Lamentations

1

Summary: *Lamentations 1 opens with the anguished cry 'Eikhah!' — 'How!' — as the poet gazes upon the desolation of Jerusalem after the Babylonian destruction of 586 BCE. The city is personified as a widow, once great among the nations, now reduced to forced labor. The first half (vv. 1-11) is the poet's third-person lament over Zion's ruin; the second half (vv. 12-22) shifts to Jerusalem herself speaking in the first person, crying out to passersby to witness her suffering. The chapter is structured as an acrostic poem: each of its 22 verses begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, from aleph to tav, imposing artistic order on the chaos of destruction.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The Hebrew title of the book is 'Eikhah' — the first word, meaning 'How!' — a cry of stunned disbelief. This same word opens chapters 2 and 4 as well. The acrostic structure is not mere literary decoration; it serves a theological function, expressing totality — grief from aleph to tav, from A to Z. The personification of Jerusalem as a weeping widow draws on ancient Near Eastern city-lament traditions (Sumerian laments for Ur and Nippur predate this by a millennium). Though traditionally attributed to Jeremiah, the text itself is anonymous, and the Talmud records debate about authorship. The shift from third-person description to first-person speech at verse 12 is one of the most powerful voice changes in biblical poetry — the city herself interrupts the poet to speak her own pain. The phrase 'Is there any sorrow like my sorrow?' (v. 12) became foundational in Jewish liturgical tradition and in Christian devotion (applied to Christ's passion).*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew niddah in verse 8 ('she has become unclean / a filthy thing') carries connotations of menstrual impurity — Jerusalem's sin is likened to ritual uncleanness. We rendered this faithfully without euphemism but noted the cultural context. The word sarnei in verse 15 (KJV 'mighty men') actually means 'bulls' or 'warriors' — we rendered it as 'warriors' with a note on the metaphor. The ayin-pe letter order in this chapter follows the standard alphabetic sequence, unlike chapters 2-4 which reverse pe and ayin — a textual variant scholars debate. The verb tzivvah ('he commanded') in verse 17 uses military language for God's summoning of enemies against Jerusalem, which we preserved.*

Connections: *The city-as-widow image connects to Isaiah 54:1-6 (the barren woman restored) and Revelation 18 (the fall of Babylon). The phrase 'no comforter' (ein menahem) repeats five times in this chapter, establishing a theme that the book of Isaiah answers: 'Comfort, comfort my people' (Isaiah 40:1, using the same root n-h-m). The cry 'Look, LORD, and see' (v. 11) anticipates the same cry in 2:20 and 5:1. The acrostic form connects to Psalms 9-10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, and 145, as well as Proverbs 31:10-31. Jerusalem speaking in first person*

anticipates the personal lament of chapter 3.

1 How she sits alone,
the city once teeming with people!
She has become like a widow —
she who was great among the nations.
A princess among the provinces,
she has been put to forced labor.

2 She weeps bitterly in the night,
tears streaming down her cheeks.
Among all who loved her,
none brings her comfort.
All her allies have betrayed her;
they have become her enemies.

3 Judah has gone into exile
under affliction and harsh servitude.
She dwells among the nations
but finds no resting place.
All who pursued her overtook her
in the narrow passes.

4 The roads to Zion mourn
because no one comes to the appointed feasts.
All her gates are desolate;
her priests groan,
her young women grieve,
and she herself is in bitter anguish.

5 Her enemies have gained the upper hand;
her foes are at ease.
For the LORD has caused her grief
because of the abundance of her transgressions.
Her children have gone away,
captives driven before the enemy.

6 All her splendor has departed
from Daughter Zion.
Her leaders have become like deer
that find no pasture —
they stumble on without strength
before the pursuer.

7 In the days of her affliction and wandering,
Jerusalem remembers all the precious things
that were hers in days of old.
When her people fell into the hand of the enemy
with no one to help her,

the adversaries looked at her
and laughed at her downfall.

8 Jerusalem has sinned grievously;
for this she has become an object of scorn.
All who once honored her now despise her,
for they have seen her nakedness.
She herself groans
and turns her face away.

9 Her uncleanness clings to her skirts;
she gave no thought to her future.
Her fall has been staggering,
and there is no one to comfort her.
"Look, LORD, upon my affliction,
for the enemy has triumphed!"

10 The enemy has stretched out his hand
over all her treasures.
She has watched as nations entered her sanctuary —
those you commanded
should never enter your assembly.

11 All her people groan,
searching for bread.
They have traded their treasures for food
just to stay alive.
"Look, LORD, and take notice,
for I have become worthless."

12 Does this mean nothing to you,
all who pass along the road?
Look and see —
is there any pain like my pain,
which was inflicted on me,
which the LORD brought upon me
on the day of his burning anger?

13 From on high he sent fire
into my bones and it overcame them.
He spread a net for my feet;
he turned me back.
He has left me desolate,
sick with grief all day long.

14 My transgressions have been bound into a yoke
by his hand.
They are woven together,
fastened upon my neck.

He has broken my strength.
The Lord has handed me over
to those I cannot withstand.

15 The Lord has rejected all my warriors
from my midst.
He has summoned an assembly against me
to crush my young men.
The Lord has trodden the virgin Daughter Judah
as in a winepress.

16 For all these things I weep;
my eyes — my eyes overflow with tears.
For any comforter is far from me,
anyone to restore my life.
My children are desolate,
for the enemy has prevailed.

17 Zion stretches out her hands,
but there is no one to comfort her.
The LORD has commanded against Jacob
that his neighbors become his enemies.
Jerusalem has become
an unclean thing among them.

18 The LORD is righteous,
for I have rebelled against his word.
Hear now, all you peoples,
and see my pain —
my young women and my young men
have gone into captivity.

19 I called out to my allies,
but they betrayed me.
My priests and my elders
perished in the city
while they searched for food
to keep themselves alive.

20 Look, LORD, for I am in anguish!
My stomach churns;
my heart turns over within me
because I have been utterly rebellious.
Outside, the sword takes my children;
inside, it is like death itself.

21 They have heard how I groan —
there is no one to comfort me.
All my enemies have heard of my disaster;

they rejoice that you have done this.
Bring about the day you have proclaimed,
and let them become like me!

22Let all their wickedness come before you;
deal with them
as you have dealt with me
for all my transgressions.
For my groans are many,
and my heart is sick.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Aleph () verse. The opening word 'Eikhah' ('How!') gives the book its Hebrew name. It is not a question seeking information but a cry of stunned grief — the same word opens David's lament for Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:19). The word rabbati ('great, teeming') appears twice in the verse, creating a bitter contrast: she was rabbati in people and rabbati among the nations, but now she is alone. The word lamas ('to forced labor, tribute') refers to corvée labor — the same system Solomon imposed on subject peoples (1 Kings 9:21). The oppressed has become the oppressed.

2. Bet () verse. The emphatic infinitive absolute bakho tivkeh ('weeping, she weeps') intensifies the grief — we rendered this as 'weeps bitterly' to capture the force. The word menahem ('comforter') appears here for the first time; its absence (ein menahem, 'no comforter') will echo through verses 9, 16, 17, and 21, becoming a structural refrain. The 'lovers' (ohaveiha) are political allies — Egypt, Edom, and other nations Judah courted for protection instead of trusting God (cf. Jeremiah 30:14, Ezekiel 23).

3. Gimel () verse. The word manoach ('resting place') echoes the failed search for rest in the wilderness and in Ruth 1:9 — rest is a covenant blessing, and its absence signals covenant rupture. The phrase bein hametsarim ('in the narrow passes / between the straits') literally means 'between the tight places' — a military image of being trapped in a canyon with no escape. In Jewish tradition this phrase gives its name to the Three Weeks mourning period between 17 Tammuz and 9 Av (bein hametsarim).

4. Dalet () verse. The Hebrew mo'ed ('appointed feast') refers to the pilgrimage festivals — Passover, Weeks, and Booths — when Israelites traveled to Jerusalem. The roads themselves personified as mourning because the pilgrims have ceased. The word betuloteiha ('her young women / virgins') refers to the young women who participated in festival celebrations (cf. Judges 21:21, Jeremiah 31:13). The adjective mar ('bitter') is the root of Naomi's self-renaming in Ruth 1:20.

5. He () verse. The crucial theological claim: the LORD (YHWH) himself has caused Jerusalem's suffering. The verb hogah ('caused grief, afflicted') makes God the active agent of the city's devastation — this is not random misfortune but covenant judgment. The word pesha'eiha ('her transgressions') is the Hebrew term for deliberate rebellion, the most serious category of sin. The children (olaleiha) going into captivity before the enemy reverses the Exodus — instead of God leading his people out, the enemy leads them away.

6. Vav () verse. The title bat-Tsiyon ('Daughter Zion') personifies the city as a vulnerable young woman — a tender address that intensifies the pathos. The word hadarah ('her splendor, majesty') refers to the visible glory of the city — the Temple, the palace, the walls. The simile of deer without pasture captures exhaustion and helplessness: deer that cannot find food become too weak to flee predators. The word sarehia ('her leaders, princes') denotes the ruling class who should protect the city.

7. Zayin () verse. The word merudeha ('her wandering, homelessness') is rare, conveying restless displacement. The word mahmudeiha ('her precious things, desirable things') likely refers to both the treasures of the Temple and the cherished life of the covenant community. The final word mishbatteha is debated: it may mean 'her cessation' (from shavat, 'to cease') or 'her sabbaths' (from shabbat). The KJV reads 'sabbaths,' but the context of enemies mocking suggests 'her downfall / cessation' — the end of everything she was. We rendered 'downfall' with this note.

8. Chet () verse. The emphatic het hateah ('sinning, she has sinned') mirrors the emphatic weeping of verse 2. The word lenidah ('to a niddah / unclean thing') carries connotations of menstrual impurity (Leviticus 15:19-33) — Jerusalem's sin has made her ritually repulsive. We rendered this as 'an object of scorn' because the emphasis in context is on the social consequence (being shunned), while noting the Hebrew connotation here. The exposure of ervatah ('her nakedness') is the language of covenant violation — Ezekiel 16 and 23 develop this metaphor extensively. She turns away in shame at her own exposure.

9. Tet () verse. The image of tumah ('uncleanness') on her skirts is visceral — her defilement is visible, trailing behind her for all to see. The phrase lo zakhrah aharitah ('she did not remember her end') means she failed to consider the consequences of her actions. The refrain ein menahem ('no comforter') returns from verse 2. At the end of this verse, Jerusalem's own voice breaks through for the first time — 're'eh YHWH' ('Look, LORD') — a sudden shift from third person to first person that many scholars see as the city herself interrupting the poet's lament.

10. Yod () verse. The word mahmadeiha ('her treasures, precious things') echoes verse 7 — what was precious has been seized. The violation of the miqdash ('sanctuary') is the ultimate sacrilege: foreign nations have entered the holy space. The prohibition referenced is Deuteronomy 23:3-4, which barred Ammonites and Moabites from the qahal ('assembly') of the LORD. The shift to second-person address ('you commanded') shows the

city speaking directly to God, accusing him of allowing what his own Torah forbade.

11. Kaf () verse. The phrase lehashiv nefesh ('to restore life / to keep alive') is literally 'to cause the soul to return' — they are at the brink of death. The word zolelah ('worthless, despised, gluttonous') is debated; it can mean 'cheap, worthless' or connect to the 'glutton' (zolel) of Deuteronomy 21:20. In context, Jerusalem is saying she has become something cheap and contemptible in the eyes of the world. The cry re'eh YHWH ('Look, LORD') echoes verse 9, reinforcing Jerusalem's direct plea to God.

12. Lamed () verse. This is perhaps the most famous verse in Lamentations. Jerusalem addresses the passersby — those walking past the ruins. The phrase makh'ov kemakh'ovi ('pain like my pain') became central in Jewish liturgy for Tisha B'Av (the anniversary of the Temple's destruction) and in Christian tradition was applied to Christ's suffering on the cross. The verb hogah ('brought grief upon') again names God as the agent, and haron appo ('his burning anger') uses the image of God's flaring nostrils — anger so intense it is described as heat radiating from his face.

