the saving help of the gracious God, all human beings would forever remain members of the “world” in the second, hostile sense. Believers are those whom Jesus has called out of the world. Those of this world will in turn be hostile to us because it was first hostile to Him (15:18-25). Living alongside the hostile “world” can often feel confusing or even threatening. In lesson 5, Jesus, our Good Shepherd, assures us that we are and forever will be safe and secure in His presence.

But, on this side of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus’ physical body reigns in heaven with the Father until He returns. How can we be sure that He has not left us? On one level, Jesus’ answer is His gift of His own presence through the Holy Spirit (14:15-17, 26; 16:7). However, on another, much more concrete level, we will know that His Spirit is among us if we manifest Jesus’ sacrificial love toward one another. In lesson 6, we will explore Jesus’ love commandment, which will prove foundational for our subsequent lessons. Even so, lessons 7 and 8 will add an indispensable caveat. Love is not just a feeling but necessarily manifests itself in following God’s commandments (lesson 7), or choosing to walk in God’s light rather than in darkness (lesson 8).

The idea that love and action are two sides of the same coin will undergird the third unit (lessons 9-13), where we



will meditate on John’s theme of living out God’s love. In lesson 9, we will discuss the key question of a Christian’s relationship to sin. We will address the issue of how Christians can simultaneously say that they love God while also acknowledging the continuing presence of sin in their lives. In lesson 10, we will return to the theme of love—the genuine presence of which is, of course, authenticated by works—for our Christian family. Here we will see that following Jesus’ love commandment is indeed the true test of our love for God as well as the primary evidence of our assured salvation. The theme of our love for and trust in God as our response to His gracious salvation will be the subject of lesson 11.

Finally, lessons 12 and 13 will recast John’s themes of love and following God’s commandments in the language of “walking”—that is, the way we conduct our lives. We will learn that walking in love coincides with walking in truth. Walking in truth compels us to walk in love. We will also discuss John’s assumption that walking in love and truth is not something any individual Christian can do on his or her own. To walk the Christian way, we must journey alongside other believers. We pray that, by the power of God’s Holy Spirit, you have chosen to walk in God’s love and truth.

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).

Lesson Exposition

Over the next thirteen weeks, we will be exploring the theme of God's love. Given this theme, our starting point—the book of Lamentations—may come as something of a shock. The title of this poetic book derives from the idea of lament: a loudly vocal, public expression of grief. What could be the relationship between God's love and human grief?

Although Lamentations was written anonymously, traditionally it is ascribed to the prophet Jeremiah, who witnessed the horrific siege of Jerusalem by Babylon in 586 BC. One of the book's main points is that the source of Jerusalem's lament is the Lord's wrath on His people's persistent sin (chaps. 1—2). How can it be possible that our God is simultaneously a God of gracious love to His people and a God with terrible wrath for sin? Both Old and New Testaments are clear that God's love for us through Jesus makes no sense apart from His wrath. Without a clear definition of what we have been saved from, the good news of our salvation through Jesus fails to be good news.

Sin and death are persistent realities for all of us on this side of eternity. The

Bible repeatedly states that no one is good and that no one seeks God. For this reason, large portions of the Bible are devoted to giving us words to help us lament in the face of all sorts of despairing situations. These range from personal sickness, pain, and loss, all the way to national tragedy, including widespread famine, starvation, and death (as in Lamentations). As Christians, we have a great reason to genuinely rejoice despite adverse circumstances (cf. Phil. 4:4-13). However, the fact that lament takes up so much of the Bible's real estate shows us that God cares deeply about our grief. We are never encouraged to ignore our negative emotions, even as we are called to rejoice in the gospel. What does it mean to you that God encourages you to bring your grief to Him?

BRING GOD THE DETAILS— Lam. 3:1-3

Throughout Lamentations, our author took on various personas for the sake of literary effect. In our passage, he adopted the viewpoint of a single inhabitant of the besieged city.

The afflicted man (Lam. 3:1). Repeatedly, the author named the peo-

ple's sin (cf. 1:5, 8) as the ultimate cause of Jerusalem's demise. In the larger context of the Old Testament, the central sin, for which the Lord sent His people into exile, is idolatry (2 Kgs. 17:6-23). In several places, the people's "affliction" is explicitly linked to God's punishment for their transgression (Lam. 1:3, 7, 9). Thus, the man's "affliction" in verse 1 should be seen not as accidental but as a direct consequence of his rejection of the Lord and embrace of sin, resulting in God's wrath.

