

THE LAMENTATIONS OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH



ירמיהו הנביא קינות

As we enter into the Sacred Triduum, we hear the chanting of the lamentations of the prophet Jeremiah during our Morning Praise.

The prophet wrote his lamentations as an expression of despair over the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and the misery of the people through famine, sword and captivity. He believed the sufferings of the people were a direct result of their sins. He designed the lamentations to warn his listeners to take heed of their sins, lest they too share the same fate.

The lamentations of Jeremiah are part of our solemn Morning Prayer because they exemplify the important element of lament, atonement and repentance of the Sacred Triduum. As we hear the prophet Jeremiah lament over the destruction of Jerusalem and the misery of his people, let us also lament our own sinfulness that creates so much suffering in our world, and in our own lives. But let us not despair for we have been saved from our sins through the death and resurrection of Christ and that the new Jerusalem has been rebuilt in our risen, crucified Lord.

The Lamentations begin with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order. The first letter of the first word begins with the letter of the alphabet in Hebrew:

<i>Aleph</i> (a) א	<i>Vau</i> (w) ו	<i>Caph</i> (k, kh) כ
<i>Beth</i> (b, v) ב	<i>Zayin</i> (z) ז	<i>Lamed</i> (l) ל
<i>Ghimel</i> (g) ג	<i>Heth</i> (h) ח	<i>Mem</i> (m) מ
<i>Daleth</i> (d) ד	<i>Teth</i> (t) ט	<i>Nun</i> (n) נ
<i>He</i> (h) ה	<i>Iod</i> (y) י	<i>Samech</i> (s) ס

CANTOR I (*Lamentation 1:1-5*)

Here begin the Lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah.

Aleph... How lonely she is now, the once crowded city! Widowed is she who was mistress o'er nations; the princess among the provinces has been made a toiling slave.

Beth... Bitterly she weeps at night, tears up on her cheeks, with not one to console her of all her dear ones. Her friends have all betrayed her and become her enemies.

Ghimel... Judah has fled into exile from oppression and cruel slavery; yet where she lives among the nations she finds no place to rest: all her persecutors come upon her where she is narrowly confined.

Daleth... The roads to Zion mourn for lack of pilgrims going to her feasts; all her gateways are deserted, her priests groan, her virgins sigh; she is in bitter grief.

He... Her foes are uppermost, her enemies are at ease; the Lord has punished her for her many sins. Her little ones have gone away, captive before the foe.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return to the Lord, your God!

CANTOR II (*Lamentation 1:6-9*)

Vau... Gone from daughter Sion is all her glory: her princes, like rams that find no pasture, have gone off without strength before their captors.

Zain... Jerusalem is mindful of the days of her affliction, and of the violation of all the precious things she had from days of old, when her people fell into enemy hands, and she had no one to help her; when her foes gloated over her, laughed at her sabbaths.

Heth... Through the sin of which she is guilty, Jerusalem is de-filed; all who esteemed her think her vile now that they see her nakedness; she herself groans and turns away.

Teth... Her filth is on her skirt; she gave no thought how she would end. Astounding is her downfall, with no one to console her. Look, O Lord, upon her misery, for the enemy has triumphed!

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return to the Lord, your God!

CANTOR III (*Lamentation 1:10-14*)

Iod... The foe stretched out his hand to all her treasures; she has seen those nations enter her sanctuary whom you forbade to come into your assembly.

Caph... All her people groan, searching for bread; they give their treasures for food, to retain the breath of life. "Look, O Lord, and see how worthless I have become."

Lamed... "Come, all you who pass by the way, look and see whether there is any suffering like my suffering, which has been dealt me when the Lord afflicted me on the day of his blazing wrath."

Mem... "From on high, he sent fire down into my very frame; he spread a net for my feet, and overthrew me. He left me desolate, in pain all the day."

Nun... "He has kept watch o're my sins; by his hand they have been plaited: they have settled about my neck; he has brought my strength to its knees; the Lord has delivered me into their grip, I am unable to rise."

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return to the Lord, your God!

CANTOR I (*Lamentation 2:8-11*)

From the Lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah.

Heth... The Lord marked for destruction the wall of daughter Sion: he stretched out the measuring line; his hand brought ruin; yet he did not relent—he brought grief on wall and ram-part till both succumbed.

