



# THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

LAMENT-COVID

AKWETAY BASIL AMAAH

AKWETey B. AMAAH

# LAMENTATIONS!

“HOW COULD IT BE?”

AKWETey B. AMAAH

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## HOW COULD IT BE? “LAMENTATIONS”

Unless otherwise indicated, the generic name, God, has been substituted for the name YHVH

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## INTRODUCTION

Let's begin this book by posing a question, which we will leave, for the most part, unanswered until the very last chapter. The question that we should file away from the onset is: Why is the Book of Lamentations in Tanakh? When we speak of Tanakh we are referring to a book of many genres including narrative, history, prophecies, poetry, and song. Tanakh also includes wisdom literature such as Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, /Iyov/ – Job, and parts of Psalms. Finally, Tanakh also incorporates what would best be called “Expressive Literature.”

A narrative is not expressive. It is merely a recounting of events. Legal texts are not expressive either as they are primarily commands with legal parameters. Prophetic text cannot be deemed expressive because they do not convey anything of a personal nature, neither a person's fears nor their wishes or responses. Rather, they are simply a conduit for God's word about what

is to happen in the future, either definitively or conditionally. Although there are examples of expressive literature in many books of Tanakh, the two books that are exclusively expressive literature are /Shir Hashirim/ - Song of Songs and Lamentations. /Shir Hashirim/ Song of Songs expresses tremendous longing, love, and desire while Lamentations lies on the opposite side of the spectrum, expressing instead, feelings of desperation and wonderment at tragedy, amongst others.

Lamentations and /Iyov/ - Job could easily be conflated because they both deal with tragedy; however, they are two very different books. /Iyov/ - Job, being part of wisdom literature, deals with the more philosophical or theological approach of trying to understand why YHVH works the way He does. /Iyov/ - Job asks the question "WHY?" and contrastingly, Lamentations asks the question "HOW?" Lamentations does not ask "How" in the clinical and mechanical sense of "how did the walls fall down," but rather, "How could such a thing happen?" The wonderment and the

amazement found in YHVH's actions is what this writer explores.

## CHAPTER 1

**1 O how has the city that was once so populous remained lonely! She has become like a widow! She that was great among the nations, a princess among the provinces, has become tributary.**

Before we can delve into discovering who the speaker of these words is, we must first understand the type of language being used. Tanakh often uses legal literature such as in the Book of Leviticus. In most of Genesis, it uses narrative, poetry, prophecy, and rebuke. So what do we have here? The opening words of Lamentations are definitely written in the poetic form. In fact, it is a rather unique poetic style that uses words that are not often used in narrative.

Who, then, is the speaker? Clearly, the speaker is one who is lamenting, crying out in a dirge. While history has put forward good offerings of who it is, for the purposes of this book, we will start by calling him “the Dirger.” We do so because his anonymity, which is maintained throughout

the book, is part of the spirit of Lamentations.

Once the speaker is established, it is natural to then ask, who is the Dirger speaking to? Who is the Dirger speaking about, and ultimately, what message is the Dirger trying to convey? The answers to these questions speak to the kind of text we are looking at. It is Expressive Literature.

The city is described as a widow, meaning an /agunah/. This word is used in a circumstance where the husband has gone away and those left behind do not know what his situation is. He could be dead or still alive. Though he may still be alive, life must continue as though he is dead.

In this first verse, the city is likened to a woman whose husband is considered as good as dead. The city is Jerusalem, the husband is YHVH, and the Hebrew people are the children. This metaphor operates throughout Lamentations. The Dirger marvels at how it could be that she, who used to have all types of people thronging at her doorways, now sits alone because she has become a widow! One who use to be a

major player amongst the nations, a major leader amongst the provinces, has become a degraded ghost town.

- Who is talking? - The Dirger!
- Who is the Dirger talking about? - The city!
- Who is the Dirger talking to? - We do not know.

As readers, we are merely eavesdropping. We know that he is not speaking to us and we know he may be speaking to someone who was alive in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, but we cannot be positively sure who he is addressing.

**2 She weeps, yea, she weeps in the night, and her tears are on her cheek; she has no comforter among all her lovers; all her friends have betrayed her; they have become her enemies.**

The city weeps at night because then she can be sure that no one is watching. She does not want to be embarrassed in front of

all the people who would see her crying during the day. We are introduced indirectly to her lovers who are not ready to comfort her, pointing us to a theme coursing throughout the book. Clearly, she has tried to seek out allies, and the allies she sought burned her. The allies/lovers are other nations, and one in particular plays a critical role throughout this story and throughout the fall of Jerusalem.

