I. INTRODUCTION. God always fulfills His word whether it’s a promised blessing or an affirmed judgment on sin. Jeremiah’s prophecy of God’s judgment on Jerusalem took place just as the prophet had declared (see Jeremiah 25:8-11). Although Jeremiah was a godly man, he experienced firsthand the destruction of Jerusalem—God’s judgment on the wickedness of His people. Jeremiah expressed his horror at this catastrophe in his prayer in this week’s lesson. That judgment brought great devastation and heartache. It led to Jeremiah’s writing of Lamentations.

II. THE LESSON BACKGROUND. The book of Lamentations is Jeremiah’s sorrowful picture of Jerusalem and its people after the destruction of the city by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Most of the people had been exiled to Babylon, but the ones remaining in Judah were the poor who were left there to tend the land. Through Jeremiah’s eyes we...
see the results of disobedience to God. His personal experiences enabled him to accurately describe the torment and anguish of the survivors of the Babylonian siege around Jerusalem. He had been in Jerusalem when the siege and the city’s destruction took place (see II Kings 25:1-3, 8-21; Jeremiah 29:1). Jeremiah must have had opposing thoughts pulling at his soul. On one hand the righteous God had judged His sinful people (see Lamentations 1:8-22) and had kept His promise to punish disobedience (see Lamentations 2:17). But despite Jerusalem’s terrible chastisement, Jeremiah knew that God responds to faith (see Lamentations 3:25, 31). On the other hand, the prophet called on God to judge the wicked pagans of Babylon who had dealt harshly with His people (see Lamentations 1:22; 3:64-65). Jeremiah had prophesied judgment upon Babylon (see Jeremiah 25:11-12), but he needed to wait on God to bring it to pass. In chapter 5 from which our lesson comes, Jeremiah’s prayer reminds us to live righteously, to confess our sins, and to have confidence in God.

III. JEREMIAH’S PLEA FOR THE LORD TO LOOK ON HIS PEOPLE (Lamentations 5:1). Our first verse says “Remember, O LORD, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach.” Earlier, Jeremiah had spoken of the many merciless afflictions that the Babylonians imposed on the Israelites (see Lamentations 1:1-4:22). Now he looked to God’s grace for help. He began by praying “Remember, O LORD, what is come upon us.” In the Bible, remembrance is never a request to simply recall
something. It always involves a resulting action; so Jeremiah’s plea here is a call for God to act. The prophet’s prayer was based on his faith that the covenant-keeping God of Israel would act in accordance with His unchangeable character. He knew that “the LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty…” (see Numbers 14:18). The nation was being punished and now the prophet saw the need for restoration. The call for God to “remember” was a plea for Him to restore His people. The phrase “what had come upon us” refers to the extreme calamity God’s people were suffering at the hands of the Babylonians. Yes, punishment had “come upon” Israel and now they faced the need for restoration. So, Jeremiah addressed his prayer to the “LORD” or Yahweh (Jehovah), a name for God that focuses on His existence, setting Him apart from all pagan gods (see Exodus 3:14-15; 6:2-3). The prophet asked that God would “consider, and behold our reproach.” The pronoun “our” here refers to Judah, the entire southern kingdom including Jerusalem. Jeremiah’s entire prayer reflects the feelings of the whole nation, but he acts as intercessor for them. By using the terms “consider” and “behold” which both mean “to see or look at,” Jeremiah was asking the “LORD” to look closely at the tragic conditions that had fallen upon Israel as a result of her sin. Using both terms shows the intense nature of Jeremiah’s plea. Judah’s “reproach” or disgrace would include other nations criticizing or mocking Israel as a people deserted by God (see Numbers 14:13-16). It’s elaborated on in the verses that follow. All their grievances are summed up in one word, “reproach.” The troubles they were now experiencing when
compared to their former dignity, were a greater “reproach” or disgrace to them than they would have been to any other people, especially considering their relationship to God and their dependence on Him. Therefore, their complaint was reasonable because since they were a “reproach,” their troubles also reflected on the name and honour of the God who had chosen them for His people. **Note:** In chapter 3, Jeremiah personalized his statements, speaking of himself as experiencing the results of God’s judgment. But when he wrote his prayer here in chapter 5, his thinking changed and he no longer uses the singular pronouns “I” or “me.” Now seeing himself as a national intercessor for his fellow Israelites, he prayed using plural pronouns, “our,” “we” and “us” (see verses 3-4, 8) because the whole nation was guilty.