Teth... Sunk into the ground are her gates; he has removed and broken her bars. Her king and her princes are among the pagans; priestly instruction is wanting, and her prophets have not received any vision from the Lord.

Iod... On the ground in silence sit the old men of daughter Sion; they strew dust on their heads and gird themselves with sackcloth; the maidens of Jerusalem bow their heads to the ground.

Caph... Worn out from weeping are my eyes, within me all is in ferment; my gall is poured out on the ground because of the down-fall of the daughter of my people, as child and infant faint away in the open spaces of the town.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return to the Lord, your God!

CANTOR II (*Lamentation 2:12-15*)

Lamed... They ask their mothers, “Where is corn and wine?” as they faint away like the wounded in the streets of the city, and breathe their last in their mother’s arms.

Mem... To what can I liken or compare you, O daughter Jerusalem? What example can I show you for your comfort, virgin daughter Sion? For great as the sea is your downfall; who can heal you?

Nun... Your prophets had for you false and specious visions; they did not lay bare your guilt, to stir you to repentance; they beheld for you in vision false and misleading portents.

Samech... All who pass by clap their hands at you; they hiss and wag their heads o’er daughter Jerusalem: “Is this the all-beautiful city, the joy of the whole earth?”

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return to the Lord, your God!

CANTOR III (*Lamentation 3:1-9*)

Aleph... I am a man who knows affliction from the rod of God's anger.

Aleph... One whom he has led and forced to walk in darkness, not in the light.

Aleph... Against me alone he brings back his hand again and again all the day.

Beth... He has worn away my flesh and my skin, he has broken my bones.

Beth... He has beset me roundabout with poverty and weariness.

Beth... He has left me to dwell in the dark like those long dead.

Ghime!... He has hemmed me in with no escape and weighed me down with chains.

Ghime!... Even when I cry out for help, he stops my prayer.

Ghime!... He has blocked my ways with fitted stones, and turned my paths aside.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return to the Lord, your God!

CANTOR I (*Lamentation 3:22-30*)

From the Lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah.

Heth... It is by the Lord's favor that we are not consumed, for his mercies are not spent.

Heth... I learned it in the morning, great is your faithfulness.

Heth... My portion is the Lord, says my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

Teth... Good is the Lord to one who waits for him, to the soul that seeks him.

Teth... It is good to hope in silence for the saving help of the Lord.

Teth... It is good for a man to bear the yoke from his youth.

Iod... Let him sit alone and in silence, when it is laid upon him.

Iod... Let him put his mouth to the dust; there may yet be hope.

Iod... Let him offer his cheek to be struck, let him be filled with disgrace.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return to the Lord, your God!

CANTOR II (*Lamentation 4:1-6*)

Aleph... How tarnished is the gold, how changed the noble metal; how the sacred stones lie strewn at ev'ry street corner!

Beth... Sion's precious sons, fine gold their counterpart, now worth no more than earthen jars made by the hands of a potter!

Ghimel... Even the jackals have their breasts and suckle their young; the daughter of my people has become as cruel as the ostrich in the desert.

Daleth... The tongue of the suckling cleaves to the roof of its mouth in thirst; babes cry for food, but there is no one to give it to them.

He... Those accustomed to dainty food perish in the streets; those brought up in purple now cling to the ash heaps.

Vau... The punishment of the daughter of my people is greater than the penalty of Sodom which was overthrown in an instant without the turning of a hand.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return to the Lord, your God!

CANTOR III (*Lamentation 5:1-11*)

Here begins the prayer of the Prophet Jeremiah.

Remember, O Lord, what has befallen us, look and see our disgrace: our inherited lands have been turned over to strangers, all our homes to foreigners.

We have become orphans, fatherless; widowed are our mothers. The water we drink we must buy, for our own wood we must pay.

On our necks is the yoke of those who drive us; we are worn out, but allowed no rest. We hold out our hands to Egypt, and to Assyria, to fill our need of bread. Our forebears who sinned are no more; but we bear their guilt.

Slaves rule over us; no one rescues us from their hands.

At the peril of our lives, we bring in our sustenance, in the face of the desert heat; our skin is shriveled up, as though by a furnace, with the searing blasts of famine.

The wives in Zion were ravished by the enemy, the maidens in the cities of Judah.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return to the Lord, your God!

