

GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS
PREACHING THROUGH THE BIBLE: LAMENTATIONS
Lamentations 3:22-23

I. INTRODUCTION

A. BRIEF DESCRIPTION

- A FIVE-POEM DIRGE LAMENTING THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

B. TITLE

1. HEBREW

a. *Ekah*

- The first word of **chapters 1, 2, 4** = “*Ah, how!*” [NASB = *How*]

b. Another term has also been used

- *Ginoth* = ‘Elegies’ or ‘Lamentations’

2. SEPTUAGINT

- *θρῆνοι* = ‘Dirges’ or ‘Laments’

3. LATIN

- *Threni* = ‘Tears’ or ‘Lamentations’

4. ENGLISH

- ‘**The Lamentations of Jeremiah**’

- Derived from Jerome’s Vulgate = ‘*Id est lamentationes Jeremiae prophetae*’

C. PLACE IN HEBREW BIBLE AND TRADITION

1. USUALLY THIRD BOOK IN THE FIVE ‘SCROLLS’ [‘MEGILLOTH’]

2. READ DURING FAST COMMEMORATING TEMPLE DESTRUCTION

- On the 9th day of the month ‘Ab’ [‘Av’]
- 11th month of Jewish civil calendar—5th month of religious calendar—about July-August
- Remembering two destructions—by Babylonians (586 BC)—and Romans (70 AD)

D. AUTHORSHIP

1. JEREMIAH

- a. Not identified in the biblical text
- b. Almost universally attributed by biblical scholars

- A few argue that the style is different from the book of Jeremiah

2. EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

a. Early Jewish sources

- Septuagint superscription
- The Talmud
- Aramaic Targum of Jonathan

b. Early Christian sources—such as Origen and Jerome

c. Elsewhere in Old Testament

- **II Chr 35:25**—*Then Jeremiah chanted a lament for Josiah, ad all the male and female singers speak about Josiah in their lamentations to this day. And they made them an ordinance in Israel; behold they are also written in the Lamentations.*

- This fact suggests Jeremiah was capable of writing *this other* book of ‘Lamentations’

3. INTERNAL EVIDENCE

a. Scenes of destruction in book must have been recorded by an eyewitness

- Jeremiah was there—and remained behind after deportation of captives—see **Jer 39**

b. Style and tone

1. Several passages are identical in style to the book of Jeremiah
2. Tone is similar to that Jeremiah—compassion, sympathy, grief

C. JEREMIAH THE PROPHET—[REVIEW FROM ‘JEREMIAH’]

1. SON OF HILKIAH THE PRIEST

2. HOMETOWN—ANATHOTH—NORTH OF JERUSALEM

3. CALLED AS A PROPHET WHILE A YOUNG MAN

- Prophesied to Judah/Jerusalem during 6th century BC—before and during early captivity
- Probably never served as a priest
- The ‘Weeping Prophet’—**9:1** and **13:17**

4. UNMARRIED—AS A PROPHETIC ORACLE TO JUDAH

5. LIFE OF CONFLICT—CONFRONTATION DUE TO HIS MESSAGE OF JUDGMENT

E. DATE AND SETTING

1. AFTER DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM—**586 BC**

- a. See **Jeremiah 39 and 52**—for description of destruction
- b. Timeline
 - January 588 to July 586—Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem
 - 19 July 586—Jerusalem fell
 - 15 August 586—city and temple were burned

2. PROBABLY BEFORE JEREMIAH TAKEN CAPTIVE TO EGYPT—see **Jer 43:1-7**

F. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

1. SIMILARITY TO JOB—AND DIFFERENCE

- Like Job—Jerusalem loses everything and suffers complete humiliation
- Unlike Job, who was righteous—Jerusalem suffers as a result of her sin

2. JESUS AS THE SUFFERING SERVANT

- Jesus was afflicted and suffered—*A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*—**Is 53:3**
- But perfectly righteous—He suffered and paid *for* the sins of Jerusalem [and all others]

• PARALLELS JESUS LAMENT OVER JERUSALEM—**Mt 23:37-38**

37 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. 38 Behold, your house is being left to you desolate

G. THEMES

1. MOURNING

- Expressions of grief for destruction of Jerusalem—as a result of God’s judgment

2. CONFESSION

- Confession of sin—and acknowledgment of God’s righteousness in judging Judah

3. HOPE

- Despite God’s wrath—He is merciful and faithful to His covenant promise
- Future hope—He will restore His covenant people

