

Klagovisorna Lamentations



Sources:

- Richard W. Nysse, "Lamentations" at EnterTheBible.org, Luther Seminary
- J. Gordon McConville. *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Prophets*, 2002.
- Ernest C. Lucas. *Exploring the Old Testament: A guide to the Psalms & Wisdom Literature*. Vol 3.

Summary



- ❧ The five poems of Lamentations respond to the **destruction of Jerusalem.**
- ❧ The book acknowledges the **consequence of sin.**
- ❧ But it also challenges the suffering as unbearable.
- ❧ The book consists of **prayers of sufferers,** not theology about suffering.

WHAT'S IT ABOUT?



- ❧ The first-person voice addresses God to see, to consider, and to restore the speakers.
- ❧ The book **moves from silent suffering to verbalizing the suffering** and, in turn, **demanding** that God end the suffering.
- ❧ Lamentations **refuses to be silent** in the face of God's silence.

SO WHAT?



- ❧ **Lamentations challenges piety (spirituality) that commends passive, silent suffering.**
- ❧ **Even if the suffering is justified punishment, the book relays the horror endured.**
- ❧ **If biblical faith is understood as living in an “already-not yet” tension Lamentations demands that readers not gloss over the suffering and horror of the “not yet.”**
- ❧ **One form of waiting on God is shouting these laments.**

WHO WROTE IT?

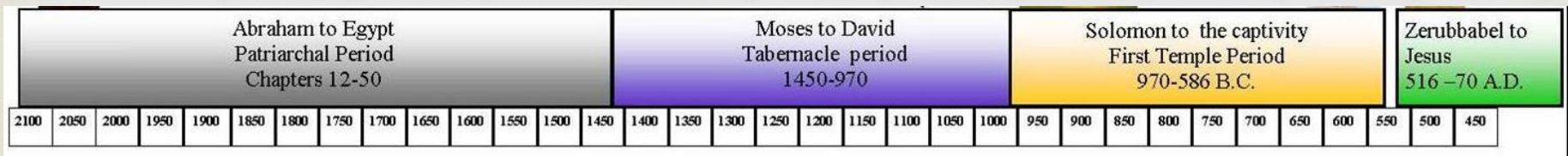


- ✧ In both Jewish and Christian tradition the book is attributed to **Jeremiah**.
- ✧ That claim has been **challenged** with reason, but it has not been completely displaced.
- ✧ Current emphasis centers on the *function* of the book more than on identifying a specific individual author.

WHEN WAS IT WRITTEN?



- It is customary to understand the book to have arisen shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/6 B.C.E.
- Lamentations continues to be used in liturgies memorializing horrors in Jewish history.



HOW DO I READ IT?



- ❧ While the book is read as a collection of **prayers of ancient sufferers wrestling with God**, the present reader is drawn in to read it now as an act of prayer.
- ❧ The **gruesome depiction of suffering** does not permit distance. The reader is asked to look, to see, and to act, just as is God in the prayers.
- ❧ **Silent distance is not permitted.**
- ❧ It would be appropriate for readers to be moved to work to alleviate contemporary suffering, but not without joining the text's petitioners in their **prayers against the silence of God.**

YET I STILL DARE TO
Hope

WHEN I REMEMBER THIS
the FAITHFUL LOVE *of the* LORD

NEVER ENDS

HIS *mercies*

NEVER CEASE

LAMENTATIONS 3:21-22

HOW DO I READ IT?



The steadfast love of
the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come
to an end;
they are new every
morning;
great is your
faithfulness.

“The LORD is my
portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope
in him.”

Lam 3:22-24 ESV

- ❧ As the theology of 3:22-24 does not silence the voice of the petitioners in the rest of Lamentations, **readers should not rush to use other sections of the canon to silence Lamentations.**
- ❧ Isaiah 40-55 may well be a response to Lamentations, but it does not silence the book.
- ❧ **Both voices are “scripturally” approved.**

Structure of Lamentations



- ❧ Chapters 1, 2, and 4 are **acrostic**.
 - ❧ The first word of each verse in these chapters begins with the subsequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
- ❧ Chapter 3 extends the acrostic by having sets of three for each letter of the alphabet
 - ❧ Thus 22 sets of three for a total of 66 verses.
- ❧ Chapter 5 is not acrostic but does consist of 22 verses.

Small Group Project



1 Lam 1:1-22

2 Lam 2:1-22

3 Lam 3:1-20

4 Lam 3:21-42

5 Lam 3:43-66

6 Lam 4:1-22

7 Lam 5:1-22

- **Read your assigned verses**
- **Develop one sentence which summarizes the message of these verses.**
- **Have a reporter who will talk about it and a writer, who will write the sentence on the white board.**

Outline suggestions



- Lamentations 1:1-22** **No Comfort, No Comforter:
Jerusalem Mourns**
- Lamentations 2:1-22** **The LORD's anger and the people's grief**
- Lamentations 3:1-66** **Not Forgiven: The poet's suffering and the
LORD's compassions**
- Lamentations 4:1-22** **Siege: Affliction upon Affliction**
- Lamentations 5:1-22** **Restore and Renew! A people subdued**

Issue:

Relation to Jeremiah



- ❧ In the book of **Jeremiah**, the prophet insists against other authoritative voices that the incursion of the Babylonians was the just judgment of God.
- ❧ Jeremiah insists in chapter 28 that **exile to Babylon was the judgment of God**.
- ❧ Lamentations is commonly read as a petitioning cry from the midst of that destruction and the punishment that it was understood to be.
- ❧ Justified or not, **the problem for Lamentations is the continued suffering**.

Theological Themes: An answer to lament?



- ❧ Christian interpreters have often sought to make the **middle of chapter 3 function as the answer** to the book's laments.
- ❧ With 3:22-24 in the center, **the steadfast love and mercy of the Lord are lifted up as the basis for hope** which should lead to quiet waiting for deliverance from the Lord (3:26).
- ❧ But it seems that in Lamentations as in some psalms (for example, Psalm 44) the received confessions about God **only intensify the lament and petition.**

Theological Themes: Silence



- ❧ Human voices do not remain silent; rather, **the silence that pervades the book is God's.**
- ❧ God is addressed repeatedly, but God does not speak in response.

Hurricane Katrina



☞ **Destroyed New Orleans**

☞ August 23, 2005 – August 31, 2005



Small Group Discussion



- ❧ If Lamentations states that the destruction of Jerusalem was a result of sin, are Christians justified saying that **hurricane Katrina's destruction of New Orleans** was a result of sin?
- ❧ Why or why not?
- ❧ Hint: What did God say to Israel--through the prophets--prior to the destruction of Jerusalem? Don't think reductionistically (over simplified).