



[Slide 1] Lamentations, at first glance, can be a depressing book! It's five poems, each one is a chapter in this little book, and it's essentially the Jewish nation crying out in grief.

Americans are strange when it comes to grieving; it's not an area where we are very healthy. We tend to respect those who can "keep it together." If someone has a family member or close friend pass away, and they still seem to be at work and in life without breaking down, we say things like, "wow, they're handling it really well." It's almost like, as a culture, we praise people for burying their pain and ignoring their grief. We're uncomfortable with it; we don't know what to say when someone is grieving or suffering.

I stumbled across a short video recently of the Hewa tribe in Papua New Guinea mourning the death of the oldest man in their village. It gives a glimpse of how they grieve:

[Author Note: I download the following video and put it in my PowerPoint presentation on Slide 2: Mourning At A Funeral In Papua New Guinea - Hewa Tribe, <https://youtu.be/qJ4tjU3RJKU> (44 seconds)]

This was just a few seconds of a much longer time of wailing. It reminds me of stories in the Bible where people grieved. For example, if you remember Lazarus' death in John 11, there was a crowd of people wailing at the home for days after his death. If someone died in your family, not only would you and your family and friends rip your clothes and be loudly crying for days, you would also hire professional wailers.

I do not mean whale hunters. These were people whose job it was to be present and wail loudly. Could you imagine doing that? Having your home full of people you hired to cry loudly for days? It's something completely foreign from our culture. And yet, professional mental health types would say that it's a lot healthier than our American tendency to hide the pain, to bury it. Sooner or later that pain will resurface; it affects us far more than we realize. Lamentations teaches us how to grieve in a healthy way, a way that brings healing.

Lamentations is a glimpse of the Jewish peoples' grieving a death, the death of their nation. The title of the book in Hebrew is "eka."

[Slide 3] Background: ‘eka = how (distress)

‘Eka literally means “how,” a distressed filled crying out. It’s not a “how do I complete this math problem;” it’s a cry for answers. As in, “*How* could this be happening?” or “*How* is this God’s will?” Translators took this title of ‘eka, “how,” and named the book Lamentations, because it captured the tone of the book. It is a collection of laments.

[Slide 4] Background: Written after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

Their nation was conquered by King Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of Babylon. You may remember him from the story of Daniel 1 and the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. When Nebuchadnezzar conquered the Jews, he devastated their nation. He tore down their walls, left the city in rubble, and destroyed the temple. On top of that, he took the best and brightest of their young people back to Babylon to serve him.

[Slide 5] Background: Written and/or collected by Jeremiah

Jeremiah was a prophet during this time; he had been warning the Jews for 40 years to change their ways, or God would judge them and allow them to be conquered, but they ignored him. Scholars believe that Jeremiah either wrote all five laments, or he wrote some and collected others.

[Slide 6] Background: Read out loud every year on the anniversary of the destruction in the synagogue

Each year, on the anniversary of the destruction of the temple, the Jewish people would gather and recite the book of Lamentations together. They would grieve together the death of their independence, the death of their temple, the death of their favor with God. This poetry, Lamentations, has three major themes that we are going to explore, examining one per week.

[Slide 7] Lamentations Themes: Judgement, Compassion, Sovereignty

Lamentations is unflinching in how it addresses the judgment of God. It does not have a happy ending with their being free again; this book finishes with the people still grieving, still suffering, still conquered. At the same time, there is a theme of compassion; God has judged them, but He loves them and is suffering with them. Finally, there is a theme of sovereignty;

the Jewish people are not in control, Nebuchadnezzar is not in control, ultimately, God is the one who is in absolute control.

[Slide 8 – title slide]

Today, we are going to read through chapter one of Lamentations, looking at the theme of judgement.

Lamentations 1:1 (NLT)

Jerusalem, once so full of people, is now deserted. She who was once great among the nations now sits alone like a widow. Once the queen of all the earth, she is now a slave.

[Slide 9] **Female language = family connection**

There's something important going on with the feminine language and pronouns being used here that we might miss, but it is the first of three important things we can learn from this passage. This is poetry written 2,600 years ago in another language and culture. It's important to remember that, because that can impact what is being communicated.

[Author note: I shared a personal story of being misunderstood in another culture. Use your own illustration, or you can use mine to illustrate this point]

I went to Bible school in England in the mid 90's. One of the many times I embarrassed myself was the time I was with some of my fellow students, all of whom were British. I mentioned I needed to go into town and was looking for a ride. Someone asked why, and I said needed some new pants. They immediately all started giggling, and were like, "what did you say?" I said it again, "I need to get some pants. My pants are wearing out, and I need new pants." They were laughing uncontrollably, so I grabbed one of the guys and asked what in the world was going on, to which he said, "I don't know what you think that word means, Matthew, but here 'pants' are ladies' underwear." What? We both speak English, but it was like we were speaking totally different languages!

These feminine pronouns would have been understood by the Jewish people 2,600 years ago as communicating a deeper relational connection, a family connection. As a people, they were identifying themselves as the

family of God, a family who had failed their Father. So, in verse two, where it says, “she sobs,” it’s speaking of the people, the nation as a whole.

Lamentations 1:2-5 (NLT)

She sobs through the night; tears stream down her cheeks. Among all her lovers, there is no one left to comfort her. All her friends have betrayed her and become her enemies. Judah has been led away into captivity, oppressed with cruel slavery. She lives among foreign nations and has no place of rest. Her enemies have chased her down, and she has nowhere to turn. The roads to Jerusalem are in mourning, for crowds no longer come to celebrate the festivals. The city gates are silent, her priests groan, her young women are crying—how bitter is her fate! Her oppressors have become her masters, and her enemies prosper, for the Lord has punished Jerusalem for her many sins. Her children have been captured and taken away to distant lands.

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were four of the many that were stolen from their families by Nebuchadnezzar.

Lamentations 1:6-8 (NLT)

All the majesty of beautiful Jerusalem has been stripped away. Her princes are like starving deer searching for pasture. They are too weak to run from the pursuing enemy. In the midst of her sadness and wandering, Jerusalem remembers her ancient splendor. But now she has fallen to her enemy, and there is no one to help her. Her enemy struck her down and laughed as she fell. Jerusalem has sinned greatly, so she has been tossed away like a filthy rag. All who once honored her now despise her, for they have seen her stripped naked and humiliated. All she can do is groan and hide her face.

They knew they had sinned; they know this judgement was deserved.

Did Babylon literally strip them all naked? No, it’s poetry. They’re using word pictures to communicate that they are experiencing the worst humiliation that can be imagined.

Lamentations 1:9-12a (NLT)