

Lamentations

Darkest Hour in
Israel's History

Introduction (אֵיכָה)

- Author: Ascribed to Jeremiah
'After Israel was taken captive & Jerusalem was laid waste, Jeremiah sat weeping & gave this lament' (LXX). Not in Hebrew manuscripts
- Form: Alphabetic poems, acrostic – 22 verses (1, 2, 4) 66 verses (3), no acrostic (5), literary symbol of Jews' complete despair

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Lament for YHWH's City (1)

- For Jerusalem (1-11a)
 - Fallen (1-3)
(empty-full, widow-great, princess-slave, all-none)
 - Empty (4-6)
(pilgrim, people, princes)
 - Defeated (7, 9-11)
(opponents, precious)
 - Unclean (8-9)
(filthy, naked, unclean)
 - By Jerusalem (11b-22)
 - Pain (12-17)
(divine instrument)
 - Prayer (18-22)
(confession of sin, request for retribution)
- Themes: No comfort, 7x,
complete ruin “all,” 16x

Anger against YHWH's City (2)

- Pity: 'The Lord has become an enemy' (1-10)
 - *Reversed* (1-5): cast down, swallowed, right hand
 - *Rejected* (6-10): temple, city; king, priest, prophet
- Personal: 'My eyes are spent weeping' (11-19)
 - *Results*: children starve (11-12), surpassed? (13-14), foes scorn (15-17), Zion: streams of tears (18-19)
- People: 'Look, O LORD and see!' (20-22)
 - *Rival?* cannibal, servants die serving, indiscriminate

Lament for YHWH's City (3)

- Cry (1-20)
intense, personal suffering!

“The poet begins with a vivid description of how God ruthlessly attacked him, driving him from the light into darkness (vv. 1-3). Metaphors follow in rapid succession, each one further magnifying the horrors of divine judgment. The Lord shriveled up his skin and shattered his bones, surrounded him with hardship, put him in a dark dungeon where he was weighed down with chains, and refused to hear his shouts for help (vv. 4-8). The Lord put obstacles in his path, mangled him like a fierce lion or bear, shot arrows into his heart (vv. 9-13), and made him a laughingstock of everyone (v. 14). If this were not enough, the Lord made him eat bitter herbs, smashed his face into the gravel, and trampled him underfoot (vv. 15-16). Deprived of peace and prosperity, he reflected on his suffering (vv. 17-20).”

Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 219-20.

Lament for YHWH's City (3)

- (I) Cry (1-20)
intense, personal suffering!
- Loyal Love (21-25)
*rises above circumstances,
hope in God's character,
awaits future deliverance*
- Repay Us (26-39)
*submit in silence, discipline
not forever but appropriate*
- (You) Cry (40-48)
*confess as prelude to lament
(heart and hands)*
- Lament (49-54)
*intense personal suffering!
relief only w/ deliverance*
- Repay Them (55-66)
*assured of God's help,
asks for God's retribution*

Anger against YHWH's City (4)

- Pain: 'Alas, the gold has grown dim' (1-10)
 - *Reverse*: past glory-present shame (*sons, food, luxury*)
- Penalty: 'He poured out His hot anger' (11-16)
 - *Retribution*: invincible? God punished Israel for injustice
- Pursued: '...ever watching vainly for help' (17-20)
 - *Reliance*: neither nation (Egypt) nor king could save
- Punish: 'He will punish, uncover your sins' (21-22)
 - *Repay*: Edom warned, divine justice is coming!

Prayer for YHWH's City (5)

- Remember: 'Look and see our disgrace!' (1-18)
 - *Allotted*: overtaken, vulnerable-water/wood (1-5)
 - *Alliances*: judged for their sins (6-7, cf. 16)
 - *Atrocities*: famine, rape, humiliation, sorrow (8-18)
- Restore: 'Renew our days as of old' (19-22)
 - *Acknowledge*: You reign, restore us *that* we may return
 - *Angry*: 'Why do you forsake us for so long . . . unless you have utterly rejected us.' (cf. Dt. 31:6, Heb. 13:5)

Summary

Lamentations recounts the darkest hour in Israel's history, the destruction of Jerusalem. Both in form and content, the author laments the complete devastation and despair of the survivors. God has reversed the greatness of Zion, pouring out His wrath against the nation's sin. Hope can be found in God's loyal love and mercy. The book ends with a call for God to remember & restore His people.