The source of his affliction (Lam. 3:2-3). Verses 2 and 3 directly attribute the man's suffering to the Lord's wrath. This complaint continues into verses 4-18, which consist of colorful images reflecting various aspects of the Lord's judgment upon our speaker. Significantly, verse 18 ends with the man's heart-wrenching cry that his horribly dark circumstances have entirely driven away his hope from the Lord.

HOPE IN THE LORD'S MERCY— Lam. 3:19-24

Whereas in verses 4-18 the speaker was talking about the Lord in the third person, in verse 19 he began speaking directly to the Lord. Thus, we too are encouraged to continue seeking the Lord amid our trials and afflictions, including and especially by lifting our difficult emotions to Him in prayer.

Remember me (Lam. 3:19-20)! In verse 19, the man cried out to the Lord to remember His "affliction" (vs. 1). "Wormwood" is a bitter herb; the word translated "gall" is describing an unspecified, poisonous plant. The point is that the speaker was calling on the Lord to be near to him in his bitter, even deadly, experience (vs. 20).

The discipline of remembering (Lam. 3:21-24). Verses 21-23 give us a specific model for praying in our suffering. We do so not by ignoring

our circumstances but by reframing them within the context of the truth we know from Scripture. This is something we can all practice. Beginning in verse 21, the speaker actively chose to call on the only genuine hope he had: his covenantal relationship with the Lord.

The word "covenant" refers to God's bond with His people, which He initiated and which is sealed at various points in Scripture by the shedding of sacrificial blood (cf. Gen. 15). Even though the word "covenant" is not used in Lamentations 3, the central terms "mercies," "compassions," and "faithfulness" in verses 22 and 23 all echo a foundational covenant passage: Exodus 34:6-7.

In this passage, the Lord appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai and declared His name and His attributes, emphasizing His perfect and mysterious balance between justice and mercy. Specifically, verse 7 emphasizes that the Lord forgives sin without minimizing the need for justice to be carried out on wrongdoers. This is a constant tension within the Old Testament, and its resolution is not revealed until the New Testament.

While in Lamentations 3 the speaker lacked this resolution, his prayer in verse 24 shows his clear understanding that the Lord honors genuine repentance. For those who see the Lord's chastisement for what it is, genuinely repent, and trust Him for their deliverance, He will open the door into His presence (Heb. 12). In this way—and only in this—can our suffering be reframed as "light affliction," which will give way to the "eternal weight of glory" for which we hope (2 Cor. 4:17).

WAIT FOR THE LORD— Lam. 3:25-33

Waiting for deliverance (Lam. 3:25-26). Verses 25-26 continue the theme of waiting expectantly and patiently for the Lord's deliverance, or

salvation, through to the other side of His chastisement. This is a direct challenge to our tendency to want to change our circumstances as quickly as possible in order to reduce our pain at any cost.

Hope in chastisement (Lam. 3:27-30). The reference to the man's "yoke" in verses 27-28 looks back to 1:14, where the Lord Himself placed the yoke of judgment for transgression upon His rebellious people. If he patiently endures the Lord's chastisement while he is young, the speaker would have the opportunity to live, freely forgiven, in the Lord's presence when he was old.

Verses 28-29 resume the same tension between God's justice and mercy that we saw in verses 21-24. While the Lord Himself promised that the destruction of Jerusalem was non-negotiable (Ezek. 24:1-14), our speaker nevertheless cast himself on God's mercy: there may yet be hope (vs. 29)! He trusted that his chastisement was in fact discipline and not utter rejection, and this made enduring present reproach possible (vs. 30).

The Lord's wrath is not forever (Lam. 3:31-33). In verses 31-33, our speaker meditated again on the Lord's covenant "compassion" and "mercy" (cf. Ex. 34:6-7). Though He judged Israel fiercely for her repeated sinful actions, it is only for her discipline. His love remains.

He concluded that only the Lord can both deal decisively with sin and ultimately cause mercy to win out for His people.

