

Lam. 1:15 with Jer, 8:21; Lam. 4:21 with Jer 49:12, for example). Its own uniformity of style marks it as the work of one author who apparently had witnessed first hand the destruction which he mourns. The book is entirely poetical. Its structure is unique in that chapters 1-4 are acrostic in form, each of the successive verses beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 5 is not acrostic but possesses 22 verses...the same number as 1-2, 4. Chapter 3 has verses set in three lines but each counted separately for a total of 66 verses. The "meter" of these verses tends to make a rhythmic pattern that is not geared to cheerfulness. Maybe I will demonstrate it.

An outline that covers the book well is this:

- I. General condition of the fallen city 1:1-11
- II. The prophet's complaint 1:12-22
- III. The Lord's judgment 2:1-22
- IV. The Prophetic lament 3:1-66
 - A. Recognition of the problem 1-17
 - B. Song of hope 18-36
 - C. Song of confession 37-54
 - D. Song of trust 55-66
- V. Results of Judgment 4:1-24
- VI. Prayer and call for redress 5:1-22

The overall complaint or theme that grows out of this outline and the content is a feeling of deep sorrow for the city (Jerusalem) as it has been crushed and regret at the severity of God while yet acknowledging the propriety of the judgment and the adequacy of the Divine will.

In the History of Redemption Lamentations follows the same pattern as Proverbs, Psalms, etc., in not giving us a formal historical setting although against the background of the city and its ruin the book gives a moving treatment of God's justice. Chapter 3 contains a lengthy section on God's mercy and reaffirms his covenantal love (18-36). We might say that Lamentations reminds us that God has not changed and His people must come to grips with that.

Questioning Lamentations we ask why the peculiar form of poetic expression is used? What is the point of the long elegies of gloom? How is the optimistic thrust in the middle of chapter 3 to be understood in the light of the continuing dismay in chapters 4-5?

Archaeologically we can only note that the destruction seen in the background by the prophet is historically correct...the utter overthrow of the city was accomplished and its period of difficulty continued until after the captivity.

Keys to understanding this book are found in 1:3 and 18 and 2:1, 10. The understanding of the circumstance and the hoped for relief is seen in 3:22-24.

Study tips: Read the book aloud trying to comprehend the feeling of the prophet. You may wish to read it against the historical background of Jeremiah 39 and 52.

Further reading is recommended in such volumes as the NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY. Many commentaries on Jeremiah also include notes on Lamentations. It is not an easy book, however, on which to find suitable helps.