How solitary lies the city, once so full of people! 
Once great among nations, now become a widow; 
Once queen among provinces, now put to forced labour!

Bitterly she weeps in the night, 
tears run down her cheeks; 
she has no one to bring her comfort 
among all that love her; 
all her friends turned traitor 
and became her enemies.

Judah went into the misery of exile 
and endless servitude. 
Settled among the nations, 
she found no resting-place; 
all her persecutors fell upon her 
in her sore straits.

The paths to Zion mourn, 
for none attend her sacred feasts; 
all her gates are desolate. 
Her priests groan and sigh, 
her virgins are cruelly treated. 
How bitter is her fate!

Her adversaries have become her masters, 
her enemies take their ease, 
for the LORD has cruelly punished her 
because of misdeeds without number; 
her young children have gone, 
driven away captive by the enemy.

All majesty has vanished 
from the daughter of Zion. 
Her princes have become like deer 
that can find no pasture 
and run on, their strength all spent, 
pursued by the hunter.

Jerusalem has remembered 
her days of misery and wandering [prob. rdg, Heb adds all her treasures which have been from days of old], 
when her people fell into the power of the adversary 
and there was no one to help her. 
The adversary saw and mocked 
at her fallen state.

Jerusalem had sinned greatly, 
and so she was treated like a filthy rag; 
all those who had honoured her held her cheap,
for they had seen her nakedness.
What could she do but sigh
and turn away?

9 Uncleanness clung to her skirts,
and she gave no thought to her fate.
Her fall was beyond belief
and there was no one to comfort her.
Look, LORD, upon her misery,
see how the enemy has triumphed.

10 The adversary stretched out his hand
to seize all her treasures;
then it was that she saw Gentiles
entering her sanctuary,
Gentiles forbidden by thee to enter
the assembly, for it was thine.

11 All her people groaned,
they begged for bread;
they sold their treasures for food
to give them strength again.
Look, O LORD, and see
how cheap I am accounted.

12 Is it of no concern to you who pass by?
If only you would look and see:
is there any agony like mine,
like these my torments
with which the LORD has cruelly punished me
in the day of his anger?

13 He sent down fire from heaven,
it ran through my bones;
he spread out a net to catch my feet,
and turned me back;
he made me an example of desolation,
racked with sickness all day long.

14 My transgressions were bound
upon me,
his own hand knotted them round me;
his yoke was lifted on to my neck,
my strength failed beneath its weight,
the Lord abandoned me to its hold,
and I could not stand.

15 The Lord treated with scorn
all the mighty men within my walls;
he marshalled rank on rank against me
to crush my young warriors.
The Lord trod down, like grapes in the press,
the virgin daughter of Judah.

16 For these things I weep over my plight,
my eyes run with tears;
for any to comfort me and renew my strength
are far to seek;  
my sons are an example of desolation,  
for the enemy is victorious.  
17Zion lifted her hands in prayer,  
but there was no one to comfort her;  
the LORD gave Jacob’s enemies the order  
to beset him on every side.  
Jerusalem became a filthy rag in their midst.  
18The LORD was in the right;  
it was I who rebelled against his commands.  
Listen, O listen, all you nations,  
and look on my agony:  
my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity.  
19I called to my lovers, they broke faith with me;  
my priests and my elders in the city  
went hungry and could find nothing,  
although they sought food for themselves  
to renew their strength.  
20See, LORD, how sorely I am distressed.  
My bowels writhe in anguish  
and my stomach turns within me,  
because I wantonly rebelled.  
The sword makes orphans in the streets,  
as plague does within doors.  
21Hear me when I groan  
with no one to comfort me.  
All my enemies, when they heard of my calamity,  
rejoiced at what thou hadst done;  
but hasten the day thou hast promised  
when they shall become like me.  
22Let all their evil deeds come before thee;  
tortment them in their turn,  
as thou hast tormented me  
for all my transgressions;  
for my sighs are many and my heart is faint.

Zion’s hope of relief after punishment

21What darkness the Lord in his anger  
has brought upon the daughter of Zion!  
He hurled down from heaven to earth  
the glory of Israel,  
and did not remember in the day of his anger  
that Zion was his footstool.  
2The Lord overwhelmed without pity  
all the dwellings of Jacob.  
In his wrath he tore down  
the strongholds of the daughter of Judah;  
he levelled with the ground and desecrated
the kingdom and its rulers.

