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LAMENT IN ROMANS:
PROMISE, SUFFERING, AND THE CRY OF DISTRESS

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LAMENT IN ROMANS:

PROMISE, SUFFERING, AND THE CRY OF DISTRESS

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To Kelley, my precious wife,
inexhaustible in your encouragement and sacrificial love,
your tears filled my pen but your “pep talks” made it write.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- BDAG Walter Bauer, Fredrick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilber Gingrich,
Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament
- LXX Septuagint
- MT Masoretic Text
- NTS *New Testament Studies*
- PssLm Psalm(s) of Lament
- SBL *Society of Biblical Literature*
- TLG Thesaurus linguae graecae

PREFACE

Lament language is widely neglected in Pauline studies. Although the Old Testament is filled with heart-wrenching cries of distress to which Paul often alludes, cites, and emulates in his letters, little thought has been given to how his reflection on lament should influence our reflection on his theology of suffering. This dissertation is an effort to correct that lapse in scholarship.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Like the Messiah he proclaimed, Paul was a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3). He is after all the apostle who once described himself as having τὰ στίγματα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ (Gal 6:17). His letters, like his body, bear the marks of an individual who suffered and knew that others, the whole world in fact, suffered as well.¹ Paul discusses suffering in different ways and from varying perspectives in his writings. For example, in the Corinthian correspondence, he catalogs his hardships from the vantage point of an apostle. The distress he experiences in fulfillment of his apostolic mission includes everything from beatings to famine (2 Cor 11:23-29).² In Galatians, his suffering stems from opponents preaching a false gospel, and he speaks from the perspective of an irate father in doubt about the long-term stability of his spiritual

¹On the theme of Paul and suffering, see Peter H. Davids, “Why Do We Suffer? Suffering in James and Paul,” in *The Missions of James, Peter, and Paul: Tensions in Early Christianity*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 435-66; Morna D. Hooker, “Interchange and Suffering,” in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament: Studies Presented to G. M. Styler by the Cambridge New Testament Seminar*, ed. William Horbury and Brian McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 70-83; Karl Theodor Kleinknecht, *Der leidende Gerechtfertigte: Die alttestamentlich-judische Tradition vom, leidenden Gerechten’ und ihre Rezeption bei Paulus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984); Michel Wolter, “Der Apostel und seine Gemeinden als Teilhaber am Leidensgeschick Jesu Christi: Beobachtungen zur paulinischen Leidenstheologie,” *NTS* 36 (1990): 535-37.

²For a study on the catalogs of suffering in the Pauline corpus, see John T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence*, SBL Dissertation Series 99 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); Niels Willert, “The Catalogues of Hardships in the Pauline Correspondence: Background and Function,” in *The New Testament and Hellenistic Judaism*, ed. Peder Borgen and Soren Giversen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1995), 217-43.

children (Gal 4:18-19). However, suffering in Paul's letters runs deeper than apostolic and pastoral distress. Suffering is in fact integral to his theology, and this is especially evident in the epistle to the Romans.

In the vast sea of works on Romans the theme of suffering is sometimes surrendered for more familiar interpretive turf.³ Perhaps this tendency is due to the fact that Paul does not speak explicitly about his hardships as an apostle in the letter or that he did not plant the church in Rome. Both issues are usually accompanied by a description of suffering in the Pauline corpus (e.g., Galatians and 1 Thessalonians). But it could also be that interpreters have too often allowed concerns about the theological density of the letter's argument to muffle, or even silence, the cries of suffering that deserve to be heard. Poignant statements about suffering are depreciated in the quest to understand and explicate the flow of Paul's argument.⁴

Nevertheless, the letter contains some jarring, even breathtaking, depictions of suffering and distress. Consider the following examples:

O wretched man that I am who will deliver from the body of this death? (Rom 7:24).

On account of you we face death all day long, we were reckoned as sheep for slaughter (Rom 8:36).

³See Erwin Ochsmeier, *Mal, souffrance et justice de Dieu selon Romains 1-3: Etude exegetique et theologique* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 1. Interpretive dialogue continues to swirl around issues such as the meaning of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ, the identity of the ἐγώ in Rom 7:7-25, and the connection between Rom 9-11 and the rest of the letter.

⁴Douglas Moo's comments on Paul's use of lament in Rom 8:36 are a prime example. He notes, "This verse is something of an interruption in the flow of thought, and one that is typical for Paul. For he is constantly concerned to show that the sufferings experienced by Christians should occasion no surprise." (Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996], 543-44).

I speak the truth in Christ, I do not lie, while my conscience testifies in the Holy Spirit, that great grief is in me and unceasing pain is in my heart. For I myself was wishing to be accursed from Christ for my brethren, my fellow kinsmen according to the flesh (Rom 9:1-3).

The common link in all three texts is not merely the theme of suffering but the language used to describe it. Specifically, Paul uses the language of lament to describe the intensity of the suffering. Extraordinary distress calls for extraordinary language, and lament meets that demand.

By “language of lament,” I am speaking of both the actual cry of distress, what could be called “lament proper,” and expressions that often precede or follow those cries. On the one hand, lament proper is a universal phenomenon that erupts spontaneously as a reaction to suffering.⁵ For example, the verbal “reflex” in the face of small or great tragedy is often “Oh my God!”⁶ This is a rather mindless cry that is not really directed toward any god in particular. On the other hand, the lament proper in the biblical text, especially in the OT, is a cry that is purposefully directed to God. The most well-known example is probably Psalm 22:2a, “My God, My God why have you forsaken me?”⁷ Cries of distress such as this one show that biblical lament is a plea for deliverance elicited by suffering that contradicts a prior promise. This kind of language, both the lament proper and the expressions accompanying lament, actually play an important role in Romans.

⁵On the phenomenology of lament, see Rebekka A. Klein, “The Phenomenology of Lament and the Presence of God in Time,” in *Evoking Lament: A Theological Discussion*, ed. Eva Harastra and Brian Brock (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 14-24.

⁶Jonas Bauer, “Enquiring into the Absence of Lament: A Study of the Entwining of Suffering and Guilt in Lament,” in *Evoking Lament: A Theological Discussion*, ed. Eva Harastra and Brian Brock (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 26-27.

⁷All OT references throughout this work are from the MT unless otherwise specified.

History of Interpretation

Paul's use of lament in Romans has not received a great deal of attention in the history of the letter's critical interpretation.⁸ "Lament" itself did not really become a formal category of inquiry within biblical studies until Herman Gunkel's form critical analysis of the psalms in the early twentieth century.⁹ Therefore, it is not surprising that there is somewhat of a lacuna in this area. I say "somewhat," because there are a handful of Pauline scholars who have recognized the pervasive presence of lament language in Romans. In particular, Roy A. Harrisville, Richard B. Hays, Sylvia C. Keesmaat, and Mark A. Seifrid have extended their discussion of lament in Romans beyond a mere notation of its presence in the letter. Although none of the four offers a systematic treatment on the subject, their works demonstrate that I am not being carelessly innovative in my approach to reading Romans.

Recontextualization

Roy A. Harrisville argues that in Romans Paul "recontextualizes" the PssLm into the flow of his argument.¹⁰ For example, in Romans 8:36 Paul recontextualized Psalm 44:23 by expanding the psalmist's political enemy to include "tribulation, or

⁸This should come as no surprise. Lament in the NT has generally not received much attention. There are some recent treatments. See, e.g., Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, *The Psalms of Lament in Mark's Passion: Jesus' Davidic Suffering* (London: T&T Clark, 2007); A. Y. Collins, "The Appropriation of the Psalms of Individual Lament by Mark," in *The Scriptures in the Gospels*, ed. C. M. Tuckett (Leuven: Leuven University Press), 223-41; Martin Ebner, "Klage und Auferweckungshoffnung im Neuen Testament," *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 16 (2001): 73-87; Markus Ohler, "To Mourn, Weep, Lament and Groan: On the Heterogeneity of the New Testament's Statement of Lament," in *Evoking Lament: A Theological Discussion*, ed. Eva Harastra and Brian Brock (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 150-65.

⁹See, e.g., Hermann Gunkel, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933).

distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword, etc.”¹¹ Furthermore, Harrisville posits that in his recontextualization of the lament Paul does not share the psalmist’s “mood.” Paul does not have in view the psalmist’s complaint about being rejected by God (Ps 44:10). Instead, the lament language has been “recontextualized.” The psalmist’s complaint from Paul’s perspective becomes “a descriptive statement of the Christian life” where the believer is “more than a conqueror.”¹²

Harrisville calls Paul’s use of OT lament language “recontextualization,” but his assessment sounds a great deal like “proof-texting.” If Paul has really left behind the mood and complaint of Psalm 44 entirely, then he has simply lifted a phrase out of context to fit his purposes. There is a misleading assumption on the part of Harrisville that if Paul did not explicitly quote certain elements from the lament texts, then he has ignored or omitted those elements altogether. He writes, “There are no quotations or allusions respecting the complaints aimed directly at God . . . , or from complaints which describe the sinner’s distress as illness or disease, physical or mental.”¹³ Such an assumption is surprising in light of the lament language echoed in Romans 7:24 and 9:1-3, where Paul is clearly taking up the complaints of his OT predecessors.

In any case, Harrisville’s analysis is only a cursory treatment of the PssLm in Romans. It is not meant to be comprehensive by any means. He is not concerned with what Paul’s use of lament language really says about suffering. Harrisville simply

¹¹Ibid., 176.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., 169.

explores one more aspect of Paul's OT hermeneutic. While that is a worthy enterprise, and one which the present study will touch on from time to time, my concern is what the language says about suffering.

Echoing Theodicy

As a part of his larger project dealing with Paul's use of the OT, Richard B. Hays takes seriously the lament language in Romans. For Hays, the use of lament from the prophets and the psalms in Romans essentially echoes questions of theodicy raised in the OT. He makes two significant observations. First, Hays argues that in Romans, "There is a cluster of echoes emanating from the lament psalms and from exilic prophecy" which he claims substantiates his argument that Romans should be read as theodicy.¹⁴ He aims to show that Paul is justifying God's way with Israel, and he points, in part, to the presence of OT lament to substantiate his claim. For example, in Hays' exegesis of Romans 1:16-17, he posits that the citation of Habakkuk 2:4 is not a mere "proof text" for Paul's "doctrine of justification with complete disregard for its original setting in Habakkuk's prophecy."¹⁵ Since Paul has "evoked" the "theodicy theme" through an announcement of God's righteousness and allusions to PssLm, Hays argues, "Hab 2:4 speaks directly to the theological problem of God's faithfulness to Israel."¹⁶ Specifically, Habbakuk 2:4 is an "answer to the prophet's claim (Hab 2:1) against the

¹⁴Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 38.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., 39.

apparent injustice of God's ways, complaint intoned through the first chapter of the book."¹⁷

Second, Hays also observes that the citation of Psalm 69:9 in Romans 15:3, and what follows in 15:4-6, is instructive for understanding Paul's other uses of the PssLm.¹⁸ He notes,

According to Rom 15:4-6, then, the purpose of Scripture—and the lament psalms are particularly in view here—is to provide a christologically grounded model of steadfastness to sustain hope in the midst of adversity, so that members of the community can continue to act for the edification of others even in the midst of opposition and temporary disunity.¹⁹

In this way, the speaker of the psalm is the Messiah, and his hope in the midst of suffering becomes paradigmatic for the Christian. But Hays ties this to his larger concern with theodicy. He writes, “Many of the psalms, even where they employ first-person singular discourse, are not strictly individual; they address the crisis of theodicy created by God's apparent abandonment of the covenant people.”²⁰

While I appreciate Hays's recognition of lament language in Romans, as well as his attempt to draw some conclusions on how Paul uses it, his assessment of its importance is flawed for two reasons. First, Hays does not take into account the most obvious citations and echoes of OT lament in Romans. There is no discussion of the multiple citations from the PssLm in Romans 3:10-18. Romans 7:24, and the entire

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 113.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., 118.

chapter for that matter, receive no treatment in Hays's interpretation of the letter. He does not seriously consider Romans 8:36, where Paul cites one of Israel's most well-known community laments.²¹ He does notice that Romans 9:1-5 is a "lament over Israel," but he explicitly, and surprisingly, dismisses the suggestion that Paul is echoing Moses' lament found in Exodus 32:34.²² To be fair, Hays's aims are larger than assessing Paul's use of lament in the letter. But he does draw overarching conclusions about it without taking into account all of the evidence. Second, Hays does not take into account the full function of lament language in the OT. It is not merely to raise questions about God's dealing with Israel (i.e., theodicy). The psalmist not only asks "why," but also "how long?" As I will show in the next chapter, OT lament language has a distinct soteriological function. In fact, questions of "why" are often part of a petition for deliverance rather than an explanation for God's ways.

A Narrative of Justice

Sylvia C. Keesmaat recognizes the high volume of PssLm in Romans.²³ She argues that Paul employs the PssLm in order to speak about God's justice, particularly his faithfulness to Israel. In this way, her understanding is akin to the work of Hays, as she

²¹His one passing statement about Rom 8:36 is, "The psalmist's complaint that the people of God are 'sheep to be slaughtered' modulates immediately into Paul's lament over the Jewish people" (Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 63).

²²Hays notes, "The suggestion is often made that Paul is recalling the story of Moses' offering of himself to atone for the sin of Israel (Exod. 32:30-34). There are, however, no direct verbal echoes of the Exodus text in Rom. 9:3." *Ibid.*, 206.

²³See Sylvia C. Keesmaat, "The Psalms in Romans and Galatians," in *The Psalms in the New Testament*, ed. Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 139-61.

acknowledges.²⁴ However, she also combines the work of Walter Brueggemann and Richard A. Horsley to argue, “As Israel’s faith was always formed and lived in the shadow of empire, so also is the faith that Paul commends to the Christian community in Rome at the heart of the empire.”²⁵ According to Keesmaat, Paul conveys this imperial dynamic through employing the PssLm. Borrowing terms from Brueggemann, she speaks about the shift from “disorientation” to “reorientation” in the letter.²⁶ She describes these terms as follows:

Laments describe an experience of disorientation by complaining that reality is not as it should be. When the wicked prosper and the righteous are oppressed, something is awry in covenantal life. Psalms of thanksgiving, and sometimes psalms of recital, give to a reorientation that has come through a time of confusion and trouble to a new place of hope and resolution.²⁷

Keesmaat applies this understanding to Paul’s use of the PssLm in Romans 1:16-17, 3:10-20, 8:31-39, 10:18, 11:1-2, 9-10, and 15:3. The presence of these psalms evokes a certain context, or world. Keesmaat explains, “Paul has also evoked the world of lament, where the question of God’s faithfulness and justice is up for grabs, where the psalmist insistently petitions God to do something about the injustice and rejection that he has

²⁴Ibid., 139.

²⁵Ibid. See also, Walter Brueggemann, “The Costly Loss of Lament,” in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 98-111; Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Politics: Ekklēsia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000); Neil Elliott, *The Arrogance of the Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

²⁶Keesmaat, “The Psalms in Romans and Galatians,” 139-41, 156-67. On “disorientation” and “reorientation,” see Walter Brueggemann, “Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function,” in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 3-32.

²⁷Keesmaat, “The Psalms in Romans and Galatians,” 141.

faced.”²⁸ Such a context reflects the one in which the Christians in Rome lived. They could either find righteousness in the “imperial narrative of Caesar or in the story of Israel as reinterpreted in the light of the story of Jesus.”²⁹ Keesmaat concludes her study of the PssLm in Romans noting:

By the end of the epistle to the Romans, Paul—both through his argument and psalmic allusion—has evoked another story, another set of symbols, and another praxis that stand in judgment over the story, symbols and praxis of the empire that surrounded on every side the house churches in Rome.³⁰

The “other story,” according to Keesmaat, is that of God’s faithfulness to Israel despite living under the shadow of imperial Rome.

I agree with Keesmaat’s analysis in a few ways. First, she rightly notes that the Christians in Rome faced suffering and questions like those found in the PssLm. In fact, she sees that suffering and lament are a vital part of the thematic statement in Romans 1:16-17.³¹ Second, Keesmaat is correct in noting the interpretive importance of the citation of Psalm 44:23 in Romans 8:36. The citation is a reminder that, despite the triumphant tone of Romans 8:31-39, Paul is addressing a community that his hurting. Third, Keesmaat helpfully notes that there is a shift from lament to praise in Romans, although she prefers Brueggemann’s nomenclature of “disorientation” and “reorientation.”

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., 139.

³⁰Ibid., 157.

³¹Ibid., 141.

Nevertheless, Keesmaat's brief study falters at two points. First, it is too limited in its scope. For example, Keesmaat does not consider the echoes of the PssLm in Romans 7:7-25. Consequently, she does not see that sin, and not just Rome, is an enemy in the same vein as those lamented in the PssLm. One gets the sense in Keesmaat's analysis that lament over sin or God's wrath is not of great concern. Second, the narrative of justice that Keesmaat adopts skews her analysis of the PssLm present in the letter. Paul never explicitly states that imperial Rome is the source of the community's suffering. On the other hand, he does use lament language to describe the suffering caused by God's wrath, the enemy of sin, and God's aloofness. While Keesmaat briefly touches on God's aloofness in her analysis of Romans 8:31-39, she does it in terms of "imperial categories."³²

Indication of Suffering

From my perspective, Mark A. Seifrid's interpretation of Romans rightly takes into account the fact that Paul's use of lament language is an indication of the suffering being experienced by creation and God's elect.³³ He recognizes the OT origin of the language throughout the letter.³⁴ But, more importantly, Seifrid is particularly aware of the importance of lament language to Paul's overall argument. Seifrid posits that Paul is incorporating larger OT themes, themes expressed in the language of lament, into his

³²Ibid., 152.

³³See, e.g., Mark A. Seifrid, *Romans*, in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 607-94.

³⁴For example, in his comments on Rom 9:1-5, he notes, "In the present Paul's grief finds no answer, just as there is presently no visible answer to the suffering of believers (8:35-36); therefore the lament." Ibid., 639.

letter. For example, in his analysis of Romans 9-11 he notes, “It is the promise of Israel’s salvation, not the visible evidence of it, that provokes Paul’s lament here and that likewise elicits his own hymn of praise in 11:33-36.”³⁵ He sees lament as the framework for the entire section noting, “Paul’s opening lament provides the conceptual framework for the entire discourse, including the closing hymn of praise, which, according to the pattern of the psalms of lament, reaffirms the hope of the promises, contrary to all outward appearances (e.g., Pss. 10; 13; 22; 60; 102).”³⁶ I shall have more to say about this later. It is sufficient to note at this point that Seifrid’s influence on the following study is substantial. His reading of Romans 7:7-25 and 9-11 is especially helpful for my purposes. Seifrid takes seriously the suffering that Paul laments in Romans whereas many commentators and interpreters fail to see its significance.

Thesis and Aim

The thesis of the present study is simply that Paul’s use of lament language discloses simultaneously the intensity of creation’s suffering and the power of the gospel.³⁷ Paul uses OT lament language in Romans 3:10-18, 7:24, 8:36, and 9:1-3 in order to climactically express the depth of the suffering he discusses in the broader context of the letter. These expressions then become the backdrop against which Paul discusses the saving work of God in Christ, the gospel. By focusing on what Paul says

³⁵Ibid., 638.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷When I say “creation,” I mean the created order and all who dwell in it, particularly the believers who dwell in it.

ails creation, and the lament language he uses to describe its damage, the power of the gospel that reveals God's righteousness comes into sharper focus.

My aim in the chapters to follow is to take seriously what Paul says causes suffering in the world, how bad that suffering really is in light of his use of lament language, and the implications this has for understanding the gospel in Romans. Additionally, I believe that lament and suffering in Romans deserves a more prominent place at the table of conversation within Pauline studies. In what follows, I hope to gather enough evidence for the concluding chapter of this work to at least give pause to some recent trends.

Two primary issues are particularly pertinent. First, the study of Paul's narrative substructure within his letters continues to gain momentum among interpreters, but current proposals for Romans do not seem to adequately account for all the data.³⁸ One question I would like to raise is whether N.T. Wright's "covenant faithfulness" reading of Romans can adequately account for the suffering stemming from God's wrath, sin's use of the law, created things, and even Israel's unbelief.³⁹ If the "proof of all these puddings will be in the eating," as Wright is so fond of saying, then one must really swallow the bitterness of statements such "O wretched man that I am" or "we were reckoned as sheep for the slaughter."⁴⁰ Does God's "covenant faithfulness" to Israel

³⁸On this approach to the reading of the NT, see N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 1-143, 215-43.

³⁹See N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 177-248.

⁴⁰N. T. Wright, "Romans and the Theology of Paul," in *Romans*, vol. 3 of *Pauline Theology*, ed. David M. Hays and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 67.

really answer the experience of suffering intimated in such statements? Or, to put it more succinctly, does Paul respond to suffering and lament in creation by pointing specifically to the “Israel-for-the-world plans” of God or specifically “Christ-for-the-world plan of God.”⁴¹ There is a difference between the two, despite arguments to the contrary, and I believe that the latter is how Paul responds to suffering throughout Romans.

Second, I also want to challenge recent conclusions regarding Paul’s consciousness or experience of sin. The seminal essay of Krister Stendhal entitled “Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West” has long been a touchstone of New Perspective proponents for understanding the problems Paul “really” grappled with in his letters. It seems that a stinging consciousness of sin was not “really” one of them. That apparently came only with Augustine and later with Luther.⁴² Stendhal implicitly claims that his reading of Paul with respect to his struggle against sin is the “original” rather than a Western or Lutheran “translation.”⁴³ He notes, “We should venture to suggest that the West for centuries has wrongly surmised that the biblical writers were grappling with problems which no doubt are ours, but which never entered their consciousness.”⁴⁴ Yet, as I will show in my analysis of Romans 7:7-25, Paul’s introspection is grounded in the OT scriptures, specifically the PssLm. The psalmist was conscience of the suffering

⁴¹Wright, *Justification*, 178.

⁴²Krister Stendhal, *Paul among the Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 85.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 96.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 95.

caused by sin in his own self, even in light of the law (see, e.g., Ps 119:5-6), and Paul borrows that language to express the same truth about the ἐγὼ confronted with the law.

Finally, the call to read Romans in its historical *Sitz im Leben* seems to have been heeded, at least according to the estimation of some.⁴⁵ There are historical circumstances that, though not always easy to discern, must be taken into consideration in one's reading of the letter. I will attempt to do that in the course of my analysis. However, Paul's repeated use of lament language raises the possibility that the *Sitz im Leben* the apostle has in mind in the writing of his letter is not only the specific situations involving himself and the church in Rome, but it is the larger reality of suffering in all of creation. The situation the Romans find themselves in is not fully grasped by simply reconstructing historical details about Gentile and Jewish relations. Such a reconstruction would only be one part of the larger cause of suffering that Paul addresses in the letter, namely God's wrath, sin's use of the law, distress for following Christ, and Israel's continued unbelief. This is the more comprehensive narrative of Romans.

⁴⁵As Gunter Klein puts it, "In the contemporary situation, that timeless dogmatic theory which views the letter to the Romans as an organic part of a consistently developed, systematic concept—as the purest manifestation of the gospel, and thus as something like a common denominator for the remainder of the New Testament—is rarely upheld" (Gunter Klein, "Paul's Purpose in Writing," in *The Romans Debate*, ed. Karl P. Donfried, rev. ed. [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991], 30).

CHAPTER 2
LAMENT LANGUAGE IN THE OLD
TESTAMENT: FORM AND
FUNCTION

On the heels of citing Psalm 69:9, an individual lament, Paul explains, “For as many things that were written beforehand, they were written for our instruction, in order that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope (Rom 15:4).” With that statement, Paul acknowledges that the OT plays an important role in the lives of the Christians in Rome. Quite simply, it gives them hope. But, in light of the multiple OT citations and allusions throughout the letter, it obviously does more than that for Paul.¹ The OT also provides for the apostle, and consequently his readers, the interpretive framework for understanding God’s work in Jesus Christ. To put it in his own words, the gospel of God is the message “promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures” (Rom 1:2). This means that the context for understanding Romans is not only the letter itself, or the particular historical circumstances of the Christians in Rome, but also the OT. As Francis Watson puts it, “If Paul’s readers are to read his own texts critically and with understanding, they must join

¹Seifrid notes, “The roughly sixty citations of the Old Testament in Romans—more numerous and concentrated than any of Paul’s other letters—are only a portion of the biblical witness upon which the letter rests. Much of the apostle’s appeal to Scripture here appears in the form of allusions” (Mark A. Seifrid, *Romans*, in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans], 607).

him in reading the scriptural texts to which he appeals.”² This chapter is an effort to do just that.

Specifically, I want to explore the form and function of lament language in its original OT context. If we are going to understand and fully appreciate the OT lament language Paul cites, alludes to, and echoes in Romans, with all the emphases, themes, and underlying narrative it carries, we must hear it first in its original context.³ As Oswald Bayer puts it, “Once the senses have been sharpened by the Old Testament, one can also recognize the ‘eschatology of answered lament’ in the New Testament.”⁴ Once our senses have been attuned to the form and function of lament in the OT, we will be better equipped to understand its presence in Romans.

The Form of Lament Language

Many treatments of OT lament have appeared over the past several decades.⁵

Although there is no consensus at every point of inquiry, it is agreed that lament language

²Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 78.

³I am operating on the presupposition that Paul does not carelessly excise OT texts to suit his purposes. Rather, he is a careful interpreter who respects the context and thrust of a text’s original meaning. Moreover, as James W. Aageson puts it, “Interpretation for Paul is more than a matter of discerning the meaning of a literary text but rather of discovering and indeed generating a sense of God’s purpose for the world and its redemption” (James W. Aageson, “Written Also For Our Sake: Paul’s Use of Scripture in the Four Major Epistles, with a Study of 1 Corinthians 10,” in *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006], 155).

⁴Oswald Bayer, “Toward a Theology of Lament,” in *Caritas et Reformatio: Essays on Church and Society in Honor of Carter Lindberg*, ed. David M. Whitford and George W. Forell (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 213.

⁵See, e.g., Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard K. Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981); Craig Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith and Experience in the Psalms: A Form-Critical and Theological Study* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989); Richard Nelson Boyce, *The Cry to God in the Old Testament*, SBL Dissertation Series 103 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985); Walter Baumgartner, *Jeremiah’s Poems of Lament*, trans. David E. Orton (Decatur, GA: The Almond Press, 1988); Christiane De Vos, *Klage als Gotteslob aus der Tiefe: Der Mensch vor Gott in den individuellen Klagepsalmen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005); Alec Basson, *Divine Metaphors in Selected*

in the OT has a distinct literary form.⁶ Specifically, one regularly finds the same participants, idiom, and pattern. These three areas are the focus of what follows.

The Participants of Lament

There are always three participants in texts that contain lament language: (1) God, (2) the lamenter, and (3) an enemy or enemies.⁷ Lament language inherently possesses an “I/We” (lamenter), “You” (God), and “them” (enemies). Each participant plays a different role.

God. God is the one to whom the cry of distress is always directed. In the PssLm there is a consistent use of the vocative “O Lord” (יהוה).⁸ This is an obvious indication that God alone is the recipient of the complaint, petition, and praise. The lament is always directed towards God, because he is the only one who can bring deliverance from the suffering being experienced by the lamenter.

Hebrew Psalms of Lamentation (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006); Ingvar Floysvik, *When God Becomes My Enemy: The Theology of the Complaint Psalms* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997); Carleen Mandolfo, *God in the Dock: Dialogic Tension in the Psalms of Lament*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 357 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

⁶I am making a distinction here between the literary form of lament texts and the attempt to reconstruct the historical setting behind them. The latter endeavor often occupies the time and energy of OT form-critics studying the PssLm. With respect to their original setting, there are plenty of hypotheses, but no consensus. For a brief overview of various hypotheses, see Walter Brueggemann, “The Formfulness of Grief,” in *The Psalms & The Life of Faith*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 84-88; Paul Wayne Ferris, Jr., *The Genre of Communal Lament in the Bible and the Ancient Near East*, *SBL Dissertation Series* 127 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 1-4.

⁷Janowski sees three consistent parts in lament. They are the “Gottklage,” “Ichklage,” and Feindklage.” See Bernd Janowski, “Klage,” in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz, Don S. Browning, Bernd Janowski, and Eberhard Jungel (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 4:1390.

⁸See, e.g., Pss 6:4; 7:3; 13:1; 25:1.

Lamenter. The lamenter is the one who, due to intense suffering, bemoans his condition and requests deliverance from God. For instance, the lamenter in Psalm 69:2 prays, “Save me God, for the waters have come unto my life.” Throughout the OT, similar laments come off the lips of individuals and the entire Israelite community. The individual lament “was composed to be used by and/or on behalf of an individual to express sorrow and grief over some perceived calamity which had befallen or was about to befall him and to appeal to God for deliverance.”⁹ The only difference in the communal lament is that it “was composed to be used by and/or on behalf of a community.”¹⁰ While Ferris’s focus is the PssLm, it still follows that the distinction applies to other genres of the OT where both individuals and entire communities experience suffering and make an appeal for deliverance.

Enemy. The third participant in lament is the enemy, or enemies, who are a never-ending source of distress.¹¹ Their identity covers a wide range of entities, but they can be broadly classified as “external” and “internal.”

In the PssLm there are three images that are frequently taken up in order to describe external enemies:

The image of an attacking and besieging army (Pss. 3:6; 27:3; 55:18; 56:1; 59:4; 62:3; and often); (2) the image of a hunter or fishermen who tries to catch his prey (Pss. 7:15; 9:15; 31:4; 35:7-8; 57:6; 59:7; 64:3; 140:5); (3) the image of wild animals that pursue their prey (Pss. 7:2; 22:12-13; 27:2; 35:21).¹²

⁹Ferris, *The Genre of Communal Lament*, 10.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹For a brief discussion on enemies in the psalms, see Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 95-99.

¹²Ibid., 95.

The larger narrative of the OT reveals that these kinds of images, and others like them, are applied to political, religious, and militaristic forces who work tirelessly to afflict Israel. These enemies routinely elicit a cry from the afflicted. In fact, Israel's bondage in Egypt shows that the cry of distress induced by enemies is woven into the very fabric of the nation's history.¹³ This is evident in the account of the nation's deliverance from Egypt where God takes notice of his people's cry, "Then the Lord said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their cry from before their taskmasters, for I have known their pain'" (Exod 3:7).

However, external enemies are not limited to foreign nations in the OT. Sometimes the enemies come from within Israel itself, and a lament arises decrying the suffering that ensues. For example, the lament in Psalm 55:13-14 points to the pain experienced when a friend becomes a foe, "For an enemy did not reproach me, then I could bear it; it is not the one who hates me who exalted himself above me, then I would be hid from him. But it is you, a man my equal, my friend and my confidant." Moreover, Israel's ill-treatment of the prophets stands out here. For example, when Pashur the priest beats and imprisons Jeremiah for announcing the impending judgment on the nation, the prophet laments, "O Lord, you deceived me and I was deceived; you have overcome me and you prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me" (Jer 20:7). This kind of rejection and ill-treatment of the prophets, accompanied by the prophet's lament, was widespread and ongoing in the nation's

¹³On this point, see Claus Westermann, "The Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament," *Interpretation* 28 (1974): 21.

history.¹⁴ The divine reports brought to the nation by the prophets are habitually rejected.¹⁵ Therefore, prophetic laments appear like the one in Isaiah 53:1, “Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”

But there is another external enemy from within Israel, one far more formidable than anyone else, namely God. On the one hand, this is to be expected. God warned that he would punish the wicked regardless of their nationality.¹⁶ This reality is clearly laid out in the introductory psalm of the psalter, “For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will be destroyed” (Ps 1:6).¹⁷ Moreover, the lamenter often times petitions God to judge the wicked.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Israel, too, often denies this reality, and, in fact, presumes innocence and insulation from divine wrath, “Yet you said, ‘I am innocent,’ surely his anger is turned away from me.’ Behold I will judge you, because you say, ‘I have not sinned’” (Jer 2:35). On the other hand, there are times when God inexplicably acts as an enemy toward his people. Either through his apparent aloofness, or the momentary success of the wicked, Israel’s God is unjustifiably and paradoxically like an antagonist. Such divine behavior elicits a lament such as the one in Psalm 44:10, “You have rejected and humiliated us, and you do not go out with our armies.” Similarly, the complaint about the perceived aloofness and divine antagonism can come in the form of a question. Job asks, “Why do you hide your face,

¹⁴See, e.g., 2 Chr 36:15-16; Acts 7:51-53.

¹⁵See, e.g., Jer 2:30; Amos 7:10-13.

¹⁶See, e.g., Isa 1:24-35; Amos 2:4-3:15.

¹⁷On Ps 1 introducing what is to come in all the psalms, see Patrick D. Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 81-86.

¹⁸See, e.g., Pss 5:11; 10:15; 140:9-12.

and reckon me as your enemy?” (Job 13:24).¹⁹ One thinks of the description in Isaiah 45:15, “Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, Savior.”²⁰ When God seems to hide himself in times of trouble, a lament arises.²¹

The internal enemy that causes suffering and distress within the body of the lamenter is sin.²² Sin’s presence and activity is sometimes portrayed as an overpowering foe, and it is linked with other antagonistic entities. This is evident in a few of the PssLm. For example, the lament in Psalm 38:4-5 portrays sin as an overpowering force, “There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no peace in my bones because of my sin (חַטָּאתִי). For my iniquities (עֲוֹנוֹתַי) have passed over my head; like a heavy load they are too heavy for me.” Here the overwhelming presence of sin and the suffering that results is linked with God’s wrath.²³ The portrayal of sin as an enemy is also clear from the lament’s petition for deliverance from it:

Deliver (הַצִּילֵנִי) me from all my transgressions (פְּשָׁעַי); do not set me as a reproach of the fool. I have been silenced, I do not open my mouth, for you have done it. Turn aside from your plague, from the contention of your hand I am fading away. With

¹⁹For a lengthy discussion regarding the hiding of God’s face, see Samuel Balentine, *The Hidden God: The Hiding of the Face of God in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

²⁰The interpretation of Isa 45:15 is not without its difficulties. Some see it as Israel’s misguided view of God. Others take it as a true statement. However, Oswalt’s conclusion is helpful, “The nations are speaking at once of the ineffable transcendence of God, a God who hides himself, and of his revealed presence as Savior of the world, God of Israel, Savior” (John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 217).

²¹See also, e.g., Pss 13:1; 44:25; 69:18; 74:1; 80:12; 102:3.

²²Kraus argues that the enemies are “beyond all doubt people.” Furthermore, the enemies who are people are subsequently “transcendentalized” so that the enemies are “the primal image of all this is evil,” (Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 98). However, I think this leaves out the depiction of sin as an enemy.

²³Terrien notes, “Disasters and maladies were commonly attributed to divine wrath. This, in turn was supposed to have been caused my human sinfulness” (Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmnas, 2003], 326).

reproofs because of iniquity you chasten a man, you consume like a moth what his precious to him, surely every man is a breath (Ps 39:9-12).

On the one hand there is a cry for deliverance from transgressions, but, on the other, the suffering experienced by the lamenter is also linked with God's wrath.²⁴ The overpowering presence of sin is also clear in Psalm 40:13, "For evils (רעות) beyond number have surrounded me; my iniquities (עוונתי) have overtaken me, and I am not able to see; they are more numerous than the hairs of my head, and my heart has left me." Therefore, while the enemies in the PssLm are most often "people," there are clear instances where sin is the non-corporeal opponent.²⁵ Moreover, sin's overpowering work can be linked with God's wrath against the lamenter. For example, the request in Psalm 39:9-11, an individual lament, connects sin and God's wrath:

Deliver me from all my iniquities; do not make me the reproach of the foolish. I have been dumb; I do not open my mouth; for you have done it. Turn aside from me your plague; because of the opposition of your hand I am perishing.²⁶

On a national level, Israel often experienced God's wrath because of its sin. This is clear in Psalm 79:8-9, "Do not remember the iniquities of our fathers against us; hurry, let your compassions meet us for we are exceedingly low. Help us O God our Savior on account of the glory of your name; and deliver us and cover our iniquities on account of your name." Similarly, Psalm 90:7-8 links the sin of Israel with suffering under God's wrath, "For we have been consumed by your anger; and by your anger we have been dismayed. You set our iniquities before you, our secret sin in the light of your face."

²⁴For a petition requesting deliverance from sin, see also Pss 51:16; 130:8.

²⁵See Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 98.

²⁶See also, e.g., Pss 51; 60; 74; 80; 85.

The Idioms of Lament

Lament language in the OT possesses a distinct idiom.²⁷ There is a stock language of lament that includes distinct cries, metaphors, expressions, and patterns. I offer here a broad overview of this language and a sampling of examples.

Lament proper. A lament proper, that is the explicit cry of distress, is basically a complaint that grounds a petition.²⁸ This cry often surfaces as a question of “how long?” or “why?” Psalm 13:2-3 is a textbook example, “How long O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long will I set counsel in my soul, sorrow in my heart all day? How long will my enemy rise against me?”²⁹ These questions, or complaints, ground the subsequent petition within the psalm, “Look, answer me Lord my God; enlighten my eyes lest I will sleep in death” (Ps 13:4). The basis for this particular petition is the suffering caused by enemy activity and the contemporaneous divine inactivity. As another example, Jeremiah asks of his suffering, “Why did I go out from the womb to see trouble and grief and my days end in shame?” (Jer 20:18; cf. Job 3:11-12). Additionally, Habakkuk asks, “How long O Lord shall I cry

²⁷I am not here focusing on specific words from the MT or the LXX that have the meaning of “cry,” “lament,” “shout,” etc. There is a place for such lexical investigation, but my focus is much broader. For a brief study of lament vocabulary, see Boyce, *The Cry to God*, 7-24; Markus Ohler, “To Mourn, Weep, Lament and Groan: On the Heterogeneity of the New Testament’s Statements on Lament,” in *Evoking Lament: A Theological Discussion*, ed. Eva Harasta and Brian Brock (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 150-51.

²⁸Miller notes, “All of the language of complaint or lament serves to ground the petition, and, like the more explicit motivation sentences . . . , to encourage, justify, from the angle of the one praying, the intervention of God as a necessary and appropriate step to overcome the suffering and distress” (Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1983], 87).

