

Lamentations: Good Grief

Lesson One

Introduction:

1. Use the Word Bank to fill in the blanks concerning the background material for the book of Lamentations. The fill-in-the-blanks continue on page 2 with a fresh Word Bank.

WORD BANK

Ah, how! Babylonians Egypt forty heart Jeremiah July/August poems tears

In the Hebrew text, Lamentations is named after its first word, אֲכָלָה (*echah*), meaning _____.

The Septuagint, an ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, gives the title Θρήνοι (*threnoi*) meaning _____.

Lamentations is a skillfully structured book of five _____, each complete in itself and independent of the others. But like the movements of a symphony, each complements the others.

All share the same overarching theme of sorrow over the destruction of Jerusalem by the _____ in 586 B.C.

Why make use of poetry for such a serious subject matter? One Bible student mused: “Poets use words to drag us into the depths of reality itself, not by reporting on how life is but by push-pulling us into the middle of it. Poetry gets at the _____ of existence. Far from being cosmetic language, it is intestinal.” (Eugene Peterson)

Lamentations is read in Jewish synagogues on the Ninth of Ab (*Tish B’Av*), around our months of _____, to commemorate the destructions of Jerusalem, including the destruction by the Romans in 70 A.D.

Early traditions name _____ as the author of Lamentations, though his name does not appear in the book.

This prophet ministered in Jerusalem for over _____ years (c. 627 – c. 580 B.C.). He was the son of a priest.

He witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem, and at the end of his life was taken to _____, where tradition says he was stoned to death.

question 1 continues on the next page

WORD BANK

A to Z acrostics contrasts cut off dropping limp linear order qinah totality unequal

The most striking literary feature of Lamentations is the use of _____, which employs the Hebrew alphabet as a key organizing principle. For example, Chapters 1 and 2 begin every three-line verse with the successive letter of the 22-letter Hebrew alphabet. Although Chapter 5 abandons the acrostic discipline of beginning lines with the successive letter of the alphabet, it maintains the constraint of 22 lines/verses overall.

Using the entire Hebrew alphabet matches the poet's intent to give full expression to the suffering of his people and the sorrows of his own soul—in effect, to offer a lament from _____.

The highly-structured form may also be an attempt to impose some sense of _____ on a tragic and chaotic situation.

Another powerful rhetorical device is the author's use of _____: male and female, bitter and repentant, individual and corporate, protesting and prophetic, hopeless and hopeful, rich and poor, young and old.

This not only conveys the _____ of God's judgment on all, it also gives expression to the nature of grief. The narrator wanders from sadness to anger, disbelief to hope, and then back to sadness. He's bitter, then repentant, then bitter again. We see that suffering is not always _____, and it's definitely not pretty.

One more interesting feature is the use of the _____ meter, a literary device used to mourn the dead.

This rhythm is based on lines of two _____ parts. The first part normally consists of three words and the second part usually includes two words. This pattern creates a cadence that mimics a _____, as one might do while walking haltingly behind a funeral procession.

The 3/2 meter may also convey the idea of something being _____ or a sense of dying away.

The entire book appears to reinforce the qinah metric concept. The first three laments (chapters 1-3) are long (66 lines each); the last two (chapters 4-5) are short (44 and then 22 lines); and the last one “disintegrates” with the _____ of the alphabetical acrostic.

2. Fill in the blanks for the outline to the book of Lamentations.

Theme: _____

Lament 1: Jerusalem's _____

Lament 2: Jehovah's _____

Lament 3: Jeremiah's _____

Lament 4: Jehovah's _____

Lament 5: Jerusalem's _____

Lamentations 1 Jerusalem's Plight

3. Clearly, Jerusalem's sin was the reason for her plight (1:5, 9, 14, 18). Of the verses listed, which one speaks the strongest warning to you about sin and why?

4. Jerusalem made sinful alliances with the surrounding nations rather than trusting in the Lord for protection (1:2). What "alliances" are Christians today tempted to make that will surely disappoint?

5. The destruction of Jerusalem and the suffering of its inhabitants were horrendous. But what seemed to grieve the poet most about Jerusalem's plight? (Hint: What statement is repeated four times in this first chapter?)

6. Lamentations 1:1-14 is read as part of the "Service of Darkness" on Good Friday. Although not a prophecy about Jesus, there are obvious parallels between the events of Good Friday and what we read in Lamentations 1:1-14. Find four such parallels.