**Introduction & Lamentations 1**

**I. Introduction to the Book of Lamentations**

A. Author:

1. Internal Evidence –

a. Jeremiah penned lamentations (2Chron. 35:25; Jer. 8:18-22).

b. Obvious language and imagery similarities (e.g. the ravaging of the virgin daughter Jerusalem, the appeal to the righteous Judge for vengeance, expectation of divine retribution upon the nations that rejoiced at Jerusalem’s collapse).

2. External Evidence (Targum; *Baba Bathra* 15a; LXX; Latin Vulgate)

B. Title:

1. The first word of the book is “how” (Hebrew, *ekah*), a word representing a severe lamentation. It came to be used as a superscription for the book in the Hebrew texts. It is also the first word of chapters 2 and 4.

2. The LXX called it “threnoi” (“wailings”) & the Latin Vulgate added the subtitle *“It comprises the Lamentations of Jeremiah the prophet.”*

3. The Talmud, *Baba Bathra 15a,* calls the book “*qinot*” (“Lamentations”).

C. Timeline: Mostly directly after the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 587/6 B.C. Harrison suggests Chapter 5 is later, but not much later. The LXX adds the preface, *“And it came to pass, after Israel was led into captivity and Jerusalem laid waste, that Jeremiah was led into captivity and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem and said…”* The Latin Vulgate added, *“with a bitter spirit sighing and wailing…”.*

D. Structure (cf. Ps. 119; Prov. 31):

1. A Hebrew alphabetic acrostic with minor variations makes up the first four chapters of the book. Chapter 5 is not one, but does have 22 lines.

2. Chapters 2-4 switch *pe* and *ayin* for unspecified reasons. It may have been a technique to increase dissonance and break the harmony, intensifying the feelings of distress as one read it.

3. Chapter 3 is an acrostic, but each letter contains 3 lines instead of 1.

4. Chapters 1-3 group three lines to a strophe with two exceptions (1:7; 2:19). Chapter 4 has two lines per strophe. These strophes frequently use Hebrew parallelism so recognizing this structure aids in understanding the book.

5. Two reasons are suggested for this structure: aid in memorization (the text would be used in public and private worship; it was read on the 9th of Ab in mid-July commemorating the fall of the Temple; cf. Jer. 41:4f; Zech. 7:3) & to convey the fullness of judgment on Jerusalem (A->Z or in Hebrew *Aleph->Tav*).

E. Major Themes:

1. The problem of national suffering (contrast Job’s personal suffering)

2. National, representative confession of guilt (especially chapters 2 and 5; cf. Ps. 44; 80; Dan. 9) *“Sow to the wind, reap the whirlwind”* (Hos. 8:7).

3. *“Divine sovereignty, justice, morality, judgment, and the hope of blessing in the distant future, are themes which emerge in solemn grandeur from the cadences of Lamentations.”* (Harrison, 200)

F. *“In spite of the incessant preaching of Jeremiah and others who warned of Jerusalem’s fall, when they actually saw their beloved city go up in flames the Jews were shocked and horrified. Staggering questions mounted up in their heart. How could the Lord allow the holy city and temple to be destroyed? Had His promises failed? Did He no longer care for them? What would be their future? Would justice ever be meted out to their enemies? Five poems, combined as the Book of Lamentations, give realistic answers to these questions.”* (Harkrider, *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, 131).

**II. Text Of Chapter 1 – “Weeping Over Jerusalem” (3.5 minutes to read)**

*A. The Decimation of Jerusalem (vv. 1-11)* – note 3rd person pronouns

1. Though once a princess among the provinces, Israel has become a forced laborer or like a lonely widow with no family, friends, or comforts. *“After Titus destroyed Jerusalem (AD 70) and subjugated Judea, a coin was struck by the Romans depicting Judea as a solitary female figure sitting under a palm tree with the inscription ‘Judaea capta.’ This is an apt representation of the imagery presented by Jeremiah in verse 1.”* (Humphries, 537)

2. Her former lovers, nations like Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Moab, Ammon, Edom, etc. have all turned against her and have each respectively played an active or passive part in her downfall. Though she had united herself with foreign gods as well, she did not take into account that these were powerless to deliver (cf. Ezek. 16:35-37; 23:22-24; Jer. 2:36f; 22:20; 27:3; 37:6-8). See also how those lovers abandoned her in time of need (Jer. 48:27; 50:11; Zep. 2:8; Ob. 12; Eze. 35:10; 36:5).

