

Easy-to-Read Version

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Lamentations

Laments are sad songs or poems. The book of Lamentations is a group of such songs about one event—the destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army in 586 BC. This was one of the most terrible events in the history of the Jewish people. Certainly, these five songs are very sad, even upsetting. They ask difficult questions like, “Why would God cause his own people to suffer?” or “Has he abandoned his people after all?”

Each chapter in this book is a new song. In four of the chapters, each verse (or group of verses) begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The songs run through the alphabet four times. The last chapter moves on without the alphabet pattern. The way the author arranged these songs says something important. It means, “This is the A to Z of all my pain and sorrow about the loss of my home.” In this way the author gives full expression to his feelings of loss. Sometimes when people experience such loss, the best thing they can do is to cry out. Only after they express their pain and sorrow will they be able to move on.

Some people think that the Bible should say only good things about God and his people. But as we live, we learn that life is not always good. Hard times cause us to be afraid and have doubts. Is it wrong to express those fears and doubts? No, God is willing to hear our worst thoughts. Lamentations reminds us that we can honestly express whatever we

feel to God. He already knows our real thoughts and feelings. So there is no need to hold them inside.

Lamentations is a book of sad songs about...

Why God destroyed Jerusalem (1:1-22)

How God destroyed Jerusalem (2:1-22)

Looking at the destruction (3:1-66)

Before and after the destruction (4:1-22)

Living in captivity (5:1-22)

Jerusalem Cries Over Her Destruction

1 Poor Jerusalem! She^{*} was once a city full of people,
but now the city is so empty.
She was one of the greatest cities in the world,

but now she is like a poor widow.
She was once a princess among cities,
but now she has been made a slave.

² She cries bitterly in the night.
Her tears are on her cheeks.
She has no one to comfort her.
Many nations were friendly to her,
but not one of them comforts her now.
All her friends have turned their backs
on her

and have become her enemies.
³ With the other people of Judah, she has
suffered abuse
and has been taken into captivity.
She lives among other nations
and has still found no rest.

Her enemies chased her
to a place with no escape.
⁴ The roads to Zion are very sad,
because no one comes to Zion for the festivals any more.

All of Zion's gates have been destroyed;
all her priests groan in sorrow.

*1:1 *She* Throughout this poem, Jerusalem is represented as a woman.

Zion's young women are upset,[†]
 and all this made Zion sad.
⁵ Jerusalem's enemies have won.
 Her enemies have been successful.
 This happened because the LORD pun-
 ished her.
 He punished Jerusalem for her many
 sins.
 Her children have gone away.
 Their enemies captured them and took
 them away.
⁶ Daughter Zion[‡] has lost her beauty.
 Her princes are like starving deer look-
 ing for grass.
 They are too weak to run away from
 those who chase them.
⁷ Now that Jerusalem is suffering and
 homeless,
 she remembers all the nice things she
 had long ago.
 But her people were captured by the
 enemy,
 and there was no one to help her.
 When her enemies saw her, they
 laughed,
 because she had been destroyed.
⁸ Jerusalem sinned greatly,
 so she is like a ruined woman.
 People who once respected her now hate
 her,
 because they have seen her disgraced.
 Jerusalem can only moan
 and hide her face in shame.
⁹ She made herself unclean.
 She gave no thought to what would hap-
 pen to her.
 Her fall was terrible.
 She had no one to comfort her.
 She says, "LORD, look how miserable I
 am!
 My enemy has defeated me!"

¹⁰ Her enemies seized all her treasures.
 She watched as foreigners went inside
 her Temple—
 the meeting place you said those people
 must not enter!
¹¹ All the people of Jerusalem are
 groaning.
 All of her people are looking for food.
 They are giving away all their nice
 things for food to stay alive.
 Jerusalem says:
 "Look, LORD. Look at me!
 See how everyone hates me."
¹² You people passing by don't seem to
 care.
 But look at me!
 Do you see anyone else suffering
 as much as I am?
 This is the pain the LORD brought on me
 when he became so very angry.
¹³ The Lord sent fire from above
 that went down into my bones.
 He stretched out a net for my feet.
 He turned me all the way around.
 He made me into a wasteland.
 I am sick all day.
¹⁴ My sins were tied up like a yoke.
 My sins were tied up in the Lord's hands.
 His yoke is on my neck.
 He has made me weak.
 He has given me to those
 who I cannot stand up against.
¹⁵ The Lord turned away all my powerful
 men
 who were inside my walls.
 Then he brought an army against me.
 He brought them to kill my young
 soldiers.
 The Lord has trampled his dearest land[¶]
 like grapes in a winepress.
¹⁶ I cry about all these things.

