

A Plea for Restoration

It's just so sad," said Deidra, looking across the restaurant. "I know," said Brendon. "I mean, Gary was the man. Now look at him. Meeting his children at a fast-food restaurant."

"They were so happy," continued Deidra, looking at the man, woman, and two children.

"Tiana is good as ever," said Brendon. "Too bad Gary could not keep that marriage going. What happened?"

"Who knows?" said Deidra, cutting her cousin off and not wanting to give him any fuel to dump on this family turmoil.

Years before, Gary had shelved the Lord and pursued a host of things—none of which was godly. Tiana had stuck it out for years. She had begged him to come back under the authority of their church and tried to get him to go to couple's counseling. Gary would not listen; Tiana told him she wanted a separation.

Eventually, Gary was demoted at work, moved into a tiny apartment, and was surviving on the little money left over from all the garnishments attached to his payroll check.

That night, as Gary lay on his sofa looking at his children sleeping in his bed eight feet away, the enormity of the consequences of his sins enveloped him. He did not want to be this guy anymore.

"Help me, Lord," Gary cried. "I want my family back. I want my life back. Most of all, I want You back. Please, Lord, don't say it's too late for me."

1. *Have you ever been so deeply upset that you cried out to God? If so, describe the circumstances and the resolution.*

2. *Were your complaints directed at God or a plea for God's help? Explain your answer.*

3. *Why do you think the Lord wants you to cry out to Him even if it is in the form of a complaint?*

Plea for Remembrance

Lamentations 5:1-7, KJV

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.

Lamentations 5:1-7, NIV

¹Remember, LORD, what has happened to us; look, and see our disgrace.

²Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our homes to foreigners.

³We have become fatherless, our mothers are widows.

⁴We must buy the water we drink; our wood can be had only at a price.

⁵Those who pursue us are at our heels; we are weary and find no rest.

⁶We submitted to Egypt and Assyria to get enough bread.

⁷Our ancestors sinned and are no more, and we bear their punishment.

The Babylonians had conquered Jerusalem and sent the Judeans into exile. Jeremiah sat in the ruins, asking God to remember and look upon their disgrace. Jeremiah lamented that foreigners and strangers were occupying the land and even living in what was left of Judean homes.

Jeremiah then asked God to note other horrible things that were happening. Because so many men had been slain, many women were widows and children were fatherless. Further, water and firewood were so scarce that those people who remained had little or no funds to buy them. Furthermore, Jeremiah's people had to be on guard against hostile pursuers who rarely gave them rest. They also had to submit to their enemies to the north (Assyria) and to the south (Egypt) just to get enough bread to eat.

The current generation was reaping the consequences of God's judgment that had been building for many generations before them. This is not to say that the current generation was guiltless. Over and over, Jeremiah warned the current generation to repent and do what God told them.

4. *What did Jeremiah ask God to remember?*

5. *Who occupied the Israelites' land and homes?*

6. *What are some other examples of the suffering that Jeremiah lamented about?*

Plea for Relief

Lamentations 5:8-14, KJV

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.

Lamentations 5:8-14, NIV

⁸Slaves rule over us,
and there is no one to free us from their hands.

⁹We get our bread at the risk of our lives
because of the sword in the desert.

¹⁰Our skin is hot as an oven,
feverish from hunger.

¹¹Women have been violated in Zion,
and virgins in the towns of Judah.

¹²Princes have been hung up by their hands;
elders are shown no respect.

¹³Young men toil at the millstones;
boys stagger under loads of wood.

¹⁴The elders are gone from the city gate;
the young men have stopped their music.

Things seemed to go from bad to worse for Jeremiah

and his people. People who had once been subdued under Judah's dominion had now become rulers over the land. As a result of their defeat, the Jews had no protection. The people faced death at the hands of armed marauders while foraging for food and suffering terribly from hunger.

Throughout Judah, women were assaulted and abused; the former rulers of the land were executed and then their bodies were hung in humiliation. Elders were treated contemptuously, and the young men were used as beasts of burden to grind grain at the millstones. Even young boys were made to carry the heavy loads of wood for their new masters. Jeremiah saw suffering everywhere.

When things are bad, it is easy to begin to reminisce ruefully about better times. The city gates that were once places of important judgments by the community elders had become empty. Also missing were the pleasant sounds of a civilized community, like the music of young men that had once brought joy to passersby. Now there was just silence.

