

Wisdom
Lamentations 1:1-6, 3:19-26 (NRSV)

How lonely sits the city
that once was full of people!

How like a widow she has become,
she that was great among the nations!

She that was a princess among the provinces
has become a vassal.

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

³ Judah has gone into exile with suffering
and hard servitude;
she lives now among the nations,
and finds no resting-place;
her pursuers have all overtaken her
in the midst of her distress.

⁴ The roads to Zion mourn,
for no one comes to the festivals;
all her gates are desolate,
her priests groan;
her young girls grieve,
and her lot is bitter.

⁵ Her foes have become the masters,
her enemies prosper,
because the LORD has made her suffer
for the multitude of her transgressions;
her children have gone away,
captives before the foe.

⁶ From daughter Zion has departed
all her majesty.
Her princes have become like stags
that find no pasture;
they fled without strength
before the pursuer.

¹⁹ The thought of my affliction and my homelessness
is wormwood and gall!

²⁰ My soul continually thinks of it
and is bowed down within me.

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

²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
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 that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.

Reading Lamentations This Week

Tradition credits Jeremiah as author of Lamentations,
As it does Moses for Torah, or David for Psalms
This set of elegy poems mourns fallen Jerusalem

In Hebrew Tanakh bibles, Lamentation is 3rd of 5 *Megillot*
Little scrolls for festivals: Song of Songs, Ruth first,
And Ecclesiastes and Esther after

Called *Eikot* (Alas) or *Kinot* (Lamentations),
Read aloud on the 9th of Av, late summer, recalling destruction.
Of Solomon's Temple (in 586BCE (and Second in 70CE)

The scrolls are marked for singing,
Each verse starts with the next letter of the alphabet (acrostic)
The rhythm of each line is in 2 parts 3 beats, then 2 points

Imagine what we lose in translation!
Each of the first 4 chapters starts at *aleph*,
In 1, 2, and 4 a word rendered in English as 'Alas'

The lectionary gives us 2 clips:
1:1-6, *aleph, bet, gimel, dalet, he, vav*
3:19-26 *zayin, chet, tet* (just 2 of 3 *tet* lines)

Turning toward content through form,
Chapter 1 'Alas' is about fallen Jerusalem, in feminine terms
Chapter 3 opens 'I am the man', speaks in 1st person singular

I've appended to these notes a 2002 translation by Adele Berlin
And a 2019 translation by Robert Alter
Each trying to carry the Hebrew poetics faithfully into English

As I suggest weekly with Psalms in our prayer invitations,
Read aloud, better, have another read aloud to you
And imagine this as sung liturgy on the 9th of Av

Start with a taste of lyrical poetry
about the city 'she' shamed

The gendered reflection on ruin is rich –
Who suffers most, how, in the wake of war?

Both Berlin and Alter render *bat-siyyôn* in v.6
as Zion's Daughter

bat can be 'daughter of' or 'female member of a group'
(thus, 'bat-mitvah' for girls, like 'bar-mitvah' for boys)

Where else do you see feminine metaphors,
particularly in this first poem in c.1,
to convey the collective plight of a people?

Continue with a sweeter note,
In the first person singular, masculine voice

Look for the transition from bitterness
anticipating personal hope in a political context

These hymns more familiar in our tradition:
'The wormwood and the gall'
'Great is thy faithfulness'

Scripture helps inform and express
Our human experiences of mortal mysteries
Suffering with passion and compassion

Aging in a declining subculture,
I'm readier for this diction,
To live more fully – for now.

Gospel
Luke 17:5-10

5 The apostles said to the Lord,
‘Increase our faith!’

⁶The Lord replied,
‘If you had faith the size of a mustard seed,
you could say to this mulberry tree,
“Be uprooted and planted in the sea”,
and it would obey you.

7 ‘Who among you
would say to your slave
who has just come in from ploughing
or tending sheep in the field,
“Come here at once
and take your place at the table”?

⁸Would you not rather say to him,
“Prepare supper for me,
put on your apron and serve me
while I eat and drink;
later you may eat and drink”?

⁹Do you thank the slave
for doing what was commanded?

¹⁰So you also,
when you have done
all that you were ordered to do, say,
“We are worthless slaves;
we have done only what we ought to have done!” ’

Reading the Gospel This Week

Once more, we get an ‘only in Luke’ story –
Stuck in after the familiar ‘faith the size of a mustard seed’
Or moving miracles: Mat 17:20, or Mat 21:21b, Mk 11:22-23b

You expected to move mountains (1 Cor 13:2)
And you got a tree uprooting itself into water
A post-Fiona image for this week!

