***Lamentations***

**Chapter 5**

**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. 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. 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**.

God will accept a sincere confession of guilt and be moved to mercy. To that end, the people who remained in the land after Jerusalem’s fall mourn to the Lord, for the temple lies desolate (v. 18). The plea for the return of “days as of old” asserts hope that God has not utterly rejected them (vv 21-22). Those who lament count on God to restore them to Himself so that His heavenly kingdom may manifest itself through them. (TLSB)

**5:1** REMEMBER O LORD – Though this chapter consists of exactly twenty-two verses, the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, yet the acrostic form is no longer observed. Perhaps any thing so technical was not thought proper when in agony and distress (under a sense of God’s displeasure on account of sin) they prostrated themselves before him to ask for mercy. Be this as it may, no attempt appears to have been made to throw these verses into the form of the preceding chapters. It is properly a solemn prayer of all the people, stating their past and present sufferings, and praying for God’s mercy. (ACC)

**5:2** *Our inheritance.* The land of Judah (see Jer 2:7 and note; 3:18). (CSB)

The invading Chaldeans had taken possession of the entire land. (Kretzmann)

**5:3** ORPHANS AND FATHERLESS – They were like those that have been deprived of their natural protectors. (Kretzmann)

LIKE WIDOWS – This statement brings out the fact that large numbers of men, the defenders of the city and country, had either fallen in battle or been led away into captivity. (Kretzmann)

**5:4** *We must buy the water … wood.* Contrast Dt 29:11; Jos 9:21, 23, 27. (CSB)

I suppose the meaning of this is, that every thing was taxed by the Chaldeans, and that they kept the management in their own hands, so that wood and water were both sold, the people not being permitted to help themselves. They were now so lowly reduced by servitude, that they were obliged to pay dearly for those things which formerly were common and of no price. A poor Hindoo in the country never buys fire-wood, but when he comes to the city he is obliged to purchase his fuel, and considers it as a matter of great hardship. (ACC)

*wood.* Firewood. (CSB)

They were obliged to buy the very necessaries of life from the conquerors or pay exorbitant taxes. (Kretzmann)

**5:5** PURSUE…WEARY – Their pursuers and tormentors being continually upon them, driving them headlong and no matter how tired they were, rest was denied them. (Kretzmann)

**5:6** *submitted.* See 1Ch 29:24; 2Ch 30:8; Jer 50:15; lit. “gave the hand” (as in 2Ki 10:15; Ezr 10:19; Eze 17:18). (CSB)

We have sought alliances both with the Egyptians and Assyrians, and made covenants with them in order to get the necessaries of life. Or, wherever we are now driven, we are obliged to submit to the people of the countries in order to the preservation of our lives. (ACC)

*Assyria.* Either (1) Assyria literally (see Jer 2:18), or (2) territory formerly occupied by Assyrians (see note on Ezr 6:22). (CSB)

**5:7** Fathers and sons alike are responsible for the calamity that has befallen Jerusalem (see v. 16; Jer 16:11–12; 31:29–30; Eze 18:2–4; cf. Isa 65:7). (CSB)

The generation of Jews at the time of the destruction of the city being obliged to bear not only its own guilt, but that of the previous generations as well, placing them under a double misfortune. God punished the iniquities of the fathers upon the children who followed their fathers on their ways of wickedness. (Kretzmann)

**5:8** *Slaves.* An ironic reference to the Babylonians, who now rule over Jerusalem (formerly “queen among the provinces,” 1:1); see Pr 30:21–22. (CSB)

Many of the Chaldean overseers and petty officers were actually slaves. (Kretzmann)

NONE TO FREE – The former kingdom of priests have become a servant of servants themselves . (Kretzmann)

**5:9** GET OUR BREAD – They could not go into the wilderness to feed their cattle, or to get the necessaries of life, without being harassed and plundered by marauding parties, and by these were often exposed to the peril of their lives. This was predicted by Moses, Deuteronomy 28:31 (ACC)

*sword in the desert.* Marauding bandits. (CSB)

The country was sparsely populated after the deportation of the exiles and was open to the ravages of nomad hordes, whose raids were a constant menace. (Kretzmann)

**5:10** SKIN IS HOT – Because of the searching winds that burnt up every green thing, destroying vegetation, and in consequence producing a famine. (ACC)

