

TYNDALE



# CORNERSTONE

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

## Isaiah

Larry L. Walker

## Jeremiah & Lamentations

Elmer A. Martens

GENERAL EDITOR:

Philip W. Comfort

WITH THE ENTIRE TEXT OF THE  
 New Living  
Translation

CORNERSTONE  
B I B L I C A L  
COMMENTARY

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## GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* is based on the second edition of the New Living Translation (2004). Nearly 100 scholars from various church backgrounds and from several countries (United States, Canada, England, and Australia) participated in the creation of the NLT. Many of these same scholars are contributors to this commentary series. All the commentators, whether participants in the NLT or not, believe that the Bible is God's inspired word and have a desire to make God's word clear and accessible to his people.

This Bible commentary is the natural extension of our vision for the New Living Translation, which we believe is both exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful. The NLT attempts to communicate God's inspired word in a lucid English translation of the original languages so that English readers can understand and appreciate the thought of the original writers. In the same way, the *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* aims at helping teachers, pastors, students, and lay people understand every thought contained in the Bible. As such, the commentary focuses first on the words of Scripture, then on the theological truths of Scripture—inasmuch as the words express the truths.

The commentary itself has been structured in such a way as to help readers get at the meaning of Scripture, passage by passage, through the entire Bible. Each Bible book is prefaced by a substantial book introduction that gives general historical background important for understanding. Then the reader is taken through the Bible text, passage by passage, starting with the New Living Translation text printed in full. This is followed by a section called "Notes," wherein the commentator helps the reader understand the Hebrew or Greek behind the English of the NLT, interacts with other scholars on important interpretive issues, and points the reader to significant textual and contextual matters. The "Notes" are followed by the "Commentary," wherein each scholar presents a lucid interpretation of the passage, giving special attention to context and major theological themes.

The commentators represent a wide spectrum of theological positions within the evangelical community. We believe this is good because it reflects the rich variety in Christ's church. All the commentators uphold the authority of God's word and believe it is essential to heed the old adage: "Wholly apply yourself to the Scriptures and apply them wholly to you." May this commentary help you know the truths of Scripture, and may this knowledge help you "grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord" (2 Pet 1:2, NLT).

PHILIP W. COMFORT  
GENERAL EDITOR



# A B B R E V I A T I O N S

## GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

|         |                                      |         |                                     |         |                                     |
|---------|--------------------------------------|---------|-------------------------------------|---------|-------------------------------------|
| b.      | Babylonian Gemara                    | Gr.     | Greek                               | no.     | number                              |
| bar.    | baraita                              | Heb.    | Hebrew                              | NT      | New Testament                       |
| c.      | <i>circa</i> , around, approximately | ibid.   | <i>ibidem</i> , in the same place   | OL      | Old Latin                           |
| cf.     | <i>confer</i> , compare              | i.e.    | <i>id est</i> , the same            | OS      | Old Syriac                          |
| ch, chs | chapter, chapters                    | in loc. | <i>in loco</i> , in the place cited | OT      | Old Testament                       |
| contra  | in contrast to                       | lit.    | literally                           | p., pp. | page, pages                         |
| DSS     | Dead Sea Scrolls                     | LXX     | Septuagint                          | pl.     | plural                              |
| ed.     | edition, editor                      | ℳ       | Majority Text                       | Q       | Quelle ("Sayings" as Gospel source) |
| e.g.    | <i>exempli gratia</i> , for example  | m.      | Mishnah                             | rev.    | revision                            |
| ET      | English translation                  | masc.   | masculine                           | sg.     | singular                            |
| et al.  | <i>et alli</i> , and others          | mg      | margin                              | t.      | Tosefta                             |
| fem.    | feminine                             | MS      | manuscript                          | v., vv. | verse, verses                       |
| ff      | following (verses, pages)            | MSS     | manuscripts                         | vid.    | <i>videur</i> , it seems            |
| fl.     | flourished                           | MT      | Masoretic Text                      | viz.    | <i>videlicet</i> , namely           |
|         |                                      | n.d.    | no date                             | vol.    | volume                              |
|         |                                      | neut.   | neuter                              | γ.      | Jerusalem Gemara                    |

## ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

|      |                                 |      |  |      |                              |
|------|---------------------------------|------|--|------|------------------------------|
| ASV  | American Standard Version       | NCV  | New Century Version                            | NKJV | New King James Version       |
| CEV  | Contemporary English Version    | NEB  | New English Bible                              | NRSV | New Revised Standard Version |
| ESV  | English Standard Version        | NIV  | New International Version                      | NLT  | New Living Translation       |
| GW   | God's Word                      | NIrV | New International Reader's Version             | REB  | Revised English Bible        |
| HCSB | Holman Christian Standard Bible | NJB  | New Jerusalem Bible                            | RSV  | Revised Standard Version     |
| JB   | Jerusalem Bible                 | NJPS | The New Jewish Publication Society Translation | TEV  | Today's English Version      |
| KJV  | King James Version              |      |  | TLB  | The Living Bible             |
| NAB  | New American Bible              |      |  |      |                              |
| NASB | New American Standard Bible     |      |  |      |                              |

## ABBREVIATIONS FOR DICTIONARIES, LEXICONS, COLLECTIONS OF TEXTS, ORIGINAL LANGUAGE EDITIONS

|      |  |      |  |     |  |
|------|--|------|--|-----|--|
| ABD  | <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (6 vols., Freedman) [1992]                          | BAGD | <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 2nd ed. (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker) [1979] | BDB | <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Brown, Driver, Briggs) [1907]                          |
| ANEP | <i>The Ancient Near East in Pictures</i> (Pritchard) [1965]                        |      |  | BDF | <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Blass, Debrunner, Funk) [1961] |
| ANET | <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (Pritchard) [1969] | BDAG | <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed. (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich) [2000] |     |  |
| ANF  | <i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>   |      |  |     |  |

- BHS *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Elliger and Rudolph) [1983]
- CAD *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* [1956]
- COS *The Context of Scripture* (3 volumes, Hallo and Younger) [1997–2002]
- DBI *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman) [1998]
- DBT *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (2nd edition, Leon-Dufour) [1972]
- DCH *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (5 volumes, D. Clines) [2000]
- DJD *Discoveries in the Judean Desert* [1955–]
- DJG *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Green, McKnight, Marshall) [1992]
- DOTP *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*. (T. Alexander, D.W. Baker) [2003]
- DPL *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Hawthorne, Martin, Reid) [1993]
- EDNT *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (3 vols., H. Balz, G. Schneider. ET) [1990–1993]
- HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, J. Stamm; trans. M. Richardson) [1994–1999]
- IBD *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (3 vols., Douglas, Wiseman) [1980]
- IDB *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (4 vols., Buttrick) [1962]
- ISBE *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (4 vols., Bromiley) [1979–1988]
- KBL *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros* (Koehler, Baumgartner) [1958]
- LCL Loeb Classical Library
- L&N *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (Louw and Nida) [1989]
- LSJ *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th edition, Liddell, Scott, Jones) [1996]
- MM *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Moulton and Milligan) [1930; 1997]
- NA<sup>26</sup> *Novum Testamentum Graece* (26th edition, Nestle-Aland) [1979]
- NA<sup>27</sup> *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th edition, Nestle-Aland) [1993]
- NBD *New Bible Dictionary* (2nd edition, Douglas, Hillyer) [1982]
- NIDB *New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Douglas, Tenney) [1987]
- NIDBA *New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* (Blaiklock and Harrison) [1983]
- NIDNTT *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (4 vols., C. Brown) [1975–1985]
- NIDOTTE *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (5 vols., W. A. VanGemeren) [1997]
- PGM *Papyri Graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*. (Preisendanz) [1928]
- PG *Patrologia Graecae* (J. P. Migne) [1857–1886]
- TBD *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Elwell, Comfort) [2001]
- TDNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (10 vols., Kittel, Friedrich; trans. Bromiley) [1964–1976]
- TDOT *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (8 vols., Botterweck, Ringgren; trans. Willis, Bromiley, Green) [1974–]
- TLOT *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (3 vols., E. Jenni) [1997]
- TWOT *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (2 vols., Harris, Archer) [1980]
- UBS<sup>3</sup> *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (third edition, Metzger et al) [1975]
- UBS<sup>4</sup> *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (fourth corrected edition, Metzger et al) [1993]
- WH *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (Westcott and Hort) [1882]

## ABBREVIATIONS FOR BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

### Old Testament

|      |             |       |              |         |                |
|------|-------------|-------|--------------|---------|----------------|
| Gen  | Genesis     | 1 Sam | 1 Samuel     | Esth    | Esther         |
| Exod | Exodus      | 2 Sam | 2 Samuel     | Ps, Pss | Psalms, Psalms |
| Lev  | Leviticus   | 1 Kgs | 1 Kings      | Prov    | Proverbs       |
| Num  | Numbers     | 2 Kgs | 2 Kings      | Eccl    | Ecclesiastes   |
| Deut | Deuteronomy | 1 Chr | 1 Chronicles | Song    | Song of Songs  |
| Josh | Joshua      | 2 Chr | 2 Chronicles | Isa     | Isaiah         |
| Judg | Judges      | Ezra  | Ezra         | Jer     | Jeremiah       |
| Ruth | Ruth        | Neh   | Nehemiah     | Lam     | Lamentations   |

|      |         |       |          |      |           |
|------|---------|-------|----------|------|-----------|
| Ezek | Ezekiel | Obad  | Obadiah  | Zeph | Zephaniah |
| Dan  | Daniel  | Jonah | Jonah    | Hag  | Haggai    |
| Hos  | Hosea   | Mic   | Micah    | Zech | Zechariah |
| Joel | Joel    | Nah   | Nahum    | Mal  | Malachi   |
| Amos | Amos    | Hab   | Habakkuk |      |           |

### New Testament

|       |               |         |                 |        |            |
|-------|---------------|---------|-----------------|--------|------------|
| Matt  | Matthew       | Eph     | Ephesians       | Heb    | Hebrews    |
| Mark  | Mark          | Phil    | Philippians     | Jas    | James      |
| Luke  | Luke          | Col     | Colossians      | 1 Pet  | 1 Peter    |
| John  | John          | 1 Thess | 1 Thessalonians | 2 Pet  | 2 Peter    |
| Acts  | Acts          | 2 Thess | 2 Thessalonians | 1 John | 1 John     |
| Rom   | Romans        | 1 Tim   | 1 Timothy       | 2 John | 2 John     |
| 1 Cor | 1 Corinthians | 2 Tim   | 2 Timothy       | 3 John | 3 John     |
| 2 Cor | 2 Corinthians | Titus   | Titus           | Jude   | Jude       |
| Gal   | Galatians     | Phlm    | Philemon        | Rev    | Revelation |

### Deuterocanonical

|          |                            |          |                     |        |                    |
|----------|----------------------------|----------|---------------------|--------|--------------------|
| Bar      | Baruch                     | 1–2 Esdr | 1–2 Esdras          | Pr Man | Prayer of Manasseh |
| Add Dan  | Additions to Daniel        | Add Esth | Additions to Esther | Ps 151 | Psalms 151         |
| Pr Azar  | Prayer of Azariah          | Ep Jer   | Epistle of Jeremiah | Sir    | Sirach             |
| Bel      | Bel and the Dragon         | Jdt      | Judith              | Tob    | Tobit              |
| Sg Three | Song of the Three Children | 1–2 Macc | 1–2 Maccabees       | Wis    | Wisdom of Solomon  |
| Sus      | Susanna                    | 3–4 Macc | 3–4 Maccabees       |        |                    |

## MANUSCRIPTS AND LITERATURE FROM QUMRAN

Initial numerals followed by "Q" indicate particular caves at Qumran. For example, the notation 4Q267 indicates text 267 from cave 4 at Qumran. Further, 1QS 4:9-10 indicates column 4, lines 9-10 of the *Rule of the Community*; and 4Q166 1 ii 2 indicates fragment 1, column ii, line 2 of text 166 from cave 4. More examples of common abbreviations are listed below.

|                    |   |                    |                              |                                |                      |
|--------------------|---|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| CD                 | Cairo Geniza copy of the <i>Damascus Document</i> | 1QIsa <sup>b</sup> | Isaiah copy <sup>b</sup>     | 4QLam <sup>a</sup>             | Lamentations         |
|                    |   | 1QM                | <i>War Scroll</i>            | 11QP <sup>s</sup> <sup>a</sup> | Psalms               |
| 1QH                | <i>Thanksgiving Hymns</i>                         | 1QpHab             | <i>Peshar Habakkuk</i>       | 11QTemple <sup>a,b</sup>       | <i>Temple Scroll</i> |
| 1QIsa <sup>a</sup> | Isaiah copy <sup>a</sup>                          | 1QS                | <i>Rule of the Community</i> | 11Qtglob                       | <i>Targum of Job</i> |

## IMPORTANT NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

(all dates given are AD; ordinal numbers refer to centuries)

### Significant Papyri (P = Papyrus)

|   |                                       |  |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| P1 Matt 1; early 3rd  | P20 James 2-3; 3rd                    | P39 John 8; first half of 3rd                        |
| P4+P64+P67 Matt 3, 5, 26; Luke 1-6; late 2nd                        | P22 John 15-16; mid 3rd               | P40 Rom 1-4, 6, 9; 3rd                               |
| P5 John 1, 16, 20; early 3rd  | P23 James 1; c. 200                   | P45 Gospels and Acts; early 3rd                      |
| P13 Heb 2-5, 10-12; early 3rd                                       | P27 Rom 8-9; 3rd                      | P46 Paul's Major Epistles (less Pastorals); late 2nd |
| P15+P16 (probably part of same codex) 1 Cor 7-8, Phil 3-4; late 3rd | P30 1 Thess 4-5; 2 Thess 1; early 3rd | P47 Rev 9-17; 3rd                                    |
|   | P32 Titus 1-2; late 2nd               |  |
|   | P37 Matt 26; late 3rd                 |  |

- P49+P65 Eph 4-5; 1 Thess 1-2; 3rd  
 P52 John 18; c. 125  
 P53 Matt 26, Acts 9-10; middle 3rd  
 P66 John; late 2nd  
 P70 Matt 2-3, 11-12, 24; 3rd  
 P72 1-2 Peter, Jude; c. 300  
 P74 Acts, General Epistles; 7th  
 P75 Luke and John; c. 200  
 P77+P103 (probably part of same codex) Matt 13-14, 23; late 2nd  
 P87 Phlm; late 2nd  
 P90 John 18-19; late 2nd  
 P91 Acts 2-3; 3rd  
 P92 Eph 1, 2 Thess 1; c. 300  
 P98 Rev 1:13-20; late 2nd  
 P100 James 3-5; c. 300  
 P101 Matt 3-4; 3rd  
 P104 Matt 21; 2nd  
 P106 John 1; 3rd  
 P115 Rev 2-3, 5-6, 8-15; 3rd

