

# 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

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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-tanimim chaltu shenuk gureichem bat-ami le-achzar ka-ye'enim ba-midbar). "Sea monsters" (tanimim, תַּנִּינִים) 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, אָכַזַר) like "ostriches" (ye'enim, יְעִנִּים). 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

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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 H1571	תַּנִּין H8577	וְלָצוּ H2502	שֶׁד H7699	הֵינּוּ יֹקוּ H3243
Even the sea monsters		draw out	the breast	they give suck
גּוֹרֵיהֶן   H1482	בִּת H1323	עַמִּי H5971	לֹאֲכֹזֶר H393	כִּי H3588
to their young ones	the daughter	of my people	is become cruel	
כַּעֲנֵי יוֹם H3283	בַּמִּדְבָּר: H4057			
like the ostriches	in the wilderness			

## 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.