

# RELATING PRAYER AND PAIN

## PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AND LAMENTATIONS RESEARCH

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### Summary

*Psychological approaches to biblical texts have gained currency, particularly in lament literature. One notes, however, an increasing interest in the intersections between Lamentations and psychological analysis as well. Upon a survey of literature, one quickly realises no singular methodology prevails: scholars have applied to Lamentations the insights of Kübler-Ross' grief process as well as the insights of John Archer, Yorick Spiegel, Sigmund Freud and the perspectives of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Whilst useful in identifying and assessing pain in the poetry, these approaches undervalue the crucial indicators of prayer in Lamentations. These indicators press research to the fecund field of the psychology of prayer. This essay exposes diverse applications of psychological approaches to the book, presents an analysis of both the benefits and limitations of this research and then relates prayer and pain in its poetry by exploring the connections between Lamentations and the psychology of prayer.*

### 1. Introduction

Psychological approaches have gained currency in biblical studies in recent years, especially in the field of lament literature. And a good number have cropped up in Lamentations research.<sup>1</sup> The volume of

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<sup>1</sup> Michael S. Moore, 'Human Suffering in Lamentations', *RevBib* 90 (1983): 534-55; Paul M. Joyce, 'Lamentations and the Grief Process: A Psychological Reading', *BibInt* 1 (1993): 304-320; David J. Reimer, 'Good Grief? A Psychological Reading of Lamentations', *ZAW* 114 (2002): 542-59; Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Hugh S. Pyper, 'Reading Lamentations', *JSOT* 95 (2001): 55-69; Antje Labahn, 'Trauern als Bewältigung der Vergangenheit zur

psychological approaches employed in research is somewhat daunting. But common to them is a focus upon coping strategies for dealing with grief and trauma.

In view of the fragmentation and human pain set in portraiture in its poetry, it is understandable that Lamentations has attracted a good deal of attention from this angle. This five-chapter masterpiece of poetry reflects, and reflects upon, the limits of human suffering following the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC. The 'exilic' period that followed became a theological watershed, spurring religious thinking and development for those who would write in this era and after.<sup>2</sup>

Although previous psychological research on Lamentations explores indicators of grief and trauma at work in its poetry, it has not fully attended to its emphasis upon prayer. A variety of 'speech-acts' in the book coalesce in their directed-ness to the Deity in prayer (Lam. 1:20-22; 2:20-22; 3:42-66; 5:1-22).<sup>3</sup> Renkema argues that prayer is the central concern of Lamentations, summarising the main theme of the book to be a combination of Lamentations 3:17, 50: 'Gone from peace is my soul; I have forgotten the good // Until he looks down and sees—YHWH from the heavens.'<sup>4</sup> Because Lamentations recurrently eventuates into prayer this fact raises the prospect of relating its poetry to research on the psychology of prayer.<sup>5</sup>

Gestaltung der Zukunft. Bemerkungen zur anthropologischen Theologie der Klagelieder', *VT* 52 (2002): 513-27; Daniel Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002): 75-104.

<sup>2</sup> Bob Becking, 'Continuity and Discontinuity after the Exile: Some Introductory Remarks' in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times*, ed. Bob Becking and Marjo C. A. Korpel (*OtSt* 42; Leiden: Brill, 1999): 4.

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of the different functions of formulaic prayer in Lamentations, see H. A. Thomas, 'The Liturgical Function of the Book of Lamentations' in *Thinking Towards New Horizon: Collected Communications to the XIXth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Ljubljana 2007*, ed. M. Augustin and H. M. Niemann (Beiträge zur Erforschung des alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums 55; Frankfurt am Main: Lang Verlag, 2008): 137-47.

<sup>4</sup> Johan Renkema, *Lamentations* (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> For research see Ann Ulanov and Barry Ulanov, *Primary Speech: A Psychology of Prayer* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982); Fraser Watts and Mark Williams, *The Psychology of Religious Knowing* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988 [2007]): esp. 10-23, 109-115; Leslie J. Francis and Jeff Astley, ed., *Psychological Perspectives on Prayer: A Reader* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2001); Fraser Watts, 'Prayer and Psychology' in *Perspectives on Prayer* (London: SPCK, 2001): 39-52; Ralph Hood, Jr., Peter C. Hill, and Bernard Spilka, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach* (4th edn; New York: Guilford, 2009) emphasises the psychology of prayer throughout from a number of angles of vision: biology, mental health, coping strategies, etc. Also note the

At the most basic level, the psychology of prayer is instructive for Lamentations research in that it distinguishes between forms of prayer. Prayer directed toward God may be differentiated from meditative prayer.<sup>6</sup> Both occur in Lamentations and should be assessed in light of their differences. In addition, psychology of prayer delineates motivations for prayer and its outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

Discoveries from the psychology of prayer will be related to the text of Lamentations to see what correspondence(s) arise. The essay will proceed as follows. I will expose the difficulty in assigning the function of Lamentations, as it bears upon how psychological approaches assess the text (section 2). I then will explore the various psychological approaches in Lamentations research (section 3). I will then assess potential benefits and drawbacks in this research (section 4) and then press forward to explore how Lamentations may be understood when assessed through research in the psychology of prayer (section 5). Finally, I shall offer conclusions to the study (section 6). It will be shown that along with other psychological approaches, insights from psychology of prayer may be applied to Lamentations and its prayers and purpose more clearly understood. In Lamentations, prayer and pain may be related productively to help clarify what it means to be human and relate to God in suffering.

## 2. The Function(s) of Lamentations

Lamentations was composed in Palestine for the post-war Judahite community between 587-540 BC.<sup>8</sup> The reason for its composition is disputed. Some suggest that the book functions as a presentation of pain: the multiform historical trauma attendant to Jerusalem's destruction. On this view, the poetry paints a negative portrait of God and reality as a whole. It protests the pain of perceived abuse at the hands of enemies and God (e.g. Lam. 1:10; 2:2-5, 20). In light of these and other examples of suffering in the book, Moore argues that Lamentations is a cathartic expression, an artistic outlet to voice pain.<sup>9</sup>

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entire January 2008 journal of *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* is devoted to the psychology of prayer.

<sup>6</sup> Watts, 'Prayer and Psychology'.

<sup>7</sup> Ulanov and Ulanov, *Primary Speech*.

<sup>8</sup> Renkema, *Lamentations*, 41-47.

<sup>9</sup> Moore, 'Human Suffering', 554.

Alternatively Lamentations may function as a way to move beyond suffering, contrasting against the divine warrior imagery in Lamentations 2. On this view, often derived from historical-critical methodologies, God is portrayed as a divine saviour. He is able to hear the cries of his people and deliver them (Lam. 1:9c, 20-22; 3:46-66, esp. 59-66; 5:1-5).<sup>10</sup> God is justified in wisdom teaching from Lamentations 3:25-39 and is affirmed in Lamentations 3:22-23, resonant with Exodus 34:6:

‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness’ (Exod. 34:6).

‘Surely the LORD’s steadfast love is not consumed; indeed his mercies do not fail; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness’ (Lam. 3:22-23).