²⁹For an analysis of Ps 13 as a pattern for understanding individual laments, see Bernd Janowski, “Das verbogene Angesicht Gottes. Psalm 13 als Muster eines Klagelieds des einzelnen,” *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 16 (2001): 25-53.

out for help, and you will not hear? I cry out to you violence, and you do not save” (Hab 1:2). These kinds of questions are aimed at discovering the divine reason and temporal length for the suffering, but the intent is also to have a basis for the petition of deliverance. Miller sums up the sense of these queries nicely:

When one is in distress and trouble, the questions that always come roaring to the forefront of the mind and heart—and here articulated in prayer—are ‘Why is this happening?’ or, to God, ‘Why are you doing this (letting this happen, etc.)?’ and the complaining query, ‘When is this going to end?’ or ‘How long do I have to endure this suffering?’³⁰

Metaphors and expressions. Lament language contains certain metaphors and expressions that relay to the reader the actions of God, the lamenter, and the enemies. The nomenclature here is not limited to lament texts, but it often appears in contexts where there is distress and cries of distress.

The imagery related to God in lament texts is both positive and negative. Positively, two recurring images are that of God as refuge-savior and judge.³¹ Psalm 31:3-4 exemplifies the refuge-savior metaphor, “Turn to me your ear, hurry, deliver me (הַצִּילֵנִי); be a rock of refuge (לְצוּר־מְעוּז) to me, a mountain stronghold in order to save me. For you are my rock and my stronghold, and on account of your name lead me and guide me.”³² There is a need for protection that brings deliverance from enemies who plot and

³⁰Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*, 72.

³¹Basson lists the three most important divine metaphors in the PssLm as refuge-savior, judge, and shield. See Alec Basson, *Divine Metaphors in Selected Hebrew Psalms of Lamentation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 76-85.

³²On the metaphor of rock applied to God, see Samuel Terrien, “The Metaphor of the Rock in Biblical Theology,” in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 157-71.

scheme against the psalmist (Ps 31:5).³³ The image of God as refuge-savior is also present in Psalm 14:6-7, “You put to shame the counsel of the afflicted, but the Lord is his refuge (מִחֲסוֹהוּ). Who will give the salvation (יְשׁוּעָה) of Israel from Zion? When the Lord returns the captivity of his people, Jacob will exalt, Israel will rejoice.”

The refuge-savior metaphor is closely connected to the God as judge image. It is a metaphor that reveals a great deal about divine action. The psalmist states plainly that “God himself is judge” (Ps 50:6). He is quite powerful in judgment, and he exacts violent justice on the wicked as indicated in Psalm 58:11-12, “The righteous will rejoice when they see vengeance, he will wash his feet in the blood of the evil person. Then people will say, ‘Surely there is fruit to the righteous, surely there is a God who judges in the earth.’” The lamenter often asks for God to judge his enemies, but the personal request is for mercy. For example, in Psalm 5:11, the petition against the enemies is, “Declare them guilty (הִשְׁיִימם/κρίνω) O God, let them fall from their devices; in the multitude of their transgressions thrust them out, for they have rebelled against you.” In Psalm 140:13, it is axiomatic that God will judge the enemies, “I know that the Lord will do it, the cause (רִי/κρίσις) of the afflicted, and justice (מִשְׁפָּט/δικαίωσις) for the poor.”³⁴ By contrast, the lamenter asks that God would not act as judge towards him. The prayer in Psalm 143:1-2 is indicative of this request, “Lord hear my prayer, give ear to my supplication, in your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness. And do not enter into judgment (וְאַל־תִּבּוֹא בְּמִשְׁפָּט) with your servant, for no one living will be justified before you.” Clearly then, in lament texts, it is often through the divine judgment of wicked

³³For other instances of God as the refuge-savior in the PssLm, see, e.g., Pss 7:2; 27:1; 57:2.

³⁴See also, Ps 10:18.

enemies that God acts justly and deliverance is secured for the righteous. Yet, his righteousness is also seen in his mercy towards those who plead for it.

There is also some imagery in lament texts that portrays God as acting negatively towards the lamenter. Specifically, lament texts sometimes depict God as hidden and one who rejects his people. Consequently, he is separated from his people.³⁵ The hidden motif is expressed in a number of ways. First, it is conveyed spatially. In Psalm 10:1 the lament is, “Why, Lord, do you stand at a *distance* (בְּרֵחוּק)? Why do you conceal yourself in times of distress?” Similarly, in Psalm 22:2, the lament arises because God is far from the afflicted, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me? *Far* from my salvation are the words of my roaring.” Second, at times a complaint arises about the hiding of God’s face.³⁶ In Psalm 27:9 the petition is, “Do not hide your face from me (אַל-תִּסְתֵּר פָּנֶיךָ מִמֶּנִּי); do not turn away your servant in wrath; you have been my help; do not abandon me and do not forsake me, O God of my salvation.” The hiding of God’s face indicates that he does not help nor hear in the midst of distress. As Balentine puts it, “When God hides his face, or when he does not see, or answer the suppliant, it is tantamount to cutting off all contact with man.”³⁷

Another key expression that indicates God’s negative action is that of “rejection.” When there is no divine deliverance in the face of enemies, sometimes the conclusion is drawn that God has rejected his people in anger. This is evident in the declarative statement of Psalm 44:10, “But you have rejected (זָנַחְתָּ) and you have

³⁵On this point, see Balentine, *The Hidden God*, 56.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 115.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 57.

humiliated us, and you do not go out with our armies.” It is also present interrogatively in Psalm 43:2, “For you are the God of my refuge, why have you rejected me (לָמָּה זָנַחְתָּנִי), why do I walk in the dark in the oppression of the enemy?” The victory of enemies means that God has rejected his people in anger, “O God why have you rejected us forever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?” (Ps 74:1; cf. Ps 60:3; 79:39). The psalmist does not always reveal, or perhaps does not really know, the reason for the divine rejection. In other portions of the OT, the reason is clearly disobedience to the law and idolatry.³⁸ This is typified in the divine warning of Deuteronomy 31:16-17:

Then the Lord said unto Moses, “Behold you are going to lie down with your fathers; and this people will rise and commit fornication with strange gods of the land which they are going there in its midst, and they will forsake me and break my covenant which I made with them. Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them (וַיִּזְנֹבֻם/ἀποστρέψω), and I will hide my face from them, and they will be eaten, many evils and distresses will find them; and they will say in that day, ‘Is it not because our God is not in our midst, that these evils have found us?’”³⁹

Here, in this narrative text, one finds four key ideas that are elsewhere echoed in lament texts: (1) rejection due to God’s anger, (2) the hiding of God’s face, (3) triumph of enemies, and (4) a lament over God not being present. The rejection, at least in this instance, is caused by the people’s disobedience. It is to be expected. Therefore, laments can arise over divine rejection that is both expected and unexpected.

³⁸ For a discussion of what motivates God’s rejection of people in all genres of the Hebrew Bible, see Monica J. Melanchthon, *Rejection by God: The History and Significance of the Rejection Motif in the Hebrew Bible*, Studies in Biblical Literature 22 (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 54-75.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

Various metaphors and expressions signify the action or condition of the lamenter. It is invariably a condition of dependency, and it is conveyed in a few different ways. First, the dependency is often expressed through the use of animal imagery. In Psalm 42:2 an image of a thirsty deer discloses the lamenter's weakness, "As a deer pants for channels of water, so my soul pants for you O God." The dependence of the lamenter is also denoted through the image of slaughtered sheep in Psalm 44:23, "For on account of you we are killed all day long, we have been reckoned as sheep for slaughter." Second, there are also spatial metaphors that indicate the dependent condition of the lamenter. "Pit" (בֹּרַחַ) appears regularly in the PssLm. It is linked with both danger from enemies and separation from God that leaves the lamenter in a weak and helpless state.⁴⁰ For instance, the cry in Psalm 88:5 is "I have been reckoned with those who go down to the pit; I am like a man with no strength." Distance between the lamenter and God causes suffering. What makes the condition even more painful is the recognition that separation from God is supposed to be definitive of God's enemies rather than his people. This is suggested by some of the petitions against enemies. For example, in Psalm 55:24, the psalmist boasts, "But you O God shall cause them to go down to the pit of destruction; men of bloodshed and deceit will not live out half their days; but I will trust in you."⁴¹ Third, there are both straightforward statements and inarticulate sounds that express the person's dependence on divine help. For example, the simple confession in Psalm 40:18a is, "But I am poor and needy." In Psalm 37:7 LXX, the description is quite plain, "I am wretched (ἐταλαιπώρησα)." Additionally, there are certain inarticulate

⁴⁰See, e.g., Pss 28:1; 143:7; Jer 18:20; Lam 3:53; Jonah 2:6.

⁴¹See also, e.g., Pss 7:16; 57:7; Isa 47:11.

sounds coming from the lamenter that suggest dependence. Quite often it is the sound of groaning or sighing. For example, “I have grown weary with my sighing (הִתְנַחֵם/στειναγμῶ), I cause my bed to swim in tears all night; I melt my couch with my tears” (Ps 6:7). The complaint in Psalm 31:11 is, “For my life has been finished with sorrow and my years with sighing (הִתְנַחֵם/στειναγμοῖς); my strength has failed on account of my iniquity, and my bones have wasted away.”⁴² Finally, the description of the lamenter’s body puts into words the dependence on divine help and the helplessness of the condition being experienced. The eyes often receive a great deal of attention as in Psalm 31:10, “Be gracious to me Lord, for distress is to me; my eye wastes away with vexation, my soul and my body.”⁴³ The lament in Job 17:7 is, “And my eye has grown dim from vexation, and all my members are like a shadow.”⁴⁴ Lamentations 2:11a is a poignant example, “My eyes fail with tears, my inward parts burn.”⁴⁵ But there is also mention of bones being broken and inward parts failing as in Psalm 22:15, “I have been poured out like water, and all my bones have been divided; my heart has become like wax; it is melted within me.” The body’s internal condition indicates the overall condition of a person. This is clearly laid out in Job 30:27, “My inward parts are seething, and they are not silent; days of affliction meet me.” Moreover, the description of the body, whether it is the eyes, the inward parts, or something else, is not just about pain and grief. It is about the death that the lamenter is facing.

⁴²See also, e.g., Pss 38:9; 79:11; 102:6; Job 3:24; Isa 35:10.

⁴³See also, e.g., Pss 38:11; 69:4; 88:10; Jer 14:17; 31:16;

⁴⁴See also, e.g., Job 16:16.

⁴⁵See also, e.g., Lam 2:18; 3:48.

When we turn our attention to the metaphors and expressions attached to the enemies in lament language, a few things stand out. First, the enemies are the antithesis of the righteous. They, unlike the righteous, will not stand in the eschatological judgment (Ps 1:5). The righteous will receive God's blessing of deliverance, but the wicked will receive his punishment. This antithesis is well-represented in lament texts such as Psalm 9:6, "You rebuked the nations, you destroyed the evil man, you wiped out their name forever and ever." Second, the enemies' actions are likened to the movements or nature of various animals.⁴⁶ For example, in order to explain the deceit of enemies, Psalm 140:4 evokes the image of a poisonous snake, "They have sharpened their tongue like a snake, the poison of viper is under their lips." The lamenter in Psalm 22 faces ferocious evildoers from all directions. Therefore, the psalmist evokes the image of being encircled by both bulls and ravenous dogs. The one who cries complains, "Many bulls have surrounded me," and "dogs have surrounded me" (Ps 22:13, 17).⁴⁷ The psalmist also likens the violent opponents to lions (Ps 22:22). Next, lament texts indicate that the actions of the enemies are especially violent or warlike. Weapons such as bows and swords appear in the hands of the wicked such as in Psalm 37:14, "The wicked have drawn their sword and tread their bow, in order to cause the poor and helpless to fall, in order to slaughter those upright in the way." Even the tongues of the wicked are likened to swords and bows, "They sharpen their tongue like as sword, they tread their bow with a bitter word" (Ps 64:4). Finally, lamenters also depict the violence of the enemies by focusing on how they use their bodies for wickedness. The enemies are deceitful and

⁴⁶See Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 95.

⁴⁷See, e.g., Pss 22:21; 59:7.

vitriolic in their speech, in a sense lethal. Therefore, Psalm 5:10 likens their throat to a “opened grave” (קִבְרֵי־פְתוּיָה).⁴⁸ Psalm 10:7 describes the mouths of enemies as “full of cursing and deceit.” Clearly, in lament language, enemies are wicked in deed and in word.

Pattern of lament. When a “lament proper” (i.e., an actual cry of distress) appears in the OT, it is often accompanied by a distinct pattern or sequence of events.⁴⁹ There are certain elements that precede and follow the lament proper. The difficulty in speaking about such a pattern is that it is not always fixed. The constituent parts of the pattern can vary in order, be absent entirely, or be assumed, but not explicitly stated. Nevertheless, broadly speaking, the pattern of lament usually includes five parts: (1) prior promise, (2) suffering, (3) lament, (4) deliverance, and (5) praise.⁵⁰

As Oswald Bayer puts it, “Without promise there is no cause for lamentation.”⁵¹ This is a much needed reminder that the starting point for discussing a pattern of lament is God’s *prior promise*. No complaint or petition would ever be uttered unless a preceding utterance from God had been left unmet or flatly contradicted. One could approach the biblical text inductively in order to unearth these prior promises of God that are so often lamented. However, that would prove to be both too taxing and

⁴⁸Cf. Jer 5:16.

⁴⁹It is not uncommon to speak of a pattern or sequence of lament. See, e.g., Walter Brueggemann, “Psalms and the Life of Faith,” in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 3-32.

⁵⁰I have been helped a great deal by Claus Westermann’s discussion about the sequence that accompanies lament. See Claus Westermann, “The Role of the Lament,” 20-38.

⁵¹Oswald Bayer, *Living By Faith: Justification and Sanctification*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 69.

somewhat misleading. To be sure, there are a number of promises in the OT. They include, just to name a few, God's promise to crush the serpent in Genesis 3:15, the promise of descendants and land to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, the promise of God's presence with individuals and the entire nation (see e.g., Josh 1:5; Jer 1:19), the promise of a new covenant with God's people in Jeremiah 31:31-34, or a new heart in Ezekiel 11:19-20, and many others. It is also true that a number of these promises appear again and again in the OT. However, the question that should be asked, especially in light of so many promises, is whether or not all of these divine assurances are part of a larger and more fundamental word from God. Lament texts, especially PssLm, are instructive at this point. Specifically, they point to a fundamental promise of God's righteousness.

Broadly speaking, in the PssLm, the lamenter has an expectation that God will do two things: (1) judge, and (2) save. Both of these expectations are based on a prior promise that is spoken in creation and the history of Israel.⁵² Even before humanity is created there is a divine promise. Specifically, in Genesis 1:31, God judges and then emphatically promises that creation was טוב מאד. Moreover, judgment and deliverance are not separate promises. Instead, one assumes the other. If deliverance is to come, it will invariably include judgment (see Ps 5:9-11). Similarly, if there is going to be an outpouring of God's judgment, there will be merciful deliverance (see Ps 143). When the promises of judgment and deliverance are melded, as they are in the psalms, what emerges is the promise of God's righteousness.⁵³ If God judges and saves in the world,

⁵²See, e.g., Pss 19:2-7; 44:1-9; 50:6; 74:12-17; 104:6-8.

⁵³For a discussion of righteousness language in the OT see, Mark A. Seifrid, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism," in *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 1 of *Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 415-42.

as he promised, then what is revealed is the larger promise of his righteousness.⁵⁴ This is exemplified in Psalm 98. The psalmist praises God for disclosing his righteousness in salvation, “The Lord made known his salvation, before the eyes of the nations he revealed his righteousness” (Ps 98:2).⁵⁵ He also praises God for disclosing his righteousness in judgment, “He has come to judge the earth, he will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in uprightness” (Ps 98:9).

Yet, what does all of this have to do with lament language? Here is where the pattern of lament is helpful. The *prior promise* of God’s righteousness is contradicted by *suffering*. Specifically, it is suffering that stems from both internal and external enemies. There is a need for the enemies to be judged and the helpless to be delivered. But when that is absent or delayed, the very action that God promised, a *lament* arises. Questions about “how long” righteousness will be delayed, or “why” righteousness is being delayed, begin to arise. It is at this point that God brings *deliverance*. Consequently, the lament shifts to praise.⁵⁶

This pattern, though diverse in its order and content, appears in a number of PssLm. I offer here one example. Psalm 14 begins with a complaint about the ungodly sons of men who do no good, “The fool has said in his heart there is no God, they are corrupt, they make abominable the deed, there is no one who does good (Ps 14:1). According to the psalmist, God’s assessment of them is that they “All have turned away,

⁵⁴Ibid., 441.

⁵⁵The righteousness is revealed to creation, in part, by God’s faithfulness to the house of Israel (Ps 98:3). However, creation clearly is the broader context.

⁵⁶For a discussion on the shift in the mood of the psalmist, the shift from lament to praise, see Federico G. Villaneuva, *The ‘Uncertainty of a Hearing: A Study of the Sudden Change of Mood in the Psalms of Lament* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

together they have become worthless, there is no one who does good, not even one” (Ps 14:3). In verses 5-7, the psalmist confidently asserts that these enemies of God will be in dread because of divine judgment and that God’s people will be delivered. The five part pattern of lament, both implied and explicitly stated, is clear. Implicitly, God’s *prior promise* to judge the wicked and deliver his people is, at least momentarily, left unfulfilled. The ungodly cause *suffering* for God’s people, as intimated in referring to the enemies as those who “eat my people as bread” (Ps 14:4). For this reason, a *lament* is elicited and voiced in verses 1-4. *Deliverance* is then brought to mind in verses 5-7 through the promise the God will judge the wicked and save his people. Consequently, the lament turns to praise, “When the Lord returns the captivity of his people, Jacob will rejoice, Israel will be glad” (Ps 14:7).

This kind of pattern is inherent to lament language and Israel’s history. In reflecting upon the nation’s deliverance from Egypt, Westermann notes:

The events making up the deliverance form a sequence which is always encountered (though it is not always the same) wherever a deliverance is related: distress, a cry of distress, a hearkening (promise of deliverance), deliverance, response of the saved (the praise of God).⁵⁷

He cites the credo in Deuteronomy 26:5-11 and Exodus 1-15 as prime examples.

Fundamentally, “The cry to God out of deep anguish accompanies Israel throughout her history.”⁵⁸ In light of this pattern, it is clear that lament language is an expression of faith in the face of uncertainty and experiences contrary to the prior promise. The language

⁵⁷Westermann, “The Role of the Lament,” 20-21.

⁵⁸Ibid., 23.

should not be understood merely as the nomenclature of theodicy or confused with grumbling. Rather, lament is a faith-induced and faith-laden language.

The Function of Lament Language

Lament language has a distinct form, but it also has a distinct function. It is necessary to speak broadly at this point. We can consider the function of lament from two perspectives, the one who uses the language and the one who hears it.

A person who uses lament language in the OT ultimately does so in order to secure divine help. A need is presented to God “so that he may resolve it and further his praise.”⁵⁹ The lament language is of course the means by which the lamenter expresses his or her suffering. But the ultimate function of the language is to receive deliverance from God. There is a call to God because of a “striking need,” and the only way out is by God’s “intervention.”⁶⁰ As we have already seen, the lament proper is a complaint that grounds a petition. That petition is varied in form, but it is consistently a request for deliverance. The one who employs lament language wants relief. Sometimes that relief comes in the form of an explanatory word from God that makes sense of the suffering (e.g., Job). At other times, and more often, relief comes via the removal of enemies who cause distress (e.g., PssLm). However, God’s justification of himself and God’s justification of man cannot be separated. Both are integral to the function of lament language. Relief, or deliverance, comes when God is both just and the justifier of those who trust in his righteousness.

⁵⁹C. C. Broyles, “Psalms of Lament,” in *The IVP Dictionary of the OT: Wisdom, Poetry, and the Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 384.

⁶⁰De Vos, *Klage als Gotteslob*, 1.

When one considers the function of lament language from the perspective of those who hear it, it is clear that it conveys to the reader the depth of the speaker's suffering, need, and expectation. Lament language serves as a literary barometer of an individual's or community's affliction. Never, in the OT, is it merely a rhetorical device. It expresses real pain, in the face of real suffering, and a deep need for deliverance. For the reader who encounters lament language, the *Sitz im Leben* of the text becomes about more than reconstructing the historical situation of the original audience and author.⁶¹ Clearly, the setting is understood as one of suffering, the need for relief, and the expectation that God will do as he promised.

Moreover, if an interpreter of the biblical text is going to speak about symbols and praxis that inform the larger narrative and worldview presented in the biblical text, lament cannot be left out of consideration.⁶² The prayer practices of Israel are just as informative as other symbols and praxis such as temple, land, torah, and worship festivals.⁶³ What Israel prayed about, specifically what they lamented, provides a great deal of information about their view of themselves and the world. Unfortunately, as Claus Westermann made clear long ago, lament is seldom considered in understanding Israel's theology, "The lament has held almost no special significance in the presentation

⁶¹To be sure, suffering is tied to specific historical circumstances that must be taken into consideration. Furthermore, the divine action must come within history.

⁶²On symbols and praxis for identifying a group's worldview, see N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 224-41.

⁶³*Ibid.*

of the theology of the Old Testament.”⁶⁴ Nevertheless, a consideration of lament in the OT reveals a recurring pattern in the life of Israel, both individually and communally. Simply put, suffering at the hands of enemies contradicts a prior promise from God. Consequently, a lament arises for help, and deliverance is experienced. For this reason, the lament turns to praise. The five fold pattern of promise, suffering, lament, deliverance, and praise pervades, both implicitly and explicitly, the use of lament language throughout the OT.

Conclusion

We have not drifted away from Romans in our consideration of lament language in the OT. Instead, we have established the literary background for understanding the presence of the language there. I have attempted to “tune our hearing” so that it can be heard properly in Paul’s letter. Specifically, it is now clear that OT lament language has a distinct form that in turn carries out a distinct function. Broadly speaking, its form consists of three participants, God—lamerter—enemy, whose specific actions are indicated through a distinct idiom. Consequently, the language consistently functions to convey the greatness of the suffering being experienced and simultaneously the greatness of the divine deliverance. Likewise, as I will show, Paul employs the language of lament in order to express the greatness of creation’s suffering and the greatness, or power, of the gospel he preaches.

⁶⁴Westernann, “The Role of the Lament,” 22.

CHAPTER 3

“ALL” ARE ENEMIES UNDER GOD’S WRATH:
THE CATENA OF LAMENT
IN ROMANS 3:10-18

“You are the man.” That is Jonathan’s announcement to David who, upon hearing the parable of a rich man stealing a poor man’s only ewe lamb, demands to know the identity of the enemy (2 Sam 12:1-7).¹ In a similar sense, this observation is Paul’s announcement about the Jew in Romans 3:10-18.² The enemy under God’s wrath is not only the idolatrous Gentile, but also the law-breaking Jew. To paraphrase Paul’s announcement, “You, all of you, are enemies under sin” (Rom 3:9). These words would have quite a chilling effect on those who knew full well how God dealt with his enemies in the OT. It would be a source of disquieting suffering and distress.

The thesis posited in the present chapter is that Paul evokes the *Sitz im Leben* of suffering under God’s wrath by employing lament language in his catena of OT citations. Romans 3:10-18, because it contains so much lament language, is best

¹Amos 1-2 has a similar effect. See Shalom M. Paul, *A Commentary on the Book of Amos* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 76.

²Paul begins this announcement in Rom 1:18 and it continues through 3:20. However, as Seifrid notes, “The opening of the final section represents an echo of what Paul has just declared concerning the human being, which he only now presents in terms of humanity *en masse*” (Mark A. Seifrid, “Unrighteous by Faith: Apostolic Proclamation in Romans 1:18-3:20,” in *The Paradoxes of Paul*, vol. 2 of *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004], 139).

described as a “catena of lament” that identifies Jews and Gentiles as God’s enemies.³ It is not merely a chain of citations meant to convey the universality of sin, although that is part of its function.⁴ Furthermore, it will not do to simply identify this string of citations as a pre-Pauline formula.⁵ Neither of these interpretive options can fully explain how the catena fits into Paul’s argument.⁶ Both fail to appreciate the form and function of the language in its original context. Therefore, I am proposing that Paul knits together a number of verses that, in their original contexts, were complaints to God about deceptive and violent enemies. Those who lamented these enemies requested that God would deal with them in his righteousness.⁷ In Romans 3:19-26, Paul lays out how God has in fact dealt with his enemies in righteousness, albeit paradoxically.

There are three main items to consider in what follows: (1) the form and function of the lament language in its OT context and Romans 3:10-18, (2) how the

³For a study of Rom 3:10-18, see Leander A. Keck, “The Function of Rom 3:10-18: Observations and Suggestions,” in *God’s Christ and His People: Studies in Honour of Nils Alstrup Dahl*, ed. J. Jervell and W. A. Meeks (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977). For a brief critique of Keck’s proposal, see Shiu-Lun Shum, *Paul’s Use of Isaiah in Romans: A Comparative Study of Paul’s Letter to the Romans and the Sibylline and Qumran Sectarian Texts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 181-85. See also, Steve Moyise, “The Catena of Romans 3.10-18,” *Expository Times* 106 (1995): 367-70.

⁴See, e.g., Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 60. For NT commentaries with this view, see, e.g., Paul J. Achtemeier, *Romans* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 59.

⁵See, e.g., Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *Studies in Paul’s Technique and Theology* (London: SPCK, 1974), 192; Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 86.

⁶On the approaches to Rom 3:10-18, see Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 259-60.

⁷Despite the conclusions of some commentators, these citations are directly related to Paul’s purpose. See, e.g., Moo who, when commenting on the citations in Rom 3:13-14, writes, “The inclusion of these verses, which are not directly related to Paul’s purpose, is one of the main arguments for regarding the collection of quotations as pre-Pauline” (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 203).

lament language impacts the interpretation of Romans 3:9-26, and (3) what the lament language in this portion of the letter says about suffering.

The Form and Function of the Language

It should be noted from the outset that the great majority of OT citations in Romans 3:10-18 come from the PssLm.⁸ Moreover, even the texts cited by Paul which are not from the PssLm, Ecclesiastes 7:20 and Isaiah 59:7-8, have a lament-like quality about them. As I discussed in chapter 2, lament language possesses a specific form. It has a particular set of participants and a distinct idiom. In the PssLm that Paul has chosen, the common link between them is that in their original contexts the participants and idiom of lament all are all related to complaints about enemies.⁹ Paul zeroed in on that particular form in his catena of lament. By recognizing this form, one can better grasp its overall function. This requires a consideration of the language's form and function both in the OT context and Romans 3:10-18.

Enemies in Their OT Context and in Romans 3:10-18

Enemies in OT lament language are often portrayed as deceptive, violent, and those who act without a fear of God's presence, power, and retribution. A distinct idiom

⁸Pss 5,10, 14, 36, 53, and 140 are all considered PssLm. See Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 239-42.

⁹I recognize that there is some debate regarding whether Paul is simply using a pre-existing *testomonia*. Even if one were to concur with that hypothesis, it would not change two fundamental points. First, even if Paul borrowed this chain of citations from another source, the citations still reflect lament language. Second, even if Paul utilizes a pre-existing *testomonia*, he would still be familiar with the original contexts of these citations, namely that they come from contexts of lament. For a review of those who see Rom 3:10-18 as a pre-existing *testomonia*, and various hypotheses about its formation, see Hans-Jürgen van der Minde, *Schrift und Tradition bei Paulus: Ihre Bedeutung und Funktion in Römerbrief* (Münich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1976), 54-58.

is used to complain about the actions of these enemies. Various metaphors and expressions help to convey the distress they cause and ground the subsequent petition for deliverance. All of this holds true for the PssLm which Paul cites in his catena of lament. Each citation needs to be considered in the original context and the context of Romans 3:10-18.¹⁰ I will also analyze the lament language found in Ecclesiastes 7:20 and Isaiah 59:7-8.

Ecclesiastes 7:20. It is first necessary to comment on the source of Paul's citation in Romans 3:10. Although there is often an assumption that the opening line of the catena, οὐκ ἔστιν δίκαιος, is from Psalm 13:1 LXX, it is more likely that Paul is citing Ecclesiastes 7:20 LXX.¹¹ The phrase οὐδὲ εἷς, which occurs immediately after οὐκ ἔστιν δίκαιος in Romans 3:10, is found in Psalm 13:1 LXX. However, in Psalm 13:1 LXX, one does not find οὐκ ἔστιν δίκαιος, but rather οὐκ ἔστιν ποιῶν χρηστότητα. Moreover, the phrase οὐκ ἔστιν δίκαιος is not Paul's redaction of Psalm 13:1 LXX. That is an unnecessary explanatory move. Rather, he combines Ecclesiastes 7:20 with Psalm 13:1-3 LXX. As Jewett notes, "The Pauline redaction replaces the motif of 'goodness' in Ps 13 with 'righteous' from Ecclesiastes, a theme that resonates with his previous discussion and with the thesis of Romans."¹²

While Ecclesiastes does not contain the explicit form of lament, it does share a "jaundiced" view of people and an expectation of divine judgment similar to the PssLm

¹⁰I will analyze the OT citations according to the order that they appear in Rom 3:10-18.

¹¹See James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38a (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 150.

¹²Jewett, *Romans*, 259. See also, e.g., Eduard Lohse, *Der Brief an die Römer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 123.

(cf. Ps 14:1-4).¹³ The commonly held view of humanity is clear in Ecclesiastes 7:20, “For there is not a righteous man in the earth, who will do good and not sin.”¹⁴ Clearly, the anthropology of Ecclesiastes accords with Psalm 14 and Romans 3:10-18. However, that is not the only link between Romans 3:10 and Ecclesiastes. Paul also shares Qoheleth’s understanding of God’s judgment. The well-known ending to Qoheleth’s work is Ecclesiastes 12:14, “For God will bring into judgment every work, everything hidden, whether good or bad.” It should be noted that the LXX translator renders עֲלֵמִים as παρεωραμένω. So, according to the LXX version, which Paul is most likely citing, God will bring into judgment everything which has been “overlooked.” This fits nicely with Romans 3:25, where it is explained that the death of Christ is a demonstration of God’s righteousness due to the previously passed over (παρέσιν) sins of humanity. Therefore, both Qoheleth and Paul share a common view of humanity and divine judgment. It is for these two reasons that Paul begins his catena of lament with Ecclesiastes 7:20. Furthermore, the language from Ecclesiastes is lament-like, especially when viewed alongside the PssLm that Paul cites in Romans 3:11-14.

Psalm 14. This psalm is an individual lament that contains a vigorous description of enemies. There is a distinguishable shift from complaint to praise between vv. 1-4 and 5-7. The complaint voiced by the lamenter stems from the suffering caused by ungodly enemies. These enemies and their actions are described in a variety of ways.

¹³Dunn writes, “The somewhat jaundiced view of Qoheleth confirms Paul’s own argument that Jewish national understanding of themselves as the ‘righteous’ is a misunderstanding of covenant privilege and responsibility” (Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 150).

¹⁴The MT and the LXX are quite close in Eccl 7:20. The LXX version reads, “For there is not a righteous man in the earth, who will do good and will not sin.”

First, they are fools who say οὐκ ἔστιν θεός.¹⁵ This is not a literal atheism, but it is at least a “practical” one.¹⁶ In other words, the enemies live in ungodliness to such a degree that it is as if God, who judges the unrighteous, is not present to judge. Second, the enemies are “ruined and detestable in their deeds” (Ps 14:1). Simply put, not one of them does what is morally good. They are unwilling and unable to do what is righteous (i.e., “they are ruined”). Next, from God’s viewpoint as judge of the world, the enemies have πάντες ἐξέκλιναν ἅμα ἠχρεώθησαν (Ps 13:2 LXX).¹⁷ “All” of them have turned away from seeking God, with deeds that are morally bankrupt, and they simply do nothing good (Ps 14:2-3). All of these descriptions are not detached observations on the part of the lamenter or God. Instead, the observable actions of the enemies are grounds for the divine retribution mentioned in Psalm 14:4-5, “Do all those who do iniquity not know, those who eat my people as bread, and they do not call on the Lord? There they are in dread, for God is with the righteous generation.” The ungodly enemies are “overtaken by terror inspired by God.”¹⁸

When the lament shifts to praise in verse 5-7, the focus becomes the divine protection of the righteous against the unrighteous. There is an assurance of God’s

¹⁵I am considering both the MT and the LXX versions of these OT texts. But it does appear that Paul uses the LXX in Rom 3:10-18. See Mark A. Seifrid, *Romans*, in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 616-18; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 149-50.

¹⁶Grogan, *Psalms*, 59.

¹⁷Kraus notes, “Whenever the Psalms speak of the heavenly throne of Yahweh and of the scrutinizing look of God, they always have in mind Yahweh’s office of judgment that is above all worlds. Under this horizon, the circle of those who are judged widens immediately. Yahweh is the judge of the whole world” (Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988], 221-22).

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 223.

presence and deliverance for his people (Ps 14:5-6). The psalmist employs the familiar metaphor of God as “refuge” (מחסה).¹⁹ There is praise for God’s presence, protection, and deliverance. It will surely entail the judgment of the wicked and the deliverance of the righteous (cf. Ps 1).

When it comes to the use of this lament language in Romans, Paul cites part of Psalms 14 (Ps 13 LXX) in Romans 3:11-12 in order to describe the Jew and Gentile who are all under sin (Rom 3:9). He specifically employs the psalmist’s descriptions of the enemies as those not doing anything good, not seeking or understanding God, and collectively turning from God and being morally bankrupt. By citing these portions of the psalm, Paul accomplishes three things. First, he shows that Jews and Gentiles are collectively unaware of divine wrath. Humanity’s sinfulness resides not only in its immoral deeds, but it also stems from a lack of understanding about the divine judgment that awaits them. This is at the heart of what Paul is saying about the Jew throughout Romans 2:1-3:20. For example, in Romans 2:3 Paul asks, “But do you think this, You who judges those who do such things and does the same things, that you will escape the judgment of God (τὸ κρίμα τοῦ θεοῦ)?” Such thinking is actually characteristic of God’s enemies (Ps 14:1-4). Second, he demonstrates that all are guilty of failing to seek God and do what is good. The use of πάντες and ἕως ἑνός mark the universality of the sinfulness on the part of Jew and Gentile. Third, by citing what was originally a complaint about enemies, Paul identifies the Jew and Gentile as divine enemies. Therefore, Paul’s use of the lament language from Psalm 14:1-3 is not only to announce

¹⁹The LXX translator renders מַחֲסֵה as ἐλπίς.

the universal sinfulness of human beings. The use of the language also identifies the Jew and Gentile as enemies under God's wrath. Although Paul does not cite the portion of Psalm 14 that portrays the enemies as saying, "There is no God," that is exactly what they are saying through their conduct.²⁰ Jews and Gentiles are living as if he God were not present to judge them, something so contrary to the very point Paul is making in Romans 1-3. The righteousness of God and the wrath of God have been revealed (Rom 1:16-18; 3:21).

Psalms 5 and 140. Both of these psalms are individual laments that contain complaints about enemies.²¹ For example, in Psalm 5:1-9, the lamenter asks to be heard and guided by God on account of enemies. In Psalm 5:9 the request is, "Lord, guide me in your righteousness (ἐν τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ σου) on account of my enemies (ἐχθρῶν μου), make straight before me your way." The psalmist continues the lament about the enemies in v. 10, "Because there is not truth in their mouth, their heart is foolish; their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they deceive." The metaphorical language to describe the speech of the enemies, namely "open grave," is an "OT idiom for flattery." As Broyles puts it:

Here is painted the graphic picture of someone being enticed by their flattering speech and slipping on their smooth tongue into their grave-like throat. They are likened to a slippery chasm to Sheol. In light of this image, their words are enticing and tempting, not accusatory.²²

²⁰Again, the statement "there is no God" is not an ontological atheism but a practical one. As Miller puts it, "The expression 'there is no God' is not an ontological statement denying the reality of or 'being' of God. It means rather that God is not here or God is not present. As if one were to reach into one's pocketbook and exclaim, 'There is no money,' or 'I have no money'" (Patrick D. Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986], 95).

²¹Anderson, *Out of the Depths*, 239-42.

²²Craig C. Broyles, "Psalms Concerning the Liturgies of Temple Entry," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller, Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 254.

Kraus, on the other hand, believes that the speech described here is not so much flattery as it is slander.²³ Either way, the motive of the enemy's speech is to cause harm. For this reason, the petition of the lamenter against the enemy is "Judge them O God" (Ps 5:11).²⁴ Similarly, in Psalm 140 (Ps 139 LXX), the lamenter asks for deliverance from the "evil" or "unrighteous man" who is deceitful in speech (Ps 140:2). The metaphor used to describe the speech of the enemies is "the poison of asps" (Ps 140:4). Whether the speech of the enemy is flattering or accusatory, the aim and outcome is fatal.²⁵ The rest of Psalm 140 bears this out (see Ps 140:2, 6). Therefore, the request and hope of the lamenter is to be protected and for the enemies to be judged (Ps 140:5, 8). The request for divine judgment against the enemies is clear in Psalm 140:11, "May coals of fire fall upon them, may they be thrown into pits from which they cannot rise."

In Romans 3:13, Paul cites both Psalm 5:10 and 140:4 (Ps 139:4 LXX) in order to describe the Jew and Gentile as enemies under God's wrath. Specifically, all Jews and Gentiles are likened to the enemies lamented in Psalms 5 and 140, against whom the psalmist requests divine judgment because of their deceitful and caustic speech. Paul uses the verbal misconduct and divine punishment of the enemies in the PssLm to identify the *Sitz im Leben* of all humanity. Both Jew and Gentile are under the

²³Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 156.

²⁴In Ps 5:11 the lamenter goes on to request, "Let them fall from their schemes; according to the multitude of their ungodliness push them out, because they have rebelled against you, O Lord."

²⁵Seybold interprets the metaphor to mean that the enemy's speech is full of "Verleumdungen." See Klaus D. Seybold, "Zur Geschichte des Vierten David Psalters," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller, Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 385.

power of sin, as demonstrated from their speech. Therefore, they are enemies who are under God's wrath.