13. Mem () verse. Three images of divine attack in rapid succession: fire in the bones (internal torment), a net for the feet (entrapment like an animal), and being turned back (military defeat). The fire 'from on high' (mimarom) emphasizes that this destruction comes from heaven — from God himself. The word davah ('sick, faint') specifically connotes the weakness of illness, not mere sadness. Jerusalem is not just sad — she is physically broken.

14. Nun () verse. The rare verb nisqad ('bound, watched, tied together') may relate to shaqad ('to watch, be alert') — the image is of sins being carefully tied together like a yoke lashed to an ox's neck. Each transgression (pesha) is a strand in the rope. The title Adonai ('Lord') is used here rather than YHWH — a distinction maintained throughout Lamentations where the poet alternates between the covenant name and the sovereign title.

15. Samekh () verse. The verb sillah ('rejected, cast aside') means to treat as worthless — the warriors who should have defended the city are swept aside by God himself. The word mo'ed ('assembly, appointed time') creates bitter irony: instead of summoning a festival assembly (cf. v. 4), God has summoned a military assembly to destroy. The winepress image (gat darakh, 'treading the winepress') is visceral — grapes are crushed underfoot until they burst, and the juice runs like blood. This image reappears in Isaiah 63:1-6 and Revelation 14:19-20.

16. Ayin () verse. The repetition eini eini ('my eye, my eye') is not a scribal error but a deliberate intensification — the poet stutters with grief. The word menahem ('comforter') returns for the third time (cf. vv. 2, 9), and meshiv nafshi ('one who restores my soul/life') adds urgency — she needs not just emotional comfort but someone to pull her back from the edge of death. The desolation of her 'children' (banai) means both the literal inhabitants and the metaphorical children of Mother Zion.

17. Pe () verse. The image of outstretched hands is a gesture of supplication — Zion begs but receives nothing. The refrain ein menahem ('no comforter') appears for the fourth time. The verb tsivvah ('commanded') is military language — God has issued orders deploying Jacob's neighbors as attackers. The word leniddah ('to an unclean thing') returns from verse 8, again evoking menstrual impurity language. The pe-ayin order here follows the standard Hebrew alphabet; chapters 2, 3, and 4 reverse pe and ayin, an ancient textual variant.

18. Tsade () verse. The stunning confession: tsaddiq hu YHWH ('righteous is the LORD'). In the midst of devastation, Jerusalem does not accuse God of injustice but confesses that the destruction is deserved — she rebelled against pihu ('his mouth/word/command'). The verb mariti ('I rebelled') is the same root used for Israel's rebellion in the wilderness (Numbers 20:24, 27:14). The appeal to 'all peoples' (kol ammim) universalizes the lament — Jerusalem calls the whole world to witness.

19. Qof () verse. The 'lovers' (me'ahavai) are the foreign allies of verse 2, now explicitly described as having 'deceived' (rimmuni) Jerusalem — the political alliances proved worthless. The priests and elders — the religious and civic leaders — died of starvation within the city walls during the siege. The phrase lehashiv et nafsham ('to restore their lives') echoes verse 11, creating a devastating parallel: the people traded treasures for food, but the leaders could not even find food to trade for.

20. Resh () verse. The visceral language — me'ai homarmarru ('my insides churn') and nehpakh libbi ('my heart turns over') — describes grief as a physical sensation, the body revolting against unbearable suffering. The repetition maro mariti ('rebelling I have rebelled') is another emphatic infinitive absolute, intensifying the confession. The final line sets up a merism: outside (mihutz) the sword kills, inside (babbayit) death stalks — there is no safe place, no escape.

21. Shin () verse. The fifth and final occurrence of ein menahem ('no comforter') in this chapter. The enemies sasu ('rejoice') at Jerusalem's suffering, which God himself caused — a bitter acknowledgment. The final line shifts from lament to imprecation: Jerusalem calls on God to bring the 'day' (yom) of judgment upon her enemies too. The 'day you have proclaimed' (yom qarata) anticipates the 'Day of the LORD' language that runs through the prophets. This is not revenge but an appeal to divine justice — if my sins were punished, let theirs be also.

22. Tav () verse — the final letter of the Hebrew alphabet, completing the acrostic. The imprecation continues from verse 21: Jerusalem asks God to treat her enemies with the same justice he applied to her. The word pesha'ai ('my transgressions') returns from verse 5, forming an inclusio — the chapter begins and ends with the acknowledgment that Jerusalem's transgressions caused her suffering. The closing words libbi davvai ('my heart is sick/faint') echo the davah of verse 13, ending the chapter in unresolved grief. There is no resolution, no comfort, no restoration — only the raw wound of judgment acknowledged as just.

2

Summary: *Lamentations 2 is the most theologically searing chapter in the book. The poet describes God himself as the destroyer of Jerusalem — not merely permitting the Babylonian invasion but actively tearing down his own Temple, his own walls, his own people. The LORD has become 'like an enemy' (v. 5). The chapter moves from God's destructive fury (vv. 1-10) to the poet's personal anguish at the sight of starving children (vv. 11-12), to a direct address to Daughter Zion urging her to cry out to God (vv. 18-19), and finally to Zion's own agonized prayer (vv. 20-22). Like chapter 1, this is a 22-verse acrostic poem following the Hebrew alphabet, but with the pe-ayin letter order reversed at verses 16-17.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The theological audacity of this chapter is almost without parallel in scripture. Verse after verse names God as the agent of destruction using verbs of violence: he has swallowed, demolished, cut down, burned, bent his bow, killed, poured out his fury, destroyed his own tabernacle. The poet does not flinch from the conclusion: the LORD has done what he planned (v. 17). The pe-ayin letter reversal (where pe precedes ayin, reversing the order found in chapter 1) is attested in several ancient acrostic texts and may reflect an alternative alphabetic tradition. The description of prophets who gave false visions (v. 14) connects directly to Jeremiah's conflict with the optimistic prophets (Jeremiah 23, 28). The closing question — 'Should women eat their own children?' (v. 20) — is the most horrifying line in the Hebrew Bible, fulfilled during the siege according to 2 Kings 6:28-29.*

Translation Friction: *The verb billa ('swallowed') in verses 2, 5, and 16 required consistent rendering — we used 'swallowed up' to convey the totality of destruction. The word sukkah in verse 6 can mean 'booth/shelter' or 'his tabernacle' — the ambiguity is theologically loaded because it connects the Temple to the temporary Sukkot booths, implying God has dismantled his own dwelling as easily as taking down a festival tent. The pe-ayin reversal at verses 16-17 was noted without attempting to reproduce it in English, since the acrostic structure does not transfer across languages. The graphic description of starving infants in verses 11-12 and cannibalism in verse 20 was rendered without euphemism.*

Connections: *The portrayal of God as warrior-destroyer connects to the Day of the LORD traditions in Amos 5:18-20, Joel 2:1-11, and Zephaniah 1:14-18. The demolished Temple connects to Jesus's prediction of the second Temple's destruction (Matthew 24:2). The false prophets of verse 14 connect to Jeremiah 23:9-40 and Ezekiel 13. The 'pouring out of the heart like water' (v. 19) anticipates Psalm 62:8. The cannibalism reference connects to the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28:53-57 and Leviticus 26:29 — the very consequences Moses warned would follow covenant violation.*

1 How the Lord has covered Daughter Zion
with a cloud in his anger!
He has hurled the splendor of Israel
from heaven to earth.
He has not remembered his footstool
on the day of his wrath.

2 The Lord has swallowed up
all the dwellings of Jacob without mercy.
In his fury he has torn down
the fortresses of Daughter Judah.
He has brought them to the ground;
he has profaned the kingdom and its rulers.

3 In burning anger he has cut off
every horn of Israel.

He has drawn back his right hand
from before the enemy.
He has blazed against Jacob
like a consuming fire on every side.

4 He has bent his bow like an enemy,
stood with his right hand poised like a foe.
He has killed all who were precious to the eye.
In the tent of Daughter Zion
he has poured out his fury like fire.

5 The Lord has become like an enemy.
He has swallowed up Israel;
he has swallowed up all her palaces
and destroyed his fortresses.
He has multiplied in Daughter Judah
mourning upon mourning.

6 He has torn down his booth like a garden shelter;
he has destroyed his place of meeting.
The LORD has made festival and sabbath
forgotten in Zion,
and in the fury of his anger
he has spurned both king and priest.

7 The Lord has rejected his own altar;
he has abandoned his own sanctuary.
He has handed over to the enemy
the walls of her palaces.
They raised a shout in the house of the LORD
as on the day of a festival.

8 The LORD determined to destroy
the wall of Daughter Zion.
He stretched out the measuring line;
he did not restrain his hand from destruction.
He made rampart and wall mourn;
together they crumble.

9 Her gates have sunk into the ground;
he has smashed and shattered her bars.
Her king and her officials are among the nations
where there is no instruction.
Even her prophets receive
no vision from the LORD.

10 The elders of Daughter Zion
sit on the ground in silence.
They have thrown dust on their heads

and put on sackcloth.
The young women of Jerusalem
have bowed their heads to the ground.

11 My eyes are spent with tears;
my stomach churns.
My bile pours out on the ground
over the destruction of the daughter of my people,
as children and infants faint
in the streets of the city.

12 They cry to their mothers,
"Where is bread? Where is wine?"
as they collapse like the wounded
in the streets of the city,
as their lives pour out
in their mothers' arms.

13 What can I say for you?
To what can I compare you,
Daughter Jerusalem?
What can I liken to you,
that I might comfort you,
virgin Daughter Zion?
For your wound is as vast as the sea —
who can heal you?

14 Your prophets saw for you
visions of emptiness and whitewash.
They did not expose your guilt
so as to restore your fortunes.
The oracles they saw for you
were false and misleading.

15 All who pass along the road
clap their hands at you.
They hiss and shake their heads
at Daughter Jerusalem:
"Is this the city that was called
the perfection of beauty,
the joy of all the earth?"

16 All your enemies open their mouths
wide against you.
They hiss and grind their teeth.
They say, "We have swallowed her up!
This is the day we waited for —
we have found it; we have seen it!"

17The LORD has done what he planned;
he has carried out his decree
that he ordained from days of old.
He has torn down without mercy;
he has let the enemy rejoice over you
and raised up the strength of your foes.

18Their heart cries out to the Lord.
O wall of Daughter Zion,
let tears flow down like a river
day and night!
Give yourself no rest;
let your eyes find no relief.

19Rise up! Cry out in the night,
at the start of every watch.
Pour out your heart like water
before the face of the Lord.
Lift up your hands to him
for the lives of your children
who faint from hunger
at the head of every street.

20Look, LORD, and consider:
To whom have you done this?
Should women eat their own offspring,
the children they have nursed?
Should priest and prophet be slain
in the sanctuary of the Lord?

21Young and old lie on the ground
in the streets.
My young women and my young men
have fallen by the sword.
You killed them on the day of your anger;
you slaughtered without mercy.

22You summoned terrors against me from every side
as on the day of a festival.
On the day of the LORD's anger,
none escaped, none survived.
Those I carried and raised —
my enemy has destroyed them.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Aleph () verse. The chapter opens with the same cry 'Eikhah' ('How!') as chapter 1. The verb ya'iv ('covered with a cloud, darkened') suggests an ominous storm cloud — God's anger as a thunderhead descending over Zion. The 'footstool' (hadom raglav) is the Ark of the Covenant and by extension the Temple (cf. 1 Chronicles 28:2, Psalm 132:7) — God has forgotten even the place where his feet rested on earth. The verb hishlikh ('hurled, thrown down') conveys violence — Israel's splendor was not gently set aside but violently thrown from heaven to the ground.

2. Bet () verse. The verb billa ('swallowed up') is a verb of total consumption — nothing remains after swallowing. The phrase lo hamal ('without mercy, without pity') appears repeatedly in this chapter (vv. 2, 17, 21), characterizing God's judgment as relentless. The verb hillel ('profaned') means to strip something of its sacred status — God has desacralized the Davidic monarchy and its leaders. This is the reversal of the anointing that made them holy.

