



The Biblical Lament as Prayers of Hope

AN EXPLORATION IN THE PRAYERS OF SUSANNA,
ESTHER, JEREMIAH, AND JESUS

Between disclosures of Hurt and articulations of Hope

- ▶ Suffering and disorientation strikes everyone
- ▶ Everyone must grapple with it
- ▶ The bible reflects on disorientation and suffering through the disclosures of hurt and articulations of hope
- ▶ Exodus is paradigmatic

Between disclosures of Hurt and articulations of Hope

- ▶ The reality of hurt:
 - ▶ Is experienced and noticed
 - ▶ It is voiced
 - ▶ It is heard by heaven; God hears and acts on it
 - ▶ This hurt voiced and heard is incorporated into liturgy as prayer
 - ▶ Hope and trust that God's promise will be enacted

Between disclosures of Hurt and articulations of Hope

- ▶ Biblical hope is not just an expectation or a desire for an outcome
- ▶ It is an attitude and characteristic of those who put their trust in God
- ▶ Biblical hope is based upon faith in the living God
 - ▶ who reveals himself as he who is
 - ▶ Who has established fellowship between him and Israel by means of his saving action
- ▶ Biblical hope is grounded in what God has already done and what he continues to promise
- ▶ It is a relational concept that centres around trust, faithfulness loyalty and allegiance that forms from within a living relationship

Which Stories will we examine?

- ▶ Susanna:
 - ▶ Narratively speaking, the clearest of the stories
 - ▶ A just a beautiful lady is beset by two wicked elders, who attempt to rape her
 - ▶ She is falsely accused of adultery
 - ▶ She cries to God for help (pivotal moment)
 - ▶ God listens and sends a spirit of understanding in Daniel who defends Susanna
 - ▶ Reversal of fates.



Which Stories will we examine?

► Esther:

- Rescues her people from the attempted genocide by Haman
- Mordecai implores Esther to tell the king
- While hesitant, Esther devises a plan to save her people – prays a prayer for eloquent speech
- At a banquet, she reveals that she is a Jew and so Haman sought to kill even her
- Reversal of fates



Which Stories will we examine?

► Jeremiah:

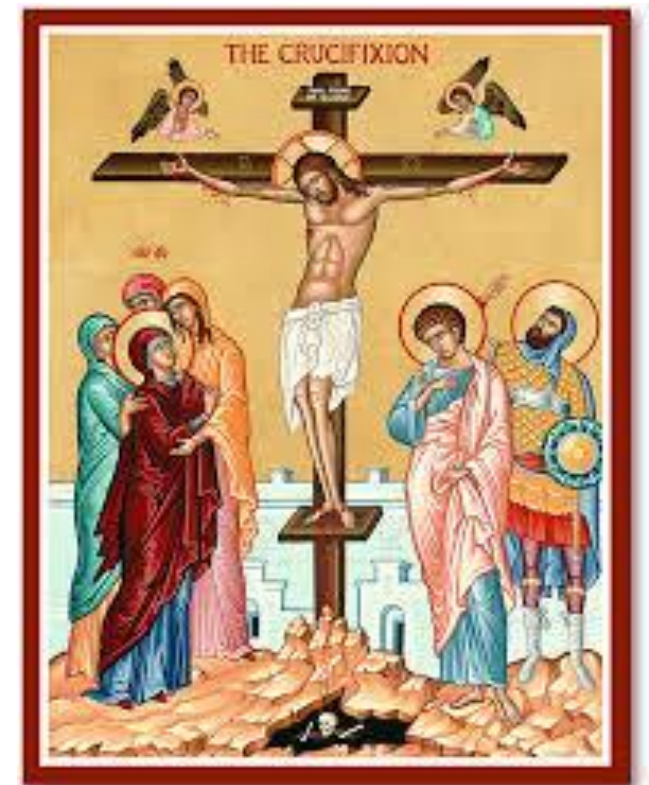
- When called, Jeremiah is disoriented
- He is inadequate for the mission
- Prayer of lament in Jer 1,6
- God listens by giving him what he needs to perform his mission



Which Stories will we examine?

► Jesus on the cross:

- My God, My God why have you forsaken me? (Mk 15,34; Mt 27,46; cf. Ps 22,1) – cry of abandonment or prayer of persuasion?
- Father, into your hands, I commend my Spirit (Lk 23,46) – changing or explaining?



Prayers of Persuasion

Tobit

You are righteous, O Lord, and all your deeds are righteous, and your ways are mercy and truth

And now you, O Lord, remember me, and look down.

And so now according to what is pleasing to you do with me, and command my spirit to be taken up from me. For it is better for me to die than to live.

