

Lamentations 3:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall.

Analysis

Before the famous hope passage (3:22-23), the speaker dwells on suffering: "Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall" (zochor oni umrudi la'anah varosh, זְכָר־עֲבֵדִי וּמְרוּדִי לְעַבְתָּה רָאשׁ). This isn't wallowing but honest acknowledgment. La'anah (לְעַבְתָּה, wormwood) is an intensely bitter plant; rosh (רָאשׁ, gall) likely refers to poisonous plants. Together they symbolize life's bitterness under judgment. Verse 20 continues: "My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me" (zachor tizkor vetashoach alai nafshi). The verb zachor appears twice—"remembering it remembers"—emphasizing that these experiences are indelibly etched in memory. Yet this remembering leads to being "humbled" or "bowed down" (tashoach), suggesting submission rather than rebellion. This sets up verse 21's pivotal turn: "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope." True hope doesn't require denying painful reality. Instead, biblical hope emerges from honest assessment of our desperate condition combined with confident trust in God's character. The movement from honest lament (verses 1-20) to grounded hope (verses 21-26) models how believers can maintain faith even in profound suffering. Suppressing or denying pain prevents genuine healing; facing it while trusting God leads to restoration.

Historical Context

The wormwood and gall imagery appears elsewhere in contexts of divine judgment. Deuteronomy 29:18 warns against idolaters producing "a root that beareth gall and wormwood." Jeremiah 9:15 and 23:15 threaten that God will feed

false prophets with wormwood and make them drink poisoned water. Amos 5:7 and 6:12 condemn those who "turn judgment to wormwood." During Jerusalem's siege and fall, the people experienced this bitterness literally—physically (famine, warfare, death) and spiritually (God's apparent abandonment, temple destruction, exile). Josephus, the Jewish historian, describes the horrific conditions during Jerusalem's later destruction in AD 70, which likely paralleled 586 BC—mothers eating their own children due to starvation, bodies piled in streets, utter despair. Yet even in this darkness, the faithful maintained memory and hope. Psalm 137 shows exiles remembering Jerusalem by Babylon's rivers, vowing never to forget. This "remembering" served two purposes:

1. honest acknowledgment of reality, refusing to minimize sin's consequences,
2. maintaining covenant identity and hope for restoration.

Daniel 9's prayer exemplifies this balance—confessing deserved judgment while appealing to God's mercy. The pattern parallels Christian experience. We remember our sin's severity (that required Christ's death) and God's costly grace (that purchased our redemption). This dual remembering produces humility and hope simultaneously.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. Why is it spiritually healthy to 'remember affliction and misery' rather than simply trying to forget past pain and move on?
2. How does the bitter imagery of wormwood and gall help us grasp both the seriousness of sin and the costliness of grace?
3. What does it mean that the soul is 'humbled' through remembering suffering, and how does this humility prepare us to receive hope?
4. In what ways does the Lord's Supper similarly call us to 'remember' (1 Corinthians 11:24-25) both Christ's suffering and God's salvation?

Interlinear Text

תְּרַאֲשׁ: לְאַתְּ הַנְּמָרֹד וְעַתִּי
Remembering mine affliction and my misery the wormwood and the gall
H2142 H6040 H4788 H3939 H7219

Additional Cross-References

Lamentations 3:15 (Parallel theme): He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood.

Lamentations 3:5 (Parallel theme): He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail.

Jeremiah 9:15 (Parallel theme): Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink.

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