[†]1:4 *are upset* The ancient Greek version has "have been taken away".

[‡]1:6 *Daughter Zion* The city of Jerusalem pictured as a young woman. Also in 2:1. In chapters 1 and 2, Jerusalem is referred to as "she" and "her". See Zion in the Word List.

[¶]1:15 *dearest land* Literally, "virgin daughter Judah".

Tears are flowing down my cheeks.
 There is no one near to comfort me.
 There is no one who can make me feel
 better.

My children are like a wasteland,
 because the enemy has won.

¹⁷ Jerusalem reaches out her hands for
 help,

but there is no one to comfort her.

The LORD has given orders for Israel's
 neighbours

to become enemies of the city.

Jerusalem is now like a dirty rag to
 them,

like something unclean.

¹⁸ The LORD is right to do this
 because I refused to listen to him.

So listen, all you people!

Look at my pain!

My young women and men
 have gone into captivity.

¹⁹ I called out to my lovers,
 but they tricked me.

My priests and my leaders
 have died in the city.

They were looking for food for
 themselves.

They wanted to keep themselves alive.

²⁰ Look at me, LORD. I am in distress!

I am upset, as if my heart turned upside
 down inside of me.

I feel this way because

I have been so stubborn.

Outside the walls, I lost my children in
 battle.

Inside, it is like death.

²¹ Listen to me, I am groaning.

I have no one to comfort me.

All my enemies have heard of my
 trouble.

They are happy that you did this to me.

You said there would be a time of
 punishment.

You said you would punish my enemies.
 Now do what you promised.

Let my enemies be like I am now.

²² Look how evil my enemies are!

Punish them the way you punished me
 because of all my sins.

See, I cannot stop groaning.

I am sick with sorrow.

The Lord Destroyed Jerusalem

2 Poor Jerusalem! Look how the Lord
 has covered Daughter Zion
 with the cloud of his anger.

He has thrown her, the glory of Israel,
 from the sky to the ground.

In his anger he showed no care even for
 the Temple

where he rests his feet.[§]

² The Lord destroyed the houses of Ja-
 cob's people without mercy.

In his anger he tore down the strong
 walls of Judah.^{**}

He threw that kingdom and its rulers
 down to the ground in shame.

³ He was so angry that he took away all
 the strength of Israel.

He refused to help them when the enemy
 came.

He came against the people of Jacob like
 a flaming fire

that burns everything around it.

⁴ He bent his bow like an enemy.

With his right hand he pulled back the
 arrow.

He killed all our finest young men.

He poured out his anger like fire on the
 tents of Zion.

⁵ Like an enemy the Lord has swallowed
 up Israel.

[§]2:1 *Temple ... feet* Literally, "the footstool of his feet", meaning the place God lived among his people.

^{**}2:2 *Judah* Literally, "Daughter Judah". Also in verse 5. See Judah in the Word List.

He has destroyed her palaces and strong cities.

He has caused great sadness and crying for the dead in Judah.

⁶ He tore up the place where he lived^{††} like someone ploughing up a garden.

He ruined the place where the people came together to worship him.

The LORD has made people forget the festivals and special days of rest^{‡‡} in Zion.

He rejected the king and the priests.

He was angry and rejected them.

⁷ He rejected his altar, and he left his holy place of worship.

He let the enemy pull down the walls of the palaces of Jerusalem.

The enemy shouted with joy in the LORD's Temple.

They made noise as though it were a festival.

⁸ The LORD planned to destroy the walls of Jerusalem.

He marked them with a measuring line and destroyed everything he marked.

He made all the walls cry out in sadness. Together they wasted away.

⁹ Jerusalem's gates have sunk into the ground.

The bars on her gates are completely destroyed.

Her king and princes have been taken to other nations.

The teaching of the law has stopped. And her prophets no longer receive

visions from the LORD.

¹⁰ Zion's leaders sit on the ground.

They sit on the ground and are quiet.

They throw dirt on their heads.

They put on rags.

The young women of Jerusalem

bow their heads to the ground in sorrow.

¹¹ My eyes are worn out with tears, and my insides are upset.

