

Lamentations

Summary

Sometimes called the “funeral dirge” of the Old Testament, this book, authored by the prophet, Jeremiah, laments the sad consequences of the tribe of Judah's disobedience. Judah was also known as the Southern Kingdom of the divided nation of Israel; her capital city was Jerusalem. The siege and destruction of Jerusalem and the enslavement of its citizens at the hands of Babylon in 586-585 B.C. is an event that Jeremiah the prophet had repeatedly warned against in the book that bears his name. Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations at the end of his days as a prophet to Judah (626-586 B.C.), likely during the final days of the Babylonian siege and just before his deportation to Egypt with other captives of the tribe of Judah. Jeremiah had warned wayward Judah for over forty years of the impending disaster should they fail to heed his warnings and remain separated from God's laws and commands. These warnings are recorded in the book of Jeremiah. While the book of Jeremiah predicts the eventual siege and fall of Jerusalem, Lamentations reflects back on the events after they have occurred. Despite its sad tone, the book of Lamentations also contains a ray of hope and one of the strongest testaments to God's never-ending grace in the entire Bible in Lamentations 3:22-23, *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.*

Author

The author of this book is the prophet, Jeremiah. Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah the priest and was born and raised in Anathoth, a small village about two miles northeast of Jerusalem. The close proximity of his village to Jerusalem allowed him to be very well acquainted with life in and around the capital city.

Date

The book was written during the final stages of the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 586 B.C.

Primary Characters

Jeremiah (Lamentations 1-5)

The City of Jerusalem often referred to as "she" or "your city" (Lamentations 1-5)

The Tribe of Judah often referred to as "she" or "your people" (Lamentations 1-5)

God generally referred to as "The Lord" or "You" (Lamentations 1-5)

Historical Moments

The Fall of Jerusalem (Lamentations 1-5)

Major Theological Themes

God Is Holy and Just, Judging the Sinful and Disciplining the Disobedient - God is supremely patient and longs for a relationship of loving obedience from His people. He warns His wayward children, longing for restoration with them. However, God is just, and there comes a time when those who absolutely refuse to turn from their sinful ways must suffer the consequences of their disobedience.

God Longs for the Wayward - The Lord lovingly restores those who confess their waywardness and turn to embrace His unending mercy. In the midst of this saddest of Old Testament books is an awesome reminder that our God is above all - loving (Lamentations 3:19-42). This theme is summarized by Jeremiah's words in Lamentations 3:31-33: *For no one is cast-off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone.*

Lessons Learned from Lamentations

God Requires Obedience - A right relationship with God requires our obedience to His commands. God desires our obedience as a demonstration of our love for Him. He knows that we are not always obedient, so He lovingly warns us when we go astray and then provides a way of returning through admitting (confession) and turning away (repentance) from our disobedience (sin). In the time of Judah, God's forgiveness was accomplished through the sacrifices of a priest; today, this restoration to God is through faith in Jesus Christ.

Mercy Versus Justice - Despite being extraordinarily patient, merciful, and compassionate, God is also just, and ultimately judges those who reject His mercy through defiant disobedience. The teaching of Lamentations (along with the book of Jeremiah and other places in the Bible) is clear: God will not wait forever and because He is just, there will come a day of judgment for all human beings. Those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior need not be worried about this coming judgment, as the great news of the gospel is that their sins have been completely paid by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. The sad truth is that many people reject this incredible, free gift of mercy. Those who reach this day of judgment, having rejected Jesus, will be handed over to suffer for their unrepentant disobedience and rejection. The gamble is that like Judah and Jerusalem in Lamentations, we do not know when our day of judgment will arrive. The New Testament teaches that people are destined to die only once and after this will face this judgment (Hebrews 9:27). The choice is up to each individual and it is clear - those who know Jesus are saved from suffering and will live eternally in God's loving presence; those who do not know Him will live eternally separated from Him. The gift is free to all, but it must be accepted.