

1. Introduction: The Biblical Imagination

Because of the Fall we are a fragmented people. We are fragmented and foolish and fallen. This fragmentation is seen in the way we read the Bible. Some of us try to engage with our minds. We love theology and doctrine. Most especially, we love being *right*. Others read the Bible with their hearts. We love devotionals and feelings.

But the Bible calls us to listen with everything we are. (Dt. 6:4f) But how do we do that? How do we bring all of our heart and mind to the listening of Scripture?

2. The Journey of Lament

The Bible is taking us somewhere. It represents a journey. The journey of Lament is reflected in numerous structures of the Bible; from Genesis to Revelation, from Psalm 1 to 150, from Job 1 to 42. The journey begins with the Law, with “Torah Obedience.” It ends with intimacy with God. The central section of the journey is the wilderness, where we learn the worth of God. In the wilderness we learn lament.

Major Themes

a. Presence

The presence of God (from here on rendered with a capital P to indicate it refers to Divine Presence) is a theme that occurs in virtually all laments. “Fill me with joy in Your Presence...” David exults in psalm 16. It is precisely in the Presence of God that David believes he can only know true joy. (21:6)

But there is a darker side to the issue of God’s Presence that intersects precisely with lament. This is when God’s Presence seems to be impossibly absent. The abject hopelessness of the psalmist echoes throughout the laments:

“Do not cast me from Your Presence...” (Ps. 51:11)

“Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” (Ps.10:1)

“God has forgotten; he covers his face and never sees.” (Ps. 10:11)

“Why, O LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me?” (Ps. 88:1)

b. Hesed

Often connected with the idea of Presence is the other most common theme in lament. It centers around one, mysterious and untranslatable word; the Hebrew word “hesed.” Put simply, hesed is the defining characteristic of God in the Old Testament.

King James wrestled with this word and was forced to use eleven different linguistic forms in his vain attempt to render it. Usually he used the term “loving-kindness.” But hesed cannot be contained in one form. How could a word that denotes the defining characteristic of God ever be reduced to one translation?

c. Formula of Remembrance

In psalm 42:4 the psalmist interrupts his lament with these words, “These things I remember...” In 68:7-18 we read a long remembrance of God’s awesome presence among his people. Psalm 74 begins in despair, “Why have you rejected us forever, O God?” but in verse 12 a remembrance begins that speaks of God’s power “of old.” He “split the sea” and “crushed the heads of Leviathan.” Surely now, the psalmist hopes God will “rise up and defend your cause.” (v.22) Psalm 78, though not a lament, contains a long section looking back on the deeds of God. (vvs.5-72) Perhaps most interesting is psalm 136 which contains a long remembrance passage punctuated with communal shouts of hesed! (see also ps. 106, .22:27, 25:5, 40:11, 51:1, 69:16, 79:8, 103:4, 1 Chr.16:4.) These passages remind us that remembering is also worship.

The formula of remembrance is a powerful path to worship in the midst of disappointment and pain. To look back on those times when God was faithful gives us hope when in the present sometimes he seems to have hidden his face from us.

d. Vav Adversative

“Vav” is the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It looks basically like a line with a small flag on the top that always points to the left. It connects things, usually translated “and.” But it has other uses. One of those is called the adversative. Then it is usually translated “but,” (or sometimes “yet”) and marks a shift in thinking.

Here are some of the most striking examples: psalm 3, the shift occurs in verse 3, psalm 13, the shift is in verse 5, psalm 22, the shift is in verse 19, psalm 41, the shift is in verse 10, psalm 55, the shift occurs in verse 16, psalm 69, the shift is in verse 13, psalm 71, the shift is in verse 14, psalm 73, the shift is in verse 23

3. Job: Turning From the Old Equation

a. The Inadequacy of Wisdom

Job is contained in a collection called the Wisdom Writings (Kethuvim), along with Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and the Song of Solomon. (The Hebrew bible include several more books in this section including Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and First and Second Chronicles.)

This collection came together during a time of transition in Israel. The shift was not so much political or even religious as it was intellectual and theological. From the beginning Israel had based her understanding of the world on what some scholars call Torah Obedience. This is the basic understanding that if I keep the Torah God will bless me, in fact He is obliged by covenant to do so. If I break any of His laws He, by necessity, will have to punish me as well as my descendents. (Ex.34:7) This simple formula gave shape and meaning to Israel's world for centuries. But then, no one knows just when, questions arose to which this formula had no answers. These questions, which confronted the centuries old wisdom embodied in Torah Obedience, found a voice in the Writings. And so the collection is not as much about wisdom as the inadequacy of wisdom.

b. Is God Moved by Our Tears?

