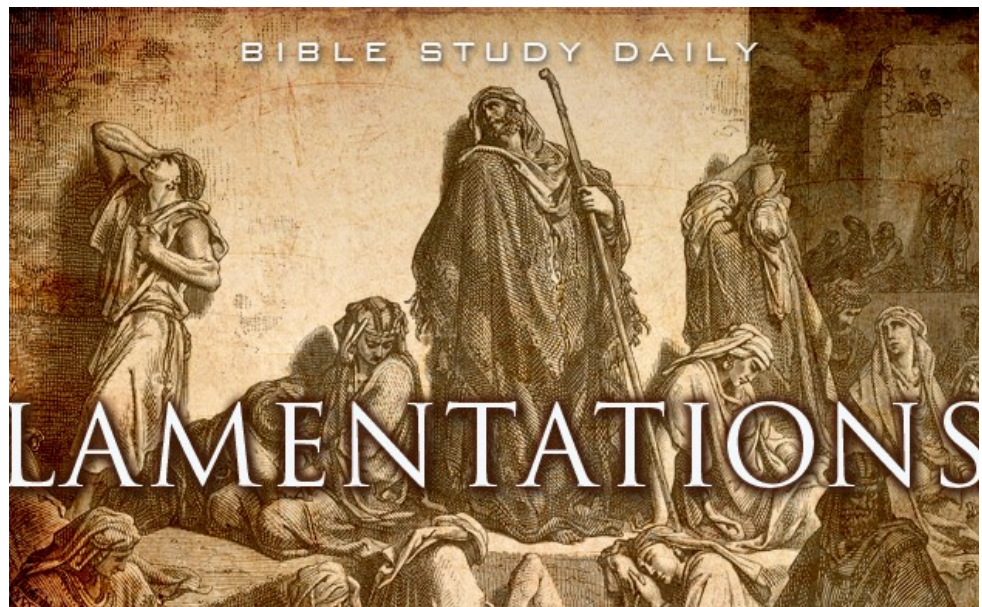




BIBLE STUDY DAILY



This document contains the introduction to the book of Lamentations as well as my study notes for the book.

Name

The title of Lamentations comes from the first Hebrew word of the book, *êkâh*, which means “Alas!” or “How!” which is characteristically the start of a lament. The Jewish Talmud title for the book is *qnôt* which means “dirges” or “laments.”

Author

Jeremiah, is the generally accepted author of Lamentations. The Greek Septuigint, the Latin Vulgate, and the Jewish Talmud each ascribe Lamentations to Jeremiah.

