

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).

PREPARING THE LESSON

- Refer to the *Townsend Press SS Commentary Teacher's Edition* for an additional lesson plan—with word studies, insights on teaching adults, learner matrices, etc.
- Review last week's student assignments ("Your Life" and Your World!").
- Thoroughly review your student book for your adult or young adult class.
- Please note that you have the option of using your subscription bundle supplements, i.e., Lesson Scenario, Student Activity Sheet, SSL-AAG.

WHY THIS LESSON MATTERS

People seek restoration when their possessions are lost and relationships are broken. How does one cope with significant losses in life? In a season of overwhelming loss and despair, the writer of Lamentations trusted that God would reestablish His relationship with Israel.

THE LESSON IN FOCUS

It is difficult to endure the separation and loss of intimate relationships and fellowship with others. Such losses can trigger a roller coaster of emotions: brokenness, despair, abandonment, depression, and anger. There are recorded instances of married couples' following each other in death when one of them has predeceased the other. Even for the children of God, deep emotional reactions to loss and brokenness are natural and to be expected. Our Savior does not condemn us when we respond in one or more of these ways because He understands human pain, for He himself experienced the ups and downs of the human experience during His time on earth. How can we be victorious in overcoming a deep sense of loss and brokenness without "falling apart"? Realistically, the key is found in our relationship with God. The more intimate our relationship with Him, the more easily we will tap into the resources God has provided to strengthen, bring inner peace, and sustain us. The closer our fellowship with Him, the more eagerly we will be able to recall His tender mercies and His faithfulness to us. As Jeremiah lamented over the devastation of Jerusalem and the deaths and exile of its residents, he received renewed hope for the future by recalling God's covenant loving-kindness and His enduring faithfulness to Judah despite her sin.

THE LESSON IN CONTEXT

The book of Lamentations is a sorrowful sequel to the book of Jeremiah. Its literary form is a series of five funeral laments that express Jeremiah's grief over the conquest and capture of Jerusalem which resulted from Judah's sin. Jeremiah's overwhelming sense of loss and brokenness drained all joy from the realization that his prophecies concerning Judah had come to fruition. The book's title is derived from its first word *ekah* (translated "alas" or "how"), a characteristic cry of exclamation or lament. Jewish tradition attributes authorship to Jeremiah, who would have written shortly after the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 586 BC. Jeremiah witnessed the devastation and destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, which left the city in jumbled heaps of smoldering rubble. Structurally, the book of Lamentations is composed of five chapters with each being in the form of a funeral poem or song. Funeral songs were usually written and recited for the dead, celebrating their good qualities and acknowledging the loss felt by those who mourned them. Jeremiah followed this pattern to lament the death in Jerusalem and the tragic aftermath of the conquest. Four of the five chapters of Lamentations are written in an acrostic style, a poetic composition in which the first word of each sentence forms a word or follows the regular sequence of the Hebrew alphabet. Scholars have suggested that Jeremiah's purpose for using this form was to aid the memorization of the words of the songs. Chapter 5 does not employ this technique and is more of a prayer than a funeral poem. The climax of Lamentations's message is found in chapter 3, where Jeremiah appears to overcome the feelings of loss and brokenness by remembering the great faithfulness of God to His covenant promises to Israel.

OPENING INQUIRY

(Choose from the items below.)

1. What was the focus of Jeremiah's prayer in verse 1?
2. How does Jeremiah describe their relationship as God's people in verses 2-3?
3. What were the consequences of sin experienced by all levels of society in Judah?

