

THE NATION'S PLEA

DEVOTIONAL READING: Lamentations 3:22-33

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Lamentations 5

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Lamentations 5

I. Confrontation

Lamentations 5:1-15

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

2 Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens.

3 We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows.

4 We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us.

5 Our necks are under persecution: we labour, and have no rest.

6 We have given the hand to the Egyptians, and to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread.

7 Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities.

8 Servants have ruled over us: there is none that doth deliver us out of their hand.

9 We gat our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the wilderness.

10 Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine.

11 They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of Judah.

12 Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honoured.

13 They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood.

14 The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their musick.

15 The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning.

1. The writer, Jeremiah, used Hebrew poetic repetition. Piling on synonyms was a way Hebrew poetry emphasized a point. The effect is to give a full account of the pain of the people, who speak as one here.

Asking God to *remember* is a plea for Him to act. *Consider* and *behold* both echo *remember*. Putting these three verbs together conveys a sense of urgency for God to see what is happening to His people and to act without delay.

What is come upon us suggests that the people saw themselves as recipients of tragedy.

2. The *inheritance* and *our houses* in the promised land was of great importance to Israel. It was a sign of God's faithful promise to Abraham and continuing faithfulness to Abraham's descendants. Laws governed inheritance to ensure that no one in Israel would lose the family's land permanently. How devastating it was for that inheritance to be lost *to strangers* and *aliens*. The land's falling into the hands of people who were outside of God's covenant jeopardized Judah's ever receiving it back.

3. *Orphans* and *widows* were protected

people under God's covenant. In a horrible reversal of fortunes, God's judgment had created widows and orphans in Judah.

4. Both the *water* and the *wood* in the promised land had been given to the Israelites for their use. Paying *money* to the invaders from Babylon emphasizes that the land was no longer controlled by Judah; this suggested that God had abandoned the covenant.

5. After the Lord had delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery, He had revealed His laws, laws that included the command to *rest* on the Sabbath. Being forced to break that command by those chosen to carry out God's judgment was seemingly more evidence of God's distance and abandonment.

6. *Bread* was a basic food staple. It was something that the people had been able to make for themselves when their fields were their own to sow and harvest. Reference to bread can also imply food in general. The need to appeal to Assyria and Egypt for aid could have resulted from the fields having been devastated by the invading army.

7. The Bible affirms that each person suffers for his or her own wrongdoing. However, biblical precedent exists for a generation to suffer for the *iniquities* of its *fathers*. The curses that God included in the covenant as potential discipline expressed that people who were not the original guilty parties would suffer. Part of the reason for this was the ripple-effect inheriting of sinful behaviors and habits, which required God's attention.

The Babylonian exile marked the end of God's patience. Jeremiah did not refrain from asking whether this punishment fit the crime (Lamentations 2:20-22). Indeed, God acknowledged that the Babylonians had overstepped their role in carrying out His decreed judgment; they would be punished for that (Isaiah 47; Habakkuk 2:2-20).

8. Judah lost its kings. The people taken

to Babylon were ruled by Babylonian *servants* there, while those left in Judah had to obey similar servants (2 Kings 24:22). Those who remained behind suffered the shame of being governed by foreigners within the borders of the promised land.

9. There may not have been much more to eat than *bread* in the land. *The sword* represents all the violence the people still feared and experienced. Its appearance in *the wilderness* probably refers to the special dangers of trying to harvest any food.

10. The reference to *an oven* may be a way of referring to a raging fever; the literal translation *our skin was black* calls to mind food that has been burned. The great hunger that the *famine* created has opened the door to all kinds of ailments.

11. *Women* and *maids* suffered sexual violation. God's laws established punishment for sexual violence. But to the invaders, this means nothing.

12a. The *princes*, representing the monarchy and advisers, perhaps had expected treatment in accordance with their positions. Being executed in a public was a grave indignity. The spectacle of their deaths was meant to remind the people of their powerlessness.