Through the process of the divine questioning God reveals that he cannot be contained in a simple definition or equation. At one and same time He unveils His awesomeness but also that He is a God who is moved by Job's tears and ours. It is a tremendous step forward in the revelation of His true character and it would have never happened if Job had not stubbornly reached out to God through the process of lament.

c. Beware Your Friends

Job calls out to those of us who are in the wilderness, “beware!” It could be that our undoing will not be caused by the death or the disease, by the cancer or the failed marriage. Our worst enemies could very well be disguised as our friends.

This is how to know the difference. Your real friends will be willing to sit with you in silence not for a week, but for as long as it takes. Your real friends will encourage you to keep talking, crying out to, and arguing with God. And when you would be tempted to despair and “quit the dance floor,” saying that you simply lack the strength or the faith to go on, it is only your real friends who will have the love to leave you all alone with the One who desires, above all, to finish the dance with you.

d. Notes for a read-through of Job

1:1 narrator says Job is innocent

1:5 Job demonstrates his faithfulness by sacrificing for what might have happened

1:8 God says Job is blameless

1:9 Satan accuses Job of living only by the equation.

1:12 God answers Job over, knowing that he will remain true

1:21f In spite of his suffering Job holds on to God, blessing His name

2:3 God points out to Satan that He was right and Job remained faithful in spite of his suffering.

2:4 Satan says the ultimate test of the equation is physical health

2:7 Satan strikes Job's body

2:9 His wife tells him to curse God and die (a part of the equation)

2:19 Job refuses to let go of God.

2:11-13 Job's three friends arrive. They weep when they see his suffering. Together with Job they sit in silence for 7 days.

3:1-26 Job's first lament, cursing the day he was born.

4:1-5:27 Eliphaz “What innocent man ever perished” v.7 R.J.

This is reproof v.17 (infers you did something wrong to deserve it)

6:1-7:21 Job's second lament “Let God crush me..” 6:9

“Tell me where I am wrong” 6:24

“ I am still in the right” 6:29

* 7:11 Refuses to let go of lament “I will not speak with restraint; I will give voice to the anguish of my soul I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.”

* 7:17-21 Returns to addressing God directly “You” “Why do You make me Your target?”

8:1-22 Bildad “If you are blameless and upright He will protect you.” V.6 R.J.
“It has always been this way” v.8

“Surely God does not despise the blameless. He gives no support to the evildoers. V.20 R.J.

9:1-35 Job’s response. *Note this is not a lament but reasoning. “He destroys the blameless and the guilty.” Contra R.J.

10:1-22 Job’s third lament “I know that I am not guilty.” v.7

11:1-20 Zophar “God has overlooked some of your iniquity.” v.6

“If there is iniquity with you, remove it.” v. 14 R.J.

“But the eyes of the wicked pine away.” v. 20 R.J.

12:1-13:16 Job’s response. Again he has stopped lamenting and is answering his friends theology. God is only the subject.

“Robbers live untroubled in their tents.” Contra R.J.

*13:3f Refuses to let go of lament. “I insist on arguing with God. But you invent lies.”

“Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.”

v.15a

“Yet I will argue my case before Him.” v.

15b

13:17-14:22 Job’s fourth lament. “Why do You hide Your face from me?” v. 24

15:1-35 Elihpaz Lament is inappropriate. “You subvert piety and restrain prayer to God. Your sinfulness dictates your speech.” v.4f

“That you could vent your anger on God and let such words come out of your mouth.” v. 13

“A wicked man writhes in his torments all his days” v. 20 R.J.

“He will not be rich.” v.29 R.J.

16:1-17:16 Job’s response. *Again there is no lamenting in this passage, only reasoning.

“Before God my eyes shed tears.” 16:20

“Where then is my hope?” 17:15

18:1-21 Bildad “Indeed, the light of the wicked fails. The flame of his fire does not shine.” R.J.

19:1-29 Job's response. *Again there is no lament.

“I know that God has wronged me.” v. 6

“He uproots my hope like a tree.” v.10

** Job's suffering leads to a vision of Jesus “I know my Redeemer lives.” v. 25

20:1-29 Zophar “The joy of the wicked is brief.” v. 5 R.J.

21:1-34 Job's response * “Why do the wicked live on?” contra R.J. Here we begin to see that Job is a man caught between the theologizing of his friends and his desire to lament to God. By this point Job has ceased reaching out to God at all.

