

## EXILIC PROPHETS

### LAMENTATIONS - SHORT VERSION

**INTRODUCTION.** This book of the Bible is a collection of five poems “lamenting” the destruction of Jerusalem. The book was probably composed during the Babylonian Exile by one or more authors who likely witnessed the destruction of God’s holy city.

Even though Lamentations is placed amongst the prophetic books, its form or makeup is more closely related to some of the psalms, especially the psalms of lament. Concerning the biblical literary form called lament, Fr. Ronald Witherup writes:

*“In the Bible a lament is a faith-filled act in which people pour out their hearts to God and plead for his mercy. A lament does not merely catalogue one’s misfortune. It places the reality in God’s hands and concludes in praise of God’s grandeur, wisdom, and power that are beyond all human comprehension.”* (The Bible Companion, p.134)

The Book of Lamentations reflects the prevalent theology of the time, namely, that has God caused the destruction of Jerusalem as punishment for sin. It could be said that the sins of the people have led inevitably to the ruin of Jerusalem and that God has allowed this to happen. But Lamentations recognizes that the defeat of the Jews is not a defeat for God. It gives hope to the survivors that by repentance and trust in God, Israel can survive.

#### **OUTLINE:**

The book is divided into five poems of lamentations.

**First lamentation – chapter 1:** The author expresses his grief as he looks upon a ruined city (vv. 1-11). Then Jerusalem confesses her sins and her hopes and her anger against the enemy (vv. 12-22).

**Second lamentation - chapter 2:** Continues the author’s description of a destroyed city (vv. 1-10). In vv. 13-22, the poet addresses the city from the depths of compassion beginning with: *“To what can I liken or compare you O daughter Jerusalem.”*

**Third lamentation - Chapter 3:** This lamentation is an individual cry of sorrow. While the poet speaks most of the poem, in verses 25-47 other voices speak from a group of sages or wise persons and other friends, baffled by the tragedy (vv. 40-47). Despite the torture and misery of verses 1-24, the poem ultimately expresses deep faith in God’s grace and power.

**Fourth lamentation – chapter 4:** The fourth lamentation returns to the style and mood of the first two. The opening verses tell the end of nobles and children (vv. 1-10), followed by a meditation on Jerusalem (vv. 11). After the responsibility is placed upon the religious leaders (v. 13-20), the poem ends with a curse upon the enemy (v. 21).

**Fifth lamentation – chapter 5:** This lamentation is often called *“The Prayer of Jeremiah”*. This liturgical prayer sustains its beauty and serenity despite its topic of rejection and tragedy. It asks very little, only that the Lord remember.

Attentive readers will see subtle dramatic movement within each poem and between the poems; a range of emotions is fully expressed – grief, anger, near despair, glimmers of hope and joy, and the will to carry on.