

# Lamentations 4:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Even the sea monsters draw out the breast, they give suck to their young ones: the daughter of my people is become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness.

## Analysis

Unnatural cruelty: "Even the sea monsters draw out the breast, they give suck to their young ones: the daughter of my people is become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness" (gam-taninim chaltsı shenuk gureichem bat-ami le-achzar ka-ye'enim ba-midbar). "Sea monsters" (taninim, תנינים) likely refers to jackals or other wild animals. Even these creatures nurse their young naturally. But Jerusalem's mothers (bat-ami, "daughter of my people") became "cruel" (achzar, אֲכֹזֶר) like "ostriches" (ye'enim, עֵנִים). Job 39:13-17 describes ostriches as neglecting eggs and young, 'hardened against her young ones, as though they were not hers.' Under extreme famine, mothers couldn't feed children—not from lack of love but from lack of food. This represents ultimate breakdown of natural affection under judgment's pressure. Romans 1:31 lists 'without natural affection' as sign of degraded society. When covenant protection is removed, even basic human instincts fail.

## Historical Context

The ostrich's reputation for neglecting young was ancient tradition, though modern ornithology shows ostriches actually care well for offspring. The biblical point isn't scientific accuracy but using familiar imagery to convey unnatural neglect. Under siege conditions, mothers faced impossible choices: watch children starve, or—horrifically—resort to cannibalism (Lamentations 4:10, fulfilling Deuteronomy 28:53-57). The comparison to nursing animals shames Israel—even

wild beasts maintain natural bonds, but God's people under judgment lose basic humanity. This demonstrates sin's degrading power. When God's image-bearers reject their Creator, they descend below animals who instinctively fulfill their nature. Isaiah 1:3 makes similar comparison: 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.' Animals recognize their provider; Israel forgot God.

## Related Passages

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**James 2:17** — Faith and works

**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

## Study Questions

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1. How does the comparison between nursing animals and cruel mothers illustrate the degrading effects of prolonged judgment and extreme suffering?
2. What does loss of 'natural affection' teach about sin's power to corrupt and destroy even the strongest human bonds?
3. How does Christ restore true humanity and natural affection by transforming us into His image (2 Corinthians 3:18, Ephesians 4:24)?

## Interlinear Text

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גַּם תִּפְנִין שׁ דַּעַת לְצַוְּאָרִים יְגַנְּבָנִים  
H1571 Even the sea monsters draw out the breast they give suck  
H8577 H2502 H7699 H3243

לְאַכְּרָבִים בַּת עֲתָה רְאַכְּרָבִים  
to their young ones the daughter of my people is become cruel  
H1482 H1323 H5971 H393 H3588

בְּמִדְבָּר: עַנְּמָן  
like the ostriches in the wilderness  
H3283 H4057

## Additional Cross-References

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**Ezekiel 5:10** (Parallel theme): Therefore the fathers shall eat the sons in the midst of thee, and the sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments in thee, and the whole remnant of thee will I scatter into all the winds.

**Lamentations 4:10** (Parallel theme): The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people.

**Lamentations 2:20** (Parallel theme): Behold, O LORD, and consider to whom thou hast done this. Shall the women eat their fruit, and children of a span long? shall the priest and the prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?

**Jeremiah 19:9** (Parallel theme): And I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they shall eat every one the flesh of his friend in the siege and straitness, wherewith their enemies, and they that seek their lives, shall straiten them.

**Leviticus 26:29** (Parallel theme): And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat.

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