

NT LAMENT IN CURRENT RESEARCH AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR AMERICAN EVANGELICALS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Shortly after OT scholar Hermann Gunkel (re)identified the lament genre in 1933, NT researchers began exploring its influence on the NT. Explorations gradually increased, with significant contributions spanning several NT genres and disciplines. The time has come to critically assess this field, to provide avenues for future researchers to explore and, of more specific concern to *JETS* readers, to raise awareness that American evangelical NT scholars have largely overlooked this field—to the detriment of evangelical churches.

Covering contributions made to the Gospels, Paul's letter to the Romans, the book of Revelation, and NT theology, my assessment begins in the 1980s after OT lament research had matured and when narrative and theological interests in the NT lament began to emerge.¹ To provide an overview of the field, I summarize in the first three sections influential contributions to NT lament research before assessing these contributions in the fourth section. In the final section I explore various ways that evangelical scholarship, with a view toward influencing the church, can (and should) build upon these contributions.

II. GOSPELS

I begin with a groundbreaking, unpublished dissertation that, to my knowledge, every researcher (myself included) has overlooked: Rosann Catalano's "How Long, O Lord?"² Catalano is groundbreaking not because her exploration of

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¹ It is difficult to demarcate some of the following contributions according to this taxonomy. For example, some researchers address lament both in the Gospels and more broadly in NT theology. This taxonomy, therefore, is generally heuristic. I relegate works that discuss multiple NT books and/or that emphasize broader, theological conclusions to the section "NT Theology." Additionally, I omit works that provide broad generalizations about the NT lament without exploring and substantiating their arguments via specific NT passages (e.g. Paul Ricoeur, "Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," *JLAR* 53 [1985] 635–50; Gotthard Fuchs, ed., *Angesichts des Leids an Gott glauben? Zur Theologie der Klage* [Frankfurt am Main: Josef Knecht, 1996]; Ottmar Fuchs, "Unerhörte Klage über den Tod hinaus! Überlegungen zur Eschatologie der Klage," *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 16 [2001] 347–79). For summaries of works prior to the 1980s and of those that primarily focus on issues "behind" the text (e.g. Douglas J. Moo, *The OT in the Gospel Passion Narratives* [Sheffield: Almond, 1983]; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), see D. Keith Campbell, *Of Heroes and Villains: The Influence of the Psalmic Lament on Synoptic Characterization* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013) 2–6.

² Rosann M. Catalano, "How Long, O Lord? A Systematic Study of the Theology and Practice of the Biblical Lament" (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Michael's College, 1988).

the NT is exhaustive (as the phrase “A Systematic Study” in her subtitle implies; she only focuses on Mark’s Passion, especially the echoes therein), nor because she accurately adjudicates how Mark appropriates the lament (see discussion below), but because she presciently and incisively detects a need for this investigation. To my knowledge, she is the first American researcher to explore the lament with a specific and sustained exegetical and theological emphasis on the NT and, in light of that, to ask what the lament means for the modern (in her case, Roman Catholic) church.³ Her primary argument is that, based on Mark’s Gospel, the NT does not nullify a Christian use of the OT lament. Rather, lament should be a central aspect of the Christian life.

Particular focus of lament research in the Gospels, as expected, is given to Jesus’ quote of Lament Psalm 22:1 in Mark 15:34 and Matt 27:46 (Jesus’ so-called “cry of dereliction”). Although every work on the lament in Mark and Matthew must address this quote, four exclusively focus on it. Vernon K. Robbins presents an argument that nearly all subsequent NT lament researchers overlook. While most interpreters believe that Mark’s Jesus had in mind the whole of Psalm 22 (and thus its climatic turn to trust), Robbins argues just the opposite. He notes that Mark uses scenes from Psalm 22 in reverse order, ending and climaxing his hermeneutic of Psalm 22 with the psalm’s first verse (with Jesus’ cry of dereliction); in other words, Mark explicates the psalm backwards. The rhetoric of the psalm itself moves toward hope and trust. Mark’s rhetoric moves in the opposite direction, away from hope and trust. Thus, Jesus’ cry of dereliction in Mark emphasizes death and agony and not the hope one finds at the end of Psalm 22.⁴ Matthew Rindge builds on Robbins’s argument, suggesting that Mark’s reversed rhetoric of Psalm 22 serves Mark’s broader theme of suffering and persecution: Mark, by reversing the rhetoric of the psalm, gives an *apologia* on how to respond to suffering. Mark’s readers, who were likely experiencing persecution, can claim this model of lament as their own.⁵

Richard Bauckham provides a detailed, exegetical study of Mark 15:39, seeking to hold in tandem Mark’s broader narrative and its accompanying intertextual web of OT allusions. He concludes that it is justifiable to read Jesus’ cry of dereliction both in the entire context of Psalm 22 (pace most scholars; contra Robbins) and within the context of the psalms of lament more generally. Additionally, Bauckham suggests that the cry of dereliction aligns Jesus with his people as a whole because (1) OT psalms of lament were not only individual but communal; (2) the darkness in Mark 15:33 is universal; and (3) Jesus did not ask the question

³ Oswald Bayer (1983) was the first German (see below).

⁴ Vernon K. Robbins, “The Reversed Contextualization of Psalm 22 in the Markan Crucifixion: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis,” in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck* (BETL 100; ed. C. M. Tuckett and F. Van Segbroeck; Leuven: University Press, 1992) 1161–83. Rebekah Eklund mentions Robbins’s argument, suggesting that it “does not work perfectly under careful scrutiny” but does not interact with it (“Lord, Teach us How to Grieve: Jesus’ Laments and Christian Hope” [Th.D. diss., Duke Divinity School, 2012] 53 n. 71).

⁵ Matthew S. Rindge, “Reconfiguring the Akedah and Recasting God: Lament and Divine Abandonment in Mark,” *JBL* 130 (2011) 755–74.