### Significant Uncials

- Ⲙ (Sinaiticus) most of NT; 4th  
 A (Alexandrinus) most of NT; 5th  
 B (Vaticanus) most of NT; 4th  
 C (Ephraemi Rescriptus) most of NT with many lacunae; 5th  
 D (Bezae) Gospels, Acts; 5th  
 D (Claromontanus), Paul's Epistles; 6th (different MS than Bezae)  
 E (Laudianus 35) Acts; 6th  
 F (Augensis) Paul's Epistles; 9th  
 G (Boernerianus) Paul's Epistles; 9th  
 H (Coislinianus) Paul's Epistles; 6th  
 I (Freerianus or Washington) Paul's Epistles; 5th  
 L (Regius) Gospels; 8th  
 Q (Guelferbytanus B) Luke, John; 5th  
 P (Porphyrrianus) Acts—Revelation; 9th  
 T (Borgianus) Luke, John; 5th  
 W (Washingtonianus or the Freer Gospels) Gospels; 5th  
 Z (Dublinensis) Matthew; 6th  
 037 (Δ; Sangallensis) Gospels; 9th  
 038 (Θ; Koridethi) Gospels; 9th  
 040 (Ξ; Zacynthius) Luke; 6th  
 043 (Φ; Beratinus) Matt, Mark; 6th  
 044 (Ψ; Athous Laurae) Gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles; 9th  
 048 Acts, Paul's Epistles, General Epistles; 5th  
 0171 Matt 10, Luke 22; c. 300  
 0189 Acts 5; c. 200

### Significant Minuscules

- 1 Gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles; 12th  
 33 All NT except Rev; 9th  
 81 Acts, Paul's Epistles, General Epistles; 1044  
 565 Gospels; 9th  
 700 Gospels; 11th  
 1424 (or Family 1424—a group of 29 manuscripts sharing nearly the same text) most of NT; 9th-10th  
 1739 Acts, Paul's Epistles; 10th  
 2053 Rev; 13th  
 2344 Rev; 11th  
 f<sup>1</sup> (a family of manuscripts including 1, 118, 131, 209) Gospels; 12th-14th  
 f<sup>13</sup> (a family of manuscripts including 13, 69, 124, 174, 230, 346, 543, 788, 826, 828, 983, 1689, 1709—known as the Ferrar group) Gospels; 11th-15th

### Significant Ancient Versions

- SYRIAC (SYR)  
 syr<sup>c</sup> (Syriac Curetonian) Gospels; 5th  
 syr<sup>s</sup> (Syriac Sinaiticus) Gospels; 4th  
 syr<sup>h</sup> (Syriac Harklensis) Entire NT; 616  
 OLD LATIN (IT)  
 it<sup>a</sup> (Vercellenis) Gospels; 4th  
 it<sup>b</sup> (Veronensis) Gospels; 5th  
 it<sup>d</sup> (Cantabrigiensis—the Latin text of Bezae) Gospels, Acts, 3 John; 5th  
 it<sup>e</sup> (Palantinus) Gospels; 5th  
 it<sup>k</sup> (Bobiensis) Matthew, Mark; c. 400  
 COPTIC (COP)  
 cop<sup>bo</sup> (Boharic—north Egypt)  
 cop<sup>fav</sup> (Fayyumic—central Egypt)  
 cop<sup>sa</sup> (Sahidic—southern Egypt)  
 OTHER VERSIONS  
 arm (Armenian)  
 eth (Ethiopic)  
 geo (Georgian)

# TRANSLITERATION AND NUMBERING SYSTEM

*Note:* For words and roots from non-biblical languages (e.g., Arabic, Ugaritic), only approximate transliterations are given.

## HEBREW/ARAMAIC

### Consonants

|         |               |      |         |               |                      |
|---------|---------------|------|---------|---------------|----------------------|
| א       | <i>aleph</i>  | = '  | מ, ם    | <i>mem</i>    | = m                  |
| ב, ן    | <i>beth</i>   | = b  | נ, ן    | <i>nun</i>    | = n                  |
| ג, ן    | <i>gimel</i>  | = g  | ס       | <i>samekh</i> | = s                  |
| ד, ך    | <i>daleth</i> | = d  | ע       | <i>ayin</i>   | = '                  |
| ה       | <i>he</i>     | = h  | פ, ן, ף | <i>pe</i>     | = p                  |
| ו       | <i>waw</i>    | = w  | צ, ץ    | <i>tsadhe</i> | = ts                 |
| ז       | <i>zayin</i>  | = z  | ק       | <i>qoph</i>   | = q                  |
| ח       | <i>heth</i>   | = kh | ר       | <i>resh</i>   | = r                  |
| ט       | <i>teth</i>   | = t  | ש       | <i>shin</i>   | = sh                 |
| י       | <i>yodh</i>   | = y  | שׁ      | <i>sin</i>    | = s                  |
| כ, ן, ך | <i>kaph</i>   | = k  | ת, ך    | <i>taw</i>    | = t, th<br>(spirant) |
| ל       | <i>lamedh</i> | = l  |         |               |                      |

### Vowels

|   |                        |      |   |                      |     |
|---|------------------------|------|---|----------------------|-----|
| ַ | <i>patakh</i>          | = a  | ֿ | <i>qamets khatuf</i> | = o |
| ְ | <i>furtive patakh</i>  | = a  | ֹ | <i>holem</i>         | = o |
| ֻ | <i>qamets</i>          | = a  | ֺ | <i>full holem</i>    | = o |
| ֵ | <i>final qamets he</i> | = ah | ֻ | <i>short qibbutz</i> | = u |
| ֶ | <i>segol</i>           | = e  | ֺ | <i>long qibbutz</i>  | = u |
| ִ | <i>tsere</i>           | = e  | ֻ | <i>shureq</i>        | = u |
| ֵ | <i>tsere yod</i>       | = e  | ֶ | <i>khatuf patakh</i> | = a |
| ִ | <i>short hireq</i>     | = i  | ֶ | <i>khatuf qamets</i> | = o |
| ִ | <i>long hireq</i>      | = i  | ֶ | <i>vocalic shewa</i> | = e |
| ֵ | <i>hireq yod</i>       | = i  | ֶ | <i>patakh yodh</i>   | = a |

### Greek

|   |              |                               |   |                |      |
|---|--------------|-------------------------------|---|----------------|------|
| α | <i>alpha</i> | = a                           | ε | <i>epsilon</i> | = e  |
| β | <i>beta</i>  | = b                           | ζ | <i>zeta</i>    | = z  |
| γ | <i>gamma</i> | = g, n (before<br>γ, κ, ξ, χ) | η | <i>eta</i>     | = ē  |
| δ | <i>delta</i> | = d                           | θ | <i>theta</i>   | = th |
|   |              |                               | ι | <i>iota</i>    | = i  |

|      |                |              |   |                  |            |
|------|----------------|--------------|---|------------------|------------|
| κ    | <i>kappa</i>   | = k          | τ | <i>tau</i>       | = t        |
| λ    | <i>lamda</i>   | = l          | υ | <i>upsilon</i>   | = u        |
| μ    | <i>mu</i>      | = m          | φ | <i>phi</i>       | = ph       |
| ν    | <i>nu</i>      | = n          | χ | <i>chi</i>       | = ch       |
| ξ    | <i>ksi</i>     | = x          | ψ | <i>psi</i>       | = ps       |
| ο    | <i>omicron</i> | = o          | ω | <i>omega</i>     | = ō        |
| π    | <i>pi</i>      | = p          | · | <i>rough</i>     | = h (with  |
| ρ    | <i>rho</i>     | = r (ῥ = rh) | · | <i>breathing</i> | vowel or   |
| σ, ς | <i>sigma</i>   | = s          | · | <i>mark</i>      | diphthong) |

## THE TYNDALE-STRONG'S NUMBERING SYSTEM

The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series uses a word-study numbering system to give both newer and more advanced Bible students alike quicker, more convenient access to helpful original-language tools (e.g., concordances, lexicons, and theological dictionaries). Those who are unfamiliar with the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek alphabets can quickly find information on a given word by looking up the appropriate index number. Advanced students will find the system helpful because it allows them to quickly find the lexical form of obscure conjugations and inflections.

There are two main numbering systems used for biblical words today. The one familiar to most people is the Strong's numbering system (made popular by the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance to the Bible*). Although the original Strong's system is still quite useful, the most up-to-date research has shed new light on the biblical languages and allows for more precision than is found in the original Strong's system. The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series, therefore, features a newly revised version of the Strong's system, the Tyndale-Strong's numbering system. The Tyndale-Strong's system brings together the familiarity of the Strong's system and the best of modern scholarship. In most cases, the original Strong's numbers are preserved. In places where new research dictates, new or related numbers have been added.<sup>1</sup>

The second major numbering system today is the Goodrick-Kohlenberger system used in a number of study tools published by Zondervan. In order to give students broad access to a number of helpful tools, the Commentary provides index numbers for the Zondervan system as well.

The different index systems are designated as follows:

|    |                                |    |                                 |
|----|--------------------------------|----|---------------------------------|
| TG | Tyndale-Strong's Greek number  | ZH | Zondervan Hebrew number         |
| ZG | Zondervan Greek number         | TA | Tyndale-Strong's Aramaic number |
| TH | Tyndale-Strong's Hebrew number | ZA | Zondervan Aramaic number        |

So in the example, "love" *agapē* [T626, Z627], the first number is the one to use with Greek tools keyed to the Tyndale-Strong's system, and the second applies to tools that use the Zondervan system.

<sup>1</sup> Generally, one may simply use the original four-digit Strong's number to identify words in tools using Strong's system. If a Tyndale-Strong's number is followed by capital letter (e.g., T61692A), it generally indicates an added subdivision of meaning for the given term. Whenever a Tyndale-Strong's number has a number following a decimal point (e.g., T62013.1), it reflects an instance where new research has yielded a separate, new classification of use for a biblical word. Forthcoming tools from Tyndale House Publishers will include these entries, which were not part of the original Strong's system.

# *Isaiah*

LARRY L. WALKER



## INTRODUCTION TO *Isaiah*

THIS BEAUTIFUL AND ELOQUENT BOOK is so filled with messianic passages that it has been called the Gospel according to Isaiah. In this magnificent prophetic writing the message is presented in such an attractive and striking manner that its superior style is without dispute. Its attention-getting imagery captivates the reader and vividly communicates Isaiah's message in an unforgettable way. Isaiah's influence on later literature and culture is profound. The New Testament writers quote Isaiah more than any of the other prophets, and many of these quotations are of strategic significance for properly understanding the overall message of Scripture.

The book of Isaiah has also been remarkably influential on art, music, political theory, missions, and evangelism over a long period of time. Many who are not otherwise familiar with Scripture recognize phrases and concepts from this great book. Likewise, throughout church history those who have studied Scripture have been continuously drawn to Isaiah by the majesty and appeal of its prophetic writing.

### AUTHORSHIP

The authorship of the book of Isaiah has been much discussed in modern times. The traditional view of both Jews and Christians is that the prophet Isaiah of eighth century BC Jerusalem is the author of the sixty-six chapters attributed to him. However, this view has been challenged by modern criticism, which finds at least two, and possibly three or more authors for these chapters. Those advocating two authors (a widespread view) claim that the traditional Isaiah of Jerusalem wrote chapters 1–39 and that “Deutero-Isaiah,” most likely living in Babylon, wrote chapters 40–66. Those suggesting at least three authors usually divide “Deutero-Isaiah” into two parts and call the third section (chs 56–66) “Trito-Isaiah.” Some also suggest that additional sections within the book have other authors.

The traditional view of the unity of Isaiah and its single authorship is based on internal biblical evidence. In 2 Chronicles 32:32 reference is made to *The Vision of the Prophet Isaiah Son of Amoz*, which is included in *The Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel*. Some believe it possible that both Zephaniah and Jeremiah are dependent upon sections of Isaiah 40–66 (Young 1958:44-48).

Isaiah's authorship of the later, disputed chapters of his book was a tradition accepted by the New Testament writers as they quoted and used this material. Examples of this are found in Matthew (3:3), Mark (1:2), Luke (3:4-6), John (12:38), and Paul (Rom 10:16-21). Within the New Testament, such personalities as John

the Baptist (John 1:28), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:28-34), and the elders of Nazareth (Luke 4:16-20) attribute these disputed chapters to a prophet named Isaiah. It seems unlikely that they would ever think about this material in the way that modern scholars present it.

Serious theological and ethical problems arise if the New Testament evidence is ignored or denied. Some suggest that the New Testament authors were ignorant of the truth concerning the authorship of Isaiah, but for those who accept the New Testament as inspired and reliable, it is not enough to say that New Testament writers were unlearned and naive men. Furthermore, that would not apply to Paul, who was "brought up and educated under Gamaliel" and "at his feet learned to follow . . . Jewish laws and customs very carefully" (Acts 22:3). Paul would have been aware of any Jewish tradition of a "Deutero-Isaiah," and if there had been composite authorship of this outstanding book, careful Jewish tradition would surely have preserved this information as it did in other cases of composite authorship (e.g., Psalms and Proverbs).

An even greater problem is created by those who suggest that the New Testament writers knew better but were simply accommodating themselves to commonly accepted (but erroneous) ideas of their time. This raises not only ethical questions, but also the question of which other statements in the New Testament might only be reflections of what their authors believed about God, angels, demons, and the life to come. Either case—ignorance of the truth or deliberate accommodation of error—creates more problems than it solves.

In addition to the New Testament witness concerning Isaiah's authorship, other lines of evidence support the traditional understanding of the text. For example, it can be shown that the last chapters of Isaiah reflect the Canaanite background of Jerusalem rather than the alleged Babylonian setting of Deutero-Isaiah. The imagery used and the natural references to the terrain and topography are all in keeping with the tradition that Judah is the setting for these chapters, rather than with the theory of a Deutero-Isaiah living in Babylon. The landscape and the climate of Canaan provide the alleged Deutero-Isaiah with the majority of his metaphors, which are based on mountains, forests, snow, land made fertile by rain (not by the overflow of rivers or by irrigation), and drought, and make frequent mention of Lebanon, the sea, and the islands. Such references are very natural in a message originating from Canaan, whereas they would be highly unusual and contrived for a resident of Babylonia.

When "Deutero-Isaiah" portrays an idolater, he shows him taking his hatchet and going into the forest to cut down a tree, a very natural act in ancient Canaan, but not in Babylonia, where virtually the only tree was the palm tree, which was not very suitable for making idols.

When the chapters refer to the circumstances of the exiles (e.g., 42:22; 51:14), they bear no relation to what we know of the actual experience of those who were transported to Babylon (cf. Jer 29; Ezekiel). The prophet was not offering an eye-witness report but using conventional stereotypes. Smart (1965:20) observes,

“When we search for evidence of the prophet’s residence in Babylon, we are surprised how hard it is to find any that is convincing.”

Although obvious differences of style and even vocabulary can be detected throughout the sixty-six chapters, stylistic similarities running throughout the material can also be identified, such as Isaiah’s famous title for God, the “Holy One of Israel,” which is found equally distributed throughout the two major parts of the book.

**Isaiah of Jerusalem.** Isaiah of Jerusalem had one of the longest ministries of any prophet. According to the opening words of his book, his life overlapped with the reigns of four Judahite kings: Uzziah (792–740 BC), Jotham (750–732), Ahaz (735–715), and Hezekiah (715–686). This means that the length of his service could have exceeded half a century, from around the time of King Uzziah’s death (probably in 740 BC; 6:1) to the accession of the Assyrian ruler Esarhaddon in 681 BC (37:38).

Isaiah’s name means “the LORD saves.” His father Amoz “according to Jewish tradition, was a brother of Amaziah, the father of King Uzziah of Judah. If the tradition is correct, Isaiah was a nephew of King Amaziah and a cousin of King Uzziah” (Youngblood 1993:10-11). Isaiah apparently had access to King Ahaz, King Hezekiah, members of the royal court, and the priests (see 7:3; 8:2; 22:15-25; 38:1).

Isaiah was married and his wife was called a “prophetess” (cf. the Heb. of 8:3). He had at least two sons, one named Shear-jashub (7:3) and another Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:1, 3), whose names were “signs and symbols in Israel from the LORD Almighty” (8:18).

