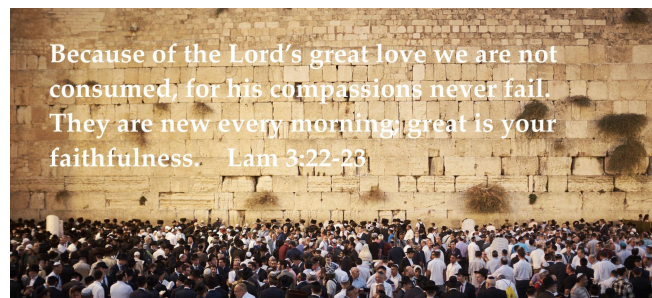


Lamentations is largely an unfamiliar book of the Bible, and can be hard to read on your own. It's a great help to see where Lamentations fits in the Bible's big story. So grab a friend, and watch the quick video. Then spend an hour together, reading the Overview and the 5 laments.

Overview of Lamentations

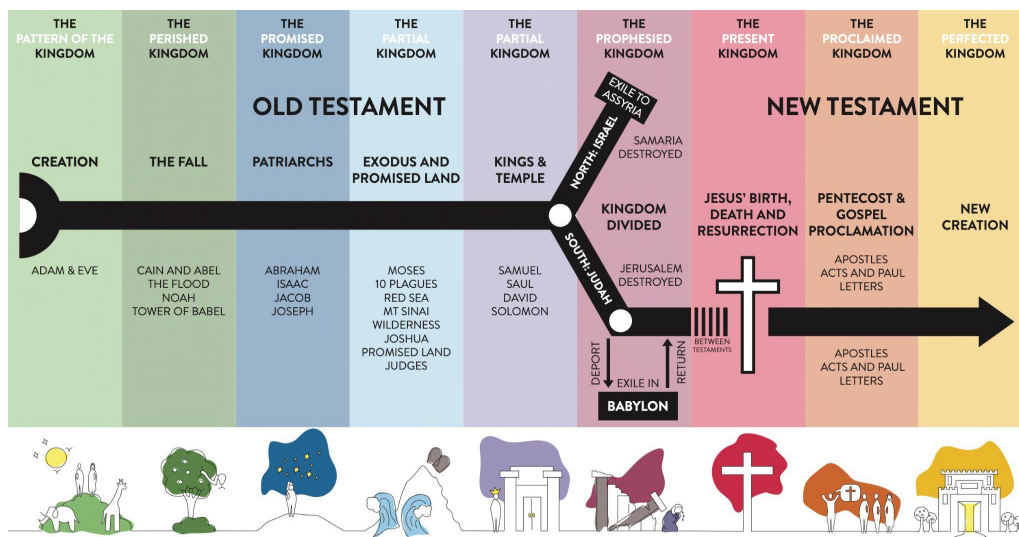
WHERE DOES IT FIT IN THE BIBLE'S STORY? (BIBLICAL THEOLOGY)

The most famous verse in Lamentations is 3:22-23. But these key verses shine much brighter, when we read them in context.



Lamentations is written at a key time in Israel's history - **the 'Exile' in Babylon**. Note 2 things:

1. The importance of the Exile in the Bible's story. *There were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.* (Matt 1:17)
2. The **'weeping woman'** represents Lamentations, in the time-line below.



WHAT IS IT? (GENRE)

Lamentations is a **raw book of poetry**, consisting of a series of **5 laments**. A lament is an outpouring of grief to God, like 42 of the Psalms (30 individual, 12 corporate).

1:1-2a How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations. She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave. Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are on her cheeks.

WHO WROTE IT? (AUTHOR)

The author is **unknown**, but seems to have been an **eye-witness** of the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC, and the resulting exile of God's people to Babylon. It could be the prophet Jeremiah, who warned Israel that Jerusalem would fall, if they didn't return to God.

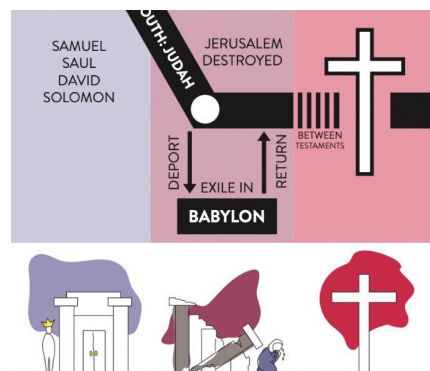
Jer 18:18 "Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, 'This is what the Lord says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.' But they will reply, 'It's no use. We will continue with our own plans; we will all follow the stubbornness of our evil hearts.'"

WHO RECEIVED IT? (AUDIENCE)

Lamentations was originally written for the **survivors** of 587 BC - the exiles in Babylon and the poorest people remaining around Jerusalem. They **struggled** to make sense of what had happened, and how to **respond** rightly to God.

WHEN WAS IT WRITTEN? (DATING)

Lamentations seems to have been written **between** the fall of Jerusalem (587 BC) and the return of the Exiles (538 BC).



HOW DOES IT FIT TOGETHER? (STRUCTURE)

The first 4 laments are “**acrostics**” or “alphabet poems”. Each new stanza/verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which has 22 letters. Lament 5 is written in the plural, as it is a corporate prayer. “*The whole gamut of human sorrow is explored: **the A to Z of sorrow.**”* (Barry Webb, *Five Festal Garments*). Below we give examples of the acrostics, from an English translation by David Slavitt, which uses the English alphabet to start each line.