My heart feels like it has been poured on the ground,

because of the destruction of my people.

Children and babies are fainting in the public squares of the city.

¹² They ask their mothers,

"Don't we have something to eat or drink?"

They get weaker and weaker, like a soldier wounded in the street,

and they finally die

in their mother's arms.

¹³ My dear Jerusalem, what can I say about you?

What can I compare you to?

What can I say you are like?

How can I comfort you, city of Zion?

You have been hurt much too badly for anyone to heal.

¹⁴ Your prophets saw visions for you, but their visions were only worthless lies.

They didn't speak against your sins.

They didn't try to make things better.

They spoke messages for you, but they were false messages that fooled you.

¹⁵ Those who pass by on the road clap their hands and laugh at you.

They make fun of Jerusalem, shaking their heads at the sight of her.

They ask, "Is this the city that people called

'The Most Beautiful City'

and 'The Joy of all the Earth'?"

¹⁶ Your enemies shout insults at you.

In anger they snarl and show their teeth, saying, "We have swallowed them up!

This is the day we were waiting for.

We have finally seen it happen!"

^{††}2:6 *the place where he lived* Literally, "his own tent", meaning the Temple in Jerusalem.

^{‡‡}2:6 *special days of rest* Or "Sabbaths". This might mean Saturday (see Sabbath in the Word List) or all the special days when the people were not supposed to work.

¹⁷ The LORD did what he planned,
 exactly as he promised long ago.
 He destroyed you without pity.
 He made your enemies strong
 and let them celebrate your defeat.
¹⁸ Cry out with all your heart to the Lord!
 Jerusalem, let tears roll down your
 walls.
 Let your tears flow like a river
 all day and all night.
 Don't look for rest
 or let your tears stop.
¹⁹ Get up throughout the night and cry
 for help.
 Let your sorrow pour out before the Lord
 like water.
 Lift up your hands in prayer to him.
 Ask him to let your children live.
 They are starving to death on every
 street corner.
²⁰ LORD, look and think about what you
 see!
 Have you ever treated anyone else so
 badly?
 Is it right for women to eat their own
 babies,
 the children they have cared for?
 Should priests and prophets be killed
 in the Temple of the Lord?
²¹ Young men and old men
 lie on the ground in the streets of the
 city.
 My young women and young men
 have been killed by the sword.
 You killed them on the day of your
 anger.
 You killed them without mercy!
²² You invited my enemies to come from
 all around to terrify me.
 You invited them like guests to a festival.
 And no one escaped on that day of the
 LORD's anger.
 My enemy killed all the children I once
 cared for and raised.

The Meaning of Suffering

³ I am a man who has seen much
 trouble.
 God beat us with a stick, and I saw it
 happen.
² He led and brought me
 into darkness, not light.
³ He turned his hand against me.
 He did this again and again, all day.
⁴ He wore out my flesh and skin.
 He broke my bones.
⁵ He built up bitterness and trouble
 against me.
 He surrounded me with bitterness and
 trouble.
⁶ He put me in the dark,
 like someone who died long ago.
⁷ He shut me in, so I could not get out.
 He put heavy chains on me.
⁸ Even when I cry out and ask for help,
 he does not listen to my prayer.
⁹ He has blocked up my path with stones.
 He has made my path crooked.
¹⁰ He is like a bear about to attack me,
 like a lion that is in a hiding place.
¹¹ He led me off my path.
 He tore me to pieces and ruined me.
¹² He made his bow ready.
 He made me the target for his arrows.
¹³ He shot me in the stomach
 with his arrows.
¹⁴ I have become a joke to all my people.
 All day long they sing songs about me
 and make fun of me.
¹⁵ He gave me this poison to drink.
 He filled me with this bitter drink.
¹⁶ He pushed my teeth into rocky
 ground.
 He pushed me into the dirt.
¹⁷ I thought I would never have peace
 again.
 I forgot about good things.
¹⁸ I said to myself, "I no longer have any
 hope
 that the LORD will help me."