Judging by his writing, Isaiah was cultured and educated; there is universal agreement as to the excellent literary character of his book. He is generally acknowledged as the greatest of the Hebrew writers, and has been called the evangelist of the Old Testament, the Prince of the Prophets, and the St. Paul of the Old Testament.

Isaiah also left us a record of the “events of Uzziah’s reign, from beginning to end” (2 Chr 26:22) and a record of “the events of Hezekiah’s reign and his acts of devotion” (2 Chr 32:32). Isaiah also refers to those following him who would pass on his work to future generations (Isa 8:16). Jewish and Christian traditions agree that Isaiah’s life ended when he was put in a hollow log and sawed in two by the evil Judahite king Manasseh (cf. Heb 11:37).

## DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING

During Isaiah’s childhood, when Israel was ruled by King Jeroboam and Judah by King Uzziah, the nation enjoyed a period of freedom and prosperity. Throughout this period, Egypt was weak and Assyria was occupied with problems elsewhere. Before Uzziah’s death in the middle of the eighth century, Jotham seems to have been regent for some years. Several years before his own death in 731 BC, he apparently put his son Ahaz on the throne. Neither Uzziah nor Jotham removed the idolatrous high places.

Most prophets address one historical setting—their own! One of the unique features of Isaiah’s book (and one that has contributed to the theory of multiple

authors) is that it addresses at least three different historical settings. The first period is the era of the prophet himself (c. 739–701 BC), the second is the time of the Exile (605–539 BC), and the third speaks of the return from Babylon (after 539 BC). Other periods are referred to in passing or are involved in the book's message, such as the distant messianic era.

**The Assyrian Period.** This earliest period covers the time of Assyria's emergence as a world power to its final destruction by the Medo-Babylonian coalition in 609 BC. For a period of about seventy-five years (823–745 BC), Assyria's neighbors (including Israel and Judah) enjoyed a period of relief from invasion, but the complacency of God's covenant people ended after the accession of the great Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BC). This signaled the end of Assyrian weakness and the beginning of their expansionist policies.

As the southern kingdom of Judah witnessed the Assyrian threat facing Israel, her northern neighbor, she was faced with a decision about being pro-Assyrian or anti-Assyrian. Judah thought that if it allied with Assyria soon enough (and not merely when it had to), Assyria might later favor or at least accommodate Judah as a faithful ally.

When Ahaz ascended the throne of Judah in 735 BC, a new pro-Assyrian policy was apparently adopted that explains why Pekah king of Israel and Rezin king of Aram attacked Judah in 735 BC (2 Kgs 16:5; 2 Chr 28:5-15). Ahaz and his court were sufficiently intimidated by the Aramean-Israelite threat (7:2) that they sent to Tiglath-pileser III for help (2 Kgs 16:7-9). These events provided the background for Isaiah's early public ministry. He preached that Judah should be more concerned about being pro-God because he saw Judah turning away from the Lord of their covenant and getting caught up in power politics (Isa 1:21-23; 2:12-17). Isaiah saw with prophetic clarity that Assyria was no friend to Judah. The enemy would quickly accept all that Judah gave voluntarily and then seize the rest by force (Isa 8:5-8). Nevertheless, Ahaz pursued this foolish course and eventually, after Tiglath-pileser III had deposed Pekah and destroyed Damascus (732 BC), Ahaz went to Damascus and appeared before the Assyrian king and was impressed with what he saw there (2 Kgs 16:10-16; cf. 2 Chr 28:20-21). The irony of all this was that the respite Ahaz gained by this treaty would have been his in any case (Isa 7:14-16). Tiglath-pileser III died in 727 BC, to the pleasure of the subject nations who hoped that they could then be free of the Assyrian yoke (cf. Isa 14). A number of insurrections immediately broke out.

Although the next Assyrian king, Shalmaneser V (727–722 BC), was not the great king that his father Tiglath-pileser III had been, he continued a similar approach in matters of state and by 724 BC had secured his empire in the east well enough that he could turn to the west, where he laid siege to the Phoenician city of Tyre and then to the Israelite city of Samaria. According to Assyrian records, over 20,000 Israelites were deported at this time and settled in the northern parts of the Assyrian Empire (ANET 284-285). Sometime during the siege, Shalmaneser V died and was succeeded by Sargon II (722–705 BC). Although Shalmaneser V is mentioned at the

beginning of 2 Kgs 17:3-7, the end of the text says only that “the king of Assyria took the city” (cf. 2 Kgs 18:9-10). However, Sargon II claimed to have conquered it, so some believe that Sargon II may have been the general in charge of the siege, or that the actual fall of the city came so shortly before his accession that Sargon II could claim it for himself (Tadmor 1958:37-39).

The death of Shalmaneser V was followed by widespread revolts, including that of Babylon. His successor, Sargon II, was occupied with particularly severe troubles in the north; thus, Babylon and other territories enjoyed a brief respite. With Hezekiah’s ascent to the throne came a change in Judah’s foreign policy; although Ahaz had been pro-Assyrian, Hezekiah was firmly anti-Assyrian. Exactly as Isaiah had foretold, Assyria clearly did not intend to cease her conquests in the area north of Judah. Meanwhile, Egypt observed this approaching Assyrian threat and was only too eager to encourage the people of Judah and their neighbors in their anti-Assyrian stance. Judah shifted from dependence upon Assyria to dependence upon Egypt, but Isaiah equally denounced both tactics (Isa 29–31).

Revolts broke out during the time of the next Assyrian king, Sennacherib (705–681 BC), son of Sargon II. Merodach-baladan once again emerged, for example. Possibly it was about this time that the Babylonian envoys visited Hezekiah (Isa 39:1). Unfortunately, Hezekiah fell for their ploy on that occasion and ultimately became the moving force in a new coalition. Some see the hand of Egypt behind this policy, promising help and support, but Isaiah was opposed to the entire arrangement. Egypt was of no help and Assyria could be left to God, so all this political maneuvering was a useless affront to God that could only result in disaster (Isa 22:5-14; 29:15-16; 30:1-18). Isaiah was correct in his predictions, for the next Assyrian monarch, Sennacherib (705–681 BC), defeated Babylon in the first years of his campaigns, again secured his eastern border, and eventually stood at the gates of Jerusalem. The fate Isaiah had predicted years before had finally come to pass as the Assyrian flood reached Judah’s neck. The horrors of Assyrian warfare are depicted on pictorial representations found in Sennacherib’s palace (Russell 1991).

When the Assyrians arrived at the gates of Jerusalem, they were only stopped by the Lord himself. Hezekiah paid Sennacherib tribute and eventually the Assyrian ruler returned home, boasting that he had penned Hezekiah “like a bird in a cage.” Apart from the significant burden of the tribute, however, he left what appears to have been the chief city of the confederacy intact and one of the main instigators of that rebellion still secure on his throne. This behavior was not at all consistent with Assyrian policy or with Sennacherib’s behavior on this campaign. If any city should have been destroyed or any king deposed, it was Jerusalem and Hezekiah. The biblical account of a judgment from God that decimated the Assyrian army and forced its hasty departure explains the outcome well. For Sennacherib to mention such a defeat would have been totally out of keeping with his position as king of Assyria and inconsistent with the style of the royal annals.

**The Babylonian Period.** Although chapters 1–39 are largely tied to local historic events, the situation is different with chapters 40–66. Chapters 40–55 seem to be

parts of nine chapters each (40–48; 49–57; 58–66). The first two parts each conclude with the statement, “There is no peace for the wicked” (48:22; 57:21). The first part focuses on the deliverance of God’s people through the instrumentality of Cyrus, the second on the theme of the Suffering Servant and the glory of Zion. The third and concluding part summarizes the future blessed condition of the true Israel in contrast with the miserable condition and doom of the apostates.

- I. The Judgments of God (1:1–35:10)
  - A. Coming Judgments and the Deliverance of Zion (1:1–6:13)
    1. The condition of God’s people (1:1–31)
    2. The future kingdom and its introductory judgments (2:1–4:6)
    3. The vineyard and its fruits (5:1–30)
    4. Isaiah’s commission (6:1–13)
  - B. The Sign of Immanuel (7:1–12:6)
    1. Immanuel’s birth (7:1–17)
    2. The Assyrian crisis (7:18–8:22)
    3. The Davidic kingdom and king (9:1–7)
    4. God’s anger against Israel (9:8–10:4)
    5. Judgment on Assyria (10:5–34)
    6. The Branch from Jesse’s roots (11:1–16)
    7. The Song of Redemption (12:1–6)
  - C. Judgments on the Nations (13:1–23:18)
    1. Babylon and Assyria (13:1–14:27)
    2. Philistia (14:28–32)
    3. Moab (15:1–16:14)
    4. Damascus (Aram) (17:1–14)
    5. Cush (18:1–7)
    6. Egypt (19:1–25)
    7. Egypt and Cush (20:1–6)
    8. Desert by the Sea (Babylon) (21:1–10)
    9. Dumah (Edom) (21:11–12)
    10. Arabia (21:13–17)
    11. The Valley of Vision (Jerusalem) (22:1–25)
    12. Tyre (23:1–18)
  - D. The Isaiah Apocalypse (24:1–27:13)
    1. Desolation of the earth and the world city (24:1–23)
    2. Praise for victory (25:1–5)
    3. Feast of the nations and the overthrow of Moab (25:6–12)
    4. Song of praise (26:1–21)
    5. Overthrow of world power and the prosperity of Zion (27:1–13)

- E. Pronouncement of Woes (28:1–33:24)
  - 1. Woe to Ephraim (28:1–13)
  - 2. Warning to the rulers of Judah (28:14–29)
  - 3. Woe to Jerusalem (Ariel) (29:1–24)
  - 4. Woe to the Egyptian alliance (30:1–31:9)
  - 5. The rule of the righteous King (32:1–20)
  - 6. Woe to Assyria (33:1–24)
- F. Indignation and Glory (34:1–35:10)
  - 1. The Lord's great anger (34:1–17)
  - 2. The Lord's great grace (35:1–10)
- II. A Historical Interlude (36:1–39:8)
  - A. God's Deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib (36:1–37:38)
    - 1. Sennacherib and Jerusalem (36:1–37:4)
    - 2. Jerusalem's deliverance foretold (37:5–13)
    - 3. Hezekiah's prayer (37:14–20)
    - 4. The Lord's answer to Hezekiah's prayer (37:21–29)
    - 5. The message of assurance to Hezekiah (37:30–38)
  - B. Hezekiah's Sickness and Recovery (38:1–22)
    - 1. Hezekiah's prayer for healing (38:1–8)
    - 2. Hezekiah's healing and his poem of thanks (38:9–22)
  - C. Envoys from Babylon (39:1–8)
    - 1. Hezekiah's reception of the envoys (39:1–2)
    - 2. Isaiah's counsel to Hezekiah (39:3–8)
- III. God's Comfort for His People (40:1–66:24)
  - A. God's Deliverance for His People (40:1–48:22)
    - 1. God's comfort for Israel (40:1–31)
    - 2. God's power in history (41:1–29)
    - 3. God's chosen servant (42:1–9)
    - 4. A song of praise to the Lord (42:10–17)
    - 5. Israel's failure to see and listen (42:18–25)
    - 6. Redemption and the new exodus (43:1–28)
    - 7. God's power versus powerless idols (44:1–28)
    - 8. God's purpose through Cyrus (45:1–25)
    - 9. Babylon's false gods (46:1–13)
    - 10. Babylon's fall (47:1–15)
    - 11. God's reminder to his stubborn people (48:1–22)
  - B. The Servant of the Lord (49:1–57:21)
    - 1. The commission of the servant (49:1–13)
    - 2. The Lord remembers Zion (49:14–26)

3. Israel's sin and the servant's obedience (50:1-11)
4. The Lord's promise to comfort his people (51:1-16)
5. Jerusalem's redemption (51:17-52:12)
6. The Lord's suffering servant (52:13-53:12)
7. Zion's future glory (54:1-17)
8. The great invitation (55:1-13)
9. Blessings for all people (56:1-8)
10. Sinful leaders and idolatry condemned (56:9-57:12)
11. Healing and comfort for the repentant (57:13-21)
- C. The Glorious Consummation (58:1-66:24)
  1. True and false worship (58:1-14)
  2. Warning against sin (59:1-21)
  3. The glory of Zion (60:1-22)
  4. Good news for the oppressed (61:1-11)
  5. Isaiah's prayer for Zion (62:1-12)
  6. Judgment and deliverance (63:1-14)
  7. Prayer for mercy and help (63:15-64:12)
  8. The Lord's response (65:1-25)
  9. Conclusion and summary (66:1-24)

COMMENTARY ON

*Isaiah*

◆ I. The Judgments of God (1:1–35:10)

A. Coming Judgments and the Deliverance of Zion (1:1–6:13)

1. The condition of God's people (1:1–31)

These are the visions that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. He saw these visions during the years when Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings of Judah.\*

<sup>2</sup>Listen, O heavens! Pay attention, earth!  
This is what the LORD says:

"The children I raised and cared for  
have rebelled against me.

<sup>3</sup>Even an ox knows its owner,  
and a donkey recognizes its master's  
care—

but Israel doesn't know its master.  
My people don't recognize my care  
for them."

<sup>4</sup>Oh, what a sinful nation they are—  
loaded down with a burden of guilt.  
They are evil people,  
corrupt children who have rejected  
the LORD.

They have despised the Holy One  
of Israel  
and turned their backs on him.

<sup>5</sup>Why do you continue to invite  
punishment?  
Must you rebel forever?

Your head is injured,  
and your heart is sick.

<sup>6</sup>You are battered from head to foot—  
covered with bruises, welts, and  
infected wounds—  
without any soothing ointments  
or bandages.

<sup>7</sup>Your country lies in ruins,  
and your towns are burned.  
Foreigners plunder your fields before  
your eyes  
and destroy everything they see.

<sup>8</sup>Beautiful Jerusalem\* stands abandoned  
like a watchman's shelter in a  
vineyard,  
like a lean-to in a cucumber field after  
the harvest,  
like a helpless city under siege.

<sup>9</sup>If the LORD of Heaven's Armies  
had not spared a few of us,\*  
we would have been wiped out like  
Sodom,  
destroyed like Gomorrah.

<sup>10</sup>Listen to the LORD, you leaders of  
"Sodom."  
Listen to the law of our God, people  
of "Gomorrah."

<sup>11</sup>"What makes you think I want all your  
sacrifices?"  
says the LORD.

"I am sick of your burnt offerings  
of rams  
and the fat of fattened cattle.  
I get no pleasure from the blood  
of bulls and lambs and goats.

<sup>12</sup>When you come to worship me,  
who asked you to parade through  
my courts with all your  
ceremony?