22:1-30 Eliphaz “If you banish iniquity from your tent...” v. 23 R.J.

23:1-24:25 Job's response *Note as a result of the denial of his lamenting, Job feels he has lost God.

“Would that I know how to reach Him.” v.3

“He is not there.” v.8

“He is hidden.” v.9

“I am innocent...” v.10b-12

“I am terrified in His presence.” v.15

“I dread Him.” v.15b

“God has made me fainthearted.” v.16

“Shaddai has terrified me.” v.16b

“No one can...prove that I am wrong.” 24:25

25:1-6 Bildad “How can man be in the right before God?”

26:1-28:28 Job's response. “Until I die I will maintain my integrity.” 27:5

29:1-31:40 Job's fifth lament “God has disarmed and humbled me.” 30:11

*Not until 30:20 does Job begin to address God directly. “I cry out to You but You do not answer 30:20 **JOBS LAST LAMENT**

32:1 Job's friends give up trying to persuade him.

32:2-37:24 Elihu, the young, appears. He is angry with Job as well as the friends.

He seems to represent a mediating position. Suffering can be discipline v.20, or reproof v.19 or even a form of redemption v. 30

34:11 “He pays a man according to his actions.” (also 36:11f) R.J.

34:19f Yet He is impartial

34:36f He also would forbid Job from lamenting, saying such talk is sin

37 provides a wonderful overture to the appearance of God.

38:1-40:3 God's first discourse on His otherness. “Where were you?”

40:4f Job's first response. "I will put my hand over my mouth."

40:6-41:26 "Whoever confronts Me I will requite." 41:3

42:1-6 Job's second response. "I said things I should not have said. But now I see You!"

*Job gets God back!

42:7-17 The aftermath. 1. God charges the three friends, "you have not spoken the truth about Me as my servant Job did." They are ordered to make a sacrifice and ask Job to pray to God for them. (vv. 7-9)

2. "When he prayed on behalf of his friends," God restored Job's fortunes twofold. v. 10 (He never got his children back)

3. Job's other friends come to a meal to honor him, giving him gifts of gold.

4. His sheep and cattle were restored

5. He has seven more sons and three beautiful daughters.

6. Job lives 140 years, living to see four generations of his family. He dies "old and content."

4. David: A Life Fashioned for Lament

The wilderness struggles of the life of David become the major themes of his psalms of lament. As, time and time again, he was confronted with death and disease, David would flee to the comfort of his simple, ten-stringed lyre. As he felt the soft breath of the resonance of the strings on his fingertips, he found the words to cry out to the God he knew held the power over death. Out of the shadows of his solitary life, he discovered solace and a path back to intimacy with God through the laments he began to create and sing, no doubt, when he was a lonely shepherd boy. As he faced over and over again the frightening specters of the many adversaries life would hurl in his direction, lament would provide a bridge back to the safe presence of God. An unheard-of hunger for *hesed* and a passion for Presence permeated the lonely life of the first shepherd king of Israel.

a. Ever-Present Enemies

Enemies from within his family and his tribe. Enemies, giant ones, outside, all around. What followed was a life infested with such enemies and dominated by the struggle against them. Like a caged bird with broken wings, David responded with songs of lament, using them to transform his enemies and the hatred he bore them into worshipful offerings he made to God.

Only someone who is fully awake and engaged in life can lament. Lament only comes from the lips of those who know the hunger and thirst, the true terrain of the wilderness, the only place where worth-ship is realized. This lonely bridge can only be crossed by the one who has felt the depth of the chasm that must be crossed, the dark valley that exists between us and our lonely God, the one that exists between us and the lost and lonely men and women who surround us like dry dunes in the desert.

b. Enemies and “The Poison We Drink”

It is an inescapable demand of following Jesus: We are called to love those who hate us, our enemies. No amount of theological backflips will ever free us from this impossible demand.

