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LAMENTATIONS 1: 1 How the city sits solitary, that was full of people! She has become as a widow, who was great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become tributary!

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This book, like the several books of the Pentateuch, is denominated in Hebrew *איכה* eicah, how, from its first word; and sometimes *קינות* kinnoth, lamentations, from its subject. In the Septuagint it is termed *QRHNOI TOU IEREMIOU*, for the same reason. The Syriac and Arabic copy or follow the Septuagint; and so does the Vulgate, from the Lamentationes of which, the book has that name which it bears in our language. In the Chaldee it has no name; and in it, and perhaps anciently in the Hebrew, it was written consecutively with the last chapter of Jeremiah.

It is one of the books of the *מגילות* Megilloth, or Roll, among the Jews; and because it relates to the ruin of their affairs, and contains promises of restoration, it is peculiarly prized, and frequently read. The five Megilloth are: Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Ruth, and Esther.

There has been little difference among learned men concerning the author of this book. The whole current of antiquity and modern times has pointed out Jeremiah as the writer: of this the style is a sufficient evidence. Mr. John Henry Pareau, in a Dissertation prefixed to his Translation and Notes on this book, (8vo. Lugd. Bat. 1790), has proved this point amply from a general collation of the prophecy of Jeremiah with select passages in this book. I have heard of but one learned man who has entertained serious doubts on the subject, Mr. Herman Van der Hardt, who has supposed the five chapters were written by Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Jeconiah. To this opinion I suppose none has ever been converted.

There has been more difference of opinion relative to the subject and occasion. Some have thought the book was composed on the death of Josiah; others that it was composed on occasion of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the various desolations connected with it. To this all its parts and its general phraseology seem best to apply; and this is the sentiment most generally embraced at present. This will receive much proof from a minute consideration of the book itself.

The composition of this poem is what may be called very technical. Every chapter, except the last, is an acrostic. Of the two first, each verse begins with a several letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in the order of the letters, with this exception, that in the second, third, and fourth chapters, the *פ* phe is put before the *א* ain; whereas in all the acrostic Psalms the latter preceded the former, as it does in all grammars of the Hebrew language. In the first and second chapters each verse is composed of three hemistichs or half verses, except the seventh verse of the first, and the nineteenth of the second chapter, which have each four hemistichs.

The third chapter contains sixty-four verses, each, as before, formed of three hemistichs, but with this difference, that each hemistich begins with the same letter, so that the whole alphabet is thrice repeated in this chapter.

The fourth chapter is made up of twenty-two verses, according to the number of the Hebrew letters; but the composition is different from all the rest, for each verse consists of only two hemistichs, and those much shorter than any in the preceding chapters.

I have called this an inimitable poem; better judges are of the same opinion. "Never," says Bishop Lowth, "was there a more rich and elegant variety of beautiful images and adjuncts arranged

together within so small a compass, nor more happily chosen and applied." "One would think," says Dr. South, "that every letter was written with a tear; every word, the sound of a breaking heart: that the author was compacted of sorrows; disciplined to grief from his infancy; one who never breathed but in sighs, nor spoke but in a groan." "Nor can we too much admire," says Dr. Blayney, "the full and graceful flow of that pathetic eloquence in which the author pours forth the effusions of a patriotic heart, and piously weeps over the ruins of his venerable country. But it was observed before that the prophet's peculiar talent lay in working up and expressing the passions of grief and pity; and, unhappily for him as a man and a citizen, he met with a subject but too well calculated to give his genius its full display." David in several places has forcibly depicted the sorrows of a heart oppressed with penitential sorrow; but where, in a composition of such length, have bodily misery and mental agony been more successfully painted? All the expressions and images of sorrow are here exhibited in various combinations, and in various points of view. Misery has no expression that the author of the Lamentations has not employed. Patriots! you who tell us you burn for your country's welfare, look at the prophecies and history of this extraordinary man; look at his Lamentations; take him through his life to his death, and learn from him what true patriotism means! The man who watched, prayed, and lived for the welfare of his country; who choose to share her adversities, her sorrows, her wants, her afflictions, and disgrace, where he might have been a companion of princes, and have sat at the table of kings; who only ceased to live for his country when he ceased to breathe; - that was a patriot, in comparison with whom almost all others are obscured, minished, and brought low, or are totally annihilated!

The prophet begins with lamenting the dismal reverse of fortune that befell his country, confessing at the same time that her calamities were the just consequence of her sins, Lam 1:1-6. Jerusalem herself is then personified and brought forward to continue the sad complaint, and to solicit the mercy of God, vv. 7-22.

