

The Lamentations of Jeremiah

Lesson 5 Lamentations 5:1-22

Second Chronicles 35:25 says:

"Then Jeremiah chanted a lament for Josiah. And all the male and female singers speak about Josiah in their lamentations to this day. And they made them an ordinance in Israel; behold, they are also written in the Lamentations."

Of the five songs in the book, only this fifth lament has the internal information to be Jeremiah's lamentation for the death of Josiah, yet nothing in the chapter really refers to the king's death. It mentions the fall of the crown, which could refer to Josiah, but it also mentions the desolation of Zion. It could indicate the extended time of mourning for the king's death, which would explain why the elders were not at the gates of the city conducting business, but it could also mean the lockdown of the city because of the threat of Nebuchadnezzar; however, neither he nor the Babylonians are mentioned in the lament. Verse 5 mentions pursuers, but verse 6 says the people had submitted to Egypt and Assyria. Egypt's Pharaoh, Necho, killed Josiah in the Valley of Megiddo and ended the power of the king in the Southern Kingdom. A few months later, Nechadnezzar seized Necho's power and dominated the rulers of Egypt and the Southern Kingdom. By that time, Nebuchadnezzar also dominated Assyria. The preponderance of all the external historical evidence, coupled with the internal content of the lament, can only mean that Jeremiah composed this sad song sometime during the three months after the death of the Josiah in 606 BC but before Nebuchadnezzar took over Egypt and placed Jehoiakim on the throne in the same year.

See Our Reproach

Lamentations 5:¹ Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us;/Look, and see our reproach!

With the death of Josiah and for the first time in over 800 years, the ultimate fate of the Promised Land lay in the hands of a foreign ruler. Ever since the Israelites crossed the Jordan River to conquer the land, Jewish judges and kings had determined its destiny, but then, for at least three months, Egypt controlled the nation's political direction. What had befallen the nation? What was the nation's reproach? The gentiles of Egypt had taken away the Jewish sovereignty and controlled her once more.

Lost Inheritance

Lamentations 5:² Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers,/Our houses to aliens.

The Egyptian strangers controlled the land given to Israel. Necho placed Jehoahaz on the throne when he killed Josiah. The new king was in servitude to the Egyptian throne; therefore, strangers controlled the inherited Promised Land. Jehoahaz's court and administration ruled in the public houses and palaces of the Southern Kingdom under the oversight of the gentile Egyptian officers of Necho.

Orphan's

Lamentations 5:³ We have become orphans without a father,/Our mothers are like widows.

The nation loved Josiah as they had most of their kings since the days of David and Solomon. Without a true king, the people felt fatherless. With Josiah's death, the nation had turned into an orphan country without a strong father figure in place. When a woman becomes a widow, she is left on her own to make decisions and try to get along in life without the guidance of her husband. Without the king to guide and direct the people, they were left like widows to do the best they could in every situation.

Egyptian Tribute

Lamentations 5:⁴ We have to pay for our drinking water, / Our wood comes *to us* at a price.

Nothing belonged to the Jews once Necho took control. He imposed a tax on everything they consumed, including the water they drew from their own wells and the wood they collected from their own trees.

2 Chronicles 36:3-4 Then the king of Egypt deposed him at Jerusalem, and imposed on the land a fine of one hundred talents of silver and one talent of gold. ⁴ The king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. But Neco took Joahaz his brother and brought him to Egypt.

Pursuers At Our Necks

Lamentations 5:⁵ Our pursuers are at our necks; / We are worn out, there is no rest for us.

Necho did not just kill the southern king and go away; he continued to haunt the Israelites during their time of mourning. Necho heckled the people constantly with new demands.

Food

Lamentations 5:⁶ We have submitted to Egypt / and Assyria to get enough bread.

Instead of relying on the Lord for their needs, instead of submitting to Him for their daily bread, the Southern Kingdom sought supplies from the two main nations on either side of them, Egypt and Assyria. The Lord considered their desperate unfaithfulness and likened it to adultery.

Father's Sin

Lamentations 5:⁷ Our fathers sinned, *and* are no more; / It is we who have borne their iniquities.

By the time Jeremiah wrote this lament, he was well aware of the sins of the past fathers of Israel. King Manasseh had ruled the Southern Kingdom with great evil intentions and his rule set in motion the ultimate fall of the kingdom in 586 BC. He was not the only one to lead the nation astray. Many others could be included in the sinful mix, but they were all dead. However, payment for their sins had not been made and the people of Jeremiah's day were bearing the brunt of the sins of the past. ²⁷

Slaves Rule

Lamentations 5:⁸ Slaves rule over us; / There is no one to deliver us from their hand.

²⁷ Jeremiah 31:29; Ezekiel 18:2-4

Necho placed Jehoahaz on the throne for three months and then removed him and took him to Egypt. He placed Jehoakim on the throne where he would serve as king for 11 years; however, because both Jehoahaz and Jehoakim were slaves to Necho, neither of them could return the Southern Kingdom to its former glory or power. ²⁸

Bread at Risk

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

Under Necho's dominance, the Southern Kingdom could not rightfully defend her kingdom from the Arabs and the other nations which surrounded it. Weakened by Necho, other nations sought the grains of the fields and threatened the lives of the farmers who tended them.