Psalm 10. In Psalm 10 (Ps 9 LXX), an individual lament, there is a two-fold complaint.²⁶ First, the psalmist complains about God's aloofness.²⁷ In typical lament idiom, there is a question, "Why do you stand at a distance Lord? Why do you conceal yourself in times of distress?" (Ps 10:1). God's absence is something that is familiar to the person in need.²⁸ Yet, it "seems very wrong" to the speaker.²⁹ Second, and directly related to God's aloofness, there is a complaint about the evil person's pursuit and oppression of the poor (Ps 10:2). God is seemingly absent while wicked enemies afflict the helpless. There is a lengthy description of the enemies, but it is highlighted by their prideful attitude towards the prospect of God's judgment.³⁰ For example, in Psalm 10:4-6 the portrayal is as follows:

The wicked, according to the haughtiness of his countenance, does not seek him. 'There is no God' is all of his thoughts. They prevail in their ways in all times, your judgments are at a distance from him, he snorts at all his adversaries. He has said in his heart, 'I will not be shaken, forever and ever I will not be in adversity.'

Much like Psalm 14, the enemies in Psalm 10 live out a kind of "practical atheism." The absence of divine judgment only emboldens their wicked activity as indicated in Psalm

²⁶For the identification of Ps 10 as an individual lament, see Anderson, *Out of the Depths*, 239.

²⁷See Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 143.

²⁸Christiane De Vos, *Klage als Gotteslob aus der Tiefe* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 132.

²⁹Samuel E. Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 126.

³⁰Pride is typical of enemies in the PssLm. See Alec Basson, *Divine Metaphors in Selected Hebrews Psalms of Lamentation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 93.

10:11, “He has said in his heart, ‘God has forgotten. He has hidden his face, he will not see forever.’” Even the enemy seems to think God is absent. Consequently, the activity of the enemies consists of “dangerous” words spoken against the helpless and lying in wait for the innocent (Ps 10:7-10).³¹ In Psalm 10:7, the psalmist says of the enemies’ speech, “His mouth is full of cursing (נָקַם) and deceit and oppression, underneath his tongue is injustice and sin.”³² As Kraus describes it, “His mouth is an arsenal full of deadly weapons.”³³ Additionally, Mowinckel argues, “All such words were considered to be powerful and fatal ‘curses,’ and were even used by the ancients in war, or before a battle, in order to strike the enemy in a way just as effective as the use of a sword or spear.”³⁴ The enemies’ speech is caustic, dangerous, and harmful. The psalmist may have in mind both threats and false accusations.³⁵

Due to the wicked activity of the enemies, the psalmist requests that God would act (Ps 10:11-18). Specifically, the petition is that God would rise and destroy the wicked (Ps 10:11, 15). In hearing the lament, God will vindicate the helpless and bring an end to the harm perpetrated by the enemies (Ps 10:18).

³¹Kraus notes, “In v. 7 we hear of the dangerous words of the wicked man” (Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 197).

³²Cf. Ps 59:13.

³³Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 197.

³⁴Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, trans. D. R. AP-Thomas (Oxford: Basil-Blackwell, 1962), 1:199.

³⁵Miller connects the speech of the enemies with the ninth commandment. He notes, “The dangers against which the Ninth Commandment stands as a shield are well illustrated in the Old Testament. The lament or complaint psalms are often petitions to God for help against persons who have endangered the petitioner by false accusations (e.g., Pss 4:2; 5:6, 9-10; 7:12-16; 10:7-9; 27:12)” (Patrick Miller, *The Way of the Lord: Essays in Old Testament Theology*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 39 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004], 14).

In Paul's use of Psalm 10, he concentrates on part of v. 7 where the psalmist describes the enemies as those, "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." This fits well with the preceding citation of Psalm 5:9 in Romans 3:13. In both instances, Paul employs texts that were originally complaints about enemies whose speech is deceitful, deadly, and dangerous. In Romans 3:13, the nouns ἀρά and πικρία, in light of their original context, indicate threatening and angry speech. Neither the psalmist nor Paul offers anything specific about the speech, but it could include threats and false accusations. Moreover, in the original setting of Psalm 10 (Ps 9 LXX), this kind of speech elicited a request for divine punishment upon enemies (Ps 10:15, 18). However, the link between such caustic speech and divine punishment is not only part of the context of Psalm 10 but also Romans 3:10-18. Although Paul does not cite the specific requests for divine punishment that are present in Psalm 10, he does connect unrighteous conduct and God's judgment throughout Romans 1-3. The lament language of the OT influences Paul's thinking about God's wrath against the ungodly and provides an idiom to express that thinking.

Isaiah 59. Although Paul diverges from the use of the PssLm in Romans 3:15-17, he is still employing lament language. In its original context, Isaiah 59:7-8 is part of a lament over the "inability of people to do righteousness."³⁶ The entire chapter contains a distinct lament idiom. First, in verses 1-2, there is an introductory note regarding God's aloofness. Divine absence is due quite simply to the people's sin. Second, in verses 3-8, there is a vivid description of those whom God has treated as his enemies. Particular

³⁶John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 512.

attention is given to the wicked speech and violent acts of the people. A number of lament metaphors appear in verses 5-8 to describe this behavior. The people are likened to poisonous serpents and spiders (Isa 59:5-6). In vv. 7-8, the metaphor shifts to feet and roads. The author demonstrates that the conduct of the people is nothing but a path of violence, destruction, and unrest. Third, Isaiah 59:9-15a contains the people's actual cry of distress over the sin described in vv. 3-8.³⁷ In vv. 9-11 the lament proper is that righteousness and salvation are far away. For example, in Isaiah 59:9a, the cry is, "Therefore, justice is far from us and righteousness does not reach us." In vv. 12-15a, there is a confession that deliverance is distant from the people because of their sin. Finally, Isaiah 59:15b-21 is the answer to the cry of distress. In typical lament fashion, there is shift from distress, to cry of distress, and finally to deliverance. God promises deliverance through a defeat and judgment of the people's enemy. However, rather than political enemies, who appear in other contexts, the enemy here is sin.³⁸ Victory will come as God delivers by means of his righteousness (Isa 59:16-17).

When the original context of Isaiah 59:7-8 is considered, it becomes clear that Paul is employing lament language that coincides with his other citations in Romans 3:10-18. Additionally, the form of the language that he cites from Isaiah is the same as the form he borrows from the PssLm. Specifically, Paul focuses on the complaint about the enemy. All who are under sin, and under God's wrath, are like the enemies described in Isaiah 59:7-8. They tread a path of violence and destruction. Peace with other people is something they do not recognize or practice (Rom 3:15-17). Therefore, God must deal

³⁷Ibid., 518.

³⁸Ibid., 527.

with the violence and destruction. Based on the original context of Isaiah 59, God will deal with the violence and destruction by overcoming sin. In his righteousness, God brings deliverance from the enemy (Isa 59:16-17). Not coincidentally, that is what Paul points to as well in Romans 3:21-26.

Psalm 36. The catena of lament concludes with a citation of Psalm 36:2 (Ps 35:2 LXX). It is a psalm that combines a variety of forms including wisdom, hymn, and lament.³⁹ Some still identify it primarily as an individual lament.⁴⁰ In any case, Psalm 36:2 contains lament language. It is part of a larger complaint about enemies (Ps 36:2-5). The enemies of the lamenter are people who speak, think, and act wickedly (Ps 36:3-5). The psalmist summarizes their action in Psalm 36:2, like Psalms 10 and 14, as practical atheism, “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”⁴¹ Psalm 36:3 provides further explanation about this practical atheism, “For he flatters himself in his own eyes.” In other words, he deceives himself by thinking that there will be no divine punishment for the iniquity committed. There is a perpetual strand of violent acts and speech because there is no fear of divine retribution. In vv. 6-13, there is a shift from complaint to praise and petition. The psalmist praises God for his lovingkindness, faithfulness, protection, and righteousness (Ps 36:6-10). The petition is for the protection of the righteous. This

³⁹Anderson, *Out of the Depths*, 240.

⁴⁰See Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content, & Message*, trans. Ralph D. Gehrke (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980), 55.

⁴¹In the LXX, the translator does not have “transgression” (ὑψῆ) as the subject. Instead, the rendering of ὑψῆ is ὁ παράνομος. The MT personifies “transgression” to be the speaker while the LXX renders it as the “lawless one.”

is followed by a statement about the fall of the wicked (Ps 36:11-13). Once again, the fate of the enemies is judgment and destruction (cf. Pss 1:6 and 36:13).

In Romans 3:18, Paul cites Psalm 36:2 in order to conclude his description of God's enemies in Romans 3:10-18. Just as the psalmist in Psalm 36 concluded that the enemies had no fear of God, Paul draws the same conclusion. The conduct of the Jew and Gentile smacks of a practical atheism, because it denies the divine judgment they deserve for their violent speech and actions. All those under the power of sin, and under God's wrath, rebuff the reality of judgment. They foolishly think God is absent: therefore, there is no divine judgment.

Summary of the Form and Function

The seven OT texts cited by Paul in Romans 3:10-18 are all related in form and function. Each shares the common form of lament language. To be even more specific, in light of their original contexts, all the citations are complaints about enemies who face God's judgment due to their unrighteous conduct. They are neither righteous nor God-fearing people (Rom 3:10, 18). Specifically, they do not seek God, they are ruined morally, and none of them do good (Rom 3:11-12). Instead, they are deceptive and violent in their speech and actions (Rom 3:13-15). They are destructive in the way they live, and they are unfamiliar with peace towards others (Rom 3:16-17). To put it plainly, Jews and Gentiles are God's enemies. Through the use of lament language, Paul identifies all of humanity as opponents who are worthy of divine judgment. Anyone conversant with OT lament would know that divine judgment is the response requested by the afflicted and promised by God. It is at this point that Paul directs his attention

more squarely on the Jew than the Gentile. In a surprising twist, he has turned their complaints about the ungodly against them.

Lament Language and the Interpretation of Romans 3:9-26

What is the exegetical significance of identifying Romans 3:10-18 as a catena of lament?⁴² It is significant for at least four reasons: (1) it demonstrates that the original context of the OT citations match the context of Romans, (2) it gives ὁ νόμος in Romans 3:19 a particular function, (3) it sheds interpretive light on the echo of lament language in Romans 3:20, and (4) it provides an interpretive context for the righteousness language in Romans 3:25-26.

The Contexts Match

Some interpreters of Romans have raised questions about the continuity between the two contexts of the OT citations in Romans 3:10-18. Moyise notes that commentators have long wrestled with whether or not Paul respects the original context of the OT text he cites.⁴³ For example, Moyise points out that Edgar argues, “The verses Paul adduces in Rom. iii to prove the universality of sin do not in their original contexts refer to all men, but in most cases to the wicked, the enemies of Israel.”⁴⁴ Käsemann also questions the continuity between the two contexts. Commenting on Paul’s catena, he

⁴²If there is no exegetical significance to seeing Rom 3:10-18 as a catena of lament, then the observation of the language becomes largely irrelevant. But I believe it is entirely relevant as I will show in this section.

⁴³See Moyise, “The Catena of Romans 3.10-18,” 367-70.

⁴⁴S. L. Edgar, “Respect for Context in Quotations from the Old Testament,” *NTS* 9 (1962): 56, quoted in Moyise, “The Catena of Romans 3.10-18,” 368.

notes, “Taking a sentence out of context, weaving together passages with different thrusts, and inserting an interpretation into the particular citation reflect rabbinic exegesis of the Bible which Jewish Christianity followed.”⁴⁵ Regarding this understanding of Paul’s use of the OT, Moyise rightly concludes, “The common features of these explanations is that Paul can make texts mean whatever he wants; in this case, a universal indictment of humankind.”⁴⁶ However, when one recognizes the pervasive use of lament language in Romans 3:10-18, questions about the continuity between the two contexts are more readily answered. Paul is not simply stitching verses together without regard to the original contexts of the citations. To the contrary, the original contexts illuminate the context in Romans 3:10-18. Specifically, by gathering together a collection of texts that originally complained about enemies and expected divine judgment against them, Paul identifies Jews and Gentiles as divine enemies facing God’s wrath. In this way, the original contexts of the OT citations provide a “second voice” in Romans 3:10-18.⁴⁷ Therefore, the contexts of the citations, both the OT and Romans 3, match.

The Law and Paul’s Catena of Lament

The function of ὁ νόμος, like the preceding catena of lament, is to complain about, or make the accusation, that the Jew is a divine enemy and thereby accountable with the whole world to God. The citations in Romans 3:10-18 were originally complaints about ungodly enemies, and Paul is using them in a similar way. A number of

⁴⁵Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 86. See also, Moyise, “The Catena of Romans 3.10-18,” 368.

⁴⁶Moyise, “The Catena of Romans 3.10-18,” 370.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

things bear this out. First, the antecedent of ὁ νόμος in Romans 3:19 is clearly the catena of lament in Romans 3:10-18.⁴⁸ It is a reference not merely to the Mosaic Law, but more specifically to the language of lament culled from Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, and the PssLm. Paul's use of ὁ νόμος is flexible enough to allow for a reference to the citations in the catena and not just the Mosaic law itself.⁴⁹ The law accuses of sin and guilt in the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. Moreover, Paul uses lament language to point more vividly to the substance and consequence of that action, namely that one is an enemy of God under his wrath. The issue is not only guilt before God, but, in the light of the lament language, it is more exactly that the Jew is an enemy of God like the wicked enemies lamented in the OT and deserving of judgment.

Second, that Paul intends the catena of lament primarily for the Jew is evident from the full statement in Romans 3:19, "But we know that as much as the law says it speaks to those who are in the law, in order that every mouth might be shut and all the world might become guilty before God." It is the phrase τοῖς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ that points specifically to the Jew. While there is some debate as to whether Paul sees Gentiles as "in the law" also, the deciding factor must be the entire context of Romans 2:1-3:18.⁵⁰ In

⁴⁸See C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 1:195; Jewett, *Romans*, 264; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 168; Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*, trans. Scott J. Hafemann (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1994), 55.

⁴⁹See William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895), 80.

⁵⁰Gathercole notes, "It is difficult to expand the concept of those in the Law to the whole world, either because every person is subject to judgment according to Torah or because Paul envisages even gentile Christians as familiar with the Torah through their synagogue or house-church experience" (Simon J. Gathercole, *Where is Boasting?: Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1-5* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 213).

that particular section of the letter, Paul's aim is to indict the Jew.⁵¹ The Jew, like the Gentile, is under God's wrath just as the "law" says. Again, Paul is not only referring to the accusations of the Mosaic Law, but also the complaints in the catena of lament. Jews who are ἐν τῷ νόμῳ (i.e., the Mosaic Law), and fail to meet its demands, are thereby enemies of God and deserving of wrath just as the ὁ νόμος (i.e., the catena of lament) says.

Third, the purpose of the catena of lament (i.e., ὁ νόμος) is to close the mouths of the enemies and make them, along with the whole world, guilty before God. The silencing of the στόμα should be understood in light of Romans 3:13-14, where the mouths of the enemies are described as deceitfully violent and poisonous. Those same mouths are closed, because they belong to the enemies of God. Shutting the mouths of enemies is the very hope found in various psalms. For example, Psalm 63:12 reads, "And the king will rejoice in God; everyone who swears by him will glory, for the mouths of those who speak lies will be shut."⁵² Once again, through this allusion, Paul identifies the Jew as an enemy under God's wrath. The Jew, like the whole world, is an enemy who is ὑπόδικος, or liable for punishment, to God.⁵³

⁵¹Ibid., 213-14.

⁵²See Seifrid, *Romans*, 618.

⁵³Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Fredrick William Danker [BDAG], 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. "ὑπόδικος."

Psalm 143 and Paul's Catena of Lament

“Because from the works of the law no flesh will be justified before him, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). This causal clause in Romans 3:20 alludes to the individual lament in Psalm 143:2 (Ps 142:2 LXX), “And do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no living thing will be justified before you.”⁵⁴ The allusion activates “Israel’s canonical memory.”⁵⁵ But of course, Paul has already “activated,” and in fact directed, that memory with the lament language in Romans 3:10-18. Already the reader’s mind has been bent towards lament and its specific emphases, particularly enemies under God’s wrath. Moreover, with the allusion to Psalm 143:2, Paul focuses on an aspect of lament language that is the natural outgrowth of the announcement in Romans 3:10-18, namely a plea for mercy.⁵⁶

In the original context of Psalm 143, the plea for mercy is not predicated solely on the activity of enemies. Enemies do play a large part in the lamenter’s requests, but those requests are themselves preceded by an acknowledgment from the speaker that no one will be justified before God (Ps 143:2-3). There is an acknowledgment of sin. Consequently, there is also a plea for mercy, “And do not enter into judgment with your servant.”

⁵⁴By “allusion,” I mean that Paul consciously evokes Ps 143:2. If one thinks of a “spectrum of intertextual reference,” then allusion, at least from my perspective, is closer to a quotation than an echo. Nevertheless, an echo can also be explicitly intended by an author rather than simply discerned by the reader. See the discussion in Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 23.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁶On Paul’s use of Ps 143, see also Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 50-60.

Paul's use of Psalm 143 is primarily an allusion to the psalmist's plea for mercy that he has contextualized for his own purposes. The plea is predicated on the activity of enemies. In the context of Romans 3:9-20, however, the enemies are the ones who are in fact making the plea rather than simply causing it.⁵⁷ Moreover, Paul adds to the allusion the phrase ἐξ ἔργων νόμου and changes πᾶς ζῶν, found in Psalm 142:2 LXX, to πᾶσα σὰρξ.⁵⁸ Both changes comport with the overall argument Paul is making. The Jew, like the Gentile, is an enemy of God who cannot be justified by doing the "works of the law."⁵⁹ Simply put, "no flesh," can be justified by doing the law. If the Jew is an enemy that cannot be justified by doing the law, then no flesh can be justified. The Jew is a "representative of the pious person" who, despite the possession of the law, is an enemy nonetheless.⁶⁰ The law simply brings knowledge of sin that in turn warrants punishment for the enemies of God, enemies such as those described in Romans 3:10-18.

⁵⁷As Harrisville puts it, "In the lament which Paul handles in such sovereign fashion, the usual progression from complaint to petition is reversed, and the latter constructed in such manner as to suggest that the petitioner is in an agony from which he cannot get free. In other words, the complainer and his enemies belong to the same community" (Roy A. Harrisville, *Romans*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980], 56).

⁵⁸On this point, see Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 51.

⁵⁹I will not enter here the well-known debate on the interpretation of "works of the law." Suffice it to say, the context of Rom 1-3, especially the lack of morally responsible works in Rom 3:10-18, seems to mitigate against understanding the phrase as "boundary markers." Paul is not dealing with a social distinction between Jews and Gentiles but a morally repugnant humanity in which Jews are just as much under God's wrath as Gentiles. They are under that wrath not merely because of their national pride. Rather, they are under the wrath due to their reprehensive speech, thoughts, and deeds. On the interpretation of "works of the law," and other related issues, see, e.g., James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 354-66; idem, "Noch einmal Works of the Law: The Dialogue Continues," in *The New Perspective on Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 413-28; Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of the Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 104-12, 179-204; Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The 'Lutheran' Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 297-340.

⁶⁰On the description of the Jew as "a representative of the pious person," see Käsemann, *A Commentary on Romans*, 87.

Righteousness and Paul's Catena of Lament

When Romans 3:25-26 is read against the backdrop of the catena of lament, one can see more clearly that the righteousness disclosed in the death of Christ is quite paradoxical. God's righteousness revealed in Christ's death is an "expected surprise" witnessed by the law and the prophets (Rom 3:21). It is a paradox that works on a few different levels.

God's judgment of the enemies described in Romans 3:10-18 is expected, especially in light of the PssLm that Paul cites. As I noted above, in the full contexts of those passages, there is a hope, even a request, that God would judge the ungodly enemies (Pss 5:11; 36:11-13).⁶¹ Divine retribution must be the end for those so vile in their speech and violent in their steps. The actions of the ungodly cannot be left unpunished. This common expectation of OT lament is reflected in the final phrase of Romans 3:25, διὰ τὴν πάρεσιν τῶν προγεγονότων ἁμαρτημάτων. The noun πάρεσις points to a postponement of divine judgment against enemies. In other words, from Paul's perspective, God had not yet brought the fullness of his divine wrath to bear on the sins committed by those described in Romans 3:10-18. His righteousness, particularly in the judgment of sinners, still needed to be revealed. Therefore, in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God's righteous judgment for his enemies is revealed.

While the judgment is expected, the means of carrying that judgment out and its saving outcome is a surprise. Here is where the paradox really lies. God simultaneously judges his enemies, thus revealing his righteousness, and he justifies

⁶¹See BDAG, s.v. "πάρεσις." Cf. the use of παράημι in Sir 23:2; Joseph. Ant 15:48. See also Jewett, *Romans*, 289-90.

them, thus revealing his righteousness. Paul can describe God as both δίκαιον καὶ δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ. Paradoxically, God's righteousness is revealed in the judgment and justification of his enemies. Therefore, the revelation of divine righteousness, expected and hoped for in OT lament, is paradoxically given in Jesus Christ (cf. Ps 98:2; Rom 1:16-17). For Paul, the expectation of punishment and the cry for mercy is answered in the cross for everyone who believes. Furthermore, by believing in the crucified and risen Christ, God's enemies, described so vividly in Romans 3:10-18, confess his righteousness. They confess his righteousness in judging them and justifying them in Christ. God righteousness is paradoxically revealed in the way he deals with his enemies. As Seifrid so nicely puts it,

In faith, one takes the side of God in his claim against oneself, giving God justice. At the same time, one takes hold of God's gift in Christ, whom he has 'put forward' as an atonement and in whom he has taken the side of the sinner.⁶²

Suffering and Paul's Catena of Lament

Once again, the overarching thesis of this project is that Paul's use of lament language in Romans discloses simultaneously the intensity of creation's suffering and the power of the gospel. The lament language in Romans 3:10-18, coupled with its impact on 3:19-26, certainly bears this out. Having examined these portions of the letter, some conclusions can be drawn about Paul's understanding of suffering in creation and how God deals with it.

⁶²Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 66.

To begin, it is now clear that the discussion of suffering in Romans should not be confined to the distress experienced by the justified which Paul discusses later in the letter (e.g., Rom 5:1-5; 8:31-39). Paul's announcement of God's wrath being revealed from heaven is not only an indictment against humanity, but also a source of its distress. This aspect of Romans 1-3 seems to be missing from many analyses.⁶³ In the rush to decipher Paul's argumentation, there is a lack of recognition that a creation living under the wrath of God is substantial cause for concern. It is a real source of distress and suffering. The absence of words such as *πάσχω* is not an indication that Paul is not discussing suffering in Romans 1-3. To the contrary, the concentrated use of lament language in Romans 3:10-18 is strong evidence that suffering is at the forefront of his mind.

Part of the problem in recognizing suffering as a major theme in Romans 1-3 is the disconnection between a legal indictment and pain. Paul's announcement of God's wrath is not just a statement of the facts. If that were the apostle's intention, he could have omitted such statements as, "Tribulation (*θλίψις*) and distress (*στενοχωρία*) is upon every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and of the Greek" (Rom 2:9). Moreover, he could have bypassed the catena of lament. Instead, he employs the most highly charged language of suffering, lament, and compacts it powerfully in a chain of citations that identify even the Jew as an enemy under God's wrath.

⁶³There are exceptions. See, e.g., J. Christian Beker, *Suffering & Hope: The Biblical Vision and the Human Predicament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 77-82; Erwin Ochsmeier, *Mal, souffrance et justice de Dieu selon Romains 1-3: Etude exegetique et theologique* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

To be under God's wrath is not merely to be charged with guilt. Guilt itself is a sentence that is experienced with a profundity of pain. That is why the lamenters in the PssLm can speak so vividly about the judgment they want their enemies to face. For example, the request in Psalm 10:15 is, "Break the arm of the evil man." The punishment is real and tangible. However, that is the very thing that makes Paul's announcement of universal guilt so troubling, especially to the Jew who is in view in Romans 3:9-20. Because God punishes his enemies, and the Jew is an enemy like the Gentile, the distress for all creation is intense. The Jew especially knew that God would reveal his righteousness by judging iniquity. Their scriptures promised as much, particularly passages filled with lament (e.g., Ps 9:9). Despite all the diversity of Judaism in Paul's day, the second temple literature is consistent in its use of lament language that focuses particularly on God's judgment of the wicked (e.g., 1QH 6:15-16). But for Paul, the wicked person deserving of God's judgment is the Jew and the Gentile. Both are guilty and under God's wrath. God's wrath is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Rom 1:18). All are enemies, and this is most troubling.

In the face of such suffering, God deals with humanity in his righteousness. If his righteousness were understood merely as retribution for guilt, then the distress would not be alleviated. However, God's righteousness is revealed powerfully and paradoxically in the death of Jesus the Christ. The expected surprise of God's revealed righteousness is that he judges the ungodly as he promised, but he justifies them as well. By judging sin in the body of Christ, God is both just and the justifier of the one who

believes in Jesus. God deals with his enemies by judging them and justifying them in Christ. In this way, his enemies can say he is righteous in judgment and mercy.

CHAPTER 4
THE ENEMY THAT MAKES ME LAMENT:
LAMENT LANGUAGE IN
ROMANS 7:7-25

Although questions always swirl around the interpretation of Romans 7:7-25, one thing is certain—the $\epsilon\gamma\omega$ is a troubled soul. The internal struggle described in these verses is almost palatable. If this particular section of Romans does not speak of suffering and distress, then I suppose none of the letter does. Paul reflects on an indwelling enemy so powerful and persistent that it makes the $\epsilon\gamma\omega$ lament, “O wretched man that I am; who will deliver me from the body of this death” (Rom 7:24). The portrayal of such a hellish experience requires a particular language; therefore, Paul employs the language of lament.¹

The thesis of the present chapter is that Paul employs OT lament language in order to describe the depth of the struggle caused by sin’s use of the law within the $\epsilon\gamma\omega$, thereby accentuating the power of the gospel. He specifically utilizes three features of lament idiom: (1) the “I-Lament,” (2) the “them-lament,” and the (3) pattern of lament.

¹I should note from the outset that it is not entirely uncommon for interpreters to refer to some of the language in Rom 7 as lament. However, it does not appear that they mean much by it. Even those who would give some credence to OT lament language as they background to the passage do not really develop their lines of thought as far as they could. See, e.g., Peter Stuhlmacher, “Klage und Dank: Exegetische und Liurgische Überlegungen zu Römer 7, ” in *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 16 (2001): 55-72. Additionally, some locate the background of Paul’s lament language in Hellenistic literature rather than the OT. See, e.g., Edgar W. Smith, “The Form and Religious Background of Romans VII 24-25a,” *Novum Testamentum* 13 (1971): 127-35.

The recognition of the lament language in this portion of Romans is important for at least three reasons. First, it better accounts for the passage's conceptual background than the current consensus that Paul is speaking merely rhetorically. Second, it clarifies the link between Romans 7:7-25 and 8:1-4. As I will show, Romans 8:1-4 is the full answer to the cry of distress in Romans 7:24. Third, the lament language points to an internal distress that must be accounted for in the larger discussion regarding suffering in Romans. The following analysis consists of four parts. First, I will briefly discuss the exegetical difficulties that consistently beset the interpreter of Romans 7. Next, I will analyze the form and function of the lament language in Romans 7:7-25. I will then consider how that language impacts the interpretive connection between Romans 7:7-25 and 8:1-4. Finally, I will draw some conclusions about suffering in Romans in light of my analysis of the lament language in Romans 7:7-25.

Exegetical Difficulties in Romans 7:7-25

The interpretive history of Romans 7:7-25 is extensive and well-documented.²

The fundamental exegetical difficulties have to do with identity and time. Who is the ἐγώ? From what temporal perspective does the ἐγώ speak? The identity question is usually answered in one of four ways. Either Paul is speaking from an autobiographical,

²See, e.g., Hermann Lichtenberger, *Das Ich Adams und das Ich der Menschheit: Studien zum Menschenbild in Römer 7* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 13-105; Michael Paul Middendorf, *The "I" in the Storm: A Study of Romans 7* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1997), 15-51. For various approaches, see, e.g., Günther Bornkamm, *Studien zum Neuen Testament* (München: Kaiser Verlag, 1985), 178-96; Hans Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 228-35; Brian Dodd, *Paul's Paradigmatic 'I': Personal Example as Literary Strategy* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 221-34; Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 258-84.

Adamic, Israel, or existential “direction.”³ Additionally, the question about time is intertwined with the identity of the ἐγώ. As one observer puts it, “Traditional interpretation has generally settled on two possibilities. Either Paul speaks of his former life in Judaism, or he speaks of his present life as a Christian.”⁴ While I do not intend to delve into the strengths and weaknesses of each position, it is necessary to make clear from the outset how I understand the identity and temporal perspective of the ἐγώ.

In many ways, I am in agreement with the recent interpretation of Mark A. Seifrid who proposes that Romans 7:7-25 should be read not as “biography” or “autobiography,” but “theo-biography.”⁵ He explains, “The apostle sets before us a portrait of ourselves that is painted by God’s law and interpreted rightly only in the light of the Gospel.”⁶ In this interpretation, “Paul speaks neither of his preconversion life, nor his Christian experience, but more fundamentally and simply of the human being confronted with the Law.”⁷ Therefore, Romans 7:7-25 is every person’s, including Paul’s, encounter with the Law.

Furthermore, in this encounter with the law, the ἐγώ sounds like a lamenter akin to those heard in the OT. This is not a coincidence. Under the influence of OT lament language, Paul describes every person’s encounter with God’s law and sin in

³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 425-27.

⁴Mark A. Seifrid, “Romans 7: The Voice of the Law, the Cry of Lament, and the Shout of Thanksgiving,” in *Perspectives on Our Struggle with Sin: Three Views of Romans 7* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, forthcoming), 1.

⁵Ibid., 5.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

terms of something that leads to a cry. Sin's use of the divine law, within the ἐγώ, inevitably causes distress, which in turn elicits a cry of distress. The cry for deliverance is answered in the gospel. Consequently, the lament turns to praise. Again, the ἐγώ is not merely a description of the pre- or post-Christian Paul. It is an account of the individual distressed by sin's use of the law to the point of crying. What inevitably arises is a lament. However, for the ἐγώ, who finds deliverance in Jesus Christ, the lament always turns from lament to praise.

The Form and Function of the Language

The form and function of the lament language in Romans 7:7-25 is patterned after the language found in the OT. Specifically, with respect to form, Romans 7:7-25 follows OT lament language in three ways: (1) the use of the "I-Lament," (2) the use of the "them-lament," and (3) the use of the pattern of lament. The fundamental elements of a lament proper are present here, namely complaint and petition. There is a complaint about the internal enemy of sin (Rom 7:7-23) and a petition for deliverance (Rom 7:24). Regarding function, the lament language conveys the depth of the distress and suffering caused by an enemy just like its OT antecedents. Furthermore, reading the language in Romans 7:7-25 in light of OT lament is preferable to current attempts to locate the form of Paul's thought merely in Greek rhetoric.⁸

⁸See, e.g., Craig S. Keener, *Romans*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 85-97; Stowers, *Rereading Romans*, 258-84.

The “I-Lament” and “Them-Lament”

As I discussed in chapter 2, there are three participants in lament language: (1) “I,” or the lamenter, (2) “them,” or the enemy, and (3) “you,” or God. In Romans 7:7-25, all three participants are present, but it is the “I” and “them” that occupies almost all of the space.⁹ The identity of the “I” is any individual confronted with the law, and the identity of “them” is the enemy of sin. The condition of the lamenter and the actions of the enemy go hand in hand. Therefore, they should be analyzed together. When considering the ἐγώ and ἁμαρτία in this section of the letter, three fundamental similarities with OT lament language emerge.

First, Paul portrays sin as enemy that is maliciously opportunistic, deceptive, and deadly just like enemies in OT lament. In Romans 7:11 he writes, “For sin having seized an opportunity through the commandment, deceived (ἐξηπάτησεν) me and through it killed (ἀπέκτειλεν) me.” Sin is the enemy that seizes and deceives the ἐγώ through the law and uses the law to kill the ἐγώ. This matches the description of enemies lamented in the OT. For example, in Psalm 10:8-10 (9:21-23 LXX), the lamenter says of the opportunistic enemy:

He sits in the ambush of the enclosures; in the hiding places he kills the innocent; his eyes lurk for the hapless. He lies in wait in the hiding place like a lion in its lair; he lies in wait to seize the innocent; he seizes the afflicted when he draws them into his net. And he crouches, he bows down, and the hapless fall by his mighty ones.¹⁰

⁹In Rom 7:7-25, the 1st person pronoun ἐγώ occurs either in the nominative, dative, or accusative cases 26 times.

¹⁰See also, e.g., Pss 140:9; 141:4 LXX; Lam 4:19.

The deceptiveness of the enemy is bemoaned in texts such as Psalm 36:4-5 (Ps 35:4-5 LXX), “The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit, he has ceased to be wise and to do good. He plans iniquity on his bed; he stations himself on a road that is not good, he does not despise evil.” The ultimate aim of the ambush and deception is death, as seen in Psalm 10:8 (Ps 9:29 LXX), “He sits in ambush in the villages, in hiding places he kills the innocent, his eyes lurk for the hapless.” Additionally, in Genesis 3:13 LXX, the woman’s complaint to God is that the serpent, her enemy, deceived her, “And the Lord God said to the woman, ‘Why did you do this?’ And the woman said, ‘The serpent deceived (ἠπάτησέν) me, and I ate.”¹¹ While his discussion of sin in Romans 7:7-25 reflects a broader literary background than just the fall in the garden, “Paul clearly wishes to press the paradox: it was the command of God which sin used to bring death into its dominant role on the stage of human life.”¹² Therefore, sin, like enemies described in OT lament language, is maliciously opportunistic through its deceptive use of the law and the aim is to kill the ἐγώ.

Second, while he does not cite a specific OT text, Paul echoes the OT lament idiom that portrays sin as an “internal” enemy that afflicts the body. Paul’s complaint about the internal struggle with sin, which causes suffering in the body, has its conceptual background in the lament language of the OT. For example, the complaint in Psalm 37:4-5 LXX (Ps 38 MT), an individual lament, is,

¹¹See the discussion of the serpent’s deceit of the woman and its relationship to Rom 7:11 in C.E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 1:352-53.

¹²See James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38 (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 385.

There is no healing in my flesh (ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου) from before your wrath, there is no peace in my bones (ὀστέοις μου) from the face of my sins (ἁμαρτιῶν μου). Because my lawless deeds (αἱ ἀνομίαί μου) have risen above my head, like a heavy load that has weighed down upon me.

In this psalm, sin and God's wrath cause suffering "inside" the lamenter.¹³ Specifically, the speaker refers to the struggle ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου and ὀστέοις μου. In other words, sin's presence in the lamenter, and the divine wrath that ensues, causes distress in the body (σῶμα). It is like a sickness within the body. As Moore puts it, "Psalm 38 is the song of a person mentally, physically, and emotionally exhausted."¹⁴ Similarly, in Psalm 31:11 MT, an individual lament, part of the complaint is, "For my life has ended in grief, and my years in sighing; my strength has stumbled on account of my iniquity, and my bones have wasted away." The internal enemy of sin is implicit in Psalm 50:11-12 LXX, "Turn your face from my sins and wipe out my lawless deeds. Create in me (ἐν ἐμοί) a clean heart O God, and renew a steadfast spirit in my inward parts (ἐγκάτοις μου)." The request for a clean heart "within" implies the presence of internal sin. Of course, there are PssLm that speak of literal enemies as taking a toll on the body. For example, the request in Psalm 6:3 LXX is, "Have mercy on me Lord, because I am weak; heal me Lord, because my bones have been disturbed."¹⁵ Whether the enemy is sin or a literal person, what occurs within the lamenter is fatal. In Romans 7:7-25, the same complaints about an enemy causing internal, even fatal, distress are present. Similar to the PssLm, the

¹³For analysis of Ps 38 MT, see Christiane De Vos, *Klage als Gotteslob aus der Tiefe* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 39-56.

¹⁴R. Kelvin Moore, *The Psalms of Lamentation and the Enigma of Suffering*, Mellen Biblical Press Series, vol. 50 (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1996), 35.

¹⁵See also Pss 22:15; 27:2; 102.

sphere of the suffering and distress caused by sin is clearly the body or flesh. The enemy of sin causes distress inside of the ἐγώ as indicated in Romans 7:8, “But sin having taken the opportunity through the commandment produced *in me* (ἐν ἐμοὶ) every desire; for apart from the law sin is dead” (cf. Ps 37:4-5 LXX). The phrase ἡ οἰκοῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἁμαρτία, in Romans 7:17 and 20, also points to an internal location of the enemy. Moreover, also in accordance with OT lament language, Paul describes the impact of sin’s presence and work as producing death “in” the ἐγώ (Rom 7:11, 13). Sin fatally afflicts the ἐγώ in the body, or “members” (ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου, Rom 7:23). The internal experience of suffering is so great that the body of the ἐγώ is described as a “body of death” (Rom 7:24; cf. Ps 31:11 MT).

Third, Paul also echoes OT lament language by describing the enemy as overpowering. There are a number of phrases in Romans 7:7-25 that indicate sin subdues the weaker ἐγώ. The expressions are influenced by the lament language used to describe enemies in the OT. For instance, in Romans 7:14, Paul writes, “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am fleshly having been sold under sin.” Both the participle πεπραμένος and the prepositional phrase ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν convey a sense of being overpowered or dominated by a more powerful enemy (cf. Rom 3:9).¹⁶ While πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν itself is unique to Paul, the conception of being overpowered by an enemy is

¹⁶The participial phrase πεπραμένος is often cited by proponents of a pre-Christian reading of the text who argue that this is a most unlikely description of a believer. See, e.g., the discussion in Moo, *Romans*, 445-47. However, as I have already argued, Paul is not speaking solely from the perspective of a believer or non-believer but simply as one whose distress stems from sin’s use of the law. Additionally, it is not uncommon for Paul to speak of the believer’s ongoing struggle against sin by using such drastic language. See, e.g., Rom 8:10; 1 Cor 15:56-57; Gal 5:17.

common in OT lament language.¹⁷ Furthermore, in light of the clear use of lament language throughout Romans 7:7-25, the meaning of Paul’s metaphor is not exhausted by the slave practices familiar to the Christians in Rome. Instead, one can also look to enemies in the OT whose actions included enslavement. This kind of action by enemies elicited a lament as indicated in Exodus 3:7, “Then the Lord said, ‘I have surely seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their cry from before their taskmasters, for I have known their pain’” (Exod 3:7). But in the case of Romans 7:14, sin, rather than some political force, is the enemy who overpowers the ἐγώ and enslaves it. This understanding of enslavement to sin was not entirely foreign to Paul’s contemporaries. 11Q5 9:10 contains the phrase, “Because of my sins, and my iniquities have sold me to Sheol.”¹⁸ Romans 7:23 also reflects an enemy that is overpowering, “But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind and taking me captive by the law of sin which is in my members.” The conceptions inherent to the two participles ἀντιστρατευόμενον and αἰχμαλωτίζοντά, used to describe sin’s activity, echo OT lament. The verb ἀντιστρατεύομαι conveys the idea of being engaged in war against something.¹⁹ Specifically, “another law” is “waging war” against the “law of the mind.”

