

LAMENTATIONS

—A dirge of National lamentation over the unrecoverable past, much like Job is the dramatic expression of personal suffering

1. Background

The name of this book is derived from the LXX title of *Threnoi*, (Vulgate = *Treni*), although the Talmud calls the book *Qinoth*, which also means lamentations.

The Hebrew name is אֶכָּח *'ekah*, an ejaculatory “How!” which introduces the first, second and fourth laments.

This book is one of the five Megilloth (scrolls marking Jewish holidays/anniversaries) and has been read annually on the 9th of ‘Ab to commemorate the destruction of the two temples.

2. Author and date of Lamentations

—by an anonymous prophet in Judah, first half of sixth century

Jeremiah the traditional author

attributed to Jeremiah in LXX and Vulgate:

“And it came to pass after Israel had been taken into captivity and Jerusalem had been laid waste that Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented this lamentation over Jerusalem and said...”

Young and Harrison believe this was a false deduction based on II Chron. 35:25:

25 Jeremiah also lamented for Josiah. And to this day all the singing men and the singing women speak of Josiah in their lamentations. They made it a custom in Israel; and indeed they *are* written in the Laments.

also in favor of Jeremiah is his weeping for Jerusalem (Jer. 9:1, etc.; cf. Lam. 1:16)

Timing: written after Jerusalem destroyed in 587 BC (e.g., 1:1, 10, 18; 5:18)

if written by Jeremiah, then probably fairly soon after the destruction of Jerusalem

if written by someone else, the author apparently was an eyewitness of the destruction, 4:20: “our...”

written certainly before the restoration under Cyrus in 536 BC

3. Structure of Lamentations

= five poems, one chapter each

Poems 1-4 = acrostic based on the order of the Hebrew alphabet, phps. signifying the dramatic totality of suffering

($\dot{\text{ש}}$ + $\dot{\text{ז}}$ *sin* and *shin* interchangeable)

Poems 1,2 have 22 verses, each verse having three lines

Poem 3, the center-piece of the book, has 66 verses; there are three verses for each letter of the alphabet with three lines in each of the three verses

Poems 2-4, change א + ב *ayin* and *pe* position

This order of the alphabet has been found on the oldest extant Hebrew writing of substantial length, which is the Hebrew alphabet, written left to right—the Izbet Sartah sherd, dated 1200-1000 BC (*BAR* 4:3 [Sept-Oct, 1978], 23-30, esp. p. 30).

Poem 5, regular, non-acrostic, but still 22 verses for 22 letters of alphabet

The book's rhythm (words per line):

Poems 1-4 3 + 2

Poem 5 3 + 3

This rhythmic pattern is not uniform throughout the poems, and its categorization as a “dirge” rhythm is now disputed (see Bullock, p. 265).

4. Content of Lamentations

The “Lament” (title in LXX and Kittel = “Threni”) is a funeral dirge (cf. Zephaniah). It combines and contrasts the former glory with the present wretchedness. The 3:2 meter is typical of the dirge, and in Hebrew literature such as this has been labeled “Qinah” meter.

cf. 2:15; 4:5

2:15 All who pass by clap *their* hands at you; They hiss and shake their heads At the daughter of Jerusalem: "*Is* this the city that is called 'The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth'?"

Yet, in spite of the great destruction and ruin of the city, God will remain faithful to his covenants, and will redeem his people; there are rays of faith and hope for the future (Lam. 3:21-26).

3:22 *Through* the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not.

23 *They are* new every morning; Great *is* Your faithfulness.

24 "The LORD *is* my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!"

25 The LORD *is* good to those who wait for Him, To the soul *who* seeks Him.

26 *It is* good that *one* should hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the LORD.