

**A LOOK AT THE BOOK  
LAMENTATIONS  
“ALTHOUGH HE SHOULD DESTROY US, . . .”**

Ralph Porter

How does a child react when being punished?  
Does he feel sadness because he has disobeyed? Or only because he has been caught?  
Or does he just get mad at his parents for stopping him?

Just as children react in different ways to discipline, so also adults differ in their reactions to God's corrective discipline.  
He sends it for our good.  
But we're not always grateful.

How do WE respond when God sends discipline to correct us?  
Do we recognize it as a demonstration of a Father's love for His children?  
Do we rebel?  
Do we thank Him?

Lamentations is a poetic description of the affliction Israel suffered when God sent His discipline in Jeremiah's day.

Although the author identified with Israel, and lamented the destruction, he realized that this was God's discipline, motivated by His love for His children, and he was trusting Him.

We all face affliction at times in our lives.  
No one escapes it totally.

However, there are a lot of different ways to respond to affliction:  
Some people get angry, thinking it's not fair for us to have to suffer.  
Others get discouraged. It seems that everything is going against us.  
Others think that God is punishing us for something we have done wrong, and repent.  
Yet others see suffering as a part of a faithful God's plan for our life which He uses to perfect us.

Obviously, an appropriate biblical perspective will support the latter view—or perhaps a combination of the last two.

However when we're going through the hard times, it's hard to *feel* that way about it, even if we know in our heads that it's right.

We have a hard time trusting Him and seeking the good He wants to bring into our life through the hard experience.

Lamentations was written in the midst of that kind of time of affliction.

The descriptions indicate it was written just after the Babylonian invasion.

The nation was in ruins and the people had been taken captive to Babylon.

#### **AUTHOR AND DATE**

As a continuation of the work of Jeremiah, the author and date of the book have already been discussed (see Jeremiah notes).

Lamentations was written soon after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., as a lament concerning the condition of Jerusalem.

It expresses the attitude of the heart of one who had to pronounce God's judgment on a people and city he loved.

You have to have lived through such a time of devastation in your own neighborhood in order to appreciate the cry of Jeremiah's heart. We felt that as we looked at the devastation caused by the Guatemala earthquake in February, 1976. 21,000 people died there, mostly from suffocation in the dust, trapped by collapsed adobe homes. As we helped towns dig out and rebuild, the pain of the devastation was incredible.

Few people can express in words what the heart feels at a time like that. Jeremiah was one of those few. He was trapped between the realization that what he was observing was a demonstration of the truth revealed in Galatians 6: "*whatever a man sows, that he will also reap,*" and the pain of a person who loved his country and grieved over the incredible loss!

## **PURPOSE AND THEME**

Lamentations is the poetic expression of that sense of grief.

The primary theme of the book is **the pain of God's people, caused when sin requires divine judgment.**

As such it is the saddest book in the whole Bible.

- As a faithful servant of God, Jeremiah had to proclaim God's judgment.
- As part of God's people, he was saddened by its results.

He never rejoiced when those who opposed him were caused to suffer.

God's control over the nations and over His people is apparent.

Jeremiah's attitude demonstrates his confidence that God, who caused the judgment, is also capable of restoring His people.

The motive of God in judging the people was the correction of sin.

Jeremiah prays that they may learn the lesson quickly, so that God can restore them soon.

He prays, confessing their sin, as part of the nation, in order to prepare the way for their restoration (Deut. 30).

### **Purposes:**

- To explain the purpose behind their suffering.
- To encourage them to confess their sin, turn back to God, and trust Him.
- To console them in their suffering.

## **ORGANIZATION**

The book is composed of five hymns of lament, which correspond to the five chapters.

Each of the first four is an acrostic lament, with differing styles of acrostic, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem.

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5
22 verses (3 lines each)	22 verses (3 lines each)	66 verses (3 line sets)	22 verses (2 lines each)	No acrostic arrangement
1. A__ ____ ____	1. A__ ____ ____	1. A__ 2. A__ 3. A__	1. A__ ____	
2. B__ ____ ____	2. B__ ____ ____	4. B__ 5. B__ 6. B__	2. B__ ____	

The final hymn is a petition to God for restoration.

Due to the intensity of the request, the final hymn does not use the acrostic style.

## ARGUMENT

### LAMENT CONCERNING THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM 1 The Cause of the Affliction

The first hymn of lament is a general lament concerning the destruction of Jerusalem.

#### THE LAMENT OF THE PROPHET 1-11

The prophet speaks, describing the extent of her desolation (1-7), and the sin which caused it (8-11).

**Description of desolation 1-7** (The desolation)

**Cause of desolation 8-11** (The transgression)

#### THE LAMENT OF THE CITY 12-22

The city, personified, takes up the cry and reveals the source of her desolation.

**Source of desolation 12-15** (Their affliction)

She knows that God has sent this judgment on her.

**Loneliness of desolation 16-22** (Their confession)

She also describes the loneliness she feels.

No one comes to comfort her, and it appears that no one cares.

**LAMENT CONCERNING THE LORD'S ANGER 2**  
**The Source of the Affliction**

The second hymn of lament is based on God's demonstration of anger toward His people.