In this part of the lament you will notice three degenerating steps:

- 1) Her friends are not comforting her.
- 2) Her friends have acted treacherously, and the most egregious of all,
- 3) Her friends have become enemies.

We are not told who these nations are, but it is clear that the city's loneliness is also a function of betrayal. Parenthetically, you could stop at this point in the text and ask "why did this happen?" We will find out later in the text that it is because the people did something wrong. Their own immorality, lack of social responsibility, and injustice has led them down this path.

**3 Judah went into exile because of affliction and great servitude; she settled among the nations, [and] found no rest; all her pursuers overtook her between the boundaries.**

We learn here that Judah had been exiled. It is important to remember that there are two critical stages to the exile. Knowing which stage the Lament is referring to will speak to when this expression of grief is being written.

The tragedy of exile started in an active fashion after it had been brewing for about 80 years, around 597 BCE. The Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and took all of the aristocracy (including the King) and the artisans away to Babylon. With the rightful King in exile, Babylon installed a puppet king. At this point, though the Temple continues to be in operation and all appears well. Jerusalem is now just a vassal state. This is the first stage.

For the next eight years, the puppet does what the Babylonians tell him to, all the while listening to his court prophets who

insist that the Babylonians would soon fall. They advise him to form an alliance with the Egyptians and sign a treaty with them to help fight against Babylon. The court prophets then start communicating to the Yehudi in exile in the Golah in Babylon, telling them to have their bags ready as they would be returning home right away.

While all of this is happening, Jeremiah, the one prophet of truth, speaks against this saying, "No! We are in this for the long haul. Accept Babylon's rule and do not rebel." Zedekiah, the puppet king, does not listen. He rebels against Babylon and signs a treaty with Egypt. Babylon retaliates and in the year 588 BCE, begins a siege against the city. Two-and-a-half years later, the city falls. This is the second stage - the ultimate destruction.

Our passage is written either between the first exile and the ultimate destruction or during the aftermath of the ultimate destruction of the city. At the very least,

**...all of her pursuers overtook her between the boundaries.**

...“it” refers to the first exile. Judah is found between the straits like one who is trapped. The imagery is that of a siege where the enemy has locked its prey in, and they are trapped in place. Now see what the Lamenters is observing.

**4 The roads of Zion are mournful because no one comes to the appointed season; all her gates are desolate, her priests moan; her maidens grieve while she herself suffers bitterly.**

The word /abel/ translated as mourning here has a related meaning in Tanakh, which sometimes refers to being desolate. We can infer that the roads to Zion are now empty. No one is going down that road; the road that was once popular now lies abandoned. This verse is interesting because it indicates that this is happening at a time when the Sanctuary was still standing. We know this because there is an expectation of attendance of the “appointed season.” The priests are waiting and not one person is showing up because they are

in exile. The daughters of Jerusalem are referred to as maidens, grieving as the city mourns.

**5 Her adversaries have become the head, her enemies are at ease; for the Lord has afflicted her because of the multitude of her sins; her young children went into captivity before the enemy.**

This is the first indication of any culpability on Jerusalem's part. The city has children and because of her sin, those children had to go into exile.

**6 And gone is from the daughter of Zion all her splendor; her princes were like harts who did not find pasture and they departed without strength before [their] pursuer.**

The splendor or glory of the City of Jerusalem are her children. Her leaders are likened to gazelles who cannot find any grazing land. Imagine that! People who normally dine in fancy settings are dying of

thirst and have become captives, walking without any energy in front of the enemy. The symbolism here is of a death march that lends itself to the terrifying description we are given of the remains of the city.

**7 Jerusalem recalls the days of her poverty and her miseries, [and] all her precious things that were from days of old; when her people fell into the hand of the adversary, and there was none to help her; the enemies gazed, gloating on her desolation.**

During the days of her affliction, she remembers all the glory of the good old days. Now she has fallen into the hands of the enemy and no one is there to help. To add to the desecration and the destruction, her enemies are laughing. The nations look at Jerusalem and rejoice in the fact that she is destroyed. In all of this, the reader is forced to ask, where is Egypt? Where is the treaty partner?

