

Lamentations Chapter 1

Lamentations is actually part of Jeremiah. It is written by Jeremiah, as well. We will find it to be like a funeral for the entire nation of Israel. It gives us a picture of the capture and destruction of Judah.

This book shows Jeremiah as the weeping prophet. He is intercessor for his people. His mourning for his homeland and his people is great. It appears, this happened after Jerusalem and Judah were carried away captive into Babylon. Jeremiah tries to repent before God for his people. This never works. They must repent for themselves.

Verses 1-22: "How doth the city sit solitary": Jerusalem was lonely, its people mourning (verse 2), forsaken by formerly friendly nations (verse 2), in captivity (verse 3), uprooted from their land, (verse 3), their temple violated (verse 10). The multitude of sins (verses 5, 8), had brought this judgment from the righteous God (verse 18).

Lamentations 1:1 "How doth the city sit solitary, [that was] full of people! [how] is she become as a widow! she [that was] great among the nations, [and] princess among the provinces, [how] is she become tributary!"

"Like a widow": (Verses 1-11), vividly portray the city like a bereft and desolate woman, as often in other Scriptures (compare Ezek. 16, 23; Micah 4:10, 13).

"Become tributary": Judah was taken captive to serve as slaves in Babylon.

Suddenly the greatness of Jerusalem is gone. Thousands are taken into captivity and many times that many have died. Jeremiah remembers the greatness and weeps for the desolation. He was there to see it all. He warned them ahead of time, but they did not listen. People from many nations had come to Jerusalem to worship in the temple. Now, there is no temple for anyone to worship in. New Jerusalem is described as a bride. Certainly, Jerusalem destroyed is like a widow.

Lamentations 1:2 "She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears [are] on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort [her]: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies."

"She hath none to comfort her": This ominous theme is mentioned four other times (verses 9, 16-17, 21).

"Lovers ... friends ... are become their enemies": This refers to the heathen nations allied to Judah, and their idols whom Judah "loved" (Jer. 2:20-25). Some later joined as enemies against her (2 Kings 24:2, 7; Psalm 137:7).

The "lovers" mentioned in the verse above, are speaking of lands they had made alliances with, such as Egypt. When Babylon came, there was no one to help, mainly because it was a judgment from God. God was considered the husband of Israel. We will get into this teaching in more detail in the book of Hosea. It is as if God has divorced her here.

Lamentations 1:3 "Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude: she dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest: all her persecutors overtook her between the straits."

"Captivity" (ca. 586 B.C.; as in Jer. 39-40, 52). There had been two deportations earlier (in 605 B.C. and 597 B.C.).

We remember, that many of the people fled into the other surrounding countries, when they knew Babylon was coming. This is speaking of them. It was not long after Judah was overthrown, that Babylon went to many of these countries where the Jews had fled and overtook them. It seems, the people who fled took their problems with them. They did not end when they fled to another country.

Lamentations 1:4 "The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate: her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she [is] in bitterness."

"Zion": This represent the place where Jehovah dwells, the mount on which the temple was built.

"Solemn feasts": Passover, Pentecost (Feast of Weeks), and Booths, or Tabernacles (compare Exodus chapter 23, Lev. Chapter 23).

"Her priests sigh": These were among those left in Judah before fleeing to Egypt (Jer. chapter 43), or possibly exiles in Babylon who mourned from afar (compare verse 3).

The "ways of Zion" is probably speaking of the roads that people from other countries travelled on to worship at the temple in Jerusalem. It would be sad to see those roads empty now. There are no more priests. They are either dead or in captivity, and there is no more temple to worship in. Jerusalem had been the center of worship in this area, and now this is no more.

Lamentations 1:5 "Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper; for the LORD hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her children are gone into captivity before the enemy."

"The multitude of her transgressions": This was the cause of the judgment (compare Jer. 40:3; Dan 9:7, 16).

In the past, they had been the head, and now they are the tail. Their enemy, Babylon, has become the head. The enemy prospers, because of the treasures they had taken from Jerusalem. They even took the temple treasures.

Lamentations 1:6 "And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed: her princes are become like harts [that] find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer."

