Shift
Lam. 3:22-26
Dr. Pierre Cannings

Historical Background. From 588 to 586 b.c. the army of Babylon ground away at the defenses of Jerusalem (for comments on these dates see information at 2 Kings 25:1–10). So Judah's early flush of excitement and euphoria following her rebellion against Babylon was replaced with uncertainty and fear. Her ally, Egypt, had been vanquished in battle as she tried in vain to rescue Judah from Babylon's grasp. One by one the other cities in Judah were crushed (cf. Jer. 34:6–7) till only Jerusalem remained before the Babylonian hordes.

Within the city the ever-tightening siege by Babylon's armies began unraveling the fabric of society. Starving mothers ate their own children (Lam. 2:20; 4:10). Idolatry flourished as the people cried out to any and every god for deliverance. Paranoia gripped the people until they were willing to kill God's prophet as a traitor and spy just because he spoke the truth.

The long siege ended abruptly on July 18, 586 b.c. The walls were then breached and the Babylonian army began entering the city (2 Kings 25:2–4a). King Zedekiah and the remaining men in his army tried to flee, but were captured (2 Kings 25:4b–7). It took several weeks for Nebuchadnezzar to secure the city and strip it of its valuables, but by August 14, 586 b.c. the task was completed and the destruction of the city began (2 Kings 25:8–10). (For support of the dates July 18 and August 14, 586 b.c., see Edwin R. Thiele, The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983, p. 190.) The armies of Babylon burned the temple, the king's palace, and all the other major buildings in the city; and they tore down the walls of the city which provided her protection. When the Babylonians finally finished their destruction and departed with their prisoners, they left a jumbled heap of smoldering rubble.

Jeremiah witnessed the desecration of the temple and the destruction of the city (cf. Jer. 39:1–14; 52:12–14). The once-proud capital had been trampled in the dust. Her people were now under the harsh hand of a cruel taskmaster. With all these events stamped vividly on his mind Jeremiah sat down to compose his series of laments.

Relationship to Deuteronomy 28. A crucial, though often overlooked, characteristic of the Book of Lamentations is its relationship to Deuteronomy 28. As John A. Martin has noted, "The author of the Book of Lamentations was attempting to show the fulfillment of the curses presented in Deuteronomy 28" ("The Contribution of the Book of Lamentations to Salvation History." Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1975, p. 44). The following chart shows many of the parallels between Lamentations and Deuteronomy 28.

The unbroken mood of despair was displaced by a beautiful affirmation of hope in spite of suffering (cf. Job 1:21; Hab 3:17–18; Rom 5:3; 1 Pet 4:12–13). The basis for renewed hope is God's "great love."

In the poet's observation of the destruction of the city as well as its implications for the relationship between God and his people, he may have concluded that God stopped caring

about his people. The reality that God's lovingkindnesses never cease rebuts such a notion (חַסְדֵי יְהוָה כִּי לֹא־תָמְנוּ).

The entire book of Lamentations has been setting up for this text, with its stress on the travail of exile. It has forced the reader to ask tough questions about life in exile and provided only small glimpses into God's future plan (1:18–22; 2:20–22).

Subject: The lesson that modern-day believers may take from this is that there is nothing wrong with asking the hard questions, but at the same time one's meditating must move, as the poet's did, to the unquestionable character of God and how that is worked out in his plan. One must deeply reflect upon the nature of God's lovingkindness, faithfulness, and compassion in times of distress.

I. Shifting vs. 22-24

a. Lovingkindness – Loyalty , **proofs of mercy** Gn 32:11 Is 63:7 Ps 89:2 *mercies, deeds of kindness*, the historic displays of lovingkindness to Israel: It means a favor done from a sense of obligation or fidelity, and I have rendered it "acts of loyalty"

1. That term (חַסְדֵי) defines God's covenantal love and faithfulness. It is typically the word that describes his positive disposition toward his people as well as his beneficial actions to his people. In other words, this covenant faithfulness is not passive or merely an attribute of YHWH, but rather his proactive effort, omnipotent power, and supernatural intervention on behalf of his people.
2. Especially in the plural (as it is here), the word denotes the multitude of these mighty workings of God to benefit his people (cf. Pss 89:2; 107:43; Isa 63:7).
3. lovingkindnesses have not ceased. The plural of חֶסֶד does not occur often in the Hebrew Bible, but one of the four times (including this verse) it is used is in Isa 63:7. There, it discusses in context not only how God acted for his people in the past but will do so when they go into exile so as to bring an end to exile. In fact, Isa 63:7 also contains the terms רַב ("great") and רַחֲמִים ("compassion") found in this verse and the next.
4. covenant mercy," "describes the disposition and beneficent actions of God toward the faithful, Israel his people, and humanity in general Not even the coming of the day of the Lord against Jerusalem signals the end of God's covenant mercy. If this is true, then nothing can exhaust the divine impulse to act graciously.
5. This confession coincides with at least two significant covenantal passages. In Exod 34:6–7, Yahweh states that he will renew the

