



Lamentations

The book of Lamentations is a collection of five heartrending songs (or poems) that sorrowfully describe the terrible destruction of Jerusalem and the Kingdom of Judah carried out by the Babylonians in 586 BC.

Since Judah had persisted in its sins of idolatry and social injustice, refusing to listen to God's prophets, judgment finally came. Like the book of Job, Lamentations addresses human suffering. Yet, unlike the book of Job, Lamentations focuses on national suffering and tackles some of the toughest questions faced by God's people. Questions like... How can God's love and justice be reconciled with such devastation? Where was God during Judah's inhabitants' darkest hour?

The prophet Jeremiah has been traditionally identified as the writer of Lamentations and describes the starvation and cannibalism he saw inside Jerusalem during Babylon's two-and-a-half year siege. Jeremiah's Grotto, a location which can still be found today just outside the north wall of Jerusalem, tradition says Jeremiah wept bitter tears and composed the book of Lamentations. Interestingly, this grotto is under the knoll that is now called "Golgotha," the same hill on which the cross of Jesus stood. Thus, the suffering Jeremiah wept where later the suffering Savior died.

For the Israelites, the Temple was their secret weapon, the source of their invincibility. It was God's home on earth. They could not imagine God allowing invaders to violate it, let alone destroy it. But the nation's sin was so pervasive and enduring that God withdrew His protection.

Lamentations is a stark reminder of the serious consequences of sin and rebellion against God. Despite the Temple's destruction, the loss of nation, the political dismantle, and the humiliation of the execution or exile of God's people, Jeremiah makes an amazing declaration. He still finds reason to hope. His reason is God! He knows what kind of being God is. God is kind and compassionate. If God had not been merciful, all the Jews would have died.

Taking trust in God's mercy, come what may, Jeremiah declares, "Deep in my heart I say, 'The Lord is all I need; I can depend on Him!'" (Lamentations 3:24). Can I say the same?