

Lamentations

Chapter 2

The Lord Has Destroyed Without Pity

How the Lord in his anger has set the daughter of Zion under a cloud! He has cast down from heaven to earth the splendor of Israel; he has not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger. 2 The Lord has swallowed up without mercy all the habitations of Jacob; in his wrath he has broken down the strongholds of the daughter of Judah; he has brought down to the ground in dishonor the kingdom and its rulers. 3 He has cut down in fierce anger all the might of Israel; he has withdrawn from them his right hand in the face of the enemy; he has burned like a flaming fire in Jacob, consuming all around. 4 He has bent his bow like an enemy, with his right hand set like a foe; and he has killed all who were delightful in our eyes in the tent of the daughter of Zion; he has poured out his fury like fire. 5 The Lord has become like an enemy; he has swallowed up Israel; he has swallowed up all its palaces; he has laid in ruins its strongholds, and he has multiplied in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation. 6 He has laid waste his booth like a garden, laid in ruins his meeting place; the LORD has made Zion forget festival and Sabbath, and in his fierce indignation has spurned king and priest. 7 The Lord has scorned his altar, disowned his sanctuary; he has delivered into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; they raised a clamor in the house of the LORD as on the day of festival. 8 The LORD determined to lay in ruins the wall of the daughter of Zion; he stretched out the measuring line; he did not restrain his hand from destroying; he caused rampart and wall to lament; they languished together. 9 Her gates have sunk into the ground; he has ruined and broken her bars; her king and princes are among the nations; the law is no more, and her prophets find no vision from the LORD. 10 The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground in silence; they have thrown dust on their heads and put on sackcloth; the young women of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground. 11 My eyes are spent with weeping; my stomach churns; my bile is poured out to the ground because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, because infants and babies faint in the streets of the city. 12 They cry to their mothers, "Where is bread and wine?" as they faint like a wounded man in the streets of the city, as their life is poured out on their mothers' bosom. 13 What can I say for you, to what compare you, O daughter of Jerusalem? What can I liken to you, that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion? For your ruin is vast as the sea; who can heal you? 14 Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes, but have seen for you oracles that are false and misleading. 15 All who pass along the way clap their hands at you; they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem: "Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth?" 16 All your enemies rail against you; they hiss, they gnash their teeth, they cry: "We have swallowed her! Ah, this is the day we longed for; now we have it; we see it!" 17 The LORD has done what he purposed; he has carried out his word, which he commanded long ago; he has thrown down without pity; he has made the enemy rejoice over you and exalted the might of your foes. 18 Their heart cried to the Lord. O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears stream down like a torrent day and night! Give yourself no rest, your eyes no respite! 19 "Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the night watches! Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord! Lift your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint for hunger at the head of every street." 20 Look, O LORD, and see! With whom have you dealt thus? Should women eat the fruit of their womb, the children of their tender care? Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord? 21 In the dust of the streets lie the young and the old; my young women and my young men have fallen by the sword; you have killed them in the day of

your anger, slaughtering without pity. 22 You summoned as if to a festival day my terrors on every side, and on the day of the anger of the LORD no one escaped or survived; those whom I held and raised my enemy destroyed.

Ch 2 In His righteous anger, God did not spare even His temple. The poet cannot exonerate Israel from guilt. Because it is the Lord who “has thrown down without pity,” relief must come from Him. Fervent, incessant prayer alone offers hope (vv 17–19). Responding to this exhortation, the daughter of Zion again appears on the stage to plead for the Lord’s mercy. (TLSB)

2:1 *set ... under a cloud!* Rare expression, likely describing how the Lord’s wrath has shrouded Jerusalem, hazy with the dust and smoke of destruction. (TLSB)

cast down...the splendor of Israel. The imagery is that of a falling star (as in Isa 14:12). (CSB)

This was the glory of the capital itself, chosen by God, as it had been, for the seat of His glory and power in the midst of His people had been established there. (Kretzmann)

footstool. Either (1) the ark of the covenant (see 1Ch 28:2) or, more likely, (2) Mount Zion (see Ps 99:5, 9). (CSB)

This is the very Ark of the Covenant, 1 Chron. 28, 2, where Jehovah was enthroned between the wings of the cherubim, was removed and destroyed. (Kretzmann)

2:2 *swallowed up...habitations of Jacob.* The Lord fights against His own people. (TLSB)

2:3 *flaming fire...consuming all around.* See Nu 11:3; Job 1:16; Ps 106:18. (CSB)

God broke the strength and majesty in the heat of His indignation. (Kretzmann)

The Lord was directly active in its destruction. (Kretzmann)

2:4 *bent his bow.* See Dt 32:42; Ps 7:12–13; Zec 9:13–14. (CSB)

poured out his fury. See Ps 69:24; 79:6; Jer 6:11; 7:20; 10:25; 42:18; 44:6; Hos 5:10; Zep 3:8. (CSB)