covenant that Israel broke through the golden calf incident because he is "compassionate and gracious" (רחום וחנון) "and full of mercy and faithfulness" (ורב חסד ואמת). In Deut 30:1–11, Moses promises that even though all the covenant consequences found in Deut 27–28 might befall Israel, if they turn back to Yahweh and obey him the Lord will have compassion

ii. Indeed Never Ceases – to come to an end
    1. In fact, the כִּי particle, translated "indeed," is used asseveratively to stress the emphatic truthfulness of the statement
    2. Some might wonder if such work will cease in exile. The poet points out an important reality: "we indeed are not finished." As discussed above, this translation is based upon the reading with the best manuscript support (לֹא־תָמְנוּ). The term תמם denotes "to end." The idea is that the poet and his people have not died and that their nation was not entirely destroyed or ended.
    3. is technically an adverbial phrase, probably denoting a causal relationship with the latter phrase ("we indeed are not finished"). Thus the KJV translation of "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed" is accurate. The idea is that God's massive, positive, gracious, and powerful workings for his people did not stop at the exile. Rather, they continue in the exile, as evidenced by the people's survival. Israel was not completely wiped out in 586 B.C., and that itself was an act of God's faithful intervention. He preserved a remnant. Thus YHWH's grace continues on. The poet stresses this amazing reality. In fact, the כִּי particle, translated "indeed," is used asseveratively to stress the emphatic or truthful nature of the statement.

b. Compassion- the seething (boiling) of your inner being and of your mercy
    1. The term "compassion" (רַחֲמִים) refers to the feeling of tenderness or care similar to a mother's concern for her child (1 Kgs 3:26).
    2. The term for "compassion" comes from רחם, a word that "signifies a warm compassion, a compassion which goes the second mile, which is ready to forgive sin, to replace judgment with grace

ii. Never Fails
    1. Fails The term for "fail" (כָּלוּ) refers to having exhausted a supply (Gen 21:15; 1 Kgs 17:14). Has God spent all his love for Israel? This statement answers with an emphatic "No." Not only will God continue to work for them, he also still truly feels for them. This extends back to Exod 34:6–8, where Israel sinned but God forgave because of his compassion
    2. is evidence that Yahweh has not abandoned his commitment, that his compassion has not become spent

iii. New Every Morning- Is 33:2; Zeph 3:5
    1. New – Fresh

a. the word “new” does not mean “something that never existed before, but rather a fresh renewal of what has been experienced before.” Each new day the proofs of God’s grace flow from his compassionate nature
b. *New* (*ḥādāš*) thus implies “something unique and special … a new and hitherto unheard of deed of Yhwh, for example, which gives rise to a new song … something unexpected and unanticipated
c. but it can also mean renewing or refreshing something in order to return it to its original pristine state or being (1 Sam 6:7).
d. Intertwined with a new exodus is the very concept of “newness.” As noted in the comments on v. 23, this does not merely refer to renewing or refreshing something, but rather probably intersects with God’s activity in producing a new covenant and a new creation. That is entailed in a new covenant where the law would be placed upon the heart (Jer 31:31–33). Appropriately, in displaying the end of exile, the poet alludes to the workings surrounding the new covenant. God’s mercies are new every morning, so as to make all things new. That, too, is part of his hope.
e. Thus, Lam 3:22 agrees with one of the most extraordinary teachings in the OT. Though Israel sinned against God through idolatry, immorality, oppression, and other forms of long-term covenantal adultery to such an extent that he finally punishes severely, the Lord will still start over with penitent Israelites.

c. Faithfulness – trustworthiness
    i. Faithfulness - In spite of Israel’s faithlessness (Dt 32:20; cf. Rom 3:3), God showed himself to be absolutely reliable. His faithfulness is great (Lam 3:23). He is loyal to his covenant and will always manifest his steadfast love to his people (Ps 136
        1. faithfulness” expresses “a characteristic of God in relationship with a human person made manifest in his deeds. Characteristics of such fidelity are consistency, stability, truth, and permanence.” God’s covenantal fidelity and integrity remain intact no matter how things may seem. Human beings may not wish it were so, but judgment for sin as promised proves this faithfulness.
    ii. In the midst of chaos and depression, the poet revealed a deep faith (vv. 22–24) in the trustworthiness of God: “Great is your faithfulness”
        1. Faithfulness - With reference to God, this word occurs only during the exile and after the exile (Jer 52). The semantic field of the word is that of constancy, reliability. It was a unique characteristic of the Lord

