

Biblical Wisdom: Understanding Life through Old Testament Sages and Poets

#1

Understanding the Place and Purpose
of Wisdom Literature within the Biblical
Canon

We seek meaning to four critical questions:

- Origins – How did we get here?
- Unity – What holds life together (coherence)?
- Purpose/Meaning – Why are we here?
- Destiny – What happens when we die? What will be the fate of the universe?

There are three root cosmological options:

- **Closed System Naturalism**
 - All meaning is confined to the system
 - The system operates by natural law, cause & effect
 - Evolution may produce change, but not transcendence
 - Where “life” exists, purpose is survival
- **Closed System Intelligent Design**
 - There are two organizing properties:
 - “Time” – ensures process that moves in only one direction
 - “Life” – mysterious creative force that powers the universe
 - These two together form the impersonal design we call God
 - The meaning of “life” is to go with the flow, not against it
- **Creator/Creature Interactive System with Dynamic Purpose**
 - The world was created as a home for humankind
 - Humanity reflects God’s character, is meant for multiple relationships
 - Freedom, necessary for true love and relationships, allowed the entrance of evil, which the Creator responded to redemptively

There are three root cosmological options:

- **Closed System Naturalism**
 - **Origin:** steady state evolutionism, perhaps initiated with Big Bang
 - **Unity:** shared history
 - **Purpose:** survival, if possible
 - **Destiny:** recycle material substance and energy to keep system running
- **Closed System Intelligent Design**
 - **Origin:** steady state evolutionism, perhaps initiated with Big Bang
 - **Unity:** the intelligence that runs the system, keeping it all together
 - **Purpose:** enhance the expression of “Life,” add to its experiences
 - **Destiny:** recycle material substance and energy to keep system running
- **Creator/Creature Interactive System with Dynamic Purpose**
 - **Origin:** Creator brought all into being
 - **Unity:** common design source and divine purpose
 - **Purpose:** enhance human capacities to reflect Creator’s relational character and multiply creative activity
 - **Destiny:** live well, share creative activity, love God and others, join in renewing creation debilitated by evil, resurrect to eternal life where these purposes will be perfected and ongoing forever

Hebrew Bible review: “TaNaK”

- **“Torah” (“Law/Covenant”):**
 - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
 - “The Five Books of Moses”/“The Pentateuch”
- **“Navi’im” (“Prophets”):**
 - “Former Prophets”: Joshua, Judges, Kings
 - “Latter/Writing Prophets”: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, “The Twelve”
- **“K’tuvim” (“Writings”):**
 - Ruth, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Song of Songs, Daniel

Bible “Big Picture”

- **Covenant Making** – God establishes a covenant relationship with a missional community by way of a redemptive act (*primary revelatory authority based upon direct encounter*)
 - Pentateuch
- **Covenant Living** – God guides the covenant relationship with the missional community by way of authorized spokespersons (*secondary revelatory authority based upon unique individual calling & equipping*)
 - Joshua – Possessing the Land/Rest/Promise
 - Judges – Nearly losing the Land/Rest/Promise
 - Ruth – Recovering Covenant Land/Rest/Promise through obedience
 - “Kings” – Establishing the Covenant Monarchy & Temple, coming under Covenant judgment
 - Ezra-Nehemiah-Esther – Restoring the Covenant Community
- **Covenant Questions** – God nurtures the covenant relationship with a missional community by way of spiritual wisdom and insight (*tertiary revelatory authority based upon communal spiritual insight*)
 - Poetry

Introductory Notes: “Wisdom Literature”

- Probes human issues, problems, needs, values
- Usually anonymous
- Assumes a divinely initiated “moral matrix”
- Assumes human sin and responsibility
- Often expressed in poetry

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#2

An Overview of Biblical Wisdom
Literature

Bible “Big Picture”

• Covenant Making – God establishes a covenant relationship with a missional community by way of a redemptive act (primary revelatory authority based upon direct encounter)

- Pentateuch

• Covenant Living – God guides the covenant relationship with the missional community by way of authorized spokespersons (secondary revelatory authority based upon unique individual calling & equipping)

- Former & Latter Prophets

• Covenant Questions – God nurtures the covenant relationship with a missional community by way of spiritual wisdom and insight (tertiary revelatory authority based upon communal spiritual insight)

- Job – “Why do I suffer?”

- Psalms – “How do I pray?”

- Proverbs – “What is true wisdom?”

- Ecclesiastes – “What is the meaning of life?”

- Song of Songs – “What is the meaning of love?”

- Lamentations – “What does it mean to have Yahweh’s covenant commitment?”

Overview of Job

- **The Plot:** A very rich man in the Ancient Near East becomes the focus of a conversation between God and Satan. All of Job's assets are taken away, and three rounds of poetic dialogue probe why this has happened.
- **The Structure:**
 - An opening prose narrative about Job and the tragedies
 - Three dramatic dialogues, each with a different group or person interacting with Job
 - A very brief closing statement about the outcomes
- **The Intent:** through this drama, questions emerge:
 - Is this world guided or random?
 - Are there moral structures and do these matter?
 - Is there a God, and if so, what is God's character?
 - What is the ultimate meaning of human existence?

Overview of Psalms

- **The Collection:** A variety of different poems by various authors and of diverse lengths and styles, expressing many different dimensions of human wondering, prayer, insight, hopes, fears, and values.
- **The Structure:**
 - One hundred fifty individual Psalms gathered into five “books,” each of which ends with a doxology (song of praise to God)
- **The Intent:** through these many prayers, worship emerges:
 - Praise to God for good events and other blessings
 - Petitions for help
 - Statements of courage and faith
 - Wrestlings with difficulties and doubts

Overview of Proverbs

- **The Collection:** A variety of different poetic lectures and many brief proverbs which capture the meaning of life and love and values and morality.
- **The Structure:**
 - There is an opening statement of the value of Proverbs
 - There is a collection of lectures about the benefits of Wisdom and the detriments of Folly
 - There are several collections of pithy proverbs, most attributed to Solomon, but also to other wise people
 - There is a concluding poem in praise of Wisdom
- **The Intent:** through these many lectures and proverbs, a particular understanding of life and living emerges:
 - God is sovereign
 - Humankind is morally responsible
 - We choose our own ethical behaviors
 - Good is always God's way, and proves best in the end

Overview of Ecclesiastes

- **The Collection:** A very wise and powerful ruler looks back at his life and experiences, and tries to make sense of things.
- **The Structure:**
 - An opening statement of the problems and tragedies of life
 - A variety of explorations and proverbs and meaning
 - A closing declaration about how to understand and live life meaningfully
- **The Intent:** through these reflections, questions emerge:
 - Is this world guided or random?
 - Are there moral structures and do these matter?
 - Is there a God, and if so, what is God's character?
 - What is the ultimate meaning of human existence?
 - How do we get by in the meantime?

Overview of Song of Songs

- **The Collection:** A variety of different types of poetry emerging from various voices, all of which together portray people in love and lust, and give the outcomes of the quest for intimacy in the life of a young woman.
- **The Structure:**
 - There is an opening statement made by a young woman who finds herself the object of love, and tries to figure out why this should be
 - There are lusty songs of praise to her and to love itself
 - There are several hints at events taking place around the young woman
 - There are choruses raised by those who observe what is happening
 - There is a concluding reflection on the meaning of love
- **The Intent:** through these many different kinds of poetry, a particular understanding of love emerges:
 - Humans are made to love
 - Love can be healthy, and it can be perverse
 - The best of who we are emerges in loving relationships

Overview of Lamentations

- **The Collection:** Five songs of lament, usually attributed to Jeremiah, which probe the reasons behind and lessons to be learned from the fall of Jerusalem.
- **The Structure:**
 - Four acrostic poems of differing lengths, voices and structures, followed by a fifth poem which is not shaped acrostically
- **The Intent:** through these laments, questions emerge:
 - Why did this disaster happen?
 - Is God in control, or not?
 - Are God's promises in place, or have they been forgotten?
 - How should we respond to overwhelming calamities?

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#3

The Language of Hebrew Poetry

Introductory Notes: Hebrew Poetry

- **Reasons for Poetry:**

- Express strong emotions
- Condense living into dramatic moments
- Provide for group expression (e.g., singing)

- **Primary qualities of Hebrew Poetry:**

1. **Parallelism:**

- Especially Synonymous, Antithetic, & Stairlike

1. **Meter:**

- Rhythm in repetitive stress patterns

2. **Widely-used poetic literary techniques:**

- Acrostics, Alliteration, Assonance, Enveloping, Chiasm

Hebrew Poetry Parallelism #1

- *Synonymous Parallelism*: two lines forming a single idea, each saying the same thing using different words:
 - “Why did I not perish at birth,
and die as I came from the womb?” (Job 3:11)
 - “Why is light given to those in misery,
and life to the bitter of soul...” (Job 3:20)
 - “What I feared has come upon me;
what I dreaded has happened to me.” (Job 3:25)

Hebrew Poetry Parallelism #2

- *Antithetic Parallelism*: two lines forming a single idea, each saying the opposite thing so that the idea is viewed from two perspectives:
 - “Do not declare me guilty,
but tell me what charges you have against me.”
(Job 10:2)
 - “Can anyone bring charges against me?
If so, I will be silent and die.” (Job 13:19)
 - “Then summon me and I will answer,
or let me speak, and you reply to me.” (Job 13:22)

Hebrew Poetry Parallelism #3

- *Stairlike Parallelism*: three or more lines forming a single idea, each building on or expanding the ideas found in the previous line:
 - “You fasten my feet in shackles;
you keep close watch on all my paths
by putting marks on the soles of my feet.” (Job 13:27)
 - “A person’s days are determined;
you have decreed the number of his months
and have set limits he cannot exceed.” (Job 14:5)
 - “At least there is hope for a tree:
If it is cut down, it will sprout again,
and its new shoots will not fail.” (Job 14:7)

Introductory Notes: Hebrew Poetry

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Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

- *The Song of Hiawatha*: an example of using Meter or rhythm to convey meaning
 - By the shores of Gitche Gumee,
By the shining Big-Sea-Water,
Stood the wigwam of Nokomis,
Daughter of the Moon, Nokomis.
Dark behind it rose the forest,
Rose the black and gloomy pine-trees,
Rose the firs with cones upon them;
Bright before it beat the water,
Beat the clear and sunny water,
Beat the shining Big-Sea-Water.
- Hebrew poetry makes great use of this technique; unfortunately, it is not easily translated from Hebrew into other languages

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Other Tools of Hebrew Poetry

- **Acrostics:**
 - Beginning successive lines or stanzas with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet
- **Alliteration:**
 - Repetition of beginning letters or sounds with a number of consecutive or nearby words in a line or group of lines
- **Assonance:**
 - Repetition of similar vowel sounds within a number of consecutive or nearby words in a line or group of lines
- **Enveloping:**
 - Using a single idea, or a couplet of lines at the beginning and again at the end of a stanza or poem, like tucking the whole message into the envelop of this idea
- **Chiasm:**
 - Repeating successive terms or ideas in reverse order after the midpoint of a poem or story

Parallelism Is Most Prominent

- Among all of the tools or techniques of Hebrew poetry, only parallelism is consistently evident in our translations.
- Other tools and techniques get lost in translation
- Parallelism is virtually always present:
 - Synonymous is dominant (perhaps 90% of the lines in Job, and perhaps 80% of the lines in Psalms)
 - Antithetic is the key method for creating proverbs (perhaps 50% of the lines in Proverbs)
 - Stairlike is often used to slow down our thinking, in order to get us to pause and reflect more fully on an idea

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#4

Introduction to the Book of Job:
The Historical Setting

The Historical Setting of Job

- **Location:**
 - Somewhere in Mesopotamia (“Land of Uz,” “people of the east”)



Where is the land of Uz?

- “Mesopotamia”
 - “Between the Rivers”
 - Tigris & Euphrates
 - Could also be:
 - Yemen?
 - Sinai Penninsula?

Golan Heights is Israeli-occupied Syria.
West Bank and Gaza Strip are Israeli-occupied with current status subject to the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement -- permanent status to be determined through further negotiation.
Israel proclaimed Jerusalem as its capital in 1950, but the US, like nearly all other countries, maintains its Embassy in Tel Aviv.

The Historical Setting of Job

- **Time of Occurrence:**
 - Probably during the Patriarchal period of Genesis (+/-2000 B.C.) (agrarian patriarchal society)

Events

- Job is Described:
 - Location: “Land of Uz” (1:1)
 - Character:
 - Blameless (1:1): “feared God and shunned evil”
 - Rich (1:2-3): many children, much possessions
 - Proactive (1:4-5): initiated sacrifices even when there was no specific evidence of wrongs
- Job is Tormented:
 - After a discussion in heaven about Job, everything is taken from him except his life and his wife!
 - Round 1—All his goods and children are destroyed in a single day
 - Interlude: Job remains stoic and godly, but Satan questions further
 - Round 2—Job’s own physical health is sapped and pained
 - Interlude: Job remains stoic and godly, but his wife gets annoying and his friends get pastoral

The Historical Setting of Job

- **Connection with other biblical literature:**
 - Paul quotes Job 5:13 (1 Cor. 3:19) & 41:11 (Rom. 11:35)
 - Ezekiel (14:14) & James (5:11) refer to Job
 - Written in Hebrew and found only in the Hebrew Bible
- **More meaning will emerge through the dialogues**
 - But for now, we leave Job in his misery
 - And we reflect on the great misery found in this world:
 - Who causes it?
 - Who is in charge?
 - Who sets the moral standards of human life?
 - What response ought to be made?

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#5

Introduction to the Book of Job:
The Transcendent Setting

Review

- Job is a rich man living in the ancient near east
- Job becomes the object of interest for both good and evil powers who are dialoguing together in heaven
- Job's life is shattered through:
 - The destruction of his property
 - The deaths of his children
 - The diseases that wrack his body

But what about God & Satan?

- Assumes a worldview like that of the Hebrew Bible:
 - Creator deity (“Yahweh”) who retains final control
 - Evil as an intrusion
 - A collection of spiritual creatures (angels; demons?) who share oversight of the physical world (cf. Psalm 82)
 - The possibility that “Satan” may have originally been an angel (cf. Isaiah 14:3-23)
 - » How you have fallen from heaven,
morning star, son of the dawn!
You have been cast down to the earth,
you who once laid low the nations!
You said in your heart,
“I will ascend to the heavens;
I will raise my throne
above the stars of God;
I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly,
on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon.
I will ascend above the tops of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.”
But you are brought down to the realm of the dead,
to the depths of the pit. (Isaiah 14:12-15)

What can we say about these things?

- The book of Job assumes the Creator God is always in control:
 - Even when Satan does evil, it happens by way of permission, not separate initiative
- The book of Job assumes that there are angelic beings who share in the supervision of creation (cf. Psalm 82 as a similar expression)
- The book of Job suggests that at least one among the angelic beings is corrupted and has become an opponent to God's good ways
- The book of Job identifies this being as "The Satan." The name, in Hebrew, actually means "the Accuser."
 - This is a legal term
 - It can be used for witnesses to a crime
 - But it can also be used for what we would call the prosecuting attorney
 - In this sense, the Satan is not necessarily evil, but deeply aware of evil, and has a responsibility to ensure that nothing false is allowed to survive
 - Like, in this respect, the "Devil's Advocate" in the Roman Catholic process of identifying saints
- This name comes back several times in the Gospels
 - For instance, in Luke 10, where Jesus sends out the 72 as missionaries
 - They return excitedly, noting that even the demons obeyed them when cast out
 - Jesus replies that he has seen "Satan" falling like lightning from heaven (Luke 10:18)
- But it is probably most paralleled in:
 - Zechariah 3
 - Revelation 12
- What does it mean?
 - We live in a corrupted world, in which evil is overtly challenging, but God is in control
 - How will we live faithfully?

