

Lamentations

Jerusalem's Desolation – Despair to Prayer

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Overview

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The Title

- Lamentations
 - Dirge or elegy
 - Latin Vulgate and LXX use “lamentations”
 - From Talmud – “qinot” – to cry out
 - Greek – Threnon – wailings
- Ekhhah
 - How!, alas!, oh!, or ah!
 - First word of chapters 1, 2, 4
 - Hebrew Bible

Place

- English Bible
 - After Jeremiah
 - Based on chronology and content connections
- Hebrew Bible
 - In the Ketuvim (writings); part of Megilloth (scrolls) – 5 Books
 - Song of Solomon – read at Pesah (Passover)
 - Ruth – read at Shavuot (feast of weeks)
 - Lamentations – read on 9th of Av – destruction of temples
 - Ecclesiastes – read at Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles)
 - Esther – read at Purim – salvation from Haman

Genre

- Poetry
 - Six books
 - 3 teaching
 - Proverbs (wisdom in relation to God)
 - Ecclesiastes (life in relation to God)
 - Job (suffering in relation to God)
 - 3 devotional
 - Psalms (praise)
 - Song of Solomon (love)
 - Lamentations (judgment and suffering)

Author

- Author is not given
 - Most support points to Jeremiah
 - LXX (picked up by Vulgate)
 - The introduction reads “and it came to pass, after Israel was taken captive, and Jerusalem made desolate, that Jeremias sat weeping, and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said”
 - Tone and style like Jeremiah
 - Jewish tradition suggests Jeremiah

Author

- Not the lament of Jeremiah for Josiah
 - 2 Ch. 35:25 – Jeremiah did a lament for Josiah – and written in book of laments – a different book since here it is clear that Jerusalem has been sacked and the king (perhaps Jehoiachin or Zedekiah) is taken captive (La. 2:9) and not killed in battle as in Josiah's case
- Saw fall of Jerusalem (Je. 52; 2 Ki. 24-25).

Date

- Likely 586 BC or soon after
 - Appears to be after the captivity started
 - Jeremiah – perhaps in Mizpah or Egypt
 - Je. 40-43

Related Scriptures

- Time of king Jehoiachin/Zedekiah
 - 2 Ki. 24-25
 - 2 Ch. 36
 - Jeremiah 39:1-18
- God's Word to Israel
 - Dt. 28

Related Scriptures

Lamentations		Deuteronomy	
1:3	She dwells among the nations but finds no rest.	28:65	And among those nations you will find no rest.
1:5a	Her foes have become her head.	28:44	He will be the head, you will be the tail.
1:5c	Her little ones have gone away as captives before the foe.	28:32	Your sons and your daughters will be given to another nation.
1:6c	They have fled without strength before the pursuer.	28:25	You shall flee seven ways before them.
1:18c	My young virgins and men have gone into captivity.	28:41	You will have sons and daughters, but they will go into captivity.
2:15	All who pass along the way clap their hands in derision at you.	28:37	You will 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	In the dust of the streets lie young and old.	28:50	Who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young.

Related Scriptures

Lamentations		Deuteronomy	
4:10	The hands of compassionate women boiled their own children.	28:56-57	Refined and delicate women among you will eat their children secretly for lack of anything else.
5:2b	Our houses were given to aliens.	28:30	You will build a house, but you will not live in it.
5:5	There is no rest for us.	28:65	And among those nations you will find no rest.
5:10	The burning heat of famine.	28:24	The rain of your land is powder and dust.
5:11	Women of Zion ravished.	28:30	You will betroth a wife but another man will ravish her.
5:12	Elders were not respected.	28:50	Who will have no respect for the old.
5:18	Foxes prowl in Zion.	28:26	And your carcasses will be food to all birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away.