The kingdom removed; the priesthood ceased; the temple and their beautiful house, burnt; and the palaces of their king and nobles demolished. And everything in church and state that was glorious were now no more.

"Her princes are become like harts that find no pasture": That are heartless and without courage, fearful and timorous, as harts are (an adult male deer), especially when destitute of food.

"And they are gone without strength before the pursuer": Having no spirit nor courage to oppose the enemy, nor strength to flee from him, they fell into his hands, and so were carried away captive (see Jer. 52:8).

The beauty of Jerusalem was in her temple. The beautiful gold, silver, and brass ornaments were unmatched anywhere. The city focused around the beauty of their worship. Zion is also the church. We know that the beauty of the church is in its relationship to God as well. Throughout the Bible, we read about the beauty of holiness. This is perhaps, what is spoken of here. "The princes like harts" means they are dissatisfied. They go and find no place of pasture.

Lamentations 1:7 "Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old, when her people fell into the hand of the enemy, and none did help her: the adversaries saw her, [and] did mock at her sabbaths."

The inhabitants of Jerusalem, now that they are in affliction and misery, have time to remember their former mercies. And with how many desirable things God had once blessed them, and compare her former state before she fell into the enemies' hands. In her present state now she is in their power. Now it is an affliction to them to hear her enemies mock at her Sabbaths, which while they enjoyed, they abused.

One of the things that set Jerusalem and the Jews apart from everyone else, was her observance of Sabbaths. In the bad times of our lives, we look back at more pleasant times. They were no different. Sometimes, something has to be taken away from us before we truly appreciate it. They had taken the temple for granted, until they had it no more. Now those who had admired the Jews before and had feared her God, are making fun of her for believing in her God and keeping Sabbath.

Verses 1:8-9: The cause of "Jerusalem's" fall is her apostasy. She has played the harlot (compare Jer. 2:1 to 3:5), by practicing the abominable idolatries of the Canaanites and their neighbors.

Lamentations 1:8 "Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed: all that honored her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness: yea, she sigheth, and turneth backward."

“She is removed”: This could refer to either the vile, wretched estate of continued sin and its ruinous consequences through judgment, or to being “moved, removed,” as the LXX and Vulgate translate it. Probably the former is correct, as before the third and fourth lines, i.e., despise, shameful, nakedness, in contrast to her former splendor (compare verse 6b).

The people had never feared the Jews. They had feared the Jew's God. When God took His protection away, they were even weaker than the nations around them. God blessed them when they were obedient to Him. When they disobeyed Him, they were not protected from their enemy. Their protection was removed because they were unfaithful to God.

Lamentations 1:9 "Her filthiness [is] in her skirts; she remembereth not her last end; therefore she came down wonderfully: she had no comforter. O LORD, behold my affliction: for the enemy hath magnified [himself]."

“Her filthiness is in her skirts”: A graphic description of the flow of spiritual uncleanness reaching the bottom of her dress (Lev. 15:19-33).

Her sin was spiritual adultery. Perhaps that is what is meant here. The Spirit of God was far removed from her. She was an adulterous wife to God. The enemy found her unguarded, and took advantage of it.

Lamentations 1:10 "The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things: for she hath seen [that] the heathen entered into her sanctuary, whom thou didst command [that] they should not enter into thy congregation."

“Entered into her sanctuary”: This was true of the Ammonites and Moabites (Deut. 23:3; Neh. 13:1-2). If the heathen were not allowed to enter for worship, much less were they tolerated to loot and destroy. On a future day, the nations will come to worship (Zech. 14:16).

The temple was a holy place. The Holy of Holies was forbidden to all, but the High Priest. The enemy came in and ravaged the entire temple including the Holy of Holies. It meant nothing to them. The heathen had been forbidden even the holy place, now they have come in and ravaged the entire temple.

Verses 11-22: The lament changes focus by shifting to the first person (“all, I”). Judah’s lament is now in her own words as she speaks from the inside looking out.

“Jerusalem” went uncomforted and was now considered “menstruous”; not even the heathen nations wanted anything to do with her!

Lamentations 1:11 "All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul: see, O LORD, and consider; for I am become vile."