But then we come to the imprecatory psalms and what seemed an insurmountable demand before, now becomes impossible. We call them the “imprecatory” psalms, because they are laments that contain imprecations or curses. Some scholars debate whether these should even be included on the lists of laments at all. For our purposes we will include them for two reasons: First, they involve, in varying degrees, David’s disappointment with God. That is, that He has allowed the enemy some degree of power over him to the point that David must cry out for help. Secondly, David’s imprecatory laments represent a worshipful offering up to God of what would otherwise be considered an unacceptable offering: his hatred. Through lament in general, we bring to God our fears and frustrations, our pain and hopelessness. All these are seen by some (like Job’s friends) to be “unworthy” offerings. God nevertheless encourages us in His Word to offer them up by means of lament. What makes the imprecatory laments “laments” is that they represent our offering God the “unacceptable offering” of our bitterest hatred of our enemies.

c. Crossing the Line

Psalm 13 echoes with David's frustrated cry, "How long?" To him it seemed God had forgotten David forever, leaving him in the hands of his gloating enemies. This psalm is one of the best examples of the resolution that occurs in every lament psalm except one (88.) It marks the transition from despair to hope, from complaint to praise. If we want to move ahead on our understanding of lament we must grasp this important facet.

In the Psalms, the transition is almost always marked by the English word "but" or "then," and reflects a Hebrew particle known as the "vav adversative." Vav is, in fact, the sixth letter in the Hebrew alphabet. (Another system of pronunciation renders it "waw.") It looks like this:  a short vertical line with a little flag on top that perpetually seems to indicate the wind is blowing from the east. It is generally used to join ideas and is most frequently translated "and." Sometimes it serves another purpose, to help express antithetical or "adverse" ideas. When used in such a way it is called the "vav adversative."

d. Disease and Death

And as he went, he cried, "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I could have died instead of you! O Absalom, my son, my son."

2 Samuel 18:33

David lived long enough to endure the deaths of practically everyone he had ever loved. First it was his dearest friend, Jonathan, killed in a battle on Mount Gilboa along with his father Saul, who committed suicide. Both their bodies were cruelly nailed up on a wall in Beth Shan. The valiant men of Jabesh Gilead journeyed through the night, stole back the bodies, burned and buried them. We are told in the first chapter of 2 Samuel that David composed a lament for the both of them; the man who most hated him and the friend he loved the most. David ordered that everyone in Judah learn the lament he had composed to a long-lost melody he entitled "The Song of the Bow."

e. A Disturbing Clarity

Next in the mournful procession was the innocent child born of his sin with Bathsheba. In the midst of the most successful period of his reign, having defeated the Ammonites and the Arameans, David took a suspicious break from what had been an almost continuous war. Even though it was spring, the time of year when kings normally returned to the battlefield, David stayed home, sending Joab out in his stead. But he learned that there are more wars to be fought in the spring than those of the battlefield.

Nine months later, a son was born whose name we will never know. Nathan told David the innocent child was going to die for his sin. Then we are told that the child, still referred to as being of "Uriah's wife" became ill (2 Samuel 12:15). Despite all David's pleading, despite his fasting and prayers, the nameless little boy died on the seventh day. (Had he lived but one more day, he would

f. A Disturbing Despair

David's son, Absalom, was handsome. He was vain. It was said of him that "he stole the hearts of the men of Israel." In a fit of righteous rage he murdered his own brother, Amnon, for the rape of his sister Tamar. In fear of reprisals, he ran away to his grandfather's and hid for three years. When finally he slinked back to Jerusalem, David refused to speak to him for another two years. The rift between David and Absalom would never be healed. In time, he would lead a successful revolt, forcing his father David to flee Jerusalem. His name literally means "the father of peace." But it was precisely the peace of his father that Absalom obliterated by his pride.

David sat pitifully, waiting at the gate like the father of the prodigal who would never return. When finally he heard the news, in stark contrast to the miraculous recovery we just saw after the death of Bathsheba's first son, David broke down completely. For once, he did not compose a formal lament. There was no tune. There was no poetry, only the repetitious, incoherent sobbing of a father whose son, though he had just died, he had lost long ago.

g. No Hope But This: Contrition

Amidst the dearth of our knowledge of the Psalms, it is the single psalm of lament for which we all seem to know the historical background. In a life that

had more than its share of ups and downs, it undeniably marks the lowest ebb in the life of David.

In a moment of illumination, David finally sees that all he has left to give is all that God wants from him. Before Bathsheba, David might have offered his fame, his many victories, his wealth, or any one of a thousand other of his “strengths.” All he has left is all God wants, his spirit that is broken and his heart that is contrite. He knows now, as he could have never known otherwise, that God delights in him just as he is. That God accepts him, unclean and hopeless. The knowledge of this sets David and each of us forever free.

5. A Selection of Laments

- a. Psalm 13: “How Long?”
- b. Psalm 51 (38): Sorrow for Sin
- c. Psalm 55: From Terror to Testimony to Trust
- d. Psalm 22: “Why?”
- f. Psalm 27: From Confidence to Doubt
- g.

