

Lamentations

¹ How desolate sits the city of Jerusalem, once filled with people! She* has become like a widow, she who was once great among the nations. The queen of all the world has become a slave-laborer.

² She cries bitterly through the night, tears rolling down her cheeks. Despite all her many lovers, no one comes to comfort her. Betrayed by all her friends, they are now her enemies.

³ Judah has been dragged off into captivity, suffering miserably under brutal slavery; she lives among the nations but has no place of her own where she can rest. Those chasing her have brought her down and she cannot escape.

⁴ Even the roads to Zion are in mourning because no one travels on them to go to the religious festivals. All her gates are empty. Her priests groan in sadness. Her girls are suffering. She herself is in bitter distress.

⁵ Those who hated her now control her; her enemies enjoy life, because the Lord has made her suffer due to all her sins of rebellion. Her children have been taken away as prisoners of the enemy.

⁶ All the glory has left the Daughter of Zion. Her leaders are like deer that can't find any grass

* **1:1** To preserve some of the poetic effect, the female personification of the city of Jerusalem has been preserved in this translation.

to eat. They don't even have the strength to run away when the hunter comes after them!

⁷ As she wanders around in her misery, Jerusalem thinks back to all the wonderful things she once had in the old days. When her enemies conquered her people, she didn't receive any help. Her enemies gloated over her, and laughed at her downfall.

⁸ Jerusalem sinned terribly which is why she is now treated as someone unclean. Everyone who used to honor her now despise her, because they've seen her naked and ashamed. She herself groans as she turns away.

⁹ Her uncleanness contaminates her skirts.† She didn't think about what would happen. Her fall was a shock, and no one was there to comfort her. “Please, Lord, see how much I'm suffering, because the enemy has won!” she says.‡

¹⁰ The invader has stolen all her treasures. She even had to watch as heathen nations went into her sanctuary, people you had forbidden to enter.

¹¹ All her people groan, looking for bread. They have spent what they value the most to buy food so they can stay alive.

“Please, Lord, look and see what's happening to me,” she says. “It's as if I'm worthless!”

¹² Don't you care anything about it, all you people passing by? Take a look and see! Is there any suffering as bad as mine, punished by the Lord when he became angry?

† **1:9** Referring to the uncleanness resulting from unfaithfulness (see Leviticus 18:20 for example). ‡ **1:9** “She says”: added for clarity.

13 He sent down fire from heaven that destroyed my bones. He spread out a net to catch my feet, tripping me over. He abandoned me, leaving me sick all day long.

14 He took my rebellious sins and twisted them together into a yoke that he tied to my neck. He took away all my strength, and handed me over defenseless to my enemies.

15 The Lord brushed aside all my strong soldiers defending me. He called up an army to attack me, to crush my young men. The Lord has trampled down the virgin Daughter of Judah like grapes in a winepress.

16 This is why I'm weeping, tears flowing from my eyes, because there's no one here to comfort me, no one to make me feel better. There's nothing left for my children because the enemy has conquered us."

17 Zion holds out her hands in distress, but there's no one to comfort her. The Lord issued orders against Jacob, and his neighbors became his enemies. Jerusalem is to them something disgusting.

18 "The Lord has done what's right, because I rebelled against his instructions. Listen, everyone everywhere; look at what I'm suffering. My young women and young men have been taken off into captivity.

19 I called out for help to my lovers, but they betrayed me. My priests and elders starved to death in the city as they tried to find food to keep themselves alive.

²⁰ Can't you see, Lord, how upset I am? inside I am in turmoil; my heart is breaking because I've been so rebellious. Outside, the sword kills those I love; inside, it's like I'm living in the house of death.

²¹ People hear me groaning, but no one comes to comfort me. All my enemies have heard about the bad things that have happened to me, and they're delighted that it was you who did it. Please bring about the day of judgment that you promised so they can end up like me.

²² May you see all the evil things they've done! Treat them the same way as you've treated me as a result of all my rebellious sins, for I'm groaning all the time, and I'm sick at heart.”