Skin Hot and Burning

Lamentations 5:¹⁰ Our skin has become as hot as an oven,/Because of the burning heat of famine.

Hunger causes the pores to dry up and the skin to absorb the heat of the day. The change in control of the government set a famine in motion that exacerbated the effects of the scorching heat.

Women and Virgins

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

The Egyptians did as they wished with the women in Zion and the virgins in the cities of Judah. The Lord warned His people that this atrocity would happen if they wandered away from Him.

Jeremiah 6:12 "Their houses shall be turned over to others, Their fields and their wives together; For I will stretch out My hand Against the inhabitants of the land," declares the LORD.

Princes and Elders

Lamentations 5:¹² Princes were hung by their hands;/Elders were not respected.

Princes and elders who rebelled against Necho's authority were killed, usually beheaded, and their bodies were hung on a wall for the birds and beasts to devour. Egypt wasn't the only nation to treat the rulers and leaders of other nations this way. The Philistines hung King Saul and his sons on a wall for the same purpose. A prophecy of the same punishment can be found in Genesis. ²⁹

Genesis 40:¹⁸ Then Joseph answered and said, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; ¹⁹ within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and will hang you on a tree, and the birds will eat your flesh off you."

²⁸ Nehemiah 5:15

²⁹ Deuteronomy 28

Young Men and Youth

Lamentations 5:¹³ Young men worked at the grinding mill,/And youths stumbled under *loads* of wood.

The work of the grinding mill was women's work, not that of young men. Children were assigned to do the work of the young men. The nation's culture had turned upside down.

Elders From the Gate

Lamentations 5:¹⁴ Elders are gone from the gate,/Young men from their music.

For hundreds of years the elders of Israel gathered at the gates of the city to dispense justice for the people. Under Necho, military leaders, not the elders, determined the cases. But, if this lamentation was for the death of Josiah, the elders were not at the gates for 30 days of mourning, the proper time of mourning for a king. Traditionally, the Jewish cities were filled with the music of the young and old men. However, during the periods of mourning, the music of the young men ceased and only the older men played the dirges on their harps and horns.

Joy and Dancing

Lamentations 5:¹⁵ The joy of our hearts has ceased;/Our dancing has been turned into mourning.

Death and defeat killed the joy of the heart and robbed the soul of its desire to dance.

Crown

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

Josiah was the last Jewish king to rule with absolute power. With his death, the crown of authority had fallen. The Lord warned the people about this event from the time of Moses and through different prophets throughout their history. In the midst of their mourning for their dead king, they could only surmise that it was a result of their continual sin.

Faint and Dim

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

All the hope of the Southern Kingdom had shattered. In the past, they had had great hope in their lives even though they were guilty of great sin. Additionally, their eyes had been bright as they barreled through the years, but with the defeat by Necho, everything changed.

Mt. Zion and Foxes

Lamentations 5:¹⁸ Because of Mount Zion which lies desolate,/Foxes prowl in it.

The political throne of the Southern Kingdom sat on Mt. Zion. The foxes of Egypt had stripped away the power of the Jews and they oversaw every move of the puppet Jewish kings.

The Lord's Throne

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

The Lord's throne and His rule are nothing like those of the Southern Kingdom. Its power was taken away, but His will never be taken away. Its power spanned just a few generations, but His power spans every generation.

Why So Long

Lamentations 5:²⁰ Why do You forget us forever?/Why do You forsake us so long?

Jeremiah had already revealed to the Southern Kingdom the Lord's timing for the exile. It was mentioned by Daniel also. A period of seventy years had been decreed and all of that time lay ahead of this lamentation. Within three months, Nebuchadnezzar would defeat Necho, control the Southern Kingdom and take the first exiles to Babylon; however, that event is not mentioned in this lament. Jeremiah knew the future and cried to the Lord in his mourning and begged for restoration.

Restoration

Lamentations 5:²¹ Restore us to You, O LORD, that we may be restored;/Renew our days as of old,

Jeremiah cried in desperation at the end of this lament. He would never see the restoration in his days but he still begged for everything to be reestablished and returned to its former glory. It was a great thought, but as time passes, things change and the Lord's plan progresses in His timing. He will restore the kingdom, but it will look nothing like that of the past.

Unless

Lamentations 5:²² Unless You have utterly rejected us/*And* are exceedingly angry with us.

Even though the Lord had revealed to Jeremiah a complete plan for the Jews with a promise to establish them as the nation above every nation, he could not help but consider the great sins of his people that had caused the anger of the Lord. Jeremiah knew the Lord had not utterly rejected His people, but he could not help but cry out to Him in wonderment in his time of personal mourning for the fall of the sovereign crown and the ultimate exile of his people.