***Lamentations***

**Chapter 1**

**How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave. 2 Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are upon her cheeks. Among all her lovers there is none to comfort her. All her friends have betrayed her; they have become her enemies. 3 After affliction and harsh labor, Judah has gone into exile. She dwells among the nations; she finds no resting place. All who pursue her have overtaken her in the midst of her distress. 4 The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to her appointed feasts. All her gateways are desolate, her priests groan, her maidens grieve, and she is in bitter anguish. 5 Her foes have become her masters; her enemies are at ease. The LORD has brought her grief because of her many sins. Her children have gone into exile, captive before the foe. 6 All the splendor has departed from the Daughter of Zion. Her princes are like deer that find no pasture; n weakness they have fled before the pursuer. 7 In the days of her affliction and wandering Jerusalem remembers all the treasures that were hers in days of old. When her people fell into enemy hands, there was no one to help her. Her enemies looked at her and laughed at her destruction. 8 Jerusalem has sinned greatly and so has become unclean. All who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness; she herself groans and turns away. 9 Her filthiness clung to her skirts; she did not consider her future. Her fall was astounding; there was none to comfort her. “Look, O LORD, on my affliction, for the enemy has triumphed.” 10 The enemy laid hands on all her treasures; she saw pagan nations enter her sanctuary— those you had forbidden to enter your assembly. 11 All her people groan as they search for bread; they barter their treasures for food to keep themselves alive. “Look, O LORD, and consider, for I am despised.” 12 “Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see. Is any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me, that the LORD brought on me in the day of his fierce anger? 13 “From on high he sent fire, sent it down into my bones. He spread a net for my feet and turned me back. He made me desolate, faint all the day long. 14 “My sins have been bound into a yoke; by his hands they were woven together. They have come upon my neck and the Lord has sapped my strength. He has handed me over to those I cannot withstand. 15 “The Lord has rejected all the warriors in my midst; he has summoned an army against me to crush my young men. In his winepress the Lord has trampled the Virgin Daughter of Judah. 16 “This is why I weep and my eyes overflow with tears. No one is near to comfort me, no one to restore my spirit. My children are destitute because the enemy has prevailed.” 17 Zion stretches out her hands, but there is no one to comfort her. The LORD has decreed for Jacob that his neighbors become his foes; Jerusalem has become an unclean thing among them. 18 “The LORD is righteous, yet I rebelled against his command. Listen, all you peoples; look upon my suffering. My young men and maidens have gone into exile. 19 “I called to my allies but they betrayed me. My priests and my elders perished in the city while they searched for food to keep themselves alive. 20 “See, O LORD, how distressed I am! I am in torment within, and in my heart I am disturbed, for I have been most rebellious. Outside, the sword bereaves; inside, there is only death. 21 “People have heard my groaning, but there is no one to comfort me. All my enemies have heard of my distress; they rejoice at what you have done. May you bring the day you have announced so they may become like me. 22 “Let all their wickedness come before you; deal with them as you have dealt with me because of all my sins. My groans are many and my heart is faint.”**

In the first lament, Jerusalem is personified as a humiliated, deserted widow. Unsuppressed sobbing rends the air as the bliss of former days are contrasted with the present nightmare of shame and destitution. The stricken mourners repeatedly confess that the Lord was justified in letting Babylon destroy Zion, for she had “sinned grievously” and had become “filthy” (vv. 8, 17). While the Israelites mourn their transgressions, they know that God hears their penitent cries for restoration. God will again use the chastised and forgiven Israel as an instrument of His gracious will. (TLSB)

**1:1** *How … !* Expresses a mixture of shock and despair (see 2:1; 4:1–2; Isa 1:21; Jer 48:17). (CSB)

 *deserted lies.* The Hebrew underlying this phrase is translated “sat alone” in Jer 15:17. There the prophet sat alone; here his beloved city does the same. (CSB)

Sitting down, with the elbow on the knee, and the head supported by the hand, without any company, unless an oppressor near,—all these were signs of mourning and distress. The coin struck by Vespasian on the capture of Jerusalem, on the obverse of which there is a palm-tree, the emblem of Judea, and under it a woman, the emblem of Jerusalem, sitting, leaning as before described, with the legend *Judea capta*, illustrates this expression as well as that in Isaiah 47:1. (ACC)

 *city.* Jerusalem. (CSB)

