

Suffering

A CRY FOR RESTORATION AMID SUFFERING Focal Verses • LAMENTATIONS 5:1-22

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: **EXAMINE** why the writer of Lamentations pleaded with God for the restoration of Israel; **IDENTIFY** the writer's feelings of sadness, anger, and despair over the oppression of his nation; and **PRAY** for the restoration of broken relationships with God.

In Focus

Karen and Tim stood in shock with their neighbors over the fire eating up their apartment complex. As they stared in disbelief, Karen broke down and began to wail, "I can't believe what has happened. We lost everything, and so many people have been displaced because of someone's negligence."

The fire had spread quickly, taking one whole building and threatening another. The first responders were still putting out the last flames and checking on those who had breathed in too much smoke. Tim wanted to do something to help comfort his neighbors, but he didn't want to leave Karen alone. She was heartbroken over the loss of their home. "It's not just the possessions, Tim. It's our history, our life together, your mother's photo albums, my paintings. And now it's all in ashes," she exclaimed. "How can we rebuild?"

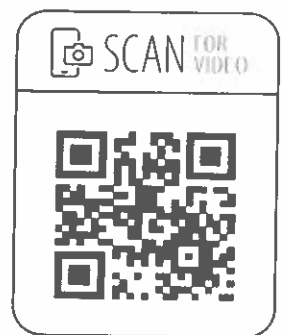
Tim suggested they pray, but Karen was suffering and feeling angry. Overcome with emotion, Karen said, "God, where are You in this? What did we do to deserve this?"

Tim held his wife and consoled her. "We need to believe God, Karen. We must trust His love and promise never to leave us. God promises He will sustain us through this crisis." Tim heard Karen take several slow, calming breaths. "Let's start with figuring out where to stay for the night," Tim added. Karen nodded, "Let's call the pastor and his wife. They'll know someone with a guest room."

How has God's Word given you hope amid suffering or when you were in a crisis?

Keep in Mind

"Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old"
(Lamentations 5:21, KJV).



Focal Verses

KJV **Lamentations 5:1** 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.

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.

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.

The People, Places, and Times

The Exile. Israel and Judah were told that God would lead them away into exile if they became unfaithful to the covenant He made with them through Moses (Deuteronomy 28:36–37, 64; 29:28). When they did break that covenant, Israel and Judah underwent periods of exile and were removed from the Promised Land. Consequently, the Jews were scattered throughout the land, where they became known as the Diaspora, which is the Greek word for “scattering.” The Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC. Judah was also defeated three times by the Babylonians. In 605, King Nebuchadnezzar took the royal court and the ablest men of Judah into Babylon. He returned

in 597 BC. During the final fall of Jerusalem to Babylonia in 586 BC, the city was burned, and the remaining people of Judah were deported, from which only a remnant returned 70 years later. The phrase “the Exile” is most often associated with the 70-year Babylonian captivity of Judah. The lasting effects of the Exile were profound. Aside from the stress of being removed from their homes and loved ones, while in captivity they had the status of slaves, were unfamiliar with the language, and were sometimes required to worship idols (Daniel 3:4–7).

Background

While some scholars question the authorship of Lamentations, it is traditionally attributed

to the prophet Jeremiah as an appendix to his book of prophesy. Jeremiah was known as the “weeping prophet” who spent over forty years calling out Israel’s displeasing ways and pleading with them to repent and avert the promised doom for disobedience. After years of predicted warnings of destruction to their homeland, the worst had come to pass. Jerusalem and Judah had been destroyed, and the Israelites were overtaken by enemies on every side until they were dispossessed from their land and taken into captivity. The major theme of Lamentations 1–4 expresses personal and community cries to God for their affliction. However, right in the middle of those cries, Jeremiah digs deep and pivots to place his hope in the God of his salvation (Jeremiah 3:21–26). Jeremiah provides a voice to their overwhelming grief: repentance and hope in God’s love and mercy because of His covenant. The book of Lamentations continues to serve as a significant part of Jewish life. The entire book is read publicly as a part of an annual solemn observance to remember the Temple’s destruction in 587 BC (Jeremiah 52:12–13).

How are Negro spirituals, hymns, or music from the Civil Rights Movement connecting points between past and current struggles?

