**Lamenting & God’s Hesed: Job, David & Jeremiah**

**by Buzz Huget**

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Friend

Our daughter Abigail died on June 11, 2022. For the past year, I have done a deep dive into understanding grief and loss. My main focus has been on wrestling with the grief of her death versus God’s lovingkindness. Upon her death, a chasm was created between the reality of her death on our side and the God of lovingkindness on the other.

Lisa and I discovered that lamenting is the bridge that allows us to stay connected with the Lord. By it we could cross from our side to His. This paper has helped me to understand the chasm, the bridge and the struggle to cross it.

I am grateful for Michael Card’s *A Sacred Sorrow* (and several other books) for helping me process this subject. I focus on three Biblical mentors, Job, David and Jeremiah. They have given me the courage to look into the depth, the breadth, and the call of lamenting. Through their grief and sorrow, I’ve gained the beginning of an understanding of the mysterious bridge of lamenting. By that bridge, the Lord reconnects us and introduces us to the twin companions of joy and sorrow. While discovering our third companion, Jesus, who travels at our side, a Man of sorrows deeply acquainted with our grief.

I am grateful to Angela Hyde for her editing help.

Buzz Huget

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**Introduction**

There are times when life doesn't make sense. Times when our circumstances do not square with what the Bible reveals to us about God and His love. How are we to understand our circumstances of pain and sorrow in light of what the Bible says concerning God‘s promises of care and protection? We read that the lovingkindness of the Lord is everlasting. The Hebrew people had a name for this expectation and experience of God's care. It is *hesed*. *Hesed* is most often translated in English as ‘lovingkindness.’ This is an adequate definition yet it doesn’t capture the fullness of the Hebrew word. It is a word broader than a single definition. In Psalm 136 *hesed* is repeated in all 26 verses. In various English versions it is translated: NIV - His love endures forever, NAS - His lovingkindness is everlasting, ESV & NRSV - His steadfast love endures forever, NKJV & KJV - His mercy endures forever, NLT - His faithful love endures forever, MSG - His love never quits. This doesn’t indicate that there is wide disagreement of the single definition of *hesed*. Rather it demonstrates that *hesed* is describing the fullness of a core character of God. Michael Card describes it as ‘the untranslatable defining the inexpressible’ (Inexpressible pg.1 2018).

Lamenting is our mental and emotional response when our life circumstances do not match our understanding of God’s *hesed*. God promises to never leave us nor forsake us. He promises to bless us and to watch over and care for us. We know our sins have consequences. But what about circumstances that aren’t the result of our bad behavior? When an accident or disease strikes us or a loved one, with or without warning? Or if our possessions have been stolen or we’ve been betrayed by a friend or our character and reputation have been irreparably damaged by lies? It is in those times that we can feel abandoned by the God who promised never to forsake us. We can feel helpless, betrayed and forsaken by God. We thought God was merciful and that the goodness of the Lord would follow us all the days of our life. We wonder, isn’t He the good shepherd who is supposed to protect us? The stronghold in whom we would be secure? The Blesser of good things and the helper in times of need?

*“(We) lament because we cannot understand how a God of hesed could possibly allow*

*us to experience pain. The cause of all lament is an inconsistency between the*

*perceived action of God and the revealed character of God as defined by the word*

*hesed. It is the source of the complaint as well as the solution.”*

Michael Card, 2014, *Sacred Sorrow* p. 123

When we are hit with tragedy, suffering and loss; one or all three, it leaves us reeling. How do we make what we know and believe about God fit the circumstance we are experiencing? As our numb and shocked state begins to dissipate, we ask; what has happened, why has it happened and then, how long will it last?

We lament when our situation, circumstances and feelings are at odds with who we have known, believed or have been told God to be. We ask where are You God? We lament when our life does not match our understanding of God’s lovingkindness, that is, His *hesed*. We ask why is this happening? Lamenting can result from many life experiences. It can be brought on by a catastrophic event or a lifetime of losses or because of a situation of someone in your life you care for but have no power to change their harmful choices. None of us can escape facing, at some point, a chasm between our circumstances and God’s *hesed*. Looking into that chasm is the starting point of lament.

Our culture has not been helpful in understanding or processing grief and thus lamenting. We deny it, avoid it and if those attempts fail, we move past it as quickly as possible. Yet, grief and lament are not something to just ‘get over.’ It is similar to a physical injury which we don’t just get over, even though it’s unpleasant and difficult. That is true of grief and thus lamenting.

Therefore the Bible has given us mentors of lamenting. We’ll look at Lamenting and God’s *hesed* in the lives of three men. Job - Lamenting a Catastrophic Moment; David - Lamenting a Lifetime of Losses and finally Jeremiah - Lamenting for an Unrepentant People.

Like us, Job, David & Jeremiah each experienced life circumstances that did not match their experience of God’s *hesed*. Job’s lament was the result of a quick succession of devastating, catastrophic events. His life up to that point was marked by a close relationship with God. He had experienced God’s *hesed* but his catastrophe events created a deep chasm between him and the Lord which shattered him to his very core. As a result, he experienced and expressed the very depth of lament. David spent a lifetime discovering God’s *hesed* by experiencing heavy obligations of responsibility while suffering deep personal losses. He wrote Psalms to give expression to both his lamenting and his learning of God's *hesed.* They record his laments throughout his life’s varied circumstances. From his trials, David expressed a tremendous breadth of lament. And finally, Jeremiah was called to declare, without compromise, the imminent judgment of God upon the nation and those around him. It was in his role as a ‘prophet of judgment’ that he learned to lament for an unrepentant people. He experienced God’s *hesed* and also became the ‘weeping Prophet’ to a stiff-necked and rebellious people. Jeremiah learned to lament for a people unwilling to repent.

In each of these lives are slices of the true Life of Lamenting which was experienced in full by Jesus Christ. He is the true Man of Sorrows acquainted with grief. Like Jesus, Jeremiah wept over unrepentant Jerusalem. David was the persecuted anointed king no one knew about. And Job pre-echoed Jesus' cry of “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?” What follows will be a look into lives that experienced lamenting in its deepest and broadest expression, while learning the cost of the Lord’s lament.

Part 1\*

## Job - Lamenting Catastrophic Events –

## Experiencing the Depth of Lament

 *God said of Job…a blameless and upright man…who fears God and*

*turns away from evil.*

Job’s early life was immersed in God’s *hesed*. In the opening verses of the book God describes Job as *“a blameless and upright man…who fears God and turns away from evil” (Job 1:8\*).* Up to this point, his life reflected the description of a ‘blessed man’ in Psalms 1 & 15. It is a picture of a life that was deeply rooted in the soil of God. It’s not dependent upon circumstantial rain but the ever-flowing hidden streams of God (Ps 1:3). A blessed man is one who sojourns in close relationship with God. He’ll never be moved’ Ps 15:1. So, in the opening verses of Job it can be observed that Job’s relationship with God was firmly established. He was respected by God and men (Job 1:8; 29:2-25). Satan approached God and argued that Job’s devotion was only because of God’s blessing. Job enjoyed God’s hedge of protection. Satan declared that if those blessings were taken away, he'd give up his devotion. Satan was convinced that his attacks on Job would shake him to his core and cause him to curse God. What he and we discovered was that despite the terrible afflictions and losses, Job did not abandon his core belief and devotion to God. Yet because of his afflictions, Job lamented his bewilderment, pain and sorrow of his body, soul, mind and emotions. His laments gave expression to his deepest anguish and misery (Job 7:11). The laments explored a deep chasm that suddenly existed between Job’s experience of God’s *hesed* and his current shattered condition. Yet, in the end, despite all of Job’s deep laments, God did not condemn Job but commended him to his friends (Job 42:7-9).

 The book begins by giving the reader a glimpse into Job’s life and God’s heavenly court. We learn that Job…

 ‘*was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from*

 *evil….(he) was the greatest of all the people of the east.’* Job *1:1,3*

God confirmed that assessment to Satan (Job 1:8) who then challenged God,

*“Take all he has from him and he’ll curse you to Your face.”* Job *1:11*

God accepted the challenge yet Job never knew about it.

 The challenge was accepted and the Lord turned Job over to Satan to do anything to him short of taking his life. What followed were a series of catastrophic events. Job lost everything, his wealth, his reputation and his children (Job 1:13-19). It was in quick succession 1] The Sabeans attacked and took his oxen, donkey’s and killed the servants; 2] then, fire from God fell and burned up his sheep and killed his servants; 3] next, the Chaldeans attacked and took all his camels and killed the servants; 4] finally a great wind collapsed the house where all his children had gathered, killing all of them. Four catastrophic events, two by man and two reportedly by God. Yet in the face of these events,

“*Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and*

*worshiped (God).* Job *1:20*

Job's response revealed the core of his character. He tore his clothes and shaved head to express his grief. He then threw himself face down on the ground, prostrated before God, in a posture of worship. He then said,

“*...Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord*

 *gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.* Job *1:21*

This expressed his worship, in essence saying, the Lord is Lord and I am His and the Lord remains the source of all blessing.

Some time later Satan visited God with a second challenge about Job…

‘*take away his health and then he’ll curse You.’(*Job *2:5)*

For reasons never explained (to Job or the reader) God allowed Job’s health to be taken from him. He was covered head to foot with open sores. In his despair he had to scrape his open sores with shards of broken pottery. Then, as a final loss, he lost his wife’s respect. In the midst of her own loss and sorrow, she said to her husband…

*“Curse God and die.” Job 2:9*

To which Job responded,

*"You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good*

 *from God and not accept adversity? (*Job *2:10)"*

Satan completed his afflictions on Job, yet,

*‘In all this Job did not sin with his lips.* Job *2:10*

So far, Job proved God was right (Job 2:3). He was a broken, battered and bereaved man but with no knowledge of Satan’s hand in it. He continued to believe God’s sovereignty but now God was silent. And for the moment, so was Job.

