

## Also: Eikhah; Qinot

LAMENTATIONS, BOOK OF, one of the Five Scrolls in the Hagiographa section of the Bible, consisting of five poetic chapters lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. and its aftermath. (The English title, like the Greek (threnoi), Latin (*Lamentationes*), and Syriac (אורליתא) titles, is a translation of the Hebrew קינות (*Kinot* (*qinot*)), BB 14b; cf. *Sefer Kinot*, Hag. 5b; *Megillat Kinot*, TJ, Shab. 16:15c; and in Jerome's *Prologus Galeatus: Cinoth.*) The title more frequently used in Hebrew manuscripts and printings is *Eikhah* (Heb. איכה) after the book's opening word. Its location in the canon is bound up with the larger issue of the order of the Hagiographa (see Bible: Canon). *Bava Batra* 14b, which does not list the Five Scrolls as a unit (see Job), places Lamentations seventh in this section of the Bible. Some manuscripts which group the *megillot* together, including the Leningrad manuscript of 1009 C.E. and the Aleppo Codex, as well as the Masoretic work *Adat Devorim*, arrange the group chronologically, placing Lamentations fourth. The standard order followed in most printed Hebrew Bibles, which follows the order in which the *megillot* are read in the Ashkenazi liturgical calendar (starting with Passover), places Lamentations third, corresponding to its recitation on the Ninth of Av (a custom already presupposed by Sof. 14:1). In the Septuagint, Peshitta, and Vulgate it is located after the Book of Jeremiah—Jeremiah being its supposed author—forming an appendix thereto (the two are connected in the present text of LXX by a statement introducing Lamentations: "And it came to pass, after Israel was taken captive and Jerusalem made desolate, that Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said..."). However this connection is not likely to have existed when the Septuagint translations of these books were first made, since the two were translated by different translators, as was demonstrated by T. Noeldeke.

## Contents and Ideology

Although the individual chapters do not generally develop particular themes systematically, certain themes do stand out in the various chapters. Chapter 1 refers repeatedly to Jerusalem's loneliness, with her inhabitants in Exile and abandoned by her former allies, and to Jerusalem's guilt. Chapter 2 stresses God's role in the destruction, and refers particularly to the destruction of various parts of the city (Temple, walls, gates, etc.). Chapter 4, in contrast, stresses the suffering of the city's inhabitants. Chapter 5 describes the distress of those who remained after the destruction.

The ideological core of the book is Chapter 3, in which the poet reflects on the meaning of suffering. The opening description of his suffering (3:1–18) concludes with his observation: "I thought my strength and hope had perished before the Lord" (3:18). However, he takes hope in the realization that God's kindness and mercy have not ended (reading *lo' tammu* in verse 22a) but are renewed every morning (3:21–23). Furthermore, God is good to those who trust Him and seek Him; it is good to accept one's suffering and wait in silence for God's deliverance—in fact it is good for a man, when young, to bear a yoke (3:25–30), for the Lord does not reject forever, but ultimately pardons, for He does not afflict man willfully (3:31–36). Nevertheless there can be no doubt that it is the Lord who has inflicted the present suffering: "Whose decree was ever fulfilled, unless the Lord willed it? [lit: Who spoke so that it came to pass, if the Lord did not command?] Is it not at the word of the Most High that weal and woe befall?" (3:37–38; cf. Ps. 33:9, "For He spoke, and it was; He commanded, and it stood forth," and especially Amos 3:6b, "Does evil befall a city unless the Lord has done it?"). This being so, the sufferer cannot blame his misfortune on blind fate (cf. I Sam. 6:9) or the ill will and strength of his adversary. Since the suffering can only have been inflicted by God, Who does not afflict willfully (Lam. 3:33–36), the ultimate cause can only be the sufferer's own sin (3:39). Now the poet shifts to the first person plural as he draws the practical inference of his observations: "Let us search and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord..." (3:40–41), frankly admitting our guilt (3:42). The poem then reverts to the lamentation form with which it began, concluding with a plea to God for deliverance and vengeance (3:43–66).

