

Lamentations

Authorship: Though the book itself does not specify an author, several internal clues point to Jeremiah as the author. Themes and phrases in Lamentations match those found in Jeremiah (Jeremiah 9:1, 18 and Lamentations 1:16; Jeremiah 30:14 and Lamentations 1:2; Jeremiah 49:12 and Lamentations 4:21). Also, both books describe their author as an eyewitness to Jerusalem's destruction (Jeremiah 19:9; Lamentations 2:20, 4:10). Jeremiah was known as a composer of lamentations (2 Chronicles 35:25). The external evidence is also strong for Jeremiah's authorship. The Septuagint attached a superscription designating Jeremiah as the author. This superscription was adopted by the Vulgate.

Date and Location: If Jeremiah is designated as the author, the final composition and compilation date was probably between the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem (586 B.C.) and Jeremiah's flight to Egypt after Gedaliah's assassination (583-882 B.C.). The emotional intensity of the book suggests a date soon after Jerusalem's fall in 586 B.C. Its eyewitness nature suggests a location near the burning city, perhaps in Jeremiah's hometown of Anathoth, in the staging area at Ramah, or in the home of a friend.

Background: Jerusalem had been destroyed by the armies of Babylon (see 2 Kings 25; Jeremiah 39). Having warned Judah for 40 years of the inevitable approach of this tragic event, Jeremiah put his tears into words once more as he lamented the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Overview: The book of Lamentations consists of five funeral dirges that poetically describe the aftermath of Jerusalem's destruction by Babylon.

Message: Mourning for Jerusalem and its people. The book of Lamentations mourns the devastating judgment upon Jerusalem for its sins. The judgment came as the fulfillment of curses in Deuteronomy 28. Even though the city's inhabitants finally recognized the total devastation their sins had caused, they knew that at that point they had no hope of mercy from the Lord.

Purpose: To discuss issues related to Jerusalem's destruction:

- (1) Jerusalem was destroyed because of Judah's sin (1:8-9; 18; 4:13-16);
- (2) But God had not abandoned his people; he was still faithful (3:21-33) and would restore them (5:19-22) if they would repent (3:40-42).

Outline: Lamentations contains five funeral dirges – one per chapter – lamenting the Lord's judgment on Jerusalem. As the following outline illustrates, the first and fifth dirges have parallel themes, as do the second and fourth dirges. The third dirge, in the center, contains Jeremiah's hopeful response to the fall of Jerusalem.

- I. Dirge One: Misery of Jerusalem caused by its sin (1)
- II. Dirge Two: The Lord's anger against Jerusalem (2)
- III. Central Dirge: Jeremiah's response to the Lord's judgment (3)
- IV. Dirge Four: The Lord's fiery anger on Jerusalem (4)
- V. Dirge Five: Lament of Jerusalem for its punishment (5)

Key Verses

"The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23 ESV).

Key Term: "Lament"

A "lament" or "lamentation" is a formal expression of grief in the face of loss or death. This book expresses the anguish the author felt over the fall of Jerusalem.

Meaning of Name

The English title renders the name given by the Greek translators of this book in the second century B.C., Θρήνοι - *Threnoi*. The original Hebrew title is simply the first word of the book, 'Ēykhôh, "How!"

Sources:

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