**Chronicles 35**



The lamentations of Jeremiah are depicted in this 1860 woodcut by Julius Schnorr von Karolsfeld.

The Bible is popularly viewed as a mixture of fact, fiction, and folklore. In this article, we will explore the subject of “When was the book of Lamentations written, and why is it important for us to know that?”

The relatively short five chapter Old Testament Bible book isn’t used very much these days. In fact, many Christians are unaware that the book even exists, and even many of those who are aware, would struggle to find its place in the Bible. This is ironic, because an older song often sung in Christian Church services, weddings and funerals, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”, is based on Lamentations 3:22-23.

TIME OF WRITING

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> *"Most researchers – included the ones who refuse Jeremiah as author – would agree that the author must have been an eyewitness of Jerusalem's destruction (compare with Jeremiah 39). Jeremiah's authorship is underlined by a number of stylistic parallels in the two consecutive books.*
>
> *Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians in the year 586 BC, which is described in the Lamentations by Jeremiah as eyewitness, is decisive for the date of writing. The time of writing therefore will have to be set shortly after this incident and in Jeremiah's last years of life."—-Studylight.org*

The book has all the earmarks of being written in the vicinity of Jerusalem shortly after it was completely razed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, and before it was re-inhabited nearly 50 years later.

The five poems that comprise Lamentations "*were probably written in Palestine after the fall of Jerusalem in 587. They are apparently the work of a single author, who with great pathos shines a ray of unconquerable trust in God and of wholehearted repentance" (NJB Introduction to Jeremiah).*

> *"The Book of Lamentations is a collection of five poems that serve as an anguished response to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B. C," (NAB introduction to Lamentations).*

**"How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who was once great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has**

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**now become a slave" (Lamentations 1:1 NIV).**

> *"'The provinces' at once suggests the period of the writer, who must have been a subject of the Babylonian empire . . . the 'provinces', like the 'nations, must be the countries formerly subject to David and Solomon (comp. Ecclesiastes 2:8)." (Pulpit Commentary).*

Even a highly skeptical secular sources, such as Wikipedia, date Lamentations to within about 65 years or less of Jerusalem's destruction.

> *The book's language fits an Exilic date (586–520 BCE), and the poems probably originated with Judeans who remained in the land.[24] The fact that the acrostics of chapters 2–4 follow the pe-ayin order of the pre-Exilic Paleo-Hebrew alphabet further supports the position that they are not postexilic compositions. However, the sequence of the chapters is not chronological, and the poems were not necessarily written by eyewitnesses to the events. The book was compiled between 586 BCE and the end of the 6th century BCE, when the Temple was rebuilt as the Second Temple.—Wikipedia*

EVIDENCE THAT THE WRITER WAS THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

The Greek Septuagint Version (LXX), which was developed in the 3rd century BCE, adds the following introductory line before Lamentations 1:1:

**"And it happened, after Israel was taken captive and Ierousalem was laid waste, Ieremias sat weeping and gave this lament over Ierousalem and**

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**said"—(Lamentations preface NETS).** Thus, the Greek Septuagint Version (LXX) attributes the writing of Lamentations to the prophet Jeremiah, had lived in Jerusalem for some time, survived the destruction of Jerusalem, and lived in the area during the aftermath of Jerusalem's horrific siege and destruction by the Babylonians (Jeremiah 40-43). Jeremiah was well placed to write the book of Lamentations.

The prophet Jeremiah composed lamentations in his prophetic book **(Jeremiah 9:1; 13:17; 14:17)** which are quite similar to the laments in Lamentations. Also, after the death of Josiah, **"Jeremiah composed laments for Josiah, and to this day all the male and female singers commemorate Josiah in the laments" (2 Chronicles 35:25 NIV).**

Jewish tradition has always attributed writership of Lamentations to the prophet Jeremiah. We have strong evidence of Jeremiah's writership.

MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE

Fragments containing parts of the book in Hebrew were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran:

1. 4Q111 (dated 30 BCE–1 BCE)
2. 3Q3 (dated 30 BCE–50 CE)
3. 5Q6 (dated circa 50 CE)
4. 5Q7 (dated 30 BCE–50 CE)

This evidence means the Book of Lamentations had to have been written long before the 1st century BCE.