<sup>13</sup>Stop bringing me your meaningless  
gifts;

- the incense of your offerings  
disgusts me!  
As for your celebrations of the new  
moon and the Sabbath  
and your special days for fasting—  
they are all sinful and false.  
I want no more of your pious  
meetings.
- <sup>14</sup>I hate your new moon celebrations  
and your annual festivals.  
They are a burden to me. I cannot  
stand them!
- <sup>15</sup>When you lift up your hands in prayer,  
I will not look.  
Though you offer many prayers,  
I will not listen,  
for your hands are covered with the  
blood of innocent victims.
- <sup>16</sup>Wash yourselves and be clean!  
Get your sins out of my sight.  
Give up your evil ways.
- <sup>17</sup>Learn to do good.  
Seek justice.  
Help the oppressed.  
Defend the cause of orphans.  
Fight for the rights of widows.
- <sup>18</sup>"Come now, let's settle this,"  
says the LORD.  
"Though your sins are like scarlet,  
I will make them as white as snow.  
Though they are red like crimson,  
I will make them as white as wool.
- <sup>19</sup>If you will only obey me,  
you will have plenty to eat.
- <sup>20</sup>But if you turn away and refuse to  
listen,  
you will be devoured by the sword of  
your enemies.  
I, the LORD, have spoken!"
- <sup>21</sup>See how Jerusalem, once so faithful,  
has become a prostitute.  
Once the home of justice and  
righteousness,  
she is now filled with murderers.
- <sup>22</sup>Once like pure silver,  
you have become like worthless slag.  
Once so pure,
- you are now like watered-down wine.
- <sup>23</sup>Your leaders are rebels,  
the companions of thieves.  
All of them love bribes  
and demand payoffs,  
but they refuse to defend the cause  
of orphans  
or fight for the rights of widows.
- <sup>24</sup>Therefore, the Lord, the LORD of  
Heaven's Armies,  
the Mighty One of Israel, says,  
"I will take revenge on my enemies  
and pay back my foes!
- <sup>25</sup>I will raise my fist against you.  
I will melt you down and skim off  
your slag.  
I will remove all your impurities.
- <sup>26</sup>Then I will give you good judges again  
and wise counselors like you used  
to have.  
Then Jerusalem will again be called the  
Home of Justice  
and the Faithful City."
- <sup>27</sup>Zion will be restored by justice;  
those who repent will be revived  
by righteousness.
- <sup>28</sup>But rebels and sinners will be  
completely destroyed,  
and those who desert the LORD  
will be consumed.
- <sup>29</sup>You will be ashamed of your idol  
worship  
in groves of sacred oaks.  
You will blush because you worshiped  
in gardens dedicated to idols.
- <sup>30</sup>You will be like a great tree with  
withered leaves,  
like a garden without water.
- <sup>31</sup>The strongest among you will  
disappear like straw;  
their evil deeds will be the spark  
that sets it on fire.  
They and their evil works will burn  
up together,  
and no one will be able to put out  
the fire.

1:1 These kings reigned from 792 to 686 BC. 1:8 Hebrew *The daughter of Zion*. 1:9 Greek version reads *a few of our children*. Compare Rom 9:29.

## NOTES

**1:1 visions.** The Hebrew *khazon* [TH2377, ZH2606] is singular. Goldingay (1998) points out that elsewhere the term is used only of a single vision, and he suggests that it applies here only to the first chapter. Further, he suggests that 2:1, rather than introducing the next chapter, is a colophon to the opening chapter.

**1:2 Listen, O heavens.** The entire universe is called as witness to God's indictment of his people (cf. Deut 30:19; 31:28; 32:1).

**1:3 Even an ox knows its owner, and a donkey recognizes its master's care.** In vivid and striking language, the rebellious and obtuse people of Judah are compared to animals.

**but Israel doesn't know its master.** God's people did not spiritually recognize or acknowledge their Master (cf. Hos 2:10; 4:1). Even the instincts of such creatures as oxen or donkeys exceed those of the spiritually obtuse Judahites.

**1:4 sinful nation.** The contrast with God's holiness highlights the sick condition of the people.

**children.** The concept of the covenant people as God's children is also found in Deut 30:9; 32:5; Hos 2:1; 1 Chr 29:10 and elsewhere. Israel calls God "Father" in Isa 63:16 and 64:7. In Jer 31:8 and Mal 1:6 God calls himself the Father of Israel.

**rejected the LORD.** "Rejected" translates the Heb. *'azab* [TH5800, ZH6440]. This customary word for "divorce" is used twenty-five times in Isaiah.

**the Holy One of Israel.** Isaiah's preferred name for God occurs twenty-six times in his book and only six times elsewhere in the OT.

**1:8 Jerusalem.** The literal "daughter of Zion" (so NLT mg) personifies the city of Jerusalem and her inhabitants.

**1:9** This verse is quoted by Paul in Rom 9:29, where it is linked with Isa 10:22-23.

**the LORD of Heaven's Armies.** Heb. *yhwh tseba'oth*. Traditionally, "the LORD of hosts" (KJV, NRSV, NASB, ESV, cf. NJPS, REB) but with variations in new versions: "the LORD Almighty" (NIV, TEV); "the LORD All-Powerful" (NCV, CEV); "the LORD of Armies" (GW). This Heb. term for armies or hosts is used of both earthly and heavenly forces. It is often translated in the LXX by *pantokratōr* "Almighty," a word found in the NT in Rev 1:8; 4:8; 11:17 and elsewhere.

**1:10 Sodom . . . Gomorrah.** The covenant people of God would have been deeply offended at being compared with these perverted Gentile cities. Isaiah's mention of the two infamous cities no doubt reminded his hearers of the reference to them in Deut 29:23. Sodom is mentioned again in Isa 3:9 and in Ezek 16:46, 48-49, 55-56.

**1:11 fattened cattle.** Refers to cattle developed by special feeding for special use.

**1:13 new moon.** The reference is to the New Moon festivals that were celebrated on the first day of each month with special sacrifices.

**1:14 annual festivals.** These celebrations included the Passover, the Festival of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

**1:15 I will not look.** The same imagery of God lit. "hiding his eyes" is also found in 8:17 and 59:2. Hypocritical worship is repulsive to God.

**blood of innocent victims.** This could refer to the sin of murder (cf. 1:21) or even to the mistreatment of widows and orphans (1:17) that resulted in their loss of life.

**1:17 orphans.** Lit., "fatherless" (*yatom* [TH3490, ZH3846]). This reflects the family structure of ancient Near Eastern society. Orphans, along with *widows*, were among the weak and exploited elements of society.

**1:18 scarlet . . . crimson.** This refers to blood shed by the hands of murderers. Scarlet and crimson are two shades of deep red, symbolic of sin that leads to bloodshed and death. Apparently sin is never described as black in the Bible.

**white as snow . . . wool.** These symbolize cleanliness, purity, and innocence (cf. Rev 1:14).

**1:24 the Lord, the LORD of Heaven's Armies, the Mighty One of Israel.** This stacking of names stresses God's authority and introduces the verdict of judgment.

**1:25 remove all your impurities.** This imagery of purifying fire is also found in 4:4 and 48:10, as well as in Zech 13:9; Mal 3:3; 1 Pet 1:7. The smelting process was designed to purify.

**1:29 groves of sacred oaks.** This refers to sites where pagan sacrifices were offered and sexual immorality took place (cf. 65:3; 66:17).

#### COMMENTARY

The opening chapters of Isaiah describe the condition of the Judahites (1:1-31). Among other indictments, they are called a fruitless vineyard (5:1-30). Nonetheless, hopeful words about the coming kingdom are also included (2:1-4:6). The section closes with an account of the prophet's commission (6:1-13).

The opening words identify Isaiah as the son of Amoz (not Amos) and as the recipient of visions concerning the city of Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. These visions also include references to other nations that shared history with Judah. The Hebrew word for "visions" used here also introduces the prophecies of Obadiah, Micah, and Nahum. The opening verses also place Isaiah historically by identifying the kings of Judah who were his contemporaries: Uzziah (792-740 BC), Jotham (750-732 BC), Ahaz (735-715 BC), and Hezekiah (715-686 BC). The historical background has already been discussed in the Introduction.

The introduction is immediately followed by a message to a nation that is rebelling against its Lord. These opening words are in the form of a lawsuit against God's people and, in a very general way, are a preview of chapters 1-39. The people are said to be even more obtuse than animals, since other creatures know better than to ignore the hand that feeds them (1:3). The people of Judah are described as evil, corrupt, and "loaded down with a burden of guilt" (1:4). Isaiah's message repeatedly focuses on the sin of rebellion as the root of the nation's illness and problems, and their condition is vividly described in terms of a sick body covered from head to foot with "bruises, welts, and infected wounds—without any soothing ointments or bandages" (1:6). As a result of their attitude and conduct, the nation is plundered and lies in ruins; it is vividly compared to an abandoned "watchman's shelter" after the harvest is finished (1:8).

In 1:10, the wicked people are compared to the sinners of ancient Sodom and Gomorrah and admonished to "listen to the law of our God," a law that is both moral and ceremonial. The rebels had maintained their ceremonial observances in various external practices but had disobeyed the more basic moral laws. Instead of their offered incense being an aroma pleasing to the Lord as originally intended, it had become disgusting and repulsive to him (1:13). Eventually the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, said of their religious practices, "I want no more of your pious meet-

ings. I hate your new moon celebrations and your annual festivals. They are a burden to me. I cannot stand them!" (1:13-14). God further warned the people that the sin they accommodated in their lives would affect their prayers and therefore said, "When you lift up your hands in prayer I will not look" (1:15).

In addition to observing the law, the people were to "Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows" (1:17). The Lord's people were instructed to help each other at a time long before governmental social agencies existed to address such needs. The good news for these sinful people was forgiveness—the Lord promised that "though your sins are like scarlet," they could become "as white as snow" (1:18) on the condition that they would "only obey me" (1:19). On the other hand, if they turned away and refused to listen, they would be destroyed by their enemies (1:20). The prophets often depicted Jerusalem as a prostitute in pitiful condition (1:21). Jerusalem had been unfaithful to her covenant Lord and had gone after other lovers. In another graphic image, Jerusalem's former "pure silver" had now become "worthless slag," and her former purity had deteriorated into "watered-down wine" (1:22). The city's leaders had associated with thieves taking bribes, but had refused to come to the aid of orphans and widows (1:23).

The spiritual and moral condition of the people could only provoke the wrath and judgment of the Holy One of Israel. "The Lord, the LORD of the Heavenly Armies, the Mighty One of Israel" would give vent to his holy wrath and pour out his fury on them, calling them his "enemies" and "foes" (1:24). God starkly said, "I will raise my fist against you" (1:25). However, the Lord would never totally destroy his people; a remnant would always remain. This remnant motif appears repeatedly in Isaiah, especially in chapters 1–12 and 28–29, but it began in Genesis with Noah and Lot (Graham 1976:217ff). The purpose of this judgment on God's covenant people was to melt them down, skim off their slag, and remove their impurities (1:25).

## ◆ 2. The future kingdom and its introductory judgments (2:1–4:6)

This is a vision that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

<sup>2</sup>In the last days, the mountain of the LORD's house  
will be the highest of all—  
the most important place on earth.  
It will be raised above the other hills,  
and people from all over the world  
will stream there to worship.

<sup>3</sup>People from many nations will come  
and say,  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain  
of the LORD,  
to the house of Jacob's God.

There he will teach us his ways,  
and we will walk in his paths."

For the LORD's teaching will go out  
from Zion;

his word will go out from Jerusalem.

<sup>4</sup>The LORD will mediate between nations  
and will settle international  
disputes.

They will hammer their swords into  
plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will no longer fight against  
nation,  
nor train for war anymore.

# *Jeremiah*

ELMER A. MARTENS



## INTRODUCTION TO *Jeremiah*

JEREMIAH spoke from within the cultural context of a society in upheaval. When eras are in transition, as from modernity to post-modernity, Jeremiah is the handbook of choice, for this book addresses uncertainty and large-scale shifts. The word of God came then, as it comes now, to rebuke, to console, and to affirm such constants as God's anger against sinful excesses and his promise of everlasting love (31:30).

When individuals wonder what it means to know God, they will find answers in Jeremiah, but they will not be clichéd directions such as "read the Bible and pray" (see 9:23-24). Devotion to God may mean going against the cultural grain. Jeremiah's courage in confronting religious and political establishments inspires those who want to know and follow God and God alone.

### AUTHOR

By word count, Jeremiah is the longest book in the Bible. Its author, a prophet, lived in Palestine, the land of Israel in the seventh and sixth centuries BC. His ministry was primarily to the people of Judah before, during, and after the Babylonian siege, which culminated in the capture of Jerusalem in 587 BC.

Jeremiah came from a family of priests whose hometown was Anathoth, located two or three miles northeast of Jerusalem. Abiathar, a priest in David's time, had lived there (1 Kgs 2:26); the place seems to have been the preferred residence for priests of Judah. Around 640 BC, Jeremiah was born in Anathoth to parents of priestly lineage. His public ministry began in 627, spanned at least forty years, and concluded in Egypt among the remnant that had gone there after 587. Little is known of Jeremiah's youth apart from his divine call to be a prophet, which came during his teenage years and meant that his vocation would not be priestly but prophetic. (In suggesting a date of birth, I agree with Lundbom 1999:107 in taking *na'ar* to indicate a "boy" of thirteen to fourteen years; cf. the boy Samuel.)

Jeremiah's ministry was characterized throughout by opposition, no doubt because he confronted his nation with its evil and, at God's directive, threatened the nation with God's judgment in the form of a military invasion. His fellow-citizens, if not also his family, planned to kill him (11:18-23). The priestly group, on at least one occasion, took exception to his message and imprisoned him (20:1-6). Jeremiah was also in constant conflict with false prophets, about whom he warned the people of Judah (23:9-40). His verbal duel with Hananiah, a prophet from Gibeon, is recounted in detail (28:1-17). Jeremiah singled out two false prophets, Ahab and

Zedekiah, who lived among the exiled Jews in Babylon (29:20-23). His heated exchanges with royalty, sometimes through writings, are also notable. He delivered oracles against the last four kings of Judah (22:10-23:6) and was definitely at odds with King Jehoiakim, who trivialized Jeremiah's written message by cutting up the columns as the scroll was read (36:21-26). He also met in person with King Zedekiah, for whom he had scarcely a consoling word (38:14-28). Opposition to his ministry landed him in custody (37:11-16), then in a terrible dungeon (38:1-6), and eventually in court confinement (38:13, 28). Most of his relationships were adversarial, and there were times, as shown by his laments, when he felt that even God was against him (20:7-13).

Many personal details about Jeremiah remain unknown, but he disclosed more of his emotional life than any other prophet. He was deeply pained by the recalcitrance of his listeners. He told of his inward agony over their refusal to change their ways, and he wished at one point that his head were a wellspring of tears so that he might weep nonstop for his people (8:18-23). His "confessions" or "laments" reveal a prophet of great sensitivity who experienced much disappointment in his life (11:18-23; 12:1-6; 15:10-14, 15-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-13, 14-18). He boldly complained to God about the evil around him (12:1-4) and in even bolder language, charged God with being deceptive and not delivering on his promises (15:15-21). With remarkable audacity, he accused God of misusing him (see comments on 20:7-13). Details about Jeremiah's physical appearance are lacking, but given the emotional disclosures, artists have been eager to capture something of the pathos that marks this prophet in their representations. He may be remembered popularly as a weeping prophet, but given his lifelong, uphill struggle against unrelenting opposition from virtually every quarter, he can more accurately be characterized as a courageous prophet.

He had only a few friends to support him that we know of. Some officials—members of Shaphan's family (26:24) and Ebed-melech (38:7-13)—were sympathetic to him. From the account of his real estate purchase from his uncle (32:1-25), it is clear that there was an extended family, not all of whom had written him off. Following a divine order, he remained unmarried (16:1-2). When Jeremiah was silenced in public ministry, his message was still disseminated, thanks to Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe and associate (36:1-8).

## DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING

The diverse style and organizational problems of the book of Jeremiah have led to many theories about its composition and date (e.g., Parke-Taylor 2000; cf. Sommer 1999). An extreme position, best described as historically minimalist, is represented by Robert Carroll (1981:8-14), who is cautious to the point of ascribing hardly any material to a man named Jeremiah. His view is that there were people of various orientations and vocations who drew inspiration from a prophet by that name, about whom we know nothing. These groups compiled materials over several centuries that were eventually edited long after the exile. A somewhat less

extreme view would suggest that core materials originated with Jeremiah and were then developed at a later time, mostly by adapting the prose sections to make them relevant to a new social context (Nicholson 1970:136-138). In this view, much is made of the Deuteronomic influence. Others, however, Weippert (1973:78, 323-333) among them, argue that the language of Jeremiah is sixth-century prose. She and John Bright attribute the bulk of the Jeremiah text to the prophet himself (Bright 1951:26). Traditionally, the contents of the book have been dated to the forty-year ministry of the prophet, 627–586 BC (Jer 1:1-3), but that ministry may have continued as late as 570 BC (cf. 44:30).

That the book was edited during and after Jeremiah's lifetime, possibly by Baruch, is virtually certain, given the initial dating (1:2-3). The opening verses specify the time period as occurring during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah, but some material in the book falls outside these dates, such as the trek of the emigrants to Egypt after 586 BC (chs 43–44). The collection and arrangement of materials by editors is also likely, given the changes of speakers. In chapters 2–25, Jeremiah speaks in the first person, "The word of the LORD came to me saying . . ." (1:4). In other parts, as in the last half of the book, Jeremiah is referred to in the third person: "The LORD gave a message to Jeremiah" (40:1; cf. 7:1). Assuming that much of the book is from Jeremiah, a date for it might be about 570 BC, but with the strong possibility of later editing, a date for the book as we have it is certainly later, but can hardly be specified.

Although the stages of that composition cannot be known, there is no shortage of speculation. One may theorize, for example, on the dating of the Book of Comfort (chs 30–31). Was it written before or after the catastrophic fall of Jerusalem? Can the second scroll that Jeremiah wrote following Jehoiakim's burning of the first one (36:27-32) be identified within the current book? Do the early chapters (e.g., 2–25) comprise the scroll that Jehoiakim burned? Can any of the material be dated to Josiah's time? Were the oracles against the nations, now appearing in a block (chs 46–51), at one time isolated oracles? It is claimed that by identifying text blocks and historical frameworks, the interpreter can better understand the text. Generally, however, interest in identifying sources for various parts is waning, as scholars have increasingly gravitated away from preoccupation with the person of Jeremiah and the process of composition to the literary shape of the book as it now appears in the canon.

The occasion for Jeremiah's messages, and hence for the book, had much to do with Judah's spiritual condition and political situation at the end of the seventh century BC. In brief, Judah had seriously drifted away from Yahweh, who now warned and threatened his people. Politically, the Babylonians from the east were extending their territorial domain and would become Yahweh's agents in punishing Judah for its sin (as Jeremiah proclaimed).

The Mediterranean world was politically stable in the middle of the seventh century BC. Assyria's empire was then at its zenith, extending westward to Syria and southward to Egypt, its vassal state. A century earlier, Samaria in Northern Israel

had been swallowed up in the Assyrian advance. Judah was spared, but like many other nations was forced to pay tribute to Assyria. Assyria's major political and cultural achievements came in Ashurbanipal's reign (668–626 BC), during which time Jeremiah was born in distant Israel. Soon thereafter, the 200-year-old empire was beset with difficulties, and the downward spiral was swift. Egypt broke away. Nabopolassar of Babylon, to the south, challenged the mighty empire by attacking and capturing Nineveh (612 BC).

This change of events altered political alignments and soon created a crisis in Judah as the Babylonians moved swiftly westward. Josiah was killed in a battle at Megiddo (609 BC) while trying to prevent the Egyptians from moving through Israel to halt the Babylonians. In a major battle at Carchemish a few years later, the Egyptians were defeated and Babylon became the new political power in the Mediterranean region. Judah's king Jehoiakim faced the encroachment of this emerging power when, under Nebuchadnezzar, Judah's coastal city Ashkelon was taken (604 BC). In 597, the Babylonians took Jehoiachin, the successor to Jehoiakim, captive and appointed a puppet ruler, Zedekiah, in his place. His political stance vacillated during his ten-year rule as loud voices urged alliance with Egypt in order to shake off Babylonian control. Such a move, which may have seemed justified in 594/593 when the Babylonians had internal problems, proved highly problematic. Nebuchadnezzar dealt with this disloyal vassal in no uncertain terms. Babylon besieged Judah's capital, Jerusalem, and sacked it in 586 BC.

The period preceding this calamity was critical for the small country of Judah. These were strange and wonderful times the world over. Karl Jaspers, a philosopher, has proposed that the sixth and fifth centuries were an axial period in world history. There were great religious and ideological stirrings: In Asia, Confucius and Gautama Buddha were founding religious movements. In Greece, Plato and Aristotle were laying the groundwork for Western civilization. A paradigm shift was underway during this hinge point in history. The Old Testament Scriptures mark that shift in the prophetic figures of Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Ezekiel. God was speaking a word in these changing times. Judah's disregard of God's message put her well-being at risk and soon landed her in exile.

Jeremiah's assignment was to arrest the downward spiritual spiral of the people. He characterized Judah as "ever turning," but mostly in the direction away from God (3:6-10). Judah did not profit from the example of nearby Israel, which had been subjugated by the Assyrians a century earlier due to her spiritual waywardness. Jeremiah's "temple sermon" addressed Judah's twofold evil: misplaced confidence and social injustice (7:1-15). To these charges could be added idolatry (7:30-8:3), living a lie (9:3-6), and spiritual adultery (2:23-25; 3:1-5). Jeremiah warned that chaos and death were imminent if the people did not change. He urged Judah (and former Israel) to repent of their sins and turn to Yahweh their God. He assured them that salvation was God's intent (31:3-9) and urged, in what must have seemed a traitorous gesture, that Judah submit to the King of Babylon. Both religiously and politically, Jeremiah was very much within the fray.

## AUDIENCE

For whom was the book intended? That question can be answered in two ways. The prophet's oracles are primarily addressed to the people of Jerusalem and Judah (e.g., 4:3-4). The famous temple sermon, for example, is given at the temple in the capital city (7:1-15). However, parts of the book are addressed to Israel, a political designation that distinguishes the northern ten tribes from the two southern tribes known as Judah (see 3:12-18; the name "Israel" can also have a theological meaning as the "people of God," in which case both the northern and southern kingdoms are included). Sometimes both Israel and Judah are recognized in the word of address (31:31-34). It is possible, as some have argued, that a word addressed to the north (for example, in the Book of Comfort) was later adapted, especially after the exile, to include a message to the south. Such a process, while not unlikely, cannot now be unraveled into its successive stages or times.

The question of audience takes a different cast when it is construed as asking for whose benefit the book containing Jeremiah's messages was compiled. If Jeremiah (essentially the words of the prophet) was brought into its present form after the exile, as is most likely, then the oracles of warning about an enemy from the north were no longer existentially relevant. Yet the messages would still have been relevant for the people in exile or thereafter inasmuch as they confirmed the reality of divine prediction and supported the prophet's credibility. At the same time, a chronicle of Jeremiah's message would show that not all prophets could be believed. Hananiah (ch 28), as could now be shown historically, was a false prophet. Moreover, disputes about the reasons for captivity would be resolved, for Jeremiah laid them out in his book with utmost clarity. The nation of Judah was expelled from its land because its inhabitants had sinned. The reason for the captivity was theological, not political. The main audience of the book was not Jeremiah's contemporaries, but people of subsequent generations. As the word of God, Jeremiah's messages remain instructive about God and his ways with humanity (2 Tim 3:16-17). This is why John Calvin, the eminent reformer, could preach 300 sermons from the book of Jeremiah (Calvin 1990:iii).

## CANONICITY AND TEXTUAL HISTORY

The Hebrew Scriptures arrange the Prophets in two groups: Former and Latter. In this ordering, Jeremiah is second of the four Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve). In some listings Jeremiah appears first, which may explain a quotation attributed to him (as giving his name to the prophetic corpus) that is actually from Zechariah (Matt 27:9). In the Greek arrangement of books (also followed in English Bibles), the book of Lamentations follows Jeremiah, on the hardly supportable basis that Jeremiah was the author of Lamentations. To be sure, the tragedy of Jerusalem's destruction, detailed in Jeremiah, receives further reflection in Lamentations, but the book is likely by another author.

The New Testament writers quote Jeremiah directly and allude to his book as many as forty times, according to one count. Matthew reports Herod's slaughter of

he is a God of unfailing love (9:24) is repeatedly and effectively demonstrated both for his people and for other nations.

The Lord's disclosure of his passions and his desire for people to experience him in these dimensions (9:24) captures the heart of this book. These divine priorities speak to every age, including ours, about the ways of God in the world.

## OUTLINE

- I. Preface (1:1-3)
- II. God's Personal Message to Jeremiah (1:4-19)
  - A. Jeremiah's Call to Ministry (1:4-10)
  - B. Divine Encouragement for Ministry (1:11-19)
- III. Sermons Warning of Disaster (2:1-10:25)
  - A. A Troubled Marriage (2:1-3:5)
    1. Honeymoon delights (2:1-3)
    2. Law court proceedings (2:4-13)
    3. Probing questions (2:14-37)
    4. Talk of divorce (3:1-5)
  - B. Calling Home the Wayward Children (3:6-4:4)
    1. Two guilty sisters (3:6-10)
    2. The first call to fickle Israel: come home (3:11-18)
    3. Children who disappoint God (3:19-21)
    4. Second call to wayward children: come home (3:22-4:4)
  - C. Calamity from the North (4:5-6:30)
    1. Sound the alarm (4:5-21)
    2. A land in ruins (4:22-31)
    3. Taking a public poll (5:1-19)
    4. Treachery and trouble (5:20-6:9)
    5. Alert! Invasion imminent (6:10-30)
  - D. Sermons about Worship (7:1-8:3)
    1. The Temple sermon (7:1-15)
    2. Censuring worship abuses (7:16-8:3)
  - E. A People's Sins, an Enemy's Siege, and a Prophet's Sorrow (8:4-10:25)
    1. Hurling down the path of sin (8:4-9:2)
    2. No one tells the truth (9:3-26)
    3. A study in contrasts: idols and Yahweh (10:1-25)
- IV. Stories about Wrestling with Both People and God (11:1-20:18)
  - A. Preaching to People and Protesting before God (11:1-12:17)
    1. Covenant talk (11:1-17)
    2. An endangered prophet (11:18-23)
    3. Audience with the Almighty (12:1-17)

- B. A Ruined Loincloth, Smashed Wine Jars, and Awful Pride (13:1-27)
  - 1. A sermon in street theater style (13:1-11)
  - 2. A proverb: smashed wine jars (13:12-14)
  - 3. Pride and punishment (13:15-27)
- C. Crises, Regional and Personal (14:1-15:21)
  - 1. A regional drought crisis (14:1-15:9)
  - 2. Personal ministry crisis (15:10-21)
- D. Something Is Desperately Wrong! (16:1-21)
- E. Sin Runs Rampant (17:1-27)
  - 1. Metaphor-Making (17:1-11)
  - 2. A spiritual oasis (17:12-18)
  - 3. Measuring obedience (17:19-27)
- F. Pottery-Making and Pottery-Smashing (18:1-20:6)
  - 1. Shaping pottery and shaping disaster (18:1-23)
  - 2. Smashing pottery and smashing structures (19:1-20:6)
- G. Jeremiah's Complaint before God (20:7-18)
- V. Disputations with Kings and Prophets (21:1-29:32)
  - A. Critiquing Kings (21:1-23:8)
    - 1. King Zedekiah, the lightweight (21:1-10)
    - 2. Basics for good government (21:11-22:9)
    - 3. A parade of royal failures (22:10-30)
    - 4. Presenting a future king (23:1-8)
  - B. Sparring with Prophets (23:9-40)
  - C. Two Baskets of Figs and a Cup of Wine (24:1-25:38)
    - 1. Figs: some good, some rotten (24:1-10)
    - 2. A conclusive oracle of judgment (25:1-14)
    - 3. The wine cup of wrath served to the nations (25:15-38)
  - D. Deciding about Prophetic Voices (26:1-29:32)
    - 1. A controversial sermon (26:1-24)
    - 2. Persuading public officials and people (27:1-22)
    - 3. Conflicting prophetic voices (28:1-17)
    - 4. Counseling exiles (29:1-32)
- VI. The Book of Consolation (30:1-33:26)
  - A. Recovering What Was Lost and More! (30:1-31:1)
  - B. Promises of Unrestrained Goodness (31:2-22)
  - C. Promises of Newness (31:23-40)
  - D. A Real Estate Transaction with a Message (32:1-15)
  - E. Nothing is Too Hard for God (32:16-44)
  - F. Fortunes Reversed—Guaranteed! (33:1-26)
- VII. Rushing Headlong to Destruction (34-39)
  - A. The Making and Breaking of a Pact (34:1-22)
  - B. Testing for Obedience (35:1-19)

- C. Despising the Written Word of God (36:1-32)
- D. A King Inquires of a Prophet (37:1-21)
- E. A Divine Ultimatum (38:1-28)
- F. Jerusalem Falls (39:1-18)
- VII. After Catastrophe (40:1-45:5)
  - A. Toward Normalcy (40:1-12)
  - B. Terrorism at Mizpah (40:13-41:18)
  - C. Decision about Leaving for Egypt (42:1-43:7)
  - D. Courting Disaster Again! (43:8-44:30)
  - E. A Message for Baruch (45:1-5)
- IX. Oracles About the Nations (46:1-51:64)
  - A. Egypt: Terrorized at Every Turn (46:1-28)
  - B. Philistia: Ripe for Destruction (47:1-7)
  - C. Moab: Doomed and Weeping (48:1-47)
  - D. Ammon and Edom: Sounds of Battle Cries (49:1-22)
  - E. Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, and Elam: Trouble from All Directions (49:23-39)
  - F. Babylon Will Fall (50:1-46)
  - G. Babylon's Fall Guaranteed (51:1-64)
- X. Historical Documentation (52:1-34)



# COMMENTARY ON *Jeremiah*

## ◆ I. Preface (1:1–3)

These are the words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiyah, one of the priests from the town of Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. <sup>2</sup>The LORD first gave messages to Jeremiah during the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah.\* <sup>3</sup>The

LORD's messages continued throughout the reign of King Jehoiakim, Josiah's son, until the eleventh year of the reign of King Zedekiah, another of Josiah's sons. In August\* of that eleventh year the people of Jerusalem were taken away as captives.

1:2 The thirteenth year of Josiah's reign was 627 BC. 1:3 Hebrew *In the fifth month*, of the ancient Hebrew lunar calendar. A number of events in Jeremiah can be cross-checked with dates in surviving Babylonian records and related accurately to our modern calendar. The fifth month in the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign occurred within the months of August and September 586 BC. Also see 52:12 and the note there.

## NOTES

1:1 *Jeremiah*. The name could mean "May the LORD [Yahweh] throw," if the root is *ramah* [TH7411, ZH8227], or more likely, "May the Lord lift up," or even, "The Lord has lifted up," from the root *rum* [TH7311, ZH8123]. Like some other prophets (e.g., Ezek 1:3), Jeremiah was of a priestly line.

*Hilkiyah*. It is debatable whether the Hilkiyah of 2 Kgs 22:4 is Jeremiah's father.

*Anathoth*. Anathoth, modern Anata, lay three miles northeast of Jerusalem in the region of Benjamin. Here Abiathar, one of two priests in David's time, was exiled by Solomon (1 Kgs 2:26–27).

1:2 LORD . . . *gave messages*. Known technically as the "prophetic revelation formula," this clause in Heb. depicts the *dabar* [TH1697, ZH1821] (message) as a distinct entity, almost as a thing whose coming is an event, a happening (cf. 2:1; 14:1; 21:1; 27:1).