This was done in the capture and destruction of the city. (Kretzmann)

the tent – This is Israel personified who once resided in Jerusalem (he tent). (TLSB)

2:5 *palaces ... strongholds.* See Hos 8:14. (CSB)

This would include the fine dwellings of the rich and mighty and all the fortified places throughout the country. (Kretzmann)

He has multiplied ... Daughter of Judah. The Sumerian “Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur” offers this parallel: “In the desolate city there was uttered nothing but laments and dirges” (lines 361–362, 486–487). (CSB)

This would be sorrow and sadness, mourning and misery. (Kretzmann)

2:6 *booth*. Originally the tabernacle, later the temple (see Ps 27:4–5). (CSB)

In the storm of God’s wrath, the massive structure of Israel’s temple disintegrated as if it were a flimsy hut made of leaves and branches. (TLSB)

like a garden. Cf. Isa 5:5–6; Jer 5:10; 12:10. (CSB)

The Temple being subjected to ruin like a garden which the owner converts into some other kind of plot if it no longer suits his purposes. (Kretzmann)

his meeting place. The tabernacle/temple, where God met with his people (see Ex 25:22; 29:42–43; Ps 74:4). (CSB)

He no longer desired these mediators of His covenant (kings and priests), and the service of the priests was no longer required when the Temple-worship cease. (Kretzmann)

2:7 *scorned...disowned*. These two verbs are found in Ps 89:38–39 (“rejected ... renounced”) in connection with the Lord’s forsaking of the king from the dynasty of David. (CSB)

God rejected it with disdain, chiefly on account of the hypocritical worship connected with it. (Kretzmann)

raised a clamor in the house of the LORD. See Ps 74:4. (CSB)

This was the raucous cries of invaders to replace the joyful shouts of worshipers. (TLSB)

on the day of festival. See Hos 12:9. (CSB)

2:8 *determined to lay in ruins*. See Jer 32:31. (CSB)

This was the destruction of Jerusalem setting into execution the judgment of God, 2 Kings 25, 10. (Kretzmann)

Daughter of Zion. A personification of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. (CSB)

stretched out a measuring line. To destroy with the same standards of precision and propriety used in building. (CSB)

Demolition of the city walls was carried out with the same precision the builders used in erecting them (Is 34:11). (TLSB)

rampart and wall to lament. See Isa 26:1. The ramparts were the outer fortifications (see 2Sa 20:15). (CSB)

2:9 *gates have sunk* – They were buried under a mass of rubbish and earth, which the destruction of the city has scattered over them. (Kretzmann)

law is no more – The proclamation of God’s Word was ended. (TLSB)

prophets find no vision. The Lord was no longer communicating to his people through prophets (see Ps 74:9; Am 8:11). (CSB)

After Jeremiah was carried away into Egypt (Jeremiah 43), no prophetic voice was heard in the region of Israel for decades. (TLSB)

2:10 *elders.* This would be the leaders of the Jewish Church. (Kretzmann)

sit on the ground in silence ... sprinkled dust on their heads and put on sackcloth ... bowed their heads. Signs of mourning (see Job 2:12–13; Ps 35:13–14). (CSB)

Ambr: “Jeremiah knew that penitence was a great remedy, which he in his Lamentations took up for Jerusalem... Here you recognize the intention of the soul, the faithfulness of the mind, the disposition of the body” (NPNF 2 10:351). (TLSB)

They have no counsel to give, chiefly because they are dumb with grief. Such is the effect when the Lord carries out His sentence of judgment upon nations and upon individuals who oppose His will. (Kretzmann)

young women of Jerusalem. These were ordinarily care-free and happy. (Kretzmann)

2:11 *My eyes are spent.* They were spent, worn out, with weeping. (Kretzmann)

my bile is poured out to the ground – Since the heart was considered the seat of the passions, - all my feelings are dissolved with pain. (Kretzmann)

It is vomiting that ends in dry heaves. (TLSB)

my people. Lit. “the daughter of my people.” (CSB)

2:12 *poured out on their mothers’ bosom.* They hug and plead for food (perhaps breast milk), (TLSB)

2:13 *say for you.* See Job 29:11. (CSB)

God is asking what can be brought that will be some measure of comfort from the experience of others. (Kretzmann)

ruin is vast as the sea. Thou hast a flood of afflictions, a sea of troubles, an ocean of miseries. (Kretzmann)

2:14 *prophets ... false.* Jeremiah often denounced false prophets (see Jer 5:12–13; 6:13–15; 8:10–12; 14:13–15; 23:9–40; 27:9–28:17). (CSB)

