

## *Lamentations*

This small poetic work originally had no title other than the opening word *hkyā* "O how" was used. The LXX named it *θρηνοι* "Dirges." It was found as the third of the books in the Megilloth in Hebrew but in the LXX it is found following Jeremiah and Baruch. The Vulgate placed it following the Book of the Prophecy of Jeremiah. English translators enlarged the title to read "Lamentations of Jeremiah." The book is customarily read on the 9th of Ab (in mid-July) when the destruction of the Temple is commemorated. In the Talmud Lamentations follows The Song of Solomon.

Dirge poetry was common in the ancient Middle East. Quite a number of dirge poems have been discovered in recent times. Normally such poetry would be used for individual laments and in funeral celebrations. See an example of dirge poetry in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* p. 378.

The five poems, which represent the five chapters and somewhat unique. The first four are written as acrostics, making for a very sophisticated construction. The 22 consonants begin with the Hebrew *!* in this translation. The Hebrew consonants appear in the left margin. The length of the verses is carefully controlled. In chapters 1 & 2, for example, there are six lines for each of the Hebrew consonants, the first of these having the appropriate acrostic letter. In chapter 3 the acrostic is a bit different. The letters of the Hebrew alphabet are used to begin each of 3 lines. Thus the letter, *!* for example is the first letter in each of verses 1, 2 & 3. In chapter 4 the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are used as the first letter of each verse as noted in our English Bibles. There are slight irregularities in poems (*chapters*) 2, 3 & 4, evidencing a slight shift. Interestingly, with the poet's requirement for this alphabetic poetic form, the writing is not stilted and the thoughts flow smoothly. In chapter 5 there is no such acrostic poetic form.

The authorship is attributed to Jeremiah, based on a Jeremiah tradition. It is possible that the tradition is based on a misunderstanding of Chronicles 35:25. There are some scholars who feel the authorship of the book is by an unknown poet. Thus some scholars feel the book is to be dated as later than the time of Jeremiah, preferring the dating to be at about the time of Ezekiel. When reading these five poems in Hebrew it can be agreed that they were written by the same hand.

The Book furnishes us with an eye witness to the disasters of 587 BCE.

The Hebrew text seems to be well preserved, exhibiting few corruptions. The LXX closely follows the Hebrew text. The variants in the LXX may have come from errors in copying the LXX rather than from the Hebrew source, or possibly, as one scholar reports: "The LXX translators may not have known Hebrew as well as they thought." The Peshitta text and Targums have also been examined for this translation..

# *Lamentations*

<CHAPTER 1>

## *THE FIRST DIRGE*

*The Misery of Jerusalem 1:1 - 22*

*I. Jerusalem is destroyed 1:1 - 7*

- Aleph                    1 Alas, how deserted the city lies,  
                              that was once filled (*or, thronged*) with people!  
Now she has become like a widow <sup>1</sup>  
                              who once had been great among the provinces, <sup>2</sup>  
                              but she has become enslaved. <sup>3</sup>
- Beth                    2 During the night she weeps bitterly;  
                              tears run down her cheeks, <sup>4</sup>  
among all her [*former*] lovers (*or, allies*)  
                              no one remains to comfort her;  
all her allies have betrayed her;  
                              they have become her enemies.
- Gimel                   3 Judah has gone into exile <sup>5</sup>  
                              because of affliction and harsh oppression. <sup>6</sup>  
Her inhabitants now reside <sup>7</sup> in other lands,  
                              but find no place to rest.  
All who pursue her have overtaken her  
                              in the midst of her distress. <sup>8</sup>
- Daleth                4 The roads to Zion are in mourning  
                              for no one comes for the appointed holidays (*or, festivals*). <sup>9</sup>  
All her gates are deserted;  
                              her priests sigh in despair; <sup>10</sup>  
her maidens <sup>11</sup> have been dragged away <sup>12</sup> (*or, raped*)  
                              and she, herself, suffers in agony (*or, anguish*).

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1 Her lovers, cf. Jeremiah 22:20 have failed her. As a result, in this lamentation Jerusalem is described as a widow. French Common Language: "Yesterday a princess ruling the province but now reduced..."

2 Literally: "cities." So also: Peshitta.

3 NEB: "now put to forced labor."

4 So: Peshitta. LXX & MT omit "run down."

5 Hebrew: %;-# literally: "was deported." Translators interpret this based on Ezekiel 12:3 as a voluntary exile. French & German Common Language: "must live among foreign people."