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#6

Understanding the Dramatic
Development of the Book of Job:
The First Act

Remember the Structure

- The Setting (Job 1-2): mostly prose
- The Dialogues (Job 3-41): almost entirely poetry
 - First Dramatic Dialogue (Job 3-31)
 - Three rounds of conversation with three friends
 - Second Dramatic Dialogue (Job 32-37)
 - Elihu takes on everyone
 - Third Dramatic Dialogue (Job 38-41)
 - God speaks without answering
- The Conclusion (Job 42): mostly prose

The Drama of Job

- First Dramatic Dialogue (mostly poetry): Condemnation & Confusion (2:11-31:40)
 1. Introduction: (2:11-3:26)
 - Job's Friends attend him (2:11-13)
 - Job's Lament (3)
 2. Round #1: (4:1-14:22)
 - Eliphaz's ("My God is strength!") Testimony: (4-5)
 - God is pure & just! (4)
 - Humans bring trouble on themselves! (5)
 - Job's Response: (6-7)
 - Show me where I've sinned! (6)
 - God, forgive me if I've sinned! (7)

The Drama of Job

- First Dramatic Dialogue (continued):
 - Round #1 (continued): (4:1-14:22)
 - Bildad's (name meaning uncertain) Challenge: (8)
 - » Only the ungodly suffer! (8:1-19)
 - » If the shoe fits, wear it! (8:20-22)
 - Job's Response: (9-10)
 - » God is wise and powerful! (9)
 - » God, why do you punish me?! (10)
 - Zophar's ("Leaping" or "Chirping") Plea: (11)
 - » God is in control! (11:1-12)
 - » Turn back to him! (11:13-20)
 - Job's Response: (12-14)
 - » I've never left him! (12)
 - » You're no help to me! (13)
 - » God, will you help me?! (14)

The Drama of Job

- First Dramatic Dialogue (continued):
 - Round #2: (15-21)
 - Eliphaz' Attack: (15)
 - Humans are wicked! (15:1-16)
 - The fate of the wicked is sure! (15:17-35)
 - Job's Response: (16-17)
 - You're no help to me! (16)
 - God, I plead my case before you! (17)
 - Bildad's Harshness: (18)
 - Who do you think you are?! (18:1-4)
 - The end of the wicked is sure! (18:5-21)
 - Job's Response: (19)
 - Have pity on me! (19:1-12)
 - God, vindicate me! (19:13-29)

The Drama of Job

- First Dramatic Dialogue (continued):
 - Round #2 (continued): (15-21)
 - Zophar's Condemnation: (20)
 - You make me angry! (20:1-3)
 - The wicked will be cut short! (20:4-29)
 - Job's Response: (21)
 - But many wicked people prosper! (21:1-33)
 - So all your arguments are false! (21:34)

The Drama of Job

- First Dramatic Dialogue (continued):
 - Round #3: (22-31)
 - Eliphaz' Accusation: (22)
 - » Submit to God!
 - Job's Response: (23-24)
 - » But I can't find God!
 - Bildad's Rebuke: (25)
 - » You can't be righteous—nothing is righteous before God!
 - Job's Response: (26-31)
 - » God is great and just and wise! (26-28)
 - » Remember how good life used to be?! (29)
 - » But look at me now! (30)
 - » Still, I maintain that I am innocent! (31)

Note This:

The First Dramatic Dialogue seems unfinished!

- **Eliphaz** and **Bildad** make their same cases three times over, but in the third round, **Zophar** is nowhere to be found!
- Job's response in Round #3 is much longer than it was in Rounds #1 and #2, and seems to plead for another view!
- The three friends immediately disappear as a new character emerges on center stage: **Elihu** ("You are my God!")
- Note: the three friends (but not Elihu!) will reappear in the final prose wrap-up
- The implication at this point is that the three friends do not have the answer for Job's situation, nor provide true religious wisdom; another voice is needed

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#7

Understanding the Dramatic
Development of the Book of Job:
The Second Act

Remember the Structure

- The Setting (Job 1-2): mostly prose
- The Dialogues (Job 3-41): almost entirely poetry
 - First Dramatic Dialogue (Job 3-31)
 - Three rounds of conversation with three friends
 - Second Dramatic Dialogue (Job 32-37)
 - Elihu takes on everyone
 - Third Dramatic Dialogue (Job 38-41)
 - God speaks without answering
- The Conclusion (Job 42): mostly prose

The Drama of Job

- Second Dramatic Dialogue (mostly poetry): A New Voice (32-37)
 1. Introduction: (32)
 - Job's three friends reach an impasse (32:1)
 - Elihu ("You are My God!") enters the picture (32:2-5)
 - Elihu's summary of the situation (the older friends have not provided appropriate wisdom or answers to Job) (32:6-22)
 2. Four Speeches: (33-37)
 - Speech #1 (to Job): God speaks through pain! (34)
 - Speech #2 (to the three friends): God is just! (35)
 - Speech #3 (to Job): It pays to serve God! (36)
 - Speech #4 (to Job): God is just, kind and sovereign! (37)

What is the New Development?

- Job's three friends have revealed their perspective:
 - This is a moral universe
 - God is in complete control
 - Good behavior results in blessings; bad behavior results in punishment
 - In other words, God is morally rigorous and absolute, and righteousness is rigid and brittle
- Elihu shares many of their beliefs:
 - This is a moral universe
 - God is in complete control
 - Good behaviors generally result in blessings; bad behaviors generally bring punishment
- But then Elihu adds a deeper level of thought:
 - But God is highly relational, not merely righteously rigid
 - Moreover, the evil in our world may result from different divine intents:
 - Sometimes God certainly brings punishment on evil
 - But sometimes God uses pain in a general sense, in a compromised world, to get people to remember their dependence, and turn to God as the source of all good things
 - In other words, while the three friends demand that Job repent, Elihu suggests that maybe Job is telling the truth about his upright character (meaning that he has nothing specific to repent for), but warns Job not to become haughty or presumptuous (meaning that he needs to listen through these sufferings for the voice of God, and to become submissive)

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#8

Understanding the Dramatic
Development of the Book of Job:
The Third Act & Brief Epilogue

Remember the Structure

- The Setting (Job 1-2): mostly prose
- The Dialogues (Job 3-41): almost entirely poetry
 - First Dramatic Dialogue (Job 3-31)
 - Three rounds of conversation with three friends
 - Second Dramatic Dialogue (Job 32-37)
 - Elihu takes on everyone
 - Third Dramatic Dialogue (Job 38-41)
 - God speaks without answering
- The Conclusion (Job 42): mostly prose

The Drama of Job

- Third Dramatic Dialogue (mostly poetry): The Voice of God Thunders (38:1-42:6)
 - Introduction: (38-39)
 - God appears (38:1)
 - God displays divine Glory (38:2-39:30)
 - Ten object lessons from the physical realm (38:2-38)
 - Ten object lessons from the animal realm (38:39-39:30)
 - Round #1: (40:1-5)
 - God's Demand: Who accuses me?! (40:1-2)
 - Job's Reply: I'm sorry! (40:3-5)
 - Round #2: (40:6-42:6)
 - God's Challenge: Can you rule in my place?! (40:6-41:34)
 - Job's Reply: I'm sorry for doubting you! (42:1-6)

Some Reflections

- The third dramatic dialogue is very brief!
- God does not really answer either Job's friends challenges, nor Job's questions
- The perspectives brought forward by Elihu seems to inform this new dialogue:
 - God is sovereign
 - This is a moral universe
 - But good and evil, and blessings and curses, are all caught up into something much bigger than individual questions about moral behaviors
 - We live in a complex world that we cannot fully explain
- The challenge of God to Job is not about any sinful actions on his part, but about any presumption that he can declare his righteousness, or know the mind of God, or even presume to dare
- The goal of this dialogue is what Elihu suggested: ***submission***

The Drama of Job

- Closing Setting (prose): Peace on Earth (42:7-17)
 - Job's three friends are chastised (42:7-9)
 - *It is interesting that Job's three friends, who talked about being punished for doing wrong, are now threatened by Yahweh with punishment for doing wrong, and are only spared by the caring gracious intervention of the very person they maligned: Job himself!*
 - Job is blessed (42:10-15)
 - Job is vindicated (42:17-17)

Questions about the Drama of Job

- Is the book of Job really about suffering?
- What else might it be about?
- Where does “Satan” (“Accuser”) come from?
- What is the cosmology of the book?
- Does the plot resolve itself?

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#9

Why Does Job Suffer?

Reflections on the Key Ideas of the Book of Job

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Why Does Job Suffer?

An analysis of the dramatic responses

<i>Dramatis Personae</i>	From whom?	Why?	Toward what end?
Narrator	Satan	Spiritual test	Show faithfulness
Job's Wife	Satan	Job's god was bettered	"Curse God and die!" (2:4)
Three Friends	God (4:9)	Job has sinned	Repentance
Job	God (6:4; 12:9; 16:11-14)	"I don't know!"	"I don't know!"
Elihu	God (33:29)	Sometimes sin (34:11); humanity's lot (33:19-34)	Guidance (33:29); Dependence
God	(not answered)	Confirm relationship with God	Surrender
Conclusion	God	Punishment (friends); Chastisement (Job)	Surrender

The Message of Job

1. Ours is not an entirely mechanistic universe:
 - *There are spiritual powers that influence our daily lives*
 - *Not all pain and problems are the direct result of our sinfulness*
2. The normal or natural human identity involves acknowledging and worshipping God
3. But the worship of God cannot be coerced
4. The fundamental challenge to human living is that of continuing to be our truest God-worshipping selves even when the limited evidence of daily experience seems to speak to the contrary

How Do We Respond to Pain & Suffering?

- *Option 1* – **accuse & placate** (Job’s friends: religious mechanism—cause/effect)
- *Option 2* – **change “gods”** (Satan: find another higher power when yours fails you)
- *Option 3* – **give up in the face of the absurd** (Job’s wife: fatalism)
- *Option 4* – **live with existential boldness** (Job: I don’t know but I won’t give in)
- *Option 5* – **wrestle and worship** (Narrator: ultimate to our existence is the Creator/Creature relationship; it is the only norming value that endorses our truest human identity, no matter what happens)

Biblical Wisdom:
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#10

Introduction to and overview of the
Book of Psalms

Notes on the Psalter

- 150 Poems, originally meant to be sung
- Other “Psalms” from Hebrew history have been found (e.g., in the Dead Sea Scrolls)
- This collection, as it has been received, has been stable since the first century A.D.
- It is divided into five “books” (1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-150), each of which ends with a “doxology.” These “books” may reflect stages of development & collection:
 - Most Psalms of David occur in the first collection
 - The Psalms of Asaph and “Sons of Korah” occur in the middle
 - A Psalm of Exile (137) occurs late
 - The “Psalms of Ascent” (Pilgrim Psalms?) occur in the last section

Notes on the Psalter

- There are a number of Psalms that have “titles.” These are not part of the actual Psalms, and may or may not reflect original circumstances.
- Some “titles” purport to give the original historical context for the creation of the Psalm:
 - Psalm 3 “A Psalm of David, when he fled from his son Absalom”
 - Psalm 18 “A Psalm of David the servant of the Lord, who addressed the words of this song to the Lord on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul”
 - Psalm 34 “Of David, when he feigned madness before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away”
 - Psalm 51 “A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba”
 - Psalm 52 “A Maskil of David, when Doeg the Edomite came to Saul and said to him, ‘David has come to the house of Ahimelech’”

Notes on the Psalter

- Some “titles” appear to be dedications:
 - “To the Leader” (5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, etc.)
 - “To Jeduthun” (39)
- Some “titles” appear to give instructions about tunes or performance cues:
 - “Psalm” – with instrumental accompaniment (e.g., 64)
 - “Song” – without instrumental accompaniment (e.g., 65)
 - “According to ‘The Deer of the Dawn’” (22)
 - “According to ‘Lilies’” (45, 69)
 - “According to ‘Alamoth’” (46)
 - “According to ‘The Lilies of the Covenant’” (60, 80?)
 - “A Maskil” (42, 44, 45, 52, 53, 77, 78, 88, 89, etc.)
 - “A Miktam” (16, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, etc.)
 - “With stringed instruments” (61, 67, 76, etc.)
 - “For the memorial offering” (70)
 - “According to ‘The Gittith’” (81, 84)

Notes on the Psalter

- Some “titles” identify the author:
 - David (73 Psalms – mostly near the beginning)
 - Solomon (2 Psalms – 72 & 127)
 - Sons of Korah (12 Psalms – 42-49, 84-85, 87-88)
 - Asaph (12 Psalms – 50, 73-83)
 - Heman the Ezrahite (1 Psalm – 88)
 - Ethan the Ezrahite (1 Psalm – 89)
 - Moses (1 Psalm – 90)

Notes on the Psalter

- Most Psalms of David occur early in the Psalter
- Most “Praise” Psalms occur late in the Psalter
- Psalms 120-134 are identified as “Songs of Ascent” and appear to have been a collection used by festival pilgrims:
 - note how they begin in distress and at a distance from Jerusalem (120)
 - anticipate seeing Jerusalem (122, 125, 132)
 - speak of traveling (121, 126)
 - and end in worship at the Temple (134)
- Psalm 119 is an acrostic (as are 9, 34, & 37), with groupings of 8 parallel couplets beginning with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet ($22 \times 8 = 176$ verses): the “completeness” (“A to Z”) of the Word/Law/Precepts of Yahweh

Understanding Hebrew Poetry

- Most obvious literary device: Parallelism
 - Synonymous—two (or more) lines that say the same thing using different words
 - “My soul is full of troubles,
my life draws near to Sheol.” (88:3)
 - “He established a decree in Jacob,
and appointed a law in Israel.” (78:5)
 - Antithetic—two lines that declare opposite ideas in order to support the same conclusion
 - “I hate the double-minded,
but I love your law.” (119:113)
 - “He did not spare them from death,
but gave their lives over to the plague.” (78:50)

Understanding Hebrew Poetry

- Most obvious literary device: Parallelism
 - Stairlike—three or more lines that build up an idea by expanding on terms used in the previous lines
 - “Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits—
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good things as long as
you live
so that your youth is renewed like the
eagle’s.” (103:2-5)

Understanding Hebrew Poetry

- Literary devices that do not translate well:
 - Rhythm & meter—cadence for recitation
 - Assonance—repetition of vowel sounds
 - Consonance—repetition of consonant sounds
 - Alliteration—repetition of word-beginning letters
- Subtle and complex literary devices:
 - Enveloping—surrounding an inner verse with a repeated chant or refrain (see 118:1, 29):

“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!”
 - Chiasm—reflexive repetition of lines , phrases or ideas in clear parallelism (see 114):

Psalm 114

When Israel went out from Egypt,
the house of Jacob from a people of strange language,
Judah became God's sanctuary,
Israel his dominion.

The sea looked and fled;
Jordan turned back.

The mountains skipped like rams,
the hills like lambs.

Why is it, O sea, that you flee?

O Jordan, that you turn back?

O mountains, that you skip like rams?

O hills, like lambs?

Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord,
at the presence of the God of Jacob,
who turns the rock into a pool of water,
the flint into a spring of water.

Understanding & Using the Psalms

- Individual Lament:
 - Cries of the individual in times of distress
 - 5,6,10,13,22,26,35,38,39,40,42,43,51,54,55,56,57,59,64,69,70,86,88,102,109,120,130,142,143
- Communal Lament:
 - Cries of the community in times of distress
 - 60,74,79,80,90,108,123,137
- Hymns of Praise:
 - Celebrations of Yahweh's goodness & character
 - 8,9,19,29,30,33,34,65,66,67,68,76,95,96,97,98,99,100,103,104,111,113,116,117,134,135,138,144,145,146,147,148,149,150
- Songs of Confidence:
 - Declarations of trust in Yahweh
 - 3,4,7,11,12,16,17,18,20,23,27,28,31,36,41,46,50,58,62,63,71,77,82,83,85,89,91,92,93,94,114,115,121,124,125,126,129,139,140,141

Understanding & Using the Psalms

- Royal Psalms:
 - Song in praise of Yahweh as Israel’s true king and the monarch who rules on Yahweh’s behalf
 - 2,21,24,45,47,61,72,110,132
- Psalms of Zion:
 - “National Anthems” that praise the earthly residence of Yahweh
 - 14,48,53,84,87,122
- “Thank” Psalms:
 - Expressions of appreciation for Yahweh’s deliverance
 - 75,118,136
- Wisdom or Priestly Instruction:
 - Poems which contain condensed teachings to be passed along by memorization
 - 1,15,25,32,37,44,49,52,73,78,81,101,105,106,107,112,119,127

Two Helpful Resources:

- Wayne Brouwer, *Hear Me, Oh God: Meditations on the Psalms*
- Wayne Brouwer, *Covenant Documents: Reading the Bible Again for the First Time* (Cognella: 2014)

Biblical Wisdom:
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#11

Understanding the Variety of Psalm
Types and Their Unique Expressions:

Part 1 – Individual Laments

Understanding & Using the Psalms

- Individual Lament:
 - Cries of the individual in times of distress
 - 5,6,10,13,22,26,35,38,39,40,42,43,51,54,55,56,57,59,64,69,70,86,88,102,109,120,130,142,143
- Communal Lament:
 - Cries of the community in times of distress
 - 60,74,79,80,90,108,123,137
- Hymns of Praise:
 - Celebrations of Yahweh's goodness & character
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- Songs of Confidence:
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Understanding & Using the Psalms

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 - 1,15,25,32,37,44,49,52,73,78,81,101,105,106,107,112,119,127

Individual Laments

- **Character:** Cries of the individual in times of distress
- **Examples:** Psalms 5, 6, 10, 13, 22, 26, 35, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 51, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 64, 69, 70, 86, 88, 102, 109, 120, 130, 142, 143

Individual Laments: Example #1 – Psalm 6

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. According to *sheminith*. A psalm of David.