3. Gimel () verse. The 'horn' (qeren) symbolizes strength and power — cutting off every horn means stripping Israel of all capacity to resist. God drawing back his right hand is devastating: the right hand is the hand of deliverance (Exodus 15:6, 12), and its withdrawal means God refuses to fight for Israel. Worse, God himself burns against Jacob — the fire that once protected Israel from Egypt (Exodus 14:24) is now turned against her.

4. Dalet () verse. The transformation is complete: God has become ke'oyev ('like an enemy') and ketsar ('like a foe'). The right hand that was withdrawn from protecting Israel (v. 3) is now deployed against her. The phrase mahmaddei ayin ('precious things of the eye') refers to beloved people — the beautiful, the cherished, the young. The 'tent' (ohel) of Daughter Zion may refer to the Temple using tabernacle language, connecting the destruction back to the wilderness dwelling of God.

5. He () verse. The central theological statement of the chapter: Adonai hayah ke'oyev ('The Lord has become like an enemy'). This is not metaphor — it is the poet's stunned recognition that the God who fought for Israel at the Reed Sea has now turned his military might against her. The verb billa ('swallowed up') appears twice in succession, intensifying the totality of destruction. The final pair ta'aniyah va'aniyah ('mourning and lamentation') is nearly synonymous, piling grief upon grief through sound repetition.

6. Vav () verse. The word sukko ('his booth/shelter') is the same word used for the temporary shelters of the Sukkot festival — God has dismantled his own Temple as casually as tearing down a harvest tent. The word mo'ado ('his appointed meeting place') connects to the 'tent of meeting' (ohel mo'ed) of the wilderness — the place where God met with Israel is now rubble. The abolition of mo'ed veshabbat ('festival and sabbath') means the entire liturgical calendar has ceased. God has rejected both civil (melekh, 'king') and religious (kohen, 'priest') leadership.

7. Zayin () verse. The bitter irony reaches its peak: the enemies shout in God's own house keyom mo'ed ('as on the day of a festival'). The joyful noise of worship has been replaced by the war cries of invaders, and the poet describes both with the same language. God has zanah ('rejected, cast off') his own altar — the place where Israel met God through sacrifice is abandoned. The verb ni'er ('abhorred, spurned') his sanctuary makes God the one who desecrates his own holy place by withdrawing from it.

8. Chet () verse. The verb hashav ('planned, determined') shows that this destruction is not impulsive but deliberate — God planned it. The measuring line (qav) is normally a tool for building (Zechariah 1:16); here it measures for demolition, a devastating inversion. The personification of rampart and wall mourning together extends the city-as-person metaphor — even the stones grieve. The verb umlelalu ('they languish, crumble') suggests slow collapse rather than sudden destruction.

9. Tet () verse. The gates 'sinking into the ground' (tave'u va'arets) is an image of total ruin — the gates have collapsed and been swallowed by rubble. The word torah here means 'instruction, teaching' rather than specifically the Mosaic law — in exile among the nations, there is no prophetic or priestly guidance. The cessation of prophetic vision (hazon) means God has gone silent. The three pillars of Israelite society — kingship, Torah instruction, and prophecy — have all failed simultaneously.

10. Yod () verse. The rituals of mourning are described: sitting on the ground (the posture of shiva), silence (yiddemmu — the deepest form of grief beyond words), dust on the head, and sackcloth garments. The elders who once sat in the gate to judge now sit in the dirt. The young women (betulot) who once danced at festivals (cf. 1:4) now bow their heads to the earth. Every element of communal life has been inverted.

11. Kaf () verse. The poet now speaks in first person, overwhelmed by what he sees. The phrase kavedi ('my liver/bile') being poured out is visceral Hebrew body language — the liver was considered the seat of deep emotion, and its 'pouring out' describes grief so intense it feels like internal organs are collapsing. The word olel ('child, toddler') and yoneq ('nursing infant') — the most vulnerable members of society — are fainting from hunger in the public squares. The poet cannot maintain detached observation; the sight of dying children breaks him.

12. Lamed () verse. The children's cry ayyeh dagan vayayin ('Where is grain and wine?') is devastating in its simplicity — they ask for the basic staples of life. The comparison to the wounded (kehalal, 'like one pierced by a sword') means the children are dying of starvation as if they had been struck in battle. The phrase behistappekh nafsham ('as their lives pour out') describes death by degrees — the nephesh (life-force) slowly draining away in their mothers' laps. This is one of the most emotionally devastating images in all of scripture.

13. Mem () verse. The poet searches for an adequate comparison and fails — no analogy is large enough. The phrase gadol kayyam shivrekh ('your wound/breaking is great as the sea') uses the sea as the measure of immeasurable vastness. The word shever ('breaking, wound, fracture') is the same word Jeremiah uses repeatedly for the nation's catastrophe (Jeremiah 6:14, 8:21, 14:17). The question mi yirpa lakh ('who can heal you?') implies the answer: perhaps no one — or only God, the one who inflicted the wound.

14. Nun () verse. The false prophets are indicted: they saw shav vetafel ('emptiness and whitewash') — tafel is literally plaster or whitewash used to cover over cracks (cf. Ezekiel 13:10-15, where false prophets are accused of 'whitewashing' a weak wall). They failed to gilu al avonekh ('expose/uncover your guilt'), which would have led to repentance and restoration. The word maddukhim ('misleading oracles, causes of banishment') may derive from nadah ('to drive away') — their false words drove the people into exile. This verse directly parallels Jeremiah's confrontation with Hananiah (Jeremiah 28).

15. Samekh () verse. The clapping (safqu kappayim) here is not applause but mockery — a gesture of scorn. The hissing (sharqu) and head-shaking are universal gestures of derision. The title kelilat yofi ('perfection of beauty') echoes Psalm 50:2 ('Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth') and masos lekhol ha'arets ('joy of all the earth') echoes Psalm 48:3. The passersby quote Jerusalem's own praise songs back to her in mockery

— what she sang about herself is now thrown in her face.

16. Pe () verse. NOTE: In this chapter, pe precedes ayin, reversing the order found in chapter 1. This pe-ayin reversal also occurs in chapters 3 and 4, and may reflect an older alphabetic tradition. The enemies use the same verb billa'nu ('we have swallowed') that was applied to God's action in verses 2 and 5 — the enemies claim for themselves what was actually God's doing. Their gloating 'this is the day' (zeh hayyom) is a perversion of the festival language 'this is the day the LORD has made' (Psalm 118:24).

17. Ayin () verse. Following pe in the reversed order. This is the theological climax: asah YHWH asher zamam ('The LORD has done what he planned'). The destruction is not a failure of divine power or a surprise — it is the fulfillment of the covenant curses God announced through Moses (Deuteronomy 28). The word bitsa ('carried out, completed') means he saw it through to the end. The phrase lo hamal ('without mercy') echoes verse 2. God's plan, Israel's enemies' triumph, and the ancient warnings all converge in this verse.

18. Tsade () verse. The poet now exhorts Daughter Zion to unceasing weeping — the tears should flow kannahal ('like a stream/torrent'), a never-ending current. The phrase bat einekh ('daughter of your eye') is the pupil — the most tender, vulnerable part of the body. The command is paradoxical: weep without stopping, because only through the exhaustion of grief can any healing begin. The address to the 'wall' (homat) may be apostrophe — the poet speaks to the ruins themselves.

19. Qof () verse. The poet commands Zion to pray — but the prayer is specifically for the children. The word ashmurot ('watches') divides the night into shifts; the command is to begin crying out at the start of each one, meaning the entire night. The phrase shifkhi khammayim libbekh ('pour out your heart like water') is one of the most powerful prayer images in scripture — the heart emptied entirely before God, holding nothing back. The olalayikh ('your little children') fainting from starvation at every street corner echoes the same devastating image from verses 11-12.

20. Resh () verse. Daughter Zion now speaks directly to God, and her words are the most searing in the Hebrew Bible. The phrase tokhalena nashim piryam ('should women eat their fruit/offspring?') refers to cannibalism during the siege — mothers eating their own children. The word tipu'him ('nursed, cherished, dandled') emphasizes that these are children who were tenderly cared for. This horror was predicted in the covenant curses (Deuteronomy 28:53-57) and is attested historically in the siege of Jerusalem (2 Kings 6:28-29). The murder of priest and prophet in the sanctuary violates every sacred boundary.

21. Shin () verse. The direct accusation against God intensifies: haragta ('you killed') and tavahta ('you slaughtered') — the second verb is butchery language, used for slaughtering animals. The phrase lo hamalta ('you did not show mercy') echoes vv. 2 and 17, completing a refrain of divine mercilessness that runs through the entire chapter. The bodies of young and old lying in the streets together eliminates every social distinction — death is the great equalizer.

22. Tav () verse — the final letter, completing the acrostic. The bitter festival language returns: keyom mo'ed ('as on the day of an appointed feast') — God has made destruction into a festival, summoning terrors the way worshippers were once summoned to Jerusalem. The totality is absolute: lo hayah palit vesarid ('no refugee and no survivor'). The chapter ends with Zion as a mother whose children have all been consumed by the enemy — the one she herself nursed and raised (tippahti veribbiti). The chapter closes without resolution, without hope, without any word of comfort.

3

Summary: *Lamentations 3 is the theological heart of the book — the longest chapter, with 66 verses arranged as a triple acrostic (three verses per Hebrew letter). An individual sufferer speaks in the first person: 'I am the man who has seen affliction' (v. 1). The first section (vv. 1-20) is unrelenting darkness — the speaker has been walled in, hunted, broken by God. Then, at the exact center of the chapter and the book, comes the astonishing turn: 'The faithful loves of the LORD never cease; his mercies never end. They are new every morning — great is your faithfulness' (vv. 22-23). This is the hope passage, set like a jewel in the middle of devastation. The chapter moves from personal lament to theological reflection on divine justice (vv. 25-39), then to communal confession and prayer (vv. 40-66).*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The triple acrostic structure is the most elaborate in the Hebrew Bible — each Hebrew letter governs three consecutive verses, creating a poem of mathematical precision within emotional chaos. The identity of the speaker is debated: he may be Jeremiah, an everyman figure, or a personification of the community. The hope passage (vv. 22-24) contains the Hebrew Bible's most concentrated expression of chesed and emunah — two covenant terms that carry the entire weight of Israel's theology of divine faithfulness. The phrase hadashim labbeqarim ('new every morning') became the basis of the hymn 'Great Is Thy Faithfulness.' The chapter's position at the center of the book's five chapters is architecturally deliberate — hope surrounded by despair on every side, yet surviving. The verb qavah ('to wait, to hope') in verse 25 is from the same root as tiqvah ('hope'), used in Jeremiah 29:11.*

Translation Friction: *The shift from individual to communal voice (around v. 40) required careful handling — the 'I' becomes 'we' without explicit transition. The word chesed in verse 22 follows the Qere (written marginal reading chasdei YHWH, 'the faithful loves of the LORD') rather than the Ketiv (written text), which reads tamnu ('they are finished') — a significant textual variant where the traditional reading reverses the meaning entirely. We followed the Qere with the majority of translations and noted the Ketiv. The Hebrew gever ('man, strong man') in verse 1 is not the generic adam or ish but the word for a warrior or vigorous man — his affliction is emphasized by his strength. The pe-ayin reversal continues from chapter 2 at verses 46-51.*

Connections: *The chesed-emunah pairing in verses 22-23 connects to Exodus 34:6-7 (the divine self-revelation to Moses), Psalm 36:5-6, Psalm 89:1-2, and Psalm 100:5. 'Great is your faithfulness' connects to Deuteronomy 7:9. The 'man who has seen affliction' connects to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52:13-53:12. The call to self-examination (v. 40) connects to Haggai 1:5-7. The image of God as a stalking bear and lion (v. 10) connects to Hosea 13:7-8. The 'pit' imagery (vv. 53-55) connects to Psalm 69 and Jeremiah 38 (Jeremiah's actual imprisonment in a cistern). The closing imprecation (vv. 64-66) connects to Psalm 137.*

1 I am the man who has seen affliction
under the rod of his fury.

2 He has driven me and led me
into darkness, not light.

3 Against me alone he turns
his hand, again and again, all day long.

4 He has worn away my flesh and my skin;
he has shattered my bones.

5 He has besieged me
and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship.

6 He has made me dwell in darkness
like those long dead.

7 He has walled me in so I cannot escape;
he has weighed down my chains.

8 Even when I cry out and plead for help,
he shuts out my prayer.

9 He has blocked my paths with cut stone;
he has made my roads twist.

10 He is a bear lying in ambush for me,
a lion in hiding.

11 He has dragged me from the path and torn me apart;
he has left me devastated.

12 He has bent his bow
and set me as a target for his arrow.

13 He has driven the shafts of his quiver
into my kidneys.

14 I have become a laughingstock to all my people,
the subject of their mocking songs all day long.

15 He has filled me with bitter herbs;
he has drenched me with wormwood.

16 He has ground my teeth on gravel;
he has pressed me into the ashes.

17 My life has been deprived of peace;
I have forgotten what goodness is.

18 So I said, "My endurance is gone,
and my hope from the LORD has perished."

19 Remember my affliction and my wandering,
the wormwood and the gall!

20 My soul remembers them vividly
and sinks low within me.

21 But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:

22 The faithful loves of the LORD never cease;
his mercies never come to an end.

23 They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness!

24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul;
"therefore I will hope in him."