“Why have you forsaken me?” just for himself, because he knows precisely why he is dying (Mark 10:45; 14:24). Thus, Mark not only portrays his Messiah as godforsaken, but he also portrays all of humanity as godforsaken.⁶ Finally, and most recently, Henry Novello suggests that Jesus’ cry of dereliction contributes to lament studies by representing a true apophatic theology.⁷

Moving beyond the cry of dereliction, Gail O’Day examines the passage about Jesus and the Canaanite woman in Matt 15:21–28. Employing OT form-critical categories, O’Day argues insightfully that Matt 15:21–28 represents a “narrative embodiment of the lament psalm.”⁸ Similarly (although not referencing O’Day), Martin Ebner, within a broader argument that lament and NT resurrection hope are intertwined, describes Mark’s crucifixion account, Mark’s “Raising of Jairus’ Daughter” (Mark 5:38–40), and Luke’s “Raising of the Widow of Nain’s Son” (Luke 7:11–15) as “dramatized laments” (*dramatisierten Klageprozesses*).⁹ Applying form-critical categories to broader swaths of Gospel texts, Matthew Boulton sees a programmatic structure of OT lament in the choreography of Passion Week.¹⁰ Interested in Mark’s OT exegesis, Adela Collins argues that, relative to the hermeneutic of his Jewish contemporaries, Mark does not misappropriate the lament psalms.¹¹

Sensing emerging methodological challenges facing NT lament researchers, to which I return more thoroughly below, I addressed in a 2011 *BBR* article how many NT scholars mistakenly equate grief/sadness with biblical lament. This results in erroneously adjudicating and interpreting various NT phrases or scenes as laments (e.g. Rachel’s weeping and Jesus’ weeping over Jerusalem). Biblical lament, as influential OT scholar Claus Westermann noted fifty years ago, is, at its core, prayer—a distraught prayer to God in order to bring about change; it is more than mere grief or sadness.¹² Thus, I argue that recitations of these emotions in the NT are not tantamount to biblical lament.¹³

⁶ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the NT’s Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 254–68. Bauckham’s conversation partner is Gérard Rossé, *The Cry of Jesus on the Cross: A Biblical and Theological Study* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1987). In contrast to Rossé, Bauckham more concertedly focuses on how Jesus’ cry of dereliction functions in Mark’s broader narrative and more exhaustively on Mark’s use of the OT.

⁷ Henry L. Novello, “Jesus’ Cry of Lament: Towards a True Apophaticism,” *ITQ* 78 (2013) 38–60.

⁸ Gail O’Day, “Surprised by Faith: Jesus and the Canaanite Woman,” *Listening* 24 (1989) 290–301.

⁹ Martin Ebner, “Klage und Auferweckungshoffnung im Neuen Testament,” *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 16 (2001) 73–87. I discuss below Ebner’s broader theological argument that NT resurrection hope should not impede lament.

¹⁰ Matthew Boulton, “Forsaking God: A Theological Argument for Christian Lamentation,” *SJT* 55 (2002) 58–78.

¹¹ Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Appropriation of the Psalms of Individual Lament by Mark,” in *Scriptures in the Gospels* (ed. C. Tuckett; Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1997) 223–41.

¹² Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) 168.

¹³ D. Keith Campbell, “NT Scholars’ Use of OT Lament Terminology and Its Theological and Interdisciplinary Implications,” *BBR* 21 (2011) 213–226. Eklund pushes back on this in relation to Rachel’s weeping, suggesting that, although the Matthean passage is not a lament proper, it functions as such (“Lord, Teach us How to Grieve,” 211); see discussion on methodology below. Christine Ritter (*Rachels Klage im antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum: Eine auslegungsgeschichtliche Studie* [Leiden: Brill, 2002] 114–

In a monograph on Mark's appropriation of the individual lament psalms, Stephen Ahearne-Kroll adroitly navigates some of these methodological challenges by focusing on what he calls "simple evocations" of the lament in Mark's passion: echoes of one, and only one, prior text. This helps determine more accurately Mark's precise intertextual and narrative focus. Ahearne-Kroll examines these simple evocations to answer the question, "What does it mean for Jesus to die 'as it is written of him' (Mark 14:21)?" Ahearne-Kroll answers: within Mark's narrative, Jesus dies not only as Isaiah's Suffering Servant—which most researchers stress—but he also dies as a suffering, Davidic lamenter *par excellence*. Mark redefines the militaristic messiah expected during the Second Temple Era by characterizing Jesus as a lamenter.¹⁴

In a subsequent monograph, I build on Ahearne-Kroll by exploring further how Mark characterizes Jesus as the OT lamenter *par excellence* (along with other OT heroes), by arguing that Mark also characterizes Jesus' opponents as those of the OT lamenter (along with other OT villains), and by exploring how Mark relates his lamenter motif to his Isaianic Suffering Servant motif. I additionally note how Matthew and Luke appropriate the same motifs, concluding that Matthew emphasizes and expands each one while Luke downplays them.¹⁵

III. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS

Richard Hays began the conversation about Paul's appropriation of the OT lament in Romans with his exceptionally influential *Echoes of Scripture* by arguing that Paul uses the lament in Romans to justify God's dealings with Israel.¹⁶ "Has God abandoned his covenant people?" Hays asks. Through ample echoes of the lament, wherein God's justice is questioned at every turn, Paul answers with a resounding "no."¹⁷ "The Gospel [for Paul]," says Hays, "is the fulfillment, not the negation, of God's word to Israel."¹⁸ Paul, then, consistently echoes the lament to address this particular dilemma of theodicy.

Four years after *Echoes of Scripture*, Hays offered another influential contribution to lament studies, specifically in relation to Paul but also in relation to NT studies more generally. He demonstrates that the early church pervasively used a hermeneutical device that portrays Jesus as a petitioner of the psalms (almost exclusively the lament) in order to provide a matrix for their Christology. This "distinctive hermeneutical move," says Hays, saw "the sufferings of Israel in [the]

29) and Frederick A. Niedner Jr. ("Rachel's Lament," *WW* 22 [2002] 406–14) explore Rachel's weeping in Matthew but do not focus on its impact as a lament proper.

