

# INTRODUCTION

The LXX introduces “Lamentations” with the sentence- “It came to pass after Israel was led into captivity and Jerusalem was laid waste that Jeremiah sat weeping, and lamented this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said...” The sorrowful dirge is read in its entirety in Jewish synagogues worldwide on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> month confirming the episode of siege as a Passover in reverse. The poem suited to memorisation in its verse-form was committed to writing before the Jewish party set off for Egypt in the 3<sup>rd</sup> month following the end of the siege.

The “Lamentations of Jeremiah” are a response to the terrible siege and its desperate finish. The work issues from the straightened circumstances which Israel entered 110 years after Hezekiah 726-697

Josiah died at Megiddo 608; Jehoiakim was a vacillating monarch whose reign ended abruptly in 598. Jehoiachin capitulated to Nebuchadnezzar in March of 597. Zedekiah trusted in Egypt contrary to the prophet’s warning and paid the price in 587-6 with the return of Nebuchadnezzar –the brutal siege and the ignominious treatment of the royal family and shameful marching off of the cream of Israel’s youth along with the retiring Chaldeans.

Jeremiah was a man who easily yielded to tears –a man adept at expressing in custom phrase and poetic dirge feelings that ran very deep. This writing is just such an alphabetical poem of our Il Penseroso among the prophets. It uses the entire scope of the alphabet to put into verse the story of the siege, the sorry plight of the people of Israel and weaves into the song highly theological themes as the following:

## *Chapter one deals with sin and its effect*

### **(1) JEREMIAH-IS IT NOTHING TO YOU? 1.12-16**

#### *The anguish of Jeremiah and of Jesus*

Is it nothing to you passers by on the way? Consider and look through prophetic eyes.

(1) Is there any pain or marring or destruction [*bwak*] like my sorrow unto death?

(2) Pain is repeatedly practiced against me with which the LORD has afflicted me in His hot anger

(3) From high up He has sent fire into my bones and He treads the winepress.

(4) He spreads a net for my feet. He has caused me to turn backwards.

(5) He has made me an object of astonishment [*mmv*] –sick and faint all day long.

(6) The yoke [*l*] of the transgressors is bound through my hands. I am not able to rise up. *If Isaiah 53 is a prophecy of the crucified Saviour Lamentations 1 is no less a powerful portrayal of the Lamb of God-the ram caught in a thicket-the LORD bound to the tree for our transgressions.*

## *Chapter 2 deals with the indignation of God-what I have called the reverse Passover*

**(2) CHAPTER 2.21-22.** The young and the aged lie on the earth in the streets. My virgins and youth are fallen by the sword. You slew them in the day of Your anger. You slew them [*jbf*] and showed no clemency. You have proclaimed as in the feast my surrounding fears and there was none that escaped in the day of the LORD’S anger. *As when the angel of death passed over there was fear of the death of the firstborn so in Jerusalem there was fear for the children when Nebuchadnezzar’s forces attacked a second time. And those I dressed in coloured clothes [*drv*] whom I nursed and stroked with the palm of my hand or caressed and brought up the*

**enemy has finished.** *It is only in the final verse of this complete alphabetical section that we get the deepest source of Jeremiah's Jeremiad. The lonely prophet is hurting for the little ones whom he dressed and nursed. We do not know if he was married but he must have been personally involved with lovely children and their little garments and witnessed their death by famine or even the sword. This is the sorest hurt that the prophet takes to God in dirge. He hoped like the Passover people for mercy but instead was dealt with as Pharaoh was-the horrors of war did not spare those near and dear to Jeremiah.*

***Chapter 3 deals with prayer***

**(3) Chapter 3.22-23** **It is through the covenant love or mercy of the LORD that we are not finished off-because his tender mercies or compassions fail not. His compassions fail not-they are new [vdj] every morning.** *As the notorious "new cart" of 1 Samuel 6.7 is described as "new" and the "new year" and "new moon" also. The moon shows the continued radiance of the sun so the new day shows the continued goodness of the LORD. Great is your faithfulness. By comparing verse 18 with verse 22 we have revealed to us the truth that Paul and the early church inherited as a first century hymn –in part directly borrowed from the dirge of Jeremiah-"Even if we are faithless He remains faithful"[2 Timothy 2.13]. Here lies the greatness of this old teacher of the prophetic school of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.*