2

¹ How the Lord has spread a cloud of his anger over the Daughter of Zion! He has thrown down Israel's glory from heaven to earth. He has deserted his Temple* from the time he became angry.

² The Lord has destroyed without mercy all the places where the descendants of Jacob lived. In his anger he has torn down the fortresses of the Daughter of Judah. He has demolished and degraded the kingdom and its leaders.

³ In his fury he has destroyed all of Israel's power, refusing to help as the enemy attacked. He was like a fire blazing in the land of Jacob, burning everything up.

* **2:1** “Temple”: literally, “footstool,” see for example Psalms 99:5, Psalms 132:7.

⁴ He has fired arrows from his bow as if he were their enemy; he has used his power against them like an attacker. He has killed all the beloved children; he has poured out his anger like fire on the tent of the Daughter of Zion.

⁵ The Lord has become like an enemy, completely destroying Israel and its palaces, demolishing its fortresses, making the Daughter of Judah cry and mourn more and more.

⁶ He has torn down his Temple as if was a garden shed; he has destroyed his meeting place. The Lord has made Zion forget about her religious festivals and Sabbaths. In his fury he has disowned both king and priest.

⁷ The Lord has discarded his altar; he has abandoned his Temple. He has handed it[†] over to the enemy. They were shouting triumphantly in the Lord's Temple just as worshipers did on festival days.

⁸ The Lord was determined to destroy the defensive walls of the Daughter of Zion. He measured out[‡] what he would destroy, and didn't hesitate to do it. He made the battlements and walls weep; they both disintegrated.

⁹ Her gates have collapsed to the ground; he has destroyed their bars, breaking them apart. Her king and her princes have been exiled to other countries. No one follows the Law anymore, and even her prophets no longer receive visions from the Lord.

[†] **2:7** "It": literally, "the walls of her palaces," taken to refer to the structure of the Temple. [‡] **2:8** "Measured out": literally, "stretched out a measuring line."

10 The elders of the Daughter of Zion sit on the ground in silence. They have thrown dust over their heads and put on clothes made of sackcloth. The young women of Jerusalem have bowed down, their heads to the ground.

11 My eyes are worn out from crying; inside I am in turmoil. I'm sick and exhausted over the destruction of Jerusalem, the daughter of my people, because children and infants are fainting in the city streets.

12 They cry out to their mothers, “We need food and drink!”[§] fainting in the city streets as if they're wounded, their lives fading away in their mothers' arms.

13 What can I tell you? What shall I compare you to, Daughter of Jerusalem? What can I say you're like in order to comfort you, virgin Daughter of Zion? For your wound gapes as wide as the sea—who could ever heal you?

14 The visions of your prophets were false and worthless; they didn't point out your guilt to prevent you being taken into captivity. Instead they presented to you visions that were false and deceptive.

15 Everyone who passes by mock you, clapping their hands, hissing and shaking their heads in scorn at the Daughter of Jerusalem. “Is this really the city that people called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth?” they ask.

[§] **2:12** “We need food and drink!” literally, “Where is the grain and wine?” an unlikely diet for infants.

¹⁶ All your enemies open their mouths at you, hissing and gnashing their teeth, “We’ve swallowed her up! This is the day we’ve been waiting for. Now it’s here and we’ve seen it happen!”

¹⁷ The Lord has achieved what he decided; he has done what he warned he would. Just as he determined to do long ago, he has destroyed you, showing no mercy. He has allowed the enemy gloat over your defeat, and he has given power to those who attack you.

¹⁸ The people cry out to the Lord from the bottom of their hearts. Daughter of Zion, let your walls stream down with tears like a river all day and night. Don’t stop, go on crying!

¹⁹ Get up and cry out as the night begins. Pour out your sad thoughts like water before the Lord. Hold up your hands to him in prayer for the lives of your children who are fainting from hunger at every street corner.

²⁰ Lord, please think about it! Who have you ever treated this way? Should women have to eat their children, the little ones they love? Should priests and prophets be killed in the Lord’s Temple?