25 The LORD is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him.

26 It is good to wait in silence
for the salvation of the LORD.

27 It is good for a man
to bear the yoke in his youth.

28 Let him sit alone and be silent
when it is laid upon him.

29 Let him put his mouth in the dust —
perhaps there is hope.

30 Let him offer his cheek to the one who strikes him;
let him be filled with disgrace.

31 For the Lord does not reject forever.
32 Though he causes grief, he will show compassion
according to the abundance of his faithful love.

33 For he does not afflict from his heart,
nor grieve the children of humanity.

34 To crush underfoot
all the prisoners of the earth,

35 to deny a person justice
before the face of the Most High,

36 to wrong a person in their lawsuit —
the Lord does not approve.

37 Who has spoken and it came to be
when the Lord has not commanded it?

38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High
that both disaster and good come?

39 Why should any living person complain?
Let each one complain about their own sins.

40 Let us examine and test our ways,
and return to the LORD.

41 Let us lift up our hearts and our hands
to God in heaven.

42 We have transgressed and rebelled,
and you have not forgiven.

43 You have wrapped yourself in anger and pursued us;
you have killed without mercy.

44 You have wrapped yourself in a cloud
so that no prayer can pass through.

45 You have made us filth and refuse
among the peoples.

46 All our enemies have opened their mouths
wide against us.

47 Terror and the pit have come upon us,
devastations and destruction.

48 Streams of tears flow from my eyes
over the destruction of the daughter of my people.

49 My eyes pour out tears without stopping,
without relief,

50 until the LORD looks down
and sees from heaven.

51 My eyes cause me anguish
because of all the young women of my city.

52 My enemies hunted me relentlessly
like a bird, without cause.

53 They tried to end my life in the pit
and threw stones at me.

54 Waters closed over my head;
I said, "I am finished."

55 I called on your name, LORD,
from the depths of the pit.

56 You heard my voice —
do not close your ear
to my cry for relief, to my plea!

57 You drew near on the day I called to you;
you said, "Do not be afraid."

58 You championed my cause, Lord;
you redeemed my life.

59 You have seen the wrong done to me, LORD.
Uphold my cause!

60 You have seen all their vengeance,
all their plots against me.

61 You have heard their insults, LORD,
all their schemes against me —

62 the words of those who rise against me,
and their murmuring against me all day long.

63 Watch them — whether they sit or stand,
I am the subject of their mocking songs.

64 Pay them back, LORD,
according to what their hands have done.

65Give them a stubborn heart;
let your curse be upon them.

66Pursue them in anger and destroy them
from under the heavens of the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Aleph () — first of three aleph verses. The triple acrostic begins. The word gever ('man') is not the common ish or adam but denotes a strong, vigorous man — the irony is deliberate. The 'rod of his fury' (shevet evrato) makes God the one wielding the rod. The speaker does not name God yet, only 'his' — the pronoun creates an ominous distance.

2. Aleph () — second verse. The verb nahag ('driven') is used for driving livestock or captives — the strong man is treated like an animal being herded. The contrast hoshekh velo or ('darkness, not light') inverts Amos 5:18, where the Day of the LORD is 'darkness, not light' — this is that day experienced firsthand.

3. Aleph () — third verse. The phrase yashuv yahapokh yado ('he turns and overturns his hand') conveys relentless, repeated striking — not a single blow but unending affliction. The word akh ('surely, only') emphasizes the isolation: the sufferer feels singled out. 'All day long' (kol hayyom) is the first of many temporal markers indicating the suffering has no respite.

4. Bet () — first verse. The verb billah ('worn away, consumed') describes erosion — flesh and skin wasting under prolonged suffering. The verb shibbar ('shattered') is intensified (Piel stem), indicating the bones are not merely broken but crushed. The body is systematically dismantled from the outside in: first skin, then flesh, then bones.

5. Bet () — second verse. The verb banah ('built') is siege language — the enemy builds siege works around a city. Here God builds the siege against the sufferer. The word rosh ('gall, poison, bitterness') refers to a bitter, possibly poisonous plant — the sufferer is walled in by toxic misery. The word tela'ah ('hardship, weariness') conveys exhaustion.

6. Bet () — third verse. The 'dark places' (mahashakim) are the realm of the dead — Sheol. The phrase kemetei olam ('like the dead of long ago') means the most thoroughly dead, those who have been in the grave so long no one remembers them. The sufferer is being described as already entombed. Cf. Psalm 143:3, which uses nearly identical language.

7. Gimel () — first verse. The verb gadar ('walled in, fenced') creates a prison image — the sufferer is enclosed on every side. The bronze chains (nehoshti) are heavy (hikhbid, from the root k-v-d, 'to be heavy') — the same root as kavod ('glory'). There is bitter irony: God's 'weightiness' once meant glory; now it means the weight of chains.

8. Gimel () — second verse. Two words for crying out: ez'aq ('cry for help') and ashavve'a ('shout, plead') — neither gets through. The verb satam ('shut out, blocked') means the prayer hits a wall. This is the opposite of the open heavens promised in covenant blessing — God has closed the communication channel. Cf. Job 30:20 for the same experience of unanswered prayer.

9. Gimel () — third verse. The walls are built of gazit ('cut stone, dressed stone') — not a flimsy barrier but permanent masonry. The verb ivvah ('made crooked, twisted') means even the paths that remain open lead nowhere useful. The image combines imprisonment with disorientation — walled in and lost simultaneously.

10. Dalet () — first verse. God is compared to predatory animals: a bear (dov) and a lion (ari) — Israel's two most dangerous wild beasts. Both are described as waiting in concealment (orev, 'lying in ambush'; bemisttarim, 'in hidden places'). The sufferer is the prey. Hosea 13:7-8 uses the same imagery: 'I will be like a lion to them; like a leopard I will lurk beside the way. I will fall upon them like a bear.' The Ketiv reads ari (without the he), while the Qere reads aryeh — both mean 'lion.'

11. Dalet () — second verse. The verb sorer ('turned aside') and vayefasshekheni ('torn apart, dismembered') continue the predator imagery — the bear or lion has seized its prey, dragged it off the path, and mauled it. The word shomem ('desolate, devastated') is the same word used for the desolation of Jerusalem — the man's inner state mirrors the city's outer ruin.

12. Dalet () — third verse. The predator image shifts to the warrior-archer image from 2:4. The word mattara ('target') means the sufferer is not hit by accident but aimed at deliberately. God is the archer; the man is the mark. This connects to Job 16:12-13 where Job uses the same archery imagery for divine hostility.

13. He () — first verse. The 'sons of his quiver' (benei ashpato) is a Hebrew idiom for arrows. The kidneys (khilyotai) were considered the seat of the deepest emotions and the most vulnerable internal organs — the arrows penetrate to the innermost part of the body. This is not a surface wound but a mortal strike to the core.

14. He () — second verse. The word sehoq ('laughter, derision') and neginatam ('their song, their taunt-song') show that the sufferer's own community mocks him. This parallels Jeremiah's experience (Jeremiah 20:7) and anticipates the Suffering Servant's rejection (Isaiah 53:3). The mocking is not from enemies but from 'my people' (ammi) — the deepest betrayal.

15. He () — third verse. The merorim ('bitter herbs') echo the Passover meal (Exodus 12:8) — but this is not memorial bitterness, it is present suffering. The la'anah ('wormwood') is Artemisia, proverbially the bitterest plant in the region. The verbs hisbi'ani ('sated me') and hirvani ('drenched me') mean the sufferer has been forced to consume bitterness until he is full to overflowing — a grotesque parody of being filled with good things.

16. Vav () — first verse. The verb vayyagres ('he ground, crushed') with hatsats ('gravel') describes being forced to eat gravel — a vivid image of humiliation and degradation. The word efer ('ashes') connotes mourning (sitting in ashes) but also worthlessness — the sufferer is ground down to the same level as dust and debris.

17. Vav () — second verse. The word shalom here carries its full weight: not merely the absence of conflict but the complete well-being that comes from right relationship with God. The sufferer has been cast so far from shalom that he cannot even remember what 'good' (tovah) feels like. The verb nashiti ('I have forgotten') indicates prolonged suffering — the memory of good times has been erased.

18. Vav () — third verse. The word nitschi ('my endurance, my lasting strength') and tokhalti ('my hope, my expectation') are both declared lost. This is the absolute nadir — the sufferer has given up on God. The phrase meYHWH ('from the LORD') means the hope that came from God is what has died. This sets up the dramatic reversal that begins at verse 21.

19. Zayin () — first verse. The imperative zekhor ('remember!') may be addressed to God or to the sufferer himself. The words la'anah ('wormwood') and rosh ('gall/poison') return from verse 15, forming an inclusio around the suffering. The word merudi ('my wandering, my homelessness') echoes 1:7, connecting the individual's displacement to the city's exile.

20. Zayin () — second verse. The emphatic infinitive absolute zakhor tizkor ('remembering, it remembers') indicates memory that cannot be suppressed — the suffering replays constantly. The Ketiv reads vetashokh ('and bows down'), while the Qere reads vetashoakh ('and sinks') — both convey the same collapse of spirit. This verse is the hinge: the soul sinks to its lowest point, and from this depth the turn begins.

21. Zayin () — third verse. The pivotal word is zot ('this') — what follows in verses 22-23 is the 'this' that the sufferer chooses to remember. The verb ohil ('I have hope, I wait') is from the root y-h-l, which carries the sense of patient waiting, not mere optimism. The sufferer does not deny the suffering of verses 1-20 but deliberately calls to mind something that coexists with it.

22. Chet () — first verse. TEXTUAL NOTE: The Ketiv (written text) reads tamnu as 'we are finished/consumed' — making the verse say 'Because of the LORD's faithful loves, we are not consumed.' The Qere (marginal reading) vocalizes it as tamnu from tamam ('to be complete/cease'), making it 'The faithful loves of the LORD do not cease.' We follow the Qere with the majority of translations, but the Ketiv reading is also theologically powerful: it is precisely God's chesed that prevents total annihilation. The word rahamav ('his mercies') is from the root r-h-m, related to rehem ('womb') — God's mercy has the quality of a mother's visceral compassion for the child of her womb.

23. Chet () — second verse. The word hadashim ('new') means these mercies are not recycled or diminished — they arrive fresh each morning like the manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16:21), which also appeared new each day and could not be stored. The exclamation rabbah emunatekha ('great is your faithfulness!') became the inspiration for Thomas Chisholm's 1923 hymn 'Great Is Thy Faithfulness.' The switch to second person ('your faithfulness') makes this a direct address to God — the sufferer is no longer talking about God but to him.

