

Equip: Resources on the Book of Lamentations

April 22, 2025

The Book of Lamentations poses a challenge to biblical scholars. It is an elegant poetic book stuck in the middle of the prophetic books in the English Old Testament, whereas in the Hebrew Bible, it is in the Writings among the poetic books.

So, should Lamentations be classified as a poetic book or as a prophetic book?

Many scholars today are gravitating toward treating Lamentations as a prophetic book, but I contend it is much more appropriate to give the Book of Lamentations the recognition it deserves as an elegant poetic book, rather than relegating it to a position of obscurity among the prophetic books.

The Book of Lamentations has five poems in five chapters. The first four poems are intricately crafted in Hebrew acrostics, while the acrostic framework is abandoned in the last chapter. The book is a funeral dirge over Jerusalem following the fall and destruction of the city in 586 B.C.

Here are some helpful resources for Lamentations.

‘Lamentations’ by Kathleen M. O’Connor in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*

Kathleen O’Connor’s article in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* is a very good

resource. *The New Interpreter's Bible* has an inviting layout that makes the material readable.

Following the format of this commentary, O'Connor deals with the introduction and historical setting, and moves on to deal with authorship, versions and canonical placement.

The commentary section provides an exegetical analysis the reader can wade into as much as or as little as needed. For instance, in discussing the structure and literary features, O'Connor delves into the relationships between the poems, and the reader may dive into it as desired.

O'Connor uses a reflective outline of the chapters thus:

Chapter 1: No Comfort

Chapter 2: Who will Heal You?

Chapter 3: The Strong Man's Dilemma

Chapter 4: The Dimming of the Future

Chapter 5: The Survivor's Prayer

An interesting section deals with the impact of Lamentations on the arts, as O'Connor points out how musicians have employed the lyrics of Lamentations for liturgical music and for more general compositions.

The New Interpreter's Bible lays out the full texts and critical notes of the New International Version and the New Revised Standard Version in parallel columns for quick reference. This facilitates the reader's ability to compare translations and scholars' views.

An Introduction to the Old Testament

***Prophetic Books* by C. Hassell Bullock**

C. Hassell Bullock's book does not treat the prophetic books in the Protestant canonical order. Rather, he follows a historical line through them, inasmuch as the historical data is visible to modern scholars.

He seeks to enable the reader to see the cultural, theological and historical interrelationships that existed among the canonical prophets. This enables the reader to gauge the approximate timeframe in which the book was written relative to other books.

Using a descriptive approach, Bullock outlines the chapters thus:

Chapter 1: The Pitiab! State of Jerusalem

Chapter 2: Yahweh's Anger

Chapter 3: Judah's Lament

Chapter 4: Jerusalem's Ruin

Chapter 5: Final Lament

The descriptive outline enables the reader to visualize the persons whose voices are heard in the lament poems, as well as the severity of the punishment God inflicted on them.

'Lamentations, Book of' by Mark J. Boda in Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets

Boda writes this article in a volume of which he is the co-editor.

Boda's article in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets* is a recent work, so it acquaints the reader with an update on the views of scholars on the book. Boda begins with the questions of authorship and history.

There is a versatile use of cross references in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, one of which is the use of the asterisk. An asterisk before a word signals the reader can find an article with that word as the title or with the word being a close wording of the title. Hence *suffering directs the reader to the article on suffering, *exile to the article on exile, *Zion to the article on Zion, *women to the article on women and female imagery, and so forth.

A section deals with theological traditions and themes where Boda discusses suffering and redemption, Zion, retribution and the character of Yahweh.

A Liturgy of Grief: A Pastoral Commentary on Lamentations by Leslie C. Allen

Leslie Allen's book is an integration of Scripture and pastoral care that presents a biblical model for helping those coping with grief. The emphasis is on emotional healing. Allen views Lamentations as a liturgy designed to help God's people come to terms with the catastrophic fall and destruction of Jerusalem.

There are many helpful resources on Lamentations. The above sources are ones I have used in my study and feel comfortable recommending to others. They are resources the general audience can enjoy, benefit from and use to minister to others.

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