“See, O Lord”: The description of the devastated widow ends with a plea for God’s mercy.

In a time of hunger, people will give all they have for a slice of bread. Their fine things had gone to pay for bread. These sighs are probably sadness for the past that was gone. "Vile", in this particular instance, means to shake, to quake, to be loose morally or worthless. I believe all of these things are perhaps true here. They would do most anything to live.

Lamentations 1:12 "[Is it] nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted [me] in the day of his fierce anger."

“All ye that pass by”: Here was the pathetic appeal of Jerusalem for some compassion even from strangers!

Jeremiah’s “sorrow” over the sin-sick and fallen Jerusalem anticipates the Savior’s own sorrow over a future sinful Jerusalem that too, will be captured and destroyed (Matt. 23:37-38, Luke 13:34-35).

Their grief is so great, and it appears no one cares about their grief. Those who pass by are any who are not citizens. They look in amazement, but not with sympathy. The terrible despair was partly for the loss of the presence of God, who had dwelled with them. His presence had been over the mercy seat in the temple. There was no question that this problem was a punishment from God. The wrath of God had been poured out upon them. To be totally separated from God, is as near as anyone wants to be to hell.

Verses 13-17: Sin’s consequences are so serious that the wise will respond in repentance before God must do anything drastic.

“The Lord” is identified as the One behind Judah’s desolation; Babylon’s army (“an assembly against me”), was only His instrument. His judgment was like “fire into” my “bones”, devastating and deep.

Lamentations 1:13 "From above hath he sent fire into my bones, and it prevaieth against them: he hath spread a net for my feet, he hath turned me back: he hath made me desolate [and] faint all the day."

“Fire into my bones”: This emphasizes the penetrating depth of the judgment.

“Turned me back”: God’s purpose was to bring repentance.

Trouble from God on His people is for a purpose. God wanted them to repent of their idolatry, and return to worship of the One True God. When we have troubles (if we are Christians), God allows them for a learning process. We must grow in the process. It is hard to learn a lesson when things are going great. We usually learn the most important lessons in the trials of our lives. Sin can feel like fire in our bones. When we are living in sin, it seems with every step we stumble and fall. The best thing to do is repent and let God handle it all.

Lamentations 1:14 "The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand: they are wreathed, [and] come up upon my neck: he hath made my strength to fall, the Lord hath delivered me into [their] hands, [from whom] I am not able to rise up."

“Yoke of my transgressions ... by His hand”: Once the farmer had put the yoke on the animal’s neck, he would control it with the reins in his hands. So God, who has brought Jerusalem under yoke-bondage to Babylon, still controlled His people.

Sin is like a yoke that weighs the person who is sinning down. Sin is a burden. It is almost too heavy to bear. I love the Scripture that says:

1 Peter 5:7 "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."

Sin seems to be like a heavy weight worn on the shoulders like a yoke. Nebuchadnezzar for them, or Satan for us, would be terrible hands to fall into.

Lamentations 1:15 "The Lord hath trodden under foot all my mighty [men] in the midst of me: he hath called an assembly against me to crush my young men: the Lord hath trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah, [as] in a winepress."

“He hath called an assembly against me”: Not the usual assembly for a solemn feast; rather the army of Babylon for destruction.

For “Virgin” as a metaphor of national identity (see the note on Jeremiah 18:13).

“In a winepress”: Speaks of forcing blood to burst forth like juice from crushed grapes. The “winepress” at times symbolizes thorough judgment (Isa. 63:3; Rev. 14:18-20; 19:15).

We see another Scripture about the winepress of the wrath of God.

Revelation 14:19 "And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast [it] into the great winepress of the wrath of God".

God's people are spoken of many times as His vineyard. He is the husbandman. The cutting off of the young and old, is because they are ruined. They are spoiled grapes. What God intended for good, has gone bad. Judah is no longer a virgin, they have been unfaithful to God.

Lamentations 1:16 "For these [things] I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me: my children are desolate, because the enemy prevailed."