This positive theology has led many interpreters to posit that these verses introduce the hope of the book that contrasts against the negative portraits of God as enemy. This hopeful portion may function in one of three ways: (a) as the central theological outlook and core that ‘corrects’ the laments of the other chapters as the latest literary accretion to the book in redaction-critical assessments (Brandscheidt; Middlemas);<sup>11</sup> (b) as the source of theological hope of the book, without necessary recourse to diachronic explanation of the difference but rather with an emphasis upon chapter 3’s being the theological centre of the book (Childs, Heim, Johnson, Mintz);<sup>12</sup> (c) as a positive vehicle to negotiate the laments of the other chapters without ‘correcting’ them as such (Berges).<sup>13</sup> The negative portrait of God and

<sup>10</sup> Jill Middlemas, ‘Did Second Isaiah Write Lamentations III?’, *VT* 56 (2006): 518-19. In her article Middlemas explicitly refers to Lam. 3:22-24, 31-39 as reflective of the divine saviour image.

<sup>11</sup> Renate Brandscheidt, *Gotteszorn und Menschenlied: Die Gerichtsklage des leidenden Gerechten in Kgl 3* (TTS 41; Trier: Paulinus, 1983); Jill Middlemas, ‘Did Second Isaiah?’

<sup>12</sup> Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); Knut Heim, ‘The Personification of Jerusalem and the Drama of Her Bereavement in the Book of Lamentations’ in *Zion, the City of Our God*, ed. Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999): 129-69; Bo Johnson, ‘Form and Message in Lamentations’, *ZAW* 97 (1985): 58-73; Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Ulrich Berges, ‘“Ich bin der Mann, der Elend sah” (Kgl 3, 1): Zionstheologie als Weg aus der Krise’, *BibZeits* 44 (2000): 1-20.

reality evinced in some portions of the book is met with a more positive portrait as well.

Different from historical approaches, past psychological research has provided another way of interpreting the almost Janus-like theology of Lamentations. It reads the tensions in the book as indicative of real-life turmoil when dealing with grief and trauma. It is appropriate to survey this research prior to turning to the psychology of prayer and Lamentations.

### 3. Survey of Critical Literature

#### 3.1 Kübler-Ross and *Yorick Spiegel*

Moore is the first to relate Lamentations to psychological analysis. He queries whether any single theological emphasis is determinative for the theology of the book, especially Lamentations 3:22-39. He suggests that Lamentations functions not as a theological treatise that provides a theology of hope as much as it functions as a vehicle for expressing pain.<sup>14</sup> Setting to the side diachronic problems associated with the book, Moore treats it as a whole because of its internal literary coherence.<sup>15</sup> He finds in it similarities to Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' 'grief work'.<sup>16</sup> As is well known, Kübler-Ross suggests that five stages of grief generally proceed in those who are dying<sup>17</sup>:

- 1) *Denial and isolation*: initial reaction to the fact that someone is dying.
- 2) *Anger*: directed towards friends, family, oneself, and God.
- 3) *Bargaining*: pleading for relief of pain and the prospect of death; promising to turn over a new leaf if the impending death will be averted; searching for meaning and explanation.
- 4) *Depression*: deep sense of loss, both in past and future. Feelings of isolation often appear once again.
- 5) *Acceptance*: quiet detachment in recognition of impending death.

It is important to note that this process is not a linear or stair-step development but rather a variable process in which the dying person moves back and forth between stages. Likewise, in Lamentations the

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<sup>14</sup> Moore, 'Human Suffering', esp. 536-37.

<sup>15</sup> Moore, 'Human Suffering', 545.

<sup>16</sup> Moore, 'Human Suffering', 536. See Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Touchstone, 1969 [1997]).

<sup>17</sup> Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, 51-146.

grief expressed vacillates from denial to acceptance and all of the phases in between quite regularly. And though he mentions Kübler-Ross' 'grief work' as integral to the psychology of the expression of pain in Lamentations, he never fully expounds upon this other than making the initial claim: 'Lamentations, the result of this "grief work", itself becomes the focal point for the grief work of an entire nation.'<sup>18</sup>

Although Moore does not systematically apply Kübler-Ross, Joyce and Reimer do so explicitly.<sup>19</sup> Joyce's work remains seminal. Noting the puzzling contradictions at play in Lamentations, he relates psychological analysis to understand them. He rightly recognises that not only the grief work (Kübler-Ross) but also the trauma of death and bereavement mark Lamentations. So he employs the insights of Yorick Spiegel to the poetry. Spiegel's paradigm assesses the psychology of bereavement<sup>20</sup>:

- 1) *Shock*: brief and devastating awareness of bereavement, which often is associated with the third stage, regression.
- 2) *Controlled grief*: often expressed through mourning rites.
- 3) *Regression*: withdrawal to childlike behaviour, expressed by weeping, defence mechanisms, memory of happier times, searching for the guilty party, and laying blame.
- 4) *Adaptation*: assimilation and adjustment to bereaved condition where new start on life can be made.

Joyce avers that both Spiegel and Kübler-Ross' insights are similar because they both 'have at their heart a radical experience of loss'.<sup>21</sup> He finds both fruitful for Lamentations analysis.

A few examples demonstrate his approach. By applying Spiegel's schema for grief one sees in Lamentations 1:1 a correlation between stages of *shock* and *controlled grief*. This verse depicts Zion's drastic reversal that leaves her in *shock, grieving*: she sits alone, the city once full of people, but she has now become a widow. Memory functions in Lamentations 1:7 to evoke the stage of *regression*: 'Jerusalem remembers in the days of her affliction and bitterness all the precious things that were hers from days of old.'<sup>22</sup> Also reflected in this stage is the desire to mete out to the guilty party, as Spiegel maintains. Joyce

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<sup>18</sup> Moore, 'Human Suffering', 554.

<sup>19</sup> Joyce, 'Lamentations and the Grief Process'; Reimer, 'Good Grief'.

<sup>20</sup> Yorick Spiegel, *Der Prozess des Trauerns: Analyse und Beratung* (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1973).

<sup>21</sup> Joyce, 'Lamentations and the Grief Process', 309-310.

<sup>22</sup> Joyce, 'Lamentations and the Grief Process', 310-11. Translation his.

avers that Lamentations 5:7 depicts this: 'Our fathers sinned, and are no more; and we bear their iniquities.' He notes *adaptation* in the central section of Lamentations 3. In this portion, 'the tragic events are seen as justly deserved punishment at the hands of God, who now shows mercy'.<sup>23</sup>

Joyce further contends the process of dying is faced in Lamentations, and so he applies Kübler-Ross' paradigm as well. Lamentations 3:31, 39, with their positive and hopeful perspective could be seen as the poet's *denial* of impending death: 'For the LORD will not spurn forever' (Lam. 3:31), and 'Why should a living human complain, a man, over his sin?' (Lam. 3:39). Moreover, *isolation* is conveyed through the constant refrain of 'there is no comforter' in Lamentations 1:2, 9, 16, and 21. Joyce sees *anger* in the protestation of Lamentations 2:20. The third stage, *bargaining*, is witnessed in the pleas and promises of reform in Lamentations 2:19, 'Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the LORD! Lift your hands for the lives of your children', and in Lamentations 3:40-42, 'Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD.'<sup>24</sup> The stages of *depression* and *acceptance* are portrayed in the dejected statement of Lamentations 5:15, 'Joy has gone from our hearts; our dancing has been turned to mourning', and in Lamentations 3:26 and 37, 'It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD ... Who has commanded and it came to pass, unless the LORD has ordained it?'<sup>25</sup> Joyce sees Kübler-Ross' insights fruitful for Lamentations' interpretation.

