

**Message #1****Various Texts**

Most people view sin as pleasurable and fun. Perhaps for a moment it seems that way. Most don't take sin seriously. Most don't take God seriously. They think sin is just a pleasure choice lifestyle. Even some of God's own people view sin this way. What people don't realize is that sin will end up leaving one depressed, dry, miserable, barren and crushed. **Sin is never the road to happiness.**

There is a book of the Bible that is totally given over to showing God's people that very point. **The book is Lamentations. Lamentations is clearly a book that shows God's people that sin will not lead them to happiness. It will leave them lonely, empty, afflicted, lamenting and wailing. Sin will kill one's spiritual life and will turn that life into a funeral song.**

Dr. Chuck Swindoll said Lamentations "...is a mute reminder that sin, in spite of all its allurements and excitement, carries misery, barrenness, and pain. It is the other side of the 'eat, drink, and be merry' coin" (*The Lamentations of Jeremiah*, "Introduction").

In the next weeks we would like to take you through Lamentations. As is our habit, to introduce the book we do so by asking introductory questions:

**QUESTION #1** – Why study Lamentations?

We cite five reasons:

**Reason #1** - Lamentations is one of only 66 inspired Biblical books God has given to man.

In his introduction to the Old Testament, Paul Benware made a very significant statement, "A person will never properly understand the New Testament Scriptures if the Old Testament Scriptures remain a mystery to him" (*Survey of the Old Testament*, p. 11). To this we add that a person will never properly understand real spirituality if the Old Testament is not properly studied.

The book that follows Jeremiah, in our English Bibles and in the Greek Septuagint and in the Latin Vulgate, is the book of Lamentations. It sits between Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which are two major prophetic books.

However, in the Hebrew Bible, Lamentations does not appear as a prophetic book listing but as one of the writings books, the Hagiographa in Greek or Kethubim in Hebrew, grouped with Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes and Esther. The Kethubim is a division of the Hebrew Bible. The word means the "writings." It is broken down into four sections:

- 1) Poetical books - Psalms, Proverbs, Job.
- 2) Megilloth books or scrolls - Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther.
- 3) Prophecy books - Daniel.
- 4) History books - Ezra, Nehemiah, I & II Chronicles.

There are literally thousands Hebrew manuscripts in existence. Lamentations was a book preserved and found in Qumram Cave 4 in the Dead Sea Scroll discovery in 1952. These manuscripts date back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. The Greek Septuagint, written from 285-246 BC, contains the book of Lamentations, and the Masoretic Hebrew vowel pointed text is well preserved as well.

Norman Geisler and William Nix wrote: “The thousands of Hebrew manuscripts, with their confirmation by the LXX and the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the numerous other crosschecks from outside and inside the text provide overwhelming support for the reliability of the Old Testament text. Hence, it is appropriate to conclude with Sir Frederic Kenyon’s statement, ‘The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries’” (*A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 383).

**Reason #2** - Lamentations is a book of the Bible that is rarely, if ever, studied and expounded at Church.

In fact, it is rarely studied and taught in theological institutions. Now one would think that if there is one book in the Bible that is devoted to showing the misery of what God causes to happen to His people if they are not faithful to Him, that all believers would want to know every word, sentence, clause and paragraph. But that is not the case. Frankly, this book is often neglected and even avoided.

After all, who wants to read a bunch of funeral laments that mourn the fact that God has leveled His own people and punished them because they refused to turn from their sin? Who wants to read and study a book that shows the devastation of the consequences and anguish that sin causes? Lamentations is not a “feel-good” book to study. So most don’t study it, which is one reason we are going to study it.

**Reason #3** - Lamentations is a book that shows how God actually feels when His people sin.

I don’t think God’s people think much about the fact that their sin hurts God. When God’s people turn away from God’s word and start trusting other things, other than Him, it breaks His heart. God does not enjoy having to punish His own people because they are not interested in being faithful to Him.

**Reason #4** - Lamentations is a book that reveals that there are devastating consequences to sin.

Sin is not a light matter in the mind of God or in the life of a believer. It will bring devastating consequences. God does punish sin in the lives of His people if they do not turn from it. People may get away with sin for a short time, but then God will hit His own people with devastating calamity.

**Reason #5** - Lamentations is a book that shows us how we need to respond when God has chastised us for our sin.

There is hope if we respond properly to the chastisement. In the midst of the devastation and judgment, God's people always have the option of turning from sin and crying out to God for renewal and restoration (5:21).

**QUESTION #2** – What is Lamentations?

The book of Lamentations is an “emotional outburst” book that shows the great sorrow over the fact that Jerusalem was destroyed because she refused to turn from her sin. **Just as Jeremiah contained warnings that literal judgment would come, Lamentations contains mournings that literal judgment did come.**

In fact, every year in synagogues on the fifth Hebrew month, the book is read to commemorate the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Even today, Orthodox Jews pray at Jerusalem's Western Wailing Wall and often cite words from Lamentations.

Lamentations is a series of five lamentation funeral wailings in which the prophet Jeremiah describes and mourns over the fact that Jerusalem was completely destroyed by the Babylonians in 587-586 BC.

The description of what happened is given by an eyewitness who was actually in Jerusalem when it happened.

**QUESTION #3** – Who wrote Lamentations?

There is no place in the book of Lamentations where the author is specifically named. Many Biblical scholars assume it was written by Jeremiah because it is so closely related to the events described by Jeremiah in Jeremiah.

**In fact, all Jewish traditions say that Lamentations was written by Jeremiah. The early church fathers said it was written by Jeremiah.**

We would not say that Lamentations is an exact sequel to Jeremiah. It is more of a response to exactly what happened in Jeremiah.

