

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Lamentations Chapter 5

8/19/15

Bible Study Notes

A Prayer For Mercy

- 1 Remember, O LORD, what has happened to us; look, and see our disgrace.
- 2 Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens, our homes to foreigners.
- 3 We have become orphans and fatherless, our mothers like widows.
- 4 We must buy the water we drink; our wood can be had only at a price.
- 5 Those who pursue us are at our heels; we are weary and find no rest.
- 6 We submitted to Egypt and Assyria to get enough bread.
- 7 Our fathers sinned and are no more, and we bear their punishment.
- 8 Slaves rule over us, and there is none to free us from their hands.
- 9 We get our bread at the risk of our lives because of the sword in the desert.
- 10 Our skin is hot as an oven, feverish from hunger.
- 11 Women have been ravished in Zion, and virgins in the towns of Judah.
- 12 Princes have been hung up by their hands; elders are shown no respect.
- 13 Young men toil at the millstones; boys stagger under loads of wood.

5:1-1 This is the only poem in the book that is not an acrostic. Lamentations ends with a poem that climaxes in the exiled Judahites' desperate call for relief from their difficulties. The fact that the chapter begins and ends with prayer is itself a most hopeful sign, for when our troubles begin to bring us to our knees, then there is good reason to hope that comfort and deliverance will not be far off. Spurgeon remarks in this connection that 'Sinking times are praying times with the Lord's servants,' and goes on to say, 'Heaven's great harbour of refuge is All-prayer, Thousands of weather-beaten vessels have found a haven there, and the moment a storm comes on it is wise for us to make for it with all sail.' That is certainly the very haven which Jeremiah makes for here on behalf of the people.

After expressing the full extent of his or her grief, the true believer should turn to God in prayer. Here Jeremiah prayed for mercy for his people. At the end of his prayer, he wondered if God had "utterly rejected" his people in his great anger. But God would not stay angry with them forever—as it says in Micah 7:18, "You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy."

5:3 Those whose social position left them dependent on others for protection and provision (Lam 5:3). God had commanded Israel to care for orphans, fatherless, and widows, to apportion to them a share of the land's goodness (Deut 14:28-29). The Israelites had failed in this duty and so God was denying them, by exile, the good things of the land.

5:7 In Lamentation 5:7 we observe the phrase "Our fathers sinned . . . we bear their punishment." A similar description of solidarity is found in Exodus 20:5. The misunderstanding that children are punished for their fathers' sins is prevented by passages such as Deuteronomy 2:16; Jeremiah 31:29-30 and Ezekiel 18. Those who share in their father's judgment do so because they also share in his sins.

5:11-13 In Lamentations 5:11-13 we see an implication of women being raped (cf. 2 Sam 13:14, 32, the Hebrew word translated "ravished" implies rape (cf. Judges 20:5). Not dismissing the absolute horror of being raped, it should be noted that the loss of virginity outside marriage brought shame on a woman and her family and could have serious consequences (Deut 22:13-21).

Verses 14-22

14 The elders are gone from the city gate; the young men have stopped their music.

15 Joy is gone from our hearts; our dancing has turned to mourning.

16 The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned!

17 Because of this our hearts are faint, because of these things our eyes grow dim

18 for Mount Zion, which lies desolate, with jackals prowling over it.

19 You, O LORD, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation.

20 Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long?

21 Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may return; renew our days as of old

22 unless you have utterly rejected us and are angry with us beyond measure.

5:14 During peace and prosperity, the leaders and elders of the city would sit at the city gate and talk over politics, theology, and philosophy, and conduct business. As Jeremiah prayed, he saw fewer and fewer evidences of either the healthy interaction or the lighthearted dancing of their former lives under God's blessing. They had lost even the everyday events they had assumed would always be there. A lack of continual gratefulness to God often indicates that we are taking the goodness of life for granted.

5:22 A high calling flouted by low living results in deep suffering. Lamentations gives us a portrait of the bitter suffering the people of Jerusalem experienced when sin caught up with them and God turned his back on them. Every material goal they had lived for collapsed. But although God turned away from them because of their sin, he did not abandon them—that was their great hope. Despite their sinful past, God would restore them if they returned to him. Hope is found only in the Lord. Thus, our grief should turn us toward him, not away from him.