

LAMENTATIONS 5: 1 Remember, LORD, what has come on us: Look, and see our reproach.

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This chapter is, as it were, an epiphonema, or conclusion to the four preceding, representing the nation as groaning under their calamities, and humbly supplicating the Divine favor, vv. 1-22.

Verse 1

Remember, O Lord - In the Vulgate, Syriac, and Arabic, this is headed, "The prayer of Jeremiah." In my old MS. Bible: Here bigynneth the orison of Jeremy the prophete.

Though this chapter consists of exactly twenty-two verses, the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, yet the acrostic form is no longer observed. Perhaps any thing so technical was not thought proper when in agony and distress (under a sense of God's displeasure on account of sin) they prostrated themselves before him to ask for mercy. Be this as it may, no attempt appears to have been made to throw these verses into the form of the preceding chapters. It is properly a solemn prayer of all the people, stating their past and present sufferings, and praying for God's mercy.

Behold our reproach - הביט hebita. But many MSS. of Kennicott's, and the oldest of my own, add the ה he paragogic, הביטה hebitah, "Look down earnestly with commiseration;" for paragogic letters always increase the sense.

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LAMENTATIONS 5: 2 Our inheritance is turned to strangers, Our houses to aliens.

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Verse 2

Our inheritance is turned to strangers - The greater part of the Jews were either slain or carried away captive; and even those who were left under Gedaliah were not free, for they were vassals to the Chaldeans.

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LAMENTATIONS 5: 3 We are orphans and fatherless; Our mothers are as widows.

LAMENTATIONS 5: 4 We have drunken our water for money; Our wood is sold to us.

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Verse 4

We have drunken our water for money - I suppose the meaning of this is, that every thing was taxed by the Chaldeans, and that they kept the management in their own hands, so that wood and water were both sold, the people not being permitted to help themselves. They were now so lowly reduced by servitude, that they were obliged to pay dearly for those things which formerly were common and of no price. A poor Hindoo in the country never buys fire-wood, but when he comes to the city he is obliged to purchase his fuel, and considers it as a matter of great hardship.

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LAMENTATIONS 5: 5 Our pursuers are on our necks: We are weary, and have no rest.

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Verse 5

Our necks are under persecution - We feel the yoke of our bondage; we are driven to our work like the bullock, which has a yoke upon his neck.

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LAMENTATIONS 5: 6 We have given the hand to the Egyptians, To the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread.

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Verse 6

We have given the hand to the Egyptians - We have sought alliances both with the Egyptians and Assyrians, and made covenants with them in order to get the necessaries of life. Or, wherever we are now driven, we are obliged to submit to the people of the countries in order to the preservation of our lives.

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LAMENTATIONS 5: 7 Our fathers sinned, and are no more; We have borne their iniquities.

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Verse 7

Our fathers have sinned, and are not - Nations, as such, cannot be punished in the other world; therefore national judgments are to be looked for only in this life. The punishment which the Jewish nation had been meriting for a series of years came now upon them, because they copied and increased the sins of their fathers, and the cup of their iniquity was full. Thus the children might be said to bear the sins of the fathers, that is, in temporal punishment, for in no other way does God visit these upon the children. See Eze 18:1, etc.

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LAMENTATIONS 5: 8 Servants rule over us: There is no one to deliver us out of their hand.

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Verse 8

Servants have ruled over us - To be subject to such is the most painful and dishonorable bondage: -

Quio domini faciant, audent cum talia fures?

Virg. Ecl. 3:16. "Since slaves so insolent are grown,

What may not masters do?"

Perhaps he here alludes to the Chaldean soldiers, whose will the wretched Jews were obliged to obey.

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LAMENTATIONS 5: 9 We get our bread at the peril of our lives, Because of the sword of the wilderness.

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Verse 9

We gat our bread with the peril of our lives - They could not go into the wilderness to feed their cattle, or to get the necessaries of life, without being harassed and plundered by marauding parties, and by these were often exposed to the peril of their lives. This was predicted by Moses, Deu 28:31.

