

WHAT THE CHURCH CAN LEARN FROM LAMENTATIONS



Before the seminar:

Watch “Overview of Lamentations”

Click: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8GDFPdaQZQ>

SEMINAR 1: CRYING/GRIEVING

A. Introduction

1. Background (watch video – “Overview of Lamentations” – see link above)
2. Relevance of Lamentations: exile and pandemic – “collective trauma”
3. Herman Gunkel: “One does not always sing praises and give thanks; there is also a time to grieve and lament. Alongside the happy festivals of rejoicing in the community stand the days of lamentation. When crop failure, pestilence, and danger from the enemy afflicted the people, such a day of lamentation was observed. On such occasions all the people would assemble at the sanctuary, tear their clothes, fast, weep, lament ...”¹

B. What is a lament?

Lament, in the biblical sense of the word could mean:

1. Cry for help (read Psalm 130:1 and Lamentations 3:55)
2. Complaint against God (read Psalm 142:2)
3. Crying/grieving (read Lamentations 1:1-2)

C. Importance of grieving

1. Grieving is part of the process of healing.
2. Three stages of recovery (Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*):
 - a. Establishing safety
 - b. Reconstructing the trauma story – remembering and mourning
 - c. Restoring the connection between survivors and their community”
3. “Lamentations was meant to serve the survivors of the catastrophe simply as an *expression* of the horror and grief they felt. People live on best after calamity, not by utterly repressing their grief and shock, but by facing it, and by measuring its dimensions.” (Hillers, *Lamentations*, 4).

D. Grieving in Lamentations

1. “Everything”
 - a. Use of the Hebrew acrostic
 - b. The acrostic “implies that suffering is so enormous, so total, that it spreads from a to z, from א to ז. There are no letters left for more suffering.” (O’Connor, 29).
 - c. But if suffering is “so total” so also is its expression. Everything is grieved over from a to z.

¹ Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, 13.

- d. At the same time, the use of the acrostic indicates that though grieving is total or comprehensive, it is not boundless – eventually, one will reach the last letter and stop.
- 2. Not rushed
 - a. Use of personification – the city and its people personified as a woman.
 - b. Two speakers in Lamentations 1 – Lady Zion and a narrator.
 - c. The narrator calls our attention to Lady Zion’s “tears on her cheeks.”
- 3. Importance of emotions
 - a. Grieving includes identifying our losses, naming them, acknowledging them, and describing how we feel about them.
- 4. “in the presence of the Lord”
 - a. “Look, O LORD, for I am in distress; my stomach churns; my heart is wrung within me ... (1:20)

Reflection questions:

- 1. Do you agree that we are in a “collective trauma”?
- 2. How do you find the grieving process in Lamentations 1?