¹⁴ Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, *The Psalms of Lament in Mark's Passion: Jesus' Davidic Suffering* (SNTSMS 142; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁵ Campbell, *Of Heroes and Villains*.

¹⁶ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 34–83.

¹⁷ Beyond intertextual echoes, Hays also argues that Paul structures Romans 9–11 after the OT lament (*Echoes of Scripture* 64).

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 34.

psalms ... as having been accomplished in an eschatologically definitive way by Jesus on the cross, *and* to see the vindication of Israel accomplished proleptically in his resurrection.”¹⁹

Sylvia Keesmaat, building on Hays’s argument in *Echoes*, suggests that Paul appropriates the world of the lament to encourage his readers that they should find their righteousness in Israel’s story reinterpreted by the Christ event and not in the “imperial narrative of Caesar.” Paul “reorients” the original content and function of the OT lament; instead of defeating the enemies as the lament prayers call for, the Messiah, who demonstrated God’s justice by suffering, dying, and raising from the dead, undermines this story.²⁰

Peter Stuhlmacher focuses more specifically on Rom 7:7–25, observing that Paul structures this passage around an OT, individual lament. Specifically, Paul culminates his “apology for the law” in Rom 7:7–24 with a lament in 7:24 (“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”). Paul follows this lament, in turn, with an expression of thanks in 7:25. Stuhlmacher then explores this lament influence of Romans 7 on the theological backdrop of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.²¹ In an equally focused work, Laurie Braaten argues that, contrary to the general consensus that Rom 8:22 should be read through the dual lenses of creation’s fall and birth pangs, it is better to read it on the backdrop of broader OT groaning/lamenting.²²

Exploring Romans more broadly than Stuhlmacher, Keesmaat, and Hays, Channing Crisler, in an unpublished dissertation, investigates what he calls “lament language” in Rom 3:10–18; 7:7–25; 8:18–39; and chapters 9–11 to argue that “Paul’s use of lament language discloses simultaneously the intensity of creation’s suffering and the power of the gospel.”²³ Paul, in other words, taps into his Scripture’s most extreme vernacular—lament—to verbalize pain. He does this to speak both about great suffering and great hope. The answer to this suffering is the promise of the gospel. Crisler applies these conclusions to two specific areas of Pauline studies.

¹⁹ Richard B. Hays, “Christ Prays the Psalms: Israel’s Psalter as Matrix of Early Christology,” in *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 111 (italics his).

²⁰ Sylvia C. Keesmaat, “The Psalms in Romans and Galatians,” in *The Psalms in the NT* (ed. Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken; London: T&T Clark, 2004) 139–61.

²¹ Peter Stuhlmacher, “Klage und Dank: Exegetische und liturgische Überlegungen zu Römer 7,” *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 16 (2001) 55–72. Building on Stuhlmacher, Mark Seifrid also sees a broader lament influence on Romans 7 (“Romans 7: The Voice of the Law, the Cry of Lament, and the Shout of Thanksgiving,” in *Perspectives on Our Struggle with Sin: Three Views of Romans 7* [ed. Stephen J. Chester et al.; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2011] 111–65) and on Romans more generally (“Romans,” in *Commentary on the NT Use of the OT* [ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007] 607–95). Seifrid, however, simply notes the lament’s presence in Romans but does not explore any interpretive payoff from Paul’s appropriation of it.

²² Laurie J. Braaten, “The Groaning Creation: The Biblical Background for Romans 8:22,” *BR* 50 (2005) 19–39.

²³ Channing L. Crisler, “Lament in Romans: Promise, Suffering, and the Cry of Distress” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012) 12.

First, he challenges N. T. Wright's argument that Israel's story, as embedded in the underlying narrative of Romans, is God's "single-plan-through-*Israel*-for-the-world"; this, according to Wright, is the interpretive key for all of Romans as an answer to suffering.²⁴ Crisler retorts, however, that Wright's interpretive key fails to make sense of Paul's suffering and lament language that is so pervasive in Romans: "For Paul, the only answer to suffering, especially suffering that leads to lament, is the promise of the gospel where God's righteousness is revealed through the promise about Jesus Christ crucified and risen."²⁵ A better interpretive key, Crisler says, is "God's 'single-plan-through-*Christ*-for-the-world."²⁶

Second, Crisler claims his conclusion offers an alternative to Krister Stendahl's argument that Western understandings of introspection about a personal, guilty conscience has crept into our understanding of Romans 7; Stendahl calls this the "introspective conscience of the West."²⁷ Stendahl suggests, in contrast to this conscience, that Paul is defending the law, and his concern centers on the tragedy caused by the power of sin. Crisler retorts, however, that a Pauline conscience is detectable in Romans 7 and that it is more accurately called a "lamenting conscience." This "is a conscience that is aware of sin's deceptive, overpowering, and ever-present power. All this comes to light in sin's use of the law. All the 'I' can do is cry for help [within the framework of OT lament language]."²⁸

IV. REVELATION

Aside from investigations set within a broader NT theology (discussed below), three brief works on the lament in Revelation have surfaced over the last decade. Although each one targets a more popular audience, they raise issues related to the lament that others have yet to explore and to substantiate more fully. Bruce Chilton briefly highlights the lament of the martyrs beneath the altar in Rev 6:10, arguing that their protests are against God's delayed justice and that their vindication is connected with the one slain in Rev 5:9–10.²⁹ In an equally brief piece, Ronald Allen sees Revelation 18 as the answer to the lament in Rev 6:10.³⁰ Slightly longer is Heath Thomas's argument that the lament in Rev 6:10 provides the theological ground for the modern Christian lamenter, one who lives in a broken world now but longs and prays for the eschatological "not yet." Moving from this point, Thomas urges today's church to reclaim the lament.³¹

²⁴ N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009) 179.

²⁵ Channing L. Crisler, "Lament in Romans" 175.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among the Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 78–96.

