



The Bible Challenge

A daily guide to reading the Bible in a year

Lamentations

Chapters 1-5

*How the Lord in his
anger
has set the daughter
of Zion under a cloud!
He has cast down from
heaven to earth
the splendor of Israel;
he has not remembered
his footstool
in the day of his
anger. --Lam. 2:1*

The Day of the Lord

The book of Lamentations is unique as the only book in the Bible which describes in detail the eye-witness experience of suffering under the judgment of the Day of the Lord for Judah and Jerusalem.

The book provides no indication of who its author is other than the setting. Many have traditionally associated it with the Prophet Jeremiah, though there is no way to know.

The purpose of Lamentations is to express the individual and corporate anger, grief, repentance and hope of a people living through the awesome judgment of a Day of the Lord.

This is a formal poetic prayer; it is written to be something sung or recited in the context of corporate worship. In Jeremiah 41:4-5, we read of where these types of observances began to take place following the destruction of the temple in 587 BC.

A Lament from A-Z: The Acrostics of Lamentations

The first four chapters use an acrostic to structure the verses. Using the Hebrew alphabet, each verse in chapter 1 begins with one of the 22 letters of the alphabet. Verse 1:1, 2:1 and 4:1 all begin with *aleph*, then verses 2:1, 2:2 and 4:2 all begin with *beth*; and so these three chapters continue for 22 verses. Chapters 3 and 5 are variations. Chapter 3 is also an acrostic but in triplets. The first three verse (3:1-3) begin with *aleph*; the second three (3:4-6) with *beth*; all continuing for a full 66 verses. The final chapter (5) is not an acrostic.

Outline of Lamentations	1-5
Lonely Jerusalem's Lament	1:1-22
The Terror of the Day of the Lord	2:1-22
The Individual Cry of Repentance and Hope	3:1-66
Corporate Complaint	4:1-22
Corporate Pleading	5:1-22



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Lonely Jerusalem's Lament (1:1-22)

Chapter 1 is a lament and complaint over the sad state of the once glorious city of Jerusalem.

*How lonely sits the city
that was full of people!
How like a widow has she become,
she who was great among the nations!
She who was a princess among the provinces
has become a slave. --Lam. 1:1*

This first lament divides into two parts. In verses 1:1-11, a narrator describes by way of contrasts the heights and depths of Jerusalem and Judah's fall. She who was a "princess" has become a "slave". The narrator graphically describes a violated and devastated people.

In verses 1:12-22, the city herself cries as individual personifying the voice of her people. Jerusalem's cry is call for help. Jerusalem first testifies to her grief over her sins and judgment (vv. 12-16). The narrator confirms her self assessment (v. 17). Then, Jerusalem cries in a prayer of confession and repentance to the Lord asking for vindication (vv. 18-22).

The Terror of the Day of the Lord (2:1-22)

The second lament is a meditation on the terror and cloud of darkness of the Day of the Lord.

*How the Lord in his anger
has set the daughter of Zion under a cloud!
He has cast down from heaven to earth
the splendor of Israel;
he has not remembered his footstool
in the day of his anger. Lam. 2:1*

This section breaks into three parts. Lamentations 2:1-10 describe the devastating effects of God's judgment on Jerusalem. God has



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made his people his enemy and utterly destroyed and completely undone the glory that once was the footstool of his throne.

Verses 2:11-19 resonate with the prophetic voice of Jeremiah who challenged Jerusalem not to listen to false prophets (v. 14) which only leads to judgment, but to repent and turn to the Lord (v. 19).

The last three verses (2:20-22) are a plea of complaint to the Lord to see the misery of his people and act.

The Individual Cry of Repentance and Hope (3:1-66)

Chapter 3 of Lamentations provides the people with the voice of a humble response of confession, repentance and hope. We do not know who this individual is but he will ultimately call the people to join him in corporate prayer and hope for restoration.

First, he relates his own personal experience as one who has lost everything under exile and judgment (3:1-18). In the midst of his "dark night of the soul", he finds occasion to remember his hope in the Lord. The key verse:

*But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:*

²² *The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;*

²³ *they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

²⁴ *"The LORD is my portion," says my soul,
"therefore I will hope in him." Lam. 3:21-24*

From the individual's personal hope in the Lord arises a lesson for others. God is good (25-30); God is just (31-36); God is in sovereign (37-39). So the call is for God's people to examine their own hearts and ways and return back to him (3:40-41)!



The Bible Challenge

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The final verses form the individual prayer of personal acknowledgement of sin and cry to the Lord for redemption and vindication (3:44-66).

*I called on your name, O LORD,
from the depths of the pit;
⁵⁶ you heard my plea, 'Do not close
your ear to my cry for help!'
⁵⁷ You came near when I called on you;
you said, 'Do not fear!'*

*⁵⁸ "You have taken up my cause, O Lord;
you have redeemed my life.
⁵⁹ You have seen the wrong done to me, O LORD;
judge my cause.
⁶⁰ You have seen all their vengeance,
all their plots against me. Lam. 3:55-60*

Corporate Complaint (4:1-22)

The lament of chapter 4 is a corporate response of complaint. It first acknowledges the suffering of Jerusalem's children (4:1-10). And then acknowledges the punishment of Jerusalem's religious leaders (4:11-16) and the power of Jerusalem's enemies (4:17-20). It ends with a threat to Jerusalem's enemies and a promise of vindication for Jerusalem (4:21-22)

Corporate Pleading (5:1-22)

In the final lament, the corporate body of the people of God join with the individual in a pleading for restoration. The prayer begins describing the woes Jerusalem has faced (5:1-18) and concludes with a prayer asking the Lord for restoration:

*Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be
restored! Renew our days as of old—unless you
have utterly rejected us,
and you remain exceedingly angry with us.
Lam 5:21-22*