24. Chet () — third verse. The word heleq ('portion, share, inheritance') is land-distribution language from the conquest. When the tribes received their inheritance, the Levites received none — God himself was their inheritance (Numbers 18:20, Deuteronomy 10:9). The sufferer, who has lost everything, claims the Levitical inheritance: God himself is what remains. The verb ohil ('I will hope, I will wait') returns from verse 21, forming the frame of the hope passage.

25. Tet () — first verse. The verb qavah ('to wait, to hope') involves active, expectant waiting — not passive resignation. The verb darash ('to seek') means diligent pursuit, not casual looking. Together they describe the posture of someone who trusts God enough to wait but engages enough to seek. The declaration tov YHWH ('the LORD is good') echoes Psalm 100:5 and 136:1.

26. Tet () — second verse. Three words define the proper posture before God: yahil ('wait with hope'), dumam ('in silence'), and the goal is teshu'at YHWH ('the salvation/deliverance of the LORD'). The silence is not emptiness but trust — the opposite of the anxious crying of the early verses. The word teshu'ah ('salvation, deliverance') is from the same root as yeshu'ah and the name Yeshua/Joshua/Jesus.

27. Tet () — third verse. The word gever ('man, strong man') returns from verse 1, creating a frame — the strong man who has seen affliction now declares that bearing the yoke early in life has value. The 'yoke' (ol) can mean suffering, discipline, or the yoke of Torah. The wisdom is that suffering endured young builds the capacity to endure what comes later.

28. Yod () — first verse. The word badad ('alone') echoes 1:1 where Jerusalem 'sits alone' — the same posture of desolation is now reframed as a posture of patient endurance. The silence (yiddom) from verse 26 continues. The verb natal ('laid upon, imposed') suggests a burden placed by God, accepted rather than fought.

29. Yod () — second verse. The gesture of putting the mouth in the dust is total prostration and submission — the lowest possible posture before God. The word ulai ('perhaps') is startlingly honest — this is not a guarantee but a possibility. And the word tiqvah ('hope') is from the root q-v-h ('to wait'), connecting to the waiting of verse 25. Hope is not certainty; it is the willingness to wait in the dust.

30. Yod () — third verse. The image of offering the cheek to the striker connects to Isaiah 50:6 (the Servant who 'gave his back to those who struck him') and to Jesus's teaching in Matthew 5:39. The word herpah ('disgrace, reproach') is to be accepted, not resisted — the sufferer absorbs shame as part of patient waiting for God's deliverance.

31. Kaf () — first verse. The word le'olam ('forever') is the key — God's rejection is real but not permanent. The verb yiznah ('reject, cast off') acknowledges that God has indeed rejected (cf. 2:7), but now places a time limit on it. This is the beginning of the theological argument: suffering is real, God caused it, but it is not the final word.

32. Kaf () — second verse. The verb hogah ('causes grief') is the same word used for God's affliction in 1:5 and 1:12, now placed in a conditional framework: though he grieves, he will also have mercy (riham, from the womb-compassion root r-h-m). The Ketiv reads hasadav (plural) and the Qere reads hasdo (singular) — either way, chesed is the basis of hope. We follow the Qere.

33. Kaf () — third verse. The phrase millibbo ('from his heart') is crucial: God's affliction is real but it does not arise from his deepest desire. The heart (lev) is the center of will and intention in Hebrew — God's core intention is not to harm but to restore. The verb innah ('afflict') and vayyaggeh ('grieve, cause sorrow') acknowledge the reality of divine-caused suffering while insisting it is not God's ultimate purpose.

34. Lamed () — first verse. Verses 34-36 form a unit describing injustices that the Lord does not approve of, even though humans commit them. The infinitive ledakke ('to crush') begins a series: crushing prisoners, perverting justice, defrauding — these acts displease God. Some read these as actions God would never do; others as actions God does not approve when humans do them.

35. Lamed () — second verse. The phrase lehatot mishpat ('to turn aside justice, to pervert a legal case') is the language of judicial corruption. The title Elyon ('Most High') emphasizes that these perversions of justice happen 'before his face' — God sees every act of injustice and does not approve, even when he permits suffering for covenantal reasons.

36. Lamed () — third verse. The verb le'avvet ('to wrong, to twist, to subvert') describes deliberately corrupting a legal proceeding. The phrase Adonai lo ra'ah is literally 'the Lord has not seen' — but in context it means 'the Lord does not look upon with favor / does not approve,' not that he is ignorant of it. God sees injustice and condemns it, even when his own judgments bring suffering.

37. Mem () — first verse. A rhetorical question asserting divine sovereignty: nothing happens without God's command (tsivvah). This is both comforting (nothing is random) and terrifying (the suffering is God's doing). The verse echoes Amos 3:6 ('Does disaster come to a city unless the LORD has done it?') and Isaiah 45:7.

38. Mem () — second verse. The Hebrew ra'ot ('bad things, disasters') and tov ('good') both proceed from the mouth of Elyon ('Most High'). The word ra'ot does not mean 'moral evil' here but 'calamity, disaster, harmful events' — God is sovereign over both fortune and misfortune. This is covenantal logic: the same God who blesses also curses, as Deuteronomy 28 laid out.

39. Mem () — third verse. The word yit'onen ('complain, murmur') is the same root used for Israel's complaining in the wilderness (Numbers 11:1). The argument is sharp: a person who is alive has no right to complain about suffering when they have sinned. The word gever ('strong man') returns from verses 1 and 27. The Ketiv reads hata'o ('his sin,' singular) and the Qere reads hata'av ('his sins,' plural).

40. Nun () — first verse. The voice shifts from singular 'I' to plural 'we' — the individual's reflection becomes a communal call to action. The verbs nahpeshah ('let us search') and nahqorah ('let us investigate') are thorough — this is not casual self-reflection but forensic self-examination. The verb venashuvah ('let us return') is the core vocabulary of repentance (teshuvah) — turning back to God after straying.

41. Nun () — second verse. The gesture of lifted hands (kappayim) was the standard posture of prayer in the ancient Near East. The command to lift hearts (levavenu) as well as hands insists on internal sincerity, not mere external ritual. The destination is El bashamayim ('God in heaven') — the same God who seemed absent is now addressed as accessible.

42. Nun () — third verse. The confession pasha'nu umarinu ('we have transgressed and rebelled') uses both pesha (willful covenant violation) and marah (bitter rebellion) — the fullest admission of guilt. The blunt accusation attah lo salahta ('you have not forgiven') is not impudence but honest prayer: the community confesses sin and simultaneously tells God that his forgiveness has not yet come. This is the raw honesty that characterizes biblical lament.

43. Samekh () — first verse. The verb sakkotah ('you have covered/wrapped') portrays God as cloaked in anger — his wrath is his garment. The verb tirdefeinu ('you pursued us') makes God the pursuer and Israel the prey, echoing the predator imagery of verses 10-11. The phrase lo hamalta ('you showed no mercy') continues the refrain from chapter 2.

44. Samekh () — second verse. The cloud (anan) that once signified God's presence (Exodus 13:21, 40:34) has become a barrier blocking prayer. The irony is devastating: the pillar of cloud that guided Israel through the wilderness is now a wall preventing their prayers from reaching God. The verb me'avor ('from passing through') makes the barrier absolute — not even prayer penetrates.

45. Samekh () — third verse. The words sehi ('scrapings, filth') and ma'os ('refuse, something rejected') describe the lowest possible social status — Israel, once chosen and set apart (qadosh), has become garbage in the eyes of the nations. This reverses the election language of Deuteronomy 7:6.

46. Pe () — first verse. NOTE: The pe-ayin reversal continues from chapter 2; pe precedes ayin here as well. The enemies opening their mouths (patsu pihem) is a gesture of mockery and devouring — like predators opening their jaws. This echoes 2:16 almost verbatim, linking the two chapters.

47. Pe () — second verse. The pair pahad vapahat ('terror and pit') is a wordplay — the similar sounds create a sense of inescapability, like falling from one danger into another. Isaiah 24:17 uses the identical pair. The word hashe't ('devastation, ruin') and hashever ('destruction, breaking') pile up synonyms of catastrophe.

48. Pe () — third verse. The phrase palgei mayim ('channels of water, streams') for tears echoes Psalm 119:136. The speaker returns to first-person singular — the 'I' reasserts itself from the communal 'we.' The phrase bat ammi ('daughter of my people') personalizes the national catastrophe —

this is not abstract destruction but the ruin of the speaker's own community.

49. Ayin () — first verse. Following pe in the reversed order. The verb niggerah ('pours out, trickles') and lo tidmeh ('does not cease') describe unending weeping. The word hafugot ('cessation, relief, pauses') means there is not even a break in the tears — the grief is constant and uninterrupted.

50. Ayin () — second verse. The verb yashqif ('looks down, gazes from above') implies that God is watching from a distance — heaven — and has not yet intervened. The expectation is that God will eventually look and act, but the 'until' (ad) sets an indefinite time frame. The sufferer weeps until God responds.

51. Ayin () — third verse. The phrase eini olelah lenafshi ('my eye does harm to my soul') means that what the speaker sees — the suffering of the young women (benot iri, 'daughters of my city') — wounds him internally. Sight becomes the channel of suffering; he cannot look away, and each sight of suffering women intensifies his grief.

52. Tsade () — first verse. The emphatic infinitive absolute tsod tsaduni ('hunting they hunted me') intensifies the pursuit. The comparison to a bird (katsippor) suggests a small, defenseless creature — the strong man (gever) of verse 1 has been reduced to prey. The phrase hinnam ('without cause, for nothing') protests innocence, shifting from the communal confession of verse 42 back to individual protest.

53. Tsade () — second verse. The bor ('pit, cistern') connects directly to Jeremiah's experience of being thrown into a cistern (Jeremiah 38:6). The verb tsamethu ('they cut off, they silenced') means the enemies attempted to destroy him completely. Throwing stones (even, 'stone') may refer to sealing the pit with a stone or to stoning — either way, it is an attempt to ensure permanent silence.

54. Tsade () — third verse. Water over the head is the language of drowning and of overwhelming suffering (Psalm 69:1-2, Psalm 42:7). The word nigzarti ('I am cut off') means severed from the living — the same root as the 'cutting off' of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:8. The speaker has reached the point of believing death is certain.

55. Qof () — first verse. From the lowest point — the bottom of the pit (bor tahtiyyot, 'the lowest pit') — the sufferer calls on the name of YHWH. This is the turning point: at the moment of greatest desperation, he prays. The phrase qarati shimkha ('I called your name') is intimate — not a generic cry for help but an invocation of the personal, covenant name of God.

56. Qof () — second verse. The shift is dramatic: shamata ('you heard') — God actually listened. After verses of silence and blocked prayer (v. 8, v. 44), the speaker testifies that God heard from the pit. The word revahati ('my relief, my breathing room') means the speaker is gasping — he needs space to breathe. The prayer is both testimony of past hearing and plea for continued attention.

57. Qof () — third verse. The verb qaravta ('you drew near') reverses the distance of the entire poem — God moves toward the sufferer instead of away. The divine word al tira ('do not be afraid') is the most frequent divine command in the Hebrew Bible, appearing in theophanies from Abraham to Isaiah. It is God's characteristic response to human fear. The sufferer's testimony is that God did not remain distant.

58. Resh () — first verse. The verb ravta ('you championed, you contended for') is legal language — God served as the sufferer's advocate in court. The verb ga'alta ('you redeemed') is the go'el verb — God acted as kinsman-redeemer, the nearest relative who is obligated by blood to rescue. This is covenant language: God did not help as a stranger but rescued as family.

59. Resh () — second verse. The word avvatati ('the wrong done to me, my injustice') can mean either 'my wrongdoing' or 'the wrong done against me' — context favors the latter, as the speaker has been unjustly persecuted. The imperative shoftah mishpati ('judge my case') asks God to serve as judge in the legal dispute between the sufferer and his enemies.