The theory of suffering expressed in verses 25–36 is that of the wisdom tradition; many of its features are expressed in certain psalms, in Proverbs, Ben Sira, and in the arguments of Job's friends. Like Lamentations 3:27, this tradition holds that suffering can benefit a man. (In this and other respects this theory anticipates features of the later rabbinic concept of *yissurin shel ahavah* ("chastisements inflicted out of love"); cf. S. Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (1936), 308–9.) The classic expression of this view is Proverbs 3:11–12: "My son, reject not the Lord's discipline; Abhor not His chastisement. For the Lord chastises him whom He loves, As a father does the son he favors" (cf. Ps.

94:12–15; Job 5:17). In Job, Elihu explains that suffering benefits a man by calling his attention to his sins, so that he may repent and be restored to good fortune (Job 33:14–30; 36:8–15). Thus it is crucial that a man accept his suffering in the right spirit—silently, without complaint (Lam. 3:26, 28; Ps. 37:7), for an angry or unrepentant response would lead to terminal punishment (Ps. 37:8; Job 5:2; 36:12–14). One must rather put his trust in the Lord and call upon Him (Lam. 3:25–32, 40–41), for such calls by the repentant will always be answered (Ps. 37:3–9, 34; Job 5:8ff.; 8:5–6; 11:13ff.; 22:21ff.; Ecclus. 2). The distinctive aspect in Lamentations' use of this theory is that here it is intended to explain the suffering not only of an individual but of an entire nation.

Chapter 3 shows the significance of the view that Israel's destruction was caused by her own guilt. The belief that the punishment was earned, not arbitrary (3:33–39), became the basis of the hope that repentance and submission could bring an end to the suffering (3:40–41). Without recognition of sin there could have been no meaningful ground for this hope. This idea is invoked in comforting Zion in 4:22: "Your iniquity, Fair Zion, is expiated [lit.: your punishment is complete]; He will exile you no longer." The same idea became the keynote of Deutero-Isaiah's preaching. Without the belief that the Exile was a punishment for sin, and not an accident of history, Deutero-Isaiah's message could not have been credible to the Exilic community. The certainty of guilt, in sum, was the necessary basis of the national reassessment and the hopefulness which paved the way for the later Restoration to Zion. This teaching seems to be the central purpose of the book.

Besides the affinity with wisdom tradition just noted, the book reflects, as shown by Y. Kaufmann, the ideology of the popular religion; ideological affinities with classical prophecy are absent. The book describes the failure of those institutions in which nations customarily place their trust, and the tone of the description shows the author to have shared this trust: he grieves over the spoliation and destruction of the Temple and its cult (1:4, 10; 2:1, 6, 7), the fate of priests and prophets (1:4, 19; 2:6, 9, 20; 4:16), king and princes, warriors, and officers (1:6, 15; 2:2, 6, 9; 4:7–8, 20; 5:12), the failure of the city's fortifications (4:12), and her defensive alliances (1:2; 4:17). The classical prophets', especially Jeremiah's, excoriation of trust in these is nowhere reflected (2:14 reflects hindsight rather than the classical prophetic view on the popular prophets).

