

Lamentations-by Tommy Lee

Chapter 1

To get a feel for Lamentations, go straight to 1.3,10; 2.2,7 and enter into the dreadful references to exile, the fall of kings, the destruction of the temple. The setting is the fall of both Jerusalem and the very temple of the Lord itself to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar in 586BC.

To "*lament*" (mourn and grieve deeply) these losses, the prophet Jeremiah has written five poems. And the very form of the poems has much to teach us; they are mostly acrostics. In an acrostic each verse begins with a successive letter of the alphabet, in alphabetical order: A, B, C, etc. The Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters, and you note that chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 have 22 verses. Chapter 3 has 66 verses because each letter gets three verses: AAA, BBB, CCC, etc. It's a super-acrostic! The idea in an acrostic is utter completeness, A-Z wholeness, absolute totality, thorough fullness, exhaustive entirety. Jeremiah is giving **FULL VENT** to his grief before the Lord (and so may we, by the way). But... in chapter 4 there are two letters of the Hebrew alphabet out of order. Think of them like Q and R, but it's R then Q. Something is starting to unravel! And then in chapter 5 there are still 22 verses, but the acrostic has fallen completely apart, there is no order to the letters at all, it has unraveled altogether. Why? *Because God is faithful, and Jeremiah knew that he would wholly save his people in the end.* Welcome to one of the most powerful books in the Bible.

Chapter 2

Note well the suffering, the sorrow, the tears, the grief that sin brings in its wake. Back in Deuteronomy 28.15-68 God established the covenant "curses" that would befall his people if they turned away from him in unfaithfulness. (Which are the opposite of all the covenant blessings he promised in Deuteronomy 28.1-14, if they remained faithful.) None of this that is being lamented in Lamentations is due to the Lord's weakness compared to other gods. It actually demonstrates the power of the Lord to stay true to his holy Word. This is just. But it's also terrible. And chapter 2 is freely expressing Jeremiah's agony and bewilderment as he struggles to come to terms with it. And here's a "use" or application of Lamentations: you can open this book up and express *your* distress and sense of abandonment with the very same force, if and when you find it helpful to do so. May we also be reminded to heed God's Word and stay true to him... for a day of greater judgment yet is still coming. Stay close to the Savior.

Chapter 3

The first two chapters were acrostics, going through all 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, giving complete vent and through treatment (A-Z) to this theme of lamentation before the Lord. And now, with chapter three, we're going through the whole of the alphabet again. But this time, rather than each letter getting one verse, each letter gets **three verses**. Verses 1-3 all begin with Aleph, verses 4-6 all begin with Beth, and on and on, through all 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, for 66 verses. It's the super-acrostic of Christian grief. And to see what makes it particularly "Christian," consider carefully vv.22-26. Is that not powerful and thrilling? Right here in the very midst of the most appalling suffering you have ever heard expressed, you find hope. Our God is a God of steadfast love, endless mercies, ceaseless compassion, great faithfulness, promised goodness and sure salvation. This statement of faith is the very heart of the book. It's the most important thing to be said from the depths of distress. Seek Jesus.

Chapter 4

As we near the end of the book, take note of v.22: "*The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter of Zion, is accomplished; he will keep you in exile no longer.*" Suffering will finally end for God's true people. God will utterly and completely save those who belong to him. May we repent of

and remove all the false trusts to which our hearts tend to turn (there is a lot of eye-opening with regard to that going on in this chapter), and trust in the Lord, fully and only. If we do so, a new day of grace will come. *"Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned"* (Isaiah 40.2). Christ himself has borne and suffered the wrath of God in our place, on our behalf. He is actually the shocking fulfillment of this book—as he is the fulfillment of all the books of the Bible—as he hangs on the cross, suffering and lamenting the fury of God's anger against sin, for our atonement. His crucifixion is the greatest demonstration of both God's judgment and God's saving love. May his gospel be all our delight.

Chapter 5

Remember the acrostic nature of this book that we described in our first reflection on Lamentations? Chapters 1 and 2 used the entire alphabet, from A to Z, lamenting Jerusalem's sufferings before the Lord. Chapter 3 upped the game, giving each letter of the alphabet three verses: A to Z times three! Chapter 4 was mostly another acrostic, but two of the letters were out of order, indicating that something is weakening. And now, in chapter 5, we have 22 verses again (and we are therefore expecting another Hebrew acrostic, using the 22 Hebrew letters), but there's no acrostic at all. It has completely unraveled. Why? Because there is hope; God's love has not ceased; his mercies are made new; great is his faithfulness; he is our portion; he is good to those who wait for him; salvation comes from the Lord (see 3.21-26). The ministry of Jesus shows that we have not been abandoned in our sin. God is redeeming his people; every tear will be wiped away (Revelation 21.4). We grieve as those who have great hope (1 Thessalonians 4.13). *"You, O Lord, reign forever; your throne endures to all generations"* (v.19).

Reflecting on Lamentations-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Lamentations. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Lamentations before we move forward?

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. John 17.17