 *once so full of people.* See Isa 1:21. (CSB)

It is a strong expression of horrified astonishment over the fact that the formerly populous city is now lonely and deserted, sitting alone in deep mourning. (Kretzmann)

 *full … great.* The Hebrew is the same for both words. (CSB)

 LIKE A WIDOW – A woman berift of her husband faced great hardship in ancient Israel, in spite of explicit legislation for her protection (Ex 22:22; Dt 10:18). (TLSB)

Having lost her king. Cities are commonly described as the mothers of their inhabitants, the kings as husbands, and the princes as children. When therefore they are bereaved of these, they are represented as widows, and childless. The Hindoo widow, as well as the Jewish, is considered the most destitute and wretched of all human beings. She has her hair cut short, throws off all ornaments, eats the coarsest food, fasts often, and is all but an outcast in the family of her late husband. (ACC)

She no longer enjoys the fellowship of Jehovah, her Husband, and she has lost her children, who have been killed in battle and carried away into exile. (Kretzmann)

 *great among the nations.* Contrast Jer 49:15. (CSB)

Israel’s rule was accepted more or less continuously in the surrounding provinces from the Brook of Egypt to the Euphrates. (Kretzmann)

 *slave.* The Hebrew for this word is translated “forced labor” in Ex 1:11; 1Ki 4:6. (CSB)

Having no longer the political form of a nation; and the remnant that is left paying tribute to a foreign and heathen conqueror. (ACC)

**1:2** *Bitterly she weeps.* As did Jeremiah, and for much the same reason (see Jer 13:17). (CSB)

Her tears flow without stopping and have no chance to dry. (Kretzmann)

 *at night.* See 2:18–19. (CSB)

Her slumber was driven away from her eyelids by the greatness of her sorrow. (Kretzmann)

 *lovers … friends.* Political allies (see, e.g., Jer 2:36–37; 27:3). (CSB)

Her allies; her friends, instead of helping her, have helped her enemies. Several who sought her friendship when she was in prosperity, in the time of David and Solomon, are now among her enemies. (ACC)

 *none to comfort her.* See vv. 9, 16–17, 21. (CSB)

These were all her friends, upon whom she depended for assistance. (Kretzmann)

 *All … have betrayed her.* See v. 19; like Edom (see 4:21–22; Ps 137:7) and Ammon (see Jer 40:14; Eze 25:2–3, 6). (CSB)

They have deserted her in the midst of the dangers which came upon her. (Kretzmann)

 *become her enemies.* See v. 17.V

Their former profession of loyalty is changing to open hostility. (Kretzmann)

**1:3** *among the nations … finds no resting place.* As Moses warned in Dt 28:65. (CSB)

She has been brought into such difficulties, that it was impossible for her to escape. Has this any reference to the circumstances in which Zedekiah and the princes of Judah endeavored to escape from Jerusalem, by the way of the gates between the two walls? Jeremiah 52:7. (ACC)

**1:4** *mourn.* Are deserted and desolate (see Jdg 5:6; Isa 33:8 and notes). (CSB)

All the roads leading to the capital were lying desolate, because there are no pilgrims found there. (Kretzmann)

 *appointed feasts.* See Ex 23:14–17 and notes; Lev 23:2. (CSB)

These were the great festivals of the Jewish year. (Kretzmann)

 *maidens grieve.* A sign of utter defeat (contrast Ex 15:20 and note; Jdg 21:19, 21; Ps 68:25; Jer 31:13). (CSB)

They normally rejoiced by singing and dancing at festivals. (TLSB)

**1:5** *masters.* Lit. “head”—in accordance with Dt 28:44 (contrast Dt 28:13). (CSB)

They have now supreme dominion over the whole land. (ACC)

 *at ease.* See Jer 12:1. (CSB)

 CHILDREN…EXILE – literally, "her infants in absence of strength before the pursuer." (Kretzmann)

**1:6** *Daughter of Zion.* A personification of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. (CSB)

 *Her princes … have fled before the pursuer.* See Jer 52:7–8. (CSB)

They have no strength to flee and escape from the enemy. (Kretzmann)

**1:7** *affliction and wandering.* See 3:19. (CSB)

 *treasures.* See vv. 10–11. (CSB)

 *days of old.* For example, the days of David and Solomon. (CSB)

The members of the Jewish Church recalling with eager remembrance the glorious evidences of God's blessing which had been theirs. (Kretzmann)