Those catastrophic losses shook Job to his core. Yet not to the point of him ‘cursing’ and abandoning God. So where did his unshakeable faith come from? There is no written record of howit came about for Job, however, scripture does provide the reason whyfaith can be unshakeable. Although the Psalms hadn’t been written yet, Job personified the ‘blessed man’ of Psalm 1 and the ‘blameless man’ of Psalm 15. The roots of his faith were deep within the soil of God and his life was planted by the stream of God. As described in those Psalms, he was blessed and blameless. His roots of faith in the Lord were deep and firm. Prior to the catastrophic events, Job tells of his close relationship with the Lord (Job 29:2-6). That is what allowed Job to withstand the bomb blast of his shattering losses. The tree of Job had been stripped clean by the hurricane of Satan’s deeds and it laid naked and bare in the heat and drought of God’s sudden silence. Yet Job’s roots of faith clung to the memory of God’s *hesed.* In his sorrowful silence Job’s faith searched for the living water that had sustained him. During his time of silent lamentation, he must have searched through the rubble of his life seeking to find what had remained unshaken.

In his days of silence (Job 2:11-13), Job must have also looked into the terrible, deep chasm that now existed between his memory of God’s *hesed* and his new shattered reality of pain and loss. Shaken to his core, he must have pondered what was true about God and himself. It was during that time of silent lamentation, his three friends arrived. In stunned silence they sat with him for seven days. At the end of those seven days, Job broke the silence with his first lament and the help of his three friends ended.

When Job finally spoke it must have shocked his friends.

*Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth*. Job 3:1

Like George Bailey in the movie *It’s a Wonderful Life*, he wished he had never been born. Over the course of the book he will speak nine different times, in laments as his friends sat and listened. And with each lament, they will respond with growing frustration and anger at what Job said. They were convinced his circumstances were the result of sin. Their core belief was that God blesses good behavior and punishes bad behavior. Despite their rebukes, Job never gave up on his own integrity or God’s. His ‘friends’ countered each of his laments with theological arguments that misrepresented God. They were adamant Jobs’ catastrophes were proof of God’s judgment against unconfessed sins. Eliphaz voiced this in his first response. It was clear that both his understanding of God’s character and his assessment of God's actions toward Job, were wrong,

*“My experience shows that those who plant trouble and cultivate evil will harvest*

*the same.” Job 4:8*.

He believed that what happened to Job was the fruit of ‘evil’ done and left unrepented. Job responded to Eliphaz with a continued complaint and lament. The response didn’t fit into the second ‘friend’ Bildad’s theological framework either. He must have wondered, just who does Job think he is, complaining about God’s actions? He even went so far as to declare that the death of Job’s children had been the result of their unconfessed sins…

*“Does God twist justice? Does the Almighty twist what is right? Your children*

 *must have sinned against Him, so their punishment is well deserved.”* Job 8:3,4

Their deaths were his theological proof positive. Bildad might have had trouble pointing out where Job had sinned but it was clear to him that the death of Job's children was evidence of God’s retributive judgment of their sin. So, in the midst of Job’s physical and emotional pain, Bildad’s comment must have wounded him deeply. His children were not there to defend themselves. Because of these accusations, Job responded directly to God…

*“Let me complain freely. …My bitter soul must complain. I will say to God ‘Don’t*

*simply condemn me - tell me the charge you are bringing against me.*

Job 10:1,2

Job’s perceived continued ‘unrepentant spiritual arrogance’ was too much for his third friend Zopha…

*“Should I remain silent while you babble on? When you mock God, shouldn’t*

 *someone make you ashamed? You claim. ‘My beliefs are pure.’ ‘I am clean in*

 *the sight of God.’ If only God would speak, He would tell you what He*

 *thinks……Listen! God is doubtless punishing you far less than you deserve.”*

Job 11:3-6

All three of Job’s friends spoke with arrogant confidence regarding Job’s circumstances and God’s hand in them. They spoke out of self-righteousness and self-deceit. And worst of all, their theology was a misrepresentation of God (Job 13:4,5,7-12; 21:34). They were wrong about Job and they were wrong when they spoke on behalf of God.

All of Job’s laments, to God and his friends, were the outpoured expression of his physical pain, emotional turmoil, and spiritual bewilderment. His condition did not match his past experiences of God’s *hesed.* Job must have felt forsaken by God, his circumstances would seem to confirm that conclusion. Added to his bewilderment was God’s silence (Job 23:9; 30:20). Therefore, Job declared that the Lord had become cruel toward him by persecuting him (Job 30:21). His friend's claimed his circumstances were the result of his rebellion and unconfessed secret sins. That had to have added to his despair. Job’s life had become unbearable. He experienced the physical pain of his afflictions, the ongoing mental and emotional battle with his friends and the spiritual abandonment he felt from God. Every aspect of Job’s life was a loss. The deepest wound was the apparent loss of God’s *hesed. (Job 27:1-6)* Therefore, his unceasing pain and heaven’s unbroken silence drove him to conclude that God was the cause. That resulted in Job giving expression to the depths of lament. He declared aloud to God things that we might dare to think but would be fearful of saying out loud. They truly were his deepest emotional cries. Yet, God never condemned him for voicing them (42:7-10). The following is a short list of Job’s deep and bitter laments:

*6:4 the Almighty has struck me down with His arrows…God’s terrors are lined up against Me.*

*9:18 He…fills me…with bitter sorrows…22 ‘He destroys both the blameless and*

 *the wicked.’ 23 When a plague sweeps through, He laughs at the death of the*

 *innocent.*

*16:9 God hates me and angrily tears me apart…He has tossed me into the*

 *hands of the wicked...12 “I was living quietly until He shattered me. He took me*

 *by the neck and broke me in pieces. Then He set me up as His target, 13…His*

 *arrows pierce me without mercy…14 Again and again He smashes against me,*

 *charging at me like a warrior*

*.*

*19:6…it is God who has wronged me, capturing me in His net...7 “I cry out, ‘Help!’ but no one answers me. I protest, but there is no justice.8 God has blocked my way so I cannot move. He has plunged my path into darkness…9 He has stripped me of my honor and removed the crown from my head.10 He has*

 *demolished me on every side, and I am finished. He has uprooted my hope like*

 *a fallen tree. 11 His fury burns against me; He counts me as an enemy.*

*23:16 God has made me sick at heart; the Almighty has terrified me.*

*30:18 With a strong hand, God grabs my shirt. He grips me by the collar of my*

*coat.. 19 He has thrown me into the mud. I’m nothing more than dust and*

 *ashes….21 You have become cruel toward me. You use Your power to*

 *persecute me.22 You throw me into the whirlwind and destroy me in the storm.*

These laments capture the pain, hurt and loss of Job’s experience. They were personal and unvarnished words directed to God. He verbalized them, not sure if God was even listening. And he said them, perhaps believing his current condition would continue for the rest of his life.

In spite of these declarations about God, Job clung to his own personal integrity of uprightness. Although he must have felt he hadn’t changed, for reasons he couldn’t understand, he believed God had become his enemy (Job 13:24). He lamented that God had ground him down and devastated his family (Job 16:7). And that God had become cruel to him and used His awesome power to persecute him (Job 30:21). It’s as if God had thrown Job into a tornado to destroy him. Job’s life was shattered (Job 7:14). He found his life disgusting and hated it. His complaints sprang out of the bitterness of his soul. He pleaded with God to leave him alone (Job 7:16). He felt God had poured out His anger on him like waves of attacking warriors (Job 10:17). Even though Job cried out, he believed God wasn’t listening…

*“I cry to you, O God, but You don’t answer. I stand before You, but You don’t*

*even look. Job 30:20*

Job continued to want his day in court with God (Job 9:3). But he knew for that to happen God must do two things: 1] remove His heavy hand of suffering from him and 2] not to have God’s presence terrify him (Job 13:20,21).

At one point Job even turned sarcastic toward God, asking Him…

*‘What do You get by oppressing me? You reject me yet smile on the schemes of*

 *the wicked! Is Your life so short You must watch my every move for a sin?*

Job *10:3,5*

And then in exasperation…

*‘if I sin how does that effect You? Why do You treat me like some kind of monster*

 *that You have to keep under lock and key!* Job *7:12,20*

As Job was driven deeper into his pain and bitterness, he began to assign motives to God’s perceived actions against him…

*“(You) didn’t…kill me at birth, because You want to watch and wait for me to sin*

 *so You could condemn me in my guilt.”* Job *10:13,14*

Job seemed to be left in two minds about God’s character and his own circumstances...

*“God why not just forgive my sin and take away my guilt (*Job *7:21)*?”

While at the same time…

*“You know I am not guilty, (but) no one can rescue me from Your hand.* Job *10:7*

Despite these bleak and honest expressions from Job's anguished soul, something else emerges. Unbelievably, out of the dark chasm of Job’s lament came shafts of God’s light. Job declares his need for someone to stand between himself and God,

*“If only there were a mediator between us, someone who could bring us together.*

*the mediator could make God stop beating me, and I would no longer live in*

*terror of his punishment.”* Job 9:33,34

He confessed that true wisdom and power were found only in God (Job 12:13). And he knew that only the blameless could stand before God (Job 13:16). Thinking his death was imminent, he responded to Zophar lamenting how he wished God would deal with his sin. He is not far from the mark.

*“I wish You would hide me in the grave and forget me there until Your anger has*

 *passed. But mark Your calendar to think of me again!...You would call and I*

*would answer, and You would yearn for me, Your handiwork…My sins would be*

*sealed in a pouch, and You would cover my guilt.* Job 14:13-17

Later, from the depth of another lament with a stunning clarity, Job declares…

*“...even now my witness is in heaven. My advocate is there on high”* (Job 16:19).

Continuing with certainty…

*“(You)...must defend my innocence…O God, since no one else will stand up for*

*me.* Job *17:3*

These inspired shafts of divine insight climaxed with an amazing declaration…

*“I know that my Redeemer lives, and He will stand upon the earth at last. And*

 *after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! I will see Him for*

 *myself. Yes, I will see Him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought!*

Job *19:25-27*

Is it possible that in the midst of deep sorrow, suffering and lament, God can speak to the lamentor? Perhaps not with reasoned words but with flashes of God-breathed inspiration.