60. Resh () — third verse. The word niqmatam ('their vengeance') and mahshevotam ('their plots, their schemes') indicate that the enemies' attacks are both reactive (vengeance) and premeditated (plots). The appeal is to God as witness — you have seen means the evidence is in, and now the sufferer awaits the verdict.

61. Shin () — first verse. The verb shamata ('you heard') parallels ra'itah ('you saw') from verses 59-60 — God has both seen and heard all the evidence. The word herpatam ('their reproach, their insults') is the public shaming language used throughout Lamentations. The sufferer builds a legal case with accumulated evidence: you saw, you heard, now act.

62. Shin () — second verse. The word siftei ('lips of') is metonymy for speech, and hegionam ('their murmuring, their meditation') suggests constant, low-level scheming — not just open attack but whispered conspiracy. The phrase kol hayyom ('all day long') echoes verse 3 and verse 14, forming a frame: the speaker is struck all day (v. 3), mocked all day (v. 14), and plotted against all day (v. 62).

63. Shin () — third verse. The merism shivtam veqimatam ('their sitting and their rising') means 'everything they do' — at all times and in every activity, the speaker is their target. The word manginatam ('their song, their taunt-song') echoes verse 14 — the mocking has not ceased. The imperative habbitah ('look! watch!') is addressed to God, urging him to observe the ongoing ridicule.

64. Tav () — first verse. The final triad turns to imprecation — a prayer for divine justice against the enemies. The verb tashiv ('give back, repay') and gemul ('recompense, what is deserved') invoke the principle of proportional justice: let the punishment match the crime. This parallels 1:22 and connects to the broader biblical theology of divine retribution.

65. Tav () — second verse. The phrase meginnat lev ('covering/hardening of heart') may mean 'a shield over the heart' — a heart that cannot feel, cannot repent, cannot receive God's word. The word ta'alatekha ('your curse') is the covenant-curse vocabulary — the sufferer asks God to redirect the curses from Israel onto the enemies. This is not personal vengeance but an appeal to covenantal justice.

66. Tav () — third and final verse, completing the 66-verse triple acrostic. The verb tirdof ('pursue') reverses the hunter-prey dynamic of verse 52 — now God is asked to pursue the enemies as they pursued the speaker. The phrase mitahat shemei YHWH ('from under the heavens of the LORD') means total annihilation — removal from existence under God's sky. The chapter ends not with the hope of verses 22-24 but with a cry for justice, reminding the reader that hope and lament coexist without resolution in this book. The acrostic from aleph to tav is complete — total suffering, total confession, total hope, total imprecation, all contained within the ordered structure of the alphabet.

4

Summary: *Lamentations 4 returns to the single acrostic form — one verse per Hebrew letter, twenty-two verses tracing the alphabet of anguish. The chapter opens with the signature cry Eikhah ('How!'), the same word that opens chapters 1 and 2 and gives the book its Hebrew name. The poet surveys the siege's devastation in gruesome specificity: gold tarnished, sacred stones scattered, starving children begging for bread, nursing infants' tongues stuck to the roofs of their mouths, former aristocrats unrecognizable in the streets, mothers cooking their own children. The once-radiant Nazirites are blackened beyond recognition. Verses 13-16 indict the priests and prophets whose bloodshed within the city invited this catastrophe. Verse 20 delivers the chapter's theological shock: 'The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was captured in their pits' — likely King Zedekiah, the last Davidic king, trapped by the Babylonians. The chapter closes by turning to Edom, mocking her false sense of security and promising that her own cup of judgment is coming.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains some of the most harrowing imagery in all of scripture. Verse 10 states without flinching that compassionate women cooked their own children during the siege — the same atrocity prophesied in Deuteronomy 28:53-57 as the ultimate covenant curse. The poet does not look away. The phrase mashiach YHWH ('the anointed of the LORD') in verse 20 is one of the most theologically loaded moments in the book. This is the only occurrence in the Hebrew Bible where the 'anointed of the LORD' is described as captured and helpless. The Davidic king, who was supposed to be God's representative on earth, is snared like an animal. The acrostic exhibits the ayin-pe reversal found also in chapters 2 and 3 — the letter pe (verse 17) precedes ayin (verse 18), departing from standard alphabetical order. This reversal may reflect an older or alternative alphabetic tradition, or it may be deliberate literary disruption mirroring the inversion of the world the poet describes.*

Translation Friction: *The word paz ('fine gold') in verse 2 is rare and required careful distinction from the more common zahav ('gold'). In verse 3, tannim (jackals) versus tannin (sea monster) is a well-known textual crux — we followed the Masoretic pointing for 'jackals.' The verb zakhu ('were bright/pure') in verse 7 describing the Nazirites carries both physical brilliance and ritual purity, and no single English word captures both. Verse 20 required decisions about whether mashiach YHWH refers specifically to Zedekiah or to the office of kingship in general — we preserved the ambiguity in the rendering and discussed it in the notes. The ayin-pe reversal (pe in verse 17, ayin in verse 18) is preserved in the acrostic structure.*

Connections: *The Eikhah opening connects to Lamentations 1:1 and 2:1, forming a three-fold refrain across the book. The covenant-curse fulfillment in verse 10 connects to Deuteronomy 28:53-57 and 2 Kings 6:28-29. The mashiach YHWH language of verse 20 connects to 1 Samuel 24:6, 2 Samuel 1:14, and the broader Davidic covenant theology. The cup of judgment given to Edom (v. 21) connects to Jeremiah 25:15-29, Obadiah 1:16, and Psalm 75:8. Edom's coming judgment connects to the entire book of Obadiah and to Isaiah 34 and 63:1-6. The scattered sacred stones (v. 1) echo the destruction imagery of Psalm 79:1 and Jeremiah 52.*

[1]How the gold has grown dull,
the finest gold discolored!
The sacred stones lie scattered
at the head of every street.

[2]The precious children of Zion,
once valued as fine gold —
how they are regarded as clay jars,

the work of a potter's hands!

3 Even jackals offer the breast
and nurse their young,
but the daughter of my people has become cruel,
like ostriches in the wilderness.

4 The nursing infant's tongue clings
to the roof of its mouth from thirst;
small children beg for bread,
but no one breaks any for them.

5 Those who feasted on delicacies
waste away in the streets;
those raised in scarlet garments
now embrace garbage heaps.

6 The iniquity of the daughter of my people
is greater than the sin of Sodom,
which was overthrown in a moment
with no hands turning against her.

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

8 Their appearance is darker than soot;
they go unrecognized in the streets.
Their skin has shriveled against their bones,
dry as a stick.

9 Better off were those slain by the sword
than those slain by famine,
who waste away, pierced through
for lack of the produce of the field.

10 The hands of compassionate women
cooked their own children;
they became their food
in the destruction of the daughter of my people.

11 The LORD exhausted his wrath;
he poured out his burning anger.
He kindled a fire in Zion
that consumed her foundations.

12 The kings of the earth did not believe,
nor any who dwell in the world,
that foe or enemy could enter

the gates of Jerusalem.

13It was for the sins of her prophets,
the iniquities of her priests,
who shed the blood of the righteous
in her midst.

14They stagger through the streets like the blind,
defiled with blood,
so that no one can touch
their garments.

15'Get away! Unclean!' people shout at them.
'Get away! Get away! Do not touch!'
So they flee and wander.
Among the nations it is said,
'They can stay here no longer.'

16The face of the LORD scattered them;
he will look on them no longer.
They showed no regard for priests
and no favor to elders.

17Our eyes still strained
for help that never came;
from our watchtowers we watched
for a nation that could not save.

18They tracked our every step
so we could not walk in our own squares.
Our end drew near, our days were spent,
for our end had come.

19Our pursuers were swifter
than eagles in the sky;
over the mountains they chased us,
in the wilderness they ambushed us.

20The breath of our nostrils,
the anointed of the LORD,
was captured in their pits —
he of whom we said,
'In his shadow we will live among the nations.'

21Celebrate and rejoice, daughter of Edom,
you who dwell in the land of Uz!
The cup will pass to you as well —
you will get drunk and strip yourself bare.

22 Your punishment is complete, daughter of Zion;
he will not exile you again.
But your iniquity, daughter of Edom, he will punish;
he will expose your sins.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Eikhah ('How!') opens this chapter as it does chapters 1 and 2, the signature cry that gives the book its Hebrew name. The word carries shock and disbelief rather than interrogation — it is an exclamation, not a question seeking an answer.

1. The Hebrew uses two words for gold: zahav (common gold) and ketem (refined, pure gold). We rendered ketem as 'finest gold' to capture its distinction from ordinary zahav. The verb yu'am means 'to grow dim, to lose luster' — the gold has not disappeared but has been degraded.

1. The 'sacred stones' (avnei-qodesh) likely refers either to the stones of the Temple itself or metaphorically to the people of Zion (as verse 2 will make explicit). Their being 'scattered' at every street corner conveys total desecration — what was holy is now trampled in public spaces.

2. The metaphor now clarifies verse 1: the 'gold' and 'sacred stones' were the people themselves. The children of Zion were once considered paz ('fine gold,' an even rarer term than ketem) but are now equated with nivlei cheres — earthenware vessels, cheap and disposable. The contrast between paz (the most precious metal) and cheres (common clay) captures the total collapse of human dignity under siege.

2. The verb nechshevu ('they are regarded, reckoned') is passive — someone is doing the reckoning. The poet leaves ambiguous whether this is God's reckoning, the enemy's, or the world's.

3. The Hebrew tannim is pointed here as 'jackals' (from tan), not 'sea monsters' (tannin). The KJV's 'sea monsters' follows an alternative reading. We follow the Masoretic pointing since jackals, as land animals known to nurse their young, create the more coherent comparison: even wild scavengers nurse their offspring, but siege-starved mothers in Jerusalem cannot.

3. The ostrich comparison (ye'enim) draws on the ancient Near Eastern belief that ostriches abandoned their eggs (see Job 39:13-16). The 'daughter of my people' (bat-ammi) is the poet's recurring personification of Jerusalem/Judah.

4. The verb davaq ('cling, stick') is viscerally physical — the infant's tongue is literally glued to its palate from dehydration. This is the same verb used in Genesis 2:24 for a man 'clinging' to his wife — a word of intimate attachment here turned into an image of suffering.

4. The phrase poresh ein lahem ('no one breaks for them') refers to the practice of breaking bread to share it. The absence of anyone to break bread for children indicates total social collapse — even the most basic communal care has ceased.

5. The contrast between former luxury and present degradation is absolute. Ma'adannim ('delicacies') denotes rich, refined food — now these same people starve in public. The verb nashammu ('are desolate, waste away') conveys both physical starvation and emotional devastation.

5. Tola ('scarlet') refers to the expensive crimson dye from the tola'at worm, worn only by the wealthy. Those who wore royal purple now clutch ashpattot ('refuse heaps, garbage dumps') for warmth or for scraps. The verb chibbequ ('embrace, cling to') implies desperate intimacy with filth.

6. The Hebrew avon can mean both 'iniquity' and 'punishment for iniquity,' and chattat can mean both 'sin' and 'sin offering/punishment.' The ambiguity is deliberate — Jerusalem's guilt and its punishment both exceed Sodom's. We rendered with the primary meanings ('iniquity' and 'sin') while noting this double sense.

6. The phrase 'no hands turning against her' (lo-chalu vah yadayim) means Sodom was destroyed instantly by divine fire without prolonged human siege. Jerusalem's suffering is worse precisely because it is prolonged — the slow starvation of siege rather than quick annihilation. Sodom had it easier.

7. Nezirim could refer to 'Nazirites' (those under the Nazirite vow) or more broadly to 'princes, consecrated nobles.' We rendered 'consecrated ones' to preserve the ambiguity. The description emphasizes physical beauty and health: snow-white skin, ruddy complexion, bodies gleaming like precious stones.

