

August 29

Lamentations 1-2

Hey, how's it going? My name is Brad Mock, and I'm the High School Pastor at CCC – bringing you the daily accelerator on August 29th.

Today we read Lamentations chapters one and two and have read the first two of the five lamentations contained in this book.

Lamentations is the only Old Testament book that consists solely of laments. A lament is simply grief or mourning. The reason for the grief and mourning in Lamentations? Jeremiah and the accounts in the books of Kings and Chronicles tell us about the last days of the city of Jerusalem and the country of Judah before its fall to Nebuchadnezzar's armies.

We are not totally certain that the author of the book was Jeremiah himself since the book itself nowhere attaches his name or the name of any one individual to the laments found here. Tradition however credits it to Jeremiah and there is no reason to question that, especially since the Book of 2 Chronicles mentions the fact that the weeping prophet Jeremiah composed various laments for the king Josiah which became a tradition in Israel and were preserved in a book of laments. Now those laments mentioned in 2 Chronicles are definitely not the ones found here talking about the fall of Jerusalem, but the fact that Jeremiah composed such pieces, and had them preserved in set collections supports the traditional view that he is behind the ones we find in the Book of Lamentations. This is especially credible since we know that he was present when the fall of Jerusalem came and that he was the one at that time who would be most likely to put such words on paper and have them preserved as a part of the canon of Scripture.

The entire book is poetic and there is a very definite structure to these laments. Chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5 are each 22 verses long. That is the exact number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 3, the one that does not have 22 verses has 66 verses, 3 times the number of letters in the alphabet. Also, chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 are alphabetic as well, that is each verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. That shows that they were intended to be committed to memory and recited as poetry.

If I can briefly summarize why Jeremiah is so broken here, he mentions at least four specific things that will recur throughout all five of the laments. First and foremost of course are the devastation and the exile itself which affected every class and family of people in Jerusalem. Kings were carried into exile, as were princes, religious leaders and priests, prophets and common people are all mentioned. They have been slaughtered and if left alive, carried away. Famine and death are the second results that come to mind and they are graphically portrayed in the first two laments- people trade treasures for food and in the most extreme cases mothers resort to cannibalizing their own children.

The third thing that I noted in reading these chapters today was the fact that the riches and in particular the temple treasures have been carried off to Babylon. Jeremiah 52 talks about some of the treasures that disappeared to the courts of Nebuchadnezzar at that time: the temple vessels, the bronze pillars, the moveable stands and the bronze sea all were broken up and carted away. The censers, the bowls, the lampstands, dishes, the bronze bulls and virtually all of the ornamentation of the Temple were removed. The temple treasury was destroyed and all of the gold and silver- virtually every thing that was transportable and some things that probably would not have been considered to be transportable all went. Jerusalem was impoverished.

The last thing that I took special note of as to why Jeremiah is so broken here in these laments was the tragic fact that the whole system of temple worship ground to a halt at this point in time. Jeremiah says "the LORD has rejected his altar and abandoned His sanctuary." It was OVER- at least for the next 70 years.

It's interesting to note that the ark is noticeably absent from any of the writings that speak of the destruction of Jerusalem and the removal of its articles of worship and that an Ethiopian tradition traces its history to that country at a somewhat later date. It was at the point of the destruction of Jerusalem and the cessation of temple worship that some of the Jews who drug an unwilling Jeremiah down to Egypt seem to have settled on an island in the Nile River near the present site of the Aswan dam. From documents that still exist, written just a few years later we know that there was a temple there. That all by itself is astonishing because the only authorized temple the Jews ever had was the one in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, there was a Jewish temple where the worship of Jehovah took place on this island in the Nile River where a colony of exiled Jews had settled. I don't think we have any certain knowledge as to exactly when that temple was constructed, but it was apparently a model of the one Nebuchadnezzar destroyed in Jerusalem. Its origins may well be traced to exactly the period of time in which these Lamentations were written simply because if they could not worship the Lord in Jerusalem, the Jews would have felt an overpowering need to worship Him according to the rites of the Mosaic law SOMEWHERE. No one ever authorized the building of this renegade temple in Egypt. It is clear from the Book of Jeremiah that the LORD Himself would not have endorsed it because he did not want the Jews to go to Egypt in the first place. They did go and apparently built themselves a rival temple and began to worship the Lord there. Later correspondence with the Jewish leaders who returned to Judah after the exile shows that the Egyptian Jews promised them that if they were given financial help in rebuilding their temple which the Egyptians had destroyed, they would promise not to offer any sacrifices there. Perhaps that means when they originally built it they WERE offering sacrifices at the rival temple. It is interesting to speculate that may be where the ark of the Covenant went.

Well we are getting a bit away from the text of Lamentations here, but I wanted to emphasize how devastated the Jews would have felt at the ending of regular services and sacrifices in the temple after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it. Of all the effects of the fall of Jerusalem, I have no doubt that they would have unanimously agreed that this

was the worst of all. Forgiveness depended upon sacrifices and if sacrifices couldn't be offered, well, that doesn't paint a very pretty picture.

The causes of all these terrible things are described by Jeremiah. In chapter 1 he simply says it happened because Jerusalem sinned greatly and had become unclean. He says that filthiness has clung to the skirts of Jerusalem. In chapter two it is because Judah has angered the LORD. The point here of course is that nowhere is there any idea this has happened because Babylon is so mighty and powerful or because Israel let her armies become too weak to defend herself. What has happened is not political. It is spiritual. It is because Israel has rebelled against her God and she is being punished. That is the perspective of the prophet and it was a very accurate perspective.

There is a book written by the 20th century apologist Dr Francis Schaeffer. It's called Death in the City. Schaeffer's thesis is that the church in our generation needs "reformation, revival and constructive revolution." He draws all kinds of parallels between our age and the one in which Jeremiah lived and lamented. The church of our day, he says, is a lot like Jeremiah's Jerusalem. She has forgotten what will happen if she walks away from God and she has also forgotten what her relationship to God was supposed to be.

This is Brad Mock, encouraging you to live lives that resemble what God wants our relationship with him to look like!