**5:11** WOMEN WERE RAVISHED – Crimes of all kinds flourished among the ruins of Jerusalem and other cities of Judah. (TLSB)

The evil mentioned here was predicted by Moses, Deuteronomy 28:30, 32, and by Jeremiah, Jeremiah 6:12. (ACC)

**5:12** *hung.* An added indignity following execution (see notes on Dt 21:22–23). (CSB)

It is very probable that this was a species of punishment. They were suspended from hooks in the wall by their hands till they died through torture and exhaustion. The body of Saul was fastened to the wall of Bethshan, probably in the same way; but his head had already been taken off. They were hung in this way that they might be devoured by the fowls of the air. It was a custom with the Persians after they had slain, strangled, or beheaded their enemies, to hang their bodies upon poles, or impale them. (ACC)

The disgrace of their slaughter was intensified by their suspension from the accursed tree. (Kretzmann)

**5:13** *toil at the millstones.* Humiliating work (see note on Jdg 9:53; see also Isa 47:2). (CSB)

This was the work of female slaves. (CC)

They dragged the heavy mill-stones with which the grinding was done. The Jewish young men and boys were required to do the lowest and most menial services. (Kretzmann)

**5:14** *city gate.* The municipal court (see Jos 20:4), but also a gathering place for conversation and entertainment (cf. 1:4). (CSB)

There is now no more justice administered to the people; they are under military law, or disposed of in every sense according to the caprice of their masters. (ACC)

YOUNG MEN STOPPED MUSIC – T**he young men and their music** for the joyful meetings were also held in the open space at the gates of the cities. (Kretzmann)

**5:15** See Jer 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; contrast Ps 30:11; Jer 31:13. (CSB)

**5:16** *crown.* Symbolizes the glory and honor embodied in the city of Jerusalem (see 1:1; 2:15; cf. Isa 28:1, 3). (CSB)

At feasts, marriages, etc., they used to crown themselves with garlands of flowers; all festivity of this kind was now at an end. Or it may refer to their having lost all sovereignty, being made slaves. (ACC)

WE HAVE SINNED – The realization of sinfulness and the acknowledgment of guilt, as in a confession of this kind, is the first step toward true repentance. (Kretzmann)

**5:17** *hearts are faint.* See note on 1:22. (CSB)

His was with the bitterness of the soul's pain. (Kretzmann)

*eyes grow dim.* See 2:11; see also note on Ps 6:7. (CSB)

The sorrow of the heart was finding its expression in tears. (Kretzmann)

**5:18** *jackals.* The Hebrew for this word, different from that used in 4:3, can also mean “foxes” (see note on Jdg 15:4). (CSB)

Jackals make their dens in its ruins. In the midst of all this sorrow, however, the hearts of the believers turn to the true source of comfort and consolation. (Kretzmann)

Foxes are very numerous in Palestine, see on Judges 15:4 (note). It was usual among the Hebrews to consider all desolated land to be the resort of wild beasts; which is, in fact, the case every where when the inhabitants are removed from a country. (ACC)

**5:19** Paralleled in Ps 102:12 (see note there). (CSB)

LORD REIGN FOREVER – Sitting as the one true Monarch ruling the entire world the Lord will always be in charge of what happens on earth. (Kretzmann)

**5:20** FORGET…FORSAKE – That Jehovah should be so inclined is beyond the conception of the inspired poet; he firmly believes that the Lord will yet remember His mercy. (Kretzmann)

**5:21** *Restore … return.* See Jer 31:18; see also note on Jer 31:18–19. (CSB)

Sinners cannot be restored to a favorable relationship with God by their “own reason of strength.” Only the Spirit’s enabling initiative and power can bring genuine renewal. (TLSB)

**5:22** See Jer 14:19. (CSB)

*unless.* Or “but.” A similarly somber ending characterizes not only other laments (e.g., Ps 88) but also other OT books (e.g., Isaiah and Malachi). (CSB)

It is hardly plausible that God's anger is so excessively great as to cause Him to shut out His repentant children forever. Thus the song of supplication, the prayer for mercy, ends with a statement of assurance, which hopes for a speedy fulfillment of its desire. Herein it is a model prayer for all times; for in the very midst of misery and affliction the believers are bound still to trust in the compassion of their heavenly Father. (Kretzmann)