2. More specifically, it may allude to the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:15; 1 Kgs 8:23; Isa 55:3; Ps 89:2, and passim), God's unconditional promise to protect the monarchy and its people, even if they sin (Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*). The poet is insisting, then, that God *must* aid Judah, that it is inconceivable that he would let harm come to the descendants of David, that as long as night follows day God will be faithful to Israel. All that is required is patience (vv. 24–26) and inevitably God will make good on his covenant obligation. Expressions close to this are found in Ps 89, a communal lament that proclaims God's "faithfulness" and "loyalty" (vv. 2–3), that explicitly mentions the Davidic covenant, that speaks of the rejection of God's anointed one, the breaching of walls and the shattering of strongholds, the mockery of passersby, the triumph of the enemy (vv. 39–43), and asks how long God will hide his face (v. 47).
3. Often in life people do not realize the faithfulness of God until the "bottom has fallen out" of their lives. In Lam 3 the "faithfulness" of God is to be interpreted in light of his promise to destroy, which he has done, and his promise to restore, which he would do. The poet realized that restoration was on its way, both nationally and individually. In a metaphor made bold by such a context of judgment, he claimed God as his "portion" (*ḥeleq*). This is a word that describes something that belongs to someone: "Yahweh is all I have" (NJB; cf. Num 18:20; Deut 32:9; Pss 16:5; 73:26; 119:57; Isa 61:7

iii. Great

1. Great" does not refer to magnitude, but rather to a multitude. The same term has described Jerusalem's past population (1:1), servitude (1:3), transgression (1:5), and pain (1:22). In contrast, God's loyalty far surpasses the multitude of sufferings or sins. His acts of faithfulness abound more than his work of judgment.

d. My Portion

i. Portion - **share of booty** Ps 16:5; 73:26

1. That which is distributed and received, e.g., spoils of war (Gen. 14:24; 1 Sam. 30:24) and food eaten in ceremonial meals (Exod. 29:26; Lev. 7:33; 1 Sam. 1:4–5). The terms are used in a technical sense with regard to inheritances (Gen. 31:14; Luke 15:12) and land (Deut. 10:9) as that entrusted or allotted to Israel by Yahweh, the true owner of the land. Expressions such as "to have a portion in (someone)" **mean to be affiliated with that person or to belong** to that person's company or community (2 Sam. 20:1; 1 Kings 12:16; cf. John 13:8).
    a. as the Lord is likewise Israel's portion (Ps. 16:5; 73:26; 119:57; 142:5; Jer. 10:16; Lam. 3:24)

b. The phrase “My portion is the LORD” resonates in a number of ways. According to Num 18:20, the priests, who had no land allotments, have the Lord as their portion, which means they received their sustenance from the Lord (from offerings brought to the Lord). Just like the priests, the exiles will receive sustenance and protection from God (cf. Pss 16:5; 73:26; 119:57; 142:6) (Hillers). Taking the interpretation one step further, God is the landholding (*ḥēleq*) of Israel in the absence of their physical land
c. The term “portion” refers to a share of spoils or an inheritance The phrase is used frequently in Psalms to denote the writer’s complete satisfaction in God (Pss 16:5; 73:26; 119:57). The idea is that the writer is content in God and desires nothing beyond him
d. It also stems from the speaker’s willingness to let God be The Levites had to abandon all other plans for inheritance. Similarly, in Ps 73:26, a psalm in which the poet confesses God’s goodness (73:1) yet also the poet’s own questions about that goodness, the poet confesses that God is “my portion” (וחלקי). So the psalmist no longer cares how the wicked prosper; instead, he focuses on the goodness of having God for a refuge. Simply stated, God is enough to satisfy the writer, and the same is apparently true of the speaker in Lam 3:24.

2. Soul – In a narrower sense the soul denotes man in his varied emotions and inner powers. Man is called to love God with all his heart and soul (Dt 13:3). Within the soul lies the desire for food (12:20, 21), the lust of the flesh (Jer 2:24), and the thirst for murder and revenge (Ps 27:12). The soul is said to weep (Jb 30:16; Ps 119:28), and to be exercised in patience (Jb 6:11). Knowledge and understanding (Ps 139:14), thought (1 Sm 20:3), love (1 Sm 18:1), and memory (Lam 3:20) all originate in the soul. Here the soul comes close to what today would be called the self, one’s person, personality, or ego.
3. Even the use of the phrase “says my soul” (אָמְרָה נַפְשִׁי) demonstrates that reversal of thought. The poet’s “soul” or inner being had previously been bereft of peace (3:17) and bowed down to the dust (3:20). In this verse, the poet’s inner being exclaims its contentment and joy.

ii. Hope – To Wait
1. Is an expectant waiting for God’s work
2. This is not a vain hope or wishful thinking. Rather, it is rooted in the fact that the writer is determined to wait upon God (אוֹחִיל לוֹ). As defined in context, this is the God whose work continues as

well as his goodwill. The depth or greatness of this divine work will fulfill all God's promises in a new covenant to bring an end to exile and make things new. Such a God is the only solution to the depth of the poet's despair and pain. Only such a God is capable of breaking through the exile and all its pain, thereby providing hope. Thus the writer hopes in him.