In the end, we are told the Lord did show up. Not to debate Job but to ask him some questions (Job 38:3). The Lord's first set of questions (Job 38:3-39:30) revolves around Job doubting God’s wisdom (Job 38:3). At the conclusion of that first set of questions, Job’s response was simple…

*“I am nothing—how could I ever find the answers? I will cover my mouth with my*

*hand. I have said too much already. I have nothing more to say.”* Job *40:4,5*

The Lord’s second set of questions (Job 40:7-41:34) addressed Job’s challenging of the Lord's justice (Job 40:8). In the end, laying in an exhausted heap, the same Job, who had demanded his right to a face-to-face meeting with God, declared…

*“I know that You can do anything, and no one can stop you. You asked, ‘Who is*

 *this that questions My wisdom with such ignorance?’ It is I—and I was talking*

 *about things I knew nothing about, things far too wonderful for me. You said,*

 *‘Listen and I will speak! I have some questions for you, and you must answer*

 *them.’ I had only heard about You before, but now I have seen You with my own*

 *eyes. I take back everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my*

 *repentance.”* Job *42:2-6*

Job finally had his ‘day in court’ with God but had nothing to ask, only repentance to offer. Yet for all of Job’s wrong assumptions and foolish accusations, God does not rebuke or condemn him. The three ‘friends' were the ones who received God’s condemnation. The Lord was angry with them for misrepresenting Him. Therefore, He required that they humble themselves and ask Job to pray for their forgiveness (Job 42:7-9). Job became their advocate and mediator. As in the beginning, the Lord declared Job 'blameless and upright’ to Satan and now to the three friends (*Job 1:8)*. The Lord declared His pleasure that Job had spoken ‘spoken accurately’ about Him (Job 42:7). That final scene took place while Job was still emotionally, physically and spiritually exhausted and broken. He was asked to intervene for his friends while still without wealth or health or children. He heard God’s praise, while still covered with open sores and racked with pain. He had lost everything and had nothing. All he had left was God. It was what he had wanted in the midst of his suffering. It was his blessing for not ‘cursing God.’ In the end Job had God because God had always had Job. The three friends came to a broken man to ask him to plead for their forgiveness from God. It is a picture of what all men must do who seek forgiveness. Performing that final act of faithfulness, God then blessed him, restoring his health, wealth and giving him a new family. It was by the bridge of lament that Job passed over his chasm of grief. In the past, he had experienced God’s *hesed* but now he met *Hesed* face to face.

In life, unwelcome events can create a chasm between our experience of God’s *hesed* and our circumstances. Catastrophic events, like Job’s, can create in our lives deep chasms of grief and confusion. Lamenting forms a bridge that connects our circumstances of pain and grief on one side with God’s *hesed* on the other side of that chasm. Job’s story assures us that honest expressions of deep loss are welcomed by the Lord. We must remember that in the midst of those raw and anguished laments we must not turn away and curse God. Job clung to what he remembered of God’s *hesed.* That was his only way to bridge that chasm. Speaking directly to God is the purest and safest form of lament. It is pure because it is a direct conversation with the Lord and it is the safest because the *hesed* of God can ‘bear all things’ even our deepest expressions of pain and grief. We may never know why we are going through our trials but like Job, it is by clinging to God, through the fires of afflictions we will find that He is all we have and all we need.

\* scriptures quoted in this section are New Living Translation 2012.

Part 2

## David- Lamenting a Lifetime of Loss

## Experiencing the Breadth of Lament

 *God said of David…a man that sought after God’s own heart.*

David was a man after God’s own heart and as a result, he experienced God’s *hesed*.

His life of seeking after the heart of God began as a shepherd boy, continued as he was persecuted by King Saul and never left him even when he became king over all of Israel. David also experienced a lifetime of losses. Therefore, his seeking God’s heart and his lifetime of personal losses produced in him a wide breadth of lamenting. That seeking and losing, resulted in David writing most of the Psalms of Lament. Many of these laments flowed because of the demanding responsibilities thrust upon him, many of which were beyond his years or experience. Many were also written while in lonely isolation. His Psalms were birthed from the burdens of leadership and from the painful loss of intimate friends. Those experiences provided opportunities for David to hone his laments into musical and poetic expressions of worship directed to God.

David’s lifetime of lament began as a small boy who was given the responsibility of shepherding the family flocks. He was sent out alone to feed, care and protect the family business. He had to find hillsides for safe grazing, quiet streams for water and protected places to rest at night. He needed to care for them against disease and injuries. And he was the defender of the flocks against fierce predators, like bears and lions.

That pattern of care and protection David also bore for others throughout his life. He had responsibilities beyond what he had been prepared for. It was during those lonely times that he developed a deep relationship with the Lord. His solitude and dependence on the Lord shaped his thinking and godly meditations. The Lord became his Helper and Confidant. That solitary life allowed him time for reflection, to grow and steel his soul, in devotion to God. It was these lonely experiences that shaped his expressions of lament we find in Psalms.

David’s laments continued as a young man. His father Jesse and his brothers were

invited to a banquet by Samuel the Prophet while he was left to tend to the flocks. He hadn’t been important enough to be invited. The Lord had sent Samuel to anoint a son of Jesse to be the next king. But the Lord chose none of the brothers. Finding that one more son was still in the field, David was sent for. When he arrived, without warning, Samuel anointed him. There is no mention of Samuel giving any specific reason for the anointing. Although David was to be Israel’s next king, only Samuel, David and the Lord understood the significance of the moment. In one sense the anointing seemingly changed nothing in David’s life. He continued to shepherd the family sheep, run errands for his father and be treated with contempt by his brothers (1 Sam 17:15,17,28). Yet with his anointing the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward (1 Sam 16:13). So, David returned to watching over the flocks and Samuel returned to his hometown of Ramah. Watching the flocks must have afforded David time to contemplate what his anointing meant and what he should do about it. We have no record of David receiving instructions, so he continued doing what he had been doing. He was still a shepherd boy, alone in the hills of Bethlehem. He must have wondered, waited and continued to worship God. After all, he had done nothing to be anointed, and he had no idea of what to do next, so he waited. He had no idea that his anointing had been the result of God’s own lament. David’s kingship was born out of the lament of God (1Sam 8:6-8). In that single moment, David went from the least important son in Jesse’ family to the future King of Israel. Yet there's no mention in scripture of what he was expected to do before he became king. It was clear that he had the confirmation of the Holy Spirit upon him (1 Sam 16:13) but he had no one to talk with or confide in.

At that time, unknown to David, the Spirit of the Lord had left Saul, the current king of Israel and sent another spirit to torment him (1 Sam 16:15). Saul sought comfort but found none. One of Saul’s attendants suggested that David should come and play for him*...*

*I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of*

 *valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the*

 *Lord is with him.* 1 Sam 16:18

Unaware that the Lord was at work, he came and with his playing and singing Saul found relief. So Saul invited him to join his court. David then split his time between Saul’s court and tending the family herd. Perhaps the Lord had directed the arrangement, so David could quietly observe the inner workings of a failed kingship. Saul grew to love David and soon made him his armor-bearer (1 Sam 16:21). Even that must have become a source of lament for David. He could tell no one of his anointing, for it would have been seen as treasonous. In his silence, David was learning the responsibilities of a king.

The Lord continued to lead David into more opportunities to develop kingly qualities. Sometime later, Jesse sent David with supplies to his brothers who were serving in the army that was facing the Philistines. Upon arriving his brother Eliab verbally abused him for coming. While there David witnessed an egregious affront to the Lord, by the Philistines. Their champion Goliath was cursing God and the army. It compelled David to defend the name of the Lord. Since David had experienced the Lord’s help in defending the flocks against predators he had the confidence to challenge Goliath. He was confident of victory because he faced Goliath ‘in the name of the Lord’ (1 Sam 17:45). Goliath, however, wasn’t defeated by some miraculous power. David used the simple skills any shepherd boy possessed; a slingshot and five stones. David confronted and was able to defeat the blasphemer of God because he was on God’s side and God was bigger than Goliath. It was another lesson for the future king.

David did not realize that his act of faithfulness to God against Goliath would bring the next step of his anointing and change the trajectory of his life. Following the killing, Saul brought David permanently into his service. (1 Sam 17:55-58) As a result, David had a front row seat to learn the responsibilities of good leadership by observing the foolish and ungodly leadership under Saul. At that time he and Jonathan, Saul's son, became close friends. But that also must have given David cause for lament. The secret of his anointing could never be shared with his closest friend. At that time, the battlefield victories over the Philistines gained David fame and honor. It resulted in the people singing,

“*Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” (1 Sam 18:7).*

That began Saul’s jealousy and hatred of David and his attempts on David’s life. Saul was convinced that David intended to overthrow his throne and so he began to treat David like an outlaw. That became a double lament for David. One being Saul’s false accusations and pursuit of him and the other that his friendship with Jonathan, being Saul’s son, could never be fully realized.

David’s life of losses and laments soon began to involve more than just himself. As an outlaw, David fled from Saul to stay with Samuel at Ramah (1 Sam 19:18). He might have gone to him looking for guidance and protection. Later he visited Jonathan to find out why Saul was seeking his life.(1 Sam 20:1) Jonathan confirmed that his father wanted David’s life. They parted full of sorrow and David fled to the wilderness. On his way, David stopped at Nob, seeking food. Ahimelech the priest gave him the consecrated bread and also Goliath’s sword. Although done in innocence it had tragic consequences. Saul, on hearing of the help, killed Ahimelech and all but one of the priests, who served at Nob except. Abiathar had not been there. Abiathar fled, sought out David for protection and faithfully served him. David faced the increased burden of knowing that anyone associated with him would be under a death sentence from Saul.

David's life entered a new phase as a fugitive. Saul was actively pursuing David. He escaped into the wilderness to the cave of Adullam. It was located between Bethlehem, David’s family home and the Elah Valley where he had killed Goliath. Because of Saul’s threats, David’s family was also in danger so they sought his protection in Adullam. Along with them many others also came to David. They were described as those in distress, desperate, in debt, bitter in soul and discontent (1 Sam 22:1-5). All these people must have added to David’s sense of lament. They became an unsought burden of responsibility since they all came seeking protection. As David looked around him, he probably wondered just what kind of kingship and kingdom he was to have. He must have lamented that his expectations of kingship were quite different from the growing burden of responsibility he was now carrying for all who were coming to him for protection.

David had spared Saul’s life several times yet Saul continued to hunt him. (1 Sam 24:10; 26:16) David was committed to not harming Saul because he was currently the Lord’s Anointed king. David knew he would be the next king, yet didn’t know when. David’s men had urged him, when he had the chance to kill Saul and take the throne. After all, that was the way leaders in other kingdoms attained the throne. But David was learning, however, that Israel’s throne was the Lord’s and He moved according to His own timing (1 Sam 24:6; 26:11).