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LAMENTATIONS 5: 10 Our skin is black like an oven, Because of the burning heat of famine.

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Verse 10

Our skin was black - because of the terrible famine - Because of the searching winds that burnt up every green thing, destroying vegetation, and in consequence producing a famine.

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LAMENTATIONS 5: 11 They ravished the women in Zion, The virgins in the cities of Judah.

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Verse 11

They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of Judah - The evil mentioned here was predicted by Moses, Deu 28:30, Deu 28:32, and by Jeremiah, Jer 6:12.

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LAMENTATIONS 5: 12 Princes were hanged up by their hand: The faces of elders were not honoured.

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Verse 12

Princes are hanged up by their hand - It is very probable that this was a species of punishment. They were suspended from hooks in the wall by their hands till they died through torture and exhaustion. The body of Saul was fastened to the wall of Bethshan, probably in the same way; but his head had already been taken off. They were hung in this way that they might be devoured by the fowls of the air. It was a custom with the Persians after they had slain, strangled, or beheaded their enemies, to hang their bodies upon poles, or empale them. In this way they treated Histiaeus of Miletum, and Leonidas of Lacedaemon. See Herodot. lib. 6 c. 30, lib. 7 c. 238.

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LAMENTATIONS 5: 13 The young men bare the mill; The children stumbled under the wood.

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Verse 13

They took the young men to grind - This was the work of female slaves. See the note on Isa 47:2.

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LAMENTATIONS 5: 14 The elders have ceased from the gate, The young men from their music.

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Verse 14

The elders have ceased from the gate - There is now no more justice administered to the people; they are under military law, or disposed of in every sense according to the caprice of their masters.

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LAMENTATIONS 5: 15 The joy of our heart is ceased; Our dance is turned into mourning.

LAMENTATIONS 5: 16 The crown is fallen from our head: Woe to us! for we have sinned.

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Verse 16

The crown is fallen from our head - At feasts, marriages, etc., they used to crown themselves with garlands of flowers; all festivity of this kind was now at an end. Or it may refer to their having lost all sovereignty, being made slaves.

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LAMENTATIONS 5: 17 For this our heart is faint; For these things our eyes are dim;

LAMENTATIONS 5: 18 For the mountain of Zion, which is desolate: The foxes walk on it.

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Verse 18

The foxes walk upon it - Foxes are very numerous in Palestine, see on Jdg 15:4 (note). It was usual among the Hebrews to consider all desolated land to be the resort of wild beasts; which is, in fact, the case every where when the inhabitants are removed from a country.

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LAMENTATIONS 5: 19 You, LORD, remain forever; Your throne is from generation to generation.

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Verse 19

Thou, O Lord, remainest for ever - Thou sufferest no change. Thou didst once love us, O let that love be renewed towards us!

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LAMENTATIONS 5: 20 Why do you forget us forever, And forsake us so long time?

LAMENTATIONS 5: 21 Turn us to yourself, LORD, and we shall be turned. Renew our days as of old.

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Verse 21

Renew our days as of old - Restore us to our former state. Let us regain our country, our temple, and all the Divine offices of our religion; but, more especially, thy favor.

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LAMENTATIONS 5: 22 But you have utterly rejected us; You are very angry against us.

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Verse 22

But thou hast utterly rejected us - It appears as if thou hadst sealed our final reprobation, because thou showest against us exceeding great wrath. But convert us, O Lord, onto thee, and we shall be converted. We are now greatly humbled, feel our sin, and see our folly: once more restore us, and we shall never again forsake thee! He heard the prayer; and at the end of seventy years they were restored to their own land.

This last verse is well rendered in the first printed edition of our Bible, 1535: - Renue our daies as in olde tyme, for thou hast now banished us longe ynough, and bene sore displeased at us.

My old MS. Bible is not less nervous: Newe thou our dais as fro the begynnyng: bot castand aweie thou put us out: thou wrathedist ugein us hugely.

