

LAMENTATIONS

Sorrows of captive Zion

1¹How 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!

2²Bitterly 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.

3³Judah 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.

4⁴The 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!

5⁵Her 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.

6⁶All 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.

7⁷Jerusalem 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.

8⁸Jerusalem 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?

⁹Uncleanness 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.

¹⁰The 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.

¹¹All 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.

¹²Is 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?

¹³He 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.

¹⁴My transgressions were bound [bound: *prob. rdg, Heb, word unknown*]
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 [its hold: *prob. rdg, Heb obscure*],
and I could not stand.

¹⁵The 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.

¹⁶For these things I weep over my plight [my plight: *prob. rdg, Heb my eye*],
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;
torment 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.
²²The 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.

³In 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.

⁴In 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.

⁵The 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.

⁶He 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.

⁷The 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.

⁸The 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.

⁹Her 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.

¹⁰The 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.

¹¹My 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

¹²and 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.

¹³How 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?

¹⁴The 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 [*fraudulent: or causing banishment*].

¹⁵All 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?'

¹⁶All 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.'

¹⁷The 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.

¹⁸Cry with a full heart [*Cry ... heart: prob. rdg, Heb Their heart cried*] 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.

¹⁹Arise 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*].

²⁰Look, 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?

²¹There 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.

²²Thou 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.

3¹I am the man who has known affliction,
I have felt the rod of his wrath.

²It was I whom he led away and left to walk
in darkness, where no light is.

³Against me alone he, has turned his hand,
and so it is all day long.

⁴He has wasted away my flesh and my skin
and broken all my bones;

⁵he has built up walls around me,
behind and before,

⁶and has cast me into a place of darkness
like a man long dead.

⁷He has walled me in so that I cannot escape,
and weighed me down with fetters;

⁸even when I cry out and call for help,
he rejects my prayer.

⁹He has barred my road with blocks of stone
and tangled up my way.

¹⁰He lies in wait for me like a bear
or a lion lurking in a covert.

¹¹He has made my way refractory and lamed me
and left me desolate.

¹²He has strung his bow
and made me the target for his arrows;
¹³he has pierced my kidneys with shafts
drawn from his quiver.
¹⁴I have become a laughing-stock to all nations,
the target of their mocking songs all day.
¹⁵He has given me my fill of bitter herbs
and made me drunk with wormwood.
¹⁶He has broken my teeth on gravel;
fed on ashes, I am racked with pain;
¹⁷peace has gone out of my life,
and I have forgotten what prosperity means.
¹⁸Then I cry out that my strength has gone
and so has my hope in the LORD.

¹⁹The memory of my distress and my wanderings
is [The memory ... is: *or* Remember my distress and my wanderings, the]
wormwood and gall.

²⁰Remember, O remember,
and stoop down to me [stoop down to me: *prob. original rdg, altered in Heb*
to I sink down] [Remember ... me: *or* I remember, I remember them and
sink down].

²¹All this I take to heart
and therefore I will wait patiently:
²²the LORD's true love is surely not spent [spent: *prob. rdg, Heb*
unintelligible],

nor has his compassion failed;

²³they are new every morning,
so great is his constancy.

²⁴The LORD, I say, is all that I have;
therefore I will wait for him patiently.

²⁵The LORD is good to those who look for him,
to all who seek him;

²⁶it is good to wait in patience and sigh
for deliverance by the LORD.

²⁷It is good, too, for a man
to carry the yoke in his youth.

²⁸Let him sit alone and sigh
if it is heavy upon him;

²⁹let him lay his face in the dust,
and there may yet be hope.

³⁰Let him turn his cheek to the smiter
and endure full measure of abuse;

³¹for the Lord will not cast off
his servants [his servants: *prob. rdg, Heb omitted*] for ever.

³²He may punish cruelly, yet he will have compassion
in the fullness of his love;

³³he does not willingly afflict
or punish any mortal man.

³⁴To trample underfoot
any prisoner in the land,
³⁵to deprive a man of his rights
in defiance of the Most High,
³⁶to pervert justice in the courts –
such things the Lord has never approved.

³⁷Who can command and it is done,
if the Lord has forbidden it?

³⁸Do not both bad and good proceed
from the mouth of the Most High?

³⁹Why should any man living complain,
any mortal who has sinned?

⁴⁰Let us examine our ways and put them to the test
and turn back to the LORD;

⁴¹let us lift up our hearts, not our hands,
to God in heaven.

⁴²We ourselves have sinned and rebelled,
and thou hast not forgiven.

⁴³In anger thou hast turned [*prob. rdg, Heb hidden*] and pursued us
and slain without pity;

⁴⁴thou hast hidden thyself behind the clouds
beyond reach of our prayers;

⁴⁵thou hast treated us as offscouring and refuse
among the nations.

