INTRODUCTION

TO

LAMENTATIONS
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to

Lamentations

I. Titles:

A. “Lamentations” means “funeral songs.” (NIV) and could be rendered funeral “dirges.” (Willis)

1. The English title, according to Youngblood, comes from a Greek verb meaning “to cry aloud.”

B. Lamentations, according to Willis, have five (5) parts as a rule although every lament does not necessarily include all five of these elements.

1. direct invocation of God.

2. complaint describing the author’s present hardship.

3. declaration of trust in God.

4. specific petitions for help.

5. pledge to praise God for his positive response to prayer.

C. Smith and Willis refer to the fact that Lamentations “originally took its title from its first Hebrew word: ekhah (“alas”) which is found at the beginning of the second and fourth chapters as well.”
1. Coffman translates *ekhah* as “how.”

2. Clarke states in Hebrew the book is named *eicah*, how, from its first word; and sometimes *kinnoth*, laments, from its subject.

II. Author:

A. The author of Lamentations is probably Jeremiah, (NIV) while Clarke wrote, “The whole current of antiquity and modern times has pointed out Jeremiah as the writer.”

B. Willis wrote, “Most scholars have concluded, in fact, that Lamentations is a collection of laments, composed by different authors (comparable to the Book of Psalms) concerning the same event.”

1. The Pulpit Commentary states, “The Book of Lamentations has no author’s name attached to it in the Hebrew Bible, . . .”

2. The Pulpit commentary questions Jeremiah’s authorship of Lamentations.

C. “Early Jewish teachers apparently considered these five poems as an appendix to the Book of Jeremiah.

1. By…(c. A.D. 100) Lamentations had been… placed in the third division of the Hebrew Bible—the … Writings.

2. There it found its place alongside of Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon…
3. In the Greek and Latin versions of the Old Testament, Lamentations resumed its position immediately after the Book of Jeremiah,” Smith wrote.

4. “The books of Ecclesiastes, Canticles (Song of Solomon), Lamentations, Ruth and Esther are known as the Megillot or Roll (Scroll) among the Jews; and because it relates to the ruin of their affairs, and contains promises of restoration, it is prized, and frequently read,” Clarke wrote.

5. Bromiley observed also that Lamentations, in the twenty-four book Hebrew canon, is placed in the Writings section.

D. Smith observed that while Lamentations does not specifically name its author, Jeremiah appears to be the writer.

1. Lamentation was a technique with which Jeremiah was definitely familiar. (See Smith).

   a. 2 Chronicles 35:25, Jeremiah composed laments for Josiah, and to this day all the men and women singers commemorate Josiah in the laments. These became a tradition in Israel and are written in the Laments. (NIV)

2. “The Greek version of the book, translated about 200 B.C., contains a heading which attributes the book to Jeremiah.” (Smith)

3. “Jewish and Christian tradition is all but unanimous in assigning Lamentations to the famous prophet.” (Smith)

4. Jeremiah was certainly acquainted with lamenting personal and national grief. (Smith)
a. Jeremiah 9:1, Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people. (NIV)

5. “The Lamentations of Jeremiah” is the title and author of this book as given in the American Standard Version. (Coffman)

6. Coffman wrote that the following parenthesis stands at the head of the Septuagint version of Lamentations: (And it came to pass after Israel was taken captive, and Jerusalem was made desolate, that Jeremiah sat weeping, and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said)…”

7. Clarke noted that anciently in Hebrew, Lamentations had no title and was a continuation of the book of Jeremiah.

III. Literary Form:

A. In the original Hebrew, the twenty-two (22) verses in each of chapters 1, 2 and 4 use the twenty-two (22) letters of the Hebrew alphabet to start the verse. (NIV)

B. The third (3rd) chapter has sixty-six (66) verses and every third verse starts a new letter of the Hebrew alphabet. (NIV)

1. “In three of the poems, the author reversed the order of two Hebrew letters apparently in order to maintain his sequence of thought,” Smith stated.

2. “Each of the chapters in Lamentations is an independent composition,” Smith wrote.

C. This form is called an acrostic. (NIV)
D. Willis wrote, “Each three line group is called a tricolon; that is, each verse represents a tricolon (three lines) of Hebrew. Chapter 3 triples this pattern.”

1. In chapter four each verse begins with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in succession, but now each verse consists of only two lines (a bicolon), Willis wrote.

   a. Clarke notes that limited exceptions are observed in regard to alphabetical succession in the second, third and fourth chapters where phe is placed before ain.