Dr. Blayney translates, "For surely thou hast cast us off altogether:" and adds, "כי ki ought certainly to be rendered as causal; God's having rejected his people, and expressed great indignation against them, being the cause and ground of the preceding application, in which they pray to be restored to his favor, and the enjoyment of their ancient privileges."

Pareau thinks no good sense can be made of this place unless we translate interrogatively, as in Jer 14:19 : - "Hast thou utterly rejected Judah?

Hath thy soul loathed Sion?"

On this ground he translates here,

An enim prorsus nos rejecisses?

Nobis iratus esses usque adeo? "Hast thou indeed utterly cast us off?

Wilt thou be angry with us for ever?"

Wilt thou extend thy wrath against us so as to show us no more mercy? This agrees well with the state and feelings of the complainants.

Masoretic Notes

Number of verses in this Book, 154.

Middle verse, Lam 3:34.

In one of my oldest MSS., the twenty-first verse is repeated at the conclusion of the twenty-second verse. In another, yet older, there is only the first word of it, השׁיבנו hashibenu, Convert us!

Having given in the preceding preface and notes what I judge necessary to explain the principal difficulties in this very fine and affecting poem, very fitly termed The Lamentations, as it justly stands at the head of every composition of the kind, I shall add but a few words, and these shall be by way of recapitulation chiefly.

The Hebrews were accustomed to make lamentations or mourning songs upon the death of great men, princes, and heroes, who had distinguished themselves in arms; and upon any occasion or public miseries and calamities. Calmet thinks they had collections of these sorts of Lamentations: and refers in proof to 2Chr 35:25 : "And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah; and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations, to this day; and made them an ordinance in Israel: and, behold, they are written in the Lamentations."

From this verse it is evident, that Jeremiah had composed a funeral elegy on Josiah: but, from the complexion of this Book, it is most evident that it was not composed on the death of Josiah, but upon the desolations of Jerusalem, etc., as has already been noted. His lamentation for Josiah is therefore lost. It appears also, that on particular occasions, perhaps anniversaries, these lamentations were sung by men and women singers, who performed their several parts; for these were all alternate or responsive songs. And it is very likely, that this book was sung in the same way; the men commencing with א aleph, the women responding with ב beth and so on. Several of this sort of songs are still extant. We have those which David composed on the death of his son Absalom, and on the death of his friend Jonathan. And we have those made by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, on the desolation of Egypt, Tyre, Sidon, and Babylon. See Isa 14:4; Isa 14:5; Isa 15:1-9; Isa 16:1-14; Jer 7:29; Jer 9:10; Jer 48:32; Eze 19:1; Eze 28:11; Eze 32:2; Jer 9:17. Besides these, we have fragments of others in different places; and references to some, which are now finally lost.

In the two first chapters of this book, the prophet describes, principally, the calamities of the siege of Jerusalem.

In the third, he deplores the persecutions which he himself had suffered; though he may in this be personifying the city and state; many of his own sufferings being illustrative of the calamities that fell generally upon the city and people at large.

The fourth chapter is employed chiefly on the ruin and desolation of the city and temple; and upon the misfortunes of Zedekiah, of whom he speaks in a most respectful, tender, and affecting manner: - "The anointed of Jehovah, the breadth of our nostrils, was taken in their toils,

Under whose shadow we said,

We shall live among the nations."

At the end he speaks of the cruelty of the Edomites, who had insulted Jerusalem in her miseries, and contributed to its demolition. These he threatens with the wrath of God.

The fifth chapter is a kind of form of prayer for the Jews, in their dispersions and captivity. In the conclusion of it, he speaks of their fallen royalty; attributes all their calamities to their rebellion and wickedness; and acknowledges that there can be no end to their misery, but in their restoration to the Divine favor.

This last chapter was probably written some considerable time after the rest: for it supposes the temple to be so deserted, that the foxes walked undisturbed among its ruins, and that the people were already in captivity.

The poem is a monument of the people's iniquity and rebellion; of the displeasure and judgment of God against them; and of the piety, eloquence, and incomparable ability of the poet.