

THE BIG READ (45)

Jesus in Lamentations

A. Introduction

1. Every book of the Bible has one dominating theme – Jesus is the Christ.

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”
(Luke 24:45-47)

Jesus is the Christ who will suffer and die.

Jesus is the Christ who will rise from the dead on the third day.

Jesus is the Christ who will forgive the sins of all who repent.

Jesus is the Christ who will be preached to the nations.

2. The Old Testament that Jesus read contained the same 39 books as our English Bibles but was arranged in a different order.

It had three sections – the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

“Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” (Luke 24:44)

The final section of the Old Testament is the Writings.

Whereas the Prophets looked back to what happened to Israel and why it happened in order to call the nation to repent and return to God, the Writings looked forward to the hope that was coming to those who repent, through a King like David, and showed those who did, how to live faithfully in all of life’s circumstances as they waited for His arrival.

This means that though the books found in the Writings sections were written at different points in Israel’s history, it was after the Babylonian exile was over, that they were collected together to give the remnant hope and guidance as they waited.

3. The next book in the Writings is Lamentations.

Lamentations is a bridging book.

The Writings end with four narrative books set during and after the exile (Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles).

Lamentations sets the context for these by focusing on the despair and grief felt by God’s people in exile.

But it also picks up on a theme from the previous book, Song of Songs.

In Song of Songs, there is a scene when the bride (God’s people) distances herself from her Bridegroom, and she experiences the unpleasantness of God’s discipline.

Lamentations puts words to this experience, because in Lamentations God’s people have distanced themselves from Him and are feeling His discipline.

B. Getting Started with Lamentations

1. What is Lamentations?

Lamentations is a series of poems that express how God's people felt after experiencing His disciplining hand upon them.

They have the feel of a funeral dirge.

The first four poems are acrostics, where the first letter of each verse starts with a succeeding letter of the 22 letter Hebrew alphabet. The fifth poem is not an acrostic, but does have 22 lines to it.

By using this pattern, the author of Lamentations appears to be stressing the completeness of his grief, that he uses every letter that could be used, to express the depth of his pain.

2. What was the event that caused Lamentations to be written?

Although we're not told precisely what the event was, it is pretty clear that Lamentations is a response to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the subsequent exile of God's people to Babylon in 587BC.

This fits with Jewish tradition which says that the author of Lamentations was Jeremiah.

In fact, in the Greek Old Testament, Lamentations actually begins with these words, *"And it came to pass that Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem and said..."*

The destruction of Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon was a disaster for God's people on many levels – military, political, spiritual, and personal.

"Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see. Is any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me, that the LORD brought on me in the day of his fierce anger?" (Lamentations 1:12)

"The LORD has done what he planned; he has fulfilled his word, which he decreed long ago. He has overthrown you without pity, he has let the enemy gloat over you, he has exalted the horn of your foes." (Lamentations 2:17)

"The LORD himself has scattered them; he no longer watches over them. The priests are shown no honour, the elders no favour." (Lamentations 4:16)

The reason it happened was because God was disciplining them for their sin and rejection of Him.

"Her foes have become her masters; her enemies are at ease. The LORD has brought her grief because of her many sins. Her children have gone into exile, captive before the foe." (Lamentations 1:5)

"My sins have been bound into a yoke; by his hands they were woven together. They have come together. They have come upon my neck and the LORD has sapped my strength. He has handed over to those I cannot withstand." (Lamentations 1:14)

"Let all their wickedness come before you; deal with them as you have dealt with me because of all my sins. My groans are many and my heart is faint." (Lamentations 1:22)

3. Yet because the historical event is not explicitly given, the book also serves the purpose of showing to God's people in every age, how to respond to God's discipline.

For the remnant after the exile was over, Lamentations taught them how to be honest about the pain of being disciplined by God, and also how to be hopeful because of God's great love and faithfulness to His promises.

"I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him. The LORD is good to those who hope in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD." (Lamentations 3:19-26)

"You, O LORD, reign for ever; your throne endures from generation to generation. Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long? Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may

4. The third lament describes the cure the people need when they are experiencing God's discipline.

In Hebrew poetry, the climax is in the middle rather than at the end, and here in Lamentations 3, we see some rays of light in the midst of the surrounding darkness of the book.

The people can have hope because God is faithful to His promises and will not totally abandon His people.

"Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:21-23)

Therefore, they should repent and return to Him.

"Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD." (Lamentations 3:40)

5. The fourth lament describes the cause of God's discipline.

It was because of their sin, especially those of their leaders.

"But it happened because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed within her the blood of the righteous." (Lamentations 4:13)

The leaders of Jerusalem will be more severely judged for leading the people away from God.

6. The final laments describes the cry of the people experiencing God's discipline.

The book ends with a cry to God.

"Remember, O LORD, what has happened to us; look, and see our disgrace." (Lamentations 5:1)

The prophet leads the people to pray that God would restore them.

"Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may return; renew our days as of old." (Lamentations 5:21)

D. Jesus in Lamentations

1. Jesus fights against His people.

He disciplines us when we disobey Him in order to bring us back to Himself.

2. Jesus fights for His people.

"O Daughter of Zion, your punishment will end; he will not prolong your exile." (Lamentations 4:22)

We will be disciplined but we will not be destroyed because Jesus was consumed by God's wrath in our place.

He will renew us and restore our relationship with God.

"The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD." (Lamentations 3:25-26)

So when we experience God's discipling hand upon us, what should we do?

"Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD." (Lamentations 3:40)