

PSALMS OF LAMENT¹

OVERVIEW

- General format: An address to God; a complaint; a request and usually an expression of trust.²
- Kinds of complaints include:
 - Concerns with the psalmists own thoughts and actions
 - Concerns with the actions of an enemy or prevailing attitude
 - Concerns with God's action or inaction

- Types of laments:
 - Corporate lament
 - Personal lament
 - Lament of repentance
 - Lament of imprecation.

- Some have elements of more than one category of lament³ or even more than one genre.⁴

CORPORATE LAMENT

- Examples include: Psalms 12, 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129

- Psalm 12
 - Situation of the psalmist**
 - This is a corporate lament as evidenced by v.7 (i.e. the promise is not personal but third person.)
 - The community is in a culture with few godly people. Manipulators and schemers characterize these times.
 - Structure of the Psalm**
 - It seems to have two parts: 1. A prayer for deliverance (i.e. including remembrance & reflection upon God's promises) and 2. Assurance of deliverance

Analysis of the Psalm

Hashsheminith – may mean, 'by the basses'

1 HELP, LORD,* for the godly man ceases to be, ¹ For the faithful	Help God! There are no more godly people. * YHWH ¹ c.f. Jer.5:1-2; Hos.4:1; Micah 7:2 Interestingly, David does not respond by doing the same
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¹ I am indebted to Dennis Bratcher for these genre's and sub-categories of Psalms. See, The Christian Resource Institute website at <http://www.cresourcei.org/psalmtypes.html> Copyright © 1999 Christian Resource Institute. My use of Bratcher's genres should not be construed as an endorsement of the views expressed on his website, which I do not endorse.

² Sometimes they make promises to God and if the psalmist has experienced some measure of resolution – gratitude and joy. Some psalms also include a confession of sin. Longmann lists 7 features of Psalm structure that, while rarely present in their entirety, are found in some combination including: invocation, plea to God for help, complaints, confession of sin or assertion of innocence, curses toward an enemy, confidence in God's response and a hymn or blessing.

³ Psalm 69 is an individual lament that also contains imprecations.

⁴ Psalm 27 has elements of lament and gratitude; Psalm 36 has elements of lament and wisdom; Psalm 40:1-11 is an expression of gratitude while 40:12-17 is a lament; Psalm 89 has elements of lament and praise.

disappear from among the sons of men.	thing but calls out to God.
2 They speak falsehood to one another; With flattering lips and with a double heart ¹ they speak.	Only liars, flatterers and hypocrites remain. ¹ <i>b^eleb waleb</i> - lit. 'with heart and heart' is a Hebrew idiom for hypocrisy; Prov.26:24-26 the same idiom is translated 'deceit' by NIV; Ja.3:10-12
3 May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, The tongue that speaks great things; ¹	We want you to intervene, God. ¹ <i>g^edolot</i> – a tongue speaking boastfully
4 Who have said, With our tongue we will prevail; Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?	They feel unrestrained in their ability to manipulate. They 'prefer autonomy & anarchy.' 'Their aim is power and that end justifies any means (v.4; cf. 10:2-11). ⁵ Absalom is an example of this kind of person (2Sam.15:1-12).
5 Because of the devastation of the afflicted, because of the groaning of the needy, Now I will arise, says the LORD; I will set him in the safety for which he longs. ¹	God will rescue those whom they attack. • PROMISE OF GOD ¹ <i>yap^h lo</i> – lit. 'he will blow at him' (NIV I will protect them from those who malign them); Ugaritic texts suggest to some <i>y p h</i> rather than <i>p u h</i> ('witness'), thus meaning, 'witness for him'... 'I will place in safety the witness on his behalf'
6 The words of the LORD are pure words; As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times. ¹	God's words are flawless. • MEDITATION ON THE PROMISES ¹ A simile intended to show the flawlessness of God's truth.
7 You, O LORD, will keep them; You will preserve him from this generation forever.	God will protect the godly from the ungodly. ASSURANCE OF DELIVERANCE
8 The wicked strut about on every side When vileness ¹ is exalted among the sons of men.	The evil are bold when the culture extols the worthless. ¹ OR worthlessness, licentious

PERSONAL LAMENT

- Examples include: Psalms 3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27*, 28, 31, 36*, 39, 40:12-17, 41, 42-43, 52*, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 69, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89*, 120, 139, 141, 142

⁵ VanGemeren, W. A. (1991) *Psalms – Song of Songs*, In: The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol.5, p.135-136.

* these psalms fit more than one category

- Psalm 42/43

Unity of 42-43 - These chapters are separate in MT & LXX however:

- There's no title for Ps. 43
- Repetition of the refrain in 42:5, 11 & 43:5
- Thought development from remembrance (42:4,6) to hope of restoration (43:3)
- Both are in a lament format & 43 follows the pattern begun in 42.