3 In his anger he hacked down
the horn of Israel’s pride,
he withdrew his helping hand
when the enemy came on;
and he blazed in Jacob like flaming fire
that rages far and wide.

4 In enmity he strung his bow;
he took his stand like an adversary
and with his strong arm he slew
all those who had been his delight;
he poured his fury out like fire
on the tent of the daughter of Zion.

5 The Lord played an enemy’s part
and overwhelmed Israel.
He overwhelmed all their towered mansions
and brought down their strongholds in ruins;
sorrow upon sorrow he brought
to the daughter of Judah.

6 He stripped his tabernacle as a vine is stripped,
and made the place of assembly a ruin.
In Zion the LORD blotted out all memory
of festal assembly [festal assembly: or appointed seasons] and of sabbath;
king and priest alike he scorned
in the grimness of his anger.

7 The Lord spurned his own altar
and laid a curse upon his sanctuary.
He delivered the walls of her mansions
into the power of the enemy;
in the LORD’s very house they raised shouts of victory
as on a day of festival.

8 The LORD was minded to bring down in ruins
the walls of the daughter of Zion;
he took their measure with his line
and did not scruple to demolish her;
he made rampart and wall lament,
and both together lay dejected.

9 Her gates are sunk into the earth,
he has shattered and broken their bars;
her king and her rulers are among the Gentiles,
and there is no law;
her prophets too have received
no vision from the LORD.

10 The elders of the daughter of Zion
sit on the ground and sigh;
they have cast dust on their heads
and clothed themselves in sackcloth;
the virgins of Jerusalem
bow their heads to the ground.
My eyes are blinded with tears, my bowels writhe in anguish. In my bitterness my bile is spilt on the earth because of my people’s wound, when children and infants faint in the streets of the town. And cry to their mothers, ‘Where can we get corn and wine?’ – when they faint like wounded things in the streets of the city; gasping out their lives in their mothers’ bosom. How can I cheer you? Whose plight is like yours, daughter of Jerusalem? To what can I compare you for your comfort, virgin daughter of Zion? For your wound gapes wide as the ocean; who can heal you? The visions that your prophets saw for you were false and painted shams; they did not bring home to you your guilt and so reverse your fortunes. The visions that they saw for you were delusions, false and fraudulent. All those who pass by snap their fingers at you; they hiss and wag their heads at you, daughter of Jerusalem: ‘Is this the city once called Perfect in beauty, Joy of the whole earth?’ All your enemies make mouths and jeer at you; they hiss and grind their teeth, saying, ‘Here we are, this is the day we have waited for; we have lived to see it.’ The LORD has done what he planned to do, he has fulfilled his threat, all that he ordained from days of old. He has demolished without pity and let the enemy rejoice over you, filling your adversaries with pride. Cry with a full heart to the Lord, O wall of the daughter of Zion; let your tears run down like a torrent by day and by night. Give yourself not a moment’s rest, let your tears never cease.
19 Arise and cry aloud in the night;  
at the beginning of every watch  
pour out your heart like water  
in the Lord’s very presence.  
Lift up your hands to him  
for the lives of your children [prob. rdg, Heb adds who faint with hunger at every street-corner].

20 Look, LORD, and see:  
who is it that thou hast thus tormented?  
Must women eat the fruit of their wombs,  
the children they have brought safely to birth?  
Shall priest and prophet be slain  
in the sanctuary of the Lord?

21 There in the streets young men and old  
lie on the ground.  
My virgins and my young men have fallen  
by sword and by famine;  
thou hast slain them in the day of thy anger,  
slaughtered them without pity.

22 Thou didst summon my enemies against me from every side,  
like men assembling for a festival;  
not a man escaped, not one survived  
in the day of the LORD’s anger.  
All whom I brought safely to birth and reared  
were destroyed by my enemies.

