



# New Every Mourning

The Lamentations of Jeremiah  
Chapter Five

## "Don't Forget to Remember"

The take-away is the main point of something, like a lesson or presentation, to learn and remember.

Tonight's take-away is in verse twenty-one where we see that God loves to **restore**.

You can *always* be restored by God; and He loves to do it.

In the times when you are struggling, suffering, maybe even sinning, God is there working to, and waiting to, restore you.

If you're like me, you can't help but think of others who are far from God, so backslidden you have to wonder if they are truly saved. This lesson certainly has application to them, too; it gives us hope to know God's heart is for them, not against them.

Lamentations is just that - a series of laments about the judgment God brought upon His sinning people. After literally hundreds of years warning them and striving with them, God sent upon them His discipline in the form of the army of Babylon. The city was breached; the Temple burned; the people killed or taken captive.

This final chapter is not a lament like the first four but, rather, a prayer. It's a prayer for God to restore, to renew.

We should note that it opens with an honest review of the current condition of the Jews as well as the reasons for their current condition.

Maybe it's telling us that, in order to be restored, a person must make an honest confession of their condition and the reasons for it.

Let's read through it, pausing to make a few clarifying remarks.

Lamentations 5:1 Remember, O LORD, what has come upon us;  
Look, and behold our reproach!

Lamentations 5:2 Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens,  
And our houses to foreigners.

Lamentations 5:3 We have become orphans and waifs, Our  
mothers are like widows.

Lamentations 5:4 We pay for the water we drink, And our wood  
comes at a price.

Lamentations 5:5 They pursue at our heels; We labor and have  
no rest.

Lamentations 5:6 We have given our hand to the Egyptians And  
the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread.

We can't add much to the description; their condition is very graphically described. Truth is, we don't really want to picture the horror of it. It's good to take it in, though, because it is a warning of what can occur when a nation or a person turns away from God.

We might note the irony in verse five where it says, "we labor and have no rest." One of the areas of disobedience for which God disciplined them was their failure to trust Him by keeping the Sabbath Year. According to the Law of Moses, every seventh year they were to let the land rest; plant no crops. No crops meant no harvest, so, yeah, it required trust in God.

They refused to keep the Sabbath Year for 490 years. When God sent them into exile in Babylon it was for a specified period of 70 years. They had refused to keep 70 Sabbath Years during those 490 years, so God required those 70 years from them.

*Had they rested rather than worked they would not be in a situation of laboring and having no rest!*

It's an example of God giving you what you think you want rather than accepting what He knows is best for you.

Lamentations 5:7 Our fathers sinned and are no more, But we bear their iniquities.

This does not mean they were unfairly held responsible for the sins of their "fathers." No, we are always responsible for our own sins.

Remember that Israel was God's chosen nation. He dealt with them as a nation. Their "fathers" made certain wrong choices at a national level. They allowed idol worship; they oppressed the poor; they refused to help the distressed; those kinds of things.

We talk like this today. How many times have you heard a politician appeal to what we are leaving for our children to deal with, for example, with the national debt? It's not their fault but it affects them.

The succeeding generations of Judah continued on the same political path as their fathers. They adopted the ways of their fathers, and that, too, is why it could be said of them, "we bear their iniquities." They were just like them; by choice.

Lamentations 5:8 Servants rule over us; There is none to deliver us from their hand.

Lamentations 5:9 We get our bread at the risk of our lives, Because of the sword in the wilderness.

Lamentations 5:10 Our skin is hot as an oven, Because of the fever of famine.

Lamentations 5:11 They ravished the women in Zion, The maidens in the cities of Judah.

Lamentations 5:12 Princes were hung up by their hands, And elders were not respected.

Lamentations 5:13 Young men ground at the millstones; Boys staggered under loads of wood.

Lamentations 5:14 The elders have ceased gathering at the gate, And the young men from their music.

Lamentations 5:15 The joy of our heart has ceased; Our dance has turned into mourning.

It was bad. Really bad. For everyone. Their treatment during and after the fall of Jerusalem shows us the exceeding wickedness of sin.

- It shows us its exceeding wickedness in the perpetrators who could do such things; who could carry-out such evil.

- It shows us its exceeding wickedness in the victims. They chose to go on sinning against God's clear warnings. Sin may be pleasurable for a season, but the end is horrific.

Why such evil? Because Adam and Eve abused their free will to disobey rather than obey God.

Tertullian wrote, "Although the abuse of free will was foreseen by God, it could have been prevented by God only at the price of depriving human existence of its most noble attribute, namely, free will."

Lamentations 5:16 The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned!

