

# Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

## Overview of the Book of Lamentations

July 15, 2015

TEARS are defined simply as "drops of salty fluid flowing from the eyes." They can be caused by irritation or laughter but are usually associated with weeping, sorrow, and grief. When we cry, friends wonder what's wrong and try to console us. Babies cry for food; children cry at the loss of a pet; adults cry when confronted with trauma and death. Jeremiah's grief ran deep. He is remembered as the "weeping prophet," and his tears flowed from a broken heart. As God's spokesman, he knew what lay ahead for Judah, his country, and for Jerusalem, the capital and "the city of God." God's judgment would fall and destruction would come. So Jeremiah wept. His tears were not self-centered, mourning over personal suffering or loss. He wept because the people had rejected their God—the God who had made them, loved them, and sought repeatedly to bless them. Jeremiah's heart was broken because he knew that the selfishness and sinfulness of the people would bring them much suffering and an extended exile. Jeremiah's tears were tears of empathy and sympathy. His heart was broken with those things that break God's heart.

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.

What makes a person cry says a lot about that person—whether he or she is self-centered or God-centered. The book of Lamentations allows us to see what made Jeremiah sorrowful. As one of God's choice servants, he stands alone in the depth of his emotions, broken by his care for the people, his love for the nation, and his devotion to God.

What causes your tears? Do you weep because your selfish pride has been wounded or because the people around you lead sinful lives and reject the God who loves them dearly? Do you weep because you have lost something of value or because people all around you will suffer for their sinfulness? Our world is filled with injustice, poverty, war, and rebellion against God, all of which should move us to tears and to action. Read Lamentations and learn what it means to grieve with God.

### 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

**ORIGINAL AUDIENCE:** The exiled people of Judah

**DATE WRITTEN:** Soon after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

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

**KEY VERSE:** "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).

**KEY PEOPLE:** Jeremiah, the people of Jerusalem

**KEY PLACE:** Jerusalem

**SPECIAL FEATURES:** 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.

## **THE BLUEPRINT**

1. Jeremiah mourns for Jerusalem (1:1-22)
2. God's anger at sin (2:1-22)
3. Hope in the midst of affliction (3:1-66)
4. God's anger is satisfied (4:1-22)
5. Jeremiah pleads for restoration (5:1-22)

Jeremiah grieves deeply because of the destruction of Jerusalem and the devastation of his nation. But in the middle of the book, in the depths of his grief, there shines a ray of hope. God's compassion is ever present. His faithfulness is great. Jeremiah realizes that it is only the Lord's mercy that has prevented total annihilation. This book shows us the serious consequences of sin and how we can still have hope in the midst of tragedy because God is able to turn it around for good. We see the timeless importance of prayer and confession of sin. We will all face tragedy in our life. But in the midst of our afflictions, there is hope in God.

## **MEGATHEMES**

### **Destruction of Jerusalem**

**EXPLANATION:** Lamentations is a sad funeral song for the great capital city of the Jews. The temple has been destroyed, the king is gone, and the people are in exile. God had warned that he would destroy them if they abandoned him. Now, afterward, the people realize their condition and confess their sin.

**IMPORTANCE:** God's warnings are justified. He does what he says he will do. His punishment for sin is certain. Only by confessing and renouncing our sin can we turn to him for deliverance. How much better to do so before his warnings are fulfilled.

### **God's Mercy**

**EXPLANATION:** God's compassion was at work even when the Israelites were experiencing the affliction of their Babylonian conquerors. Although the people had been unfaithful, God's faithfulness was great. He used this affliction to bring his people back to him.

**IMPORTANCE:** God will always be faithful to his people. His merciful, refining work is evident even in affliction. At those times, we must pray for forgiveness and then turn to him for deliverance.

### **Sin's Consequences**

**EXPLANATION:** God was angry at the prolonged rebellion by his people. Sin was the cause of their misery, and destruction was the result of their sin. The destruction of the nation shows the vanity of human glory and pride.

**IMPORTANCE:** To continue in rebellion against God is to invite disaster. We must never trust our own leadership, resources, intelligence, or power more than God. If we do, we will experience consequences similar to Jerusalem's.

### **Hope**

**EXPLANATION:** God's mercy in sparing some of the people offers hope for better days. One day, the people will be restored to a true and fervent relationship with God.

**IMPORTANCE:** Only God can deliver us from sin. Without him there is no comfort or hope for the future. Because of Christ's death for us and his promise to return, we have a bright hope for tomorrow.