¹⁷Jewett notes, “An extensive TLG search indicates that the expression ‘sold under sin’ (πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τῆν ἁμαρτίαν) appears here for the first time in Greek literature, and thereafter is entirely restricted to patristic writers dependent on this verse” (Robert Jewett, *Romans* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007], 461).

¹⁸On this point, see Stuhlmacher, “Klage und Dank,” 62.

¹⁹The verb appears in Joseph., *Ant.* 2:240 in a discussion of the Ethiopians’ military conquest of the Egyptians. The verbal cognate στρατεύω is employed with some kind of militaristic association in 1 Esd 4:6; 2 Macc 15:7; 4 Macc 9:24; 18:5; Isa 29:7 LXX; Luke 3:14; 1 Cor 9:7; 2 Cor 10:3; 1 Tim 1:18; 2 Tim 2:4; Jas 4:1. Quite similar to the use of ἀντιστρατεύομαι in Rom 7:23 is the use of στρατεύω in 1 Pet 2:11, “Beloved, I urge you as strangers and sojourners to abstain from fleshly desires which war (στρατεύονται) against your soul.”

The latter expression is not entirely synonymous with the Mosaic Law, but it is a way of referring to the inner self's reflection on and desire for obedience to the law.²⁰ The internal conflict caused by sin's use of the law is nothing short of warlike. Furthermore, sin takes the ἐγώ as a prisoner of this war, an idea intimated through the use of αἰχμαλωτίζω.²¹

The complaint in Romans 7:23 about sin's overpowering aggression echoes the distress of some OT lamenters, namely the lament language that links sin with war and captivity. Conceptual dependence, and not merely literary resemblance, is reflected in Paul's language. Once again, he is not echoing one particular text, but rather an entire genre. For example, in Psalm 39:13 LXX, the speaker cries, "For evils (κακά) surrounded me, of which there is not number, my transgressions (αἱ ἀνομίαι) seized (κατέλαβόν) me, and I am not able to see; they have multiplied more than the hairs of my head, and my heart failed."²² In this particular psalm, sin is personified as a warlike enemy who seizes, or captures, the lamenter just as in Romans 7:23. Furthermore, it should be noted that there is a link throughout Israel's history between sin and captivity at the hands of foreign enemies. The connection is reflected in a number of lament texts such as the cry of

²⁰Seifrid notes, "The mind, which Paul has already pictured as 'the inward self,' appears as a sort of mirror of the Law of God" (Seifrid, "Romans 7," 46).

²¹Cf. the use of αἰχμαλωτίζω in the LXX of 1 Kgs 8:46; 2 Kgs 24:14; 2 Chr 28:8, 17; 30:9; 1 Macc 1:32; 5:13; 8:10; 10:33; 15:40; Ps 105:46; Lam 1:1.

²²In the fuller context of Ps 40 (Ps 39 LXX), sin is not the only enemy. There is also the threat of literal physical enemies. See Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 2003), 341.

²²In the fuller context of Ps 40 (Ps 39 LXX), sin is not the only enemy. There is also the threat of literal physical enemies. See Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 2003), 341.

Lamentations 1:5, “Her adversaries have become her masters, her enemies prosper, for the Lord has caused grief because of the multitude of her transgressions; her children have gone into captivity (יָצַף/αἰχμαλωσία) before the enemy.”²³ Similarly, the lament language in Ezra 9:7 LXX connects sin with captivity throughout Israel’s history:

From the day of our fathers we are in great error until this day and on account of iniquities we have been handed over, and our kings, and our sons into the hand of kings of the nations in sword, and in captivity (αἰχμαλωσία), and in plunder and in our open shame, as it is this day.

Paul echoes this kind of link between captivity and sin minus the political opponents. Sin alone is the enemy that wars against and captures the ἐγώ.

Pattern of Lament

Romans 7:7-25 also reflects OT lament language through its pattern of lament, or deliverance. As I noted in chapter 2, part of the idiom of lament is the pattern, or sequence, of events that come before and after a cry of distress. The five parts of the pattern are generally: (1) prior promise, (2) suffering, (3) lament, (4) deliverance, and (5) praise. As Westermann notes, this kind of pattern is part and parcel to Israel’s history in the OT (e.g., Exod 1-15; Deut 26:5-11).²⁴ All five parts are present in this portion of the letter.

Prior promise. The prior promise standing behind the lament language in Romans 7:7-25 is God’s promise of life for obedience to the law, but death for disobedience to it. Romans 7:10 echoes this promise, “But I died and the commandment

²³See also, e.g., Deut 28:41; Amos 4:10; Hab 1:9.

²⁴See Claus Westermann, “The Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament,” *Interpretation* 28 (1974): 20-21.

which was for life, this was found in me for death” (cf. Rom 10:5; Gal 3:12). The OT antecedent is most likely a text like Leviticus 18:5, “So you shall keep my statutes and my judgments, which if a man will do them he will live by them; I am the Lord.”²⁵ Conversely, if a person does not do the law, he or she will die.²⁶

Suffering. The suffering connected with God’s prior promise stems from sin’s deceptive use of the commandment. Paul explains in Romans 7:11, “For sin having seized the opportunity through the commandment seized me and through it killed me.” Sin, the enemies, causes the ἐγώ distress, because it deceptively misinterprets the command as promising life despite disobedience to it, “You surely shall not die.” (Gen 3:4). Consequently, by deceiving the ἐγώ into pursuing life from God through obedience to the commandment, sin killed the ἐγώ. Such a scenario echoes the serpent’s deception of Adam and Eve in the garden. The serpent deceptively misinterpreted the divine commandment so that Adam and Eve would look to themselves for life rather than God (Gen 3:1-4). The result is that, through the serpent’s use of the divine commandment, Adam dies because of the separation from God (Gen 3:24). From Paul’s perspective, this scenario is repeated every time the ἐγώ is confronted with the law.²⁷ That is because sin is not only deceptive, but it is also an ever-present internal and overpowering foe.

²⁵Jewett also points to Gen 2:17; Deut 4:1; 6:24; Prov 6:23; Sir 17:11; 45:5; Bar 3:9. See Jewett, *Romans*, 452. Furthermore, Hartley notes the similarity between Lev 18:5 and Deut 26:3-13; 28:1-14; Ezek 20:11, 13, 21; Neh 9:29. See John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 4 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992), 293.

²⁶Seifrid notes, “The same law, after all, both threatened death and promised life” (Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ Our Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Justification* [Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000], 119).

²⁷*Ibid.*, 116.

Therefore, in Romans 7:13-25, Paul goes on to defend the law's goodness, but he complains about sin's murderous activity in the body. The enemy of sin plagues the ἐγώ to the point of a wretched and fatal existence (Rom 7:24). Not only that, it drives the ἐγώ to the point of lament.

Lament. Suffering caused by the enemy of sin elicits a lament reminiscent of, and yet unique to, those found in the OT. The cry of distress in Romans 7:24 is, “Wretched man that I am; who will deliver me from the body of this death?” Like its OT antecedents, this lament contains both a complaint and a petition. The complaint is summed up in the expression *ταλαίπωρος*, an adjective often used in the LXX when miserable or ruinous conditions, caused by enemies, are being lamented. For example, in 2 Maccabees 4:47, where prisoners are in a miserable state because they face execution, the author describes them as *ταλαιπώροις*.²⁸ The verbal cognate *ταλαιπωρέω* occurs in a number of places to describe the condition of those who suffer. Psalm 37:7 LXX, an individual lament, uses the verb *ταλαιπωρέω* to describe the state of the lamenter, “I have been wretched (*ἐταλαιπώρησα*) and bent down continually, all day long I was going around being of sad countenance.” The activity of human foes, sin, and a wrathful God resulted in a miserable condition (Ps 37:4-5, 13 LXX). The verb also occurs in the lament language of the LXX version of Jeremiah. *Ταλαιπωρέω* is frequently the translator's rendering of the MT's *רָדַף*. It is used in contexts where there is a lament over the conditions caused by enemies, both divine and human. For example, in Jeremiah

²⁸Additionally, cognates of *ταλαίπωρος* occur in Greek tragedy to describe the state of the lamenter. See, e.g., Aesch. Agamemnon 1260. For a list of other parallels from laments in Greek tragedy, see Keener, *Romans*, 95.

4:13 LXX the lament is, “Behold like a cloud he will come up, and like a whirlwind his chariots, their horses are swifter than eagles; woe to us, because we are wretched (ταλαιπωροῦμεν).” A similar use is found in Jeremiah 9:18 LXX, “Because the sound of the lamentation has been heard in Zion, ‘How we have become wretched (ἐταλαιπωρήσαμεν), we have been exceedingly ashamed, because we abandoned the land and we abandoned our tabernacles.’”²⁹ The verb also occurs in the lament language of Zechariah 11:1-3 LXX:

Open, Lebanon, your doors, and let the fire consume your cedars; let the pine howl, because the cedar has fallen, because the mighty men have become very miserable (ἐταλαιπώρησαν); howl, oaks of Basan, because the thickly planted forest has been torn down. A sound of lamenting shepherds, because their majesty has become ruined (τεταλαιπώρηκεν); a sound of lions roaring, because the pride of the Jordan has become ruined (τεταλαιπώρηκεν).

Clearly, ταλαίπωρος, or ταλαιπωρέω, is associated with the language of lament. It indicates that the conditions of the lamenter are miserable, or ruined, on account of enemy activity.³⁰ It describes the state of invaded and captured cities. Paul uses the adjective to describe an inner man captured and killed by sin’s use of the law. Therefore, Paul summarizes, and laments, the entire narrative in Romans 7:7-25 by saying that the ἐγώ is a ταλαίπωρος ἄνθρωπος.

The petition in Romans 7:24 is similar to the petitions of OT lament in a few different ways. First, much like OT lament, the complaint “Wretched man that I am”

²⁹For the use of ταλαιπωρέω in the LXX of Jer, see also Jer 4:20; 9:18; 10:20; 12:12.

³⁰For the sense of “ruined” associated with ταλαιπωρέω, see also LXX Hos 10:2; Mic 2:4; Joel 1:10.

grounds the petition “Who will deliver me from the body of this death?”³¹ Second, also like OT lament, Paul phrases the petition in the form of a question—“who?” For example, Job’s petition to die is posed as a question, “Why did I not die from the womb? Why did I not come forth from the womb and die?” (Job 3:11). Paul likewise embeds the petition of the ἐγώ in a question. Next, at the heart of the petition is a request for deliverance—*ῥύσεται*. In the PssLm of the LXX, one finds petitions grounded in complaints about a miserable condition. For example, in Psalm 108:22 LXX, the petition is, “Deliver me (*ῥύσαι*), because I am miserable (*πτωχός*) and poor, and my heart has been disturbed within me.”³² The request is to be delivered from enemies, “Rise, Lord, come before them and cast them down, deliver (*ῥύσαι*) my soul from the ungodly, your sword from the enemies of your hand” (Ps 16:13 LXX).

However, Paul’s lament proper in Romans 7:24 is also unique in comparison to OT lament. Specifically, there is no divine vocative, and the lamenter requests to be delivered from his body. In OT lament language, petitions for deliverance are routinely accompanied by forms of direct address such as *θεός* or *κύριε*. For example, in Psalm 7:2 LXX, the petition is, “O Lord, my God (*κύριε ὁ θεός μου*), I have hoped in you; save me from all those who persecute me and deliver me.”³³ For the OT lamenter there is no question about from whom the deliverance will come. The direct addresses *θεός*, or *κύριε*, clearly indicates that the lamenter knows to request deliverance from God. By

³¹For a complaint grounding the petition in a lament, see, e.g., Pss 13; 22; 58.

³²For other petitions of deliverance in the PssLm of the LXX, see, e.g., Pss 7:2; 30:2; 37:23; 39:14; 78:9; 139:5; 142:7, 9.

³³See also, e.g., Pss LXX 11:2; 16:13; 37:23; 84:8; 85:2.

contrast, the divine vocative is absent in Romans 7:24. This speaks to the intensity of the suffering experienced by the ἐγώ. There is quite simply a loss of hope. As Seifrid astutely observes, in contrast to the lamenters of the PssLm who call on the name of the Lord, the “I” of Romans 7:24 is “at a loss and the end of hope.”³⁴ To whom can the ἐγώ really turn to? Sin has used the holy law against the “I” as an instrument of death. Therefore, the “I” cannot turn to observance of the law for life. Moreover, disobedience to the law incurs divine condemnation so that a turn to God seems out of the question. Although the “Psalmists cry out to the Lord and appeal to his mercies,” the ἐγώ of Romans 7 is unsure to whom he can turn. But he is certain that he cannot turn to himself. In fact, in another unique aspect of the lament in Romans 7:24, the ἐγώ asks to be delivered “from the body of this death.” In OT laments, the petitioners ask to be delivered from a number of things such as political enemies, sickness, divine wrath, and the pit.³⁵ However, there are no requests to be delivered from one’s own body. With respect to lament language, this is unique to Paul. In light of the deceptive, internal, and overpowering presence of sin in the body, the only solution is deliverance from the body. Since death is occurring in the body, only deliverance from it will bring life.

Deliverance and praise. There is a drastic shift from lament in Romans 7:24 to praise in 7:25. This shift is similar to the change that often takes place in the PssLm.³⁶

³⁴Seifrid, “Romans 7,” 6.

³⁵For a brief discussion on enemies in the PssLm, see Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 95-99.

³⁶For a recent discussion on the shift from lament to praise in the PssLm, see, e.g., Federico G. Villaneuva, *The ‘Uncertainty of a Hearing: A Study of the Sudden Change of Mood in the Psalms of*

For example, Psalm 60, a community lament, contains both complaint and petition throughout vv. 3-13. There is a steady flow of complaints about enemies and the need for deliverance. But in Psalm 60:14 there is dramatic shift to praise, “In God we will do valiantly and he will tread down our adversaries.” Similarly, Paul makes a dramatic swing from lament to praise in Romans 7:25a, “But thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”³⁷ While there is no explanation for the deliverance in Romans 7:25, there is clear praise for the saving work in Christ. The explanation of the deliverance comes in Romans 8:1-4, which I will discuss later in the chapter. Yet, even before the explanation of the deliverance, there is praise for God’s work in Christ. The shift is unexpected in light of the depth of despair depicted in Romans 7:24. It is truly a move from one extreme to the other that can only be appreciated when the language of lament is taken into full consideration.

However, this shift from lament to praise does not mean that the lament is permanently silenced, at least not while one is still in the flesh, even for those who are in Christ.³⁸ Paul points to this reality in Romans 7:25b when he concludes, “So then I myself in my mind am serving the law of God but in my flesh the law of sin.” Paul’s

Lament (Leiden: Brill, 2008); LeAnn Snow Flesher, “Rapid Change of Mood: Oracles of Salvation, Certainty of a Hearing, or Rhetorical Play?” in *My Words Are Lovely: Studies in the Rhetoric of the Psalms*, ed. Robert L. Foster and David M. Howard (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 33-45.

³⁷The doxological formula $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma \delta\grave{\epsilon} \tau\omega \theta\epsilon\omega$ is found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus. See, e.g., Rom 6:17; 2 Cor 8:16.

³⁸As Bayer puts it with regards to Rom 7:25a, “This praise neither refutes the lament of the old human being nor suffocates or suppresses it; rather, such praise makes room for it all” (Oswald Bayer, “Toward a Theology of Lament,” in *Caritas et Reformatio: Essays on Church and Society in Honor of Carter Lindberg*, ed. David M. Whitford and George W. Forell [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002], 212).

concluding statement has caused not a little trouble for interpreters.³⁹ But it must be kept in mind that throughout Romans 7:7-25 Paul is discussing the human being's encounter with sin and the law. Sin's deceptive, internal, and overpowering use of the law continues as long as one is in the body. Even the Christian, still living in the flesh, shares in that distressing experience. Consequently, the shift from lament to praise is a back and forth movement for those in Christ. There is deliverance for those in Christ, and that is reason for praise. Yet, it is a deliverance experienced in hope of the resurrection, and that is a reason for praise and lament (Rom 8:18-25).

A Form of Rhetoric or a Form of OT Lament?

Despite the density of OT lament language in Romans 7:7-25, interpreters sometimes argue that the conceptual background of Paul's language is more akin to Greek rhetoric than anything else.⁴⁰ For example, some have argued for an affinity between Romans 7 and Platonic or Stoic philosophies.⁴¹ One of the more influential

³⁹Seifrid notes, "Paul places the joyful shout of thanksgiving in a penultimate position, followed by the sober assessment of the human being that we have noted: 'So then, I myself with my mind serve the Law of God, and with my flesh the law of sin (v. 25b). As the history of interpretation shows, this summary statement has created enormous difficulties for interpreters, and especially for the attempt to interpret the text solely in reference to Paul's past. Zahn's suggestion that v. 25b is to be read as a question that reflects misunderstanding ('So then, I do with my mind . . .?') fails to persuade, not least because the one would expect, as in all other instances in Romans that Paul would follow it was an emphatic 'Far be it!' (Seifrid, "Romans 7," 49).

⁴⁰Some prefer a patchwork of rhetorical echoes to an OT background. See, e.g., Keener, who writes, "The sort of struggle depicted in 7:14-25 would resonate with many people in antiquity. Some philosophers depicted the struggle between reason and the body's passions, an image relevant here (especially 7:22-23). Judaism spoke of an evil impulse (*yetzer*), and later teachers argued that learning Torah would strengthen one's good impulse to defeat the evil impulse" (Keener, *Romans*, 93).

⁴¹See, most recently, e.g., Niko Huttunen, *Paul and Epictetus on Law: A Comparison* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 101-26;

readings of Romans 7:7-25, from a rhetorical perspective, is that of Stanley K. Stowers.⁴² He argues that, like certain forms of Greek rhetoric, “Rom 7:7-25 resembles tragic soliloquy and *prosopopoiia* of the person in a tragic situation in several ways.”⁴³ According to Stowers, *prosopopoiia* is a “speech-in-character” that ancient writers such as Celsus and Origen were familiar with and would have recognized in Romans 7.⁴⁴ Moreover, he posits that Paul essentially combines *prosopopoiia* with Greek philosophy’s concern over ἀκρασία, or a “lack of self-mastery.”⁴⁵ He cites a number of ancient philosophers, both Stoic and Platonic, who gave much thought to the “Greek-Roman ethic of self-mastery.”⁴⁶ Stowers then concludes that the background and form of Paul’s language in Romans 7:7-25 is predicated on these features of Greek rhetoric. He goes on to note that Paul employs these features in his own way in accordance with specific historical circumstances.⁴⁷ In short, he says, “Paul uses *prosopopoiia* in chapter 7 to characterize not every human or every human who is not a Christian but rather gentiles, especially those who try to live by works of the law.”⁴⁸

Stowers’s thesis that the form of the language in Romans 7:7-25 reflects a specific kind of Greek rhetoric is a clear challenge to my own proposal that Paul is

⁴²See Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 258-84.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 271.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 264. Additionally, regarding Paul’s use of *prosopopoiia*, see Raymond F. Collins, *The Power of Images in Paul* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 259-60.

⁴⁵Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 260.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 260-64.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 273-84.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 273.

purposefully employing a form of OT lament. Therefore, I offer three critiques.⁴⁹ First, literary similarity does not equal literary dependence. As Michael Bird warns readers of Paul, “We must avoid the notion that analogy means genealogy or that similarity means source.”⁵⁰ While there are certain similarities between Romans 7 with something like Epictetus’s *Dissertationes*, it does not follow that Paul is using that form of rhetoric.⁵¹ Second, Stowers is inaccurate in his argument that the OT does not use the “language of external power” to describe sin. He writes, “Such language is not typical of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (for example, the Psalms) or earlier Jewish literature but rather of what scholars often call the fragmented personality of Homer and the Greek poets.”⁵² But this is to ignore texts such as Psalm 39:13 LXX, “For evils (κακά) surrounded me, of which there is not number, my transgressions (αἱ ἀνομίαι) seized (κατέλαβόν) me, and I am not able to see; they have multiplied more than the hairs of my head, and my heart failed.”⁵³ Moreover, as I have demonstrated above, Paul used the descriptions of enemies found in OT lament and applies them to sin. Third, Paul’s use of *ταλαίπωρος* does not have to be traced to Greek tragedians and comedians.⁵⁴ On the contrary, *ταλαίπωρος* and

⁴⁹For a recent critique of Stower’s thesis, see Cosmin Murariu, “The Characters in Romans 7, 7-25” in *The Letter to the Romans*, ed. Udo Schnelle (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2009), 739-53.

⁵⁰Michael Bird, *Introducing Paul: The Man, His Mission and His Message* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 21.

⁵¹See, e.g., Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 262-63.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 272.

⁵³See also, e.g., Gen 4:7; Num 32:23; Ps 38:4-5; Isa 59:12.

⁵⁴See Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 272.

ταλαιπωρέω appear in the lament language of the LXX.⁵⁵ In any case, the lament of Greek tragedy is more accurately defined as lamentation. The cries of distress found in those dramas are linked to situations of hopelessness, such as a funeral dirge.⁵⁶ Finally, Roman's high volume of OT lament language employed to depict suffering casts a shadow of doubt on the idea that in Romans 7:7-25 Paul draws from another conceptual well. The idiom of lament present in Romans 7:7-25, replete with lament expressions and a pattern of lament, points to the OT as the source of Paul's portrait of the ἐγώ.

Lament Language and the Interpretation of Romans 7:7-8:4

Commentators connect Romans 7:24-25 and 8:1 in a variety of ways.⁵⁷ Due to interpretive difficulties, Bultmann even proposed that Romans 8:1a was a “non-Pauline marginal gloss.”⁵⁸ Some rightly note that Romans 8 is an “expansion” of Paul's doxological interjection in Romans 7:25a.⁵⁹ Yet, in light of the lament language employed in Romans 7:7-25, it is more accurate to say that, in Romans 8:1-4, Paul finishes the answer to the lament voiced in Romans 7:25a.⁶⁰

⁵⁵See, in the LXX, Ps37:7; Hos 10:2; Mic 2:4; Joel 1:10.

⁵⁶On lamentation in Greek literature, see Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

⁵⁷Some commentators speak about a salvation-historical shift between Rom 7:24-25 and 8:1. See, e.g., Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 472; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 398-99.

⁵⁸See Jewett, *Romans*, 476.

⁵⁹See, e.g., William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895), 190.

⁶⁰Beker agrees, “Chapter 8 not only marks the unfolding of the themes introduced in 5:1-11, but also describes the reversal of the lament of the person in bondage to the law, which Paul had sketched

The answer to the lament in Romans 7:24 begins with the shout of praise in Romans 7:25a, “But thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord,” and the explanation of the deliverance given to the wretched man comes in Romans 8:1-4. In short, the answer to the lament is that God has delivered the wretched man by condemning his deceptive, internal, and overpowering enemy, sin, in the flesh of his son Jesus. The words *κατάκριμα* and *κατακρίνω* are key in Paul’s answer, and they point to the believer’s “deliverance from the penalty that sin exacts.”⁶¹ The conclusion Paul draws in Romans 8:1, and then explains in 8:2-4, is, “Therefore, now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Paul draws this conclusion from the discussion in Romans 7, and implies that underneath sin’s work in the *ἐγώ* is the concern about the penalty of condemnation, or death, for sin (Rom 7:10-11). In his explanation of the deliverance, the link between the lament about sin in Romans 7:24 and the answer to the lament becomes even clearer. Paul’s use of *νόμος* in Romans 8:2-4 is especially telling. In Romans 7:10-11, there is a complaint about sin’s deceptive and deadly use of the law. Like the serpent in the garden, the divine commandment became an instrument of death in sin’s hand rather than life in God’s. Therefore, when Paul explains how God answers the lament evoked by sin’s deceptive use of the law, he uses the unique phrase *ὁ νόμος τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς ζωῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ*. God frees the lamenter from sin’s deceptive and deadly use of the law through the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” Of course, Paul is not saying that the law in itself brings deliverance. As he explains in

in 7:7-25 (especially 7:24)” (J. Christian Beker, “Vision of Hope for a Suffering World: Romans 8:17-30,” *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 3 [1994]: 28).

⁶¹Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 472-73.

Romans 8:3, the law did not have the ability to bestow life due to the weakness of the flesh (cf. Gal 3:21). It is in Christ's obedience to the law that the believer is freed from the law of sin and death (i.e., sin's deceptive and deadly use of the law). God condemned, or put to death, the enemy of sin in the flesh of his son (Rom 8:3). He condemned sin in the flesh of Jesus in order to fulfill the righteous requirement of the law in the believer (Rom 8:4). With the enemy of sin condemned in the flesh of Jesus, there is no longer a penalty of death, or condemnation, for those in Christ Jesus. The deliverance that the wretched man cried for in Romans 7:24 is what God provides through sin's condemnation and the believer's Spirit given-life in Christ Jesus. Paul goes on to explain that God-given life in Romans 8:5-11, where the focus remains on the Spirit's work in Christ. It is ultimately in the resurrection activity of the Holy Spirit that the lament of Romans 7:24 will once and forever be silenced. While deliverance from the body of death is an accomplished fact in the crucified and risen Christ, it finally becomes an experiential reality when the Spirit, who raised Christ's body, raises the mortal "bodies" of those in Christ. Due to that promise, as I will show in the next chapter, the gospel actually elicits lament.

Suffering and Romans 7:7-25

The Pauline corpus contains some passages that are excruciating and extensive in their descriptions of suffering. They generally describe the distress associated with Paul's apostolic office, and the source of the affliction he describes is generally external.⁶² That makes Romans 7:7-25 all the more unique. The suffering he describes

⁶²See, e.g., 2 Cor 1:8-11; 4:7-15; 11:16-31.

here is linked to the law, and the source of the suffering he describes is the internal power of sin. Nowhere else in the Pauline letters, nor the entire NT for that matter, does one find a more vivid description of internal suffering, in the face of an ever-present enemy, than Romans 7:7-25. Yet, in the quest to label the passage as “pre-conversion,” “post-conversion,” “autobiographical,” and the like, the profundity of the language can be overlooked. What Paul describes here is an individual that is tortured in mind, volition, and body. Paul is not merely defending the goodness of the law. He is describing someone whose suffering is intense.

Intense suffering requires an equally intense language. Therefore, Paul employs the language of lament. OT lament provides Paul the idiom he needs to express what would otherwise be inexpressible. For example, what words could one use to describe an enemy so vile and deceptive that it actually uses God’s holy law to cause death (Rom 7:11)? However, it is not enough to simply note the similarity between Paul’s language and OT lament language. One must also consider the kinds of circumstances that warranted the use of lament in the OT. Oppression at the hands of enemies and the experience of divine wrath are the conditions in which lament usually arose. When this is kept in mind, one better appreciates the intensity of the suffering described in Romans 7. Sin is an enemy who afflicts and kills the ἐγώ just like enemies described in the OT. It is a deceptive, overpowering, and deadly enemy whose activity in the body leads to divine condemnation for the ἐγώ. Paul sums up the entire experience with the adjective *ταλαίπωρος*, a word, as I noted above, often used in the LXX to describe the condition of one afflicted with war and captivity (Rom 7:24). It is in Romans 7:24 that the bottom is finally reached. The intensity of the suffering ultimately

drives the ἐγώ to tears, to desperation, and to the question “Who?” The bewilderment is so great that Paul even moves beyond the norm of OT lament. There is no divine vocative. In other words, the lamenter does not know whom to call upon for deliverance from a body of death. Yet, in a way, it is only in this pit of despair that the power of the gospel can be grasped. It is only when all other options are cut off, and the ἐγώ is driven to the howl of despair, that the power of the gospel is revealed. Then, and only then, can the lament be changed to the praise of God through Jesus Christ (Rom 7:25). The intensity of the suffering requires an intense language. Lament provides that idiom. Paul crafts the entire text so that it does not simply speak “to” the person confronted with sin’s deceptive and deadly use of the law. He, like the psalmist, provides language that speaks “for” the lamenter.⁶³ Essentially, what the ἐγώ asks is what every person confronted with the law and the power of sin asks, “Wretched man that I am; who will deliver from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:24).

⁶³As Anderson notes, “In this sense, the Psalms may speak ‘for’ us, by expressing the whole gamut of human response to God’s grace and judgment and thereby teaching us how to pray” (Anderson, *Out of the Depths*, 9).

CHAPTER 5

HOPE, SUFFERING, GROANING, AND DELIVERANCE:
LAMENT LANGUAGE IN ROMANS 8:18-39

In the PssLm, cries for deliverance are predicated on “hope.” Those who request divine deliverance do so because their hope rests in God’s promise of salvation. There would not be lament in the face of suffering without hope. For example, in Psalm 7:2 LXX, an individual lament, the psalmist cries, “O Lord, my God, I have hoped (ἤλπισα) in you; save me from all those who persecute me and deliver me.”¹ Similarly, in Romans 8:18-39, Paul’s lament language stems from hope in the promise of the gospel despite present suffering. Specifically, he speaks of a hope for the “redemption of the body” (Rom 8:23-24). Due to this hope in the face of suffering, there is a “groaning,” or lament, emanating from creation, the sons of God, and the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:18-30). Moreover, there is great confidence in this promise, and it is confidence the Paul confesses on behalf of the Christians in Rome who face death on account of God’s apparent absence (Rom 8:36).

The thesis of the present chapter is that Romans 8:18-39 contains two forms of lament language that Paul uses to juxtapose the greatness of suffering alongside the greatness of the believer’s hope. First, in Romans 8:18-30, it is the participants and the pattern of lament that reflect OT lament language. Second, in Romans 8:31-39, Paul

¹See also, e.g., Pss LXX 12:6; 15:1; 17:3; 21:5; 30:2.

employs a familiar OT complaint regarding separation from God. He discusses the great hope of God's love in Christ by juxtaposing it with great suffering that, in OT lament fashion, he describes as being separated from God. In what follows, I will examine the form and function of the lament language in Romans 8:18-39. Next, I will discuss how an appreciation of the lament language impacts one's interpretation of Romans 8:18-39. I will then consider how Paul's use of lament language here contributes to the larger discussion about suffering in the rest of the letter.

The Form and Function of the Language

As I have noted in the previous chapters, lament language contains a particular form and function. Ultimately the function is always to convey the depth of the suffering being experienced. However, different forms of the language are employed to make that point. This holds true in Romans 8:18-39 as well. The lament language throughout the passage functions to convey the greatness of both hope and suffering in Christ. Different forms of lament language appear in Romans 8:18-30 and 8:31-39 to make that point.

The Participants and Pattern of Lament in Romans 8:18-30

The forms of lament that appear in Romans 8:18-30 are the participants and pattern of lament. Paul depicts creation, the sons of God, and the Holy Spirit as all "groaning," a sound associated with lament.² Additionally, Romans 8:18-30 contains the five-fold pattern of deliverance so often associated with lament: (1) promise, (2)

²For participants in lament, see Bernd Janowski, "Klage," in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz, et al., (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 4:1389-90.

suffering, (3) lament, (4) deliverance, and (5) praise.³ Although Paul uses these forms in his own unique way, he is still influenced by OT lament language.

Participants. As I discussed in chapter 2, the participants of lament are “I/we” (lamerter),” “you” (God), and “them” (enemies). In Romans 8:18-30, all the participants of lament are squeezed into the “we” slot. The participants of the lament language in Romans 8:18-30 are creation, the sons of God, and the Holy Spirit.⁴ Paul tethers the lamenting action of the three through the use of the στενω-*root*. This root often appears in the LXX to describe the inarticulate groaning and sobbing of a lamenter.⁵ “Groaning” is a sound often associated with the pain of those who lament.⁶ For example, in Psalm 30:11 LXX, the cry of distress is, “My life is left in pain and my years in groaning (στεναγμοῖς); my strength weakened in poverty, and my bones were disturbed.” The στενω-*root* also appears in Job 3:24 LXX to express the lamenter’s pain, “For before my food groaning (στεναγμός) comes near to me, and I cry while being gripped with fear.” Furthermore, in the OT, God responds to the groaning, or lamenting. For example, in

³See Claus Westermann, “The Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament,” *Interpretation* 28 (1974): 20-38.

⁴Hahne argues that the “groaning” is a structural device in Rom 8. He notes, “This structural device stresses the solidarity between believers and the rest of creation. Both groan for complete deliverance from the corruption of the physical world. The Spirit supports the longing of believers as they express in prayer their desire for deliverance” (Harry Alan Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation: Nature in Romans 8.19-22 and Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, Library of New Testament Studies 336 [London: T&T Clark, 2006], 201).

⁵See, e.g., the use of στεναγμός in LXX Pss 6:7; 11:6; 30:11; 37:9-10; 78:11; 101:6, 21.

⁶For a brief discussion of words associated with crying or lament, see Markus Ohler, “To Mourn, Weep, Lament and Groan: On the Heterogeneity of the New Testament’s Statements on Lament,” in *Evoking Lament: A Theological Discussion*, ed. Eva Harasta and Brian Brock (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 150-51.

Exodus 6:5 LXX, God responds to the groaning of the sons of Israel who are enslaved in Egypt, “And I heard the groaning (στευναγμόν) of the sons of Israel, whom the Egyptians oppress them, and I remembered your covenant.”⁷ Similarly, in Psalm 6:9-10 LXX, an individual lament, the psalmist cries, “Turn from me, all who do wickedness, because the Lord heard the sound of my weeping (τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ κλαυθμοῦ μου); the Lord heard my request, the Lord received my prayer.”⁸ The “groaning” of all the participants reflects both the greatness of suffering and the greatness of hope in God’s promise of deliverance. Groaning is not an indication of hopelessness, but is a sign of hope in the midst of great pain. The “groaning” in Romans 8:18-30 reflects the same thing.

The first participant of lament mentioned in Romans 8:18-30 is creation. In his description of creation’s suffering and hope, Paul echoes a number of OT texts. In Romans 8:22 Paul writes, “For we know that all creation groans and suffers birth pains together until now.”⁹ By describing creation as groaning and suffering birth pains, Paul personifies creation as a participant in lament that both suffers and hopes. The suffering of creation stems from being subjected to futility and enslaved to decay (Rom 8:20-21).¹⁰ In order to understand Paul’s use of ματαιότης and φθορά, it is helpful to consider the OT

⁷See the use of στευναγμός in Judg 2:18 LXX.

⁸The noun κλαυθμός is a conceptual cognate of στευναγμός.

⁹For a discussion about στενάζω, its OT background in the LXX, and Rom 8:22, see Laurie J. Braaten, “All Creation Groans: Romans 8:22 in Light of the Biblical Sources,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 28 (2006): 131-59.

¹⁰It has become quite popular to interpret Rom 8:22 in light of modern concerns over global warming. But Paul’s focus is not climate change induced by human industrialization. Rather, he is concerned with divinely induced decay that is the result of humanity’s sin. One should not skip over the fact that the agent of ὑπετάγη in Rom 8:20 is not a person but God. For a recent interpretation of Rom 8:22 in light of concerns over global warning, see, e.g., Thomas A. Vollmer, “A Theocentric Reading of Romans 8, 18-30,” in *The Letter to the Romans*, ed. Udo Schnelle (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2009), 789-97.

texts being echoed.¹¹ Texts which connect humanity and the suffering of creation are obviously important, because Paul makes that very connection in Romans 8:19-24. One must begin with Genesis 3:17-19 where God curses the earth on account of Adam's sin, an action that adversely affects creation. Instead of yielding fruit for humanity's sustenance, the earth sprouts thorns and thistles (Gen 1:11-12; 3:18). Adam will only receive sustenance from the earth through hard labor (Gen 3:19). Subsequent passages in the OT elaborate on a creation affected by humanity's sin, and they are instructive for Paul's appraisal in Romans 8:19-22. For instance, Ecclesiastes 1:2-11 LXX uses *ματαιότης* a number of times in order to describe both the condition of humanity and creation. While there is some disagreement about the meaning of *ματαιότης*, or *הבל*, the context of Ecclesiastes 1:2-11 points to "meaningless."¹² A person toils "under the sun," and it is meaningless, or purposeless, because of the inevitability of death. There is no value to the work due to the transitory nature of the one who toils. Consequently, creation, though not transitory like humanity, is also meaningless in its endless cycles. It does not fulfill its purpose of bringing glory to God, because humanity does not remain to fulfill its purpose.¹³ Additionally, Isaiah 24:3 LXX contains a use of *φθορα* in relation to creation, "The earth will certainly be ruined (*φθορᾶ φθαρήσεται*), and it will certainly be

¹¹For a discussion of how these two terms have often been understood in Rom 8:22, see C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 1:413-14; Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation*, 190-93.

¹²See Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 63-65.

¹³Bultmann, although misguided in seeing a Gnostic background for Rom 8:20, is right to note that for Paul, "The 'creation' is characterized by creaturely transitoriness" (Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007], 1:229-30).

spoiled; for the mouth of the Lord spoke these things.”¹⁴ The writer of Isaiah 24 connects the “ruin” of the earth with the conduct of its inhabitants and God’s judgment:

And the earth is corrupted on account of those who dwell in it, because they have transgressed the law and changed the law, the eternal covenant. On account of this a curse will consume the earth, because those who dwell in it sinned; on account of this those who dwell in the earth will be poor, and a few men will be left (Isa 24:5-6).