7. The word peninim is traditionally rendered 'rubies' but more likely refers to red coral — a precious material in the ancient Near East. Sappir in biblical Hebrew refers to lapis lazuli (the deep blue stone), not modern sapphire. The gizratam ('their form, their cutting') suggests a sculpted, polished appearance.

8. The reversal from verse 7 is devastating: those who gleamed like snow and coral are now darker than shechor ('soot, blackness') — not a reference to skin color but to the filth, starvation, and sun-exposure of siege conditions. The verb nikru ('recognized') in the negative indicates these former nobles are so emaciated and grime-covered that their own neighbors cannot identify them.

8. The verb tsafad ('shriveled, clung') describes skin shrinking against bone from starvation. The comparison to etz ('wood, stick') captures both dryness and rigidity — living flesh has become dead wood.

9. The grim calculus of siege: a quick death by sword is preferable to slow death by starvation. The verb yazuvu ('flow away, ooze') describes the gradual wasting of the body — they literally melt away. The word meduqqarim ('pierced through') borrows the language of violent death and applies it to hunger — famine 'stabs' them as surely as any blade.

9. Tenu'vot sadai ('produce of the field') is achingly specific — these people are dying for lack of the most basic agricultural provisions, the grain and fruit that the land of covenant promise was supposed to supply.

10. This verse is among the most horrifying in all scripture, and the poet renders it with devastating restraint. The adjective rachmaniyyot ('compassionate') is the key — these were not monsters but loving mothers driven to the unspeakable by starvation. The word comes from the root r-ch-m, related to rechem ('womb') — these are women defined by womb-love who were forced to consume what their wombs produced.

10. The verb bishlu ('cooked, boiled') is clinical and specific — not raw desperation but actual preparation of food. This fulfills the covenant curse of Deuteronomy 28:53-57, which warned that siege conditions would reduce parents to eating their children. The word levarot ('as food, for sustenance') completes the horror with matter-of-fact finality.

11. The verb killah ('completed, exhausted, spent') applied to divine wrath suggests God emptied the full reservoir of his fury — nothing was held back. The image of wrath being 'poured out' (shafakh) like liquid is standard prophetic language (Ezekiel 7:8, 14:19), but here it combines with fire imagery: the anger is both flood and flame.

11. The fire consuming yesodoteha ('her foundations') means the destruction reaches below the surface. Not just walls and buildings but the very foundations — the city is ruined down to its base. This may also carry theological resonance: Zion's 'foundations' included God's covenant promises to David (Psalm 87:1).

12. The verb he'eminu ('believed') from the root a-m-n emphasizes that Jerusalem's fall was unthinkable to the entire known world. The city's reputation for impregnability was legendary — protected by terrain, by walls, and above all by the belief that God dwelled there. The pairing of tsar ('adversary, oppressor') and oyev ('enemy') is a standard Hebrew doublet intensifying the idea.

13. The poet identifies the cause of Jerusalem's fall: not the strength of Babylon but the corruption of Jerusalem's own spiritual leaders. The paired terms chattoat ('sins') for prophets and avonot ('iniquities') for priests use the two primary Hebrew sin-words, covering the full range of moral failure. The shedding of righteous blood (dam tsaddiqim) refers to the judicial murder of the innocent — prophets and priests used their authority to condemn the righteous to death rather than protect them.

14. The subject continues from verse 13 — the prophets and priests who shed innocent blood now wander Jerusalem like blind men. The verb na'u ('they stagger, wander') suggests disorientation and purposelessness. The word nigo'alu ('they are defiled, polluted') uses the same root as go'el ('redeemer') in a grimly ironic inversion — instead of being redeemers of blood, they are polluted by it.

14. The detail that no one can touch their garments evokes the purity laws of Leviticus — these priests are now so contaminated by bloodguilt that they render impure anyone who contacts them. The very guardians of ritual purity have become sources of contamination.

15. The cry suru tameh ('Get away! Unclean!') echoes the leper's required self-announcement (Leviticus 13:45-46). The priests and prophets who once declared others clean or unclean now receive the leper's cry themselves. The triple suru ('get away, get away') conveys escalating revulsion.

15. The phrase baggoyim ('among the nations') indicates that even in exile, these leaders find no rest — the nations themselves refuse to shelter them. The verb lagur ('to sojourn, to dwell as a resident alien') being negated means they are denied even the most basic hospitality afforded to foreigners.

16. Penei YHWH ('the face of the LORD') can mean God's presence or God's anger — here the context indicates wrathful attention. The verb chilleqam ('divided, scattered them') means God's gaze itself became the instrument of their dispersal. This is the inversion of the Aaronic blessing: instead of 'the LORD lift up his face upon you' (Numbers 6:26), God's face drives them away.

16. The second half shifts subject: 'they' (the enemies or the people) showed no respect for the priests and elders during the siege and fall. The social hierarchy that organized Israelite life collapsed entirely.

17. This is the pe verse (note the ayin-pe reversal from standard alphabetical order, matching chapters 2 and 3). The voice shifts to first-person plural — the community now speaks directly. The verb tikhlena ('fail, waste away') applied to eyes conveys the physical strain of watching the horizon endlessly for reinforcements that never arrive.

17. The 'nation that could not save' (goy lo yoshia) almost certainly refers to Egypt, on whom Judah's kings repeatedly relied against Babylon (Jeremiah 37:5-8, Ezekiel 29:6-7). The word hevel ('vanity, futility') underscores that this hope was empty from the start.

18. This is the ayin verse (following pe — the reversal). The verb tsadu ('they hunted, tracked') uses hunting language for urban warfare — the enemy stalked the inhabitants through their own streets. The word rechovoteinu ('our public squares') emphasizes that the spaces of communal life became killing grounds.

18. The repetition of qitseinu ('our end') in both the third and fourth lines creates a drumbeat of finality. The verb male'u ('were full, were completed') applied to 'our days' means the allotted time has expired — there is no more.

19. The nesharim ('eagles' or 'vultures') are the largest and fastest raptors in the Levant — the comparison emphasizes the terrifying speed of the Babylonian pursuit. The same comparison appears in Deuteronomy 28:49, where God warns that the covenant-curse nation will come 'like an eagle swooping down' — another fulfillment of the Deuteronomic curses.

19. The shift from mountains to wilderness traces the flight route of those trying to escape Jerusalem — south through the Judean hills toward the Arabah desert. This matches the account of Zedekiah's flight in 2 Kings 25:4-5 and Jeremiah 39:4-5.

20. This verse is the theological center of the chapter. Mashiach YHWH ('the anointed of the LORD') almost certainly refers to King Zedekiah, captured by the Babylonians as he fled through the plains of Jericho (2 Kings 25:5, Jeremiah 39:5). The phrase ruach appeinu ('the breath of our nostrils') is borrowed from ancient Near Eastern royal language — Egyptian texts use identical phrasing for the Pharaoh.

20. The word shechitotam ('their pits') uses hunting vocabulary — the king was trapped like a wild animal in a pit-trap. This is deeply humiliating language for an anointed monarch. The people's confidence that they would 'live in his shadow among the nations' (survive exile under his protection) proved catastrophically misplaced.

20. This is the only verse in the Hebrew Bible where the mashiach YHWH is described as captured and helpless. The theological crisis is immense: if God's anointed can be trapped like prey, what remains of the Davidic promise?

21. The imperative sisi ve-simchi ('celebrate and rejoice') is bitterly ironic — the poet mocks Edom's gloating over Jerusalem's fall by promising that the same cup of judgment will reach her. Edom (Israel's perpetual rival, descended from Esau) evidently celebrated Judah's destruction — see Obadiah 1:12 and Psalm 137:7.

21. The 'cup' (kos) is the cup of divine wrath — a standard prophetic image (Jeremiah 25:15-29, Isaiah 51:17, Habakkuk 2:16). Getting drunk on this cup means being overwhelmed by judgment. The verb tit'ari ('strip yourself bare, expose yourself') adds humiliation to punishment — Edom will be publicly shamed. The land of Uz is associated with both Edom and the setting of Job (Job 1:1).

22. The chapter ends with a sharp contrast between Zion and Edom. The verb tam ('is complete, is finished') applied to Zion's iniquity/punishment offers a sliver of hope — the suffering has an end. The verb paqad ('visit, attend to, punish') applied to Edom's iniquity promises that Edom's reckoning is coming.

22. The verb gillah ('uncover, expose, exile') applied to Edom's sins carries a double meaning: God will both 'uncover' (expose) Edom's wrongdoing and 'exile' her. The same root means both 'reveal' and 'deport' — Edom's hidden sins will be laid bare and she will suffer the same exile she mocked in Judah.

22. Again, avon can mean both 'iniquity' and 'punishment for iniquity.' For Zion, the punishment aspect is emphasized (it is 'complete'). For Edom, both senses apply — her guilt will be exposed and punished.

5

Summary: *Lamentations 5 is a communal prayer — the entire community speaks in the first-person plural, petitioning God to see and remember their suffering. Unlike chapters 1-4, this chapter is NOT acrostic, though it preserves the twenty-two verse count matching the Hebrew alphabet. The poem catalogues the specific indignities of life under occupation and exile: loss of land and homes, forced labor, dependence on enemies for basic provisions, sexual violence against women, humiliation of elders, and the cessation of all joy. The chapter builds toward two climactic appeals: verse 19 affirms God's eternal sovereignty ('You, LORD, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation'), and verse 21 pleads for restoration ('Return us to yourself, LORD, and we will return; renew our days as of old'). But the book ends with verse 22's devastating open wound: 'Unless you have utterly rejected us, and are angry with us beyond measure.' The Hebrew Bible's liturgical tradition requires re-reading verse 21 after verse 22 so that the book does not close on despair — a practice that itself testifies to how unbearable this ending is.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is the only one in Lamentations without acrostic structure, yet its twenty-two verses preserve the alphabet count — as if the poet has moved beyond the formal constraint of the acrostic but cannot escape the number twenty-two, the shape of the Hebrew alphabet still governing even formless grief. The shift to communal petition is significant: the individual voice of the poet and the personified voice of Zion give way to the collective 'we.' This is no longer one person's lament but an entire people's prayer. The final verse (5:22) is one of the most debated lines in the Hebrew Bible. The particle ki im can mean 'unless,' 'but rather,' 'surely,' or 'even though' — and the meaning of the entire book hinges on how it is read. We have rendered it 'Unless' to preserve the conditional horror: the possibility that God has permanently rejected his people is left hanging without resolution. The Jewish liturgical practice of repeating verse 21 after verse 22 (also done for Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, and Malachi) is called hashlamah — the tradition refuses to let a prophetic book end on judgment or despair. This practice does not change the text; it supplements it with communal hope.*

Translation Friction: *The particle ki im in verse 22 is the most consequential translation decision in the chapter. It can be adversative ('but rather'), conditional ('unless'), or emphatic ('surely'). We chose 'Unless' because it preserves the open-ended anguish — the poet does not resolve whether God has rejected them or not. The verb chadesh ('renew') in verse 21 could mean 'restore to former condition' or 'make new' — we used 'renew' which carries both senses. The word peruqim in verse 18 (describing Mount Zion as desolate, with foxes walking on it) uses the rare form shu'alim, which means 'foxes' or 'jackals' — small predators scavenging where the Temple once stood.*

Connections: *The opening petition 'Remember, LORD' connects to Psalm 74:2, 89:50, and Nehemiah 1:8. The reference to ancestors' sins (v. 7) connects to Jeremiah 31:29 and Ezekiel 18:2 ('The fathers have eaten sour grapes'). The foxes on Mount Zion (v. 18) inverts Song of Songs 2:15 ('Catch for us the foxes') — the foxes that were nuisances in the vineyard now rule the ruin. Verse 19's throne affirmation connects to Psalm 9:7, 45:6, and 102:12. The plea 'Return us and we will return' (v. 21) uses the key verb of Jeremiah and Hosea — shub/teshuvah — and connects to Jeremiah 31:18 ('Turn me back and I will be turned'). The unresolved ending connects thematically to Psalm 44, another communal lament that ends with an unanswered 'Why?' and 'How long?'*