In all copies of the Septuagint, whether of the Roman or Alexandrian editions, the following words are found as a part of the text: *Και εγενετο μετα το αιχμαλωτισθηναι τον Ισραηλ, και Ιερουσαλημ ερημωθηναι, εκαθισεν Ιερεμιας κλαιων, και εθρηνησεν τον θρην ο ν τουτον επι Ιερουσαλημ, και ειπεν* - And it came to pass after Israel had been carried away captive, and Jerusalem was become desolate, that Jeremiah sat weeping: and he lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem; and he said."

The Vulgate has the same, with some variations: - "Et factum est, postquam in captivitatem redactus est Israel, et Jerusalem deserta est, sedit Jeremias propheta fiens, et planxit lamentations hac in Jerusalem, et amaro animo suspirans et ejulans, digit." The translation of this, as given in the first translation of the Bible into English, may be found at the end of Jeremiah, taken from an ancient MS. in my own possession.

I subjoin another taken from the first Printed edition of the English Bible, that by Coverdale, 1535. "And it came to passe, (after Israel was brought into captivitie, and Jerusalem destroyed); that Jeremy the prophet sat weeping, mournynge, and makinge his mone in Jerusalem; so that with an hevye herte he sighed and sobbed, sayenge."

Matthew's Bible, printed in 1549, refines upon this: "It happened after Israell was brought into captivite, and Jerusalem destroyed, that Jeremy the prophet sate wepyng, and sorrowfully bewayled Jerusalem; and syghynge and hewlyng with an hevye and woofull hert, sayde."

Becke's Bible of the same date, and Cardmarden's of 1566, have the same, with a trifling change in the orthography.

On this Becke and others have the following note: - "These words are read in the lxx. interpreters: but not in the Hebrue."

All these show that it was the ancient opinion that the Book of Lamentations was composed, not over the death of Josiah, but on account of the desolations of Israel and Jerusalem.

The Arabic copies the Septuagint. The Syriac does not acknowledge it; and the Chaldee has these words only: "Jeremiah the great priest and prophet said."

Verse 1

How doth the city sit solitary - Sitting down, with the elbow on the knee, and the head supported by the hand, without any company, unless an oppressor near, - all these were signs of mourning and distress. The coin struck by Vespasian on the capture of Jerusalem, on the obverse of which there is a palm-tree, the emblem of Judea, and under it a woman, the emblem of Jerusalem, sitting, leaning as before described, with the legend *Judea capta*, illustrates this expression as well as that in Isa 47:1. See the note on Isa 3:26 (note), where the subject is farther explained.

Become as a widow - Having lost her king. Cities are commonly described as the mothers of their inhabitants, the kings as husbands, and the princes as children. When therefore they are bereaved of these, they are represented as widows, and childless.

The Hindoo widow, as well as the Jewish, is considered the most destitute and wretched of all human beings. She has her hair cut short, throws off all ornaments, eats the coarsest food, fasts often, and is all but an outcast in the family of her late husband.

Is she become tributary! - Having no longer the political form of a nation; and the remnant that is left paying tribute to a foreign and heathen conqueror.

LAMENTATIONS 1: 2 She weeps bitterly in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has no one to comfort her: All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they are become her enemies.

Verse 2

Among all her lovers - Her allies; her friends, instead of helping her, have helped her enemies. Several who sought her friendship when she was in prosperity, in the time of David and Solomon, are now among her enemies.

LAMENTATIONS 1: 3 Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude; she dwells among the nations, she finds no rest: all her persecutors overtook her within the straits.

Verse 3

Between the straits - She has been brought into such difficulties, that it was impossible for her to escape. Has this any reference to the circumstances in which Zedekiah and the princes of Judah endeavored to escape from Jerusalem, by the way of the gates between the two walls? Jer 52:7.

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LAMENTATIONS 1: 4 The ways of Zion do mourn, because no one come to the solemn assembly; all her gates are desolate, her priests do sigh: her virgins are afflicted, and she herself is in bitterness.

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Verse 4

The ways of Zion do mourn - A fine prosopopoeia. The ways in which the people trod coming to the sacred solemnities, being now no longer frequented, are represented as shedding tears; and the gates themselves partake of the general distress. All poets of eminence among the Greeks and Romans have recourse to this image. So Moschus, in his Epitaph on Bion, ver. 1-3: - Αλινα μοι στροναχειτε ναπαι, και Δωριον ύδωρ και ποταμοι κλαιοιτε τον ιμεροεντα Βιωνα. Νυν φυτα μοι μυρεσθε, και αλσεα νυν γοαιοισθε, κ. τ. λ. "Ye winds, with grief your waving summits bow,

Ye Dorian fountains, murmur as ye flow;

From weeping urns your copious sorrows shed,

And bid the rivers mourn for Bion dead.