The reference to humanity’s sin and God’s curse clearly echo the narrative of Genesis 3:17-19. Such a predicament has led to creation’s ruin. The writer goes on to personify the earth as one who suffers (Isa 24:19-20). The suffering stems from humanity’s sin and God’s judgment. Yet, in contrast to the discussion of creation in Ecclesiastes 1:2-11, there is hope for creation (Isa 24:21-23; 65:17; 66:22-24).¹⁵

Therefore, Paul’s personification of creation as a lamenter that suffers from divinely inflicted futility and decay is not without biblical precedent. He clearly echoes Genesis 3:17-19, as well as subsequent reflections on that event found in the OT (e.g., Eccl 1:2-11; Isa 24:1-6).¹⁶ Romans 8:19-22 describes a creation that suffers from futility and slavery to corruption because of the fall. Creation cannot fulfill its ultimate purpose because of sin. Yet, Paul, perhaps unlike the preacher in Ecclesiastes, does not believe that creation is without hope (Rom 8:21).¹⁷ In fact, Paul describes creation as having an

¹⁴For a discussion about the parallels between Isa 24-27 and Rom 8:18-30, see Jonathan Moo, “Romans 8.19-22 and Isaiah’s Cosmic Covenant,” *NTS* 54 (2008): 74-89.

¹⁵Hahne also points to Jer 4:4, 11, 26-28 as passages that make reference to sin’s impact on nature. See Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation*, 200.

¹⁶For a discussion on the personification of creation in Rom 8:19-22, the OT, the rest of the NT, and Philo, see Joseph R. Dodson, *The ‘Powers’ of Personification: Rhetorical Purposes in the Book of Wisdom and the Letter to the Romans* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 162-77.

¹⁷See Roy A. Harrisville, *Romans*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980), 129-30.

eager expectation (Rom 8:19). Specifically, there is an eagerness for the sons of God to be revealed in the resurrection, because the freedom of the children of God from decay will mean the freedom of creation from slavery to decay (Rom 8:21). This means that creation's cry is not lamentation but lament. The former looks backwards in despair, but the latter looks forward in hope.¹⁸ The hopefulness of creation's cry is seen in Paul's metaphor of an expectant mother—συνωδίνει.¹⁹ The cry of a mother giving birth is an expression of suffering mixed with hope.²⁰ A mother suffers the pain of birth with the hope that, in the end, her child will arrive. Paul sees creation collectively groaning and suffering, ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν, in the same way.²¹ In other words, the lamenting continues until the arrival, or resurrection, of God's sons. Lament does not end with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It can only in end when those in Christ are raised. With the use of οἶδαμεν in Romans 8:22, Paul takes it as granted that the Christians in Rome are aware of creation's lament. Creation's lament is "heard" in an observance of nature that is seen through the lens of the OT and "refined through Christian teaching."²² It is a

¹⁸Westermann distinguishes between the "lament of the dead" that "looks backward" and the "lament of affliction" that "looks forward." See Westermann, "The Role of the Lament," 22.

¹⁹On this metaphor, see Raymond E. Collins, *The Power of Images in Paul* (Collegville, MN: Liturgical Press), 204.

²⁰Paul's use of συνωδίνω is a *hapax legomenon*. However, ὠδίνω is present in the LXX in a number of contexts where suffering is linked to the pains of an expectant mother, e.g., Odes. Sol. 5:17; Mic 4:10; Isa 26:17, 18; Isa 54:1; Jer 4:31. See the discussion on συνωδίνω in Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation*, 203-06.

²¹Cf. the use of the same construction in Phil 1:5.

²²See the discussion in Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation*, 199-200. He points to a number of texts that indicate an awareness of creation's suffering and hope. See, e.g., Isa 11:6-9; 65:17-25; 66:22-23; Acts 3:21; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1-2.

lament that stems from suffering in decay and futility all the while hoping for the resurrection of God's sons. It is quite simply a lament of hope.

In Romans 8:23, Paul indicates that creation is not the only one who laments in hope, "But not only this, but also we ourselves having the first fruit of the Spirit, we also ourselves groan in ourselves awaiting the adoption, the redemption of our body." The sons of God, like creation, participate in the lament of hope. Paul uses the first person plural στενάζομεν to indicate that the sons of God also groan in hope of the resurrection (cf. συστενάζει in Rom 8:22).²³ The verb στενάζω lends expression to a person's experience of pain.²⁴ The pain experienced by the sons of God is both internal and external. The internal suffering stems from the power of sin still at work in the body of the believer. The body is in fact "dead on account of sin" (Rom 8:10). The external suffering emanates from those things which threaten to separate the believer from God's love (Rom 8:31-39). The resurrection will mean deliverance of the believer from both enemies. Therefore, the sons of God groan for the "adoption" or "redemption of the body."

Moreover, there is good reason for this lament of hope. The groaning is predicated not only on suffering, but hope. Specifically, the hope provided by the presence of the Spirit and the hope associated with the promise of the gospel lead to groaning (Rom 8:23-25). Since the sons of God already have the "first fruits of the

²³The multiple uses of ἐλπίς and ἐλπίζω indicate that importance of the idea in Rom 8:24-25.

²⁴See the uses of στενάζω in Job 9:27; 18:20; 24:12; 30:25; Isa 19:8; 21:2; 24:7; 30:15; 59:10; Lam 1:8, 21; Mark 7:34; 2 Cor 5:2; Heb 13:17.

Spirit,” they groan in hope.²⁵ The noun ἀπαρχή also appears in 1 Corinthians 15:20 and 23 in connection with the resurrection. In those instances, Paul identifies Christ as the “first fruits,” or portion, from the dead.²⁶ But in Romans 8:23 he uses the phrase ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος. The genitive noun is best understood as appositional.²⁷ Believers groan because they have the ἀπαρχὴν, who is the Spirit. The experience of suffering and the presence of the Spirit, who gives hope of a future resurrection, produce the lament within the believer. Like creation, believers eagerly await the redemption of the body. Paul links the expectation of the believer with creation’s expectation through the use of ἀπεκδέχομαι in Romans 8:19 and 23, a word he uses elsewhere to refer to eschatological hope.²⁸ The noun ἀπολύτρωσις, used to describe the resurrection, evokes the thought of a release not yet experienced.²⁹ Again, the release is from the internal enemy of sin and the external enemy of those things which threaten to separate the believer from God (Rom 8:10, 31-39). The redemption of the body is the very hope associated “with” the gospel, “For with hope we were saved” (Rom 8:24a). The dative noun ἐλπίδι is best understood

²⁵I am taking ἔχοντες as causal. For a causal interpretation of the participle, see Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 264; Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* (Zurich: Benziger, 1980), 2:158.

²⁶Regarding the use of ἀπαρχή in 1 Cor 15:20, 23, see Ben Witherington, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 1995, 304.

²⁷See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 438.

²⁸Cf. the use of ἀπεκδέχομαι in 1 Cor 1:7; Gal 5:5; Phil 3:20.

²⁹On the use of ἀπολύτρωσις in Lk 21:28, Rom 8:23, and Eph 4:30, Morris notes, “There can be no doubt that in each of these cases redemption means something more than that which believers have already experienced” (Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], 47).

as associative.³⁰ The hope of future resurrection is the expectation, or hope, that comes with salvation through faith in the gospel. Paul goes on to explain that this hope is unseen. If the hope were seen, then it obviously would not be hope. Moreover, if the resurrection were already seen, rather than hoped for, there would be no lament, or groaning. The groaning would be silenced, because the very thing groaned for is the resurrection.

The third participant in the lament of hope, or the groaning, is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit takes up the lament “with” the believer, and “for” the believer, albeit with “wordless groaning.” The Spirit’s groaning is similar to the “lament of the mediator” in the OT. Just as lamenters in the OT spoke on the behalf of the entire community in the midst of its suffering, the Spirit speaks on behalf of the believer.³¹ The mediator expresses the suffering and hope of the people to God. Romans 8:26-27 reflects the same kind of action. In Romans 8:26, Paul writes, “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes with wordless groaning.” The link between the groans of creation and the sons of God is indicated through Paul’s use of στεναγμός.³² Interpreters have understood the

³⁰For the association interpretation, see Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 519-20; Schreiner, *Romans*, 439. For a discussion regarding the interpretive options for ἐλπίδι, see Andrzej Gieniusz, *Romans 8:18-30: Suffering Does Not Thwart the Future Glory* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 200-02; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 140.

³¹Regarding the lament of the mediator, Westermann notes, “It first appears in the lament of Moses, recurs in the lament of Elisha and reaches a high point in the laments (or confessions) of Jeremiah, which then in turn point to the songs of the Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah” (Westermann, “The Role of the Lament,” 34).

³²Cf. the στενα-root in Rom 8:22-23.

phrase στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις in a few different ways.³³ Yet, in light of the fact that Paul portrays creation and the sons of God as lamenting in hope, it is best to understand στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις in a similar way. The groaning of creation, the sons of God, and the Holy Spirit is ultimately for the same thing, namely the resurrection of the dead. Yet, this does not quite explain everything. Paul notes that believers do not know how to pray about this hope exactly as they should. They are weak in prayer.³⁴ Specifically, the weakness in prayer has to do with both time and content. There is a need for someone to always be lamenting, since the believer lives between suffering of the present time and the hope of the resurrection to come.³⁵ Crump notes, “Whatever we understand these groans to be, they are an ongoing activity of the Spirit within God’s children.”³⁶ Due to suffering in the present age, and the hope of the age to come, there is a need to always be crying out to God. Therefore, the Holy Spirit intercedes on behalf of the believer.³⁷ But

³³Käsemann proposed that the στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις referred to *glossolia*. See Ernst Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1971), 122-37. For a brief discussion of the various interpretations, see David Crump, *Knocking on Heaven’s Door: A New Testament Theology of Petitionary Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 202-04; Schreiner, *Romans*, 444-45.

³⁴The Jesus tradition also acknowledges the problem of ignorance in prayer. See, e.g., Matt 6:5-13; Luke 11:1-4.

³⁵Jewett says something similar in discussing the weakness of the believers in prayer, “They know enough of the coming age to yearn for it, along with the rest of the creation, but they continue to be assaulted by the principalities and powers of the old age of the flesh” (Robert Jewett, *Romans* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007], 522).

³⁶Crump, *Knocking on Heaven’s Door*, 203. Additionally, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, Anchor Bible Commentary, vol. 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 518-19; Moo, *Romans*, 562.

³⁷The verb συναντιλαμβάνομαι occurs in contexts where someone is in desperate need of assistance. See, e.g., in the LXX, Exod 18:22; Num 11:17; Ps 88:22. The verb ὑπερευχάνομαι indicates that the Holy Spirit appeals to God on behalf of the believer. Specifically, he laments. See the use of ἐντυγχάνω in Rom 8:27, 34; 11:2. On ὑπερευχάνομαι, see Gordon P. Wiles, *Paul’s Intercessory Prayers: The Significance of the Intercessory Prayer Passages in the Letters of Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 18.

there is also a weakness with respect to the content of the prayer.³⁸ Although the believer groans for the hope of the resurrection, God's ways are not always clear. It follows then that what the believer should pray for is not always clear. Present suffering and the fulfillment of the future hope make it difficult to know how to pray. Paul discusses what the believer can confess in Romans 8:28-30. Ultimately, it is the confession that God works all things for good (Rom 8:28). Specifically, Paul speaks about God's work of foreknowing, predestining, calling, justifying, and glorifying the brethren. The believer confesses that God is working toward the glorification, or resurrection of his children. There is a clear hope, just as Paul makes clear throughout Romans 8. Yet, paradoxically, God's ways remain hidden in the face of creation's decay and the believer's suffering. The ultimate hope of the resurrection remains unseen for the believer. Therefore, the lament of the Holy Spirit is with στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις (cf. Rom 11:33). The Holy Spirit laments with the hope and in the suffering of the sons of God, but he is not susceptible to their weakness of not seeing and not knowing. He laments and intercedes according to God's will (Rom 8:27).

Pattern of lament. Behind the groaning of creation, the sons of God, and the Holy Spirit, there is a pattern associated with OT lament (e.g., Exod 1-15; Deut 26:5-11).³⁹ Specifically, one can discern a prior promise, suffering, lament, deliverance, and praise. The prior promise is the resurrection of the sons of God (Rom 8:21, 23). This

³⁸Commentators are not agreed on all points with respect to what Paul means by ἀσθένεια. But there does seem to be some agreement that it has to do with the content of the believer's prayer. See Schrenier, *Romans*, 443.

³⁹I am not recommending that the flow of Paul's argument should not be primary in the exegesis of Rom 8:18-30. I am simply suggesting that, in light of Paul's use of lament language, one should consider to what extent the forms of that language appear in the text and how it contributes to the understanding of the text.

promise forms an *inclusio*, as indicated through the use of δόξα and δοξάζω in Romans 8:18 and 30. The glory which is about to be revealed is the resurrection of the dead (Rom 8:18). However, in the meanwhile, there is suffering. In fact, being glorified with Christ must be preceded by suffering with him (Rom 8:17). Paul does not go into great detail about the specifics of the suffering. However, he does note that God subjected creation to futility and decay. Creation ultimately suffers in that it does not get to fulfill its purpose as long as sin reigns in the world and the sons of God die. With respect to the suffering of the sons of God, Paul does not specify what their suffering is. Yet, suffering is surely a reality for them. The section begins with a statement about the “present sufferings” (Rom 8:18). Paul is just as vague in Romans 5:3 when he speaks about “tribulations.” Some light is shed on the details of the suffering in Romans 8:31-39, where the suffering comes from external forces. However, the internal suffering described in Romans 7:7-25 also applies here. What is clear is that the suffering is fatal. It causes death in some way. Death is contrary to the promise of the resurrection. Therefore, a lament arises. Paul uses the στείνω-root to make the point that creation, the sons of God, and the Holy Spirit are all lamenting. The lament arises from two things: (1) hope in the prior promise, and (2) suffering in the present day. What is needed, for both the believer and creation, is what the gospel promises—life from the dead. The divine deliverance that creation and the sons of God groan for is experienced only in hope. Yet, hope in the resurrection is even greater than the suffering being experienced. That is due to the fact that the believer has the first fruits of the resurrection, namely the Holy Spirit. Moreover, they were saved with the hope of the resurrection. Through the Holy Spirit and the hope of the resurrection, the sons of God are already delivered but not yet

delivered. The lament turns to praise, but the praise is not yet without lament. There is praise for the resurrection to come both at the beginning and end of Romans 8:18-30.

The present sufferings are not worthy to be compared to the glory to come, and the God who justified the sons of God will also glorify them in the resurrection. Therefore, the five-part pattern of lament in Romans 8:18-30 is as follows: (1) prior promise of the resurrection, (2) suffering caused by sin and death, (3) lament stemming from hope and suffering (4) deliverance in hope, and (5) praise for the resurrection.

Separation from God in Romans 8:31-39

Suffering caused by separation from God is the OT lament form reflected in Romans 8:31-39. In various OT lament texts, the suffering of God's people stems from a perceived distance, or separation, from God. For example, Psalm 10 begins with the complaint, "Why, O Lord, do you stand at a distance? Why do you hide yourself in times of distress?" (Ps 10:1).⁴⁰ A sense of separation from God arises from the presence of enemies. Moreover, if God is absent, and the enemies are present, the result will be death. This is the scenario Paul has in mind in Romans 8:31-39 as well. The elect children of God, who groan for the hope of a redeemed body, suffer. Specifically, in accordance with OT lament, the presence of external enemies and God's apparent absence results in death. However, Paul gives the assurance that, in Christ, God is also present with his people. There is no possibility of separation from God in death despite the presence of enemies who cause suffering. The crucified and risen Christ is with the father and with the elect at the same time. The result is deliverance for the believing

⁴⁰See, also, e.g., Pss 13:2; 22:2.

community, even one that faces death on account of God's apparent absence in the face of enemies. There is no divine rejection of those who are in Christ (Rom 8:1). It is against this backdrop of suffering, or this form of lament language, that I am proposing one should read Romans 8:31-39. One must take note of all the participants and their actions. In typical OT lament fashion, all three participants are present: the lamenter, God, and the enemy.⁴¹

Separation in Romans 8:31-35. In these verses, like Romans 8:37-39, Paul has in mind enemies whose activity could be construed by the Christians in Rome as separation from God. I have come to see that in the midst of such suffering, both the internal suffering of Romans 7 and the external suffering are in view here. Therefore, the question that Paul addresses is, "If the enemies are present to do their deadly work, and God is not here to stop them, then have I been separated from God?"⁴² Paul's words in Romans 8:31-39 combat such a notion. While various hypotheses are proposed for the historical *Sitz im Leben* of Paul's words here, one thing is clear—God's elect suffer because of enemies.⁴³ For this reason, Paul discusses their suffering in the light of God's

⁴¹Kleinknecht notes that the structure of Rom 8:31 reflects the structure of the PssLm, where "Jahwe" stands with the "Beter" against the "Feind." See Karl Theodor Kleinknecht, *Der liende Gerechtfertigte: Die alttestamentlich-jüdische Tradition vom leidenden Gerechten und ihre Rezeption bei Paulus* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr Siebeck, 1984), 342.

⁴²See, e.g., Ps 13.

⁴³Jewett hypothesizes, "Paul's discourse reflects a rhetorical situation in which voices were being raised in Romans against the 'weak' who consisted predominantly of Jewish Christians whose leaders had been expelled from Rome by the Edict of Claudius. These critics suggested that the 'affliction and distress' suffered by believers should be interpreted as divine disfavor and inadequate faith" (Jewett, *Romans*, 546). Schlatter, on the other hand, writes, "For the Roman situation this verse was still preparation for what was to come later, though soon, to be sure" (Adolf Schlatter, *Romans: The Righteousness of God*, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995], 197). Additionally, Seifrid observes, "Christians in Rome generally were not experiencing troubles of the dimensions that Paul describes at the time of his writing (Seifrid, *Romans*, 637).

work in Christ. That is why he begins the section with the question, “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who will be against us? He who did not spare his own son but delivered him over for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Rom 8:31-32). The referent of ταῦτα in Romans 8:31 is the hope laid out in Romans 8 and, really, Romans 5-7 as well.⁴⁴ While the elect suffer at the hands of enemies, both internal and external, Paul tells the Roman Christians that God’s work in Christ is the assurance that God is ὑπέρ them.⁴⁵ The prepositional phrase ὑπέρ ἡμῶν, as it occurs in this context, is unparalleled in the biblical text. Yet, in Romans 8:27, 31, and 34, Paul speaks of God being for the elect in a quite magnanimous way.⁴⁶ God is on the side of his elect; therefore, no enemy can successfully be against them. More specifically, no kind of enemy activity can lead to, or should be construed as, separation from God. In Romans 8:33-35 and 37-39, Paul succinctly describes a number of scenarios in which God’s work in Christ negates enemy activity.

Romans 8:33-34 reflects a legal setting where an attempt is made to charge and condemn God’s elect.⁴⁷ A successful accusation and punishment would result in separation from God. The exact setting and time is somewhat difficult to determine. The future tense verb ἐγκαλέσει could refer to one of three scenarios: (1) accusation by

⁴⁴As Schreiner notes, “The word ταῦτα, then, comprises all that is contained in 5:1-8:30” (Schreiner, *Romans*, 458).

⁴⁵Cf. Ps 118:6.

⁴⁶See the use of ὑπέρ in Rom 5:8; 8:27, 31, 34; Gal 3:13; Eph 5:2; 1 Thess 5:10; Titus 2:14.

⁴⁷Paul’s use of ἐγκαλέω, δικαιόω, and κατακρίνω all point to a legal setting. Moo notes that the verb ἐγκαλέω occurs in Acts, particularly in Paul’s trials (Acts 19:38, 40; 23:29, 38; 26:2, 7). See, Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 541. See also, LXX Exod 22:8; 2 Macc 5:8; Prov 19:5; Wis 12:12; Sir 46:19; Zech 1:4.

enemies on the last day, (2) accusation by enemies in the present day, or (3) both. Option three fits the context best. The suffering discussed in Romans 8:31-39 is something experienced in the present, but it also has eschatological ramifications, namely eternal separation from God. Condemnation by God means separation from him in the present and forever. If an accusation by enemies is accepted in the divine court presently, or on the last day, then death would follow. Paul does not explicitly state who the accusing enemy is. However, it would most likely consist of Satan, the fallen world, and sin.⁴⁸ However, none of these accusing agents can successfully bring a charge or secure condemnation against God's elect. The anticipated answer to both of Paul's questions in Romans 8:33-34 is "No one." None one can charge or condemn God's elect, because God himself justifies his people. He sets them in the right and, thereby, delivers them from the accusing enemy. Paul indicates that the elect's justification has already been accomplished in Christ, who "died, but rather was raised, who also is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us" (Rom 8:34). Separation from God through condemnation, induced by the accusation of an enemy, is overcome through Jesus Christ. In this way, Paul echoes Isaiah 50:7-9 LXX:

And the Lord has been my helper, on account of this I was not ashamed, but I set my face like a firm rock and I knew that I certainly would not be put to shame. Because the one who justified me is near. Who is the one who judges me? Let him

⁴⁸Based on the echo of Isa 50:7-9 in Rom 8:33-34, Seifrid identifies the accusing enemies as the "fallen world and its idols." See, Mark A. Seifrid, *Romans*, in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 635. Regarding the identity of the accuser, Moo writes, "To be sure, Satan, the 'accuser,' may seek to do so; so may our enemies and, perhaps most persuasively of all, our own sins" (Moo, *Romans*, 541-42). Stuhlmacher writes, "At the most, only Satan and his helpers, the so-called angels of destruction, can still attempt this. But they too must fail with their accusation" (Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*, trans. Scott J. Hafemann (Louisville: Westminster, 1994), 139. Sampley proposes that the accusing enemy is another believer from an opposing faction in Rome. See, J. Paul Sampley, "Romans in a Different Light: A Response to Robert Jewett," in *Romans*, vol. 3 of *Pauline Theology*, ed. David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 122-23.

oppose me at the same time; and who is the one who judges me? Let him come near to me. Behold the Lord helps me; who will do me harm? Behold you all, like a garment, will become old, and, like a moth, it shall devour you.

The questions posed in Isaiah 50:7-9, like those in Romans 8:33-34, require the answer “No one.”⁴⁹ There is no one who can judge or harm the speaker, because God is the one who justified and helps. Specifically, he helps through Jesus Christ. There is deliverance from condemnation because Christ died. In other words, he suffered the condemnation of death for the elect. Paul here reiterates a point he has already made in Romans 3:21-26, 5:6-21, and 8:1-4, namely that deliverance from condemnation comes through the condemnation of Christ. But deliverance from accusing enemies is also linked to Christ’s resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of God (cf. Ps 110:1).⁵⁰ Just as the psalmist hopes for deliverance from enemies in God’s exaltation of the anointed one, Paul finds hope in the exalted Χριστός Ἰησοῦς (Rom 8:34).⁵¹ Specifically, Paul says that Jesus ἐντυγχάνει ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν. He intercedes, or appeals, to God as the crucified and risen Messiah.⁵² Just as the Holy Spirit intercedes for the elect who suffer, Jesus does as well (cf. Rom 8:26-27). His word, replete with his death and resurrection, overcomes the word of accusation from enemies. Therefore, the accusation of the enemy, meant to separate God from his elect, proves unsuccessful in the present day and on the last day.

⁴⁹On Paul’s echo of Isa 50:7-9 in Rom 8:33-34, see Seifrid, *Romans*, 634-35; Shiu-Lun Shum, *Paul’s Use of Isaiah in Romans: A Comparative Study of Paul’s Letter to the Romans and the Sibylline and Qumran Sectarian Texts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 201-02.

⁵⁰See also, 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1.

⁵¹Cf. Pss 2; 110.

⁵²The intercession of Jesus is not separate from his death and resurrection. Schreiner notes, “This intercession should not be separated from his death on behalf of his people; rather, his intercession on behalf of the saints is based on his atoning death” (Schreiner, *Romans*, 463).

In Romans 8:35, Paul asks, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” As in Romans 8:33-34, Paul does not explicitly identify the enemy agents. Yet, someone, or something, is behind these things.⁵³ The two nouns θλίψις and στενοχωρία should probably be read together, since they often appear as a pair elsewhere.⁵⁴ They are general terms that can stand for a number of distressing situations.⁵⁵ Some of the other terms in Romans 8:35 are a little more specific. The noun διωγμός implies a designed harassment by enemies hostile to God’s elect.⁵⁶ The action could be both physical harm and social ostracism (e.g., Acts 13:50).⁵⁷ Paul’s reference to λιμός indicates a lack of physical sustenance.⁵⁸ Famine could come as a result of a natural disaster, but the context of Romans 8:35 points to an enemy as the cause of the hunger.⁵⁹ Even more disturbing,

⁵³Rom 8:35 is sometimes pointed to as evidence of a *Peristasenkatalog*. Fitzgerald notes, “Bultmann cited examples of such *Peristasenkataloge* from Epictetus, Musonius Rufus, Horace, and Seneca, and pointed especially to Romans 8:35 as an example in Paul” (John T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988], 11). However, it is of little consequence if Rom 8:35 resembles a *Peristasenkatalog*. Paul’s use of Ps 44 in Rom 8:36 demonstrates that he is looking at suffering from the perspective of OT lament rather than Stoicism.

⁵⁴See, e.g., LXX Deut 28:53, 55, 57; Isa 8:22; 30:6; Rom 2:9; 2 Cor 6:4.

⁵⁵While one does not want to over-interpret the terms listed in Rom 8:35, they deserve some careful consideration. Cf. Moo’s approach, “The list of difficulties that follows requires little comment, except to note that all the items except the last are found also in 2 Cor. 11:26-27 and 12:10, where Paul lists some of those hazards he himself has encountered in his apostolic labors” (Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 543).

⁵⁶Cf. the use of διωγμός in 2 Macc 12:23; Matt 13:21; Mark 4:7; 10:30; Acts 8:1; 13:50; 2 Cor 12:10; 2 Thess 1:4; 2 Tim 3:11.

⁵⁷Jewett points to the persecution suffered by Jewish Christians in Rome due to the Edict of Claudius. See Jewett, *Romans*, 546.

⁵⁸Cf. the use of λιμός in 2 Cor 11:27.

⁵⁹For the use of λιμός in contexts where the cause seems to be a natural disaster, see, e.g., LXX Gen 12:10; 26:1; Ruth 1:1.

God sometimes afflicted Israel with famine in the OT. For example, in Deuteronomy 28:48a LXX, the warning is, “And you shall serve your enemies, whom the Lord will send upon you, in famine (λιμῶ) and in thirst and in nakedness (γυμνότητι) and in lack of all things.”⁶⁰ In other words, famine could be interpreted as a sign of divine disfavor and separation from God’s blessing. It is certainly perceived this way in OT lament. For example, in Lamentations 2:21 LXX, the complaint is, “They have fallen asleep in the street, young and old; my virgins and young me went into captivity; with sword (ρόμφαίᾳ) and famine (λιμῶ) you killed them, in the day of your wrath you mangled them, you did not spare.”⁶¹ Paul’s list also includes γυμνότης. Like famine, this points to a lack of sustenance that is due in some way to the activity of enemies. The noun κίνδυνος, like θλίψις and στενοχωρία, seem to be more general than the other terms. The danger comes from any number of things, but its source is the enemy. Paul ends his list with μάχαιρα.⁶² This is most likely a reference to execution at the hand of enemies.⁶³ Moreover, as in the case of λιμός, μάχαιρα is often times a reference to divine punishment in the LXX. For example, in the lament language of Jeremiah 12:12 LXX, the cry is, “Upon every passage in the desert destroyers have come, the sword (μάχαιρα) of the Lord will devour from one end of the land to the other, there is no peace to all

⁶⁰See also, LXX 2 Sam 21:1; 24:13; Ps 104:16.

⁶¹See also, LXX Isa 5:13; 51:19; Jer 5:12; 11:22; 14:12, 16; 16:4; 18:21; 24:10; Lam 4:9; 5:10; Sir 39:29; 40:9.

⁶²Jewett describes μάχαιρα as the “climactic tribulation” in Paul’s list. See Jewett, *Romans*, 547.

⁶³Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 543.

flesh.”⁶⁴ In many instances, *λιμός* and *μάχαιρα* occur together as evidence of God’s wrath.⁶⁵ This raises a question about how the suffering should and should not be perceived. The catalog of sufferings in Romans 8:35 are acts perpetrated by enemies, human and demonic. Paul plainly asserts that none of these things can separate God’s elect from Christ’s love. But the appearance of things says otherwise. Paradoxically, even though Paul says that nothing can separate the elect from the love of Christ, God is absent. He is at least absent in the sense that Christ has not yet returned. This absence is the very reason that the elect suffer at the hands of their enemies. Therefore, one could look at the situation and conclude, as some did in OT lament, that God’s apparent absence in battle meant divine rejection. That is thought the Paul will acknowledge in Romans 8:36, but he will then undo it in Romans 8:37-39.

Psalm 44. Romans 8:36 is a citation of Psalm 44:23 (Ps 43:23 LXX). It is a citation that can be fully appreciated only in light of its original context. Failure to understand the original context will lead to a devaluation of what Paul is saying in Romans 8:31-39. Therefore, it is helpful to give a brief overview of the entire psalm before commenting on its use in Romans.

In OT lament language, separation from God frequently elicits a complaint. In Psalm 44, a community lament, God’s people suffer in the face of their enemies, because there is a divine absence in battle (Ps 44:10).⁶⁶ They are separated from, or seemingly

⁶⁴On the tone of lament in Jer 12, see Walter Baumgartner, *Jeremiah’s Poems of Lament*, trans. David E. Orton (Decatur, GA: The Almond Press, 1988), 86.

⁶⁵See, e.g., LXX Jer 5:12; 49:22; 51:12, 13, 18, 27; Lam 2:21; Ezek 5:17; 7:15.

⁶⁶There is no consensus on the historical circumstances underlying Ps 44. See, Adele Berlin, “Psalms and the Literature of Exile: Psalms 137, 44, 69, and 78,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick Miller, Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 71-75.

rejected by, their God in the conflict with their enemies (Ps 44:10-12). They have become an object of derision and cheaply earned spoil (Ps 44:13-17). To compound the problem, their suffering is undeserved (Ps 44:18-22).⁶⁷ Therefore, at the height of the complaint, the psalmist writes, “For on account of you we are put to death all day long; we were reckoned as sheep for the slaughter” (Ps 44:23 MT; 43:23 LXX). By prefacing the complaint with “on account of you,” the psalmist places the responsibility for the nation’s suffering squarely on God.⁶⁸ “On account of you” is a reference to God’s absence and separation from his people. It is because of the separation from God that the community suffers defeat at the hands of its enemies. This understanding of “on account of you” is confirmed in Psalm 44:25, “Why do you hide your face? You forget our affliction and oppression.” With the metaphors of hiding the face and divine forgetfulness, it becomes clear that the source of the community’s distress is not just its enemies. Underlying the distress caused by enemies is God’s absence. It is an absence that is both mystifying and frightening. It is mystifying in the sense that there is no reason for it, but it is frightening because it would mean that God is angry with his people

⁶⁷Interpreters of Ps 44 continue to debate whether or not the psalmist really means to say that God’s people are innocent of sin in this particular instance. Ferris observes that, in community laments, the protestation of innocence is “rare.” He points to Pss 44 and 59 as the only examples. See Paul Wayne Ferris, Jr. *The Genre of Communal Lament in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 99. However, the protest of innocence is made nonetheless. Therefore, the heart of the matter is the cause of the nation’s suffering. Terrien argues, “In Psalm 44 the divine abandonment of the nation remains a total enigma,” (Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 360). By contrast, Kraus argues, “The suffering comes to the community because it belongs to Yahweh. It is experiencing martyrdom” (Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988], 448). Therefore, two interpretive options for understanding the cause of the suffering in Ps 44 are “mystery” or “martyrdom.” The suffering either remains an enigma, or it can be explained as the consequence of being God’s people (i.e., martyrdom). Either way, the suffering is still undeserved.

⁶⁸This holds true even if the cause of the suffering is understood as martyrdom. Nevertheless, when Ps 44 is taken as a whole, it is clear that the cause of the suffering is God’s aloofness rather than the people’s faithfulness to him (i.e., martyrdom).

for no justifiable reason.⁶⁹ It is “on account of” the separation from God in his absence that a complaint arises about continually facing death like a sheep to slaughter. “On account of” is not a reference to martyrdom. It is a reference to God’s absence. The community suffers at the hands of its enemies, on account of the fact that God is not present.

Romans 8:36. In light of its OT context, the interpretive key to understanding Paul’s citation of Psalm 43:23 LXX is the phrase ἕνεκεν σοῦ.⁷⁰ Either Paul is echoing a concern about God’s absence in the face of enemies, or he has something else in mind, perhaps martyrdom.⁷¹ As I have already noted, the full context of Psalm 44 (Ps 43 LXX) points to a complaint about God’s absence. Therefore, the question becomes whether Paul’s use of the citation refers to the same concern. There are three things which indicate Paul is reflecting on God’s absence in the face of suffering. First, Paul uses the introductory formula καθὼς γέγραπται ὅτι. In this way, he links the citation of Romans 8:36 with its antecedent. The antecedent of the citation is both its original context, Psalm 44, and its new one, Romans 8:35. In his analysis of the introductory formula in Paul’s

⁶⁹It should be kept in mind that the first OT reference to God hiding his face occurs in Deut 31:18, “But I will surely hide my face in that day on account of all the evil which they did, for they turned to other gods.” The cause of the hiding in this context is divine anger over sin. Cf. Job 13:24.

⁷⁰There is only a slight difference in the phrase as it appears in Ps 43:23LXX and Paul’s citation. The former reads ἕνεκα while the latter is ἕνεκεν. The form ἕνεκα is common in the Attic, but it is rarer in the NT. The only unanimously attested occurrence of ἕνεκα in the NT is found in Acts 26:21. See, Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Fredrick William Danker [BDAG], 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “ἕνεκα.”

⁷¹Käsemann sees a reference to martyrdom in the citation of Ps 43:23 LXX. He writes, “The citation from Ps 43:23 LXX was commonly used by the rabbis with reference to the martyrdom of the pious, sometimes in a transferred sense” (Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], 249).

letters, Watson observes, “This introductory formula serves also to connect the citation with its antecedent, the statement that precedes it in its new context; it asserts that the citation corresponds both to exemplar and its antecedent.”⁷² Therefore, the antecedent context of Romans 8:36, namely Romans 8:35, corresponds with the antecedent context of Psalm 44:23 (Ps 43:23 LXX). This means that the psalmist’s concern about God’s absence in the face of enemies is also Paul’s concern. Second, that Paul has in mind God’s absence in his use of ἕνεκεν σου is also indicated by the tone of Romans 8:31-39. Paul’s tone is pastoral not triumphal.⁷³ To be sure, he is very reassuring to the suffering community that God’s work in Christ means there is no separation from divine love. However, it does not follow that Paul means to say in Romans 8:36, “We are doing all this ‘on account of you’ Lord! We are being slaughtered like sheep all for your glory.” That would make Paul’s use of the psalm incongruent with its original context. Moreover, Paul’s tone is not something like “Don’t be surprised.”⁷⁴ This too would make Paul’s citation and its original OT context clash. Rather, he is addressing a real concern about the paradox of hope and suffering. Third, Romans 8:37 takes up theme of victory, evident through the use of ὑπερνικάω. This is a theme coming directly out of the context of Psalm 44. The psalmist laments God’s absence in battle and the victory it affords the enemy (Ps 44:10-17). “On account of” God’s absence there is no victory. However, in

⁷² Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 43.

⁷³ On Paul’s pastoral tone in Rom 8:31-39, see Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms*, Word Biblical Themes (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 129-30.

⁷⁴ Some commentators interpret Rom 8:36 in this manner. Moo writes of Paul’s citation, “For he is constantly concerned to show that the sufferings experienced by Christians should occasion no surprise” (Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 543-44).

Romans 8:37, Paul assures the Christians in Rome that God's presence in Christ means victory over all the suffering described in Romans 8:35.

Therefore, "on account of you" is a reference to God's absence in the midst of suffering. The result of God's absence is daily death—"We face death all day long" (Rom 8:36). Paul portrays the actions of Romans 8:35 as things which happen frequently. Moreover, the condition of the community is likened to sheep led to the slaughter. In the psalms, sheep are portrayed either as God's own whom he protects or "collective humanity" that are headed for death.⁷⁵ The latter, rather than the former, seems to be the lot of the believing community in light of their suffering. Death threatens to separate God's elect from him. Nevertheless, Paul borrows this lament language, with all of its emphases, and juxtaposes it alongside the victory won in Jesus Christ. This is evident both before and after Romans 8:36.

Separation in Romans 8:37-39. Paul asserts "super-triumph" in Christ over external enemies so that separation from God is not a possibility.⁷⁶ There are a number of circumstances and agents that threaten separation, but ultimately they are unsuccessful. They are unsuccessful because the work and presence of Christ precludes them from doing so. In this way, the complaint about facing death on account of God's absence is answered. Paul makes clear the greatness of the hope by setting it alongside enemies who, if let unchecked, would surely separate the elect from God.

⁷⁵J. Kenneth Kuntz, "Growling Dogs and Thirsty Deer: Uses of Animal Imagery in Psalmic Rhetoric" in *My Words Are Lovely: Studies in the Rhetoric of the Psalms*, ed. Robert L. Foster and David M. Howard, Jr. (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 51. Kuntz notes other references to sheep in Pss 49:15; 74:1; 77:21; 78:52; 79:13; 80:2; 95:7; 100:3; 107:41; 114:4, 6.

⁷⁶Seifrid comments, "Through 'the one who loved us' we 'super-triumph'" (Seifrid, *Romans*, 637).

It is no wonder that Paul speaks of “super-triumph” in Romans 8:37, because the forces marshaled against God’s elect are supernatural and cosmic in scale. Paul speaks of existence (life-death), supernatural agents (angels-rulers), time (things present-things to come), powers, and spatial dimensions (height-depth). Death is the “fiercest enemy of God,” but life is almost as wearisome.⁷⁷ Since the believing community lives in a world subjected to futility and decay, life is lived under the threat of death.⁷⁸ It is also distressing that angelic beings, though unseen, present an extremely potent threat of separation from God. Paul speaks of “angels and rulers,” as well as “powers.”⁷⁹ He often times uses ἄγγελος as a reference to both godly and demonic agents in his writings.⁸⁰ In Romans 8:38, Paul probably has both in mind. His point is that neither godly nor demonic angels could separate the elect from God (cf. Gal 1:8). In the Pauline corpus, ἀρχή frequently denotes evil and hostile spiritual forces.⁸¹ This meaning fits the context of Romans 8:37-39 as well.⁸² Paul’s list also includes “things present” and “things to come.” This is a reference to suffering caused by enemies presently and in the future. The sense is that the capability of future events to separate the elect from God is just as impotent as present ones (cf. 1 Cor 3:22). He also talks about the inability of “height” and “depth” to detach the elect from God. Here is most likely reflecting on

⁷⁷See Stuhlmacher, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 140-41.