He argues that psychological analysis explains some 'inconsistencies' in the book. The uneven descriptions of the cause of suffering in Lamentations—God (Lam. 1:5), enemies (Lam. 3:58-66), the citizens of Jerusalem (Lam. 5:16), the prophets and priests (Lam. 4:13), ancestors (Lam. 5:7)—reflect the psychology of death and grief rather than expose logical 'inconsistencies' as such. Psychological analysis also helps Joyce assess the ambiguous nature of hope in the book. Hope in Lamentations is contextualised within a parade of emotions and voices, making the theological 'high point' of Lamentations 3 equivocal to other theological presentations within the

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<sup>23</sup> Joyce, 'Lamentations and the Grief Process', 311.

<sup>24</sup> Joyce, 'Lamentations and the Grief Process', 312.

<sup>25</sup> Joyce, 'Lamentations and the Grief Process', 312.

book.<sup>26</sup> So for Joyce, the theological tensions do not necessarily reflect contradictory divine portraits as much as they indicate the variable coping strategies analogous to the judgements of Kübler-Ross and Spiegel's research.

Reimer also employs Kübler-Ross' insights to Lamentations. He sees that a 'dominant perspective' appears in each chapter of Lamentations which in fact mirrors each stage of grief work. Lamentations 1 reflects the stage of *denial* and *isolation*. Reimer admits that *denial* is not reflected in this chapter at all, *isolation* certainly is with the constant refrain of absent comfort and help.<sup>27</sup> The embittered cry of Lamentations 1:22 segues into the dominant theme of chapter two, *anger*. God is angry, especially in Lamentations 2:1-9. But this anger is tempered by the anger of Zion personified, who protests God's actions (Lamentations 2:20-22). Reimer says that 'she challenges [the LORD] with the outrageous crimes committed in Jerusalem'.<sup>28</sup> The next chapter contrasts the two preceding chapters by effecting 'a transition from hopelessness to hope through a reflection on the character of God. While hope remains uncertain, there is no better option.'<sup>29</sup> Lamentations 3 reflects the *bargaining* stage. It demonstrates the proper way forward: 'good behaviour' will hopefully lead to God's deliverance, although this deliverance remains uncertain for 'God is no automaton.'<sup>30</sup> Lamentations 4 reflects *depression* through the dominant theme of reversal: 'what was once precious, good, and vital has become worthless, spoiled, and lifeless'.<sup>31</sup> The negativity and unfinished mourning in the chapter parallels the *depression* stage. Lamentations 5 is 'the most distinctive of the book' because prayer frames both this poem and the book as a whole. The dual imperative of Lamentations 5:1, 'consider and look (הבִּיטָה וּרְאֵה)', parallels the constant appeal throughout the remainder of the book: 'look and consider (וּרְאֵה וְהִבִּיטָה)' (Lam. 1:9, 11, 20; 2:20). Thus the final chapter picks up the threads of appeal for future life that preceded it and concludes the book on a firm request: 'The sufferers

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<sup>26</sup> For another view, see Middlemas, 'Did Second Isaiah', 522-25.

<sup>27</sup> Reimer, 'Good Grief', 547.

<sup>28</sup> Reimer, 'Good Grief', 549.

<sup>29</sup> Reimer, 'Good Grief', 551.

<sup>30</sup> Reimer, 'Good Grief', 552.

<sup>31</sup> Reimer, 'Good Grief', 552.



insist that God take note of their suffering and act accordingly.<sup>32</sup> The last poem of Lamentations cries out for future life, refusing to let God see the sufferers perish. This poem contrasts against Kübler-Ross' stage of *acceptance*. Despite this, Reimer still sees that the other chapters reflect, to certain degrees, the grief paradigm of Kübler-Ross. For Reimer, psychological analysis provides a description of the contents and structure of the book and offers a trajectory for theological reflection.

### ***3.2 Freud, Mourning, Melancholia, and the 'Monstrous'***

Linafelt employs Freudian psychoanalysis upon Lamentations, specifically his distinction between mourning and melancholia. Freud was perhaps the first to distinguish between mourning and melancholia, where the former is a positive process that brings a sense of resolution to suffering. Melancholia, on the other hand, unhealthily persists, moving forward interminably.<sup>33</sup>

Linafelt suggests that in the image of personified Jerusalem in Lamentations 1 and 2, the poetry aims for continued survival and protest against interminable pain rather than aiming for an explanation of suffering or a way out of it.<sup>34</sup> Linafelt's interest is not to develop a full theology of Lamentations but rather to shift the focus away from predominant theological impulses of Lamentations 3. He thereby highlights the rhetoric of Lamentations 1 and 2: melancholia prevents the possibility of resolution in mourning; thus the poetry functions to perpetually confront God and interminably express pain. Yet this promotes a crucial theological point: it is an audacious protest against the LORD and an eternal voicing of pain. It presents an 'unrelenting depiction of death' where, in the words of Zion herself, 'none survived or escaped' (Lam. 2:22).<sup>35</sup> Melancholia in the poetry vociferously confronts God rather than justifying him. But in so doing, the voice of Zion in Lamentations works as a mechanism to survive the very destruction and devastation the book depicts and embodies. In this way, Linafelt calls Lamentations 'survival literature'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Reimer, 'Good Grief', 555.

<sup>33</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Trauer und Melancholie', *Internationale Zeitschrift für ärztliche Psychoanalyse* 4 (1917): 288-301.

<sup>34</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 135.

<sup>36</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 142-43.

Pyper concurs with Linafelt that *Lamentations* reflects melancholia, though he presses this point further and in a different direction. Using Freud's article 'The Ego and the Id',<sup>37</sup> Pyper notes that melancholia can be represented as a 'revolt against the loved one which becomes an ambivalence turned on the self'.<sup>38</sup> Inevitably, Pyper believes the poet of *Lamentations* may have mitigated this anger by directing it against the victim,<sup>39</sup> in this case, personified Zion. He deduces that *Lamentations* justifies God at the expense of the degraded and raped woman, Zion herself. The poet fashions Zion as a lascivious woman through her admissions of sin, fashioning herself into an adulterous and abandoning mother.<sup>40</sup> Thus the poet uses Zion's admissions of sin to justify God (the Father) and degrade the mother (Jerusalem). In Pyper's reading, there is a strong case for theodicy at the expense of the feminine, in contradistinction to Linafelt. Divine justice that is constructed in *Lamentations* actually takes on a 'monstrous' aspect, God is confirmed at the expense of a degraded and raped woman.

### ***3.3 John Archer and the Nature of Grief***

Labahn applies insights from John Archer's *The Nature of Grief* to *Lamentations* and reveals that mourning actually paves the way towards a positive future with God in its poetry.<sup>41</sup> Archer identifies grief as a natural human reaction that occurs in all humans, in all cultures.<sup>42</sup> He argues that human grief involves both 'primitive emotional reactions' (protest, denial, anger, outrage) as well as 'complex mental processes' (searching for meaning in the troubling events, blaming self, others, or even deceased).<sup>43</sup> Archer sees that humans 'try to cope with grief in different ways' but particularly two stand out: a 'loss-orientated' process as well as a 'restoration-orientated' process of coping.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Ego and the Id' in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis* (Penguin Freud Library 11; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991): 350-408. See Pyper, 'Reading *Lamentations*', 57.

<sup>38</sup> Pyper, 'Reading *Lamentations*', 57.

