

Lamentations

Chapter 1

How Lonely Sits the City

How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become, she who was great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a slave. 2 She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has none to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies. 3 Judah has gone into exile because of affliction and hard servitude; she dwells now among the nations, but finds no resting place; her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress. 4 The roads to Zion mourn, for none come to the festival; all her gates are desolate; her priests groan; her virgins have been afflicted, and she herself suffers bitterly. 5 Her foes have become the head; her enemies prosper, because the LORD has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions; her children have gone away, captives before the foe. 6 From the daughter of Zion all her majesty has departed. Her princes have become like deer that find no pasture; they fled without strength before the pursuer. 7 Jerusalem remembers in the days of her affliction and wandering all the precious things that were hers from days of old. When her people fell into the hand of the foe, and there was none to help her, her foes gloated over her; they mocked at her downfall. 8 Jerusalem sinned grievously; therefore she became filthy; all who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness; she herself groans and turns her face away. 9 Her uncleanness was in her skirts; she took no thought of her future; therefore her fall is terrible; she has no comforter. “O LORD, behold my affliction, for the enemy has triumphed!” 10 The enemy has stretched out his hands over all her precious things; for she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary, those whom you forbade to enter your congregation. 11 All her people groan as they search for bread; they trade their treasures for food to revive their strength. “Look, O LORD, and see, for I am despised.” 12 “Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the LORD inflicted on the day of his fierce anger. 13 “From on high he sent fire; into my bones he made it descend; he spread a net for my feet; he turned me back; he has left me stunned, faint all the day long. 14 “My transgressions were bound into a yoke; by his hand they were fastened together; they were set upon my neck; he caused my strength to fail; the Lord gave me into the hands of those whom I cannot withstand. 15 “The Lord rejected all my mighty men in my midst; he summoned an assembly against me to crush my young men; the Lord has trodden as in a winepress the virgin daughter of Judah. 16 “For these things I weep; my eyes flow with tears; for a comforter is far from me, one to revive my spirit; my children are desolate, for the enemy has prevailed.” 17 Zion stretches out her hands, but there is none to comfort her; the LORD has commanded against Jacob that his neighbors should be his foes; Jerusalem has become a filthy thing among them. 18 “The LORD is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word; but hear, all you peoples, and see my suffering; my young women and my young men have gone into captivity. 19 “I called to my lovers, but they deceived me; my priests and elders perished in the city, while they sought food to revive their strength. 20 “Look, O LORD, for I am in distress; my stomach churns; my heart is wrung within me, because I have been very rebellious. In the street the sword bereaves; in the house it is like death. 21 “They heard my groaning, yet there is no one to comfort me. All my enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that you have done it. You have brought the day you announced; now let them be as I am. 22 “Let all their evildoing come before you, and deal with them as you have dealt with me because of all my transgressions; for 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)

lonely sits. 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)

city. Jerusalem. (CSB)

that was 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 bereft of her husband faced great hardship in ancient Israel, in spite of explicit legislation for her protection (Ex 22:22; Dt 10:18). (TLSB)

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. 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)

1:2 *weeps bitterly.* 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)

in the night. 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)

The author describes Israel’s reliance on foreign nations such as Egypt as harlotry (Jer 3:1; 4:30). (TLSB)

none to comfort her. These were all her friends, upon whom she depended for assistance. (Kretzmann)

have dealt treacherously. 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. 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)

pursuers. Babylonians. (TLSB)

1:4 *mourn.* Are deserted and desolate. (CSB)

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

none come to the festival. These were the great festivals of the Jewish year. (Kretzmann)

virgins have been afflicted. 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 *children have gone away* – 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 without strength. See Jer 52:7–8. (CSB)

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

1:7 *days of old.* For example, the days of David and Solomon. (CSB)

Many points in Lm recount what the people of Jerusalem felt during or after the siege by the Babylonians. (TLSB)

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

mocked at her downfall. 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 *filthy.* 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 *uncleanness.* Ceremonial uncleanness, here caused by willful sin. (CSB)

fall is terrible – The greatness of her fall being such as to cause men to marvel. (Kretzmann)

no comforter– 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)

1:10 *her sanctuary...you forbade.* 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)

revive their strength. 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 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. Though the Hbr presents difficulties, it is clear that passersby are hailed to look and see the greatness of Zion's sorrow. (TLSB)

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

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

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)

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)

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. (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)

Common theme in Ps to describe affliction. (TLSB)

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)

stunned. 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 *bound into a yoke*. Israel could not extricate herself from the consequences of her transgressions. (TLSB)

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 *trodden as in a winepress ... trampled*. A common metaphor of divine judgment (see Isa 63:2–3; Joel 3:13; Rev 14:19–20; 19:15). (CSB)

1:16 *comforter is far from me* – The friends to whom she might have looked for words and deeds which would restore her soul have forsaken her. (Kretzmann)

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

1:17 *be his foes*. His very neighbors being his enemies and seeking his destruction. (Kretzmann)

filthy thing. 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. (Kretzmann)

1:18 *The LORD is in the right*. See Dt 32:4; 2Ch 12:6; Ps 119:137; Jer 12:1. (CSB)

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

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

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

Judah feels a great need for sympathy. (Kretzmann)

1:19 *lovers ... deceived me*. This would be the nations which had professed an interest of true affection. (Kretzmann)

my priests and elders – This would include both the spiritual and the temporal rulers expiring in the neighborhood of the Sanctuary of Jehovah. (Kretzmann)

revive their strength. 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 distress.* Their very bowels were violently excited with excessive grief. (Kretzmann)

heart is wrung within me. 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 *They.* Enemies. (TLSB)

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

The day of the Lord brought punishment for Israel’s sins (Am 5:18–20; Jer 39:15–16). When it dawns again, Israel will be restored and her enemies destroyed (Jer 46:10; 47:4; 50:27). (TLSB)

1:22 *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)

Ch 1 Jeremiah describes the terrible conditions in Jerusalem after it fell to the Babylonians and its leading citizens were taken captive. Contrasted with the wealth and beauty of its former days, the ruins lie as a testimony to God’s just response against persistent sin and rebellion. The foundation of sin and rebellion is unbelief, a refusal to trust God and follow Him. Even in the face of His people’s faithlessness, God proves Himself faithful to His promise of a Savior by preserving a remnant that will return to Jerusalem. • Teach us to live wisely, O Lord, according to Your will and in the joy of our salvation in Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)