

Read the Bible in a Year

Week 45 – April 10-16

Read on Your Own this Week:

Psalm 129-131

Luke 13-16

Readings in Class:

Ezekiel 9-22

Introduction to Lamentations

“How lonely sits the city, once so full of people.” So, begins one of the most painful books in the Bible to read. The emotions are raw and pointed. Nothing is held back as the author, most likely the Prophet Jeremiah, laments to God concerning the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in 587 BC to the Babylonian Empire.

Lamentations is an often-overlooked book of the Bible. Sandwiched between two Prophets, it is easy to glaze over it. But it provides us with the best and most honest words that we can use in the midst of tragedy and loss.

Perhaps key to the book of Lamentations is the 3rd chapter which forms the climax and exact center of the book. Verses 22-33 form the center around which the book turns. The hope in the midst of extreme suffering and tragedy is the fact that God will not abandon his steadfast love. That even if all evidence points to the contrary we will yet hope in God.

A brief summary of Lamentations

Lamentations consists of 5 Laments. With each chapter forming its own lament and theme.

1. Lament 1: The Destruction and Misery of Jerusalem
2. Lament 2: God’s Fierce Anger
3. Lament 3: The Lord’s Discipline and Mercy
4. Lament 4: Zion’s Punishment is Total and Complete
5. Lament 5: The Pleas of the God forsaken

Features of Lamentations

1. Acrostic Poems. Chapters 1,2, 4 are Acrostic Poems. Each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew Alphabet. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew Alphabet, hence the number. It is as if the Author is saying, “Here is our suffering and pain from A to Z or as they

would say in Hebrew: From Aleph to Taw. The suffering encompasses every letter you can put together into words.

2. A Triple Acrostic. Chapter 3 is 66 verses long. Three verses are devoted to each letter instead of one verse. This helps chapter 3 function as the center and climax of the suffering and pain being experienced and makes verses 22-33 that much more central and important to the book.
3. A Failed Acrostic. Chapter 5 is 22 verses long but fails to complete an Acrostic Poem. The last few verses trail off the pattern. It is as if the author is so exhausted and run down by the pain that has been witnessed and experienced that he cannot finish the poem correctly and goes off script with the final plea for God “to show mercy and to restore unless he is exceedingly angry with us and...” the author can’t bring himself to conclude that thought. It is a lament too terrible to put into words.

Hard Words

Laments are common in the Bible, with 40% of the Psalms being Laments. Laments are a type of praise to God and usually are prayers directed at God. They are honest in their words, which might be quite shocking to modern readers. But we also can discover with much peace that we can bring even our most shocking words and thoughts to God himself. Laments give us the chance to bring even that to God.

In Lamentations we hear of how the destruction of Jerusalem spared no one. Man, woman, child. The author will note how children were eaten by parents during the siege, how families were torn apart, how priests lay dead in the smoldering ruins of the temple, and how God was responsible for it all, but how the people had deserved the long overdue punishment for their treachery against God.

In the end, Lamentations leaves the restoration and hope in the hands of God, knowing that his covenant love never dies and that hope can still be found in him.

Christ in Lamentations

As we read Lamentations we can be reminded that Christ carried our sorrows (laments) and our burdens. The cross looms large in this book and we can hear Christ’s cry from the cross echo in this book, “My God my God, why have you forsaken me.” And we can also hear the words of hope that form the center and guiding thought of the Laments: “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning, great is your faithfulness.” Truly that thought was on Christ’s mind as he uttered his final words, “Father into your hands I commit my spirit.”