Lamentations is strikingly uncommunicative concerning the nature of Israel's sins. One searches the book almost in vain for the mention of a specific sin. Idolatry is not mentioned. Nowhere do we hear of the sins for which classical prophecy threatened destruction: social injustice, oppression of the weaker classes, bribery, and so on. Only 4:13 appears to specify a sin: "It was for the sins of her prophets, the iniquities of her priests,/Who had shed in her midst the blood of the innocent." It is not clear under what circumstances the priests and prophets are supposed to have shed innocent blood; since elsewhere in the Bible it is kings and ministers who are accused of this crime, Y. Kaufmann suggests that the meaning of the final clause is "(and for the sins of those) who had shed, etc.," with the reference here, too, being to the ruling circles. Be that as it may, the accusation does not carry conviction; it strikes one as a grasping at straws. It is a conventional accusation of the sort which is frequently leveled by the Bible against nations and kings as well as individuals (cf. II Kings 21:16; 24:4; Isa. 1:15; 59:7; Ezek. 7:23; 16:38; 18:10; 22:3, et al.). No other biblical passage supports the accusation. Here in Lamentations it gives the impression of an attempt to account for a calamity which the author could not really explain. A measure of his difficulty is provided in 5:7, where he complains "Our fathers sinned and are no more;/And we must bear their guilt"—a complaint which echoes the popular view mentioned by Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Jer. 31:28; Ezek. 18:2). The poet does not thereby disclaim any responsibility by his own generation, for just nine verses later he laments "Woe to us that we have sinned!" (5:16); but by invoking the sins of the fathers as at least partial explanation, he shows how difficult it was for him—quite unlike the classical prophets—to discover a sufficient measure of sinfulness in his own generation. That the generation of the destruction did attribute its sufferings to a previous generation, that of Manasseh, is apparent from Jeremiah 15:4; II Kings 23:26; 24:3. Since Manasseh is accused in Kings of filling Jerusalem with innocent blood, it may be that the charge in Lamentations 4:13 is also intended to refer to Manasseh's generation. It follows from all this that Lamentations' acknowledgement of sin is based not on the author's own knowledge but on theological axiom (cf. 3:33–39). For the history of biblical religion it is significant that this axiom is reflected in a book which is a product of the popular religion. This refutes the view that the destruction created a crisis of faith in God which only the classical prophets were able to solve by their "new" doctrine that the defeat proved not God's impotence but His anger and Israel's guilt. Lamentations

shows that the popular religion was capable of this explanation independently of classical prophecy.

## Style

The book describes the destruction and suffering from the viewpoint of several speakers, and employs several metaphors. The subject of chapters 1–2 is Mother Zion; in 1:1–11b the poet describes her suffering in the third person, while in 11b–22 (excepting verse 17) Zion herself speaks. In chapter 2 the same female personification, though somewhat less pronounced, continues; in 2:1–10 the poet describes the destruction, speaking of Zion in the third person again, while in 11–17 he turns lyric, expressing his own sorrow and (13–17) addressing Jerusalem and her wall in the second person; in 18 or 19–22 he calls upon the city or the wall to cry out to God, and describes what is to be said. In 3:1–39 the speaker is a man who describes his own suffering in the first person singular, in the style of the individual laments in Psalms; in verses 40–47 (beginning with the letter *nun*, which is the Hebrew first person plural prefix) there is a shift to the first person plural, and the style is that of the national lament; in verses 48–51 the speaker is an individual mourning the fate of the city; and in verses 52–66 the lament of the individual sufferer, with which the poem began, resumes. The mixture of styles is certainly original in the chapter, since the acrostic structure presupposes all of these sections. The identity of the man speaking in the individual lament which dominates the chapter has been the subject of many theories. Naturally many have thought him to be Jeremiah, both on the basis of his own suffering (which, however, does not correspond in detail to the description in chapter 3) and his supposed authorship of the book (see below). Kaufmann identifies him as Zedekiah, Judah's last king, since Zedekiah's fate aptly symbolized the fate of the nation. R. Gordis suggests no specific individual, but invokes the concept of "fluid personality" and sees the poet as identifying his own suffering with that of his nation. O. Eissfeldt treats the individual as simply a literary device personifying Jerusalem or Judah. Chapters 4 and 5 do not employ metaphors or personification for Judah and Jerusalem; 4:1–16 consist of a third person description of the suffering of Zion's inhabitants; 17–20 of a first person plural description of pursuit and frustrated hopes. In 21–22 the poet apostrophizes triumphant Edom, telling her that her time will come, too, and Zion, telling her that her sin is now expiated. Chapter 5 is a first person plural prayer calling upon God to take note of the suffering following the destruction.

The first four poems are alphabetic acrostics, as if to express the gamut of sorrow from *a* to *z*. In chapters 1 and 2 each letter of the alphabet introduces a verse of three lines (1:7 and 2:19 have four). Chapter 3 is a triple acrostic with each letter introducing each of three successive stichs; in chapter 4 each letter introduces a verse of two lines (chs. 2–4 have an unusual alphabetic order, with *p* preceding *A*; see Alphabet). Chapter 5, while not acrostic, has 22 verses (like ch. 1, 2, 4), corresponding to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, of one line each. Because of the limitations imposed on the poet's choice of words by the alphabetic structure, the logical connection of the verses is somewhat loose (in 3:17–42 these limitations have been largely overcome); themes are treated where the alphabet provides opportunity; the exegete must consequently piece together a complete picture of a theme from various passages.

