

NEW BIBLE STUDIES - LAMENTATIONS *continued*

We have taken the occasion of this new series as an opportunity to reach out to others. Martyrs' Facebook page outlines this invitation:

"Maybe, with the 'new season' starting in so many areas in the month of September, you've been thinking about getting back to church. It's likely you've been considering this for some time.

Allow me to invite you to begin a journey with us at Martyrs this Lord's Day morning when the first message in our new Bible Study series will be delivered. The plan is to plot a course through one of the most unfamiliar books of the Bible – Lamentations. The title of this series is: 'Out of the Suffering and the Silence Rise Sighs of Supplication.' It's remarkable how relevant this old book is to modern life. It certainly targets the state of – and the solution for – our nation. It will search our hearts. I trust it will even replace some of the Suffering and Silence we may be feeling with precious and delivering Sighs of Supplication. You will be very welcome to join with us."

Other invitation cards are available: please take some and distribute them among your family and friends.



MEETINGS TODAY

- Morning Worship – 11.30am:
1st Message in the Lamentations
Series: "Welcome To Woe!"
- Evening Service – 7.00pm

INSPIRATION IN A SENTENCE

"... No word of God shall fall to the ground, but the event will fully answer the prediction; and the unbelief of man shall not make God's threatenings, any more than His promises, of no effect. The justice and truth of God are here written in bloody characters, for the conviction or the confusion of all those that make a jest of His threatenings. Let them not be deceived, God is not mocked." [Matthew Henry].

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NEW BIBLE STUDY SERIES - LAMENTATIONS

Ever since my years in the Whitefield College of the Bible I have been personally keen to conduct a study on **the Book of Lamentations**. However, outside of preaching from its most famous passages (**Lamentations 1:12; 3:22-24**), I have never proceeded with my desire to teach through this largely unfamiliar Bible book. Until now.

Knowing that our time in Paul's letter to the **Galatians** was coming to an end, my mind – and prayers of course – began to focus on asking the Lord to impress another section of Scripture upon my heart. For a time I felt that this may be the book of **Revelation**, though I believe that has been overruled – at least for now. This is because my thoughts began to coalesce around Lamentations again: various incidents, uninfluenced by me, conspired to point in this direction. Today we commence a series on this book which will naturally lead us on to plot a vital course through other Old Testament scriptures, bringing us from what is essentially a 'dark' book into one that leads us out of the darkness into the light.



WELCOME TO WOE

Introduction to Lamentations.

In the galleries of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia is an imposing sculpture of a sad queen with this inscription at its base: 'Jerusalem in Her Desolation.' Carved into stone by William Westmore Story (1819-1895), this sculpture captures the moments of a city still numb with grief after it fell to Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C., and her citizens were deported to Babylon. The poetry employed by the Book of Lamentations provided a vent for the nation to lament over the sheer horror of Judah's fall – and seeks to erect some scaffolding on which fresh and future hope can be regained. Therefore the title of this series, 'Out of the Suffering and the Silence Rise Sighs of Supplication.'

[1] THE HISTORICAL SETTING FOR THE BOOK.

(a) THE RECORD OF IT. The historical backdrop for Lamentations is the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, in 586 B.C.. The history behind this is in **2 Kings 24-25**, **2 Chronicles 36**, and also in **Jeremiah** – especially **chapter 52**. This report states that when Jerusalem fell it was (i) Dethroned, **Jeremiah 52:1-11**; (ii) Demolished, **Jeremiah 52:12-16**; (iii) Desecrated, **Jeremiah 52:17-23**; and (iv) Depopulated, **Jeremiah 52:24-30**.

(b) THE REASON FOR IT. The most obvious one is this: God is a righteous Judge who brings people to account because of their sins (cf. **Jeremiah 52:3**). For this reason they were banished from His presence – the ultimate judgment; cf. **Psalm 27:4**; **51:11**. Nearly every verse in **Jeremiah 52** is a fulfilled prophecy and provides the explanation for the book of Lamentations.

[2] THE HEARTRENDING SORROW IN THE BOOK.

If **Jeremiah 52** simply notes all of the minutiae of the historical details, the words of Lamentations are soulful and impassioned. The **(a) STYLE OF THE BOOK** pours out raw emotion: each of

the five chapters in Lamentations is a complete poem in itself. In the Hebrew Bible it was placed in the middle of a mini-collection of five smaller books with **Song of Solomon**, **Ruth**, **Ecclesiastes** and **Esther** (known as Megilloth – “the scrolls”). These works were kept together because they were recited at the sacred festivals of the Jews (Lamentations was read on the ninth day of the month Ab). cf. ability of poetic works to depict the almost indescribable horrors of WW1 (Sassoon, Owen, etc.).

(b) THE SCRIBE OF THE BOOK: Despite the wrangling of the modernists, the author is Jeremiah: the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations dovetail together sharing striking similarities in tone, style and use of language; the introduction to Lamentations in the Septuagint (Greek translation of OT) states: “... *Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented with this lamentations over Jerusalem, and said ...*.” Cf. also **2 Chronicles 35:25**.

(c) THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK: 4 out of the 5 chapters in Lamentations have 22 verses, the central chapter has triple this – 66 verses. The book has wonderful symmetry – 22, 22, 66, 22, 22. Also, the book follows an alphabetical acrostic pattern: in **chapters 1, 2 and 4** each of the twenty-two verses begins with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet; **chapter 3** follows the same pattern, grouping the verses into sets of 3. This literary tool means that Lamentations describes the complete heartrending sorrow of God's people – from A to Z; from Aleph to Taw.

[3] THE HELPFUL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BOOK.

This book is vital for its' message centres on:-

(a) CONSEQUENCES: SIN HAS CONSEQUENCES; **Romans 6:23**; **Hebrews 9:27**; **Matthew 25:41, 46**; **1 Thess. 5:2-3**.

(b) CONTRITION: SOULS NEED CONTRITION. A chief aim of the book is to exhort the people most earnestly and passionately **to repentance**.

(c) COVENANT: GOD IS CONSTANT. Despite the measure of their affliction, Lamentations encourages them to fresh hope in their unchanging covenant God. At the centre of the covenant is where we find Christ. “... *strong allusions to Christ*” (Hawker).

(d) COMMUNION: PRAYER IS CRITICAL. This book is “*to open the door of prayer to God, so that the people in their extremities might venture to flee to God's mercy.*” (Calvin).