Sarah

Blessed are you, O Lord my God! And blessed is your holy and honoured name forever. Let all your works praise you forever.

And now, O Lord, I have turned my eyes and my face towards you.

Command that I be set free from the earth and hear reproach no more.

Tobit and Sarah

- ▶ The acknowledgment of who God is
- ▶ The call to meet God's gaze
- ▶ A lamentation
- ▶ God hears their cry, but in a surprising way
- ▶ Their call to die is a call for aid
- ▶ God sends the angel Raphael to heal Tobit and to defeat the demon tormenting Sarah

Tobit and Sarah

- ▶ The primary function is to persuade and motivate God to act
- ▶ Based on the relationship between God and the petitioner
- ▶ God is declared sovereign, holy, faithful, loving, and just
- ▶ God desires to aid the plight of the poor, needy, those who suffer
- ▶ This prayer urges and reasons with God, to appeal to who God is

Jesus in the garden



- ▶ He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." (Mk 14,36).
- ▶ Jesus laments because he is about to die; this is the cup he wants removed
- ▶ Jesus highlights the Father's nature: Abba, Father (Abba = O Father = Creator) and why he should act (everything is possible for him – sign of trust)
- ▶ Jesus knew that the cup could not be removed; thus, he is saying something somewhat different: if I am to do this, be with me!
- ▶ Luke's version: an angel comes to strengthen him

The Relational God of Prayer

- ▶ We truly engage God and urge God to act
- ▶ God, in giving the law, urges reasons upon the people
- ▶ Humanity dares to approach holy God with no restrictions
- ▶ These pleas appeal to God to be and to act as God
- ▶ They revolve the petition “thy will be done!”

Within the context of the Jubilee

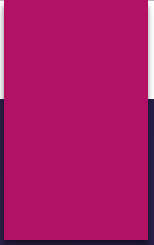
- ▶ The Hebrew “yobel” which means trumpet
- ▶ An event that was celebrated every 50 years (Leviticus 25,18-20)
- ▶ Proclaimed with a trumpet sound (yobel),
 - ▶ Celebration
 - ▶ decisive acts of God (Isa 27,13; 1 Cor 15,52) – redemption
- ▶ In redeeming the people from slavery under Pharaoh, God proved to be the strongest and liberated the people, who are now able to prosper under God

Within the context of the Jubilee

- ▶ Jubilee is about:
 - ▶ The sovereignty of God
 - ▶ The providence of God (gift)
 - ▶ God's historical act of redemption in our past,
 - ▶ We experience forgiveness in the present
 - ▶ We remember God's promise to be with us until the end of time.
 - ▶ We can blossom again like a flower and live a renewed life

Basic Thesis of these lessons

- ▶ prayers of lamentation:
- ▶ are not cries of abandonment
- ▶ but are prayers of persuasion.
- ▶ These laments presuppose that God will indeed heed the cries of his people because
 - ▶ he is the God who creates and redeems us
 - ▶ so that we may live the life we were created to live if we remain within the boundaries of covenantal friendship.



Towards Understanding the Basic Form of the Lament

KLAGEN OR PRAYERS THAT CALL ON GOD TO HELP?

Introduction

- ▶ Lament is such a key element of the bible that it is hard to read any book without finding an example of it
- ▶ In Genesis, Exodus, Job, Lamentations, the prophets, the psalms, people complain and cry to God for help
- ▶ Old Testament texts describe this form of prayer as constitutive God's identity as well as Israel's identity
- ▶ We saw Jesus' prayer in the garden
- ▶ Acts 4,23-31 is a good example of lament of the first community

What is a lament?

- ▶ 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 a German setting, lament (Klage) tended to mean accusation and thus connected to the problem of theodicy and the lost of trust
- ▶ But this is wrong!

What is a lament?

- ▶ Klagen is not biblical lamentation!
- ▶ Klagen has a strong juridical and accusatory resonances
- ▶ The term is used in the tribunal – the lamenter is a victim of injustice
- ▶ God is understood to have wronged Israel by abandoning his people
- ▶ Israel takes God to court, accusing him for not acting like God
- ▶ But laments are also found in moments of disorientation (vocations stories)

What is a lament?

- ▶ To understand lament, we must understand that the love (hesed) and fidelity (emet) of God are foundational
- ▶ It is the relationship of trust in God's faithfulness and God's responsibility towards those who he created that enables the cry for help and underpins all laments.
- ▶ All the situations of trouble that give rise to cries for help are matters in which humanity's or Israel's relations to God is paramount
- ▶ The cry for help, then, occurs within the framework of a particular relationship and addresses a specific God:
 - ▶ The Creator who made all of humanity, The God of Israel, who made promises to Israel to bless and protect her and be her God

What is a lament?