¹ LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger
or discipline me in your wrath.

² Have mercy on me, LORD, for I am faint;
heal me, LORD, for my bones are in agony.

³ My soul is in deep anguish.
How long, LORD, how long?

⁴ Turn, LORD, and deliver me;
save me because of your unfailing love.

⁵ Among the dead no one proclaims your name.
Who praises you from the grave?

⁶ I am worn out from my groaning.
All night long I flood my bed with weeping
and drench my couch with tears.

⁷ My eyes grow weak with sorrow;
they fail because of all my foes.

⁸ Away from me, all you who do evil,
for the LORD has heard my weeping.

⁹ The LORD has heard my cry for mercy;
the LORD accepts my prayer.

¹⁰ All my enemies will be overwhelmed with shame and anguish;
they will turn back and suddenly be put to shame.

Note these things:

- Note the dedication and instructions in the title
- Note the synonymous parallelism used throughout
- Note the interspersing of declarations about suffering and questions to God as to why this is happening, or why God is silent, or why God is not acting quickly to remedy the situation
- Note the concluding confidence:
 - God had heard
 - God will help

Individual Laments: Example #2 – Psalm 22

For the director of music. To the tune of “The Doe of the Morning.” A psalm of David.

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?

² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.

³ Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.

⁴ In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.

⁵ To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

⁶ But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by everyone, despised by the people.

⁷ All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.

⁸ “He trusts in the LORD,” they say,
“let the LORD rescue him.

Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him.”

Individual Laments: Example #2 – Psalm 22

⁹ Yet you brought me out of the womb;
you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast.

¹⁰ From birth I was cast on you;
from my mother's womb you have been my God.

¹¹ Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.

¹² Many bulls surround me;
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.

¹³ Roaring lions that tear their prey
open their mouths wide against me.

¹⁴ I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.

My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted within me.

¹⁵ My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.

Individual Laments: Example #2 – Psalm 22

- ¹⁶ Dogs surround me,
a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce^[e] my hands and my feet.
- ¹⁷ All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.
- ¹⁸ They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.
- ¹⁹ But you, LORD, do not be far from me.
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.
- ²⁰ Deliver me from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dogs.
- ²¹ Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;
save me from the horns of the wild oxen.
- ²² I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you.
- ²³ You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!
- ²⁴ For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.

Individual Laments: Example #2 – Psalm 22

²⁵ From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;
before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.

²⁶ The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the LORD will praise him—
may your hearts live forever!

²⁷ All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,

²⁸ for dominion belongs to the LORD
and he rules over the nations.

²⁹ All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.

³⁰ Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.

³¹ They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!

Note These Things

- Jesus obviously knew this Psalm, and found in it a strong comparison between his circumstances and those of David
- David's tormenters used a variety of demeaning words and actions to accomplish their persecutions
- The first two-thirds of the Psalm are very negative, describing in horrible detail the awful things that are happening to David, but the last third suddenly breaks out in a song of deliverance to be shared with God's people at worship

Individual Laments: Example #3 – Psalm 88

A song. A psalm of the Sons of Korah. For the director of music. According to *mahalath leannoah*. A *maskil* of Heman the Ezrahite.

- ¹ LORD, you are the God who saves me;
day and night I cry out to you.
- ² May my prayer come before you;
turn your ear to my cry.
- ³ I am overwhelmed with troubles
and my life draws near to death.
- ⁴ I am counted among those who go down to the pit;
I am like one without strength.
- ⁵ I am set apart with the dead,
like the slain who lie in the grave,
whom you remember no more,
who are cut off from your care.
- ⁶ You have put me in the lowest pit,
in the darkest depths.
- ⁷ Your wrath lies heavily on me;
you have overwhelmed me with all your waves.
- ⁸ You have taken from me my closest friends
and have made me repulsive to them.
I am confined and cannot escape;
- ⁹ my eyes are dim with grief.
I call to you, LORD, every day;
I spread out my hands to you.

Individual Laments: Example #3 – Psalm 88

¹⁰ Do you show your wonders to the dead?

Do their spirits rise up and praise you?

¹¹ Is your love declared in the grave,
your faithfulness in Destruction^[e]?

¹² Are your wonders known in the place of darkness,
or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?

¹³ But I cry to you for help, LORD;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.

¹⁴ Why, LORD, do you reject me
and hide your face from me?

¹⁵ From my youth I have suffered and been close to death;
I have borne your terrors and am in despair.

¹⁶ Your wrath has swept over me;
your terrors have destroyed me.

¹⁷ All day long they surround me like a flood;
they have completely engulfed me.

¹⁸ You have taken from me friend and neighbor—
darkness is my closest friend.

Note These Things

- This is a “song” rather than a “psalm”, according to the title. The difference in these two words in the Hebrew language is only a slight variation in pronunciation, but a “song” was meant to be sung without instrumental accompaniment, while “psalms” were always accompanied with instruments. This may signal the horrible nature of this song’s message: I am left alone and no one shares my pain with me!
- This is the darkest Psalm in the entire collection
- Even God seems to be an enemy, according to Heman, at least from his limited perspective. There is almost no concluding note of confidence in rescue or salvation.

Reflections on Individual Laments

- We live in a world that often thinks of “worship” as mostly songs of praise and prayers of thanks.
- Laments help us remember our own needs and failures
- Laments give voice to the cries of the heart that are too often left in the shadows of the lonely
- Laments remind us of our dependence upon God, no matter what the circumstances of our lives.

Biblical Wisdom:
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#12

Understanding the Variety of Psalm
Types and Their Unique Expressions:

Part 2 – Communal Laments

Understanding & Using the Psalms

- Individual Lament:
 - Cries of the individual in times of distress
 - 5,6,10,13,22,26,35,38,39,40,42,43,51,54,55,56,57,59,64,69,70,86,88,102,109,120,130,142,143
- Communal Lament:
 - Cries of the community in times of distress
 - 60,74,79,80,90,108,123,137
- Hymns of Praise:
 - Celebrations of Yahweh's goodness & character
 - 8,9,19,29,30,33,34,65,66,67,68,76,95,96,97,98,99,100,103,104,111,113,116,117,134,135,138,144,145,146,147,148,149,150
- Songs of Confidence:
 - Declarations of trust in Yahweh
 - 3,4,7,11,12,16,17,18,20,23,27,28,31,36,41,46,50,58,62,63,71,77,82,83,85,89,91,92,93,94,114,115,121,124,125,126,129,139,140,141

Understanding & Using the Psalms

- Royal Psalms:
 - Song in praise of Yahweh as Israel's true king and the monarch who rules on Yahweh's behalf
 - 2,21,24,45,47,61,72,110,132
- Psalms of Zion:
 - “National Anthems” that praise the earthly residence of Yahweh
 - 14,48,53,84,87,122
- “Thank” Psalms:
 - Expressions of appreciation for Yahweh's deliverance
 - 75,118,136
- Wisdom or Priestly Instruction:
 - Poems which contain condensed teachings to be passed along by memorization
 - 1,15,25,32,37,44,49,52,73,78,81,101,105,106,107,112,119,127

Communal Laments

- **Character:** Cries of the community in times of distress
- **Examples:** Psalms 60, 74, 79, 80, 90, 108, 123, 137

Communal Laments: Example #1 – Psalm 60

For the director of music. To the tune of “The Lily of the Covenant.” A *miktam* of David. For teaching. When he fought Aram Naharaim and Aram Zobah, and when Joab returned and struck down twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.

- ¹ You have rejected us, God, and burst upon us;
you have been angry—now restore us!
- ² You have shaken the land and torn it open;
mend its fractures, for it is quaking.
- ³ You have shown your people desperate times;
you have given us wine that makes us stagger.
- ⁴ But for those who fear you, you have raised a banner
to be unfurled against the bow.
- ⁵ Save us and help us with your right hand,
that those you love may be delivered.
- ⁶ God has spoken from his sanctuary:
“In triumph I will parcel out Shechem
and measure off the Valley of Sukkoth.
- ⁷ Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine;
Ephraim is my helmet,
Judah is my scepter.
- ⁸ Moab is my washbasin,
on Edom I toss my sandal;
over Philistia I shout in triumph.”
- ⁹ Who will bring me to the fortified city?
Who will lead me to Edom?
- ¹⁰ Is it not you, God, you who have now rejected us
and no longer go out with our armies?
- ¹¹ Give us aid against the enemy,
for human help is worthless.
- ¹² With God we will gain the victory,
and he will trample down our enemies.

Note these things:

- The Psalm is connected directly to a difficult time in the life of David, according to the title.
- We do not know what the Hebrew word “miktam” means, but all of the Psalms in which it appears in the titles are Psalms of David, and are psalms of distress.
- Note the connection made between the difficult fortunes of Israel in battle, and the sense of divine judgment
- Note the concluding confidence (as was the case with Individual Laments):
 - God had heard
 - God will help

Individual Laments: Example #2 – Psalm 80

A psalm of Asaph.

- ¹ O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance; for we are in desperate need.
they have defiled your holy temple,
they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble.
- ² They have left the dead bodies of your servants ⁹ Help us, God our Savior,
as food for the birds of the sky, for the glory of your name;
the flesh of your own people for the animals of the deliver us and forgive our sins
wild. for your name's sake.
- ³ They have poured out blood like water ¹⁰ Why should the nations say,
all around Jerusalem, "Where is their God?"
and there is no one to bury the dead. Before our eyes, make known among the nations
that you avenge the outpoured blood of your
servants.
- ⁴ We are objects of contempt to our neighbors,
of scorn and derision to those around us. ¹¹ May the groans of the prisoners come before you;
with your strong arm preserve those condemned to
die.
- ⁵ How long, LORD? Will you be angry forever?
How long will your jealousy burn like fire? ¹² Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times
the contempt they have hurled at you, Lord.
- ⁶ Pour out your wrath on the nations ¹³ Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture,
that do not acknowledge you, will praise you forever;
on the kingdoms from generation to generation
that do not call on your name; we will proclaim your praise.
- ⁷ for they have devoured Jacob
and devastated his homeland.
- ⁸ Do not hold against us the sins of past generations;
may your mercy come quickly to meet us,

Note These Things

- Israel's idea of blessing is tied to its "inheritance" in the land of Canaan
- Fleeing before conquering nations is considered to be part of the curses of the Sinai Covenant that kick in when the people are unfaithful to God
- God's very honor is at stake in the outcome of this conflict
- Therefore God's people are certain that God will bring victory

Individual Laments: Example #3 – Psalm 137

- ¹ By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion.
- ² There on the poplars
we hung our harps,
- ³ for there our captors asked us for songs,
our tormentors demanded songs of joy;
they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”
- ⁴ How can we sing the songs of the LORD
while in a foreign land?
- ⁵ If I forget you, Jerusalem,
may my right hand forget its skill.
- ⁶ May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth
if I do not remember you,
if I do not consider Jerusalem
my highest joy.
- ⁷ Remember, LORD, what the Edomites did
on the day Jerusalem fell.
“Tear it down,” they cried,
“tear it down to its foundations!”
- ⁸ Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction,
happy is the one who repays you
according to what you have done to us.
- ⁹ Happy is the one who seizes your infants
and dashes them against the rocks.

Note These Things

- This Psalm dates from late in Israel's existence: the Babylonian Exile
- Alienation from the land of Promise is an indication of God's judgment
- But even in an alien environment, God's people do not have to imagine themselves forgotten, or lacking the watchful care of their God
- Still, the unique practices of the people of God separate them from other religious groups and cultures, and make them stand out. This can lead to taunting and persecution.
- "Zion" is the code name for God's dwelling on earth, the Temple in Jerusalem
- Remembering and faith and faithfulness are all part of the same package

Reflections on Communal Laments

- We live in a world that often thinks of “worship” as mostly songs of praise and prayers of thanks.
- Laments help us remember our own needs and failures.
- Communal laments give voice to the cries of the community that transcend individual experience.
- Communal laments keep us focused on segments of society that are inherently lacking access to justice and positions of influence.
- Communal laments arise from devastations that are much larger and more critical than simply a single person’s misfortunes.
- Communal laments are about shared pain and shared faith.

Biblical Wisdom:
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#13

Understanding the Variety of Psalm
Types and Their Unique Expressions:

Part 3 – Praise

Understanding & Using the Psalms

- Individual Lament:
 - Cries of the individual in times of distress
 - 5,6,10,13,22,26,35,38,39,40,42,43,51,54,55,56,57,59,64,69,70,86,88,102,109,120,130,142,143
- Communal Lament:
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 - Song in praise of Yahweh as Israel's true king and the monarch who rules on Yahweh's behalf
 - 2,21,24,45,47,61,72,110,132
- Psalms of Zion:
 - “National Anthems” that praise the earthly residence of Yahweh
 - 14,48,53,84,87,122
- “Thank” Psalms:
 - Expressions of appreciation for Yahweh's deliverance
 - 75,118,136
- Wisdom or Priestly Instruction:
 - Poems which contain condensed teachings to be passed along by memorization
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Praise

- **Character:** Celebrations of Yahweh's goodness and character, and the delights of life that expresses the best of what the Creator intended for us
- **Examples:** Psalms 8, 9, 19, 29, 30, 33, 34, 65, 66, 67, 68, 76, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 103, 104, 111, 113, 116, 117, 134, 135, 138, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150

Praise: Example #1 – Psalm 8

For the director of music. According to *gittith*.^[b] A psalm of David.

¹ LORD, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory

in the heavens.

² Through the praise of children and infants

you have established a stronghold against your enemies,

to silence the foe and the avenger.

³ When I consider your heavens,

the work of your fingers,

the moon and the stars,

which you have set in place,

⁴ what is mankind that you are mindful of them,

human beings that you care for them?

⁵ You have made them a little lower than the angels

and crowned them with glory and honor.

⁶ You made them rulers over the works of your hands;

you put everything under their feet:

⁷ all flocks and herds,

and the animals of the wild,

⁸ the birds in the sky,

and the fish in the sea,

all that swim the paths of the seas.

⁹ LORD, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Note these things:

- The Psalm is “enveloped” by the refrain: “Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.”
- The Psalm has two parts:
 - In the first half, creation is praised with awe for its vastness, and humankind is presented as small
 - In the second half, humanity is praised for its prominence in the Creator’s intentions, and all other things are made subservient
- There is a combined attitude of wonder and pride, all caught up into the larger theme that God, the Creator, is over all
- Still, notice that the transcendent God is “our Lord!”

Praise: Example #2 – Psalm 19

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

- ¹ The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
 - ² Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
 - ³ They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
 - ⁴ Yet their voice^[b] goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
- In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.
- ⁵ It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
 - ⁶ It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.

Praise: Example #2 – Psalm 19

The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.

⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.

The decrees of the LORD are firm,
and all of them are righteous.

¹⁰ They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;

they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.

¹¹ By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

Praise: Example #2 – Psalm 19

¹² But who can discern their own errors?

Forgive my hidden faults.

¹³ Keep your servant also from willful sins;

may they not rule over me.

Then I will be blameless,

innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴ May these words of my mouth and this meditation

of my heart

be pleasing in your sight,

LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Note These Things

- The Psalm has two parts and a prayer
 - Part one lauds the glory of God in Creation
 - Part two celebrates the glory of God in Revelation
 - The prayer seeks divine assistance in right living in creation through the guidance of revelation
- Praise involves knowing one's place before God
- Sin and sinfulness are assumed as innate to the human condition
- Right living results from knowing the glory of God and the righteousness of God's character revealed

Praise: Example #3 – Psalm 100

A psalm. For giving grateful praise.

- ¹ Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.
- ² Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.
- ³ Know that the LORD is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
- ⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.
- ⁵ For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Note These Things

- Note the title. This Psalm has always evoke praise.
- Notice the variety of metaphors used to describe God's relationship with God's people, and the people's relationship with God.
- Note that this Psalm is particularly intended as a song of praise at the beginning of worship, as God's people are gathering in the Temple.

Praise: Example #4 – Psalm 134

A song of ascents.

- ¹ Praise the LORD, all you servants of the LORD
who minister by night in the house of the LORD.
- ² Lift up your hands in the sanctuary
and praise the LORD.
- ³ May the LORD bless you from Zion,
he who is the Maker of heaven and earth.

Note These Things

- Note the title. This Psalm is the final of fifteen “Songs of Ascent” (120-134) that appear to have been a collection within the larger collection of the Psalms, used specifically by Israelite travelers on their way up to Jerusalem of one of the three great festivals each year.
- Notice that the Psalm pictures the travelers finally arriving in Jerusalem, late in the day, but first heading to the Temple for worship.
- Note the posture of prayer (standing, with upraised arms).
- Note the character of the culminating blessing.

