

(Sermons will be preached on Feb 19<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>)

At the first session consider showing the whole group this introductory [video](#). At the last session use the this [video](#) which takes the story through to Easter morning.

To inhabit *Lamentations* I suggest that you use a form of *lectio divina*. Each week read slowly through that week's chapter allowing people time to reflect on what they read, then consider the following questions:

- What has surprised you?
- What has challenged you?
- Have you felt like this and how might these words have helped you to express it in prayer?

Alternatively you may want to use the following notes. Beware of over theologising, so that you are still 'inhabiting' the text rather than 'dissecting' the text. Also, however tempting it might be to rush ahead to 'answers' to the prayers being offered, try and keep focus on the emotions in the chapters with all the uncertainties and ambiguities that are left hanging. The questions focus on pastoral use of the chapters

Christopher Wright suggests the underlying problem in Lamentations is that:

Hope is ... theologically centred in the Poet's faith, but structurally decentred in the Poet's experienced reality. The truth about God's ultimate faithfulness and compassion does not erase that pain or silence the questions it generates. They continue in the unresolved present and into an as yet unknown future, even as the book ends. (Wright: 34)

There are more questions than are needed for one evening. Be selective in what you use, you are not expected to answer all the questions, some may be more relevant in your group than others.

## **Week 4      Lamentations 4**

Some of the hope that appeared to be expressed in chapter 3 is shown as fleeting, yet there is a change in this chapter – for the first time there is an outward look and a promise claimed that the torment will end (v22).

### Overall structure

- 1-5            The comparison between what was and what is are spelt out in the parallelism of the verses
- 6-10          Sodom was destroyed in a volcanic eruption/earthquake – it was sudden and immediate. The siege and the ongoing consequences of exile simply prolong the agony.
- 11-13        Everyone seemed to think ‘it couldn’t happen here’ BUT (v13) – a reiteration that the people realised they were part of the reason
- 14-20        A lament that nobody will come to our help.
- 21-22        At last a looking outward: Edom (a neighbouring country typified as ‘bad’) are told their time will come. This turns to a reflection that the pain of Zion will cease.

How often do you long for ‘the good times past’ when life has got difficult and hard?  
How honest is it to view things in this way?

In chapter 3 we noted a call for patience, in v22 there are the first signs of light in the darkness. If some of you have been through hardship, how did you recognise the glimmerings of hope?

In v21 the prayer turns to the expectancy of judgment on Edom: are we right to expect (or pray for) God’s judgment on others who have hurt us?

If we find ourselves in a place where we say ‘I can’t forgive’ – how do we get out of it?

If friends say to you, ‘I can’t believe in God because of what he has done to me?’  
how do you start a journey to a place where that is changed?