

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)

5:2 *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)

A change in the social order is in view. (TLSB)

wood. Firewood. (CSB)

They were obliged to buy the very necessities 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)

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

Extending the hand of friendship and alliance to Egypt and Assyria dated back to the days of Israel’s fathers. God’s prophets repeatedly warned against rejecting God and seeking protection among men (Is 30:2–3; 31:1; Jer 2:18, 36; Eze 16:28; 23:5, 12; Hos 5:13; 7:11). (TLSB)

5:7 *we bear their iniquities.* While the fathers did not live to see the prophets’ threats of divine judgment come true, their generation was as guilty as the present generation. (TLSB)

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)

Servants of the Babylonians who “lorded it over the people” (Ne 5:15). (TLSB)

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

Bedouin raiders threatened Israel as she eked out an existence in the outer limits of the land. (TLSB)

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)

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

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

Perhaps executed men were put on display as a warning to others. (TLSB)

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)

young men their music. A glimpse of former youthful activity in Jerusalem. Cf Mt 11:17. (TLSB)

The 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)

we have sinned! The suppliants did not accuse God of punishing them for sins they did not commit, as some of their contemporaries did by quoting a blasphemous proverb. (TLSB)

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)

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)

The impassioned pleading ends with uncertainty and doubt rather than in the exclamation point of firm trust and joyous anticipation. However, Israel boldly appeals to God to be true to Himself. If He is “merciful and gracious ... abounding in steadfast love,” as He has declared Himself to be (Ex 34:6), He cannot refuse to pardon His penitent children. (TLSB)

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)

Ch 5 Jeremiah points out that the sins of all the people lie at the very root of their current suffering (cf v 16). Because of their unfaithfulness, they struggle just to get enough to eat; they find themselves subjected to abuse and humiliation. Lamenting in anguish, God's people appeal to the Lord for forgiveness and restoration. In our own lives, we easily forget God and our calling as His people at times when it seems that everything is going our way. God stands ready to forgive penitent sinners by restoring His blessing to us through the blood of Jesus Christ. • Father, keep us faithful in good times and secure in our faith during bad times, for we are Yours at all times. Amen. (TLSB)