**HIS OVERTHROW OF THE CITY 1-10** (The Lord's indignation)

Because He was very angry over Israel's sin, rebellion, and idolatry, He has judged them severely and overthrown the city.

It was HIS work!

**THEIR CAUSE FOR SORROW 11-22** (The people's pain)

Now they are sad because of what He has done.

**The causes 11-17**

The causes of their sadness are revealed.

Famine 11-13

They have suffered a severe famine and their children are dying.

False visions 14

The prophets delivered false messages and deceived the people in God's name.

Ridicule from enemies 15-16

Their enemies have ridiculed them.

Destruction from God 17

Most important, God Himself has overthrown the city.

**The sorrow 18-22**

Therefore, their sorrow is great.

Their tears 18-19

Their appeal 20-22

They cry out to God to consider their condition.

The implication is that he will do something about it.

## **The Hope in the midst of the Affliction**

The third hymn of lament reflects more of Jeremiah's personal response to the suffering.

*Note the parallels to Job's misery!*

### **CRY OF THE SUFFERING 1-18**

He expresses with great emotion his personal sense of loss.

### **SONG OF CONFIDENCE 19-39**

He interrupts his own sorrow when he begins to consider God's faithfulness and love, the source of his hope.

### **PRAYER OF THE AFFLICTED 40-66**

The expression of confidence in God motivates him to petition God for forgiveness and for deliverance.

**Petition for forgiveness 40-47**

**Petition for deliverance 48-66**

## **LAMENT CONCERNING THE CONDITIONS IN THE LAND 4** **The Results of the Affliction**

The fourth hymn of lament describes the conditions in the land.

He expresses a deep feeling of anguish because of those conditions.

### **DESCRIPTION OF CONDITIONS 1-10**

Everything of value is gone.

**Lack of gold 1-2**

There is no gold.

**Lack of compassion 3**

There is no compassion.

**Lack of food 4-10**

There is no food.

### **CAUSE OF CONDITIONS 11-20 (Cause of the invasion)**

The cause of their affliction was dual:

**Guilt of the prophets and priests 11-16**

They suffered because their religious leaders led them astray.

**False hope in human assistance 17-20**

They also suffered because they mistakenly trusted others to come to their rescue, and no one came.

**WARNING TO EDOM 21-22 (Retribution)**

Edom, who could have helped Israel, will fall because they refused to help, and rather, rejoiced at Israel's fall.

**PETITION FOR THE RESTORATION OF JERUSALEM 5**  
**The Prayer in the midst of the Affliction**

The fifth hymn is more a petition that God will restore His people.

It's a prayer, totally directed to God.

**PETITION TO REMEMBER 1-18 Sorrow of the people**

It calls on God to consider their sad condition, and then, once again, describes the details of their state.

**PETITION TO RESTORE 19-22**

They call on God to restore them.

*Everything else is gone! But YOU remain forever! 22*

Although the conclusion is posed as a question, considering whether God has become angry so as to never restore them, the author knows that he hasn't.

God still cares and will restore His people according to His promise.

Jeremiah asks that God might act soon and renew their relationship as it used to be.

***What practical lessons do we learn from our study of this book?***

**What did the author think when he looked around at so much destruction?**

Fact of divine discipline.

Attitude of confidence in God, even in the midst of the suffering.

Identification with God's people, even when He is correcting them.

He express his confidence in the Lord in 3:19-39.

*What is his hope? Based on what?*

*What concept of God does he reveal?*

God is great, just, and sovereign.

At the same time, He is merciful, faithful, and good.

*BOTH are true!*

God is personally interested in every child of His.

Because He loves His people so much, He won't abandon them forever.  
He will restore them!

***THE LORD IS FAITHFUL, EVEN WHEN HE HAS TO DISCIPLINE US!***

### **Concerning Prayer**

Because of his affliction and his confidence in God, Jeremiah prays several times in the book.

*What does he want from God?*

1. He asks God for vengeance against their enemies (1:20-22; 2:20-22; 3:40-66; 5:1-22).
2. He confesses their sin (national and individual) and asks forgiveness (3:40-51).
3. He asks for deliverance from their affliction (3:52-60).
4. He asks God to remember them and their situation (5:1-18).
5. He asks for restoration (national) to fellowship with Him (5:19-22).

### **Concerning affliction**

1. God is merciful and faithful (3:22-23).
2. God is our portion; we find all we need in Him (3:24).
3. Affliction doesn't last forever (3:31).
4. God isn't out to get us when He has to correct us (3:22-32).
5. God has a purpose when He allows us to suffer (3:33).
6. God isn't unjust in His dealings with His people (3:35-36).

***EVEN WHEN GOD HAS TO DISCIPLINE US,  
WE CAN TRUST HIS GOOD PURPOSE FOR US!***

Sometimes when we are suffering, we can't even pray.

It seems like God doesn't hear us.

He seems so far away.

Nevertheless, He sees what we're going through and controls the circumstances.

God uses the affliction according to His purpose for our lives.

Sometimes He corrects us.

Sometimes He teaches us.

He always uses it to help us to draw closer to Him and to become conformed to the image of His Son.

*How would YOU have responded if you had lived through this situation?*

*What would you have felt?*

*What would you say to God?*

*What would you do?*

*What have you done when you have faced hard times in your life?*

*What do you think Jeremiah would tell you to do differently?*