6. Jeremiah: An Impossible Hope

- a. A Costly Call: Jeremiah 1

The call to be a prophet is a costly call. To speak the words of God to a people who historically had seldom cared to listen was not a role Jeremiah savored. It came when he was still a young man. The Lord’s first words to him affirmed that He had known Jeremiah before he had been formed in the womb. Before he had been born he had been set apart as a “prophet among the nations.” Jeremiah tried to escape the call of God on his life by pointing to his youth. Like Moses he also claimed that he did not know how to speak, so how could he possibly be qualified to speak for God? The Lord would not listen to either of these excuses.

- b. A Cruel King: Jeremiah 36

Along the way Jeremiah encountered primarily people who were unwilling to listen to his message. This stubbornness was one of the major sources of his lament. No one was more stubborn than king Jehoiakim. Once again, the

purpose of the prophecy was so that “each of them would turn from his wicked way.”

c. The Cost of the Call: Jeremiah 37-38, 40:1-6

In two final back-to-back incidents we see the suffering of Jeremiah because of and for the call of God on his life. In the first he is arrested, falsely accused, beaten and thrown into prison. In the second he is lowered into a muddy cistern.

The suffering inflicted on him, like Job’s suffering, is innocent suffering. Jeremiah suffers *because* he is obedient. The source of the suffering could be said to be the call of God on his life. The cause of his suffering is clearly the sin of disbelief of the king and his officials.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, during which Jeremiah was safely in captivity in the courtyard of the guard, he is sought out among the captives by the powerful commander of the imperial guard of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan. He, in effect, repeats the core of Jeremiah’s prophecy; the Lord had decreed this disaster because of the sin of the people. “But today,” he said, “I am freeing you.”

This section marks the end of the story of Jeremiah, chronologically. As he wandered back to find Gedaliah at Mizpah, with whom he would stay, I wonder if that first promise God had made so long ago echoed back in his mind, “I am with you and I will rescue you.” (1:8, 19)

d. A Nightmare Come True: Jeremiah 39,52

After a siege that lasted over two and a half years, the wall of Jerusalem fell and the Babylonian officials entered the city, taking up the seats of authority in the Middle Gate. Zedekiah fled to the Jordan valley. He was finally apprehended, along with his sons in the plains of Jericho. His sons were eventually killed in his presence just before his eyes were put out. It was the last horrific image to flash before his mind before it was closed to any more images.

Four thousand six hundred of the survivors were carried off into exile and the holy city burned. The Temple was destroyed and all its valuable metal implements broken up. These two short chapters provide an impassionate, news paper type description of the details the book of Lamentations will wail

over all of its four dark chapters. These two chapters in Jeremiah provide the factual account we need before we enter into the emotional laments that follow.

e. Lamentations: A Lament of National Disaster

In order to prepare ourselves for reading through Lamentations in a meaningful way we must set the scene. We must imagine ourselves looking over the shoulder of the prophet, past him to an overview of the ruins of Jerusalem. It is 587 B.C. and the unthinkable, the impossible has happened; Jerusalem, the City of God and the Temple of Solomon, the House of God, have been utterly destroyed. Daniel 5 and Jeremiah 52 tell of the Babylonians looting the Temple. Judah had become smug and self-righteous because they had survived the devastation experienced by Israel at the hands of the Assyrians. No one they thought could ever attack God's city and God's house.

There are Five poems of Lament. The first four poems are alphabetical acrostics (**cf.* Pss. 25; 34; 37; 119; Prov. 31:10–31). Chapters 1 and 2 contain twenty-two verses of three lines each, and the first word of each verse begins with a different Hebrew letter. In chapter 4 each verse has two lines.

Chapter 3 is the most tightly constructed, for its sixty-six verses are divided into twenty-two groups of three verses each, and each of the three begins with the appropriate letter. Even chapter 5, which is not in alphabetical form, seems to have been affected by the acrostic pattern; it also has twenty-two verses of one line each. The artistic acrostic structure serves as a mnemonic device.