Jesus, apostles, Luke, and early readers
Shared assumptions about slavery and its roles and duties
Can you recognize, if not endorse them?

Imagine your own ‘just doing my job’ (or not doing it) story
Or your own ‘premature entitlement’ story
Attitudes of dutiful deference, not defiant freedom

Were your stories spiritualized, or concrete?
Were you familiar with boss role, or worker job?
Is God the slave-owner, are we serfs in bondage?

Try again: did you ever claim too much, too soon,
Resent the slow uncertain pace of payoffs,
In material progress or spiritual growth?

Go back to the editorial opening:
Apostles (‘the Twelve’ in Luke, not crowd, nor opponents)
Imperatively: ‘increase our faith’ (trust, not cognitive belief)

What do you want? _____
When do you want it? NOW!

Lamentations 1:1-6

Adele Berlin translation © 2002

Aleph

1 Alas, she sits alone,
the city once thronged with people,
she has become like a widow.
Great among nations,
mistress among provinces,
reduced to forced labor.

Bet

2 She weeps on through the night,
and her tears are on her cheek.
She has no consoler
from all her lovers.
All her friends have betrayed her,
have become enemies to her.

Gimel

3 Judah is exiled in affliction
and in hard labor.
She dwells among the nations,
she finds no rest.
All her pursuers overtake her
in straits.

Dalet

4 The roads of Zion mourn
Without festival pilgrims.
All her gates are desolate,
her priests are groaning,
her virgins are sorrow-stricken
and she – it is bitter for her.

He

5 Her foes are at the head,
her enemies are tranquil,
for the Lord has stricken her with sorrow
because of all her trespasses.
Her babes have fallen captive
before the foe.

Vav

6 And from Zion's Daughter is departed
All her glory
Her nobles have become like stags
That find no pasture,
And they go without strength
Before the pursuer.

Lamentations 3:19-26

Adele Berlin translation © 2002

Zayin

19 Remember my misery and trouble –
wormwood and bitterness.

20 I well remember (them) myself,
and I am downcast;

21 This do I tell myself,
therefore I have hope:

Chet

22 The Lord's acts of loyalty have not ended,
His compassion is not used up.

23 They are renewed every morning;
Vast is your faithfulness.

24 My portion is the Lord, I say to myself,
therefore I hope in him.

Tet

25 Good is the Lord to those who hope in him,
To the one who seeks him.

26 It is good to wait and be still
For the Lord's deliverance.

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

Lamentations 1:1-6

Robert Alter translation © 2019

Aleph

How she sits alone,
the city once great with people.
She has become like a widow.

Great among nations,
mistress among provinces,
reduced to forced labor.

Bet

She weeps on through the night,
and her tears are one her cheek.
She has no consoler
from all her lovers.

All her friends have betrayed her,
have become enemies to her.

Gimel

Judah is exiled in affliction
and in hard labor.

She dwells among the nations,
she finds no rest.

All her pursuers overtake her
in straits

Dalet

The roads of Zion mourn
without festival pilgrims.

All her gates are desolate,
her priests are groaning.

Her virgins are sorrow-stricken
and she – it is bitter for her.

He

Her foes are at the head,
her enemies are tranquil,
For the Lord has stricken her with sorrow
because of all her trespasses.
Her babes have fallen captive

	before the foe.	
<i>Vav</i>	And from Zion's Daughter is departed	6
	All her glory.	
	Her nobles have become like stags	
	that find no pasture,	
	And they go without strength	
	before the pursuer.	

Lamentations 3:19-26

Robert Alter translation © 2019

<i>Zayin</i>	Recall my affliction and my wandering –	19
	wormwood and poison.	
	My very life does recall	20
	and bends down upon me.	
	Thus I answer to my heart,	21
	therefore I yet hope:	
<i>Chet</i>	The Lord's kindness has not ended,	22
	for His mercies are not exhausted.	
	They are renewed every morning.	23
	great is your faithfulness.	
	"My portion is the Lord", I said.	24
	therefore I yet hope for Him.	
<i>Tet</i>	Good is the Lord for those who look to Him,	25
	for the person who seeks Him out.	
	Good that he hopes in silence	26
	for rescue from the Lord.	
	Good is it for a man that he bear	27
	a yoke in his youth.	