**(4) Chapter 3 55-57** **I called Your name O LORD from the marks [hwt] of the cistern.** *Jeremiah like any incarcerated individual would write on the cistern wall-marking the water level and just being able to say "Yahweh" at first. But that was good enough. He struggled from a position of being dangerously submerged in the mud and called out "Yahweh." Prayer is the soul's sincere desire-and what a discovery he made in the cistern. Perhaps we should say that the story of the cistern deserves to be told widely in establishing and illustrating the nature of prayer.*

*You must listen to my call. Do not make your ear disappear –listen to my breathing [jwr]-to my cry for help [w] Jeremiah gives us the content of his praying. He wanted to know God could hear him straining for breathe-and his plaintive cry for help in these desperate circumstances. You drew near in the day that I called you. **You said "Fear not".** Jeremiah testifies to hearing the audible voice of God in the deep cistern-the unmistakable comfort of the omnipresent LORD who entered the Upper Room with the same words.*

***Chapter 4 deals with holiness***

**(5) Chapter 4. 15** **Depart You unclean they cried to them; [the Babylonians]depart, depart, do not touch us; they fled or shone bright; [xmw]they also stumbled about in the smoke-they spoke adamantly among the heathen-do not add or continue to stay as strangers.** *Jeremiah saw the priests at once as a contradiction to true holiness and as a bright testimony even though they were staggering around themselves-they told the Babylonians to get going. They were certainly brave to the point of recklessness.*

***Chapter 5 deals with the doctrine of God***

**(6) Chapter 5.12** **Princes were hanged [hl t] or suspended by their hands.** *This is an example of crucifixion by the Babylonians. It was not invented by the Romans. The person of the elders was not respected. The sons of Zedekiah were slain but thereafter they may have been crucified as a reproach to Israel.*

**(7) Chapter 5 21-22** O Yahweh cause us to return to You and we shall return. Keep refreshing restoring and repairing [vdj] us as in days as of old.

22. For if You have finally rejected us You are **provoked** or broken in very great anger against or over us. [pxq being equivalent to the Greek *πηγνυμι* suggests brokenness within the Godhead-as if the covenants are gone and the faithfulness of God is perished. Jeremiah in his last verse plumbs the depth of the most profound theological concept of all-the concept of God and His judgment and wrath. He sees in the casting away of Israel the ruin of the sovereign of the universe. He is really urging the impossibility of that possibility. He is bold enough to think the thought that the very Godhead could be cleft in two over the matter of human iniquity and how to grapple with it. His thought is not misplaced-it leads directly to Gethsemane. It leads to the interposition of an angel at Gethsemane to stress solidarity in trepidation. It leads to the cross and the cry of dereliction. It points to the fact that neither Israel nor mankind can be brought back to union with God or given eternal life without the death of the Son of God. **This act introduced a “torn veil” and a “torn heart” into the eternal joy of the Godhead and a “rupture” of fellowship experienced within the life of YAHWEH ELOHIM.** Heavenly covenant love was willing to go that far to bring about redemption and to maintain the utter integrity of the name and being of the Godhead. Only a triune being could accomplish such a miracle for the redemption of man made in His image. Behind this brokenness there is also provocation. The utter rebellion of Satan from the era of man’s beginnings in the garden has provoked the Almighty and increased that provocation by temptation so that human sin joined demonic accusation but found the covenant love of God too strong and constant to relinquish His design to bring many sons to glory. The Father heart of God prevailed to find a way through the deepest anguish of mankind and a way to deal righteously with man despite the entire accumulation of sin over centuries and millennia. That way was Calvary where from the heart of Christ flowed blood and serum. We broke God’s heart but God bound us to Him by a love that will not let us go.]

***It is through trauma and deep grief that many of life’s lasting lessons are learned. Jeremiah in the poetic lines of Lamentations discovers principles of divine operation. Through empathy with his tears we can improve our theology.***

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A BIBLE COMPANION