

**Lamentations Lesson 1**  
**Introduction and**  
**Lamentations 1-2**

# Who Wrote Lamentations?

- Author Not Named
- Jeremiah Traditionally Considered the Author, Based on Similarity of Writing Style and Vocabulary
- Jeremiah 7:29, 8:21, 9:1,10, 20 Mention Lament and Mourning
- Some Recent Scholars Argue For a Different Unnamed Author; Lamentations Focuses on the Judeans' Pain Versus Jeremiah Which Focuses on the Cause of the Destruction Due to the People' Sin and Disobedience



Jeremiah Lamenting the  
Destruction of Jerusalem;  
Rembrandt; 1630;  
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam,  
The Netherlands



Engraving From The Dore  
Bible Illustrating Lamentations  
1:1-2 I; The People Mourning  
Over The Ruins Of Jerusalem  
By Gustave Dore 1832-1883

# When Was It Written?

- Certainly Written After the Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 BC
- Many Scholars Argue That the Vivid Descriptions Could Only Have Been Written by an Eyewitness
- At Least 1 Scholar Argues for a Writing Around 516 BC When the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Was Dedicated
- Another Scholar Argues For a Writing After 68 AD When This 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Was Destroyed by the Romans



Givati Parking Lot excavations in the City of David Park in Jerusalem, a site where remnants of the 586 BCE destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians were discovered. (photo copyright: Shai Halevi/Israel Antiquities Authority; The Times of Israel, August 9, 2020)

# What Is A Lament?

- Tremper Longman, “a Cry Uttered When Life Falls Apart”
- It Is Poetry
- Psalms Contains 42 Individual and 16 Corporate Laments; Almost 40% of the Book of Psalms
- Psalms’ Laments Are Cries to and a Challenge to God Over a Disoriented Life
- Lamentations’ Laments Are Corporate or National Laments

# Lamentations' Form

- Acrostic
- 22 Letters in the Hebrew Alphabet
- Lamentations 1, 2, 4 and 5 Have 22 Verses;  
Lamentations 3 Has 66 Verses (22 x 3)
- In the Original Hebrew, in Chapters 1, 2, and 4, Each Verse Begins With a Successive Letter of the Hebrew Alphabet (alef, bet, etc.)
- In Lamentations 3, Each Series of 3 Verses Starts With a Success Hebrew Letter
- Lamentations 5 Has No Specific Alphabetic Form



# When Did Laments Originate?

- A Very Old Poetic Concept
- In the Near East, Well Known City Laments Exist from 2100-2000 BC When the Sumerian City State of Ur, Its Temples, And Surrounding Cities Were Destroyed by Invaders From the East and the West
  - The Lamentation Over the Destruction of Ur
  - The Lamentation Over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur
  - The Nippur Lament
  - The Eridu Lament
  - The Uruk Lament

# When Did Laments Originate?

- These Old City Laments Reflect Fear, Disbelief, and Bitterness
- In Context, the Patriarchal Stories About Abraham Date From This Same Period in History
- This Begs the Question: Did God Rescue Abraham and His Family From Destruction?
- Here is Certainly Another Story of the Remnant



**MadainProject**  
<https://madainproject.com>

Ur, Royal Precinct; Circa 2100 BC; copyright: The Madain Project, Encyclopedia of Abrahamic History & Archaeology; <https://madainproject.com>

# Lamentations' Main Themes

- People of Judah Express Their Intense Pain and Suffering; What Has Happened to Them; Want to Draw Empathy From God
- It Is Permissible to Cry Out to God in Our Suffering. He Hears Our Cries, Pleas, and Prayers
- God is Pictured as a Divine Warrior. God Has Come to Wage War Against His People Because of Their Sin
- Babylon Was Merely God's Agent for His Divine Retribution

# Lamentations' Main Themes

- God's Actions Were Not Arbitrary. Rebellion Against God and Breaking His Covenant Were at the Roots of God's Anger
- The Proper Response to the Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple is Sincere, Heartfelt Contrition
- God is Good. He is Still a God of Hope, Love, Faithfulness, and Salvation



The destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem. Francesco Hayez (1791–1882; Gallery of Modern Art, Pizzi Palace, Florence Italy

