

## LAMENTATIONS

Title: Lamentations - In the Hebrew Old Testament the book is entitled "Ekah," meaning "How," or "Alas," taken from the first word in the book. The Septuagint called it "Threnoi Ieromiou," meaning The "Lamentations of Jeremiah." The Greek word "Threnoi" is the plural form of a word which means "to cry aloud," thus descriptive of the anguished wailing of its author.

Author: Traditionally, the book of Lamentations has been attributed to Jeremiah. Though the Hebrew version has no internal declaration of authorship, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that Lamentations is a product of the "weeping prophet," Jeremiah. In the Hebrew Bible, Lamentations falls between Ruth and Ecclesiastes, being included in the "Hagiographa," (The Writings). However, in the Greek Septuagint, Lamentations is placed immediately after Jeremiah, and is ascribed to him by way of the following introduction: "And it came to pass after Israel was led into captivity that Jeremiah sat weeping and lamenting and lamented this lamentation over Jerusalem." Even those who challenge Jeremiah's authorship agree that the author must have been a contemporary of Jeremiah and an eyewitness to the destruction and ruin of Jerusalem. That being the case, who was better qualified to write this record than Jeremiah? His strong compassion for Judah but absolute submission to Jehovah, is evident throughout this book. Indeed, the style of the book is similar to the book of Jeremiah, and certainly characteristic of the spirit of Jeremiah's sorrowful utterances (see II Chron. 35:25, Jer. 9:1, etc.).

Theme: The book of Lamentations is a series of funeral dirges which portray the heart-rending aftermath of the fall of Judah and the terrible destruction of Jerusalem. The lament of Jeremiah is like a national funeral song for the nation of Judah, as he depicts the suffering and sorrow that attended the spiritual death of his people and the physical destruction of their capital city. For forty years Jeremiah had prophesied about the destruction of Jerusalem, and now his predictions have come true before his own eyes in glaring detail. Every statement of impending doom has been fulfilled and is now the sad reality that he sees in the ruins of the city and the heap of stones that once was the beautiful temple of God, constructed during the reign of Solomon. As he views the smoldering ruins, no doubt his soul is stirred to its very depth as he sees the justice of God, and realizes that this catastrophe is the result of the sins of Judah. How patiently and lovingly he had warned his rebellious brethren only to have them reject his warnings and plunge headstrong along the course to their ultimate destruction. Perhaps, though, he found some comfort in his predictions of the Restoration, which he had declared would be as certain as the Captivity. Although another half century would pass before the Exile would end, Jeremiah was certain that God would cause the people to return, the city and the temple to be rebuilt, and the nation to be restored, just as He had caused the destruction that was evident on every hand.

Key Verse: 1:12 - "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord has afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger." (Chapter 3:22 - 26 is also a key section of great beauty and power.)

## Introduction:

The composition of Lamentations is quite unique, with the first four chapters arranged in the form of acrostic poems. Chapters one, two, and four each have twenty-two verses, with each verse beginning with a consecutive letter of the twenty-two letter Hebrew alphabet (Aleph, Beth, etc.). Chapter three has sixty-six verses, with each third verse beginning with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Although chapter five contains twenty-two verses, it is not an acrostic poem, but rather a prayer for forgiveness and restoration. The acrostic poem lends itself to easy memorization and is relatively easy to set to music, as was frequently done with some of the Psalms. Some scholars have suggested that this form was used in Lamentations to emphasize that Judah had sinned from "Aleph to Thau," or as we would say from "A to Z."

For study purposes, Lamentations can easily be divided into five sections, following the basic chapter divisions. The first section deals with the desolation of Jerusalem and the resulting sadness of a once great nation that now sits weeping like a widow that cannot be comforted. The distress and misery that exiled Judah feels is the result of the multitude of her transgressions. The laurels of her great past, as the chosen people of God, have not prevented God's wrath from being released against her present rebellion. One of the great lessons of this section is that past accomplishments are no substitute for present faithfulness or the lack thereof. Judah has learned that sin has its price and that heartache is the unwelcome companion of spiritual rebellion.

Section two concerns God's wrath against His people expressed through the destruction of the temple. The Lord has terminated all religious observance, removed the priests, prophets, and kings, and has caused the enemy to destroy the city, the palace, and most importantly the sanctuary. As Jeremiah states: "The Lord hath cast off his altar, he hath abhorred his sanctuary, he hath given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; they have made a noise in the house of the Lord..." (2:7). The Jews put so much stock in the external trappings of their religion (i.e. "the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord...(Jer. 7:4), but God was showing them that He cared far more about the reality of their internal spiritual condition.

