

A Visitor's Guide to the Old Testament

The Book of Lamentations

I. Who wrote Lamentations?

- A. None listed in the text
- B. Tradition
 - 1. Jeremiah
 - 2. Ancient and widespread
 - 3. Similarities between the Book of Jeremiah and the Book of Lamentations

II. Literary features of the Book of Lamentations

A. Content

- 1. "Laments" – not uncommon for the times (586 B.C.)
- 2. The sad song for God's chosen place, Jerusalem in Judah – Messianic?
- 3. God's great "I told you so"! (cf. pages 9,10)
- 4. The all-important middle – God's faithfulness

B. Form - Acrostic

Chapter 1 & 2 22 Verses/66 Lines	Chapter 3 66 Verses/66 Lines	Chapter 4 22 Verses/44 Lines	Chapter 5 22 Verses/22 Lines
Vs. 1 נ – line 1 line 2 line 3	Vs. 1 נ – line 1 Vs. 2 נ – line 1 Vs. 3 נ – line 1	Vs. 1 נ – line 1 line 2	No acrostic
Vs. 2 כ – line 1 line 2 line 3	Vs. 4 כ – line 1 Vs. 5 כ – line 1 Vs. 6 כ – line 1	Vs. 2 כ – line 1 line 2	
Vs. 3 ג – line 1 line 2 line 3	Vs. 7 ג – line 1 Vs. 8 ג – line 1 Vs. 9 ג – line 1	Vs. 3 ג – line 1 line 2	

Outline of the Book of Lamentations

Theme: A Lament for God's Chosen

- I. **The Destruction of Jerusalem (1:1–22)**
 - A. The Lament of the Prophet Jeremiah (1:1–11)
 - B. The Lament of the City Jerusalem (1:12–22)

- II. **The Anger of God (2:1–22)**
 - A. The Anger of God (2:1–9)
 - B. The Agony of Jerusalem (2:10–17)
 - C. The Appeal of Jerusalem (2:18–22)

- III. **The Prayer for Mercy (3:1–66)**
 - A. Jeremiah's Cry of Despair (3:1–18)
 - B. Jeremiah's Confession of Faith (3:19–39)
 - C. Jeremiah's Condition of Need (3:40–54)
 - D. Jeremiah's Confidence in God (3:55–66)

- IV. **The Siege of Jerusalem (4:1–22)**
 - A. The Conditions During the Siege (4:1–10)
 - B. The Cause of the Siege (4:11–20)
 - C. The Consequences of the Siege (4:21, 22)

- V. **The Prayer for Restoration (5:1–22)**
 - A. The Review of the Need for Restoration (5:1–15)
 - B. The Repentance of Sin (5:16–18)
 - C. The Request for Restoration (5:19–22)

(Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1996). *Nelson's complete book of Bible maps & charts: Old and New Testaments* (Rev. and updated ed.). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.)

Questions for the Book of Lamentations

I. The Destruction of Jerusalem (1:1-22)

1. What great tragedies have struck the once favored city of Jerusalem? (1:1-3)
2. Why did this desolation strike Jerusalem and Judah? (1:5,8)
3. What did Jerusalem acknowledge about the judgment it faced? (1:17,18)
4. What did Jerusalem want God to notice about its plight? (1:20)

II. The Anger of God (2:1-22)

1. In 2:1-8 what point does the prophet repeatedly make about who destroyed Jerusalem and Judah and why he did it?
2. How extensive was the damage done to the city of Jerusalem and to the people of Judah? (2:8-10)
3. What important truth must the people of Judah realize about their situation? (2:17)
4. What is the main subject of the prayer the people of Judah offer to God? (2:20-22)

III. The Prayer for Mercy (3:1-66)

1. In this section, Jeremiah uses picture after picture to describe his agony. Work through the section, and note the pictures he uses or the points he makes. Join with him in his agony.
 - 3:1
 - 3:2
 - 3:3
 - 3:4-6
 - 3:7
 - 3:8,9
 - 3:10,11
 - 3:12,13
 - 3:14,15
 - 3:16
 - 3:17,18