6 Literally: "great servitude."

7 Literally: "she has to live."

8 Hebrew uncertain.

9 I. e. "bereft of pilgrims" as MFT so aptly translates.

10 Cf. Joel 1:9.

11 Literally: "virgins."

12 So: LXX. Old Latin & Hebrew: "afflicted."

He 5 Her enemies have now become powerful (*or, her masters*);<sup>13</sup>  
her foes prosper,  
because the Lord has afflicted her  
because of her many transgressions.  
Her children have been taken into captivity,<sup>14</sup>  
captives before their enemies.

Waw 6 All the splendor of the daughters of Zion<sup>15</sup>  
has departed.  
Her leaders have become like deer (*or, stags*)  
that have found no pasture;  
listlessly they have fled  
before the drovers.<sup>16</sup>

Zayin 7 Jerusalem remembers her days of persecution and bitterness,<sup>17</sup>  
when all the precious things were hers in the past;  
when her people fell into enemy hands,  
with no one to help them ;  
when conquerors gloated over her,  
laughing at her downfall.<sup>18</sup>

*II. Destruction follows sin 1:8 - 11*

Heth (Cheth) 8 Jerusalem has sinned grievously  
resulting in her having become a mockery.<sup>19</sup>  
All who honored her despise her,  
for they have seen her disgrace.<sup>20</sup>  
She, herself, groans  
and hides her face.<sup>21</sup>

Teth 9 Her uncleanness was obvious<sup>22</sup>  
for she was not concerned about her fate.<sup>23</sup>  
Therefore her downfall was terrible<sup>24</sup>

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13 Literally: "Her foes shall become the head."

14 A hapax legomenon.

15 A poetic term for the city of Jerusalem.

16 JB translates: "Listlessly they took to the road, driven by the drovers."

17 So: emended. The Hebrew seems to mean "wandering" which would express a duration of time. The Peshitta translates the Hebrew as "rebellion" or "discipline." In Hebrew this verse has 8 lines instead of 6. Some scholars suggest dropping 2 lines though there is no agreement as to which lines should be dropped. It translates well into 6 lines.

18 Literally: "cessation,"

19 A hapax legomenon. Recent scholarship has determined the word means "mockery." Older scholars maintained the word meant "filthy." Cf. Leviticus 12:2, 5; 15:19 - 24.

20 Literally: "nakedness." The once proud lady, Jerusalem, is described as a woman of ill repute. Cf. Hosea 2:3

21 Literally: "turns backwards."

22 Literally: "in her skirts."

23 The concept of her future doom is too strong a concept to translate the Hebrew word. Literally: "did not remember her latter end."

24 Literally: "she has gone down astoundingly."

with no one to comfort her.  
"O Lord, see my affliction (*or, misery*),  
how the enemy has become triumphant."

Yodh 10 The enemy has robbed (*or, plundered*) her  
again and again of her treasures.  
She has even seen the nations  
invading her temple (*or, sanctuary*).  
Those whom you had forbidden admission,  
for they have entered into your congregation (*or, sacred premises*).<sup>25</sup>

Koph 11 All her inhabitants sigh  
as they search for food.  
They have exchanged (*or, bartered*) their treasures for food  
to revive their strength (*or, to keep themselves alive*).  
"Look at me, O Lord, and see  
how despised [*an object*] I have become."<sup>26</sup>

*III. A plea for mercy 1:12 - 22*  
*a. The plea of Jerusalem 1:12 - 16*

Lamed 12 "Is it nothing to you,<sup>27</sup> all you who pass by?  
Look and see  
if there is any agony like the agony  
which has been inflicted on me  
by the Lord  
at the time of his fierce anger.

Mem 13 "He sent fire from heaven  
making it go deep into my bones;<sup>28</sup>  
he spread a net (*or, snare*) for my feet;  
he abandoned (*or, thwarted*)<sup>29</sup> me.  
He left me forlorn (*or, stunned*),  
faint all day long.

Nun 14 "My transgressions have been bound into a yoke,<sup>30</sup>  
and have been woven<sup>31</sup> together by his hand.

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25 Based on poetic meter a word seems to be missing in Hebrew.

26 Jerusalem realizes the enormity of her crime against God.

27 Hebrew uncertain. Literally: "not to you." Is the line to be interpreted interrogatively as in the translation above, or should it be interpreted as a wail. "May it never happen to you!" Scholars are divided on this. Cf. Baruch 4:12. HOTTTP recommends "It is not your concern."

28 So: LXX. MT: "from above he hurled fire into my bones and trampled it." Some emend, adding "and it masters me."

29 Literally: "backward."

30 So emended. Hebrew uncertain. 27 Hebrew manuscripts read "be watchful." This could be translated as "A watch has been kept over my transgressions." Many emendations have been suggested.