## Lamentations

### Lesson 1: Introduction and Chapters 1-2

In his introduction to Lamentations in the *ESV Study Bible Notes*, author Paul House describes the literary type of Lamentations as follows: “Each chapter of Lamentations is a lament, many examples of which exist in the Psalms (e.g., Psalms 3, 13, 44, 77). Laments in the Psalms vary in format, but they regularly include a description of the problem, protests of innocence, a plea for help, a statement of faith, and a pledge of service when the situation changes. Except for “pleas of innocence,” all these characteristics occur in Lamentations. The “confession of faith” and “pledge of service” are also less evident, perhaps because the book focuses on sinful persons returning to the Lord rather than faithful persons pouring out their hearts to God because of unjust suffering.”

There are 3 different speakers in the Book of Lamentations:

1. A woman personifying Zion (Jerusalem), sometimes called “The Virgin Daughter of Zion”
2. A fellow member of the suffering community of those left behind in Judah, who serves in a pastoral role
3. A communal voice representing all those remaining in Judah

As you read each chapter in Lamentations, try to determine who is speaking.

1. What city is Lamentation 1:1 referring to? Why do you think the city isn’t named?
2. What personification is used to describe the city in Lamentations 1:1? What did this status imply in Biblical times?
3. Read Lamentations 1:1-6. What human, social, and political losses have the people of Judah endured because of the Babylonian conquest?

4. According to Lamentations 1:7-11, what material losses have the people of Judah suffered?
  
5. Lamentations 1:10 refers to the sanctuary. What is this a reference to? How do Psalm 74:4-8, Jeremiah 28:1-3 and Jeremiah 52:12-23 add context to this Lamentations passage?
  
6. According to Lamentations 1:12-16, who is responsible for Judah's suffering?
  
7. How does Lamentations 1:14 describe the weight of the sins of Judah?
  
8. Jesus used a similar analogy in Matthew 11:30. How would you contrast Matthew 11:30 with Lamentations 1:14?
  
9. According to Lamentations 1: 16-21, why is there no one to comfort the people of Judah?



10. What words of contrition are stated in Lamentations 1:18?
  
11. What words does the speaker use to describe her anguish in Lamentations 1:20-22?
  
12. What do you think the writer meant by “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” in Lamentations 2:1a-b?
  
13. How do Lamentations 2:1c and Lamentations 2:6-7 describe what happened to the Temple in Jerusalem? To what do the footstool and the booth/meeting place refer?
  
14. What physical destruction to Jerusalem (Zion) does Lamentations 2 describe?
  
15. Prophet, priest, and king are common roles in the Bible. What has happened to the people serving in those roles, according to Lamentations 2:6c and 2:20c? What specific charges are leveled against the prophets in Lamentations 2:14?

16. What do the nations around Judah think of her now, according to Lamentations 2:15-16?
17. What words in Lamentations 2 does the writer use to describe the effects of the famine in Jerusalem because of the siege?
18. Lamentations 2:17 refers to Leviticus 26:14-39 and Deuteronomy 28:25-68. Were the Leviticus and Deuteronomy passages an accurate prediction of what befell the people of Judah at God's command?
19. Psalm 137 is an imprecatory (invoking evil) psalm, written from the perspective of the exiles in Babylon. How does it contrast to Lamentations 1-2? How does Jeremiah 25: 12-14 add context to Psalm 137?

## Lamentations

### Lesson 1: Introduction and Chapters 1-2

In his introduction to Lamentations in the *ESV Study Bible Notes*, author Paul House describes the literary type of Lamentations as follows: “Each chapter of Lamentations is a lament, many examples of which exist in the Psalms (e.g., Psalms 3, 13, 44, 77). Laments in the Psalms vary in format, but they regularly include a description of the problem, protests of innocence, a plea for help, a statement of faith, and a pledge of service when the situation changes. Except for “pleas of innocence,” all these characteristics occur in Lamentations. The “confession of faith” and “pledge of service” are also less evident, perhaps because the book focuses on sinful persons returning to the Lord rather than faithful persons pouring out their hearts to God because of unjust suffering.”