At-A-Glance

1. A Plea For Consideration (Lamentations 5:1–6)
2. A Plea For Sins (vv. 7–16)
3. A Plea For Mercy (vv. 17–22)

In Depth

1. A Plea for Consideration (Lamentations 5:1–6)

Jeremiah, as an eyewitness to the calamity, paints the scenes of the devastation through

these laments. The people of Israel were enduring great horror and punishment. Such disgrace included loss of their inheritance. Those God commanded them to protect and provide for (widows and orphans) were unprotected as a result of their sins rooted in idolatry and apostasy. The prophet’s petition was for the Lord God to intently look upon the reproach and suffering of His covenant people. In essence, all the curses for disobedience God proclaimed through Moses were realized (Deuteronomy 28:15–68). God’s commands are sure, and yet He provided Israel with opportunity after opportunity through the voice of His prophets to repent, turn from their wicked ways, and return to Him. Israel suffered consequences for no longer depending on God as the source of their life, provision, safety, and identity.

How can we look at troubling times through the lens of God’s Word and realize what went wrong?

2. A Plea For Sins (vv. 7–16)

In his distress, Jeremiah calls out that his generation’s suffering was a direct result of the sins from past generations. When God formed Israel as a nation, He warned them that iniquity would follow them through generations (Exodus 20:4–5, 34:6–7). But note that God is not temperamental and would later refute the Israelites’ idea that the suffering experienced in the current generation was a result of their ancestors (Jeremiah 31:29–30, Ezekiel 18:1–5).

The prophet’s lament in these stanzas shares how the basis of their community life had been uprooted and was in peril. The elders were not esteemed or in their rightful place to execute justice in their land. The women were sexually assaulted. There was no one to protect them because the young men were burdened from survival. On behalf of the community, Jeremiah woefully cries out that there is no joy in living, and the glory of Israel is gone as past and present sins are taking their toll.

How can we accept responsibility before God and others for our sins and turn around to do what pleases Him?

3. A Plea For Mercy (vv. 17–22)

Jeremiah expresses how he and his people are heartsick over what they have experienced, and are at the end of themselves because the home in which they placed so much of their identity as a people is destroyed. He ends this last stanza of the lament by transitioning his hope to God. He reminds himself of God’s power and authority in that His throne remains forever. God’s heavenly throne continues even after God’s earthly throne in Jerusalem is gone. As any human would amid the depth and length of this suffering, Jeremiah questions why God continues to allow their suffering. Although he feels forsaken by God, he still unshakably believes that God is eternal and almighty. He pleads in true penitence for God to show mercy by restoring and renewing His people and their land. Jeremiah strikes a balance between owning the nation’s sins, remembering God’s love and mercy, and—with human limitations—still questioning if God will reject his pleas.

In what ways has God made His love and mercy known to us?

Search the Scriptures

1. How does Jeremiah open his prayer for God’s attention to their suffering (Lamentations 5:1–6)?
2. Where does Jeremiah shift his lament to reflect on God’s power (v. 19)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Does Jeremiah’s reflection of his people’s suffering capture the pain felt by all of the Jews? Is he effective?
2. How does remembering God’s sovereignty shift the pleas in this lament to hope in His mercy?

Liberating Lesson

As a community, we have our part for action and inaction as it relates to the status of socioeconomic conditions where we live. We are empowered to make our communities safer and more economically sound by working cooperatively, and as in the past, the Church must lead the way. As a people, we have survived the atrocities of slavery, segregation, and systemic injustice with God as our source and strength. As a resilient people, we have to continue to pass down the heritage of how to strategically fight and pray—working across the generations—to realize the true transformation and restoration God promises when we look to Him.

Application for Activation

Life gets discouraging, and lamenting on the ills of our world is a common natural response. But after acknowledging the pain, we must turn that complaint to action. There are so many ways for us to get involved individually and collectively to make a social impact. Get to know legislators at every level of government and keep them accountable to their campaign platforms. Develop faith-based programs that share the Gospel or join existing programs that serve the common good. As we engage in social media platforms, focus on solutions and help shift the conversation from the negative to how to make life better.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

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Say It Correctly

Diaspora. dee-AS-pore-ah.
Edomite. EE-dum-ite.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 127

2 Chronicles 28–31
Psalm 51:13–19

DAY 128

2 Chronicles 32–34
Psalm 52:1–4

DAY 129

2 Chronicles 35–36
Psalm 52:5–9

DAY 130

Ezra 1–6
Psalm 53

DAY 131

Ezra 7–10
Psalm 54

DAY 132

Nehemiah 1–6
Psalm 55:1–8

DAY 133

Nehemiah 7–11
Psalm 55:9–14