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JESUS WEPT

The Significance of Jesus' Laments
in the New Testament

REBEKAH EKLUND

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*For my mother, Carol Ann Grossi (1947–2008),
my grandfather, Alfred Eklund (1913–2010),
and my friend and adviser, Allen Verhey (1945–2014)*

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	The Anchor Bible
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
ASCE	<i>Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CQR	<i>Church Quarterly Review</i>
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
ETL	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBLMS	Journal of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
JBQ	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
JBTh	Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie
JES	<i>Journal of Ecumenical Studies</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCC	Library of Christian Classics
Neot	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum, Supplements
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
NTL	New Testament Library
NZSTh	<i>Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie</i>
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series

<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, 1964–76
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 8 vols. Grand Rapids, 1974–
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>WBC</i>	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WUNT</i>	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

PREFACE

Many people helped to shepherd this book into being, whether through editorial acuity, prayer, timely gifts of chocolate, or earnest arguments over Karl Barth's eschatology. The first group to whom I owe thanks are the dissertation committee at Duke Divinity School, who nurtured the concept of the book from its first glimmerings in my coursework into the finished product: Susan Eastman, Mark Goodacre, Amy Laura Hall, Richard Hays, and Allen Verhey. My adviser and director Allen Verhey encouraged and cheered me on every step of the way, hounded me over keeping deadlines, and made every chapter better with his insightful comments. The Th.D. women made writing a far less solitary pursuit through their encouragement and friendship. The Louisville Institute's Dissertation Fellowship supported me generously in my final year of writing.

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My mother and my grandfather were there to see the beginning but not the end of this project. In a convergence of joy and grief, I attended the memorial service for my dissertation director Allen Verhey on the same day that I submitted the manuscript for publication. They would all have been so proud to see this book come into being; with hope in that day when tears will be no more, this book is for them.

INTRODUCTION

While reading a number of books urging the theological recovery of lament, I noticed that the texts commended for use in this recovery tended to be almost exclusively from the Old Testament, and that writers sometimes accused the Christian tradition of muting or even silencing the voice of lament. I began to wonder if there were significant laments in the New Testament—or, if any New Testament texts could provide resources for the theological recovery of lament as a practice for the church. These are the questions this book sets out to answer. I answer ‘Yes’ to both. Despite what appears to be the relative lack of lament in the New Testament, when compared with the Old, the gospel thoroughly incorporates lament into the story it tells about Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.

Lament is such a key element of the Old Testament that it is hard to read any book without finding an example of it: in Genesis, Exodus, Job, Lamentations, the prophets, and the psalms, people complain and cry out to God for help. In fact, Old Testament texts describe this form of prayer as constitutive of God’s identity (as the God who heard cries for help and rescued from Egypt; Exod. 2.23-25; 3.7-10) and of Israel’s identity (as the people who ‘strive with God’; Gen. 32.26-27). Yet when one turns to the New Testament, lament is far less evident.

Indeed, some fail to see lament in the New Testament altogether. For example, Markus Öhler writes, ‘The New Testament is characterized by the absence of lament. There are no newly written psalms and songs of lament, indeed that painful turning to God in the face of suffering and death almost seems opposed to the Christian way of life.’¹ One might argue that the New Testament contains no newly written psalms because it had no need of any: the early church already had a collection of laments in its prayerbook, the Psalter. On the other hand, the point is well-taken: the Old Testament is replete with lament, whereas the New

1. Markus Öhler, ‘To Mourn, Weep, Lament and Groan: On the Heterogeneity of the New Testament’s Statements on Lament’, in Eva Harasta and Brian Brock (eds.), *Evoking Lament: A Theological Discussion* (London: T&T Clark International, 2009), p.150.

Testament (especially the epistles) sings songs of praise and thanksgiving for God's act of salvation in Christ. Has the longing voice of lament present in Israel's prayers been muted by resurrection hope and accompanying exhortations patiently to endure suffering and trials?