12b. The *elders* were due reverence based on their wisdom gained with age. It seems likely that the dishonor afforded them was also public execution.

13. Typically it was female slaves who were the ones to *grind* grain. But this task has fallen to *young men* who would be better suited to different tasks. In contrast, *the children* are given work much too difficult for them. The image is that of falling under their burden of sin—the weight of its punishment.

14. In gated cities like Jerusalem, *elders* congregated at a main *gate* to decide legal cases, to reach business agreements, etc. The absence of the elders from their usual place speaks to the complete upheaval

of the government. The lack of *music* further reveals the cultural upheaval that is evident throughout this book.

15. In Psalm 30:1-3, the psalmist rejoiced in God's deliverance from enemies and sickness. The opposite is seen here: the conquered people suffered from both, with *joy* turning to *mourning*. How utterly hopeless their current situation seemed!

II. Confession

Lamentations 5:16-22

16 The crown is fallen from our head; woe unto us, that we have sinned!

17 For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim.

18 Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it.

19 Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation.

20 Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?

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

22 But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wrath against us.

16a. This verse summarizes the societal and governmental upheaval that the people have experienced. Though *the crown* represented the monarchy, the monarchy itself represented Judah.

16b. These mourners had claimed that they suffered for previous generations' sins (Lamentations 5:7). Here they take responsibility for their own sin. The word *woe* expresses their grief.

17-18. Weakness of *hearts* and *eyes* resulted from the fate of *the mount of Zion*. This place had great significance, first as the stronghold of the Jebusites that David defeated. David's palace had been built there as had the temple.

The people mourned for the fate of the city, the monarchy, and the temple. *Foxes* in the heart of the city marks the profound desolation of Jerusalem.

19. The *Lord* has not been called out since verse 1. This absence emphasizes the feelings of distance that the people felt. The call on Him now is a moment of praise.

To speak of God's eternal *throne* emphasizes His role as King. It is He who has the power and authority to decide and impose punishment. Having existed *from generation to generation*, He knows how unfaithful they have been.

20. The Lord does not *forget* as people do. Jeremiah had offered words of encouragement previously (Lamentations 3:22-33). Those seem to be a drop in the bucket in light of the overwhelming pain that continued.

21a. The people did not trust themselves to *turn* to the *Lord* as they should. For this reason, they asked that God would give His grace to them by turning them himself.

God would honor this prayer by giving hearts of flesh in place of stone (Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26). The ultimate answer to the plea is found in the church, where we are "transformed by the renewing of [our] mind" (Romans 12:2).

21b. Though the *days as of old* were full of disobedience, they were days when God showered His people with blessings. The desire was for transformation by the repentance of the people.

22. The people turned once again to what they feared was true. Could God be so *very wrath* with them that He would *utterly* reject them forever?

The book ends here. God does not answer. Jeremiah offered no further words of encouragement. The people were not consoled. Reality emphasized the depth and breadth of God's anger.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

THE NATION'S PLEA

Into the Lesson

Write the title of a song that resonated with you during a time of hardship.

Should you keep your pain to yourself, or should you express it?

Into the Word

Read Lamentations 5.

Part 1: *Background Research*

Who was Jeremiah, the suggested author?

What was the name of the city once “full of people” mourned in Lamentations 1:1?

When was the time frame of Lamentations?

Part 2: *Digging into Lamentations 5*

Does “remember” in verse 1 imply that it’s possible for the Lord to “forget” (see verse 20)? Why, or why not?

What was the “inheritance” that was lost in verse 2, and why was it called that?

What historical event might be recalled in verse 5?

How does verse 7 relate to Jeremiah 31:29-30 and/or Ezekiel 18:1-4?

What do verses 8-18 reveal regarding the conditions of the covenant people at the time?

In what way does the chapter change at verse 19?

Into Life

Conduct a mock debate on the following proposition:

It’s usually best to keep one’s grief private.

The **Affirmative Team** will offer arguments in favor of the proposition.

The **Negative Team** will counter with the opposite.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Let sorrow draw you closer to God.