²⁸ Crisler, "Lament in Romans" 180.

²⁹ Bruce D. Chilton, "The Revelation of John: Lament and Praise," *Living Pulpit* 11 (2002) 8–9. This entire eleventh issue of *Living Pulpit* is dedicated to exploring the lament.

³⁰ Ronald J. Allen, "Should We Praise God when the Unjust Suffer?" *ibid.* 15–16.

³¹ Heath Thomas, "My God! My God!: Lament and the Christian Life," *Miqra* 7 (2008) 11–15.

V. NT THEOLOGY

German researchers set the pace for exploring a broader understanding of the NT lament, arguing that both scholarship and church ought to pay more attention to it. Oswald Bayer, Gotthard Fuchs, and the editors of *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* took the lead in these endeavors. As early as 1983, Bayer argues that Jesus' resurrection in Mark's and Matthew's passion and in Heb 5:7 demonstrates the theological assurance that God has heard the OT lament and provides NT validation for the Christian's continued use of it.³² Bayer later picks up these themes by suggesting that, in addition to Jesus' resurrection and Heb 5:7, the Lord's Supper (specifically in how it echoes Psalm 22), and by implication a broader Christology, is also grounded in lament. Specifically, the Lord's Supper (viewed as a "thank offering" [*todab*]), wherein lament is presumed³³) is the confessed answer to the lament.³⁴ Bayer later contributes the entry "Klage III. Systematisch-theologisch" alongside of Bernd Janowski's "Klage II. Biblisch" in *RGG*⁴.³⁵ These entries are notable not because they contribute anything new to an understanding of the NT lament but because a discussion of the NT lament was altogether omitted in *RGG*³.

The entire sixteenth volume of *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* (2001) is dedicated to the lament and was written, according to Fuchs and Janowski, because after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 no one lamented to God and most people, more content with nicer and cleaner explanations, did not even realize its absence.³⁶ Three articles from this volume explore the lament through a NT lens. Stuhlmacher explores the lament in Romans 7 (discussed above). Bayer, building on his previous work, argues that lament deserves a place at the theologian's table where, for far too long, stoic theology has been the staple diet. The NT, as he previously argued in "Erhörte Klage," provides an "eschatology of answered lament"—an answer that, instead of silencing the lament, makes it louder and sharper.³⁷ Martin Ebner, as mentioned above, asks whether resurrection hope stands in the way of lament and answers with a unmitigated "no"; resurrection hope, in contrast to the arguments of Ebner's German predecessors, is actually the theological basis for lament. For support, Ebner cleverly notes that, although Jesus is fully aware of his pending resurrection (Mark 8:31; 9:31), he laments anyway (Mark 15:34).³⁸

³² Oswald Bayer, "Erhörte Klage," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie* 35 (1983) 259–72.

³³ It is presumed because lament necessarily precedes a thank offering: Israel laments a particular plight, God responds, and then they present a thank offering for God's deliverance.

³⁴ Oswald Bayer, "Tod Gottes und Herrenmahl," in *Leibliches Wort: Reformation und Neuzeit im Konflikt* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992) 289–305.

³⁵ Oswald Bayer, "Klage III. Systematisch-theologisch," *RGG*⁴ (2001) 1391–92; Bernd Janowski, "Klage II. Biblisch," *RGG*⁴ (2001) 1389–91.

³⁶ Ottmar Fuchs and Bernd Janowski, "Vorwort," *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 16 (2001) v–vi.

³⁷ Oswald Bayer, "Zur Theologie Der Klage," *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 16 (2001) 289–301 (ET: "Toward a Theology of Lament," in *Caritas et Reformatio: Essays on Church and Society in Honor of Carter Linberg* [ed. David M. Whitford and George M. Forell; St. Louis: Concordia, 2002] 211–20).

³⁸ Ebner, "Klage und Auferweckungshoffnung im Neuen Testament" 73–87.

A subsequent German volume focuses on the NT lament: *Mit Gott klagen*, which T&T Clark published a year later in English as *Evoking Lament*.³⁹ Two essays in this amorphous collection—the purpose of which is to provoke more multi-perspectival discussions and to help articulate and foster a well-balanced practice of Christian lament—are pertinent here. Markus Öhler concludes from the vast array of NT words that reflect mourning, weeping, lamenting, and groaning that the NT does not repudiate or invalidate the lament as a form of conversation with God.⁴⁰ Eva Harasta explores the OT lament in light of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection to suggest how Christians should pray the OT lament. Christian lament, Harasta concludes, is grounded in the cross and resurrection of Jesus; it is “cruciform lament.”⁴¹

In America, Kathleen Billman and Daniel Migliore, while addressing the broader issue, “Why the lament is absent in modern, mainline churches,” explores the lament in the Bible, in the history of Christian theological tradition, and in recent pastoral theology. Their purpose is to establish a pastoral theology of lament prayer in the practice of modern ministry. They build their NT case on so-called “strands of prayer of lament”—passages that “breathe [the lament's] spirit”—found in the NT: the cry of the disciples to Jesus before he stills the storm (Mark 4:35–41; par. Matt 8:23–27); Rachel's weeping for her children (Matt 2:17–18); the persistent prayer of the widow (Luke 18:1–8); Jesus' cry of dereliction (Mark 15:34; par. Matt 27:46); and, following O'Day, the Canaanite woman who begs Jesus to heal her daughter (Mark 7:28). They conclude that, while the lament undergoes important changes in the NT—such as praying for enemies instead of crying out for vengeance and a tendency to mute the lament tradition by encouraging patience and endurance in the face of suffering (especially in Luke, John, and Paul)—it is not entirely lost.⁴² They also surmise a helpful, but perhaps incomplete (see below), list of characteristics of the NT lament.⁴³

Similar to Billman and Migliore, Richard Hughes investigates and tries to rehabilitate biblical laments as resources for Christian theology. He believes that the lament's gradual disappearance from theological inquiry began as early as the NT itself: Mark and Matthew strongly promote lament in the face of suffering while canonically later authors—Luke (including Acts), John, Paul, and the General Letters—reject it by promoting patience amidst suffering and by emphasizing God's providence (though Hughes fails to consider Rev 6:10). This emphasis on provi-

³⁹ Eva Harasta, ed., *Mit Gott klagen: Eine theologische Diskussion* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2008); Eva Harasta and Brian Brock, eds., *Evoking Lament: A Theological Discussion* (London: T&T Clark International, 2009).