⁴⁶All our enemies make mouths
and jeer at us.

⁴⁷Before us lie hunter's scare and pit,
devastation and ruin.

⁴⁸My eyes run with streams of water
because of my people's wound.

⁴⁹My eyes stream with unceasing tears
and refuse all comfort,

⁵⁰while the LORD in heaven looks down
and watches my affliction [*my affliction: prob. rdg, Heb my eye*],

⁵¹while the LORD torments [*the LORD torments: prob. rdg, Heb tormenting*]
me

with the fate of all the daughters of my city.

⁵²Those who for no reason were my enemies
drove me cruelly like a bird;

⁵³they thrust me alive into the silent pit,
and they closed it over me with a stone;

⁵⁴the waters rose high above my head,
and I said, 'My end has come.'

⁵⁵But I called on thy name, O LORD,
from the depths of the pit;
⁵⁶thou heardest my voice; do not turn. a deaf ear
when I cry, 'Come to my relief.'
⁵⁷Thou wast near when I called to thee;
thou didst say, 'Have no fear.'
⁵⁸Lord, thou didst plead my cause
and ransom my life;
⁵⁹thou sawest, LORD, the injustice done to me
and gavest judgement in my favour;
⁶⁰thou sawest their vengeance,
all their plots against me.
⁶¹Thou didst hear their bitter taunts, O LORD,
their many plots against me,
⁶²the whispering, the murmurs of my enemies
all the day long.
⁶³See how, whether they sit or stand,
they taunt me bitterly.
⁶⁴Pay them back for their deeds, O LORD,
pay them back what they deserve.
⁶⁵Show them how hard thy heart can be,
how little concern thou hast for them.
⁶⁶Pursue them in anger and exterminate them
from beneath thy heavens, O LORD.

4¹How 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.
²See Zion's precious sons,
once worth their weight in finest gold,
now counted as pitchers of earthenware
made by any potter's hand;
³Even 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.
⁴The sucking infant's tongue
cleaves to its palate from thirst;
young children beg for bread
but no one offers them a crumb.
⁵Those who once fed delicately
are desolate in the streets,
and those nurtured in purple
now grovel on dunhills.
⁶The 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.

⁷Her 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.

⁸But 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.

⁹Those who died by the sword were more fortunate
than those who died of hunger;
these wasted away, deprived
of the produce of the field.

¹⁰Tender-hearted women with their own hands
boiled their own children;
their children became their food
in the day of my people's wounding.

¹¹The LORD glutted his rage
and poured forth his anger;
he kindled a fire in Zion,
and it consumed her foundations.

¹²This 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.

¹³It was for the sins of her prophets
and for the iniquities of her priests,
who shed within her walls
the blood of the righteous.

¹⁴They 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.

¹⁶The LORD himself scattered them,
he thought of them no more;
he showed no favour to priests,
no pity for elders.

¹⁷Still we strain our eyes,
looking in vain for help.
We have watched and watched

for a nation powerless to save us.

¹⁸When 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.

¹⁹Our 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.

²⁰The 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.

²¹Rejoice 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.

²²The 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

5¹Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us;
look, and see how we are scorned.

²Our patrimony is turned over to strangers
and our homes to foreigners.

³We are like orphans, without a father;
our mothers are like widows.

⁴We must buy our own water to drink,
our own wood can only be had at a price.

⁵The yoke is on our necks, we are overdriven;
we are weary and are given no rest.

⁶We came to terms, now with the Egyptians,
now with the Assyrians, to provide us with food.

⁷Our fathers sinned and are no more,
and we bear the burden of their guilt.

⁸Slaves have become our rulers,
and there is no one to rescue us from them.

⁹We must bring in our food from the wilderness,
risking our lives in the scorching heat [in the scorching heat: *or* by the
sword].

¹⁰Our skins are blackened as in a furnace
by the ravages of starvation.

¹¹Women were raped in Zion,
virgins raped in the cities of Judah.

¹²Princes were hung up by their hands,
and elders received no honour.

¹³Young men toil to grind corn,
and boys stumble under loads of wood.

¹⁴Elders have left off their sessions in the gate,
and young men no longer pluck the strings.

¹⁵Joy has fled from our hearts,
and our dances are turned to mourning.

¹⁶The garlands have fallen from our heads;
woe betide us, sinners that we are.

¹⁷For this we are sick at heart,
for all this our eyes grow dim:

¹⁸because Mount Zion is desolate
and over it the jackals run wild.

¹⁹O LORD, thou art enthroned for ever,
thy throne endures from one generation to another.

²⁰Why wilt thou quite forget us
and forsake us these many days?

²¹O LORD, turn us back to thyself, and we will come back;
renew our days as in times long past.

²²For if thou hast utterly rejected us,
then great indeed has been thy anger against us.