<sup>39</sup> Pyper, 'Reading *Lamentations*', 56.

<sup>40</sup> Pyper, 'Reading *Lamentations*', 63-65.

<sup>41</sup> Labahn, 'Trauern als Bewältigung', 513-27; John Archer, *The Nature of Grief: The Evolution and Psychology of Reactions to Loss* (London: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>42</sup> Archer, *The Nature of Grief*, 249.

<sup>43</sup> Archer, *The Nature of Grief*, 250-51.

<sup>44</sup> Archer, *The Nature of Grief*, 250, 104-107.

Labahn suggests Lamentations evinces both coping styles identified by Archer but it finally emphasises the ‘restoration-orientated’ style. Lamentations 1, 2, 4, and 5 emulate the ‘loss-orientated’ style and reflect an extreme sense of loneliness and pain. Labahn says, ‘The experienced disruption leads to loneliness. Grief does not only isolate humans from their God, but also from each other. Therefore loneliness is a constitutive part of grief.’<sup>45</sup> But the prominent central position of Lamentations 3:21-39a draws significant attention to the ‘restoration-orientated’ coping process. This section reveals a new way of living. Under the mercy of the LORD, with his help, and through his intervention, the crisis that Lamentations expresses can be navigated.<sup>46</sup> Labahn avers, ‘Since Israel has painfully lived through and “grieved through” her catastrophe, she has now come into the position where she can shape a future with God’s help.’<sup>47</sup> Labahn admits that this new orientation and new life with the LORD only remains potential in Lamentations and never actualised, but nonetheless serves as a true spring for future hope. The theological tensions in the book are explained through the differing perspectives of ‘loss-orientated’ and ‘restoration-orientated’ styles of coping with grief. In Labahn’s view, the hopeful ‘restoration-orientated’ central portion of Lamentations 3 offers the potential way out of grief and accomplishment of the past. But more than this, she argues that offering the way out of the crisis is the purpose of the book.<sup>48</sup>

### ***3.4 Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the Exile***

Finally, Smith-Christopher explores Lamentations through the psychological insights of refugee studies and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).<sup>49</sup> PTSD trauma is a distress that disorients those who experience it. Symptoms of PTSD can appear as: recurrent intrusive

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<sup>45</sup> ‘Der erlebte Abbruch führt zur Einsamkeit. Trauer isoliert die Menschen nicht nur von ihrem Gott, sondern auch voneinander. Einsamkeit ist deswegen für das Trauern konstitutiv’ (Labahn, ‘Trauern als Bewältigung’, 518).

<sup>46</sup> Labahn, ‘Trauern als Bewältigung’, 523. This parenetic section provides a foreseeable ‘grundsätzliche Bereitschaft zur Neukonstituierung der Lebensumstände’.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Weil Israel seine Katastrophe leidvoll durchlebt und “durchtrauert” hat, ist es nun in die Lage versetzt, mit Jahwes Hilfe Zukunft gestalten zu können’ (Labahn, ‘Trauern als Bewältigung’, 525).

<sup>48</sup> ‘Den Weg dorthin zu schaffen und nicht im Elend des Abbruchs stehen zu bleiben, ist die Funktion der Threni’ (Labahn, ‘Trauern als Bewältigung’, 526). Similarly, see Berges, ‘Ich bin der Mann’, 1-20.

<sup>49</sup> Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 75-104.

memories, dreams, or feelings of repetition of the destruction and violence, debilitating depression, detachment, and estrangement. Moreover these symptoms persist to the degree that they can appear years after the event or events that triggered them, instigating a ‘cross-generational passing of PTSD symptomatology’ from parents to children, family to family. This transaction debilitates the receiving generation and promulgates the duration of trauma.<sup>50</sup>

Smith-Christopher recognises the serial trauma that Lamentations depicts and relates this to PTSD.<sup>51</sup> Recurring memories of destruction and brutality crop up in Lamentations, indicative of ‘intrusive memories’, a symptom of PTSD. These include: cannibalism (Lam. 1:11; 2:12; 4:4, 9-10), famine (Lam. 2:11-12; 4:4-10), rape (Lam. 1:10; 5:11), and slaughter (Lam. 1:1; 2:21). Further, the sense of isolation (the lack of comfort in Lam. 1:2, 9, 16-17, 21) and depression (Lam. 1:20; 2:11) evidenced in the poetry are also PTSD symptoms. The multi-angled and multi-perspectival portrayal of destruction is symptomatic of PTSD: from the immediacy of famine and siege (Lamentations 1–2), reflection upon the finished disaster (Lamentations 3), to a complaint about living conditions long after the disaster has occurred (Lamentations 5).<sup>52</sup> Smith-Christopher concludes that reading the book through the lens of PTSD ‘is once again to recover Lamentations as a measure of the psychological and spiritual crisis of the exile’.<sup>53</sup>

#### 4. Benefits and Limitations of Previous Psychological Analysis

Psychological analyses bear some interpretative fruit. On the most fundamental level, psychological approaches help to provide an entrée to begin thinking about the presence, reality, and depiction of pain as well as the complexity of human reaction to grief and disaster in Lamentations. This book exemplifies the challenge of human suffering

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<sup>50</sup> Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 89-94. For a helpful summary of PTSD, see John B. Murray, ‘Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Review’, *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs* 118, 3 (1992): 315-38.

<sup>51</sup> Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 93-94.

<sup>52</sup> See Erhard Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations* (FOTL; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001): 471-74.

<sup>53</sup> Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 104.

that cannot be explained away in a systematic manner as a theodicy may attempt to do. By emphasising the humanity of the experience of loss, the psychological readings of Moore, Joyce, Reimer, Labahn, and Smith-Christopher move Lamentations scholarship forward. Of these, Joyce, Reimer, Smith-Christopher, and Linafelt successfully avoid some previous interpretative tendencies that gloss over the suffering presented in the book by focusing mainly upon Lamentations 3:19-24. These readings successfully bring in a note of caution for triumphalistic interpretations of the book's function and theology.<sup>54</sup>

Psychological analysis may also helpfully chasten inbuilt interpretative tendencies within diachronic methods that miss the ambivalence—both in expression of content and theological portrayal—present in texts like Lamentations. Diachronic methods necessarily look for threads that run throughout biblical literature only to draw those out and separate them from other threads that are strange to them, setting the whole on a historical timeline. Lamentations, however, rather plausibly reflects a time in which great uncertainty and pain permeates the literature all the way down, providing ambiguity and ambivalence that marks its very character.<sup>55</sup> The studies explored above provide a means to recognise and explain this literary character without resorting to the kind of diachronic impulse that argues, for instance, that Lamentations 1 and 2 represents the earliest (and most despondent) poems of the book, while chapter 3 provides the latest literary accretion because of the emphasis upon hope present therein (e.g. Lam. 3:21-24).<sup>56</sup> Close exegetical attention to the text with a critical eye to psychological theory will provide rich and fecund readings that allow the tensions of hope and despair to intermingle because of a greater understanding of the vagaries of coping with pain.

And yet some potential limitations nevertheless surface. As with any methodology, it is possible for practitioners to allow methodology to run rough-shod over the text so that it loses its distinctive voice and theological contribution. This is, unfortunately, a critique that goes to Pyper's reading. In his attempt to see the text as a vindication of God

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<sup>54</sup> See too Federico Villanueva, *The 'Uncertainty of a Hearing': A Study of the Sudden Change of Mood in the Psalms of Lament* (VTSup 121; Leiden, Brill, 2008): 213-47.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas, 'The Liturgical Function'.

