

LAMENTATIONS (Teacher's Edition)

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AUTHOR-

Lamentations itself gives no clue concerning its author, but most Bible scholars agree on the prophet Jeremiah as the most likely candidate. The book is realistic in its portrayal of conditions in Jerusalem just before its fall, suggesting the author was **an eyewitness** of these events. This supports Jeremiah's authorship, since he prophesied in Jerusalem during this period of his nation's history.

Jeremiah was a very **sensitive prophet** who expressed his feelings about his nation's sins and approaching doom in rich symbols and metaphors. A deep outpouring **of sorrow** is characteristic of Lamentations as well as some sections of the Book of Jeremiah. All this evidence supports the traditional view that the prophet wrote the Book of Lamentations.

WHEN THE BOOK WAS WRITTEN-

The date of the writing was probably some time shortly after the fall of the city in 587 or 586 B.C.

ABOUT THE BOOK-

The book consists of five poems, one for each chapter. The first, second, and fourth poems are written as acrostics, with each successive verse beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The fourth poem is also an acrostic, although in an expanded form giving three verses to each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The fifth poem departs from the acrostic pattern, but it contains 22 verses, the same number as poems one, two, and four. It seems to be a personal prayer. It is also uniquely written: the meter is what is known as *qinah*. The first member of the verse is longer than the second and is sometimes called the "limping verse." Instead of being balanced and reinforced by the second, it is faintly echoed, giving the effect of the whole dying away in a mournful cadence.

It is clear that the writer of Lamentations went to much trouble to compose this book. He wove several literary devices together, under the inspiration of God's Spirit, to give these poems a somber tone. Nothing less could express his deep sorrow over the plight of Jerusalem at the hands of the invading Babylonians.

In overview, Lamentations portrays the reaction of a devout Israelite toward the destruction of the theocracy. The tragic scene presents God's people as so corrupt that Jehovah has forsaken His sanctuary and abandoned it to enemies. The poet celebrates the Lord's righteousness but bewails the iniquity of the nation and calls upon the inhabitants to repent. The whole note is one of deep tragedy. The Lord's people, from whom salvation would eventually come, have become so vile as to be fit only for destruction.

Lamentations 3 is unique and instructive in many ways. It shows the heart of a true intercessor. In it one person describes his own peculiar sufferings in connection with the general calamity, and then too in the name of the others begins a psalm of repentance. This person did not suffer so severely because he was an exceptional sinner, but because of the unrighteousness of his people. This is what an

intercessor does! He or she **identifies and empathizes** and pleads for repentance and mercy as if they were the guilty one!

The fall of Jerusalem to Babylonian forces under Nebuchadnezzar in 587/586 B.C. was one of Israel's most bitter experiences. In fact, the destruction of Jerusalem and the lessons God taught His people were so significant that the Jews started reading this book at **an annual service** to commemorate the destruction! They did not want the painful experience to be **forgotten** as we should not forget the **painful consequences** of our sins.

Another truth in this book is that it models for us the way we should deal with and confront sin and the justice of God's judgment. We should always declare that God's justice is sure, however gracious His ways. Sin breeds **confusion**, gives place to **evil**, invites **destruction** and produces **death**. God is not vindictive, but His holiness demands the **purging out** of all that is of **sin and self**. And when judgment does come, the proper question should never be why, but rather, "**Why not more?**" These truths, however, should never be declared in a tirade- Jeremiah **weeps** as he explains the cause of judgment. And he states that God **does not** afflict willingly (3:33). In fact, His mercies have left us alive!

Finally. One way to summarize the entire book might be to say that Lamentations served the Judeans as an **expression** of their **grief**, an **explanation** for the destruction, and a call for repentance and **hope**. It warns us today that an immoral nation stands in danger of God's awesome judgment and that the only hope for survival is **submission to God**.

As a side note, one person wrote that they observed that Jews at Wailing Wall gather every Friday afternoon to bewail the downfall of the holy city, kissing the stone wall, watering it with their tears, and repeating the Lamentations of Jeremiah as well as appropriate Psalms.

NOTE: Because of the nature of this book, we will use the basic themes part as our truths and applications and we will depart from our usual order.

A POSSIBLE KEY WORD-

Though there are many themes in the book, they all revolve around one issue, mourning, hence, my key word is: **LAMENT**.

KEY VERSE(S) AND CHAPTER(S)-

It is difficult to choose one verse that sums up the dual idea of both punishment and God's mercy and forgiveness, which are important to the book. Therefore I chose a passage: **Lamentations 3:19-26**. As to the key chapter, I believe, for the same reasoning for key verse, the key chapter is: **Lamentations 3**.

JESUS REVEALED IN THE BOOK-

Perhaps the greatest revelation of this book is the fact that people are **so weak** under the Law and **cannot serve God** in their own strength. This is why we need **Jesus** and are brought to Him (Romans 8: 3). In chapter three, Jesus is seen as: **our hope, the manifestation of God's mercy and compassion, our redemption and vindication**. In a very beautiful way, we also see Jesus manifested in Jeremiah's wailing concern over his beloved city as well.

THE HOLY SPIRIT REVEALED IN THE BOOK-

If there was ever a great illustration of the Holy Spirit bringing **conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment** (John 16:7-11), it is in this book. The deep groaning and intercession over judgment in Lamentations also pictures the role of the Spirit mentioned in **Romans 8:26,27**.

BASIC THEMES & TRUTHS AND APPLICATIONS-

Lamentations features six major themes and all of them are linked to the topic of suffering:

- 1) **Their suffering was the result of their sin**. Not all suffering in human life comes from sin, but the reality mentioned in this book is repeated in every chapter and was obviously fully accepted by the hearers. Their troubles were the result of God's righteous wrath, He was dealing with their spiritual condition and they were supposed to take it personally.
- 2) **Their suffering was seen as coming from God and not from men**. God may have used the Babylonians as the physical

agents of His justice, but there was no doubt it was the Lord who was the cause of all that happened. In fact, one out of every 3.5 verses declares this!

- 3) **Their suffering could direct them toward God.** There is a total consciousness of God, His purposes and dealings. There is no abandoning God throughout the process of His judgment.
- 4) **Suffering, tears and prayer go together.** They were encouraged to pour out their hearts to God, weeping before Him and expressing grief, pain, frustration and shame. Every chapter except 4 ends in a prayer and all of 5 is a prayer, as if making up for the end of 4.
- 5) **Prayer should always look for some ray of hope.** The horrors of the judgment, and the subsequent intercession, seem to lead to the revelation of God's mercy in 3:21-24. There is never hopelessness!
- 6) **Their responsibility was to submit to their sufferings patiently.** Godly sorrow produced by Godly repentance as the result of God's judgment on sin patiently works through the purification process of God's refining fire.