Structure

- 5 chapters – 4 poems and a prayer
 - 1, 2, 4, 5 – 22 verses; 3 – 66 verses
 - 1-4 are acrostics using the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet
 - 1-2 – three lines per verse – 66 lines each
 - 3 – 3 verses for each letter (1 line each) – 66 lines
 - 4 – 2 lines per verse – 44 lines
 - 5 is 22 verses – 1 line per verse – but not an acrostic
 - Total of 264 lines
 - Parallelism used in up to 162 lines (nearly all of chapter 5 is this way)

Structure

- Caveats

- Chapter 5 not an acrostic
- Some argue for an extra line in 1:7 and 2:19, making 266 lines
- In chapters 2 through 4 the “ayin” and “pe” are in reverse order.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16 - Ayin	17 - Pe	18	19	20	21	22
	b v	g	d	h	w	z	h	t	y	k kh	l	m	n	s		p ph	ts	q	r	s sh	t	
Chapter 1	א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז	ח	ט	י	כ	ל	מ	נ	ס	ע	פ	צ	ק	ר	ש	ת
Chapter 2-4	א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז	ח	ט	י	כ	ל	מ	נ	ס	פ	ע	צ	ק	ר	ש	ת

Structure

- Other alphabet acrostics in Hebrew
 - Ps. 9 and 10 together
 - Ps. 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145
 - In 25, 34, 145 each letter starts a half verse
 - In 119 there are 22 sections of 8 verses where each verse starts with the same letter within each section
 - Pr. 31:10-31
 - In the Septuagint the letters pe and ayin are reversed in Proverbs 31 as they are in Lamentations 2-4

Word Counts

45	Lord	5	cause	4	poured	3	heads	3	wrath	2	given
20	daughter	5	cry	4	priests	3	heaven	2	according	2	glad
18	like	5	days	4	said	3	iniquity	2	afflicted	2	great
15	Zion	5	faint	4	set	3	Israel	2	ago	2	grief
13	become	5	ground	4	shall	3	Jacob	2	beauty	2	grind
13	day	5	head	4	soul	3	killed	2	bent	2	groan
12	will	5	Judah	4	strength	3	may	2	bitterly	2	groans
11	hands	5	let	4	swallowed	3	midst	2	bitterness	2	grown
11	made	5	none	4	sword	3	mothers	2	blood	2	hearts
10	enemy	5	pass	4	tears	3	mouth	2	bow	2	heavens
10	people	4	away	4	therefore	3	now	2	bowed	2	High
10	young	4	bread	4	things	3	peoples	2	call	2	hiss
9	among	4	called	4	turned	3	pity	2	came	2	hot
9	anger	4	can	4	wait	3	precious	2	caused	2	house
9	eyes	4	comfort	3	Away	3	princes	2	churns	2	hunger
9	hand	4	desolate	3	bear	3	prophets	2	cloud	2	iniquities
9	without	4	destruction	3	became	3	punishment	2	comforter	2	jackals
8	men	4	earth	3	bones	3	pursuers	2	cried	2	joy
7	children	4	elders	3	broken	3	revive	2	crush	2	king
7	city	4	every	3	cast	3	right	2	darkness	2	lay
7	Jerusalem	4	festival	3	commanded	3	ruins	2	dim	2	left
7	man	4	fire	3	dealt	3	sanctuary	2	distress	2	lie
7	one	4	foe	3	done	3	sinned	2	dwell	2	life
7	seen	4	foes	3	dust	3	sins	2	Edom	2	lives
7	streets	4	food	3	end	3	skin	2	exile	2	longer
6	come	4	good	3	enter	3	stones	2	fallen	2	love
6	enemies	4	heard	3	face	3	street	2	false	2	lovers
6	heart	4	help	3	fierce	3	taunts	2	filled	2	many
6	long	4	hope	3	flow	3	transgressions	2	filthy	2	might
6	nations	4	laid	3	forever	3	upon	2	find	2	mourning
6	see	4	Let	3	gates	3	wall	2	forget	2	must
6	women	4	Look	3	get	3	water	2	full	2	near
5	affliction	4	night	3	gold	3	wilderness	2	gave	2	never
5	brought	4	old	3	gone	3	wood	2	give	2	object