**IV. THE TRAGIC RESULTS OF SIN (Lamentations 5:2-14)**

**A. Dispossessed (Lamentations 5:2).** This verse says “Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens.” Judah’s abandonment by God had many repercussions for their immediate future. The people had been deprived of the things that made their lives comfortable. First, Jeremiah spoke about their “inheritance.” Long before, God had promised Abraham’s descendants the land of Canaan as a national “inheritance” (see Genesis 17:8). But instead of enjoying this “inheritance,” Jeremiah said the “inheritance” or the land
“is turned to strangers.” In other words, the Promised Land no longer was in the hands of the owners God had given it to. “Strangers” or foreigners had taken control of Palestine (see II Kings 24:2). God had even given their “houses” to these foreigners, who are also called “aliens.” The nation’s kings and princes, the strongest individuals, lost their rights and were defenseless (see Habakkuk 1:6-10). During the invasion of Jerusalem, these foreigners had also destroyed all the buildings of the city including the palace (see II Kings 25:9).

B. Impoverished (Lamentations 5:3-4).

1. (vs. 3). This verse says “We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows.” When sin bears fruit, the consequences reach to the very center of life, right down to individual families. God’s people had been used to economic security, but those who remained in Judah now saw themselves as society’s weakest and most helpless class. Jeremiah prayed “We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows.” In a society where male leadership was vital, now “orphans,” and the “fatherless” and “widows” had no one to provide the basic necessities of life for them. God’s law had provided special protection for such people to make sure their rights were not violated (see Exodus 22:22-24). But sin had caused the “orphans,” the “fatherless” and “widows,” the remnant in Judah, to lose their protection. The nation was brought into a condition like that of “widows” and “orphans.” The fact that they considered themselves “fatherless” means that they were helpless. They had nobody to protect them, to provide for
them, or to take care of them.

2. (vs. 4). This verse says “We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us.” The phrase, “We have drunken our water for money” means that even as servants to the Babylonians, the Israelites were forced to pay for drinking “water.” In addition, they also had to pay for firewood. The essentials of life, once freely found in nature, now had to be paid for. Ironically, this condition was the opposite of what God had intended for His people in Canaan (see Deuteronomy 6:10-11). This made life extremely difficult, for only poor people remained in the land (see II Kings 24:14; 25:12; Jeremiah 39:10). The rest were carried into Babylon.

C. Constantly harassed (Lamentations 5:5). This verse says, “Our necks are under persecution: we labour, and have no rest.” The phrase “Our necks are under persecution” was a Hebrew idiom or expression meaning that the Babylonian pursuers were within a hand’s reach of the people’s “necks” as they fled (see Deuteronomy 28:48; Jeremiah 28:14). Their merciless masters could touch their lives and humiliate them at any time. The people’s “necks” symbolized their fortitude, strength, and dignity, all of which had been lost. God’s people had not accepted the counsel of Jeremiah to submit to the yoke of the king of Babylon (see Jeremiah 27:12). Having stiffened their “necks” against God’s will and law, they found that without Him each new day brought bitter trials. Jeremiah also said “we labour, and have no rest.” Those who remained in the land could no longer pursue personal wealth. Now they were
forced to “labour” or work long hours just to survive. It was God’s will for His people to both work and rest (see Leviticus 23:3). In exchange for faith and obedience, He promised them “rest” in the Promised Land (see Deuteronomy 12:10). God had warned that if His people didn’t observe the sabbatical years to allow the land to “rest” each seventh year (see Leviticus 25:1-6, 20-22), the land would not produce fruit and God would allow foreigners to overrun the land. The LORD’s warning had now come to pass; the land would receive its “rest” but the people would not (see Leviticus 26:14-20; II Chronicles 36:21).

