

## *Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey*

Bible Survey Lesson 46: The Book of Lamentations

### **OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS**

#### ***Introduction***

When moving from the study of the book of Jeremiah into the study of the book of Lamentations an interesting fact appears. There is a vast disparity between the introductions of the two books. For instance:

1. In study and reference Bibles, The introduction to Jeremiah is given three times more space than is Lamentations'.
2. In Bible handbooks, it is 4 pages to less than 1 page in favor of Jeremiah.
3. In major commentaries it is even more noticeable with the book of Lamentations receiving only one fifth the attention that Jeremiah receives (30 to 7 pages).
4. Many Bible survey books have even put the introductions and treatments of both books together.

*Surely there is a pattern here, and for good reason.*

1. The vast majority of Jewish and Christian Bible scholars agree with the traditional historic view, that Jeremiah wrote both books.

The translators of the Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate were so sure they even added a superscription under its title saying, "*Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem.*"

John MacArthur does a fine job of summarizing many scholars' material in his introduction in *The MacArthur Study Bible*,

*Jeremiah wrote Lamentations as an eyewitness, possibly with Baruch's secretarial help during or soon after Jerusalem's fall in 586 BC. It was mid-July when the city fell and mid-August when the temple was burned. Likely, Jeremiah saw the destruction of walls, towers, homes, palace, and temple; he wrote while the event remained painfully fresh in his memory, but before his forced departure to Egypt ca. 583. The language used in Lamentations closely parallels that used by Jeremiah in his much larger prophetic book.*

2. The historical time period is the same and Lamentations is obviously Jeremiah's reaction to the last event recorded in Jeremiah 52, destruction of Jerusalem. (This is why many survey books combine the two. Several even had both books covered by one outline.)

#### ***Title and Style***

The term Lamentations is from a Greek verb translated "to cry aloud."

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That expresses the tone of this book which is a series of five dirges, or melancholy poems, mourning over the destruction of "David's City,"

Lamentations is one of the five scrolls of the Megilloth and is read in Synagogues in July or August as part of ceremonies commemorating the destruction of Solomon's temple in 586 B. C. and Herod's temple in 70 A. D.

The book is made up of five poems, one in each chapter, which are written in a cadence called a "limping meter," which was the common step used in Jewish funeral processions. They are typical Old Testament dirges including words of complaint, petition, and confidence.

The first, second and fourth are acrostics of twenty-two verses (lines). Each verse begins with a word whose first letter corresponds to a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, each in turn. The third, or center chapter, is also an acrostic but three verses (a triplet) are allotted to each Hebrew letter. The last poem is also one of twenty-two lines but is much like a lament psalm and is not an acrostic.

### ***Theme and Purpose***

The question needs to be asked: If the fall of Jerusalem was orchestrated by God as a punishment for incessant idolatry and apostasy, why bother to cry out? Wasn't Jeremiah's message that Judah's doom was sealed and Babylon would destroy Jerusalem?

Jeremiah clearly acknowledges the fact that Judah's sin led to the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. However, in the midst of the calamity, he knows his Lord. He knows God is merciful, full of compassion, and true to His Word.

He longed for the day when God would show His favor to His covenant people, bring judgment on their enemies, and restore His Kingdom.

***It is from this heart that these poems come.***

Unlike Jeremiah, Lamentations fairly jumps into an outline with its common theme and poetic style:

### **I. FIRST POEM: A DESOLATE PLACE (Chapter 1)**

The theme of the book is presented in the opening verses. Moral and physical calamity has been visited on Jerusalem *and it is deserved*. So, along with a review of the causes, comes a plea for mercy.

#### **A. Jeremiah Weeps (1-11)**

Jerusalem was like a beautiful princess and now she was a slave. She has been plundered by her friends and foes alike. Her temple has been polluted and her people carried into exile. She is now like an inconsolable woman who has no one to come to her aid and has become a laughing stock because, *"she has become an unclean thing. (v 8) . . . She did not consider her future; Therefore, she has fallen astonishingly." (v 9)*

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### **B. Jerusalem Weeps (12-22)**

The personified city, itself, laments that the Lord has poured out His wrath on her. She knows she is to blame for God's judgment and for the death and exile of her people, but she seeks comforters from among those who claimed to be friends. In desperation she confesses her sin and asks for the Lord to have mercy and take vengeance on her enemies.

## **II. SECOND POEM: A DESTROYED PLACE (Chapter 2)**

This lament describes, in gory detail, the disaster that had fallen upon Judah and Jerusalem. It is obviously written by one who saw it, experienced it, and was torn apart by it.

