

## LESSON 8

April 25, 2021

### Unit II: Prophets of Restoration

#### Overcoming Losses and Brokenness

**Devotional Reading: Lamentations 3:22-33**

**Background Scripture: Lamentations 5**

**Print Passage: Lamentations 5:1-22**

**Key Verse**—Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. (Lamentations 5:21, KJV)

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Restore us to yourself, Lord, that we may return; renew our days as of old. (Lamentations 5:21, NIV)

#### Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Understand why the writer of Lamentations pleaded with God for the restoration of Israel.
- Sense the writer's feelings over the oppression of his nation.
- Pray for and engage in the restoration of broken relationships with God.

#### KEY TERMS

**Forsake (verse 20)**—Hebrew: **azab (aw-zab')**: to leave, abandon.

**Remember (verse 1)**—Hebrew: **zakar (zaw-kar')**: take thought; recall.

**Restore (verse 21)**—Hebrew: **shub (shoob)**: to turn back; return; "turn" (KJV).

#### INTRODUCTION

Among the many prophets God commissioned to call Israel back to Him, Jeremiah is one of the most well-known. His repeated admonitions to the leadership and the people of Judah fell on deaf ears. In the end, he saw the city and the Temple destroyed, many of its citizens killed or exiled, and Judah's last king captured, blinded, and exiled in Babylon. Jeremiah proved the integrity of his prophetic ministry in that his prophecies were fulfilled during his lifetime. As anyone would, the prophet felt a deep sense of loss and brokenness after being branded a traitor, beaten, imprisoned, and even ignored by his own people. Jeremiah's personal response to this devastating life experience is poignantly captured in Lamentations 3. Despite Jeremiah's faithful obedience in carrying out God's assignment, Jeremiah had to share in the bitter afflictions of his disobedient countrymen. Jeremiah expressed his personal grief as well as extreme sorrow and compassion for his suffering, rebellious people. Though personally distressed and grieving for his people, Jeremiah knew that he could always turn to God during times of loss and brokenness. Somewhere between Jeremiah's description of his personal distress (see 3:1-20), his counsel to return to the Lord, and his imprecatory prayer for divine vengeance (see 3:39-66), Jeremiah realized that remembering and reflecting on God's unfailing love, compassion, and great faithfulness is key to overcoming and surviving seasons of tremendous loss and despair (see 3:21-38).

## THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT

The book of Lamentations is a tearful tribute to a fallen, broken city that once stood proudly against the landscape of Judah. The book's author, Jeremiah, penned the book as an eyewitness account of the events that occurred during or soon after the fall and destruction of Jerusalem (586 BC). The Hebrew title of the book is derived from a Hebrew expression (*ekah*) that means "how" and expresses "dismay." It is the only Old Testament book that contains nothing but laments. Another fitting title for the content and mood of the book would be "Elegies," from the Hebrew word *qinot*, meaning "a serious reflection or lament for the deceased." Each of the five chapters is a lament or dirge expressing the bitter heartache and suffering the prophet experienced over the destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah composed the book using the literary device known as acrostic, a poetic composition in which the first letter of each line spells out a word, a message, or the alphabet. He begins each section with aleph, the first Hebrew letter, and uses the whole Hebrew alphabet four times in chapters 1–4. Lamentations 5 does not follow the acrostic style because it is more of a prayer than a lament. It is comprised of a confession of sin and the acknowledgment of God's abiding sovereignty.

## ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

### Pleading for God's Mercy

(Lamentations 5:1-10)

#### KJV

*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.

#### NIV

*REMEMBER*, LORD, what has happened to us; look, and see our disgrace.  
2 Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our homes to foreigners.  
3 We have become fatherless, our mothers are 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 ancestors sinned and are no more, and we bear their punishment.  
8 Slaves rule over us, and there is no one 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.

Jeremiah concludes his personal response to the devastation of Jerusalem and the suffering of his people with a prayer for restoration. He expressed his hope in the great faithfulness of God to

restore His people (see Lamentations 3:23-24) then pleaded with God to execute it. Jeremiah began his prayer by calling God to remember what the people had suffered and to observe their present disgrace (verse 1). Jeremiah prayed for God's mercy for the people because of the horrible condition of suffering brought on them by the Babylonian invasion. The once proud land of Judah had been given by God to its foreign conqueror, Babylon, and was annexed among the territories of the surrounding nations (verse 2). The citizens of Judah had lost their property rights and were as defenseless as orphans (verse 3). Their new taskmasters were so severe that they were reduced to having to pay for the bare necessities of life. Wherever they went, they found no rest from their enemies (verses 4-5). Though repeatedly warned, the people of Judah and their ancestors had disobeyed God by entering into treaties with Egypt and Assyria for the sake of national security (verses 6-8). Their forefathers had deliberately submitted themselves to godless nations rather than to their God. The suffering the nation experienced was the direct result of their own avoidable sin. After the invasion, conditions in Judah were so severe that people risked their lives just to survive and struggled desperately just to find food (verses 9-10). The suffering and horror they were forced to endure were the result of their deliberate disobedience and refusal to abandon their idolatrous ways. The refusal to repent of sin invites the inevitable consequences of God's judgment.