Extant ancient manuscripts of the Septuagint version include Codex Vaticanus (4th century), Codex Sinaiticus (4th century), Codex Alexandrinus (5th century) and Codex Marchalianus (6th century).

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The Latin Vulgate also has the prologue:

**“And it happened that, after Israel was driven into captivity, and Jerusalem was deserted, the prophet Jeremiah sat weeping, and he wailed this lamentation in Jerusalem. And sighing with a bitter soul, and mourning, he said” (Lamentations Prologue  Catholic Public Domain Version)**

LAMENTATIONS RECORDS PROPHETIC FULFILLMENTS

In addition to the Bible, secular history and archaeology also record the horrific events leading up to, during, and after the destruction of Jerusalem. Lamentations records with strikingly vivid imagery the pitiful results, as only an eyewitness could describe.

**“I will utter lamentation like the jackals” (Micah 1:8 NAB).** Over a hundred years in advance, Micah prophetically acted out the “lamentation” that would follow Jerusalem’s horrific destruction.

**“Zion will be plowed as a field; Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, And the mountains of the house will become high places of a forest” (Micah 3:12 LSB).** The book of Lamentations provides verified eyewitness testimony of events prophesied more than 100 years in advance, such as Micah’s prophesy. This prophecy was well known by the Jews, and was quoted about 100 years later by “some of the elders of the land” (Jeremiah 26:17-19 LSB).

**“‘I have set My face against this city for evil and not for good,’ declares Yahweh. ‘It will be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will burn it with fire'” (Jeremiah 21:10 LSB).** Years in advance, Jeremiah was inspired by Yahweh to predict the destruction of Jerusalem, and Lamentations records the fulfillment.

**“Yahweh shall cause you to . . . become an example of terror to all the kingdoms**

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**of the earth . . . Yahweh will bring a nation against you . . . a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young . . . it shall besiege you . . . until your high and fortified walls in which you trusted come down . . . Then you shall eat the offspring of your own body, the flesh of your sons and of your daughters . . . during the siege and distress by which your enemy will distress you. The man who is refined and delicate among you shall be hostile toward his brother and . . . wife he cherishes and toward the rest of his children who remain, so that he will not give even one of them any of the flesh of his children which he will eat" (Deuteronomy 28:25,49,50,52-55 LSB).** Lamentations concisely records the fulfillment of these warning prophecies.

**"Her gates have sunk into the ground; He has destroyed and broken her bars . . . Your destruction is as vast as the sea . . . Should women eat their offspring, The infants who were born healthy? Should priest and prophet be killed In the sanctuary of the Lord? On the ground in the streets Lie Lie young and old; The virgins and young men Have fallen by the sword . . . And there was no one who escaped or survived" (Lamentations 2:9,13,20-22 LSB).** The images are so vivd and striking, exactly what we would expect from an eyewitness. These descriptions, coupled with historical and archaeological evidence help build our confidence in Almighty God, Yahweh.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW WHEN LAMENTATIONS WAS WRITTEN?

**"That someone tramples underfoot all the prisoners in the land. Or denies justice to anyone in the sight of the Most High. Or subverts a person's lawsuit—does not the Lord see" (Lamentations 3:35-36 LSB).** The immediate composition of the laments highlights the theme of divine justice, which is one God's main qualities. **"Yahweh is a God of justice" (Isaiah 30:18 LSB).**

CONCLUSION

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When was the book of Lamentations written? The vivid and graphic descriptions of the immediate aftermath of Jerusalem's destruction in 586 BCE are undoubtedly an eyewitness account, confirming that the book of Lamentations was written shortly after Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BCE. This not only reinforces the fact that everything in the Bible is authentic, completely factual, but has striking internal cohesion.

Everything the Bible says can be relied on 100%. It is not fiction.

Note: Please see the related article, *"Is the Bible Reliable — Bible Authenticity",* on this website at: https://bibleauthenticity.com/bible-reliable/

Also see:

> *When Was the Book Of Micah Written?*

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