⁴⁰ Markus Öhler, “To Mourn, Weep, Lament and Groan: On the Heterogeneity of the NT's Statements on Lament,” in *Evoking Lament* 150–65.

⁴¹ Eva Harasta, “Crucified Praise and Resurrected Lament,” in *Evoking Lament* 204–17.

⁴² Kathleen D. Billman and Daniel L. Migliore, *Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1999). William S. Morrow argues, conversely, that, by the time of the NT, the lament was completely eclipsed (*Protest against God: The Eclipse of a Biblical Tradition* [Hebrew Bible Monographs 4; Sheffield Phoenix, 2007]).

⁴³ Billman and Migliore, *Rachel's Cry* 33–40.

dence at the expense of lament continued, Hughes suggests, with post-NT writers and is exacerbated by the modern concept of theodicy, a theodicy that erroneously tries to answer every question about God. Such theodicy leaves no room for lament wherein questions can linger.⁴⁴

Scott Ellington, while focusing more broadly on a practical theology of lament, explores the lament in Matthew and Revelation. Ellington thinks, as evidenced in the accounts of Rachel's weeping (Matt 2:18) and the Canaanite woman (Matt 15:21–28), that lament is programmatic for Matthew. In the same way, because the lament in Rev 6:10 is answered in Rev 16:5–7 (thus forming an *inclusio*), Ellington argues that lament provides the fundamental shape to the book of Revelation.⁴⁵

The most comprehensive NT lament theology to date is Rebekah Eklund's 2012 Duke Divinity School Th.D. dissertation (slated for publication in December 2014).⁴⁶ Her goal, as it relates to the Gospels, is to discern the role of the lament both in each individual narrative and in their coherent witness, focusing on the pattern and words of lament in three scenes: the Garden of Gethsemane, the raising of Lazarus, and Jesus' crucifixion. She concludes concerning these scenes that "the lament centers around Jesus, who prays the full movement of lament (complaint, petition, and trust), and enacts the pattern of lament from humiliation into vindication. God's faithfulness to God's promises is at stake in the prayer of lament; at the cross, both Jesus' righteousness and God's faithfulness are tested and proved."⁴⁷

After establishing a portrait of lament in the Gospels, Eklund next looks at its significance through a threefold lens. (1) Jesus lamenting as a human being. Lamenting is as old as suffering humankind. Jesus participates within the long, general laments of all humans. However, all lamenting humans lament within specific contexts. Jesus is no different. He participates in the *Jewish* context of the lament. (2) Jesus lamenting as the messianic king, priest, and prophet. Jesus lamenting as king both continues the tradition of the royal lament psalms and contributes to the irony of his kingship: he is a *suffering* king—one who, in participating in, and embodying, the lament, refuses to rule "as the Gentiles do." Jesus lamenting as the high priest of Hebrews (especially Heb 5:7) qualifies him to intercede for those who suffer. Jesus lamenting as God's mediating prophet reorients the harsh imprecation of the psalms toward intercession for others without diminishing the legitimate desire for God's justice (similar to Rev 6:10). (3) Jesus lamenting as the unique, divine Son of God, who voices Ps 22:1 as a divine lament (God the Son laments to God the Fa-

⁴⁴ Richard Hughes, *Lament, Death, and Destiny* (New York: P. Lang, 2004), building on his previous article "Lament in Christian Theology," *Encounter* 61 (2000) 187–204.

⁴⁵ Scott A. Ellington, *Risking Truth: Reshaping the World through Prayers of Lament* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2008) 163–82.

⁴⁶ Eklund, "Lord, Teach Us How to Grieve." Forthcoming as *Jesus Wept: The Significance of Jesus' Laments in the NT* (LNTS; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark).

⁴⁷ Eklund, "Lord, Teach Us How to Grieve" 63.

ther) and who delivers, with assistance from the Holy Spirit (Romans 8), human lament into the life of the triune God.

Eklund rounds off her work by exploring how the NT's unique "already-not-yet" eschatology influences the prayer of lament. Jesus' ministry, as the promised consolation of Rachel's weeping in Matt 2:18, represents an "inaugurated vindication of lament," the promise of the end of lament.⁴⁸ Vindication is achieved through Jesus' resurrection, which in turn guarantees the resurrection of all believers; this vindication is both now, in that it has broken into the present, and not yet, in that full redemption remains to be realized. In the tension between this "now and not yet," the description of mourning and hope in 1 Thess 4:13 strikes a needed balance: lament is transformed but not eliminated by the resurrection. In other words, in the "now" described in the NT, lament and patient endurance belong together. The Lord's prayer, Eklund claims, provides a paradigmatic eschatological lament for those living between the now and the not yet.

VI. ASSESSMENT

Assessing these works in detail is impractical and, for the limited purposes of this article, unnecessary. Sufficient here is to paint in broad brushstrokes, noting, first, the need to reassess several interpretive tendencies made by many NT lament researchers.⁴⁹ Second, I suggest a way forward before, in the final section of this article, addressing more specifically evangelical scholarship and church.