1. What happened when Jeremiah thought of his afflictions? (3:19,20)
2. In the midst of remembering his gloom and suffering, Jeremiah remembered something else. What did he remember? (3:21-25)
3. What is the appropriate response to the afflictions God places on a believer's life? (3:25-27)
4. 3:28-30 offer further instruction on how to bear God's chastening. What attitude should we have when the Lord lays burdens on us?
5. What is the Lord's attitude toward his own activity of laying burdens on us? (verses 31-33) How does he feel about those who willingly act as his agents in bringing suffering (such as the Babylonians in Jeremiah's day)? (3:34-36)
6. The Lord is the one who sent terrible times of punishment and chastening into the lives of the people of Judah, causing believers to suffer along with unbelievers. Yet according to 3:39, what do believers have to acknowledge about themselves and their sufferings?
7. What did Jeremiah call on the people of Judah to do? (3:40-42)
8. To his prayer, the prophet added a long description of the sufferings of his people. Why do you think the prophet added this list? (3:43-51)
9. As we read Lamentations, we must realize that we are dealing with two groups of people who are both going through the sufferings God is sending on his people. The first group is the majority. They are the unbelievers in Judah, who for centuries had been rebelling against God by worshiping idols. In their case, everything God is doing to Judah and Jerusalem is pure punishment. The other group is where Jeremiah and his fellow believers fall. For them, everything that is happening to Judah and Jerusalem is chastisement. God is using these difficulties to refine and purify the faith of the believers.

Read 3: 52-66 with this in mind. Jeremiah prophesied the horrors of what God would do to Judah and Jerusalem. Everything he said flew in the face of the false prophets, who prophesied peace and security for Jerusalem. Jeremiah was continually persecuted for his message of doom. What's more, in proclaiming victory for Babylon, Jeremiah was looked on as a traitor, for his words were demoralizing the troops. Yet how did the Lord use the persecutions Jeremiah faced to strengthen his faith? (3:52-59)
10. Nevertheless, Jeremiah added a request, namely, that God not allow his persecutors to succeed. Was it wrong for Jeremiah to curse them? (3:60-66)

IV. The Siege of Jerusalem (4:1–22)

1. In verses 1-20 Jeremiah describes in graphic terms the suffering Judah and Jerusalem brought on themselves through their unbelief and rebellion. Focus on the following passages and describe the scene.
 - 4:1
 - 4:2
 - 4:3,4
 - 4:5
 - 4:6,9
 - 4:7,8
 - 4:10
 - 4:11,12
 - 4:13-16
 - 4:17-20
 - 4:20
2. What hope did God offer his beleaguered people in 4:22?

V. The Prayer for Restoration (5:1–22)

1. 5:1-18 contain another woeful description of Jerusalem following its fall to the Babylonians. Yet there is a note of hope in verse 1. Can you find it?
2. What painful losses had the people endured? (5:2,3)
3. What were some of the oppressive conditions these people now faced? (5:4-6,10)
4. What important admission does the prophet speak in 5:16?
5. What fervent plea does the prophet make at the end of these laments? (5:21,22)
6. At the end of the lament, the prophet is as low in his sorrow as he can go. Explain.

The Kings of Babylon in Biblical Times



Map of Neo-Babylonian Empire

The Babylonian Empire (also called the Chaldean Empire) became a world power in 625 BC after the fall of Assyria. Babylon continued its reign until 536 BC. Nebuchadnezzar, its greatest king, reigned in the days of Daniel and took the southern Kingdom of Judah into captivity after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Babylon was finally captured by the Medes and Persians under Cyrus as predicted by the prophet Daniel, and the Babylonian Empire came to an end in 536 BC.

Babylonian Kings in Biblical Times

- **Nabopolassar** (626 BC-605 BC) founder of the Neo-Babylonian empire by rebelling against and destroying Assyria. The Medes and Babylonians sacked Assyria's capital (Nineveh) in 612 BC. The Neo-Babylonian Empire's claim to succeed the Neo-Assyrian Empire was immediately challenged by Egypt under Pharaoh Necho II, who fought for several years until he was defeated at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC.
- **Nebuchadnezzar II** (605-562 BC) was the longest reigning king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. He sacked Jerusalem in 586 BC and took the southern kingdom of Judah into captivity.
- **Amel-Marduk** (562-560). Little is known of his reign. He is mentioned in 2 Kings 5:27: *Evil-Merodach* is remembered for releasing the King Jehoiachin from prison after 37 years in captivity.
- **Neriglissar** (560-556 BC) usurped the throne from Amek-Marduk.
- **Labashi-Marduk** (556 BC) – He ruled less than a year before being overthrown.
- **Nabonidus** (556-539 BC) – He also angered the priests and commoners of Babylon by neglecting the city's chief god, Marduk, and elevating the moon god, Sin, to the highest status. Meanwhile, King Cyrus of Persia became popular among the residents of Babylon by promising to restore Marduk to his rightful place in the city.
- **Belshazzar** (552-539 BC) – co-reigned while his father was long-absent from Babylon. He plays a significant role in the book of Daniel.

The Prevalence of Babylon in Scripture

Babylon is mentioned 288 times in 255 verses in Scripture.