10	Lord	2	days	1	bound	1	fierce	1	mighty	1	servitude
6	become	2	dealt	1	bread	1	find	1	mocked	1	set
5	among	2	desolate	1	called	1	finds	1	mourn	1	sinned
4	like	2	distress	1	captives	1	fire	1	multitude	1	sits
4	none	2	enter	1	captivity	1	fled	1	nakedness	1	skirts
4	strength	2	faint	1	caused	1	flow	1	neck	1	slave
3	affliction	2	filthy	1	cheeks	1	forbade	1	neighbors	1	sought
3	comfort	2	foe	1	churns	1	friends	1	net	1	spirit
3	day	2	food	1	commanded	1	full	1	night	1	spread
3	enemies	2	groan	1	congregation	1	future	1	nothing	1	stomach
3	enemy	2	groans	1	crush	1	gates	1	old	1	street
3	foes	2	hand	1	deal	1	gave	1	overtaken	1	stretched
3	gone	2	heard	1	death	1	glad	1	pass	1	stretches
3	hands	2	heart	1	deceived	1	gloated	1	pasture	1	stunned
3	Jerusalem	2	Judah	1	deer	1	great	1	peoples	1	suffering
3	Look	2	lovers	1	departed	1	grievously	1	perished	1	suffers
3	men	2	midst	1	descend	1	groaning	1	place	1	summoned
3	nations	2	now	1	despise	1	hard	1	prevailed	1	sword
3	people	2	one	1	despised	1	head	1	princes	1	terrible
3	revive	2	precious	1	done	1	hear	1	princess	1	thing
3	see	2	priests	1	downfall	1	help	1	prosper	1	thought
3	things	2	seen	1	dwells	1	high	1	provinces	1	together
3	transgressions	2	sorrow	1	elders	1	honored	1	pursuer	1	took
3	young	2	tears	1	evildoing	1	house	1	pursuers	1	trade
3	Zion	2	therefore	1	exile	1	inflicted	1	rebelled	1	treacherously
2	afflicted	2	upon	1	eyes	1	Jacob	1	rebellious	1	treasures
2	away	1	anger	1	face	1	left	1	rejected	1	triumphed
2	bitterly	1	announced	1	fail	1	let	1	remembers	1	trodden
2	brought	1	assembly	1	fall	1	Let	1	resting	1	trouble
2	children	1	back	1	far	1	lonely	1	right	1	turned
2	city	1	became	1	fastened	1	long	1	roads	1	turns
2	come	1	behold	1	feet	1	made	1	sanctuary	1	uncleanness
2	comforter	1	bereaves	1	fell	1	majesty	1	search	1	virgin
2	daughter	1	bones	1	festival	1	many	1	sent	1	virgins

Structure

	Lost Devotion – Gained Affliction – O Lord Behold My Affliction – Despair	
Chapter 1	How lonely sits the city (1, 19) – a widow (1)	From princess among the nations to slavery (1)
The city afflicted	None to comfort her; no resting place (2, 3, 9, 16, 17, 21)	She weeps (2, 16); Daughter of Zion (6)
	Mourning and gates are desolate (4)	Jerusalem remembers days of old (7); sinned (8)
A mourning widow	My affliction (5, 7, 9), sorrow (12), suffering (18), groans (4, 8, 11, 21-2)	Foes now the head (5); the sword (20)
After Destruction	Seeking bread (11); my neck (14), eyes weeping (16), heart turned (20, 22)	Fire from on high (13)
Alas!	You have brought the day (21)	Virgin daughter of Judah (15) – winepress
	Look, O Lord (9, 11, 20)	Metaphors – fire, net, yoke, grapes
Chapter 2	Swallowed up (2, 5 (2), 8, 16)	Israel (1, 3, 5); Jacob (2, 3)
Source of affliction	No comfort (13); eyes weeping (11, 18) False prophets (14) and priests (20)	Fallen by the sword (21); day of anger (22)
Destruction	Fruit of the womb as food (2:19-20); famine (11-12)	Head of every street (19)
A weeping daughter	Flaming fire (2:3, 4)	Daughter of Jerusalem (13, 15), Judah (2, 5), my people (11) Daughter of Zion (1, 4, 8, 10, 13 (virgin), 18)
Alas!	Look, O Lord (20)	Metaphors - fire, measuring line, garden, sea
Chapter 3	Affliction – gravel, ashes, gall (1-20)	
Hope in affliction	Eyes and weeping (48, 49, 51)	Hope (18, 21, 24, 26, 29)
Despair to Prayer	Hope – Lord’s steadfast love and mercy (21-24, 29, 32)	Salvation is of the Lord (26)
An afflicted man	Test and examine our ways (40)	Until the Lord looks down from heaven and sees (50)
Chapter 4	Gold grown dim – sons of Zion (1, 2); consumed (11)	Chastisement greater than Sodom (6)
Reason for affliction	Defiled with blood (13-15); eyes failed (17) False prophets and priests (13)	Another nation could not save (17); days numbered (18)
Tarnished gold	Fruit of the womb as food (4:9-10); famine (1-5)	Head of every street (1)
Destruction	A fire (4:11)	Daughter of my people (6); Daughter of Edom (21, 22)
Alas!	The cup shall pass (21)	Metaphors – pots, snow, milk, sapphire, fire, eagles
Chapter 5	Orphans – our mother like widows (3)	Slaves rule over us (8)
Hope in Affliction	No rest (5) pursuers (5)	Dancing to mourning (15) Lost inheritance (2)
After Destruction	Left the city gate and mourning (14)	Days of old (21) Fathers and we sinned (7, 16)
Prayer	Our disgrace (1); woe to us (16); sick (17)	Crown fallen from our head (16); The sword (9)
	Seeking bread (6, 9) necks (5); heart (15,17); eyes (17-18)	Skin hot as an oven; burning heat (10)
	Why forsake us for many days (20)	
	Remember, O Lord (1, 19, 21)	Your throne endures to all generations (19)
	Renewed Devotion – Restore Us to Yourself O Lord – Prayer	