*thirteenth year*. Some see this date, 627 BC, as the date of Jeremiah's birth (1:5) since no oracles are clearly dated between 627 and 609 BC (e.g., Holladay 1989:25–26). Most, however, regard the date as marking the beginning of the prophet's ministry.

*Josiah*. This good king, noted for initiating a spiritual renewal, reigned over Judah for 31 years (640–609 BC; 2 Kgs 21:24).

1:3 *Jehoiakim*. During Jehoahaz's three-month rule, Jeremiah was apparently silent; thus, he is not listed and we read immediately of Jehoiakim, whom Pharaoh Neco put on the throne in place of Jehoahaz, whom he imprisoned. He ruled for eleven years (609–598 BC; 2 Kgs 23:36) and was severely censured by the prophet (Jer 22:13–19; cf. oracles dated to his reign, e.g., 26:1; 36:1).

*the eleventh year of the reign of King Zedekiah*. Zedekiah, Judah's last king, ruled from 597–586 BC. The book of Jeremiah includes oracles subsequent to King Zedekiah's death (586 BC); these are explained as additions by later editors (e.g., chs 40–44).

## COMMENTARY

The opening paragraph, the preface to this book, presents a conundrum. On one level, the book's content is attributed to a man named Jeremiah. Like other books, this one is stamped by a personality and shaped by an individual mind. But the second sentence qualifies the first. This book has not one author, but two. God stands behind and beyond the human author, Jeremiah. The prophetic formulas ("The word of the LORD came," e.g., 2:1; 18:5) and messenger formulas ("This is what the LORD says," e.g., 31:15) are constant reminders that the content originates with God. Thus the message partakes of both a divine and a human element, not unlike the dual nature of the incarnate Christ. God superintended the presentation of the message so that the human language formulations corresponded to the divine intent (2 Tim 3:16).

The preface teaches that divine revelation to humans is anchored in history. God's communication comes to us within the flow of human experience with its concomitant politics, significant dates, and key events. The names of the kings Jehoiakim and Zedekiah foreshadow the prophet's role in engaging, admonishing, and challenging them. God's word is grounded in the affairs of human beings living out their days. It was mostly prior to the catastrophe of Jerusalem's capture that Jeremiah spoke God's words to Israel, giving warning and counsel both to civil and religious leaders and to the general public.

## ◆ II. God's Personal Message to Jeremiah (1:4-19)

## A. Jeremiah's Call to Ministry (1:4-10)

<sup>4</sup>The LORD gave me this message:

<sup>5</sup>"I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations."

<sup>6</sup>"O Sovereign LORD," I said, "I can't speak for you! I'm too young!"

<sup>7</sup>The LORD replied, "Don't say, 'I'm too young,' for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you. <sup>8</sup>And don't be afraid of the people, for I will be

with you and will protect you. I, the LORD, have spoken!" <sup>9</sup>Then the LORD reached out and touched my mouth and said,

"Look, I have put my words in your mouth!

<sup>10</sup>Today I appoint you to stand up against nations and kingdoms. Some you must uproot and tear down, destroy and overthrow. Others you must build up and plant."

## NOTES

**1:5 I knew you.** The Heb. *yada'* [<sup>TH</sup>3045, <sup>ZH</sup>3359] indicates intimate familiarity with another person (see Gen 4:1, 17, KJV), as well as possessing information.

**formed.** God formed (*yatsar* [<sup>TH</sup>3335, <sup>ZH</sup>3670]) the earth (Isa 45:18, NRSV), as well as the first human (Gen 2:8, KJV). The related noun *yotser* [<sup>TH</sup>3335A, <sup>ZH</sup>3450] means "potter" (18:2; cf. Isa 29:16).

*set you apart.* The root *qadash* [TH6942, ZH7727] in the causative (hiphil) form has the sense of making holy—i.e. cleansing, sanctifying, and consecrating (e.g., priests, Exod 20:23-26; temple, 2 Chr 29:5). The term *nabi'* [TH5030, ZH5566] (prophet) is used of Abraham (Gen 20:7), Moses (Deut 34:10), Samuel (1 Sam 3:20), and of the writing prophets such as Isaiah (37:2), Habakkuk (1:1), Zechariah (1:1), and others. Speaking for God was a major function of the *nabi'* (Exod 7:1), but prophets were also intercessors (1 Sam 12:23; Jer 14:11) and analysts of their society (Amos 5:7-8).

**1:6 *I'm too young.*** The term *na'ar* [TH5288, ZH5853] can refer to an infant (Exod 2:6), a child just weaned (1 Sam 1:24), or a youth (Gen 37:2); in this context, its nuance may indicate Jeremiah's lack of experience. Almost certainly, given what is known of the length of Jeremiah's ministry, the term here designates a teenager, perhaps 15–18 years old.

**1:8 *don't be afraid.*** The prohibition against fearing the people anticipates later opposition (e.g., his own family and townspeople; Jer 11:21). Fear, rather than youthfulness, may have been the real cause of his hesitation.

***I will be with you.*** This "divine assistance formula" first occurs as a word to Jacob (Gen 28:15) and then to others (e.g., Gideon, Judg 6:12). It is frequent in Jeremiah (15:20; 30:11; 42:11; 46:28; cf. Matt 28:20).

**1:9 *the LORD . . . touched my mouth.*** In the symbolic installation service (cf. Isa 6:7), God further addresses Jeremiah's objection about his inability to speak (cf. Deut 18:18).

**1:10 *uproot and tear down.*** Jeremiah is to be something of a verbal wrecking ball; he will demolish wrong-headed notions and misapplied traditions (cf. 7:1-15). While the book contains reassuring oracles (e.g., chs 30–33), it is more often a critique of the people and their ways than a book about future hope.

***build up and plant.*** This word combination occurs frequently in Jeremiah (18:7-9; 24:6; 31:28; 42:10; 45:4; cf. Ezek 36:36).

#### COMMENTARY

God's messages frequently address religious or political groups, but that does not mean that God is inattentive to individuals, even before they are born (Jer 1:5; cf. Ps 139:6, 13-16). God is concerned with cosmic galaxies (Ps 113:5, 6, 9) and with the smallest details of human life. God's attentiveness to the unborn is a strong consideration in the debate about abortion, for it means that a fetus is alive and that God knows it as a living person.

God claims a person's life in the full knowledge of who that person is. Many persons called to fulfill a divinely appointed task (and what Christian is not?) recognize, as Paul did, that God's involvement in their lives began very early (Gal 1:15). John Goldingay, a British Old Testament theologian and scholar, chronicled his life in the introduction to one of his books (e.g., "Age 12: decide to learn Greek instead of German"). His first entry reads: "Age 0: chosen, called to be a theologian, born, baptized" (1998:14). Similarly, Wilbur Smith, a twentieth-century preacher, recounts, "One morning when I was standing in my bedroom on the third floor of our home, the Lord suddenly hit me. I wasn't praying. I wasn't weeping for my sins; I was rather perplexed as to what I should do, and the Lord just suddenly said to me, 'You are to go into the Christian ministry.' I can't explain it; it was just overwhelming, and it was from the Lord."

In a culture in which age was revered and youth frequently disparaged as

unimportant, God moved counter-culturally by selecting a youth for his service. The Scriptures identify a number of God's servants as young at the time of their calling: Joseph (Gen 37-41), Samuel (1 Sam 2:18-3:21), Daniel (Dan 1:4-7), Mary (Luke 1:27), and Timothy (1 Tim 4:12). The times when God chooses inexperienced and insignificant persons over those who are experienced and favored are so numerous as to call for careful reflection, especially by leaders and institutions.

When God called Jeremiah, he hesitated. One would think that the initial human response to God's commissioning would be exuberance, but more often there is hesitation or even refusal (cf. Moses, Exod 3:1-12; Isaiah, Isa 6:1-13; Ezekiel, Ezek 1:28-3:11). The objections are frequently superficial. That Jeremiah's objection misses the heart of the matter is suggested by God's remonstrance, "Don't be afraid." With that remark, God identifies the unspoken excuse as fear. God does not ignore the objections raised; he answers them (cf. 1 Sam 16:1-3; Acts 9:10-16).

Jeremiah's ministry was not grounded in human abilities, but in God's sovereign knowledge and purposes (1:5). God takes the initiative in calling someone to ministry; he also takes ownership of the follow-through (1:7). He will not leave his servant stranded, but promises direction and protection, as well as the content of the message and the know-how to present it. God does not call people without also equipping them.

Jeremiah's call includes a ministry to the nations (1:10). It may have been the projected scope of his ministry that was the reason for his reluctance. Most prophets were appointed to address Israel; a few such as Obadiah and Nahum had other nations as their primary subject matter. Jeremiah was an international prophet as the later oracles indicate (46-51). Overall, his job consisted of demolition activities, not unlike that of a wrecker ball. He hammered away at false theologies, for example (7:3). Yet after his many critiques and dire warnings with the threat of exile, there would be a time to be constructive. Israel would return to her land (24:6). His message would yet be one of hope and comfort (cf. 30-33).

## ◆ B. Divine Encouragement for Ministry (1:11-19)

<sup>11</sup>Then the LORD said to me, "Look, Jeremiah! What do you see?"

And I replied, "I see a branch from an almond tree."

<sup>12</sup>And the LORD said, "That's right, and it means that I am watching,\* and I will certainly carry out all my plans."

<sup>13</sup>Then the LORD spoke to me again and asked, "What do you see now?"

And I replied, "I see a pot of boiling water, spilling from the north."

<sup>14</sup>"Yes," the LORD said, "for terror from the north will boil out on the people of

this land. <sup>15</sup>Listen! I am calling the armies of the kingdoms of the north to come to Jerusalem. I, the LORD, have spoken!

"They will set their thrones  
at the gates of the city.  
They will attack its walls  
and all the other towns of Judah.

<sup>16</sup>I will pronounce judgment  
on my people for all their evil—  
for deserting me and burning incense  
to other gods.

Yes, they worship idols made with  
their own hands!

17 "Get up and prepare for action.  
 Go out and tell them everything  
 I tell you to say.  
 Do not be afraid of them,  
 or I will make you look foolish in  
 front of them.  
 18 For see, today I have made you strong  
 like a fortified city that cannot be  
 captured,

like an iron pillar or a bronze wall.  
 You will stand against the whole  
 land—  
 the kings, officials, priests, and  
 people of Judah.  
 19 They will fight you, but they will fail.  
 For I am with you, and I will take  
 care of you.  
 I, the LORD, have spoken!"

1:12 The Hebrew word for "watching" (*shaqed*) sounds like the word for "almond tree" (*shaqed*).

#### NOTES

1:11-12 *What do you see?* God's approach is sometimes interactive (cf. 24:3; Amos 7:7-8; 8:1-2).

*I see a branch.* A word play is evident in the Heb.: *shaqed* [TH8247, ZH9196] (almond branch) and *shaqed* [TH8245, ZH9193] (watching). The almond tree is appropriately called *shaqed* since it is the first of the nut and fruit trees to blossom (figuratively "peek, watch") in the spring. The *shaqed* blossom (watcher) confirmed visually that God would be on the lookout to ensure that his announcement (*dabar* [TH1697, ZH1821], "word"), linked either to Jeremiah's call (1:4-10) or to the nation's future, would be fulfilled (see 1:13).

1:13 *again.* Usually *again* (lit., "a second time") is understood as indicative of a new vision that directly follows the vision of the almond branch. Lundbom (1999:227-230, 238) proposes that the call vision of 1:4-10 concludes with the story of the almond branch in 1:12, thus making the second vision of the boiling pot a sequel to the first vision. Support for this view is found in Heb. paragraphing and thematic fit. The first vision is primarily about Jeremiah's vocation; the second concerns the substance of Jeremiah's message, so that the "word" over which God watches (and which he guarantees) concerns the coming enemy (1:14-15).

*pot of boiling water, spilling from the north.* The boiling pot, presumably over an outdoor stone firepit, may have been in close proximity to the almond tree, also in the courtyard.

1:14 *terror from the north.* Invasions of Israel came either from the south (e.g., from Egypt), or from the north (e.g., Assyria, Babylon). The desert to the east spelled doom for travelers, so merchants and armies from the east followed the river routes and entered the land of Israel from the north. The unidentified enemy from the north was earlier thought to be the Scythian people. The current consensus is that this indefinite designation, here and certainly later in the book, refers to the Babylonians (25:9; cf. 6:1, 22; 10:22). Alternatively, the "terror from the north" may be Yahweh or something related to his dwelling place (cf. E. H. Roshwalb 1998; D. J. Reimer 1989).

1:15 *They will set their thrones at the gates of the city.* This announcement anticipates the later Babylonian occupation of the city (39:3).

1:16 *for all their evil.* The evil of deserting God is singled out early in the book (2:13). There will be more than one diatribe against idolatry (7:17-20; 7:30-8:3), sometimes delivered with scathing sarcasm (10:1-16).

1:17 *prepare for action.* This lit. means "fasten your belt," in the sense of girding oneself for war. This is appropriate to the following job description with its adversarial tone (1:18).

*Go out and tell them.* Several phrases from the "calling" section (1:4-10) are echoed in this segment (1:11-19). The directive "say whatever I tell you" of 1:7 is repeated in 1:17, and "Do not be afraid of them" in 1:17 echoes a similar earlier command (1:8). The

assistance formula, “I will be with you,” is found in both sections (1:8, 19), as is the signature statement *ne’um Yahweh* [TH5002/3068, ZH5536/3378], cf. “says/LORD” and “I, the LORD, have spoken” (1:8, 19).

**1:18 fortified city . . . iron pillar . . . bronze wall.** These are images of defense and solidity (cf. 15:20). Jeremiah’s ministry will be characterized by contests and struggles with people in authority.

#### COMMENTARY

As a follow-up to his call, God gave Jeremiah visions (1:11-16) and a directive (1:17-19; see notes on 1:13). Both were divine encouragements. Within the frame of the book, both the vision and the directive are programmatic—they are about large threats and large promises.

**Two Visions (1:11-16).** If the entire chapter is regarded as a unified account of a one-day event, one can imagine Jeremiah’s contemplating the divine call as he strolled in the courtyard or in the orchard. There God engaged the prophet in dialogue about a blossoming almond branch. Questions have a way of pinning down rambling thoughts, and a memorable place, or even an object such as a branch, can be a significant hook on which to hang promises. Conceivably, each year in the spring when the prophet saw a blossoming almond branch, he would remember that God was taking care of matters and that he would fulfill his word, both the promises and the threats. Whatever his misgivings, Jeremiah would be reassured about God’s credibility.

In a second divine-human interaction concerning a boiling pot, God gave Jeremiah a clue about the content of his message by filling in some details of his job description. In much the same way, other prophets were helped to understand what lay ahead at the time of their call (Isa 6:9-13; cf. Ezek 2:1-10). The message might be grim, but the prophet was encouraged by the reliability of a God who would be watching over his word.

God’s punitive action, as Jeremiah would insist throughout his career, was not capricious or triggered by temperamental whims. If there was judgment in the overall forecast, it was because the people’s evil called for it. Jeremiah will harp on the theme of the people’s deserting the Lord (2:13, 19; 5:7, 19; 16:11; 17:13). The remedy for the impending catastrophe is a return to God, so it is not surprising if Jeremiah’s message is punctuated with shrill calls for the people’s repentance.

