

FIFTH LAMENT

A Prayer

The previous four lamentations have been acrostic. The only similarity here is that this lamentation has 22 verses (the same number as the letters in the Hebrew alphabet). The lamentation does not progress through the alphabet like the earlier lamentations. Lamentation 5 is a communal lament. Like the first, second and fourth lament it arose in response to the horrific experiences of 587BC.

**¹Remember, YHWH, what has befallen us;
look, and see our disgrace!**

1. A complaint uttered by the community (5:2-18)

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

**³We have become orphans, fatherless;
our mothers are like widows.**

**⁴We must pay for the water we drink;
the wood we get must be bought.**

**⁵With a yoke on our necks we are hard driven;
we are weary, given no rest.**

**⁶We stretched out our hand to Egypt and Assyria,
to get enough to eat.**

**⁷Our ancestors sinned; they are no more,
and we bear their iniquities.**

We are reminded of the proverb rejected by Ezekiel:

What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge”?

– Ezekiel 18:2

**⁸Slaves rule over us;
there is no one to deliver us from their hand.**

The ‘slaves’ are the Babylonian officials who command the conquered city.

**⁹We get our bread at the peril of our lives,
because of the sword of the wilderness.**

**¹⁰Our skin is black as an oven
from the scorching heat of famine.**

**¹¹Women are raped in Zion,
virgins in the towns of Judah.**

**¹²Princes are hanged by them;
no respect is shown to the elders.**

**¹³Young men are compelled to grind,
and boys stagger under loads of wood.**

**¹⁴The old men have left the city gate,
the young men their music.**

¹⁵The joy of our heart is gone;
our dancing has been turned to mourning.
¹⁶The crown has fallen from our head;
woe to us, for we have sinned!

¹⁷Because of this our heart is sick,
because of these things our eyes have grown dim:
¹⁸because of Mount Zion, which lies desolate;
jackals prowl over it.

2. Praise of God (5:19)

¹⁹But you, YHWH, reign forever;
your throne endures to all generations.

3. Plea for God's intervention (5:20-22)

²⁰Why have you forgotten us completely?
Why have you forsaken us these many days?
²¹Restore us to yourself, YHWH;
renew our days as of old –
²²unless you have utterly rejected us,
and are angry with us beyond measure.

The Psalmist prays:

Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?
For we sink down to the dust; our bodies cling to the ground.
Rise up, come to our help. Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love.

– Psalm 44:24-26

Restore us again, O God our Saviour, and calm your indignation toward us.
Will you be angry with us forever?
Will you prolong your anger from one generation to the next?
Will you not change and give us life again, so that your people may rejoice in you?
Show us your kindness, YHWH, and grant us your salvation.

– Psalm 85:4-7