D. Punished for the fathers’ sins (Lamentations 5:6-7).

1. (vs. 6). This verse says “We have given the hand to the Egyptians, and to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread.” The words, “have given the hand” was a Hebrew idiom or expression to refer to submission. The meaning is that God’s people submitted to Egypt and Assyria in order to get food. The people were willing to submit themselves to the authority of any nation who would give them “bread” or food. The point of this verse is that the Israelites had made treaties with foreign powers that the prophets had warned against (see Isaiah 30:1-3; Jeremiah 2:17-18; Hosea 5:13). These treaties were suppose to help the Israelites “be satisfied with bread” or provide them with food; but instead, those treaties led to the invasion by Babylon.

2. (vs. 7). This verse says “Our fathers have
sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities.” Although the suffering captives understood that they had sinned (see verse 16), they still thought their ancestors were also accountable for their tragic situation, for Jeremiah said “Our fathers have sinned, and are not.” The words “and are not” mean that their “fathers,” or ancestors had died before this judgment fell on the nation. This present generation was saying that “we have borne their iniquities.” They thought that they were suffering because of the “iniquities” or sins of their “fathers.” Both the forefathers and their descendants were responsible for the disaster that had come on Jerusalem. The truth of the matter was that the present generation was just as sinful as their “fathers” and made them equally deserving of punishment (see Ezekiel 18:1-4). But for every generation of Israelites, God promised to be more compassionate and withhold His punishment when the people repented of their sins (see Jeremiah 18:7-8; Jonah 3:4-10).

E. Degraded (Lamentations 5:8). This verse says “Servants have ruled over us: there is none that doth deliver us out of their hand.” Things were so bad for the remnants in Israel that they were being ruled by Babylonian officials who themselves were considered “servants” or slaves of the king of Babylon. This is what is meant by the statement “Servants have ruled over us.” In essence, the Hebrews in Palestine, who themselves were “servants” to Babylon, were also being “ruled” by “servants.” God’s people were not only “ruled” by Babylonian officials, but also by their “servants” or slaves who surely abused insulted them whenever they wanted to. God’s people would also
have to be at the beck and call of those Babylonian “servants” just as they would be for the Babylonian officials. It appears that the curse that Noah pronounced on Canaan, his grandson: “A servant of servants shall he be” (see Genesis 9:18, 22, 25) had now become the doom of Judah. The Israelites refused to be ruled by their God, and by His servants the prophets, whose rule was gentle and gracious. Therefore, they were justly “ruled” with strictness by their enemies and their enemies’ “servants.” The people were correct when they said “there is none that doth deliver us out of their hand.” In other words, they had no kings to “deliver” or save them from the Babylonians. One of Judah’s kings, Jehoiachin, surrendered to the Babylonians when Jerusalem was besieged (see II Kings 24:10-16), and the one the Babylonians replaced him with, Zedekiah, soon rebelled against Babylon. They put out his eyes and carried him to Babylon (see II Kings 24:17-20: 25:1-7).