**8 Jerusalem sinned grievously; therefore, she became a wanderer; all who honored her despised her, for they have seen her shame; moreover, she herself sighed and turned away.**

In verse 8, we notice that she has become a /Nidah/ - wanderer. Compare this to how she is introduced at the beginning as /agunah/- a widow. We may well ask, which is better? A /Nidah/ is considerably better than an /agunah/ - at least the wanderer's husband is present and accounted for even though the couple may be separated for a while.

The Mourner now picks up the image of a /Nidah/ and says that all of those who used to honor her are now degrading her because they have seen her nakedness - her vulnerability. This is reminiscent of what the Sons of Edom said when they entered into the destruction.

*7Remember, O Lord, for the sons of Edom, the day of Jerusalem, those who say, "Raze it, raze it, down to its foundation!" – Psalm 137 Tanakh*

...the exclamation is profound because they want to see Jerusalem leveled. This powerful house of Jerusalem has been stripped to its very foundation and has no more glory. The city sighs and turns away, broken. Still, playing on the imagery of the /Nidah/, the Mourner continues.

**9 Her uncleanness is in her skirts, she was not mindful of her end, and she fell astonishingly with none to comfort her. Behold, O Lord, my affliction, for the enemy has magnified himself.**

Have you ever bumped into an old friend who you hadn't seen in a long time? While they did not say a word for you to know the hardships they had been through, the trials were written all over their faces, gestures, and posture. Perhaps they suffered great losses in their family, and had experienced health problems and financial setbacks. Even though they did not say a word, you know all of this because your friend looks about 30 years older than he or she actually

is. This is the picture that is painted of Jerusalem at this time.

In this verse, we see a sudden and dramatic shift. In the first eight-and-a-half verses of Chapter 1, we have established that the Lamenter is speaking in the first eight-and-a-half verses, but to whom is his speech addressed? He is talking to an unknown audience about Jerusalem. He speaks of how the once amazing Jerusalem has been brought low and has now lost all of her glory. Suddenly, in the second half of the 9th verse, the voice of Jerusalem rings out to YHVH. He is her audience. What does she say? ... **Behold, O Lord, my affliction, for the enemy has magnified himself.**

**10 The adversary stretched forth his hand upon all her precious things, for she saw nations enter her Sanctuary, whom You did command not to enter into Your assembly.**

The Mourner cries out against entry into the city's sanctuary. In essence, he says, "Nations that you commanded that may not so much as marry into the nation of Israel have walked freely into her sanctuary." This is a similar cry to the one we hear from the Psalmist,

*1A song of Asaph. O God! Nations have come into Your heritage, they have defiled Your Holy Temple, they have made Jerusalem into heaps. 2They have given the corpses of Your servants as food to the birds of the heaven, the flesh of Your pious ones to the beasts of the earth. 3They have spilt their blood like water around Jerusalem, and no one buries [them]. 4We were a disgrace to our neighbors, ridicule and derision to those around us. 5How long, O Lord? Will You be wroth forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire? 6Pour out Your wrath upon the nations that do not know You and upon the kingdoms that did not call out in Your name. 7For they devoured Jacob and made his dwelling desolate. – Psalms 79 Tanakh*

**11 All her people are sighing [as] they search for bread; they gave away their treasures for food to revive the soul; see, O Lord, and behold, how I have become worthless.**

It is important to note that throughout the Book of Lamentations, a major emphasis is placed on describing the horrific state of the people and not of the buildings (Sanctuary). The people who were eating at fancy banquets and formerly dressed in gold and silver are now picking dirt out of the ground and trying to eat it.

As in verse 9, the city speaks again and the only words she can muster are the same as before: ... **see, O Lord, and behold, how I have become worthless.**

At this point, we come exactly to half of the chapter. From the next verse onwards, the city continues to speak; whereas previously, it was primarily a Lamerter talking to an audience about the city, with two short interjections from the city to plead with YHVH. At the half-way point of the chapter, the city takes over the mourning for

the rest of the chapter.

**12 All of you who pass along the road, let it not happen to you. Behold and see, if there is any pain like my pain, which has been dealt to me, [with] which the Lord saddened [me] on the day of His fierce anger.**

The city starts by speaking out to all the people who passes her by. They are, of course, laughing at her. She explains that her current state is because YHVH is angry and this is what He has done to her.