There are 3 different speakers in the Book of Lamentations:

1. A woman personifying Zion (Jerusalem), sometimes called “The Virgin Daughter of Zion”
2. A fellow member of the suffering community of those left behind in Judah, who serves in a pastoral role
3. A communal voice representing all those remaining in Judah

As you read each chapter in Lamentations, try to determine who is speaking.

1. What city is Lamentation 1:1 referring to? Why do you think the city isn’t named?
  - Jerusalem
  - The city is not named because the author assumes that the reader will know which city is being described.
2. What personification is used to describe the city in Lamentations 1:1? What did this status imply in Biblical times?
  - How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave.
  - A widow implied someone who had no income and no means of support; someone who depended on society to sustain her.
  - A queen signaled authority, prominence, wealth, and stature.

- A slave served at the will of others. Sometimes slaves held positions of prominence in a household (example: Joseph in Potiphar’s household), but generally they were among the lower echelons of Biblical society.
3. Read Lamentations 1:1-6. What human, social, and political losses have the people of Judah endured because of the Babylonian conquest?
- Prestige and power
  - No homeland, army, wealth, or nobility
  - Loss of friendly nation neighbors
  - Exile
  - Capital city deserted
  - City walls destroyed
  - Religious festivals gone
  - Enemies all around
4. According to Lamentations 1:7-11, what material losses have the people of Judah suffered?
- Wealth/Treasures
  - The Temple
  - Food
5. Lamentations 1:10 refers to the sanctuary. What is this a reference to? How do Psalm 74:4-8, Jeremiah 28:1-3 and Jeremiah 52:12-23 add context to this Lamentations passage?
- The enemy laid hands on all her treasures; she saw pagan nations enter her sanctuary—those you had forbidden to enter your assembly. Lamentations 1:10

- Your foes roared in the place where you met with us; they set up their standards as signs. <sup>5</sup> They behaved like men wielding axes to cut through a thicket of trees. <sup>6</sup> They smashed all the carved paneling with their axes and hatchets. <sup>7</sup> They burned your sanctuary to the ground; they defiled the dwelling place of your Name. <sup>8</sup> They said in their hearts, “We will crush them completely!” They burned every place where God was worshiped in the land. Psalms 74:4-8
  - Lamentations 1:10 refers to the Temple. In addition, it refers to the fact that the Babylonians entered the Temple to strip it of its treasures and then set fire to it.
6. According to Lamentations 1:12-16, who is responsible for Judah’s suffering?
- The Lord
7. How does Lamentations 1:14 describe the weight of the sins of Judah?
- My sins have been bound into a yoke; by his hands they were woven together. They have been hung on my neck, and the Lord has sapped my strength. He has given me into the hands of those I cannot withstand. Lamentations 1:14
  - Like a weighted yoke hung around the neck
8. Jesus used a similar analogy in Matthew 11:30. How would you contrast Matthew 11:30 with Lamentations 1:14?
- Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30
  - In Lamentations 1:14, the wearer is so burdened with the weight of his sin that he has no strength and nowhere to turn.
  - In contrast, Jesus tells all who are burdened by their sins and ills to rest in him. Believing in Jesus and following his teachings is easy; this burden is light.
9. According to Lamentations 1: 16-21, why is there no one to comfort the people of Judah?
- The young men and women have been taken into exile.
  - Jerusalem is no more.

- The priests and elders have died.
  - Judah's neighbors are now its enemies.
  - Death and starvation are everywhere.
10. What words of contrition are stated in Lamentations 1:18?
- The LORD is righteous, yet I rebelled against his command.
11. What words does the speaker use to describe her anguish in Lamentations 1:20-22?
- I am in torment within Lamentations 1:20
  - in my heart I am disturbed Lamentations 1:20
  - People have heard my groaning Lamentations 1:21
  - All my enemies have heard of my distress Lamentations 1:21
  - My groans are many and my heart is faint Lamentations 1:22
12. What do you think the writer meant by “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” in Lamentations 2:1a-b?
- God is no longer shining his countenance on Judah like the sun. Rather, his countenance is hidden behind a cloud.
  - God has cast aside Judah.
  - God has exiled Judah from his presence.
13. How do Lamentations 2:1c and Lamentations 2:6-7 describe what happened to the Temple in Jerusalem? To what do the footstool and the booth/meeting place refer?
- he has not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger. Lamentations 2:1c

- He has laid waste his dwelling like a garden; he has destroyed his place of meeting. The LORD has made Zion forget her appointed festivals and her Sabbaths; in his fierce anger he has spurned both king and priest. <sup>7</sup> The Lord has rejected his altar and abandoned his sanctuary. He has given the walls of her palaces into the hands of the enemy; they have raised a shout in the house of the LORD as on the day of an appointed festival. Lamentations 2:6-7
- God has destroyed his Temple using the Babylonians.
- The footstool refers to the Mercy Seat and the booth/meeting place refers to the Holy of Holies within the Temple.

