

Lamentations Chapter 5

Verses 1-18

God's people have often called on Him to "remember" them in times of distress (Gen. 8:1; 19:29; Exodus 32:13).

In this prayerful chapter are four lessons for overcoming sin, depression and defeat: Remembering, repentance, recognition and renewal.

Lamentations 5:1 "Remember, O LORD, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach."

"Remember, O LORD":

Jeremiah prayed for mercy on his people.

He summed up the nation's wounds and woes (verses 1-10), recalled woes of specific groups (verses 11-14), showed why God judged (verses 15-18), and interceded for the removal of Israel (verses 19-22; compare Micah 7:18-20).

This is a cry from the people in captivity to God.

This prayer continues through this chapter.

God had shut His ears to their prayers in the past, but a great deal of time has passed and perhaps God will hear them now.

It begins by asking God to take a look at their situation.

Verses 2-3

For the theme of the widow, the orphan, the poor and the stranger (see the note on Jeremiah 7:6).

Lamentations 5:2 "Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens."

The land of Canaan in general, which was given to Abraham and his seed to be their inheritance; and their field, and vineyards in particular.

Which came to them by inheritance from their fathers, were now in the hands of the Chaldeans, strangers to God, and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel (as all Gentiles were; Eph. 2:12).

"Our houses to aliens":

Which they had built or purchased, or their fathers had left them, were now inhabited by those of another country.

The strangers, of course, are their Babylonian captors.

The houses that had not been burned, now belonged to their captors.

Lamentations 5:3 "We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers [are] as widows."

In every sense.

In a natural sense, their fathers having been cut off by the sword, famine, or pestilence.

In a civil sense, their king being taken from them; and in a religious sense, God having forsaken them for their sins.

"Our mothers are as widows":

Either really so, their husbands being dead; or were as if they had no husbands, they not being able to provide for them, or protect them.

They were orphaned of their physical fathers during the war, and the famine that followed.

Their worst plight is that they were abandoned by their Father, which is in heaven.

Verses 4-9

These verses depict a situation where the captives were at the mercy of low-level Babylonian officials placed in authority over them.

Food was scarce, and the people had to wander about, trying to find enough to stay alive.

A dangerous venture ("with [the peril of] our lives"), when others are desperate to get what they need.

Lamentations 5:4 "We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us."

They who in their own land, which was a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths, had wells of water of their own, and water freely and in abundance.

Now were obliged to pay for it, for drink, and other uses.

"Our wood is sold unto us":

Or, "comes to us at a price"; and a dear one.

In their own land they could have wood out of the forest, for the cutting down and bringing home; but now they were forced to give a large price for it.

In this land of captivity, they must pay for everything they get like water and wood.

When they lived in Judah, God had provided these natural things for them in abundance.

Lamentations 5:5 "Our necks [are] under persecution: we labor, [and] have no rest."

A yoke of hard servitude and bondage was put upon their necks, as Jarchi interprets it; which they were forced to submit unto.

Or, "upon our necks we are pursued"; or, "suffer persecution".

Which Aben Ezra explains thus, in connection with (Lam. 5:4); if we carry water or wood upon our necks, the enemy pursues us; that is, to take it away from us.

"We labor, and have no rest":

Night nor day, nor even on Sabbath days.

Obliged to work continually till they were weary; and, when they were, were not allowed time to rest themselves, like their forefathers in Egypt.

They were like slave laborers.

Their captors persecuted them.

There was no 8 hour work day.

They worked as long as there was light to see by.

Lamentations 5:6 "We have given the hand [to] the Egyptians, [and to] the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread."

"Egyptians ... Assyrians":

The Jews submitted to unholy alliances, thus expressing trust in men for protection and goods (compare Jer. 2:18, 36).

Prior to the invasion, Judah had made alliances with foreign nations such as Egypt and Assyria (Jer. 2:18; Ezek. 16:28; Hosea 12:1).

Their choice to trust in other nations instead of God's covenant promises set the stage of their punishment.

These were natural foes of the Jews, but they would do most anything to feed their starving bodies.

Lamentations 5:7 "Our fathers have sinned, [and are] not; and we have borne their iniquities."

