

### Discipline, Confession, and Restoration

#### Lamentations 4-5

**Lamentations 4:1-2** - *“How the gold has become dim! How changed the fine gold! The stones of the sanctuary are scattered at the head of every street. <sup>2</sup> The precious sons of Zion, valuable as fine gold - how they are regarded as clay pots, the work of the hands of the potter!”*

#### Background Notes for Lamentations 4

The book of Lamentations has been called “The Funeral of a City.” In a series of five laments or funeral dirges, Jeremiah mourned the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army. The resulting devastation and desolation of the city, and the death and captivity of the people, make up the content of the five Hebrew poems that comprise the book of Lamentations.

In Lamentations 4:1-2, the conquered city was likened to tarnished gold. The people of Jerusalem were no longer like precious gold and gemstones, but rather like common clay jars - easily broken and thrown out as worthless.

#### Doctrinal Point for Lamentations 4

**There is restoration after divine discipline.**

John’s baptism was a baptism of *repentance* (Matthew 3:11). Our Lord was sinless - He didn’t need to repent. The Bible makes it very clear that the Lord Jesus was not contaminated by sin in any way. 2 Corinthians 5:21: *“He knew no sin.”* And 1 Peter 2:22: *“He committed no sin.”* And 1 John 3:5: *“In Him there is no sin.”*

God allows His people to reap what they have sown. This is a divine principle of God’s moral government in this world. An individual or nation reaps what it has sown (Galatians 6:7). Verses 3-12 described some of the horrible conditions in Jerusalem as a result of divine discipline.

**Lamentations 4:3-12** – *“Even the jackals present their breasts to nurse their young; but the daughter of my people is cruel, like ostriches in the wilderness. <sup>4</sup> The tongue of the infant clings to the roof of its mouth for thirst. The young children ask for bread, but no one breaks it for them. <sup>5</sup> Those who ate delicacies are desolate in the streets. Those who were brought up in scarlet embrace ash heaps. <sup>6</sup> The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, with no hand to help her! <sup>7</sup> Her Nazirites were brighter than snow and whiter than milk. They were more ruddy in body than rubies, like sapphire in their*

appearance. <sup>8</sup> Now their appearance is blacker than soot. They go unrecognized in the streets; their skin clings to their bones; it has become as dry as wood. <sup>9</sup> Those slain by the sword are better off than those who die of hunger; for these pine away, stricken for lack of the fruits of the field. <sup>10</sup> The hands of the compassionate women have cooked their own children! They became food for them in the destruction of the daughter of my people.

<sup>11</sup> The Lord has fulfilled His fury, He has poured out His fierce anger. He kindled a fire in Zion, and it has devoured its foundations. <sup>12</sup> The kings of the earth and all inhabitants of the world would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem.”

In Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, God’s Law predicted all this sad fallout if the people would not obey and follow the Lord - even the horrible act of cannibalism (v10). The sin of Judah was greater than the sin of Sodom (v6) because the Jewish people had the written Law of God, whereas the Gentiles of Sodom did not.

A number of reasons were given as to why God in His anger disciplined His people in verses 13-20. The prophets, priests and Judah’s leaders who had perverted justice and shed innocent blood would now wander as unclean lepers, scattered among the nations.

God had to discipline His people because they had looked to the foreign nations instead of the Lord for help and protection - but those same foreign powers became enemies that hunted them down (v17-19): *“Still our eyes failed us, watching vainly for our help. In our watching we watched for a nation that could not save us. <sup>18</sup> They tracked our steps so that we could not walk in our streets. Our end was near; our days were over, for our end had come. <sup>19</sup> Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the heavens. They pursued us on the mountains and lay in wait for us in the wilderness.”*

Even the people’s hope in King Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, had to be judged because he was a wicked king who did not follow the Lord. Zedekiah tried to escape and was captured by the Babylonians. Verse 20: *“The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was caught in their pits, of whom we said, “Under his shadow we shall live among the nations.”*

But the good news came in verses 21 and 22: *“Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the land of Uz! The cup shall also pass over to you and you shall become drunk and make yourself naked. <sup>22</sup> The punishment of your iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion. He will no longer send you into captivity. He will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom; He will uncover your sins!”*

The Edomites, who were related to the Jewish people, wrongly rejoiced when Jerusalem fell and was destroyed, and therefore they would be judged. Read the book of Obadiah.

Meanwhile, the discipline of God’s people would be completed. They would be restored and return from captivity. ***There is restoration after divine discipline!*** This is still true today. God’s discipline does not last forever. Hebrews 12:11 says that God’s discipline yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. There is restoration after divine discipline.