- ▶ lament is the passionate expression of intimate and personal pain to the Creator God who will come to the aid for those who are his.
- ▶ For this reason, it is better to these prayers as persuasion through which the lamenter cries to God to persuade him to help

Paradigmatic text: Ex 2,23-25

²³After a long time the king of Egypt died. The sons of Israel groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God.

²⁴ God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ²⁵ And God saw the sons of Israel and God knew.

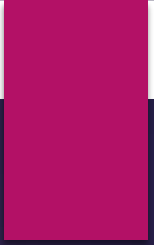
- Here, verse 23 explains that a passage of time as passed and the king died – while God remains alive. Israel was still in a situation of bondage and they cry out to the living God for redemption. In verses 24-25 explains, through a parallel structure, God's movement:

Paradigmatic text: Ex 2,23-25

- ▶ Hearing
 - ▶ Remembering
- ▶ Seeing
 - ▶ Knowing

Paradigmatic text: Ex 2,23-25

- ▶ God who compels Israel to shema` (Deut 6,4) has first of all 'shema`-ed' Israel
- ▶ this prayer affirms it since Israel had faith that the God who created them is also the God, in his omnipotence, who can redeem them
- ▶ Shema means is a movement of the heart, a call to obedience



Understanding the form of the lament

WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS THAT MAKE UP A LAMENT?

Basic Form

- ▶ Invocation of the name of the Lord
- ▶ Description of the cry of problem
- ▶ Sometimes there is a confession of sin or an assertion of innocence
- ▶ The motive why God should hear and help (hesed and emet)
- ▶ The Petition
- ▶ Certainty of being heard
- ▶ Sometimes there is a vow or pledge

Basic Form

- ▶ Be careful on the point of view of the lament
 - ▶ The point of view is often the end wherein one is looking back
 - ▶ Movement: from orientation to disorientation and from disorientation to reorientation
 - ▶ The shift from lament to praise is a change in “moments”
 - ▶ The certainty of hearing in the psalms is often implicit
 - ▶ The certainty of hearing in narrative texts is often explicit



Text and Commentary on the story of Susanna

Focusing on her prayer of lament

Dan 13,1-4: Susanna is beautiful & just

- ▶ There was a man living in Babylon whose name was Jo'akim. ² And he took a wife named Susanna, the daughter of Hilki'ah, a very beautiful woman and one who feared the Lord. ³ Her parents were righteous, and had taught their daughter according to the law of Moses. ⁴ Jo'akim was very rich, and had a spacious garden adjoining his house; and the Jews used to come to him because he was the most honored of them all
- ▶ Susanna is the protagonist of the story
- ▶ Se is beautiful and one who feared the Lord
- ▶ In a Jewish context, this is somewhat paradoxical for usually female beauty was often connected with sexual temptation – this is a subversive text

Dan 13,5-6: the elders, full of iniquity

- ▶ ⁵ In that year two elders from the people were appointed as judges. Concerning them the Lord had said: “Iniquity came forth from Babylon, from elders who were judges, who were supposed to govern the people.” ⁶ These men were frequently at Jo’akim’s house, and all who had suits at law came to them

- ▶ While Susanna is just, the elders are wicked
- ▶ The elders are supposed to uphold the law – they are judges and rulers

Dan 13,7-12: the elders are found out

⁷ When the people departed at noon, Susanna would go into her husband's garden to walk. ⁸ The two elders used to see her every day, going in and walking about, and they began to desire her.

⁹ And they perverted their minds and turned away their eyes from looking to Heaven or remembering righteous judgments. ¹⁰ Both were overwhelmed with passion for her, but they did not tell each other of their distress, ¹¹ for they were ashamed to disclose their lustful desire to possess her. ¹² And they watched eagerly, day after day, to see her.

- ▶ Noontime, hot and lunchtime – everyone should leave
- ▶ The wicked heart of the elders lead to desiring her

Dan 13,13-14: the elders collude

¹³ They said to each other, "Let us go home, for it is mealtime."

¹⁴ And when they went out, they parted from each other.

But turning back, they met again; and when each pressed the other for the reason, they confessed their lust.

And then together they arranged for a time when they could find her alone

- ▶ Turning point in the story
- ▶ The elders act on their lust
- ▶ Rather than being ashamed they collude with one another

Dan 13,15-21: attempted rape

¹⁵ Once, while they were watching for an opportune day, she went in as before with only two maids, and wished to bathe in the garden, for it was very hot. ¹⁶ And no one was there except the two elders, who had hid themselves and were watching her.