This is a cynical proverb from (Jer. 31:29 and Ezek. 18:2).

This prayer is from the generation, who were babies when the captivity began.

They are pleading with God that they were paying for the sins of their fathers.

In the Old Testament, it was thought that the children should pay for the sins of their fathers.

Exodus 20:5 "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God [am] a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth [generation] of them that hate me;"

Verses 8-18: A list of horrors that had befallen Judah.

Lamentations 5:8 "Servants have ruled over us: [there is] none that doth deliver [us] out of their hand."

The Targum is, "the sons of Ham, who were given to be servants to the sons of Shem, they have ruled over us."

Referring to the prophecy of Noah (Gen. 9:26); or such as had been tributary to the Jews, as the Edomites.

So Aben Ezra; the Babylon, is meant; and not the nobles and principal inhabitants only.

But even their servants, had power and authority over the Jews and they were at their beck and command.

Which made their servitude the more disagreeable and intolerable.

"There is none that doth deliver us out of their hand":

Out of the hand of these servants.

They had no deliverer like Moses, to take them out of this captivity.

It is as if they are saying, send us a deliverer.

The great Deliverer of all mankind is Jesus.

Lamentations 5:9 "We gat our bread with [the peril of] our lives because of the sword of the wilderness."

That is, those of us left in the city after its capture by the Chaldeans.

"Because of the sword of the wilderness":

Because of the liability to attack by the robber Arabs of the wilderness, through which the Jews had to pass to get "bread" from Egypt (compare Lam. 5:6).

The Ishmaelites attacked them many times when they went to gather their food, perhaps this is speaking of their attacks.

Verses 10-19

Israel had suffered famine, rape, torture, disgrace and slavery, and now they had no king ("the crown has fallen"; Jer. 13:18).

Disparaged, they were at a loss to see how David's throne could endure according to the LORD's promise (2 Sam. 7:12, 16, 19).

Although devastation dims vision, even the worst of circumstances cannot eclipse this truth: God's "throne" is everlasting (Psalm 45:6).

Lamentations 5:10 "Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine."

Or "terrors and horrors of famine"; which are very dreadful and distressing: or, "the storms of famine" (see Psalm 11:6).

Or, "burning winds", such as are frequent in Africa and Asia; to which the famine is compared that was in Jerusalem, at the siege of it, both by the Chaldeans and Romans.

And as an oven, furnace, or chimney becomes black by the smoke of the fire burnt in it, or under it.

So the skins of the Jews became black through these burning winds and storms, or burnings of famine (see Lam. 4:8).

So Jarchi says the word has the signification of "burning"; for famine as it were burns up the bodies of men when most vehement.

The blackness here, could also be speaking of their bodies being burned up with fever from this terrible famine.

Lamentations 5:11 "They ravished the women in Zion, [and] the maids in the cities of Judah."

Or "humbled" them; a euphemism.

The women that were married to men in Zion, as the Targum; and if this wickedness was committed in the holy mountain of Zion, it was still more abominable and afflicting, and to be complained of.

And if by the servants before mentioned, as Aben Ezra interprets it, it is another aggravating circumstance of it.

For this was done not in Babylon when captives there; but at the taking of the city of Jerusalem, and by the common soldiers, as is too often practiced.

"And the maids in the cities of Judah":

In all parts of the country, where the Chaldean army ravaged, there they ravished the maids.

The Targum is, "the women that were married to men in Zion were humbled by strangers; (the Targum in the king of Spain's Bible is, by the Romans), and virgins in the cities of Judah by the Chaldeans."

Suggesting that this account has reference to both destructions of the city, and the phenomenon and consequences thereof.

Women fall prey many times to the unwanted advances of the conquerors.

As in any war, the women were raped.

The age of the woman did not seem to matter.

The young and the mature fell to the same fate.

Lamentations 5:12 "Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honored."

Meaning by the hand of the enemy.

Impalement after death was a common punishment with the Assyrians and Babylonians.

Thus, Sennacherib says that after capturing rebellious Ekron, he hung the bodies of the chief men on stakes all over the city.

