

BIBLE SYNTHESIS IV (Bible Survey)

Introduction to Lamentations

On the face of the Hill of Calvary, the green hill without the city wall where our dear Lord was crucified, is a dark recess known as “Jeremiah’s Grotto.” This is held to be the place where the prophet sat and gazed at the ruined city, and composed this wail of a broken heart. If this is so, *how suggestive it is to find that the mourning patriot’s tears for the woes of the city should have been shed so near the spot where the rejected Saviour should suffer for the sins of that city, and indeed of the whole world.*

Jewish patriots chant this book every Friday at the wailing place in Jerusalem, and it is read in every Jewish Synagogue on the fast of the ninth day of August¹, the day set apart to mourn over the five great calamities which have befallen the nation.

—*The Outlined Bible*, Robert Lee, London

1. Author:

Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, was the human author.

(1) Son of Hilkiyah — 1:1

[This must have been the Hilkiyah of the revival of Josiah — II Kings 22:4, 8–14. Though, the place of Jeremiah’s birth casts some doubt as to this. See I Kings 2:26–27 and I Samuel 2:27–36. Abiathar was a descendant of Eli, who was rejected. Anathoth was the home of Abiathar, and of Jeremiah.]

(2) Priest of Anathoth in Benjamin — 1:1 (cf. I Kings. 2:26)

(3) Jeremiah was contemporary with Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel, Ezekiel, and possibly Obadiah. He also prophesied during the very last days of Nahum.

2. Date:

In the Septuagint Version (LXX), this book is prefaced with the words: “And it came to pass, after Israel was taken captive, and Jerusalem made desolate, that Jeremias sat weeping, and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said.” [While this remark is not a translation, it was made by those who were much nearer that period than we.]

Date: After the third siege and fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

3. Background:

Historical:

Jeremiah, the ninth or tenth in the succession of the prophets of Israel, lived to see five kings upon the throne of Judah: Josiah (good), Jehoahaz (evil), Jehoiakim (evil), Jehoiachin (evil), and Zedekiah (evil). It was during the reigns of the last three of these kings during which Jerusalem fell to the forces of Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah was to Josiah as Isaiah had been to Hezekiah (see II Kings 23:1—25:30 to find the history of Jeremiah’s time).

There were three great events which took place in Jeremiah’s lifetime:

(1) The Battle of Megiddo — between Judah and Phar’aoth-ne’choh, where good king Josiah was killed.

¹ If we follow the Jewish calendar, this will not be the same day on our calendar each year.

- (2) The Battle of Carchemish, near the same spot about four years later during evil Jehoiakim's time. He had become a vassal of Egypt. In this battle the Egyptians were defeated by Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, and the first deportation of Jews took place (605 B.C.). Daniel was included in this deportation.
- (3) Capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the destruction of the city and Temple, and the exile of the greater part of those who were left from the previous deportations (586 B.C.).

It was a time of great contest for supremacy in the world. Assyria had been in the place of leadership for 300 years. Now Assyria was growing weak, and Babylon was ascending in power. Egypt also wanted supremacy. In 607 B.C. Assyria was defeated by Babylon, and in 605 B.C. Egypt was crushed at the Battle of Carchemish. Babylon then became the unrivaled master of that part of the world.

4. Purpose of the Book:

- (1) Historically, it relates the personal anguish of the prophet at the sight of the once beautiful and thriving city of Jerusalem now in terrible ruins.
- (2) Spiritually, Lamentations portrays God's great faithfulness in the midst of turmoil and ruin. See Lamentations 3:22–23.

5. Theme of Lamentations:

Mourning for Jerusalem — A lament over the destruction of Jerusalem

6. Key Verse:

Lamentations 3:22–23
—also, Lamentations 1:1, 12

7. Key Terms:

Zion (15 times — speaking of Jerusalem as the spiritual center of the land), *Jerusalem* (7 times), *desolate* (7 times)

8. Purpose of Lamentations:

To express the sorrow in the heart of the prophet over the destruction of Jerusalem — a destruction brought about because of the sin and rebellion of God's people. Through reading Jeremiah we are given at least a little understanding of the sorrow in the heart of God when He is forced to chasten His people. The New Testament teaching about chastening in Heb. 12:5–6, 11 is illustrated in the book of Lamentations. An example is given to the Jews, and to us, as to the proper way to be "exercised" by the Lord's chastisement.

"A greater than Jeremiah here:

"There is no doubt that we have a greater than Jeremiah here." He quotes from Scofield: "The touching significance of this book lies in the fact that it is the disclosure of the love and sorrow of Jehovah for the very people whom He is chastening—and sorrow wrought by the Spirit in the heart of Jeremiah." And continues: "This book foreshadowed the wailing of the Lord Jesus over the approaching desolation of the Holy City. Many passages are charged with Messianic meaning: 1:12; 2:15; 3:14–15, 19, 30." —Robert Lee, op cit.

9. Structure of Lamentations:

The literary form is poetry. It is an acrostic poem, with each lament designated by chapter, being set up as follows:

- (1) Chapters 1, and 2, and 4 have 22 verses each (there are 22 verses in the Hebrew alphabet). Each of these verses begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
- (2) Chapter 3 has three verses to each letter, with a total of 66 verses in the chapter.
- (3) Chapter 5 has 22 verses, but they do not follow in alphabetic order.

BIBLE SYNTHESIS IV
(Bible Survey)

Outline of Lamentations

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| 1. Jerusalem Represented as a WEEPING WIDOW | —Lam. 1 |
| (1) The City in her calamity | —1:1–7 |
| (2) Judgments — God justified | —1:8–11, 18 |
| (3) Passersby — the appeal for sympathy | —1:12–19 |
| (4) Prayer — appeal to the LORD | —1:20–22 |
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| 2. Jerusalem Presented as a Veiled Woman | —Lam. 2 |
| (1) Jerusalem — siege and ruin | —2:1–14 |
| (2) Passersby — their scorn and cruel taunts | —2:15–16 |
| (3) Judgments foretold | —2:17 |
| (4) Prayer — to the LORD | —2:18–22 |
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| 3. The Cry of a Chastened People | —Jer. 21 — 29 |
| (1) Jeremiah shares in the affliction of Jerusalem | —3:1–20 |
| (2) Jeremiah’s hope | —3:21–36 |
| (3) Jeremiah’s tearful appeal to the people | —3:37–54 |
| (4) Jeremiah’s appeal to the LORD | —3:55–66 |
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| 4. Jerusalem Represented as GOLD | —Lam. 4 |
| (1) Pictures of the destruction | —4:1–10 |
| (2) The LORD’s anger | —4:11–16 |
| (3) Israel’s vain hopes | —4:17–20 |
| (4) Punishment upon Edom | —4:21–22 |
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| 5. Imprisonment until the Fall of Jerusalem | —Lam. 5 |
| (1) Calamity | —4:1–6 |
| (2) Confession | —4:7 |
| (3) Captivity and suffering | —4:8–18 |
| (4) Call to the LORD | —4:19–22 |