¹⁷ She said to her maids, "Bring me oil and ointments, and shut the garden doors so that I may bathe." ¹⁸ They did as she said, shut the garden doors, and went out by the side doors to bring what they had been commanded; and they did not see the elders, because they were hidden.

¹⁹ When the maids had gone out, the two elders rose and ran to her, and said: ²⁰ "Look, the garden doors are shut, no one sees us, and we are in love with you; so give your consent, and lie with us. ²¹ If you refuse, we will testify against you that a young man was with you, and this was why you sent your maids away."

Dan 13,15-21: attempted rape

- ▶ Up until now, the elders have been watching from afar waiting for a time to rape her
- ▶ Susanna was going about her business as she often did
- ▶ The elders knew what was going to happen and knew that she would be alone
- ▶ They act on their wicked desire and threaten her that if she does not allow herself to be raped they will accuse her of adultery

Dan 13,22-23: Susanna's response

²² Susanna sighed deeply, and said, "I am hemmed in on every side. For if I do this thing, it is death for me; and if I do not, I shall not escape your hands.

²³ I choose not to do it and to fall into your hands, rather than to sin in the sight of the Lord."

- ▶ Susanna is naked in the water, the elders are on land fully clothed
- ▶ She is a woman and alone, they are powerful men and "friends" of her husband

Dan 13,24-27: implementation

²⁴ Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and the two elders shouted against her. ²⁵ And one of them ran and opened the garden doors.

²⁶ When the household servants heard the shouting in the garden, they rushed in at the side door to see what had happened to her.

²⁷ And when the elders told their tale, the servants were greatly ashamed, for nothing like this had ever been said about Susanna.

- ▶ Susanna has no way to defend herself
- ▶ She does the only thing she can: scream
- ▶ The elders execute their threat

Dan 13,28-30: false trial

²⁸ The next day, when the people gathered at the house of her husband Jo'akim, the two elders came, full of their wicked plot to have Susanna put to death.

²⁹ They said before the people, "Send for Susanna, the daughter of Hilki'ah, who is the wife of Jo'akim." ³⁰ So they sent for her. And she came, with her parents, her children, and all her kindred.

- ▶ We should feel anger here
- ▶ The false law-case happens in her own house
- ▶ The wickedness of the elders also affects the household and the community

Dan 13,31-34: abuse of Susanna

³¹ Now Susanna was a woman of great refinement, and beautiful in appearance.

³² As she was veiled, the wicked men ordered her to be unveiled, that they might feed upon her beauty.

³³ But her family and friends and all who saw her wept.

³⁴ Then the two elders stood up in the midst of the people, and laid their hands upon her head.

- ▶ The custom was her to be veiled and there is no reason for her to be unveiled
- ▶ It is done so that they can feed on her beauty
- ▶ She is abused even now

Dan 13,35-41: false testimony

³⁵ And she, weeping, looked up toward heaven, for her heart trusted in the Lord.

³⁶ The elders said, “As we were walking in the garden alone, this woman came in with two maids, shut the garden doors, and dismissed the maids. ³⁷ Then a young man, who had been hidden, came to her and lay with her. ³⁸ We were in a corner of the garden, and, when we saw this wickedness, we ran to them.

³⁹ We saw them embracing, but we could not hold the man, for he was too strong for us, and he opened the doors and dashed out. ⁴⁰ So we seized this woman and asked her who the young man was, but she would not tell us. These things we testify.”

⁴¹ The assembly believed them, because they were elders of the people and judges; and they condemned her to death

Dan 13,42-43: the lament

⁴² Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and said, “O eternal God, who discerns what is secret, who are aware of all things before they come to be,

⁴³ you know that these men have borne false witness against me. And now I am to die!

Yet I have done none of the things that they have wickedly invented against me!”

Dan 13,42-43: the lament

- ▶ Susanna first invokes God: o eternal God!
- ▶ The motive why God should hear and the assertion of innocence are interconnected since God “discerns what is secret,” “aware of all things before they come to be”, he know that the elders are bearing false witness against her.
- ▶ The description of the problem and the request for help are interconnected for since she is about to be killed after being falsely convicted, she cries out to God for help.
- ▶ The certainty of hearing will happen in the following verse.

Dan 13,44-46: The Lord hears

⁴⁴ The Lord heard her cry. ⁴⁵ And as she was being led away to be put to death, God aroused the holy spirit of a young lad named Daniel; ⁴⁶ and he cried with a loud voice, "I am innocent of the blood of this woman."