### **What Do You Think?**

How do you feel about the possibility of suffering because of the sins of others?

### **The Wages of Sin**

(Lamentations 5:11-18)

#### **KJV**

- 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.
- 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.

#### **NIV**

- 11 Women have been violated 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.

Proverbs 14:12 reminds us that there is a way that appears to be right, but its end is the way of death. The terrible retribution brought upon the nation of Judah was self-imposed. The people chose the way that seemed right to them rather than God's way and reaped death instead of life.

Everyone in the nation paid a high price for the privilege of sinning against God. No one in Judah was spared of the consequences and horrors of God's judgment. Jeremiah graphically describes the horrors experienced by people throughout the land. The women who escaped death were mercilessly raped by their sadistic male conquerors (verse 11). Princes and elders were hung up by their hands and tortured to death as the leaders of the rebellion against Babylon (verse 12). Young men were enslaved and worked like domestic animals. The community was robbed of the wisdom and justice of the elders who once gave counsel at the city gate (verses 13-14). What had formerly been a city of music, joy, glory, and majesty became a place of gloom and misery because of unrepentant sin (verses 15-16). The survivors grew weak from hunger, their hearts heavy, and their eyes dimmed by tears because of the desolation of Jerusalem (verses 17-18). Yet, they had only themselves to blame. But even when we reap the bitter fruit of our own sin, we can trust God to remain faithful to His promises concerning us.

### **What Do You Think?**

Many believers find themselves drifting into sin and becoming complacent and nonchalant. Explain why consistent obedience to God is so necessary.

### **Pleading for Divine Restoration**

(Lamentations 5:19-22)

#### **KJV**

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 wroth against us.

#### **NIV**

19 You, 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, 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.

Jeremiah described the current condition of Judah in the preceding verses and concluded with a prayer for restoration. God has always faithfully honored His promise never to reject His people forever. Jeremiah prayed for restoration on the basis of that truth concerning God's character (verse 19). Knowing God's ability to restore the nation, Jeremiah boldly asked God why he had forsaken them for so long (verse 20). The prophet prayed that God would fulfill His covenant promise to the nation. The plea for restoration was more spiritual than physical. Jeremiah prayed that God would restore the people spiritually, then grant the physical restoration of their homeland (verse 21). Jeremiah realized that the loss of God's blessing was more tragic than any material loss. The basis of Jeremiah's hope for restoration was God's faithfulness to His covenant promises (verse 22). Despite their sin, Judah had not been altogether abandoned by God. They still had a future hope of restoration and recovery from loss and destruction. Jeremiah knew that if the nation would confess their sin, repent, and call on God, then He would be their defense and deliverer, and would ultimately restore them as a nation. God sometimes uses adversity to break a pattern of rebellion and draw us closer to Him. Some of the survivors of the invasion recommitted themselves to

pursuing a closer relationship with God. In the wake of disasters in life, our challenge is to reflect on God's past acts of faithfulness and seek spiritual understanding and restoration for the future.

### **What Do You Think?**

When have you known adversity to lead you (or someone else) to a deeper relationship with God?

### **A CLOSING THOUGHT**

How can you overcome loss and brokenness? Go to God! Even when God finds it necessary to chastise or correct us, His love remains constant. If He did not love us, then He would allow us to continue in our sin unchecked. Lamentations concludes with this implied message: God is the only source of spiritual and physical restoration from adverse circumstances. Our hope of comfort and deliverance lies in His unfailing faithfulness and His promises to sustain those who repent and turn from their sin.

### **YOUR LIFE**

Judah suffered loss and brokenness because of deliberate disobedience. Realistically, every living soul will experience some degree of trouble and adversity—sometimes through no fault of our own, and at other times because of our own sin. Our eternal hope rests in God's unfailing love and faithfulness to us. This week, give God intentional praise for His grace, mercy, and faithfulness to His promises.

### **YOUR WORLD!**

The world is full of people who suffer the bitter consequences of sin and misfortune. This lesson provides a pathway of understanding that believers can find hope and comfort despite the anguish of their current condition. A strong relationship with God equips believers for facing the challenges of life. The world needs to hear the message of God's hope and see it manifested in the lives of all who claim Jesus as Lord.

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Dear God, thank You for providing a way for us to overcome difficult, devastating seasons of life that result from personal sin, general misfortune, or the sins of others. Help us remember Your faithfulness throughout history, and give us hope of a great future in Your presence. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### **CONCLUSION**

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Which is the greater authority, civil or divine? Is there ever a time to compromise the two? These questions will be answered in our study next week. Read the Print Passage in preparation for this study.

## **HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS (April 26–May 2, 2021) Micaiah: Speaking Truth to Power**

MONDAY, April 26: "Elisha Prophesies Truth to King Jehoshaphat" (2 Kings 3:9-17)

TUESDAY, April 27: “Kings Propose Battle Against Aram” (1 Kings 22:1-6)

WEDNESDAY, April 28: “Micaiah Resists Pressure to Prophesy Falsely” (1 Kings 22:7-14)

THURSDAY, April 29: “A Lying Spirit Brings Disaster” (2 Chronicles 18:18-22)

FRIDAY, April 30: “King Ahab Suffers Fatal Injury” (1 Kings 22:29-40)