We are on safe ground if we take the position that Jeremiah wrote Lamentations for six reasons:

**Reason #1** - It was written by an eyewitness to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Certainly Jeremiah was in a good position to write Lamentations. He had been an eyewitness to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

**Reason #2** - The introduction to Lamentations in the Greek Septuagint says that after Jerusalem was destroyed Jeremiah sat weeping and lamenting and this was his lamentation (*Lamentations*, Septuagint, p. 972).

This preface to the book of Lamentations in the Greek Septuagint has become a major reason many have concluded Jeremiah wrote the book. In fact, the Septuagint titles this book Qrhnoi Ieremiaç “Lamentations Jeremiah.”

**Reason #3** - The Hebrew text of II Chronicles 35:25 clearly connects Jeremiah to Lamentations.

Now the translators of the Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate did not just invent some novel idea that Jeremiah wrote it. They based their conclusions on II Chronicles 35:25 that says, “Then Jeremiah chanted a lament for Josiah. And 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.”

Now Lamentations does not actually record a lament concerning Josiah, but it certainly does clearly connect Jeremiah to the concept of Lamentations.

**Reason #4** - There are similarities in vocabulary and tone of the book between Jeremiah and Lamentations.

If we compare passages, there is a distinct connection: Lam. 1:2/Jer. 30:14; Lam. 1:16; 2:11/Jer. 9:1, 18; Lam. 2:20; 4:10/Jer. 19:9; Lam. 4:21/Jer. 49:12.

**Reason #5** - The Latin Vulgate states that Lamentations was written by Jeremiah.

**Reason #6** - No one even questioned that Lamentations was written by Jeremiah until 1712, when a German Theologian named Hermann von der Hardt said Jeremiah did not write it.

He claimed there were five different authors who each did one chapter: Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and King Jehoiachin. Many theologians disregarded him and his teachings.

**We suspect that the book of Lamentations was written by Jeremiah.**

**QUESTION #4** – When was Lamentations written?

Lamentations is a raw book filled with raw emotion over the fact of what happened to Jerusalem. The author saw it and was emotionally moved by it. **Therefore we know that this book was written in close proximity to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587-586 BC.**

The events in the book were vivid in the writer's mind. He had seen it and lived it and he was able to describe it.

**QUESTION #5** – What is unique about the structure of Lamentations?

Lamentations is a very systematically structured book. As one scholar observed “Lamentations is one of the most highly crafted of all Biblical books, the Hebrew poetry developed in a complex acrostic pattern.” The book is comprised of 5 chapters. Each chapter is a lament or poem.

Each chapter is written as an alphabetic acrostic of the Hebrew alphabet. In other words, each chapter except one contains 22 verses each of which begins with the successive letter of the twenty two letter Hebrew alphabet.

The Hebrew alphabet contains twenty two letters: Aleph, Bet, Gimel, Dalet, He, Waw, Zayin, Het, Tet, Yod, Kaf, Lamed, Mem, Nun, Samek, Ayin, Pe, Tsade, Qof, Resh, Sin/Shin, Tau.

So each verse in chapters 1-2, 4-5 begins with a word that is successive letter that starts with aleph and ends with tau. In chapter 3, every third verse begins with a successive letter that starts with aleph and ends with tau.

**Chapter 1** contains 22 verses and each verse begins with the successive letter of the alphabet.  
**Chapter 2** contains 22 verses and each verse begins with the successive letter of the alphabet.  
**Chapter 3** contains 66 verses and each 3<sup>rd</sup> verse begins with the successive letter of the alphabet.  
 So in chapter three we find 22 three verse clauses that are also successive.  
**Chapter 4** contains 22 verses and each verse begins with the successive letter of the alphabet.  
**Chapter 5** contains 22 verses and each verse begins with the successive letter of the alphabet.

There have been many attempted explanations given for this structure. But one thing we certainly see about this structure of the Hebrew language is that God's word is systematically written.

God's promises are written and when God promises in His written word to send His judgment, it is a complete A to Z or Aleph to Tau judgment that precisely fulfills His written word. Nothing in His written word is left out.

Certainly this kind of grammatical structure should prompt all to carefully and systematically study the Bible.

**QUESTION #6** – What does Lamentations teach?

Certainly one of the main things this book teaches is **when God's people turn away from God and His word, there will be devastating, chastising judgments that He will send that will leave His own people suffering and mourning.**

**QUESTION #7** – What is an overview of the book of Lamentations?

The key point of the book is that Jerusalem and Judah were hit with a judgment of God that destroyed them.

**Chapter 1** is a lament because Jerusalem was totally destroyed.

**Chapter 2** is a lament concerning God's anger and wrath.

**Chapter 3** is a lament because God caused horrible events to happen because of His wrath.

**Chapter 4** is a lament concerning the suffering and ruin God's judgment caused.

**Chapter 5** is a lament for the pitiable condition and asks God for any hope.

J. Vernon McGee said Lamentations “is a hymn of heartbreak, a psalm of sadness, a symphony of sorrow, and a story of sifting. Lamentations is the wailing wall of the Bible” (*Thru The Bible*, Vol. 3, p. 425).

A few years ago a poll was taken about the saddest song ever sung. Some of the top songs were:

Hank Williams “I’m so Lonesome I could cry.”

George Jones “He Stopped Loving Her today.”

Harry Chapin “Cats in the Cradle.”

Eric Clapton “Tears in Heaven.”

Those are sad songs, but none equal Lamentations. Stay away from sin or life for any of us will be a very sad song.