Genre

Prophecy

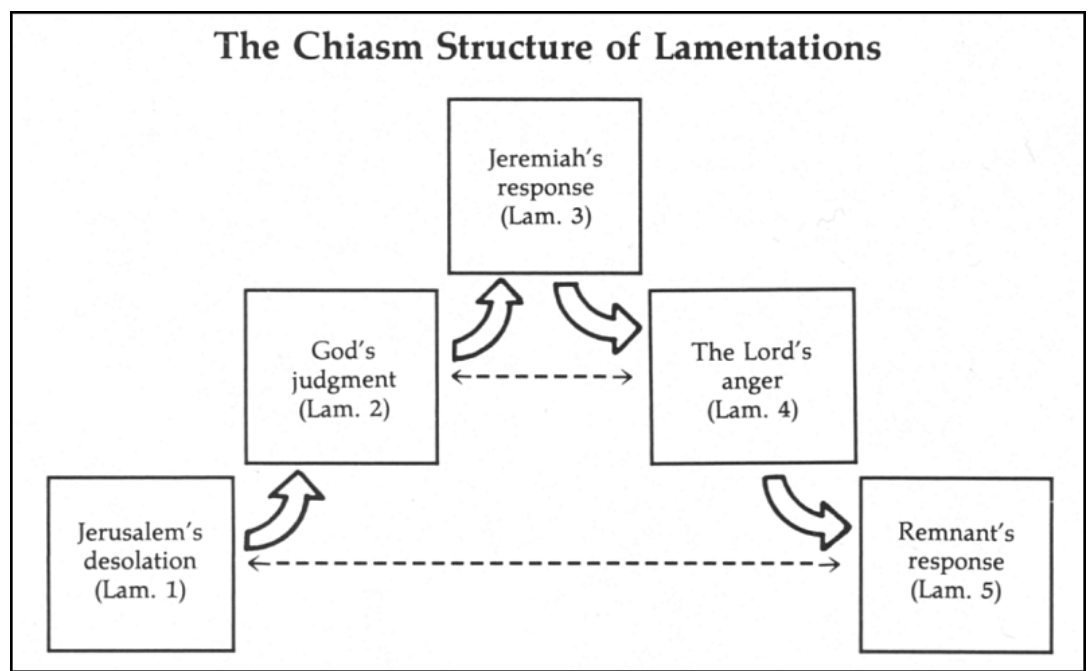
Literary Form


Poetry

The poetic form of Lamentations is so artistic that it deserves additional discussion.

The five chapters form a chiasm structure: Lamentations 1 – Jerusalem’s Destruction, Lamentations 2 – God’s Judgement, Lamentations 3 – Jeremiah’s Response, Lamentations 4 – The Lord’s Anger, Lamentations 5 – The Remnant’s Response. Lamentations 1 & 5 focus on the people, while Lamentations

2 & 4 focus on the Lord. Lamentations 3 becomes the center or pivot point of the book. The chiasm structure of Lamentations is more apparent in the graphic below from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*.





Lamentations 1, 2, and 4 are written as an acrostic. Each chapter has 22 verses (22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet), and each verse begins with the subsequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet. For example: Lamentations 1:1 begins with *alep*, 1:2 begins with *bet* and so on. The same acrostic pattern is seen in Lamentations 2, and 4.

Lamentations 3 is also written as an acrostic, but has 66 verses (three verses per letter of the Hebrew alphabet).

Lamentations 5 is not written as an acrostic, but has 22 verses.

Time Frame

Assuming Jeremiah as the author, Lamentations would have had to have been written in the short time frame between the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of the people to Babylon. So a date of between late 586 b.c. or early 585 B.C. is most likely.

Emphasis

The emphasis on Lamentations is on the covenant promise of God. God had promised to care for his people and prosper them (Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28-30), but this covenant was conditional, the people must obey God. If they did not God would punish them until they repented and returned to Him. Lamentations records the judgement of the Lord on the people who disobeyed and rejected God just as predicted in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

Outline

- The Devastation of Jerusalem (1:1-1:22)
- The Lord's Wrath (2:1-2:22)
- The Judgement and Compassion of God (3:1-3:66)
- The Lord's Anger over Sin (4:1-22)
- The Remnant's Prayerful Response (5:1-5:22)

What I Noticed Today (Lamentations 1-2)

Lamentations 1

Five times in Lamentations 1, Jeremiah mentions the “cries for help” after the fall of Jerusalem went unanswered (vv. 2, 9, 16-17, 21).

There are two main sections to Lamentations 1: Jeremiah cries out over the destruction of Jerusalem (vv. 1-11), and the city’s pleas for mercy (vv. 12-22).

In verses 1-7 Jeremiah writes in the third person on behalf of Jerusalem. She had suffered the decimation of the population, the once great nation was now a widow (dependent on others), and was now a slave. There is no one to comfort her. Her alliances are broken; these nations were now their enemies. Judah is now a slave in exile. People who used to come and worship at the temple come no longer. Adversaries have become their masters because of their sins. The treasures of the city have been taken as plunder by their enemies.

In verses 8-9 Jeremiah says the city fell because the people had sinned greatly and they had not considered what would be the outcome of their sin.

In verses 10-11 Jeremiah describes the results of their sin: pagan nations had desecrated the temple by entering into it, and a severe famine forced them to trade their material wealth for food.

In verses 12-15 Jerusalem calls out to passersby to see the judgment God had poured out on them because of their sin. He uses four metaphors:

- 1) It was like a fire that burned deep into their bones.
- 2) It was like a hunter’s trap and they could not escape.
- 3) It was like an animal’s yoke that bound their sin to their judgment.
- 4) It was like treading out grapes in a winepress as the Lord trampled Judah.

In verses 16-17 Jeremiah describes the city as reaching out her hands for someone to comfort her but there is no one. All their neighbors were now their enemies.

In verses 18-19 Judah acknowledges the Lord’s justice and confesses their guilt in rebelling against God. All their lovers (neighboring countries who worshiped foreign gods) had betrayed them.