19 Remember, I am very sad,
 and I have no home.
 Remember the bitter poison that you
 gave me.
 20 I remember well all my troubles,
 and I am very sad.
 21 But then I think about this,
 and I have hope:
 22 The LORD's faithful love never ends;[¶]
 his acts of mercy never stop.
 23 He shows us his love in new ways ev-
 ery morning!
 He is completely faithful!
 24 I say to myself, "The LORD is every-
 thing to me.
 I put all my hope in him."
 25 The LORD is good to those who trust
 him.
 He is good to those who look to him for
 help.
 26 It is good if we wait quietly
 for the LORD to save us.
 27 It is good if we learn to be patient
 while we are young.
 28 He should sit alone and be quiet
 when the Lord puts his yoke on him.
 29 He should bow down to the Lord.
 Maybe there is still hope.
 30 He should turn his cheek to the one
 who hits him;
 he should let people insult him.
 31 He should remember that
 the Lord does not reject people forever.
 32 When he punishes, he also has mercy.
 He has mercy because of his great love
 and kindness.
 33 He does not enjoy causing people
 pain.
 He does not like to make anyone
 unhappy.
 34 He does not like any prisoner on earth
 to be trampled down.

35 He does not like anyone to be unfair
 to another person.
 Some people will do such things right in
 front of God Most High.
 36 The Lord does not like anyone to cheat
 another person.
 He does not like any of these things.
 37 No one can say something and make
 it happen,
 unless the Lord orders it.
 38 God Most High commands
 both good and bad things to happen.
 39 No one alive can complain
 when he punishes them for their sins.
 40 We should examine the way we are
 living
 and turn back to the LORD.
 41 Let us offer our hearts to God in
 heaven.
 Let us lift up our hands in prayer to him
 and say,
 42 "We have sinned and refused to listen
 to you.
 So you have not forgiven us.
 43 Filled with anger, you chased us
 and killed us without mercy!
 44 You have hidden yourself in a cloud
 that keeps our prayers from reaching
 you.
 45 You have made us seem like filthy
 rubbish
 to the rest of the world.
 46 "Our enemies shout insults against us.
 47 We are filled with fear,
 like we have fallen into a pit.
 We have been broken
 and are lying here in ruins."
 48 Tears stream from my eyes
 as I see my people destroyed.
 49 I cannot stop the tears.
 They will keep on flowing
 50 until the LORD looks down from
 heaven

[¶]**3:22 The LORD's ... ends** This follows the ancient Aramaic and Syriac versions and one Hebrew copy. The traditional Hebrew text has "[Because of] the LORD's faithful love, we are not cut off."

and sees our suffering.

⁵¹ When I see what happened to the women of my city,

it makes my heart ache.

⁵² For no reason,

my enemies hunted me like a bird.

⁵³ They threw me alive into a pit and then threw stones at me.

⁵⁴ Water came up over my head.

I said to myself, "I am finished."

⁵⁵ LORD, I call your name from the bottom of the pit.

⁵⁶ Hear my voice.

Don't close your ears;

don't refuse to rescue me.

⁵⁷ Be near me on the day that I call out to you.

Tell me, "Don't be afraid."

⁵⁸ Defend me

and save my life.

⁵⁹ LORD, see my trouble.

Now judge my case for me.

⁶⁰ See how my enemies have hurt me and made evil plans against me.

⁶¹ Hear their insults, LORD, and all their harmful plans.

⁶² The words and the thoughts of my enemies

are against me all the time—

⁶³ when they sit down and when they stand up.

Look how they make fun of me!

⁶⁴ Give them back what they deserve, LORD.

Pay them back for what they have done.

⁶⁵ Make them stubborn and then curse them.

⁶⁶ Chase them in anger and destroy them.

Wipe them off the face of the earth, LORD!

The Horrors of the Attack on Jerusalem

4 Poor Jerusalem! See how the gold has lost its shine,

how the pure gold has changed.

The city's holy jewels are scattered in the streets.

² These precious people of Zion were once worth more than gold.

But now they are treated like something worthless,

like the cheap clay jars a potter makes.

³ Even a wild dog feeds her babies.

Even the jackal lets her pups suck at her breast.

But my people^{§§} neglect their young, like ostriches in the desert.

⁴ Babies are so thirsty their tongues stick to the roofs of their mouths.

Young children ask for bread, but no one gives them any.

⁵ Those who ate rich food are now dying in the streets.

Those who grew up wearing nice red clothes

now pick through rubbish piles.

⁶ The punishment of my people was very great—

greater than that of Sodom.

Sodom was destroyed suddenly, but not by any human hand.*

⁷ Some of the men of Judah were dedicated to God in a special way.

They were purer than snow, whiter than milk.

Their skin glowed with colour like coral, and they sparkled like blue gems.