II. Good As It Gets vs. 25-26

a. The Lord is Good
    i. Good – God is good, and the suffering he sends is also good for a person (vv. 25–27). God is just and therefore there must be ample reason for the suffering he sends; concomitantly, God would not oppress people unfairly (vv. 33–36).
        1. This word is the same used in Gen 1:1–2:4, where the creation is described as being "good." It may be understood here in the sense of God's re-creating Israel after the destruction of Jerusalem (cf.
    ii. To those Who Wait
        1. Wait - To await, hope Ps 37:7
        2. During times of visitation and judgment, the righteous must exercise great faith (Isa 26:8; Lam 3:19–33
    iii. To Those Who Seek
        1. Seek - Seek with care, **care for**: a person
b. It is Good
    i. Wait Silently - the concept of waiting silently for God's deliverance certainly is not (see Pss 37:9; 62:2, 6
        a. argues that this silence in 3:26 "ought to be understood as more than simply sitting in a sort of paralyzed amazement. The present text speaks rather of a tenacious intensification of 'being silent,' of a conscious option for remaining silent." In other words, this text transforms silence from a posture of the defeated to one of the soon-to-be delivered. Further, this silence does not preclude prayer, given 2:11–19 and 3:19–24. Thus, the silence heightens the waiting that will eventually be rewarded with "the salvation of the LORD
        2. For the Salvation
            a. Salvation- **deliverance, help** from God in various spheres of life: —a) as something which is waited for or hoped for in the future

Lovingkindness - **proofs of mercy** Gn 32:11 Is 63:7 Ps 89:2 Lam 3:22[1] *mercies, deeds of kindness*, the historic displays of lovingkindness to Israel: [2]

Never Cease - **to come to an end, expire**

Compassion the seething (boiling) of your inner being and of your mercy[3]

Fail - **stop, come to an end**

New – Fresh

Faithfulness - **trustworthiness**,[4]

God's Faithfulness. In spite of Israel's faithlessness (Dt 32:20; cf[5]. Rom 3:3), God showed himself to be absolutely reliable. His faithfulness is great (Lam 3:23). He is loyal to his covenant and will always manifest his steadfast love to his people (Ps 136).

The pinnacle of faithfulness in the Bible is seen in the work of Jesus Christ, who showed himself faithful to his Father (Heb 3:2) and in his witness (Rv 1:5). God calls men and women to be faithful by following Christ, relying on him for all things (Hab 2:4; cf[6]. Rom 1:17[7]

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[1] Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 337.

[2] Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 339.

[3] Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1219.

[4] Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 62.

[5] cf. compare

[6] cf. compare

[7] Stuart D. Sacks, "Faithfulness," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 765.

Portion- **share of booty** Ps 16:5; 73:26

That which is distributed and received, e.g., spoils of war (Gen. 14:24; 1 Sam. 30:24) and food eaten in ceremonial meals (Exod. 29:26; Lev. 7:33; 1 Sam. 1:4–5). The terms are used in a technical sense with regard to inheritances (Gen. 31:14; Luke 15:12) and land (Deut. 10:9) as that entrusted or allotted to Israel by Yahweh, the true owner of the land. Expressions such as "to have a portion in (someone)" mean to be affiliated with that person or to belong to that person's company or community (2 Sam. 20:1; 1 Kings 12:16; cf. John 13:8). Words translated "portion" can also be used with reference to that which is dear and close to a person; thus Israel is called the portion of the Lord (Deut. 32:9), as the Lord is likewise Israel's portion (Ps. 16:5; 73:26; 119:57; 142:5; Jer. 10:16; Lam. 3:24). "Portion" can also refer to the lot or fate that befalls a person at the hand of the Lord (Job 31:2; Jer. 13:25; Rev. 21:8; RS[8]V "lot"). At Luke 10:42, the "good portion" chosen by Mary is the attention she gives to Christ's teaching.[9]

Soul- In a narrower sense the soul denotes man in his varied emotions and inner powers. Man is called to love God with all his heart and soul (Dt 13:3). Within the soul lies the desire for food (12:20, 21), the lust of the flesh (Jer 2:24), and the thirst for murder and revenge (Ps 27:12). The soul is said to weep (Jb 30:16; Ps 119:28), and to be exercised in patience (Jb 6:11). Knowledge and understanding (Ps 139:14), thought (1 Sm 20:3), love (1 Sm 18:1), and memory (Lam 3:20) all originate in the soul. Here the soul comes close to what today would be called the self, one's person, personality, or ego.