7. Jesus: The Man of Sorrows

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows.” Isa. 53:3-4

*“You will be sorrowful;
you will weep and lament,
but the world will rejoice.”
(John 16:20)*

a. Introduction: A wilderness life

Jesus (like David) is born in the wilderness area of Bethlehem. He grows up in the wilderness of the Galilee, not only a geographical wilderness but also a social and religious wilderness. (At least 7 other gods were worshipped on Galilee) Lament echoed in to his early life as the innocents are slaughtered. The sorrow of the lament was articulated by Jeremiah 31:15. (Mt. 2:13-18)

In Mathew 10:35f Jesus quoted a lament of the prophet Micah to define his ministry. (7:6) John presents Jesus in a lonely and misunderstood light, as the Wisdom of God who is misunderstood and rejected by men. (1:5, 10f) During his life Jesus enters into the sufferings of people like Mary, Martha and Lazarus. (Jn.11)

His own family, at one point, considers Him “out of his mind.” (Mk. 3:21) He is rejected by many of His own disciples in John 6:60. He struggles with God through lament in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Mt. 26:36ff) He laments from the cross. (Mk.15:34)

1. Jesus and Job

- The greatest part of the book of Job comprises a lengthy argument over what God is really like. Jesus’ life was one long discussion, one extended explanation, one perfect definition of the Father’s “unexpected-love.”

Job’s vision of Jesus: Intercessor (9:33ff), Advocate (16:19ff), Redeemer. (19:25ff)

2. Jesus and David

- He was called, “Son of David.” (Mt. 1:1, 12:23, 15:22, 20:30, 21:9 and parallels) This was clearly understood as a title of his kingship, but to be associated with David means more than simply wearing a crown or sitting on a throne. Jesus’ experience of betrayal and of disease and death also marked him as David’s kin. And when he suffered most, Jesus found that the words he needed were David’s words. (Mk. 15:34, Ps. 22:1)

3. Jesus and Jeremiah

-He was, at least once, mistaken for Jeremiah, the “weeping prophet.” (Mt.16:13f) He echoed Jeremiah’s prophecy and predicted yet

another destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah is both prophet and the priest. Jesus perfects these two roles. Like Jeremiah, Jesus laments to the Father for us and laments for the Father to us.

Jeremiah's vision of Jesus: "Our Righteousness" (Jer. 23:6, 33:16)

b. Our Categories Incarnate

- **Presence** finds its fulfillment and meaning in the Incarnation. In Jesus we finally understand that we need God's Presence more than we need His provision. His name is Immanuel, "God with us!" Isa. 7:14, Mt. 1:23 Teaches us that what we ask for in prayer we almost never really need. All we really need is God's Presence. Remember, the answer in Job was Presence.
- **Hesed** makes perfect sense as the life of Jesus. His flesh and blood represents the perfect translation of that untranslatable word. The problem voiced in lament is always about the fact that God has acted in a way that is inconsistent with hesed, What God does through the life and death of Jesus gives a definitive answer once and for all.
- **Crossing the line.** The line we saw so many lamentors cross (vav adversative) was finally drawn in the sand of Golgotha. **Jesus makes the journey from Ps. 1-150. In the garden he made the decisive move from "me" to "you".**
- **The old equation.** The word "equation" implies something has to be worked out. Jesus life and death are a working out of that equation. Lament represents our entering into the process of working out the equation in our own lives.
- **The Final Answer to Theodicy.** God does not provide an answer to this question. (cp. Job) Jesus answer is his own righteous suffering which saves the world. He makes purposeful the question.

- **Lament as Wilderness Worship.** Jesus demonstrated His Sonship in the wilderness. He reveals the worth of God (“worship) in His responses to satan. (Mk.1:12ff, Mat. 4:1-11)

c. Incarnation: The Presence of *hesed*

1. John 1:1-14 *Hesed* Made Flesh

v.1-2 Besides the question of the “word,” the central idea of the verse is Presence. The Word was always present (“from the beginning”) was always with God, from the beginning.

v. 3 This concept is grounded in psalm 33:6. But note also in 136:5 that following a statement concerning the heavens being made by Gods wisdom comes the affirmation, “His *hesed* endures forever.”

v. 4 See Psalm 63:3 where life and *hesed* are compared. See psalm 90:8 where Presence is equated with light.

v.5 Even as the darkness has not understood the light, so we have seen that men, since the beginning, have understood neither the Presence nor the *hesed* of God. They are untranslatable, unfathomable.

v. 14 Could it be that the “Word” that became flesh was not simply the “logos?” Could the “word” have been “*hesed*?” The terms “grace and truth” might be John’s attempt to translate that untranslatable word.

d. The Command to “do *hesed*” Luke 6:27- 36

v. 27 “Enemy-love” is one way to translate the word *hesed*. (cp.Provb.25:21)

v. 28 When David realized that he had become the enemy of God because of his sin with Bathsheba, it was to *hesed* that he appealed (ps.51:1) In the face of our enemies Jesus demands that we demonstrate “surprising-mercy.”

v. 32-34 Jesus speaks of the expectations that come from the old equation. You love people who deserve it, do good to others because they’ve done good to you, etc. This matches perfectly the mentality of Satan’s accusation of Job to God. (Job 1:9ff) Jesus is calling into question the old notion and making way for a totally new and unexpected mercy.

v. 35b Jesus’ conclusion could be a textbook definition of the word *hesed*. “He (God) is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.”

v. 36 This verse could well be translated, “Do *hesed*, just as your Father does *hesed*.”

