

Lamentations

| Emotions of and Reasons for the Fall | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| Fall Described | Judgment Acknowledged | Jeremiah's Feelings | Trusting Leaders | Prayer |
| Chapter 1 | Chapter 2 | Chapter 3 | Chapter 4 | Chapter 5 |
| The Suffering | The Cause | The Hope | The Reason | The Lament |
| 3 Line Acrostic | 3 Line Acrostic | 1 Line Acrostic | 2 Line Acrostic | 1 Line Not Acrostic |
| People | God | Prophet | God | People |
| Third Person Singular ("she") 1:1-11 | First Person Singular ("I") 1:12-22 | Third Person Singular ("He") 2:1-10 | First Person Singular ("I") 2:11-4:22 | First Person Plural ("us/our") 5:1-22 |
| Jerusalem | | | | |
| 586 BC | | | | |

Key Word: Confession

Key Verse: "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Summary Statement:

The way Jeremiah modeled repentance after Jerusalem's destruction was by confessing that God alone could restore Judah from their sin.

Application:

When God punishes us, our only hope lies in turning to our "Enemy."

(Adapted from Huang Sabin)

Lamentations

Introduction

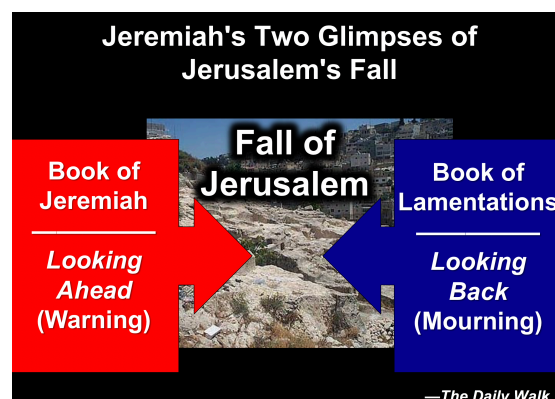
- I. **Title** The Hebrew title for the book (אֵיכָה 'ekah) is the exclamation "How!" (BDB 32d 2) or "Oh!" taken from the first word of chapters 1, 2, and 4 (1:1; 2:1; 4:1, 2; cf. Isa. 1:21; Jer. 48:17). The Greek title *Threnoi* means "Dirges" or "Laments," and the Latin title *Threni* ("Tears" or "Lamentations") was derived from this word. The subtitle in Jerome's Vulgate became the basis for the English title "The Lamentations of Jeremiah" (*TTTB*, 207). Lamentations is the only prophetic book not named after its author. Rather, the title conveys the deep personal and national loss that the author feels after the fall of Jerusalem.

II. Authorship

- A. **External Evidence:** The Masoretic (Hebrew) text does not claim a particular author, but Jewish tradition attributes the authorship to Jeremiah (Targum at Jer. 1:1; Talmud *B. Bat.* 15a; LXX and Vulgate headings: cf. LaSor, 617, n. 2). The LXX introduction reads, "And it came to pass after Israel was taken captive and Jerusalem laid waste that Jeremiah sat weeping and raised this lament over Jerusalem..." Jeremiah's authorship was universally accepted until 1712, when Herman von der Hardt challenged it (Dyer, *BKC*, 1:1207). All objections of von der Hardt and others have been thoroughly refuted (LaSor, 618; Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 365-7; Walter C. Kaiser, *A Biblical Approach to Personal Suffering*, 24-30).
- B. **Internal Evidence:** The book is anonymous, yet its contents reveal an author who was an eyewitness, profound theologian, skillful poet, and true patriot (LaSor, 618). Nothing in it raises doubt about the tradition that the author is Jeremiah. Similarities between the Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations are striking: 1:2 (Jer. 30:14); 1:15 (Jer. 8:21); 1:16; 2:11 (Jer. 9:1, 18); 2:20; 4:10 (Jer. 19:9); 2:22 (Jer. 6:25); 4:21 (Jer. 49:12). Both books express the same compassion, sympathy, and grief over Judah's downfall (*TTTB*, 207). It is no wonder that Jeremiah has been called "the weeping prophet."