Babylonians are mentioned 4 times.

Chaldeans are mentioned 77 times in Scripture.

Chaldean is mentioned 4 times.

Nebuchadnezzar is referenced 91 times in 88 verses (32X in Daniel; 37 times in Jeremiah).

Comparison Of "Lamentations" in 2 Kings, Jeremiah, Lamentations

	2 Kings (2 Chr 36:11-21)	Jeremiah	Lamentations
The siege of Jerusalem	2 Kings 25:1-2	Jeremiah 39:1-3, 52:4-5	Lam 2:20-22, 3:5,7
Famine	2 Kings 25:3	Jeremiah 37:21, 52:6	Lam 1:11, 19, 2:11-12, 19-20, 4:4-5, 9-10, 5:9-10
Flight of army and king	2 Kings 25:4-7	Jeremiah 39:4-7, 52:8-11	Lam 1:3, 6, 2:2, 4:19-20
Burning of palace, temple, city	2 Kings 25:8-9	Jeremiah 39:8, 52:13	Lam 2:3-5, 4:11, 5:18
Breaching of city walls	2 Kings 25:10	Jeremiah 33:4-5, 52:7	Lam 2:7-9
Exile of people	2 Kings 25:11, 12	Jeremiah 28:3-4, 39:9-10	Lam 1:1, 4-5, 18, 2:9, 14, 3:2, 19, 4:22, 5:2
Temple Looted	2 Kings 25:13-15	Jeremiah 51:51	Lam 1:10, 2:6-7
Execution of leaders	2 Kings 25:18-21	Jeremiah 39:6	Lam 1:15, 2:2, 20
Vassal Status of Judah	2 Kings 25:22-25	Jeremiah 40:9	Lam 1:1, 5:8-9
Collapse of the expected foreign help	2 Kings 24:7	Jeremiah 27:1-11, 37:5-10	Lam 4:17, 5:6

Comparison of Lamentations and Deuteronomy

The author of Lamentations makes the point that the judgment described in Deuteronomy 28 had come upon the nation. Therefore, that judgment, although lamentable, was not surprising. It was the just consequence of the actions which had been performed by the people. It was due to their disobedience!

Lamentations		Deuteronomy	
1:3	She dwells among the nations but she has found no rest.	28:65	And among those nations you shall find no rest.
1:5a	Her adversaries have become the head	28:44	He shall be the head, you shall be the tail
1:5c	Her little ones have gone away as captives before the adversary.	28:32	Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people.
1:6c	They have fled without strength before the pursuer.	28:25	You shall flee in seven ways before them
1:18c	My virgins and my young men have gone into captivity	28:41	You shall have sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours, for they shall go into captivity
2:15	All who pass along the way clap their hands in derision at you	28:37	You shall become a horror, a proverb, a taunt among all the people where the Lord will drive you.
2:20	Should women eat their offspring?	28:53-57	Then you shall eat the offspring of your own body....

2:21	On the ground in the streets lie young and old	28:50	...who shall have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young
4:10	The hands of compassionate women boiled their own children	28:56-57	...the refined and delicate women among you ... she shall eat them secretly (i.e., her children) for lack of anything else
5:2b	Our houses were given to aliens	28:30	You shall build a house, but you shall not live in it.
5:5	There is no rest for us.	28:65	And among those nations you shall find no rest
5:10	... the burning heat of famine....	28:24	... the rain of your land powder and dust
5:11	Women of Zion ravished.	28:30	Who shall have no respect for the old
5:12	Elders were not respected	28:50	Who shall have no respect for the old
5:18	foxes prowl in Zion	28:26	And your carcasses shall be food to all birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten them away.

Visual Outlines of Lamentations

LAMENTATIONS

	Jerusalem's Desolation	The Lord's Anger	Jeremiah's Grief	The Lord's Anger	Jeremiah's Prayer
	CHAPTER 1	CHAPTER 2	CHAPTER 3	CHAPTER 4	CHAPTER 5
Underlying Emotion	Lonely, groaning	Angry, exhorting	Broken, weeping	Desperate, anguished	Weary, pleading
Short Prayers	1:20-22 "See us!"	2:20-22 "Look at us!"	3:55-66 "Judge them!"	4:20 "Avenge us!"	5:21 "Restore us!"
Theme	Mourning over sin; the severity of God's judgment; hope in His mercy				
Key Verses	1:1, 5	2:14, 17	3:16-24	4:11-12	5:5, 19-22
Christ in Lamentations	Jesus, like Jeremiah, wept over the sins of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:27-38; Luke 13:34-35).				

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