H. STRUCTURE

1. FIVE CHAPTERS—EACH ONE IS A LAMENT POEM

2. ACROSTIC PATTERN

- a. First four chapters use 22 letters of Hebrew alphabet to start verses

b. Chapters 1—2—4

- Each chapter has 22 verses
- The first word of each verse begins with a Hebrew letter [in alphabetic order]
- Chapters 1 and 2—have three lines of Hebrew text per verse
- Chapter 4—has two lines of Hebrew text per verse

c. Chapter 3

- Has 66 verses
- Every third verse begins with a Hebrew letter [in alphabetic order]
- Each verse—is only one line of Hebrew text

d. Chapter 5

- Does not follow acrostic pattern
- Has 22 verses—each with one line of Hebrew text

I. OUTLINE

○ SORROW FOR JERUSALEM—**CHAPTER ONE**

- Lament of Jeremiah—1:1-11
- Lament of Jerusalem—1:12-22

○ GOD'S WRATH UPON JERUSALEM—**CHAPTER TWO**

- God's Anger—2:1-9
- Jerusalem's Agony—2:10-17
- Jerusalem's Appeal—2:18-22

○ JEREMIAH'S PRAYER FOR MERCY—**CHAPTER THREE**

- Despair—3:1-18
- Confession of Faith—3:19-39
- Description of Situation—3:40-54
- Confidence in God—3:55-66

○ SIEGE OF JERUSALEM—**CHAPTER FOUR**

- Conditions during Siege—4:1-10
- Cause of Siege—4:11-20
- Results of Siege—4:21-22

○ PRAYER FOR RESTORATION—CHAPTER FIVE

- Need for Restoration—5:1-15
- Repentance of Sin—5:16-18
- Plea for Restoration—5:19-22

II. BIBLICAL TEXT

Lam 3:22-25—22 *The Lord's loving kindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail.* **23** *They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.* **24** *"The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I have hope in Him."* **25** *The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him.*

CONTEXT

- God's judgment has fallen upon Judah and Jerusalem
- Jerusalem has been destroyed—Judah defeated—and the people taken into captivity
- In the midst of this tragedy—Jeremiah still proclaims his hope and trust in God
- Reminiscent of Job's trust in God—even facing impending death

III. EXPOSITION

A. GOD IS FAITHFUL

1. HIS MERCY IS EVERLASTING

- a. **Psalm 136**—repeats *His lovingkindness is everlasting* 26 times
- b. His mercy extends endlessly—to all generations

Dt 7:9—*Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love him and keep His commandments*

2. EVIDENCE—CONTINUAL DELIVERANCE IN ISRAEL'S HISTORY

- **Exodus** from Egypt—sustaining Israel in the Wilderness
- Conquering **Canaan**
- Repeated delivery under **Judges**
- Establishing **Davidic kingdom**—and Solomon's prosperity
- Repeated intervention to **protect** Israel and forestall defeat

3. LONGSUFFERING—TOLERATING SINFUL REBELLION

- From Jeroboam to destruction—God waited over 200 years

○From Rehoboam to captivity—God waited 350 years

4. GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS WORD

1. He fulfills all His prophecies and promises
2. **Example**—191 OT prophecies about Messiah—were fulfilled in Jesus

B. BACKGROUND—JOSIAH

1. AFTER HEZEKIAH (715-687)

○Judah had 50 years of bad leadership

- ▲ Manasseh 687-642 [co-regent with Hezekiah—697-687]
- ▲ Amon 642-640

2. JOSIAH REFORMED JUDAH (640-609)

- a. God prophesied to Jereboam that Josiah would do this—**I Kgs 13:1-3**—300 years earlier!
- b. Reforms described in II Kgs 22-23 and II Chr 34-35
- c. Beginning—in Josiah's 18th year
 - He ordered High Priest Hilkiah to renovate temple—purge pagan artefacts
 - Hilkiah discovered scroll—'book of the law'—part of Torah—probably Deuteronomy
 - Josiah tore his robes when he heard the Law read
 - He ordered it to be read to all the people—and that it be obeyed
- d. Reform measures
 - Ordered exclusive worship of Jahweh
 - Tore down Baal and other pagan altars—even outside Judah
 - Executed pagan priests
 - Centralized worship in Jerusalem—at purged Temple
 - Restored Ark of Covenant to Temple
 - Destroyed temple at Bethel—that had become paganized
 - Reinstated Passover celebration

3. JOSIAH WAS KILLED IN BATTLE AGAINST PHAOROH NECO—609 BC

C. CRISIS OF FAITH—IN JEREMIAH'S DAY

1. WHY DID GOD ALLOW JOSIAH TO DIE—AFTER IMPLEMENTING REFORMS?
2. WHY DID GOD ALLOW JERUSALEM TO FALL?

○It was Jahweh's home—where the Ark of the Covenant resided

○It seemed inviolable—impregnable—defended by God Himself

3. WHY DID GOD ALLOW JUDAH TO BE DEFEATED?

○What about God's covenant with David?