Chapters 1–2, as noted by M. Weiss, also display chiasmus: with 1:22, 21, 20, 19, 18, and 12 echoing, respectively, 1:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 11; and with 2:22, 21, 20, 13, and 12 echoing, respectively, 2:1, 2, 3, 10, and 11. On the possible chronological arrangement of the chapters, see below.

Lamentations incorporates elements of the lamentation form known from elsewhere in the Bible, in funeral dirges, national laments, and other expressions of grief and regret. Typical is the opening of chapters 1, 2, and 4 with (ה)אִיכָה, *eikh(ah)*, introducing a description of unexpected reversal of good fortune (cf. II Sam. 1:19ff.; Isa. 14:4ff.; Jer. 9:18; Zeph. 2:15). Each of the poems ends on a note of prayer or confidence (1:20–22; 2:18–22; 3:64–66; 4:22; 5:20–21), as do other biblical laments (Ps. 28:6–9; 44:25–27; 74:19–23, et al.). The book's acknowledgement of guilt is paralleled in individual laments (Ps. 38:5, 19; 51:3ff.), but this element is rare in the national laments in Psalms (Ps. 79:8–9), which more frequently protest innocence (Ps. 44:18–23) or at least confess no guilt; on the other hand, national laments appearing in the prophets do express guilt (Jer. 3:25; 14:7, 20; Hos. 6:1, 3; 14:3b–4), suggesting that this was an original element in the genre (Eissfeldt in *ibid.*, 113–14). Chapters 1–4 often employ distichs in which the second hemistich is shorter than the first, which seems to die away in the second, producing a choked or sobbing effect (e.g., 1:5; 2:5; 3:1ff.; 4:7; 5:2–3). Since this pattern appears in some other biblical laments (e.g., Isa. 14:4ff.; Ezek. 19; Amos 5:2), and was first identified in Lamentations, it is often

called the elegiac or *qinah* meter; however, other laments lack this meter (e.g., II Sam. 1:19ff.; 3:33–34), and at the same time it also appears in other types of compositions (e.g., Song 5:9ff.; Ps. 19:8ff.); consequently such terms seem to be misnomers.

## Authorship and Date

Lamentations itself contains no statement of its authorship. The tradition that Jeremiah wrote the book is reflected in the introductory verses of the present Septuagint (see above) and the Targum, the book's complete Greek and Latin titles (*threnoi Hieremion*, *lamentationes Jeremiae prophetae*), and rabbinic sources (BB 15a, et al.). Beyond the fact that

- (1) Jeremiah was, in the eyes of later generations, the dominant personality who lived through the disaster, this tradition may have been prompted to some extent by
- (2) similar metaphors and expressions in Jeremiah and Lamentations,
- (3) by Jeremiah's call, before the destruction, for a lament to be uttered over it by himself and others (Jer. 7:29; 9:9, 19),
- (4) by the statement that Jeremiah composed a lament over Josiah which is written "in the laments" (II Chron. 35:25; cf. Jos., Ant. 10:5, 78; the Targum actually takes Lam. 4:20 to refer to Josiah), and
- (5) by presumed references to Jeremiah's life in 3:14, 53–56 (cf. Jer. 20:7; 38:6ff.). Modern advocates of Jeremianic authorship stress (2) in particular.

Most modern scholars deny Jeremianic authorship. Arguments (1) and (3) are clearly inconclusive. Stylistic similarities (2) may indicate at most literary influence or a common contemporary idiom, and in view of similarities to Deuteronomy (Kaufmann, in bibl., 597) and Ezekiel (Perles, in bibl., 98; Loehr, in bibl., 31–50) as well, an explanation along these lines seems more likely. Jeremiah's lament over Josiah (4) refers not to the events of 587 but to one in 609. The supposed references to Jeremiah's life (5) are nothing more than literary clichés standard in individual laments, and Lamentations 3:54 in fact contradicts Jeremiah 38:6. The most telling argument is that of ideology: as noted above, the viewpoints of Lamentations and classical prophecy conflict on fundamental issues. For example, the author of Lamentations is one of those who counted on foreign help and who trusted in Zedekiah (4:17, 20), while Jeremiah denounced reliance on other nations and predicted doom for Zedekiah (Jer. 2:18, 36b; 24:8–10). Jeremiah, who pointed out Israel's sins on many occasions and to whom the destruction was self-understood, could hardly have been as vague and uncertain about Israel's sin as the author of Lamentations is.

