

Two Year Bible Trek
Week 66
2 Kings 24-25; 2 Chronicles 36; Lamentations

Key Concepts: The key concepts in this section are that God fulfills God's promises of judgment and that the people deeply mourn the destruction of their nation.

Stories: In 2 Kings we open with King Jehoiakim becoming a vassal of the Babylonians, then rebelling, then dying, the reign of his son Jehoiachin who surrenders to the Babylonians, the first deportation to Babylon including the stripping of the wealth of the palace and Temple, the new king, Zedekiah, his rebellion against Babylon, the fall of Jerusalem, the execution of the King's sons and his own blinding, the second deportation to Babylon, the utter destruction of Jerusalem, the appointment of Gedaliah as governor, his assassination, the flight of the people to Egypt and finally the release from prison of Jehoiachin by a new Babylonian king. Chronicles tells the same basic story but with more theological explanations for the disaster. Lamentations is a series of laments over the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the people. They are carefully crafted as alphabetic acrostics.

Brief Summary: We have come to the end of an independent homeland for God's people. Except for a very brief time (166 BCE-63 BCE) there was no true homeland for the Jews until the establishment of Israel in 1948. The fall of Judah centers on the inability of the leadership to understand three things. The first is Babylon was not capable of being defeated or resisted by either Egypt or the city states and nations which surrounded Judah. The second is that Egypt could not be trusted as a defender of Judah. What this meant was that when push came to shove, Egypt would not come to the rescue of Judah. The third is that the Temple and its rituals would not save Judah. This had been the message of countless prophets, yet the people and the leaders would not listen.

The kings who reigned during this period, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, were placed in a difficult situation. Babylon was powerful, yet at times had to withdraw from the region because of rebellions at home or in other parts of their kingdom. Those momentary withdrawals coupled with the fervor of nationalism, a desire for independence and the prospect of Egyptian assistance virtually forced them to rebel. Had the kings not rebelled they probably would have been assassinated by their own people. Yet the outcome of their rebellions was the brutal and ruthless destruction of their nation, its capitol and its religious shrine. The effects of this destruction can be seen and felt in the words of the writers of Lamentations.

The Book of Lamentations is believed to be the product of a variety of writers whose work was melded by a single author. The content of the book begins with the reflections of Jerusalem, the widow. It is presented in both first person (Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow) and in third person (she has seen the nations invade her sanctuary). Chapter two is the wailing cries of the people over the devastation that has befallen them because of God's judgment. Chapter three has three Psalms of personal lament and hope in God. Chapter four retells of the horror of the siege in which parents became so desperate that they cooked and ate their children. Chapter five is a Psalm of petition to God for deliverance. As you read these verses take note of the pain, the pleading, the theological justification and yet the hope that God might still save God's people.

1. How do you respond to the view that God brought this defeat upon Judah?
2. Have you ever been in a place in your life where a lament would have been an appropriate response to your situation?
3. What stands out for you from the readings from this section, A Nation Divided?