○Judah had a stable monarchy—continuous line from David—unlike Israel

○God had miraculously delivered it from Sennacherib under Hezekiah—701 BC

4. WHAT ABOUT GOD'S PROMISES TO HIS COVENANT PEOPLE?

D. ANSWERS—TO CRISIS OF FAITH

1. IMMEDIATE CAUSE

a. **Four bad kings**—led Judah into rebellious idolatry

1. **Jehoahaz**—bad king

▪ After 3 months deposed by Pharaoh Neco

2. **Jehoiakim**—bad king

▪ Egyptian vassal until Babylonians defeated Egypt (605)

▪ Then Babylonian vassal—but rebelled against Babylon

▪ Nebuchadnezzar deported key people like Daniel to Babylon

3. **Jehoiachin**—bad king

▪ Reigned 3 months—deported to Babylon (597)

4. **Zedekiah**—bad king

▪ Attempted alliance with Egypt—led to Babylonian capture of Jerusalem (586)

b. But this was only **part** of the answer

1. It was only 23 years from Josiah's death to the fall of Jerusalem

2. Judah had suffered bad leadership for longer periods before

3. It does not explain why God allowed Josiah to die—in the midst of his reforms!

2. THE REST OF THE STORY

a. God is faithful in both mercy *and judgment*

b. God fulfills **all** His prophecies—both good and bad

1. 'Good' prophecy

➤ He had prophesied Josiah would reform—300 years beforehand—**I Kgs 13**

➤ He was faithful to fulfill this

2. 'Bad' prophecy

a. God also prophesied to Josiah the coming judgement

▲ Through Prophetess Huldah—**II Kgs 22** and **II Chr 34**

b. It was too late—Josiah would be spared—but not Judah

▲ Judah had a long history of idolatry

▲ God was determined to eradicate it forever

3. WHY DID GOD ALLOW JERUSALEM—AND MT. ZION—TO FALL?

○ God's residence—Zion—was not in Jerusalem—but in heaven, above all creation

○ God was/is not a cultic God of just one people—but God of all people

○ God was/is not confined to one place—the Temple—or Ark of Covenant

4. WHY DID GOD ALLOW THE DAVIDIC KINGDOM TO FALL?

○ To purge it—and prepare for restoration of a righteous remnant

○ To rid the bad kings—and prepare the way for His 'righteous branch'

○ While maintaining the lineage of the Messiah through the line of David

5. WHY DID SUCH BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOD'S COVENANT PEOPLE?

a. God always keeps His word

1. Yes—He *did* promise mercy to those who are obedient—**Dt 7:9**

2. But—He *also* promised judgment to those who rebel

Dt 7:10—*but repays those who hate Him. He will repay him to his face.*

b. God's faithfulness is fair and just—in *both* mercy *and* judgment

c. God is right—in judging rebellion—punishing sin—revealing His wrath

d. God's punishment is redemptive—recalling sinners to repentance and obedience

IV. APPLICATION

1. GOD IS PATIENT AND FORGIVES REPEATEDLY—BUT THIS DOES NOT ELIMINATE THE POSSIBILITY OF DIVINE JUDGMENT

2. GOD WILL NOT ABIDE REBELLION FOREVER—HE WILL JUDGE SIN

3. A NATION MIGHT PROSPER AND REFORM ITSELF TEMPORARILY—EVEN WHEN IT HAS ALREADY COME UNDER DIVINE JUDGMENT!

4. REFORM AND REVIVAL LAST ONLY ONE GENERATION—EVERY GENERATION MUST DISCOVER AND OBEY GOD FOR ITSELF

5. GOD WILL NOT TOLERATE PRESUMPTION OR ARROGANCE FROM HIS PEOPLE
6. DO NOT PUT CONFIDENCE IN NATIONAL IDENTITY OR HISTORY OF PROSPERITY
7. GOD'S JUDGMENT IS A FORM OF DIVINE LOVE—CALLING US BACK TO HIM

IV. INVITATION

'TIS SO SWEET TO TRUST IN JESUS