14. What physical destruction to Jerusalem (Zion) does Lamentations 2 describe?

- Destruction of military strongholds
- Destruction of homes
- Destruction of palaces
- Destroyed the Temple
- Destroyed Jerusalem's city walls

15. Prophet, priest, and king are common roles in the Bible. What has happened to the people serving in those roles, according to Lamentations 2:6c and 2:20c? What specific charges are leveled against the prophets in Lamentations 2:14?

- in his fierce anger he has spurned both king and priest Lamentations 2:6c
- Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord? Lamentations 2:20c
- God has rejected the priests and the king.
- The priests and prophets have been killed.
- The visions of your prophets were false and worthless; they did not expose your sin to ward off your captivity. The prophecies they gave you were false and misleading. Lamentations 2:14

16. What do the nations around Judah think of her now, according to Lamentations 2:15-16?
- All who pass your way clap their hands at you; they scoff and shake their heads at Daughter Jerusalem: Lamentations 2:15a-b
  - All your enemies open their mouths wide against you; they scoff and gnash their teeth and say, “We have swallowed her up. This is the day we have waited for; we have lived to see it. Lamentations 2:16
17. What words in Lamentations 2 does the writer use to describe the effects of the famine in Jerusalem because of the siege?
- **children and infants faint** in the streets of the city. <sup>12</sup> They say to their mothers, “Where is bread and wine?” as they faint like the wounded in the streets of the city, as **their lives ebb away in their mothers’ arms**. Lamentations 2:11c-12
  - Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your **children, who faint from hunger at every street corner**. Lamentations 2:19c-d
  - Young and old lie together in the dust of the streets; Lamentations 2:21a
18. Lamentations 2:17 refers to Leviticus 26:14-39 and Deuteronomy 28:25-68. Were the Leviticus and Deuteronomy passages an accurate prediction of what befell the people of Judah at God’s command?
- The LORD has done what he planned; he has fulfilled his word, which he decreed long ago. He has overthrown you without pity, he has let the enemy gloat over you, he has exalted the horn of your foes. Lamentations 2:17
  - Yes. If the people sinned and rebelled against God, He promised to send disease, drought, defeat by their enemies, famine, destruction of places of worship, destruction of cities, birds and wild animals to eat their carcasses, madness, and a foreign nation to defeat them.



19. Psalm 137 is an imprecatory (invoking evil) psalm, written from the perspective of the exiles in Babylon. How does it contrast to Lamentations 1-2? How does Jeremiah 25: 12-14 add context to Psalm 137?

- By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. <sup>2</sup> There on the poplars we hung our harps, <sup>3</sup> for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” <sup>4</sup> How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? <sup>5</sup> If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. <sup>6</sup> May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy. <sup>7</sup> Remember, LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. “Tear it down,” they cried, “tear it down to its foundations!” <sup>8</sup> Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us. <sup>9</sup> Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks. Psalms 137
- “But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt,” declares the LORD, “and will make it desolate forever. <sup>13</sup> I will bring on that land all the things I have spoken against it, all that are written in this book and prophesied by Jeremiah against all the nations. <sup>14</sup> They themselves will be enslaved by many nations and great kings; I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.” Jeremiah 25:12-14
- Both Psalm 137 and Lamentations 1-2 are a retrospective about the loss of Jerusalem. Psalm 137 is written from the perspective of the Babylonian exiles while Lamentations 1-2 is written from the perspective of those left behind in Judah.
- Jeremiah 25:12-14 reminds the people left in Judah and the Babylonian exiles that God will repay all of the evil done by Babylon after 70 years of Babylonian exile. Babylon will be thrown down and suffer the same defeat as Judah suffered.