THE LORD'S IMPARTIAL JUSTICE— Lam. 3:34-39

Oppression in Israel (Lam. 3:34-36). We mentioned above that throughout the Old Testament, idolatry is identified as the deepest sin, from which every other sin springs

(Ex. 20:3-6; Matt. 22:34-40). In Lamentations 3:34-36, our speaker named some of Israel's repeated sins, which can be summed up as oppression of the poor, needy, or otherwise socially vulnerable. Both political and spiritual leaders were particularly guilty of such oppression (Jer. 23:9-40; Ezek. 34:1-10).

The Lord decides the standard of justice (Lam. 3:37-39). In verses 37-39, we learn that the Lord is the only one who has the authority to set the rules of holy conduct and to enforce them. Although it is also the reason for His temporary discipline, the Lord's stable righteousness is also the source of the speaker's—and our—hope for the day when all will be made right.

—Blake Henriques

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God can handle, and even desires to hear, our negative emotions (Lam. 3:1-3).
2. Our Heavenly Father's chastisement (discipline) often feels grievous and crushing.
3. We can count on God's mercy when we repent, even and especially when we deserve His judgment (vss. 19-23).
4. Christian hope requires softening our hearts and allowing ourselves to trust that God will deliver us as He promised (vss. 24-29).
5. Compassion, mercy, and justice are all essential parts of God's nature (vss. 30-33).
6. The Lord particularly hates political and spiritual leaders' oppression of the socially vulnerable (vss. 34-39).

—Blake Henriques

FOR DAILY MEDITATION

MONDAY, Nov. 30. Ps. 13:1-6.

How long, O Lord? When we hear the word “salvation,” we may think this applies only to our immaterial souls. It can sometimes feel pointless or even irreverent to clog up God’s inbox with prayers about our physical bodies or circumstances. Yet notice how David defined “salvation” in terms of practical deliverance from the enemies pursuing him. David assumed that God was intimately concerned about his urgent practical needs. So should we.

TUESDAY, Dec. 1. Lam. 3:4-18.

Jeremiah’s affliction. Far from being pressured to censor our prayers, we are encouraged to be completely honest with God about our grievances. If God already knows our thoughts and prayers before we say them aloud (cf. Ps. 139:4), then we need not shy away from telling Him that we feel far from Him. We can even tell Him that we feel pursued and persecuted *by* Him. No area of our lives—physical, emotional, or psychological—is off-limits.

WEDNESDAY, Dec. 2. Lam. 3:40-66.

The Lord’s judgment. Do you ever feel as if your prayers bounce off the ceiling, unable to reach God? Even when we can wholly admit that our suffering is a result of our sin, we dare not stop praying for God’s deliverance. Our merciful and compassionate God transforms the just judgment we deserve into chastisement—discipline for children that has an end goal: eternal life in His holy presence.

THURSDAY, Dec. 3. 2 Cor. 4:7-10.

Afflicted but not crushed. As Christians, we suffer because we are united to Christ, who in the present time is opposed by His enemies, which are

the powers of darkness (2 Cor. 4:4-5; cf. Eph. 2:1-3). Jesus died once and for all and will never die again (Rom. 6:5-11). Since we are united to Him, while we can experience great pain and even physical death, we cannot be destroyed or utterly separated from Him (cf. 8:37-38).

FRIDAY, Dec. 4. Ps. 130:1-8.

Out of the depths I cry. When we truly understand the depths of our sin and its consequences, our prayers for God’s mercy and deliverance become urgent, even frantic. Have you grasped the depth of your sin? Furthermore, is it real to you that you cannot lift yourself out of the pit you have dug? Only God, through Jesus’ sacrifice in your place, can lift you out (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21)!

SATURDAY, Dec. 5. Ps. 36:1-12.

The Lord’s love. There is a stark difference between God’s rejecting judgment of the unrepentant and His covenant mercy for His children. God’s children have repented of their sins and placed their trust in Him alone for their salvation. Christian, the Lord is your refuge! And He not only intends to deliver you from judgment, but He also promises to deliver you into jubilant, eternal life in His presence!

SUNDAY, Dec. 6. Lam. 3:1-3, 19-39.

Steadfast love in affliction. God is both just and merciful and refuses to diminish either of these characteristics (cf. Ex. 34:6-7). The punishment for sin is death (Rom. 6:23). However, rather than subjecting us to death, God sent Jesus to take our sin upon Himself and die in our place, giving us His righteousness—and the result, resurrection life with Him (2 Cor. 5:21; Col. 3:1-4).

—Blake Henriques