

OVERVIEW OF LAMENTATIONS

Author & Date: Although the text does not identify an author to the book of Lamentations, historical tradition as well as the contents of the book supports the conclusion that the prophet Jeremiah is the author of Lamentations. In writing the book, Jeremiah provides an eye witness account of the fall of Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem fell to Babylon in 586 B.C. The book appears to have been written shortly after the fall. The name of the book comes from the Latin meaning to “cry out.” The Hebrew name *ekah* comes from the first word of the book (repeated in 2:1 and 4:1) and is an explanation meaning, “how?”

Purpose: The book records the anguish of seeing God’s judgment on an unbelieving people. For us, the book serves as a reminder of the severity and seriousness of the judgment of God and reminds us that we also deserve this judgment, except for the great love, mercy and compassion of our God. Jeremiah records this in five cries or “laments” which follow the chapter divisions of the book. The first four laments are alphabetic acrostics with chapter 3 repeating each letter three times for 66 verses.

Tradition holds that Jeremiah wept over Jerusalem outside Jerusalem’s north wall, at a place known as Golgotha. “However that may be, the Spirit of Christ in the prophet made him in a real sense a prefigurement of our Lord (Jer 13:17), as the Master likewise wept over the erring city (Mt 23:36-38)”¹

Key/Noteworthy Passages:

- 1:1 How lonely sits the city *That was* full of people! *How* like a widow is she, Who was great among the nations! The princess among the provinces Has become a slave!
- 1:18 "The LORD is righteous, For I rebelled against His commandment. Hear now, all peoples, And behold my sorrow; My virgins and my young men Have gone into captivity.
- 3:22 Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. 23 They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (NIV)
- 5:21 Turn us back to You, O LORD, and we will be restored; Renew our days as of old,

Outline for Lamentations

- I. Lament for Jerusalem (chapter 1)
- II. Lament Explaining the Lord’s Anger (chapter 2)
- III. Lament for Personal Grief’s (chapter 3)
 - A. Personal Afflictions (3:1-18)
 - B. Hope in God’s Mercy (3:19-66)
- IV. Lament over the Extent of Suffering (chapter 4)
- V. Lament of Prayer for Restoration (chapter 5)

¹ Unger, Merrill F. *Unger’s Bible Handbook*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967 p. 361.

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Food for Thought

1. Starting in verse 12, Jeremiah writes chapter 1 “personifying” the city of Jerusalem writing in the first person (except v. 17). What are some thoughts the city pours out as one who has been judged by God in this lament? How might this response parallel that of the sinner who finds himself judged by God for eternity? (Consider the rich man in Luke 16:23-31).
2. According to chapter 2, who caused the affliction in Jerusalem? (note the name repeated 7 times in the first 8 verses). What insight does this give us into the nature of God?
3. Starting in 2:9 Jeremiah describes Jerusalem and his feelings as he observes the city (v. 11). Does this description support the conclusion of the majority of Jerusalem in the first 35 years plus of Jeremiah’s ministry that he was a traitor?
4. In the midst of the despair in this book, hope is found in chapter 3 beginning in verse 20. Read verses 20-51 and identify the characteristics of the Lord that bring hope. How can this lighten the heart of one who has sinned and whom God is chastising now?
5. Chapter 5 is a prayer of restoration. The majority of the prayer is a reminder to God of the affliction of Jerusalem. However verses 19-22 summarize the plea. What can we conclude from this prayer and what does it reveal about the heart of the one praying it? (Consider also the time for judgment decreed in Jer. 25:11 and the purpose of God in Jer 29:10-14.)