3 1 I am the man who has known affliction,  
I have felt the rod of his wrath.  
2 It was I whom he led away and left to walk  
in darkness, where no light is.  
3 Against me alone he, has turned his hand,  
and so it is all day long.  
4 He has wasted away my flesh and my skin  
and broken all my bones;  
5 he has built up walls around me,  
behind and before,  
6 and has cast me into a place of darkness  
like a man long dead.  
7 He has walled me in so that I cannot escape,  
and weighed me down with fetters;  
8 even when I cry out and call for help,  
he rejects my prayer.  
9 He has barred my road with blocks of stone  
and tangled up my way.  
10 He lies in wait for me like a bear  
or a lion lurking in a covert.  
11 He has made my way refractory and lamed me  
and left me desolate.
He has strung his bow and made me the target for his arrows; he has pierced my kidneys with shafts drawn from his quiver. I have become a laughing-stock to all nations, the target of their mocking songs all day. He has given me my fill of bitter herbs and made me drunk with wormwood. He has broken my teeth on gravel; fed on ashes, I am racked with pain; peace has gone out of my life, and I have forgotten what prosperity means. Then I cry out that my strength has gone and so has my hope in the LORD.

The memory of my distress and my wanderings is wormwood and gall. Remember, O remember, and stoop down to me I sink down. All this I take to heart and therefore I will wait patiently: the LORD’s true love is surely not spent, nor has his compassion failed; they are new every morning, so great is his constancy. The LORD, I say, is all that I have; therefore I will wait for him patiently. The LORD is good to those who look for him, to all who seek him; it is good to wait in patience and sigh for deliverance by the LORD. It is good, too, for a man to carry the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and sigh if it is heavy upon him; let him lay his face in the dust, and there may yet be hope. Let him turn his cheek to the smiter and endure full measure of abuse; for the Lord will not cast off his servants for ever. He may punish cruelly, yet he will have compassion in the fullness of his love;
he does not willingly afflict
or punish any mortal man.

To trample underfoot
any prisoner in the land,
to deprive a man of his rights
in defiance of the Most High,
to pervert justice in the courts –
such things the Lord has never approved.
Who can command and it is done,
if the Lord has forbidden it?
Do not both bad and good proceed
from the mouth of the Most High?
Why should any man living complain,
any mortal who has sinned?
Let us examine our ways and put them to the test
and turn back to the LORD;
let us lift up our hearts, not our hands,
to God in heaven.
We ourselves have sinned and rebelled,
and thou hast not forgiven.
In anger thou hast turned [prob. rdg, Heb hidden] and pursued us
and slain without pity;
thee hast hidden thyself behind the clouds
beyond reach of our prayers;
thee hast treated us as offscouring and refuse
among the nations.
All our enemies make mouths
and jeer at us.
Before us lie hunter’s scare and pit,
devastation and ruin.
My eyes run with streams of water
because of my people’s wound.
My eyes stream with unceasing tears
and refuse all comfort,
while the Lord in heaven looks down
and watches my affliction [my affliction: prob. rdg, Heb my eye],
while the Lord torments [the Lord torments: prob. rdg, Heb tormenting]
me
with the fate of all the daughters of my city.

Those who for no reason were my enemies
drove me cruelly like a bird;
they thrust me alive into the silent pit,
and they closed it over me with a stone;
the waters rose high above my head,
and I said, ‘My end has come.’
But I called on thy name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit; thou heardest my voice; do not turn a deaf ear when I cry, ‘Come to my relief.’

Thou wast near when I called to thee; thou didst say, ‘Have no fear.’

Lord, thou didst plead my cause and ransom my life; thou sawest, LORD, the injustice done to me and gavest judgement in my favour; thou sawest their vengeance, all their plots against me.

Thou didst hear their bitter taunts, O LORD, their many plots against me, the whispering, the murmurs of my enemies all the day long.

See how, whether they sit or stand, they taunt me bitterly.

Pay them back for their deeds, O LORD, pay them back what they deserve.

Show them how hard thy heart can be, how little concern thou hast for them.

Pursue them in anger and exterminate them from beneath thy heavens, O LORD.

1 How dulled is the gold, how tarnished the fine gold!
The stones of the sanctuary [The stones of the sanctuary: or Bright gems] lie strewn at every street-corner.

See Zion’s precious sons, once worth their weight in finest gold, now counted as pitchers of earthenware made by any potter’s hand;

Even whales [prob. rdg, Heb jackals] uncover the teat and suckle their young; but the daughters of my people are cruel as ostriches in the desert.