Chapters 1 and 5

Chapter 1	How lonely sits the city (1, 19) – a widow (1)	From princess among the nations to slavery (1)
The city afflicted	None to comfort her; no resting place (2, 3, 9, 16, 17, 21)	She weeps (2, 16); Daughter of Zion (6)
	Mourning and gates are desolate (4)	Jerusalem remembers days of old (7); sinned (8)
A mourning widow	My affliction (5, 7, 9), sorrow (12), suffering (18), groans (4, 8, 11, 21-2)	Foes now the head (5); the sword (20)
After Destruction	Seeking bread (11); my neck (14), eyes weeping (16), heart turned (20, 22)	Fire from on high (13)
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Chapter 5	Orphans – our mother like widows (3)	Slaves rule over us (8)
Hope in Affliction	No rest (5) pursuers (5)	Dancing to mourning (15) Lost inheritance (2)
After Destruction	Left the city gate and mourning (14)	Days of old (21) Fathers and we sinned (7, 16)
Prayer	Our disgrace (1); woe to us (16); sick (17)	Crown fallen from our head (16); The sword (9)
	Seeking bread (6, 9) necks (5); heart (15,17); eyes (17-18)	Skin hot as an oven; burning heat (10)
	Why forsake us for many days (20)	
	Remember, O Lord (1, 19, 21)	Your throne endures to all generations (19)

Chapterts 2 and 4

Chapter 2	Swallowed up (2, 5 (2), 8, 16)	Israel (1, 3, 5); Jacob (2, 3)
Source of affliction	No comfort (13); eyes weeping (11, 18) False prophets (14) and priests (20)	Fallen by the sword (21); day of anger (22)
Destruction	Fruit of the womb as food (2:19-20); famine (11-12)	Head of every street (19)
A weeping daughter	Flaming fire (2:3, 4)	Daughter of Jerusalem (13, 15), Judah (2, 5), my people (11) Daughter of Zion (1, 4, 8, 10, 13 (virgin), 18)
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Chapter 4	Gold grown dim – sons of Zion (1, 2); consumed (11)	Chastisement greater than Sodom (6)
Reason for affliction	Defiled with blood (13-15); eyes failed (17) False prophets and priests (13)	Another nation could not save (17); days numbered (18)
Tarnished gold	Fruit of the womb as food (4:9-10); famine (1-5)	Head of every street (1)
Destruction	A fire (4:11)	Daughter of my people (6); Daughter of Edom (21, 22)
Alas!	The cup shall pass (21)	Metaphors – pots, snow, milk, sapphire, fire, eagles

Chapter 3

Chapter 3	Affliction – gravel, ashes, gall (1-20)	
Hope in affliction	Eyes and weeping (48, 49, 51)	Hope (18, 21, 24, 26, 29)
Despair to Prayer	Hope – Lord’s steadfast love and mercy (21-24, 29, 32)	Salvation is of the Lord (26)
An afflicted man	Test and examine our ways (40)	Until the Lord looks down from heaven and sees (50)

Themes

- Personification of a people/city as a woman (“bat” – daughter – Ps 48:11; Js. 15:45, 47; Ga 4:26; Re. 17:5)
- Daughter or virgin daughter (20 times, 22 times in Jeremiah)
- Daughter of my people (5 times (virgin daughter of my people – 1), 10 times in Jeremiah, 1 in Isaiah)
- Daughter of Zion (8 times (virgin daughter of Zion – 1), 3 times in Jeremiah) out of 26)
- Daughter of Judah (3 times (virgin daughter of Judah – 1) – only in Lamentations)
- Daughter of Jerusalem (2 times out of 7)
- Daughter of Edom (2 times) – only in Lamentations