The answer to this question, based on a careful study of the role of lament in the New Testament, is a qualified 'no'. Lament has been altered, but by no means diminished. The New Testament thoroughly incorporates the pattern of Israel's lament into its proclamation of the gospel, especially in its description of Jesus' passion. Furthermore, the New Testament consistently refracts lament through the lens of Jesus' resurrection. The New Testament authors embed the longing of lament (for God's vindication) into the framework of inaugurated eschatology.

Jesus Christ embodies the full pattern of lament: Jesus provides God's answer to Israel's long-prayed petitions for restoration in his ministry of healing and exorcism and his proclamation of the dawning kingdom of God; he takes up Israel's prayer of lament himself during his own time of trial and suffering; and he enacts lament's common pattern of humiliation and vindication in his death and resurrection. In the epistles and Revelation, lament appears primarily as a form of longing for the kingdom that Jesus has already inaugurated.² In the New Testament, the expected vindication of lament is brought forward partly into the present but remains to be fully consummated in the future, at the eschaton.

While New Testament scholars have examined key lament texts in great detail—most notably, Jesus' 'cry of dereliction' from the cross in Matthew and Mark—scholars have generally focused less on lament in the New Testament as a whole.³ Therefore, I undertake in this book an

2. A possible exception is Paul's lament over Israel in Romans 9–11, but even this text occurs in a context of eschatological tension—between human sin and God's rectifying action, between Israel's rejection of her Messiah and God's ultimate plan to show mercy to all.

3. Several recent theological works on lament that include reference to New Testament texts are Allen Verhey, *The Christian Art of Dying: Learning from Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), pp.216–54; Scott A. Ellington, *Risking Truth: Reshaping the World through Prayers of Lament* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008), pp.163–91; Oswald Bayer, 'Zur Theologie der Klage', in Martin Ebner *et al.* (eds.), *Klage* (JBTh, 16; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001), pp.289–300; Kathleen D. Billman and Daniel L. Migliore, *Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1999); Öhler, 'To Mourn, Weep, Lament and Groan', pp.150–65; Martin Ebner, 'Klage und Auferweckungshoffnung im neuen Testament', in Ebner *et al.* (eds.), *Klage*, pp.73–87; Johann Reikerstorfer, 'Über der "Klage" in der Christologie', in Ebner *et al.* (eds.), *Klage*, pp.269–87; Ottmar Fuchs, 'Unerhörte Klage über den Tod hinaus! Überlegungen zur Eschatologie der Klage', in Ebner *et al.* (eds.), *Klage*, pp.347–79.

endeavor that necessarily means briefer treatments in places I might otherwise have paused to examine at greater length (e.g., some of the Pauline texts). That is, rather than studying lament in Mark or in John or in Romans, I examine the role that lament plays in the witness(es) of the New Testament as a whole.

I do so first by laying the necessary groundwork and defining my terms: What is lament in the Old Testament, especially in the psalms (since those provide the most important background for the New Testament texts), and in that light what is lament in the New Testament? This is the subject of the first chapter. Because I propose that the laments of Jesus are the most significant form that lament takes in the New Testament, Chapter 2 is an exegetical study of the key lament texts in the passion narratives of all four gospels, with a focus on the laments of Jesus in Gethsemane, at the tomb of Lazarus, and from the cross. This detailed examination lays the foundation for the next three chapters, which reads Jesus' laments through a threefold lens: his identity as a human being (Chapter 3); his identity as the messianic king, priest, and prophet (Chapter 4); and his identity as the divine Son of God (Chapter 5). In doing so, I assume that Jesus' person as traditionally understood—as fully human and yet divine, the deliverer of Israel—affects the nature of his laments, and thus affects the meaning of lament itself in the New Testament and the Christian tradition. To that end, Chapter 4 begins with a brief defense for my use of the threefold office as a lens through which to read Christ's laments. Finally, in Chapter 6, I conclude by suggesting that the New Testament embeds lament into the framework of its inaugurated eschatology; that is, Christian lament is a practice precisely for the time between the now and the not yet. As such, it expresses a longing exemplified by the prayers 'Your kingdom come' and 'Come, Lord Jesus!'