2. Willis further wrote, “The fifth chapter is not an acrostic, but it does consist of twenty-two (22) lines, one for each of the twenty-two (22) letters in the Hebrew alphabet.”

E. Lamentations is written entirely in poetic form and “consists of four dirges (chapters 1-4) and one prayer (chapter 5),” Smith wrote.


2. “This is not a poetry of rhyme but of thought,” Smith wrote.

3. National suffering is described in Lamentations and here and there confessions of sin, declarations of penitence and appeals for divine aid are made. (See Smith)

IV. Situation Rationale:

A. Jerusalem and the temple have been totally destroyed, but this is seen as the judgment of a righteous God for the sins of the people. (NIV)
1. “Jeremiah must have expressed their collective shock and sorrow as he wrote this book,” Youngblood stated.

2. Jerusalem and the temple were very special to ancient Israel. Its loss caused tremendous grief. (See Youngblood.)

B. God is merciful and Jeremiah appeals for mercy in his prayer to the Lord. (NIV)

C. Historically the book of Lamentations is set in the years immediately following the destruction of Jerusalem (circa 585-560 B.C.) (Willis) and this “forms the background of Lamentations.” (Smith)

1. Those associated with Lamentations were people who fondly remembered Jerusalem prior to its destruction, and who were pessimistic about any restoration of the city in the near future.” Willis wrote.

D. The author was evidently grieving the devastation of Jerusalem. (NIV)

1. The destruction of Jerusalem was caused by its people’s sins. (See Smith)

2. Those who saw the devastation, destruction, exploitation of the Holy City were truly devastated.

3. “Lamentations underscores the comfort which the Bible has for those who suffer, viz., that where pain and hurt are, there God is also,” Smith wrote.

E. Clarke mentions that some, a small minority, hold that Lamentations was composed upon the death of Josiah.
V. Outline of Lamentations:

A. According to the NIV Introduction:

3. Thoughts on suffering – hope in God (3:1-66). (NIV)
5. A prayer for God’s mercy (5:1-22). (NIV)

B. According to Smith, quoting C. Paul Gray:

1. A Widowed City (chapter 1).
2. A Broken People (chapter 2).
3. A Suffering Prophet (chapter 3).
4. A Ruined Kingdom (chapter 4).
5. A Penitent Nation (chapter 5).

C. According to Youngblood:

1. The Destruction of Jerusalem
   a. Lamentations 1:1-22
2. The Anger of God
a. Lamentations 2:1-22

3. The Prayer for Mercy

   a. Lamentations 3:1-66

4. The Siege of Jerusalem

   a. Lamentations 4:1-22

5. The Prayer for Restoration

   a. Lamentations 5:1-22

VI. Imprecation on enemies:

   A. Willis wrote that calling on the Lord to bring on enemies the same level of suffering that the Israelites were then suffering is foreign to Christians who have been taught to forgive.

   B. Willis further wrote, “Such Christian compassion seems inconceivable to these writers.”

1. Psalm 137:1-9, By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy. Remember, O LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. "Tear it down," they cried, "tear it down to its foundations!" O Daughter of Babylon,
doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us — he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks. (NIV)

2. Psalm 79:1-13, O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple, they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble. They have given the dead bodies of your servants as food to the birds of the air, the flesh of your saints to the beasts of the earth. They have poured out blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there is no one to bury the dead. We are objects of reproach to our neighbors, of scorn and derision to those around us. How long, O LORD? Will you be angry forever? How long will your jealousy burn like fire? Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the kingdoms that do not call on your name; for they have devoured Jacob and destroyed his homeland. Do not hold against us the sins of the fathers; may your mercy come quickly to meet us, for we are in desperate need. Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake. Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Before our eyes, make known among the nations that you avenge the outpoured blood of your servants. May the groans of the prisoners come before you; by the strength of your arm preserve those condemned to die. Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times the reproach they have hurled at you, O Lord. Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise. (NIV)

3. “They are not uncertain that the Lord is merciful, but they are deeply concerned that their sinfulness has surpassed even his mercy,” Willis wrote.
4. Our feelings when experiencing injustices must be honestly addressed, not repressed to the detriment of our emotional and spiritual health,” Willis pointed out.

5. Ancient Israel was honest about their feelings in regard to Lamentations.

C. Coffman wrote, “The great lesson from Lamentations is that God will eventually destroy any nation that forgets God.

1. “God’s judgment eventually falls upon every wicked nation,” Coffman wrote.

2. Punishment may be delayed, but it will surely come!
   a. Jerusalem attests to this fact.

VII. Lamentations, a neglected canonical book.

A. Smith wrote, “Actually Lamentations is much more than the cheerless protest of the inequities of life.”

1. “These poems are really an affirmation of faith in the justice and goodness of God.”