Themes

- None to comfort her – 1:2, 9, 16, 17, 21
- Look, O Lord – 1:11, 20; 2:20
- How or alas – 1:1, 2:1, 4:1
- Sword – 1:20; 2:21; 4:9; 5:9
- Weep – 1:2, 16; 2:11 – cry – 2:12, 19
- Affliction – 1:3, 4, 5, 7, 9; 3:1, 19, 33

Phrases

No of times	Phrase
5	the daughter of my people
4	of the daughter of zion
4	of the daughter of my
3	the destruction of the daughter
3	destruction of the daughter of
2	your iniquity o daughter of
2	young women and my young
2	women and my young men
2	wall of the daughter of
2	the streets of the city
2	the object of their taunts
2	the head of every street
2	the daughter of zion
2	of the destruction of the
2	none to comfort her
2	my young women and my
2	into the hand of the
2	in the streets of the
2	in the midst of her
2	daughter of my people has
2	because of the destruction of
2	at the head of every
2	all their plots against me

Other Observations

- God (Elohim) is not mentioned in the book
 - Mentioned once as “el” in 3:41 – almighty
 - Mentioned as the “most high” in 3:35, 38
 - Mentioned as LORD (Jehovah) 29 times – the eternal self-existing one
 - Mentioned as Lord (Adonai) 14 times – master
- Interestingly – Babylon is not mentioned by name nor is the name of the event that caused the devastation
- Viewing defeat at the hands of the enemy – complete grief and sorrow
- All started with a loss of devotion for the Lord

Other Observations

- The context in three views
 - The Jewish remnant at time of captivity
 - The Jewish Messiah at time of his suffering
 - The Jewish remnant at time of great tribulation

Overall Thoughts

- God is faithful to his word
 - Love and justice
- Issue for the people - unfaithfulness
 - The relevance of God
 - The place of God's word
 - The place of trust
- Afterwards - national suffering
 - Not so much why – but why so much and how long

Overall Thoughts

- Relation to today – practical
 - "High calling, flaunted by low living, inevitably issues in deep suffering." – J. Sidlow Baxter
- God's compassion, mercy, and faithfulness to those who have strayed
- Man's coldness, cruelty, and unfaithfulness must be judged
- Man's reaction to God's judgment – repentance and restoration

Chapter 1

- A view of the destruction without hope
 - A woman afflicted – a mourning widow
 - A view from outside the city – 1-11
 - A view from the city – 12-22
 - A bustling city to a lonely widow (1:1; 5:3)
 - A princess to a slave (1:1; 5:8)
 - Many lovers to none to love (1:2)
 - From head to tail (1:3)

Chapter 1

- A view from outside the city – 1-11
 - An outside view of the devastation itself
- A view from the city – 12-22
 - An inside view of the devastation and its results
- Death in the city
 - A theme – no comfort – 1:1, 9, 16, 17, 21

Chapter 1:1-11

- The removal of the place of rest
 - A bustling city to a lonely widow - population
 - Numerical change - fruitfulness
 - A princess to a slave - prestige
 - Economic change - blessing
 - Many lovers to none to love – pleasure
 - Social change - love
 - From head to tail - position
 - Position change – strength

Chapter 1:1-11

- Leaving the place of rest – captivity (v. 3)
- No one comes to visit the place (v. 4)
- There is a reason – transgressions (v. 5,8)
- Daughter – (figurative of human character)
 - The woman that comprises (of)
 - of Zion – 2:10
 - of Jerusalem
 - of Judah
 - of my People

Chapter 1:1-11

- Days of old (v. 7; 5:21) – looks to past
– Present affliction (vv. 5, 7, 9)
- Took no thought of the future (v. 9)
- Jerusalem as a woman had exposed herself (v. 8)
- The woman exposed is taken advantage of (v. 10)
- The woman is starved and seeks bread (v. 11; 5:6, 9)

Chapter 1:12-22

- The view from the city – the city speaks
 - Contemplation from within of desolation
 - It is the Lord's response
 - The Lord's – fire (12-13)
 - The Lord's – net (13)
 - The Lord's – yoke (14)
 - The Lord's – winepress (15)
 - Her response – weeping – no comfort (16-17)