Ye shady groves, in robes of sable hue,

Bewail, ye plants, in pearly drops of dew;

Ye drooping flowers, diffuse a languid breath,

And die with sorrow, at sweet Bion's death."

Fawkes.

So Virgil, Aen. vii., ver. 759: -

Te nemus Anguitiae, vitrea te Fucinus unda

Te liquidi flevere lacus. "For thee, wide echoing, sighed th' Anguitian woods;

For thee, in murmurs, wept thy native floods."

And more particularly on the death of Daphnis, Eclog. 5 ver. 24: -

Non ulli pastos illis egere diebus Frigida,

Daphni, boves ad flumina: nulla neque amnem

Libavit quadrupes, nec graminis attigit herbam.

Daphni, tuum Poenos etiam ingemuisse leones

Interitum, montesque feri, sylvaeque loquuntur. "The swains forgot their sheep, nor near the brink

Of running waters brought their herds to drink:

The thirsty cattle of themselves abstained

From water, and their grassy fare disdained.

The death of Daphnis woods and hills deplore;

The Libyan lions hear, and hearing roar."

Dryden.

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LAMENTATIONS 1: 5 Her adversaries are become the head, her enemies prosper; for the LORD has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her young children are gone into captivity before the adversary.

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Verse 5

Her adversaries are the chief - They have now supreme dominion over the whole land.

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LAMENTATIONS 1: 6 From the daughter of Zion all her majesty is departed: her princes are become like deer that find no pasture, they are gone without strength before the pursuer.

LAMENTATIONS 1: 7 Jerusalem remembers in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that were from the days of old: when her people fell into the hand of the adversary, and no one helped her, The adversaries saw her, they mocked at her desolations.

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Verse 7

Did mock at her Sabbaths - מִשְׁבַּתָּה mishbatteha. Some contend that Sabbaths are not intended here. The Septuagint has κατοικεσσια αὐτης, "her habitation;" the Chaldee, אַל טוֹבָהּ al tubaha, "her good things;" the Syriac, al toboroh, "her breach." The Vulgate and Arabic agree with the Hebrew. Some of my oldest MSS. have the word in the plural number, מִשְׁבַּתֵּיהָ mishbatteyha, "her Sabbaths." A multitude of Kennicott's MSS. have the same reading. The Jews were despised by the heathen for keeping the Sabbath. Juvenal mocks them on that account: - - cui septima quaeque fuit lux

Ignava et partem vitae non attigit ullam.

Sat. v. "To whom every seventh day was a blank, and formed not any part of their life."

St. Augustine represents Seneca as doing the same: -

Inutiliter id eos facere affirmans, quod septimani ferme partem aetatis suae perdent vacando, et multa in tempore urgentia non agendo laedantur. "That they lost the seventh part of their life in keeping their Sabbaths; and injured themselves by abstaining from the performance of many necessary things in such times."

He did not consider that the Roman calendar and customs gave them many more idle days than God had prescribed in Sabbaths to the Jews. The Sabbath is a most wise and beneficent ordinance.

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LAMENTATIONS 1: 8 Jerusalem has grievously sinned; therefore she has become as an unclean thing; all who honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness: yes, she sighs, and turns backward.

LAMENTATIONS 1: 9 Her filthiness was in her skirts; she didn't remember her latter end; therefore is she come down wonderfully; she has no comforter: see, LORD, my affliction; for the enemy has magnified himself.

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Verse 9

She remembereth not her last end - Although evident marks of her pollution appeared about her, and the land was defiled by her sinfulness even to its utmost borders, she had no thought or consideration of what must be the consequence of all this at the last. - Blayney.

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LAMENTATIONS 1: 10 The adversary has spread out his hand on all her pleasant things: for she has seen that the nations are entered into her sanctuary, concerning whom you commanded that they should not enter into your assembly.

LAMENTATIONS 1: 11 All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for food to refresh the soul: look, LORD, and see; for I am become abject.

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Verse 11

They have given their pleasant things - Jerusalem is compared to a woman brought into great straits, who parts with her jewels and trinkets in order to purchase by them the necessaries of life.

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LAMENTATIONS 1: 12 Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look, and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which is brought on me, With which the LORD has afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.

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Verse 12

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? - The desolations and distress brought upon this city and its inhabitants had scarcely any parallel. Excessive abuse of God's accumulated mercies calls for singular and exemplary punishment.