31 Literally: "twisted."

These have been hung around my neck, weighing heavily,  
sapping my strength.<sup>32</sup>  
The Lord delivered me into the hands  
of those against whom I am helpless.

Samekh (Samech) 15 "The Lord laughed<sup>33</sup> at all my finest soldiers  
who protect me.  
He proclaimed an assembly against me,  
to crush my young men.<sup>34</sup>  
The Lord has crushed the virgin daughter of Judah  
like grapes in a wine press.

Ain (Ayin) 16 "I weep because of these things.  
My eyes<sup>35</sup> are flooded with tears (*or, tears stream from my eyes*);  
no one can comfort me,  
no one can revive my courage;<sup>36</sup>  
my children are forlorn (*or, desolate*),  
for the enemy has prevailed."

*b. The plea of the prophet 1:17*

Pe 17 "Zion stretches out her hands,  
but there is no one to console.  
The Lord has given orders against Jacob,  
that his neighbors<sup>37</sup> should become his enemies.  
Jerusalem has become  
a filthy (*or, unclean*) thing among them."

*c. The Lord speaks 1:18*

Sadie (Tsadhe) 18 "The Lord is just (*or, in the right*)  
for you have defied his commands.  
But listen!<sup>38</sup> All you nations:  
notice the agony (*of Jerusalem*);  
how her young women and youths  
have been taken into exile."

*d. The plea of Jerusalem 1:19 - 22*

Qoph (Koph) 19 "I cried out to my allies<sup>39</sup>  
but they refused to help (*or, betrayed me*).

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32 Literally: "causing my strength to stumble."

33 Peshitta: "despised, rejected."

34 LXX: "He kept watch over my sins."

35 Literally: "my eye, my eye."

36 Peshitta: "to be utterly exhausted."

37 Literally: "around him."

38 In Hebrew the word is emphatic.

39 I. e. allies of verse 2. The Syriac text is unclear.

My priests and elders <sup>40</sup>  
have perished in the city,  
while they searched for food  
to remain alive (*or, to survive*).

Resh 20 "See! Be attentive, O Lord, for I am in agony!  
My soul is in tumult, <sup>41</sup>  
my heart is broken within me <sup>42</sup>  
because I have been very rebellious.  
In the street the sword causes bereavement;  
in the house there is death. <sup>43</sup>

Schin (Sin) 21 "Listen <sup>44</sup> to my groans.  
There is no one to comfort me;  
all my enemies have heard of my plight (*or, misfortune*). <sup>45</sup>  
They are glad that you have done it.  
Bring on <sup>46</sup> the day about which you have given warning,  
and let them suffer as I am suffering. <sup>47</sup>

Tau 22 "Let all their wickedness (*or, evil*) come before you  
and deal with them,  
as you have dealt with me,  
because of all my transgressions;  
for my sighs (*or, groans*) are many  
and my heart is faint (*or, sick*)."<sup>48</sup>

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40 Those thought to be the real leaders favored soothing lies and disregarded the warnings of Jeremiah.

41 Literally: "my inward parts are in ferment." NRSV: "My stomach churns."

42 Literally: "My heart has turned over within me."

43 A possible reference to the plague or pestilence. cf. Jeremiah 15:2; 18:21.

44 So: LXX & Syriac. MT: "they heard."

45 Literally: "evil."

46 So: Syriac. Hebrew: "You have brought."

47 Hebrew unclear. Emended: "Oh bring on them what befell me, and let them become like me." TAN: "You have brought on the day that you threatened, let them become like me."

48 CEV: "I have lost hope."

<CHAPTER II>

**THE SECOND DIRGE**

*Divine judgment on the city 2:1 - 33*

*a. God's hostility toward the people 2:1 - 9*

Aleph

1 How the Lord, in his wrath,  
has disgraced (*or, detested*)<sup>49</sup> the daughters of Zion in the gate  
(*or, For he has treated the daughter of Zion with contempt*)!  
He has thrown the splendor of Israel<sup>50</sup> down  
from heaven to earth,  
unmindful of his footstool (*i.e. the temple*)  
on the day of his anger.<sup>51</sup>

Beth

2 The Lord has destroyed<sup>52</sup> all the inhabitants of Judah  
without mercy.  
In his wrath he has razed  
the fortifications of the daughter of Judah.  
He has brought the kingdom and it's rulers<sup>53</sup>  
down to the ground in degradation.

