



## **WOW: Word Of the Week**

### **Lament: When Lament Turns to Hope by Bob Young April 8, 2020**

Lament is pervasive in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), in practice and as a literary theme. Lament is recognized as a genre, used in many literary contexts, from prophetic to narrative to liturgy. About one third of the psalms are laments. Lament is found in the Book of Job. The prophets cry out to God in lament.

Lament can be described as a plea for help in the midst of pain. One whole book of the Old Testament, Lamentations, expresses the confusion and suffering Jeremiah felt after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

Trying to understand lament during the current pandemic and health crisis may be helpful. We cry out for help, for answers, for relief. We are afloat on a sea of uncertainty.

Here's a quick look at the book of Lamentations: Jeremiah loved Jerusalem. It was perhaps where he was born, it was where he ministered, where he saw people dying in the streets. It was the city that he had seen saw destroyed. Discouraged, sad, disheartened. For him, lament was natural. Lament seems natural to us as well.

Lamentations is a book of lament. Biblical lament often follows a pattern of protest, petition, and praise. The book of Lamentations is composed of at least five laments, each of which are acrostics, written with an A to Z pattern. What grabs my attention in studying Lamentations is that right in the middle of the book, where it is not at all expected, Jeremiah breaks into words of hope (3:21-24).

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;  
they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

"The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

Lament often recognizes and praises God, but to include a strong statement of hope is less common. If we do not know the biblical laments, we will not recognize the power of Jeremiah's outburst of hope. He is not following the script: this is not how a lament should go. Affirmation: hope, unceasing steadfast love, unending mercy, daily renewal, faithful God, hope, goodness.

It's OK to lament. In your lament, do not lose sight of our faithful God. To help us remember, let's sing those words together.

Great is Thy faithfulness  
Great is Thy faithfulness  
Morning by morning new mercies I see  
And all I have needed Thy hand hath provided  
Great is Thy faithfulness  
Lord unto me!