In verses 20-22 Jerusalem now calls out to God in their dismay that there is no one to comfort them, they ask God to also bring judgment upon their neighbors.

Lamentations 2

There are three main sections to Lamentations 2: the anger of God (vv. 1-10), Jeremiah's cry over the destruction of the city (vv. 11-19), and the people's response (vv. 20-22).

In verses 1-5 Jeremiah explains God's anger is directed to the "Daughter of Judah" (Or some translations "Daughter of Zion") which is a reference to Jerusalem. The destruction includes houses, palaces, and strongholds, as well as, the leaders of the land.

In verse 6-7 Jeremiah describes God's anger as also being directed against His temple. He tore it down as though it was a temporary shelter. His rejection of the altar, the sanctuary, and even the palace was complete.

In verses 8-10 the Lord had determined to destroy the walls of the city as he had destroyed the leaders who were supposed to instruct and teach God's prophecies to the people. The people's response to the loss of leadership was to go into mourning (sprinkling dust on their heads and wearing sackcloth).

In verses 11-19 Jeremiah describes five terrifying scenes that resulted from the destruction of the city.

In verses 11-12 (scene 1) Jeremiah describes the people crying out for grain and wine because the famine is so severe. Children's lives fade away in the arms of their mothers and there is nothing they can do.

In verse 13 (scene 2) Jeremiah describes himself trying to find words to bring comfort to the city, like a man who is trying to comfort a friend, but to no avail.

In verse 14 (scene 3) Jeremiah describes how the false prophets contributed to bringing about the fall of the city because they told lies and mislead the people.

In verses 15-17 (scene 4) Jeremiah describes all those who pass by mocking the city that had been described as the perfection of beauty. Jerusalem's enemies proudly claim day they had been waiting for was the day they swallowed up the city. The Lord reminds them that He has brought about this destruction as He had planned.

In verses 18-19 (scene 5) Jeremiah describes the people crying out and pouring out their hearts like water (prayer) because the children were starving everywhere in the city.

In verses 20-22 Jeremiah records the plea of the people of Jerusalem to God. They asked God to look and see their plight. Should the women eat their own children? Should priests and prophets be killed in the sanctuary? Both young and old were laying in the street dead because of the Lord's anger.

What I Noticed Today

(Lamentations 3-5)

Lamentations 3

Lamentations 3 is Jeremiah's first-person report of his reaction to the fall of Jerusalem and the Lord's judgment on the city.

Note: In some sections of the chapter, Jeremiah is speaking in the first person singular ("I", "me", "my"), in other places, he speaks in the first person plural ("we", "us", "our"). In these plural sections, Jeremiah is likely referring to himself and the people of Israel.

Lamentations 3 has three main sections: 1) Jeremiah's afflictions and God's mercy (vv. 1-18), 2) God's mercy produces hope (vv. 19-40), 3) Jeremiah's prayer for God to deliver and restore Israel (vv. 41-66).

There are distinct parallels between verses 1-6 and 7-11.

In verses 1-3 Jeremiah describes his affliction as being driven away from God and forced to walk in darkness rather than in the light.

In verses 4-6 Jeremiah says this adversity had worn him down physically.

In verses 7-9 Jeremiah feels trapped. His prayers go unanswered.

In verses 10-13 Jeremiah says God has torn him apart, leaving him desolate.

In verses 14-18 Jeremiah says he is a laughingstock to his people, mocked. He has no peace and has forgotten what happiness is like. His future and hope in the Lord is lost.

In verses 19-24 Jeremiah calls on God to remember his affliction and this brings him hope. The Lord's love is faithful, His mercies never end, so he will put his hope in the Lord.

In verses 25-40 Jeremiah says it is good to wait upon the Lord, to sit alone and be silent. The Lord will not reject us forever. He will show us compassion. God does not delight in our affliction but it must be endured because of our sins. The judgment of God is only to turn us back to Him.

In verses 41-47 Jeremiah prays to the Lord, imploring the people to return to God and repent of their sin and rebellion. Because of God's anger, they have unanswered prayer and they are rejected by their enemies. They have experienced panic, devastation, and destruction because of their rebellion.

In verses 48-51 Jeremiah switches from plural back to singular voice. He is full of tears because of the destruction of his people. He is full of grief because of what has happened to the city.