⁷⁸See 1 Cor 15:54-57.

⁷⁹Schreiner lumps these three together. See Schreiner, *Romans*, 465.

⁸⁰See, e.g., 2 Cor 11:13; 12:7; Gal 1:8; 3:19; 4:14.

⁸¹See, e.g., Eph 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16, 18; 2:15.

⁸²Stuhlmacher identifies the “angels and rulers” as “fallen angels and principalities.” See Stuhlmacher, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 141.

spatial dimensions, a common feature of OT lament language (cf. Pss 55:24; 88:5; Eph 3:18).⁸³ There is no place high enough, or low enough, in all creation to separate the elect from God.⁸⁴ Finally, Paul ends his list with a reference to “any other created thing.” This is a reminder to the believing community that God triumphs over what he created. Everything mentioned in Paul’s list has been created by God. Moreover, any other created thing hostile to the elect, but not mentioned in the list, does not have the ability to separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

Lament Language and the Interpretation of Romans 8:18-39

The form of lament language in Romans 8:18-39 includes the participants of lament, the pattern of lament, and a common lament about separation from God. Recognition of these forms is helpful for interpretation of the passage in at least two ways. First, it offers a corrective to any exegesis that tends to gloss over the depth of the suffering that Paul has in view and the hope he is offering. For example, one commentator writes about Romans 8:18-30, “The thesis of verse 18 is that present sufferings are inconsequential in light of our certain future glory, and the subsequent verses 19-30 support this thesis.”⁸⁵ The word most bothersome is “inconsequential.” Such a description tends to eclipse, or silence, the groaning of creation, the sons of God, and the Holy Spirit. Paul does not treat suffering as inconsequential in Romans

⁸³Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:443.

⁸⁴ Paul’s focus on spatial dimensions is similar to Ps 138:8 LXX, “If I should go up to heaven, you are there; if I should go down to Hades, you are present.”

⁸⁵Schreiner, *Romans*, 434.

8:19-30. Instead, he uses lament language to juxtapose the greatness of the suffering alongside the greatness of the hope in Christ. “Groaning” is not just about hope. It is an act that speaks to the depth of the suffering, as well as the hope. Neither the emphasis on hope nor the suffering should be jettisoned. To ignore one is to misunderstand the other. What is missed is the *Sitz im Leben* of suffering that Paul clearly lays out in Romans 8:18-39. He writes as one who suffers, and he writes to Christians who, either have suffered or will suffer in the future. The pastoral dimension of the text must be considered in exchange for a one-sided reading about future glory. Hearing the lament language in the text raises an awareness of the suffering Paul has in mind and engenders greater appreciation for the hope he writes about.

Second, by recognizing the form of lament language in Romans 8:31-39, Paul’s citation of Psalm 43:23 LXX makes more sense. In fact, it actually sheds light on the entire motif of separation that Paul writes about. However, some commentators have branded the citation as somewhat of an intrusion in an otherwise hope-laden passage. For example, Moo writes, “This verse is something of an interruption in the flow of thought, and one that is typical for Paul.”⁸⁶ Yet, as my analysis shows, Paul’s citation of Psalm 43:23 LXX should not be so easily passed over. In fact, by ignoring the original lament context of the psalm, one misses the fact that Paul’s citation first functioned as a complaint about God’s absence. The psalmist did not write in order to encourage the community not to be surprised by their suffering and neither did Paul. Yet, that seems to be the conclusion among many interpreters of Romans. For example, Cranfield writes,

⁸⁶Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 543.

“The main effect of the quotation of Ps 44:22 [LXX: 43:23] is to show that the tribulations which face Christians are nothing new or unexpected, but have all along been characteristic of God’s people.”⁸⁷ Yet, this is exactly the opposite of why Paul cites Psalm 43:23 LXX. Paul takes up the complaint of the psalmist, because suffering could give the impression that God is absent. Famine, sword, and the like, appear to be in accordance with separation from God. However, Paul gives assurance that nothing can separate the elect from God’s love in Christ. His point is not “Don’t be surprised.” Rather, his point is “Despite all appearances, don’t be dismayed.” Allen captures the point of Romans 8:31-39, and especially 8:36, best:

Cries of anguish escape from Christian lips as readily as from Israelite lips. In pastoral vein Paul lingered on the pangs of disorientation, for which the noblest of causes is no anodyne. It is accord with this pastoral note that mention of suffering is tenderly wrapped around with ‘the love of Christ’ and ‘the love of God in Christ.’⁸⁸

Suffering and Romans 8:18-39

The lament language in Romans 8:18-39 sheds a great deal of light on Paul’s view of suffering. Specifically, four things stand out: (1) suffering is far reaching, (2) hope and suffering lead to lament, (3) suffering affects one’s perception of God, and (4) the hope of deliverance is Christ alone.

Suffering reaches to God’s children, God’s creation, and God himself. That is why all three groan. All three lament. In Romans 8:18-30, creation groans, the sons of God groan, and the Holy Spirit groans. Groaning is a form of lament. It is, in part, the

⁸⁷Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:440. See also, Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 543-44; Schreiner, *Romans*, 464.

⁸⁸Allen, *Psalms*, 130.

sound of pain. Creation experiences the pain of not fulfilling its purpose. It is subjected to futility and decay. Therefore, creation groans. However, creation's pain, and hope, is linked directly to the pain and suffering of the sons of God. As long as death holds sway over them, creation cannot fulfill its purpose. The sons of God groan because of pain caused by sin, death, and evil. Yet, neither creation nor the sons of God lament only because of their suffering. There would be no need for groaning if they had no hope. Without hope, they would remain silent. The hope they share is the resurrection. Both creation and the sons of God groan for the redemption of the believer's body. Yet, there is a third participant in this lament. Since the sons of God are weak in their prayer and understanding, the Holy Spirit helps. In this way, God shares in the suffering of his creation and his children. This is evident in the fact that he makes the same sound as those who suffer, namely he groans. The Holy Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. This is much needed, because suffering affects the saint's perception of God.

The main reason Paul gives such great assurance about God's sovereignty and love is that the believing community's suffering either was, or soon would be, great. Paul assures the Christians in Rome that God is "for them," because suffering could lead to the perception that God is absent. Moreover, his absence could lead to the conclusion, as in Psalm 44, that God is against them. Paul's citation of Psalm 43:23 LXX in Romans 8:36 points to the perception that "on account of" God's absence in the face of suffering there is death all day long. Suffering could be interpreted as God's rejection of his people that would surely lead to death. Therefore, Paul points to the great hope of deliverance they have in Christ.

Paul juxtaposes great suffering from enemies with great hope in Christ. There are a number of enemies that threaten the believing community, but Paul gives the assurance that none of those things can separate the elect from God's love in Christ. The reason for their hope is the deliverance achieved through Jesus Christ. Regardless of what form the suffering takes, Paul's sees the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ as reason for hope in the face of pain. The hope of God being "for them" rests in the crucified and risen Christ (Rom 8:31). God handed over his son to death on behalf of the elect, and that means God will surely give all that the suffering community needs (Rom 8:32). Christ's death, resurrection, and exaltation give the sure hope that no enemy, human or demonic, can successfully accuse the elect (Rom 8:33-34). The exalted Christ intercedes for the suffering elect at God's right hand. This means that God is not absent. There is no separation from him even in the face of death (Rom 8:35-36). The suffering caused by enemies, regardless of time, place, or method, is overwhelming conquered through the Christ who loved the elect at the cross (Rom 8:37-39). The hope of the deliverance found in Jesus Christ is the salve for all the suffering that makes it seem as if God is absent, or that he has rejected his people. Like the PssLm, where cries of suffering are predicated on hope in divine deliverance, the elect's lament is laden with hope in the deliverance of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 6

ISRAEL'S UNBELIEF, PAUL'S GRIEF, AND THE GOSPEL:
LAMENT LANGUAGE IN ROMANS 9-11

In Romans 9-11, Paul's grief and pain over Israel's unbelief is obvious from the outset. There is real and heartfelt suffering over his kinsmen's rejection of their Messiah. Yet, this is in accordance with God's promise to Israel. As heartbreaking as it is for Paul to see his fellow Israelites snub God's mercy, their unbelief results in salvation for the Gentiles just as God had promised. Therefore, God's mercy is hidden in Israel's unbelief.¹ The expression of such a painful, paradoxical, and praiseworthy divine purpose requires a special language, namely lament.

The thesis of the present chapter is that Paul's lament language in Romans 9-11 reveals both the depth of the suffering caused by Israel's unbelief and the depth of the gospel's answer to such pain. There is lament language present throughout Romans 9-11 that needs to be considered in the analysis of a notoriously difficult section of the letter. In what follows, I will consider three things: (1) the form and function of the lament language in Romans 9-11, (2) the interpretation of Romans 9-11 in light of lament language, and (3) suffering in light of Romans 9-11.

¹I am following Seifrid at many points in my analysis of Rom 9-11. See Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 151-69.

The Form and Function of the Language

Romans 9-11 contains two primary forms of lament language. First, Romans 9:1-5 is an intercessory lament that echoes Exodus 32:32. The echo of Moses' lament and the answer God gives him is heard throughout Romans 9-11. Second, Romans 9-11 contains a clear pattern of lament. Paul begins with a cry of distress in Romans 9:1-5 and ends with praise in Romans 11:33-36. Between the initial lament and final word of praise there is an answer to the distress over Israel's unbelief. All of this constitutes lament language.

Paul's Echo of Moses' Intercessory Lament

In Romans 9:1-5, Paul expresses his "great grief" and "unceasing pain" for his kinsmen according to the flesh. The nouns λύπη and ὀδύνη are strong indicators of the inner anguish Paul experienced due to Israel's unbelief. The depth of his concern is evident in Romans 9:3, "For I myself was wishing to be accursed from Christ for my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh." This particular statement is akin to the intercessory lament in the OT. Specifically, Paul echoes the lament of Moses found in Exodus 32:32, "But now if you will forgive their sin, but if not, blot me out now from your book which you wrote."²

²Regarding the use of Exod 32-34 in Rom 9:1-5, see Brian J. Abasciano, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9.1-9: An Intertextual and Theological Exegesis* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 45-146; Mark A. Seifrid, *Romans*, in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 639; Gordon P. Wiles, *Paul's Intercessory Prayers: The Significance of the Intercessory Prayer Passages in the Letters of Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 255-57.

Exodus 32:32 in context. Based on the context of Exodus 32-34, there are three things that should be noted about Moses' intercessory lament in Exodus 32:32.³

First, Moses is concerned that Israel will be separated from God's presence. Separation is a real threat due to the nation's idolatry manifested in their fashioning and worship of a golden calf (Exod 32:1-6). Concern over God's absence is evident in Exodus 33:15, "Then he said to him, 'If your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here.'"

Regarding the theme of divine presence in Exodus 32-34, Moberly notes,

It was this, as a basic part of the covenant relationship, that was jeopardized by Israel's sin, and it is for this that Moses urgently pleaded, that despite the people's sin Yahweh should yet go with the people in a movable shrine and be present in their midst.⁴

Next, Moses' intercession in Exodus 32:32 is the second of three such prayers that are uttered in Exodus 32-34. The first intercession comes immediately after Israel worships the golden calf. God threatens to destroy Israel, but Moses intercedes by using a form of lament language. Specifically, he appeals to God's reputation,

Why will the Egyptians speak saying, "On account of evil he led them out in order to kill them in the mountains and to bring them to an end from upon the face of the earth." Turn from the burning of your anger and change your mind about the harm to your people (Exod 32:12).

It is common in lament language to appeal to God's reputation, or name, when a request is made.⁵ Moses also recalls God's prior promise to the patriarchs, "Remember

³For Exod 32-34 as a distinct unit, see Robert Davidson, *The Courage to Doubt: Exploring an Old Testament Theme* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 69-79; William Sanford Lasor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 76-79; Michael Wildmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 89-225.

⁴R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32-34* (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Press, 1983), 110.

⁵See, e.g., Pss 25:11; 31:4; 79:9.

Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants whom you swore to them and you said to them, ‘I will multiply your seed according to the stars of the heavens and all this land which I swore I will give to your seed and they will take it as an eternal possession’ (Exod 32:13). God responds to Moses’ intercessory lament with both mercy and judgment.⁶ The third intercession is in Exodus 33:12-23. Moses wants knowledge of God’s presence and ways with Israel (Exod 33:13, 15). The divine response is that Moses will be allowed to view a partial glimpse of God’s glory. Revelation of the glory is summarized in Exodus 34:6-7:

Then the Lord passed over his face and then he declared, “The Lord God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth, who keeps lovingkindness to thousands, who forgives transgression and sin; yet, he will certainly not leave unpunished, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”

Once again, God answers Moses’ request by showing his mercy and judgment. Finally, in Exodus 32:32, Moses requests that Israel would be forgiven for their idolatry. A lack of forgiveness will mean separation from God. It is here that interpretive questions usually arise. Is Moses really offering himself in place of Israel? Or, is he requesting to be wiped out with Israel if God will not forgive?⁷ Both interpretations have strong points, but I am persuaded that Moses is, in some way, offering himself in place of Israel. Moses is an intercessor so moved by concern for the people that he offers his life for theirs.⁸ If God was willing to start a new nation through him, then perhaps he would

⁶Part of the judgment is the slaying of the people in the camp at the hands of Moses and the Levites. God’s mercy is revealed in that he does not slay everyone. See Exod 32:14-29.

⁷On these questions, see Davidson, *The Courage to Doubt*, 73; Widmer, *Moses*, 131-34.

⁸Gerhard von Rad, speaking about Moses’ intercession, notes, “But once more we find that this trait is magnified, and in fact even pushed to the extreme: in order to save Israel, Moses declares that he is ready himself to become ἀνάθεμα on their behalf” (Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: Theology of Israel’s Historical Traditions*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker [San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1962], 1:293).

consider forgiving the present nation through him instead (Exod 32:10). This is also evident in God's immediate response to Moses' request, "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot him out of my book'" (Exod 32:33). In other words, Moses cannot be blotted out in place of those who committed idolatry. He cannot face the nation's judgment for them. However, it does not follow that God's promise to multiply Abraham's seed and give Israel the land has failed. To the contrary, the fact that God has mercy on Moses, and others, reveals that divine mercy is hidden in divine judgment.

Evidence of the echo. Many commentators recognize the similarity between Paul's words in Romans 9:3 and the words of Moses in Exodus 32:32.⁹ Nevertheless, the comparison of the two intercessory laments is generally brief. Therefore, it is necessary to review the evidence for Paul's echo of Moses' lament.¹⁰

Of all the prayer language in the OT, Romans 9:3 most resembles Exodus 32:32.¹¹ There are a number of links between the two texts. For example, both Moses and Paul request to be separated from God for the sake of Israel. Although the language

⁹See, e.g., James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38b (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 525; Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 560-61; Eduard Lohse, *Der Brief an die Römer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 266-67; William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895), 229; Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*, trans. Scott J. Hafemann (Louisville: Westminster, 1994), 145.

¹⁰Surprisingly, Hays does not believe that Rom 9:3 is an echo of Exod 32:32. He notes, "The suggestion is often made that Paul is recalling the story of Moses' offering himself to atone for the sin of Israel (Exod. 32:30-34). There are, however, no direct verbal echoes of the Exodus text in Rom. 9:3" (Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989], 206).

¹¹There has been a suggestion that Paul alludes to Mordecai's prayer in Esth 4:17d LXX. See Panagiotis Bratsiotis, "Eine Exegetische Notiz zu Rom. IX 3 und X. 1," *Novum Testamentum* 5 (1962): 299-300.

is not exactly the same, the concept is. Moses' request to be "wiped out" from the book and Paul's request to be "accursed" is to ask for the same thing, namely divine destruction through separation from God. In the Pentateuch, the verb $\pi\pi\eta$, or $\acute{\epsilon}\xi\alpha\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\iota\psi\omega$, often appears in contexts of divine judgment. For example, God's announcement in Genesis 7:4 is, "For yet in seven days I am bringing rain upon the earth for forty days and forty nights and I will wipe out ($\pi\pi\eta$ / $\acute{\epsilon}\xi\alpha\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\iota\psi\omega$) every creature, which I made, from the face of the earth."¹² To be "wiped out" is to face God's divine wrath. In Exodus 32:32, Moses wishes to face that wrath in the place of the nation. He wants to be blotted out of God's "book." The OT contains various references to a divine record book.¹³ The righteous are included in the book, but the wicked are not.¹⁴ Israel's idolatry would warrant removal from the book, which is tantamount to being separated from, and cursed by, God. Widmer explains, "In other words, when Moses asks to be erased from God's record, he appears to express a willingness to be cut off from his relationship with YHWH and thus would subject himself to curse and eventual death."¹⁵ Similarly, Paul's use of $\acute{\alpha}\nu\acute{\alpha}\theta\epsilon\mu\alpha$ is a request to be separated from God in death. In the Pauline corpus, $\acute{\alpha}\nu\acute{\alpha}\theta\epsilon\mu\alpha$ carries the idea of divine judgment and being cut off from God in death like a wicked person. For example, in Galatians 1:8, Paul writes, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you besides that which we preached to you, let him be accursed ($\acute{\alpha}\nu\acute{\alpha}\theta\epsilon\mu\alpha$)."¹⁶ Paul wishes for the troublemakers in Galatia, who preach a

¹²See also, Gen 7:23; 9:15; Exod 17:14; Deut 9:14; 29:19.

¹³See Widmer, *Moses*, 130.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶See also, 1 Cor 16:22; Gal 1:9.

different gospel, to face divine judgment. It is a request for separation from the life that God gives. Moreover, it comports with being “wiped out from the book.” Jewett observes, “To pray to be ἀνάθεμα is an apt expression of being blotted out of the book of life.”¹⁷

However, the evidence for an echo of Exodus 32:32 in Romans 9:3 does not rest merely on the similarity of being “accursed” and “wiped out.” There are two other links between the intercessory laments of Moses and Paul. First, the wider contexts of both Exodus 32:32 and Romans 9:3 contain an evocation of a prior promise. As I noted in the previous section, Moses’ first intercessory lament references God’s prior promise to the patriarchs, “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants whom you swore to them and you said to them, ‘I will multiply your seed according to the stars of the heavens and all this land which I swore I will give to you seed and they will take it as an eternal possession’” (Exod 32:13). Moses hopes his petition will be heard on the basis of God’s prior promise. Similarly, in Romans 9:4-5, Paul evokes God’s prior promises to Israel. In typical lament fashion, and like Moses, Paul evokes the prior promises of God in his lament over Israel’s unbelief. Second, the echo of Exodus 32:32 is evident in the similarity of the divine answer that both Moses and Paul receive. As I already noted, God responds to all three of Moses’ intercessory laments with judgment and mercy. Specifically, God’s mercy is revealed against the dark backdrop of his judgment. For example, Moses and the Levites slaughter many Israelites in the camp after the golden calf incident, but God does not slay all of them. His mercy is seen in judgment. Not coincidentally, Paul receives the same divine answer. In Romans 9:6-11:32, Paul

¹⁷Jewett, *Romans*, 560.

explains that God's mercy to the world, and Israel, is hidden in his judgment of Israel. Paul's echo of God's answer to Moses' lament is further substantiated by his citation of Exodus 33:19 in Romans 9:15. This means Paul passes at least one of Hays' seven tests for hearing echoes in a text, namely "availability."¹⁸ His citation of Exodus 33:19 shows that Exodus 32-34 is "available" for Paul's use in Romans 9:3. Moreover, Romans 9:3 also passes Hays' tests of "thematic coherence" and "satisfaction."¹⁹ Paul's lament language in Romans 9:3, and throughout Romans 9-11, fits closely with the themes of Exodus 32-34. Additionally, it adds illumination to the larger context, as I will show in the next section. Therefore, it is not one single piece of evidence that confirms the echo of Exodus 32:32 in Romans 9:3. Rather, it is the corroboration of a number of things.

The Pattern of Lament in Romans 9-11

The best way to analyze the lament language in Romans 9-11 is to consider the pattern of lament, or deliverance, present in this particular portion of the letter. The pattern is present on three levels: (1) Romans 9:1-5 is the pattern of lament *in nuce*, (2) Romans 9:6-11:32 is the answer to Paul's opening lament, and (3) Romans 11:33-36 contains the shift from lament to praise.

The pattern *in nuce*. As noted in previous chapters, the five-fold pattern associated with lament language is as follows: (1) prior promise, (2) suffering, (3) lament,

¹⁸See Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 29.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 29-32.

(4) deliverance, and (5) praise. Romans 9:1-5 contains all five parts. Like Moses' intercessory laments in Exodus 32-34, Paul's lament arises from both God's prior promise and Israel's unbelief. The nation's rejection of the Messiah, despite God's prior promise of deliverance, results in Paul's suffering and lament. In Romans 9:1-2, Paul swears that he has great internal torment, "I speak the truth in Christ, I do not lie, while my conscience testifies in me in the Holy Spirit, that great grief is in me and unceasing pain in my heart."²⁰ The internal and emotional nature of Paul's suffering is evident through his repetitive use of the dative case and his use of καρδία. It is also evident through his use of λύπη and ὀδύνη.²¹ Collectively the language points to Paul's deep anguish over Israel's condition.

Such suffering over the unbelieving nation elicits the lament in Romans 9:3, "For I was praying that I myself would be accursed from Christ for my brethren my kinsmen according to the flesh." As I noted already, Paul's language is reminiscent of Moses' intercessory lament. He knows that Israel's unbelief results in separation from Christ, which is separation from God. Therefore, he requested that he would be separated instead. Specifically, he prayed to be accursed from Christ. The imperfect use of εὔχομαι, indicates that at some point Paul actually prayed this prayer.²² While it is true that the imperfect tense can indicate potential action, that does not seem to be the idea in Romans 9:3.²³ The use of αὐτός ἐγώ would be less emphatic if Paul never actually

²⁰For Paul's oath language, see Jewett, *Romans*, 557-58.

²¹Dunn notes, "The doubling of λύπη and ὀδύνη intensifies the already strong emotive force of the affidavit" (Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 523).

²²See Jewett, *Romans*, 560.

²³For those who see Paul's prayer as potential but not actual, see, e.g., Chrys C. Caragounis, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual*

uttered these words.²⁴ Perhaps commentators are reluctant to see this as an actual prayer from the apostle, because Paul knew full well that he could not atone for the sins of Israel. However, Wiles is helpful in his conclusion, “The guarded language, ἠὺχόμεν, suggests that in his perplexity and concern he did harbor such a prayer, but could hardly believe it possible of fulfillment.”²⁵ Additionally, Paul echoes both Moses’ petition and God’s answer. Therefore, he knows full well that he cannot be separated from Christ in place of Israel. Nevertheless, that does not mitigate Paul’s profound pain.²⁶ Once again, the depth of Paul’s suffering is indicated by the lament language he employs.

Paul’s suffering and lament do not stem only from Israel’s unbelief. Just as in Romans 8:18-30, where suffering and hope elicit a groaning, Israel’s unbelief and God’s prior promise lead to an intercessory lament. The descriptions of Paul’s kinsmen according to the flesh contained in Romans 9:4-5 can all be summarized as promise.²⁷

Seifrid nicely ties every description of Israel to promise. He observes:

The ‘sonship’ granted to Israel in its redemption from Egypt foreshadows the adoption to sonship at the ‘redemption of the body. The glory of God which followed Israel in the wilderness had as its ‘goal’ the glory of God which will be manifest in the resurrection of the dead. The giving of the law anticipated the sending of Christ. Israel’s worship in the wilderness pointed forward to the

Transmission (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 163; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 558; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 552; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 480.

²⁴Jewett, *Romans*, 560.

²⁵Wiles, *Paul’s Intercessory Prayers*, 256.

²⁶Crump notes, “In the heart of his letter to the Romans, Paul strikes a near-spiritual profligacy when he admits a willingness to surrender his own salvation in the cause of Israel’s inclusion within the church. These words are more than rhetorical flourish; Paul vents a genuine desire expressed in real petitions to God” (David Crump, *Knocking on Heaven’s Door: A New Testament Theology of Petitionary Prayer* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006], 221).

²⁷Seifrid, *Christ Our Righteousness*, 153.

gathering of the Gentiles and their priest service to God. Over against the fathers to whom the promises were given stands the Christ in whom they are fulfilled. In other words, Israel's history is itself promissory.²⁸

The "promissory" history of Israel, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, makes Israel's rejection of the Messiah all the more stinging to Paul. All the promises of God to Israel are fulfilled in Christ, but Israel is separated from him. Paul does not see his kinsmen with the Messiah as God had promised. Therefore, Paul laments, and God answers.²⁹

The shorthand answer to Paul's lament is contained in the doxological statement of Romans 9:5, "Whose are the fathers and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever, Amen." In short, the answer to Paul's lament, that unbelieving Israel is separated from God, is that Christ is God over all. Interpreters are divided on how to properly punctuate and translate Romans 9:5.³⁰ Either the verse is punctuated in such a way that Christ is not praised as God, or it is punctuated in such a way that he is. However, the discussion does not really turn on grammatical issues alone. For example, Dunn admits that grammatically the most natural reading of Romans 9:5 is, "From them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."³¹ Yet, he concludes,

On the other hand, the theology implied in referring the benediction to the Messiah would almost certainly jar with anyone sensitive to the context. This list is a

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Seifrid notes, "In the present Paul's grief find no answer, just as there is presently no visible answer to the suffering of believers; therefore the lament" (Mark A. Seifrid, *Romans*, in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 639).

³⁰See the discussion in Moo, *Romans*, 565-68.

³¹James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 256.

sequence of Israel's blessings and would naturally end with a benediction to the God of Israel, just as the whole discussion climaxes with a doxology to God alone.³²

Dunn implies that the context of Romans 9:1-5, and 9-11, will not allow for a doxological statement about Jesus. Yet, the opposite is true. In Romans 9:6-11:32, Paul attributes a number of actions to Christ, actions that had Yahweh as their original referent.³³ For example, Romans 10:13 contains a citation of Joel 2:32 (Joel 3:5 LXX), "For whoever should call on the name of the Lord will be saved." In its original context, the referent of κύριος, or יהוה, can only be Yahweh. Yet, in the context of Romans 10:1-13, the referent is clearly Jesus Christ. Moreover, Romans 10:12 is clearly a monotheistic statement, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is overall, being rich to all who call on him."³⁴ Again, the referent of "Lord" is Jesus Christ. This means that Dunn's objection to the correspondence between Romans 9:5 and 10:13 cannot stand.³⁵ Christ, in whom all the prior promises to Israel are fulfilled, is God over πάντων. "All" refers to both Jew and Gentile. The answer to Paul's cry for unbelieving Israel, just as for the Gentiles, is only answered in Christ. Separation from God, or being accursed, is overcome in the divine presence of Christ. Deliverance is found in him alone. Paul unpacks that answer in Romans 9:6-11:32.

³²Ibid.

³³Bauckham notes that several OT citations in Rom 9-11 have Yahweh as their original referent. However, when Paul employs them, Christ is the clear referent. See Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 189.

³⁴Ibid., 195.

³⁵Regarding the correspondence between Rom 9:5 and 10:13, he writes, "To be sure, Paul later in the same section speaks of Jesus as 'Lord of all.' But 'Lord,' as we have seen, is not to be equated simpliciter with 'God'" (Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*, 256).

The answer in Romans 9:6-13. When Moses lamented Israel's separation from God, the divine answer focused on both mercy and judgment. Specifically, in God's judgment of Israel, his mercy is paradoxically hidden and revealed. Similarly, when Paul laments Israel's separation from Christ, the divine answer, laid out in Romans 9:6-11:32, is mercy hidden in judgment.³⁶ The first part of the answer is that God created Israel through a divine promise rather than human effort. Paul's lament language could easily be misconstrued.³⁷ The emotionally charged display in Romans 9:1-5 could leave the impression that God's promise for Israel had failed. But, as Romans 9:6-11:32 shows, the opposite is true. Paul makes it clear from the outset that the λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ has not failed (Rom 9:6). By λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, Paul refers to the promise of deliverance and judgment, the judgment through which salvation comes.³⁸ God created Israel through his word of promise rather than physical descent or personal merit (Rom 9:9-13).³⁹ Paul explains that neither Abraham, nor Isaac, nor Jacob received the promise of a great nation that would bless the world, and bring deliverance, on any basis except God's promise. As an example of God's creating Israel through a promise, he points to God's election of Jacob rather than Esau:

For when they had not been born, nor done anything good or bad, in order that the purpose of God might remain according to election, not from works but from the

³⁶I am following the three-part structure of Rom 9-11 laid out by Seifrid: (1) Rom 9:1-13, (2) 9:14-10:21, and (3) 11:1-36. See Seifrid, *Christ Our Righteousness*, 152.

³⁷Jewett, *Romans*, 573.

³⁸Seifrid notes, "Here as well as in the earlier context, the 'word of God' not only promises salvation but also brings the judgment through which salvation arrives. Thus the use of the broader term *logos* is understandable" (Seifrid, *Romans*, 639).

³⁹On this point, see C. K. Barrett, *Paul: An Introduction to His Thought* (Louisville: Westminster, 1994), 120; Seifrid, *Romans*, 640.

one who calls, it was said to her that, “The lesser will serve the greater,” just as it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” (Rom 9:11-13).

The citations of Genesis 25:23 and Malachi 1:2-3 substantiate Paul’s explanation that Israel came from a promise in the past and still does in Paul’s day.⁴⁰ As Seifrid notes, “Paul’s appeal to the text implies that the pattern has been repeated in his day. God in freedom has set his love on some within Israel, but not on others.”⁴¹ Israel had always been, and still was in Paul’s time, created through God’s promise.

The answer in Romans 9:14-10:21. God’s freedom in creating Israel through a promise raises some questions about God’s righteousness that Paul addresses in Romans 9:14-10:21. In the course of answering these questions, a second part of the answer to Paul’s lament emerges. The suffering that Paul experiences due to Israel’s unbelief is answered in God’s righteousness. Specifically, God is free in his righteousness, but Israel, in accordance with the promise of the scriptures, has rejected that righteousness.

Two theological objections are raised in this section of Romans 9-11. First, Paul writes, “What then will we say? There is not unrighteousness with God is there? May it never be?” (Rom 9:14). God’s creation of Israel through a promise, to the exclusion of others, raises a question about God’s righteousness. However, Paul uses the Exodus narrative to make the point that God was, and still is, free in his righteousness,

⁴⁰Hanson comments on Paul’s citations in Rom 9:6-13, “He is not saying: ‘The lineage that begins with a promise is the one that counts.’ He is saying something much more like John 1.13: ‘who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of man, but of God’” (Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *Studies in Paul’s Technique and Theology* [London: SPCK, 1974], 89). In other words, Paul’s citations do not merely establish how God worked in the beginning. They indicate that God works the same way in Paul’s present, namely Israel comes through the word of promise.

⁴¹Seifrid, *Romans*, 641.

“For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion’” (Rom 9:15).⁴² The conclusion Paul draws is that mercy is not contingent on human striving (Rom 9:16). If it were, mercy would cease to be mercy.⁴³ Moreover, Paul explains that God demonstrates his freedom to show mercy in the hardening of others, as his dealings with Pharaoh make clear. However, this raises a second theological objection. In Romans 9:19, Paul writes, “You will say to me then, ‘Why then does he still find fault? For who has resisted his will?’” Paul’s response is once again to focus on God’s freedom. He employs the prophetic image of the clay and its potter (Isa 29:16; 45:9; Jer 18:6; 50:25).⁴⁴ The clay cannot ask the potter why it has been made in such a way. In other words, Israel cannot object to how God freely acts in mercy. God is free in both his divine wrath and mercy. Paul continues with the clay-potter imagery, and he explains that the potter has the authority to make vessels for “honor” and “dishonor” from the same batch (Rom 9:21).⁴⁵ If one follows the metaphor, Paul means that God is free to do with Israel, and all creation, what he pleases.⁴⁶ His

⁴²Regarding the present tense λέγει in Rom 9:15 and elsewhere, Watson notes, “In most cases, the verb of speaking occurs in the present tense, and the effect is to make the scriptural statement a contemporary utterance. In what they once wrote, Moses, David and Isaiah still speak here and now. Even where divine speech occurred in a quite specific context, addressed perhaps to Moses or to Pharaoh, it can still be introduced as contemporary speech” (Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* [London: T&T Clark, 2004], 45).

⁴³Seifrid notes, “Mercy rests solely in God, who determines to show mercy. Mercy remains mercy precisely because it is free” (Seifrid, *Romans*, 643).

⁴⁴On Paul’s use of this OT image, see Raymond F. Collins, *The Power of Images in Paul* (Collegeville: MN, 2008), 208-09; Jewett, *Romans*, 594-95.

⁴⁵“Honor” and “dishonor” refer to salvation and judgment. See Seifrid, *Romans*, 645.

⁴⁶He already made this point in Rom 9:11-13 with respect to God’s choice of Jacob over Esau.

pleasure, according to Paul in Romans 9:22-23, is to show to the objects of mercy, objects prepared beforehand, his glory. Paul writes,

But if God wanting to his demonstrate his wrath and to make known his power bore with much patience the objects of wrath having been designed for destruction, and in order that he might make known the wealth of his glory upon the objects of mercy which were prepared beforehand for glory (Rom 9:22-23).⁴⁷

God shows his glory through his patience towards objects of wrath prepared for destruction.⁴⁸ Specifically, the glory Paul speaks of is the glory of the resurrection promised in the gospel.⁴⁹ The “objects of wrath prepared for destruction” are those who reject the gospel. God is patient towards those objects in the sense that he does not pour out the full measure of his wrath in the present time.⁵⁰ Yet, God will reveal his power, wrath, and glory to the objects of mercy on the eschatological day.⁵¹ The divine mercy will be all the more glorious in the face of divine wrath, thereby echoing Exodus 32-34 once again. In Romans 9:24-29, Paul goes on to describe the objects of mercy in his

⁴⁷The interpretation of θέλω has troubled commentators for some time. The two most likely choices are concessive or causal. The former interpretation would mean that, although God wanted to demonstrate his wrath, he was patient. Contrastively, the causal interpretation would mean since God wanted to demonstrate his wrath he was patient towards the objects of wrath. Given the context in which Paul emphasizes God’s freedom, it seems unlikely to me that he would suddenly speak of God wanting to do something but then not doing it. Therefore, the causal interpretation is to be preferred. It is because God wanted to demonstrate his wrath that he was patient. For further discussion of θέλω, see Moo, *Romans*, 604-06; Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 261.

⁴⁸Moo rightly asks, “But how has God’s patient toleration of the vessels of wrath served the purpose of manifesting his wrath and power?” (Moo, *Romans*, 606).

⁴⁹Paul has not ceased to speak about the gospel in Rom 9. Moreover, he has not entered into an abstract conversation about God’s election. Seifrid notes, “Paul does not identify God with a hidden election of some to destruction and some to glory. Paul affirms that the Creator acts in sovereign freedom, but his response to the impertinent question of the human being does not rest with an abstract assertion of the Creator’s right; rather, he bears witness to the promise of the gospel, that the Creator’s purpose is the restoration of his glory to those whom he is now is preparing” (Seifrid, *Romans*, 646).

⁵⁰God’s patience is not only related to the opportunity for repentance but also an opportunity for the revelation of divine wrath. See Rom 2:4; 2 Pet 3:1-13.

⁵¹See E. Elizabeth Johnson. *The Function of Apocalyptic and Wisdom Traditions in Romans 9-11*, SBL Dissertation Series 109 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 110-75.

present day. God effectually called them from both Jews and Gentiles. He cites prophetic texts from Hosea and Isaiah to make the point that God shows mercy to Gentiles by making them his people, and he shows mercy to Israel by preserving a remnant. In Paul's typological hermeneutic, God called objects of mercy in the present day just as he did in the days of Hosea and Isaiah. The remnant in Isaiah's day is typical of the remnant in Paul's day.⁵² Therefore, Paul takes up Isaiah's lament for Israel. In Romans 9:27, he introduces the citation from Isaiah 10:22-23 with the verb κρᾶζει. This is a unique introduction for an OT citation.⁵³ It indicates that Paul's lament for Israel echoes not only Moses' lament but also Isaiah's. Moreover, the answer to those cries is the same. Within God's judgment, divine mercy is both hidden and revealed. Israel is judged, but, in that judgment, a remnant is saved. The freedom associated with God's righteousness is in accordance with Israel's history and scriptures. This is a major component of the answer to Paul's lament. His cry will eventually turn to praise in light of the freedom God has in his righteousness. Yet, also in accordance with the scriptures, Israel rejects God's righteousness.

The answer to Paul's lament is not only that God created Israel through a promise, because he is free to do so. In Romans 9:30-10:21, the answer is also linked to

⁵²Paul cites Isa 10:22-23 in Rom 9:27-28. A brief look at the original context of Isa 10 reveals a similarity with the context of Rom 9. Isaiah 10 is an oracle of both woe and salvation. There is woe against Israel's social injustice and Assyria's arrogance (Isa 10:1-4). Because of their iniquity, God will send Assyria as an instrument of judgment (Isa 10:5-6, 12). Yet, Assyria's arrogance, namely their attribution of success against Israel to themselves, will be their downfall (Isa 10:13-14). It is in this situation that Isaiah cries out the salvation oracle which Paul cites in Rom 9:27-28. In the midst of judgment, Isaiah gives the people a glimmer of hope through the promise of a saved remnant. Similarly, Paul sees the remnant of saved Israel in his own day as reason for hope.

⁵³One expects the simple λέγει. In Rom 9:25, his introduction of Hos 2:23, Paul uses λέγει. See also, Rom 9:17, 29; 10:6, 8, 11, 16, 19; 11:2, 4, 9.

