

Book of Lamentations

Historical Background

Both Jewish and Christian traditions ascribe authorship to Jeremiah, although the author of Lamentations remain nameless within the book. The book's name in Hebrew, *Ekah*, is an expression of grief and sorrow and a cry of lament. The corporate laments in this book revolve around the destruction of Jerusalem in the wake of the Babylonian invasion in 586 BC.

How is the book Lamentations relevant to us today?

Jeremiah's poetry in this book describes the desolation of Jerusalem and the pain of the people of Jerusalem—young and old, men and women. Lamentations remind us of two important matters of our faith: the necessity of mourning over our sins. And on the other, ask God's forgiveness when we sin. In his book, *Prophetic Lament*, Soong-Chan Rah, a Korean American theologian, suggests why Lamentations is relevant and useful in the twenty-first-century of Western society:

Despite its age, Lamentations offers us a prophetic critique of what passes for gospel witness in our time. This critique offers fresh insight into our ecclesiology, or more precisely, how the North American Christian community should respond to a broken world. The major themes—the importance of lament, the necessity of engaging with suffering, the power of encountering the other—should lead us to a theology of lament that corrects the triumphalism of Christianity in the West. Lamentations may serve as the prophetic corrective necessary to embrace the next phase of Christianity.¹

Overall, Lamentations displays the consequences of sin while pointing to the compassionate God who restores and rescues.

¹ Rah, Soong-Chan. *Prophetic Lament* (pp. 25-26). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

Lamentations 1 (Lament)

Observation: What expressions, emotions, or imageries of the destruction of Jerusalem do you see in this text?

Interpretation: What do you think Jeremiah had in mind when he wrote and exhibited those expressions and emotions? How had Jeremiah made sense of all those? What is/are the purpose(s) of lamenting?

God loving Us: How has God gifted us with lamentation to address grief/sorrow?

God Meeting Us: In the lives of the saints who demonstrated/demonstrate lamentation to process grief/sorrow, when and where did you experience their practices?

God Refining Us: What are some people or means to help you cultivate lamentation?

God Inspiring Us to Serve: What are some ways in which you can practice/demonstrate lamenting?

Real Life Today: What kind of community would you like to play a role in practicing/demonstrating/cultivating lamentation?

Lamentations 2 (Righteous Anger)

Observation: What expressions, emotions, or imageries of the destruction of Jerusalem do you see in this text?

Interpretation: How had Jeremiah made sense of Jerusalem's destruction directly resulting from God's anger at sin?

God loving Us: How has God gifted us with righteous anger for things that defy God?

God Meeting Us: In the lives of the saints who demonstrated/demonstrate righteous anger, when and where did you experience their practices?

God Refining Us: What are some people or means to help you cultivate righteous anger?

God Inspiring Us to Serve: What are some ways in which you can practice/demonstrate righteous anger in your life, in the church, and the world?

Real Life Today: What kind of the community would you like to play a role in practicing/demonstrating/cultivating righteous anger in the future?

Lamentations 3 (Hope)

Observation: What expressions, emotions, or imageries of the destruction of Jerusalem do you see in this text?

Interpretation: How had Jeremiah made sense of the destruction of Jerusalem in conjunction with hope in compassionate God?

God loving Us: How has God gifted us with hope?

God Meeting Us: In the lives of the saints who demonstrated/demonstrate hope amid grief and sorrow, when and where did you experience their practices?

God Refining Us: What are some people or means to help you cultivate hope?

God Inspiring Us to Serve: What are some ways in which you can practice/demonstrate hope in your life, in the church, and the world?

Real Life Today: What kind of the community would you like to play a role in practicing/demonstrating/cultivating hope in the future?

Lamentations 4 (Heart for children)

Observation: What expressions and emotions you see toward children in this text?

Interpretation: How had Jeremiah responded to children in need in this text? Why do you think he made a connection between God's righteous anger with that of children in despair?

God loving Us: How has God gifted us people with a heart for children?

God Meeting Us: In the lives of the saints who had/have hearts for children, when and where did you experience their hearts come alive in actions?

God Refining Us: What are some people or means to help you cultivate a heart for children?

God Inspiring Us to Serve: What are some ways in which you can practice/demonstrate your heart for children in your life, in a community, in a church, and the world?

Real Life Today: What kind of the community would you like to play a role in practicing/demonstrating/cultivating heart for children in the future?

Lamentations 5 (Restoration)

Observation: What expressions, emotions, and imageries of restoration do you see in this text?

Interpretation: Why do you think Jeremiah end the book with such expectation? What does Jeremiah's expectation of God tell us about who God is?

God loving Us: How has God gifted us with power/agency to restore?

God Meeting Us: In the lives of the saints who were involved/involve in restoration, when and where did you experience their restorative practices and perspectives?

God Refining Us: What are some people or means to help you cultivate restorative practices and perspectives?

God Inspiring Us to Serve: What are some ways in which you can practice/demonstrate your restorative practices and perspectives in your life, in your church, and in the world?

Real Life Today: What kind of the community would you like to play a role in practicing/demonstrating/cultivating restorative practices and perspectives in the future?