Reflections on Praise

- The vast majority of the Psalms are of this variety.
- Praise is always couched in specific terms, rehearsing who God is or what God has done.
- Praise is always a communal experience. Even when the Psalmists express appreciation to God because of private deliverances, they indicate that they need to call others to praise with them.
- God's identity is always linked with God's people and God's mission.
- Praise is the language of love.

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#14

Understanding the Variety of Psalm
Types and Their Unique Expressions:

Part 4 – Instruction

Understanding & Using the Psalms

- Individual Lament:
 - Cries of the individual in times of distress
 - 5,6,10,13,22,26,35,38,39,40,42,43,51,54,55,56,57,59,64,69,70,86,88,102,109,120,130,142,143
- Communal Lament:
 - Cries of the community in times of distress
 - 60,74,79,80,90,108,123,137
- Hymns of Praise:
 - Celebrations of Yahweh's goodness & character
 - 8,9,19,29,30,33,34,65,66,67,68,76,95,96,97,98,99,100,103,104,111,113,116,117,134,135,138,144,145,146,147,148,149,150
- Songs of Confidence:
 - Declarations of trust in Yahweh
 - 3,4,7,11,12,16,17,18,20,23,27,28,31,36,41,46,50,58,62,63,71,77,82,83,85,89,91,92,93,94,114,115,121,124,125,126,129,139,140,141

Understanding & Using the Psalms

- Royal Psalms:
 - Song in praise of Yahweh as Israel’s true king and the monarch who rules on Yahweh’s behalf
 - 2,21,24,45,47,61,72,110,132
- Psalms of Zion:
 - “National Anthems” that praise the earthly residence of Yahweh
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- “Thank” Psalms:
 - Expressions of appreciation for Yahweh’s deliverance
 - 75,118,136
- Wisdom or Priestly Instruction:
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Instruction

- **Character:** Poems which contain condensed teachings to be passed along by memorization
- **Examples:** Psalms 1, 15, 25, 32, 37, 44, 49, 52, 73, 78, 81, 101, 105, 106, 107, 112, 119, 127

Instruction: Example #1 – Psalm 1

- ¹ Blessed is the one
 who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
 or sit in the company of mockers,
² but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and who meditates on his law day and night.
³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
 which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
 whatever they do prospers.
⁴ Not so the wicked!
 They are like chaff
 that the wind blows away.
⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
 nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
⁶ For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

Note these things:

- A comparison is made between two types of people, those who acknowledge and worship God, and those who do not. While many of their actions might be similar in life, the outcomes of their existences are very different.
- The Psalm has two parts:
 - In the first half, the righteous person is praised for a particular lifestyle that conforms to the divine plans for humanity, and the wicked are seen as in opposition to God and to them
 - In the second half, the wicked are derided for denying the Creator's intentions, and for harming the righteous
- The Psalm is not directed toward God as a prayer.
- Rather, it is the testimony of those who know and love God, seeking to pass this wisdom along to the next generation
- In that sense, this Psalm is an educating tool.

Instruction: Example #2 – Psalm 15

A psalm of David.

- ¹ LORD, who may dwell in your sacred tent?
Who may live on your holy mountain?
 - ² The one whose walk is blameless,
who does what is righteous,
who speaks the truth from their heart;
 - ³ whose tongue utters no slander,
who does no wrong to a neighbor,
and casts no slur on others;
 - ⁴ who despises a vile person
but honors those who fear the LORD;
who keeps an oath even when it hurts,
and does not change their mind;
 - ⁵ who lends money to the poor without interest;
who does not accept a bribe against the innocent.
- Whoever does these things
will never be shaken.

Note These Things

- Notice that the Psalm begins with a synonymous parallelism question (one question, posed twice for poetic emphasis). This question is answered in the bulk of the Psalm (the lists of activities related to righteousness), and then the concluding synonymous parallelism recaps the answer to the initial question
- The behaviors of the righteous encompass social activities of many dimensions, both outwardly expressed and inwardly thought or imagined.
- Holiness is both a process and a reflection of God at work in one's life
- Therefore worship is the outcome of right living

Instruction: Example #3 – Psalm 37

Of David.

- ¹ Do not fret because of those who are evil
or be envious of those who do wrong;
- ² for like the grass they will soon wither,
like green plants they will soon die away.
- ³ Trust in the LORD and do good;
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.
- ⁴ Take delight in the LORD,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
- ⁵ Commit your way to the LORD;
trust in him and he will do this:
- ⁶ He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,
your vindication like the noonday sun.
- ⁷ Be still before the LORD
and wait patiently for him;
do not fret when people succeed in their ways,
when they carry out their wicked schemes.
- ⁸ Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;
do not fret—it leads only to evil.
- ⁹ For those who are evil will be destroyed,
but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.

Instruction: Example #3 – Psalm 37

- ¹⁰ A little while, and the wicked will be no more;
though you look for them, they will not be found.
- ¹¹ But the meek will inherit the land
and enjoy peace and prosperity.
- ¹² The wicked plot against the righteous
and gnash their teeth at them;
- ¹³ but the Lord laughs at the wicked,
for he knows their day is coming.
- ¹⁴ The wicked draw the sword
and bend the bow
to bring down the poor and needy,
to slay those whose ways are upright.
- ¹⁵ But their swords will pierce their own hearts,
and their bows will be broken.
- ¹⁶ Better the little that the righteous have
than the wealth of many wicked;
- ¹⁷ for the power of the wicked will be broken,
but the LORD upholds the righteous.
- ¹⁸ The blameless spend their days under the LORD's care,
and their inheritance will endure forever.
- ¹⁹ In times of disaster they will not wither;
in days of famine they will enjoy plenty.

Instruction: Example #3 – Psalm 37

²⁰But the wicked will perish:

Though the LORD's enemies are like the flowers of the field,
they will be consumed, they will go up in smoke.

²¹The wicked borrow and do not repay,
but the righteous give generously;

²²those the LORD blesses will inherit the land,
but those he curses will be destroyed.

²³The LORD makes firm the steps
of the one who delights in him;

²⁴though he may stumble, he will not fall,
for the LORD upholds him with his hand.

²⁵I was young and now I am old,
yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken
or their children begging bread.

²⁶They are always generous and lend freely;
their children will be a blessing.

²⁷Turn from evil and do good;
then you will dwell in the land forever.

²⁸For the LORD loves the just
and will not forsake his faithful ones.

Wrongdoers will be completely destroyed;
the offspring of the wicked will perish.

²⁹The righteous will inherit the land
and dwell in it forever.

Instruction: Example #3 – Psalm 37

- ³⁰ The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom,
and their tongues speak what is just.
- ³¹ The law of their God is in their hearts;
their feet do not slip.
- ³² The wicked lie in wait for the righteous,
intent on putting them to death;
- ³³ but the LORD will not leave them in the power of the wicked
or let them be condemned when brought to trial.
- ³⁴ Hope in the LORD
and keep his way.
He will exalt you to inherit the land;
when the wicked are destroyed, you will see it.
- ³⁵ I have seen a wicked and ruthless man
flourishing like a luxuriant native tree,
- ³⁶ but he soon passed away and was no more;
though I looked for him, he could not be found.
- ³⁷ Consider the blameless, observe the upright;
a future awaits those who seek peace.^[d]
- ³⁸ But all sinners will be destroyed;
there will be no future^[e] for the wicked.
- ³⁹ The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD;
he is their stronghold in time of trouble.
- ⁴⁰ The LORD helps them and delivers them;
he delivers them from the wicked and saves them,
because they take refuge in him.

Note These Things

- This Psalm is an acrostic. That means that each successive thought unit (usually a pair of synonymous parallelism lines, but sometimes longer units) begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. That gives the Psalm the feeling of expressing the fullness of the ideas from A to Z. This might also be the reason for some of the perceived choppiness of the Psalm, since it is deliberately crafted to fit this writing convention.
- Notice the variety of metaphors used to describe the manner in which God cares and God's people respond.
- Notice that righteousness and salvation are always closely interlinked.

Reflections on Instruction

- These Psalms are essentially teaching tools, designed to help people remember why God is to be honored and how they are to live faithfully.
- Righteousness is connected to right living, and also to salvation.
- Righteousness is expected of God's people, because it is the mark of God's kingly rule expressed through them.

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#15

Understanding the Variety of Psalm
Types and Their Unique Expressions:

Part 5 – Royal Psalms

Understanding & Using the Psalms

- Individual Lament:
 - Cries of the individual in times of distress
 - 5,6,10,13,22,26,35,38,39,40,42,43,51,54,55,56,57,59,64,69,70,86,88,102,109,120,130,142,143
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Understanding & Using the Psalms

- Royal Psalms:
 - Song in praise of Yahweh as Israel’s true king and the monarch who rules on Yahweh’s behalf
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 - 75,118,136
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Royal Psalms

- **Character:** Song in praise of Yahweh as Israel's true king and the monarch who rules on Yahweh's behalf
- **Examples:** Psalms 2, 21, 24, 45, 47, 61, 72, 110, 132

Royal Psalms: Example #1 – Psalm 2

¹ Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?

² The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the LORD and against his anointed,
saying,

³ “Let us break their chains
and throw off their shackles.”

⁴ The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord scoffs at them.

⁵ He rebukes them in his anger
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,

⁶ “I have installed my king
on Zion, my holy mountain.”

⁷ I will proclaim the LORD’s decree:
He said to me, “You are my son;
today I have become your father.

⁸ Ask me,
and I will make the nations your inheritance,
the ends of the earth your possession.

⁹ You will break them with a rod of iron;
you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”

¹⁰ Therefore, you kings, be wise;
be warned, you rulers of the earth.

¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear
and celebrate his rule with trembling.

¹² Kiss his son, or he will be angry
and your way will lead to your destruction,
for his wrath can flare up in a moment.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Note these things:

- Yahweh, the Creator, who is partner to Israel, is understood as the Father of the king on Israel's throne. In this sense, the theocracy of Israel is affirmed, and its relationship with the nations around described.
- Although Israel is small among the nations (geographically), it is considered by God to be the central and key figure in the political fortunes of the world. What happens to Israel happens to God. What happens through Israel is for the benefit and blessings of the nations.
- The Psalm is built in a broad chiasm:
 - The first major section is verses 1-3, describing the rebellion of the rulers of the nations of earth against the rightful rule of Yahweh, the Creator of all.
 - This section is paralleled in verses 10-12, at the end of the Psalm, in which these rebellious kings are urged to worship God and honor God's earthly regent, the king on the throne in Israel.
 - The second major section is verses 4-6, which describe Yahweh's plans for the establishment of the kingship in Israel, regardless of what the other nations and kings might think.
 - This second section is paralleled with the section that immediately follows it, verses 7-9, in which the authority of the king in Jerusalem is affirmed and established.
- So the point of the Psalm is to affirm the validity of the Davidic king in Jerusalem as God's intended ruler for the blessing of all nations.
- Thus, Israel is God's earthly partner in the divine mission to reclaim and bless all the nations of the earth, and the Davidic king on the throne is divinely appointed to serve these ends.
- This is why the New Testament Apostles (see Acts 4) understood this Psalm as foretelling Jesus, the last and greatest son of David to rule over the nations.

Royal Psalms: Example #2 – Psalm 24

A psalm of David.

¹ The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;

² for he founded it on the seas
and established it on the waters.

³ Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD?
Who may stand in his holy place?

⁴ The one who has clean hands and a pure
heart,
who does not trust in an idol
or swear by a false god.

⁵ They will receive blessing from the LORD
and vindication from God their Savior.

⁶ Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek your face, God of Jacob.

⁷ Lift up your heads, you gates;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

⁸ Who is this King of glory?
The LORD strong and mighty,
the LORD mighty in battle.

⁹ Lift up your heads, you gates;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

¹⁰ Who is he, this King of glory?
The LORD Almighty—
he is the King of glory.

Note These Things

- Notice the many synonymous parallelisms throughout the Psalm, which constantly reiterate and reaffirm certain ideas
- Notice that the Psalm begins with an affirmation about the global, universal rule of God, and then moves to the royal procession ascending the throne in Jerusalem.
- The Psalm deliberately leaves vague the location of this ultimate throne:
 - Is it the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple, the throne of God on earth?
 - Is it the throne of David in the human palace?
- No answer need be given, for these two thrones are essentially the same! God, the King of Heaven and Lord of Earth is represented by the divinely appointed Son of David on Israel's national throne. This is the mission of God to bless all nations.

Royal Psalms: Example #3 – Psalm 110

Of David.

¹ The LORD says to my lord:

“Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet.”

² The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion, saying,
“Rule in the midst of your enemies!”

³ Your troops will be willing
on your day of battle.

Arrayed in holy splendor,
your young men will come to you
like dew from the morning’s womb.

⁴ The LORD has sworn
and will not change his mind:

“You are a priest forever,
in the order of Melchizedek.”

⁵ The Lord is at your right hand;
he will crush kings on the day of his wrath.

⁶ He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead
and crushing the rulers of the whole earth.

⁷ He will drink from a brook along the way,
and so he will lift his head high.

Note These Things

- This is a Psalm of David, but it celebrates an authority which lies outside of and above the Levitical priesthood which is usually seen to be the primary means by which Israel connects with God.
- The greater authority is based on the person and idea of Melchizedek. Melchizedek is only a footnote in the Old Testament (Genesis 14:18-20), but because the father of the whole Israelite nation and family, Abraham, offers sacrifices to God through the ministry of Melchizedek.
- This theme of a greater authority than that of the Levitical priests and their sacrifices is picked up in Hebrews 8-10 to explain the unique authority of Jesus as High Priest and Divine Ruler.

Reflections on Royal Psalms

- These Psalms assert the link between God's rule over the whole world and the unique role that the king of Israel plays in God mission through Israel. God rules, but this reign is exerted through Israel's place among the nations. So the king of Israel is the representative for God among the nations.
- Thus the king must live as a righteous life, reflecting God's character.
- Also the righteousness of the people is a reflection of their following of the righteous rule of the king.

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#16

Understanding the Variety of Psalm
Types and Their Unique Expressions:

Part 6 – Psalms of Zion

Understanding & Using the Psalms

- Individual Lament:
 - Cries of the individual in times of distress
 - 5,6,10,13,22,26,35,38,39,40,42,43,51,54,55,56,57,59,64,69,70,86,88,102,109,120,130,142,143
- Communal Lament:
 - Cries of the community in times of distress
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Understanding & Using the Psalms

- Royal Psalms:
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Psalms of Zion

- **Character:** “National Anthems” that praise the earthly residence of Yahweh
- **Examples:** Psalms 14, 48, 53, 84, 87, 122

Psalms of Zion: Example #1 – Psalm 48

¹ Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise,
in the city of our God, his holy mountain.

² Beautiful in its loftiness,
the joy of the whole earth,
like the heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion,
the city of the Great King.

³ God is in her citadels;
he has shown himself to be her fortress.

⁴ When the kings joined forces,
when they advanced together,

⁵ they saw her and were astounded;
they fled in terror.

⁶ Trembling seized them there,
pain like that of a woman in labor.

⁷ You destroyed them like ships of Tarshish
shattered by an east wind.

⁸ As we have heard,
so we have seen
in the city of the LORD Almighty,
in the city of our God:
God makes her secure
forever.

⁹ Within your temple, O God,
we meditate on your unfailing love.

¹⁰ Like your name, O God,
your praise reaches to the ends of the earth;
your right hand is filled with righteousness.

¹¹ Mount Zion rejoices,
the villages of Judah are glad
because of your judgments.

¹² Walk about Zion, go around her,
count her towers,

¹³ consider well her ramparts,
view her citadels,
that you may tell of them
to the next generation.

¹⁴ For this God is our God for ever and ever;
he will be our guide even to the end.

Note these things:

- God is first affirmed as the ruler of all nations.
- Then Zion is affirmed as God's earthly home and palace.
- Zion was the name of the fortress or castle or citadel of the Jebusites that David conquered and made his capital for the unified nation of Israel, freed from all its enemies.
- But David refused to be considered the ultimate authority in Israel, clearly demonstrating by bringing the Ark of the Covenant (Yahweh's throne) into Jerusalem, that Yahweh is Israel's true king.
- Thus Zion becomes the name for the center of God's rule on earth.
- So Zion should be the object of delight who know and desire to live in harmony with the rule of God.

Psalms of Zion: Example #2 – Psalm 48

¹ How lovely is your dwelling place,
LORD Almighty!

² My soul yearns, even faints,
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh cry out
for the living God.

³ Even the sparrow has found a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may have her young—
a place near your altar,
LORD Almighty, my King and my God.

⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your house;
they are ever praising you.

⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.

⁶ As they pass through the Valley of Baka,
they make it a place of springs;
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.

⁷ They go from strength to strength,
till each appears before God in Zion.

⁸ Hear my prayer, LORD God Almighty;
listen to me, God of Jacob.

⁹ Look on our shield, O God;
look with favor on your anointed one.