There is a tendency among some NT lament researchers toward the methodological fallacy that I call the "lament-grief equivalence"—the equating of lament and grief within the biblical corpus.⁵⁰ Although lament and grief overlap and merit simultaneous research and although the terms "lament" and "grief" are synonymous in modern English usage, Claus Westermann clearly demarcated the two terms 35 years ago vis-à-vis biblical parlance.⁵¹ While all biblical lament contains grief, not all grief is lament. Lament is biblically delineated as, first and foremost, prayer, prayer to God to change a given plight.⁵² Simply put, grief alone is not tantamount to biblical lament. Braaten ("The Groaning of Creation"), for example, bases his entire argument about lament on Paul's grief language in Rom 8:22. Crisler ("Lament in Romans"), Allen ("Should We Praise God when the Unjust Suffer?"), and especially Öhler ("To Mourn, Weep, Lament and Groan") also reflect a similar penchant. Hughes (*Lament, Death, and Destiny*), although correctly defining biblical lament, repeatedly draws conclusions about the lament from NT texts that simply record characters' grief.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 192.

⁴⁹ My highlighting of specific examples from these researchers for reassessment is not necessarily tantamount to critiquing their work as a whole.

⁵⁰ Cf. Campbell, "NT Scholars' Use of OT Lament Terminology."

⁵¹ Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* 168.

⁵² For definitions of lament, see Campbell, *Of Heroes and Villains* 8–11, and Eklund, "Lord, Teach Us How to Grieve" 17.

Related to this tendency is the particular penchant among some NT lament researchers toward Sandmel's "parallelomania."⁵³ A cursory glance at the works discussed in this article reveals a staggering number of suggested NT parallels and echoes to the OT lament, many of which are not linked in any way linguistically or thematically to OT texts. Space limitations prevent enumerating these, but Hughes (*Lament, Death, and Destiny* and "Lament in Christian Theology"), Catalano ("How Long, O Lord?"), and especially Öhler ("To Mourn, Weep, Lament and Groan") provide three pertinent examples.

Some NT lament researchers also tend toward overstatement, claiming too much from too little evidence. This tendency usually serves a broader, albeit admirable and worthy, agenda to revitalize the lament among modern Christians. Catalano ("How Long, O Lord?"), for example, argues that the lament is constitutive for new covenant believers based only on Mark's passion narrative while failing to consider Paul's stress on joyfully enduring suffering. Ellington (*Risking Truth*) sees lament as programmatic for both Matthew and Revelation based on tenuous *inclusio*s. Similarly, Boulton ("Forsaking God") argues, based on broad narrative patterns instead of on specific intertextualities, that Jesus' entire Passion Week follows the lament pattern of Psalm 22. From this conclusion alone, he argues for a retrieval and rehabilitation of Christian forms of lament. Harasta ("Crucified Praise and Resurrected Lament") calls her work a "systematic theology of lament" although she explores the OT lament exclusively through Jesus' NT lament. This tendency toward overstatement gets the proverbial cart before the horse by circumventing detailed exegetical investigations or by omitting other, potentially competing, NT themes (e.g. suffering patiently) while drawing broad theological and practical conclusions.

Avoiding these tendencies is challenging. Scholarly consensus generally agrees that the OT lament influences the NT. However, since much of the NT data on lament presents in the form of echoes, allusions, and parallels, detecting them with certainty often exist on a continuum; it is frequently as much an art as it is a science. Although there will always be uncertainty regarding many intertextualities, I suggest that synthesizing the following methods will help avoid these tendencies and more accurately delineate and interpret the NT lament.

Ellington provides a helpful three-tiered taxonomy for delineating laments in the NT: (1) lament references: references made to laments being offered without the reader being told their content (e.g. Paul's unstated prayer for the removal of his thorn [2 Cor 12:8–9]); (2) lament fragments: isolated petitions that are self-contained and stand alone (often found in healing and deliverance stories: "Have mercy on me!"); and (3) lament allusions: quotes or echoes of specific OT laments (the passerby "shaking their heads" at Jesus' crucifixion).⁵⁴ Eklund adds a fourth

⁵³ Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *JBL* 81 (1962) 1–13.

⁵⁴ Ellington, *Risking Truth* 164–67. David G. Firth inaccurately critiques Ellington by suggesting that Ellington fails to advance biblical scholarship (review of Ellington, *Risking Truth*, *JSOT* 33 [2009] 148–49). Although not without broader interpretive weaknesses akin to the fallacies mentioned above, Ellington provides this helpful methodology to locate the lament in the NT.

tier: (4) texts that evoke the ethos and function of the lament (Jesus weeping at Lazarus' tomb).⁵⁵ And, I add a fifth one: (5) lament prayer proper. This is similar to Ellington's "lament fragments" in that they are isolated petitions and stand alone but differ in that they are petitions directed toward God (instead of toward Jesus)—petitions that contain Westermann's three determinate elements of the lament: the one who laments, God, and the others (e.g. Rev 6:10).⁵⁶

While adjudicating NT laments according to tiers 1 and 5 are more straightforward, tiers 2, 3, and 4 inherently pose more methodological challenges. For example, to what degree should petitions directed toward Jesus instead of toward God (tier 2) be called "lament" in any OT sense of the term? The perennial challenges of delineating echoes (tier 3) still remains; and does an echo or direct quote of a lament psalm (e.g. Luke's quote of Ps 31:5 in 23:46) mean that the writer intends to appropriate lament-prayer proper (the petition for change) instead of using it for other hermeneutical purposes?⁵⁷ Does the ethos of the lament actually lie behind Jesus' weeping at Lazarus' tomb (tier 4), or is Jesus just sad because his friend is dead?⁵⁸

Although these methodological issues cannot be resolved here, I suggest the following parameters to help advance and guide future conversations on the topic. When assessing lament fragments embedded within healing and deliverance stories (tier 2), O'Day's ("Surprised by Faith") and Ebner's ("Klage und Auferweckungshoffnung im Neuen Testament") precedents should guide the discussion. When assessing lament echoes (tier 3), Hays's now standardized criteria in *Echoes of Scripture* should set the pace—but, only as tempered by 15 years of critique and with echoes that accord with Ahearne-Kroll's concept of "simple evocations" (echoes of one, and only one, OT text) receiving interpretive priority.⁵⁹ Adjudicating texts that evoke the ethos and function of the lament (tier 3) poses the most formidable challenge due to their inherent ambiguities. Care should be taken to avoid the "lament-grief equivalency fallacy" while placing more interpretive weight on the other four tiers. In other words, delineating an author's intentional allusion to lament is, although not without complications, easier for tiers 1, 2, 3, and 5 than it is for tier 4. Thus, tier 4 should stand in the interpretive shadow of the other four.⁶⁰

Moving beyond methodology to interpretation, Eklund's impressive theological grasp of the NT lament should set the pace and provide the way forward for all

⁵⁵ Eklund, "Lord, Teach Us to How to Grieve" 19. Eklund actually presents her own three-tiered taxonomy. Her first one (quotations of lament psalms) coincides with Ellington's "lament allusions" and her second one (new prayers of lament) is not present in the NT, so it seems superfluous to include it here.

