

# Introduction to Lamentations

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## Where is it in the Bible?

Lamentations is the twenty-fifth book in the Old Testament and is found between Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In the Hebrew Bible, Lamentations is included in the Writings and found between Ruth and Ecclesiastes.

## Who wrote it?

Traditionally the book was considered to have been written by the prophet Jeremiah. Although the Hebrew text does not claim that, it is attributed to the prophet Jeremiah in the Septuagint (LXX). Many scholars do not think that this is true and consider the author to be an unknown eyewitness to the fall of Jerusalem.

## When was it written?

Lamentations is generally thought to have been written shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. There is nothing specific in the book which suggests this date, but the intensity of the grief expressed in it suggests that event was fairly recent.

## What is it about?

The book of Lamentations consists of five mournful poems which express grief over the destruction of Jerusalem. Although it acknowledges that the catastrophe was precipitated by the people's disobedience, it pleads for God to have mercy and relieve the suffering.

## How is it structured?

- I. The Desolation of Jerusalem (1:1-22)
- II. Warnings Fulfilled (2:1-22)
- III. God's Love Endures (3:1-66)
- IV. Zion Punished (4:1-22)
- V. Remember and Restore (5:1-22)

## What are some things to look for?

- **God's Silence:** In Lamentations, God is frequently addressed but does not answer. This has led some to suggest that other parts of the Old Testament were written to provide a response. One example might be Isaiah 40-55 (Second Isaiah), as well as announcements of hope found in other prophets.
- **Poetic structure:** Each chapter of Lamentations is a lament similar in structure to those found in Psalms. The only difference is that the laments in this book do not include a protest of innocence which is typical of those in Psalms. Chapters 1, 2, and 4 are acrostic poems; each of their 22 verses begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 3 is a variation of the acrostic form in which succeeding groups of three verses begin with the next letter of the alphabet. For example, the first three verses begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet (*aleph*), the next three begin with the next letter (*beth*), and so on for the 66 verses. Although it has 22 verses, chapter 5 is not an acrostic poem.