Jeremiah had many tirades against the false prophets. Those misled by religious charlatans share the guilt of their deceivers. Gregory says, “While fearing to reprove faults, they vainly flatter evil doers by promising security; neither do they at all discover the iniquity of sinners, since they refrain their voice from chiding. For the language of reproof is the key of discovery, because by chiding it discloses the fault of which even he who has committed it is often himself unaware.” (TLSB)

deceptive. The unusual Hebrew word underlying this word comes from the same root as that underlying “banish” in Jer 27:10, 15: The lies of false prophets “mislead” the people and thus lead to “banishment” by the Lord—so they are “banishing” in their effect. (CSB)

They did not reprove for sin, they flattered them in their transgressions; and instead of turning away thy captivity, by turning thee from thy sins, they have pretended visions of good in thy favor, and false burdens for thy enemies. (Kretzmann)

2:15 *wag their heads.* All of above actions illustrate scorn and mockery expressing the derision which they felt. (Kretzmann)

was called the perfection of beauty. Jerusalem had the distinction of being the city of the great King (cf Ps 50:2) (TLSB)

the joy of all the earth. It is a question of scornful wonderment, denying Jerusalem's right ever to have borne such designations. To this behavior of strangers is added the mocking triumph of enemies. (Kretzmann)

2:16 *swallowed her up.* See Jer 51:34. (CSB)

They feel a corresponding satisfaction and pleasure. But the destruction of Jerusalem was not a chance happening, nor was it alone the culmination of men's hateful plans. (Kretzmann)

2:17 *carried out his word.* God makes contact with sinners through His Word. The Word comes from God, who authors it and sends it across time and space to the sinner. It will accomplish what God desire and that is the salvation of his people. God assures us in these verses that His Word is effective. It is His Word because it goes out of His mouth and returns to Him. As His Word, it is powerful. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us, “The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to the dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (4:12) (PBC)

long ago. The days of Moses (see, e.g., the threats of Lev 26:23–39; Dt 28:15–68). (CSB)

The Lord fulfilled the curses of Dt 27–28. (TLSB)

The holiness of the Lord demands the punishment of every act of rebellion against His holy Law. (Kretzmann)

exalted the might of your foes. Increased the strength. The enemies of Israel were given power, authority, and victory. (Kretzmann)

2:18 *O wall.* A city gate is similarly addressed in Isa 14:31. (CSB)

Daughter of Zion. A personification of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. (CSB)

2:19 *beginning of the night.* Prayer continued into the night, which was divided into watches. (TLSB)

pour out your heart. In earnest prayer (see Ps 62:8). (CSB)

like water. A common simile with “pour out” (see Dt 12:16, 24; 15:23; Ps 79:3; Hos 5:10). (CSB)

The very heart dissolving in tears, as it were, in the excess of the sorrow caused by the great calamity. (Kretzmann)

Lift up your hands to him. In prayer and praise (see Ps 28:2; 63:4; 1Ti 2:8). (CSB)

2:20–22 The prayer called for in v. 19. (CSB)

2:20 *women eat the fruit of their womb.* When Jerusalem’s food supply ran out during the Babylonian siege in 586 B.C., cannibalism resulted (see Eze 5:10). Such shocking activity was not unprecedented in Israel (see 2Ki 6:28–29), and it would occur again: “A woman ... who ... had fled to Jerusalem ... killed her son, roasted him, and ate one half, concealing and saving the rest” (Josephus, *Jewish War*, 6.3.4). (CSB)

Disobedience to God leads to horrific consequences (Lv 26:26; Dt 28:56). (TLSB)

This was revolting cannibalism caused by excessive hunger. Cf. Lev. 26, 29; 'Deut. 28, 53. (Kretzmann)

priest and prophet be killed. The chief priest Seraiah and other temple officials were slain at Riblah by the Babylonians (2Ki 25:18–21; Jer 52:24–27). It appears that others were killed on the spot at Jerusalem. (TLSB)

2:22 *terrors on every side.* From every direction, so that Jerusalem was surrounded by them. (Kretzmann)

day of the anger of the Lord. The chapter ends as it began (see v. 1). (CSB)

no one escaped or survived. See Jer 42:17; 44:14(CSB)

Fortunate is the person who, when experiencing the Lord's punishment, cried out thus in true repentance! (Kretzmann)

Ch 2 By the Lord’s hand, Babylon has destroyed Jerusalem and razed its temple. The consequences of sin have left people slaughtered and the remaining citizens exiled to Babylon. God has turned His back on His people for turning their back on Him. Their worship of false gods violated the covenant dating back to the exodus from Egypt. Their sin has now born hideous fruit. Despite the apostasy of God’s people, He still loves them and will bring them back from their captivity to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. From these people, God shall raise up a Savior for all nations. • Lord, teach us to heed Your warnings and repent when we stray, that we might receive Your precious forgiveness. Amen. (TLSB)