Chapter 1

BRIDGING FROM LAMENT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT TO LAMENT IN THE NEW

Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down!
(Isa. 64.1 NKJV)

Lament in the New Testament depends on lament in the Old. That is, the laments of Israel, especially in the psalms, provide the essential foundation for the role that lament plays in the New Testament. Therefore, the place to begin is in characterizing the nature and function of lament in the Old Testament; from this beginning point, I offer a definition of lament that will undergird my investigation of lament in the New Testament texts.

The verb ‘to lament’ and the noun ‘lament’ are flexible terms. Old Testament scholars, New Testament scholars, and theologians do not always use these terms in a uniform way. Lament can mean complaint, an expression of grief, the ritual act of mourning, a dirge for the dead, a cry for help, an accusation directed to God, a public protest over injustice, or wordless wailing. In English-speaking cultures, lament tends to be associated with ‘the passionate expression of intimate and personal pain’, especially in the event of a death; in German-speaking cultures, lament (*Klage*) tends to mean accusation, and is thus more closely connected to the problem of theodicy.¹ On Old Testament terms, however, lament is a form of prayer in the midst of trouble: a cry for help to a particular God—one who has saved before.

Lament in the Old Testament arises from settings of dispossession, oppression, and marginalization. In the psalms, Israel’s laments arise from many troubles, individual and social (illness, barrenness, threats from enemies, betrayal by friends), but the two key events for understanding

1. Eva Harasta and Brian Brock, ‘Introduction’, in Harasta and Brock (eds.), *Evoking Lament*, pp.3–5.

Israel's laments are exodus and exile.² Exodus 2.23-25 could be considered the root of all subsequent lament, narratively speaking, for it contains the essential elements: the people cry out for help in a situation of suffering, and God hears (on the basis of the covenant relationship) and is moved to respond. The devastating event of the Babylonian exile, including the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, offers a yet more challenging basis for lament—God's punishment *and* the enemy nation's oppression as the causes of distress. Will God hear and respond out of covenant-love, despite Israel's rebellion? Similarly, in the Second Temple period, anguished laments arise from the second destruction of the temple and the capture of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE (e.g., *4 Ezra*).

I. Individual Lament Psalms

Although lament occurs throughout the Old Testament, the individual psalms of lament are the primary background for Jesus' laments, and thus the form that lament takes there is of special interest to an investigation of lament in the New Testament. Two figures are of seminal importance for the study of the lament psalms: Hermann Gunkel (whose work was completed by Joachim Begrich) and Claus Westermann. Gunkel's form-critical work, largely followed and supplemented by Westermann, describes the basic form of the lament in the Psalter and other key Old Testament texts.³ The lament psalms of Israel, although some of them may have originated as private prayers or hymns, came to be used in a public setting as part of the community's worship, and probably included a variety of ritual actions.⁴ The following constitute

2. Claus Westermann and Walter Brueggemann discuss Exod. 2.23-25 as the paradigmatic setting for lament in Westermann, 'Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament', *Int* 28, no. 1 (1974), pp.20-38 (21); and Brueggemann, 'The Rhetoric of Hurt and Hope: Ethics Odd and Crucial', *ASCE* (1989), pp.73-92. Brueggemann describes the exile as the 'primal habitat' of Israel's lament in Brueggemann, 'Lament as Wake-up Call (Class Analysis and Historical Possibility)', in Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo (eds.), *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), p.225.

3. Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (Mercer Library of Biblical Studies; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), pp.88, 177-80.

4. Gunkel and Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms*, pp.122-30; see also Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Dearborn, MI: Dove, 2004), pp.1-41. Mowinckel argued that the great majority of the psalms were cult hymns composed for use in the temple; many scholars now take