The third section deals with the bitter realities of suffering, as Jeremiah bares his heart to the reader. As he passionately pled with the people to render wholesale repentance and to experience a national conversion, he was met with the national contempt of people bent on their own destruction. His life was one long martyrdom, but like every true follower of God his concern was not so much for himself, as it was for his rebellious brethren. "Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people" (3:48). In spite of the numerous persecutions that Jeremiah had endured (3:1-18), he optimistically looks to the future to see a brighter day of the Lord's salvation (3:24-26).

The fourth chapter graphically portrays the suffering that was attendant with the eighteen month siege of the city of Jerusalem. Zion's fate of slow starvation seems to be worse than the sudden destruction of Sodom. Conditions became so horrible that children died of thirst and the people stooped to cannibalism. All of this was the result of Judah reaping what she had sown, the innocent suffering right along with the guilty, because the people had willingly allowed themselves to be led by false prophets and priests, into the very pit of sin and rebellion.

The final section, chapter five, expresses a humble prayer for God's mercy. In Babylonian captivity the people cry out for forgiveness and restoration. Finally, they recognize that their sin has been their downfall, and that because they have turned away from God, He has turned away from them. In a pitiful and penitent concluding plea, Judah begs the Lord's forgiveness and promises renewed faithfulness if God will hear and grant their petition.

The book of Lamentations reminds us that God will not tolerate rebellion and that ultimately our sins will be punished, as a result of God's justice. However, it also sheds a ray of hope as it depicts God as a compassionate and merciful Father, who is anxious to forgive His children, who yield their lives to His divine will and purpose.

### Simple Outline:

- I. Jerusalem's Devastation And Desolation (1:1 - 22)
- II. God's Wrath (2:1 - 22)
- III. Suffering Analyzed (3:1 -66)
- IV. Jerusalem's Ancient Glory And Present Misery (4:1 -22)
- V. Prayer For Mercy (5:1 -22)

### Detailed Outline:

- I. The Suffering Of Jerusalem (1:1 - 1:22)
  - A. Desolate Conditions (1:1 - 1:6)
    - 1. The city sits solitary, like a weeping widow who has no friends
    - 2. What once was a princess is now a vassal
    - 3. Her affliction is the result of the multitude of her transgressions
    - 4. God has sent Judah's children into captivity as punishment
  - B. Past Memories And Present Realities (1:7 - 1:11)
    - 1. In contrast to her past glory, Judah now resides in a state of suffering and distress
    - 2. Jerusalem has sinned grievously by backsliding into her former wickedness
  - C. God-Sent Sorrow (1:12 - 1:17)
    - 1. God has afflicted Judah with sorrow for their sins
    - 2. Jeremiah weeps until his eyes fill with water
    - 3. He feels that God has forsaken him and his people
    - 4. They seek the comfort of God, but God sends no comfort
  - D. God's Righteousness Acknowledged (1:18 - 1:22)
    - 1. Judah acknowledges her sin and the justice of God's punishment
    - 2. Judah's enemies delight in her downfall
    - 3. God is asked to punish Judah's enemies like He has punished her
- II. The Suffering Of The Sanctuary (2:1 - 2:22)
  - A. God's Wrath Exhibited (2:1 - 2:10)
    - 1. In the day of God's anger not even His footstool (the Temple - see I Chron. 28:2) is spared
    - 2. God has withdrawn His aid from Judah so that her enemies prevail
    - 3. In fact, He has become an adversary of Judah, pouring out His fury against her like fire
    - 4. He has violently taken away His tabernacle (the destruction of the temple was God's purpose worked through the Babylonians) ✓
    - 6. Judah's glory is departed
      - a. The city is destroyed
      - b. The temple is in a heap
      - c. The kings and nobles have been captured by the Gentiles
      - d. The law is no more
      - e. The prophets find no vision from the Lord
      - f. The daughters of Jerusalem lament in sackcloth and ashes

B. Futile Search For Comfort (2:11 - 2:22)

1. The eyes fill with tears and the hearts fail as the children faint in the streets
2. Where can comfort and healing be found
3. The prophets have not fulfilled their responsibilities to the people to warn them with the Truth
4. Surrounding nations mock the former glory of Jerusalem
5. Their suffering is the Lord's punishment for their rebellion
6. The people cry for deliverance, begging for the lives of their children, but no deliverance is to be found
7. The Lord's wrath is inescapable, so that the streets are filled with the bodies of the slain

III. The Suffering Of Jeremiah (3:1 - 3:66)

A. Suffering Catalogued And Analyzed (3:1 - 3:18)

1. Jeremiah feels attacked by God, because of the persecution he has received at the hands of his brethren
2. They have mocked and derided him, even making him the subject of taunting songs
3. He has had no peace nor prosperity