1 Remember, LORD, what has happened to us;
look and see our disgrace.

2 Our inheritance has been handed over to strangers,
our homes to foreigners.

3 We have become orphans, fatherless;
our mothers are like widows.

4 We pay money for our own water;
our own wood comes to us at a price.

5 With yokes on our necks we are driven;
we are exhausted and given no rest.

6 We stretched out our hands to Egypt
and to Assyria, just to get enough bread.

7 Our ancestors sinned and are no more,
but we bear the weight of their iniquities.

8 Slaves rule over us;
there is no one to rescue us from their hand.

9 We risk our lives to get our bread
because of the sword in the wilderness.

10 Our skin burns like an oven
from the scorching heat of famine.

11 Women were violated in Zion,
young women in the towns of Judah.

12 Officials were hung up by their hands;
the faces of elders were shown no honor.

13 Young men were forced to grind at the mill,
and boys staggered under loads of wood.

14 The elders have vanished from the city gate,
the young men from their music.

15 The joy of our hearts has ceased;
our dancing has turned to mourning.

16 The crown has fallen from our head.
Woe to us, for we have sinned!

17 Because of this our heart is sick;
because of these things our eyes grow dark.

18 Because Mount Zion lies desolate —
foxes prowl across it.

19 But you, LORD, reign forever;
your throne endures from generation to generation.

20 Why do you forget us forever?
Why do you abandon us for so long?

21 Return us to yourself, LORD, and we will return;
renew our days as of old.

22 Unless you have utterly rejected us
and are angry with us beyond measure.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb zekhor ('remember') is not a request for God to recall information he has forgotten but a plea for God to act on what he knows — in Hebrew, 'remembering' implies responsive action (as when God 'remembered' Noah in Genesis 8:1 and the flood receded). The verb habbitah ('look') and re'eh ('see') together form an urgent double imperative — the community begs God to turn his attention toward them.

1. Cherpatenu ('our disgrace, our reproach') sets the tone for the entire chapter: this is a catalogue of humiliations, not just sufferings.

2. The nachalatenu ('our inheritance') refers to the ancestral land allotments — the land God promised to each tribe and family as a permanent possession (Joshua 13-21). The verb nehepkhah ('has been turned over, reversed') implies a total inversion of the covenant promise. The parallel between zarim ('strangers') and nokhrim ('foreigners') emphasizes that outsiders now possess what God gave to Israel.

3. The word yetomim ('orphans') paired with ve'ein av ('and without a father') creates a painful redundancy — they are not just technically orphans but utterly without paternal protection. The fathers are dead or deported. The mothers are ke'almanot ('like widows') — the qualification 'like' may indicate that some husbands are alive in exile but functionally absent, leaving families in the vulnerable status of the fatherless and widowed, the two groups the Torah most insistently commands Israel to protect (Deuteronomy 10:18, 24:17).

4. The indignity is specific: the people must purchase water and firewood from their own land — resources that were freely available are now controlled by occupiers who sell them back. The word bekesef ('with silver, for money') and bimechir ('at a price') emphasize the monetization of basic necessities. This reverses the covenantal promise of a land freely providing for its people (Deuteronomy 8:7-9).

5. The phrase al tsavvareinu ('upon our necks') evokes the image of an ox yoke — forced labor under foreign taskmasters. The verb nirdaphnu ('we are pursued, driven') carries the sense of relentless compulsion. The combination of yaga'nu ('we are weary, exhausted') with lo hunach lanu ('no rest is given to us') echoes the slave conditions of Egypt before the Exodus. The covenant was supposed to free them from exactly this.

6. The idiom natan yad ('gave the hand') means to submit, to make a pact, to surrender — the people were forced to seek terms with foreign powers merely to survive. Egypt and Assyria represent the two great imperial powers that dominated the ancient Near East. That Israel must beg bread from the very empires God delivered them from is a devastating reversal of Exodus.

6. The phrase lisboa lachem ('to be satisfied with bread') reduces the nation's aspirations to bare subsistence — not prosperity, not blessing, just enough food to survive.

7. This verse voices the generational complaint also found in Jeremiah 31:29 and Ezekiel 18:2 — 'the fathers ate sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.' The verb savalnu ('we bear, we carry') treats iniquity as a physical burden passed from one generation to the next. The tension between corporate and individual responsibility is left unresolved here — the poet does not argue theology but simply states the felt injustice.

7. The phrase ve'einam ('and they are not') means the ancestors have died — they sinned and escaped to death, while the living generation inherits the punishment.

8. The word avadim ('slaves, servants') ruling over free Israelites represents total social inversion. This may refer to low-ranking Babylonian officials governing Judah, or it may express the humiliation of being governed by those the community considers beneath them. The verb mashlu ('they rule, they govern') is the same verb used for legitimate governance — now applied to illegitimate overlords.

8. The phrase poreq ein miyyadam ('there is no one to tear us from their hand') uses poreq ('one who tears away, rescuer') — there is no liberator, no deliverer. The absence of a go'el or redeemer is the defining crisis.

9. The phrase benaphshenu ('at the cost of our lives, with our souls') means that foraging for food is a life-threatening venture. The cherev hamidbar ('sword of the wilderness') refers to marauding bands and raiders in the open country between settlements — those who venture out to find food may be killed by bandits or enemy patrols. Basic sustenance now requires mortal risk.

10. The verb nikhmaru ('are burning, are feverish') describes skin that is hot to the touch — inflamed either from fever or from the metabolic breakdown of starvation. The word tannur ('oven, furnace') compares their skin to the heated clay walls of a bread oven. The phrase zal'aphot ra'av ('scorching blasts of famine') treats hunger as if it were a desert wind — a burning force that withers the body from within.

11. The verb innu ('humiliated, violated') is the standard Hebrew euphemism for sexual assault (see Genesis 34:2, Deuteronomy 22:24, 2 Samuel 13:14). We rendered it directly as 'violated' rather than softening it — the text names this atrocity plainly. The pairing of nashim ('women') and betulot ('young women, virgins') indicates that the violence was indiscriminate, affecting women of all ages across the entire territory of Judah, not only in Jerusalem.

12. The verb nitlu ('were hung, were suspended') likely refers to impalement or suspension as a form of execution or public humiliation — a common Assyrian and Babylonian practice. The word sarim ('officials, princes, leaders') indicates that the ruling class was specifically targeted for degrading punishment.

12. The phrase penei zeqenim lo nehdaru ('the faces of elders were not honored') means the cultural deference normally accorded to the elderly was completely disregarded. The verb nehdaru (from hadar, 'to honor, to show respect') is negated — the social fabric is torn.

13. Grinding at the mill (techon) was traditionally women's work or slave labor (Exodus 11:5, Judges 16:21 — Samson grinding in the Philistine prison). Forcing young men to do it is deliberate humiliation. The verb nasa'u ('they carried, bore') indicates forced labor. The word ne'arim ('boys, youths') staggering under wood (ba'etz kashalu) paints a picture of child labor — children collapsing under burdens too heavy for their bodies.

14. The sha'ar ('gate') was the center of public life — where justice was administered, business conducted, and community decisions made (Ruth 4:1-11, Proverbs 31:23). The elders' absence from the gate means civic life has ceased entirely. The verb shavtu ('they have ceased, stopped') implies permanent cessation, not temporary interruption.

14. The pairing of elders at the gate with young men and their music captures the full spectrum of communal life — governance and celebration, wisdom and joy — all of it gone.

15. The verb shavat ('has ceased') echoes verse 14 — the cessation is comprehensive. Mesos libbenu ('the joy of our hearts') is not superficial happiness but deep, settled gladness. The verb nehpakh ('has been turned, overturned') is the same verb used for the overthrow of Sodom (Genesis 19:25) — joy has been catastrophically inverted into mourning. The word mecholenu ('our dancing') refers to communal circle dances associated with festivals and celebrations (Exodus 15:20, Judges 21:21).

16. The ateret roshenu ('crown of our head') could refer to the monarchy (the Davidic crown), to national dignity, or to the festive garlands worn during celebrations. All three readings work — the people have lost their king, their honor, and their joy. The cry oy na lanu ('woe to us') is the people's own acknowledgment of responsibility — in the midst of cataloguing external sufferings, they confess: ki chatanu ('for we have sinned'). The community does not blame God alone.

17. The adjective daveh ('sick, faint, ill') describes a heart weakened by grief — the same word describes menstrual sickness in Leviticus 15:33, carrying the sense of chronic, debilitating affliction. The verb chashkhu ('grow dark, become dim') applied to eyes means vision is failing — either literally from malnutrition or figuratively from despair. The demonstratives 'this' and 'these' point both backward to the sufferings catalogued and forward to the specific devastation in verse 18.

18. This is the single most devastating image of desolation in the chapter: Mount Zion, where the Temple stood, where God's presence dwelled, where the Davidic king reigned — now so thoroughly abandoned that wild animals roam freely over it. The shu'alim ('foxes' or 'jackals') are scavengers associated with ruins (Ezekiel 13:4, Nehemiah 4:3 — 'if a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall'). The verb hillekhum ('they walk about') suggests not a single sighting but habitual presence — the foxes have taken up residence.

18. The image inverts Song of Songs 2:15: there, foxes threatened the vineyards but could be caught; here, they own the ruins. What was once sacred ground is now an animal den.

19. The emphatic attah ('you') at the beginning contrasts God's permanence with everything that has perished. The verb teshev ('you sit, you remain, you are enthroned') carries the specific sense of sitting on a throne — God's kingship endures even when the earthly Davidic throne is empty. The phrase le'olam ('forever') paired with ledor vador ('from generation to generation') creates a double statement of permanence.

19. This verse functions as the theological hinge of the chapter: the sufferings of verses 1-18 are brought before a God who still reigns (v. 19), which grounds the petition of verse 21. If God were not on his throne, the petition would be pointless.

20. The question lammah ('why?') is the cry of the lament tradition — not requesting information but protesting injustice (Psalm 10:1, 22:1, 44:23-24). The verb tishkachenu ('you forget us') is theologically charged: God's 'forgetting' is the opposite of the 'remembering' requested in verse 1. If to remember is to act, to forget is to abandon.

20. The parallel between lanetsach ('forever, perpetually') and le'orekh yamim ('for length of days, for so long') creates a crescendo of anguish: God's forgetting feels not temporary but permanent. The word lanetsach echoes the olam of verse 19 — if God reigns forever, why does he also forget forever?

21. The verb hashivenu ('return us, restore us, bring us back') is a hiphil imperative of shub — the causative form means 'cause us to return.' The theology is precise: the people cannot turn back to God by their own power. God must turn them first, and then (venashuvah, 'and we will return') they can respond. This same theology appears in Jeremiah 31:18: 'Turn me back and I will be turned.'

21. The verb chadesh ('renew') asks God to make their days ke-qedem ('as of old, as in ancient times') — a plea for restoration to the former covenant relationship. Whether this means a return to pre-exilic conditions or a renewal of the Sinai relationship is left open.

21. In Jewish liturgical practice, this verse is re-read after verse 22 so that the book of Lamentations does not end on despair. This custom (hashlamah) is also applied to the final verses of Isaiah, Ecclesiastes, and Malachi.

22. This final verse is the most debated line in Lamentations. The particle ki im can function as 'unless,' 'but rather,' 'surely,' or 'except.' We render it 'Unless' to preserve the conditional force: the plea of verse 21 is followed by the terrifying possibility — not the certainty — that God's rejection may be final. The book ends suspended between hope and despair.

22. The verb ma'os me'astanu ('you have utterly rejected us') uses the infinitive absolute construction for emphasis — if God has rejected them, the rejection is total and complete. The verb qatsaphta ('you are angry') with ad me'od ('exceedingly, beyond measure') pushes divine wrath to its extreme.

22. The book ends here — without resolution, without comfort, without divine response. The silence after verse 22 is itself a theological statement. The Jewish tradition of re-reading verse 21 after verse 22 is not a textual emendation but a liturgical refusal to let the final word be despair. The text itself, however, ends in the dark.