

OUTLINE STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

LAMENTATIONS

It is attested by almost unbroken tradition that the author of this book was Jeremiah.

The Septuagint Translation, the Targum, Talmud, Josephus, all unite in declaring Jeremiah, the prophet, to be the writer. Prefixed to the book we find in the Septuagint the following note: "And it came to pass after Israel had been carried away captive, and Jerusalem made desolate, Jeremiah sat weeping, and lamented this lament over Jerusalem, and said."

It would require strong evidence indeed to set aside testimony so explicit and direct as this. Prof. Plumtre sums up the internal evidence in support of the common view as to the authorship thus: "The poems belong unmistakably to the last days of the kingdom, or the commencement of the exile, and are written by one who speaks with the vividness and intensity of an eye witness of the misery which he bewails." Local belief has placed "the Grotto of Jeremiah" in the face of a rocky hill on the western side of the city where these lamentations were uttered. The prophet may well be supposed to have taken his stand and poured out his grief over his fallen country at a point where the ruined city could be seen.

The main characteristic of the book is indicated by its title, "Lamentations."

Threnoi, loud weepings, hot burning and choked with sobs, is the emphatic word the Septuagint uses. It is an elegy, a dirge, written over the desolation of Jerusalem by one whose love for it, guilty as he knew it to be, was like that of a father for a child, a wife for her husband. The prophet's grief for the smitten city reminds one of David's for Saul and Jonathan (II Samuel 1:17-27), of Rachel's for her dead children (Jeremiah 31:15). The cry of anguish at the fall of Constantinople; "the last sigh of the Moor," as he rode away an exile from beautiful Cordova; the wail of pity at the expulsion of the Huguenots from France and the Waldenses from the Piedmontese valleys, have not been forgotten, for they made a profound impression on the memory and the conscience of the world and literature has recorded them in words of such tenderness as move even the coldest reader. But Jeremiah's lamentation for favored, sinful and ruined Jerusalem is a cry of sorrow so touching as to move the stoutest heart, and must have been read with streaming eyes and quivering lips by many a Jew. In all literature there is nothing more pathetic than this mournful dirge.

1. *The first lament*, chap. 1.

There are two parts in this first chapter:

(1) *Zion, the widow*, vss. 1-11.

The description of the sorrow-smitten city is wonderfully graphic. Like a woman bereft of her husband and her children, seated on the ground with disheveled hair, stripped of all her ornaments, clad in weeds, weeping and wailing, is the prophet's vivid picture of the once proud and splendid city. It is *Judea capta* he describes. Of all her lovers not one is there to comfort her. The gates are gone, the priests sigh, the princes flee like the timid hart, and the children are gone into captivity. But the faithful servant of God fails not to make known the cause of such unparalleled disaster, such fearful woe. It is the Lord who has afflicted Zion; it is because of her multiplied transgressions that He has turned against, and "**left her naked to her foes.**"

(2) *Zion's confession*, vss. 12-22.

In this part Zion speaks, while in the first part it is the prophet who laments. She bewails her dreadful plight, challenges the world to furnish a parallel to her misery. Yet she acknowledges that her punishment is from the Lord and her sins have brought the accumulated woe upon her. "**The Lord is righteous; I have rebelled**" is Zion's confession.

2. *The Second Lament*, chap. 2, is spoken by the prophet.

It is a very remarkable description of the siege of Jerusalem and the ruin which followed its capture, vss. 1-12. The walls and palaces of the city, the altar and the sanctuary are defiled, the elders sit covered with dust, the virgins walk with head bowed down to the ground, and the children swoon in the streets, and breathe out their young lives into their mothers' bosoms. Then again the prophet discloses the secret of these awful calamities; it is the sin of the people; the visions of the false prophets that have led astray. And now the Lord has turned against His people and city like a mighty warrior, and doom has fallen upon them all.

3. *The Third Lament*, chap. 3, is likewise spoken by the prophet.

But it differs from the preceding in that here he enters into the miseries of his people and makes them his own. In Zion's affliction he is afflicted. He shares to the uttermost the desolations of his people. We see the like spirit in Daniel, (9). Love—love to God and man—is a marvelous thing.

Paul could say, "**Who is weak, and I am not weak? grieved, and I not grieved? offended, and I burn not?**" II Corinthians 11:29.

The truest philanthropy and patriotism are found in the genuine servants of God.

4. *The Fourth Lament*, chap. 4, is uttered also by the prophet.

The sense of the overwhelming overthrow that had come is intensified to the uttermost in this chapter. God's judgments on the guilty place have been pitiless, tremendous. Nothing is left but smoldering ruin, slain men, weeping women, orphan children.

But there is now a gleam of hope. Divine wrath has exhausted itself, and mercy can once more flow out to the stricken ones. Thus in verse twenty-two this glad announcement is made: "**The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; He will carry thee no more away into captivity.**"

5. *The Fifth Lament*, chap, 5, spoken by the Jewish people, who make confession and appeal to God for help, deliverance and forgiveness. The ground of their appeal is their desolation and their utter helplessness.

The book of Lamentations teaches among others this great truth, that the affliction of God's people, even when they most deserve it, does not escape His eye. His Spirit enters into it through His servant the prophet, and shares it with them. "**In all their affliction he was afflicted.**" The divine pity for the sufferings which love will not avert—how wonderful it is! Jesus weeping at the grave of Lazarus, over Jerusalem, is an amazing scene, and one which cannot be fully comprehended.

~ end of chapter 26 ~

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