III. Circumstances

- A. **Date:** Nearly all scholars agree that the book refers to the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 BC. Nothing indicates that it was written during the exile. The vividness and deep emotions in the account indicate that an eyewitness composed it shortly after the events took place.
- B. **Recipients:** Jeremiah was never exiled to Babylon (cf. Jer. 40–44), so Lamentations shows to the remnant left in the land the devastating effects of God's judgment on His people.
- C. **Occasion:** In 586 BC Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem with its temple and the nation of Judah went into exile, following years of prophetic warning by Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and others—warnings which stretched back even as far as the Law (cf. Deut. 28:41, 49-57, 64f.). On the heels of such a catastrophic defeat, Jeremiah mourned the loss in the five poems that comprise Lamentations. These poems express the anguish of the remnant and the reasons for God's judgment as a stimulus to national repentance. The worst disaster ever to befall the Jewish nation was certainly this destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (including the departure of the Spirit of God from the Holy of Holies). The two scriptural books written by Jeremiah focus on this tragic event:



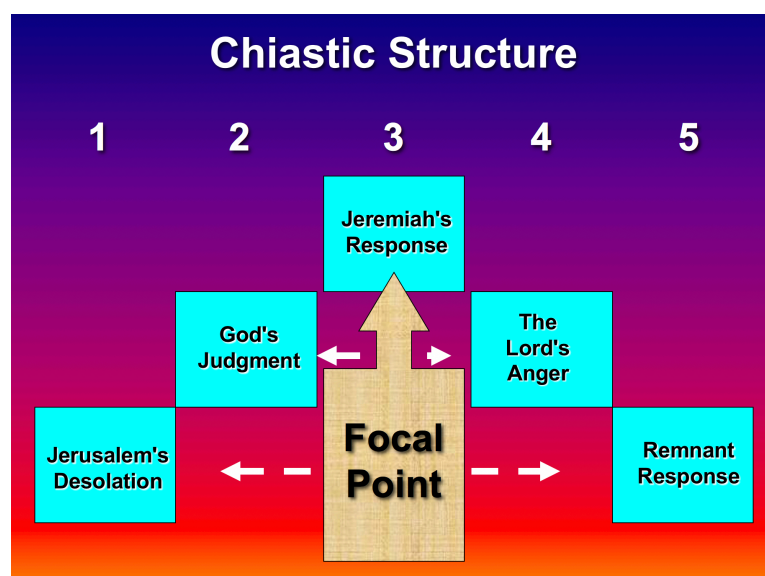
IV. Characteristics

- A. As previously noted, Lamentations is the only prophetic book not named after its author. This makes sense since Jeremiah already has a prophecy bearing his name. The title conveys the deep personal and national loss that he felt after the fall of Jerusalem.
- B. This is the saddest of all books in Scripture. In 2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 52, we find the historical *facts* of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple; however, only Lamentations effectively captures the *emotions* (LaSor, 617).
- C. Lamentations is also the only book in the Bible whose basic structure forms an acrostic. All chapters (except chapter 3) have 22 verses, each beginning with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet (except chapter 5). Chapter 3 has 66 verses, with each letter repeated three times. The pattern may be for easy memorization or to emphasize the complete nature of suffering for sin (Dyer, *BKC*, 1:1211).

| <u>Verse</u> | <u>Chapter 1</u> | <u>Chapter 2</u> | <u>Chapter 3</u> | <u>Chapter 4</u> | <u>Chapter 5</u> |
|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1 | a (=A) | a | a | a | not |
| 2 | b (=B) | b | a | b | acrostically |
| 3 | g (=“C”) | g | a | g | arranged |
| 4 | d (=D) | d | b | d | |
| 5 | h (etc.) | h | b | h | |
| 6 | w (etc.) | w | b | w | |
| etc. | etc. | etc. | etc. | etc. | |
| # of Verses | 22 | 22 | 66 | 22 | 22 |
| # of Lines | 66 | 66 | 66 | 44 | 22 |
| Lines/stanza | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 |

Chapter 5 is not an acrostic, but it does have a "mini-acrostic." Verses 19-20 are composed of four lines starting with the letters A, K, L, and "Z," respectively (i.e., a, k, l, and t). The effect is to express the highest praise for Yahweh, followed by the last two verses of the book that contain a tentative, hopeful cry for help (Homer Heater, Jr., "Structure and Meaning in Lamentations," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 [July-September 1992]: 304-15).

