

# LAMENTATIONS

## STUDY GUIDE

### AUTHOR & DATE

The book does not state its author, but has traditionally been attributed to **Jeremiah**. Some challenge Jeremiah's authorship arguing that the poetry in Lamentations is too structured for what Jeremiah would potentially write. While it may not be completely provable that Jeremiah wrote Lamentations, it is very likely he did! Jeremiah was an eyewitness to the fall of Jerusalem and there is consistency between the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations regarding God's judgment upon the Babylonians.

The tone within Lamentations indicates the book being written shortly after the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in **587-586 B.C.**

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Jerusalem has been overtaken by the Babylonians. In short, God's people have experienced the destruction of their capital city, demolition of their temple, and depopulation through war and exile. What sadness remains in the ruins of Jerusalem!

The Jews were deeply impacted by this event, so much so that they began reading Lamentations in an annual service of remembrance. In reading Lamentations, they would again remember the lessons God taught them about the painful consequences of their sin.

### LITERARY STRUCTURE

The title for Lamentations in Hebrew is *'ekah*, meaning "how" or "in what way." This word, *'ekah*, is the standard opening word for funeral dirges and is used in Lam. 1:1, 2:1, and 4:1. The book consists of 5 independent poems sharing a common theme of sorrow over Jerusalem's demise, but from different perspectives. All but the last poem is acrostic, meaning verses are arranged according to the Hebrew alphabet. Lamentations 1, 2, and 4 each consist of 22 verses, one verse for each consecutive Hebrew letter. Lamentations 3 is also an acrostic, but dedicates three verses per letter, equaling 66 verses for 22 letters. Lamentations 5, though 22 verses is NOT an acrostic, but more of a personal prayer. Why the use of acrostic structure? Some suggest the acrostic aids in memorization of the poems. Others suggest it symbolized a complete expression of grief, an "everything from A to Z" on the topic.

There are several ways to look at the overall structure of Lamentations.

### AN OUTLINE OF LAMENTATIONS

(From Philip Graham Ryken, *“Jeremiah and Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope”*)

- 1: Suffering for Sin
- 2: The Days That Are No More
- 3: Mercy for the One Who Suffers
- 4: A Failure of Leadership
- 5: A Prayer for Renewal

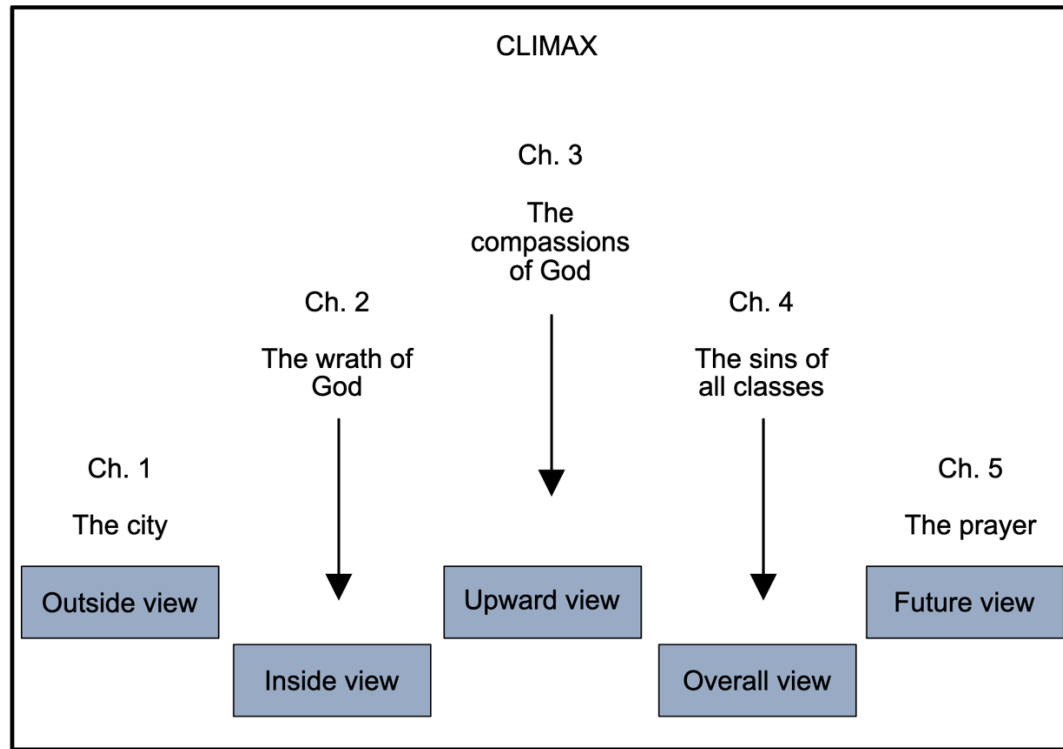
## LAMENTATIONS

	<b>Jerusalem's Desolation</b>	<b>The Lord's Anger</b>	<b>Jeremiah's Grief</b>	<b>The Lord's Anger</b>	<b>Jeremiah's Prayer</b>
	<i>CHAPTER 1</i>	<i>CHAPTER 2</i>	<i>CHAPTER 3</i>	<i>CHAPTER 4</i>	<i>CHAPTER 5</i>
<b>Underlying Emotion</b>	Lonely, groaning	Angry, exhorting	Broken, weeping	Desperate, anguished	Weary, pleading
<b>Short Prayers</b>	1:20-22 “See us!”	2:20-22 “Look at us!”	3:55-66 “Judge them!”	4:20 “Avenge us!”	5:21 “Restore us!”
<b>Theme</b>	Mourning over sin; the severity of God's judgment; hope in His mercy				
<b>Key Verses</b>	1:1, 5	2:14, 17	3:16-24	4:11-12	5:5, 19-22
<b>Christ in Lamentations</b>	Jesus, like Jeremiah, wept over the sins of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:27-38; Luke 13:34-35).				

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*Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "A Biblical Approach to Personal Suffering"*

### OBSERVATION WORDS

Be on the lookout for the following words used throughout the book. Don't just mark them, but note what you learn about them.

- **God / Lord (any other names, references of God)**
- **Holy Spirit**
- **Jesus**
- **My people / Judah / Jerusalem / Zion**
- **References to sin** (*what are they, what is the Lord accusing them of*)
- **Judgments** (*what is the Lord doing in response to sin*)
- **Lord, look / Lord, see**

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## **SUMMARY QUESTIONS**

- What are some new things you learn about the destruction of Jerusalem? (conditions, effects on people, etc.)
  
- Describe God's response to sin. What does this reveal about God's character? What does this mean for your own life?
  
- Jeremiah reveals deep feelings in Lamentations. What are your thoughts about his words? Is it right speak this way? How do you think the modern church handles those who reveal such deep emotions?
  
- What does Jeremiah learn through his suffering – about sin, himself, and God? What did Jeremiah learn that you need to learn yourself?
  
- Where do you see Jesus and the Holy Spirit represented in this book?

**KEY WORD:**

**KEY VERSE:**

**KEY CHAPTER:**