(see also the parables of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25ff, the Prodigal Son, Luke 15:11ff and the Workers, Matthew 20:1ff, all these speak of the unexpected nature of the mercy and grace of God)

e. A Blessing for those who lament , Luke 6:21

Just six verses before Jesus’ definition of *hesed*, He pronounces a “barocha” or blessing on those who “weep.” This word was given specifically to the disciples. (v.20) The blessing is spoken with others, those who are poor, hungry, are hated. Jesus reminds them that this is precisely how the prophets experienced life. Verses 24-26 contain a mirrored set of “woes.” They are spoken, not to the disciples, but to others who are listening.

Later, Jesus will tell the disciples that the world will rejoice when they are weeping. But also, there will be a radical reversal. (Jn 16:22)

f. The Voice of Jeremiah’s Weeping, Luke 13:34f, 19:41-44

a. In the first passage, Jesus is only three days away from entering Jerusalem for the last time. He has just received a questionable warning from the Pharisees to flee Herod. His statement about the prophets and Jerusalem prompts Jesus to lament for the city in 34-35. He speaks of the desire of his heart to gather the children together, but they were unwilling. While he described Herod as a fox, Jesus likens his desire to that of a mother hen, gathering her chicks under the shelter of her wings.

b. In the next passage, Luke will tell us that Jesus actually openly weeps. (*klaio*) Echoing the words of Jeremiah 22:5, he pronounces that the house is desolate. They will not see Jesus until the day they repeat the words of psalm 118:26, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Jesus prophetically sees the destruction of the city that will occur in less than forty years. He sees the siege ramp that Titus will build. He sees, as Jeremiah saw, the suffering of the children. Jesus sees it all, every detail. He bursts into tears.

All because they had not recognized the time of God's coming to them. That very moment, when the Presence of God came riding a smelly foal. When the Incarnation of Hesus, God's defining characteristic, came weeping, uncontrollably like a little boy.

g. The Miracle of Tears, John 11

Before Jesus moves on to the tomb of his friend, to call the "dead man" from the grave, He enacts what most of us never regard as a miracle. But it may be the most miraculous miracle of the whole story. The miracle? Jesus wept. He *showed up* (Presence) and entered fully and painfully into the suffering of his friends.

Could it possibly be true that the greater miracle is not the healing or the unexpected check that saves from bankruptcy, but the unthinkable truth that God has chosen to be with us through it all? Could it possibly be true that the miracle is not provision, but Presence?

h. The God-Forsaken God

Luke 22:39-46 tells us they went out as usual to the Mount of Olives. On the mount was a privately owned garden called "Gethsemane," which means "place of crushing," since there was an olive press located there. But when they got there Jesus had begun to feel the crushing weight of his own fear and sorrow. Jesus moves off and kneels. He makes the sort of disturbingly honest statement to the Father that we have become used to hearing in lament. "If there is any way to get me out of this, I want out," in effect He says. He knows what the Father's will is for him, to die a torturous death. In the openness of lament he responds, "I don't want this!"

Matthew tells us he prayed this over three periods of time. An angel, we are told, appears to encourage him, but apparently it is to no avail. His anguish peaks. His sweat becomes blood. He wins the battle with the words, "Not what I want, but what You want." Jesus has crossed the line from "me" to "you." ("Yet, not my will, but yours be done.")

Could it be that the same throne room scene was taking place that we saw in Job? Was the Accuser snarling that Jesus had only lived the perfect life he lived because something was in it for him? Now the time had come to make

the exchange Job had made, only on an infinitely larger scale; to give up everything in order to receive everything. Only for Jesus, the “everything” was still not for himself but for you and me

i. The Voice of David’s Laments, Matthew 27:45

Darkness had covered the land. The same darkness that David had lamented in psalm 18. Matthew tells us that Jesus cried out, in one of his last short, gasping phrases from the cross, in the words of David’s lament in psalm 22.