Situation of the psalmist.

- This is a personal lament as evidenced by the use of 1st person references in every single verse.
- The author appears to be in exile, perhaps in Aram, Assyria, Babylon
- He's surrounded by people who taunt him about the impotence of his God (i.e. remember, the outcomes of wars determined who's god was strongest at this time) (42:3 & 10)

Structure of the Psalm

- Built around a refrain repeated three times (42:5, 11, 43:5)
- There's a progression & climax as the author contemplates first the past, then present and finally the future.
- Three kinds of complaint are evident: his own thoughts, his enemies and God himself are sources of discouragement for him.

Analysis of the Psalm

For the director of music. A *maskil*⁶ of the Sons of Korah.⁷

<p>1 AS the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul¹ pants for You, O God.²</p>	<p>LAMENT 42:1-4 I yearn for you God. 'as the deer...' A simile used for emblematic parallelism ¹ <i>nepes</i> - soul; not the spiritual aspect exclusively...it means the whole self. ² <i>Elohim</i></p>
<p>2 My soul thirsts for God,¹ for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God?²</p>	<p>When will he respond? ¹ <i>Elohim</i> – this may be a simple preference or it may communicate about the God of all might...he is able to rescue. ² probably a reference to the Temple from which he is restrained (i.e. notice he remembers how he used to lead the way in v. 4); the Masoretes changed every text that implied man could see God and so the Niphal form of the verb 'see', could be either <i>w^e era'eh</i> - 'and I shall be seen,' or <i>w^e er'eh</i> - 'I shall see'; Several MSS (Syriac & the Targum) support the latter translation.</p>
<p>3 My tears have been my food¹ day and night, While they say to me all day long, Where is your God?</p>	<p>I constantly mourn and am mocked over your inaction. 10:11, 73:11, 94:7, Micah 7:8-10 ¹ hyperbole and imagery</p>
<p>4 These things I remember and I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go along with the throng and lead them in procession</p>	<p>I recall my joy in commitment to your praise. ¹ Three annual pilgrimages to the Temple included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passover - Deliverance from God's judgment • Firstfruits - God's provision • Tabernacles - At the autumnal harvest, a commemoration of the wilderness wandering...God's provision in the midst of </p>

⁶ This is probably a contemplative or instructional psalm.

⁷ See the notes concerning the sons of Korah from the first class

to the house of God, With the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival. ¹	judgment.
5 <u>Why are you in despair,</u> <u>O my soul? And why</u> <u>have you become</u> <u>disturbed within me?</u> ¹ Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him For the help of His presence. ²	HOPE V. 5 Why am I so troubled? God will rescue me. ¹ MT this second question is missing...making this either an ellipsis (incomplete parallel) or a scribal mistake. ² See Martin Lloyd Jones, <i>Spiritual Depression: Its causes and cure</i> , for a practical exposition of this verse. See also, Os Guinness, <i>Doubt</i> for the issue of being in two minds (Ch.2).
6 O my God, my soul is in despair within me; Therefore I remember You from the land of the Jordan And the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. ¹	LAMENT VV.6-7 I am in despair so I remember your presence in the land. ¹ unknown peak
7 Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls; ¹ All Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me. ²	I feel awe and despair at the same time. ¹ imagery of power and rest if one is observing them but... ² imagery of fear and despair if one is in them
8 The LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime; And His song will be with me in the night, A prayer to the God of my life.	HOPE V. 8 A response to v.3; God is as near as prayer God will respond to my prayers.
9 I will say to God my rock, Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?	LAMENT VV. 9-10 Where are you God of strength and security?
10 As a shattering of my bones, ¹ my adversaries revile me, While they say to me all day long, Where is your God?	My enemies wear me out by mocking your inaction. ¹ A simile - lit. 'in murder in my bones'; several MSS read, "like rot in my bones"; others read, "like breaking in my bones." Regardless, the point is how severe the author's suffering has become.
11 <u>Why are you in despair,</u> <u>O my soul? And why</u> <u>have you become</u> <u>disturbed within me?</u>	HOPE V. 11 Why am I so troubled? God will rescue me.

Why might God be bringing this to my attention today?

How to respond when under pressure.