<sup>56</sup> Claus Westermann, *Die Klagelieder: Forschungsgeschichte und Auslegung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990).

(Father) at the expense of the woman (Zion/mother), he misses the reality that Zion herself cries out and accuses the LORD in Lamentations 2:20-22, with language that protests to the Deity and his activity. This can be seen also in the movement back to lament in Lamentations 3:42-44, and as Reimer perceptively notes, in the despondent and uncertain conclusion in Lamentations 5. God is never unequivocally justified in his actions, and neither is Jerusalem unequivocally pronounced as an unfaithful woman. Closer exegetical detail is warranted for Pyper's work to be persuasive.

Another drawback appears in the failure to distinguish between descriptive and prescriptive applications of coping models. The paradigms of Kübler-Ross, Spiegel, and Archer are helpful in that they are descriptive empirical models. They reveal the different ways humans cope with pain. But this observation should not be confused with a prescriptive model. Labahn's work is extremely useful and her exegesis elucidates how the loss-orientated view is exploited in Lamentations. She overstates her case, however, with the view that Lamentations 3 prescribes the way forward in faith for the people of the LORD, so that the chapter becomes the way out of the crisis. The text does not bear out this prescriptive conclusion. Lamentations 3 concludes with a complaint about present distress about enemies (Lam. 3:61-66), leaving in question its overly hopeful perspective. Also to describe the primary function of the book as offering a way out of the suffering and misery of destruction seems to be at odds with her appropriation of Archer's work. Labahn has transformed Archer's descriptive observation and made it prescriptive for understanding Lamentations: loss necessarily gives way to restoration, expressly found in Lamentations 3:25-39. Westermann, for one, has argued cogently that expressing pain to God in lament (the loss-orientated view in Labahn) is just as valuable as offering a way out of the crisis (the restoration-orientated view).<sup>57</sup> Hope for restoration certainly exists in Lamentations and this fact should not be diminished. But hope is expressed through the poetry both in piety and protest—the hope that God will hear and respond.<sup>58</sup>

It is in place to note as well the danger, particularly in Reimer's application of Kübler-Ross, to make the canonical book of

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<sup>57</sup> Westermann, *Die Klagelieder*, 73-81.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas, 'The Liturgical Function', 140-47.

Lamentations ‘fit’ the ‘grief work’ paradigm, which may lead to reductionism. Kübler-Ross’ model again is descriptive and does not demand a linear progression through successive stages. The stages of grief are decidedly *not* linear. Humans facing grief move back and forth between stages, in some cases again and again. Reimer’s suggestion of a ‘dominant perspective’ in each chapter should not be pressed too far. Each chapter of Lamentations varies in message, theme, and perspective. So whilst one may broadly argue that Lamentations 1 displays *isolation*, one can also poignantly argue that it displays *depression*, *bargaining* and *anger* as well. The ‘no comfort’ theme emphasised in Lamentations 1:2b, 7c, 9b, 16b, 17a and 21a certainly bolsters Reimer’s recognition of *isolation*. But the prayer that concludes the chapter (Lam. 1:20-22) petitions God to punish Zion’s enemies. This parallels *anger*. In light of this emphasis, it may be that Lamentations 1 structurally moves from *isolation* to *anger*, specifically towards enemies. On this reading, this ultimate note of *anger* in the chapter recasts the penultimate note of *isolation*. This example indicates that the poem vacillates between stages in Kübler-Ross’ model without landing upon a ‘dominant perspective’. Such vacillation is an outcome of its poetic quality—it is paratactic, imagistic, and tells its story through repetition of language and sound rather than thematic unity.<sup>59</sup> Reimer’s application of Kübler-Ross’ model should be taken with caution.

## 5. Lamentations and the Psychology of Prayer

Perhaps the most direct drawback in previous psychological approaches lay in their underdevelopment of Lamentations’ recurrent emphasis upon prayer: Lamentations 1:9, 11, 20-22; 2:20-22; 3:19, 42-44, 59-66; 5:1-22. The press towards prayer draws a focus towards God and divine response to the pray-er. Reimer rightly suggests that the poems, with the exception of Lamentations 4, intertwine prayer significantly within descriptions of pain. He indicates that prayer engages God and responds to the pain. This insight, however, is not his major point.<sup>60</sup> But his suggestion moves in the right direction.

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<sup>59</sup> F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 2002): 12-23.

<sup>60</sup> Reimer, ‘Good Grief’, esp. 557-58.

Psychological approaches to Lamentations would benefit from a correlation between Lamentations and the psychology of prayer.

The psychological study of prayer often is identified as the empirical study of prayer<sup>61</sup> and remains a vital field of enquiry. William James contended that prayer is the ‘very soul and essence of religion’.<sup>62</sup> Research in the psychology of prayer has assessed the measurable effect upon the one who prays—individual change in disposition, feelings of wellbeing as a result of prayer, and the actuality of answers to prayer.<sup>63</sup> Other aspects of the psychology of prayer are important, but for the confines of this study two particularly will be explored. First, research into the psychology of prayer has noted and assessed the variety of forms of prayer as well as the various desires that give rise to them. Second, this field of research indexes the affective difference between meditative, petitionary, colloquial, or ritual prayer on the petitioner.<sup>64</sup> Ulanov and Ulanov identify the affective quality of prayer as ‘transfiguration’, or the change within the pray-er that occurs in and through the process of prayer.<sup>65</sup> These points highlight the human dimension of prayer.

It is in place to note that the empirical study of prayer also researches the efficacy of prayer: does God answer prayer or not? But this demands empirical evidence of pray-ers for measurable results. For Lamentations, it is impossible to tell which prayers wrought what kind of change within the ones who prayed them, especially in the sixth century BC. One cannot usefully measure how palliative or effective these prayers were. One cannot say for certain whether these prayers helped ancient Judahites cope with disaster or which prayers were more affectively significant than others. As a result, here this aspect of analysis is avoided.

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<sup>61</sup> Leslie J. Francis and Thomas E. Evans, ‘The Psychology of Christian Prayer: A Review of Empirical Research’ in *Psychological Perspectives on Prayer*, 2-22.

<sup>62</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: The Modern Library, 1902): 454.

<sup>63</sup> Watts and Williams, *The Psychology of Religious Knowing*, 10-23, 109-115.

<sup>64</sup> Margaret M. Poloma and Brian Pendleton, ‘Exploring Types of Prayer and Quality of Life’ in *Psychological Perspectives on Prayer*, 249-57. Poloma and Pendleton identify four basic types of prayer in their study while recognising that there are more: meditative, ritualist, petitionary, and colloquial prayer.

<sup>65</sup> Ulanov and Ulanov, *Primary Speech*. The Jungian overtones are apparent in this construction, but nonetheless their description of desire to transformation is useful for describing Lamentations’ prayers.