3. She dwells among the nations, a curse of disobedience (Lev. 26:39; Dt. 28:64-67).

4. Jerusalem’s gates are devoid of the typical transactions and justice & the way to the Temple is empty and eerily quiet.

5. All this has come because of her transgressions which is reiterated several times as a theodicy in light of such devastation (vv. 5, 8f, 18).

6. There is little hope of a future since all those of promise have been taken from the land. What will be the future? Will there be a future?

7. Though she was as a sheep with the Lord as Shepherd (Ps. 23), she is now a deer fleeing from a hunter in futility and into a land lacking any vegetation and sustenance. The “glory has departed” as Jerusalem has become Ichabod (1Sam. 4:21). She is ridiculed (cf. Ps. 137:1; Jer. 24:9; Ezek. 22:4f; Neh. 4:1f). How the mighty have fallen (Pss. 48; 89).

8. Several times in this chapter we also see the idea of uncleanness (vv. 8f). She has exposed herself to the world and God has handed her over to the fruit of her ways. She had refused to blush (cf. Jer. 6; 8); now she has been forced to face the music (cf. Is. 47:3; Jer. 13:22; Ezek. 16:37). As a menstruous woman might bleed through her garments and be seen by all, so Jerusalem is humiliated (Gen. 31:35; 1Tim. 5:24).

9. The enemy, who was formerly banned from the Temple and worship by the LOM, has entered and destroyed the house of the Lord.

10. She had been reduced to selling all her precious things, including the remaining children into slavery, just to eat (Jer. 38:9; 52:6).

*B. Pleas for Mercy & Retribution (vv. 12-22)* – note 1st person pronouns

1. Verse 12 has become a common phrase even today to appeal for basic mercy on a distressing situation.

2. Verse 13 and the fire in the bones is reflected in Jer. 20:9. There it was when Jeremiah attempted to hold the word of the Lord in; here, it is the devastation wrought by the judgment of the Lord. See also Jer. 5:14 where the word of the Lord erupted forth as fire from the mouth of Jeremiah and consumed the people (cf. Jer. 23:29; *fire* 41x in Jer.).

3. Yoke imagery calls to mind Jer. 27-28 and the contest with Hananiah (cf. also Matt. 11:28-30).

4. The people have been trodden as in a winepress, a majorly used OT image.

5. Though she attempts again & again to elicit compassion, she is refused. As Jeremiah had wept years prior (8:18-9:1), so the city now weeps.

6. In the midst of this all, God is called righteous (cf. Gen. 18:25). *“The prodigal daughter is finally coming to her senses.”* (Harrison, 212)

7. Though Jerusalem recognizes that she suffers for her sins, she also prays that others who have also sinned, particularly against her, would also experience God’s wrath (cf. Is. 47:6; Jer. 25:29; 30:16; 50:17, 33)

**III. Thought Questions For Chapter 1**

A. Contrast verbal similarities between this chapter and Psalm 23.

B. Who were the friends/lovers of Judah? Who were the enemies?

C. What normally happened in the gates? (v. 4)

D. Do we see God interacting with the nations today or does God only act personally since the destiny of physical Israel was fulfilled?

**IV. Applications For Chapter 1**

A. We need to have faith in the justice AND the unfailing goodness of God.

B. *“A positive reaction to an experience of suffering is a necessary prerequisite to spiritual maturity”* (Harrison, 202)

C. *“Lam. 1:18: The Lord is righteous. While He is a God of love and mercy, He does not ignore blatant rebellion and rejection of His word. Therefore, He is a God of wrath too, and He will execute righteous vengeance upon evildoers (2 Thess. 1:7-9; Jude 15; Rev. 14:9-11; 20:11-15).”* (Harkrider, 134)

D. *“The sins of the parents bring heavy consequences upon their children and their children’s children (Exod. 20:5; Num. 14:18, 33).”* (Humphries, 542)

E. Gloating over the misfortune of another will bring condemnation!