At that time Samuel died. He had been the only one who knew of David’s anointing and now he was gone. All of Israel assembled for Samuel’s burial, except David. He must have lamented that he was now alone with his secret. After Samuel’s burial David fell into a state of despair. He expressed fear that he was eventually going to die by Saul’s hand (1 Sam 27:1). During that time of doubt, David decided to go to the Philistines and offer the service of he and his men. Perhaps he was hoping that by doing so Saul would stop hunting him.

The Philistines gathered to wage war against Israel. Because of that, Saul was filled with fear. (1 Sam 28:5) Since he had been cut off from God, he sought help from a witch of En-dor. At the same time the Philistines rejected David's help. They did not trust his claim of allegiance. In deep discouragement, David must have lamented that everywhere, leaders rejected him and disbelieved his loyalty. David’s stronghold was at Ziklag and while away, the Amalikites captured and destroyed the town and took captive all their women and children. Upon returning, David and all with him wept bitterly. In their anger and grief the men wanted to kill David (1 Sam 30:4). It appeared that David couldn’t even protect his men’s families. David must have been nearing a breaking point. Was he thinking, “will I ever become king and do I even deserve to be king?” But instead of turning to deeper despair, David chose to turn to the Lord. And the Lord directed him to pursue the Amalekites raiders. David and the men overtook and defeated them and all the women and children were returned unharmed (1 Sam 30:16-20). In that very dark moment David remembered the *hesed* of the Lord (1 Sam 30:6).

During these latter days of David’s pre-kingship, he must have wrestled with the disconnect between his anointing as a shepherd boy and his current life as a hunted man. In Psalm 31 David laments his constant running from Saul who endangered him and the lives around him. He had to constantly stay on the move. Despite doing the right thing and sparing Saul’s life, his own life didn’t get any easier. His loyalty was rejected by the Philistines. Even his deep friendship with Jonathan was destined to end in loss. Since Jonathan was heir apparent to Saul, David’s anointing from the Lord meant he, not Jonathan, was to be the next King. There is no record of David ever telling Jonathan about his anointing yet Jonathan told David he would become king (1 Sam 23:16-18). These were some of the contradictions David faced and lamented during this period of his life.

 The death of Saul and Jonathan came while fighting the Philistines on Mt.Gilboa. The Philistines took their bodies and ignobly nailed them to the city wall of Beth-shan. When David learned of their deaths, he wrote a song of lamentation for them and taught it to the people of Israel (2 Sam 1:19-27). David must have experienced both joy and sorrow. His grief of their deaths while at the same time grappling with the joy in the fulfillment of his long awaited ascension to the throne. It was another lesson learned by David. Lamenting is often the mixture of both joy and sorrow. The little shepherd boy was finally to be king. But he was to find that even as king, his life would continue to be about losses and lamenting.

At long last, David was installed as King. Then, without warning Abner broke allegiance with David and took Ish-bosheth the son of Saul and made him king over Saul’s tribe of Benjamin (2 Sam 2:8-10). The next two years were a war between the house of Saul and the house of David (2 Sam 3:1). Eventually Abner came back to David in order to unite all of Israel. However Joab, by treachery, murdered Abner in revenge for killing his brother Asahel during the war. Once again joy was mixed with sorrow. David lamented Abner's death (2 Sam 3:34). Finally, all the elders of Israel came to David and made a covenant with him to be king over a united Israel. (2 Sam 5:1-4) (Psalm 20 & 21).

Not all of David’s lamenting was the result of outside forces. His next major loss and lament was the result of his own ungodly lust. While his army was in the field of battle, David instead of overseeing it, stayed home. He then chose to gratify his lust by committing adultery with the wife of one of his Officers, Uriah. To hide his shameful act David made sinful choice upon sinful choice. He chose to deceive, lie and then involve others in the murder of Bathseba’s husband Uriah. Nine months later, a child was the result of David’s sinful action. He was confronted by Nathan the Prophet. He declared to David, ‘You are the man!’ (2 Sam 12:7). Struck with the conviction of his guilt, David recorded his confession, repentance and lament in Psalms 39 & 51. Because all sins have to be paid by someone, the penalty for David’s sin was to be paid by the life of his seven-day-old unnamed son. David had to face the truth that his shame, sorrow, despair and guilt were the result of his sinful and corrupt heart. Even though he was God’s anointed king, David had to publicly confess the truth that he was a liar, deceiver, adulterer and murderer. And that he was responsible for the death of his loyal officer Uriah and his unnamed son. He had failed to act like a king, husband, father and ultimately failed to follow after God’s heart. Remarkedly, David’s Psalms of confession and repentance, became offerings of worship to the Lord to be sung by the people. David also acknowledged that his sin ultimately had been against God. Therefore, the only path to receiving full and complete forgiveness would be found in lamenting, confession and repentance to God.

 David continued to experience and lament personal losses. Amnon was David’s first-born son and the assumed crown prince to the throne. He acted upon a deep lust for his half-sister Tamar and forced himself on her. (2 Sam 13:1) Amnon may have felt no constraint because of David’s affair with Bathsheba. And for reasons unknown, perhaps out of his own guilt David did nothing to discipline Amnon for his shameful deed (2 Sam 13:21). But Tamar’s full brother Absalom, patiently plotted to take revenge. Two years later Absalom had Amnon murdered and then fled to Geshur, staying there three years. During that time David’s anger at Absalom dissipated. Joab then manipulated the situation to get David to allow Absalom back to Jerusalem (2 Sam 13:37-39; 14:1-3, 21). Absalom then spent two more years in Jerusalem without speaking to David (2 Sam 14:28). Finally the two met and were somewhat reconciled. But from that time forward Absalom worked a plan to overthrow David (2 Sam 15:1-6). He also may have concluded that David’s affair with Bathsheba was evidence of David’s growing weakness and was losing his grip on the throne. Absalom would never disgrace himself by writing a public confession as David did in Psalms 39 & 51. He may have seen it as a sign of weakness by David.

Absalom had plotted his path to the throne by first eliminating Amnon. He may have hoped that the people would take his murder of Amnon as a ‘righteous act’ of revenge that David hadn’t. Absalom must have believed that the people would view the killing as wrong but noble. He then worked to turn the hearts of the people against David. Finally, Absalom enacted his coup and drove David out of Jerusalem. (2 Sam 15) However, in a battle pressed against David, Absalom was killed. On hearing the news, David lamented his death but in doing so revealed his misguided thinking. Before the battle began, David had ordered his generals…

*“Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom. And all the people heard*

 *when the king gave orders to all the commanders about Absalom.”* 2 Sam 18:5

And when the news came to David of Absalom’s death,

*“...The king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son*

 *Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son! 5 Then Joab came into the house to the*

 *king and said, You have today covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who have this day saved your life and the lives of your sons and your*

 *daughters and the lives of your wives and your concubines, 6 because you love*

 *those who hate you and hate those who love you. For you have made it clear*

 *today that commanders and servants are nothing to you, for today I know that if*

 *Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased. 7*

 *Now therefore arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants, for I swear by the*

 *Lord, if you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night, and this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come upon you from your youth until now.* 2 Sam 19:4-7

Absalom had wanted David’s throne. And his actions displayed his disdain for how David ascended to it. The Lord was never part of his calculations. David had waited for the Lord to move, Absalom wanted to take it by force. Gene Edwards has this interesting perspective on the Absalom episode.

*I (David) can stop Absolom by becoming a Saul but I intend to be David even if it*

*costs me the throne, the kingdom, even my life. I did not fight to become king*

 *and I will not fight to remain king. It’s God’s kingdom, He can raise up a king*

 *and He can remove a king. I want God’s will, not His power…(Nathan says)*

 *Circumstances change but the heart remains the same. Saul never sees a*

 *David, only an Absalom. And an Absalom never sees a David, only a Saul. The*

 *corrupt heart will find its own justification. Absalom will make an excellent Saul. (*The Tale of Three Kings 1965? by Gene Edwards)

On the heels of Absalom’s coup attempt a man named Sheba attempted one more rebellion. Perhaps perceiving instability following Absalom’s rebellion, Sheba called for his Tribe of Benjamin, to break from David’s rule. Joab went in pursuit of Sheba. He followed and trapped him in the town Abel of Beth-maacah. Joab threatened to destroy the town, unless they turned over Sheba. The townspeople, led by a wise woman, killed Sheba and the revolt ended. One more sad saga of loss and lament for David.

 King David’s final lament and loss was the result of his sin of taking a census without the Lord commanding it. (2 Sam 24). A census was the way kings determined their power and strength based on the size of their army. It may have been at a time when David was questioning his authority and power as king. Perhaps he had grown fearful as a result of the rebellions of Absalom and Sheba. In the past, as with Goliath, David had no hesitation about his ability. He knew his authority and power came from his trust in God. With the census, David was doing what kings of the nations did. David was trusting in the size of the army and thus had taken his eyes off God. But David became convicted, went to the Lord and confessed his sin. God allowed him a choice of judgements. He chose three days of pestilence in the land. Even though David took responsibility for his sin the price for his sin would be borne, once again, by others. The pestilence resulted in the death of 70,000 men. (2 Sam 24:15-17) The Lord halted the deaths in Jerusalem at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. David then purchased the site and built an altar to the Lord there. It would become the future site of the Temple that David’s son Solomon would build (2 Chron 3:1).

 As stated earlier, the Lord lamented the reign of King Saul. So He sought a man for king who would pursue His heart. David was that man. (1 Sam 13:14) David, the shepherd boy, pursued God's heart in the hills around Bethlehem. And on those hills, he learned to pour out his heart to God’s heart in songs of praise and lament. On those lonely hills, his Friend and Protector was the Lord and so he discovered the Lord’s *hesed,* His lovingkindness*.* David's pursuit of God’s heart continued throughout his whole life. And so he continued writing Psalms to express the breadth of his joys, sorrows and laments. They were and are his soul’s pursuit of the heart of God.

As in Psalm 31

*….v.9* (David’s) “*eye is wasted away from**grief****,*** *my soul and my body also.*

*10 For my life is spent with**sorrow and my years with sighing.”*

Also in Psalm 55,

*v.2…I am restless in my complaint and I moan* ***..****.4**My heart is in**anguish within*

 *me; the terrors of death have fallen upon me… 5 Fear and trembling come*

 *upon me, and horror overwhelms me.”*

He also gave full expression of his unabashed need for God.