¹⁰ Better is one day in your courts
than a thousand elsewhere;

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of
my God
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

¹¹ For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
the LORD bestows favor and honor;
no good thing does he withhold
from those whose walk is blameless.

¹² LORD Almighty,
blessed is the one who trusts in you.

Note These Things

- This Psalm clearly had its origins as a traveling song for those who were on pilgrimage to Jerusalem (note verses 2-7) for one of the three great festivals each year (Passover, Weeks, Tents)
- Zion is perceived as the residence of Yahweh, the object of their worship.
- The fate of the world is understood as linked to the blessings of Yahweh.
- Celebrating Zion is adoring its Master, the God of the universe.

Psalms of Zion: Example #3 – Psalm 87

Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm. A song.

¹ He has founded his city on the holy mountain.

² The LORD loves the gates of Zion
more than all the other dwellings of Jacob.

³ Glorious things are said of you,
city of God:

⁴ “I will record Rahab and Babylon
among those who acknowledge me—
Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush—
and will say, ‘This one was born in Zion.’”

⁵ Indeed, of Zion it will be said,
“This one and that one were born in her,
and the Most High himself will establish her.”

⁶ The LORD will write in the register of the peoples:
“This one was born in Zion.”

⁷ As they make music they will sing,
“All my fountains are in you.”

Note These Things

- Notice that the establishment of Jerusalem as the throne city of Yahweh is declared to be God's own initiative.
- Notice that the Psalm is a kind of two-voice dialogue:
 - The first voice is that of the narrator, who praises God and God's city Zion, announcing that all nations belong to this King's kingdom
 - The second voice is that of Yahweh, calling for and declaring that people of all known nations belong as citizens to God's kingdom.
- This is a very missional Psalm, announcing that the God of Israel is the Lord of all nations, and that their best interests is found in league with Yahweh.

Reflections on Psalms of Zion

- The Psalms of Zion praise the city where the living Creator takes up residence to be with the people of earth who belong to God.
- The theological assumptions behind these Psalms are extravagant:
 - Israel is not special among the nations of herself, but it is Israel's God who is by Creator's right, the Lord of all nations
 - Zion is the connecting point between Heaven and Earth, allowing the Creator to appear in the human arena, and take rightful place as the King of all nations
 - All peoples, whatever citizenships they claim, will gladly and quickly announce the priority of Zion's claim on their lives when they understand who Zion's true Ruler is.

Biblical Wisdom:
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#17

Understanding the Variety of Psalm
Types and Their Unique Expressions:

Part 7 – Thank Psalms

Understanding & Using the Psalms

- Individual Lament:
 - Cries of the individual in times of distress
 - 5,6,10,13,22,26,35,38,39,40,42,43,51,54,55,56,57,59,64,69,70,86,88,102,109,120,130,142,143
- Communal Lament:
 - Cries of the community in times of distress
 - 60,74,79,80,90,108,123,137
- Hymns of Praise:
 - Celebrations of Yahweh's goodness & character
 - 8,9,19,29,30,33,34,65,66,67,68,76,95,96,97,98,99,100,103,104,111,113,116,117,134,135,138,144,145,146,147,148,149,150
- Songs of Confidence:
 - Declarations of trust in Yahweh
 - 3,4,7,11,12,16,17,18,20,23,27,28,31,36,41,46,50,58,62,63,71,77,82,83,85,89,91,92,93,94,114,115,121,124,125,126,129,139,140,141

Understanding & Using the Psalms

- Royal Psalms:
 - Song in praise of Yahweh as Israel’s true king and the monarch who rules on Yahweh’s behalf
 - 2,21,24,45,47,61,72,110,132
- Psalms of Zion:
 - “National Anthems” that praise the earthly residence of Yahweh
 - 14,48,53,84,87,122
- “Thank” Psalms:
 - Expressions of appreciation for Yahweh’s deliverance
 - 75,118,136
- Wisdom or Priestly Instruction:
 - Poems which contain condensed teachings to be passed along by memorization
 - 1,15,25,32,37,44,49,52,73,78,81,101,105,106,107,112,119,127

“Thank” Psalms

- **Character:** Expressions of appreciation for Yahweh’s deliverance
- **Examples:** Psalms 75, 118, 136

“Thank” Psalms: Example #1 – Psalm 75

For the director of music. To the tune of “Do Not Destroy.” A psalm of Asaph. A song.

he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth

drink it down to its very dregs.

⁹ As for me, I will declare this forever;

I will sing praise to the God of Jacob,

¹⁰ who says, “I will cut off the horns of all the wicked,

but the horns of the righteous will be lifted up.”

¹ We praise you, God,

we praise you, for your Name is near;
people tell of your wonderful deeds.

² You say, “I choose the appointed time;
it is I who judge with equity.

³ When the earth and all its people quake,
it is I who hold its pillars firm.

⁴ To the arrogant I say, ‘Boast no more,’
and to the wicked, ‘Do not lift up your
horns.

⁵ Do not lift your horns against heaven;
do not speak so defiantly.’”

⁶ No one from the east or the west
or from the desert can exalt themselves.

⁷ It is God who judges:
He brings one down, he exalts another.

⁸ In the hand of the LORD is a cup
full of foaming wine mixed with spices;

Note these things:

- At first glance this Psalm might not seem very “thankful.” However, there is a special formula for thanking that is more evident in the Hebrew language. Each of these Psalms use the term “todah” or “thanks” in it.
- This becomes evident in Psalm 75 when reading verses 1 and 9. Each of these verses is about declaring God’s saving activities. This is the “thanks” that is being offered—not merely an off-handed “Thank you” to someone who has opened a door, or stepped out of the way. This thanks has to do with the huge things of life, where rival perspectives and powers are at stake. When God assert divine authority, it is over against the petty powers at work in human society that destroy and demean and dehumanize us. When God acts over against these powers, goodness and care and delight erupt once again, and life shimmers with significance.
- So this “thanks” is named and identified on the basis of the clear and direct actions of God to reclaim and redeem and renew life on planet earth.

“Thank” Psalms: Example #2 – Psalm 118

- ¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.
- ² Let Israel say:
“His love endures forever.”
- ³ Let the house of Aaron say:
“His love endures forever.”
- ⁴ Let those who fear the LORD say:
“His love endures forever.”
- ⁵ When hard pressed, I cried to the LORD;
he brought me into a spacious place.
- ⁶ The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?
- ⁷ The LORD is with me; he is my helper.
I look in triumph on my enemies.
- ⁸ It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to trust in humans.
- ⁹ It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to trust in princes.
- ¹⁰ All the nations surrounded me,
but in the name of the LORD I cut them down.

“Thank” Psalms: Example #2 – Psalm 118

- ¹¹ They surrounded me on every side,
but in the name of the LORD I cut them down.
- ¹² They swarmed around me like bees,
but they were consumed as quickly as burning thorns;
in the name of the LORD I cut them down.
- ¹³ I was pushed back and about to fall,
but the LORD helped me.
- ¹⁴ The LORD is my strength and my defense;
he has become my salvation.
- ¹⁵ Shouts of joy and victory
resound in the tents of the righteous:
“The LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!
¹⁶ The LORD’s right hand is lifted high;
the LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!”
- ¹⁷ I will not die but live,
and will proclaim what the LORD has done.
- ¹⁸ The LORD has chastened me severely,
but he has not given me over to death.
- ¹⁹ Open for me the gates of the righteous;
I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.
- ²⁰ This is the gate of the LORD
through which the righteous may enter.

“Thank” Psalms: Example #2 – Psalm 118

- ²¹ I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.
- ²² The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
- ²³ the LORD has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.
- ²⁴ The LORD has done it this very day;
let us rejoice today and be glad.
- ²⁵ LORD, save us!
LORD, grant us success!
- ²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.
From the house of the LORD we bless you.
- ²⁷ The LORD is God,
and he has made his light shine on us.
With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up to the horns of the altar.
- ²⁸ You are my God, and I will praise you;
you are my God, and I will exalt you.
- ²⁹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

Note These Things

- This Psalm begins and ends with the “todah” thanks theme. It spells out a number of historical actions by which Yahweh has delivered the people, and the thanks is due to Yahweh precisely for this reason.
- This Psalm becomes the usual final song of the Jewish Passover service, precisely because it talks of deliverance, and expresses thankfulness.
- Jesus and his disciples likely sang this song after their meal together on the night before Jesus died.

“Thank” Psalms: Example #3 – Psalm 136

¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.

His love endures forever.

² Give thanks to the God of gods.

His love endures forever.

³ Give thanks to the Lord of lords:

His love endures forever.

⁴ to him who alone does great wonders,

His love endures forever.

⁵ who by his understanding made the heavens,

His love endures forever.

⁶ who spread out the earth upon the waters,

His love endures forever.

⁷ who made the great lights—

His love endures forever.

⁸ the sun to govern the day,

His love endures forever.

⁹ the moon and stars to govern the night;

His love endures forever.

“Thank” Psalms: Example #3 – Psalm 136

¹⁰ to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt
His love endures forever.

¹¹ and brought Israel out from among them
His love endures forever.

¹² with a mighty hand and outstretched arm;
His love endures forever.

¹³ to him who divided the Red Sea asunder
His love endures forever.

¹⁴ and brought Israel through the midst of it,
His love endures forever.

¹⁵ but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea;
His love endures forever.

¹⁶ to him who led his people through the wilderness;
His love endures forever.

¹⁷ to him who struck down great kings,
His love endures forever.

¹⁸ and killed mighty kings—
His love endures forever.

“Thank” Psalms: Example #3 – Psalm 136

¹⁹ Sihon king of the Amorites

His love endures forever.

²⁰ and Og king of Bashan—

His love endures forever.

²¹ and gave their land as an inheritance,

His love endures forever.

²² an inheritance to his servant Israel.

His love endures forever.

²³ He remembered us in our low estate

His love endures forever.

²⁴ and freed us from our enemies.

His love endures forever.

²⁵ He gives food to every creature.

His love endures forever.

²⁶ Give thanks to the God of heaven.

His love endures forever.

Note These Things

- Notice that this Psalm is intended to be sung by a soloist and a choir or congregation, sort of like a gospel choir and lead singer, or a soloist leading a congregational response. The soloist sings the first line of each verse, with the choir or congregation responding with the refrain: “His love endures forever.”
- Notice that this Psalm rehearses much of the early history of Israel from the creation itself through the Exodus and deliverance and the wilderness encounters on the way to the Promised Land. For this reason, the thankfulness of the Psalm is rooted in the history of God’s redemptive activity.
- The final solo testimonies link God’s ancient saving activities to those in our contemporary experience.

Reflections on “Thank” Psalms

- While many of the Psalms express thankfulness, these Psalms use a particular Hebrew term and style to give thanks to God.
- The key element to current thankfulness, according to these Psalms, is a recognition of God’s past track record of deliverance for God’s people, and a confidence that this remains the desire of God’s heart with God’s current people.
- These are some of the most popular and most often used and repeated Psalms in Israelites, Jewish and Christian worship.

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#18

Understanding the Variety of Psalm
Types and Their Unique Expressions:

Part 8 – Songs of Confidence

Understanding & Using the Psalms

- Individual Lament:
 - Cries of the individual in times of distress
 - 5,6,10,13,22,26,35,38,39,40,42,43,51,54,55,56,57,59,64,69,70,86,88,102,109,120,130,142,143
- Communal Lament:
 - Cries of the community in times of distress
 - 60,74,79,80,90,108,123,137
- Hymns of Praise:
 - Celebrations of Yahweh's goodness & character
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- Songs of Confidence:
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Understanding & Using the Psalms

- Royal Psalms:
 - Song in praise of Yahweh as Israel’s true king and the monarch who rules on Yahweh’s behalf
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Songs of Confidence Psalms

- **Character:** Declarations of trust in Yahweh
- **Examples:** Psalms 3, 4, 7, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 20, 23, 27, 28, 31, 36, 41, 46, 50, 58, 62, 63, 71, 77, 82, 83, 85, 89, 91, 92, 93, 94, 114, 115, 121, 124, 125, 126, 129, 139, 140, 141

Songs of Confidence: Example #1 – Psalm 23

A psalm of David.

- ¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
- ² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
³ he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.
- ⁴ Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
- ⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
- ⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.

Note these things:

- This may be the most familiar of all of the Psalms. It may, in fact, be one of the earliest of David's Psalms, given that its themes reflect the perspectives of a shepherd out in the wilds with his sheep.
- The Psalm is rich in metaphors, all of which provide an analogy between the competent shepherd who cares for and protects his sheep and God, who is viewed as even more competent and caring and protecting when it comes to looking after us.
- Because of the references to death and eternity, this Psalm has become a favorite at funerals and in times of death and disaster.

Song of Confidence: Example #2 – Psalm 124

A song of ascents. Of David.

- ¹ If the LORD had not been on our side—
let Israel say—
- ² if the LORD had not been on our side
when people attacked us,
- ³ they would have swallowed us alive
when their anger flared against us;
- ⁴ the flood would have engulfed us,
the torrent would have swept over us,
- ⁵ the raging waters
would have swept us away.
- ⁶ Praise be to the LORD,
who has not let us be torn by their teeth.
- ⁷ We have escaped like a bird
from the fowler's snare;
the snare has been broken,
and we have escaped.
- ⁸ Our help is in the name of the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.

Note These Things

- This is one of the “Psalms of Ascent,” the 15 pilgrimage psalms that would have been sung by those traveling from the distant reaches of ancient Israel up to Jerusalem for either the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, or the Feast of Booths (the three annual pilgrim festivals, requiring the presence of all Israelites to travel to the temple). Notice that its themes speak of deliverances from attackers, which might well have happened to some along the way through dangerous places.
- According to the title for this psalm, it was written by David. There is a lot of similarity between this psalm and Psalm 23. Both credit Yahweh with being the great deliverer and provider, and both confidently express delight in God as Savior and Protector.

Songs of Confidence: Example #3 – Psalm 139

For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.

¹ You have searched me, LORD,
and you know me.

² You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

³ You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.

⁴ Before a word is on my tongue
you, LORD, know it completely.

⁵ You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

Songs of Confidence: Example #3 – Psalm 139

- ⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
- ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
- ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
- ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
- ¹¹ If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,”
- ¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.
- ¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
- ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
- ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
- ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.
- ¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts,^[a] God!
How vast is the sum of them!
- ¹⁸ Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you.

Songs of Confidence: Example #3 – Psalm 139

- ¹⁹ If only you, God, would slay the wicked!
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!
- ²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.
- ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, LORD,
and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?
- ²² I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.
- ²³ Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
- ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Note These Things

- Along with Psalm 23, this is one of the most widely known and often quoted among the Psalms. It is also attributed to David.
- David is very personal about his trust in God. He reflects on every dimension of his personal existence, giving God the sovereign credit for shaping and caring for it, but without any sense of feeling limited or bound within that knowledge.
- In fact, the final stanzas show that David has gained God's values, so that those who are enemies of God have become David's enemies as well.
- The last lines are a powerful prayer, seeking to conform fully to the good will of the One who is Creator, Sovereign, Redeemer and Lover.

Reflections on Songs of Confidence

- Along with the Psalms of Praise, these are among the most numerous in the book of worship found in the Bible. This echoes the dominant themes we need to express in our relationship with God: praise and confidence.
- While it is stated in many ways, including very individual expressions of deliverance, the common theme to all of these Psalms is a great trust in God, no matter what the current circumstances, leading to faith and hope and an optimistic view about the future.
- These testimonies are directed to two hearers:
 - First, of all, of course, is God. These Psalms are direct prayers of praise and thanks for deliverance, and confidence about future benefits in this relationship.
 - Second, these Psalms are meant to be sung in front of and with others, so that the experiences of deliverance and confidence of the one giving testimony can be shared and affirmed by others, and so that they can also deepen their confidence in God.