- ▶ God listens!
- ▶ He works through Daniel who is innocent of this woman's blood

Dan 13,47-59: the proof

⁴⁷ All the people turned to him, and said, “What is this that you have said?”

⁴⁸ Taking his stand in the midst of them, he said, “Are you such fools, you sons of Israel? Have you condemned a daughter of Israel without examination and without learning the facts? ⁴⁹ Return to the place of judgment. For these men have borne false witness against her.”

⁵⁰ Then all the people returned in haste. And the elders said to him, “Come, sit among us and inform us, for God has given you that right.” ⁵¹ And Daniel said to them, “Separate them far from each other, and I will examine them.”

Dan 13,47-59: the proof

⁵² When they were separated from each other, he summoned one of them and said to him, “You old relic of wicked days, your sins have now come home, which you have committed in the past, ⁵³ pronouncing unjust judgments, condemning the innocent and letting the guilty go free, though the Lord said, ‘Do not put to death an innocent and righteous person.’”

Dan 13,47-59: the proof

⁵⁴ Now then, if you really saw her, tell me this: Under what tree did you see them being intimate with each other?" He answered, "Under a mastic tree." ⁵⁵ And Daniel said, "Very well! You have lied against your own head, for the angel of God has received the sentence from God and will immediately cut you in two."

Dan 13,47-59: the proof

⁵⁶ Then he put him aside, and commanded them to bring the other. And he said to him, “You offspring of Canaan and not of Judah, beauty has deceived you and lust has perverted your heart. ⁵⁷ This is how you both have been dealing with the daughters of Israel, and they were intimate with you through fear; but a daughter of Judah would not endure your wickedness.

Dan 13,47-59: the proof

⁵⁸ Now then, tell me: Under what tree did you catch them being intimate with each other?" He answered, "Under an evergreen oak." ⁵⁹ And Daniel said to him, "Very well! You also have lied against your own head, for the angel of God is waiting with his sword to saw[e] you in two, that he may destroy you both."

Dan 13,47-59: the proof

- ▶ Daniel employs a good tactic
- ▶ He separates the witnesses
- ▶ To see if their stories are the same
- ▶ The first judge: known for condemning the innocent and acquitting the guilty
- ▶ The second judge: known for sexually assaulting young women
- ▶ The secondary detail of which tree shows they are lying

Dan 13,60-64: reversal of fates

⁶⁰ Then all the assembly shouted loudly and blessed God, who saves those who hope in him. ⁶¹ And they rose against the two elders, for out of their own mouths Daniel had convicted them of bearing false witness; ⁶² and they did to them as they had wickedly planned to do to their neighbor; acting in accordance with the law of Moses, they put them to death.

Thus, innocent blood was saved that day.

⁶³ And Hilki'ah and his wife praised God for their daughter Susanna, and so did Jo'akim her husband and all her kindred, because nothing shameful was found in her.

⁶⁴ And from that day onward Daniel had a great reputation among the people.

Applying the story

- ▶ Does God like injustice?
- ▶ Should we allow injustice to happen?
- ▶ Should we say nothing if we see injustice?
- ▶ What kind of person is pleasing to God?
- ▶ What does God expect of our leaders?
- ▶ Are women less important?

Applying the story

- ▶ God is the creator God wanting everything to flourish
- ▶ Humanity, by living in conformity with the Creator, can flourish
- ▶ The heart of life is peace
- ▶ The elders do not have peace
- ▶ Susanna's gaze is on God
- ▶ They live opposite lifestyles

Applying the story

- ▶ How does God allow injustice?
- ▶ Real relationship and love risks all
- ▶ If I could not abuse God's goodness, then I could not have a real relationship with him
- ▶ Elders and leaders must be those who must conform to God most of all
- ▶ Women and men have equal dignity in front of God



Esther's and Mordecai's Prayer as one of Lament

Heroic deeds of those whose trust is in God

The Story

- ▶ King Ahasuerus becomes displaced with Queen Vashti due to disobedience
- ▶ He disposes her (Est 1,1-22) and starts to search for a new queen
- ▶ Esther, the daughter of Mordecai's uncle Abihail becomes queen (Est 2,1-18)
- ▶ Esther keeps her heritage a secret
- ▶ Mordecai saves the king from an assassination plot (Est 2,19-23)
- ▶ Mordecai refuses to bow down in front of Haman, who vows to exterminate the Jews (Est 3,1-6)

