The Book of Lamentations
Jeremiah Weeps

Introduction:
Lamentations is a collection of poetic, funeral messages commemorating the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. As you read each chapter you can sense the turmoil of Jeremiah’s heart as he describes his eye witness account. Jeremiah begins each chapter with a letter from the Hebrew Alphabet as an acrostic formation. As Jeremiah writes, each letter reveals his heart ache and pain of seeing the Capital City, Jerusalem lay in ruin; finally Jeremiah cries out “Great is they faithfulness.” (Lam. 3:23).

In 586 B.C.E., the army of the neo-Babylonian empire destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple because the kingdom of Judah, of which Jerusalem was the capital, refused to remain a loyal vassal of Babylonia. The king of Babylonia at the time, Nebuchadnezzar, sought to counter Egyptian military power and political influence in Syria-Palestine, and so control of Judah was particularly important to him. Jerusalem was destroyed, and large parts of the population were exiled to Babylon.

But Lamentations is not concerned with the technical historical details of the destruction, but rather with larger and meta-historical issues: Why did God, who had once been Israel’s redeemer, acquiesce to the destruction of His holy city and temple? Why is God's love no longer evident? How can it be that "the city that was full of people" now "dwells alone" (Lamentations 1:1)? Lamentations offers more questions than answers, but asking these questions is an important step in dealing with the theological crisis posed by the destruction of the Temple.

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The Author of Lamentations:
Here is yet another book where the author is not named. However there is internal evidence as well as external evidence that Jeremiah is the likely candidate. Christian tradition supports the idea that Jeremiah was the author. The Bible itself says “Jeremiah also lamented for Josiah.” 2 Chronicles 35:25. There are obvious internal evidences that Jeremiah was he author. As you read the poems it becomes quite clear that only an eye witness could describe such details as are pointed out in the book of Lamentations (Lam. 1:13-15; 2:6, 9; 4:1-12). Here are some verses for comparison; Lam. 1:5 (Jer. 30:14); Lam. 1:15 (Jer. 8:21); Lam. 1:16 & 2:11 (9:1, 18); Lam. 2:22 (Jer. 6:25); Lam. 4:21 (Jer. 49:12). As you compare the verses you will notice that the same compassion of Judah’s downfall is apparent in both books.

Keys to Lamentations:
➢ The key word is—LAMENTATIONS: There seem to be several themes which run through Lamentations; with the most prominent being (Mourning) over Jerusalem’s holocaust. Remember this is the destruction of the first Temple. The second theme is (Confession) of sin and the acknowledgment of God’s righteousness and judgment upon Judah. The third theme is (Restoration); although this is the least prominent of the three themes, it is certainly and important factor in the restoration of Israel.
The key verses to LAMENTATIONS: Chapter 2:5, 6 and 3:22, 23.

The key chapter in LAMENTATIONS: Chapter 3; a viewing of the faith of Jeremiah amid turmoil of ruin. You will find an exhibition of one man’s strength, faith and determination; when you read chapter 3.

The Christology of the Book of Lamentations:

Simply put: The Christological purpose of Lamentation is to show Christ as the: Man of sorrows acquainted with grief. There are a number of pictures and types of Christ in the Bible. Here; Jeremiah “The weeping Prophet” is a picture of the Messiah (Jesus) who weeps over the same city, the same people; six centuries later; for He says; “37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! 38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” Matt 23:37-38 (KJV). Like Jeremiah, Jesus identified himself with the plight of Jerusalem. Both men had great concern and passion for the same people.

Lessons from Lamentations:

- The awful facts of God’s judgment – 1:1-6
- The tenderness of God’s heart – 1:12-16
- The righteousness of God’s wrath – 1:18-22
- The truthfulness of God’s Word – 2:17
- The faithfulness of God’s mercy – 3:18-36

The Message of the Five Poems:

- The destruction of Jerusalem – 1
- The Anger of Yahweh – 2
- The prayer for mercy – 3
- The siege of Jerusalem – 4
- The prayer for restoration – 5

In closing: The book of Lamentations itself teaches; if a person builds their life around Jesus Christ, they are safe. Jesus is faithful; He is faithful to chasten; He is faithful to forgive; He is faithful to sympathize; He is faithful to deliver and He is faithful to keep us. The Apostle Paul said; I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him; 2 Tim. 1:12.

Dr. Phillip Jones