- D. Not only does the book use multiple acrostics, but it has a chiastic structure as well. In other words, certain elements reappear in a deliberate order later in the book. Chapters 1 and 5 both depict Jerusalem's destruction from the viewpoint of the inhabitants, chapters 2 and 4 both describe God's view, and the center of the book (chap. 3) shows Jeremiah's response:



- E. Deuteronomy 28 prophesied the terrible judgments resulting from sin nearly 800 years before Lamentations with striking parallels (Charles Dyer, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:1209):

| Parallels Between Lamentations and Deuteronomy | | | |
|--|---|-------------|---|
| Lamentations | | Deuteronomy | |
| 1:3 | She dwells among the nations; she finds no resting place. | 28:65 | Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. |
| 1:5 | Her foes have become her masters. | 28:44 | He will be the head, but you will be the tail. |
| 1:5 | Her children have gone into exile, captive before the foe. | 28:32 | Your sons and daughters will be given to another nation. |
| 1:6 | In weakness they have fled before the pursuer. | 28:25 | The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven. |
| 1:18 | My young men and maidens have gone into exile. | 28:41 | You will have sons and daughters but you will not keep them, because they will go into captivity. |
| 2:15 | All who pass your way clap their hands at you; they scoff and shake their heads at the Daughter of Jerusalem. | 28:37 | You will become a thing of horror and an object of scorn and ridicule to all the nations where the Lord will drive you. |
| 2:20 | Should women eat their offspring, the children they have cared for? | 28:53 | Because of the suffering that your enemy will inflict on you during the siege, you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the Lord your God has given you. |
| 2:21 | Young and old lie together in the dust of the streets. | 28:50 | ... a fierce looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young. |
| 4:10 | With their own hands compassionate women have cooked their own children. | 28:56–57 | The most gentle and sensitive women among you ... will begrudge the husband she loves and her own son or daughter the afterbirth from her womb and the children she bears. For she intends to eat them secretly during the siege. |
| 5:2 | Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens, our homes to foreigners. | 28:30 | You will build a house, but you will not live in it. |
| 5:5 | We are weary and find no rest. | 28:65 | Among those nations you will find no repose. |
| 5:10 | Our skin is as hot as an oven, feverish from hunger. | 28:48 | In hunger and thirst ... you will serve the enemies the Lord sends against you. |
| 5:11 | Women have been ravished in Zion, and virgins in the towns of Judah. | 28:30 | You will be pledged to be married to a women, but another will take her and ravish her. |
| 5:12 | Elders are shown no respect. | 28:50 | ... a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old ... |
| 5:18 | Mount Zion ... lies desolate, with jackals prowling over it. | 28:26 | Your carcasses will be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away. |

Argument

Jeremiah's Lamentations consists of five poems that express, in deeply emotional terms, the siege conditions and the reasons God gave for the fall of Jerusalem. The purpose of documenting such an unpleasant situation is to serve as a model of national confession that the remnant would repent and trust God for His merciful restoration. It begins with two acrostic poems of equal length which describe the siege (ch. 1) as a result of God's withdrawal of His hand (ch. 2), then expresses in an extended poem his own feelings of affliction, hope, and repentant confidence in God as a model for the suffering people to follow (ch. 3). The fourth acrostic poem indicates that the city fell for trusting in its leaders rather than God (ch. 4), and the final poem (not an acrostic) laments, acknowledges national sin, and requests restoration (ch. 5). The chiastic structure makes chapter 3 the focal point in which Jeremiah models the repentant attitude needed in Judah (see previous paragraph "D" above).