4. What was Jeremiah and the people's ultimate desire in verse 21, and why was this significant?

INSIGHTS

No one can avoid the inevitable experience of loss and brokenness in life. Such experiences are not always the result of personal sin but are woven into the fabric of our human existence in a fallen world. "Good" people, those who walk faithfully with Lord, are not exempt, but they do have a powerful advantage—the opportunity to develop and maintain an intimate relationship with God. As the relationship with God grows deeper and the believer becomes more spiritually mature, the focus in life becomes more spiritual than temporal. When this occurs, it becomes easier to accept losses and brokenness in view of the greater benefits associated with being God's child. How can one overcome loss and brokenness? It is through a lifelong, obedient relationship with the God of all comfort whose faithfulness to His promises endures forever.

EXPLORATION

This lesson provides a teaching platform to encourage your students to focus on their relationship with God. There are no seminars or self-help techniques more effective in helping to overcome loss and brokenness than a deep and abiding relationship with God. Discuss the change in the tone of Jeremiah's prayer in verse 19 when he consoled himself with the fact that God will always reign on His throne. Because God reigns, those in a relationship with Him have a never-ending source of comfort and inner peace. Be mindful of any student(s) who may be experiencing troubles or grief and encourage them to follow Jeremiah's example of recalling the power, presence, and provision of our faithful God.

ADDITIONAL EXPOSITORY INSIGHTS FOR THE TEACHER

Commentary on 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.

Lamentations 5 is a prayerful response to the suffering caused by the devastation of Jerusalem. It begins by drawing attention to the tragedy as the basis for seeking God's compassion. In the aftermath of disaster, the prophet calls God to regard the desperate state of His people and their disgrace (verse 1). Jeremiah petitioned God to move with compassion on the people's great sorrow. The once proud land of Judah was now the possession of foreigners and had also fallen victim to annexation by the nations around them (verse 2). Descriptively, Jeremiah lists the deplorable conditions of the suffering caused by Babylon. Those remaining had lost both property and their rights (verse 3). Their new taskmasters had no compassion on them and treated them like orphans and widows, the most defenseless people in their culture. The bare necessities came with a monetary cost and they were constantly reminded of their complete subjugation (verses 4-5). Conviction of sin causes introspective reflection. The survivors recalled the sin of trusting men rather than God that was committed by their fathers (verse 6). They had intentionally pledged allegiance to Egypt and Assyria for the sake of national security. This sin attributed to the nation's downfall and their survivors reaped the punishment for it (verse 7). The bitter fruit of cruel taskmasters was their reward (verse 8). Desperate situations produce desperate measures. To survive these harsh conditions, the people had to risk their lives just to buy bread. Prowling bands of desert nomads who preyed upon them or whose territory they had to go through to get food added to their suffering (verse 9). So desperate were these circumstances that the people had become physically ill because of the lack of food (verse 10). Jeremiah's message is clear: the wages of sin are high. Israel, the entire nation, repeatedly chose to rebel against God. They chose to worship the created rather than the Creator. God's will never share His glory with anything or anyone else. Judah realized too late the necessity of honoring God and was forced to suffer the consequences of her own rejection of God. This is a somber message for humanity, both the saved and the unsaved. The only way to escape divine judgment is to totally obey God. Judah ignored God's commandments and His prophets. God has given us the complete revelation of His Word; our task is to trust and obey.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Question:**

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

- **Young Adult Question:**

Jeremiah went to God in intercessory prayer on behalf of suffering people whom he could not help. What situations have prompted you to intercede for other people?

Commentary on 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.

