

# LAMENTATIONS

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## BACKGROUND

Jerusalem had been destroyed by the armies of Babylon (see [2 Kings 25](#); [Jeremiah 39](#)). Having warned Judah for 40 years of the inevitable approach of this tragic event, Jeremiah put his tears into words once more as he lamented the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

## AUTHOR

Jeremiah (see [Jeremiah: Author](#)):

- Lamentations has marked similarities with the book of Jeremiah:
- The Hebrew phrases "daughter of Zion," "daughter of my people," and similar phrases are used to refer to Israel about 20 times in each book.
- The author of each book describes his tears as streams of water ([Lament. 1:16](#), [Jeremiah 9:1](#)).
- The author of each book tells of being confined in a pit ([Lament. 3:53](#); [Jeremiah 37:16](#); [Jeremiah 38:6](#)).
- Both books describe signs of sinfulness found on the "skirts" ([Lament. 1:9](#), KJV; [Jeremiah 2:34](#); [Jeremiah 13:22, 26](#)).
- The author was apparently an eyewitness to the destruction of Jerusalem, which fits what is known about Jeremiah.
- The suffering of the author of Lamentations ([Lament. 3](#); especially [Lament. 3:53](#)) fits what is known from the book of Jeremiah about Jeremiah's suffering.
- Jeremiah was known in Israel as a writer of laments ([2 Chron. 35:25](#)). (The Septuagint, other Greek manuscripts, and the KJV call the book the "Lamentations of Jeremiah.")

## DATE AND LOCATION

The emotional intensity of the book suggests a date soon after Jerusalem's fall in 586 B.C. Its eyewitness nature suggests a location near the burning city, perhaps in Jeremiah's hometown of Anathoth, in the staging area at Ramah (see exposition on [Jeremiah 39:11-18](#)), or in the home of a friend.

## PURPOSE

To discuss issues related to Jerusalem's destruction:

- Jerusalem was destroyed because of Judah's sin ([Lament. 1:8-9, 18](#); [Lament. 4:13-16](#)).
- But God had not abandoned his people; he was still faithful ([Lament. 3:21-33](#)) and would restore them ([Lament. 5:19-22](#)) if they would repent ([Lament. 3:40-42](#)).

## UNIQUE FEATURES

- Each of the first four chapters of Lamentations is an acrostic poem. In [Lament. 1](#), [Lament. 2](#), and [Lament. 4](#), each of the 22 verses begins with a successive letter of the Greek alphabet. In [Lament. 3](#), every third of the 66 verses begins with successive Greek letters. Though [Lament. 5](#) has 22 verses as well, it does not follow the acrostic pattern.
- Though other Bible books contain laments (see [2 Samuel 1:17-27](#); [Job 3](#)), only Lamentations is composed entirely in this literary style.

## OUTLINE

1. THE PROVOCATION AGAINST GOD ([Lament. 1](#))
  2. THE PUNISHMENT FROM GOD ([Lament. 2](#))
- III. THE SORROWFUL PROPHET OF GOD ([Lament. 3](#))
- IV. THE SUFFERING PEOPLE OF GOD ([Lament. 4](#))
- V. THE PRAYER TO GOD ([Lament. 5](#))

## TIMELINE

627 B.C.:	Jeremiah begins ministry
c. 586 B.C.:	Jerusalem falls, Jeremiah's lament
581 B.C.:	Jeremiah's last prophecy

**[Lament. 1:1-11](#)** *Desolate because of sin.* Jeremiah surveyed the scene of Jerusalem's desolation and mourned for her. Once a great city, Jerusalem was now leveled, lonely, and empty, her people having been taken away as slaves. The very roads to Jerusalem mourned because no one traveled them anymore on their way to the feasts ([Lament. 1:4](#)). While Judah's enemies prospered, Judah could only dream of her past glory ([Lament. 1:5, 7](#)). Worst of all, foreigners had entered the Temple ([Lament. 1:10](#)). All this had happened because of Judah's sin ([Lament. 1:8-9](#)).

**[Lament. 1:12-19](#)** *"Has there ever been such suffering?"* The people of Jerusalem cried out to the surrounding world to take note of their great suffering, acknowledging it was because of their sin ([Lament. 1:12-16](#)). Jeremiah acknowledged his people's anguish ([Lament. 1:17](#)) and once again recorded their cry of confession ([Lament. 1:18-21](#)). They asked God to judge their enemies as well, just as he had promised to do (see [Jeremiah 46-51](#)).

**[Lament. 2:1-9](#)** *"He has become our enemy!"* Though he used Babylon as his instrument of judgment, Jeremiah knew it was God himself who had brought this great calamity upon both his holy city and his Temple. In his anger with Judah, he had become "like an enemy" to them.

**[Lament. 2:10-22](#)** *Sorrowful people, sinful prophets, sovereign God.* Jeremiah joined the people in mourning their tragedy ([Lament. 2:10-13](#)) and reminded them that the false prophets, instead of promoting righteousness, had led the way to destruction ([Lament. 2:14](#); see [Jeremiah 23](#); [Jeremiah 29](#)).

Now Judah had become the laughingstock of her enemies ([Lament. 2:15-16](#); see [Lament. 1:7](#)). Yet, no matter how great their suffering ([Lament. 2:18-22](#)), they had to acknowledge that God had sovereignly fulfilled his purpose in punishing their sin ([Lament. 2:17](#)).

**[Lament. 3:1-20](#)** *Beloved friend or bitter foe?* Speaking for his people, Jeremiah discussed the painful experience of being afflicted and broken by God.

**[Lament. 3:21-39](#)** *Yet his favor and faithfulness never fail!* Despite his anguish, Jeremiah humbly recalled the unfailing mercies and great faithfulness of God ([Lament. 3:21-24](#)). God is good to all who "wait for him and seek him" ([Lament. 3:25](#); see [Isaiah 25:9](#); [Isaiah 40:27-31](#)).

**[Lament. 3:40-66](#)** *Repentance and a torrent of tears.* Including himself in the admission of rebellion, Jeremiah called the people to repentance and renewal ([Lament. 3:40-47](#)). He committed himself to keep praying, pleading, and weeping until the Lord looked upon his people's plight and judged their persecutors ([Lament. 3:48-66](#)).

**[Lament. 4:1-16](#)** *God's people punished more than Sodom.* Jeremiah surveyed the calamity in Jerusalem and declared it worse than the punishment meted out to Sodom ([Lament. 4:1-6](#)). Even the healthiest people saw their bodies shriveled in starvation ([Lament. 4:7-8](#)). Some had even resorted to cannibalism ([Lament. 4:10](#)). All this was because of their sin ([Lament. 4:13](#)).

**[Lament. 4:17-22](#)** *Abandoned by their allies and their own king.* Jerusalem could not be saved by an ally as strong as Egypt ([Lament. 4:17](#); see [Jeremiah 2:20-37](#); [Jeremiah 37:5-7](#)), nor even by their own king ([Lament. 4:20](#)). As the Babylonian army closed in, there was no escape ([Lament. 4:18-19](#)). Judah's punishment would someday end, however; then Edom, which had promoted Judah's downfall, would be punished as well ([Lament. 4:21-22](#)).

**[Lament. 5:1-22](#)** *"Restore us, for we have suffered greatly!"* Jeremiah described the humiliation and suffering of his enslaved people ([Lament. 5:1-18](#)), acknowledging that it was because of their sin ([Lament. 5:16](#)). In a great crescendo of praise to the God of renewal, he called out for an end to divine judgment ([Lament. 5:19-22](#)).