**13 From above He has hurled fire into my bones, and it broke them; He has spread a net for my feet, He has turned me back, He has made me desolate [and] faint all day long.**

The city then speaks in the voice of a familiar character in Tanakh named /Iyov/ – Job. In the story of Iyov, he presents himself as someone who YHVH has aimed his arrows at. In fact, the name, Iyov, probably

comes from the fact that Iyov said YHVH has become his /Oyeb/ - Enemy. Iyov 13:24. The city presents herself in that same light.

**14 The yoke of my transgressions was marked in His hand, they have become interwoven; they have come upon my neck and caused my strength to fail; the Lord delivered me into the hands of those I could not withstand.**

She accepts the fact that she has sinned, but she does not quite accept that the weighty punishment is justified.

**15 The Lord has trampled all my mighty men in my midst, He summoned an assembly against me to crush my young men; the Lord has trodden as in a wine press the virgin daughter of Judah. 16For these things I weep; my eye, yea my eye, sheds tears, for the comforter to restore my soul is removed from me; my children are desolate, for the enemy has prevailed.**

Who was the original comforter that she speaks of? Egypt! The one she signed the

Treaty with is the very one who has turned his back on her, and now, YHVH, the one who is supposed to look after her and her children is also far from her.

Notice that whenever the city speaks, she acknowledges that she has sinned, yet still cries out a disbelieving “YHVH, look at what you have done!” This is not the theology we are accustomed to hearing and so it is important to pay attention and ponder the entire book in order to grasp the full and correct picture of why this is.

Just as the city sporadically interjects during the lament of the Mourner in the first half of the chapter, so, too, the Lamenter interjects in the speech of the city in the second half of the chapter.

**DEDICATED TO:**

**AFELLE PETERSEN &  
KINGSLEY COCKETT**

For inspiring the continuation and completion of this book. Shalom, till we study Torah again in the world to come!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rabbi Akweteey Amaah is founder of Kingdom of Kings Academy World Wide and Leadership For The 3rd World. He is an accomplished author, global lecturer, renowned educator, Bible scholar, counselor, and thinker. He makes use of ancient wisdom and modern wit to captivate his audiences around the world. Rabbi Amaah is a professionally-ranked speaker and lecturer who have touched the lives of people from all walks of life, transforming many by his provocative questions, eye-opening lectures, revealing seminars, and captivating interviews.

Kingdom of Kings Academy World Wide is a place where biblical study comes to life. It is geared towards those seeking an in-depth and textual understanding of the Bible from its original Hebraic perspective. Rabbi Amaah still serves as Dean and Senior Lecturer at Kingdom of Kings Academy World Wide.

Leadership For The 3rd World is an international leadership organization

created to address the challenges of 21st-century leaders and their philosophies within the context of the 3rd World and the Diaspora. Its goals are to educate and rebuild self-concepts, self-worth, and self-esteem with a focus of erasing the stain of oppression and abuse on the 3rd World conscience.

Rabbi Amaah's philosophy is, "TEACH, DON'T PREACH!" Preaching sometimes conveys information in a way that has a "fire and brimstone" quality without paying attention to how the audience actually interacts with what is being said or how the audience feels. The preacher often conveys an emotionally-charged message that emphasizes the "straightening out" of the individual to accept what is being communicated, sine quaestione, and neglecting to highlight the importance of thought-provoking, reflective questioning in the individual. Teaching, on the other hand, invites the questioner to contemplate the subject matter at hand and provides an opportunity for clarity of the subject matter. It spurs the individual on to more in-depth,

contemplative research and meaningful study. Moreover, the audience gets time to interact with and understand the subject matter on their own terms, at their level. Teaching encourages authentic exploration of a subject matter without judgment.

Rabbi Amaah lives in Las Vegas, Nevada with his beautiful wife and three children. He is available for seminars, lectures, and interviews, and can be reached through Kingdom of Kings Academy.

## **BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR**

### **NY'AWO RUTH**

A Commentary on the Book of Ruth

### **NY'AWO ESTHER**

A Commentary on the Book of Esther

### **GBALJ JONAH**

A Commentary on the Book of Jonah

## **WOMAN! BY DIVINE DESIGN**

### **NMALE SAMUEL I**

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A Commentary on the Book of II Samuel

### **JAJELJ "KOHELET"**

A Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes

# Lament - Covid

*O how has the city that was once  
so populous remained lonely! She  
has become like a widow! She  
that was great among the nations,  
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has become tributary.*