### **A. Lord's View (1-10)**

Because of its evil, the Lord attacked Jerusalem as if it were an enemy. Instead of protecting the city with His power, *"In fierce anger He has cut off all the strength that is Israel; . . ."* (v 3)

He has poured His anger upon it like fire, abandoning His temple and allowing His city walls to be destroyed. He has allowed the removal of its kings, its law, and its prophets. Only the old men and young women are left to mourn. And *it is all just punishment.*

### **B. Man's View (11-22)**

Jeremiah cries out at the plight of the children dying of hunger in their mothers' arms. He grieves with them, but calls the people to repent and beg for mercy. In the siege women ate their own children to stay alive. In the attack religious leaders were slaughtered in the temple, and the street was littered with corpses. **No one escaped!**

## **III. THIRD POEM: A DISTRAUGHT PROPHET (Chapter 3)**

This lament takes the form of an acrostic in triplets. Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet leads off three verses. In many ways this dirge crystallizes the basic themes of Lamentations. It also foreshadows the passion of Jesus, the Messiah, and thus parallels Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22.

### **A. GOT TO GRIPE (1-20)**

Speaking as a representative of the suffering people of Judah, Jeremiah laments God's hostile treatment of the nation. The effects of this hostility are likened to life-threatening experiences such as serious illness, injury, and imprisonment in a dark dungeon. Judah's distress is compared to traveling a winding path, filled with dangerous obstacles, being mauled by vicious animals, being shot in the heart with an arrow, being force-fed bitter food, and having one's face mashed into the ground.

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### **B. GET A GRIP (21-66)**

*"This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The Lord's loving kindness indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning." (vv. 21-23)*

The Lord's love, compassion, and faithfulness (His mercy) had kept the nation from destruction time and time again. He would eventually deliver them, though He had to discipline them now.

Jeremiah urged the people to confess their sins and come before the Lord with repentant hearts. Then he prayed a prayer of confession and called for divine vengeance on Judah's enemies who were continually taunting them. God had intervened for him in the past and he believed God would be merciful again.

### **IV. FOURTH POEM: A DEFEATED PEOPLE (Chapter 4)**

In a melancholy mood, Nehemiah looks at the past and contrasts the terror and sadness of the present with the peace and joy of earlier days. The glorious City of David is now a humbled city of rubble.

#### **A. Hopeless (1-20)**

The description of a fallen Jerusalem continues. Jerusalem lays in ashes, its gold domes and jewels decorations plundered. The city's children, once treated as precious as gold treasure, were now treated as discarded clay pots. No one reacted to their cries for food, in fact, *"The hands of compassionate women boiled their own children; they became food for them, because of the destruction of the daughter of my people."* (v. 10)

Their sin had been compared to that of Sodom, but the siege had brought a slow painful death far worse than Sodom's instant destruction. The great city, once thought invincible (12) was now invaded, burned, sacked, and totally destroyed, *"Because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, we have shed, in her midst, the blood of the righteous. . . ."* (v 13-)

#### **B. Hopeful(21-22)**

Having described the conquest of Jerusalem, again Jeremiah issues a warning to Edom, one of the confederacies of nations that brought about and profited from the cities fall. Judah's time of trouble and captivity would end, but Edom had yet to face the wrath of God.

### **V. FIFTH POEM: A DESPERATE PRAYER (Chapter 5)**

This lament also contains 22 verses, but is the only one that is not in acrostic form. That may be because it is a very **spontaneous** and **personal** prayer of confession, adoration, and supplication.

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### **A. Remember (1-18)**

Jeremiah begins by asking the Lord to look again, very closely, at what has happened to His chosen people. This time it is worded in a softer, more personal tone, *"We have become orphans without a father, our mothers are like widows. (v 3) The joy has of our hearts has ceased; Our dancing has been turned into mourning."* (v 15)

The confession is short and sweet, *"The crown has fallen from our head; Woe to us, for we have sinned."* (v 16)

### **B. Restore (19-22)**

The request for help comes along with a statement of adoration, *"Thou, O Lord, dost rule forever; Thy throne is from generation to generation."* (v 19)

And finally, obviously with the right heart attitude, *Restore us to Thee, O Lord, that we may be restored; Renew our days as of old."* (v 21)

The book ends on a negative note. There is no assumption of forgiveness here. The people are still stiff-necked, the prophecy of seventy years of exile still stands, and the purifying fire has just begun.

Because of this ending, when the book was read publicly at the memorial service, verse 21 was repeated at the end by the congregation.

That is still done in orthodox services today.

### ***Lesson***

1. There is no pain comparable to the pain of spoiling our personal relationship with God.
2. The right response to that broken relationship is confession of our sin, admission of our need, asking for forgiveness, and changing our behavior. ***"Restore us to Thee, O Lord"***

### ***Homework:***

Read: Begin reading the Book of Ezekiel

Think: What would your reaction be to "a vision of God's glory."

Apply: Pray and live Psalm 139:23 and 24

*"Search me, O God, and know my heart.*

*Try me and know my anxious thoughts;*

*And see if there be any hurtful way in me,*

*And lead me in the everlasting way."*