There is no suggestion in the O[10]T of the transmigration of the soul as an immaterial, immortal entity. Man is a unity of body and soul—terms which describe not so much two separate entities in man as the one man from different standpoints. Hence, in the description of man's creation in Genesis 2:7, the phrase "a living soul" (KJ[11]V) is better translated as "a living being." The thought is not that man became a "soul," for clearly he had a body. The use of the word in the original draws attention to the vital aspect of man as "a living being." The Hebrew view of the unity of man may help to explain why man in the O[12]T had only a shadowy view of life after death, for it would be difficult to conceive how man could exist without a body (Pss 16:10; 49:15; 88:3–12). Where hope of an after-life exists, it is not because of the intrinsic character of the soul itself (as in Plato). It is grounded in confidence in the God who has power over death and the belief that communion with him cannot be broken even by death (Ex 3:6; 32:3–9; 1 Sm 2:6; Jb 19:25, 26; Pss 16:10, 11; 73:24, 25; Is 25:8; 26:19; Dn 12:2; Hos 6:1–3; 13:14).[13]

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[8]RSV Revised Standard Version

[9] Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 841.

[10]OT Old Testament

[11]KJV The King James Version

[12]OT Old Testament

[13] Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Soul," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1987.

Hope- to wait

Wait – To await, hope Ps 37:7

> During times of visitation and judgment, the righteous must exercise great faith (Isa 26:8; Lam 3:19–33). Thus Isa confidently asserts, "I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him" (Isa 8:17). When God arrives on the scene with redemptive power, the response of those who have waited will be jubilant joy and great singing (Isa 25:9).[14]

Seeks -seek with care, **care for**: a person[15]

Salvation- . **deliverance, help** from God in various spheres of life: —a) as something which is waited for or hoped for in the future[16]

[**22–39**] As in the book of Job, the assumption in this section is that knowledge of the true nature of God will bring comfort and hope to the sufferer. The speaker reasons with himself as a writer of Wisdom literature might, composing a kind of theodicy.[1170] He does not pray or lament, addressing God in the second person, but instead composes an intellectual essay about God, referring to him in the third person and emphasizing abstract concepts like infinity, omnipotence, goodness, and justice. God's loyalty and mercy are infinite, and therefore hope never ends (vv. 22–24, 32). God is good, and the suffering he sends is also good for a person (vv. 25–27). God is just and therefore there must be ample reason for the suffering he sends; concomitantly, God would not oppress people unfairly (vv. 33–36). God is omnipotent, the source of good and evil, and as long as a person is alive he should accept whatever punishment God metes out to him (vv. 37–39). This is not to say, though, that the theodicy is entirely divorced from the language of prayer, for at several points it invokes liturgical phrases (like the attributes of God) and may even be quoting them, either to use them as support or to refute them.

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[14] John E. Hartley, "קָוָה 1994," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 791.

[15] Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 233.

[16] Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1801.

[1710] The sapiental character of this section has been recognized by earlier scholars, who thought of it as a sermon or as instruction to the community. Westermann, 72, considers vv. 31–38 didactic and midrashic. Few commentators explicate the wisdom aspects of the pericope; an exception is Dobbs-Allsopp (*Lamentations*), who, among other things, notes that vv. 25–39 share the basic outlook of Job's friends.

[**22–23**] Among the attributes of God are his *ḥesed*, "loyalty," his *raḥămāyw*, "compassion," and his *ʾĕmûnâ*, "faithfulness" (Exod 34:6). It is not unusual to invoke one or more of these attributes in psalms of lament. For example, Ps 88:12–13 calls on God's *ḥesed*, "loyalty," *ʾĕmûnâ*, "faithfulness," and *ṣĕdāqâ*, "justness"—which cannot be invoked by the dead. God's *raḥămîm*, "compassion," refers to God's nature as a merciful God, and his "faithfulness" means his faithfulness to Israel. The sense of *ḥesed* is difficult to convey in English. It means a favor done from a sense of obligation or fidelity, and I have rendered it "acts of loyalty" (it is in the plural in our verse). In the present context, it suggests that God, by virtue of his covenant with Israel, is obligated to help them. More specifically, it may allude to the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:15; 1 Kgs 8:23; Isa 55:3; Ps 89:2, and passim), God's unconditional promise to protect the monarchy and its people, even if they sin (Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*). The poet is insisting, then, that God *must* aid Judah, that it is inconceivable that he would let harm come to the descendants of David, that as long as night follows day God will be faithful to Israel. All that is required is patience (vv. 24–26) and inevitably God will make good on his covenant obligation. Expressions close to this are found in Ps 89, a communal lament that proclaims God's "faithfulness" and "loyalty" (vv. 2–3), that explicitly mentions the Davidic covenant, that speaks of the rejection of God's anointed one, the breaching of walls and the shattering of strongholds, the mockery of passersby, the triumph of the enemy (vv. 39–43), and asks how long God will hide his face (v. 47).