**A Divine Directive (1:17-19).** God’s directive to Jeremiah was to put aside his fear and get going. “Don’t lose your nerve because of them, lest I shatter your nerve right before them.” Jeremiah would stand firm, because God took responsibility for outfitting the prophet for his job. God would work in advance of the problems the prophet would encounter, not by forestalling the problems (though that was an option) but by empowering his servant.

# *Lamentations*

ELMER A. MARTENS



## INTRODUCTION TO *Lamentations*

WHEN TIMES ARE HARD, whether for society, God's people, or an individual, the laments in the book of Lamentations can provide a template for processing disappointment and grief. This book gives us access into the heart of a poet who took his sorrows to God, who wrestled with this God, and who found reasons for at least some comfort.

### AUTHOR

The book of Lamentations is commonly believed to have been written by the prophet Jeremiah. The reasons for this are that (1) the introduction and title given to the book in several versions, including the Septuagint, is "The Dirges of Jeremiah"; (2) there is a long Christian tradition regarding Jeremiah as the author; and (3) there are similarities of literary expression between the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations (e.g., Jer 9:1 [8:23] and Lam 3:48 and the use of *sheber* [TH7667, ZH8691], "brokenness" and "destruction"). But an argument against Jeremiah's authorship can also be made based on style (no acrostics in Jeremiah) and content (appeal for retribution on the Babylonians, 3:64-66; cf. Huey 1993:442-443).

The book itself does not offer any direct clues about the author, and while it could have been the prophet Jeremiah, it could have just as easily been someone else. The poet of Lamentations, a skillful literary artist, was almost certainly an eyewitness to the catastrophe (1:13-15; 2:6, 9). The intense pathos in the lyrics suggests an author personally affected by the disaster. The poet was a member of the Hebrew faith community who shared the notion of divine retribution for evil with his original audience.

Some hold that not one but several poets may have been involved. For example, Westermann, when reviewing the authorial options, concludes that "the assumption of multiple authorship remains the more probable" (1994:58). But multiple authorship has been questioned on the basis of the consistent literary style found throughout the book (Marcus 1986).

### DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING

The poems of the book focus on the agony resulting from the tragedy of Jerusalem's capture and destruction by the Babylonians. Since the descriptions are so graphic, one may assume that the poet had firsthand experience of Jerusalem's destruction, or that he knew and conversed with those who had seen it. This would mean the book was

written soon after 586 BC. Recent studies, however, have focused on the use of other city-laments in the ancient Near East and propose that the lament be associated with the razing of the foundations of the old structure and the preparation to rebuild the Temple. In this view the date for the book would be 520 BC. (For a brief summary of this position and reasons why the view may not be tenable, see Dobbs-Allsopp 2002:6-12.)

The occasion for writing was the calamity that befell Jerusalem. Some had thought that this city, where the Temple stood as the symbol of God's presence, was inviolable (Jer 7:4). It had miraculously withstood past sieges (e.g., by the Assyrians, 701 BC; 2 Kgs 18:13-19:37). But now the unthinkable had happened. Jeremiah's warnings about a northern foe coming against the holy city had materialized (Jer 1:14-15). The military forces of Babylon had marched westward, defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish (605 BC), and continued southward along the Mediterranean. Hostages had been taken in 604 BC and a puppet king, Zedekiah (598-587 BC) had been put in place. That king and his counselors chose the route of insubordination. When they tried to assert Judah's independence with help from Egypt, the Babylonians laid siege against the city and took it (for more historical detail see the introduction to Jeremiah).

The city had been burned and its citizenry exiled to Babylon. An era of over 350 years' rule by Davidic kings had ended. Gone were the splendor of city, Temple, and sovereign. National independence ceased. Were God's promises also gone? Disappointment and grief had settled in. The poet voices that grief, disappointment, and confusion as he reflects on the siege, describes the hardships, cries for help, and ponders the physical and emotional pain.

## AUDIENCE

The book, or at least large parts of it, are in the genre of mourning rites well known in the ancient Near East (Pham 1999). The poems are addressed to God as a series of laments. He is presented with the details of the complaint, including the people's perplexity about his anger (2:20-22).

At another level, the book is for the benefit of the exiles and those who remained in the land after the Babylonian takeover. The book keeps the memory of that fateful event alive for coming generations. The poems provide a grief-stricken people with words for their agony.

Parts of Lamentations are reminiscent of a funeral dirge. A fast was instituted to commemorate the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC (2 Kgs 25:8-9; Zech 7:3-5; 8:19). In later times, a fast instituted in the Babylonian month Ab commemorated the destruction of the city both in 586 BC and AD 70. There is a long tradition of reading the book on such fast days, and "it is not unreasonable to assume that it [Lamentations] was intended for this purpose from the first" (Ellison 1986:697).

## CANONICITY AND TEXTUAL HISTORY

Lamentations was not contested for inclusion into the scriptural canon, as were some other books. In the Hebrew order of the canon, the book is placed in the third

division, the "Writings." In some versions, Lamentations has preceded Daniel and Esther. Usually, however, it is placed with the four other books—Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and Esther—that make up the Megillot, the "Scrolls," which are designated to be read on certain Jewish festivals. For the most part, though not consistently, the book of Lamentations follows in a chronological order after Ecclesiastes and before Esther (ABD 4:138).

In the Septuagint's ordering of the books (followed by English versions), Lamentations comes after Jeremiah, not only because the Septuagint names Jeremiah as the author, but because it is a fitting sequel to Jeremiah's description of the Babylonian capture of the city.

As for textual considerations, "In the book of Lamentations the MT itself seems to be in a good state of preservation" (ABD 4:140). The Greek text, according to some scholars, was brought into line with the Masoretic Text (MT), and thus is not especially helpful where there are textual problems. A sizeable manuscript that has portions of Lamentations 1, along with some fragments from other chapters, was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is known as 4QLam<sup>a</sup>. Greater clarity on textual transmission can be expected as these fragments are deciphered and analyzed.

## LITERARY STYLE

The book consists of five poems that correspond to the present five chapters (though some count seven poems by segmenting Lam 3; House 1998: 485). The central poem, a personal lament, is the longest (Lam 3). On either side of it are two communal laments (Lam 2 and 4). The central portion of the book is bracketed by the first and fifth chapters, each of which describes the tragic situation. Lamentations 1, which incorporates elements of the dirge, is also a communal lament, as is Lamentations 5 (so Westermann 1994:117-119, 211, 219). As has been noted by others, the book as a whole is in the *qinah* or lament pattern, in which three longer poems are followed by two shorter ones.

The *qinah*, or lament rhythm, has a poetic line of three major beats followed by another with two stresses, and so suggests a halting, sobbing movement. Both communal and individual laments are common in the Psalms (e.g., 6; 13; 80), and several occur in Jeremiah (e.g., 11:18-12:6; 15:15-21; 20:7-18). They are often marked with the Hebrew word *'ekah* [TH349A, ZH377] (how), a word of dismay as in, "How the mighty heroes have fallen!" a lament uttered by David over the death of Saul and Jonathan (1:1; 2:1; 4:1; 2 Sam 1:19).

Laments as a literary form were known among Israel's neighbors (Ferris 1992:63-87, 153-175). Some laments attribute the destructions of their cities to the abandonment of their patron gods. From the Mesopotamian region comes "The Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur" (Nana Lament; ANET 611-619). In this lament, the destruction came with an Elamite invasion, made possible because the patron deity of the city had abandoned it. In "The Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur" (Ningal Lament; ANET 455-463), the departure of the deity is the consequence and not the cause of the city's calamities. In these poems, appeals are made to the

deity, also a notable feature in the book of Lamentations. A further point of comparison comes from another document, "The Curse of Agade," in which the god Inanna, after departing from the city, turns against it in battle, apparently to avenge the desecration of a shrine (ANET 646; cf. Block 1988:130-133). So also in Lamentations, God is depicted as the enemy destroying Jerusalem (2:2). The communal lament, the primary genre of the book of Lamentations, generally includes such components as accusations against God, complaints about enemies, acknowledgment of guilt, a plea for God to take heed, and a petition for reprisal against enemies. Two other customary aspects of a communal lament, retrospection and a plea for intervention, are lacking in Lamentations (Westermann 1994:118-119, 227). For a detailed discussion of the form of the communal laments, both in the ancient Near East and in the Bible, see Ferris (1992:17-61, 89-152).

The book is unique in that it consists (except for chapter 5) of acrostic poems built on the twenty-two-letter Hebrew alphabet. The four acrostic poems do not all, however, follow the same pattern. In the first two poems, only the first word of each stanza is keyed to the alphabet and each stanza is composed of three bi-cola (verse lines that may be divided into two parts that are usually parallel in some fashion). The fourth poem is like the first two except that its stanzas have two bi-cola. The third poem (Lam 3) has three bi-cola for each stanza, but each bi-cola in the stanza begins with the featured letter.

Several literary reasons for the acrostic have been advanced: (1) as an artistic device they provide a distinctive framework for an author's thoughts; (2) acrostics require an orderly form, providing some restraint to what appears to be uncontrollable grief; (3) acrostics are pleasing partly because readers anticipate the way that subsequent stanzas will be introduced; (4) acrostics facilitate memorization; and (5) acrostics convey a sense that the subject is too vast to be adequately described or comprehended in ordinary language.

Behind the alphabetic acrostics in Lamentations, one may see an ideological rationale. Jerusalem's fall was tragic beyond description. Exhausting the alphabet makes the point that the nation's trauma was so severe that language could not do justice to the topic.

Another biblical example of this use of acrostic is Psalm 119 (the longest biblical acrostic) which expounds on a topic too big for ordinary words, namely the richness of God's law. So also, because language is finally inadequate, the poet of Proverbs 31 resorts to an acrostic when praising the virtues of the capable woman. All three topics—a terrible tragedy, God's teaching, and an exceptional woman—tax their authors since each subject is really too large for words.

## MAJOR THEMES AND THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Various characters appear in the acrostics: the city (personified as a woman), the citizens of Jerusalem, their enemies, and God. Each poem takes account of all four characters and develops theological themes around them.

The city of Jerusalem is given a voice through the literary device of personifica-

The book might also be read for hints about processing grief. Resist denial. Face and state the ugliness. Wrestle with the way that God is experienced in this difficulty. Seek consolation in the goodness of God. Give voice to your feelings and pray. For other essays on the theology of the book, see Chisholm 1991:359-363, Brown 1997, Martens 1996, Westermann 1994:221-235, and House 1998.

## OUTLINE

- I. After the Disaster (1:1-22)
  - A. A City's Ruin (1:1-11a)
  - B. The People's Pain (1:11b-22)
- II. God as Israel's Enemy (2:1-22)
  - A. God's Angry Siege against the City (2:1-10)
  - B. The Cry of an Anguished People (2:11-22)
- III. Dealing with Grief (3:1-66)
  - A. Personal Afflictions (3:1-20)
  - B. God is Good (3:21-39)
  - C. Tears and Prayers (3:40-66)
- IV. A People's Plight (4:1-22)
  - A. Then and Now (4:1-11)
  - B. Problems on Every Side (4:12-22)
- V. Appeals to the Lord (5:1-22)
  - A. Experiencing Hard Times (5:1-18)
  - B. One Final Appeal (5:19-22)

COMMENTARY ON  
*Lamentations*

◆ I. After the Disaster (1:1–22)

A. A City's Ruin (1:1–11a)\*

Jerusalem, once so full of people,  
is now deserted.

She who was once great among the  
nations  
now sits alone like a widow.  
Once the queen of all the earth,  
she is now a slave.

<sup>2</sup>She sobs through the night;  
tears stream down her cheeks.  
Among all her lovers,  
there is no one left to comfort her.  
All her friends have betrayed her  
and become her enemies.

<sup>3</sup>Judah has been led away into  
captivity,  
oppressed with cruel slavery.  
She lives among foreign nations  
and has no place of rest.  
Her enemies have chased her down,  
and she has nowhere to turn.

<sup>4</sup>The roads to Jerusalem\* are in  
mourning,  
for crowds no longer come to  
celebrate the festivals.  
The city gates are silent,  
her priests groan,  
her young women are crying—  
how bitter is her fate!

<sup>5</sup>Her oppressors have become her  
masters,  
and her enemies prosper,  
for the LORD has punished Jerusalem  
for her many sins.

Her children have been captured  
and taken away to distant lands.

<sup>6</sup>All the majesty of beautiful Jerusalem\*  
has been stripped away.  
Her princes are like starving deer  
searching for pasture.  
They are too weak to run  
from the pursuing enemy.

<sup>7</sup>In the midst of her sadness and  
wandering,  
Jerusalem remembers her ancient  
splendor.  
But now she has fallen to her  
enemy,  
and there is no one to help her.  
Her enemy struck her down  
and laughed as she fell.

<sup>8</sup>Jerusalem has sinned greatly,  
so she has been tossed away like  
a filthy rag.  
All who once honored her now despise  
her,  
for they have seen her stripped  
naked and humiliated.  
All she can do is groan  
and hide her face.

<sup>9</sup>She defiled herself with immorality  
and gave no thought to her  
future.  
Now she lies in the gutter  
with no one to lift her out.  
"LORD, see my misery," she cries.  
"The enemy has triumphed."

<sup>10</sup>The enemy has plundered her  
completely,  
taking every precious thing she  
owns.  
She has seen foreigners violate her  
sacred Temple,

the place the LORD had forbidden  
them to enter.

<sup>11</sup>Her people groan as they search  
for bread.  
They have sold their treasures for  
food to stay alive.

1 Each of the first four chapters of this book is an acrostic, laid out in the order of the Hebrew alphabet. The first word of each verse begins with a successive Hebrew letter. Chapters 1, 2, and 4 have one verse for each of the 22 Hebrew letters. Chapter 3 contains 22 stanzas of three verses each. Though chapter 5 has 22 verses, it is not an acrostic. 1:4 Hebrew *Zion*; also in 1:17. 1:6 Hebrew *of the daughter of Zion*.

#### NOTES

**1:1 *Jerusalem, once so full of people, is now deserted.*** The NLT has named the city. The book itself does not do so until 1:4. The book begins with *'ekah* [TH349A, ZH377], a recognized hallmark of a lament (cf. 2:1; 4:1; 2 Sam 1:19), though the word is also used in narrative and other genres (Ferris 1992:139). The poetry is in *qinah* rhythm (see Introduction). For a survey of the communal lament in the OT and the ancient Near East, see Ferris (1992) and Westermann (1994:86–98). The word *rabbath* [TH7227, ZH8041] (“abundant,” “great”—in form, a remnant of an early case ending; see Waltke and O’Connor 1990:127–128) occurs in two successive cola, once modifying “city” (“so full of people”) and once modifying “widow” (lit., “as a widow [once] great among the nations”).

*she is now a slave.* Lit., “she exists for tribute.”

**1:2 *She sobs.*** The description is made emphatic by the intensifying infinitive *bako* [TH1058, ZH1134], followed by the *qal* of the same root *thibkeh* [TH1058, ZH1134] (sobs bitterly).

***Among all her lovers.*** These were her friendly political allies (cf. Jer 4:30; 30:14; cf. Hos 8:9–10).

**1:3 *Judah . . . oppressed with cruel slavery.*** The Exile followed the capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, though they are nowhere named in this book. The number deported was 4,600 persons, at three separate times (Jer 52:28–30). A place of rest (*manoakh* [TH4494, ZH4955]) promised earlier by God (cf. 1 Kgs 8:56) could be lost as a result of their wrongdoing (Deut 28:65).

**1:4 *The roads to Jerusalem.*** The use of the word “Zion” for Jerusalem in the Heb. of this verse introduces worship-related topics. Three annual festivals brought worshipers from throughout the country: Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (April/May); the Feast of Firstfruits (May/June); and the Feast of Tabernacles (October); see Deut 16. For young women participating in procession, see Ps 68:25.