- Turn your desires and hope toward God [42:1,2,5,11, 43:1,3,4,5]
I lift my eyes to the hills – Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. Ps.121:1-2
- It's here that we so often turn our thoughts to our own devices.
- Be honest in your turmoil [42:2, 3, 7,9,10, 43:2]
We're too afraid to tell the truth but not giving voice to doubts doesn't make them go away. On the other hand, voicing anger, doubt, fear & anxiety opens it up to the truth (e.g. Sarah missed the opportunity to expose her doubt about the power of God to God's scrutiny and instruction).
- Remember God's hand in your life prior to this – God loved and protected you [42:4,6]
This is a common theme in the Psalms...remembrance of God's past actions provides hope for current and future actions.
- Remind yourself of the truth – that God loves and will rescue you. [42:5,8,11, 43:5]

LAMENT OF REPENTANCE

- Examples include: 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143
- Psalm 51

Situation of the psalmist

- This psalm concerns David's response to his sin with Bathsheba after Nathan rebuked him (2Sam.11:1-12:25)
- David recognizes that sin, in his position, puts his nation in jeopardy too.

Structure of the Psalm

- Prayer for personal restoration (vv.1-2)
 - Confession & humility (vv.3-6)
Return to the request for restoration (vv.7-12)
 - Gratitude (vv.13-17)
- Prayer for Israel's restoration (vv.18-19)

Analysis of the Psalm

For the choir director: A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

<p>1 Be gracious¹ to me, O God,² according to Your loving kindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.</p>	<p>Because of your love & compassion - forgive me. ¹ <i>honnenni</i> – the same root, <i>h - n - n</i> is used in Nu.6:25 as part of the priestly blessing; it is used frequently in laments (4:1, 6:2, 31:9, 41:4, etc.); he has no right to ask for forgiveness on any basis other than the one God offers – his mercy anchored in his love (Exodus 34:6-7; Ps.25:6; Isa.63:7; Lam.3:32; Lk.18:13; 1Pet.1:3). ² <i>Elohim</i></p>
<p>2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin.</p>	<p>This makes it clear that the purpose of the sin sacrifice was to symbolize God's forgiveness and restoration not to cause it.</p>
<p>3 For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me.</p>	<p>I realize how wrong I've been.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>I sinned against you and you've every right to judge</p>

Against You, You only, I have sinned ¹ And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.	me for it. ¹ Some theologians, after studying the use of the word and concept of sin, argue that we may hurt others but we sin against God alone.
5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.	I am a sinner by nature.
6 Behold, ¹ You desire truth in the innermost being, ² And in the hidden part ³ You will make me know wisdom.	Since you want truth in my core, you teach me wisdom. ¹ OR 'since' ² <i>battuhot</i> – the inner parts ³ <i>satum</i> – the inmost place (this has partial assonance with <i>battuhot</i>)
7 Purify me with hyssop, ¹ and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.	Cleanse me from my sin. Vv.7-9 is chiasmic relative to vv.1-2 . ¹ <i>ezob</i> - used to apply the Passover blood (Ex.12:22), in purification rituals to sprinkle water (lepers, Lev.14; Nu.19) or blood for sin sacrifices (Lev.14:4-8; Nu.19:6-8, 17-21; Heb.9:19).
8 Make me to hear joy and gladness, ¹ Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.	Restore me. ¹ Joy follows from God's restoration (Isa.65:17-18); independent of all circumstances except for one – having a settled state of radical trust in the goodness and provision of God
9 Hide Your face from my sins And blot out all my iniquities.	Look away from my iniquity and forgive me.
10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.	Make me a clean man, loyal to you. Restoration to a spiritual man is a gift from God (Deut.30:6; Isa.59:21; Jer.31:33-34; Ez.36:26-27 {see also Jer.24:7,31; 32:39; Ez.11:19; 18:31; 2Cor.5:17; Gal.6:15; Eph.2:10; 4:24})
11 Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.	Do not cast me aside. At the rebuke of Nathan he must have thought back to Saul who was cast aside for rejecting the will of God (1Sam.13:14; 15:10,22-23; 16:14-23). Now, David had 'despised the word of the Lord' (2Sam.12:9,10,14). What would God do?
12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit.	Restore me and make me loyal to you and ... Interestingly, it is God's salvation that produces joy.
13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, ¹ And sinners will be converted to You.	...I will be your advocate toward other sinners. ¹ Many MSS have this in the singular, 'your way'

14 Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, ¹ O God, the God of my salvation; Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.	Do not destroy me and I will praise you. ¹ could mean the death penalty (Ez.18:12-13) for adultery or for murder in the case of Uriah (2Sam.12:5,13)
15 O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise.	Let me praise you
16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering.	Animal sacrifice does not please you or I would do it.
17 The sacrifices of God ¹ are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.	Humility and repentance are the sacrifices that you accept. ¹ <i>zibhe</i> from the MT could be <i>zibhi</i> - 'my sacrifice, O God'
18 By Your favor do good to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem.	Be gracious with Israel. Protect Jerusalem. Some suggest that these two verses are post-exilic additions to the Psalm. This is conceivable and would not do great harm to the text but it doesn't have to suggest some breach in the walls of Jerusalem...the walls represent protection that David jeopardized with his sin (2Sam.24).
19 Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices, In burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.	We will sacrifice to praise & honor you. Sacrifices were appropriate in the context of a right heart for they symbolized substitutionary atonement and demonstrated submission to God.