Psalm 31:15 “*My times are in Your hand; Deliver me from the hand of my*

 *enemies… 17 Let me not be put to shame, O Lord, for I call upon You.”*

Ps 143:8 *“Let me hear in the morning of Your steadfast love (hesed), for in You I*

 *trust. Make me know the way I should go….9 Deliver me from my enemies, O*

 *Lord!...10 Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God! …11 For Your name's*

 *sake, O Lord, preserve my life!...12 ….in Your steadfast love (hesed) You will*

 *cut off my enemies, and You will destroy all the adversaries of my soul, for I am*

 *Your servant.”*

David accepted God’s sovereignty over his life, because he trusted God’s *hesed* to guide his path (Ps 23:3), to deliver him from his enemies (Ps 7:1) and teach him God’s will (Ps 32:8). Also, because of God’s *hesed,* David could risk making full confessions of sins to Him.

Psalm 38:4 “*For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they*

 *are too heavy for me. 5 My wounds stink and fester because of my*

 *foolishness…18 I confess my iniquity; I am sorry for my sin*.”

Psalm 39:8 *Deliver me from all my transgressions….10 Remove your stroke*

 *from me…”*

Psalm 40:12 “*For evils have encompassed beyond numbers…my iniquities have*

*overtaken me…they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me.”*

It also meant David could express his sins in graphic ways to help him capture the breadth of his confessions. Such as describing his iniquities as cesspools of sins and the weight of them crushing him. Some sins were foolish and festering self-inflicted wounds. He learned that if he tried to outrun his sins they were like a pursuing enemy, overwhelming his heart.

His most raw and jarring confession is found in Psalm 51. In it he admits to lying, adultery and murder. It is an unflinching and breathtaking confession to God. The opening line was his only hope…

*v.1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love (hesed* *);*

 *according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgression.*

He was honest about his sins and who it was ultimately against,

*v.3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. 4 Against you,*

 *you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be*

 *justified in your words and blameless in your judgment….*

Therefore, his only hope was in God’s *hesed, of* mercy and grace.

…*v.7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter*

*than snow.*

What David needed he could only receive from God.

*v.9… blot out all my iniquities. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew*

 *a right spirit within me.*

Because David had learned to pursue God’s heart, even his greatest sins could be confessed because he knew the Lord to be a great Savior, full of *hesed*.

 David also lamented because of betrayal by friends, persecution by countrymen and hated deadly enemies.

Enemies plotted to take his life…

Psalm 31:11 *Because of all my adversaries, I have become a reproach…13 For I*

*have heard the slander of many, Terror is on every side; While they took counsel together against me, They schemed to take away my life…He was hated because of virtue,*

 *Psalm 38:12 Those who seek my life lay their snares… speak of ruin and*

 *meditate treachery…19…my foes are vigorous…mighty…those who hate me*

 *wrongfully. 20 Those who render me evil for good accuse me because I follow*

 *after good.*

Psalm 40 *He asks the Lord to put his enemies to shame*, *14 Let those be put to*

 *shame and disappointed altogether who seek to snatch away my life let those be*

 *turned back and brought to dishonor who delight in my hurt!*

His enemies even included former personal friends,

*Psalm 55:12 For it is not an enemy who taunts me— …13 But it is you, a man,*

*my equal, my companion, my familiar friend.*

In some cases, he didn’t simply want relief from them but asked the Lord deal severely with them,

*Psalm 55:9 Destroy, O Lord, divide their tongues…15 Let death steal over them;*

*let them go down to Sheol alive… ..23 But you, O God, will cast them down into*

 *the pit of destruction; men of blood and treachery shall not live out half their*

 *days. But I will trust in you.*

Some of his declarations sound shocking to us..

*Ps 56:7 For their crime will they escape? In wrath cast down the peoples, O God!*

*Ps 59:5 You, Lord God of hosts, are God of Israel. Rouse Yourself to punish all*

 *the nations; spare none of those who treacherously plot evil…*

But perhaps the hardest to hear are David’s Imprecatory Psalms. These are psalms with curses or prayers for the brutal punishment of his enemies.

Psalm 109…

*6 Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser stand at his right hand.*

 *7…let his prayer be counted as sin!...9 May his children be fatherless and his*

 *wife a widow! 10 May his children wander about and beg…11 May the creditor*

 *seize all that he has…12 Let there be none to extend kindness to him, nor any*

 *to pity his fatherless children! 13 May his posterity be cut off; may his name be*

 *blotted out in the second generation! 14 May the iniquity of his fathers be*

*remembered before the Lord, and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out!*

These expressions are harsh and we may even want to judge them as being cruel and hateful. But we must remember that these were David’s deep expressions while in intolerable circumstances. Michael Card describes these as “*accepted unacceptable offerings to God*.” (A Sacred Sorrow 2005 pg 75) We must also remember that God accepted these prayers and preserved them in His Word. But we have no evidence that the Lord acted upon them. God is very tolerant in listening to the anguished prayers of His children but He always acts in accordance with His *hesed*.

How was David able to give such a wide breadth of expressions to his grief and sorrow in his laments? The foundational reason was that he learned of God’s *hesed.* In his early years of God’s care and protection. During his time in caves of Adullum. And as king in the throne room in Jerusalem. In each phase of his life, he faced responsibilities beyond his experience, which forced him to turn to his only hope, the Lord. So in obedience he took responsibility for the care of those whom the Lord brought under his leadership. He depended upon the Lord’s *hesed* for what he lacked in own ability. Therefore, he could carry the secret of his anointing while publicly defending King Saul. And he could welcomed the outcasts who came to him for protection. And It was from these experiences that David learned and grew in God’s *hesed*. He expressed this truth when as king, he wrote a song of thanksgiving when the Ark of God was brought into Jerusalem. The song concludes…

*“Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His steadfast love (hesed)*

 *endures forever!”* 1 Chron 16:34

David lived a life of great triumphs and painfully deep losses. He lost friends, fellow warriors and children to death. Throughout his life David lamented in both personal and very public ways. He wrote many of his laments as songs of worship to be sung to God. They expressed the reality that the triumphs and tragedies of life are a mix of joy and sorrow. His Psalms were not composed for the purpose of answering the ‘why’ questions of grief and sorrow but to give us words to express the breadth of our griefs and losses. In doing so we can make and keep our connection with God. David provides us with bridges of lament which allows us to cry out in the pain of our circumstances and connect with the God of *hesed.*

David’s Psalms of Lament: Psalms 5, 13, 22, 26, 28, 31, 38, 39, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 59, 60, 64, 69, 70, 86, 109, 140, 141, 143.

Part 3

## Jeremiah- Lamenting as a Calling - Lamenting for the Unrepentant;

## Experiencing the Cost of the Lord’s Lament

 *God said of Jeremiah… fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls.*

God called Jeremiah to be His prophet. The call came at the beginning of the national revival of King Josiah. It came when Jeremiah was a young man. (Jere 1:1-10 ) He had no qualifications or training to commend him to the role. There is no record of him having received any formal education. Therefore, it can be understood that he was totally unprepared for the role of prophet. It is a reasonable assumption, given his family background. Jeremiah descended from a line of priests. His lineage was through Eli the Priest and because Eli had honored his evil sons above the Lord his descendants had been rejected by the Lord (1 Sam 2:31),

 *“Therefore the Lord, the God of Israel, declares: I promised that your house and*

 *the house of your father should go in and out before Me forever, but now the*

 *Lord declares: Far be it from Me, for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days are coming*

 *when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that*

 *there will not be an old man in your house.” (1 Sam 2:30-31*)

However, the ‘cutting off’ remained unfulfilled for many generations. Therefore, Jeremiah’s relatives continued in service as priests. In the days of David, Ahimelech, one of those descendants was the priest at the city of Nob. David came to him seeking food. Ahimelech was unaware that David was fleeing from King Saul. Because he helped David, Saul took revenge by having Ahimelech and the other priests with him murdered (1 Sam 21:1, 22:16, 20). One priest, Abiathar, however, was not present and survived. He escaped, went to David for protection and faithfully served him throughout David’s reign. However, just before David died, Abiathar sided with David’s son Adonijah rather than Solomon to be the next king. Because of that betrayal, once Solomon was established as king, he declared to Abiathar…

“*…to Abiathar the priest the king said, Go to Anathoth, to your estate, for you*

 *deserve death. But I will not at this time put you to death, because you carried*

 *the ark of the Lord God before David my father, and because you shared in all*

 *my father's affliction. 27 So Solomon expelled Abiathar from being priest to the*

 *Lord, thus fulfilling the word of the Lord that he had spoken concerning the*

 *house of Eli in Shiloh.*(1 King 2:26-27)

The Lord’s long-awaited judgment on Eli’s line was finally fulfilled. That was Jeremiah's lineage. He was from a family of disqualified priests, living in a village probably known for its disqualified priests. (Jere 1:1)

Thus, God called an inexperienced, unprepared and disqualified priest to be His Prophet and proclaim to Judah and the nations around it the forthcoming judgments. It would seem that the requirements for that kind of prophet would be someone with tough skin, a powerful constitution and dynamic persona. The pronouncements would seem to need to be delivered with great authority and a fiery firmness. Why would anyone pay attention to a young man from a line of rejected priests, who lacked life experiences or personal authority to be God’s Prophet? Yet, Jeremiah was the one God called to declare His imminent judgments.

Jeremiah would be confronting Judah’s kings, priests, leaders and people as well as the nations around it. What must Jeremiah have thought when he received that call? Also, because of his heritage and his village status, did he have a sense of disconnect and distance from God? Did he have any understanding of God’s *hesed*? What is known is that after 40 years of Jeremiah’s long service as God’s prophet, he recorded one of the most profound statements regarding God’s *hesed*. Jewish tradition says that as the Temple and Jerusalem were being destroyed, Jeremiah sat in a cave, called the Grotto of Jeremiah, on a hill opposite of Jerusalem and wrote the book of *Lamentations.* In the middle of this five-poem book Jeremiah penned one of the most beautiful expressions of God’s *hesed*.