The Story

- ▶ Mordecai, on learning about the plot, implores Esther to talk with the king (Est 4,1-8)
- ▶ Based on what happened to Vashti, Esther knows that this is dangerous
- ▶ If Vashti was disposed because she did not obey the king when he called for her, then Esther would be disposed of if she goes to the king without him calling her – and it has been a month since she went to the king (Est 4,9-11)
- ▶ Mordecai replies (Est 4,12-14):
 - ▶ She is still in danger, she will be found out that she is a Jew
 - ▶ If she does not help, help will come elsewhere for the Jews
 - ▶ Perhaps this is the reason why she became queen

The Story

- ▶ Esther listens
- ▶ She first prays a prayer of lament asking for eloquent speech
- ▶ She devises a plan by inviting both the king and Haman to a banquet
- ▶ She reveals that she is a Jew and that Haman is seeking to kill her
- ▶ The reversal of fates

The Text

- ▶ Hebrew text is more original, written around the 5th century BC
- ▶ The Greek text was written around the 3rd century BC with several additions including the prayer of Esther and Mordecai
- ▶ The additions form 107 additional verses and placed at the appropriate places in the translation of the Hebrew form of the book
- ▶ The disordered chapter numbers comes from the fact that the additions are found at the end of the book's version in the Vulgate
- ▶ Addition A (chapter 11) and F (10,4-11,1) form an inclusion. They discuss Mordecai's dream and its fulfilment
- ▶ Additions B and E (13,1-7 and 16,1-24) are the letters of King Ahasuerus
- ▶ Addition C (13,8-14,19) are the prayers of Mordecai (13,8-18) and Esther (14,1-19)
- ▶ Addition D (15,1-16) explains Esther's approach to the king after her prayer

Remember the form of the lament

- ▶ The invoking of the name of God,
- ▶ Motive why God should hear and help,
- ▶ There can be a confession of sin and an assertion of innocence,
- ▶ The description of the problem,
- ▶ Request for help,
- ▶ Certainty of being heard

Are the prayers laments?

Mordecai's Prayer

- ▶ Invocation of God as creator and ruler (vv. 9-11)
- ▶ Motive: it is the will of God to save Israel (v. 9) and due to the past (Exodus, v. 16)
- ▶ A protest of innocence and humility (vv. 12-14)
- ▶ Description of problem: Haman wants to kill us
- ▶ Plea: save us – echo of Ex 2,23-25
- ▶ Certainty of hearing happens narratively

Esther's Prayer

- ▶ Esther invokes God as king and God of Israel (14,3)
- ▶ Motive: the past history of Israel (14,5)
- ▶ Acknowledgment of guilt (idolatry; 14,6-7)
- ▶ Protest of innocence and humility (14,15-18)
- ▶ Description of the problem: danger and genocide (14,4.8-10)
- ▶ Plea: eloquent speech (14,11-14)
- ▶ Certainty of hearing happens narratively

Conclusion

- ▶ The prayers of Mordecai and Esther are paradigmatic of biblical hope.
- ▶ Biblical hope is not a leap in the darkness or just one's own projection of a desired future but rather borne from the experience that the people of God had throughout its history.
- ▶ It is this hope in such a God that spurs people in the scriptures, like Esther and Mordecai, to pray and plea to God for help.

Conclusion

- ▶ I aimed to illustrate that such a prayer is only truly possible in the context of intimacy and relationship.
- ▶ It is time to not only explain the beauty of such a kind of prayer but also to start to practice such prayer in our local churches and communities.



Jeremiah 1,4-9 and being called

Between Disorientation and Reorientation

Introduction

- ▶ The word of God is the underlying element in Jeremiah
- ▶ Uncontrollable and all-consuming is compels Jeremiah to enter into a living relationship with God
- ▶ The call narrative of Jer 1,4-9 explains how the calling disorients Jeremiah
- ▶ This “hurt” is caused by the fact that he is inadequate and knows that without being sustained by God, he is unable to accomplish the task

Introduction

- ▶ The basis of the call narration
 - ▶ A dialogue between God and Jeremiah
 - ▶ God initiates the event and sends the prophet
 - ▶ The word which Jeremiah preaches is not his own
 - ▶ This brings out the inadequacy of Jeremiah
 - ▶ Jer 1,6: the lament
 - ▶ God gives Jeremiah what he needs

Jer 1,4-9

⁴ Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,

⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

⁶ Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."

⁷ But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you.

⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." ⁹ Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth.

Remember the form of the lament

- ▶ The invoking of the name of God,
- ▶ Motive why God should hear and help,
- ▶ There can be a confession of sin and an assertion of innocence,
- ▶ The description of the problem,
- ▶ Request for help,
- ▶ Certainty of being heard

IS Jer 1,6 a lament?