[**24**] The phrase "My portion is the LORD" resonates in a number of ways. According to Num 18:20, the priests, who had no land allotments, have the Lord as their portion, which means they received their sustenance from the Lord (from offerings brought to the Lord). Just like the priests, the exiles will receive sustenance and protection from God (cf. Pss 16:5; 73:26; 119:57; 142:6) (Hillers). Taking the interpretation one step further, God is the landholding (*ḥēleq*) of Israel in the absence of their physical land (Provan). Our verse would then become the counterpart of Deut 32:9: "The LORD's *ḥēleq* is his people." Another explanation emphasizes that "to have a portion" in a king means to acknowledge his sovereignty (Moskowitz). See 2 Sam 20:1, when Sheba ben Bichri says, "We have no *ḥēleq* in David." In Josh 22:25 and 27 the tribes that settled east of the Jordan risk being thought of as not having a portion in the Lord and insist that this is not so. If we understand the phrase in this sense, the poet is maintaining that his sovereign is still God, not the Babylonian king. Israel is still God's people, even though they are no longer in the land that God gave to them. Verse 24 reinforces the notion in vv. 22–23 that God and Israel are still bound by their covenant.

[**26–30**] Forbearance and humility are counseled. Symbols that in other contexts are negative signs of defeat—the yoke (1:14), sitting alone (1:1), putting the mouth in the dust (3:16), the shame of having the cheek struck (Job 17:10)—are here infused with positive meaning. The yoke (v. 27), a symbol of submission, is a metaphor, although its literal meaning comes through in the context of captivity. Jewish tradition views God's commandments as a "yoke," and the phrase is interpreted this way in the Targum.[18]

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[18] Adele Berlin, *Lamentations: A Commentary*, First paperback edition., The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 92–94.

3:22–24 The unbroken mood of despair was displaced by a beautiful affirmation of hope in spite of suffering (cf. Job 1:21; Hab 3:17–18; Rom 5:3; 1 Pet 4:12–13). The basis for renewed hope is God's "great love." The Hebrew word *hesed*, sometimes translated as "covenant love" or "loyal love," is a word that has the basic meaning of *loyalty* or *faithfulness*, especially as related to the covenant initiated by God; the word involves obligations to family, friends, and the community.[198] Another basis of hope is God's unfailing "compassions" (*raḥămîm*; from a word related to the womb, it describes the tender, caring love of a mother), which are experienced in a fresh and new way every day.

Whereas earlier the writer accused God of cruelty and faithlessness, now he exalted God's love and "faithfulness." Verse 23 is the best known verse in Lamentations (memorialized by the popular hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"). In the midst of chaos and depression, the poet revealed a deep faith (vv. 22–24) in the trustworthiness of God: "Great is your faithfulness" (*ʿĕmûnâ*). This word is from *ʾmn* in the verb and is connected to the word *ʾamen*, which means *so be it*, the word that closes prayers. Its meaning in English is connected to truth, faith, and trustworthiness. With reference to God, this word occurs only during the exile and after the exile (Jer 52). The semantic field of the word is that of constancy, reliability. It was a unique characteristic of the Lord.[209] Contrary to the way neighboring peoples viewed their gods, the Jews now understood their God to be faithful to them, and there is no greater hope than knowing that God is totally reliable. God had always been faithful (Exod 34:6–7), but the point here is that the people finally realized it. Often in life people do not realize the faithfulness of God until the "bottom has fallen out" of their lives. In Lam 3 the "faithfulness" of God is to be interpreted in light of his promise to destroy, which he has done, and his promise to restore, which he would do. The poet realized that restoration was on its way, both nationally and individually. In a metaphor made bold by such a context of judgment, he claimed God as his "portion" (*ḥeleq*). This is a word that describes something that belongs to someone: "Yahweh is all I have" (NJB; cf. Num 18:20; Deut 32:9; Pss 16:5; 73:26; 119:57; Isa 61:7).