### 5.1 Types of Prayer in Lamentations

Drawing from the insights of psychology of prayer, one notes the variety of prayer forms in Lamentations, some of which overlap one another.<sup>66</sup> In this discussion, I am not primarily drawing upon the forms of prayer drawn from form-critical discussions. On that account, Lamentations is comprised of a mixture of genres: communal lament, individual lament, wisdom material, city-lament, and the dirge.<sup>67</sup> Rather I emphasise the object of appeal in the varied prayers in the book. Note, for example: confession (Lam. 1:11c; 1:20a; 5:16), appeals for relief from personal and emotional distress (Lam. 1:20; cf. 1:22c); vengeance against enemies (Lam. 1:21c-22b; 3:64-66; 4:22); appeals for relief from enemies (Lam. 1:9c; 3:46-63; 5:1-15, 17-22), and even protestation against God (Lam. 2:20-22; 3:42-45). Moreover, one notes intercessory prayer at points for various groups including children, young men, maidens, elders, princes, and the devastated people of Jerusalem in general (Lam. 2:19, 21; 3:48-51; 5:3b, 11-14). Even formulaic prayer in Lamentations is not uniform: Lamentations 1:11c and 20a advances a form of confessional prayer while appealing for relief from distress; Lamentations 1:9c and 3:50 complain to God about enemies; Lamentations 5:1 appeals to God to consider ‘disgrace’.<sup>68</sup> Each of these is a form of direct address to the Deity about some source of pain. The rationale and logic behind them is the desire that God would enact some change in the life of the one who prays, and the change would be on the basis of the nature of the direct appeal. As these relate to the psychology of prayer, analogously they may be labelled as a mix between ‘petitionary prayer’ and ‘colloquial prayer’ that consists of asking God to forgive sin (colloquial), asking God to lessen suffering (colloquial), and asking God to provide for needs of both the petitioner and others about whom the petitioner prays (petitionary).<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Watts, ‘Prayer and Psychology’. Watts identifies confession, thanksgiving, petition and intercession, adoration and praise, and meditation.

<sup>67</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas, ‘The Liturgical Function’, 137-47.

<sup>69</sup> Simon Dein and Roland Littlewood, ‘The Psychology of Prayer and the Development of the Prayer Experience Questionnaire’, *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 11 (2008): 39-52, esp. 40-41; Leslie J. Francis and Mandy Robbins, ‘Psychological Type and Prayer Preferences: A Study Among Anglican Clergy in the United Kingdom’, *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 11 (2008): 67-84, esp. 68-69.

But another form of prayer is prominent in the book as well. This form of prayer frequently recognised in the book is what psychologists of religion would identify as ‘meditation’, where one introspectively reflects upon God and life in a focussed way rather than addressing the Deity directly.<sup>70</sup> This prayer form is found especially in the third chapter of the book, in the central portion of Lamentations 3:21-39. The distinctiveness of this pericope deserves attention because, as was indicated in section two above, it has served as a focal point for the function of the book. In terms of genre, this section clearly draws upon wisdom tradition and is parenetic. It instructs worshippers to meditate upon God and the situation in Lamentations in a particular way. Lamentations 3:21 opens by stating, ‘This I return to my heart [or “mind”<sup>71</sup>], therefore I have hope.’ As the worshipper returns the succeeding verses to his mind over and over again, hope in the LORD is constructed. Berlin suggests that what the worshipper returns over and over again in his mind in verse 21 is found ‘in the following section, the description of the nature of God’.<sup>72</sup> Lamentations 3:25-39 centres the worshipper upon the covenant love of God and his ways. By ‘returning’ this to the worshipper’s heart (v. 21), he gains hope in the LORD (vv. 21, 24).<sup>73</sup> In the verses that follow, there is a call for the worshipper to ‘wait patiently’ (v. 26), ‘sit alone in silence’ (v. 28), and reflect upon the ways of God who is just and who does not afflict people without cause (vv. 31-39). Each of these features bears significant features of meditation.

Watts describes meditation as the process of focussing one’s mind upon a singular topic or object so as to quiet one’s emotions. Silence is also important in meditation, a stillness of both mind and body in which one focusses upon something simple (but profound) for an extended period of time. Psychologically, meditation helps to reorient the human and see life and situations in a new way, with a new

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<sup>70</sup> This, of course, assumes a theistic account of meditation. For an analogue, see Poloma and Pendleton, ‘Exploring Types of Prayer’. This form of meditation is at best only an analogue to the text under discussion here. It is quite difficult to establish precisely the form or space in which meditation occurred in ancient Judah during the exilic period. For some indicators, see Thomas, ‘The Liturgical Function’, 137-39.

<sup>71</sup> JPS Tanakh rightly translates **זאת אשוב אל־לבי על־כן אוֹחִיל**, ‘But this do I call to mind, therefore I have hope’, rendering the ‘heart’ as more than an emotional centre but rather the centre of cognition and will as well.

<sup>72</sup> Adele Berlin, *Lamentations* (OTL; Louisville: WJK, 2002): 92.

<sup>73</sup> The entire **על־כן** strophe is set within the inclusio through the repetition of **אוֹחִיל**.

‘directness’.<sup>74</sup> As Labahn indicates, it is precisely at this point in Lamentations one discovers the ‘restoration-orientated’ coping strategy that leads to new life. Mintz calls this passage a recollection of ‘a series of propositions about God’s nature’ and a kind of ‘exploratory meditation’ on ‘the justice of God’s actions’. He suggests that this meditation upon God and his ways comprises the richest theological vein in the book and therefore serves as its ‘theological nub’.<sup>75</sup> For Kaiser this portion effects a theological change both in the tone of the poetry and in the life of the worshipper.<sup>76</sup> Here he finds ‘a pool of light in the thickest darkness’ which ‘rises above all [other chapters] in the hope and consolation it offers’.<sup>77</sup> This point will be assessed below.

### ***5.2 Motivations for Prayer in Lamentations***

The variety of prayers in the book is matched with a variety of motivations that ground them. On the most basic level, the prayers of direct address in Lamentations are grounded in ‘desire’, a hope that God would change something. Ulanov and Ulanov suggest that for prayer, ‘Desire is the motivating force that leads us toward that meeting [between God and humans] and prayer [is] the language in which that movement explains itself’.<sup>78</sup> The prayers of Lamentations are audacious. They fear neither divine reprisal nor the possibility that they ask too much. Rather, they express a desire for a change and request divine action that might bring the pray-er into a new relational state, between the pray-er, God, and his/her situation.

Prayers of confession most desire absolution and forgiveness.<sup>79</sup> In Lamentations, this particularly means a traverse of the Deity from that of an adversary to that of a saviour.<sup>80</sup> Lamentations 3:42 exemplifies a desire for forgiveness through confession, although in the form of a complaint to God that forgiveness has not taken place: ‘We have transgressed and rebelled (but) you have not forgiven.’ This desire for forgiveness over guilt and sin should not be understood as a

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<sup>74</sup> Watts, ‘Prayer and Psychology’, 46-49.

<sup>75</sup> Mintz, *Hurban*, 35.

<sup>76</sup> Walter Kaiser, *Grief and Pain in the Plan of God: Christian Assurance and the Message of Lamentations* (Ferne, UK: Christian Focus, 2004): 22-23.

<sup>77</sup> Kaiser, *Grief and Pain*, 81.

<sup>78</sup> Ulanov and Ulanov, *Primary Speech*, 13-14. Similarly Watts describes petitionary prayer especially to be motivated in particular by desire (‘Prayer and Psychology’, 44).

<sup>79</sup> Watts, ‘Prayer and Psychology’, 40-42.

