

BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

1. "Lamentation" means "tears" or "to cry" in Latin. The title of this book is "tears" in the Greek language. It is not a song, but a funeral chant. There are 5 funeral chants in this book. Hence, the plural "Lamentations".
2. This kind of literature is also found in the book of Job. God allowed Job to express his agonies and sufferings. It is also found in the book of Psalms, e.g. Psalm 10. It is the expression of a suffering person, protesting to God and asking God, "Why, God, why?"
3. God allows such emotional expression of man because God Himself is emotional and He made us in His image.
 - a) As such, we should not be embarrassed about expressing our emotions.
 - b) God wants us to process and vent our emotions to Him like a child to a father. We can see in such literature in the Bible where emotions are expressed in circular form, over and over again.
 - c) Pastors should allow church members to process and share their emotions in like manner when they suffer.
 - d) It is acceptable to God that we express our emotions in an unashamed way as we are human.
4. Who was the author of Lamentations?

The author of Lamentations was Jeremiah who also wrote the books of 1 Kings & 2 Kings as well as the book of Jeremiah.

What is the book of Lamentations about?

1. In the book of Jeremiah, he prophesied the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jews. However, in the book of Lamentations, it is no longer about predictions or warnings, but looking back and lamenting how terrible the destruction of the 1st Temple and Jerusalem was in 586 BC.
2. Jeremiah poured out his heart regarding the unthinkable fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the 1st Temple and the exile of Jews.
 - a) Everything that the Jews had put their hopes on was gone in one event.
 - b) So, every year on the 9th day of Abib in the Jewish calendar, the 5 songs in this book of Lamentations are read in every Jewish synagogue to remind them of the event that happened in 586 BC. The 1st Temple built by Solomon was destroyed on this day.
3. In AD 70, the Roman army destroyed the 2nd Temple which was built by Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah during King Cyrus' reign and was subsequently rebuilt by King Herod.
 - a) This same 2nd Temple was visited by Jesus, as described in the Gospels. On the same 9th day of Abib in AD 70, this 2nd Temple was also destroyed.
 - b) It was prophesied by Jesus in Mark 13:1-2 and the disciples were shocked by the prophecy. The Jews could not accept this prophecy just as they did not accept the prophecy about the destruction of the 1st Temple.
 - c) The 2nd Temple was destroyed 40 years after Jesus' resurrection.
 - i. The Jews were given 40 years (the number 40 speaks of testing by God) to accept this prophecy but they did not.

- ii. They rejected their suffering Messiah, as they wanted a conquering Saviour to overthrow the Roman rule. They were not concerned about their sins or their spiritual state but only about their financial and political state. They wanted their own version of god.
 - iii. This is no different from people today, who like the “wealth and health gospel”.
4. Therefore, both the 1st and 2nd Temples were destroyed on same Jewish calendar day though hundreds of years apart.

What is the Structure of the Book of Lamentations?

1. All 5 chapters of the book have 22 verses each.
 - a) The Hebrew alphabetical system has 22 letters. Every verse begins with the Hebrew alphabet equivalent of A, B C and so forth. This is known as an acrostic poem or an alphabetical songs so that it was easy to remember.
 - b) This acrostic poetry style was adopted for the first 4 songs in this book.
 - c) Jeremiah wrote it in an acrostic poem form so that the exiled Jews could remember and sing them in their exile in Babylon, as they did not have a place to worship God.
 - d) God wants us to express our emotions in prayers, as we do in a conversation. We do not need to be formal and impress others when we pray.
2. Chapter 3 is the longest chapter because there are more words per verse.
3. Jeremiah sees the sufferings from 5 different angles:
 - a) Chapter 1 – Suffering as a widow. It is projected as a lamentation of a helpless widow who lost her husband, children and home. There was nothing left of the 1st Temple as everything was gone! It was described as though the city of Jerusalem was a widow (Jerusalem was depicted as “she”), crying about her own desolate state.
 - b) Chapter 2 – God was judging His people. Jeremiah wrote about how God (“He”) had judged.
 - i. Everything that happened in 586 BC was predicted a thousand years ago in the book of Deuteronomy at Mount Sinai.
 - ii. Deuteronomy 28:53-55 predicted that this would happen - if Israel disobeyed God that they would eat the flesh of their own children and would not share the flesh of that child with their other children or spouse. God is faithful to His Word.
 - c) Chapter 3 – Suffering of a man.
 - i. “I” probably refers to the author, Jeremiah, himself.
 - ii. Lamentation 3:22-24 say that God’s compassion do not fail and they are new every morning. Great is His faithfulness and it is because of God’s mercy that they were not consumed (or wiped out totally) for He had preserved a remnant.
 - iii. Jeremiah saw the mercy of God in the midst of sufferings. The Jews deserved much more punishment and Jeremiah realised this. Although

- they were in exile, Jeremiah saw God's faithfulness and promise of a remnant even after 1000 years of rebellion.
- iv. Therefore, God was faithful both to punish (Deuteronomy 28:53-55) and to bless. He is faithful in all that He said. Do we see His faithfulness when He punishes or chastises us?
- d) Chapter 4 compares the past and present Jerusalem. "They" refers to the people of the city. It compared Jerusalem's glory to Jerusalem's desolation. It describes the same suffering from a different angle.
 - e) Chapter 5 is not in acrostic form, although it also has 22 verses.
 - i. It was as though Jeremiah's heart became chaotic at that point and he cried out, unable to put everything in acrostic form.
 - ii. "We" refers to God's people. It was Jeremiah's prayer for help to the Father. Only Jews can fully grasp this pain of the destruction of Jerusalem and its 1st Temple.
 - iii. The book ends with Lamentations 5:19-22 as though God has forsaken them. God was very angry and so Jeremiah asked God, "Where are You"? There is no proper conclusion. The end is only revealed in the book of Revelation.
 - iv. It is similar to life on Earth, where there is no beautiful fairy tale ending, even for believers. The glorious conclusion comes in only in the book of Revelation when Jesus comes back again.
4. Therefore, this book of Lamentations is best listened via an audio Bible, so as to get the feelings behind the book and not to analyse it. We must learn to love God with our hearts and feelings.

Closing Thoughts

1. Do we cry when God's name is mocked or shamed? We should cry when people mock at God, just like when someone insults our earthly father. Do you feel for the things of God? Do you feel sorry for the followers of false teachers or when people are suffering?
2. Cry for God's honour and His house! Jeremiah's cry was a reflection of God's cry for His people. When God judges, His heart bleeds. Like a father when he punishes his children, he feels the pain more than his children.
3. Do you know the heart of God when He had to punish and chastise you? Do we only see the hand of God in the words of the Bible, rather than the heart of God?
4. Know that when you are praying, you are talking to a loving, tender, understanding and emotional Father.