Gimel

3 In his fierce fury he has shattered  
all the might;<sup>54</sup>  
he has withdrawn his right hand from them,  
(*or, he has refused to help them*)  
in the presence of the enemy;  
he has ravaged Jacob like a flaming fire,  
consuming every thing.<sup>55</sup>

Daleth

4 Like an enemy he has made his bow taut  
poised like a foe, with [*arrows*] in his right hand.  
He has killed all who delight our eyes<sup>56</sup>  
in the tent of the daughter of Zion,  
He has poured out his wrath like fire.<sup>57</sup>

He

5 The Lord has acted like an enemy;  
he has destroyed Israel;

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49 Hebrew uncertain. Recent scholarship has found a different root word in Arabic meaning "to disgrace." LXX: εγνοφωσεν.  
Syriac: "cloud."

50 A possible reference to the temple.

51 The kingdom of Judah will be completely eclipsed.

52 Hebrew: *rlay* "to utterly destroy." There are 47 different Hebrew words for the concept of destroy. The Hebrew word used here can also be translated as "to swallow."

53 Hebrew: %,-// without the first / is read in Syriac as "her king's." Most LXX manuscripts read "her king."

54 Literally: "horn" /b9--8 was a favorite symbol of power and strength.

55 The meter is awkwardly established in Hebrew.

56 Literally: "all the desirable ones of the eye" thus perhaps meaning "all the notables."

57 Possibly one line is missing since in this chapter each poem dealing with a letter normally has 6 lines.

he has destroyed all its <sup>58</sup> palaces (*or, citadels*),  
demolished (*or, shattered*) it's fortifications,  
and he has increased mourning and moaning <sup>59</sup>  
within the daughter of Judah.

Waw                    7 He has stripped his booth <sup>60</sup> as one might do with a garden shelter,  
laid in ruins the places of his appointed feasts (*or, his tabernacles*).  
The Lord has abolished Zion,  
even the designated festivals and Sabbaths.  
In his razing, king and priests alike  
have been spurned.

Zayin                8 The Lord rejected his altar;  
disdained <sup>61</sup> his sanctuary;  
he has handed over the wrath of her citadels  
into the hand of the enemy.  
A victorious shout was raised in the house of the Lord  
where we once worshipped on festival days.

Heth (Cheth)      8 The Lord resolved to lay the wall <sup>62</sup>  
of the daughter of Zion in ruins.  
He stretched out the measuring line;  
he did not restrain his hand from destruction. <sup>63</sup>  
He caused rampart and wall to lament.  
They both (*i.e. the wall and rampart*) succumb.

Teth                 9 Her gates have sunk into the ground; <sup>64</sup>  
he has smashed her bars (*or, gate locks*) into fragments.  
Her king and princes are in exile; <sup>65</sup>  
her law <sup>66</sup> is no more,  
and her prophets receive  
no vision from the Lord.

*b. Sufferings consequent upon famine 2:10 - 13*

Yod                  10 The elders <sup>67</sup> of the daughter of Zion

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58 Literally: "her"palaces. It is emended to agree with the Hebrew in the next line.

59 There is an alliteration in Hebrew: *taniyyah* = "mourning." *nnyyah* = "moaning."

60 A hapax legomenon, no doubt meaning a flimsy structure. Several Hebrew manuscripts are at variance with the MT.

HOTTP suggests: 1. "He has broken its walls which are like those of a garden." 2. "He has broken down his hut, which is like one in a garden." LXX: "He stripped his tabernacles as a vine is stripped."

61 A rare Hebrew word. cf. Psalm 89:39. Hebrew: Psalm 89:40.

62 Hebrew: a form of metonymy. The container for the thing to be contained, i.e. Jerusalem. LXX uses a hapax legomenon.

63 Literally: "He did not turn his hand from swallowing."

64 Hebrew: *brai*.

65 Literally: "among the nations."

66 Literally: "Torah."

67 Possibly the heads of families.



sit on the ground <sup>68</sup> in silence.  
 They have thrown dust on their heads  
 and donned sackcloth. <sup>69</sup>  
 The young girls of Jerusalem  
 have bowed their heads to the ground.

Koph      11 My eyes are worn out with weeping;  
               my stomach <sup>70</sup> churns (*or, is in knots*).  
 Bile is poured out in grief, <sup>71</sup>  
               because of the ruin of the daughter of my people;  
 because infants and babies faint  
               in the streets of the city.

Lamed      12 They cry to their mothers,  
               "Where is grain <sup>72</sup> and wine?"  
 as they faint (*or, black out*) in the streets of the city  
               like wounded men,  
 as their life ebbs away  
               on the bosom of their mothers.

*c. Trust and false prophets 2:14 - 17*  
 Mem      13 What can I say for you to comfort you, <sup>73</sup>  
               O daughter of Jerusalem?  
 To what can I liken you, that I might comfort you,  
               O virgin daughter of Zion?  
 Your ruin is as vast as the sea!  
               Who can heal?

