

# LAMENTATIONS



Following the fall of Jerusalem and the horrendous things that took place there, believers try to understand what had happened. They are not complaining; they see the ruins as deserved punishment for their many excesses and constant rejection of God's warnings. Yet, they know that the Lord loves his people: they believe this, feel it and proclaim it.

When the exiles returned to Jerusalem, they might have gathered to pray together on the ruins of what had been the temple, and taken turns with these laments. Later they continued yearly to pray them on the date of the catastrophe, and much later the Church adopted the custom of using them in the days she remembers the death of Jesus.

In the Lord's Passion, the believer sees the sum total of the suffering and anxiety of humankind. These poems help us to look with the same compassion on the suffering of Christ and the suffering of the destitute. They will help us to unite the vision of universal pain with the sense of human sinfulness and responsibility.

A Jewish tradition attributes these poems to Jeremiah. They do seem to manifest a spirit very similar to his.

## First lamentation

**1** <sup>1</sup>How forlorn the city lies,  
once teeming with people!  
How like a widow is she,  
once mistress of the nations!  
A princess among the cities,  
she has now become a slave.

<sup>2</sup>She spends her nights weeping,  
drenching her cheeks with tears.  
Who is there to comfort her  
among all her lovers?  
All her friends have betrayed her  
and have become her enemies.

<sup>3</sup>Humiliated, exhausted,  
Judah has gone into exile  
but she finds no rest among the  
nations  
where she sojourns;  
her pursuers have overtaken her  
where there is no way of escape.

<sup>4</sup>All roads to Zion are in mourning;  
no one comes to her feasts.  
Her gates are deserted,  
her priests groan,  
her virgins grieve.  
What bitter anguish she suffers!

<sup>5</sup>She is at the mercy of her foes  
who enjoy prosperity and power.  
Yahweh himself has made her suffer  
for all her iniquity.

Her children, driven into captivity,  
take the lonely road to exile.

<sup>6</sup>Gone from the daughter of Zion  
is all her majestic splendor.  
Her rulers, like harts  
that find no pasture,  
have fled helplessly  
before the oppressors.

<sup>7</sup>Jerusalem recalls her days  
of wandering and affliction,  
her people fell into the hands of her foes  
and there was no help.  
Haters gloated over her downfall  
and laughed at her destruction.

<sup>8</sup>Greatly has Jerusalem sinned;  
she has become as a thing unclean.  
Honored before,  
but now despised by those who have  
seen her naked,  
she herself groans in dismay  
and turns her face away.

<sup>9</sup>Her filth clings to her skirt.  
She gave no thought to her doom,  
and so her fall came suddenly,  
with no one to offer comfort.  
“Look, O Yahweh, upon my misery,  
for my enemy has overcome me.”

<sup>10</sup>She has seen how the enemy  
has laid hands on her treasures.  
She has seen how the nations  
have defiled her Sanctuary—  
those people you have not allowed  
to come into your assembly.

<sup>11</sup>All her people groan  
as they search for bread;  
just to keep themselves alive,  
they give their jewels for food.  
Look, Yahweh, and mark  
how I have been despised.

<sup>12</sup>All you who pass by,  
look and see.  
Is there any calamity  
like this, inflicted on me

by Yahweh on the day  
of his burning anger.

<sup>13</sup>From above he sent a fire  
down into my very bones,  
he ensnared my feet  
and threw me down,  
and left me in pain  
the whole day long.

<sup>14</sup>He bound my sins into a yoke  
and fastened them together,  
then set them upon my neck  
and caused my strength to fail.  
Yahweh gave me into the hands  
of those I cannot withstand.

<sup>15</sup>Yahweh has spurned  
the bravest of my fighters;  
he has summoned an army  
to crush my young warriors.  
Yahweh has trodden in his wine  
press  
Judah's virgin daughter.

<sup>16</sup>This is what I weep about,  
what makes my tears well up.  
No one is near to restore my spirit,  
no one at hand to console me.  
My children are desolate,  
for the enemy has triumphed.

<sup>17</sup>Zion stretches out her hands,  
but there is no one to give comfort.  
Yahweh has decreed for Jacob  
that his neighbors become his foes.  
As an unclean thing among them  
has Jerusalem become.