The laments contain a more detailed description of the crucifixion than any of the gospels. Both Zechariah and Jeremiah has seen the price of the thirty pieces of silver. (Zech. 11:12, Jer. 32:6-9) Psalm 22:8 predicts the soldiers gambling for Jesus coat. Psalm 69:21 speaks of the vinegar he was given to drink. Psalm 109:25 tell of the mocking of the crowd.

But psalm 22:16 contains the real treasure. It says, “They have pierced my hands and feet.” The gospel accounts of the crucifixion do not give this detail. The only hint we have is Jesus pointing out the nail prints after the Resurrection first to the disciples (Jn.20:20) and then only later to Thomas. (20:24ff)

Appendix:

Journaling You Own Lament

Perhaps there is no pressing need for you to lament just now. Maybe there is some deeper listening you need to do to your own life before you move into lament. Perhaps this would be a good time to examine you own exhaustion. Come with a willingness to open your life completely to the Holy Spirit, asking him to place a finger on those scars that need to be offered up through lament. This is a process that always takes more time than you or I can imagine. The

head is miraculously fast but the heart is mysteriously slow. This is heart work, only accomplished by the help of the Spirit.

- **Be stubborn and free.** As thoughts for lament do begin to surface remember those qualities we saw in Job, David, Jeremiah and especially Jesus. They existed in marvelous freedom before God. They possessed a stubborn refusal to turn away from God.
- **Hunger for heseb and Presence.** Remember; God's character is defined by heseb. Realize that, most of all you need Presence. As you write your own lament, describe what that yearning for Presence feels like in your own life.
- **Remember.** At some point you will want to make use of the Formula of Remembrance we saw in so many laments. Ask yourself, "What has God done in my life that is worth remembering?" This question will move you in the direction of seeing the "worth-ship" of God for yourself.
- **Wait for the crossing of the line.** At some point you will inevitably experience the "crossing of the line" we saw occurring through the Vav Adversative in the laments. Remember, this is not a formula, it is a form. The movement from "me-centeredness" to "God-centeredness" cannot be forced. It also is the Spirit's work. Let it happen on its own.
- **A new experience of Worth-ship.** Finally, after it does take place, spend as much time as you can simply inhabiting this new place before the Throne of God. Thank God for graciously sharing His Presence with you. It is an amazing and costly gift He gives, full access to the throne.
- **What has God done in your life that's worth remembering**

Additional Themes of Some Other Lament Psalms

3 A lament for the warrior first psalm of David

5 Individual lament on the morning Temple service

12 Isolation/abandonment by God

13 Suffering =joy pain and praise desolation to delight. Presence=trust "How Long"

17 First psalm to be called a prayer,

22 The virtuous sufferer, a lament that is rooted in trust and faith. Not an accusation but a scream of confusion.

25 Isolation, Presence=trust
 26 Presence=trust fear of death
 28 A plea for help from illness
 35 "How Long?"
 38 Lament for a grievously ill person
 40 Joy/suffering reversed, logically wrong
 42/43 A national psalm of suffering, presence=hope (9-11?)
 52 Presence=trust
 55 God sustains
 56 Suffering=joy presence=trust
 59 Plea of an innocent man, a song David writes as he looks out the window at Saul's henchmen, sent to kill him.
 69 Suffering=joy, represents every individual element of lament
 70/71 Suffering=joy senior citizen
 74 What do you do when the shepherd has turned against the sheep?
 79 "How Long?"
 80 "The persistent prayer of a desperate man to a deaf deity. A near death psalm. "How Long?"
 85 A new year's psalm
 88 Saddest psalm in the Psalter, does not resolve, an embarrassment to conventional faith. Most hopeless of all psalms. The only time the words, "I am hopeless" appear in the O.T.
 90 Lament of Moses There is only one psalm of Moses. As does Jesus, it speaks of death as sleep.
 102 Psalm of suffering
 103 The most exquisite psalm of praise.
 109 Protesting innocence, most vindictive, never used in Jewish liturgy for worship. Contradicts the gospel command to love our enemies? There is nothing else I can do with my sin but take it to God.
 137 A vengeance psalm, one of the most famous in the Bible
 Justice in its most primitive form.
 Communal complaints 9-10, 44, 60, 74, 77, 79, 80, 85, 89, 90, 108,
 Individual complaints 6, 13, 22, 35, 39, 42-43, 88, 102
 Enemies 6, 9-10, 15, 22, 35, 42-42
 Sickness and disease 13, 22, 42-43, 102