Sin and its consequences have a cancerous effect. They spread and contaminate beyond their point of origin. Jeremiah describes the devastating consequences of Judah's sin. The women who survived were the first group mentioned who suffered the horrors of the Babylonian occupation. They were brutally raped and abused by the Babylonian soldiers. Totally defenseless, they were the unfortunate victims of their immoral and hateful conquerors (verse 11). God had often rebuked Judah's leadership for leading the people astray and supporting rebellion against Babylon. Now, they too suffered the consequences of their sin. The elders were cruelly tortured to death (verse 12). Most likely this was death by crucifixion, impaling men on stakes. The young men of Judah were enslaved and forced to do the work usually performed by animals (verse 13). The physical suffering among the people was accompanied by the loss of intangible blessings and privileges—wisdom, justice, and joy were gone. God's deserved judgment at the hands of the Babylonians left God's people with little to rejoice about (verses 14-15). Gloom like a black shroud hung over the city (verses 16-18). Sadness replaced joy, desolation replaced prosperity, dishonor replaced glory, hunger replaced fullness, and tears replaced joyous laughter—all because of their sin. All of this gloom and doom was avoidable. All God had required was for His people to honor and obey His commandments. Instead, they had refused, choosing harsh judgment rather than promised blessings. After years of halfhearted devotion, the nation was teetering on the balance between obedience and disobedience. Even though the people are only inclined to hear words of blessings, today's church must be firm in proclaiming the whole truth of the Gospel: the wages of sin is indeed death, but the gift of God's grace is eternal life for all who will accept it (see Romans 6:23).

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Question:**

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

- **Young Adult Question:**

In the wake of devastating circumstances, it is often hard to speak words of hope. How has looking to God strengthened you to have hope for the future?

Commentary on 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.

God is patient and longsuffering. His Word tells us that if we genuinely confess our sins, then He is faithful and just to forgive them and will cleanse us from unrighteousness (see 1 John 1:9). So great is His loving-kindness toward those who fear Him that when He forgives, He removes transgression as far as east is from west (see Psalm 103:11a-12). Jeremiah closed his prayer with a focus on God's divine character. First, he acknowledged God's eternal and sovereign rule (verse 19). This was the source of consolation for him and for believers in every generation. God will reign forever and what He allows to happen will always be under His control. Just as God orchestrated Judah's calamity, He was equally capable of bringing about her restoration in His own timing. Jeremiah's knowledge and recognition of God's ability to bring about restoration prompted the prophet to ask whether God had abandoned His people (verse 20). The question was actually a request for God to remember His covenant promise. When we pray, we can call to remembrance God's promises—for God always honors His Word. Jeremiah specifically asked God for the blessings of spiritual restoration and physical restoration to their homeland (verse 21). With confidence in God's faithfulness, the prophet asked God to remember His covenant promises and to fulfill them (verse 22). When we pray, our requests for the spiritual should always exceed requests for temporal or material blessings. The power to overcome loss and brokenness is achieved spiritually. Joy and inner peace are available to those who seek spiritual union with God (see Isaiah 26:3).

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Question:**

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

- **Young Adult Question:**

The people's relationship with God was broken. Discuss how sin affects our spiritual life and how to restore a broken relationship with God.

LIFE APPLICATION

- **Refer to Adult Book (**
See student lesson's "Your Life" section.)
—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.
(See student lesson's "Your World!" section.)
—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.
- **Refer to Young Adult Book**
(See student lesson's "Your Life" section.)
—Having joy in your life brings optimism and a sense of hope. At times when you feel you are losing your joy, remember how God reveals Himself as the Lord who sits on His sovereign throne, reigning forever.
(See student lesson's "Your World!" section.)
—So many situations in life can bring us to the point of despair. In those times, remember to take God at His Word, for He has promised to never leave or forsake you. This promise of God's constant presence extends to His people in every generation.

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

The lesson topic for Sunday, May 2, 2021, is "Speak Truth Boldly." The Devotional Reading is 1 John 3:23–4:3a; Deuteronomy 18:19–22, the Background Scripture is 1 Kings 22:1–40, and the Printed Text is 1 Kings 22:15–23, 26–28.

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear God, we acknowledge Your unlimited power and thank You for remaining faithful to Your promises concerning us. We trust You to help us overcome any loss and brokenness we may face. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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 Prophecy 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)

SATURDAY, May 1: “Jehoshaphat Promotes Peace with Israel” (1 Kings 22:41-46)

SUNDAY, May 2: “Prophet Micaiah Speaks the Truth” (1 Kings 22:15-23, 26-28)