⁵⁶ Westermann, *Praise and Lament* 169. Ellington alludes to, but does not demarcate, a similar tier (*Risking Truth* 165 n. 5).

⁵⁷ For example, how the Gospel writers narratively employ the lament to enhance their characterization (Campbell, *Of Heroes and Villains*).

⁵⁸ Cf. Eklund, "Lord, Teach Us How to Grieve" 46–48.

⁵⁹ For a recent assessment of Hays, see David A. Shaw, "Converted Imaginations? The Reception of Richard Hays's Intertextual Method," *CBR* 11 (2013) 234–45.

⁶⁰ This is what I try to do in my *Of Heroes and Villains*, wherein simple evocations set the interpretive agenda, with supplemental data providing substantiating evidence.

subsequent research, which should proceed in at least two directions: substantiation and application. Although I think Eklund's exquisite interpretation of the NT lament will prove correct, it still needs further substantiation via (1) closer exegetical attention to specific passages (detailed attention like that found in Bauckham's discussion of Mark 15:34⁶¹); (2) with more attention given to authorial intent because occasionally, for Eklund, canonical intent takes precedence;⁶² (3) with an eye toward tendencies to commit the lament-grief equivalency fallacy; and (4) through further confirmation beyond tier 4, on which Eklund places considerable interpretive weight.⁶³

Other, more narrowly focused, arguments deserve particular consideration in subsequent NT lament research. Catalano ("How Long, O Lord?") needs revisiting since her work has been omitted from the conversation. Robbins ("The Reversed Contextualization of Psalm 22") and Rindge ("Reconfiguring the Akedah and Recasting God") should be addressed: does Mark actually reverse the hermeneutic of Psalm 22 and, if so, does this ultimately imply, especially in light of Jesus' resurrection, that Mark excises the hope found at the end of the psalm? In need of further substantiation is Collins's argument that, relative to his contemporaries, Mark employs the OT lament appropriately ("The Appropriation of the Psalms of Individual Lament by Mark") because she only focuses on two OT echoes—one of which is quite tenuous (Mark 3:20–21). Bayer's understanding of the Lord's Supper as the confessed answer to the lament ("Tod Gottes und Herrenmahl") needs further confirmation: is it accurate to surmise that the NT writers had in mind the lament at the Lord's Supper without explicitly stating it? To what degree are Stuhlmacher ("Klage und Dank") and Hays (*Echoes of Scripture*) correct to see the OT lament structure in Romans 7 and 9–11, respectively? And, what interpretive difference does it make? Speaking of Hays, his argument that NT writers portray Jesus as the petitioner of the lament needs broader consideration ("Christ Prays the Psalms"). Does Ebner's insight that Jesus prayed the lament while fully aware of his own resurrection ("Klage und Auferweckungshoffnung im Neuen Testament") further inform the theological conversation beyond Eklund? In light of the brevity of Chilton's ("The Revelation of John") and Allen's ("Should We Praise God when the Unjust Suffer?") work and in light of Ellington's potential overstatement that lament is programmatic for John's Apocalypse (*Risking Truth*), the lament in Revelation needs further exploration. Finally, considering the broader dialogue on the NT lament since their 1999 publication and considering, in particular, Eklund's contributions, how might one critique, hone, and expound on Billman's and Migliore's "characteristics of lament in the NT" (*Rachel's Cry*)?

One particularly fertile ground for advancing and applying NT lament studies, especially as it relates to a broad cross section of scholarship and church, is within evangelicalism.

⁶¹ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel* 254–68.

⁶² Cf. Eklund, "Lord, Teach Us How to Grieve" 60.

⁶³ In my monograph, I interact with Eklund briefly, but not substantially, because my interpretive interests (literary) differs from hers (theological) (see Campbell, *Of Heroes and Villains* 74, 155–57).

VII. AMERICAN EVANGELICAL SCHOLARSHIP AND CHURCH

Mainline American and German scholarship from a plethora of disciplines have for two decades admirably grieved the loss of lament in Western Christianity. American evangelical scholarship and churches have largely ignored it. The reasons for this are varied: stoicism vis-à-vis suffering is perhaps still esteemed; Paul's and James's teachings about joyfully and patiently suffering has possibly shrouded the NT's teaching on lament; maybe the relative wealth of the West diminishes its perceived need; or perhaps a broader emphasis on "positive thinking" and "uplifting and encouraging" Christianity makes lament appear spiritually inferior or, similarly, makes one feel guilty for lamenting. Whatever the reasons, to be true to the whole counsel of God, evangelicals must explore and explicate the NT lament for both scholarship and church.

Before noting how a better understanding of the lament might compliment particular evangelical disciplines, a couple of preliminary remarks are in order. First, I run the risk of being misunderstood by framing the discussion with the terms "mainline" and "evangelical."⁶⁴ My focus on evangelical scholarship should not imply that its research and conclusions are divorced from mainline scholarship. After all, realizing that evangelicals will agree with many of its arguments, I summarize the field above in order to provide a launching pad for future research. Evangelicals, though, do have certain presuppositions (e.g. the nature of Scripture, canonicity, and that NT writers view Jesus as divine) that may influence particular conclusions about the NT lament and how to apply it. Furthermore, a solid understanding of the NT lament grounded appropriately in, but not divorced from, the OT lament needs popularizing in the pulpits, pews, and parachurch ministries of evangelical churches.