Nun      14 Your prophets have seen <sup>74</sup> visions for you  
               that are false and deceptive. <sup>75</sup>  
 They have not exposed your iniquities  
               so as to avert your fate, <sup>76</sup>  
 but have seen oracles for you  
               that are false and misleading. <sup>77</sup>

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68 Cf. note 55.

69 A sign of repentance & mourning.

70 Literally: "soul." LXX:  $\eta$  κοιλιᾶ μου would be a literal translation of Hebrew but Codex B has καρδιά.

71 Literally: "my liver spills on the ground." NEB translates "bowels and liver." A description of being afflicted with bitter sorrow.

72 Hebrew:  $\$ \#'$  usually means "grain" but is often translated "bread," the normal sustenance. Cf. Deuteronomy 11:14. Syriac adds "and oil."

73 French Common Language Translation: "I no longer know what to do with you."

74 Literally: "divined."

75 Literally: "emptiness and whitewash" or as someone has described it: "stuff and nonsense."

76 Literally: "restore your fortune."

77 A hapax legomenon. Possibly a play on words is found in the choice of Hebrew words.

- Samekh (Samech) 15 All who pass along the way  
clap<sup>78</sup> their hands at you;  
they hiss and wag their heads  
over the daughter of Jerusalem.  
"Is this the city which was called  
the perfect example of beauty,  
the joy of all the earth?"<sup>79</sup>
- Pe<sup>80</sup> 16 All your enemies  
loudly rail (*or, jeer*) against you;  
they sneer<sup>81</sup> and gnash their teeth.  
They cry, "We have ruined her!  
We have lived to see this,  
and now we love it! We see it happening!"<sup>82</sup>
- Ain (Ayin) 17 The Lord has done what he intended;  
he has fulfilled his decree (*or, threat*).  
As he had ordained long ago,  
he has demolished without pity;  
he has made the enemy rejoice over you,  
and exalted the might of your foes.<sup>83</sup>
- d. A tearful prayer to God 2:18 - 22*
- Sadhe (Tsadhe) 18 Cry aloud<sup>84</sup> to the Lord!  
Wail, daughter of Zion!  
Let tears stream down like torrents  
day and night!  
Give yourself no respite,  
no repose for your eyes!<sup>85</sup>
- Qoph (Koph) 19 Get up during the night and cry out  
at the beginning of each of the watches.<sup>86</sup>  
Pour out your heart like water  
in the presence of the Lord!  
Lift your hands<sup>87</sup> to him

78 Hebrew: **b#52** to clap with malicious delight. NEB translates "snap their fingers."

79 Note the additional line in the Hebrew poem.

80 Pe **5** and Ayin **3** are reversed in verses 16 & 17.

81 Literally: "All your enemies have opened their mouths to you."

82 Literally: "we have attained, we have seen." 5 Hebrew manuscripts, Syriac and Arabic place verse 16 after verse 17 to correct the alphabet.

83 Literally: "He has raised up the horn of your foes."

84 So: emended. Hebrew: "their heart cried out, O wail of daughters."

85 MT: "Do not let the pupil of your eye close." "Pupil" signifying the entire eye.

86 Watches were a unit of time. 3 segments of 4 hours comprised the watches.

87 I. e. pray to God.

for the lives of your children  
[who faint for hunger  
at every street corner.]<sup>88</sup>

Resh

20 Look, O Lord! See!  
To whom have you done this?  
Is it right for women to eat their offspring,<sup>89</sup>  
the new-born children for whom they have cared tenderly  
(*or, who they bounced on their knees*)?  
Or: should priest and prophet  
be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord?

Shin (Sin)

21 The young and old lie dead  
in the dust of the streets.<sup>90</sup>  
Maidens and youths  
have fallen by the sword;<sup>91</sup>  
in the day of your anger, you have killed them;  
slaughtering without mercy.

Tau

22 You summoned my terrors from every side,  
as on the day of an appointed feast (*or, festival*).  
Terrors are all around for on the day of the Lord's anger  
no one escapes or survives (*or, there is no refuge or survivor*).  
Those whom I bounced on my knee (*or, tenderly cared for* and reared,  
my enemy has destroyed!

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88 Many scholars feel these 2 additional lines are a gloss. Literally: "at the head of every open place."

89 French Common Language translation: "Can women go so far as to eat their children?" Spanish Common Language translation: "Should mothers have to eat their own children?"

90 Literally: "on the ground" i.e. in open places.

91 LXX adds "and by famine."