- ▶ Invocation of the Lord: Ah Lord God. “Ah” is found often in a cry of sorrow
- ▶ The motive way is in v. 5: God knows Jeremiah before he was formed in the womb and before he came out of the uterus he was “consecrated” and set apart for God and from God
- ▶ We not have a protest of innocence or acknowledgement of sin
- ▶ The description of the problem: Jeremiah does not know how to speak because he is a youth; he is inexperienced and inadequate
- ▶ The plea is implicit: if I am to be sent, you have to be with me!
- ▶ Certainty of hearing: this “ineffective” plea is effective because God gives him what he needs to accomplish the task: the word of God placed in his mouth

Conclusion

- ▶ The call narration, we see that Jeremiah is indeed a faithful servant of the Lord who is granted full powers and the authority to preach the word which was placed in his mouth by his Lord and master
- ▶ The Lord declares that He himself will be with him to deliver him
- ▶ This call disorients Jeremiah who recognises that without God to be with him and to give him his word, he is inadequate for the mission
- ▶ The ineffective plea of Jeremiah in 1,6 is marvellously effective in as much as the Lord confirms everything which He told his prophet in the call narrative by effectively giving him what he needed to fulfil the mission: the word of the Lord which is placed in his mouth

Conclusion

- ▶ Jeremiah, now emboldened by God, can go out and fulfil his mission
- ▶ This is only possible because (a) there is intimacy with the Lord who is the originator and governor of the mission and (b) trust that what God promises he can do
- ▶ It is this word that is placed in Jeremiah's mouth which allows us to label him as more than a messenger, a word, enveloping his life, which burns within him like a fire and leads him to do extraordinary things because it is no ordinary word, but the word of the Lord



The Crucifixion and the Cry of Jesus

Abandoned by the Father? Or Prayer calling on the Father's aid?

Mark 15,21-41 and Mt 27,32-44

Mark 15,21-41

- ▶ The events before the crucifixion (vv. 21-23)
- ▶ The crucifixion (vv. 24-28)
- ▶ The mocking scene (vv. 29-32)
- ▶ The events leading up to his death (vv. 33-38)
- ▶ Confession of the centurion and presence of the women (vv. 39-41)

Matthew 27,32-44

- ▶ The events before the crucifixion (vv. 32-34)
- ▶ The crucifixion (vv. 35-38)
- ▶ The mocking scene (vv. 39-44)
- ▶ The events leading up to his death (vv. 45-53)
- ▶ Confession of the centurion and presence of the women (vv. 54-56)

Mk 15,21-23 // Mt 27,32-34

- ▶ Simon of Cyrene is ordered to carry the cross of Jesus – probably the patibulum or the cross beam (Mk 15,21 / Mt 27,32)
- ▶ In Mk 15,22 / Mt 27,33, we arrive at Golgotha
- ▶ In Mark 15,23, they tried to offer Jesus wine mixed with myrrh – mocking the “king”; in Matthew 27,34, wine mixed with gall – wine embittered

Mk 15,24-27 // Mt 27,35-38

- ▶ Enough to follow Mark here
- ▶ Mk 15,24 narrates simply that Jesus was crucified and then the soldiers divided his clothes among themselves, casting lots for them (cf. Ps 22,18)
- ▶ Historically accurate
- ▶ Probably the case that Jesus had a loincloth on him due to Jewish sensibilities (Jub 3,30-31; 7,20)
- ▶ In Mk 15,25: the third hour (9 am)
- ▶ In Mk 15,26: the titulus against Jesus “The king of the Jews” – historically accurate but ironic
- ▶ In Mk 15,27: Jesus is crucified between two robbers (cf. the two sons of Zebedee)

Mk 15,29-32 // Mt 27,39-44

► Taunting or Mocking

- Those who passed by there (Mk 15,29-30 / Mt 27,39-40)
 - Aha! = scornful wonder
 - In Matthew, similar to Satan's testing in the desert: since you are the son of God, exploit your power for your benefit. This is testing if Jesus uses power for himself or for the advantage of the other. While the mock is implying that Jesus is impotent to come down from the cross, it is because he is the omnipotent God he does not come down from the cross.
- Chief priests and scribes (Mk 15,31-32a / Mt 27,41-43)
 - Similar to the first mocking scene
- Those who were crucified with Jesus (Mk 15,32b / Mt 27,44)

Mk 15,33-38 / Mt 27,45-53

- ▶ At the sixth hour darkness come over the land until the ninth hour (Mk 15,33 / Mt 27,45)
- ▶ Mk 15,34 / Mt 27,46 the lament of Jesus
- ▶ There is the misinterpretation that Jesus was calling Elijah (heightened in Matthew with Eli Eli) (Mk 15,35 / Mt 27,47)
- ▶ The bystanders try and give Jesus sour wine (Mk 15,36 / Mt 27,48) – mocking since they did not believe that Elijah would come but they were curious
- ▶ Then Jesus dies (Mk 15,37-38 / Mt 27,50-53)

Mk 15,39-41 / Mt 27,54-56

- ▶ The confession of the centurion
 - ▶ Truly this was the Son of God
- ▶ The story ends of a note of the women looking at distance



Did Jesus feel abandoned on the cross?

