

# Lamentations

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5 Poems from an anonymous author

A poetic reflection on the siege of Jerusalem and the Exile (see [2 Kings 24-25](#)) - the most horrendous catastrophe in Israel’s history up until this point.

- Promised Abraham the land
- Given David victory to make Jerusalem Israel’s capital
- From David came the royal line of Kings
- God’s presence in the Temple
  - Where priests maintained the rituals of Israel’s worship

After 500 years of all of this history, in the summer of 587 B.C. the city fell to Babylon  
All was decimated and gone

## Purpose of Lamentations

The Book of Lamentations is a memorial to the pain and confusion of the Israelites that followed this destruction.

## Lament Poems in the Bible

(see Psalms [10](#), [63](#), [69](#), [74](#), [79](#))

Lament Means:

- A Form of protest - *the way of drawing our attention and God’s to the horrible things that happen in this world that should not be tolerated*
- A way to process emotion - *God’s people vent their anger and dismay at the ruin caused by people’s sin and selfishness*

- A place to voice confusion - *suffering makes us ask questions about God's character and promises*

**None of this is looked down on in the Bible. Just the opposite: Lament poems give a sacred dignity to human suffering**

**These human words of grief that are addressed to God have now become a part of God's Word to His people.**

## **Design of the 5 Poems**

### **Chapter 1-4 Acrostics = "Alphabet Poem"**

- Each poetic verse begins with a new letter of the Hebrew Alphabet which is made up of 22 letters
- Ordered and Linear Structure is in stark contrast to the disorder of pain and confused grief explored in these poems

### **Chapter 1 Lady Zion's Grief and Shame**

- Jerusalem is personified as "the daughter of Zion"
  - as a widow
  - Sits alone
  - Bereaved of her loved ones and no one comes to comfort her
- Look, oh Lord, on my distress ([1:20](#))
  - Poet shows that the city's destruction brought a level of psychological trauma on the Israelites that can only be expressed as the experience of a funeral and the death of a loved one

### **Chapter 2 The Fall of Jerusalem and God's Wrath**

Consequence of Israel's sin was brought about by God's wrath

- Divine Wrath does not equal spontaneous volatile anger but equals God's justice
- Israel had entered a covenant agreement with God
  - For centuries had violated it by
    - Worshipping other gods
    - Perpetrating injustice
    - Oppressing the poor

Yes God is slow to anger, but he eventually does get angry at human evil and will bring His just anger in the form of punishment.

- Allows Babylon to invade Jerusalem
- Justifies God's wrath
  - But doesn't keep the poet from lamenting to God and asking Him to show compassion

### **Chapter 3 The Suffering One**

Figuratively a lonely man speaking out of his suffering and grief as a representative of the whole people.

3 verses per letter; 66 verses

- Longest poem in the book
  - Found also Job 3 - Job's lament, Lament Psalm 22, 69, Suffering Servant - Isaiah 53
  - The poet sees his hardship as a form of God's justice, but paradoxically this is what gives him hope which leads him to offer the only hopeful words of the book:
    - Read Lamentations 3:22-24
      - The poet reasons If God is consistent enough to bring justice on human evil, then He is also be consistent with His covenant promise not to let evil get the final word.
      - God's judgement becomes the seedbed of Hope for the future.

### **Chapter 4 The Siege of Jerusalem**

Same alphabet structure of Chapters 1 and 2

Vivid and disturbing depiction of the 2 year siege in Jerusalem based upon how things used to be in the past and how terrible they became in the siege

- Children used to laugh and play in the street vs. Now they beg for food
- The wealthy used to eat lavish meals vs. Now they eat what they can find in the dirt
- The royal leaders used to be full of splendor vs. Now they are famished dirty and unrecognizable
- The anointed King from the line of David has been captured and dragged away

The poems power comes from the shock of these contrasts and explores the depths of the suffering that Israel brought on itself.

### **Chapter 5 Communal Prayer for God's Mercy**

Breaks the design pattern of the alphabet order; it's the same length of the other alphabet poems but there is no pattern

- No order
- As if the poet's grief explodes back into chaos

Israel begs for God's mercy and not to ignore their suffering or abandon them

List of all of the different kinds of people who were devastated by the fall of the city.

- Remember us, o Lord: Look on our disgrace
- Lament on behalf of others
  - Fathers
  - Mothers
  - Princes
  - Boys
  - Elders

Suffering in silence is not a virtue in this book.

God's people are not asked to deny their emotions, but voice the protest and vent their feelings and pour them all out

The Book ends with a Paradox:

- Oh Lord, you reign as King forever ([5:19](#))
- Why do you forget and forsake us? ([5:20](#))
  - The tension is totally unresolved
  - Ends in Unless you've totally rejected us...? ([5:22](#))

The poet doesn't offer a neat conclusion

The story of the Bible does not end here , but this book shows how lament, prayer, and grief are crucial part of the journey of faith of God's people in a broken world.