"The crown has fallen" can mean one of two things (and probably means both):

1. It can mean that their last king, Zedekiah, was vanquished leaving them without their own authority, to be ruled by foreign kings.
2. It can mean that their role as God's primary nation on earth had been abdicated by them. As they looked away from God and down, as it were, to earthly things the crown fell.

Then they say, simply but powerfully, "for we have sinned!"

That's it, isn't it? That's the honesty that is missing from my life when I rebel or from the lives of the backsliders I know. So many times we try to blame our sin on others, or on circumstances. We blame it on genetics, saying, "I was born this way!"

Even more wretched are times we say that what we're doing isn't sin - not for us, anyway. We can even get to the point where we call good evil, and evil good.

God is ready to restore (as we will see in a moment). But He can't if we don't think we need restoration.

Lamentations 5:17 Because of this our heart is faint; Because of these things our eyes grow dim;

Lamentations 5:18 Because of Mount Zion which is desolate, With foxes walking about on it.

Sick in heart; their eyes "dim" because they are filled with tears; they nevertheless, *because they've confessed their sin*, can 'look' beyond themselves to God. They are saddened that "Mount Zion" is "desolate, with foxes walking about on it."

In other words, their sin had defiled God's holy mountain. It wasn't just about them anymore. It was about their relationship with God.

A person needing to be restored must recognize their sin and understand that they have sinned against God - offending Him, grieving Him, abandoning Him. It is the absolute ground zero for restoration.

The final four verses put the entire book into perspective. Jeremiah and the nation can only pray using these words because God works to restore them.

Lamentations 5:19 You, O LORD, remain forever; Your throne from generation to generation.

We like to say "God is on the throne." Or that God is "sovereign." The Jews recognized He was - not in spite of their condition but because of it. He was behind it leading them to repentance so He could restore them.

If God is so sovereign, sitting on His throne, how do we account for some of the things He permits to happen?

God's methods in exercising His sovereignty bear a striking resemblance to the ways good human parenting functions.

First, God sometimes permits our freedom to play itself out in consequences, even if we become a cause of our own suffering and others' suffering. Freedom could have no meaning if it did not risk going astray. To posit a freedom that cannot possibly fail is to run away from the human freedom God gives. God graciously allows human freedom the room both to stand and to fall. The situation of the sixth centuries Jews attests to God giving them their freedom but bringing consequences.

Second, God sometimes hinders, at times directly resisting, our ill-motivated actions. He puts obstacles in the way of our hurting ourselves, like the parent who builds a fence so the child will not go into the street. The child still may find a way to get into the street, but not without confronting the serious effort of the parent at placing an obstacle in harm's way. An example of this is Satan's complaint that God had put a hedge around Job.

Third, God might overrule us when we wander completely out of line. The sons of Jacob sold their brother Joseph into slavery. Then, as governor of Egypt, he became the means of the redemption of the whole family. Joseph mirrored God's own

providence when he said to his pleading brothers: "You meant to do me harm; but God meant to bring good out of it..."

Fourth, God steers our way toward new options, opening some doors, closing others. An example would be the apostle Paul being prevented from going to certain areas until he received the vision to go to Macedonia.

What will always remain a mystery to us is why God doesn't overrule in some cases; why He doesn't hinder in others. We need to trust there are things He knows about the hearts He is dealing with and about the effects of everyone's choices that we cannot hope to fathom.

Lamentations 5:20 Why do You forget us forever, And forsake us for so long a time?

Their discipline was so intense that it felt as if God had forgotten them. It felt as if He had forsaken them "so long a time." In truth, it was they who had forgotten God for many centuries.

God had revealed to them He would never forget them; and the discipline had a very definite end - after seventy years.

They were feeling what God had been feeling.

Lamentations 5:21 Turn us back to You, O LORD, and we will be restored; Renew our days as of old,

Lamentations 5:22 Unless You have utterly rejected us, And are very angry with us!

Be honest. You've felt utterly rejected by God. You've wondered if He wasn't very angry with you. Of course He isn't.

If He is disciplining, it is out of love.

Having come to the point of honest confession of sin, the people could ask The Lord to act to "turn us back to You, O Lord."

Wait. Do I turn? Or does God turn me?

We get too caught up in the semantics. Think it through. God had been working all along to turn them back! The famines; the pestilences; the prophets; all were God's efforts to turn them back.

Finally the destruction of the city and their captivity was God's final effort to turn them back... And it worked!

**Their declaration, "turn us back to You, O Lord," is a recognition of the Lord's faithfulness toward them - working relentlessly to do just that!**

Once "restored," God "renew[s]." There is that joy of His salvation; that first-love feeling.

I know it was brutal - the whole Babylonian invasion and captivity. But it was nevertheless the work of a Father loving His children enough to discipline them.

And it worked! The nation was preserved; they returned to their land; Jesus was born to be Savior of the world.