For these sore afflictions, and for my sins that have caused them, and for these impressions of Divine wrath which I discern in them Lord! I that am thy prophet, and we that are Israelites indeed, weep, and that plentifully. Having neither thee present with us as formerly to be our hope or comfort, nor any friend that will deal by us as friends sometimes do, by others in swooning fits to fetch back their souls.

"My children are desolate, because the enemy prevailed": Either the other cities of Judah, (Jerusalem was the mother city,) or my people, my inhabitants, are wasted, destroyed, and made desolate, because the enemy hath prevailed.

Jeremiah is again weeping for the people of God, and for the city of God which God caused to be destroyed. God is crying too. Nothing makes a parent sadder than to have to severely punish their children for their sins.

Lamentations 1:17 "Zion spreadeth forth her hands, [and there is] none to comfort her: the LORD hath commanded concerning Jacob, [that] his adversaries [should be] round about him: Jerusalem is as a menstruous woman among them."

She extendeth her hands as a suppliant praying for relief and consolation.

"And there is none to comfort her": None who can, or are even inclined to do it.

"The Lord hath commanded": That is, it came to pass by God's command, that the surrounding nations were the adversaries of Jacob. We meet with a similar form of expression (Psalm 68:11). The Lord gave the word, great was the company of those that published it.

"Jerusalem is as a menstruous woman": She is become loathsome and filthy in the eyes of her former friends, like women separated from the congregation in the time of their legal uncleanness.

"Spreadeth forth her hands" is reaching out to God for help, but they waited too late to reach out. God has turned His back. Jerusalem is a spectacle before her neighbors, she is helpless as a woman.

Verses 18-22: "Death" was everywhere, whether one ventured into the streets ("abroad the sword bereaveth"), or mourned inside one's house. Out of Israel's anguish came something purposeful: repentance, in the form of a declaration that the people had "rebelled" and the Lord is "righteous" and therefore was justified in bringing this punishment. In this confession, Israel also pleads for God to vanquish her enemies ("bring the day").

Lamentations 1:18 "The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment: hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity."

"The Lord is righteous ... I have rebelled": The true sign of repentance was to justify God and condemn oneself.

Jeremiah's vicarious confession of sin recognized that Jerusalem's fall was its own fault and not that of God who always acts in strict righteousness (compare Gen. 18:25).

Jeremiah admits the judgement that God has spoken on Judah, and even on His beloved Jerusalem, is righteous judgement. Disobedience to God brings His wrath. Jeremiah cautions others to listen to their warnings, and not commit this sin. He continues to show them the punishment for disobeying God.

Lamentations 1:19 "I called for my lovers, [but] they deceived me: my priests and mine elders gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls."

As Jeremiah had prophesied (Jer. 2:26-28, 36-37), Jerusalem's "lovers" (her false gods and foreign entanglements), could not rescue her in time of peril.

We mentioned lovers here, are those like Egypt who had an agreement to help them, and did not. The priests and the elders suffered from the famine, and then died (gave up the ghost). They have no special privileges in war.

Lamentations 1:20 "Behold, O LORD; for I [am] in distress: my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled: abroad the sword bereaveth, at home [there is] as death."

Thus, she turns from one to another; sometimes she addresses strangers, people that pass by. Sometimes she calls to her lovers; and at other times to God, which is best of all. To have pity and compassion on her in her distress. And from whom it may be most expected, who is a God of grace and mercy.

"My bowels are troubled": As the sea, agitated by winds, which casts up mire and dirt; or as any waters, moved by anything whatsoever, become thick and muddy. Or like wine in fermentation; so the word in the Arabic language, signifies. Expressive of great disturbance, confusion, and uneasiness.

"Mine heart is turned within me": Has no rest nor peace.

"For I have grievously rebelled": Against God and his word; her sins were greatly aggravated, and these lay heavy on her mind and conscience, and greatly distressed her.

"Abroad the sword bereaveth": This, and what follows in the next clause, describe the state and condition of the Jews, while the city was besieged. Without it, the sword of the Chaldeans bereaved mothers of their children, and children of their parents, and left them desolate.