²¹ The dead, young and old, lie together in the dust of the streets. My young men and young women, have been killed by the sword. You killed them when you were angry; you have slaughtered them without mercy.

²² You invited enemies to attack me from every direction like you were inviting them to a religious festival. At the time when the Lord was

angry nobody escaped, nobody survived. My enemy has destroyed the children I looked after and loved.

3

¹ I am the man who has experienced suffering under the rod of God's anger.

² He has driven me away, forcing me to walk in darkness instead of the light.

³ In fact he hits* me again and again all day long.

⁴ He has worn me out; he has broken me in pieces.

⁵ He has besieged me, surrounding me with bitterness and misery.

⁶ He has forced me to live in darkness like those long dead.

⁷ He has built a wall around me so I can't escape; he has bound me with heavy chains.

⁸ Even when I keep on crying out for help, he refuses to listen to my prayer.

⁹ He has put stone blocks in my way and sends me down crooked paths.

¹⁰ He is a bear that lies in wait for me, a lion in hiding ready to attack,

¹¹ He dragged me from my path and ripped me to pieces, leaving me helpless.

¹² He loaded his bow with an arrow and used me as his target,

¹³ He shot me in my kidneys with his arrows.

¹⁴ Now everyone laughs at me, singing songs that mock me all day long.

* **3:3** "Hits": literally, "turns his hand against."

15 He has filled me with bitterness; he has filled me up with bitter wormwood.

16 He has broken my teeth with grit; he has trampled me in the dust.

17 Peace has been torn away from me; I've forgotten all that's good in life.

18 That's why I say, "My expectation of a long life is gone, along with all that I hoped for from Lord.

19 Don't forget everything I've suffered in my wandering, as bitters as wormwood and poison.

20 I certainly haven't forgotten. I remember it all too well, so I sink into depression.

21 But I still hope when I think about this:

22 It's because of the Lord's trustworthy love that our lives are not finished, for through his merciful actions he never lets us down.

23 He renews them every morning. How wonderfully trustworthy you are, Lord!

24 The Lord is all I need," I tell myself, "so I will put my hope in him."

25 The Lord is good to those who trust in him, to anyone who seeks to follow him.

26 It is good to wait quietly for the Lord's salvation.

27 It is good for people to learn to patiently bear discipline[†] while they're still young.

28 They should sit by themselves in silence, because it's God who has disciplined them.

29 They should bow low with their faces to the ground, for there may still be hope.

[†] 3:27 "Learn to patiently bear discipline": literally, "carry the yoke."

30 They should turn a cheek to someone who wants to slap them; they should take the insults of others.

31 For the Lord won't abandon us forever.

32 Even though he may bring sadness, he shows us mercy because his trustworthy love is so great.

33 For he doesn't willingly hurt people, or cause them grief.

34 Whether it's mistreating all the prisoners of the land,

35 Or denying someone their rights as the Most High watches,

36 Or cheating someone in their legal case—these things the Lord doesn't approve of.

37 Who spoke and it came into existence? Wasn't it the Lord who commanded it?†

38 When the Most High speaks it can be a disaster or a blessing.§

39 Why should any human being complain about the results of their sins?

40 We should look at ourselves, examine what we're doing, and return to the Lord.

41 Let's not just hold up our hands to God in heaven, but our minds* as well, saying,

42 “We are the ones who sinned; we are the ones who rebelled; and you haven't forgiven us!”

43 You have wrapped yourself in anger and chased us down, killing without mercy. You have killed without pity.

† **3:37** A reference to Psalms 33:9. § **3:38** See also Isaiah 45:7. * **3:41** “Minds”: literally, “hearts,” but from a Hebrew perspective the heart was where you did your thinking.

⁴⁴ You have wrapped yourself with a cloud that no prayer can penetrate.

⁴⁵ You have made us waste and refuse to the nations around.

⁴⁶ All our enemies open their mouths to criticize us.