F. Intimidated (Lamentations 5:9). This verse says “We gat our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the wilderness.” When the people tried to find “bread” or food in the “wilderness,” they faced great danger. Jeremiah said “We gat our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the wilderness.” In other words, they went into the “wilderness” to hunt for food, risking death from the “sword” of their enemies who might attack them as they searched for food. The Babylonians had given certain poor people the responsibility for caring for the land (see Jeremiah 52:16). These caretakers found themselves in danger when they tried to work the land or harvest any crops they may have be able to
grew. This remnant of Jews left in Canaan probably were able to gather enough food to stay alive, but it was at \textit{the peril of our (their) lives} since \textit{the wilderness} provided very little protection. The challenges the people faced from \textit{the sword of the wilderness} may have reminded them of the invasions by the Midianites in the days of Gideon (see Judges 6:3-6). But even before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, God warned them that the consequences of unbelief would include being hungry, thirsty, naked and in need of all things (see Deuteronomy 28:48). Now they were learning that God does not play; He meant exactly what He said.

G. Humanity ravaged (Lamentations 5:10-14).

1. (vs. 10). This verse says \textit{“Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine.”} Getting food was a tremendous problem for God’s people in Judah. The description \textit{“Our skin was black like an oven”} in the Hebrew text, emphasizes that their \textit{“skin”} was \textit{“black”} or inflamed \textit{like} the inside of \textit{“an oven.”} This condition was due to \textit{“the terrible famine”} meaning that the people were sick because of the lack of food.

2. (vs. 11). This verse says \textit{“They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of Judah.”} All sorts of people were abused and dishonored by the Babylonians. Jeremiah prayed saying that \textit{“They ravished the women in Zion.”} The Israelite women \textit{“in Zion”} or Jerusalem were sexually violated as well as \textit{“the maids in the cities of Judah.”} The term \textit{“maids”} most likely refers
to virgins. This indicates that women throughout Judah were being “ravished” or sexually violated at the whims of their enemies. It’s true that God gave laws concerning sexual violence against women and the punishment for it (see Deuteronomy 22:25-29), but that didn’t mean anything to the ruthless and godless Babylonians.

3. (vs. 12). This verse says “Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honoured.” The great men of Israel were not only put to death, but put to the most shameful deaths. Jeremiah said that their “Princes are hanged up” as if they were slaves, “by their hand” meaning at the hands of the Babylonians. These public hangings were grave indignities. No doubt they took pride in these barbarous executions. The “elders” were the tribal or family heads in Israel. The phrase, “the faces of elders were not honoured” means that the Babylonians showed them no respect for their age or their positions. Isaiah prophesied that the way the Babylonians treated Israel’s “elders” particularly would be remembered and held against them at a later time (see Isaiah 47:1-5).

4. (vs. 13). This verse says “They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood.” In addition to dishonoring Israel’s elders, the Babylonians “took the young men to grind” at the hand-mills. “The young men” most likely had to carry mill-stones which was normally done by animals. So, many of them probably broke their backs while they were young which made the rest of their lives more miserable. Not even the
little “children” were excluded from heavy labor. The Babylonians made them carry their “wood” to their homes for fuel, and those burdens were so heavy that “the children fell under the wood;” they “fell” down “under” the weight of “the wood” that they were forced to carry by the inhuman cruel Babylonian taskmasters!

5. (vs. 14). This verse says “The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their musick.” This verse gives us some idea of what normal life was like in Judah by describing what had ceased. Since “the elders” had been dishonored by the Babylonians (see verse 12), Jeremiah said that “The elders have ceased from the gate.” The “gate” was the entrance into gated cities where legal and business issues were handled. Now, “the gate” was deserted. The “elders” no longer conducted business there. In addition, “the young men,” who used to be full of mirth and merriment by playing their instruments have “ceased...from their music.” The light-hearted pleasures of “music” provided by “the young men” had been replaced by the harsh life including grinding grain described in the preceding verses.