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#19

The Theological Assumptions
Undergirding the Psalms

Covenant Theology & the Psalms

- Yahweh is always acknowledged as the true King of Israel (e.g., 24, 93)
- “Zion” is Yahweh’s capital city (e.g., 48, 76, 84)
- The Covenant with David authenticates the right of this family to rule (e.g., 89, 110)
- Yahweh is also understood to be ruler over all nations (e.g., 2, 60, 87, 96, 97)
- Israel’s purpose is to be witness to the nations (e.g., 67, 87)
- Divine blessing is linked to covenant faithfulness and punishment to covenant curses (e.g., 15, 78, 79, 80, 81, 85, 101, 106, 107)
- Laments are based upon the right to plead for God’s covenant faithfulness, even when the people have sinned (e.g., 80, 109)
- Praise is an extension of the witness intended to be communicated through Israel (e.g., 113, 115, 117, 135, 145)

Engaging the Psalms

- Enjoy the poetic images: 19, 29, 104
- Rest in the gracious comfort: 23, 139
- Marvel in the compact simplicity: 1, 131
- Vocalize sorrow for sinfulness: 32, 51
- Express spiritual longing: 42-43, 73
- Ponder great evil and pain: 22, 88
- Gain a moral compass: 15, 107
- Learn the language of praise: 100, 145, 150

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#20

Hebrew Parallelism in the Psalms and
Proverbs

Understanding Hebrew Poetry

- Most obvious literary device: Parallelism
 - Synonymous—two (or more) lines that say the same thing using different words
 - “My soul is full of troubles,
my life draws near to Sheol.” (88:3)
 - “He established a decree in Jacob,
and appointed a law in Israel.” (78:5)
 - Antithetic—two lines that declare opposite ideas in order to support the same conclusion
 - “I hate the double-minded,
but I love your law.” (119:113)
 - “He did not spare them from death,
but gave their lives over to the plague.” (78:50)

Understanding Hebrew Poetry

- Most obvious literary device: Parallelism
 - Stairlike—three or more lines that build up an idea by expanding on terms used in the previous lines
 - “Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits—
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good things as long as
you live
so that your youth is renewed like the
eagle’s.” (103:2-5)

Understanding Hebrew Poetry

- Literary devices that do not translate well:
 - Rhythm & meter—cadence for recitation
 - Assonance—repetition of vowel sounds
 - Consonance—repetition of consonant sounds
 - Alliteration—repetition of word-beginning letters
- Subtle and complex literary devices:
 - Enveloping—surrounding an inner verse with a repeated chant or refrain (see 118:1, 29):
 - “O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!”
 - Chiasm—reflexive repetition of lines , phrases or ideas in clear parallelism (see 114):

Psalm 114

When Israel went out from Egypt,
the house of Jacob from a people of strange language,
Judah became God's sanctuary,
Israel his dominion.

The sea looked and fled;
Jordan turned back.

The mountains skipped like rams,
the hills like lambs.

Why is it, O sea, that you flee?

O Jordan, that you turn back?

O mountains, that you skip like rams?

O hills, like lambs?

Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord,
at the presence of the God of Jacob,
who turns the rock into a pool of water,
the flint into a spring of water.

Parallelism in Psalms & Proverbs

Psalms

- Most parallelism is synonymous: perhaps up to 85%
- Synonymous parallelism accentuates ideas by restating them

Proverbs

- Most parallelism (after the opening “Lectures on Wisdom” in chapters 1-9) is antithetic: perhaps up to 85%
- Antithetic parallelism accentuates proverbial ideas by showing contrasts

Antithetic Parallelism in Proverbs

10 The proverbs of Solomon:

A wise son brings joy to his father,
but a foolish son brings grief to his mother.

² Ill-gotten treasures have no lasting value,
but righteousness delivers from death.

³ The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry,
but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.

⁴ Lazy hands make for poverty,
but diligent hands bring wealth.

⁵ He who gathers crops in summer is a prudent son,
but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son.

⁶ Blessings crown the head of the righteous,
but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked.^[a]

⁷ The name of the righteous is used in blessings,^[b]
but the name of the wicked will rot.

⁸ The wise in heart accept commands,
but a chattering fool comes to ruin.

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#21

Introduction to the Book of Proverbs,
Part 1: Theme and Opening Lectures on
Wisdom and Folly

How do we enter Proverbs?

- We need to think in terms of the process of developing a moral lifestyle: education.
- The word “proverb” is from a Latin term which means “for a verb.” In other words, these are “words” which take the place of “more words,” or concise distillations of wisdom compacted into a few phrases.
- The worldview of Genesis and Exodus is assumed, though never explicitly stated.
- We must understand the power of Hebrew poetry, especially antithetic parallelism, to summarize key moral concepts.
- We must pay attention to the careful development of the collection in its final form.

Proverbs Overview

- Prologue: the purpose of Proverbs (1:1-7)
- Lectures on Wisdom & Folly (1:8-9:18)
- Collections of Proverbs: (10:1-31:9)
 - “The Proverbs of Solomon” (10:1-22:16)
 - “Sayings of the Wise” (22:17-24:22)
 - “More Sayings of the Wise” (24:23-34)
 - “More Proverbs of Solomon” (25:1-29:27)
 - “The Sayings of Agur” (30:1-23)
 - “The Sayings of King Lemuel” (31:1-9)
- Epilogue: “The Wife of Noble Character” (31:10-31)

Prologue

Proverbs 1:1-7

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

For learning about wisdom and instruction,
for understanding words of insight,
for gaining instruction in wise dealing,
righteousness, justice, and equity;
to teach shrewdness to the simple,
knowledge and prudence to the young—
let the wise also hear and gain in learning,
and the discerning acquire skill,
to understand a proverb and a figure,
the words of the wise and their riddles.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

How do we enter Proverbs?

- Key Metaphor:
 - BOY MEETS GIRL!
- In fact, we might say:
 - BOY MEETS TWO GIRLS!



Lectures on Wisdom & Folly

1:8-9:18

- Both “Wisdom” & “Folly” are feminine nouns in the Hebrew language.
- Thus the use of the literary device, “My son, listen to my words,” is intentional. All readers/hearers are the “son” (masculine) who is courted by two women (feminine “Wisdom” & “Folly”). At the end of these lectures all must choose which woman to be with. Wisdom brings stability and well-being; Folly offers quick experiences and tragic ends.
- The “lectures” are carefully planned & written:

Lectures on Wisdom & Folly

- Enticement to Perverse Ways (1:8-19)
- Wisdom's Call (1:20-33)
 - Benefits of Wisdom (2:1-22) [22 poetic lines] [42]
 - Benefits & Specific Instructions (3:1-20) [20] [84]
 - Benefits & Specific Instructions (3:21-35) [15] [42]
 - Benefits of Wisdom (4:1-27) [27]
 - Warning against Adultery (5:1-23) [23] [43]
 - Warning against Perverse Ways (6:1-19) [20] [86]
 - Warning against Adultery (6:20-35) [16] [43]
 - Warning against Adultery (7:1-27) [27]
- Wisdom's Call (8:1-36)
- Wisdom's Invitation & Folly's Enticement (9:1-18)

Seeing the Big Picture

- While much of the book of Proverbs exists as very brief (usually two-line antithetic parallelism) nuggets about living wisely, these only make sense after reading and understanding the “Lectures on Wisdom and Folly” (chapters 1-9) as a single unit.
- If, at the end of these lectures, we choose Folly as our life-companion, the rest of the book means nothing to us.
- If, however, at the end of these lectures, we choose Wisdom as our life-companion, the rest of the book is essentially the atmosphere in and furnishings of the house of Wisdom.
- In other words, the Proverbs themselves are the lifestyle of those who have committed to a life-time relationship with God, as manifested in the personification of Wisdom.

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#22

Introduction to the Book of Proverbs,
Part 2: The Collections of Proverbs

The Proverbs of Solomon

10:1-22:16

- 375 parallelism couplets expressing summary points of wisdom
- There are no numerals in the Hebrew language. Numbers are indicated by use of the letters of the alphabet which represent certain values. The letters in Solomon's name have numerical values that add up to 375.
- The first 180 proverbs in this collection are virtually all "antithetic;" the last 195 are somewhat more varied in parallelistic form.
- These may have been created for banquet entertainment or recorded as official statements of Solomon in the context of his executive legislation.
- They might also have been published for training the young among the royal families in preparation for government duties.

Sayings of the Wise

22:17-24:22 & 24:23-34

- After a brief introduction (22:17-21) there are 30 “wise sayings” about social relationships.
- An Egyptian collection called “The Wisdom of Amenemopet,” dated to around 1000 B.C. (about the time of Solomon), is nearly parallel in structure & content. It also has 30 brief “wise sayings,” of which 10 are virtually identical to 10 of these “sayings.” Scholars differ as to which came first, but there seems to be some interaction between the sources behind both collections.
- The fragment of 5 “More Sayings of the Wise” (24:23-34) seem related to the preceding collection, but little else is known about these.



Handwritten text in a script, likely Persian or Arabic, covering the main body of the page. The text is arranged in approximately 12 horizontal lines. Some words are written in red ink, possibly indicating a title or important terms. The script is dense and cursive.

From the *Wisdom of Amenemope*

From the *Proverbs of Solomon*

Incline thine ears to hear my sayings, and apply thine heart to their comprehension, for it is a profitable thing to put them in thy heart. --
Amenemope 1:6

Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge, for it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee.
Proverbs 22:17-18

Remove not the landmark on the boundary of the fields... and trespass not on the boundary of the widow. 7:12-15

Remove not the old landmark, and enter not into the fields of the fatherless. 23:10

They have made themselves wings like geese, and they have flown to heaven. *Amenemope* 10:5

Riches certainly make themselves wings, they fly away as an eagle toward heaven. *Proverbs* 23:4-5

Better is poverty in the hand of God, than the riches in the storehouse. Better are loaves when the heart is joyous. *Amenemope* 9:5-8

Better is little with fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is. *Proverbs* 15:16-17

Fraternize not with the hot-tempered man. And press not on him for conversation. *Amenemope* 11:13-14

Make no friendship with an angry man. And with a furious man thou shalt not go. *Proverbs* 22:24

(Proverbs 22:17-18): *"Incline thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, And apply thine heart to my doctrine; For it is pleasant if thou keep them in thy belly, that they may be established together upon thy lips"*

(Amenemope, ch. 1): "Give thine ear, and hear what I say, And apply thine heart to apprehend; It is good for thee to place them in thine heart, let them rest in the casket of thy belly; That they may act as a peg upon thy tongue"

(Proverbs 22:22): *"Rob not the poor, for he is poor, neither oppress (or crush) the lowly in the gate."*

(Amenemope, ch. 2): "Beware of robbing the poor, and oppressing the afflicted."

(Proverbs 22:24-5): *"Do not befriend the man of anger, Nor go with a wrathful man, Lest thou learn his ways and take a snare for thy soul."*

(Amenemope, ch. 10): "Associate not with a passionate man, Nor approach him for conversation; Leap not to cleave to such an one; That terror carry thee not away."

(Proverbs 22:29): *"[if you] You see a man quick in his work, before kings will he stand, before cravens, he will not stand."*

(Amenemope, ch. 30): "A scribe who is skillful in his business findeth worthy to be a courtier"

(Proverbs 23:1): *"When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, Consider diligently what is before thee; And put a knife to thy throat, If thou be a man given to appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties, for they are breads of falsehood."*

(Amenemope, ch. 23): "Eat not bread in the presence of a ruler, And lunge not forward(?) with thy mouth before a governor(?). When thou art replenished with that to which thou has no right, It is only a delight to thy spittle. Look upon the dish that is before thee, And let that (alone) supply thy need."

(Proverbs 23:4-5): *"Toil not to become rich, And cease from dishonest gain; For wealth maketh to itself wings, Like an eagle that flieth heavenwards"*

(Amenemope, ch. 7): "Toil not after riches; If stolen goods are brought to thee, they remain not over night with thee. They have made themselves wings like geese. And have flown into the heavens."

(Proverbs 14:7): *"Speak not in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words"*

(Amenemope, ch. 21): "Empty not thine inmost soul to everyone, nor spoil (thereby) thine influence"

(Proverbs 23:10): *"Remove not the widows landmark; And enter not into the field of the fatherless."*

(Amenemope, ch. 6): "Remove not the landmark from the bounds of the field...and violate not the widows boundary"

(Proverbs 23:12): *"Apply thine heart unto instruction and thine ears to the words of knowledge"*

(Amenemope, ch. 1): "Give thine ears, hear the words that are said, give thine heart to interpret them."

More Proverbs of Solomon

25:1-29:27

- The title to this collection (25:1) indicates that “the men of Hezekiah” gathered and published these. This would be a little more than two hundred years after Solomon, during a time of reform and strong religious resurgence in Judah.
- Though similar to the first collection of Solomon-proverbs, there is more diversity of subject matter and literary form among these. (Perhaps the first collection was meant to honor Solomon at his death—so the 375 proverbs connected to the number of his name—and these were among the leftovers after the most formulaic were culled.)
- Most are still antithetic parallelism single-couplets, but there are more multiple-line proverbs among them.

Sayings of Agur & King Lemuel

30:1-23 & 31:1-9

- We don't know who these people were.
- Some speculate they were from the Ishmaelite tribe of Massa (Genesis 25:14) and entered Israelite culture through traders from Edom.
- The form of these sayings is strikingly different from others in the Proverbs collection, particularly the use of numbers for identifying extremes or adding emphasis.
- The "Agur" reflections are on general life situations, while the brief "King Lemuel" notes focus more specifically on the necessary character of good rulers.

Remember the Overall Plan in Proverbs

- While much of the book of Proverbs exists as these very brief (usually two-line antithetic parallelism) nuggets about living wisely, these only make sense after reading and understanding the “Lectures on Wisdom and Folly” (chapters 1-9) as a single unit.
- If, at the end of these lectures, we choose Folly as our life-companion, the rest of the book means nothing to us.
- If, however, at the end of these lectures, we choose Wisdom as our life-companion, the rest of the book is essentially the atmosphere in and furnishings of the house of Wisdom.
- In other words, the Proverbs themselves are the lifestyle of those who have committed to a life-time relationship with God, as manifested in the personification of Wisdom.
- The connections between Proverbs and the wisdom literature of other nations may well show the success of God’s activity through Israel (cf. Genesis 12), by which the wisdom of Solomon became recognized throughout the ancient Near East as symbolic of life with Israel’s God.
- This is the great mission of God, seeking to win back all the nations of the earth.

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#23

Introduction to the Book of Proverbs,
Part 3: The Concluding Poem and Its
Interpretive Significance

Proverbs Overview

- Prologue: the purpose of Proverbs (1:1-7)
- Lectures on Wisdom & Folly (1:8-9:18)
- Collections of Proverbs: (10:1-31:9)
 - “The Proverbs of Solomon” (10:1-22:16)
 - “Sayings of the Wise” (22:17-24:22)
 - “More Sayings of the Wise” (24:23-34)
 - “More Proverbs of Solomon” (25:1-29:27)
 - “The Sayings of Agur” (30:1-23)
 - “The Sayings of King Lemuel” (31:1-9)
- Epilogue: “The Wife of Noble Character” (31:10-31)

Epilogue: “Wife of Noble Character”

31:10-31

- This is an acrostic poem:
 - The beginning letter of each successive couplet follows the 22-letters of the Hebrew alphabet in sequence. This technique communicates completeness of an idea (everything from A-Z).
- What is the purpose?
 - Describe the ideal woman/wife?
 - Identify the appropriate tasks of a homemaker?
- Think back to the opening “lectures:”
 - There we were asked to choose a “wife”
 - If we chose “Wisdom,” chapters 10-30 described the furnishings and lifestyle in our marriage home
 - This concluding poem summarizes the good life created by Wisdom

One more note on “Wisdom”

- In its personification of Wisdom, Proverbs 8 includes a section that makes “Wisdom” the creative partner of Yahweh (22-31).
- Correlating this to the Prologue of John (1:1-18) where “The Word” is the creative agent of God, some Christian theologians have interpreted the “Wisdom” of Proverbs 8 as a pre-incarnate manifestation of the second person of the Trinity.
- This is highly speculative at best, and adds little to either Wisdom theology or Christology.