 *22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an*

 *end; 23 they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. 24 The Lord is*

 *my portion,says my soul, therefore I will hope in him. 25 The Lord is good to*

 *those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. 26 It is good that one should*

 *wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. (Lamentations 3:22-26)*

It would appear that Jeremiah did learn of God’s *hesed* and learned it through proclaiming God’s coming and unfolding judgment.

 The Book of Jeremiah was written during the final years leading up to Judah’s captivity. It is a patchwork of collected sermons, historical accounts and personal observations by Jeremiah, These were written down and compiled by his scribe Baruch. The book does not follow a chronological order. This was probably because of the chaotic conditions in Judah. The upheaval Jeremiah lived through was due to the bad leadership resulting in multiple enemy invasions. Ironically, although his calling and mission came without warning or preparation, it also began at a time of national peace and revival..

“*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I*

 *consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet*.” Jer 1:5

It began in the 13th year of King Josiah’s reign (Jer 1:2). God confirmed his calling to Jeremiah by giving him two visions. The first was an almond branch (Jer 1:11-16). Almond trees were the first tree to blossom in spring and were called ‘the watchers’ because people watched for them to know that spring was coming. God was showing Jeremiah that He was watching over His word and His judgments were coming. The second vision was a boiling pot in the north of Judah. God was going to pour out His judgment with invading armies from the north, like a emptying cauldron pot. These visions occurred in the midst of King Josiah’s national revival. Although it appeared the people were following God, the visions were a sign to Jeremiah that despite their apparent righteousness, judgment was coming and coming soon...

*“I will declare My judgments against them, for all their evil in forsaking me. They have made offerings to other gods and worshiped the works of their own hands.*

 *17 But you, dress yourself for work; arise, and say to them everything that I*

 *command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them.*

*18 And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze*

 *walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests,*

 *and the people of the land. 19 They will fight against you, but they shall not*

 *prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you.”*

*(Jer 1:16-19* )

Despite Jeremiah’s lack of qualifications, the Lord promised to make him a fortified city (able to withstand the attacks of all his enemies), an iron pillar (unbending against the assaults of man), and a bronze wall (the people could not tear him down). (Jere 1:18-19) The Lord was preparing Jeremiah to understand that his ministry would be in a fight but he was also to know that the Lord would be with him and deliver him.

As mentioned above, Jeremiah began his ministry during King Josiah’s spiritual revival. Over the course of Josiah’s reign, the Lord directed Jeremiah to deliver three major messages, warning the nation of the coming judgment. The first one was given in the streets of Jerusalem. The second message given in the Temple addresses the worshipers. The third major message Jeremiah delivered was to Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah. These messages were to declare that the nation had broken their Covenant with the Lord and therefore the promised judgment was coming.

When King Josiah died, in 609 BC, so did the revival. The final four Kings of Judah would prove to be defiant enemies of both Jeremiah and God. With the change of rulers, the Lord directed Jeremiah to a different form of communication to the people. He instructed Jeremiah to deliver a series of what I will call street theater parables. The Lord called Jeremiah to perform five different parables over the course of his remaining ministry. The parables would be used to capture the imagination while also confronting the nation with God’s word.

**The first parable was in King Jehoiakim’s 3rd year 606 BC.** The Lord told Jeremiah to purchase a clay flask from the Potter's house. He did, in the presence of some of Judah’s elders and priests (Jer 19:1). Jeremiah then went to the Topheth Valley and broke the clay flask beyond repair. And declared…

“...*O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the Lord of*

 *hosts…Behold, I am bringing such disaster upon this place that the ears of*

 *everyone who hears of it will tingle. 4 Because the people have forsaken Me and*

 *have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods…because they*

 *have filled this place with the blood of innocents, 5 and have built the high*

 *places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it come into My mind…this place shall no more be called Topheth, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of*

 *Slaughter. (Jer 19:3-6)*

That valley had become a vile place. Sons were given there as burnt offerings to Baal. It

was soaked with the blood of children. God renamed it the Valley of Slaughter because of the slaughter of the sons and because of the imminent slaughter He was bringing. Nebuchadnezzar’s army was, at that moment, preparing for an attack against Jerusalem. They would be taking the first wave of captives back to Babylon. It was 605 BC and the young man Daniel was part of that first group of exiles. The Lord had warned King Jehoiakim at the beginning of his reign…

*“Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of*

 *the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the*

 *resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this*

 *place.“ (Jer 22:3).*

Jehoiakim, however, disdained the word of God, ignored Jeremiah and did evil throughout his reign, as we shall see.

 **The second street theater parable occurred seven years later, in 599 BC in Jehoiakim 9th year.** The Lord instructed Jeremiah to buy a linen loincloth and wear it. He then took and buried it among the rocks at the Euphrates River. Sometime later when he retrieved it and showed that it had become ruined. Jeremiah then declared…

 9 *Thus says the Lord: Even so will I spoil the pride of Judah and the great pride*

 *of Jerusalem. 10 This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly*

 *follow their own heart and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship*

 *them, shall be like this loincloth, which is good for nothing. 11 For as the loincloth clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, declares the Lord, that they might be for me a*

 *people, a name, a praise, and a glory, but they would not listen. (Jer 13:9-11)*

The people’s righteousness was to have come from the Lord but because they had rejected Him, their righteousness was now no better than a rotten robe.

**Five years later in 594 BC Jeremiah acted out the third parable**. Nebuchadnezzar had returned and partially sacked Jerusalem and the Temple. The total destruction would come later. He once again took away captives, including King Jehoiachin (Jer 22:24-30; 52:31-34 ), as well as many sacred items from the Temple. Nebuchadnezzar then placed Josiah’s youngest son Mattaniah on the throne as a vassal king and renamed him Zedekiah. The Lord then sent Jeremiah to King Zedekiah wearing a wooden yoke around his neck, as the third parable. At that time, envoys from the neighboring nations had gathered in Jerusalem to make political arrangements with the new king. That was the fulfillment that Jeremiah would be God’s Prophet to the Nations (Jer 1:5), He stood before them wearing the yoke and declared…

*“Thus the Lord said to me: Make yourself straps and yoke-bars and put them on*

 *your neck. 3 Send word to the king of Edom… Moab…Ammon… Tyre… Sidon…*

*come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah king of Judah. 4 Give them this charge…5 It is I*

 *who by My great power and My outstretched arm have made the earth, with the*

 *men and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever it seems right*

 *to me. 6 Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the*

 *king of Babylon, my servant…7 All the nations shall serve him and his son and*

 *his grandson until the time of his own land comes…8 But if any nation or*

 *kingdom will not serve this Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and put its neck*

 *under the yoke of the king of Babylon, I will punish that nation with the sword,*

 *with famine, and with pestilence, declares the Lord, until I have consumed it by*

 *his hand. 9 So do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your*

 *fortune-tellers, or your sorcerers, who are saying to you, You shall not serve the*

 *king of Babylon. ( Jer 27:2-8)*

Jeremiah’s wooden yoke pictured God’s clear message that Nebuchadnezzar was the Lord’s servant. He would accomplish God’s judgment and the nations were to submit to his yoke. Jeremiah continued to wear the yoke. Later, Hananiah, a false prophet, spoke against him as they stood together in the Temple (Jer 28). He then removed the yoke from Jeremiah and broke it. He then predicted that within two years the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar would be broken and all the exiles and Temple treasures would be returned. Jeremiah countered by declaring that Hananiah was lying, that the Lord had not sent him and the Lord would shortly remove him from the ‘face of the earth.’ Hananiah died later that year. (Jer 28:17).

**Jeremiah’s fourth parable came during Nebuchadnezzar’s final siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 588 BC.** The entire nation was in chaos. And because Jeremiah had clearly prophesied of these events, he was considered a traitor. He had been beaten and imprisoned multiple times. In the midst of the chaos, the Lord commanded him to purchase property in his home village…

*7…The word of the Lord came to me: Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum*

 *your uncle will come to you and say, Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the*

 *right of redemption by purchase is yours…9 And I bought the field… in the*

 *presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard... 37…(the*

 *Lord says) I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in*

 *safety. 38 And they shall be my people, and I will be their God…42 For thus*

 *says the Lord: Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people, so*

 *I will bring upon them all the good that I promise them. (Jer 32:7-42)*

Even though the Lord was at that very moment bringing judgment, the parable of the property was a promise. The Lord would bring the exiles back from captivity, that He might have them once again. So as the people were fleeing Nebuchadnezzar’s army, the Lord was showing that He was not through with His people. Jeremiah’s purchased property was a promise that God’s people would have a future. However, the siege of Judah continued as Nebuchadnezzar destroyed cities and took away more captives. The purchase of property by Jeremiah was the Lord’s downpayment and commitment to the hope that awaited in 70 years. The Lord would punish His rebellious people but He would never forsake them. He had made a deposit upon the future of His people.

**The fifth and final street theater parable took place in Egypt in 585 BC**. During the previous two years, Jeremiah witnessed the total destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Nebuchadnezzar had Zedekiah’s sons killed then blinded and led him away. Before returning to Babylon Nebuchadnezzar made Gedaliah governor over the region. But within a few months, Gedaliah was murdered by Ishmael an Idudeamite causing chaos and fear of retaliation to those who remained in the land. A remnant of people, who were with Jeremiah, asked him to inquire from God what they should do (Jer 42). The Lord warned them to stay in the land and not to go to Egypt for its assumed protection. But they rejected the Lord’s word and went to Egypt, taking Jeremiah and Baruch with them against their will. It was there in Egypt that the Lord had Jeremiah perform his fifth and final parable. The Lord told him to find and bury large flat stones in the city of Tahpanhes…

“...*at the entrance to Pharaoh's palace in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the men of*

 *Judah…say to them, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I*

 *will send and take Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and I will*

 *set his throne above these stones that I have hidden, and he will spread his*

 *royal canopy over them. He shall come and strike the land of Egypt…”*

*Jer 43:9-11*

Eighteen years later, 567 BC Nebuchadnezzar led his conquering army into Egypt and fulfilled that prophecy. There’s no record of what happened to the Judeans in Egypt but the Lord had warned them through Jeremiah, what awaited them there,

*“If you set your faces to enter Egypt and go to live there, 16 then the sword that*

 *you fear shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine of which*

 *you are afraid shall follow close after you to Egypt, and there you shall die.”*

*Jer 42:15-16*

Tradition says that Jeremiah died at the hands of his own people in Egypt. The date of his death is unknown. As a side note, in 1886 English Archeologist Sir Flinders Petrie digging in Egypt unearthed stones believed to be the ones Jeremiah had buried.