<sup>18</sup>Yahweh acts justly,  
for I have defied his order.  
Listen, all you peoples,  
and see how I suffer.  
My young men and maidens  
have all gone into exile.

<sup>19</sup>I cried for help to my lovers,  
but they betrayed me.  
My priests and my elders  
perished in the city  
they sought anything to eat,  
but finally they had to die.

Is 63:2

Jer  
13:17;  
14:17Jer  
30:14

Dt 32:35 <sup>20</sup>Look, Yahweh, upon my distress:  
all within me is in anguish.  
My heart recoils within me:  
I know that I have been rebellious.  
See, outside, the sword that kills,  
and within, death that stalks.

Am 5:18 <sup>21</sup>People have heard my moaning  
but no one comes to comfort me.  
My foes have known of my suffering,  
they rejoice at what you have done.  
Hasten the day you have proclaimed,  
that they may be even as I am.

<sup>22</sup>Let their evil come  
before you, and deal with them  
as you have dealt with me  
on account of my sins.  
Great indeed is my groaning.  
How sick at heart I am!

### Second lamentation

**2** <sup>1</sup>Oh, how Yahweh in his anger  
has despised the daughter of Zion!  
Israel's glory he has flung  
from heaven down to earth;  
unmindful of his footstool  
on the day of his wrath.

<sup>2</sup>Without pity Yahweh has shattered  
in Jacob every dwelling.  
He has torn down in his anger  
the ramparts of Judah's daughter.  
He has thrown her rulers and her king  
to the ground, dishonored.

<sup>3</sup>He has cut down in his anger  
the horn of Israel's might.  
He has withdrawn his right hand  
at the approach of the enemy.  
In Jacob, he has blazed like a fire,  
he has devoured all around.

<sup>4</sup>Like an enemy he has bent his bow,  
his right hand steadying the arrow.  
All our pride of manhood he slew  
as he took his stand as a foe,  
pouring out fury like fire  
upon the tent of Zion's daughter.

<sup>5</sup>The Lord has become an enemy  
who has laid Israel in ruins.  
He has destroyed all her palaces  
and laid waste her fortresses.  
He has multiplied the tears  
of the daughter of Judah.

<sup>6</sup>Yahweh has wrecked her dwelling,  
laid waste her place of meeting.  
He has made Zion forget  
her appointed feasts and Sabbaths;  
he has spurned in his fierce wrath  
king and prophet and priest.

<sup>7</sup>The Lord has rejected his altar,  
has forsaken his Sanctuary.  
He has handed over the walls of her  
tower to the enemy,  
whose triumphant shouts are heard  
in the temple of Yahweh.

<sup>8</sup>Yahweh resolved to tear down  
the ramparts of Zion's daughter.  
He stretched out the measuring line,  
and did not relent from bringing ruin.  
He made both wall and rampart mourn,  
till, together, they crumbled down.

<sup>9</sup>Her gates have sunk into the ground;  
broken and removed are their bars.  
Her king and rulers  
live in exile among the nations.  
No more message for their prophets,  
no more visions from Yahweh.

<sup>10</sup>The elders of the daughter of Zion  
sit in silence upon the ground,  
their heads sprinkled with dust,  
their bodies wrapped in sackcloth,  
while Jerusalem's young women  
bow their heads to the ground.

<sup>11</sup>With weeping, my eyes are spent;  
my soul is in torment  
because of the downfall  
of the daughter of my people,  
because children and infants faint  
in the open spaces of the town.

<sup>12</sup>To their mothers they say,  
"Where is the bread and wine?"  
as they faint like wounded men  
in the streets and public squares,  
as their lives ebb away  
in their mothers' arms.

<sup>13</sup>To what can I compare you,  
O daughter of Jerusalem?  
Who can save or comfort you,  
O virgin daughter of Zion?  
Deep as the sea is your affliction,  
and who can possibly heal you?

<sup>14</sup>Your prophets' visions  
were worthless and false.  
Had they warned of your sins,  
your fate might have been averted.

Ezk  
24:21

Dt 28:36

Jer 6:26

Ezk  
13:10

But what they gave you, instead,  
were false, misleading signs.

<sup>15</sup>Passersby shudder;  
some clap their hands at the sight;  
others wag their heads at the fate  
of the daughter of Jerusalem.  
“Is this the city that was called  
the loveliest, the joy of the world?”