 *fell into enemy hands.* See 2Sa 24:14. (CSB)

 *destruction.* Lit. “cessation.” The Hebrew root for this word is the same as that for “Sabbath”—and may be intended as an ironic pun (see Lev 26:34–35). (CSB)

As the Jewish day of rest was a favorite object of mockery on the part of the enemies, so they now thought it a huge joke that a general and lasting Sabbath had come upon their country. (Kretzmann)

**1:8** *unclean.* See v. 17 and note. It refers to the ceremonial uncleanness of a woman during her monthly period (see Lev 12:2, 5; 15:19); Jerusalem is here personified as a woman (see v. 6). (CSB)

 HER NAKEDNESS – Her sins and vices having now become known. (Kretzmann)

 SHE HERSELF GROANS – Now at last she has, in a measure, come to the realization of her transgressions.

**1:9** *filthiness.* Ceremonial uncleanness (see note on Lev 4:12), here caused by willful sin. (CSB)

 *did not consider her future.* See Isa 47:7. (CSB)

Although evident marks of her pollution appeared about her, and the land was defiled by her sinfulness even to its utmost borders, she had no thought or consideration of what must be the consequence of all this at the last. (ACC)

 FALL WAS ASTOUNDING – The greatness of her fall being such as to cause men to marvel. (Kretzmann)

 NONE TO COMFORT – There was no one to take her part with so much as a word of consolation. It is for this reason that her sighing is heard. (Kretzmann)

 *Look, O Lord.* See vv. 11, 20. (CSB)

 *enemy has triumphed.* See v. 16. (CSB)

**1:10** *forbidden to enter your assembly.* See Eze 44:7, 9. (CSB)

The heathen as such being excluded from the Temple, except where they were proselytes of righteousness. They had been excluded from the Sanctuary, but here they entered with blasphemous intent, ruthlessly trampling down and robbing just as they chose. (Kretzmann)

**1:11** *search for bread.* Food shortages were an ever-present problem during and after the siege of Jerusalem. (CSB)

 *keep themselves alive.* See v. 19; 1Sa 30:12. (CSB)

Jerusalem is compared to a woman brought into great straits, who parts with her jewels and trinkets in order to purchase by them the necessaries of life. (ACC)

No valuables being too precious, in this emergency, where the question is to save lives. Their groaning arises in a fervent appeal. (Kretzmann)

 I AM DESPISED – They were an object of wretchedness. The first step of true repentance is a full and unequivocal acknowledgment of one's own sinfulness and a corresponding free confession of it to the Lord. (Kretzmann)

**1:12** See v. 18. Up to this point, the author has been the main speaker. Now, at the halfway mark of ch. 1, the main speaker changes to Jerusalem personified. (CSB)

 IS IT NOTHING – The desolations and distress brought upon this city and its inhabitants had scarcely any parallel. Excessive abuse of God’s accumulated mercies calls for singular and exemplary punishment. (ACC)

Will none of those who are witnesses of her misery and shame take the proper notice of her calamity? (Kretzmann)

 *fierce anger.* See 2:3, 6; 4:11. The expression is common in Jeremiah (see Jer 4:8, 26; 12:13; 25:37–38; 44:6; 49:37; 51:45). (CSB)

The greatness of Jerusalem's misery was so unusual that men seeing it were bound to conclude that there was a special hand and work of God in it. The picture is that of an outcast by the wayside begging the passers-by for at least some show of sympathy. And it may be said that Jerusalem, in this instance, prefigures Christ, whom the language is prophetically made to suit. (Kretzmann)

In the liturgy of Good Friday, Israel’s grief is equated with the suffering of Jesus Christ when the Lord inflicted anger on Him. (TLSB)

**1:13** *From on high he sent fire.* See 1Ki 18:38; 2Ki 1:10, 12, 14; 2Ch 7:1. (CSB)

 *my bones.* The bones of Jerusalem (personified as a woman; see note on v. 8). In a strikingly similar image, the word of the Lord was like fire in the bones of the prophet (see Jer 20:9 and note). (CSB)

Here it is thought of as organs of the body that are first to feel a racking pain, **and it prevails against them,** so that the very vital powers are affected. (Kretzmann)

 *spread a net for my feet.* See Ps 57:6; Pr 29:5. (CSB)

This was to entangle her in His judgments. (Kretzmann)