Israel's rejection of God's righteousness.⁵⁴ It is a rejection that prompts a prayer from Paul. Here the emphasis lies more on the "human cause of Israel's failure."⁵⁵ Israel's failure stems from its rejection of the righteousness from faith and its pursuit of righteousness from the law (Rom 9:31). This is in contrast to the Gentiles, who received righteousness by faith (Rom 9:30). Paul depicts Israel's rejection using the prophetic metaphor of the "stone of stumbling."⁵⁶ Israel's pursuit of righteousness by the law has resulted in Christ becoming a "stone of stumbling" rather than protection. Israel's stumble elicits Paul's prayer to God for their salvation. In Romans 10:1, Paul writes, "Brothers, the desire of my heart and prayer to God for them is for salvation." The prayer report in Romans 10:1 sheds more light on the intercessory lament of 9:1-5.⁵⁷ In both prayers, Paul's desire and request are for Israel's salvation. He suffers, because Israel will not be subjected to the righteousness of God. Moreover, despite all protests

⁵⁴Sanday and Headlam note, "St. Paul now passes to another aspect of the subject he is discussing. He has considered the rejection of Israel from the point of view of the Divine justice and power, he is now to approach it from the side of human responsibility" (Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 278).

⁵⁵Seifrid, *Romans*, 650.

⁵⁶ In Romans 9:33, Paul cites Isaiah 28:16 LXX, "Behold I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and everyone who believes in him will not be disappointed." Paul's reference to the "stone of stumbling" is found in Isa 8:14 but not Isa 28:16. Wagner explains, "Paul's composite citation takes an A-B-A form, with a portion of 8:14 spliced into the middle of 28:16" (J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul in Concert in the Letter to the Romans* [Leiden: Brill, 2002], 127). Moreover, the use of λίθος in the LXX of Isaiah is both positive and negative. It is the figurative expression of protection from God's wrath as well as the very source of divine destruction. By conflating Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16, Paul brings out both the negative and positive realities of the stone. As Moo puts it, "By replacing the middle of Isa. 28:16 with a phrase from Isa. 8:14, he brings out the negative point about Israel's fall that is his main point in the context. At the same time, by including the reference to Isa. 28:16, he lays the foundation for the positive exposition of Christ as a 'stone' that he will develop in chap. 10" (Moo, *Romans*, 630).

⁵⁷Wiles notes the connection between the prayer reports in Rom 9:3 and 10:1. He writes, "In the second prayer-report Paul takes up again the burden of the first, but now more positively and with less vehemence" (Wiles, *Paul's Intercessory Prayers*, 257).

from Israel, the “righteousness of faith” is available to them. To make this point, Paul employs a number of OT texts. For example, in Romans 10:6-8, Paul takes up the warning of Deuteronomy 30:12-14 and reworks it.⁵⁸ In its original context, Deuteronomy 30:12-14 is a warning to Israel about the danger of rejecting the commandments God graciously gave to them. As Seifrid notes, “By them they will ensure their well-being and preserve their life in the land. Disobedience will bring destruction, exile, and servitude.”⁵⁹ When Moses speaks of the nearness of the word, it reminds Israel of God’s grace and their obligation to obey him.⁶⁰ Similarly, but in a way that far surpasses the righteousness of the law, Paul speaks about the nearness of the righteousness of faith in the gospel.⁶¹ Additionally, in Romans 10:14-21, Paul negates the objection that Israel has not heard or known the gospel. The report of the crucified and risen Christ has gone out, but Israel has not believed it (Isa 53:1; Rom 10:14-16). In fact, the message has gone out into all creation (Ps 19:4; Rom 10:18). Moreover, Israel’s scriptures made it known that God would provoke the nation to jealousy through the conversion of the Gentiles (Deut 32:21; Isa 65:1; Rom 10:19-20). God has offered salvation to Israel “all day long,” but they have rejected the divine hands extended to them in grace (Isa 65:2; Rom 10:21). Yet, the fact that God’s offer is so persistent, “all day long,” is a source of hope for Israel.

⁵⁸On this point, see Seifrid, *Christ Our Righteousness*, 120-22; idem “Paul’s Approach to the Old Testament in Rom 10:6-8,” *Trinity Journal* 6 (1985): 3-37; Roy E. Ciampa, “Deuteronomy in Galatians and Romans,” in *Deuteronomy in the New Testament*, ed. Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 106-10; Per Jarle Bekken, *The Word Is Near You: A Study of Deuteronomy 30:12-14 in Paul’s Letter to the Romans in a Jewish Context* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

⁵⁹Seifrid., *Christ Our Righteousness*, 122.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid., 120-22.

Therefore, in Romans 9:14-10:21, the second part of Paul's answered lament is that God acts in his righteousness according to his own freedom. At the same time, Israel rejects God's righteousness that is found only through faith in Christ. The echoes of God's response to Moses' intercessory lament still apply here. God responded to Moses' lament with both judgment and mercy. Similarly, the response to Paul's lament is judgment and mercy. Although Israel's rejection of God's mercy incurs divine wrath, it is in that wrath that divine mercy is present.

The answer in Romans 11:1-32. Once again, the overarching answer to Paul's lament is that God's mercy is paradoxically revealed and hidden in judgment. Romans 11:1-32 contributes to that answer in a number of ways. First, in Romans 11:1-10, it is clear that Israel's rejection of the gospel does not mean God has rejected his people (Rom 11:1). Instead, that rejection affords God the opportunity to reveal his mercy, specifically through the preservation of a remnant. Paul, just as he has taken up the laments of Moses and Isaiah already, takes up Elijah's lament from 1 Kings 19:10, 14.⁶² Elijah complains, "Lord they killed your prophets, they tore down your altars, and I alone have been left and they seek my life" (1 Kgs 19:10; Rom 11:3). The words of the prophet were originally uttered at Mt. Horeb, in his flight from Jezebel (1 Kgs 19:1-9). God's response to Elijah's lament is similar, in some ways, to the one he gave Moses in Exodus 32-34.⁶³ Specifically, as Elijah stands on the mountain, God passes by (cf. Exod

⁶²On Paul's use of 1 Kgs 19:10, 14, see Seifrid, *Romans*, 667-69.

⁶³Davidson observes, "The parallelism with Mosaic tradition is explicit and intentional—Moses who spent forty days and forty nights on the mountain, Moses who experienced his strange theophany as he sheltered in the crevice of a rock" (Davidson, *The Courage to Doubt*, 97).

33:19-23; 1 Kgs 19:11-13). Additionally, the divine response to Elijah's lament is judgment and mercy. There is going to be great bloodshed in Israel, but God will preserve a remnant (1 Kgs 19:15-18). It becomes clear in 1 Kings 19 that Elijah had a limited understanding of Israel's condition. Indeed, they were rebellious, violent, and apostate. They were about to face swift divine judgment. Nevertheless, God would preserve for himself a remnant. In Paul's reading of 1 Kings 19, some of the ungodly were spared.⁶⁴ The divine answer responded to Elijah's lament, "I have left for myself seven thousand people, who have not bowed the knee to Baal" (1 Kgs 19:14; Rom 11:5). In Romans 11:5-6, Paul sees the divine response of judgment and mercy, originally given to Elijah's lament, as typical for his own day, "In this way now also in the present time there has been a remnant according to the election of grace; but if by grace, it is no longer from works, because grace would no longer be grace." Paul's reference to a *λεῖμμα* in Romans 11:5 echoes the reference to a *ὑπόλειμμα* in Romans 9:27, where he cites Isaiah 10:22-23. He emphasizes that the judgment of Israel typically included God's mercy, namely the preservation of a remnant. Paul sees the same thing happening in his own day. In fact, Paul himself is evidence of God's mercy in the judgment of Israel, "Therefore I say, God did not reject his people did he? May it never be; for I also am an Israelite, from the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin" (Rom 11:1). Paul is part of the remnant that is preserved only by God's grace, not by its works (Rom 11:6).⁶⁵ In

⁶⁴Paul has interpreted 1 Kgs 19 in light of his knowledge of God's judgment and mercy. Seifrid writes, "While the Hebrew text predicts the destruction of all Israel save the seven thousand, Paul speaks of this destruction and deliverance as an accomplished reality. Consequently, the 'not bending the knee to Baal,' which appears as a condition of salvation in the Hebrew text, may be read, and almost certainly should be read, as the content or result of divine deliverance in Romans" (Seifrid, *Christ Our Righteousness*, 160-61).

⁶⁵If any Israelite understood that God's preservation of a remnant was based entirely on grace, it had to be Paul. The Pauline corpus reflects this understanding. See, e.g., 1 Cor 15:8-10; Gal 1:22-23.

Romans 11:7-10, he continues to reflect on the mercy shown to the remnant in the midst of judgment. Paul cites a number of OT texts to make the point that God preserves a remnant and hardens the rest of Israel in his own day, just as in times past.⁶⁶ Israel's present rejection of the gospel results in divine judgment typical of the nation's history. Moreover, it is the hardening David asked for in his own laments, "And David says, 'Let their table become a snare and a trap and a stumbling block and retribution for them, let their eyes be darkened so as not to see and bend their backs continually'" (Ps 69:22-23; Rom 11:9-10). Paul takes up the lament language of David, who asked that his enemies would be punished. He specifically cites Psalm 69:22-23 (Ps 68:23-24 LXX), an individual lament.⁶⁷ In its original context, Psalm 69:22-23 is part of an elongated cry of distress that occupies most of the poem. The *τράπεζα*, mentioned in Psalm 68:23 LXX, should be understood in light of a hunting metaphor.⁶⁸ David wishes for God to trap the enemies and wipe them out (Ps 68:29 LXX). For Paul, the *τράπεζα*, which functions as a trap, is "Israel's exclusive table fellowship."⁶⁹ Israel's table fellowship in Paul's day functioned as both a "boundary marker" and a "claim to true piety and godliness."⁷⁰ Yet, in their claim, Israel has rejected the crucified and risen Christ. Therefore, their judgment

⁶⁶On Paul's use of Deut 29:4 and Isa 29:10, see Ciampa, "Deuteronomy in Galatians and Romans," 112; Watston, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 434-36.

⁶⁷Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 240.

⁶⁸Keel suggests, "The 'table,' consisting of an outspread mat, might very well be compared to an open snare . . . , and the foods placed on it could be compared to the trigger ('trap') which holds the bait" (Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: An Ancient Near East Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett [New York: Seabury Press, 1978], 91).

⁶⁹Seifrid, *Romans*, 671.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

is stupor, blindness, and deafness. For Paul, their backs are bent as a sign of divine punishment, because they bent the knee to an idol, namely their own piety and godliness.⁷¹

Second, Romans 11:1-32 also answers Paul's lament by showing that David's petition against his enemies is not the end of Israel's story.⁷² Instead, it is integral to it. In Romans 11:11-16, Paul makes it clear that God uses Israel's transgression of unbelief to reveal his mercy. Incredibly, God uses Israel's rejection of the gospel to show mercy to the Gentiles (Rom 11:11). Even more, the mercy shown to the Gentiles is meant to provoke Israel to jealousy in order that they too might receive mercy. However, what is most astounding of all is that God's mercy to Israel will mean resurrection from the dead for all creation. Paul asks, "For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be if not life from the dead?" (Rom 11:15). It is here that one sees the depth and complexity of the answer to Paul's lament. Therefore, the Gentiles, those unnatural branches who have been grafted in, should not boast in their position (Rom 11:17-24). Rather, they should join in Paul's lament, because the answer to that lament means the end of all suffering. The unbelief that pains Paul so much is the very means by which God will relieve the pain of all creation. In this way, the answered lament is a mystery.

The third way in which Romans 11:1-32 contributes to the answer of the lament is that it provides the eschatological lens through which Paul must see the mystery of Israel's rejection of the gospel. The current hardening of Israel that makes Paul lament

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid.

is only partial, “For I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, about this mystery, in order that you might not be wise in yourselves, that a partial hardening has taken place in Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles might enter in” (Rom 11:25). When the full number of Gentiles enters into the people of God, then “all Israel” will be saved in accordance with the scriptures. By “all Israel,” Paul does not mean every Israelite from every portion of history. That would make the lament of Romans 9:1-5 superfluous.⁷³ Rather, he is speaking of those whom receive God’s mercy in the midst of judgment, a remnant. In his citation of Isaiah, Paul envisions the coming of Israel’s Messiah as the point at which “all Israel” will be saved.⁷⁴ Isaiah 59:20-21, in its original context, functioned as the divine response to the lament over Israel’s own injustice, deceit, and wickedness. God is portrayed as a warrior whose wrath flows like a fierce river (Isa 59:16-19). Yet, with the arrival of God’s wrath, there is mercy for Israel from the redeemer who comes, “The one who saves will come from Zion, he will turn the ungodliness from Jacob, and this will be the covenant with them from me, whenever I should take away their sins” (Isa 59:20-21; 27:9; Rom 11:26-27). In Romans 11:28-32, Paul summarizes the mystery he has been explaining throughout Rom 9-11, the mystery of divine mercy hidden and revealed in divine judgment. Israel faces God’s judgment as an enemy, so that Gentiles can receive mercy. Yet, Israel receives God’s mercy because of the prior promise to the fathers, a promise that is irrevocable (Rom 11:28-29). Both Jew and Gentile were disobedient to God and then shown mercy (Rom 11:30-31). God

⁷³Seifrid notes, “Paul’s point here is not that every last member of Israel in all of time will be saved; if that were the case, his deep lament, with his willingness to suffer his own condemnation for Israel’s sake would be pointless” (Seifrid, *Romans*, 673). See also, Moo, *Romans*, 719-26.

⁷⁴In Rom 11:25-26, Paul conflates Isa 59:20-21 and 27:9 LXX. See Shum, *Paul’s Use of Isaiah in Romans*, 240.

imprisoned them to their disobedience in order that he might have mercy on all (Rom 11:32). Mercy is revealed only when all are rendered disobedient and live under God's wrath. Therefore, although the Israel of Paul's day rejected the gospel, it provided the platform on which God would come and reveal his mercy to them. That would take place with the coming of Christ from the heavenly Zion.⁷⁵ Paul sees an eschatological remnant of Israel being saved when they see their deliverer.⁷⁶ Therefore, God reveals his mercy in human disobedience and divine judgment. That is the essence of the answer to Paul's lament.

From lament to praise. Paul begins this section of Romans with a lament over Israel's unbelief, but he ends with a hymn of praise for God's incredible wisdom and judgment.⁷⁷ Just as in the OT, Paul's pattern of lament shifts from lament to praise (cf. Deut 26:5-11).⁷⁸ However, the praise is not meant to deny the ongoing reality of Paul's suffering and lament over Israel's unbelief. It simply indicates that one must take God at his word of promise, and his word is quite praiseworthy. Based on faith in God's promise, Paul's lament must ultimately turn to praise. The hymn of praise contains three parts that evoke thoughts of God, who is Christ over all, as the Creator. First, Romans

⁷⁵On "heavenly Zion," see Schreiner, *Romans*, 619.

⁷⁶Seifrid notes, "Israel will see and believe in him as the coming Redeemer, as Paul himself did. The final act in the drama of redemption is not the formation of a church that consists largely of Gentiles, but the creation of salvation for the people of Israel" (Seifrid, *Romans*, 673).

⁷⁷Johnson observes a number of features in Rom 11:33-36 that indicate it is a hymn. She writes, "Its strophic structure of nine lines, the repetition of triads, the chiasmic relationship among the divine attributes and rhetorical questions, the repeated pronominal references to God, and the doxological conclusion are all indications of hymnic material" (Johnson, *The Function of Apocalyptic Wisdom Traditions in Romans 9-11*, 166). The hymn is Paul's own composition. See Seifrid, *Romans*, 678.

⁷⁸On the shift from lament to praise in the OT, see Federico G. Villaneuva, *The Uncertainty of a Hearing: A Study of the Sudden Change of Mood in the Psalms of Lament* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

11:33 contains the “threefold praise of God’s riches, wisdom, and knowledge.”⁷⁹ Paul praises God for the “depth” of his riches, wisdom, and knowledge in dealing with a fallen creation. The figurative use of βάθος points to the difficulty in assessing God’s judgments and ways.⁸⁰ As Seifrid notes, “Even the depths of the sea or earth were hardly subject to measurement. How much more the Creator!”⁸¹ When the final part of the creator’s mystery is enacted, it will bring “riches” that are difficult to assess.⁸² The wisdom and knowledge that God has in dealing with fallen creatures is difficult to measure, because it is so deep. Paul’s praise for God’s κρίματα echoes the praise of the psalms. For example, the praise in Psalm 35:7 LXX is similar to Paul’s, “Your righteousness is like the mountains of God, and your judgments are a great abyss (τὰ κρίματά σου).”⁸³ The similarity between the two shouts of praise is the creational context. The creator is praised for his judgments, or decisions. They are judgments that Paul describes as “inscrutable.” Just as the depth of God’s riches, wisdom, and knowledge cannot be adequately assessed, neither can his judgments.⁸⁴ His “ways” are incomprehensible. The way that the Creator acts towards his creation is not easily

⁷⁹Seifrid, *Romans*, 678.

⁸⁰Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker [BDAG], 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v., “βάθος.”

⁸¹Seifrid, *Romans*, 678.

⁸²Jewett, *Romans*, 716.

⁸³See also, Pss LXX 47:12; 96:8; 104:5; 118:62, 164.

⁸⁴Prov 25:3 LXX describes the wisdom of a king in a similar way, “As heaven is high, and the earth is deep, the heart of a king is unsearchable (ἀνεξελέγκτος).”

comprehended.⁸⁵ Second, Paul's hymn of praise contains two OT citations in Romans 11:34-35 that both evoke the Creator's contention with humanity.⁸⁶ The citation in Romans 11:34 is from Isaiah 40:13 LXX, "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"⁸⁷ In its original context, Isaiah 40:13 answers the question, "Who can accurately comprehend the aspect of God and so tell him what to do?"⁸⁸ Paul praises God for the fact that the divine ways cannot be molded into manageable systems based on the input of fallen humanity.⁸⁹ Similarly, the citation from Job 41:3 demonstrates that the creature cannot ultimately win a judgment against God.⁹⁰ Although Job presses for an answer from God throughout the book, the answer he receives in Job 38-39 leads him to the realization that "the divine wisdom is beyond the ability of any human being to grasp."⁹¹ This is the answer to Job's many laments.⁹² His cries about

⁸⁵Cf. the use of ἀνεξιχνίαστος in Rom 11:33 with the use in Pr Man 12:6, "And the mercy of your promise is immeasurable and unsearchable (ἀνεξιχνίαστων)."

⁸⁶Seifrid notes, "These final rhetorical questions further sharpen the doxology because they again introduce the context of contention between God and fallen humanity" (Seifrid, *Romans*, 679).

⁸⁷On the citation from Isa 40:13 LXX in Rom 11:34, see Shum, *Paul's Use of Isaiah in Romans*, 245-47.

⁸⁸John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 59.

⁸⁹Seifrid, *Romans*, 679. Additionally, Achtemeier writes, "The attempt to create a more manageable, visible God runs from the time of Israel's creation as a people to the post-exilic time when they still needed warning against such an attempt. Yet, there again, it was that very difference that made it possible for God to be deliverer and redeemer" (Paul Achtemeier, *Romans* [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985], 190).

⁹⁰While there are some differences between Paul's citation of Job 41:3 and the LXX version, conceptually they are still very similar. I agree with Stuhlmacher who concludes, "The apostle expresses this truth with words from an ancient Greek translation of Job 41:3, only the vestiges of which are still known to us" (Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 176).

⁹¹John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 536.

⁹²See, e.g., the lament in Job 3.

being rejected by God are answered by the Creator in Job 38-39. Job cannot understand the profundity of creation.⁹³ Therefore, it follows that he cannot accurately assess, let alone counsel, God in his ways.⁹⁴ All of his laments, though not entirely silenced, turn ultimately to praise. Similarly, Paul's lament over Israel's unbelief must ultimately turn to praise in the face of the Creator whose ways cannot be adequately assessed by the apostle. Third, Paul's hymn of praise ends with a doxological statement about God's sovereign power in Romans 11:36, "For from him and through him and to him are all things; to him be the glory forever, amen." Here is the praise that fallen creatures have refused to give God (Rom 1:18-23).⁹⁵ No one can advise God in his ways with, either the Jew or the Gentile, because he is the source, agent, and purpose of all things.⁹⁶ Judgment and mercy are from God, and through God, and the final goal is God. That is why the lament can, and does, shift to praise, because the very thing that Paul laments, Israel's unbelief and the judgment it incurs, is from God, and through God, and for God.

Lament Language and the Interpretation of Romans 9-11

By recognizing Paul's lament language in Romans 9-11, interpretive light is shed on this section of the letter in a few different ways. First, by hearing the echo of Moses' intercessory lament in Romans 9:1-5, Exodus 32-34 becomes instructive for

⁹³Cf. Ps 76:20 LXX.

⁹⁴Oswalt notes the similarity between Isa 40 and Job 41: "Thus Isaiah asks, if we cannot even take the measure of the physical world, how can we take God's measure? This line of thinking is similar to the one found in Job 38-41" (Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 59). Moreover, Johnson notes that Isa 40:13 and Job 41:3 were often linked in rabbinic interpretation. See Johnson, *The Function of Apocalyptic and Wisdom Traditions in Romans 9-11*, 167.

⁹⁵See Seifrid, *Romans*, 679.

⁹⁶See Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 340.

understanding Romans 9-11. The answer God gave to the lamenting Moses is the same one Paul writes about in Romans 9-11. Specifically, judgment and mercy go hand in hand. Judgment both conceals and reveals divine mercy. Therefore, the answered lament that one can expect to hear, and in fact finds in Romans 9:6-11:32, is that Israel's unbelief incurs divine judgment, judgment that hides and manifests divine mercy. Second, the pattern of lament in Romans 9-11 provides a helpful structure for interpretation. The five-fold pattern of lament is present in some shape or form throughout this section of the letter. The prior promise from God, coupled with Israel's unbelief, causes Paul a tremendous amount of suffering. The anguish is so intense that it elicits a lament, an intercessory lament. Paul offers himself in place of Israel. He wishes to be separated from Christ, in order that his kinsmen would not be. Therefore, three of the five parts of the pattern of lament are present in Romans 9:1-5. The answer to that lament is contained in three parts: (1) Rom 9:6-13, (2) Rom 9:14-10:21, and (3) Rom 11:1-32. The first part of the answer, laid out in Romans 9:6-13, is that God created Israel through a promise. This leads to the second part of the answer in Romans 9:14-21. God is free in his righteousness, but Israel, in accordance with the promise of the scriptures, has rejected that righteousness. The third part of the answer, contained in Romans 11:1-32, is that Israel's rejection of the gospel provides the platform for the revelation of God's mercy, even the eschatological mercy through the appearance of Israel's Messiah. What all three parts of the answer have in common is that God's mercy is paradoxically hidden and revealed in judgment. God's mysterious ways with Jew and Gentile moves Paul's lament to praise. The OT-like shift from lament in Romans 9:1-5 to praise in 11:33-36

forms an *inclusio* for this section of the letter.⁹⁷ Finally, the recognition of lament language in Romans 9-11 sheds some light on Paul's OT hermeneutic. Paul casts himself with Moses, Isaiah, and Elijah through the use of lament language. Specifically, all four figures participate in intercessory lament for Israel. Romans 9:1-5 contains the echo of Moses' intercessory lament. Paul, like Moses, offers himself in place of the nation. In Romans 9:27, Paul introduces his citation of Isaiah 10:22-23 with the verb κρᾶζει. He does not portray Isaiah as merely prophesying about Israel, but actually crying out for them. Romans 11:2-5 contains Paul's discussion of Elijah's lament. Elijah actually cried against Israel because of their sin and rebellion. The similarity of intercessory lament between these three OT figures is not coincidental. Paul sees himself as a kind of intercessory lamenter, typified by the likes of major figures in Israel's history. Therefore, Paul is not merely using the OT to substantiate his arguments. Rather, he is using the OT to speak for him. It is in the cries of Moses, Isaiah, and Elijah that he finds the words he needs to express his anguish for his kinsmen.

Suffering and Romans 9-11

There is quite a bit of ground to cover in Romans 9-11. Yet, my overarching focus remains the same. What is Paul's understanding of suffering in Romans? An analysis of the lament language proves helpful once again. It shows both the depth of Paul's suffering and the power of the gospel that brings relief. Paul's statement in Romans 9:3 expresses, as much as is possible with words, the intensity of the apostle's hurt, "For I myself was praying to be accursed from Christ for my brethren, my fellow

⁹⁷Moo writes, "The body of Rom. 9-11 is framed by an opening personal lament (9:1-5) and a closing doxology (11:33-36)" (Moo, *Romans*, 553).

kinsmen according to the flesh.” Paul could not have used any more drastic expression than this. He essentially says he would have liked to have died in the place of Israel. He is so torn by the incongruity of Israel’s unbelief in the Messiah and God’s prior promise that he laments in the darkest possible terms. There could be no darker, or more hellish, place than separation from Christ. After speaking so confidently about not being separated from the love of God in Christ in Romans 8:31-39, he is willing to forfeit all of it for Israel. The apostle is obviously hurt, profoundly and deeply. Yet, his suffering and lament, as profound as it is, goes to show the power of the gospel in him. Gone are the days of excelling more than his Jewish contemporaries (Gal 1:14). He is no longer looking past them, but at them. His gaze is no longer inward but outward. While what he sees hurts him, the suffering and lament demonstrate the mercy of God in him. By wishing to die for Israel, he is suffering with Christ, who did in fact die for his kinsmen (Rom 8:17).

Yet, his suffering is relieved through a number of paradoxes. First, Israel’s unbelief, and the divine judgment such unbelief incurs, both hides and reveals God’s mercy. This is the essence of the answered lament in Romans 9:6-11:32. Israel’s rejection of the Messiah results in salvation for the Gentiles. Therefore, mercy is revealed in judgment. Yet, despite Israel’s unbelief, God preserves a remnant for himself (Rom 11:1-10). Therefore, mercy is hidden in judgment. Second, although Paul suffers greatly because of Israel’s unbelief, relief comes paradoxically by preaching to the Gentiles (Rom 11:13). It is only as Israel suffers from jealousy over Gentiles entering the people of God that Paul’s suffering from Israel’s unbelief will be relieved (Rom 11:14). Third, God’s imprisonment leads to deliverance. God confines both Jews and Gentiles to

disobedience in order that he might show mercy to all. The creature's entire existence hinges upon God's word of mercy and judgment.⁹⁸ As Seifrid so nicely puts it, "Israel and the nations are the tools by which God the Creator establishes the ungodliness of all, and so justifies the ungodly."⁹⁹

Ultimately, the suffering of Paul, all the sons of God, and all creation will only stop when the "one who delivers" comes and saves "all Israel" (Rom 11:25-27). The groaning of creation for the revelation of the sons of God will turn permanently to praise when the Son of God appears (Rom 8:18-25; 11:25-27). In the meanwhile, God's word of judgment and mercy turns Paul's lament to praise (Rom 11:33). Only God, only Christ over all, could orchestrate, carry out, and complete such a painful, paradoxical, and praiseworthy promise.

⁹⁸Seifrid, *Christ Our Righteousness*, 167.

⁹⁹Ibid.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Suffering is undeniable in Romans. Humanity and creation itself hurt. The pain stems from four sources: (1) God's wrath against his enemies, (2) sin's use of the law, (3) distress in following Christ, and (4) Israel's unbelief. The depth of this suffering can be gauged by the language used to describe it. Paul uses the most extreme vernacular for verbalizing pain, lament. Like his OT predecessors, Paul uses lament language to speak about great suffering and great hope. The profoundness of suffering under the wrath of God, the power of sin, enemies of the gospel, and Israel's rejection of the Messiah can only be matched by the profoundness of the gospel's promise. At every point of pain in Romans, pain expressed with the language of lament, Paul's answer is the gospel. God's wrath is overcome by the news of Christ crucified and risen (Rom 3:21-26). The wretched "I" is delivered through the condemnation and intercession of Christ (7:24-8:4). Separation caused by enemies hostile to the believer is bridged through the crucified, risen, and exalted Christ (Rom 8:31-39). Israel's unbelief is ultimately overcome through the appearance of the crucified and risen Christ (Rom 11:25-27). That is the thrust of what I have argued throughout this work. The answer to the suffering that Paul so vividly describes, and at times laments, is the promise of the gospel.

However, my findings must be brought to bear on two areas of concern in Pauline studies. Two questions will serve as a guide: (1) Does the analysis of suffering

and lament language point to an underlying narrative in Romans besides Wright's "Israel-for-the-world plan?"¹ (2) Does the recognition of lament language in Romans 7 offer an alternative to Stendahl's dismissal of the "introspective conscience of the West?"

N. T. Wright, Suffering, and the Gospel

It is becoming increasingly difficult to critique the work of N. T. Wright. His cache of articles, books, and commentaries continues to grow, along with those who both challenge and support him. However, my summary and critique here is not too ambitious. I simply want to determine if the answer to suffering in Romans is the "through Israel-for-the-world plan" of God that Wright proposes or something else.

Wright's Reading of Romans

Wright contends that there is both a "poetic sequence" and "narrative sequence" in Romans.² The former is the "actual argument of the letter" while the latter is "the wider worldview and belief system on which Paul draws."³ He attempts to merge the two sequences in his exegesis. As a result, the narrative sequence he proposes for reading the letter is as follows:

The implicit narrative is the story of the creator and the creation; of the covenant with Abraham as the means of restoring creation and humans; of the paradoxical failure, and yet the paradoxical success, in the death and resurrection of Jesus; of its implementation by the Spirit and through the apostolic mission; and of its final consummation in the renewal of all things.⁴

¹N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 179.

² N. T. Wright, "Romans and the Theology of Paul," in *Romans*, vol. 3 of *Pauline Theology*, ed. David M. Hays and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 32.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 67.

The shorthand expression he adopts for this narrative sequence is God’s “single-plan-through-Israel-for-the-world.”⁵ Furthermore, this expression is a major component of his definition of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ.⁶ He notes,

The best argument for taking *dikaiosyne theou* in Romans 1:17, 3:21, and 10:3 as ‘God’s faithfulness to the covenant with Abraham, to the single-plan-through-Israel-for-the-world,’ is the massive sense it makes of passage after passage, they way in which bits of Romans often omitted from discussion, or even explicitly left on one side as being irrelevant to the main drift of the discourse, suddenly come back into focus with a bang.⁷

In other words, the “single-plan-through-Israel-for-the-world” contributes to understanding the key expression of the letter, δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ, and every other section of the letter.⁸ When this narrative reading is carried out, the result is that Israel’s story, and all that it entails, becomes the interpretive key for all of Romans. This is seen in Wright’s exegesis of Romans 1-3. The thrust is that, “Not only are pagans idolatrous and immoral, but the people who were supposed to put the world to rights have themselves gone astray.”⁹ The final assize, in view in Romans 2:1-16, is when, as Wright puts it,

⁵Wright, *Justification*, 179.

⁶ On Wright’s understanding of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ, see also N. T. Wright, *Romans*, in vol. 10 of *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 396-406.

⁷Wright, *Justification*, 179.

⁸Wright believes that the “poetic” and “narrative” sequences of the letter match the historical situation of the Christians in Rome. He notes, “What Paul faced as a serious possibility in Rome was the mirror image of the problem he had met in Antioch. In making Rome his new base, there was always the danger, as the rise and popularity of Marcion in the next century was later to show, that local anti-Jewish sentiment would lead Gentile Christians not only to isolate Jews within the Christian fellowship but also to marginalize a mission that included Jews.” Furthermore, Wright notes, “The strategy that Paul adopted was that of expounding his own fresh understanding of the terms of the covenant, the original divine answer to the problem of Adam” (Wright, “Romans and the Theology of Paul,” 35).

⁹Ibid., 37.

“The verdict of the last day will truly reflect what people have actually done.”¹⁰ The “Spirit-driven Christian living” will square with the favorable verdict on the last day, a verdict received in advance in the present.¹¹ When Paul directs his attention to the Jew in Romans 2:17, Wright argues, “It is the first statement of the theme which we saw so markedly in Galatians, and which continues unbroken, though in different modes, through most of the letter. It is the story of the single-plan-through-Israel-for-the-world.”¹² Paul’s discussion in Romans 2:17-24 is not about the Jew’s salvation. Instead, it is about “God’s plan for salvation to come through the Jew.”¹³ Therefore, the Jew’s boast in Romans 2:17-20 is, according to Wright, “Well, but I am the solution to this problem.”¹⁴ Yet, since Israel is like the other nations, it cannot carry out its task.¹⁵ This creates a problem for Israel, the world, and God.¹⁶ Israel has not fulfilled its vocation of being a light to the world.¹⁷ Paul explains the dilemma further in Romans 3:1-8. The essence of the question directed towards God is, “How is he then going to be faithful not

¹⁰Wright, *Justification*, 191.

¹¹Ibid., 192; idem, *Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 203.

¹²Wright, *Justification*, 194.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., 195.

¹⁵Wright explains, “The presence of misbehavior within ethnic Israel renders void the national, ethnic boast; it prevents Israel from fulfilling its calling to be the light of the world” (Wright, *Romans*, 445).

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷As Wright puts it, “Israel has been charged with shining God’s light into the world, and has instead provided a good deal of darkness.” Ibid., 198.

only to the promises made to Israel but to the promises made through Israel?”¹⁸ Paul’s response is that “God will be true to his single plan.”¹⁹ Yet, the “Israel-plan” does not mean that Israel will avoid condemnation as Romans 2:1-16 and 3:9-20 show. The catena of OT citations especially shows that “Israel’s Scriptures themselves declare Israel to be guilty.”²⁰ Wright sums up God’s problem in Romans 1-3 noting, “In other words, God must find a way of enabling ‘Israel’ to be faithful after all, as the middle term of the single plan; God must thereby deal with sin; and God must do so in such a way as to leave no room for boasting.”²¹ He also puts it this way in another place:

Somehow, this god must be faithful nonetheless; and, unless the covenant itself is to be dissolved this means, logically, that there must somehow, after all, be an Israel that is faithful to the covenant, so that through Israel the creator/covenant god can deal with the evil of the world, and with its consequences.²²

God must deal with evil through Israel, but the problem is that Israel itself is guilty of sin.

Therefore, the solution to God’s problem is in Romans 3:21-31. Wright comments on these verses:

‘The work of Torah,’ that is, those practices which mark Israel out from among the nations, cannot be the means of demarcating the true covenant people; they merely point up the fact of sin. Instead, the covenant faithfulness of the creator to the world is revealed through the faithfulness of the Messiah, for the benefit of all, Jew and Gentile alike, who believe.²³

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., 199.

²⁰Ibid., 200.

²¹Ibid., 201.

²²Wright, “Romans and the Theology of Paul,” 37.

²³Ibid.

The “impossible task” God faced in Romans 1:18-3:8, namely to deal with the world’s evil through Israel, itself guilty of sin, is achieved in Christ according to Romans 3:24-26.²⁴ This means there is no more “ethnic boasting” (Rom 3:27-31).²⁵ Clearly, the “single-plan-through-Israel-for-the-world” is the interpretive tool Wright employs the most in Romans 1-3.

Similarly, in Romans 7-8, Israel’s story once again takes center stage.²⁶ Wright identifies the ἐγώ as both Israel and Adam.²⁷ Commenting on Romans 7:7-12 he explains, “The primary emphasis of the argument is on Israel, not Adam: what is being asserted about Israel is that when the Torah arrived it had the same effect on her as God’s commandment in the Garden had on Adam.”²⁸ Israel, although wanting to keep the Torah, was in sinful Adam.²⁹ Therefore, he uses the expression “Israel-in-Adam.”³⁰ Nevertheless, Israel’s disobedience to Torah was part of God’s “strange plan.” Wright explains, “The perplexity of the ‘I’ in Romans 7, and the puzzle of the Torah in the same passage, is the reflex of the strange plan of God to deal with sin by collecting it in one place and condemning it there.”³¹ Wright elaborates, “God’s covenant purpose, it seems,

²⁴Ibid., 38.

²⁵Ibid., 39.

²⁶Wright does offer exegesis of Rom 4-6 in various places. However, I am focusing on his exegesis of those passages that I have examined throughout my work. In his interpretation of Rom 4-6, Israel is once again of primary importance. See Wright, “Romans and the Theology of Paul,” 39-49.

²⁷Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 197.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., 198.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

is to draw the sin of all the world on to Israel, in order that it may be passed on to the Messiah and there dealt with once and for all.”³² The purpose of the law is to “heap up sin in the one place.”³³ God deals with sin in the Messiah (Rom 8:1-3). In that way, he is faithful to the covenant. He both condemns sin in the Messiah and raises him from the dead. The covenant is renewed. Yet, Wright notes, “The action of the creator/covenant god in raising his people from the dead is to be seen as the final great act of covenant renewal and vindication.”³⁴ Wright’s focus in Romans 8:12-39 is once again Israel. He argues that the primary thought of the whole chapter is, “All these blessings that you have, you have because the creator promised them to Israel, and has now given them, in Christ, to you.”³⁵

Finally, in Romans 9-11, Wright’s “single-plan-through-Israel-for-the-world” comes to full bloom. He argues that there is no possible understanding of these chapters without the Israel plan in view.³⁶ Regarding Paul’s main thesis in Romans 9-11, Wright comments,

He is arguing basically, that the events of Israel’s rejection of the gospel of Jesus Christ are the paradoxical outworking of God’s covenant faithfulness. Only by such a process—Israel’s unbelief, the turning to the Gentiles, and the continual offer of salvation to Jews also—can God be true to the promises to Abraham, promises which declared both that he would give him a worldwide family and that his own seed would share in the blessing.³⁷

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Wright, “Romans and the Theology of Paul,” 53.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Wright, *Justification*, 240.

³⁷Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 236.

The entire passage is about “the covenant faithfulness of Israel’s god.”³⁸ Wright summarizes Paul’s train of thought in nine points.³⁹ The gist of his summary is that Israel’s vocation as God’s covenant people was to rescue the world. But Israel distorted the vocation with the idea of “privilege.” Nevertheless, God always intended to deal with sin by “heaping it up in one place and there passing and executing sentence of judgment upon it.”⁴⁰ God always intended the Messiah to be that place with one condition, namely that Israel “itself become the place where sin was gathered together.”⁴¹ This means God called Israel to be “vessels of wrath” (Rom 9:19-23). Nevertheless, God never meant for this to be Israel’s “permanent condition.”⁴² Israel must let go of its status by realizing, in faith, what God has done in their history through the Messiah.

There is much more that could be said about Wright’s interpretation of Romans, but my purpose is not to summarize him at every point. I simply wanted to review his interpretation of the passages I have investigated in previous chapters. To his credit, Wright treats each section of Romans carefully, never wavering from his “poetic” and “narrative” approach. One of the boons of this approach, at least according to Wright, is that it makes sense of the whole letter. Under the “old perspective framework” used to read Romans, many passages “simply fall apart.” Wright notes, “Having studied this letter intensively for much of my adult life, I, of course, believe that my current

³⁸Wright, “Romans and the Theology of Paul,” 56.

