

LAMENTATIONS - A STUDY GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
 - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. If you had been on the committee to pick the books of the Bible would you have included *The Lamentations*? Did you find Lamentations inspiring? Helpful? Does Lamentations add to our picture of God? Who was the author and when was it written?
2. The Lamentations is in poetic verse form, but of an unusual pattern. Each stanza begins with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet (There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet). Such a poem is known as an Acrostic. Imagine creating this literary masterpiece with the first stanza beginning with Aleph, the next with Beth, the next one with Gimel and so on, while Jerusalem was under siege by Nebuchadnezzar. Chapter one, two and four are like this. Chapter three is even more complicated. There are 66 verses, and the first three begin with Aleph, the second three with Beth, and the third three with Gimel etc.! Only Chapter five doesn't exactly follow this pattern. Why do you think Jeremiah did this? Why would he write such a sad message in such a poetically balanced form? Who do you think this was written for? Did they all have copies of the "Bible" available to them? How many people during Jeremiah's lifetime actually heard or read his writings? Do you think he wrote Lamentations like this so it could be an aid to memorization?
3. Who seems to be causing all of Jerusalem's and Jeremiah's suffering? See Lamentations 1:5,12,15,16; 2:1-12,16. Is God actively involved in doing these things, or is there another explanation for such wording? Compare Jeremiah 12:1 and Psalms 77:1-10.
4. Do you think Jeremiah's experience was similar to David's? (Psalms 6:6 and Lamentations 1:16) Is Jeremiah complaining? Didn't David do the same thing? Did others have similar experiences?
5. Do you think you could become so hungry that you could eat your own child? Did the Jews actually reach such a state? (Lamentations 2:20; 4:10; Leviticus 26:27-29; Deuteronomy 28:53-57; 2 Kings 6:26-29; Jeremiah 19:9; Ezekiel 5:10)
6. What picture of God is Jeremiah reflecting in Lamentations 3:7,8? How could he speak of God like this under inspiration? Lamentations 3:44 says, "Thou has wrapped Thyself in a cloud so that no prayer can pass through." Is there ever a time when God does not hear our prayers? In Isaiah 1:15 (NIV) we are told, "When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you...I will not listen." Compare Jeremiah 7:16; Psalms 77:10. Are these statements true?

If they are not true, why would God allow Himself to be pictured like this? Compare Psalms 22:1 and Matthew 27:46, “Why hast thou forsaken Me?”--didn't Jesus feel like He had been abandoned? Is God offended if we feel moved to cry out like this?

7. Whose experience is being referred to in Lamentations 3:13-15 and 3:61-63?
8. How can Jeremiah speak the words of the first part of this book and then say what he does in Lamentations 3:21-33 and 3:55-60? Doesn't verse 33 clearly suggest what Jeremiah thinks is happening? Would you feel comfortable saying all these things about your God under similar circumstances?
9. Is Lamentations 3:37-39 an explanation for the apparent conflicts that precede it? Is it true that both “calamities and good things come” from “the mouth of the Most High?” (Lamentations 3:38, *NIV*, Compare Isaiah 45:7, especially *KJV*) What do you think should be our interpretation of these verses? The Jews were anxious to acknowledge the total sovereignty of God. Is it true that nothing could happen without His will, or permission?
10. In the *New English Bible*, Lamentations 2:5 says “The Lord played an enemy's part.” The *New International Version* says, “The Lord has become like an enemy.” Why would he write like this? Doesn't a child think his parent has turned against him when he spansks him?
11. Does Jeremiah seem to be confused as he swings from his grief at what is happening, to his trust of God and His mercy and love? What are we supposed to learn from this?
12. How should God have dealt with all of this rampant evil that was taking place in Jerusalem? When a body is being destroyed by cancer, is it morally wrong to cut out the cancer? When an infectious disease is spreading over the land, is it fair to quarantine the infected? See Lamentations 3:37 “the Lord ordained it.”
13. How could he end with the questions in Lamentations 5:19-22? Can you think of parallel passages elsewhere?

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