



*Let us pray in contemplation,
While we sing this lamentation.
With eyes tearful, hearts repenting,
Let us grieve with no relenting.
Lo, the sun and stars are fading;
sadness, nature all pervading.
Host of Angels, sadly weeping,
Who'll explain their deep bereaving?
Mountains, cliffs and rocks are crumbling;
Sealed tombs open, loudly thundering.
Why such sorrow, desolation
Overwhelming all creation?*

From "Gorzkie Żale" (Bitter Lamentations), an eighteenth century Polish devotion on the Passion of Christ and the sorrows of Mary.

HOW?

The title of Lamentations in the Hebrew Bible is a Hebrew word translated "How," which is the first word of Lamentations. This term is an exclamation of how much Jerusalem has suffered. Although this suffering is overwhelming, the author (credited with being written by the Prophet Jeremiah) pours out his heart beautifully. The book of Lamentations is structured in five poems (five chapters in English Bible). The poems are acrostics; each new line begins with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet and. The voice is corporate and expresses the suffering of the people of Israel. Lamentations is a eulogy for the death of the kingdom of Judah, which has been taken away into exile. The situation is stark and bleak. How would God allow His Chosen people to suffer?

Lamentations speaks to our pain through Judah's experience. It begins with the mention of enemies, pursuers, and foes. The immediate historical context of these references is Babylon, which laid siege against Jerusalem in 587 BC under Nebuchadnezzar II. Lamentations puts in front of us, in ways that are impossible to deny, the horrible consequences of rebellion against God, the horrible consequences of acting like you know better, rejecting God's Law and writing your own. Israel's rejection of God and their descent into wickedness cause the unthinkable to happen: the destruction of God's Temple in Jerusalem.

Our study of Lamentations will take a look at the serious consequences of sin, both individually and corporately, and the necessity for each of us as Christians to sincerely confess our sins and truly repent before it is too late. It is in our confession that we will realize the tender mercies of God.

Questions for Reflection

Lamentations Chapter 1

Jerusalem's Devastation

1. What imagery does the narrator use to describe the pain and sorrow of the nation (vv. 1–11)?
2. What does this indicate about the gravity of their transgression and the severity of their subsequent punishment?
3. What reason is given for Judah's exile (vv. 8–9)?

Jerusalem's Call for Help

4. To whom does Jerusalem express her sorrow (vv. 12, 19), and what is her complaint?
5. Does comfort come from those to whom she cries out?
6. In 1:20–22, the Prophet continues to acknowledge the nation's guilt, but what seems to make the suffering even worse?

The Consequences of Sin

7. What are the results of our sins (both individually and corporately)?
8. What should we do? How can we help others?

PSALM 55:1-5, 22-23

*Listen to my prayer, O God,
do not ignore my plea;
hear me and answer me.*

*My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught
because of what my enemy is saying,
because of the threats of the wicked;
for they bring down suffering on me
and assail me in their anger.*

*My heart is in anguish within me;
the terrors of death have fallen on me.
Fear and trembling have beset me;
horror has overwhelmed me.*

*Cast your cares on the Lord
and he will sustain you;
he will never let
the righteous be shaken.*

*But you, God, will bring down the wicked
into the pit of decay;
the bloodthirsty and deceitful
will not live out half their days.*

But as for me, I trust in you.