⁸ But now their faces are as dark and gloomy as night.

No one recognizes them in the streets.

^{§§}4:3 *my people* Literally, "the daughter of my people".

*4:6 *not by any human hand* The Hebrew text is not clear.

The skin on their bones has shrivelled
up;
it's as dry as wood.

⁹It was better for those who were killed
by the sword
than for those who died of hunger.
Those starving people were sad and hurt.
They died because they got no food from
the field.

¹⁰Then even nice women
cooked their own children.
The children were food for their
mothers.

This happened when my people were
destroyed.

¹¹The LORD used all his anger.
He poured out all his anger.

He made a fire in Zion
that burned it down to the foundations.

¹²The kings of the earth and the people
of the world
could not believe what had happened.
They could not believe that enemies
would be able to come through the city
gates of Jerusalem.

¹³This happened because the prophets
of Jerusalem sinned.
This happened because the priests of
Jerusalem did evil things.

They were shedding the blood of good
people
in the city of Jerusalem.

¹⁴The prophets and priests walked
around
like blind men in the streets.

They had become dirty with blood.
No one could even touch their clothes
because they were dirty.

¹⁵People shouted, "Go away!
Go away! Don't touch us."
They wandered around and had no
home.

People in other nations said,
"We don't want them to live with us."

¹⁶The LORD himself scattered them.
He didn't care for them any more.

He didn't respect the priests.
He didn't care about the leaders of
Judah.

¹⁷We have worn out our eyes looking for
help,
but no help comes.

We kept on looking for a nation to save
us.

We kept watch from our watchtower,
but no nation came to us.

¹⁸Our enemies hunted us all the time.
We could not even go out into the
streets.

Our end came near; our time was up.
Our end has come!

¹⁹The men who chased us
were faster than eagles in the sky.
They chased us into the mountains.
They hid in the desert to catch us.

²⁰The king was very important to us.
He was like the breath we breathe,
but he was trapped by them.
The LORD himself chose the king,
and we said this about the king,
"We will live in his shadow.
He protects us from the nations."

²¹Be happy, people of Edom.
Be happy, you who live in the land of Uz.
But remember, the cup of the Lord's
anger will come around to you too.

When you drink from that cup,
you will get drunk and strip off all your
clothes.

²²Your punishment is complete, Zion.
You will not go into captivity again.
But the Lord will punish your sins, peo-
ple of Edom.

He will uncover your sins.

A Prayer to the Lord

5 Remember, LORD, what happened
to us.

Look and see our shame.

²Our land has been turned over to
strangers.

Our houses have been given to foreigners.

³We have become orphans with no father.

Our mothers have become like widows.

⁴We have to buy the water that we drink.

We have to pay for the wood that we use.

⁵We are forced to wear a yoke on our necks.[†]

We get tired, and we have no rest.

⁶We made an agreement with Egypt.

We also made an agreement with Assyria to get enough bread.

⁷Our ancestors sinned, and now they are dead.

And we are suffering because of their sins.

⁸Slaves have become our rulers.

No one can save us from them.

⁹We risk our lives to get food.

There are men in the desert with swords.

¹⁰Our skin is hot like an oven.

We have a high fever because of our hunger.

¹¹The enemy raped the women of Zion and the girls in the cities of Judah.

¹²The enemy hanged our princes.

They didn't honour our leaders.

¹³The enemy made our young men grind grain at the mill.

Our young men stumbled under loads of wood.

¹⁴The leaders no longer sit at the gates of the city.

The young men no longer make music.

¹⁵We have no more joy in our hearts.

Our dancing has changed to crying for the dead.

¹⁶The crown has fallen from our head.

Things have gone badly for us because we sinned.

¹⁷For this reason our hearts have become sick,

and our eyes cannot see clearly.

¹⁸Mount Zion is a wasteland.

Foxes run around on Mount Zion.

¹⁹But you rule forever, LORD.

Your throne lasts for ever and ever.

²⁰Why have you forgotten us?

You seem to have left us alone for such a long time.

²¹Bring us back to you, LORD.

We will gladly come back to you.

Make our lives as they were before.

²²You were very angry with us.

Have you completely rejected us?

[†]5:5 *We are forced ... necks* This follows one ancient Greek translation (Symmachus). The traditional Hebrew text reads "Upon our neck we are pursued." This seems to mean, "Those chasing us are about to strike our neck!"