In verses 52-55 Jeremiah relates how he was afflicted in his own life. He was hunted by his enemies, and dropped into a pit and left to die. He called out to

the Lord from the pit.

In verses 56-58 Jeremiah describes how the Lord comforted him, saved him from the pit, and redeemed him.

In verses 59-66 Jeremiah calls on the Lord to remember the wrongs done to him, the insults, the plots against him, the slandering, and the mocking. He asks the Lord to pay them back for what they deserve.

Lamentations 4

Lamentations 4 reveals the results of the Lord's judgment on the people of Judah. There are three main sections to chapter 4: 1) Jeremiah contrasts the condition of Jerusalem before and after the fall (vv. 1-11), 2) he explains the causes of the siege (vv. 12-20), and 3) calls out to God to vindicate Jerusalem (vv. 21-22).

In verses 1-2 Jeremiah describes Jerusalem in terms of pure gold that has become tarnished and precious stones that have been scattered in the street. But now the once precious people worth their weight in gold are now only as valuable as a clay pot.

In verses 3-5 Jeremiah speaks specifically of the children who are thirsty and have nothing to eat. Now they huddle in garbage dumps (ash heaps).

In verse 6 Jeremiah compares Jerusalem to Sodom saying the punishment of Jerusalem is greater than what happened to Sodom.

In verses 7-9 Jeremiah describes the leaders of Jerusalem as facing the same fate as the people. Their bodies are darkened and they are wasting away from hunger.

In verses 10-11 Jeremiah describes living mothers who in desperation are now eating their own children to survive. The Lord had brought this upon the people as He poured out His anger on them.

In verse 12 Jerusalem thought she was safe from enemies.

In verses 13-16 Jeremiah blames the priests and prophets who were leading people astray, they were shedding the blood of innocent men and they were unclean, so God scattered them because they had led the people into sin.

In verses 17-19 Jeremiah then blames the faulty alliances Jerusalem made with Egypt instead of trusting in the Lord. The enemy came upon them swiftly, like an eagle, capturing Jerusalem.

In verse 20 Jeremiah blames King Zedekiah, the Lord's anointed, who had assured the people they were safe but then tried to escape the Babylonians himself.

In verses 21-22 Jeremiah warns the people of Edom that judgment will also come upon them (for their role in bringing about the fall of Jerusalem). Jerusalem's punishment was at an end but Edom's was yet to come.

Lamentations 5

Lamentations 5 is Jeremiah's prayer for the redemption of Judah. There are two primary sections to chapter 5: 1) Jeremiah calls on God to remember their condition (vv. 1-18), and 2) Jeremiah calls on God to restore Judah (vv. 19-22).

In verse 1 Jeremiah calls on God to look, see, and remember the people of Judah.

In verse 2 Jeremiah uses first person plural to describe how their inheritance had been turned over to foreigners.

In verse 3 Jeremiah says they had become orphans, fatherless, and widows in their own land.

In verses 4-5 Jeremiah describes how under Babylonian rule they must now buy their own water and firewood, and they are constantly persecuted.

In verses 6-8 Jeremiah describes the foolishness of making an alliance with Egypt and Assyria to get food. But their leaders ended up being killed and the people punished. Now even slaves rule over them.

In verses 9-10 Jeremiah says even the food they gather in the wilderness comes at the risk of their lives. Hunger was ravishing their bodies.

In verses 11-14 Jeremiah switches from first person to third person (they, their). He describes the women being raped in the city, princes and elders were tortured, the young men enslaved and worked like animals. There are no longer elders sitting at the city gates dispensing wisdom and justice. Even the joy of music was gone.

In verses 15-18 their dancing had turned into mourning. The crown of Jerusalem (majesty) was gone. It was all lost because of sin. Because of sin, their hearts are sick, their eyes grow dim, and Jerusalem is desolate with jackals prowling the street.

In verses 19-20 Jeremiah calls on the everlasting God, asking if He has forgotten them and will abandon them forever.

In verses 21-22 Jeremiah implores the Lord to restore the people to Himself and renew them (based on the covenant promises of Leviticus 26:40-45, Deuteronomy 3:1-10). Unless, God was completely rejecting them, which He said He would never do (Leviticus 26:44, Jeremiah 31:31-37).