Synthesis

Emotions of and reasons for the fall

| | |
|----------|---------------------------------|
| 1 | Fall described |
| 1:1-11 | Heights to depths (3ps) |
| 1:12-22 | Deserved desolation (1ps) |
| 2 | Judgment acknowledged |
| 2:1-10 | God caused it |
| 2:11-22 | Lament/exhortation |
| 3 | Jeremiah's feelings |
| 3:1-18 | Affliction |
| 3:19-39 | Hope |
| 3:40-66 | Repentant confidence |
| 4 | Reason: trusting leaders |
| 4:1-11 | Glory vs. siege |
| 4:12-20 | Trusted leaders—not God |
| 4:21-22 | Edom to be punished |
| 5 | Prayer |
| 5:1-15 | Lamentation |
| 5:16-18 | Confession |
| 5:19-22 | Restoration |

Outline

Summary Statement for the Book

The way Jeremiah modeled repentance after Jerusalem's destruction was by confessing that God alone could restore Judah from their sin.

- I. **Jerusalem's horrible fall recalls the awful consequences of rebellion against God to stir Judah to repent and obey (Lam 1).**
 - A. The fall of Jerusalem from prominence to a lowliness reminds the nation of the heights the city enjoyed by grace before God's judgment (1:1-11).
 - B. Jerusalem confesses her deserved desolation with the agony the people feel over the awful effects of rebellion against God (1:12-22).
- II. **God caused Jerusalem's destruction so that all would admit this as his judgment and seek his mercy (Lam 2).**
 - A. God caused the destruction of the city and its covenantal institutions to help his people see this as his judgment (2:1-10).

- B. Jeremiah laments the city's condition so that all would admit this as God's judgment and seek his mercy (2:11-22).
1. The people listening to their false prophets caused their suffering by their enemies as God prophesied (2:11-17; cf. Deut. 28).
 2. The people should cry out to God in prayer to prevent their deaths from starvation (2:18-19).
 3. Jeremiah prays for God to deliver them from their cannibalism, murders, and terrors on every side (2:20-22).
- III. Jeremiah voices his affliction, hope, and repentant confidence in God so the suffering people will follow (Lam 3).**
- A. Jeremiah describes his afflictions in general, poetic terms to identify with the suffering people (3:1-18).
- B. Jeremiah puts his hope in God to model how to pray for mercy (3:19-39).
- C. Jeremiah repents and acknowledges God's deliverance to model national repentance and confident faith in God (3:40-66).
1. The remnant must pray so that those still living after the holocaust will repent (3:40-42).
 2. The sad state of the people should show the awful consequences of disobedience (3:43-54).
 3. God will defend the repentant Israelites and pay back the Babylonians to stir national repentance and faith in God's justice (3:55-66).
- IV. God judged Jerusalem in the siege for trusting in their leaders instead of him and will judge Edom to move them to trust him (Lam 4).**
- A. Jerusalem's pre-siege glory contrasts with the contemptible siege conditions to recall God's wrath for breaking their covenant (4:1-11).

| Parallelism in Lamentations 4:1–11 | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|------------|---|
| 4:1–6 | | 4:7–11 | |
| vv. 1–2 | The value of the sons of Zion has become despised. | vv. 4:7–8 | The value of the princes has become despised. |
| vv. 4:3–5 | The little children and adults suffer. | vv. 4:9–10 | The little children and adults suffer. |
| v. 4:6 | Conclusion: The calamity is God's punishment. | v 4:11 | Conclusion: The calamity is God's punishment. |

- B. The city fell because the people trusted their prophets, priests, elders, alliances, and king rather than God, but they can now trust Him (4:12-20).
- C. Jeremiah sarcastically calls on Edom to rejoice over Jerusalem's doom, but warns of their coming judgment as God is fair to all (4:21-22).



- V. Jerusalem's lament, confession, and appeal for restoration should move the remnant to repent and hope for renewal (Lam 5).**
- A. The city ("us/our") laments to God so the remnant will feel their suffering (5:1-15).
 - B. The city ("us/our") confesses sin to exhort the remnant to repent (5:16-18).
 - C. The city ("us/our") prays for restoration to encourage the remnant to hope for renewal (5:19-22).