<sup>16</sup>All your enemies open wide  
their mouths against you;  
they gnash their teeth, they hiss,  
they crow: “We have destroyed her!  
This is the day we have waited for;  
we have lived to see it happen.”

<sup>17</sup>Yahweh has accomplished his purpose;  
he has fulfilled his word  
which he decreed in the days of old;  
he overthrew you, without mercy.  
He made your enemies joyful  
and gave them power to crush you.

<sup>18</sup>Cry out to the Lord, O wall  
of the daughter of Zion!  
Oh, let your tears flow  
day and night, like a river.  
Give yourself no relief;  
grant your eyes no respite.

<sup>19</sup>Get up, cry out in the night,  
at the beginning of the watches!  
Pour out your heart like water  
in the presence of the Lord.  
Lift up your hands to him,  
for the lives of your children,  
who faint with hunger  
at the corner of every street.

<sup>20</sup>Look, Yahweh, and answer:  
Why have you treated us like this?  
Why must women eat their little ones,  
whom they have nursed in their arms?  
Why must priest and prophet be  
slaughtered

in the Sanctuary of the Lord?

<sup>21</sup>In the dust of the streets  
lie the young and the old,  
both virgins and young men—  
all fallen by the sword.  
You have killed on the day of your fury;  
you have slaughtered without mercy.

<sup>22</sup>As for a feast day, you bade  
terrors to come from every side.  
There was, on the day of your anger,  
neither fugitive nor survivor.  
My enemy has murdered  
all whom I bore and reared.

### Third lamentation

**3** <sup>1</sup>I am a man who has known  
calamity from the rod of his wrath.

<sup>2</sup>He has driven and brought me  
into darkness, not into the light.

<sup>3</sup>He turns his hand against me alone,  
all the day long, again and again.

<sup>4</sup>He has worn away my flesh and skin;  
he has broken all my bones.

<sup>5</sup>He assails me and surrounds me  
with tribulation and bitterness.

<sup>6</sup>He leaves me to dwell in darkness,  
like those who have long been dead.

<sup>7</sup>He has walled me in without escape;  
he has weighed me down with chains.

<sup>8</sup>I could not even cry for help,  
for he has stopped my prayer.

<sup>9</sup>He bars my way with stones  
and left me helplessly alone.

<sup>10</sup>Like a bear lying in ambush,  
like a lion waiting for its prey,

<sup>11</sup>he lunged at me, tore me to pieces,  
and left me alone and helpless.

<sup>12</sup>Then he drew his bow  
and aimed his arrow at me.

<sup>13</sup>He pierced my sides  
with arrows from his quiver.

<sup>14</sup>I have become a laughingstock,  
a topic of songs for all the people.

<sup>15</sup>He has sated me with bitter food;  
he has made me drunk with worm-  
wood.

<sup>16</sup>He has broken my teeth with gravel  
and thrown me down in the ashes.

<sup>17</sup>He has deprived my soul of peace,  
till I have forgotten happiness.

<sup>18</sup>Now I say, “Gone are my hopes  
and all my confidence in Yahweh.”

<sup>19</sup>Recalling my affliction and home-  
lessness is wormwood and gall.

<sup>20</sup>Thinking it over and over  
makes my soul downcast.

<sup>21</sup>But this, when I ponder,  
is what gives me hope:

<sup>22</sup>Yahweh’s love abides unceasingly.

His compassion is never consumed;  
<sup>23</sup>every morning it is renewed.  
 And his love remains ever faithful.

<sup>24</sup>“My portion is Yahweh,” says my soul.  
 “On him shall I rely.”

<sup>25</sup>Yahweh is good to those who hope  
 in him,  
 to souls who search for him.  
<sup>26</sup>It is rewarding to wait in silence  
 for Yahweh’s salvation.  
<sup>27</sup>It is good for man to bear the yoke  
 from his yOUTH.

<sup>28</sup>Let him sit alone in silence  
 when Yahweh fastens the yoke on him.  
<sup>29</sup>Let him put his lips to the dust  
 there may still be hope.

<sup>30</sup>Let him offer his cheek to be struck;  
 let him be overwhelmed with insult.

<sup>31</sup>For it is not forever  
 that the Lord rejects man.

<sup>32</sup>In the abundance of his love  
 he punishes, but has compassion.  
<sup>33</sup>For he does not willingly abase  
 or afflict the human race.