The sucking infant’s tongue cleaves to its palate from thirst; young children beg for bread but no one offers them a crumb.

Those who once fed delicately are desolate in the streets, and those nurtured in purple now grovel on dunghills.

The punishment [Or iniquity] of my people is worse than the penalty [Or sin] of Sodom,
which was overthrown in a moment
and no one wrung his hands.
7 Her crowned princes [crowned princes: or Nazirites] were once purer than snow,
whiter than milk;
they were ruddier than branching coral [than ... coral: prob. rdg, Heb branch than coral],
and their limbs were lapis lazuli.
8 But their faces turned blacker than soot,
and no one knew them in the streets;
the skin was drawn tight over their bones,
dry as touchwood.
9 Those who died by the sword were more fortunate
than those who died of hunger;
these wasted away, deprived
of the produce of the field.
10 Tender-hearted women with their own hands
boiled their own children;
their children became their food
in the day of my people’s wounding.
11 The LORD glutted his rage
and poured forth his anger;
he kindled a fire in Zion,
and it consumed her foundations.
12 This no one believed, neither the kings of the earth
nor anyone that dwelt in the world:
that enemy or invader would enter
the gates of Jerusalem.
13 It was for the sins of her prophets
and for the iniquities of her priests,
who shed within her walls
the blood of the righteous.
14 They wandered blindly in the streets,
so stained with blood
that men would not touch
even their garments.
15 ‘Away, away; unclean!’ men cried to them.
‘Away, do not come near.’
They hastened away, they wandered among the nations [prob. rdg, Heb adds they said],
unable to find any resting-place.
16 The LORD himself scattered them,
he thought of them no more;
he showed no favour to priests,
no pity for elders.

17 Still we strain our eyes,
looking in vain for help.
We have watched and watched
for a nation powerless to save us.

18 When we go out, we take to by-ways to avoid the public streets; our days are all but finished [our ... finished: prob. rdg, Heb our end has drawn near, our days are complete], our end has come.

19 Our pursuers have shown themselves swifter than vultures in the sky; they are hot on our trail over the hills, they lurk to catch us in the wilderness.

20 The LORD’s anointed, the breath of life to us, was caught in their machinations; although we had thought to live among the nations, safe under his protection.

21 Rejoice and be glad, daughter of Edom, you who live in the land of Uz. Yet the cup shall pass to you in your turn, and when you are drunk you will expose yourself to shame.

22 The punishment for your sin, daughter of Zion, is now complete, and never again shall you be carried into exile. But you, daughter of Edom, your sin shall be punished, and your guilt revealed.

A prayer for remembrance and restoration

5 1 Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us; look, and see how we are scorned.
2 Our patrimony is turned over to strangers and our homes to foreigners.
3 We are like orphans, without a father; our mothers are like widows.
4 We must buy our own water to drink, our own wood can only be had at a price.
5 The yoke is on our necks, we are overdriven; we are weary and are given no rest.
6 We came to terms, now with the Egyptians, now with the Assyrians, to provide us with food.
7 Our fathers sinned and are no more, and we bear the burden of their guilt.
8 Slaves have become our rulers, and there is no one to rescue us from them.
9 We must bring in our food from the wilderness, risking our lives in the scorching heat [in the scorching heat: or by the sword].
10 Our skins are blackened as in a furnace by the ravages of starvation.
11 Women were raped in Zion,  
   virgins raped in the cities of Judah.  
12 Princes were hung up by their hands,  
   and elders received no honour.  
13 Young men toil to grind corn,  
   and boys stumble under loads of wood.  
14 Elders have left off their sessions in the gate,  
   and young men no longer pluck the strings.  
15 Joy has fled from our hearts,  
   and our dances are turned to mourning.  
16 The garlands have fallen from our heads;  
   woe betide us, sinners that we are.  
17 For this we are sick at heart,  
   for all this our eyes grow dim:  
18 because Mount Zion is desolate  
   and over it the jackals run wild.

19 O LORD, thou art enthroned for ever,  
   thy throne endures from one generation to another.  
20 Why wilt thou quite forget us  
   and forsake us these many days?  
21 O LORD, turn us back to thyself, and we will come back;  
   renew our days as in times long past.  
22 For if thou hast utterly rejected us,  
   then great indeed has been thy anger against us.