A second remark concerns the guild's increasing need for international, scholarly dialogue. I mention briefly in a previous *JETS* article the need for Western scholarship and churches to engage those in the Global East/South, without the hegemony of past eras.⁶⁵ This holds especially true for the lament.⁶⁶ How might

⁶⁴ The definitions of "mainline" and "evangelical" fall on a continuum, and precisely adjudicating the works addressed in this article accordingly is not my purpose here. Rather, I proceed with the simple observation that, as one progresses toward the evangelical side of this continuum, research in America on the NT lament and, especially, its dissemination to the church is nearly nonexistent. Exceptions include Thomas's brief article ("My God! My God!") in a relatively obscure journal and Crisler's unpublished dissertation ("Lament in Romans"), which does not provide practical application for the church. Furthermore, most of Eklund's ("Lord, Teach Us How to Grieve") incisive theological arguments comfortably fall within evangelical convictions but are directed toward scholars. For the popular press, Michael Card commendably seeks to revitalize the lament for the evangelical church, but his work is severely impaired by the methodological fallacies mentioned above (*A Sacred Sorrow: Reaching Out to God in the Lost Language of Lament* [Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2005]; *The Hidden Face of God: Finding the Missing Door to the Father Through Lament* [Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2007]).

⁶⁵ D. Keith Campbell, "The American Evangelical Academy and the World: A Challenge to Practice More Globally," *JETS* 56 (2013) 337–53. More recently, Larry Hurtado argues similarly, calling for the internationalization of NT scholarship ("Fashions, Fallacies and Future Prospects in NT Studies," *JSNT* 36 [2014] 299–324).

⁶⁶ Cf. Eklund, "Lord, Teach Us How to Grieve" 258–60.

living with and engaging Global Eastern/Southern scholars—where suffering relative to the West is often significantly amplified—influence and sharpen our understand and practice of lament?⁶⁷ Modernity now requires that scholars from every global culture sit at the scholarly table and, given the vast monetary resources and general political peace of the West, perhaps the onus of responsibility to make this happen falls on the shoulders of Western scholars. Lament studies, given its inherent relation to suffering, would particularly benefit from such international and intercultural dialogue.

The following are representative questions that will help guide particular disciplines in exploring further the NT lament and how it might specifically influence evangelical scholarship and church.⁶⁸

1. *Biblical studies and theology.* What, if anything, are the implications of NT lament for Christologies that adhere to Jesus as divine?⁶⁹ What interpretive results might arise from seeing Gospel characters lamenting to Jesus, an OT prayer directed only toward God? Does this in any way inform Larry Hurtado's twenty-year agenda to demonstrate a chronologically early devotion to Jesus as Lord? What precisely do NT lamenters lament about? How should Jesus' mantra "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" be reconciled with the lamenters who pray for God's justice in Rev 6:10?

2. *Psychology, counseling, and spiritual formation.* What role should laments play in the lives of depressed people? What specifically should lament look like for the individual between "the already" and the "not yet," especially in relation to the NT's parallel teaching to joyfully and patiently endure suffering. For example, how should lament prayer manifest for a mother who loses her teenage son in a car accident? How/should a rape victim pray the imprecatory laments of the psalms to God about her rapist? Is lament valid for life's "less intense" situations: Loss of health? Bankruptcy? House fire?⁷⁰

3. *Homiletics and ecclesiology.* How should preachers preach the NT lament? In planning for long-term preaching, how often should preachers include the lament? How should homileticians edit forthcoming lectionaries to adequately represent the biblical lament?⁷¹ Similarly, how is it best to disseminate the need to preach the lament to those who do not use a lectionary? What role should lament play in fu-

⁶⁷ Stephen Lakkis asks a similar question ("Have You Any Right to Be Angry?" in Harasta, *Evoking Lament*). But, interestingly, Harasta's volume, as far as I can tell, was written entirely by Westerners.

⁶⁸ Since these disciplines overlap in various ways, I divide them here simply for heuristic purposes.

⁶⁹ Cf. Eklund, "Lord, Teach Us How to Grieve" 67.

⁷⁰ Denise Ackermann exemplifies an admirable but failed attempt to apply a biblical understanding of lament to a specific situation—namely post-apartheid South Africa—wherein she understands the goal of lament as therapeutic "healing" ("On Hearing and Lamenting: Faith and Truth Telling," in *To Remember and to Heal: Theological and Psychological Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation* [ed. H. Russel Botman and Robin M. Peterson; Cape Town, South Africa: Human & Rousseau, 1997] 47–56). In contrast to therapeutic healing, which one might hope is a byproduct of lament, the ultimate goal of biblical lament is to cry out unashamedly and boldly for God to intervene in one's plight (cf. Eklund, "Lord, Teach Us How to Grieve" 233 n. 98).

⁷¹ Many have noted that lectionaries tend to avoid the lament (e.g. Billman and Migliore, *Rachel's Prayer* 13).

nerals? How might lament inform modern worship services, especially contemporary Christian music?

VIII. CONCLUSION

Twenty years ago, OT scholar Walter Brueggemann reflected on the “Costly Loss of Lament.”⁷² American evangelicals have largely not considered this cost. In light of tragedies that are now delivered daily from news venues to cell phones and tablets, evangelicals need a category of prayer that stands between human suffering and God, a category that goes beyond focusing exclusively on patient suffering and on theodicies that seek to tidy up every human-to-God interaction. A category, instead, is needed that more accurately reflects the holistic teaching of Scripture, wherein the weak and suffering have a specific prayer form through which to commune with God. The OT lament, as continued and refracted by the NT, provides this category. By turning attention to this type of NT prayer, evangelical scholars can advance their respective fields in helpful ways—to the benefit of evangelical churches.

⁷² Walter Brueggemann, “The Costly Loss of Lament,” in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 98–111.