

Verse 4-5. The roads are weeping because no pilgrims are traveling to Jerusalem for the religious holidays. No crowds mingling at the gate, no merchants, no sacrifices.

Verse 6-7. The widowed daughter of Zion is ugly, weak, and helpless. All her beauty is gone.

Verse 8-9. The poet presents the reason for Zion's present misery. She lived only for the present.

Some Lessons

1. We must learn from our failures. Let them teach us lessons we never forget and let us never repeat those sins.
2. Such lessons can be taught our children so they don't fall into condemnations that others have.
3. We ought to study God's word and have it in our hearts so we can repeat its admonitions and warnings.
4. We should consider how we would respond God's discipline.

QUESTIONS:

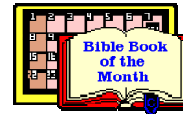
1. Why is the book of Lamentations a much neglected book?
2. How can this book help us as Christians?
3. Who do we understand the author to be?
4. What was the background situation of the book?
5. Thought Question: Why was the city unprepared for what happened?
6. What is the theme of the book?
7. What can you tell about the structure of the book?
8. What do the funeral songs describe?
9. What may be the purpose of such acrostic patterns of composition?
10. What purpose did the book serve to the Jews?
11. How might it be helpful to us today?
12. Under what picture does chapter 1 describe the misery of the survivors of Jerusalem?

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LAMENTATIONS

Jeremiah's Funeral Song

Text: Lamentations 1:1-7
Collateral Reading: Lamentations 1-5



Introduction

The titles of the books in the Hebrew Bible usually came from the very first word, in this case *Okeh* which may be translated into English "alas" or "how sad it is." The scholars who translated the O.T. into Greek during the inter-testamental period (and later into Syriac and Latin) applied the longer title "The Lamentations of Jeremiah."

This five chapter book is neglected today as a somber and gloomy record of Jeremiah weeping over the ruins of Jerusalem. But it is more than just "a cloudburst of grief, a river of tears, a sea of sobs" as one writer called it. This poem is an affirmation of faith in the justice and goodness of God.

True, the author had tasted pain and sorrow and endured frustration and loneliness, but he clings to an undaunted faith which triumphs in circumstances. The book endeavors to explain history and place calamities in proper perspective. When the Christian understands its purpose we see how wonderfully this book contributes to our understanding of calamities and catastrophes.

The Background and Occasion of the Book

The destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC was God's judgment for the idolatry and rebellion of Judah against Him. God had been patient and long-suffering with them but finally had to chastize Jerusalem for her horrible behavior.

Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem for eighteen long months. Lamentations describes in the most vivid manner the terrible suffering to which the Jews were subjected. When the city was captured the Chaldean king ordered it completely demolished.

To see their beloved sacred city go up in flames was a shocking, sad experience. Despite Jeremiah's warning the city was unprepared for it. For over a hundred years since the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem in the days of king Hezekiah the popular notion had been that Jerusalem was inviolable and secure (Micah 3:11b).

Investigative Question-1: What had been the predominate message of the false prophets? (Micah 3:11b; Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11; Ezek. 13:10.)

Theme and Content

Investigative Question-2: What other lamentation had Jeremiah written? (2 Chronicles 35:24-25).

The theme of the book is a lament over the terrible woes which had fallen upon sinful Judah and over the destruction of the Holy City and the Temple of God. The book consists of four funeral hymns (dirges), ch. 1-4; and one prayer, ch. 5, written in those agonizing days following the destruction of the Jerusalem.

For the most part the poems describe the adversity of the people, their land, the city, and the cause of it. Here and there are confessions of sin, declarations of penitence, and appeals that they not be forgotten.

Hymn 1	A Widowed City	1:1-22
Hymn 2	A Broken People	2:1-22
Hymn 3	A Suffering Prophet	3:1-66
Hymn 4	A Ruined Kingdom	4:1-22
Prayer	A Penitent Nation	5:1-22

The Form and Structure of Lamentations

The book is entirely in poetic form. Hebrew poetry does not involve rhyme (as a rule) but rather of thought. The second and third lines repeat the thought of the first in different words (synonymous parallelism).

The four dirges are in the form of alphabetic acrostics in which each verse begins with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapters 1, 2, and 4 have twenty-two verses, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 3 contains sixty-six verses with 3 verses assigned to each Hebrew letter.

The reason for using such acrostic patterns was usually to serve as mnemonic devices to aid the memory when the hymns were publicly recited or sung.

It may be also that the author used this technique in order to give a sense of completeness to the expression of grief. When one goes from **A** to **Z** (so to speak) in expressing his grief he seems to have said all that can be said. (Psalms 25; 34; 35; 111; 112; 119; 145; and Proverbs 31:10-31).

Purpose and Use

The book served the purpose of helping the people of Judah maintain their faith in God in the midst of overwhelming disaster. Lamentations expresses the conviction that God had dealt justly with His people. The writer wants the people to recognize the righteousness of God's dealings with

them and to cast themselves upon the mercy of the Lord.

Lamentations is read in Jewish synagogues on the ninth of the month Ab (which falls at the end of July or early August), a fast day which commemorates the destruction of the Temple by Babylon in 586 BC and the Romans in AD 70.

Lamentations 1:1-7

1 How lonely sits the city
That was full of people!
How like a widow is she,
Who was great among the nations!
The princess among the provinces
Has become a slave!

2 She weeps bitterly in the night,
Her tears are on her cheeks;
Among all her lovers
She has none to comfort her.
All her friends have dealt treacherously
with her;
They have become her enemies.

3 Judah has gone into captivity,
Under affliction and hard servitude;
She dwells among the nations,
She finds no rest;
All her persecutors overtake her in dire
straits.

4 The roads to Zion mourn
Because no one comes to the set feasts.
All her gates are desolate;
Her priests sigh,
Her virgins are afflicted,

And she is in bitterness.

5 Her adversaries have become the master,
Her enemies prosper;
For the Lord has afflicted her
Because of the multitude of her
transgressions.
Her children have gone into captivity
before the enemy.

6 And from the daughter of Zion
All her splendor has departed.
Her princes have become like deer
That find no pasture,
That flee without strength
Before the pursuer.

7 In the days of her affliction and roaming,
Jerusalem remembers all her pleasant
things
That she had in the days of old.
When her people fell into the hand of the
enemy,
With no one to help her,
The adversaries saw her
And mocked at her downfall.
NKJV

A Widowed City – Text: Lamentations 1:1-9

Chapter one has two major divisions. In vs. 1-11 the prophet laments the present condition of Zion and alludes to his own personal agony twice. In vs. 12-22 the city itself laments over its condition. The entire chapter is written in acrostic style.

In verses 1-7 we have a description of the conditions of the city, and verses 8-9 give an explanation for that condition. Then verses 9b-11 is a prayer to God concerning her.

Verse 1-3. Jerusalem is personified as a widowed princess who sits alone in the night weeping over the loss of her husband and children. Loneliness of widowhood is emphasized. Jerusalem's "lovers" (idol gods) and her "neighbors" (political allies) deserted her.