

# Outline of Lamentations

This outline of Lamentations is intended to help you deepen your understanding of God's holy Word. May you discover His love for you in its pages.

## Background

Although never named in the book, the book of Lamentations has long been attributed to the prophet Jeremiah, although some scholars have disputed this. Lamentations 3 may fit with Jeremiah's experience of being cast into the pit (compare Lamentations 3:52-57 with Jeremiah 38:1-13). [There is a problem in that in Jeremiah 38:5 it is said that there was no water, but only mire; while in Lamentations 3:54 the writer states that the waters flowed over his head. It is possible to resolve this problem chronologically by noting that a muddy pit may at times be a watery pit, depending on the seepage of water.] Certainly, the opposition mentioned in Lamentations 3:52-63 would fit with Jeremiah. Ultimately, however, we cannot state with certainty who is the human author of the book.

The book is a series of five theological laments centered on the fall of Jerusalem. Fittingly, in the Hebrew Scriptures, it follows Ecclesiastes, setting forth in stark contrast to the follies of sin the sorrow of God's judgment on His people's sin. In our present Scriptures, the book is appended to Jeremiah.

The five laments are five poems with somewhat varying structure, but all based on the Hebrew alphabet. Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 are acrostic poems. In chapters 1, 2, and 4, the first letter of each stanza of the poem (each verse) matches the Hebrew alphabet. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet and thus there are 22 verses. Each verse in chapters 1 and 2 contain three lines in the Hebrew text, except for 1:7 and 2:19 which contain four lines. Each verse in chapter 4 contains two lines in the Hebrew text. In each of chapters 1, 2, and 4, only the first word of the first line of each verse is alphabetical. Chapter 3 is somewhat more complex. As with chapters 1 and 2, each stanza contains three lines. But unlike chapters 1 and 2, each line of the stanza begins with the same Hebrew letter and there is only one line per verse. Thus, in our English Bible, each verse in verses 1-3 begin with "aleph," the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet; each verse in verses 4-6 begin with "beth," the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and so forth. With each line made into a different verse, there are 66 total verses, although the actual length of the chapter is virtually identical to chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 5 is not an acrostic lament, but it also follows the pattern of having only 22 stanzas (verses). Unlike the other four laments, this poem has only one line per stanza. Like chapter 3, each line corresponds with a verse.

The setting of the book is of a people enduring the just punishment for their sin against God, at least this is the view of the writer (1:5, 8, 14, 18, 20, 22; 2:14; 3:39; 4:6, 13, 22; 5:16). The unthinkable has happened (4:12). Jerusalem, God's protected city, has been destroyed. And the author sees the destruction as the hand of God (1:5, 12-15, 17; 2:1-9, 17, 21-22; 4:11, 16). The laments in chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 focus thus on the unrelenting loss and misery of Jerusalem's captivity, made all the more bitter because of the recent prosperity of Jerusalem (1:1, 6, 7; 2:1, 15; 4:1-2, 5, 7).

To place this in some historical context, Jerusalem was the city on whom God had set His favor. It was where Abraham had offered Isaac and God intervened with a promise of a future sacrifice. It was David's royal city. It was the city of Solomon's temple, and God's promise to listen to those who prayed towards the city. The temple had stood for 300+ years, in its splendor and glory. It was the city of the sacrifices to God. It was where God dwelt. It was unthinkable to the Jews, and even to those around, that it would be destroyed. In the minds of the Jews, God would never let His temple be destroyed (Jeremiah 7:4-15). And yet, Jeremiah had prophesied it would happen. And it did. The loss of such a national treasure was unfathomable (2:7). But even worse was the depths to which the people sunk. They were reduced to eating their own children (2:20; 4:10). God did not hear their prayers (1:17). And the writer

weeps deeply over the destruction.

The laments are set in order. Chapter 1 begins with the great opening line “How lonely sits the city who was full of people.” Chapter 1 is a lament focused on the moral cause — sin. Chapter 2 is a lament focused on immediate cause -- God. Chapter 4 is a lament focused on the result -- misery. Chapter 5 is a lament focused on the hope -- that God, in seeing the enumerated suffering, will have compassion.

In the midst of the book, in chapter 3, we find a personal lament dealing with these same subjects but in a personal context and providing perhaps a greater theological perspective on the issue of suffering and God. This chapter is such an encouragement, as it contains the great statement:

*For the Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, Yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men.  
(verses 31-33)*

The author of this book applies this same hope to the nation, although fearing that perhaps God had finally had enough (see 5:1, 20-22).

The book presents the justice and holiness of God in dealing with sin, the compassion of God in dealing with us (3:22, 32), the faithfulness of God (3:23); and the goodness of God to those who wait on Him (3:25).

**Date:** around 586 B.C.

## Outline

- I. **A Lament on the Bitter End of Sin Chapter 1**
- II. **A Lament on the Heavy Hand of God Chapter 2**
- III. **A Lament on Personal Suffering Chapter 3**
  - A. The Heavy Hand of God vs. 1-21
  - B. The Helpful Hope in God vs. 22-42
  - C. The Hearing Ear of God vs. 43-66
- IV. **A Lament on the Great Loss of God’s Favor Chapter 4**
- V. **A Lament and Plea for God to Consider Chapter 5**

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### **Key Idea:**

Persistent sin will bring misery to God’s people. Yet, the compassion of God brings hope to those who seek Him.

**Key Passage:** Lamentations 3:22-33

**Key Lesson:** The miserable end of sin.