"The faces of elders were not honored":

No reverence or respect were shown to elders in age or office, or on account of either; but were treated with rudeness and contempt.

The princes were killed, and then hung up for everyone to see, like a hunter might hang up a deer.

The young leaders on display like this would probably cause fear to rise up, and many would surrender because of it.

These heathen people had no regard for elders, not even their own.

Lamentations 5:13 "They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood."

Or, "The young men" have borne the mill, a menial and laborious task usually performed by slaves (compare Isa. 47:2).

"The children fell under the wood":

Or, lads have stumbled under burdens of wood.

By lads are meant youths up to the age of military service; another form of menial labor.

They used the young men, as you would a horse to pull the grist mill around.

It appears, that even the small children worked bringing in the wood.

These were all captives, and they had to do exactly as they were told to do.

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

Of the Sanhedrim, or court of judicature, as the Targum.

From the gate of the city, where they used to sit and try causes; but now there was nothing of this kind done.

"The young men from their music":

Vocal and instrumental; the latter is more particularly specified, though both may be intended.

Neither were any more heard; their harps were hung upon the willows on the banks of Euphrates, which ran through the city of Babylon (Psalm 137:1).

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

Joy was gone, as well as the external signs of it: Such as "keeping the Sabbath", as it may be rendered.

Alluding perhaps to the cordial joy expressed formerly on their Sabbaths and other festivals, now not observed.

At least, not with that joy, inward and outward, as they formerly were.

"Our dance is turned into mourning":

Which also was used at their solemn feasts, as well as at their common diversions (Judges 21:21).

But now no more of that; but instead, mourning at the calamities they were oppressed with; and at the remembrance of mercies and privileges, civil and religious, they were deprived of.

There was no time left for the pleasant things they had enjoyed before the siege.

The elders would sit by the gate and greet the passersby.

Now they had to work.

The young men loved the music and dancing, and making merriment.

There was no merriment now.

They were too sad, and too tired from heavy work to enjoy music and dancing.

Lamentations 5:16 "The crown is fallen [from] our head: woe unto us, that we have sinned!"

"The crown is fallen":

Israel lost its line of kings wearing the crown.

The Davidic monarchy was temporarily over and will not be resumed until Christ comes as King (Jer. 23:5-8; Ezek. 37:24-28; Rev. 19:1-21).

These people had been the chosen of God.

They had been crowned with all the good things God bestowed on His family.

They were God's peculiar people.

They ruined all of that, when they worshipped false gods.

God brought the siege against them in punishment, and their crown has fallen and broken.

Lamentations 5:17 "For this our heart is faint; for these [things] our eyes are dim."

And sinks under the load of its own heaviness.

"Our eyes are dim":

See Lam. 2:11.

Our spirits fail us, and we are almost blind with weeping.

This is a statement of total despair.

Jeremiah is even touched deeply by these things that have come upon his people.

Lamentations 5:18 "Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it."

Meaning either the city of Jerusalem in general, or the temple in particular, which both lay in ruins.

But the latter gave the truly godly the greatest concern; that the seat of divine Majesty should be in such a condition.

That the public exercises of religion should cease, and there be no more opportunities of waiting upon God, and worshipping Him as before.

Their civil interest, and the loss of that did not so much affect them as the interest of religion, and what that suffered.

“The foxes walk upon it”:

Foxes and other wild beasts, which flee from places inhabited for fear of mankind’s inhabiting, and are much in desolate places.

The mountain of Zion, where the temple once stood, and people met to worship God, was now a desolate, unfrequented place, so wild beasts ran up and down there.

The people are gone and wild animals roam on the mountain of Zion.

Verses 19-21

In the light of God's unchanging faithfulness and righteousness (Psalm 52:1; Mal. 3:6; James 1:17), and His inviolable standards of holiness, Jeremiah pleads with God to do that work that the hearts of His people will be "turned" back to Him in godly sorrow and full repentance (see the note on Jeremiah 3:21-25; compare Jer. 4:1; Zech. 1:3-4; James 4:8).

Lamentations 5:19 "Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation."

"Thy throne from generation to generation":

Here is the high point of this chapter.