Remember the Overall Plan in Proverbs

- While much of the book of Proverbs exists as these very brief (usually two-line antithetic parallelism) nuggets about living wisely, these only make sense after reading and understanding the “Lectures on Wisdom and Folly” (chapters 1-9) as a single unit.
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#24

Introduction to Ecclesiastes: Theme
and Development

Notes on Ecclesiastes

- Name:
 - Hebrew – “Qoheleth” (“convener of an assembly for instruction”)
 - Greek – “Ecclesiastes” (“Teacher/Preacher”)
- Author: Solomon? (cf. 1:1, 12, 16; 12:9-10)
- Date:
 - 950? (if directly from Solomon)
 - 400-250? (if gathered and/or composed after the exile)
- Reason for inclusion in the Bible – link to Solomon
- Theme: “All is meaningless!” (1:2; 12:8)
 - If this is a closed system world, all is tragedy & meaningless
 - If there is a God, life is brief but meaningful
 - If you believe the latter, live **boldly, joyfully** and **godly!**
- Literary forms:
 - Personal Reflections – e.g., chapter 2
 - Rhetorical Questions – e.g., 1:3, 10; 2:2, 12
 - Proverbs – e.g., 1:4-9, 15, 18; 3:1-8; 4:5-6; 7:1-13; 9:17-11:4
 - Allegory – e.g., 12:1-7

Worldview Options

- Closed System:
 - No external information or forces
 - Human life is accidental and holds no more meaning than any other object
 - Bible is a purely human product
- Impersonal Intelligent Design:
 - “Life” & “Time” are the creative edge that shape existence in a closed system
 - Human life is meaningful insofar as it plays out its role and obeys “designed” purposes
 - Bible is a record and reflection upon that design
- Creator/Creation Open System:
 - Existence is planned and intended by God
 - Human life is honored, compromised, and redeemable
 - Bible is part of the divine/human redemptive link

Ecclesiastes in Outline

- Prologue: Theme (“Meaninglessness”) & Brief Explanation (1:1-11)
- Meaningless Things: Wisdom, Pleasures, Folly, Toil (1:12-2:26)
- Interlude: The Bondage of Time (3)
- Other Meaningless Things: Oppression, Toil, Friendlessness, Political Advancement, Unfulfilled Vows to God, Amassing Wealth (4:1-6:12)
- In order to stay sane, get practical wisdom (7:1-8:6)
- Reflections on all the Teacher’s Observations: (8:7-12:7)
 - The meaning of life must be found beyond life—in God alone
 - All of life is progressing toward a common end
 - So enjoy life while you have it
 - And be wise
 - In summary—Live Boldly! Live Joyfully! Live Godly!
- Epilogue: The Theme and Its Value, Plus Final Reminders (12:8-14)

Biblical Wisdom:
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#25

Introduction to Ecclesiastes: Major
Messages and Worldview Implications

Worldview Options

- Closed System:
 - No external information or forces
 - Human life is accidental and holds no more meaning than any other object
 - Bible is a purely human product
- Impersonal Intelligent Design:
 - “Life” & “Time” are the creative edge that shape existence in a closed system
 - Human life is meaningful insofar as it plays out its role and obeys “designed” purposes
 - Bible is a record and reflection upon that design
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- Prologue: Theme (“Meaninglessness”) & Brief Explanation (1:1-11)
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 - And be wise
 - In summary—Live Boldly! Live Joyfully! Live Godly!
- Epilogue: The Theme and Its Value, Plus Final Reminders (12:8-14)

Worldview Assumptions

- This universe is the Kingdom of God
 - Interpretive Choice over against:
 - Evolutionary Naturalism
 - Panentheistic Historicism
- Earth is the specially-prepared domain for humanity, made in God's image to share creative stewardship and relational love
- Humanity is in rebellion against its Creator
- At least in part because of the unique characteristics of humankind (divine imagers), the Creator has chosen not to annihilate this world, but rather to redeem this world
- This redemptive initiative is the divine mission explained and interpreted in the Bible, the authoritative handbook formed in partnership between the Creator and a community uniquely commissioned to serve as the earthly vanguard of the mission
- This redemptive mission has one purpose (reconcile all back to full communion with the Creator), but is expressed in two related strategies:
 - Through ancient Israel, to place a covenantally-shaped community at the center of the world, on stage before all nations, in an effort to draw them back to their Creator
 - Through the Church of Jesus Christ, to place covenantally-shaped communities into every expression of human society as a missional witness, in an effort to draw all back to their Creator

Reflecting on Ecclesiastes

- At face value, this book is rather dark & depressing (especially the opening sections)
- Its **Screaming Message** (on first reading) seems to be: *“All we do and everything that happens to us is ultimately meaningless and has no lasting value!”*
- Its **Moderate Message** (on second reflections) appears to be: *“Yet life goes on, so let’s make the best of it and be more wise than foolish about it.”*
- Its **Subtle Message** (underlying the others) is: *“Life can only mean something if there is a God who sets the values (e.g., time & morality) and gives us a link to eternity which confirms our right to exist.”*

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#26

Introduction to Song of Songs:
Background and Major Interpretive
Choices

Notes on Song of Songs

- Author: ??? Solomon? ???
- Date: ??? 950? ???
- Literature Genres:
 - Love Songs
 - Autobiographical Reflections
 - Communal Assessments
 - Search Narratives
- Interpretation:
 - The primary choice necessary in interpretation is whether there are two or three main characters
 - Love Duet? – Solomon woos a hesitant maid
 - Love Triangle? – Solomon in lust tries to steal a country maid from her betrothed, but true love wins

Methods of Interpretation

- Divine/Human Allegory:
 - Yahweh and Israel (cf. Hosea)
 - Christ and the Church (cf. Ephesians 5:25-33)
- Morality Play: “Don’t do what Solomon did!”
- Royal Nuptials: Elaborate wedding drama developed for entertainment at Solomon’s many weddings
- Liturgical Ecstasy: Language of spiritual union between the soul (feminine) and God (masculine)
- “Sanctified” Sexuality: God created sex, so enjoy it!

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#27

Introduction to Song of Songs: The
Key Interpretive Choice

Possible “Plot” to SoS

- King Solomon has brought the Shulamite Maid into his palace harem and tries to overwhelm her with power & poetry (1:2-2:7)
- The maid’s true lover comes seeking her at night and is chased, but the two escape to their country community (2:8-3:5)
- Solomon mounts a royal procession to reclaim his current infatuation (3:6-4:8)
- Once again the maid’s lover comes, trying to get her free; she misses him, runs into the streets after him when he is chased away, and is beaten until rescued by the harem guard (4:9-6:3)
- Solomon continues his wooing with more sensual love songs (6:4-7:9)
- But the Shulamite Maid spurns Solomon’s advances and returns to her rural community and the lover who waits for her there (7:10-8:14)

Interpretive Notes

- This approach allows the drama to have integrity in its original storyline context.
- This approach seems to take into account the subtle negative aspersions cast at Solomon (e.g., 8:12—“My vineyard, my very own, is for myself; you, O Solomon, may have the thousand...”)
- This approach seems consistent with the repeated refrain: “... do not stir up or awaken love until it is ready!” (2:7, 3:5, 8:4; compare 5:8)
- This approach fits with what we know to be the historical developments of Solomon’s own life.
- This approach would speak against the harem and polygamist marriages, and nurture a stronger commitment to monogamous unions.

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#28

Introduction to Song of Songs: The
Dramatic Story and Its Implications

Possible “Plot” to SoS

- King Solomon has brought the Shulamite Maid into his palace harem and tries to overwhelm her with power & poetry (1:2-2:7)
- The maid’s true lover comes seeking her at night and is chased, but the two escape to their country community (2:8-3:5)
- Solomon mounts a royal procession to reclaim his current infatuation (3:6-4:8)
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- This approach seems to take into account the subtle negative aspersions cast at Solomon (e.g., 8:12—“My vineyard, my very own, is for myself; you, O Solomon, may have the thousand...”)
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Christian Ethical Foundations

- Creational Norms:
 - How did God intend for things to be?
 - Note: So the portraits of life on earth in Genesis 1-2
- Restraint of Sin:
 - What evil has infested the world that needs to be restrained and counteracted?
 - Note: So the negative expression of the Ten Commandments and the laws to Israel
- The Mind of Christ/God:
 - What is the heart and passion and will of God?
 - Note: So the unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ
- Eschatological Hope:
 - What goals or plans or expectations is God drawing us toward in the consummation of all things?
 - Note: So Paul in 1 & 2 Thessalonians, and first-generation Christians in general, believing that Jesus would return within their life-times

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#29

Reflections on Proverbs, Ecclesiastes
and Song of Songs as Marking the
Developments in Solomon's Life

The “Solomon” Trilogy?

- While the connections with Solomon in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs are mostly indirect, his name and circumstances are linked to each. What might this indicate?
- One possibility:
 - **Proverbs** emerges from the young Solomon who displayed much wisdom and colored Israel’s international character because of it
 - **Ecclesiastes** might emerge from the reminiscences of an old Solomon who realized much of his later-life folly, and was trying to recover a sense of self and wisdom
 - **Song of Songs** could be the work of someone after Solomon died who created a morality play about love based on the failings of the great king

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#30

The Unique Literature of
Lamentations: An Introduction

Jeremiah's Times

- Assyria had long ago destroyed the northern brother nation called “Israel” (722)
- Judah was now a tiny community with diminishing resources, constantly tossed around by bigger nations
- Assyria was being beaten down between 612 (battle of Nineveh) and 605 (battle of Carchemish) by its eastern bully province, Babylon
 - Interesting Note: Assyria had long “owned” and dominated Egypt, so when the Babylonians began this revolt, the Egyptian army under Pharaoh Neco II was called up as support. On the way from Egypt to Carchemish, King Josiah of Judah tried to stop Pharaoh Neco’s advance at Megiddo in 609, and was killed! (2 Kings 23:29; 2 Chronicles 35:20-27).
- Babylon immediately took over Palestine
- Judah was experiencing a rapid turnover of kings, many of whom were puppets of Babylon
- Egypt loomed in many minds as either the only ally strong enough to withstand Babylon, or the safe haven for refugees escaping Babylonian sieges & deportations

The Assyrian Empire



The Babylonian Empire



The Lamentations (of Jeremiah?)

- Traditionally ascribed to Jeremiah: hence their location in biblical literature immediately following Jeremiah
- Four acrostic laments (1-4) plus another lament (5)
 - 1 (22 X 3 couplets, only the first of which begins with the successive letter): Jerusalem is like a lonely widow suffering from many oppressions
 - 2 (22 X 3 couplets, only the first of which begins with the successive letter): Yahweh's covenant anger and the resulting judgment
 - 3 (22 X 3 lines, each of which begins with the successive letter): Personalized pain because of Yahweh's judgment, coupled with an expectation of restoration
 - 4 (22 X 2 couplets, only the first of which begins with the successive letter): the pain of Jerusalem's ruin personalized
 - 5 (22 couplets, not acrostic): a prayer of repentance, seeking Yahweh's deliverance

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#31

Lament 1: The Woman Jerusalem
Mourns

The Lamentations (of Jeremiah?)

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- Four acrostic laments (1-4) plus another lament (5)
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Lamentations 1

1 How deserted lies the city,
once so full of people!
How like a widow is she,
who once was great among the nations!
She who was queen among the provinces
has now become a slave.

2 Bitterly she weeps at night,
tears are on her cheeks.
Among all her lovers
there is no one to comfort her.
All her friends have betrayed her;
they have become her enemies.

3 After affliction and harsh labor,
Judah has gone into exile.
She dwells among the nations;
she finds no resting place.
All who pursue her have overtaken her
in the midst of her distress.

4 The roads to Zion mourn,
for no one comes to her appointed festivals.
All her gateways are desolate,
her priests groan,
her young women grieve,
and she is in bitter anguish.

Lamentations 1

⁵ Her foes have become her masters;
her enemies are at ease.

The LORD has brought her grief
because of her many sins.

Her children have gone into exile,
captive before the foe.

⁶ All the splendor has departed
from Daughter Zion.

Her princes are like deer
that find no pasture;

in weakness they have fled
before the pursuer.

⁷ In the days of her affliction and wandering
Jerusalem remembers all the treasures
that were hers in days of old.

When her people fell into enemy hands,
there was no one to help her.

Her enemies looked at her
and laughed at her destruction.

⁸ Jerusalem has sinned greatly
and so has become unclean.

All who honored her despise her,
for they have all seen her naked;

she herself groans
and turns away.

Lamentations 1

⁹ Her filthiness clung to her skirts;
she did not consider her future.

Her fall was astounding;
there was none to comfort her.

“Look, LORD, on my affliction,
for the enemy has triumphed.”

¹⁰ The enemy laid hands
on all her treasures;
she saw pagan nations
enter her sanctuary—
those you had forbidden
to enter your assembly.

¹¹ All her people groan
as they search for bread;
they barter their treasures for food
to keep themselves alive.

“Look, LORD, and consider,
for I am despised.”

¹² “Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?
Look around and see.

Is any suffering like my suffering
that was inflicted on me,
that the LORD brought on me
in the day of his fierce anger?

Lamentations 1

¹³ “From on high he sent fire,
sent it down into my bones.

He spread a net for my feet
and turned me back.

He made me desolate,
faint all the day long.

¹⁴ “My sins have been bound into a yoke;
by his hands they were woven together.

They have been hung on my neck,
and the Lord has sapped my strength.

He has given me into the hands
of those I cannot withstand.

¹⁵ “The Lord has rejected
all the warriors in my midst;
he has summoned an army against me
to crush my young men.

In his winepress the Lord has trampled
Virgin Daughter Judah.

¹⁶ “This is why I weep
and my eyes overflow with tears.

No one is near to comfort me,
no one to restore my spirit.

My children are destitute
because the enemy has prevailed.”

Lamentations 1

¹⁷ Zion stretches out her hands,
but there is no one to comfort her.
The LORD has decreed for Jacob
that his neighbors become his foes;
Jerusalem has become
an unclean thing among them.

¹⁸ “The LORD is righteous,
yet I rebelled against his command.
Listen, all you peoples;
look on my suffering.
My young men and young women
have gone into exile.

¹⁹ “I called to my allies
but they betrayed me.
My priests and my elders
perished in the city
while they searched for food
to keep themselves alive.

²⁰ “See, LORD, how distressed I am!
I am in torment within,
and in my heart I am disturbed,
for I have been most rebellious.
Outside, the sword bereaves;
inside, there is only death.

Lamentations 1

²¹ “People have heard my groaning,
but there is no one to comfort me.
All my enemies have heard of my distress;
they rejoice at what you have done.
May you bring the day you have announced
so they may become like me.

²² “Let all their wickedness come before you;
deal with them
as you have dealt with me
because of all my sins.
My groans are many
and my heart is faint.”

Reflections on Lament 1

- Jerusalem is pictured as a forlorn widow whose children have all died or have been taken away.
- The woman acknowledges that, while other nations have done this, it is Yahweh who is behind it all.
- The reason for Yahweh's judgment is the woman's own sinfulness, so Yahweh is justified in these actions that have resulted in torture and pain and loneliness and helplessness.
- These things are all a result of the curses of the Sinai Covenant coming to pass.

Biblical Wisdom:
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#32

Lament 2: The Divine Declarations

The Lamentations (of Jeremiah?)

- Traditionally ascribed to Jeremiah: hence their location in biblical literature immediately following Jeremiah
- Four acrostic laments (1-4) plus another lament (5)
 - 1 (22 X 3 couplets, only the first of which begins with the successive letter): Jerusalem is like a lonely widow suffering from many oppressions
 - 2 (22 X 3 couplets, only the first of which begins with the successive letter): Yahweh's covenant anger and the resulting judgment
 - 3 (22 X 3 lines, each of which begins with the successive letter): Personalized pain because of Yahweh's judgment, coupled with an expectation of restoration
 - 4 (22 X 2 couplets, only the first of which begins with the successive letter): the pain of Jerusalem's ruin personalized
 - 5 (22 couplets, not acrostic): a prayer of repentance, seeking Yahweh's deliverance

Lamentations 2

2 How the Lord has covered Daughter Zion
with the cloud of his anger!
He has hurled down the splendor of Israel
from heaven to earth;
he has not remembered his footstool
in the day of his anger.

² Without pity the Lord has swallowed up
all the dwellings of Jacob;
in his wrath he has torn down
the strongholds of Daughter Judah.
He has brought her kingdom and its princes
down to the ground in dishonor.

³ In fierce anger he has cut off
every horn of Israel.
He has withdrawn his right hand
at the approach of the enemy.
He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire
that consumes everything around it.

⁴ Like an enemy he has strung his bow;
his right hand is ready.
Like a foe he has slain
all who were pleasing to the eye;
he has poured out his wrath like fire
on the tent of Daughter Zion.

Lamentations 2

⁵ The Lord is like an enemy;
he has swallowed up Israel.

He has swallowed up all her palaces
and destroyed her strongholds.

He has multiplied mourning and lamentation
for Daughter Judah.

⁶ He has laid waste his dwelling like a garden;
he has destroyed his place of meeting.

The LORD has made Zion forget
her appointed festivals and her Sabbaths;
in his fierce anger he has spurned
both king and priest.

⁷ The Lord has rejected his altar
and abandoned his sanctuary.

He has given the walls of her palaces
into the hands of the enemy;
they have raised a shout in the house of the LORD
as on the day of an appointed festival.

⁸ The LORD determined to tear down
the wall around Daughter Zion.

He stretched out a measuring line
and did not withhold his hand from destroying.

He made ramparts and walls lament;
together they wasted away.

Lamentations 2

⁹ Her gates have sunk into the ground;
their bars he has broken and destroyed.

Her king and her princes are exiled among the nations,
the law is no more,
and her prophets no longer find
visions from the LORD.

¹⁰ The elders of Daughter Zion
sit on the ground in silence;
they have sprinkled dust on their heads
and put on sackcloth.

The young women of Jerusalem
have bowed their heads to the ground.

¹¹ My eyes fail from weeping,
I am in torment within;
my heart is poured out on the ground
because my people are destroyed,
because children and infants faint
in the streets of the city.

¹² They say to their mothers,
“Where is bread and wine?”
as they faint like the wounded
in the streets of the city,
as their lives ebb away
in their mothers’ arms.

Lamentations 2

¹³ What can I say for you?

With what can I compare you, Daughter Jerusalem?

To what can I liken you,

that I may comfort you, Virgin Daughter Zion?

Your wound is as deep as the sea.

