



Overview for Lamentations

Purpose: The Prophet Jeremiah wrote this book to provide the people of Judah with dirges (mournful songs) that would bewail the destruction of the city of Jerusalem at the hand of the Babylonians, and express their sorrow over their loss of national identity. By vividly describing the horrors and desolation of the siege, the prophet indicated to the people of Judah that God had allowed this terrible tragedy because of their immorality and idolatry. Jeremiah also reminded the people of God's mercy, ending the book with a prayer that God would one day return Israel to her former glory.

Author: The Prophet Jeremiah, one of the greatest Hebrew prophets, who was born into the priestly family of Anathoth, and was a son of Hilkiah.

Time Period Covered: Shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

History: Nebuchadnezzar had besieged Jerusalem for eighteen months, and the beleaguered city finally fell. Solomon's beautiful Temple, which had existed for about four hundred years, had been burned to the ground. The city had been totally demolished, King Zedekiah had been captured, and many of the people of Judah had been taken captive to Babylon. Those who remained in Judah suffered from great poverty and deprivation. The prophet had been an eyewitness to the horrible disaster, and he responded by this outpouring of grief and anguish over the city of God and the terrible plight of the people.

A Biblical account of the fall of Jerusalem can be found in 2 Kings 25 and 2 Chronicles 36.

Key People: Jeremiah and the people of Judah.

Setting: Jeremiah had just witnessed the Babylonian army plunder, burn, and destroy the city of Jerusalem. While Jeremiah never mentioned the name *Babylon* in the Book of Lamentations, the thrust was that this judgment came from God and was a consequence of the people's disobedience.

Special Features: The five chapters in the Book of Lamentations are five separate poems written in a style similar to ancient funeral songs. The Hebrew alphabet has twenty-two letters, and the first four poems in Lamentations are dirges written in an acrostic form, meaning that each verse begins with a

consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The third poem, which has sixty-six verses, uses each succeeding Hebrew letter three times. The fifth poem was not written in alphabetical order.

In the sequence of the Jewish year, five books of the Hebrew Bible are associated with certain feasts or holidays. These books are used to relate an event that took place during that specific month. The Book of Lamentations is still traditionally read on the ninth of Av (Tisha B'Av), which falls in July or August on the Gregorian calendar, to commemorate the destruction of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.

Jeremiah's dramatic portrayal of the horrific aftermath and suffering of the people who remained in Judah is interlaced with verses of continuous hope in God's everlasting mercy. The point is made that even in this time of dreadful judgment, God's love, faithfulness, and deliverance were available to those who would turn to Him.

Summary: The first poem (chapter 1) is a dirge mourning the devastation of Jerusalem. The prophet described the ruin of the city and outlined the reason for God's judgment. He lamented the city's desolate condition, and prayed that one day her enemies would suffer the same misfortune.

The second dirge (chapter 2) continues the theme of the wrath of God being poured out upon Jerusalem, but this poem broadens out to include the Jewish people in general. Approximately forty aspects of divine retribution are described in this chapter, impacting nearly every facet of Jewish life.

Chapter 3 is the personal lament of the anguished prophet. Included in this chapter is the most hopeful insight in the book (verses 19-42) and Jeremiah's prayer for the suffering people.

Chapter 4, the fourth and final dirge, describes the siege of the ruined kingdom, and is a song of contrasts. It compares the former glory of Judah to its dreadful state after the Babylonian siege and the destruction of the city.

The book concludes with a prayer for a penitent nation (chapter 5) in which the miseries the people had undergone were recited. This lament was designed to bring the people to a position of humility and repentance, in which they would cast themselves upon the mercy of God.

Timeline

See “The Divided Kingdom” four-page timeline included in this unit.

Outline

*Hannah's Bible Outlines used by permission per WORDsearch.
A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.*

- I. The devastation and sorrow of Jerusalem (1:1-22)
 - A. The lament of Jeremiah (1:1-11)
 - B. The lament of Jerusalem (1:12-22)
- II. The destruction of Jehovah on Jerusalem (2:1-22)
 - A. The wrath of God (2:1-10)
 - B. The devastation of the city (2:11-19)
 - C. The prayer of the city (2:20-22)
- III. The lamentation and prayer of Jeremiah (3:1-66)
 - A. The sorrows of Jeremiah (3:1-18)
 - B. The confidence of Jeremiah (3:19-38)
 - C. The prayer of Jeremiah (3:39-66)
- IV. The description of the siege of Jerusalem (4:1-22)
 - A. The horrors of the siege (4:1-10)
 - B. The cause of the siege (4:11-20)
 - C. The judgment upon Edom (4:21-22)
- V. The petition for the restoration of the remnant (5:1-22)
 - A. The lament of the remnant (5:1-18)
 - B. The prayer of the remnant (5:19-22)