2. “No book in the Bible is better designed to help believers cope with calamities of all kinds.”

3. The book of Lamentations definitely deserved much more attention than it has historically received!

B. Smith quoted Kaiser as saying Lamentations is “one of the most comprehensive surveys of the problem of suffering found anywhere.”
C. “There never has been serious opposition to the canonicity of Lamentation,” The Word Commentary states.

1. Lamentations is definitely regarded as inspired of God!

VIII. Lessons from Lamentations from the Word Biblical Commentary:

A. “The book conveys pain, indeed agony, caused by divine punishment in response to human sin, which is hardly a popular topic these days.”

B. “The Christian community in the West may not have totally forgotten how to lament over sin, but it is certainly well into the process of forgetting how to do so, . . .”

C. “The Lord is righteous, just, powerful, kind, severe, compassionate, faithful, and willing to hear and answer prayers.”

D. “However, . . .the Lord is (also) a thorough, severe, and unstinting judge of thorough, ingrained, consistent sin.”

E. God’s loving kindness, faithfulness, and ruling power are the Lord’s ongoing traits, so the covenant people have hope for the future.”
Questions
on the
Introduction
to
Lamentations
(Questions based on NIV text.)

1. What does “Lamentation” mean? ____________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

2. Of what five (5) parts do Lamentations generally consist? _________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

3. Why could Lamentations be correctly called “alas” or “how”? _____
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
4. Who wrote Lamentations? Give reasons for your answer.

5. Which Biblical books comprise the Writings section of the Hebrew scriptures? By what other name(s) are they known?

6. In which order are they arranged? Why are they arranged in this order?

7. What is another name for Canticles?

How many books are in the Hebrew Bible?
8. What is an acrostic? How does this word apply to Lamentations? ____________________________________________________________________ ____________________________________________________________________ ____________________________________________________________________ ____________________________________________________________________ ____________________________________________________________________ ____________________________________________________________________ ____________________________________________________________________

9. In the __________________________ _______________________, the ____________________- ______________________ verses in each of __________________  ____________________, _______________ _ and _________________ use the _______________- _______________ ______________________ of the ___________________________ to start the verse.

10. The ___________________________ has ______________ - ___________________________ and every ______________ starts with a ______________ _______________ _______ of the ___________________________ _________________.

11. In _______________________ of the ___ __________________ the _________________ _______________ the _________________ of ___________ _______________ _______________ in order to ________________ ____ his __________ _____________ of ______________________.

12. ________________ of the ___________________ in ____________ is an _______________________ _______________________.

13. Each ___________________________ _______________ _______________ is called a ___________________; that is, each __________________ represents ________________________ _______________ of ___________________________. chapter ____________________________ _______________ this __________________________.
14. In chapter ________________, each verse begins with the __________________ of the __________________________ in ___________________, but now each __________________________ consists of only __________________________ (a __________________________).

15. Limited exceptions are found regarding __________________________ in the ______________, ______________ and ______________ chapters where __________________________ is placed before __________________________.

16. The __________________________ chapter is __________________________ an __________________________, but nit does consists of ______________-________________________ lines, one for each of the ______________-________________________ in the ______________-________________________.

17. __________________________ consists of __________________________ clearly delineated __________________________ and is __________________________ entirely in __________________________ and consists of __________________________ and __________________________. __________________________ is not of __________________________ but of __________________________.

18. What was the background, situation, date, regarding which Lamentations was written? ____________________________________________

19. What caused Jerusalem’s troubles? How did its former residents feel about Jerusalem’s devastation? ____________________________________________
20. What did the future hold for Jerusalem? How could these people who had been so wicked expect good things from God? 

21. Outline Lamentations following the NIV model. 

22. Outline Lamentations following the Smith/Gray model. 

23. Outline Lamentations following the Youngblood model.
24. How did the Jerusalem captives feel toward their enemies? Did God approve of that attitude? ______________________________________

25. How do you feel when you experience severe injustices? Do you deal honestly with your feelings? ______________________________________

26. How does God want us to feel when we suffer severe injustices? ______________________________________

27. According to Coffman, what is the great lesson from Lamentations? ______________________________________

28. ________________’s ________________ eventually ________________ upon ________________ ________________ may be ________________, but it will ________________ ________________.
29. Why has Lamentations been neglected? ______________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

30. What lessons, according to The Word Biblical Commentary, should we learn from our study of Lamentations? ______________________
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Bibliography


