

# Grieving With Hope

A Series Thru Lamentations — Lesson 4

## Hope

As we have previously observed, the book of Lamentations is a collection of five poems, the first four of which (chapters 1-4) are acrostic using the Hebrew alphabet. In addition, they are written and organized as a chiasm with chapter 3 in the middle. Commentator Walter Kaiser writes of chapter 3: "It holds the middle position and functions as the culmination and central affirmation of the whole book." In Leslie Allen's excellent commentary on Lamentations titled *A Liturgy of Grief*, he describes the prophet Jeremiah as "the wounded healer" in Lamentations 3: "Here in turn is a preacher who has lived out the theology he teaches, one who is a battle-scarred witness to its truth." The reason chapter 3 is the culmination and central affirmation of the book, and the reason the wounded healer has something to preach, is because there is hope grounded entirely in the love and goodness of God. This is the great turning point, and the beginning of the ascent, in the mourning process – hope grounded in God that leads to prayer.

1. **Summary and Outline of Chapter 3:** The prophet Jeremiah is likely the speaker (note the first person in verse 1) who provides a sermon that recounts his and the community's suffering but turns to hope (vv. 1-24) grounded in the goodness and faithfulness of God even when God brings or permits suffering (vv. 25-39). The poem / sermon ends with a call to prayer. Generally following the outline in Walter Kaiser's book *Grief and Pain in the Plan of God*, we may outline chapter 3 as follows:

- The Lord's mercy and love to us is unending (vv. 1-24)
- The Lord's goodness and sovereign control even in our suffering is reassuring (vv. 25-39)
- The Lord's forgiveness and answers to prayers are encouraging (vv. 46-66)

2. **Metaphors for Pain and Suffering (3-6):** The poem frequently employs metaphors for severe suffering as verse 3 illustrates: (1) flesh wearing away and broken bones; (2) God laid siege to him; and (3) God placed him in darkness (like a grave).

- Why would the Holy Spirit inspire the writing to employ these metaphors?

3. **Hope — the Great Turning Point (21-24):** Note Jeremiah's pronouncement of hope in verse 21. These verses 21-24 present the great turning point in the mourning process. This is the first step in the ascent from deep despair back to healthy living and at its core is faith in God's goodness.

- In verse 22 what is the "proof" of God's faithful love?
- In verse 23, how are the Lord's mercies new every morning?
- What does it mean that the Lord is my portion? Compare Numbers 18:20; Psalms 16:5, 73:26, 119:57, 142:5

4. **God is Good Even in the Pain? (25-39):** In the Hebrew, verses 25-27 each begin with the word "good." He claims God is good even when we suffer. But how can that be? What can possibly be good about suffering?

5. **A Call to Prayer (40-66):** Jeremiah calls on the community to examine themselves, recognize their sin, and turn back to God in prayer. The call to prayer includes a prayer that God would deal with their enemies. This is not unlike what David prayed (Psalm 28:4) and what the apostle Paul wrote (2 Timothy 4:14). That they could turn to God in prayer and expectation signals the return of hope in their lives.