3:25–27 Each of the verses in this triad begins with "good" (*ṭōb*) in the M[21]T. The Hebrew word has a broad range of meaning: practical or material good, abstract goodness such as beauty, and moral good. This word is the same used in Gen 1:1–2:4, where the creation is described as being "good." It may be understood here in the sense of God's re-creating Israel after the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. the destruction of the world and the re-creation of it in

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[198] See J. *Krašovec*, "The Source of Hope in the Book of Lamentations," *VT* 42, 2 (1992): 223–233. The NRSV translates the first line of 3:22 as "the steadfast love of the LORD never ceases," following the Syr and Targum (cf. JB, NAB, NASB, NEB). The LXX adds at the end of 3:22: "Pity (us), O Lord, early in the morning, for we are not brought to an end because his compassions are not exhausted." See K. D. Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), for a study of the word *hesed*.

[209] "אמן" in *TDOT 1*, ed., G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 292–323.

[21]MT Masoretic Text

Gen 6–9). Lamentations 3:25–27 reveals some qualities of genuine faith: (1) belief in God's goodness to those who trust in him; (2) confidently and without complaint waiting for God's help; and (3) willingness to accept hardship and testing, knowing that they strengthen faith. Those who truly trust in the Lord do not complain or despair even when in trouble (cf. Pss 34:9; 86:5; Isa 30:15; Matt 11:28–30). Those who learn in youth[1220] to bear suffering are better prepared for the hardships that may come in old age.[23]

Verses 22–24: The Character of God

3:22 The next tricolon is the most famous section of the book. It is fitting in light of the context set up by the writer (see comment on the previous verse). These three lines provide the truths that give hope to the hopeless, instill perseverance to those whose strength has come to an end, and encourage those who have experienced the worst turmoil of exile.

Line 1: Breadth of God's Goodness. The first truth concerns the constant love of God. This emphasis is seen in the chiastic structure of the verse. The outside terms deal with God's lovingkindness and compassion, whereas the internal terms express the unfailing or enduring nature of those attributes (Parry, 100–101). This helps the reader to understand the emphasis of the verse.

In the poet's observation of the destruction of the city as well as its implications for the relationship between God and his people, he may have concluded that God stopped caring about his people. The reality that God's lovingkindnesses never cease rebuts such a notion (חַסְדֵי יְהוָה כִּי לֹא־תָמְנוּ). In fact, the כִּי particle, translated "indeed," is used asseveratively to stress the emphatic truthfulness of the statement (House, 414).[40240] Because the reader might have assumed the contrary, the writer emphasizes the reality of God's lovingkindness. That term (חַסְדֵי) defines God's covenantal love and faithfulness. It is typically the word that describes his positive disposition toward his people as well as his beneficial actions to his people.[40251] This definition is true, but within this concept is the notion of God's unilateral action to aid those in the covenant.[40262] In other words, this covenant faithfulness is not passive or merely an attribute of YHWH, but rather his proactive effort, omnipotent power, and supernatural intervention on behalf of his people.[40273] Especially in the plural (as it is here), the word denotes the multitude of these mighty workings of God to benefit his people (cf. Pss 89:2; 107:43; Isa 63:7).[40284]

[2210] Some Hebrew and Greek MSS, the OL, and Vg read "from his youth" (also JB, NJB, NAB) instead of "in his youth" (MT; also KJV, RSV, NEB, NASB).

[23] F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, vol. 16, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 473–474.

[24400] *IBHS*, 665 (§39.3.4e).

[25401] H. J. Stoebe, "חסד," in *TLOT*, 2:450–52.

[26402] D. A. Baer and R. P. Gordon, "חסד," in *NIDOTTE*, 2:212–14.

[27403] Ibid.

[28404] Oswalt, *Isaiah 40–66*, 604–5.

Some might wonder if such work will cease in exile. The poet points out an important reality: "we indeed are not finished." As discussed above, this translation is based upon the reading with the best manuscript support (לֹא־תַמְנוּ). The term תמם denotes "to end." The idea is that the poet and his people have not died and that their nation was not entirely destroyed or ended.