³⁹Ibid., 57.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

opinions on its historical and theological meaning, though humble, are accurate.”⁴³ His confidence stems from his heuristic device summed up once again as God’s “single-plan-through-Israel-for-the-world.”⁴⁴ Wright believes that it makes sense of all the parts. However, it is at this very point, among others, that I think Wright should be questioned. Specifically, does Wright’s reading, something that clearly revolves around God’s covenant faithfulness to Israel, make sense of the suffering and lament language so prevalent in Romans? Moreover, does Paul respond to the suffering he wrestles with by pointing to God’s covenant faithfulness or something else?

Suffering, Lament, and the Gospel

Wright’s reading of Romans, guided by his “single-plan-through-Israel-for-the-world” narrative approach, tends to fly over both the depth of the suffering and power of the gospel that Paul lays out. I offer here three critiques.⁴⁵ First, Romans 3:10-18 is not, as Wright asserts, merely a catena that announces Israel has failed in its God-given assignment and is therefore guilty like the Gentiles. That does not do justice to the OT language of lament that Paul employs. Although Wright points to the original contexts of Paul’s citations for a clear understanding of their use, he does not take into account how

⁴³Wright, *Romans*, 395.

⁴⁴Wright, *Justification*, 179.

⁴⁵For critiques of Wright’s reading of Romans and his interpretive approach in general, see Richard B. Hays, “Adam, Israel, Christ: The Question of Covenant in the Theology of Romans: A Response to Leander E. Keck and N. T. Wright,” in *Romans*, vol. 3 of *Pauline Theology*, ed. David M. Hays and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 68-86; Mark A. Seifrid, “The Narrative of Scripture and Justification by Faith: A Fresh Response to N. T. Wright,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 72 (2008): 19-44.

the lament language really functioned.⁴⁶ Wright says of Paul's catena, "The surface meaning of the text is clear, that all who are 'under the law' are condemned as sinners; but the subtext is saying all the time, 'Yes; and in precisely this situation God will act, because of the divine righteousness, to judge the world, to rescue the helpless, to establish the covenant.'" Here is an example of Wright's failure to hear the full force of the lament language. The PssLm that Paul cites do not depict the oppressors as "helpless" people who wish for God to "establish the covenant." If Paul really respects the original context of the language, as Wright says he does, then it follows that he is describing Jews and Gentiles as enemies who are under God's wrath.⁴⁷ Therefore, the Jew's immediate wish at this point would not be that God would establish his covenant. Neither the psalmist, nor Paul, speaks in those terms in these texts that are cited. The psalmist, in a sense, cries for blood, the blood of enemies.⁴⁸ Yet, the shocking reality in Romans 3:9-20 is that the Jew is the enemy who is facing the full fury of God. Facing the wrath of God, rather than failing to see God's covenant faithfulness, is the distressing situation facing the Jew in this portion of the letter. Wright allows the "narrative sequence" of the text to drown out the "poetic sequence." This in no way means that Romans 3:1-8 simply "falls apart" for me.⁴⁹ To the contrary, Romans 3:1-8 is also concerned with the prospect of God's judgment rather than covenant faithfulness. Wright argues that the overarching purpose of Romans 3:1-8 is to show that, "God remains

⁴⁶Wright, *Romans*, 458.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 457.

⁴⁸In the original contexts of the PssLm that Paul cites in Rom 3:10-18, the psalmist wants to see the enemies face the full force of God's wrath. See, e.g., Ps 140:11.

⁴⁹See Wright, *Justification*, 179.

faithful to the covenant plan even though Israel has failed in the covenant task.”⁵⁰ Yet, in reality, Paul is demonstrating the God is just in his judgment of Israel. Furthermore, God’s judgment of the nation is in line with what he promised all along. The question Paul raises is not “How will God be faithful to the covenant?” Rather, the question is, “How will God judge the world?” (Rom 3:6). God, “who brings wrath” is not unjust by demonstrating his righteousness through judging the unrighteous Jew (Rom 3:5). God is justified and victorious in his judgment of the Jew (Rom 3:4). The penitential lament that Paul cites, Psalm 51, is not about covenant faithfulness.⁵¹ Rather, it is about facing God’s judgment. Yet, Wright insists on a reading that emphasizes his “single-plan-through-Israel-for-the-world” narrative approach. He writes, “If God is to be true to his character, if the promises are to be fulfilled, what is needed is a faithful Israelite who will act on behalf of, and in the place of, faithless Israel. Paul will argue in 3:21-26 that God has provided exactly that.”⁵² But if one takes the prospect of facing God’s wrath in all of its profundity, what is needed is more than a faithful Israelite who will do Israel’s job right. The greatest need is the one revealed by the law. The whole world stands accountable to God the righteous judge (Rom 3:20). What is needed is justification. The psalmist, whom Paul alludes to in Romans 3:19, understood that, “And do not enter into judgment with your servant, because no one living will be justified before you” (Ps 142:2 LXX). Once sin and divine wrath is known, lament arises in the face of the prior promise (i.e.,

⁵⁰Wright, *Romans*, 452.

⁵¹Wright argues that the original context of Ps 51 alludes to “new covenant themes.” He points specifically to language about a “new heart” and “Holy Spirit.” *Ibid.*, 453-54. While there may be intertextual allusions to the new covenant, the immediate context of Ps 51 is undoubtedly about God’s judgment and mercy.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 455.

the promise of judgment and mercy). Therefore, Romans 3:21-26 is about the revelation of God's righteousness in judgment and salvation, not covenant faithfulness. To be fair, Wright does see the "turning away" of God's wrath as part of what Paul has in mind in Romans 3:21-26.⁵³ Yet, Wright asserts that the other two thoughts have to do with God's covenant faithfulness through Jesus' faithfulness in death. Here a fundamental problem with Wright's "narrative sequence" really comes into view. If Jesus' faithfulness undoes Israel's unfaithfulness, does it follow that Israel was originally supposed to die for its own sin and that of the world?⁵⁴ This raises larger questions about the "single-plan-through-Israel-for-the-world" narrative approach of Wright. Wright speaks about God "heaping up" or "piling up" sin in one place, namely Israel.⁵⁵ He writes, "The necessary precondition for this judging of sin in the person of the Messiah was that Israel, the people of the Messiah, should itself become the place where sin was gathered together, in order that this burden might then be passed on to the Messiah alone."⁵⁶ However, Hays rightly asks, "But where does Paul ever say that Israel was first supposed to draw all the sin of the world onto its own head so that it could be passed on to the Messiah?"⁵⁷ The answer is "nowhere." Moreover, one could ask, "Where does the OT ever say this?" Likewise, the answer is "nowhere." Here we see an example of the "narrative sequence"

⁵³Ibid., 477.

⁵⁴Seifrid notes on this point, "Did God then intend Israel to die for the sins of the world? If Israel had been faithful to God, would it have fulfilled this role? How could the people who from the start were part of the problem themselves be the solution to the problem? That these questions remain unresolved indicate that, despite its traditional elements, Wright's understanding of Christ's saving work is driven by the moral idealism inherent to the conception of 'representation'" (Seifrid, "The Narrative of Scripture," 34).

⁵⁵Wright, "Romans and the Theology of Paul," 57.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Hays, "Adam, Israel, Christ," 82.

overriding the “poetic sequence” of Romans 3:21-26 and Wright’s reading of the OT. Most importantly, the suffering caused by God’s wrath and the power of Christ’s atoning death is eclipsed in order to keep the story line in place. While I would agree with Wright that God is not an “angry malevolent tyrant who demands someone’s death,” to those who stand under his wrath that is exactly what he looks like.⁵⁸ God deals swiftly, powerfully, and frightfully with his enemies in the OT. Paul evokes that divine activity through his catena of lament. Enemies of God are swept away in judgment. Yet, God reveals his righteousness apart from the law in the cross of Christ. He is both just towards his ungodly foes, and he is the one who justifies them. Such righteousness cannot be accomplished through someone merely becoming the example to the world Israel that was supposed to be all along. It is only accomplished when God’s wrath is truly propitiated in his son. Israel was not merely guilty of boasting in its privileged ethnic position. Israel offended its creator with its poisonous lips and violent feet, just like the Gentile. God is not the justifier of the ungodly Jewish enemy only, but also the Gentile. If one is to speak of Israel’s Messiah identifying with her, it must be in the sense that he became God’s enemy just like her at the cross. That is the narrative and poetic sequence of Romans 3:9-31.

Second, Wright’s narrative approach to Romans 7:7-25 fails to grasp the depth of the suffering caused by sin’s use of the law in any person, not just Israel, and the gospel’s answer to such a dilemma.⁵⁹ Wright sees two controlling narratives in this section of the letter: (1) “the story of Adam and the Messiah,” and (2) “the new

⁵⁸Wright, *Romans*, 476.

⁵⁹Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 198.

exodus.”⁶⁰ Israel is in Adam and cannot do any better in its law observance than pagans like Epictetus, Seneca, and Aristotle.⁶¹ Wright, like Stowers and others, sees the source of the language in Romans 7:7-25 as stemming from Greco-Roman philosophy.⁶² Furthermore, the ἐγώ, at least according to Wright, is “Israel-in-Adam” who has sin piled on it so that God can then deal with it in the Messiah. Wright explains, “But Torah has the effect, when applied to Israel-in-Adam, of focusing a bright spotlight precisely on the Adamic character of the people of God, showing up sin in its true colours.”⁶³ He also notes, “The present passage, seems, then, to be a Christian theological analysis of what was in fact the case, and indeed what is still the case for those who live ‘under the law,’ not a description of how it felt or feels.” Yet, as Hays notes, Paul never identifies the ἐγώ as Israel.⁶⁴ If the “I” is simply “Israel-in-Adam,” then the suffering caused by sin in an individual person is mitigated. The language of lament becomes a mere rhetorical charade that does nothing more than add some dramatic flair to Israel’s story. Wright notes about the rhetoric of Romans 7,

Though we can learn a certain amount on this topic from considerations of how ‘autobiographical’ language was used in ancient rhetoric, the main things this teaches us is simply that such language could be used for purposes other than literal descriptions of one’s actual experience.⁶⁵

⁶⁰With respect to the “Exodus narrative” in Rom 7, Wright sees this especially in Rom 7:7-12. See Wright, *Romans*, 550-52.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 554.

⁶²Wright does recognize the similarity between Paul’s statement in Rom 7:24 and the PssLm. He notes, “Paul’s famous cry of despair, put into the mouth of the ‘I,’ echoes but goes beyond the great tradition not only of the biblical psalms of lament but of subsequent Jewish lamentation such as the Qumran *Hodayot*” (Wright, *Romans*, 571). Nevertheless, this recognition does not greatly influence his reading of the section.

⁶³Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 198.

⁶⁴Hays, “Adam, Israel, Christ,” 82.

⁶⁵Wright, *Romans*, 553.

But is that really how the language works in Romans 7:7-25? While I do not think that a psychological reading of Romans 7 is advisable, one has to admit that something extremely exasperating is experienced by the ἐγώ.⁶⁶ It is not merely the experience of Israel, even if Paul is included at some level.⁶⁷ Paul uses OT lament language to describe a person's ongoing encounter with an ever-present and overpowering enemy, namely sin. It is an enemy that never changes, even though the one in whom it dwells might change. Paul never limits the identity of the ἐγώ to his pre-or post-conversion self, Israel, or someone else. Therefore, Romans 7:7-25 is a general description of sin's deceptive use of the law. Wright is correct in his assertion that throughout Romans 6:1-8:11 Paul speaks of the Christian not being "in sin", "in the flesh," or "under the law."⁶⁸ But it does not follow that, "It is simply impossible, after this oft-repeated statement, to suppose that Paul will then expound a view of the Christian in which he or she is, after all, 'fleshly sold under sin,' or that he or she is 'enslaved to the law of sin.'"⁶⁹ While it is true that the Christian is changed, sin is not. Paul depicts sin in Romans 7:7-25 as always deceptive in its use of the law, always present, and always over-powering in any person. It is this condition that elicits the lament of Romans 7:24, "Wretched man that I am; who deliver me from the body of this death." This wretchedness is a real experience and not merely

⁶⁶For a psychological reading of Rom 7, see, e.g., Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 202-65.

⁶⁷Wright notes of Paul's involvement in the story, "Though in a sense this is Paul's own story, as a Jew who had lived under Torah himself, it is not a transcript of 'how it felt at the time'" (Wright, *Romans*, 553).

⁶⁸Ibid., 551.

⁶⁹Ibid., 552.

“Christian hindsight.”⁷⁰ It is unclear to me how “Christian hindsight” works at this point from Wright’s perspective. If a person, or Israel, never felt the wretchedness at any time in any way, why in hindsight would one speak this way? Paul’s Christian hindsight of the life under the law in Philippians 3 is always put forth as evidence that he had a “robust conscience.” So, why, in Romans 7, would he say, in hindsight, that it was “wretched?” Wright’s attempt to distinguish the hindsight of Philippians 3 from Romans 7 does not help at this point.⁷¹ Although the ἐγώ in Romans 7 is not Paul per se, it is still his hindsight on some level. In any case, the answer to the lamenting “I,” is the work of Jesus Christ. The deliverance that the “I” requests is found in the crucified and risen Christ. This is clear both from the praise of Romans 7:25a and the explanation in Romans 8:1-11. God condemned sin in the flesh of his son so that those in Christ would not be condemned because of their disobedience to the law. Wright also speaks of deliverance in Romans 8:1-11, but he does so by repeatedly talking about Christ *and* the Spirit. For example, he writes,

The role Paul here assigns to the Spirit is that of doing what the law could not. Or rather, this is the role Paul gives to Christ and Spirit together; we must not make the mistake, as is sometimes made, of supposing a neat antithesis of either Law/Christ or Law/Spirit.⁷²

This means that the deliverance the ἐγώ requests in Romans 7:24 is experienced both through Christ and the Spirit, rather than the gospel of Christ crucified and risen alone.

Wright explains, “The people of God, having come out of the Egypt of sin and death, are

⁷⁰Ibid., 552.

⁷¹Ibid., 552-53.

⁷²Ibid., 555.

led through the wilderness by the Son and the Spirit.”⁷³ While it is true that he says a great deal about the Spirit in Romans 8:1-11, it is not the case that Paul describes condemnation as removed by the work of the Spirit in the believer. The wretched despair of the “I” in Romans 7:24 is only answered through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus (i.e., the gospel). To be sure, Paul speaks of the “law of the Spirit of life” as freeing the believer in Romans 8:1. Yet, it is the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” Paul goes on to explain in Romans 8:2-4 that condemnation in the flesh of Jesus Christ is what brought freedom. The Spirit then indwells the believer in order to bring obedience and eventually resurrection. This is no small issue. As Seifrid notes of Wright’s combining Christ and the Spirit in the work of justification, “At the very least, Wright’s interpretation of justification results in a radical loss of assurance, which we fallen human beings then will always seek to find elsewhere (to be sure, ‘by the power of the Spirit’) in our works, our faith, and our humanness.”⁷⁴ If one looks to the Spirit’s battle against sin in order to answer the lament for deliverance in Romans 7:24, the praise of Romans 7:25a could never come in this lifetime. The specific answer to the lament is neither the work of the Spirit nor the faithfulness of the Spirit-filled human. Just as the OT laments remembered the promise of deliverance and shouted in praise, so too does Paul (see Ps 44:1-9). It is the promise that Christ was condemned in the flesh and raised from the dead that moves one from praise to lament again and again. This is exactly what Paul points to in Romans 8:31-39. He points to the promise of the crucified and risen Christ as the assurance of God’s presence in the midst of suffering.

⁷³Ibid., 556.

⁷⁴Seifrid, “The Narrative of Scripture,” 39.

Third, in his reading of Romans 9-11, Wright muffles Paul's lament over Israel's unbelief and his praise for God's mysterious ways.⁷⁵ On the one hand, Wright does take seriously Paul's lament in Romans 9:1-5. He writes, "Paul's deep, constant, and unresolved grief is a standing rebuke to the shallowness that forbids Christians to grieve on the grounds that all shall be well."⁷⁶ Moreover, he recognizes that in Romans 9:1-5 Paul laments Israel's rejection of Christ, writing,

The whole argument implies, in other words, that the problem can be stated as follows: the great majority of Paul's Jewish contemporaries have not believed the gospel of Jesus Christ, and Paul believes that they are therefore, at the moment, excluded from salvation.⁷⁷

He also recognizes the shift from lament to praise reminiscent of the psalms.⁷⁸ Yet, within his exposition of Romans 9-11 there are some things that only serve to muffle Paul's lament and praise. For example, Wright sees Israel's downfall described in Romans 9-11 as "national righteousness."⁷⁹ He explains, "Israel's fault was her rejection of God's plan; which manifested itself in her 'national righteousness' (which was invalidated by her Adamic sin); which expressed itself in her rejection of the crucified

⁷⁵Hays writes, "Wright underestimates the extent to which Jewish rejection of the gospel is a puzzlement and vexation for Paul, indeed a mystery. More justice must be done to Paul's sense of agony in this situation, his lingering hope that even unbelieving Israel will at last somehow be reclaimed by the mercy of God. The realized eschatology that Wright attributes to Paul in this passage is thoroughly out of keeping with the characteristic Pauline eschatological reservation, his insistence that 'we hope for what we do not see'" (Hays, "Adam, Israel, Christ," 83).

⁷⁶Wright, *Romans*, 631.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 627.

⁷⁸He writes, "In Romans 9-11 Paul belongs in the tradition of the great psalmists. He starts with an urgent problem; he wrestles with it in grief and prayer; he retells the story of Israel, laying out God's acts from of old and in the present. Finally he bursts forth through to a paean of praise" (Wright, *Romans*, 696)." Nevertheless, some of his exposition brings into question the urgency of Paul's lament.

⁷⁹ See, e.g., Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 243.

Messiah.”⁸⁰ In other words, Israel’s rejection of Jesus was simply an “expression” of her rejection of God’s plan that she was to be a light to the world. She was guilty of “turning her privilege into a boast and her safeguarding symbols into badges of superiority.”⁸¹ Yet, Wright’s unnecessary and misguided periphrastic explanation of Paul’s grief does not come from the text of Romans 9-11 but from the narrative sequence he brings to his interpretation. Wright’s narrative sequence dictates the poetic sequence of Paul’s words. The emphasis in Romans 9-11 is constantly placed on God’s divine judgment and mercy. His mercy is hidden in the judgment of the nation through means of salvation to the Gentiles and a remnant of Israel. This is the answer to Paul’s lament. God does not fully explain everything such as how “all Israel” will be saved or why some are “vessels of wrath” and others “vessels of mercy.” Nevertheless, in a section of Romans that talks so vividly about the freedom of God’s righteousness, Wright’s interpretation ironically binds God’s ways to a particular story-line. Additionally, Hays critiques Wright’s realized eschatology so evident in his interpretation of Romans 11:25-27. He points to Wright’s statement that, “For Paul, the restoration of Israel had already happened in the resurrection of Jesus, the representative Messiah.”⁸² However, if Paul really held to such a notion, both his lament and praise at the beginning and end of Romans 9-11 lose something. Wright does not believe that there is a reference to the parousia of Christ in Romans 11:25-27.⁸³ Instead, according to Wright, Paul is simply speaking about what is

⁸⁰Ibid., 244.

⁸¹Ibid., 243.

⁸²See, Wright, “Romans and the Theology of Paul,” 61; Hays, “Adam, Israel, Christ,” 83.

⁸³Wright, *Romans*, 687-93.

already taking place through the gospel.⁸⁴ Gentiles hear the gospel, Israel becomes jealous, and in this way all Israel will be saved. For Wright, all of this is already happening. He writes, “That is, God is providing in the present time the path and the means of covenant renewal, of forgiveness, of healing and transformation, of life in and by God’s Spirit: the way (in other words) of faith.”⁸⁵ But why then does Paul lament? Why does he praise God for his inscrutable ways? Moreover, why does Paul connect Israel’s acceptance by God with the resurrection from the dead in Romans 11:15? Even in his exegesis of Romans 11:15, Wright’s realized eschatology is clear. In his comments on Romans 11:15, he writes, “Just think, Paul is saying to the Gentile Christians in Rome: once you realize that their ‘casting away’ was like the death of the Messiah, when they are brought back again it will be like a little Easter—and you should celebrate!”⁸⁶ But Paul never speaks about the resurrection of the dead this way. There is no “little Easter” for him. Instead, there is an eschatological moment for which all creation, the sons of God, and Paul groan. The moment hoped for is when the “deliverer,” who is Christ, comes from the heavenly Zion and takes away the ungodliness from Jacob (Rom 11:26). In Romans 11:25-27, there are echoes not merely of covenant renewal but “Maranatha” (1Cor 16:22). It is at that moment that God’s mercy will definitively be revealed in judgment. Yet, that moment is only a promise in Romans 9-11. It is a promise that has not yet been experienced and is thereby not fully discernible. For those reasons, Paul

⁸⁴Ibid., 692.

⁸⁵Ibid., 693.

⁸⁶Ibid., 683.

laments and praises. He cries while the promise is left untasted, but he praises God because the promise is so incredible.

Finally, Wright's "single-plan-through-Israel-for-the-world" reading of Romans, discovered through his narrative reading of the text, replaces what Paul himself put forth in the poetic sequence of the text. In the four sources of suffering that I have identified in Romans, the answer to the pain is simply the gospel. Suffering caused by God's wrath is not answered with an explanation that God has been faithful to his covenant. Rather, the explicit answer is that Jesus Christ is the propitiation for sin (Rom 3:24). Jesus' death and resurrection are the hope of salvation from wrath presently and on the last day (Rom 5:9). When the *ἔγώ* cries out in wretchedness, there is no mention made of God's covenant faithfulness to Abraham. Rather, Paul's explicit answer is that God condemned sin in the flesh of his son (Rom 8:1-4). When creation and the sons of God groan for the resurrection, there is no mention of covenant faithfulness. Paul's explicit answer is that they were saved in "hope," namely the hope that as the crucified Christ rose they will as well. In his pastoral address to Christians who feared separation from God in the face of so much suffering, there is no mention made of covenant faithfulness. Instead, Paul talks explicitly about Jesus being condemned and raised (Rom 8:32-34). When Paul laments the unbelief of Israel, the answer to the lament is not a discussion of covenant faithfulness. Rather, Paul reflects on the mercy that is hidden in God's judgment and is yet to be revealed. Paul's answer to suffering in Romans does not revolve around the covenant but the good news that Jesus Christ was crucified and risen. Wright's narrative approach obscures this answer at best and eclipses it at worse. Moreover, this tendency seems to come out in some of his broader discussions about evil

and suffering. For example, in his work entitled *Evil and the Justice of God*, Wright lists some “intermediate tasks” for the church to lay hold of until the return of Christ.⁸⁷ Not one of them includes proclaiming the gospel of God. Yet, for Paul, the only answer to suffering, especially suffering that leads to lament, is the promise of the gospel where God’s righteousness is revealed through a promise about Jesus Christ crucified and risen. Therefore, if one is going to designate a short-hand phrase about the narrative sequence in Romans, it cannot be God’s “single-plan-through-Israel-for-the-world.” Instead, it is much closer to Paul’s thinking, and the poetic sequence of Romans, to use the phrase God’s “single-plan-through-Christ-for-the-world.”

Stendahl, Introspective Conscience, and Romans 7

Krister Stendahl’s seminal essay “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West” has had a huge impact on Pauline studies in the past several decades.⁸⁸ His appraisal and subsequent challenge of reading “western” concerns into Paul’s writings has clearly impacted the thinking of those in the New Perspective camp.⁸⁹ Stendahl raised a number of questions about the traditional interpretation of Paul’s letters. Most memorably, he concluded that “a fresh look at the Pauline writings themselves

⁸⁷See N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 118-29.

⁸⁸See Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among the Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 78-96.

⁸⁹See, e.g., James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 120; E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977), 435-38. See the summaries and critiques of Stendahl in John M. Espy, “Paul’s Robust Conscience Re-Examined,” *NTS* 31 (1985): 161-88; Timothy George, “Modernizing Luther, Domesticating Paul: Another Perspective,” in *Paradoxes of Paul*, vol. 2 of *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brein, and Mark A. Seifrid (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 442-48; Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The Lutheran Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 146-49).

show that Paul was equipped with what in our eyes must be called a rather ‘robust’ conscience.”⁹⁰ Traditional interpretations of Paul, under the influence of Augustine and Luther, wrongly read into his letters “introspection” about sin and guilt. According to Stendahl, Paul did not suffer from a conscience weighed down by sin and a need for forgiveness.⁹¹ To the contrary, Stendahl argued that Paul’s writings reveal a rather healthy conscience before God. Yet, Stendahl knew that the largest objection to such an understanding would be the traditional reading of Romans 7.⁹² He would have to explain how the “I” in Romans 7 does not portray a person riddled with guilt about sin. In what follows, I offer a brief summary of Stendahl’s interpretation of Romans 7 and a critique of that reading in light of the lament language Paul uses.

Stendahl’s Reading of Romans 7

Stendahl’s comments on Romans 7 are relatively brief.⁹³ His overall impression of the text is that, “Paul is here involved in an interpretation of the Law, a defense for the holiness and goodness of the Law.”⁹⁴ Therefore, Stendahl protests against a reading of Romans 7 that overemphasizes anthropological concerns. He writes,

While much attention has been given to the question whether Paul here speaks about a pre-Christian or Christian experience of his, or about man in general, little attention has been drawn to the fact that Paul here is involved in an argument about

⁹⁰Stendahl, *Paul among the Jews and Gentiles*, 80.

⁹¹Ibid., 82.

⁹²Toward the end of his essay, Stendahl writes of Rom 7, “Yet there is one Pauline text which the reader must have wondered why we have left unconsidered, especially since it is the passage we mentioned in the beginning as the proof text for Paul’s deep insights into the human predicament.” Ibid., 92.

⁹³Even Stendahl’s commentary on Romans contains only a few pages about Rom 7. See Krister Stendahl, *Final Account: Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 27-30.

⁹⁴Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, 92.

the Law; he is not primarily concerned about man's or his own cloven ego or predicament.⁹⁵

The reason later interpreters saw Romans 7 as “a most penetrating insight in the nature of man and into the nature of sin” is that they failed to see it as a discussion about the law. He notes, “The question about the Law became the incidental framework around the golden truth of Pauline anthropology. This is what happens when one approaches Paul with the Western question of an introspective conscience.”⁹⁶ Once the larger concern about the law is forgotten, and interpreters bring their own concerns to the table, the language of Romans 7 is misunderstood. For example, Stendahl writes about the lament of Romans 7:24, “The *talaiporos ego anthropos* is not an existential quiver, or a guilt-ridden cry.”⁹⁷ The lament is not about weakness caused by guilt. Rather, the weakness is really tragedy caused by sin. Stendahl notes,

When Paul speaks about his weakness, it is tragic. But Paul never feels guilty about being weak. He is weak because Satan is slapping him in the face. Weakness comes from outside. This anthropology is totally different from the one that dominates much of our thinking.⁹⁸

The power of sin is “tragic rather than laden with guilt.”⁹⁹ He explains the tragedy is:

The tragedy is very clear. The world is not pretty. But Paul thinks in terms of *hamartia*—and here I lift some concept from Rudolf Bultmann's analysis of this chapter and from Käsemann's interpretation—as a kind of cosmic power. *Hamartia* is a power. It is not the sum total of our little sinning—or our big sinning. When

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid., 93.

⁹⁷Stendahl, *Final Account*, 29.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Ibid., 30.

you see it as a power game in which we get trapped, or nations get trapped, then it takes on a meaning more tragic than a guilt-ridden individual.¹⁰⁰

Clearly, Stendahl's main concern in the interpretation of Romans 7 is the reading of a guilty conscience into the *ἐγώ* of Romans 7. This mirrors his larger criticism about the Western understanding of Pauline theology. What Stendahl sees in Romans 7 is Paul defending the law and discussing the tragedy caused by the power of sin.

The Lamenting Conscience of the Biblical Text

Stendahl's reading of Romans 7 is at the same time helpful and unsatisfying. It is helpful in the sense that Stendahl rightly observes the absence of guilt language in this section of the letter and the Pauline corpus in general. If Paul had in mind an "I" riddled with guilt because of sin, he would have used different language. Stendahl writes, "Guilt language, and the very word 'guilt,' do not occur in Paul."¹⁰¹ He is also helpful in his description of sin's power as "tragic." While he does not fully elaborate on what he means by the description, Stendahl clearly recognizes that the struggle in Romans 7 is more along the lines of battling an enemy rather than dealing with a guilty conscience. Insistence on seeing a guilty conscience in Romans 7 makes the condemnation of sin discussed in Romans 8:3 simply silly.

Nevertheless, Stendahl's reading is ultimately unsatisfying, because he fails to articulate a clear alternative to the "introspective conscience" that he jettisons. While the "I" in Romans 7 does not suffer from a guilty conscience per se, suffering stems from somewhere. It is distress that is quite noticeable, even lamentable. That is exactly why

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 29.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

Paul employs lament language. The conceptual well he draws from to describe the experience of sin's use of the law is that of the PssLm. It is in the cries of the psalmist that Paul finds the language he needs to describe the internal struggle against sin. Sin, like the enemies of OT lament, is deceptive, over-powering, and ever-present (Rom 7:11). It is an oppressive force that kills (Rom 7:11, 23). The guilt is not what gets to the ἐγώ, as Stendahl rightly observes. Yet, something plagues the conscience. The "I" is clearly experiencing something, as indicated by the use of verbs such as γινώσκω, εὐρίσκω, and βλέπω (Rom 7:15, 21, 23). Stendahl does not give enough of an alternative at this point. To be fair, his work on Romans 7 is primarily part of a larger thesis he is pushing. Nevertheless, comments about Romans 7 buttress the thoughts of his seminal essay.¹⁰² Therefore, it simply will not do to say that Paul's conscience was "robust" because he does not use language about feeling guilty in his writings. That conclusion does not do justice the lament language of Romans 7. The wretchedness of the "I" is palatable. Sin's power and work is so drastic, indeed so tragic, that a lament arises. In the biblical text, as I have previously discussed, lament language signals great suffering. It is not merely a language employed for rhetorical purposes. Literary requests and petitions seen by the reader, like those found in Romans 7:24, are the equivalent of shrieks and screams normally heard by the ear. A cry of distress is the outward indication of internal affliction. The "I" is aware, even conscience of, suffering. In the case of Romans 7, the "I" is conscious of an internal struggle against the enemy of sin. The enemy is so pernicious that it uses the holy law to bring death to those who are confronted with its commandment. Moreover, the suffering caused by sin's presence and

¹⁰²See, Stendahl, *Paul among the Jews and Gentiles*, 78, 92-94.

activity is topped only by the wrath of God that ensues. That Paul has in mind God's wrath in Romans 7 is evident from the forensic language in Romans 8:1-4. The ἐγώ needs deliverance from sin's power and the wrath of God. For Paul, this does not make the conscience of the person confronted with the law "introspective," at least not in the sense that he or she feels guilty. Stendahl is right to point this out. However, the internal struggle against the enemy of sin does make the "I" lament. Like those who were conscience of enemies in the OT, and therefore lamented, the "I" in Romans 7 laments sin's power. Therefore, if one is to speak of a person's conscience in this text, it is more accurate to call it a "lamenting conscience" than an introspective one. It is a conscience that is aware of sin's deceptive, overpowering, and ever-present power. All of this comes to light in sin's use of the law. All the "I" can do is cry for help.

Suffering as the *Sitz im Leben* of Romans

Mirror reading is a tenuous, yet necessary, exercise for understanding epistolary literature. Interpreters must try, as responsibly as they can, to locate the historical circumstances which prompted a piece of writing. This holds true for Paul's letter to the Romans. Yet, it is also true that Romans does not fully cooperate in this process. The circumstances surrounding Christians in Rome are not made explicitly clear in the letter. To be sure, there is a clear indication of a struggle between those who are "strong" and "weak" in faith, as indicated in Romans 14-15. Additionally, from Paul's end of things, he has a hope that the believers in Rome will help him in his missionary journey to the west, as indicated in Romans 15:24. Beyond that, I do not think anything really definitive can be said about the *Sitz im Leben* of Romans, at least not with respect to its specific historical milieu.

Nevertheless, there is another *Sitz im Leben* in Romans that is sometimes overlooked. It is simply the *Sitz im Leben* of suffering. Specifically, it is suffering of the deepest kind and on the widest scale, cosmic to be exact. The profundity of the suffering is indicated by the profundity of the language that Paul employs to describe it, namely the language of lament. Just as tears, screams, and cries indicate the sharpest pain in a person, lament language points to the sharpest pain in literature. Lament is a kind of literary sobbing, and Paul participates in it fully. The situation of hurt he addresses stems from God's wrath, sin's use of the law, the believer's suffering "on account of" God, and Israel's unbelief. All of this suffering boils down to one issue—the righteousness of God. In this way, Paul echoes the *Sitz im Leben* of the OT. For example, in all the various kinds of psalms, especially the PssLm, God's righteousness maintained the same place of prominence as Paul affords it in Romans. The psalmist had an expectation and longing that God would reveal his righteousness, a righteousness that would change lament to praise. This is clear in Psalm 97:1-4 LXX:

Sing to the Lord a new song. For the Lord did wonderful things; his right hand and his holy arm saved for himself. The Lord made known his salvation, before the nations he revealed his righteousness [δικαιοσύνην]. He remembered his mercy to Jacob and his truth to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Sing to God, all the earth, sing and be glad and sing psalms.

Additionally, the prophets longed for the revelation of God's righteousness as well. The prophecy of Habbakuk, in some ways, resembles the *Sitz im Leben* of Romans.¹⁰³

Habbakuk laments God's wrath for sin, Israel's unbelief, and the triumph of enemies

¹⁰³On the similarities between Hab and Rom, see Rikki E. Watts, "For I Am Not Ashamed of the Gospel: Romans 1:16-17 and Habakkuk 2:4," in *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Sven K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 3-25.

(Hab 1:2-4, 12-17).¹⁰⁴ In the midst of his suffering and lament, Habakkuk awaits an answer from God. Paul cites part of that answer in Romans 1:17, “But the righteous will live by faith.” In other words, the revelation of the righteousness of God that Habakkuk longed for is a promise he must believe. Similarly, Paul tells the Romans that the righteousness of God, the righteousness that relieves all their suffering, is a promise that must be believed. It is a promise contained in the gospel that proclaims the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Salvation from divine wrath, indwelling sin, external opposition, and even unbelief is an accomplished fact in Jesus Christ. Yet, it is only experienced in the present through faith in the promise. Therefore, paradoxically, the hope of the gospel not only answers lament, it causes it.

Simply put, the point is that Paul would have no reason to address the pain of the Christians in Rome if there were not a prior promise, a prior hope, in the gospel. The promise of deliverance juxtaposed with a creation overran by the forces of darkness elicits a cry. C. S. Lewis defined the problem of pain in just this sense. He writes of Christianity, “In a sense, it creates, rather than solves the problem of pain, for pain would be no problem unless, side by side with our daily experience of this painful world, we had received what we think a good assurance that ultimate reality is righteous and loving.”¹⁰⁵ In other words, without a prior promise, the pain and suffering Paul writes about in Romans would be ridiculous to his readers. The very pain they experience stems from a mixture of suffering and hope. The suffering contradicts the hope they have in the gospel

¹⁰⁴On the presence of lament language in Hab, see J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster, 1991), 87-90; Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 32 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 102-04.

¹⁰⁵C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), 14.

and vice versa. There is a sequence of promise, suffering that seems to encroach upon that promise, and then a cry of distress. This is the situation Paul deals with in Romans. The divine righteousness that will finally bring an end to this pattern is contained in the promise of the gospel. It is the promise that God, in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, has and will put every enemy under their feet. Therefore, the final shift from lament to praise is summed up in the promise of Romans 16:20, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”

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ABSTRACT

LAMENT IN ROMANS: PROMISE, SUFFERING, AND THE CRY OF DISTRESS

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This dissertation examines Paul's understanding of suffering in Romans by analyzing the OT lament language that he often cites, alludes to, and echoes. Chapter 1 introduces the history of interpretation, thesis, and aim of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 summarizes the OT lament language that Paul employs in Romans. Specifically, this chapter examines the form and function of lament language in various parts of the OT.

Chapter 3 examines Paul's use of lament language in Romans 3:10-18. There is analysis of both the form and function of the language. The chapter considers how recognition of lament language in this portion of the letter impacts interpretation of the immediate context and the overall understanding of suffering in Romans.

Chapter 4 addresses the use of OT lament language in Romans 7:7-25. There is an analysis of both the form and function of the language. The chapter considers how the recognition of lament language in this portion of the letter impacts the interpretation of the immediate context and the overall understanding of suffering in Romans.

Additionally, there is a discussion regarding the preference for an OT background to Romans 7:7-25 rather than a Greco-Roman one.

Chapter 5 examines the use of a lament language in Romans 8:18-39. It considers how Paul portrays the sons of God, creation, and the Holy Spirit as lamenters. Moreover, it looks at the impact of the citation from Psalm 44, a lament psalm, on the overall meaning of Romans 8:31-39. There is also a consideration of how the lament language in Romans 8:18-39 informs one's understanding of suffering in Romans.

Chapter 6 looks at use of lament language in Romans 9-11. Special attention is given to the echo of Moses' intercessory lament in Romans 9:1-5. The chapter considers how Romans 9:6-11:36 contains an answer to Paul's intercessory lament. The findings are then brought to bear on the issue of suffering in Romans.

Chapter 7 is the conclusion to the work that summarizes the thesis and brings the weight of that thesis to bear on two issues germane to Pauline Studies. Specifically, Wright's narrative reading of Romans is challenged, and Stendahl's reading of Romans 7 is questioned. Finally, the chapter proposes a *Sitz im Leben* for Romans in light of the pervasive use of lament language in the letter.

The main thesis of this work is that Paul's use of lament language in Romans simultaneously points to the depth of the suffering he addresses and the power of the gospel he preaches. By recognizing this language, one gains a better appreciation for the suffering of Paul and the Christians in Rome, as well as the hope they had in the midst of such profound pain.

VITA

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