How to deal with your sin

- God's Role
 - Forgive (vv. 1,2,7,9,14)
 - Restore (vv. 6,8,10,12)
 - Make wise (vv.10-13)
Prov.4:23 guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life
Ps.119:9
- Our Role
 - Repent v.3,4
 - Trust v.1,7
 - Serve
 - Restore others v.13
 - Praise God v.14-15
 - Meekness v.16-17

LAMENT OF IMPRECATION

- Examples include: Psalms 35, 69, 88, 109, 137, 140
- Psalm 137

Situation of the psalmist

- . c. 520-445 BC
- See Jeremiah's letter (Jer.29:4-23)

Structure of the Psalm

- Lament vv.1-4
- Confession & Trust vv.5-6
- Pleading for God's Intercession vv.7-9

Analysis of the Psalm

1 By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat ¹ down and wept, ² When we remembered Zion.	We mourned our exile. ¹ <i>yasabnu</i> – sat or dwelt ² <i>bakinu</i> - wept
2 Upon the willows in the midst of it We hung our harps.	We sang no more...
3 For there our captors ¹ demanded of us songs, And our tormentors ² mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion."	...because our songs of you were mocked by our captors. ¹ <i>sobenu</i> – our captors ² <i>totalenu</i> – our tormentors, rhymes with <i>sobenu</i> but also forms a word play with <i>talinu</i> (we hung) in the previous verse.
4 How can we sing the LORD'S song In a foreign land?	How can we sing your song in exile? One translator puts this, "how can we who are unclean sing Yahweh's praises to an unclean people in an unclean land?"
5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, May my right hand forget <i>her</i> <i>skill</i>	I will not forget you Jerusalem. Love for Jerusalem and God were inexorably linked b/c of the temple (1Ki.8:48-49).
6 May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth If I do not remember you, If I do not exalt Jerusalem Above my chief joy. ¹	I will make Jerusalem my highest joy. vv. 5-6 form an ABB'A' structure A – If I forget... B – my right hand ... B' – my tongue... A' – If I do not remember
7 Remember, ¹ O LORD, against the sons of Edom The day of Jerusalem, Who said, "Raze it, raze it To its very foundation."	Judge the Edomites for their hatred of us. The Edomites were collaborators in Jerusalem's destruction (Lam.4:21; Ez.25:12-14; 35:5-15; Obadiah 11-14). ¹ <i>z^ekor</i> – remember has a legal connotation, thus the psalmist may be invoking the name of the god of covenant YHWH to fulfill his promise of retribution against those who attack Israel.
8 O daughter of Babylon, you devastated one, How blessed will be the one who repays you With the recompense	Judge the Babylonians for their devastation of us.

with which you have repaid us.	
9 How blessed will be the one who seizes and dashes your little ones Against the rock.	

What are we to make of curses?

- There is constant tension in the Bible between love of people and hatred of evil.
 - Love is in the Torah (Lev.19:17-18; Prov.25:21)
 - So is hatred of evil (Amos 5:14; Ps.109:6-20; Acts 17:30-31)
We often have a diminished view of evil in our culture.

But diminishing our view of evil, diminishes the justice of God and the appropriate horror his creatures should feel at the terrible predicament they are in..."the one who sins will die" (Ez.18:4,20).

This low view of evil minimizes the awesome mercy God extends to anyone who wants mercy.

- So what must we do?
 - We must uproot vindictiveness (Gal.5:15, Ja.3:13-16)
 - We must love the enemies of God (Isa.48:9; 2Pet.3:9; Col.1:21; Rom.5:10)
 - We must hate & resist evil (1Cor.10:3-5 & Eph.6:12) but trust God to take care of any retribution (notice in the imprecations the author doesn't hope to mete out retribution).
"It is an act of profound faith to entrust one's most precious hatreds to God, knowing they will be taken seriously." Brueggemann *Message of the Psalms*, p. 77

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

READ PSALMS 11, 21, 23, 27, 40, 75, 91, 92, 105/106, 107, 125,138 (notice the poetic devices).
Review the notes on Psalms of Gratitude (c.f. Wk.1)

Prepare responses to the following:

1. **Identify some sub-categories you notice.**
2. **Suggest one reason why God might tell us to express gratitude.**
3. **Write your own psalm of gratitude (thanks) in a Hebrew style.**