

Lamentations: Fruitful Weeping in the Pain of Life

The Book of Lamentations

Introduction

- **The bible's major place for lament**

'God's people must learn how to weep. For there is a wrong way and a right way to weep. There is a God-honouring way to respond to the deepest tragedies of life, and there is a seriously harmful way for the people of God to react to their calamities, both as individuals and as a body...Lamentations'...message continues to be needed, so that the people of God may maintain a proper balance in their lives as they pass through the alien, wilderness world as strangers and pilgrims.'

(O P Robertson, *The Christ of Wisdom*, p279)

4 Key themes of Lamentations

1. The Calamity

- **We must recognise and not diminish our real sorrow**

Aaaah! How can it be! 1:1; 2:1; 2:15 cf Ps46, 48 etc

2. The Cause

- **We must repent and not deny our real sin**

1:5,14,20,22; 3:39,42; 4:6(footnote), 13, 5:7,17 etc

3. The Chastisement

- **We must revere and not despise our real Sovereign**

His fierce anger, wholly justified 2:1,3,22; 3:1,43; 4:11 etc

4. The Covenant

- **We must remember and not despair of our real Saviour**

There is hope: *prayer* 1:11ff, 2:18; esp 3:21-33

and *promise*: 4:22; cf Deut 4:29-31; 32:36ff; hence 5:21

5:22? We have assurance and certain hope

Written after 586 BC, traditionally by Jeremiah (cf 2 Ch 25:35)

A very careful arrangement of **Acrostic** poetry (each line beginning with the 22 successive letters of the Hebrew Alphabet): to order grief, and ? to help memorise

An ABC and an A-Z of how to weep for sin's consequences (2Cor 7:10)

'a single piece of literature that provides a framework for the expression of grief felt by community and individual...the book continues to speak significantly to every community, every culture and every individual today' (O Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of Wisdom*, p284)

5 Laments each with particular perspectives

Lament 1. The Pain of the Calamity: God's City desolate

- **22 stanzas of 3 lines (in Hebrew); 1st line of stanza acrostic**
Focus on the city itself in its extensive devastation

Lament 2. The Perpetrator of the Calamity: God's fierce anger

- **22 stanzas of 3 lines; 1st line of each stanza acrostic**
Focus on God as the one who has done it. 'He has...'
V17 – done as his covenant promised long ago (Deut 28 etc)

Lament 3. The Personal Calamity: 'under the rod of his wrath'

- **22 stanzas of 3 lines; each line of stanza acrostic (AAA,BBB,CCC etc)**
Focus on the intensity of pain of exile, recognition & confession of sin
The highpoint of hope: in steadfast covenant love 21-33

Lament 4. The Pervasiveness of the Calamity: utter degradation in Israel

- **22 stanzas of 2 lines; 1st line of each stanza acrostic**
Sheer depth of sin (6, 13-16) & consequences – even the Lord's anointed king captured. But a glimmer of hope (22) leads to final prayerful lament

Lament 5. The Prayer from the Calamity: the remnant seek repentance

- **22 stanzas of 1 line; no acrostic**
Hope in the LORD's great mercy alone. 'Remember, turn us, that we may turn'