<sup>34</sup>To trample underfoot  
 the prisoners of the land,  
<sup>35</sup>to deny a man his rights  
 in the presence of the Most High,  
<sup>36</sup>to deprive people of justice—  
 the Lord does not approve of this.

<sup>37</sup>Who can command and execute  
 what the Lord has not willed?

<sup>38</sup>From the mouth of the Most High  
 come all things, good or bad.

<sup>39</sup>Why then, should mortals complain  
 when punished for their sin?

<sup>40</sup>Let us search and examine our ways  
 and return to Yahweh.

<sup>41</sup>Let us lift up our hearts and hands  
 to God in heaven, and say:

<sup>42</sup>We have sinned and rebelled,  
 and you have not forgiven us.

<sup>43</sup>Clothed in anger you have pursued  
 us without mercy.

<sup>44</sup>You have wrapped yourself in clouds  
 so that no prayer can reach you.

<sup>45</sup>You have reduced us to dust  
 and refuse among the nations.

<sup>46</sup>Our foes have opened wide  
 their mouths against us.

<sup>47</sup>Terror is our lot:  
 pitfall, ruin and desolation.

<sup>48</sup>Great is my grief over the downfall  
 of the daughter of my people.

<sup>49</sup>No respite, no relief,  
 as my tears flow ceaselessly,

<sup>50</sup>till Yahweh looks down  
 from heaven and sees.

<sup>51</sup>My soul will grieve in torment  
 for the women of my city.

<sup>52</sup>Like a bird I have been hunted  
 by my foes without cause.

<sup>53</sup>They flung me alive into a pit  
 and cast stones at me.

<sup>54</sup>As the waters closed over my head,  
 I thought I would never again live.

<sup>55</sup>Out of the depths I called  
 on your name, O Yahweh.

<sup>56</sup>You heard; you have not been deaf  
 to my cry for relief.

<sup>57</sup>When I called, you even came near  
 and told me not to fear.

<sup>58</sup>O Lord, you took up my case  
 and redeemed my life.

<sup>59</sup>You have seen the wrong they did me,  
 uphold my cause!

<sup>60</sup>You have seen how resentfully  
 they plotted to destroy my life.

<sup>61</sup>O Yahweh, you have heard the insults  
 hurled at me, their insidious plots;

<sup>62</sup>You have been aware of their  
 thoughts,

their muttering against me all day long.  
<sup>63</sup>Look at them—sitting or standing—  
 mocking me in their song!

<sup>64</sup>Repay them as they deserve,  
 according to their deeds, O Yahweh.

<sup>65</sup>Harden their hearts;  
 hold them under your curse.

<sup>66</sup>Pursue and destroy them in fury  
 from under the heavens, O Yahweh.

#### Fourth lamentation

**4**<sup>1</sup>How tarnished the gold has become.  
 The fine gold has lost its luster.

Mic 7:7;  
 Ps 73:26

Jer  
 15:17

Is 50:6;  
 Mt 5:39

Is 63:7

Am 1:6

Am 5:7

Jl 2:12;  
 Hos 6:1

Is 55:7

Jer 1:8

Why, the sacred stones lie strewn  
at every street corner!

<sup>2</sup>Oh, the precious sons of Zion,  
once worth their weight in gold—  
but now reckoned no more  
than earthen jars from a potter's mold!

Job  
39:13

<sup>3</sup>Even jackals bare their breasts  
to suckle their young,  
but my people have become heartless,  
like ostriches in the desert land.

<sup>4</sup>In thirst the infant's tongue  
cleaves to the roof of its mouth.  
Children are begging for alms,  
but there is no one to help them.

<sup>5</sup>Those accustomed to fine food  
now lie dying in the streets.  
Those accustomed to wear purple  
now lie destitute upon the ash heaps.

Is 1:9;  
Ezk  
16:46

<sup>6</sup>The punishment of my people  
is greater than that of Sodom,  
which was overthrown in an instant,  
without a helping hand.

<sup>7</sup>Brighter than snow were their rulers,  
even whiter than milk;  
their bodies rosier than coral,  
their beauty as radiant as sapphires.

<sup>8</sup>Now they look blacker than soot,  
unrecognized in the streets.  
Their emaciated form shows lack of food,  
their skin shriveled and dry as wood.