7. *How had the tables been turned on Jeremiah's people?*

8. *What other signs of suffering did Jeremiah observe?*

9. *What did Jeremiah not observe that also grieved him greatly?*

Plea for Restoration

Lam. 5:15-22, KJV

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

Lamentations 5:15-22, NIV

¹⁵Joy is gone from our hearts; our dancing has turned to mourning.

¹⁶The crown has fallen from our head.

Woe to us, for we have sinned!

¹⁷Because of this our hearts are faint,

because of these things our eyes grow dim

KJV

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.

NIV

¹⁸for Mount Zion, which lies desolate, with jackals prowling over it.

¹⁹You, LORD, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation.

²⁰Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long?

²¹Restore us to yourself, LORD, that we may return; renew our days as of old

²²unless you have utterly rejected us and are angry with us beyond measure.

Jeremiah continued his lament for Israel's lost joy. Where there once was dancing, only hopeless mourning remained. The picture of the crown falling from the head points back to their loss of national sovereignty at the hands of their enemies. But the prophet reminded the people that all their tribulation was from their sin against God. The desolation of Mount Zion (Jerusalem) is an apt picture of a life ravaged by sin.

After despairing over the consequences of his people's sin, Jeremiah chose to turn his eyes to the only source of hope any of us have—our Lord. The prophet acknowledged that earthly kingdoms come and go, but God's kingdom is eternal.

Jeremiah acknowledged in his prayer that God might not come to Judah's aid because His anger toward them might not be appeased. However, Jeremiah also acknowledged the goodness of God. In spite of all evidence to the contrary, "His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22–23).

10. *How did Jeremiah describe the people's sorrow?*

11. *What happened when Jeremiah turned his eyes heavenward?*

12. *What did Jeremiah seek from the Lord?*

Our Deliverer!

The psalmist praised the Lord, saying, “The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all” (Ps. 34:17-19).

The psalmist conveys many spiritual insights. Among these insights are that our heavenly Father truly listens to us when we cry out for His help and that He will, indeed, deliver us. The strongest evidence that God not only hears but also harkens to the pleas of His children is in the true meaning of Christmas. For hundreds of years, the Jews had cried out to God because of their hardships as humiliated subjects under the reign of various conquering dynasties in the region. God heard their cries and listened to their complaints; He sent His Son, who reigned with Him in their heavenly kingdom, humbled Himself by assuming a human form, and was born in a stable in Bethlehem. For thousands of years, Christians have also lifted their hands and their pleas to God, and they only need to look back to the Christmas story to be reassured that God listens.

Another insight from the psalmist is that God will deliver us, and the strongest evidence for this truth is in the true meaning of Easter. Not only did Jesus die on the Cross for our sins, but God also raised His Son from the dead, assuring us of salvation in Christ. Jesus’ earthly ministry culminated on Easter Sunday when He conquered sin and death and evil once and for all time.

13. *How do you know that God listens to your pleas for His help when you ponder the Christmas story?*

14. *How do you know that God will deliver you from your troubles when you ponder the Easter story?*

15. *Why is it important for you to know that God works according to His timetable and not yours?*

Rest Assured

This week's Scripture focused on Jeremiah's heartfelt lament about the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and how he sought God's attention and mercy. Although our plight is far less in scale to the Jews at that time, our ordeals can still be a challenge to our faith in Christ. Nevertheless, our faith will be strengthened when we truly believe that God listens to us when we cry out to Him and that He will deliver us from our troubles.

► *Briefly describe in your study book a situation in which you have been questioning whether God is really listening to your prayers—and also any reassurance He has given you that your life is firmly in His merciful hands.*

KEY VERSE

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

Restore us to yourself, LORD, that we may return; renew our days as of old. —Lamentations 5:21, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of April 26 through May 2

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** 2 Kings 3:9-17—Elisha Prophesies Truth to King Jehoshaphat.
- Tues.** 1 Kings 22:1-6—Kings Propose Battle against Aram.
- Wed.** 1 Kings 22:7-14—Micaiah Resists Pressure to Prophecy Falsely.
- Thurs.** 2 Chronicles 18:18-22—A Lying Spirit Brings Disaster.
- Fri.** 1 Kings 22:29-40—King Ahab Suffers Fatal Injury.
- Sat.** 1 Kings 22:41-46—Jehoshaphat Promotes Peace with Israel.
- Sun.** 1 Kings 22:15-23, 26-28—Prophet Micaiah Speaks the Truth.