Beyond the three major messages delivered during the time of Josiah and the five parable performances, the call as God’s Prophet came with a high personal cost to Jeremiah. Those costs unfolded over the length of his ministry. As noted above, his ministry began in the midst of King Josiah’s national revival. Stepping out of obscurity and with no experience, the Lord commanded Jeremiah to deliver those major messages to the people. He must have questioned himself, ‘who am I to speak for God’? He had to stand before the people and declare God’s coming judgment. Despite his declaration of judgment and call to repent, the people ignored his words and remained unrepentant (Jer 7:16). Because of his persistent declarations, Jeremiah was reviled by the people.

 Adding to the personal cost, the Lord commanded Jeremiah to neither pray nor intercede for the people. The Lord declared that they were in perpetual apostasy (Jer 8:4-9:26). He was not to attend wedding celebrations or enter into the people’s grieving, lamenting or mourning because their hearts worshiped idols and rejected the Lord. Later an even deeper personal blow came to Jeremiah when the Lord commanded that he was not to marry,

*2 You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this*

 *place..3 For…the sons and daughters who are born in this place….4 They*

 *shall die of deadly diseases. They shall not be lamented, nor shall they be*

 *buried…Do not enter the house of mourning, or go to lament or grieve for them,*

 *for I have taken away My peace from this people, My steadfast love and*

 *mercy…7 No one shall break bread for the mourner, to comfort him for the*

 *dead, nor shall anyone give him the cup of consolation….8 You shall not go into*

 *the house of feasting to sit with them, to eat and drink. 9 For thus says the*

 *Lord…I will silence in this place, before your eyes and in our days, the voice of*

 *mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the*

 *bride. (*Jer 16:2-9)

The Lord knew the despair and death that awaited the husbands, wives and children of Judea. It would be terrible and Jeremiah would need to depend wholly on the Lord. His call was to preach judgment and repentance to a people, who were unrepentant and determined to continue in their hard hearted ways. Therefore, the Lord spoke through Jeremiah, declaring,

*5“Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose*

 *Heart turns away from the Lord…7 Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord,*

 *whose trust is The Lord. 8 He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its*

 *roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes,...9 The heart is*

 *deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? 10 I*

 *the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his*

 *ways, according to the fruit of his deeds. Jer 17:5-10*

As a result of Jeremiah’s proclamations, in every city the people turned in anger against Jeremiah.Even the men in his own village of Anathoth made a vow to kill him (*Jer 11:18-23).* Because of the threats and animosity, Jeremiah complained to God about how difficult his calling was. The Lord responded to his complaint…

*If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will you*

 *compete with horses? And if in a safe land you are so trusting, what will you do*

 *in the thicket of the Jordan?* Jer 12:5

The Lord was letting Jeremiah know that this was just the beginning of what he would be facing in his ministry. The cost to him would continue to grow. It had been one thing to serve during Josiah’s reign but with his death, the kings who were to follow would be no friend to Jeremiah or God. His ministry was moving from the ‘safe land’ under Josiah into ‘the thicket of the Jordan,’ under the remaining kings of Judah. His calling would cost Jeremiah everything because he was to declare the Lord’s coming judgment, despite the growing opposition with clarity and without compromise. Following Josiah's death (1 Kings 23:29-30) began the dark descent of Judea, into its predicted end. Jeremiah’s days of competing with horses and serving in the thicket of Jordan were beginning. The cost to Jeremiah would continue and escalate into personal threats and bodily harm.

 The last kings of Judah; Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah had nothing but disdain for Jeremiah and the word of God. They and those around them directed their contempt of Jeremiah in the form of both verbal and physical abuse. It was in King Jehoiakim’s 3rd year, 606 BC, that Jeremiah broke the clay flask, as mentioned above. This so enraged Pashhur, a priest, that he had Jeremiah beaten and put into stocks. When Jeremiah was released the next day he declared,

*For thus says the Lord: Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself and to all*

 *your friends. They shall fall by the sword of their enemies while you look on.”*

 *Jer 20:4*

Jeremiah continued to face that level of personal animosity. The following year, 605 BC, for reasons not given though probably influenced by Pashhur, Jeremiah was prohibited from going into the Temple. Therefore the Lord instructed Jeremiah…,

*“Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today” Jer 36:2.*

Jeremiah dictated to Baruch his scribe and completed the scroll. Because of being banned from the Temple, he had Baruch go and read it. When King Jehoiakim heard about the reading he had the scroll brought to him..

 *As Jehudi read three or four columns, the king would cut them off with a knife*

 *and throw them into the fire in the fire pot, until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the fire pot… Jer 36:23.*

Such was the disdain that the king had for Jeremiah’s work and the Lord’s word. The Lord commanded Jeremiah to confront Jehoiakim face to face…,

*“You have burned this scroll…Therefore…he shall have none to sit on the throne*

 *of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by*

 *night. And I will punish him and his offspring and his servants for their iniquity”*

*Jer 36:29-31*

The Lord told Jeremiah to once again dictate the words to Baruch. But because of Jeremiah’s rebuke, Jehoiakim ordered the arrest of he and Baruch. They fled and the Lord hid them (Jer 36:26).

Jeremiah’s troubles continued, as he confronted the false prophets. In 593 BC Nebuchadnezzar temporarily withdrew from attacking Jerusalem so Zedekiah rebelled against him. As a result, false prophets predicted that within two years all the exiles and Temple treasures would be returned to Jerusalem. It was at the time Jeremiah was wearing the wooden yoke of his third parable. He warned Zedekiah …

*“Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are saying to you, You shall not*

 *serve the king of Babylon, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you. 15 I*

 *have not sent them, declares the Lord.’* Jer 27:14-15

One of the prophets, Hananiah, confronted Jeremiah in the Temple. He took and broke the wooden yoke and insisted that he, not Jeremiah, was speaking for the Lord regarding the exiles and Temple treasures (Jer 24:1-4). Sometime later the Lord told Jeremiah…

*“Go, tell Hananiah, Thus says the Lord: You have broken wooden bars, but you*

 *have made in their place bars of iron. 14 For thus says the Lord of hosts, the*

 *God of Israel: I have put upon the neck of all these nations an iron yoke to serve*

 *Nebuchadnezzar king* of Babylon*… I will remove you from the face of the earth.*

 *This year you shall die, because you have uttered rebellion against the Lord.”*

 *Jer 28:13-14,16*

Hananiah died that very year and so proved Jeremiah was right. That however, only intensified the hatred of those who rejected him and the word of the Lord.

 **Four years later in 589 BC, Jeremiah faced more trouble.** While threatening Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar’s army once again temporarily withdrew. Jeremiah attempted to leave the city, in order to visit his family's land in Benjamin. A Jerusalem sentry seized and accused him of trying to desert to the Chaldeans. The accusation so enraged city officials that they beat and threw him into a cistern to die (Jer 37:11-15). Ebed-melech an Ethiopian eunuch, interceded with Zedekiah on Jeremiah’s behalf and rescued him. Jeremiah was taken from the cistern and confined to the Court of the Guard (Jer 38:7-13). He remained imprisoned until Jerusalem was finally sacked and the nation capitulated to Nebuchnezzar, in 586 BC. Jeremiah was offered a choice of going to Babylon with the exiles or remaining in the land with the impoverished remnant. He chose to stay. Perhaps his hope was to serve the remaining repentant people. A few months later, the appointed Governor, Gedaliah was murdered, plunging the people back into fear and chaos. As hopeful as Jeremiah might have been, it was not to be. Jeremiah must have been broken-hearted to see his hopes for the future of his people evaporate because of the act of an assassin. The people would continue to rebel and Jeremiah would remain to the end, the Weeping Prophet.

As mentioned above, the people with Jeremiah feared reprisals, so they ignored God’s counsel and fled to Egypt taking Jeremiah with them.(*Jer 43:1-7).* Tradition says that the final cost to Jeremiah for proclaiming God’s word and lamenting an unrepentant people was that he was killed in Egypt by his own people. Jeremiah’s life foreshadowed the One who would come some five hundred years later, a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief.

 Jeremiah’s ministry lasted over 40 lonely years. What sustained him through all the tragedy and rejection? He had few friends, only Baruch and Ebed-meleh are named. The kings, prophets, priests and people of Judah all rejected him. Even men from his own village plotted to kill him (Jer 11:21-23). Perhaps Jesus had Jeremiah in mind when He stated that “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and nation…” (Matt 13:57; Jn 4:44). Despite the rejection, there is evidence sprinkled throughout Jeremiah’s ministry of what sustained him. To start with, God’s word was a delight and comfort to him.

*“Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by Your name, O Lord, God of hosts.” Jer 15:16*

He also understood that without God’s word, man was incapable of directing his own life.

 *“But the Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King…*

 *I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.”* Jer 10:10, 23

And because of the continued unrepentant actions of the people, he also saw that man could not trust his own thinking because of the self-deception of the heart. Only the Lord could heal and save the heart…

 *“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is*

 *like a tree planted by water…The heart is deceitful above all things, and*

 *desperately sick; who can understand it?...14 Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be*

 *healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for you are my praise.”* Jer 17:7-9, 14

Also the sins of the people testified against them showing that their only hope was God…

*“Though our iniquities testify against us, act, O Lord, for Your name's sake…8 O*

 *You hope of Israel, its savior in time of trouble, …we are called by Your name;*

 *do not leave us.” Jer 14:7-8.*

God’s word revealed to Jeremiah that the Lord was going to save His people by means of their captivity in Babylon. They would be there 70 years but then the Lord would bring them back. That was why God had Jeremiah write to the exile already in Babylon…

*“v.4…to all the exiles …5 Build houses… plant gardens…6 Take wives and have*

 *sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in*

 *marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not*

 *decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you…and pray to*

 *the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare…I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you My promise and bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans I have for you…to give you a future and a hope…I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have*

 *driven you,” Jer 29:4-7,11*

Jeremiah’s amazement must have continued, as he declared that upon their return to the land, the Lord would make a New Covenant with them. It would not be like the old one of Sinai. God’s new Covenant, would write His law not on stones but on the hearts of His people and He would forgive their sins…

*…I will bring them back…they shall be my people, and I will be their God.*

*39 I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for*

 *their own good and the good of their children after them. 40 I will make with*

 *them an everlasting covenant…I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant*

 *them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul. Jer 32:38-40*

Jeremiah revealed that God’s judgment on exiles would also be the path of restoring the people to the land and to Himself. He would bring them back because He had never stopped loving them. And they would return weeping with joy because once again the Lord would have for Himself a ransomed and redeemed people…

*“…I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued My*

 *faithfulness to you.... …9 With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for*

 *mercy I will lead them back…for I am a father to Israel…11 For the Lord has*

 *ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him…I will*

 *comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.” Jer 31:3,9,11*

The Lord also revealed through Jeremiah that He would raise up a seed from the line of David. The seed would be known as the righteous Branch of David and would be unlike any of the kings they had known. This Branch would become the people’s righteousness…

*“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and He shall reign as King and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness …And this is the name by which He will be called: The Lord is our righteousness.” Jer 23:5*

The black cloud of judgment Jeremiah declared for 40 years had with it a golden lining. The Lord’s plan was for the eventual welfare of His people by means of a New Covenant and the righteous Branch of David.