Who can heal you?

¹⁴ The visions of your prophets

were false and worthless;

they did not expose your sin

to ward off your captivity.

The prophecies they gave you

were false and misleading.

¹⁵ All who pass your way

clap their hands at you;

they scoff and shake their heads

at Daughter Jerusalem:

“Is this the city that was called

the perfection of beauty,

the joy of the whole earth?”

¹⁶ All your enemies open their mouths

wide against you;

they scoff and gnash their teeth

and say, “We have swallowed her up.

This is the day we have waited for;

we have lived to see it.”

Lamentations 2

¹⁷ The LORD has done what he planned;
he has fulfilled his word, which he decreed long ago.

He has overthrown you without pity,
he has let the enemy gloat over you,
he has exalted the horn of your foes.

¹⁸ The hearts of the people
cry out to the Lord.

You walls of Daughter Zion,
let your tears flow like a river day and night;
give yourself no relief,
your eyes no rest.

¹⁹ Arise, cry out in the night,
as the watches of the night begin;
pour out your heart like water
in the presence of the Lord.

Lift up your hands to him
for the lives of your children,
who faint from hunger
at every street corner.

²⁰ "Look, LORD, and consider:
Whom have you ever treated like this?
Should women eat their offspring,
the children they have cared for?
Should priest and prophet be killed
in the sanctuary of the Lord?

Lamentations 2

²¹ “Young and old lie together
in the dust of the streets;

my young men and young women
have fallen by the sword.

You have slain them in the day of your anger;
you have slaughtered them without pity.

²² “As you summon to a feast day,
so you summoned against me terrors on every side.

In the day of the LORD’s anger
no one escaped or survived;
those I cared for and reared
my enemy has destroyed.”

Reflections on Lament 2

- Now the voice and perspective of Yahweh are most prominent.
- The key theme is that Yahweh has actively accosted Jerusalem to tear it down (through the actions of the Babylonian armies), but this has happened because God's people have forgotten who they are and Whose they are.
- The reason for Yahweh's judgment is the woman's own sinfulness, so Yahweh is justified in these actions that have resulted in torture and pain and loneliness and helplessness.
- These things are all a result of the curses of the Sinai Covenant coming to pass.

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#33

Lament 3: Wrestling for Hope

The Lamentations (of Jeremiah?)

- Traditionally ascribed to Jeremiah: hence their location in biblical literature immediately following Jeremiah
- Four acrostic laments (1-4) plus another lament (5)
 - 1 (22 X 3 couplets, only the first of which begins with the successive letter): Jerusalem is like a lonely widow suffering from many oppressions
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 - 3 (22 X 3 lines, each of which begins with the successive letter): Personalized pain because of Yahweh's judgment, coupled with an expectation of restoration
 - 4 (22 X 2 couplets, only the first of which begins with the successive letter): the pain of Jerusalem's ruin personalized
 - 5 (22 couplets, not acrostic): a prayer of repentance, seeking Yahweh's deliverance

Lamentations 3

- 3 I am the man who has seen affliction
by the rod of the LORD's wrath.
- 2 He has driven me away and made me walk
in darkness rather than light;
- 3 indeed, he has turned his hand against me
again and again, all day long.
- 4 He has made my skin and my flesh grow old
and has broken my bones.
- 5 He has besieged me and surrounded me
with bitterness and hardship.
- 6 He has made me dwell in darkness
like those long dead.
- 7 He has walled me in so I cannot escape;
he has weighed me down with chains.
- 8 Even when I call out or cry for help,
he shuts out my prayer.
- 9 He has barred my way with blocks of stone;
he has made my paths crooked.
- 10 Like a bear lying in wait,
like a lion in hiding,
- 11 he dragged me from the path and mangled me
and left me without help.
- 12 He drew his bow
and made me the target for his arrows.

Lamentations 3

- ¹³ He pierced my heart
with arrows from his quiver.
- ¹⁴ I became the laughingstock of all my people;
they mock me in song all day long.
- ¹⁵ He has filled me with bitter herbs
and given me gall to drink.
- ¹⁶ He has broken my teeth with gravel;
he has trampled me in the dust.
- ¹⁷ I have been deprived of peace;
I have forgotten what prosperity is.
- ¹⁸ So I say, "My splendor is gone
and all that I had hoped from the LORD."
- ¹⁹ I remember my affliction and my wandering,
the bitterness and the gall.
- ²⁰ I well remember them,
and my soul is downcast within me.
- ²¹ Yet this I call to mind
and therefore I have hope:
- ²² Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
- ²³ They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
- ²⁴ I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."

Lamentations 3

- ²⁵ The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him;
- ²⁶ it is good to wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.
- ²⁷ It is good for a man to bear the yoke
while he is young.
- ²⁸ Let him sit alone in silence,
for the LORD has laid it on him.
- ²⁹ Let him bury his face in the dust—
there may yet be hope.
- ³⁰ Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him,
and let him be filled with disgrace.
- ³¹ For no one is cast off
by the Lord forever.
- ³² Though he brings grief, he will show compassion,
so great is his unfailing love.
- ³³ For he does not willingly bring affliction
or grief to anyone.
- ³⁴ To crush underfoot
all prisoners in the land,
³⁵ to deny people their rights
before the Most High,
³⁶ to deprive them of justice—
would not the Lord see such things?

Lamentations 3

- 37 Who can speak and have it happen
if the Lord has not decreed it?
- 38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High
that both calamities and good things come?
- 39 Why should the living complain
when punished for their sins?
- 40 Let us examine our ways and test them,
and let us return to the LORD.
- 41 Let us lift up our hearts and our hands
to God in heaven, and say:
- 42 “We have sinned and rebelled
and you have not forgiven.
- 43 “You have covered yourself with anger and pursued us;
you have slain without pity.
- 44 You have covered yourself with a cloud
so that no prayer can get through.
- 45 You have made us scum and refuse
among the nations.
- 46 “All our enemies have opened their mouths
wide against us.
- 47 We have suffered terror and pitfalls,
ruin and destruction.”
- 48 Streams of tears flow from my eyes
because my people are destroyed.

Lamentations 3

- 49 My eyes will flow unceasingly,
without relief,
50 until the LORD looks down
from heaven and sees.
51 What I see brings grief to my soul
because of all the women of my city.
52 Those who were my enemies without cause
hunted me like a bird.
53 They tried to end my life in a pit
and threw stones at me;
54 the waters closed over my head,
and I thought I was about to perish.
55 I called on your name, LORD,
from the depths of the pit.
56 You heard my plea: "Do not close your ears
to my cry for relief."
57 You came near when I called you,
and you said, "Do not fear."
58 You, Lord, took up my case;
you redeemed my life.
59 LORD, you have seen the wrong done to me.
Uphold my cause!
60 You have seen the depth of their vengeance,
all their plots against me.

Lamentations 3

- ⁶¹ LORD, you have heard their insults,
all their plots against me—
- ⁶² what my enemies whisper and mutter
against me all day long.
- ⁶³ Look at them! Sitting or standing,
they mock me in their songs.
- ⁶⁴ Pay them back what they deserve, LORD,
for what their hands have done.
- ⁶⁵ Put a veil over their hearts,
and may your curse be on them!
- ⁶⁶ Pursue them in anger and destroy them
from under the heavens of the LORD.

Reflections on Lament 3

- This is the high point of the Laments. It is the most intricately developed of all the Laments. It also is more comprehensive than any of the others, almost as if all of the themes probed in the other Laments are taken up and incorporated here.
- Now the voice and perspective is that of a human man who functions in much the same role as that of the widow in Lament 1. The difference here is that the man is more aware of the struggles that are part of this tragic event, both in his own life and that of Yahweh. God, too, is wrestling with what to do, and how to make this terrible judgment come out in renewal and blessing.
- There is much more anticipation of God's grace, and the hope that it will be the final word spoken in this horrible turn of the relationship between God and God's people.
- The key theme is once again that Yahweh has actively accosted Jerusalem to tear it down (through the actions of the Babylonian armies), but this has happened because God's people have forgotten who they are and Whose they are.
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#34

Lament 4: A Shorter Sigh

The Lamentations (of Jeremiah?)

- Traditionally ascribed to Jeremiah: hence their location in biblical literature immediately following Jeremiah
- Four acrostic laments (1-4) plus another lament (5)
 - 1 (22 X 3 couplets, only the first of which begins with the successive letter): Jerusalem is like a lonely widow suffering from many oppressions
 - 2 (22 X 3 couplets, only the first of which begins with the successive letter): Yahweh's covenant anger and the resulting judgment
 - 3 (22 X 3 lines, each of which begins with the successive letter): Personalized pain because of Yahweh's judgment, coupled with an expectation of restoration
 - 4 (22 X 2 couplets, only the first of which begins with the successive letter): the pain of Jerusalem's ruin personalized
 - 5 (22 couplets, not acrostic): a prayer of repentance, seeking Yahweh's deliverance

Lamentations 4

4 How the gold has lost its luster,
the fine gold become dull!

The sacred gems are scattered
at every street corner.

² How the precious children of Zion,
once worth their weight in gold,
are now considered as pots of clay,
the work of a potter's hands!

³ Even jackals offer their breasts
to nurse their young,
but my people have become heartless
like ostriches in the desert.

⁴ Because of thirst the infant's tongue
sticks to the roof of its mouth;
the children beg for bread,
but no one gives it to them.

⁵ Those who once ate delicacies
are destitute in the streets.
Those brought up in royal purple
now lie on ash heaps.

Lamentations 4

- ⁶ The punishment of my people
is greater than that of Sodom,
which was overthrown in a moment
without a hand turned to help her.
- ⁷ Their princes were brighter than snow
and whiter than milk,
their bodies more ruddy than rubies,
their appearance like lapis lazuli.
- ⁸ But now they are blacker than soot;
they are not recognized in the streets.
Their skin has shriveled on their bones;
it has become as dry as a stick.
- ⁹ Those killed by the sword are better off
than those who die of famine;
racked with hunger, they waste away
for lack of food from the field.
- ¹⁰ With their own hands compassionate women
have cooked their own children,
who became their food
when my people were destroyed.

Lamentations 4

¹¹ The LORD has given full vent to his wrath;
he has poured out his fierce anger.

He kindled a fire in Zion
that consumed her foundations.

¹² The kings of the earth did not believe,
nor did any of the peoples of the world,
that enemies and foes could enter
the gates of Jerusalem.

¹³ But it happened because of the sins of her prophets
and the iniquities of her priests,
who shed within her
the blood of the righteous.

¹⁴ Now they grope through the streets
as if they were blind.

They are so defiled with blood
that no one dares to touch their garments.

¹⁵ “Go away! You are unclean!” people cry to them.
“Away! Away! Don’t touch us!”

When they flee and wander about,
people among the nations say,
“They can stay here no longer.”

¹⁶ The LORD himself has scattered them;
he no longer watches over them.

The priests are shown no honor,
the elders no favor.

Lamentations 4

¹⁷ Moreover, our eyes failed,
looking in vain for help;
from our towers we watched
for a nation that could not save us.

¹⁸ People stalked us at every step,
so we could not walk in our streets.

Our end was near, our days were numbered,
for our end had come.

¹⁹ Our pursuers were swifter
than eagles in the sky;
they chased us over the mountains
and lay in wait for us in the desert.

²⁰ The LORD's anointed, our very life breath,
was caught in their traps.

We thought that under his shadow
we would live among the nations.

²¹ Rejoice and be glad, Daughter Edom,
you who live in the land of Uz.

But to you also the cup will be passed;
you will be drunk and stripped naked.

²² Your punishment will end, Daughter Zion;
he will not prolong your exile.

But he will punish your sin, Daughter Edom,
and expose your wickedness.

Reflections on Lament 4

- This is a shorter Lament than the first three, but just as powerful.
- Here again the voice and perspective is that of a human man who functions in much the same role as that of the widow in Lament 1. The difference here is that the man is more aware of the struggles that are part of this tragic event, both in his own life and that of Yahweh. God, too, is wrestling with what to do, and how to make this terrible judgment come out in renewal and blessing.
- The key theme is once again that Yahweh has actively accosted Jerusalem to tear it down (through the actions of the Babylonian armies), but this has happened because God's people have forgotten who they are and Whose they are.
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#35

Lament 5: Submission

The Lamentations (of Jeremiah?)

- Traditionally ascribed to Jeremiah: hence their location in biblical literature immediately following Jeremiah
- Four acrostic laments (1-4) plus another lament (5)
 - 1 (22 X 3 couplets, only the first of which begins with the successive letter): Jerusalem is like a lonely widow suffering from many oppressions
 - 2 (22 X 3 couplets, only the first of which begins with the successive letter): Yahweh's covenant anger and the resulting judgment
 - 3 (22 X 3 lines, each of which begins with the successive letter): Personalized pain because of Yahweh's judgment, coupled with an expectation of restoration
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 - 5 (22 couplets, not acrostic): a prayer of repentance, seeking Yahweh's deliverance

Lament

5

1 Remember, O LORD, what has happened to us;
look, and see our disgrace.

2 Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens,
our homes to foreigners.

3 We have become orphans and fatherless,
our mothers like widows.

4 We must buy the water we drink;
our wood can be had only at a price.

5 Those who pursue us are at our heels;
we are weary and find no rest.

6 We submitted to Egypt and Assyria
to get enough bread.

7 Our fathers sinned and are no more,
and we bear their punishment.

8 Slaves rule over us,
and there is none to free us from their hands.

9 We get our bread at the risk of our lives
because of the sword in the desert.

10 Our skin is hot as an oven,
feverish from hunger.

11 Women have been ravished in Zion,
and virgins in the towns of Judah.

Lament

12 Princes have been hung up by their hands;
elders are shown no respect.

13 Young men toil at the millstones;
boys stagger under loads of wood.

14 The elders are gone from the city gate;
the young men have stopped their music.

15 Joy is gone from our hearts;
our dancing has turned to mourning.

16 The crown has fallen from our head.

Woe to us, for we have sinned!

17 Because of this our hearts are faint,
because of these things our eyes grow dim

18 for Mount Zion, which lies desolate,
with jackals prowling over it.

19 You, O LORD, reign forever;
your throne endures from generation to generation.

20 Why do you always forget us?

Why do you forsake us so long?

21 Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may return;
renew our days as of old

22 unless you have utterly rejected us
and are angry with us beyond measure.

Reflections on Lament 5

- This is the shortest Lament among the five, and not an acrostic.
- More prayer than mere lament, the voice of the prophet comes through, strongly wrestling with God for the future of God's people.
- Even though Yahweh has actively accosted Jerusalem to tear it down (through the actions of the Babylonian armies), the people have begun to learn their lesson, and are calling on God to remember them.

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#36

The Theology of Lamentations

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What is the message of the Lamentations?

- Absolute affirmation that the judgments of Yahweh against Jerusalem and the people of Judah were appropriate (direct link to the curses of the Sinai Covenant)
- And yet, questions:
 - How can Yahweh carry out the divine mission if Yahweh's human partner is annihilated?
 - What message is sent if Israel is utterly destroyed?
 - How will the nations of the world (Yahweh's target for reclamation in the divine mission) view Yahweh if the marriage of Yahweh and Israel ends in divorce?
 - Can Yahweh be trusted to see things through, even when Israel is persistently unfaithful?
 - How can a marriage between such unequal partners ever last?
 - Where do we go from here?

Messianic Leanings

- The problems identified in the Laments do not come to conclusions or resolutions
- They anticipate a new act of God (3:22-24) that will resolve matters by divine initiative
- These same issues resurface in the New Testament when Paul writes with confidence about “predestination” to the Roman congregation (Romans 8), only to have to explain God’s actions with Israel (Romans 9-11)

Lament 3

19 I remember my affliction and my wandering,
the bitterness and the gall.

20 I well remember them,
and my soul is downcast within me.

21 Yet this I call to mind
and therefore I have hope:

22 Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.

23 They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

24 I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."



Because of the Lord's great love
we are not consumed, for His compassions
never fail. They are new every morning;
great is Your faithfulness.
Lamentations 3:22

“I’ll Never Let Go of Your Hand”

Don Francisco

I know what you've been hearing
I've seen you hide your fear
Embarrassed by your weaknesses
Afraid to let Me near
I wish you knew how much
I long for you to understand
No matter what may happen, child
I'll never let go of your hand

I know you've been forsaken
By all you've known before
When you failed their expectations
They frowned and closed the door
But even though your heart itself
Should lose the will to stand
No matter what may happen, child,
I'll never let go of your hand

The life that I have given you
No one can take away
I've sealed it with my Spirit, Blood and Word
The everlasting Father
Has made His covenant with you
And He's stronger than the world you've
seen and heard

So don't you fear to show them
All the love I have for you
I'll be with you everywhere
In everything you do
And even if you do it wrong
And miss the joy I've planned
No matter what may happen, child,
I'll never let go of your hand