

Seven Bible Studies 2017

Prophecy

June 9: Lamentations 1-5 (John Morris)

Reading for June 9, 2017

LAMENTATIONS

For the first time in our reading of the prophets this year, a day is devoted to an entire book. We'll see this repeatedly as we move through the Minor Prophets, God permitting, but today serves as a first.

The Jews of antiquity appear to have treated Lamentations as an addendum to Jeremiah (that is, included it as a part of Jeremiah in their Bible, which grouped many of the books differently than we do). The book expresses deep sadness over the destruction of Jerusalem that Jeremiah had predicted would come, and though we cannot speak with absolute certainty on the point, there is strong evidence to suggest that Jeremiah was, in fact, the book's author. He is credited with its authorship as early as 200 BC, named as the author in the Jewish Talmud, and was uniformly regarded as such by the ancient, so-called "church fathers" (REALLY don't like that descriptor, but it communicates). The book certainly reads like Jeremiah, both in content and in sentiment. Lamentation 3:48, for example: "My eyes overflow with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people" (see also 2:11). Sounds just like the man we've come to know as the weeping prophet (Jer. 9:1; 14:17).

Lamentations is written in poetic form. The first four chapters (dirges) are alphabetic acrostics, chapters 1, 2, and 4 each having their successive verses begin with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet (22 verses corresponding to Hebrew's 22 letters). Chapter 3, containing 66 verses, is a different type of alphabet acrostic (more complicated in form), and then chapter 5, which closes out the book, is not an acrostic at all, though still poetic. Interestingly, Hebrew poetry generally does not involve rhyme, but does make use of rhythm. One author points out: "The metrical structure used in the Book of Lamentations is known as the Qinah or lament rhythm. This is the meter most commonly used in the ancient Near East for chanting dirges over the dead or lamenting national calamities. In Qinah rhythm the second line of each verse is one stress shorter than the first line. As a rule in Lamentations the pattern is three stresses in the first line, two in the second, and three in the third line. This meter, practically obscured in English translation, becomes apparent as one reads the Hebrew text aloud." Would be cool to hear.

Lamentations is not the easiest book to outline, since content is so similar from one chapter to the next, but the following breakdown (which I've borrowed) may serve to provide at least a basic framework:

- Chapter 1: A Widowed City
- Chapter 2: A Broken People
- Chapter 3: A Suffering Prophet
- Chapter 4: A Ruined Kingdom
- Chapter 5: A Penitent Nation

Sorry to make comments so brief, but gonna have to leave it at that this week. Just one helpful hint: 1:1-11 contains the laments of the prophet (again, probably Jeremiah), but 1:11-16, 18-22 actually personifies the city, and has Jerusalem, itself, weeping its/her past sins and subsequent fall. Can make it a little confusing at first, but makes it especially memorable in the end.

Comment:

Steven Wright:
Good stuff bro!

Comment:

Charles Fry:
Do notice the hope of Lamentations at the very center of the book, 3:21-42, especially 22-24 which you can sing from Songs of Faith and Praise in RSV wording. "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases..."

Replies:

Steven Wright:
We sang that at VBS this week!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:
<https://youtu.be/rFkwvVHtyMM>
"The Book of Lamentations Reading"

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thanks, John!