<sup>80</sup> Middlemas, ‘Did Second Isaiah’.

problematic tendency in Lamentations, not least from the perspective of psychology of prayer. Watts, Nye and Savage suggest that prayers of confession are proper in some instances because they reflect an appropriate sense of shame before God for recognised wrongdoing. Humans may feel ashamed before God, but in prayers of confession, God does not shame or humiliate. Rather, the tacit assumption of confessional prayer is that God removes shame and guilt. His gaze is benevolent rather than malevolent.<sup>81</sup> But it is for this reason the prayer of Lamentations 3:42 remains all the more troubling. God is recognised to have not forgiven, leading the feeling of guilt over sin to persist all the more. This works to heighten the appeal to God and rhetorically gain his attention.

Desire is also expressed in the prayers of vengeance against enemies (Lam. 1:21c-22b; 3:64-66; 4:22). Here, the motivation for prayer is found in Zion's words that God would 'deal with them [enemies] as You have dealt with me on account of all my criminal acts' (Lam. 1:22b). Violence depicted in Lamentations in particular has been a source of consternation for many interpreters.<sup>82</sup> Yet psychologically, Ulanov and Ulanov suggest this aggressive side of prayer is finally constructive for a robust faith. It should not be excised from human experience but rather expressed in a healthy way—with God in and through prayer. It prevents the pray-er from sublimating rage or from obsessing over it. It also releases anger and deters the pray-er from engaging in violent action against the enemy.<sup>83</sup>

Desire takes a different motivational form in prayers for relief from enemies and God. Here, the petitioner wishes to be released from the abusive activity of enemies, on the basis of its tacit abuse and perceived injustice. 'Look, O LORD, and consider to whom you have done this!' (Lam. 2:20a); 'See, O LORD, my misery! For the enemy triumphs!' (Lam. 1:9c). In the first verse, it is God who has abused—children, priests, and prophets are slaughtered. Women eat their children. The language is that of protest against God's actions, with the rhetorical force of gaining his attention so that he might, in effect, respond to the prayer and against his previous actions. Likewise, the

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<sup>81</sup> Fraser Watts, Rebecca Nye, and Sara Savage, *Psychology for Christian Ministry* (London: Routledge, 2002): 11-12.

<sup>82</sup> Deryn Guest, 'Hiding behind the Naked Women in Lamentations: A Recriminative Response', *BiblInt* 7 (1999): 413-48.

<sup>83</sup> Ulanov and Ulanov, *Primary Speech*, 68-69.

prayer of Lamentations 1:9c highlights the pain over the abuse of enemies. This prayer couples with Lamentations 1:10, where enemies have ‘raped’ Zion—an egregious violation.<sup>84</sup>

These prayers of relief from enemies and God reveal that their motivation arises from a situation of injustice and abuse. Their nature shows that the ‘desire’ that undergirds these prayers is not petty. God is addressed aggressively and confrontationally, in hopes that he would indeed look and see the injustice. Only he can confront the injustice that the appeals expose. ‘The great resource and purpose of our aggression [even in angry prayer against enemies and God] is to willingly put our fate, no matter how good or bad, into God’s hands, to deposit all of our most consciously and vigorously registered reactions into our prayers.’<sup>85</sup>

It is important to note that Lamentations’ prayers of direct address in whatever form and with whatever motivation never *require* change in a particular way. This point coheres with Reimer’s that ‘God is no automaton.’<sup>86</sup> The prayers of Lamentations request from God a situational change, even firmly and audaciously. But they do not require an exact response from God. Rather, they make their requests but leave God to respond as he sees fit.<sup>87</sup> This point remains important for understanding the theology of Lamentations’ prayers of direct address. It shows the tacit recognition of humanity inherent in them. In these prayers, humans remain in the final analysis creatures related to a God who has a different perspective and vitality. He is God, humans are not. God is not ultimately obliged to respond to the prayer precisely along the lines of its request. ‘Desires’ that give rise to the prayers in the first place may ultimately be transformed by the activity of God. The structure of *request* rather than *requirement* affords this change. There is the possibility in the prayers of Lamentations that God may respond on the basis of his knowledge over and above the limited knowledge of the petitions. Even where the prayers of vengeance are uttered, the enactment of vengeance is ultimately relinquished from the petitioner and left in the realm of the divine. With this relinquishment,

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<sup>84</sup> For discussion, see Berlin, *Lamentations*, 53-55.

<sup>85</sup> Ulanov and Ulanov, *Primary Speech*, 69.

<sup>86</sup> Reimer, ‘Good Grief’, 552.

<sup>87</sup> Lam. 3:29b reinforces the provisionality of the requests made in the book: ‘*perhaps* there is hope’. God has the final say in things prayed for, not human beings as he is divine and humans are not. God knows how best to respond to the prayers offered in the book.

there is left open the possibility that the very desire for vengeance in the pray-er may be transformed through God's non-response or alternative response to the prayer. Prayer, then, in Lamentations may 'refine' the desires of the one praying.<sup>88</sup>

The meditative prayer of Lamentations 3:21-39, by contrast, does not desire a change *per se* as much as it reflects upon God and his ways. If change comes (which it does, notably 'hope' in vv. 21, 24) then it is out of the reflection upon the nature of God. Obliquely this may be a 'desire' for a change of perspective, but this is not stated as clearly as in the prayers of direct address in Lamentations. At any rate the relationship between Lamentations 3:21-39 and the remainder of the book may be helped by insights of the psychology of prayer. Watts argues that meditation does not 'correct' or 'ignore' emotions and other forms of prayer. Rather, he states, meditation stills the emotions and provides a centre to know God in a way that other forms of religious thought and practice do not achieve. Meditation helps the worshipper look at the world or a situation in fresh ways and to 'look at it with a new directness'.<sup>89</sup> The meditation of Lamentations 3:21-39, then, focusses the trauma(s) expressed in the book in a new way without employing direct address to God.

### ***5.3 Preferred Prayer in Lamentations: Meditation or Direct Address?***

This point on meditation in Lamentations 3:21-39 leads to another important issue addressed in the psychology of prayer. Which prayer form is to be preferred? When assessed alongside insights from the psychology of prayer, Kaiser and Mintz prefer introspective meditation as the pre-eminent prayer form in the book. Meditation ushers the worshipper to the richest theological account of God and his ways. As shown above (in 3.), this insight has a good deal of affinity with Labahn's assessment of Lamentations 3 providing the 'restoration-orientated' perspective of dealing with trauma that was garnered from Archer's work. So meditation, it may be argued, offers the constructive path towards new life more than any other prayer form.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> See the discussion of Watts, 'Prayer and Psychology', 44-45. This refinement, however, cannot be proved on the basis of Lamentations' poetry. Rather what remains in focus is the desire expressed in the various petitions.

<sup>89</sup> Watts, 'Prayer and Psychology', 46-49.

<sup>90</sup> Labahn, 'Trauern als Bewältigung', 526.

