

The Half Hour That Changes the World

Lamentations

Book 25

Basic Questions behind the book:

Do I have to be joyful all the time as a Christian? Is it okay for me to have an off day when I'm upset and things get on top of me?

Summary of book:

Jeremiah is the author of the book of Lamentations. Jeremiah's two books focus on one event, the destruction of Jerusalem. The book of Jeremiah predicts it, and Lamentations looks back on it. Known as the book of tears, Lamentations is a dirge, a funeral song written for the fallen city of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah grieves a lot in this book. In fact, Lamentations is about emotions - grief, remorse, anger, and frustration. This short book is divided into five poems. It is structured as an acrostic poem for the first four chapters, meaning that each verse begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It has been suggested that this was to symbolise completion, that the trials of the people were over. It is grim reading, and expresses honesty in the face of suffering and disillusionment.

Judah is called unfaithful. The people have abandoned their first love, the covenant is being ignored. He talks about the foreign powers and their threat. There is a lot of suffering; Jeremiah suffers for his words, as the government doesn't want to hear his words. He is mocked, threatened, thrown into prison and put down a well. Jeremiah often performs symbolic gestures to make a spiritual point.

Vital Statistics:

Purpose: To teach people that to disobey God is to invite disaster, and to show that God suffers when his people suffer.

Author: Jeremiah.

Recipients: The people of Israel and of Judah at home and in exile.

Dating: Soon after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

Setting: Jerusalem had been destroyed by Babylon and her people killed, tortured, or taken captive.

Reflections:

Three strands of Hebrew thought meet in Lamentations - prophecy, ritual, and wisdom. Lamentations is written in the rhythm and style of ancient Jewish funeral songs or chants. It contains five poems corresponding to the five chapters.

"My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within, my heart is poured out on the ground because my people are destroyed, because children and infants faint in the streets of the city." (2:11)