

## Lamentations

*This is part of an ongoing series of short articles designed to help us understand what scripture is and what is **in** each book of scripture. Previous articles can be found at [www.openarms-communityofchrist.org](http://www.openarms-communityofchrist.org).*

Lamentations is one of the shortest books in the Hebrew scriptures—only five chapters. The author is unknown. Traditionally it was assumed that they were written by Jeremiah, author of the previous book, but the thoughts and the language used are very different from his writings.

The book can be described as a short set of psalms, but unlike the book of Psalms, these—as the name suggests—are all laments dealing with the overthrow of the city of Jerusalem.

Although it is difficult for us to recognize in the English translation, the first four chapters follow a specific format. They are alphabetic acrostics—in other words, there is a stanza for each of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The last chapter has the same number of verses as the alphabet.

These psalms were written for public worship on the days when the congregation would be remembering the loss of the city. There are powerful images in the writings, images that would have been very familiar to countries conquered by Rome.

The common theme of the psalms is the agony of the people, the apparent desertion of Zion (Jerusalem) by God, but also the hope that God will restore a humbled and repentant people.