There is some reason to doubt that all the chapters are from the same hand. The usual type of argument from style is of course notoriously subjective. However, the unusual alphabetic order of chapters 2–4 suggests that they may not be by the same author as chapter 1, and the absence of acrostic in chapter 5 suggests the same for it. Numerous linguistic similarities between the chapters can be invoked in favor of the book's unity (Rudolph, Kaufmann, et al.), but these might also be explained by literary influence or a common contemporary style, and/or a vocabulary characteristic of the literary genre. Hence, though for convenience it is customary to speak of "the author," there is a strong possibility of several authors. It is at least arguable that the author(s) belonged to the upper classes or the court circles. This is suggested by his devotion to royalty (4:7–8), his esteem for the leaders (1:6), and his concern for the suffering of the well-to-do (4:5). Chapter 4, verse 19 implies that the author was among the party that fled with Zedekiah but escaped when he was captured (II Kings 25:4–6). While sins of priests and prophets are mentioned (2:14; 4:13), those of the king and officials are not. An origin in upper class or court circles would be quite in keeping with the book's affinities with wisdom literature, which was cultivated in these circles (cf. R. Gordis, in: HUCA, 18 (1944), 77–118) and with Deuteronomic elements in the book (Kaufmann, in bibl., 597), since Deuteronomy might be a product of royal scribes who were themselves influenced by wisdom literature (see M. Weinfeld, in: JBL, 86 (1967), 253ff.).

Dating the individual chapters is an especially elusive problem, and the following remarks are offered with reserve. It seems quite likely that the author is a contemporary of the events which he describes, since he so frequently seems to have shared the hopes, disappointments, and experiences of the period of

destruction (see above; note also ch. 3; 4:17–20). W. Rudolph argues that chapter 1 presupposes only the events of 598, since it does not mention the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. R. Judah in Lam. R. 1:1, 20 (ed. Buber, 22a) who dates the entire book to the reign of Jehoiakim). However, in this and other details the chapter could as well reflect the events of 587 before the final destruction and deportation following the seventh of Av (II Kings 25:8ff.). Chapters 2 and 4 could be slightly later than that date: Zedekiah has been captured and taken to Babylon (2:9; 4:20; cf. II Kings 25:6–7), the Temple and the city walls have been destroyed (2:1, 4, 6–9, 17 (but cf. 18); 4:1, 11; cf. II Kings 25:9–10), but the deportation (II Kings 25:11) is as yet incomplete, and starvation (cf. II Kings 25:3) continues (Lam. 2:10–12, 19–22; 4:3–5, 8, 17). Chapter 3 offers no firm criteria for dating. Chapter 5 speaks as if the suffering and subjugation have continued for some time (e.g., 5:20); the Temple Mount is now desolate (5:18). How much later than the destruction the chapter was written cannot be determined. Certainly none of the chapters can postdate Cyrus' proclamation of 538 (II Chron. 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–4), since none of the hope which it engendered is reflected in the book.

If the above chronology should be correct, chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 would seem to be ordered chronologically: chapter 1 before the burning of the Temple and city; chapters 2 and 4 after the burning but before the deportation is complete; chapter 5 somewhat later.

## Relation to Mesopotamian Lamentations

Lamentations over destroyed cities and temples are known from Mesopotamia. Several Sumerian laments date from the early second millennium B.C.E., while Akkadian laments date from the first millennium B.C.E. Numerous parallels in subject matter—hunger, destruction of city and temple, pillage, flight, captivity, wailing—can reflect simply similar experiences in times of destruction rather than a literary relationship. Striking parallels have been explained in different ways by various scholars. Until a systematic comparative study of these genres has been made, no conclusions can be drawn concerning the nature of their relationship.

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