

LAMENTATIONS

Introduction

Author. The author does not identify himself in the book but Jewish tradition attributes it to Jeremiah. The prescript in the Alexandrian form of the LXX credits Jeremiah with the authorship as well. Certain internal similarities ("his eyes flow with tears," Jer 9:1, 18; Lam 1:16 and the writer was an eyewitness of Jerusalem's fall in 586 B. C., Jer 19:9; Lam 2:20; 4:10) also suggest Jeremianic authorship.

Date. Assuming that Jeremiah did indeed compose the work it must have been written within a fairly narrow time frame, between the fall of Jerusalem in 586 and Jeremiah's move to Egypt 583-582 (cf. Jer 43:1-7). The vivid descriptions of the siege and fall and the emotion with which they are recorded indicate that it was written shortly after the events occurred.

Purpose. The book of Lamentations is a mournful dirge of the destruction of Jerusalem. It serves as a post script to the book of Jeremiah and fully expresses the results of sin. Despite sin's alluring excitement, it effects only sorrow, grief, pain and misery. But beyond this personal message there is a historical message for the nation. Throughout the book the author is careful to record the suffering and destruction in terms of God's covenant with the people, specifically Deuteronomy 28. A brief perusal of the following quotations/allusions readily demonstrates the relationship between Lamentations and the covenant. Jeremiah's purpose then was not only to record the effects of sin, but perhaps more importantly, to reveal the character of God as one who is meticulously faithful to his word whether in blessing or cursing.

Structure. At least three elements of the structure of this book are noteworthy: lament pattern, acrostic arrangement and chiasmic balance.

Lament Pattern. The book is composed of five separate laments or funeral dirges. Through these Jeremiah laments the tragic "death" of the city. At least two features identify this genre. The first feature is the use of the word "How" or "Alas" ('ekah) to begin three of the five chapters (Lam 1:1; 2:1; 4:1). This

word was the characteristic cry of lamentation or exclamation. The second feature that emphasizes the lament pattern is the rhythmic pattern called the qinah meter used in the first four chapters. In this pattern the second half of a line of a verse has one less beat than the first half of the line producing a hollow effect or a "limping gait." The empty, dark mood created by this form matches the content of the poem.

Acrostic Arrangement. In the first four chapters each verse (stanza) begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The first chapter contains 22 verses with three lines in each verse. Only the first line of each verse, however, conforms to the alphabetic arrangement. The second chapter is identical to the first with the exception that the ayin and pe (vss. 16 and 17) are interchanged. Chapter three contains 22 stanzas as well but these are divided into 66 verse because each line conforms to the acrostic pattern. All three lines of each stanza begin with the same letter with the 22 stanzas arranged, again, in alphabetic order. Chapter four is identical to chapters two and three with the lone exception that each stanza has only two lines instead of three. As in chapters two and three only the first word of the first line conforms to the acrostic pattern. Chapter five is not acrostic but does conform in number (22 stanzas) to the alphabet and thus to the other four chapters.

The purpose for acrostic arrangement is probably to encourage completeness in the expression of grief. The idea was that as the whole of the alphabet had been exhausted so also the full expression of grief had been satisfied. There was nothing more left to say.

Chiasmic Balance. The book displays a symmetrical balance with its focal point in chapter three. Chapters one and five roughly correspond in their overall summaries of the disaster. Chapters two and four are more explicit narratives of what took place. In chapter three the acrostic form is intensified with three times the alphabetic arrangement. Within chapter three there is also a chiasmic arrangement in form and content. The first 21 verses are written in the singular while in 22-47 the plural is utilized. Verses 48-66 revert once again to the singular. The first and third sections of this chapter evidence a gloomy content while the center section focuses upon the daybreak of God's mercies and compassion. While the book explores the pain of suffering and judgment its focus is clearly upon the hope that issues from the covenant faithfulness of God even in the darkest days of the nation.

Message Statement. *The grief and suffering of the destruction of Jerusalem was a complete fulfillment of the curses of the Deuteronomic covenant.*

Outline

1A	DIRGE 1: THE DESOLATION OF THE CITY	1:1-22
1B	<u>The Prophet's Speech: The Barrenness of the City</u>	1:1-11
2B	<u>Jerusalem's Speech: Her Anguish</u>	1:12-22
1C	The cause of anguish	1:12-17
2C	The confession of sin	1:18-19
3C	The call for help	1:20-22
2A	DIRGE 2: THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CITY	2:1-22
1B	<u>The Lord's Judgment of the City</u>	2:1-10
2B	<u>The Author's Address to the City</u>	2:11-22
1C	His despair	2:11-16
1D	Over famine	2:11-12
2D	Over false prophets	2:13-14
3D	Over enemies	2:15-16
2C	His plea	2:17-22
1D	To the people	2:17-19
2D	To the Lord	2:20-22
3A	DIRGE 3: THE DISTRESS OF THE NATION	3:1-66
1B	<u>Her Suffering</u>	3:1-2
2B	<u>Her Complaint</u>	3:3-18
3B	<u>Her Hope</u>	3:19-38
4B	<u>Her Repentance</u>	3:39-42
5B	<u>Her Further Complaint</u>	3:43-54
6B	<u>Her Prayer</u>	3:55-66
4A	DIRGE 4: THE DEFEAT OF THE CITY	4:1-22
1B	<u>The Description of the Siege</u>	4:1-12
2B	<u>The Reasons For the Siege</u>	4:13-20
3B	<u>The Warning From the Siege For Edom</u>	4:21-22
5A	THE PRAYER FOR THE PEOPLE	5:1-22

1B	<u>Their Situation</u>	5:1-18
2B	<u>Their Petition</u>	5:19-22