 TURNED ME BACK – This would make it impossible to become free from the meshes of the net. (Kretzmann)

 *desolate.* Like Absalom’s sister Tamar (see 2Sa 13:20). (CSB)

The city is thus pictured as a person whose happiness is destroyed and whose health is broken. (Kretzmann)

**1:14** SINS…BOUND…YOKE – I am now tied and bound by the chain of my sins; and it is so wreathed, so doubled and twisted round me, that I cannot free myself. A fine representation of the miseries of a penitent soul, which feels that nothing but the pitifulness of God’s mercy can loose it. (ACC)

Sin is not only a taskmaster, but a yoke pressing the sinner down, with God Himself, as it were, holding the reins firmly twisted round His hand, so that escape is impossible. (Kretzmann)

**1:15** *In his winepress … trampled.* A common metaphor of divine judgment (see Isa 63:2–3; Joel 3:13; Rev 14:19–20; 19:15). (CSB)

 *Virgin Daughter of Judah.* See 2:13; see also notes on 2Ki 19:21; Jer 14:17. (CSB)

**1:16** *eyes overflow with tears.* See 3:48; Jer 9:18; 13:17; 14:17; see also Jer 9:1. (CSB)

 NO ONE IS NEAR – The friends to whom she might have looked for words and deeds which would restore her soul have forsaken her. (Kretzmann)

 *enemy has prevailed.* See v. 9. (CSB)

The enemy being still in power, with the result that the inhabitants of Jerusalem were destroyed, that they perished most miserably. (Kretzmann)

**1:17** STRETCHES OUT HER HANDS – Extending the hands is the form in supplication. (ACC)

 *become his foes.* See v. 2. (CSB)

His very neighbors being his enemies and seeking his destruction. (Kretzmann)

 *unclean thing.* See note on v. 8; for the same imagery elsewhere see Ezr 9:11; Isa 30:22; 64:6; Eze 7:19–20; 36:17. (CSB)

Shut out from intercourse with people and from attendance at the Temple-worship. These facts impress Jerusalem as being important and true; she must admit their justice. (Krretzmann)

**1:18** *The Lord is righteous.* See Dt 32:4; 2Ch 12:6; Ps 119:137; Jer 12:1; see also note on Ps 4:1. (CSB)

The Lord is just in His treatment of the rebellious city. (Kretzmann)

 *rebelled against his command.* See Nu 20:24. (CSB)

 *Listen, all you peoples.* See 1Ki 22:28; Ps 49:1; Mic 1:2. (CSB)

Judah feels a great need for sympathy. (Kretzmann)

**1:19** *allies … betrayed me.* See v. 2 and note. (CSB)

This would be the nations which had professed an interest of true affection. (Kretzmann)

 MY PRIESTS…ELDERS – This would include both the spiritual and the temporal rulers expiring in the neighborhood of the Sanctuary of Jehovah. (Kretzmann)

 *keep themselves alive.* See note on v. 11. (CSB)

The very nobles of the people being obliged to seek food of any kind whatsoever, if it only would suffice to preserve their lives. (Kretzmann)

**1:20** *I am in torment within.* Repeated in 2:11. (CSB)

Their very bowels were violently excited with excessive grief. (Kretzmann)

 *Outside … inside.* See Jer 14:18. The Sumerian “Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur” contains a striking parallel: “Inside it we die of famine, outside we are killed by weapons” (lines 403–404). (CSB)

**1:21** *day you have announced.* Day of God’s judgment on the nations (see Jer 25:15–38). (CSB)

Babylon shall be visited in her turn; and thy judgments poured out upon her shall equal her state with my own. See the last six chapters of the preceding prophecy for the accomplishment of this prediction. (ACC)

**1:22** *wickedness … before you.* See Ps 109:14–15. (CSB)

That is, Thou wilt call their crimes also into remembrance; and thou wilt do unto them by siege, sword, famine, and captivity, what thou hast done to me. Though thy judgments, because of thy long-suffering, are slow; yet, because of thy righteousness, they are sure. (ACC)

 *my heart is faint.* The same expression is found in Jer 8:18; see La 5:17; Isa 1:5. (CSB)

This is not a vindictive prayer, but a plea for justice, which repentant believers of all times may well send up to the throne of God. The very punishment of God upon rebellious children is intended to change into a blessed experience of good. (Kretzmann)