Lament	Length	Form	Theme
1	22 verses of 3 lines <i>1:1 Alas, a woman widowed, alone, the city sits that once was full of people and great among the nations, a princess among the provinces, now turned tributary. 1:2 Bereft, she weeps in the night ... 1:3 Captive is Judah ... 1:4 Desolate ... 1:5 Enemies ...</i>	Acrostic	The desperate city (she)
2	22 verses of 3 lines	Acrostic	The angry LORD (he)
3	22 verses* of 3 lines <i>3:1 Afflicted am I and beset ...Abused by his rod ... Against me ... 3:2 Bones broken ... Bitterness is my portion ... Banished ...</i>	Triple Acrostic	The afflicted man (I)
4	22 verses of 2 lines	Acrostic	The poor city (it)
5	22 verses of 1 line	[Prayer]	Response (we)

* Note: In some English translations, the 22 verses are split into 66 verses.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT? (THEMES)

Lamentations is about suffering and sin. Whereas the book of Job is about **undeserved suffering**, the book of Lamentations is about **deserved suffering**, which makes it very sobering to read. A key verses is 5:16: *Woe to us, for we have sinned!* Ultimately, it points to the **lamentations of Jesus**, in the Garden of Gethsemane (Lk 22:42) and the Cross (Mk 15:34). These were the greatest lamentations of all human history, because the sinless man suffered in place of sinful humanity.

Reading Lamentations

1. Read each Lament one at a time. After each lament, pause for just 2 minutes, and fill out the table below.

Lament	Which verse stood out to you? Why?
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

2. How might Lamentations point to Jesus?

Pray

Dear Lord,

Thank-you for giving us the book of Lamentations which helps us to reflect on the fall of Jerusalem almost 2600 years ago. Help us to humbly sit under your Word and see your character more clearly. We pray for those around us who don't yet know Jesus, to see the incredible relief he brings. And for those who are currently suffering, whether deserved or undeserved, to find great hope in your mercies, which are new every morning.

Extra Reading - acrostics

Here's a taster of David Slavitt's translation, which cleverly uses an English acrostic.

Lament 1 (acrostic)

Alas, a woman, widowed, alone, the city sits that once was full of people and great among the nations, a princess among the provinces, now turned tributary.

Bereft, she weeps in the night, her bitter tears trailing down her cheeks. Of her many lovers none is left to console or comfort. Her friends have forsaken her now and become the friends of her foes.

Captive is Judah, in servitude sorely afflicted. A lady once, the equal of any, she is lowly now like a servant who cannot rest; her oppressor persecutes her in her time of torment.

Desolate, Zion's roads are empty now and in mourning. No travelers come on feast days. Her gates are lonely, abandoned. Her priests groan and her maidens, sobbing, are dragged away.

Enemies prosper and foes triumph: the Lord has afflicted her for her many transgressions. Her children are carried away, her conqueror's prizes and captives.

From the daughter of Zion all beauty is banished and glory is gone. Her princes are starving deer that are lacking in speed and strength and cannot elude their pursuers.

Gone are all the good times that Jerusalem cannot remember, those pleasant and prosperous days before her townsfolk fell into the enemy's hands and none was there to help her. Her adversaries gloated and mocked her desolation.

How grievously has Jerusalem sinned: she is filthy, unclean, and all that did her honor have seen her naked and shamed. She groans in the grief she feels and turns away her face.

Impurity hid in the hems of her skirts, but she took no heed. Her fall is all the worse for she herself was at fault, and no one cares or comforts. "O Lord," she cries, "behold my woe, for my foe has triumphed."

Lament 3 (triple acrostic)

Afflicted am I and beset, a man whom God in his wrath has abased. **A**bused by his rod and broken, I am driven into the darkness. **A**gainst me, he turned his hand, and again and again.

Bones broken, wasted, I am besieged and battered. **B**itterness is my portion and tribulation. **B**anished, I dwell in the darkest darkness like those who are long dead.

Chained so I cannot escape and walled in, I am a captive. **C**rying for help, I call out, but he will not hear my prayer. **C**rooked are all my paths, which he has blocked with boulders.

Desolate am I and desperate, and he lies in wait like a bear in his den or a lurking lion. **D**etours I must walk to avoid the many dangers. **D**esperate I am and defenseless, as he aims all his arrows at me.

Everyone everywhere laughs and all my people mock me. **E**ven into my heart he shoots the arrows of his anger. **E**ach day fills me with bitterness and feeds me with foul wormwood.

Extra Reading - Jerusalem

To get a feel for how important Jerusalem is in the Bible's story, have a look at some of these key verses.

The story up to Lamentations

Genesis 12:1-3, 14:18; Joshua 15:1,63; 2 Samuel 5:6-12; 7; 1 Chronicles 23:25-26; 1 Kings 8 / 2 Chronicles 16; 2 Kings 25 / 2 Chronicles 36; Psalm 46; Psalm 132

*"Since the day I brought my people out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city in any tribe of Israel to have a temple built so that my Name might be there, nor have I chosen anyone to be ruler over my people Israel. But now **I have chosen Jerusalem for my Name to be there**, and I have chosen David to rule my people Israel." (2 Chron 6:5-6)*

*There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, **she will not fall**. (Psalm 46:4-5a)*

Beyond Lamentations

Ezra 1:2-4; Ezra 3; Isaiah 2:1-4; 40:1; 62:11-12; 65-66

*I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; **the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more**. (Is 65:19)*

The New Testament

Hebrews 11:8-10; 12; 1 Peter 2:6; Revelation 21-22

*For **he [Abraham] was looking forward to the city** with foundations, **whose architect and builder is God**. (Heb 11:10)*

*But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the **heavenly** Jerusalem. (Heb 12:22)*

*I saw the Holy City, the **new** Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. (Rev 21:2)*

Copyright

David Slavitt, *The Book of Lamentations: A Meditation and Translation* (2018)

Ian Morrison: *Biblical Theology diagram*, Engadine & Heathcote Anglican. Download [here](#).

Wailing Wall: Photo by Bruno Aguirre on [Unsplash](#)