

# Grieving With Hope

A Series Thru Lamentations — Lesson 1

## Calamity

The historical background of the book of Lamentations is the capture of Jerusalem and destruction of the city and its famous Temple. From 588 to 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar's army laid siege to Jerusalem. The siege ended on July 18, 586 BC when the walls were breached and the Babylonian troops entered the city. Judah's King Zedekiah and what remained of his army attempted to flee the city but were caught. By August 14, 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar had fully secured the city and plundered it. The Temple was burned, and the king's palace, the protective walls, and the major buildings were destroyed. Many who survived were taken as prisoners, and what was left behind was a destroyed and burning city. These events are recorded in 2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 39 and 52. The survivors who remained in the city faced a daily reminder of their great loss. Yet the Bible tells us God binds these wounds and that in the midst of the pain we have hope. (See Psalm 34:18, 147:3; 1 Thess. 4:13). The book of Lamentations was written to guide the journey through grief and suffering.

1. **The Author:** The author has traditionally been understood to be the prophet Jeremiah. He likely wrote the poems shortly after the city of Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians.
2. **The Literary Form:** The book is composed of 5 separate poems and each has 22 stanzas. Chapters 1-3 have 3-line stanzas and chapter 4 has 2-line stanzas. Chapters 1-4 have an alphabetic structure as acrostics. The Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters. Each verse / stanza of chapter 1 begins with the next Hebrew letter in the usual order of the Hebrew alphabet. In chapters 2-4, two letters are transposed (corresponding to our letters o and p). In chapter 3, each line of the stanza follows the acrostic format, but chapter 5 is a prayer without an acrostic. The apparent purpose of this "a to z" format is that the issues of grief and suffering must be fully worked through.
3. **What is a Chiasm?** A further but critical observation about the literary form is that the 5 poems together form a chiasm. Chapters 1 and 5 have parallels, as do chapters 2 and 4, with chapter 3 in the middle providing the climax or crescendo. The first 2 chapters provide an ascent to chapter 3 and in particular to Lam. 3:22-24, and then there is a descent through the rest of the book. The truth found in Lam. 3:22-24 is the focal point of the book because it grounds their hope.
4. **Relevance for Christians:** Walter Kaiser writes: "Lamentations supplies: (1) orientation, (2) a voice for working completely through grief (from a to z), (3) instruction on how and what to pray, and (4) a focal point in God's faithfulness and in the fact that He is our portion."
5. **Grief and Mourning:** We suffer a loss anytime there is a removal from or separation from something meaningful to us, and this can be a physical loss or an abstract loss. The cluster of emotions associated with our contemplation of that loss is what we call grief or sorrow. The process of working through and expressing that grief, and over time separating from the loss, is what we call grieving or mourning. NOTE: EVERYONE HAS GRIEF. MOURNING IS A CHOICE.
6. **The First Poem (Ch. 1):** The theme of chapter 1 is in the phrase "there is no one to comfort" (1:2, 9, 16, 17, 21). Jerusalem is personified as a woman who has lost everything. The focal point is verse 18. In this poem we see grief verbalized in its loneliness (vv. 1-7), causes (vv. 8-11), purpose (vv. 12-17), and confessions (vv. 18-22). We grieve losses not events, and the key lesson is that we must fully contemplate the loss. Sometimes this includes our actions that caused or contributed to the loss.