⁴⁷ We're terrified and trapped, devastated and destroyed.

⁴⁸ Tears stream from my eyes over the death of my people.

⁴⁹ My eyes overflow with tears all the time. They won't stop

⁵⁰ Until the Lord looks down from heaven and sees what's going on.

⁵¹ What I've seen torments me because of what's happened to all the women in my city.

⁵² For no reason my enemies trapped me like a bird.

⁵³ They tried to kill me by tossing me into a pit and throwing stones at me.

⁵⁴ Water flooded over my head, and I thought I was going to die.

⁵⁵ I called out for you, Lord, from deep inside the pit.

⁵⁶ You heard me when I prayed, "Please don't ignore my cry for help."

⁵⁷ You came to me when I called you, and you told me, "Don't be afraid!"

⁵⁸ You have taken my case and defended me; you have saved my life!

⁵⁹ Lord, you have seen the injustices done to me; please vindicate me!

⁶⁰ You have observed how vengeful they are and how often they've plotted against me.

61 Lord, you have heard how they've insulted me, and what they've plotted against me,

62 How my enemies talk against me and complain about me all the time!

63 Just look! Whether they're sitting down and or standing up, they go on making fun of me in their songs.

64 Pay them back as they deserve, Lord, for all they've done!

65 Give them a covering for their minds!† May your curse be on them!

66 Chase them down in your anger, Lord, and get rid of them from the earth!

4

1 How gold has tarnished! Even pure gold has lost its shine! Jewels from the Temple* have been scattered on every street corner.

2 Look at how the precious people of Zion, worth their weight in gold, are now valued like cheap clay jars made by a potter!

3 Even jackals nurse their young at their breasts, but the women of my people have become cruel, like an ostrich† in the desert.

† 3:65 This may be similar to the expression in 2 Corinthians 3:15, “a veil covers their minds.” * 4:1 “Jewels from the Temple”: literally, “holy stones.” These could also refer to the stones from which the Temple was constructed, but in the context of things of value it seems more likely that they refer to the jewels used to decorate the Temple, or even those from the High Priest's clothing.

† 4:3 Ostriches were proverbially seen as cruel because they leave their young to fend for themselves. See Job 39:14-18.

⁴ The nursing babies are so thirsty that their tongues stick to the roof of their mouths. Little children beg for food, but nobody gives them anything.

⁵ Those who used to eat gourmet food now die starving in the streets. Those who dressed in fine clothes[‡] from their childhood now live in heaps of rubbish.

⁶ Jerusalem's[§] punishment is worse than sinful Sodom's, which was destroyed in a brief moment, without the help of human hands.*

⁷ Her leaders were purer than snow, whiter than milk; their bodies were a healthier red than coral, and they shone like lapis lazuli.[†]

⁸ But now they look blacker than soot; no one recognizes them in the street. Their skin has shrunk to their bones and is as dry as wood.

⁹ Those killed by the sword are better off than those who die of hunger, who slowly waste away in agony because the fields produce no crops.

¹⁰ The hands of loving women have cooked their own children to eat during the destruction of Jerusalem.

¹¹ The Lord has given full expression to his anger. He has poured out his fury. He has

[‡] **4:5** "Fine clothes": literally "purple," the color of clothes used by royalty. **§** **4:6** "Jerusalem": literally, "the daughter of my people." Also verse 10 and elsewhere. * **4:6** "Without the help of human hands": or, "without anyone wringing their hands (in mourning)" [†] **4:7** "Coral" is sometimes translated as "rubies," however it is believed that rubies were not known at this time. Similarly "lapis lazuli," an intensely blue stone, is more likely than "sapphire."

started a fire in Zion, and it has burned down her very foundations.

¹² No king on earth—in fact nobody in all the world—thought that an enemy or attacker could enter the gates of Jerusalem.†

¹³ But this happened because of the sins of her prophets and the wickedness of her priests, who shed the blood of the innocent right there in the city.

¹⁴ They wandered like blind men through the streets, made unclean by this blood, so no one would touch their clothes.