**Lamentations 5** was Jeremiah's prayer of confession on behalf of the nation.

**Lamentations 5: 1-18** – *“Remember, O Lord, what has come upon us. Look, and behold our reproach! <sup>2</sup> Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens, and our houses to foreigners. <sup>3</sup> We have become orphans and waifs, and our mothers are like widows. <sup>4</sup> We pay for the water we drink, and our wood comes at a price. <sup>5</sup> They pursue at our heels. We labor and have no rest. <sup>6</sup> We have given our hand to the Egyptians and the Assyrians to be satisfied with bread. <sup>7</sup> Our fathers sinned and are no more, but we bear their iniquities. Servants rule over us. There is none to deliver us from their hand. <sup>9</sup> We get our bread at the risk of our lives, because of the sword in the wilderness. <sup>10</sup> Our skin is hot as an oven, because of the fever of famine.*

*<sup>11</sup> They ravished the women in Zion, the maidens in the cities of Judah. <sup>12</sup> Princes were hung up by their hands, and elders were not respected. <sup>13</sup> Young men ground at the millstones. Boys staggered under loads of wood. <sup>14</sup> The elders have ceased gathering at the gate, and the young men from their music. <sup>15</sup> The joy of our heart has ceased; our dance has turned into mourning.*

*<sup>16</sup> The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned! <sup>17</sup> Because of this our heart is faint; because of these things our eyes grow dim; <sup>18</sup> because of Mount Zion which is desolate, with foxes walking about on it.*

## **Background Notes for Lamentations 5**

Lamentations 5, although it was written as a Hebrew poem like chapters 1-4, it is different from the first four chapters in two significant ways. First, it was not an acrostic poem using the Hebrew alphabet of twenty-two letters. Although it has twenty-two verses (like a Hebrew alphabet of twenty-two letters), it did not follow the Hebrew alphabet. We don't know the reason for this. Second, Lamentations 5 was a prayer rather than a lament. It was a confession of sin that was prayed by Jeremiah on behalf of the nation. It was a recognition of God's righteous sovereignty in His dealings with them as His people. At the end of the chapter there is a petition for restoration.

## **Doctrinal Point for Lamentations 5**

**There is restoration after contrite confession.**

In chapter 1, fallen Jerusalem was pictured as a mourning widow. In chapter 2, she was pictured as a weeping daughter. In chapter 3, Jerusalem was depicted as a man suffering the affliction of discipline. In chapter 4, the city was seen as tarnished gold. In chapter 5, suffering Jerusalem was considered a suffering orphan (v1-3).

In verses 4-18, there was a further description of the terrible conditions in the conquered city, including poverty and starvation (v4-10); rape and execution (v11-12); disgrace and despondency (v13-18).

The purpose of this prayer was not only to bring these devastating conditions before the Lord, but also to acknowledge that it was the sins of the nation that had brought judgment upon God's people. The point of verse 7 was not to blame the former generations, but to acknowledge that the nation had continued on with the sins of the fathers.

**Lamentations 5:19-22** – *“You, O Lord, remain forever; Your throne from generation to generation. <sup>20</sup> Why do You forget us forever, and forsake us for so long a time? <sup>21</sup> Turn us back to You, O Lord, and we will be restored. Renew our days as of old, <sup>22</sup> unless You have utterly rejected us, and are very angry with us!”*

Verses 19-22 sounded a note of hope. At the first reading, these verses may not seem like a message of hope, but they were indeed a message of hope for Jeremiah and the small remnant of godly Jews. After acknowledging the total sovereignty of God and His righteous dealings with the nation (v19-20), a confident request for restoration was made: *“Turn us back to You, O Lord, and we will be restored. Renew our days as of old”* (v21).

I say it was a confident request because Jeremiah and the godly remnant knew that the hypothetical conditions of verse 22 were not true. It was not true that God had utterly rejected His people and would be angry with them forever. They knew that because of the covenant promises that God had made with His people – promises that He had confirmed more than once – they knew that God would not utterly reject His people. Read Deuteronomy 30, for example.

There is restoration after contrite confession - for Israel and for individual Christians. This truth is certainly taught in the New Testament for God's people today. 1 John 1:9 says, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* There is restoration after contrite confession.

## Practical Application

### Take heed lest you fall!

That's exactly what we read in 1 Corinthians 10:12, *“Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”* This exhortation was given to the proud Corinthian believers. They were in danger of spiritual and moral decline if they did not remember the lessons of Israel's history.

Now look again at Lamentations 4:12 - *“The kings of the earth and all inhabitants of the world would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem.”* Everyone thought that Jerusalem could never be taken down, but because of Israel's sins, God allowed Jerusalem, the Holy City, to fall.

What a spiritual lesson for us as believers! If we, in our pride, think that we are invulnerable, and they we're free from any possibility of spiritual or moral failure, we need to hear this warning.

***“Take heed lest you fall!”***