

# Grieving With Hope

A Series Thru Lamentations — Lesson 5

## Pain

We saw in last week's lesson that Lamentations 3 is the culmination and central affirmation of the book, and the reason Jeremiah (the wounded healer) has something to preach is because there is hope grounded entirely in the love and goodness of God. Lamentations 3 is the central chapter in the 5-chapter chiasm and provides the great turning point, and the beginning of the ascent, in the mourning process – hope grounded in God that leads to prayer. Chapters 4 and 5 will complete the ascent. While earlier chapters detailed what had befallen the nation and the holy city Jerusalem, chapter 4 narrows the focus to the pain that resulted and the chief cause of that pain. In the grieving process, after a period of contemplating the loss there needs to be a turning point (chapter 3) and a change of focus “names” the specific pains, and where appropriate, the blameworthy cause of the pain. This is important because we grieve losses, not events. We must leave behind reliving the events, but own the pain.

1. **Summary and Outline of Chapter 4:** This chapter reduces the intensity in its language and structure. Whereas chapters 1-3 had three-line stanzas, chapter 4 uses two-line stanzas (and chapter 5 uses one-line stanzas). Recall that the entire book is a chiasm; chapters 2 and 4 correlate, but where chapter 2 focus on events, chapter 4 focuses on the pain. Commentator Walter Kaiser provides this basic outline — put a name on the pain...

- in its costs (vv. 1-11)
- in its causes (vv. 12-20)
- in its conclusion (vv. 21-22)

2. **Naming the Costs (vv. 1-11):** Verses 1-6 focus on people in general while verses 7-11 turn to the princes or rulers. Verses 1 and 2 use three different Hebrew terms for “gold” to provide the theological metaphor for what had transpired as what was once “pure gold” had tarnished to the point of becoming as mere pottery or clay jars. Verses 3-5 describe the pain in physical terms; the events had made the people cruel (v. 3), children starve and no one helps (v. 4), and even the wealthy have nothing (v. 5). Verse 6 summarizes the preceding verses. Verses 7-10 address the princes with verse 11 summarizing.

- Note the parallels to chapter 2 by comparing 4:1 to 2:1, 6; 4:4 to 2:11-12 and 2:20; 4:10 to 2:20.

3. **Naming the Causes (vv. 12-20):** The FOCAL VERSE is verse 13 that blames the wicked priests and prophets for what happened. During Jeremiah's ministry, they challenged Jeremiah and rejected his message. (Cf. Jeremiah 26:7-24) Jeremiah repeatedly denounced the false prophets for what they were. (Cf. Jeremiah 6:13; 8:8-12; 23:11-36; 26:7-24; 28:1-17) Now the people finally acknowledge the false prophets. In verse 15, they reject those they previously embraced.

- Why do you think the people believed the false priests and prophets and rejected Jeremiah's messages?
- What is the application for God's people today?

4. **The Conclusion (vv. 21-22):** The chapter ends with the hope that was central in chapter 3. Verse 21 acknowledges that the cup of wrath is passed from Judah to her enemies (in particular to Edom). Verse 22 acknowledges that Judah's punishment is over. This does not mean the consequences are lifted. We know it will take many years before the temple is rebuilt and the walls of Jerusalem are reconstructed. But they are realizing God's mercies that are new every morning.