

Lamentations

A Unique Book	The Book of Lamentations is unique because it grouped in the Major Prophets section of our Old Testament, after Jeremiah and before Ezekiel. One reason it's where it is because Jeremiah wrote it. It also functions as a bridge between Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Think of it this way: Jeremiah predicted the Babylonian Captivity in his prophecy and saw it come to fruition. Ezekiel lived it as he went to Babylon. Lamentations "laments" it, as it is Jeremiah's reflection of the event.
The Hebrew Title	The name of Lamentations in Hebrew is <i>ekah</i> , which means "Alas" and/or "How?" "Alas" denotes a sense of "it has been decreed." It's a prophetic phrase that essentially means "The Lord told you this was going to happen, and it did. "How" is more reflective. How did we get to this point as a people? That's the question Jeremiah's asking in the book. We use the term "Lamentations" in our Bible because it's a bit clearer and gives a sense of weeping and/or lamenting over the event.
A Biblical Lament	Laments are common in the Bible. The Book of Psalms, for example, contains numerous laments (Psalm 130 is a great example). Many are inclined to define "laments" as expressions of sorrow. However, this definition doesn't paint a complete picture of a biblical lament. A better way to understand a lament is that it is a <u>divinely inspired</u> piece of biblical literature that the Lord give us in order to <u>process pain</u> so that <u>we can eventually rejoice</u> and <u>see our situation the way God sees it</u> . That only comes via the Lord's help. Thus, the reason Lamentations is in your Bible.
The Setting of Lamentations	"How deserted lies the city," Jeremiah says in the first verse, that was "once so full of people." Jeremiah walked through the streets of Jerusalem and saw nothing but devastation, pain, suffering, and destruction. As He predicted, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC. He wrote the book just after the catastrophe, while the situation was still raw and palpable.
Like Job, But Not Like Job.	The Book of Lamentations is extremely important because it pictures a man of God grappling with issues related to the results of evil and suffering in the world. It is like Job in that sense. But there is a key difference: Job dealt with evil and suffering that we do not understand. Jeremiah, however, deals with evil and suffering that was <u>entirely of Jerusalem's own making</u> . The people of Jerusalem experienced judgment that could have been avoided. The results were devastating.
The Theme of Lamentations	The most obvious theme in Lamentations befits the original title of the book: "How" did we get to this point, people of God? Another theme is a little more practical: It's appropriate to mourn over sin. But it's also appropriate to ask the Lord for His forgiveness when we fail him so that what we experience doesn't happen again. Unfortunately for Jerusalem, it did (the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70AD).
Key Verse	<i>"Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (3:22-23)</i>
Outline	Lamentations is a poem that contains a deliberate structure called a "chiasm," where thoughts are connected and flow from each other. For our purpose, however, Lamentations flows like this: Jerusalem's Desolation (ch1); God's judgment (ch2); Jeremiah's response (ch3); the Lord's anger (ch4); the Remnant's response (ch5).

Jerusalem's Desolation (Ch1)

Sin is the Focus	Jeremiah sees the situation of Jerusalem's destruction as it is. <u>It's a metaphor for how God wants us to see sin.</u>
It's Complete	How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave. ² Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are on her cheeks. Among all her lovers there is no one to comfort her. All her friends have betrayed her; they have become her enemies. ³ After affliction and harsh labor, Judah has gone into exile. She dwells among the nations; she finds no resting place. All who pursue her have overtaken her in the midst of her distress. ⁴ The roads to Zion mourn, or no one comes to her appointed festivals. All her gateways are desolate, her priests groan, her young women grieve, and she is in bitter anguish. (1:1-4)
It Destroys	"See, Lord, how distressed I am! I am in torment within, and in my heart, I am disturbed, for I have been most rebellious. Outside, the sword bereaves; inside, there is only death. (1:20)

God's Judgment (Ch 2)	
Judgment is the Focus	Jeremiah now answers the question "why" pertaining to "how" Jerusalem got to the point of Babylonian Captivity. The answer is God's judgment. It's a metaphor for what God's judgment looked like. It's a giving over.
Zion Was Given Over	⁸ The Lord determined to tear down the wall around Daughter Zion. He stretched out a measuring line and did not withhold his hand from destroying. He made ramparts and walls lament; together they wasted away. (2:8)
False Prophets Were Too	¹⁴ The visions of your prophets were false and worthless; they did not expose your sin to ward off your captivity. The prophecies they gave you were false and misleading. (2:14)
So, the Lord Gave You Over	¹⁷ The Lord has done what he planned; he has fulfilled his word, which he decreed long ago. He has overthrown you without pity, he has let the enemy gloat over you, he has exalted the horn of your foes. (2:17)

Jeremiah's Response (ch 3)	
The Tone Changes	In chapter 3, we get into the "so what" section of Lamentations. It's a chapter where Jeremiah reflects on what is needed. Here is where the lament starts to rise from the cellar into hope. It's a beautiful chapter in the Bible.
Jeremiah Includes Himself in the Story of Judgment	¹⁰ Like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in hiding, ¹¹ he dragged me from the path and mangled me and left me without help. ¹² He drew his bow and made me the target for his arrows. ¹³ He pierced my heart with arrows from his quiver. ¹⁴ I became the laughingstock of all my people; they mock me in song all day long. ¹⁵ He has filled me with bitter herbs and given me gall to drink. (3:10-15)
But, oh, How God is Merciful Even in Judgment	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. ²⁴ I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore, I will wait for him." ²⁵ The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; ²⁶ it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. (3:22-26)

The Lord's Anger (ch 4)	
Seems Out of Place	Chapter 2 dealt with the Lord's anger in judgment. As a result, this chapter seems out of place. But it's not. In a Hebrew chiasm, the second thought gets repeated before the grand climax as a reminder. Think of it like a "we better not do this again moment."
False Prophets Were the Reason	God, through Jeremiah, makes it clear that the false prophets that harassed him in his book and told lies to the people were the targets of his anger. They led people astray and the people suffered the consequences.
¹² The kings of the earth did not believe, nor did any of the peoples of the world, that enemies and foes could enter the gates of Jerusalem. ¹³ But it happened because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed within her the blood of the righteous. (4:12-13)	

The Remnant's Response (ch 5)	
Who Was the Remnant?	The remnant, as we learned last week, is often a subject matter for the major prophets. For the "remnant" implies God isn't finished with His people. They will return for God has a plan for them. The "remnant" also includes those who didn't go into captivity for whatever reason. They were lucky enough to remain in the land. Here, <u>Jeremiah tells them what they (present and future remnant) must do</u>
Remember	Remember, Lord, what has happened to us; look, and see our disgrace. ² Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our homes to foreigners. (5:1-2)
Praise	You, Lord, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation. (5:19)
Hope and Plead	²⁰ Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long? ²¹ Restore us to yourself, Lord, that we may return; renew our days as of old ²² unless you have utterly rejected us and are angry with us beyond measure. (5:20-22)

The Lord Heard Their Pleas	
In 539, Cyrus the Great of Persia allowed Israel to return to their land after a period of 70 years of captivity, just as Jeremiah predicted, not the false prophets	
"Great is thy faithfulness. Great is thy faithfulness. Morning by morning new mercies I see. All thou hast needed thy hand has provided. Great is thy faithfulness Lord unto me.	