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LAMENTATIONS 1: 13 From on high has he sent fire into my bones, and it prevails against them; He has spread a net for my feet, he has turned me back: He has made me desolate and faint all the day.

LAMENTATIONS 1: 14 The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand; They are knit together, they have come up on my neck; he has made my strength to fail: The Lord has delivered me into their hands, against whom I am not able to stand.

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Verse 14

The yoke of my transgressions - I am now tied and bound by the chain of my sins; and it is so wreathed, so doubled and twisted round me, that I cannot free myself. A fine representation of the miseries of a penitent soul, which feels that nothing but the pitifulness of God's mercy can loose it.

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LAMENTATIONS 1: 15 The Lord has set at naught all my mighty men in the midst of me; He has called a solemn assembly against me to crush my young men: The Lord has trodden as in a wine press the virgin daughter of Judah.

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Verse 15

Called an assembly - The Chaldean army, composed of various nations, which God commissioned to destroy Jerusalem.

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LAMENTATIONS 1: 16 For these things I weep; my eye, my eye runs down with water; Because the comforter who should refresh my soul is far from me: My children are desolate, because the enemy has prevailed.

LAMENTATIONS 1: 17 Zion spreads out her hands; there is no one to comfort her; The LORD has commanded concerning Jacob, that those who are around him should be his adversaries: Jerusalem is among them as an unclean thing.

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Verse 17

Zion spreadeth forth her hands - Extending the hands is the form in supplication.

Jerusalem is as a menstruous woman - To whom none dared to approach, either to help or comfort, because of the law, Lev 15:19-27.

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LAMENTATIONS 1: 18 The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment: Please hear all you peoples, and see my sorrow: My virgins and my young men are gone into captivity.

LAMENTATIONS 1: 19 I called for my lovers, but they deceived me: My priests and my elders gave up the spirit in the city, While they sought them food to refresh their souls.

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Verse 19

I called for my lovers - My allies; the Egyptians and others.

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LAMENTATIONS 1: 20 See, LORD; for I am in distress; my heart is troubled; My heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled: Abroad the sword bereaves, at home there is as death.

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Verse 20

Abroad the sword bereaveth - War is through the country; and at home death; the pestilence and famine rage in the city; calamity in every shape is fallen upon me.

Virgil represents the calamities of Troy under the same image: - - Nec soli poenas dant sanguine Teucrici:

Quondam etiam victis redit in praecordia virtus;

Victoresque cadunt Danai. Crudelis ubique

Luctus, ubique Pavor, et plurima mortis imago.

Aeneid. lib. 2:366. "Not only Trojans fall; but, in their turn,

The vanquished triumph, and the victors mourn.

Ours take new courage from despair and night;

Confused the fortune is, confused the fight.

All parts resound with tumults, complaints, and fears;

And grisly death in sundry shapes appears."

Dryden.

So Milton - " - Despair

Tended the sick, busiest from couch to couch;

And over them triumphant Death his dart Shook."

Par. Lost, B. 11:489.

Jeremiah, Jer 9:21, uses the same image: -

Death is come up into our windows:

He hath entered our palaces,

To cut off the infants without,

And the young men in our streets.

So Silius Italicus, ll. 548: -

Mors graditur, vasto pandens cava guttura rletu,

Casuroque inhians populo. "Death stalks along, and opens his hideous throat to gulp down the people."

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LAMENTATIONS 1: 21 They have heard that I sigh; there is no one to comfort me; All my enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that you have done it: You will bring the day that you have proclaimed, and they shall be like me.

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Verse 21

They have heard that I sigh - My affliction is public enough; but no one comes to comfort me.

They are glad that thou hast done it - On the contrary, they exult in my misery; and they see that Thou hast done what they were incapable of performing.

Thou wilt bring the day that thou hast called, and they shall be like unto me - Babylon shall be visited in her turn; and thy judgments poured out upon her shall equal her state with my own. See the last six chapters of the preceding prophecy for the accomplishment of this prediction.

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LAMENTATIONS 1: 22 Let all their wickedness come before you; Do to them, as you have done to me for all my transgressions: For my sighs are many, and my heart is faint.

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Verse 22

Let all their wickedness come before thee - That is, Thou wilt call their crimes also into remembrance; and thou wilt do unto them by siege, sword, famine, and captivity, what thou hast done to me. Though thy judgments, because of thy long-suffering, are slow; yet, because of thy righteousness, they are sure.

For my sighs are many - My desolations continue; and my heart is faint - my political and physical strength almost totally destroyed.

Imprecations in the sacred writings are generally to be understood as declarative of the evils they indicate; or, that such evils will take place. No prophet of God ever wished desolation on those against whom he was directed to prophesy.