<sup>9</sup>Better to have died by the sword  
than to have perished in hunger.  
The famine-stricken people perish,  
and slowly, wretchedly, pass away.

<sup>10</sup>Once loving mothers, our women  
have cooked their own children  
and made them their food:  
such has been the crash of my people!

<sup>11</sup>Yahweh has given full vent to his  
wrath;  
pouring out his fierce anger.  
He has kindled a fire in Zion,  
which has consumed her foundation.

<sup>12</sup>Never had kings believed  
nor the world thought possible  
that the enemy could break  
through the gates of Jerusalem.

Jer 5:31;  
Ezk 7:23

<sup>13</sup>But this happened because of the  
priests, who sinned,  
because of the prophets who trans-  
gressed,  
shedding in her midst the blood of the just.

<sup>14</sup>They wandered like blind men,  
groping through the streets,  
so defiled with blood  
that none could touch their garments.

<sup>15</sup>"Go away!" people cried at them.  
"Do not touch us! You are unclean!"  
They became fugitives wandering about,  
but even the nations would drive them  
out.

Is 52:11

<sup>16</sup>Yahweh himself has dispersed them;  
no longer does he watch over them.  
The priests are shown no honor;  
the elders are given no favor.

<sup>17</sup>Our watchmen strained their eyes,  
looking for help in vain.  
We anxiously waited for an ally,  
who failed to save us.

Jer 37:7

<sup>18</sup>Like dogs our enemies hounded us  
and kept us off the streets.  
As our end drew near,  
we knew our days were numbered.

<sup>19</sup>Swifter were our pursuers,  
than the eagles in the sky.  
Over the hills they chased us,  
they waylaid us in the wilderness.

<sup>20</sup>Our life's breath, Yahweh's anointed,  
was taken captive in their pit—  
he of whom we said, "In his protection  
we shall live among the nations."

<sup>21</sup>Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of  
Edom,  
you who dwell in the land of Uz.  
But you shall be drunk and stripped bare,  
for to you also the cup will pass.  
<sup>22</sup>Your ordeal, daughter of Zion, will end;  
for your exile will not be prolonged.  
But Edom's daughter will be chastised,  
and her wickedness will be exposed.

Is 51:17;  
Heb  
2:15

### Fifth lamentation

**5** <sup>1</sup>Remember, Yahweh, what has be-  
fallen us. Look, and see our dis-  
grace,

<sup>2</sup>our home handed over to stran-  
gers, our inheritance to foreigners.

<sup>3</sup>We are as orphans, fatherless, and  
early widowed are our mothers.

<sup>4</sup>Our drinking water we must buy;  
for our own wood we have to pay.

Is 55:1

<sup>5</sup>With the yoke stifling our breath,  
without rest we work to death.

<sup>6</sup>We have bowed down to Egypt,  
and to Assyria, just to subsist.

<sup>7</sup>Our ancestors who sinned are no  
more but we bear their guilt.

<sup>8</sup>Slaves rule us, and there is no one  
to rescue us from their hands.

<sup>9</sup>We brave the desert heat and the  
sword just to get our hard-earned  
food.

<sup>10</sup>Our skin is hot like a furnace,  
dried up and shriveled by hunger.

<sup>11</sup>Ravished are the wives in Zion,  
the virgins in the towns of Judah.

<sup>12</sup>Princes are hung up by their  
hands; elders shown no respect.

<sup>13</sup>Young men toil at the millstones,  
boys stagger under heavy loads.

<sup>14</sup>The old have shunned the city  
gate, the young, their music.

<sup>15</sup>From our hearts joy is gone; we  
danced then, but now we lament.

<sup>16</sup>The garlands have fallen from  
our heads. Woe upon us, for we have  
sinned!

<sup>17</sup>Over all this our hearts are sick;  
and our eyes have grown weak:

<sup>18</sup>for we see Mount Zion desolate; Mic 3:12  
the jackals prowl within.

<sup>19</sup>You, O Yahweh, forever reign; Ps 102:13  
your throne endures from age to age.

<sup>20</sup>Why, then, should you abandon  
us, why forget us for so long a time?

<sup>21</sup>Lead us to you again, O Yahweh,  
that we may be restored; renew our  
days as of old.

<sup>23</sup>Have you utterly rejected us? Is Jer 14:19  
there no end to your wrath against  
us?