

A Lament for Jerusalem – Part 3 (c. September 587 BC)

Lamentations 4–5

The Prophet Speaks:*Aleph*

4:1 Alas! Gold has lost its luster;
pure gold loses value.
Jewels are scattered
on every street corner.

Beth

2 The precious sons of Zion
were worth their weight in gold—
Alas!—but now they are treated like broken clay pots,
made by a potter.

Gimel

3 Even the jackals nurse their young
at their breast,
but my people are cruel,
like ostriches in the desert.

Daleth

4 The infant's tongue sticks
to the roof of its mouth due to thirst;
little children beg for bread,
but no one gives them even a morsel.

He

5 Those who once feasted on delicacies
are now starving to death in the streets.
Those who grew up wearing expensive clothes
are now dying amid garbage.

Waw

6 The punishment of my people
exceeded that of Sodom,
which was overthrown in a moment
with no one to help her.

Zayin

7 Her consecrated ones were brighter than snow,
whiter than milk;
their bodies more ruddy than corals,
their hair like lapis lazuli.

Heth

8 Now their appearance is darker than soot;
they are not recognized in the streets.
Their skin has shriveled on their bones;
it is dried up, like tree bark.

Teth

9 Those who died by the sword are better off
than those who die of hunger,
those who waste away,
struck down from lack of food.

Yod

10 The hands of tenderhearted women
cooked their own children,
who became their food,
when my people were destroyed.

Kaph

11 The Lord fully vented his wrath;
he poured out his fierce anger.
He started a fire in Zion;
it consumed her foundations.

Lamed

12 Neither the kings of the earth
nor the people of the lands ever thought
that enemy or foe would enter
the gates of Jerusalem.

Mem

13 But it happened due to the sins of her prophets
and the iniquities of her priests,
who poured out in her midst
the blood of the righteous.

Nun

14 They wander blindly through the streets,
defiled by the blood they shed,
while no one dares
to touch their garments.

Samech

15 People cry to them, "Turn away! You are unclean!
Turn away! Turn away! Don't touch us!"
So they have fled and wander about;
but the nations say, "They may not stay here any longer."

Pe

16 The Lord himself has scattered them;
he no longer watches over them.
They did not honor the priests;
they did not show favor to the elders.

The People of Jerusalem Lament:*Ayin*

17 Our eyes continually failed us
as we looked in vain for help.
From our watchtowers we watched
for a nation that could not rescue us

Tsade

18 Our enemies hunted us down at every step
so that we could not walk about in our streets.
Our end drew near, our days were numbered,
for our end had come!

Qoph

19 Those who pursued us were swifter
than eagles in the sky.

They chased us over the mountains;
they ambushed us in the wilderness.

Resh

20 Our very life breath—the Lord’s anointed king—
was caught in their traps,
of whom we thought,
“Under his protection we will survive among the nations.”

The Prophet Speaks:

Shin

21 Rejoice and be glad for now, O people of Edom,
who reside in the land of Uz.
But the cup of judgment will pass to you also;
you will get drunk and take off your clothes.

Taw

22 O people of Zion, your punishment will come to an end;
he will not prolong your exile.
But, O people of Edom, he will punish your sin
and reveal your offenses!

The People of Jerusalem Pray:

5:1 O Lord, reflect on what has happened to us;
consider and look at our disgrace.
2 Our inheritance is turned over to strangers;
foreigners now occupy our homes.
3 We have become fatherless orphans;
our mothers have become widows.
4 We must pay money for our own water;
we must buy our own wood at a steep price.
5 We are pursued—they are breathing down our necks;
we are weary and have no rest.
6 We have submitted to Egypt and Assyria
in order to buy food to eat.
7 Our forefathers sinned and are dead,
but we suffer their punishment.
8 Slaves rule over us;
there is no one to rescue us from their power.
9 At the risk of our lives we get our food
because robbers lurk in the countryside.
10 Our skin is hot as an oven
due to a fever from hunger.
11 They raped women in Zion,
virgins in the towns of Judah.
12 Princes were hung by their hands;
elders were mistreated.
13 The young men perform menial labor;
boys stagger from their labor.
14 The elders are gone from the city gate;
the young men have stopped playing their music.
15 Our hearts no longer have any joy;
our dancing is turned to mourning.
16 The crown has fallen from our head;
woe to us, for we have sinned!
17 Because of this, our hearts are sick;
because of these things, we can hardly see through our tears.
18 For wild animals are prowling over Mount Zion,

which lies desolate.

- 19 But you, O Lord, reign forever;
your throne endures from generation to generation.
- 20 Why do you keep on forgetting us?
Why do you forsake us so long?
- 21 Bring us back to yourself, O Lord, so that we may return to you;
renew our life as in days before,
- 22 unless you have utterly rejected us
and are angry with us beyond measure.

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