V. NO MORE JOY (Lamentations 5:15-18)

A. Mourning (Lamentations 5:15). This verse says “The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning.” Prior to the invasion of the Babylonians, God’s people had often expressed “joy” during their festivals and
other events (see I Chronicles 12:40; II Chronicles 30:20-27). But now, as a result of centuries of disobedience, the people said that “the joy of our heart is ceased.” Not only had the times of “joy” ended, the people said that “our dance is turned into mourning.” Instead of leaping for “joy” as they were known to do, God’s people were falling down in sorrow and grief. Dancing in Israel often took place after victories of war (see I Samuel 18:6), and when the Ark of the Covenant was transported (see II Samuel 6:16). But now, the people’s dancing had been “turned into mourning” or extreme grief. Years earlier, King David had praised God because He had turned his mourning into dancing (see Psalms 30:11). Now because of sin, God had reversed that, for Israel’s dancing had been “turned into mourning.” It was God’s desire that His people would always “praise his name in the dance” (see Psalms 149:3), but their sins had left God no choice but to change their dancing into “mourning” and extreme grief.

**B. Confession (Lamentations 5:16-18).**

1. (vs. 16). This verse says “The crown is fallen from our head: woe unto us, that we have sinned!” The term “crown” may refer to the city of Jerusalem which was the capital city of Judah. But the words “the crown is fallen from our head” most likely refer to the glory and honor Jerusalem had lost as a result of being destroyed by the Babylonians (see Lamentations 1:1; 2:15; 5:18). Jerusalem had been burned down and the temple was also destroyed (see II Kings 25:8-17). But we must also consider that the phrase “The crown is fallen from our head” could also
refer to the nation of Israel which had been an honored nation (see Exodus 19:6), but now had lost its glory among the other nations (see Psalms 89:36-45). Since Judah had lost its glory among the other nations, they confessed saying, “woe unto us, that we have sinned!” The word “woe” expresses the tragic situation the people were in and their confession “that we have sinned” reveals that they had taken responsibility for their tragic situation.

2. (vs. 17). This verse says “For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim.” The words “For this” and “for these things” refer back particularly to verse 16, where the people admitted that their sins had caused the nation to lose its glory and honor now that Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed. As a result of this, Jeremiah declared for the nation, that “our heart is faint” and “our eyes are dim.” The phrase “our heart is faint” means that the people were losing hope, and “our eyes are dim” means that they cannot see clearly. Both of these phrases describe the mourning and grief the people were suffering at the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

3. (vs. 18). This verse says “Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it.” Here Jeremiah continued to say in his prayer why the people’s hearts were faint and their eyes were dim. It was “Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it.” The “mountain of Zion” or mount “Zion” was the hill on which Jerusalem stood (see II Samuel 5:7; I Kings 8:1; II Kings 19:31).
Jerusalem was now “desolate” or a wasteland and “the foxes walk upon it” meaning that “foxes” ran wild over the area. **Note:** Solomon built the temple on Mount Moriah (see II Chronicles 3:1), which was a hill separate from Mount “Zion,” and moved the Ark of the Covenant there. The word “Zion” came to include the Temple and the Temple area (see Psalms 2:6: 48:2, 11-12; 132:13). It was not long before the name “Zion” was used for Jerusalem, the land of Judah, and the people of Israel as a whole (see Isaiah 40:9; 60:14; Jeremiah 31:12).

VI. JEREMIAH’S PLEA FOR RESTORATION  
(Lamentations 5:19-22)

A. Hope based on God’s eternal rule  
(Lamentations 5:19-20).

1. (vs. 19). This verse says “Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation.” After mentioning the people’s overwhelming sorrows, and their confession of sin, Jeremiah now focused on God’s Person. The people’s temporal concerns were replaced by approaching God in faith on the basis of His eternal nature and supremacy. So Jeremiah prayed “Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation.” The prophet clearly stated the fact that God dwells forever on His heavenly “throne.” Conditions on earth may change, but God’s “throne” is
unchangeable and lasts “from generation to generation.” Although the holy city of Jerusalem had been destroyed, God had not been defeated. The “LORD” is eternal and His “throne” is forever, to all “generations.” God’s judgment caused the deplorable conditions in Jerusalem, but Jeremiah still humbly admitted the LORD’s exalted position. When we experience difficult times, let’s not forget that our gracious God is still in control.