Jeremiah was consoled by the fact that God always sits on His sovereign throne, ruling over the universe from heaven (Psalms 45:6; 93:2; 102:12; 103:19; Dan. 4:3, 34-35).

This statement by Jeremiah is recognizing for himself and for these people, that there is no other God.

Their God is God.

The LORD is His name.

He is Eternal God.

The Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.

Verses 20-22

After lamenting their apparent abandonment by God, His people pled to Him for restoration (Psalm 80:3), recognizing that God rightly brought judgment because of the nation's sin.

The last words barely seem to hold onto hope, but this is a reflection of the people's iniquity rather than a question of God's faithfulness to His covenant.

Lamentations 5:20 "Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, [and] forsake us so long time?"

Since thou art firm, constant, and unchangeable, and thy love and covenant the same.

God seems to forget His people when He afflicts them, or suffers them to be oppressed, and does not arise immediately for their help.

Which being deferred some time, looks like an eternity to them, or they fear it will ever be so.

At least this they say to express their eager desire after His gracious presence, and to show how much they prize it.

"And forsake us so long time?":

Or, "to length of days".

So long as the seventy years' captivity; which to be forsaken of God, or to seem to be forsaken of Him, was with them a long time.

The question is why, why, why?

But they know the reason why.

The family of Jacob was in Egypt 400 years.

This is a short time compared to that.

Verses 21-22

This plea was not made with anger.

The humble closing prayer sought God, who can never reject His people forever, to be faithful in restoring them (compare Jer. 31:35-37; 33:25-26).

In fact, their godly sorrow over sin was the beginning of that restoration, which would be completed by turning to God in faith and obedience.

Lamentations 5:21 "Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old."

"Turn thou us unto thee":

God must Himself initiate and enable any return to Him (Psalm 80:3, 7, 19; Jer. 24:7; 31:18; John 6:44-65).

"Renew our days":

The intercessions (of verses 19-22), will yet be fulfilled in the New Covenant restoration of Israel (compare Jer. chapters 30-33, and see notes there).

Now, we see an urgent plea for God to look favorably upon them again.

Repentance is turning away from the old life, and turning toward the new.

There is something about repentance that God helps in.

We have the desire to turn, but God must help us turn.

This is the statement here.

Lamentations 5:22 "But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us."

Literally, "Unless thou hast utterly rejected us," unless "thou art very wroth against us."

This is stated as a virtual impossibility.

God's anger can be but temporary (Psalm 30:5), and therefore the very supposition is an indirect expression of hope.

"Thou art very wroth against us":

Thou hast been, and still continue to be: or, "wilt thou be exceeding wroth against us?"

Or continue thy wrath to extremity, and for ever?

Thou wait not; it is not consistent with, thy mercy and grace, truth and faithfulness.

And so, it is an argument of faith in prayer, and not an expression of despondency.

Though the Jews, because they would not have the book end in what is sorrowful and distressing, repeat the foregoing verse. And the like method they take at the end of Ecclesiastes, and the prophecies of Isaiah and Malachi, as Jarchi observes.

God does not need to be reminded of the fact that He had rejected them.

That is what this is saying.

It is as if the person speaking is trying to remind God of His covenant relationship with Israel.

His anger was justified, but He will forgive and start them again.

Behind every dark cloud, the sun is shining.

Lamentations Chapter 5 Questions

1. Verse 1 is a cry from the people in _____.
2. The strangers are whom?

3. Why were they orphans?
4. What natural things were they having to pay for?
5. What were their working hours?
6. Why had they given their hand to the Assyrians and Egyptians?
7. Why were they not killed in the siege of Babylon?
8. For how many generations would the iniquities of the fathers continue?
9. Who is the great Deliverer of all mankind?
10. Why were they black?
11. What happens to the women in verse 11?
12. Explain what they did with the princes of the land?
13. They took the young men to _____.
14. What work did the children do?
15. What had turned into mourning for the young men?
16. Why did they not enjoy the pleasant things anymore?
17. What happened to their crowns?
18. Verse 17 is a statement of total _____.
19. Give some of the names that describe God's eternity?
20. What is the question of verse 20?
21. What is the answer?
22. Verse 21 is speaking of what?