But this conclusion is not accurate to the poetry. Prayers of direct address regain their voice in the book. Language found in Lamentations 1 and 2 appears throughout Lamentations 3:1-66, and all three poems culminate in lament prayer to God (Lam. 1:20-22; 2:20-22; 3:64-66). This evidence detracts from the hypothesis that Lamentations 3 (particularly vv. 21-39) as meditation stands over and above the rest of the book. Nor is it appropriate to suggest that meditative prayer in Lamentations 3:21-39 offers a corrective to prayer that directly addresses God in the other portions of the book. This is a tendency in some research. But Lamentations 3 concludes with verses 64-66, by all counts a petition that God would respond to enemy activity. It is typical of lament prayer and parallel to the prayer of Lamentations 1:22. Although Lamentations 3:21-24 is important to Lamentations' construction of hope, one cannot isolate these verses because they sit within a larger context that one must address. In the chapter, verses 21-24 are a step along a journey from lament (vv. 1-20), to meditation (vv. 21-39), and back to lament (vv. 40-66).<sup>91</sup> So the poem concludes in lament rather than the meditative prayer of 3:21-39 and fits with the prayers that employ direct address in the other poems. It is actually better to see meditation found in Lamentations 3:21-39 as only part of the diversity of prayers in the book, no better or worse than the others, but simply different.

An exegetical point emphasises this as well. The phrase *חסדי יהוה*, 'the acts of the covenant love of the LORD', in Lamentations 3:21b is important but rare, occurring elsewhere only in Psalms 89:2; 107:43; and Isaiah 63:7. In every instance the phrase depicts divine activity that demonstrates the LORD's faithful action toward the parties with whom he is in relationship: the king and his royal line (Ps. 89:2), Israel (Ps. 107:43), and remnant Israel (Isa. 63:7). In Psalm 107, the phrase summarises Israel's history of God's redemption, indicating the expectation of real, tangible divine actions. In its stilted, initial position directly following *על-כן אורחיל* (Lam. 3:21b), *חסדי יהוה* responds to the grounds for hope that was broached in verse 21: the expectation of physical proofs of divine deliverance. This covenant language points back to the experience of pain, but points forward to an expectation of

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<sup>91</sup> Villanueva, *The 'Uncertainty of a Hearing'*, 213-47. For others that argue Lam. 3:21-39 should not be taken as a corrective to the remainder of the poetry, see: I. Provan, *Lamentations* (NCBC; London: Marshall Pickering, 1991): 22, 108-109; and Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 126-28

future divine activity. It is more than a mere reflection upon what God has done in the past. What this means is that this covenant language invites meditation upon the way(s) that God may deliver in this situation. Meditative prayer, then, does provide a forward perspective similar to Archer's 'restoration-orientated' perspective, but more to the point, the meditation on the LORD and his acts of covenant faithfulness informs the recurrent prayers of direct address in the other portions of the book. That is to say, meditation may serve as an engine that drives prayers of direct address in Lamentations.

Meditation upon God's character and God's actions (Lam. 3:21-39) moves the worshipper toward direct address all the more (e.g. Lam. 3:41-66; 5:1-22).<sup>92</sup> If this is the case, prayers of direct address are given a significance that Mintz and Kaiser (and perhaps Labahn) have overlooked. Meditation upon God and his ways is neither the transcendent high point of theology nor is it the ultimate form of spiritual expression in the book. This indicator in Lamentations reinforces the notion that meditation upon God and his ways actually energises the worshipper to address the Deity in and through prayers of direct address, over a myriad of sources of pain. Prayers of direct address and meditative prayer remain complementary to rather than competitive with one another.<sup>93</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

This discussion has observed the various forms of psychological analysis deployed in Lamentations research and their benefits and drawbacks. The works of Joyce, Reimer, Labahn, Smith-Christopher especially surface the human dimension of pain in the poetry of Lamentations, a point not to be missed. Yet underdeveloped in their research is the importance of prayer in Lamentations. Thus research on the psychology of prayer was applied analogously to the book to further the discussion.

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<sup>92</sup> The wisdom instruction to sit alone in silence and penitence (Lam. 3:26-28) is not followed in the remainder of the poem. If this teaching were followed, then the poetry would stop and all other prayer of direct address would cease. The wisdom section then is a step along the way to more prayer of direct address. Chapter 5 is an extended communal lament directed toward God, and so does not in fact leave the book 'silent' as 3:26 demands.

<sup>93</sup> Fraser Watts, 'Prayer and Meditation' in *Encyclopaedia of Science and Religion: Volume 2* (New York: Macmillan Reference, 2003): 296-98.



This application helped to surface the different forms of prayer in Lamentations as well as the various desires that undergird their appeals. From the psychology of prayer, the possibility that Lamentations 3:21-39 reflects meditative prayer was also uncovered. Through this prayer the worshipper returns the teaching expressed therein to his heart so that he might gain a new perspective on the sufferings expressed in the poetry. But it was shown that meditative prayer is not necessarily constitutive for either the theological teaching of the book or its prescribed form of prayer. Rather, meditation actually may inform and encourage further direct address to God.

Further, by assessing Lamentations through the psychology of prayer it has been suggested that the affective quality of Lamentations' prayers may be considered as well. Lamentations does not privilege one form of prayer over another in the book but includes a wide range of different prayer types in its canonical form. This speaks to the kind of faith and prayer deemed valuable to those who created the book. Confession, petition, meditation, and prayers of vengeance were all shown to be important and (likely) affective for the community of Judah in the exilic age who used Lamentations.

But in spite of the benefits from reading Lamentations with the insights of the psychology of prayer, one must still admit its own deficiencies. Watts has suggested that prayer cannot be reduced only to what happens to the pray-er when he or she prays. Rather, 'Central to the religious person's experience of prayer is the belief that, as William James put it, "something is transacting".'<sup>94</sup> Lamentations constantly pushes the worshipper not to assess why its prayers are beneficial to oneself (their affective quality, their efficacy, their benefits for coping with pain), or to provide the rationale as to prayer itself (forms and motivations of prayers), but rather to drive the worshipper toward that transcendent transaction—toward prayer itself.

The ground of expectation in this transaction is, for Lamentations, the covenant (note the echoes of Exod. 34:6-7 in Lam. 3:21-24). Iterative insistence upon prayer in the book only becomes sensible if indeed its rhetoric is grounded in a view that the LORD is related to the

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<sup>94</sup> Watts and Williams, *The Psychology of Religious Knowing*, 10-23, 109-15, esp. 113. Of course research in the psychology of prayer does just that, as this essay has just demonstrated.

petitioners and he will hear and respond to the prayers therein.<sup>95</sup> Lamentations evinces an implicit conceptual framework that understands the Deity as a divine judge to whom all prayer could go; the people can pray to the LORD about sin, enemies, and even about perceptions of his injustice. The reality of prayer in Lamentations reveals a relational/covenantal foundation to the poetry. Without it, the very rhetoric of Lamentations' prayer falls flat and becomes impotent.

In this way, one may say that psychology of prayer helps elucidate a number of things for understanding prayer in Lamentations. But because of the general *Tendenz* towards prayer in the poems, Lamentations serves as an encounter mechanism between the people of God and the LORD. Lamentations' prayers clear the ground for encounter with God. Those who composed this text believed God would respond on their behalf out of his relationship with them. If psychological analyses focus primarily upon the effusion of, or even the processing of grief, without taking the second step to recognise the poetry as prayer to God, then these methodologies will overlook the crucial rhetorical facet of the book as theological literature. Prayer gives the framework through which pain is expressed. Prayer gives the framework for the rhetoric that aims to move God to action on behalf of his people. But even after recognising the import of the relation between psychology of prayer and Lamentations, one would be remiss not to highlight that as the pain in the book is taken up in prayer, the reader is expected to, in fact, pray to the LORD and await his good response.

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<sup>95</sup> Patrick D. Miller, 'Prayer as Persuasion: The Rhetoric and Intention of Prayer', *Word and World* 13 (1993): 356-62.