"At home there is as death": Within the city, and in the houses of it, the famine raged, which was as death, and worse than immediate death. It was a lingering one: or, "in the house was certain death"; for the "*caph*" here is not a mere note of similitude, but of certainty and reality. To abide at home was sure and certain death, nothing else could be expected. The Targum is "within the famine kills like the destroying angel that is appointed over death;" (see Heb. 2:14).

The grief that Jeremiah is feeling is almost unbearable. The devastation is so great, that Jeremiah is sick to his stomach. His heart is about to break in two. Death is everywhere.

Verses 21-22: "Bring the day": A prayer that God will likewise bring other ungodly people into judgment, especially Babylon (3:64-66; 4:21-22). Such prayers are acceptable against the enemies of God (compare Psalm 109:14-15).

Lamentations 1:21 "They have heard that I sigh: [there is] none to comfort me: all mine enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that thou hast done [it]: thou wilt bring the day [that] thou hast called, and they shall be like unto me."

The nations contiguous to me, Egypt and others that before pretended to be my friends and allies. Have been no strangers to my bitter afflictions, which have forced sighs from me.

"There is none to comfort me": None of them can or will relieve my distress, but abandon me as in a desperate situation.

"They are glad that thou hast done it": They have even expressed gladness at the calamities that have befallen me. And they please themselves with the thought that thou our God, of whose favor and protection we used to boast, should forsake us, and give us up as a prey to our enemies.

Thou wilt bring the day that thou hast called": The day when thou wilt execute thy judgments upon the Babylonians, and our other enemies and false friends, will certainly come at the time thou hast determined for that purpose. "We have here again the like turn of phrase as in the first line of this period". For the meaning evidently is, that the enemies of Jerusalem would in the end find little cause for their triumph, since the same Almighty Being, who had caused her evil day to come, had declared that, after a while, they should also suffer the like fate. "Thou that hast brought the day [of adversity upon me] hast pronounced, that they shall become even as I", Blaney.

In some of this, Jeremiah is grieving as if he were the city and its people. The enemy is glad of the downfall of Jerusalem. They are actually rejoicing in the calamity of others. All of the other countries had been jealous of Israel because of Israel's God. The day will come, when God will take vengeance on the enemy for this very act.

Lamentations 1:22 "Let all their wickedness come before thee; and do unto them, as thou hast done unto me for all my transgressions: for my sighs [are] many, and my heart [is] faint."

“Let all their wickedness come before thee”: Let it appear that though thou hast chastened us for our sins, our enemies have still greater ones to answer and be punished for. Compare Rev. 16:19.

Babylon was an evil country. They worshipped false gods and they were not innocent of sin. The prophet here asks for God to judge Babylon for their sins. It is not that he wants them to suffer for doing God's will in destroying Jerusalem. He just wants God to judge them equally for their sin. He is grieved greatly.

Lamentations Chapter 1 Questions

1. Who is Lamentations a funeral for?
2. Who is Lamentations by?
3. This book shows Jeremiah as the _____ prophet.
4. What time does this cover?
5. Who does Jeremiah try to repent for?
6. What is the city compared to in verse 1?
7. New Jerusalem is described as a _____.
8. Who are the "lovers" of verse 2?
9. _____ was considered the husband of Israel.
10. What is the "ways of Zion" speaking of?
11. _____ had been the center of worship in this area.
12. They had been the head, and now they are the _____.
13. Who had become the head?
14. The beauty of Jerusalem was in her _____.
15. The beauty of the church is in its _____ with God.
16. What was one thing that set Jerusalem and the Jews apart from everyone else?

17. They had taken the temple for granted, until when?
18. Why was Jerusalem removed?
19. What was her sin?
20. What does verse 10 tell us was ravaged?
21. In a time of hunger, people will give all that they have for a _____ of _____.
22. To be totally separated from God, is as near as anyone wants to be to _____.
23. Why does God allow troubles to come on the Christians?
24. What is sin compared to in verse 14?
25. What is Jeremiah weeping for in verse 16?
26. What does "spreadeth forth her hands" speak of?
27. What does Jeremiah admit about the judgement of God on Jerusalem?
28. What physical condition does all this bring on Jeremiah?
29. In verse 21, Jeremiah is grieving as if he were the _____.
30. What is Jeremiah asking God for in verse 22?