**1:5 *the LORD has punished Jerusalem.*** The root *yagah* [TH3013, ZH3324] (niphal feminine participle, “crying,” “grieving”) used in 1:4 is repeated here in 1:5 (hiphil, *yagah*, “causing grief”) with God as subject. In Lamentations, the name Yahweh (LORD) occurs thirty-two times; the title “Lord” (*adonay* [TH136, ZH151]) fourteen times. The word “God” (*'elohim* [TH430, ZH466]) does not appear in the book, but two other forms (*'el* [TH410A, ZH446] and *'elyon* [TH5945B, ZH6610]) occur three times.

**1:6 *All the majesty of beautiful Jerusalem.*** The term *hadar* [TH1926, ZH2077] (splendor, majesty) is at home in worship language (cf. extolling God’s majesty, Ps 29:4); it appears also with glory (*kabod* [TH3519, ZH3883], Ps 145:5) and with holiness (*qodesh* [TH6944, ZH7731], Pss 96:9; 110:3).

***Her princes are like starving deer.*** This may allude to the king and his court, who fled the city (2 Kgs 25:4; Jer 39:4).

**1:7 Her enemy . . . laughed.** The laughter (*sakhaq* [TH7832, ZH8471], “mocking”) of the enemy was over Jerusalem’s demise. An illustration of neighboring Edom’s reaction is given in Ezek 35:10, 12.

**1:8 tossed away like a filthy rag.** At issue in translation is the word *nidah* [TH5206, ZH5765], which some lexicons take as a derivation from *nud* [TH5110, ZH5653] (sway). If so, this is a gesture of the head (“so she has become a mockery,” NRSV). Most, including the NLT, see it as an alternate spelling for *niddah* [TH5079, ZH5614] (menstrual flow; excretion, something detestable). The parallel cola, however, favors the meaning of “mocking” (Holladay 1971:237).

**hide her face.** This is an English equivalent for the Heb., “turn the back part.”

**1:9 She defiled herself with immorality.** The Heb. image, one of soiling (*tum’ah* [TH2932, ZH3240]) her skirts, refers to Judah’s sin (cf. Jer 2:34).

**she lies in the gutter.** Her condition here has the nuance of “appalling” (*pela’im* [TH6382A, ZH7099]).

**1:10 The enemy has plundered.** The Heb. expression compares to the colloquial English, “his grubby hands pawed over it.” “Every precious thing” would include the Temple (cf. 1:7) and possibly children (1:11). Moabites and Ammonites were forbidden entry into the sanctuary (Deut 23:3; Ezek 44:7, 9).

**1:11 their treasures.** These would have been marketable items, possibly even children to be sold into slavery.

#### COMMENTARY

The first poetic acrostic (1:1-22) is in two parts. The lament is about a place, Jerusalem (1:1-11a), and a people who are hurt and distressed (1:11b-22). The first part is written in the third person, as from the viewpoint of a spectator (except for 1:9c). The second part is largely in first person (except for 1:17), interacting with the spectator. The middle verse (1:11) is a bridge that contains both third person reporting and first person exclamation.

The disaster has a personal ring to it from the start. Like a widow, Jerusalem sits forlorn, totally broken in spirit. She had lost virtually everything. The female personification is natural because in Hebrew the word “city” is feminine in gender.

**Heavy Losses.** Jerusalem had lost her status as a city of major importance (1:1). Perhaps the poet was thinking of the glory days of the Israelite empire, when David had established Jerusalem as a royal city. Solomon had made it a place of grandeur (cf. the visit of the queen of Sheba, 1 Kgs 10) when from it he presided over Israel’s largest territorial expanse and extensive commercial trade. Later, King Jehoiakim (609–598 BC) built an imposing palace there (Jer 22:13-14).

The city, now widowed, had lost her allies. No one was available to comfort or help her—a point made three times, twice with the word “comfort” (*nakham* [TH5162, ZH5714], 1:2, 9) and once with the word “helper” (*’ozer* [TH5826A, ZH6468], 1:7). Worse, her political allies had turned against her (1:2). The city had lost all its leading citizens through several deportations to Babylon (1:3), and its traditional celebrations were no longer held. Roads and gates, also personified, mourned or remained silent in the absence of festal worship traffic (1:4). As a center of worship, the Temple was populated with forbidden foreigners.

The city had lost its freedom (1:5) and had become the object of mockery (1:7c) and humiliation (1:8c). Her prestige, built upon the grand structures of Temple and palace, wise leaders and princes, was gone (1:6). She who once knew station and status was now in the gutter (1:9). She had been raided and stripped (1:8) of all her valuables. All that remained was a memory of better times (1:7).

**Concentrated Evil.** The emphasis in this poetic panel is on the severity of the disaster, but the reason for that disaster receives mention twice. It was not political or military failure that brought this celebrated city to ruins, but Jerusalem's sins (1:5, 8). That sin is compared, following the NLT, to a filthy rag. The story of this city is from riches to rags.

That sin brings dire consequences is a message already pressed home with the story of Adam and Eve's fall (Gen 3). Punishment was also clearly assured for sinning cities in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:1-29; cf. Tyre, Ezek 27-28). Similarly, Babylon was threatened with judgment because of her many sins (Jer 50-51, and ultimately became a symbol of evil (Rev 18:1-24).

World history is filled with battle narratives of the siege and capture of cities: Alexandria, Rome, Seoul, St. Petersburg. Just as not every personal tragedy should be interpreted as a punishment for personal sin (cf. Job), it would also be reductionist to assign collective sin as the reason for *every* city's fall. Although cities should not be universally stigmatized as dens of iniquity, it is in the cities, then and now, that evildoing is often concentrated, and this may indeed bring God's judgment. Modern, world-class cities are not infrequently associated with political corruption and with vices such as gambling (e.g., Las Vegas), the sale of sex (e.g., Bangkok), drugs and drug cartels (e.g., Bogotá), and homosexuality (e.g., San Francisco). Wrongdoing is the order of the day, and as with Jerusalem, no thought seems to be given to consequences (1:9). Sin engenders callousness and immunizes both individuals and city governments from the elementary logic of cause and effect. Jerusalem's catastrophe remains a warning.

## ◆ B. The People's Pain (1:11b-22)

"O LORD, look," she mourns,  
"and see how I am despised.

<sup>12</sup>"Does it mean nothing to you, all you  
who pass by?

Look around and see if there is any  
suffering like mine,  
which the LORD brought on me  
when he erupted in fierce anger.

<sup>13</sup>"He has sent fire from heaven that  
burns in my bones.  
He has placed a trap in my path  
and turned me back.

He has left me devastated,  
racked with sickness all day long.

<sup>14</sup>"He wove my sins into ropes  
to hitch me to a yoke of captivity.  
The Lord sapped my strength and  
turned me over to my enemies;  
I am helpless in their hands.

<sup>15</sup>"The Lord has treated my mighty men  
with contempt.  
At his command a great army has  
come  
to crush my young warriors.

- The Lord has trampled his beloved city\*  
like grapes are trampled in a winepress.
- <sup>16</sup>“For all these things I weep;  
tears flow down my cheeks.  
No one is here to comfort me;  
any who might encourage me are far way.  
My children have no future,  
for the enemy has conquered us.”
- <sup>17</sup>Jerusalem reaches out for help,  
but no one comforts her.  
Regarding his people Israel,\*  
the LORD has said,  
“Let their neighbors be their enemies!  
Let them be thrown away like a filthy rag!”
- <sup>18</sup>“The LORD is right,” Jerusalem says,  
“for I rebelled against him.  
Listen, people everywhere;  
look upon my anguish and despair,  
for my sons and daughters  
have been taken captive to distant lands.
- <sup>19</sup>“I begged my allies for help,  
but they betrayed me.  
My priests and leaders  
starved to death in the city,  
even as they searched for food  
to save their lives.
- <sup>20</sup>“LORD, see my anguish!  
My heart is broken  
and my soul despairs,  
for I have rebelled against you.  
In the streets the sword kills,  
and at home there is only death.
- <sup>21</sup>“Others heard my groans,  
but no one turned to comfort me.  
When my enemies heard about my troubles,  
they were happy to see what you had done.  
Oh, bring the day you promised,  
when they will suffer as I have suffered.
- <sup>22</sup>“Look at all their evil deeds, LORD.  
Punish them,  
as you have punished me  
for all my sins.  
My groans are many,  
and I am sick at heart.”

1:15 Hebrew *the virgin daughter of Judah*. 1:17 Hebrew *Jacob*. The names “Jacob” and “Israel” are often interchanged throughout the Old Testament, referring sometimes to the individual patriarch and sometimes to the nation.

#### NOTES

**1:12** *Does it mean nothing to you?* Lit., “not unto you” is best taken as a question. Other interpretive options are “Let it not come to you” (Talmud) or “It is nothing to you.” If *lo’* [TH3808/3808A, ZH4202] expresses a wish, then “Oh that among you who pass by, you would look and see” (Huey 1993:454) is a possibility. Westermann (1994:113) holds that “the meaning of the first two words cannot be determined.”

*when he erupted in fierce anger.* The day of his fierce anger is the day of Yahweh, considered here as an event in the past. Divine anger is a dominant theme in Lamentations, as it is in Jeremiah (see comments on 2:1; Jer 25:15-38).

**1:14** *a yoke of captivity.* The Heb. is very cryptic: forms of *’ol* [TH5923, ZH6585] (yoke) or *’al* [TH5921, ZH6584] (unto, over) occur three times in seven words. Various combinations of vowel markings (pointings) allow for meaning options. If the word *nisqad* [TH8244, ZH8567], the meaning of which is uncertain but which is usually rendered “bound,” is changed slightly to *nishqad* [TH8245, ZH9193] (watchful) and the following Heb. word is reprinted as the preposition *’al*, “over,” the result (as in LXX, NAB, NJB) is “he kept watch over my sins” (Huey 1993:454).

**1:15 treated my mighty men with contempt.** God contemptibly tossed aside these men, as though they were lightweight soldiers; he allowed the Babylonian army to run roughshod over the Israelite infantry.

**winepress.** This is an image of God's wrath (Isa 63:3; Rev 19:15). An arresting assonance is achieved using the less common word for "winepress" (*gath* [TH1660, ZH1780]) in connection with *bath* [TH1323, ZH1426] (daughter). A homonym for *bath*, which signifies a liquid measure, might well evoke association with the winepress.

**1:16 encourage me.** Lit., "bring restoration to my soul."

**1:17 Jerusalem reaches out for help.** The language is graphic; Jerusalem stretches out her hands.

**filthy rag!** The word *niddah*, "menstrual rags" (cf. 1:8 and comments), continues the image of the city as female.

**1:18 I rebelled against him.** Lit., "for [against] his mouth I rebelled."

**sons and daughters.** Lit., "virgin daughters (*bethulah* [TH1330, ZH1435], virgin) and select (*bakhur* [TH970, ZH1033]) sons."

**1:20 see my anguish!** The physical dimension of the pain is poignantly represented by "my stomach churns" (*khamarmaru* [TH2560/2560A, ZH2812/2813]). Note the onomatopoeic sounds (when pronounced, these Heb. syllables sound like a stomach churning). Cf. also Westermann 1994:114, "my innards smolder." The appeal for God to see (imperative of *ra'ah* [TH7200, ZH8011]) is found in both sections of the poem (cf. 1:11; cf. the call to the people, 1:18). Grammatically, the notion of rebellion is given emphasis, regarding either its duration or intensity by use of a verbal absolute.

**1:21 Others heard my groans.** The word "groan" (niph of *'anakh* [TH584, ZH634]) in its various forms appears five times in the poem. In addition to the middle verse (1:11), it is found twice in each half (1:4, 8, 21, 22). Similarly, the word "comfort" (*nakham* [TH5162, ZH5714]) is found five times (1:2, 9, 16, 17, 21). For an excursus on "The Description of Misery," see Westermann (1994:121-124).

#### COMMENTARY

The first section is a third-person descriptive report (1:1-11a). In the second section (1:11b-22), the victim reports the tragedy in first person. The voices are those of hurting people. Pain and anguish are the subjects, whether the poem turns to God's role in the event (1:11b-15), the absence of sympathizers and comforters (1:16-19), the current circumstances (1:20-21a), or even the closing vendetta (1:21b-22).

**God-forsaken (1:11b-15).** The sufferer recognized that the ultimate agent in the disaster was God. It is one thing to assert in confidence and joy that "God is for us." It is another matter to learn that "God is against us" in fierce anger (1:12). God's severe intervention, described as fire penetrating the bones (1:13), was a crushing blow. Israel knew, however, that God was not capricious. He did not act on whims of displeasure. Nonetheless, the fierce reality would come; sooner or later, sinners would feel the hot breath of God's indignation.

**Isolated (1:16-19).** Part of God's judgment on his people was to isolate them. Despite the victim's tears and appeals for others to take notice, there were no comforters (1:16, 21). Neighbors who might be expected to feel sorry for the hapless victim

turned against her at the instigation of the Lord (1:17). Allies who might have given humanitarian aid did not do so; instead, they took delight in her misfortune (1:21). Being totally forsaken, even by God, is foreshadowed here. The common idea that people will find ample company in hell is mistaken, if by it is meant that they will have camaraderie in their misery. The misery may well be total isolation. That kind of absolute abandonment burns like fire.

**No Relief (1:16-22).** The people of Jerusalem felt anguish because there was no word from God despite their constant appeals for his attention (1:11b, 20). Their pain was compounded by the realization that their rebellion was the legitimate reason for God's silence (1:20). Rebellions against God had not turned out well, for example, in Israel's forty-year desert wandering (Num 14:33). Part of the groaning was self-reproach. They sought relief from this self-inflicted anguish by appealing to God to punish the perpetrators of the disaster. "Oh, bring the day . . . when they will suffer." To her credit, the helpless victim knew better than to take matters into her own hand—vengeance was left to God, where it belonged (Deut 32:35). There is no indication that Israel's dark thoughts against her conqueror in any way reduced her anguish.

## ◆ II. God as Israel's Enemy (2:1-22)

### A. God's Angry Siege against the City (2:1-10)

The Lord in his anger  
has cast a dark shadow over  
beautiful Jerusalem.\*  
The fairest of Israel's cities lies in  
the dust,  
thrown down from the heights  
of heaven.  
In his day of great anger,  
the Lord has shown no mercy even  
to his Temple.\*

<sup>2</sup>Without mercy the Lord has  
destroyed  
every home in Israel.\*  
In his anger he has broken down  
the fortress walls of beautiful  
Jerusalem.\*  
He has brought them to the ground,  
dishonoring the kingdom and its  
rulers.

<sup>3</sup>All the strength of Israel  
vanishes beneath his fierce anger.  
The Lord has withdrawn his  
protection  
as the enemy attacks.

He consumes the whole land of Israel  
like a raging fire.

<sup>4</sup>He bends his bow against his  
people,  
as though he were their enemy.  
His strength is used against them  
to kill their finest youth.  
His fury is poured out like fire  
on beautiful Jerusalem.\*

<sup>5</sup>Yes, the Lord has vanquished Israel  
like an enemy.  
He has destroyed her palaces  
and demolished her fortresses.  
He has brought unending sorrow  
and tears  
upon beautiful Jerusalem.

<sup>6</sup>He has broken down his Temple  
as though it were merely a garden  
shelter.

The LORD has blotted out all memory  
of the holy festivals and Sabbath  
days.  
Kings and priests fall together  
before his fierce anger.