

April 25, 2021

“The Nation’s Plea”
Lesson 8 of Unit

Lamentations 5:1-22

Intro

The book of Lamentations deals with the events and the emotions of the people in the time following the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Many of those who were healthy were taken into captivity; those who were weak and poor were left in the land to deal on their own with foreign settlers. Those left are the subject of chapter 5, today’s study passage. They were starving, weak, and threatened by those more powerful.

An interesting aspect to the book is how Jeremiah wrote it. The first four chapters are all acrostics, meaning verses followed Hebrew alphabetic order. If in English, the first verse would begin with an A, the second verse with a B, and so on. Since Hebrew has 22 letters, there are 22 verses in chapters 1, 2, and 4. Chapter 3 has 66 verses, with the acrostic style used three times in a row. The fifth chapter doesn’t use the acrostic format, though it does have 22 verses. One suggestion for this is that the first four chapters show a sense of order that still exists or could exist, despite the troubles faced by the people. The lack of pattern in the final chapter might suggest that the lives of the people are in a state of variance, with some degree of order (22 verses) and some degree of the unknown (no acrostic pattern).

Read Lamentations 5:1-22

1. vs. 1: God is asked to “remember” His people

Remember here is a call to God to act, to do something for a people in need

The words “look” and “see” in this verse have the same meaning and purpose.

Remember, look, see together suggest urgency, a need to do something **now**

“What has happened to us”

This phrase suggests something happened to them, not that they were responsible

The people were in this place because of their disobedience to God; their fault

2. vs. 2-15: The results of their sins

Consider all the following consequences, and how you might feel if they all happened to you at the same time:

vs. 2: inheritance (land and home) given over to foreigners

vs. 3: children have become fatherless, mothers are widows

Both are protected groups under God’s covenant (Deut. 10:18)

Vs. 4: Must buy both drinking water and wood for burning

The land produced both; if not under their control, they must buy from controllers

Vs. 5: Pursued relentlessly, weary and without rest

The people are already conquered; this “pursuit” is like a hounding

They are forced to comply with the conquerors demands daily

They are likely not getting a Sabbath rest every week

Vs. 6: Appeal to Egypt and Assyria for bread (help/assistance)

Both Egypt and Assyria are enemies of Israel

- Egypt kept them in slavery; Assyria found against them frequently
 Both are appealed to for basics like bread against Babylonians
 Shows how desperate the nation is
- Vs. 7: bear the punishment for ancestors' sins
 Though this seems unfair, it's not without its reasons
 Sin in one generation frequently is taught/learned by the next generation
 God deals with disobedience
 The ancestors have died, and this group suffers for both those sins and their own
 Shows the degree to which sin is present in the people
 Shows the degree of God's wrath at His people's disobedience
- Vs. 8: Slaves rule over us; no one can free us
 Both captives in Babylon and those left in Jerusalem faced this problem
 They were so low in status that even slaves were ruling over them
 No one in charge was interested in freeing them from enslavement
- Vs. 9: We get bread at our live's risk
 There was little food in the land (vs. 6)
 Trying to find any food and harvest it had inherent dangers
 Some came from violent enemies
- Vs. 10: skin is hot / feverish
 Likely this refers to diseases from poor nutrition
 This verse follows one about trying to find bread
- Vs. 11: women violated
 The verses uses "women" and "virgins"
 Both mean adult females
 God's law established punishment for sexual violence (Deut. 22:25-29)
 Invaders not concerned with God's laws
- Vs. 12: Princes executed; elders disrespected
 Executing them publicly was treating them with indignity
 Also reminded people of their powerlessness if their leaders were executed
 Elders likely also executed publicly, since two are put in the same verse
- Vs. 13: Young men and boys doing inappropriate work
 The young men are grinding grain (millstones)
 This work was usually done by women / female slaves
 These young men could be doing something more suited to them
 The boys are carrying heavy loads of wood
 This work is too difficult for them ("stagger")
 One suggestion for these unusual tasks is punishment
 Their tasks are burdens suffered for the sins of the nation
- Vs. 14: Upheaval of usual actions
 The elders usually gather at the gate to talk, discuss, do business, etc
 They have quit congregating there
 The young men who produced music are not doing so anymore
 Perhaps because they are working (see vs. 13)
- Vs. 15: The overall conclusion to these previous actions
 The people have no joy; they mourn instead
 The situation described in vs. 2-14 feels hopeless to them

3. Confession: vs. 16-22

Of their sins

Vs. 16: Their society has totally been changed

There is no king (crown), and the king represents the nation

They acknowledge their sins—“we have sinned”

Their actions have led to these situations

Vs. 17-18: Mount Zion is desolate

This is where David’s palace and the temple were built

This site represents the heart of God’s place in their lives

If jackals are there, it shows no people are; it is deserted, empty

Of God’s reign over them

Vs. 19: This is the first time God has been referred to since vs. 1

Shows how distant the people feel from God in this chapter

He is referred to as having a throne, therefore He is a king

This acknowledges His power and authority to decide and carry out punishment

He is also acknowledged to “endure from generation to generation”

This shows He is eternal, everlasting

This admits that God knows the nation’s history of disobedience

Calling out to Him here also shows a desire to remain connected to Him

Of their hopes and their fears

Vs. 20: They fear God has forgotten them

This can be how it feels to someone who has walked away from following God

It can also feel like a long time in getting back to Him

This is primarily on us; we have to change our hearts/minds to get realigned with Him

This can take some time

Vs. 21: The people ask for restoration, for renewal through repentance

They ask God to restore them to Him, as though they are so sinful they can’t do it

The “days of old” likely means returning to the best relationship to Him

Vs. 22: The chapter ends on a negative of high concern

“unless you have utterly rejected us”

They fear this is the case, based of the ugly situation they are in now

This is a statement of their greatest fear

A modern question of this might be, “Could God be so angry with us that he would completely reject us forever?”

This is where the book of Lamentations ends

No answer to this question is given by God

The people are not comforted and their situations are not altered

This emphasizes the depth of God’s displeasure with His people

Application: We **know** that God is always trustworthy and faithful. But we can **feel** that He is so unhappy with us that He is no longer faithful to be as loving and merciful to us as we want/need Him to be at that moment. We may not sense God's presence and forgiveness at the time we confess our sins and repent. We may still have to endure consequences.

This book is really the language of telling God of our deep pains, our very real feelings and thoughts. And because it was written, it suggests that we can tell God what we're thinking and feeling: we're scared, we're unsure of our relationship to Him, we're concerned about His anger, and so much more. Paul says that "nothing can separate us from the love of God" (Rom. 8:39). Lamentations shows that to be true: God's love for His people isn't separated from them because of destruction, forced labor, exile, famine, or siege. This is a truth for us who are connected to God through the blood of Jesus Christ. Nothing can separate us from His love.

Prayer: Father God, help us to have soft hearts toward You, to turn to You daily and always. We ask for Your presence in our lives especially when circumstances seem the hardest and the most difficult, and that we remember nothing can separate us from Your love for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.