- ▶ Psalm 22 is a lament:
 - ▶ Invocation of the Lord: vv. 1-2
 - ▶ Description of the sorry state: vv. 6-8.12-18
 - ▶ God should help: vv.3-5.9-10; who is God (holy), what God does in the past and present
 - ▶ Petition: v.11.19.20-21 (come to my aid)
 - ▶ Certainty of hearing in the praise: vv. 22-24.27-31
 - ▶ Vow of peace: vv. 25-26

Atomistic vs. Contextual reading of the Psalm

- ▶ We cannot read Ps 22,1 in isolation
- ▶ Jesus' suffering and vindication must be taken into consideration
- ▶ Remember the point of view of the psalmist is after the fact
- ▶ Jesus' prayer to the father is based on trust
- ▶ Typical of the time to use the "incipit" of the prayer to mean the entire prayer

Atomistic vs. Contextual reading of the Psalm

- ▶ In the Mishnah:
 - ▶ The remembrance and the Shofar verses
 - ▶ And In my distress I cried unto the Lord and he answered me... (Ps 120)
 - ▶ And I will lift up my eyes into the hills... (Ps 121)
 - ▶ And out of the deep have I cried unto you, o Lord ... (Ps 130)
- ▶ While only the first verses are cited, they are cited in a way that evokes the rest of the psalm that was expected to be prayed as well

Mk 15,24	and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.	they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots	Ps 22,18
Mk 15,29	Those who passed by derided him, <u>shaking their heads</u>	All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, <u>they shake their heads</u>	Ps 22,7
Mk 15,30 Mk 15,31	save yourself He cannot save himself	Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver— let him rescue the one in whom he delights	Ps 22,8
Mk 15,34	My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"	My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?	Ps 22,1
Mk 15,39	"Truly this man was God's Son!"	Vindication; impossible to cite it	Ps 22,24-31

Overall sense of Psalm 22 in Mark

- ▶ Jesus was abandoned by his friends and disciples and by those who wanted to kill him
- ▶ But he was never abandoned by God the Father
- ▶ Rather, as in the baptism and transfiguration, there is a love relationship between the Father and Son
- ▶ Therefore Jesus could not have been abandoned by the Father

In Luke?

- ▶ Father, into your hands, I commend my Spirit (Lk 23,46)
- ▶ This is a citation from Ps 31,5 – another psalm of Lamentation which shows trust
- ▶ What Luke is doing is citing from an another psalm of lament, but a different part of that psalm
- ▶ Rather than citing from the description of the problem, he cites from the assurance of trust that stems from the very core of these psalms
- ▶ Therefore, he is not watering it down, rather he is explaining to his non-Jewish audience what Ps 22,1 would imply for Jesus

Jesus is never abandoned by the Father

- ▶ if he were abandoned by God the Father, we would have to subscribe to either Arianism or Adoptionism for we would have to admit that either that there was a time when Jesus was not God or that we can identify a moment when Jesus began to be God and thus divide the historical Jesus from the Christ of faith
- ▶ all evidence points to the fact that faithful Jesus, who suffered and died in accordance with the will of God and the scriptures, was then subsequently vindicated and took his rightful place at the righthand of God. The Father, who was well-pleased with his beloved Son, was there all along the journey to hear, see, and know it

General Conclusion

WE NEED TO PRAY

General Conclusion

- ▶ Lamentations are not “taking it against God” – or even perhaps complaining against God
- ▶ In an attitude of trust and within a living relationship with God who hears our voiced hurts and comes to our aid – not always in the way we want but always in the way we need
- ▶ Spes non confundit: hope is born from love and is based on the love that flows from the cross
- ▶ Relational God of prayer

The Relational God of Prayer

- ▶ This type of prayer emphasizes that the one who prays can truly engage God and can urge God to act on one's behalf just as God, in giving the law, urges reasons upon the people
- ▶ Prayer is the point at which humanity dares to approach holy God with no restrictions of what can be expressed
- ▶ These pleas appeal to God to be and to act as God would be and act
- ▶ They revolve the petition "thy will be done!"