B. God's Faithfulness To The Contrite (3:19 - 3:30)

1. The Lord's mercy is our hope and His faithfulness is great
2. We must quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord, for the Lord is good to those that seek Him and wait for Him
3. It is good to suffer in youth because this brings wisdom in age

C. The Compassion Of God Is Our Only Hope (3:31 - 3:47)

1. God's compassion is equal to His mercy
2. His punishment is not arbitrary, but rather is used as chastisement to cause man to repent
3. We must test ourselves and repent when wickedness is discovered
4. We must admit our sin and seek God's forgiveness

D. Jeremiah's Lament (3:48 - 3:66)

1. Jeremiah's crying will be endless unless God will answer his prayers
2. The Lord heard his cries in the dungeon
3. Jeremiah asks for deliverance from his persecutors and retribution for the evil they have perpetrated against him

IV. The Suffering Of The Siege (4:1 - 4:22)

A. The Pitiful Conditions In Jerusalem As A Result Of The Siege (4:1-12)

1. The glory of the magnificent temple is diminished as famine destroys Jerusalem
2. The famine is so great that parents hoard their meager supplies and won't feed their children
3. Some of the people have stooped to cannibalism
4. The slow death of starvation is worse punishment for Jerusalem than the rapid destruction of Sodom
5. Who would have believed that glorious Jerusalem would come to this pitiful end

- B. Sin Is The Basis Of Their Suffering (4:13 - 4:22)
  - 1. The false prophets and priests have shed innocent blood
  - 2. Their lies have destroyed the people
  - 3. The cup of God's wrath will end in the captivity of God's people
  - 4. No one can hide their sins from God's all-seeing eyes

#### IV. Suffering Judah's Penitent Plea For Mercy (5:1 - 5:22)

- A. The Condition Of Israel (5:1 - 5:6)
  - 1. God's people have been reproached by God
  - 2. Their inheritance has been given away to strangers
  - 3. The nation is filled with orphans and widows
  - 4. They have had to buy their own water and wood
  - 5. They are persecuted until they have no rest
- B. Confession Of Sin (5:7 - 5:18)
  - 1. Our fathers have sinned and we are living with the consequences
  - 2. We have been punished with famine
  - 3. We have seen our wives humiliated at the hands of our oppressors
  - 4. Our rulers have been tortured
  - 5. Our young men and children have been enslaved
  - 6. Our joy has departed
  - 7. "Woe unto us, that we have sinned" (5:16)
- C. Judah's Humble Appeal (5:19 - 5:22)
  - 1. Confession of God's eternal power and dominion
  - 2. A pitiful cry: "Why dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?"
  - 3. Judah appeals for God to turn to them again, and promises that they will return to the old paths

## LAMENTATIONS

- I. LAMENTATION OVER THE RUIN OF JUDAH AND JERUSALEM, CH. 1
  - 1. The prophet's lament, v. 1-11
  - 2. The lament of the city, v. 12-22
- II. THE LORD IS THE ONLY SAVIOR, CH. 2
  - 1. The Lord's severe judgment, v. 1-10
  - 2. In vain are all human efforts at consolation, v. 11-16
  - 3. Only the Lord can help. Turn to Him! v. 17-19
  - 4. The people's prayer, v. 20-22
- III. THE MERCY OF THE LORD THE ONLY SOURCE OF COMFORT, CH. 3
  - 1. The calamity is so great that no sorrow seems adequate and no comfort possible, v. 1-18
  - 2. Remembering the unchanging mercy of the Lord of the Covenant, the believer regains his confident trust in the Lord, v. 19-39
  - 3. The prophet urges his people to return to the Lord in sincere and prayerful repentance, v. 40-45
  - 4. The people plead for deliverance from the cruel enemies and for the Lord's vengeance upon them, v. 46-66
- IV. JEREMIAH'S HOPE FOR THE LORD'S FORGIVENESS, CH. 4
  - 1. The severity of the judgement, v. 1-12
  - 2. Judah is punished for the sins of her prophets and priests and for placing her trust in human helpers, v. 13-20
    - A. The sins of prophets and priests, v. 13-16
    - B. The people's trust in human helpers, v. 17-20
  - 3. Salvation for Judah, destruction for her enemies, v. 21-22
- V. THE PROPHET'S PRAYER FOR THE LORD'S MERCY, CH. 5
  - 1. The prophet's sorrow, v. 1-18
  - 2. The prophet's final plea, v. 19-22