

THE LAMENTATIONS (of Jeremiah)

The writer: Although Jeremiah is not identified as such, tradition has ascribed it to him, and Keil (Jeremiah, II, 349, 350) says that no other tradition is as well supported as this. See his discussion, pp. 339-350.

The date: Between the beginning of the Babylonian Exile and the time when Jeremiah was forced to go to Egypt, A.D., c. 545 B.C.

The title: It was originally listed in the Hebrew Canon as, תנחומי -- the word with which chapters 1, 2, and 4 begin. Later the Rabbis called it, Lamentations, from the contents.

Its place in the Canon: The Hebrew Bible places it after Ecclesiastes, and just before Esther. It really belongs with the poetical books because it is poetry, but it was placed after ~~XXXXXXXX~~ Jeremiah by the Masoretes because they combined it with Jeremiah as one book in their attempt to combine the OT into 22 books to conform with the Hebrew alphabet.

Peculiarities:

- 1) Each of the five chapters is a separate lamentation.
- 2) They appear to be arranged in the order in which they ~~xxxx xxxx~~ were written.
- 3) Chapters 1-4 are all written as Psa. 119--following the Hebrew alphabet. There are these differences:
 - a) Ch. 1 is the only chapter which follows the present form of the alphabet. In chapters 2-4 ד precedes ו. This, however, is not unusual because other chapters in the Bible written after this fashion show similar variations (i.e., the omission of a letter, or the repetition of one, or both, etc.).
 - b) Chapters 1, 2, and 4 have 22 verses with the letters of the alphabet beginning each verse (each verse having 3 lines). In ch. 3, the three lines of each verse begin with the the same letter, and the translators have made them three separate verses. Thus, we have vv. 1-3 beginning with א; vv. 4-6 with ב; etc.

Alphabetical arrangement shows: logical order, completeness, and continuity. Deviation from the order (as indicated above) shows that the truth or the thought has not not been sacrificed for the method. This is also true in chapter 5--"a prayer, in which the careful consideration indispensable for the carrying out of the alphabetic arrangement must give place to the free and natural outcome of the feelings" (Keil, op. cit., 339).

Outline: Five Lamentations (each with a distinct emphasis):

- I. Judah has no one to help her. Her enemies are in complete control. Her friends have proven false (as God had warned many times before the Captivity). Interspersed are prayers, and a final confession to the Lord (vv. 18-22).
- II. The Lord is the One who has brought the judgment. They had also scorned this idea before the Captivity.
- III. An unidentified man speaks, giving his testimony of how he had found God faithful and forgiving when (he (the man) had had to be judged for his own sin. It is given as an encouragement to Judah to turn to the Lord for help.
- IV. Pictured is the absolute misery and universal suffering experienced by Judah--which is to serve as a warning to "Edom," a related nation, and this is an indication that other nations will come under divine judgment in time!
- V. Judah's appeal to the Lord for help. The book closes (5:22) with no help in sight.

Since, 2:16, 17, 3:46-48, 49-51, 4:16, 17, are the verses showing the change.

The lessons of the book. All five chapters serve to confirm the truth of the warnings and promises that God had been giving to Judah (and Israel) right from the very beginning of her history. There is a special emphasis in each chapter.

- 1) Chapter 1. God wants His people to trust Him, and not to put their confidence in men. Cf. Jer. 37:6-10; Isa. 30:1-3, 7; Psa. 60:11; 108:12--and many more!

In vv. 1-9a Jeremiah is describing what has happened to Judah. (Note esp. vv. 1, 2) In vv. 9b-11 Jeremiah is praying. In vv. 12-17 it seems that Judah is appealing to any nation for help, but then from v. 18 to end (22) calls upon the Lord.

- 2) Chapter 2. Repeatedly the people had denied the warnings of judgment given by the prophets. Cf. Jer. 5:10-18.

Cf. Jer. 22: 6-9, esp. v. 8. Note from v. 1 on the emphasis is upon what the Lord has done! It carries through to v. 17. V. 18 tells how they had prayed. In v. 19 Jeremiah encourages them to continue praying. Beginning with v. 20 we have his prayer. The judgments of God are always as severe as the predictions have indicated.

- 3) Chapter 3. This unidentified man tells his experience, beginning with how he experienced the judgment of God and then found "hope" in the Lord (vv. 21 ff.). This continues down through v. 39.

Hope
Deut. 30:1-10

In vv. 40-47 he exhorts the people to turn to the Lord.

In vv. 48-54, the prayer of Jeremiah for this chapter.

In vv. 55-66, the man seems to be speaking again, realizing not only that there is hope for himself, but asking also for the destruction of his enemies.

- 4) Chapter 4. Again, ch. 4 begins with the word, , which also is used to introduce chs. 1, 2. It means, "Alas, how . . . ?"

The unbelievable desolation of Judah is again presented. Cf. v. 12. But, by the last two verses, this is to serve as a warning to "Edom," and this would mean that every nation on the face of the earth would ultimately come under the judgment of God.

Cf. 1 Pet. 4:17; Deut. 30:7; Jer. 25:12-14, 27-29 ff.; Isa. 10:12, 13.

- 5) Chapter 5. This is the prayer of the children. Cf. vv. 3, 7. Chs. 2 and 4 especially emphasize the effect of the judgments upon the children. Cf. 2:11, 12; 4:3, 4, 10.

Two lessons seem to be prominent:

- 1) Children do not need to follow in the steps of their parents. They can turn to the Lord and find blessing.
- 2) In repentance we must turn to the Lord to do His will before we can see any evidence that He has heard, and before there is a sign of change in our circumstances.

Cf. 2 Chron. 7:14.