2. (vs. 20). This verse says “Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?” Having considered the truth that God sovereignly rules (see verse 19), Jeremiah poses the question “Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?” The prophet was asking God why He would allow His people to experience lengthy suffering. He was expressing his fears about God’s forsaking Israel and wondered why He was taking so long to begin restoring or bringing Israel back to Himself. When passing through trials, it appears that the Israelites thought that God had forgotten and forsaken them “forever.” God looked at their circumstances from the perspective of eternity, so to Him their trials were lasting only a little while. But being so worried with their misery meant that they were focused on themselves instead of considering God’s sovereignty. Just like in the case of Job, Israel’s relief would not to be found in lengthy discussions about temporal troubles. Relief would come by accepting God’s rule and acknowledging Him as the fountain of all their blessings (see Job 38:1-40:2). **Note:** *Like Israel, we might feel that if God really cared, He would not allow us to suffer. But the purpose of God’s discipline is twofold:*
to punish and to correct. He disciplines those He loves (see Hebrews 12:5-11). In the midst of His judgment, He offers the hope of repentance and restoration (see Jeremiah 33:4-8). While distress does come into our lives as a result of sin, we may want to raise a caution flag by pointing out that not all trouble is divine judgment for sin. Like Job’s comforters, some people blame every trial on an offended, vengeful God. When trouble comes they assume that some unconfessed or secret sin has angered God. Bad things do happen to good people. Job’s miserable condition was not the result of divine judgment for his sins. God’s commendation of Job proves that (see Job 1:8). Trouble is a common experience for all humanity. We cannot earn a trouble-free life of ease by being righteous. Tragedy does not single out the wicked while exempting the righteous. It comes upon anyone at anytime, attacking both the wicked and the righteous without prejudice.

B. Hope based on God’s restoration of his people (Lamentations 5:21-22).

1. (vs. 21). This verse says “Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old.” The people of Judah were suffering and their punishment was deserved. In the midst of their suffering, they asked God for mercy. The people said “Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned.” The plea “Turn thou us unto thee” reveals that God’s covenant people recognized that they needed help to “turn” to God.
The phrase “and we shall be turned” reveals that they couldn’t do it by themselves (see Psalms 51:5-10; Jeremiah 31:18). Jeremiah understood the timetable God had set. Since the Captivity would last for seventy years, many people in that present generation would die (see Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10) before God would reconcile the nation to Himself. But in His own time, God would bring His people back to Palestine. He would do as they requested, “renew our days as of old.” Jeremiah was turning to this hope of restoration. Sin had resulted in the people being expelled from the land, but a return to God would result in restoration. Note: It’s true that divine judgment will do one of two things: it will bring people to their senses (as it did the prodigal son), or it will harden them in their sin. The same sun that melts butter will also harden concrete. Sin mars and disfigures God’s creation and only God can restore and recreate (see Jeremiah 18:1-6). God can reform and reshape lives that have been broken and marred by sin.

2. (vs. 22). Our final verse says “But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us.” The conjunction “But” can be translated “unless” and ties this verse to verse 21. Jeremiah was saying to the LORD, that He should restore His people unless He had utterly rejected them. A permanent rejection of the Israelites was impossible because God’s faithfulness to His Word would not allow Him to break His promise (see Jeremiah 31:35-37; Hebrews 6:18). The people were correct when they admitted to God that “thou art very wroth (or angry) against us,” but God’s anger would only be temporary. It would come to an
end in the days when the king of Persia allowed thousands of Jews to return to their homeland (see Ezra 1:1-4).

**VII. Conclusion.** Divine punishment is the burden every sinner must bear. That burden includes suffering, grief, heartache, pain, loss, and ultimately death—both physical and spiritual. Whenever we find ourselves under God’s correction, we must yield to it. The proper response to God’s correction is humility, repentance and a plea for restoration.

***The International Sunday School Lesson Curriculum***