¹⁵ “Go away! You’re unclean!” people would shout at them, “Go away, go away! Don’t touch us!” So they ran away and wandered from country to country, but the people there told them, “You can’t stay here!”

¹⁶ The Lord himself has scattered them; he doesn’t bother with them anymore. Nobody respects the priests, and nobody admires the leaders.

¹⁷ We wore out our eyes pointlessly looking for help the whole time; we watched from our towers for a nation to come that couldn’t save us.

¹⁸ The enemy§ tracked our every movement so we couldn’t walk through our streets. Our end approached. Our time was up because our end had come.

¹⁹ Our pursuers were faster than eagles in the sky. They chased us across the mountains and ambushed us in the desert.

† 4:12 See Psalms 46:5. § 4:18 “Enemy” supplied for clarity.

20 The king,* the Lord's anointed, our country's "life-breath,"† was trapped and captured by them. We had said about him, "Under his protection we will live among the nations."

21 Celebrate and be happy while you can, people of Edom, you who live in the land of Uz, because this cup will be passed to you too. You will get drunk and strip yourself naked.

22 People of Zion, your punishment is coming to an end—he won't continue your exile for long.‡ But he is going to punish your sins, people of Edom; he will reveal your sins.

5

1 Lord, please remember what's happened to us. Look at us and see how we've been humiliated!

2 The land we used to own has been handed over to strangers, our houses have been given to foreigners.

3 We have lost our fathers, and our mothers are widows.

4 The water we drink we have to pay for; our firewood comes at a price.

5 Like animals we're driven along with harnesses around our necks;* we're worn out but don't find any rest.

6 We allied ourselves with Egypt and Assyria so we could have plenty of food.

* 4:20 "King": supplied for clarity. † 4:20 "Life-breath": literally, "breath of our noses." ‡ 4:22 "He won't continue your exile for long": or "he won't exile you again." * 5:5 The image is that of human beings being treated as beasts of burden.

⁷ Our forefathers sinned and they're gone, but we're being punished for their sins.

⁸ Servants of our conqueror[†] rule over us; no one can save us from their power.

⁹ We take our lives in our hands when we look for food, because of the armed raiders in the desert.

¹⁰ Our skin is hot like an oven because of the fever caused by hunger.

¹¹ They raped women in Zion, virgins in the towns of Judah.

¹² Princes have been hung up by their hands; they show elders no respect.

¹³ Young men are forced to work at hand-mills; boys stagger under bundles of wood.

¹⁴ The elders have abandoned their places at the city gate;[‡] the young men have given up playing their music.

¹⁵ There's no more happiness for us; our dancing has turned into mourning.

¹⁶ The crown[§] has fallen from our head. What a disaster has come upon us because we have sinned!

¹⁷ Because of all this, we're sick at heart; because of all these things, we can hardly look;^{*}

[†] **5:8** "Of our conqueror": supplied for clarity. [‡] **5:14** "Their places at the city gate": where legal cases were decided and advice given. **§ 5:16** The word used here is the general word for crown or garland, not the word for the royal or priestly crown. It may therefore refer to garlands used in local celebrations. ^{*} **5:17** "Hardly look": whether this is because of the appalling sights or because of the many tears is unclear.

¹⁸ Because of Mount Zion, which has been abandoned, and where only foxes[†] roam.

¹⁹ But you, Lord, live forever! You rule for all generations!

²⁰ So why have you forgotten us for such a long time? Why have you abandoned us for so many years?

²¹ Bring us back to you, Lord, so we can be with you again. Please remake our lives like they used to be.

²² Or have you have completely rejected us? Are you still really furious with us?

[†] **5:18** The mention of foxes is particularly significant since they are unclean animals.

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Version translation in American English

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Language: English

Dialect: American

Translation by: Dr. Jonathan Gallagher

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2022-11-11

PDF generated using Haiola and XeLaTeX on 11 Nov 2022 from source files dated 11 Nov 2022
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