**Jeremiah must also have been sustained in his ministry in discovering God’s *hesed*.** Fromthe beginning of his ministry, the Lord had Jeremiah tell of His love and devotion for them….

*“Go and declare in the hearing of the people of Jerusalem: ‘This is what the Lord says: “I have fond memories of you, how devoted you were to me in your early years. I remember how you loved me like a new bride; you followed me through the wilderness, through a land that had never been planted. Jer 2:2*

He reminded them that with repentance, the Lord was always ready to bring forgiveness and healing….

*“Go, and proclaim, ‘Return, faithless Israel’…I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful…I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your guilt…I will bring you (back) to Zion. And**I will give you shepherds after my own heart… will heal your faithlessness." Jer* 3:12-15

Jeremiah saw that even in judgment the Lord’s purpose was ultimately for restoration not destruction…

*“...Only I will not destroy you completely. But I will chasten you justly And will by no means leave you unpunished.'....22 'You shall be My people, And I will be*

 *your God.'" Jer* 30:10, 11, 22

He could also see God’s *hesed* revealed in the future that was planned for them.

*" I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you with*

*lovingkindness (hesed). "Again I will build you and you will be rebuilt…9 For I*

 *am a father to Israel…10 "He who scattered Israel will gather him…11 the*

 *Lord has ransomed and redeemed Jacob…13 the (Lord) will turn their*

 *mourning into joy…comfort them and give them gladness for sorrow…17 There*

 *is hope for your future…20…as often as I have spoken against him, I certainly*

 *still remember him; Therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy*

 *on him,...Jer 31:3-20*

God’s *hesed* must have been clear to Jeremiah as he remembered the nation’s past redemption out of Egypt (Jer 11:4) and learning of the future promised New Covenant and Righteous Branch.

And finally, Jeremiah experienced God’s *hesed* in his own life. With no merit on his part, the Lord raised him up to be His Prophet. Whatever Jeremiah might have known of God’s *hesed* as a young man; his long years of faithful ministry, must have confirmed in him God’s *hesed*. He had ‘run on foot against men’ but later he was able to ‘compete with horses.’ And thus he survived the ‘thicket of the Jordan’ by clinging to the *hesed* of God. (Jer 12:8).

Because Jeremiah was both the observer and the recipient of God’s *hesed*, it becomes clearer to understand his writing of the Book of Lamentations. After those long years of faithful service to God, he sat in a cave opposite Jerusalem as Babylon's army savaged God’s rebellious people, completely razed the city of David, and utterly destroyed the Lord’s Temple. He watched, wept, wrote and lamented for God’s foolish and unrepentant children. He wrote the book of *Lamentations,* a poetic recounting of Judah’s sin, rebellion and judgment. It is a tragic and seemingly hopeless set of poems. Yet in the middle of its tragic telling, Jeremiah remembers God’s *hesed.* And so, he placed at the center, the very heart of the book, one of the most profound expressions of God’s *hesed* and undiminished love for His people...

 *22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an*

 *end; 23 they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. 24 The Lord is*

 *my portion, says my soul, therefore I will hope in him. 25 The Lord is good to*

 *those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. 26 It is good that one should*

 *wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. Lamentations 3:22-26*

I leave to Jeremiah the last word. He faithfully delivered God’s message of judgment, death and carnage that awaited the people. Yet the plea, even at that late hour, still held the hope that it was still not too late to repent and turn to the Lord.

*“…Thus declares the Lord: The dead bodies of men shall fall like dung upon*

 *the open field, like sheaves after the reaper, and none shall gather them.*

*23 Thus says the Lord: let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the*

 *mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, 24 but let*

 *him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the*

 *Lord who practices steadfast love (hesed), justice, and righteousness in the*

 *earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord. Jer* 9:22-24

Part 4

## Conclusion

From the day that forbidden fruit was eaten in that first garden to those hours of darkness on a hill called the Skull, God has been familiar with sorrow and is acquainted with grief. He laments. He has endured the rebellion of His people and has borne the penalty and cost of our sins. Lamenting is a gift that God has taught to man.

Job lamented both his catastrophic losses and God’s silence. Yet God without Job's knowledge set a limit on his suffering, telling Satan to go so far and no further. Job learned that he could express the very depth of his suffering but not to the point of cursing God. Because his life was shattered to his core, he lamented his deepest sorrow, grief and pain. His lamenting gave him no answers. He lamented the utter disconnect between his circumstances and his remembered experience with God. From the depth of his deepest pain and sorrow Job expressed wrong things about God yet he remained blameless. Why? Because he clung to God and didn’t curse Him. What else could he do? And in the end, all he had left was all he ever needed or wanted, God.

David knew God all his life with no life circumstances where the Lord was not there. He sought after God’s heart. Whether on the hills around Bethlehem or in the caves of Adullum, whether fleeing from Saul's persecution or hiding from his sin (Ps 139), he eventually sought after God’s own heart. He experienced the Lord as his Shepherd and experienced Him as a prodigal. He knew he could return to Him because he sought His heart. God’s calling of the kingship of David was out of lamenting for an unrepentant king. So, from the beginning to the end, the breadth of David's life, he learned how to lament and turn it into praise.

Jeremiah knew about God but discovered Him through His judgments and *hesed*. He faithfully declared God’s warning in a thankless and seemingly unfruitful effort. Through his obedience, he learned the cost of loving an unrepentant people. Jeremiah learned God’s *hesed* by speaking the truth in love.

Job did not curse God. David did not become a king like Saul. And Jeremiah was faithful to an unworthy end. Because of life’s losses, failings and disappointments, lamenting is inevitable. It is caused by grief and sorrow. Grief and sorrow cause a chasm between what we are experiencing with our loss and our understanding of God’s care for us. Lamenting is a bridge that can connect our side of life to God. That chasm is not too deep or too broad that lamenting can’t connect. But lamenting comes with a cost. It costs us everything. Hurl the depth and breadth of our grief, sorrow and pain upon the Lord. Love bears all things, so He can take it.

Lamenting is the path on which we can ask the Lord: What is this that’s happening to me? Why is this happening to me? How long will it last? And lamenting is the bridge that keeps us connected to the Lord. He hears our lament, He remembers our lament and sometimes He answers the questions we haven’t even asked.

Part 5

## My question for Job, David and Jeremiah:

## My daughter Abigail has died, what words would you have for me?

Job, my daughter has died, what words would you have for me?

I lost ten children…you never forget them.

Remember, God gives and takes away and gives again. I never knew why.

I was silent when it started and when it ended. I had many words in between, but when the Lord finally spoke to me, I was speechless.. You are fortunate, you have God’s word.

Remember you can say anything to Him, just don’t curse Him.

David, my daughter has died, what words would you have for me?

I lost 3 sons. Their deaths were directly or indirectly the result of my foolishness or my outright sins. My unnamed son only lived 7 days. On the 8th I would have named him. That too is part of my shame and loss, I couldn’t even give him an identity with a name. But God has him and knows his name. My son Amnon was my firstborn, the one I thought would succeed me to the throne. That is until Solomon was born and the Lord made it clear that he was His chosen successor. I avoided my responsibility of having that conversation with Amnon. Like Esau of old, he assumed it was his. I suspect he would have taken it one way or another. I never made God’s word clear to him. And then he acted with Tamar just like I had with Uriah’s wife. In his eyes, he did what he believed kings had the right to do. Avoiding responsibility, was a blind spot in me that I failed to overcome. Amnon and I never talked. Then there was my son Absalom. He was so much like me. A natural leader with a sympathetic listening ear. I saw a lot of myself in him but I also saw a hunger in his eyes, an attraction to my throne room. This too was a blind spot in me that I couldn’t overcome. Absalom and I never talked. What advice do I have for you? As long as you have time, talk to your children.

Jeremiah, my daughter has died, what words would you have for me?

I never had the chance to have a daughter. Matter of fact I never had the chance to have any children because the Lord forbid me to marry. That sounds severe but I lived in very chaotic times. I felt at times like I didn’t even have a place to lay my head (sound familiar?). I had hard messages to deliver in very difficult situations. The Lord was right, most of my life was like moving through the thickets of the Jordan. Besides, I learned fairly soon that more than a wife, I needed the Lord to be my ‘helpmate.’ But I sure feel like I could have used a few more friends than Baruch and Ebed-melech. Sorry, I don’t have much to say about daughters. However, regarding death, unfortunately, I’m much too familiar. Mothers, fathers, children, kings and priests; some to famine, some to the sword and some to the chains of slavery. I proclaimed, pleaded and wrote the truth of God. But what they treasured in their hearts was not the Lord. At times it was too much for my soul to bear. I was a man of sorrows and surrounded by grief (sound familiar?). At times I wished my eyes were a fountain so I could cry day and night for the dead. But I know He keeps all our tears and one day will wipe them all away. So regarding death, grieve your loss and let it be expressed by your body, mind, emotions and your soul. I know He usually doesn’t change our circumstances, because I prayed often enough that He would but Nebuchadnezzar came anyway. But He does promise to bring to us His peace and *hesed* right where we are.