The relationship between "God's lovingkindnesses" and "we indeed are not finished" should be better defined. The former (see discussion above) is technically an adverbial phrase, probably denoting a causal relationship with the latter phrase ("we indeed are not finished"). Thus the KJ[29]V translation of "It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed" is accurate. The idea is that God's massive, positive, gracious, and powerful workings for his people did not stop at the exile. Rather, they continue in the exile, as evidenced by the people's survival. Israel was not completely wiped out in 586 B.C., and that itself was an act of God's faithful intervention. He preserved a remnant. Thus YHWH's grace continues on. The poet stresses this amazing reality. In fact, the כִּי particle, translated "indeed," is used asseveratively to stress the emphatic or truthful nature of the statement (House, 414).[40305]

One further thought remains on this phrase. The poet actually has good grounds to say that Israel's survival is a testimony to the fact that God's lovingkindnesses have not ceased. The plural of חֶסֶד does not occur often in the Hebrew Bible, but one of the four times (including this verse) it is used is in Isa 63:7. There, it discusses in context not only how God acted for his people in the past but will do so when they go into exile so as to bring an end to exile. In fact, Isa 63:7 also contains the terms רַב ("great") and רַחֲמִים ("compassion") found in this verse and the next. These terms suggest that Isa 63:7 is part of the background of the poet's statement here. Overall, the poet in the first hemistich assures the people that God's omnipotent acts have not ceased but will continue to end the exile. To put it in Jeremianic terms, God will not only tear down but build up (Jer 1:10).

The next hemistich affirms this as well. It speaks of God's unfailing compassion (לֹא־כָלוּ רַחֲמָיו). The term "compassion" (רַחֲמִים) refers to the feeling of tenderness or care similar to a mother's concern for her child (1 Kgs 3:26).[40316] As stated above, a reader might have believed that such love was now gone because of God's recent actions. However, the poet proclaims that this is also not the case. His compassions have not failed. The term for "fail" (כָלוּ) refers to having exhausted a supply (Gen 21:15; 1 Kgs 17:14). Has God spent all his love for Israel? This statement answers with an emphatic "No." Not only will God continue to work for them, he also still truly feels for them. This sentiment is rooted in past theological statements about God's compassion (and lovingkindness). This extends back to Exod 34:6–8, where Israel sinned but God forgave because of his compassion (Dearman, 459). The covenant continues toward the fulfillment of its promises even in judgment because of God's grace and mercy. God through the prophets later promises eschatological blessings that will conclude the exile because he is compassionate (Deut 30:1–11; Joel 2:13–14). In sum, neither God's disposition nor his intervention have been exhausted; they will continue through the exile. The poet knows that God has not determined to end his relationship with his people, but rather to end the exile.

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[29] KJV King James Version

[30] 405 *IBHS*, §39.3.4e, 665.

[31] 406 *HALOT*, 2:1218.

3:23 *Line 2: Depth of God's Goodness*. The next line amplifies the previous one. While v. 22 dealt with the continuity of God's kindness, this verse deals with its greatness or abundance. Put differently, v. 22 deals with the breadth of God's goodness, whereas this verse deals with its depth. The poet expands on the lovingkindnesses and compassions of God in the previous verse by stating that they are new every morning (חֲדָשִׁים לַבְּקָרִים).[40327] The term "new" can denote something that is new in the sense that it has never existed before (Exod 1:8; Jer 31:31; Isa 62:2; 65:17), but it can also mean renewing or refreshing something in order to return it to its original pristine state or being (1 Sam 6:7). The two are not mutually exclusive in this case. God's compassions and lovingkindnesses do not wane from day to day. Rather, they are made new every morning (חֲדָשִׁים לַבְּקָרִים). God's readiness to intervene for Israel is at its peak all the time. This demonstrates that God's love for his people even in exile is not only constant, but is still as grand as it was in the past.

Such "newness" has implications that seem to dovetail with the theology of Jeremiah. Most noticeably, Jeremiah's conception of a "new covenant" (Jer 31:31), which encompasses how God will perform "new things" (Jer 31:22), may be in the background. It is certainly in the background of how God will end exile based on his compassions, as discussed above.[40338] Thus, when God's mercies are renewed, he will end exile and establish a new covenant to do so. In this way, the writer exhibits the "depth" of God's lovingkindness. It is full and will accomplish the promised spectacular work. That is the depth of God's goodness; it transforms and makes new as it is constantly renewed.

Similarly, as the next hemistich proclaims, God's faithfulness is great (רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתֶךָ). "Great" does not refer to magnitude, but rather to a multitude. The same term has described Jerusalem's past population (1:1), servitude (1:3), transgression (1:5), and pain (1:22). In contrast, God's loyalty far surpasses the multitude of sufferings or sins. His acts of faithfulness abound more than his work of judgment. He will keep his promises to the end, no matter what might occur—as the previous hemistich implied (Berlin, 93). This is a God whose covenant love will make all things new; his plentiful faithfulness will accomplish that reality.

3:24 *Line 3: Result of Hope*. As a result of these realizations, the poet now reacts to his meditation. This is essentially the opposite of what he said earlier (v. 18). He proclaims that YHWH is his portion (חֶלְקִי יְהוָה). The term "portion" refers to a share of spoils or an inheritance (Berlin, 93; Parry, 101–2). The phrase is used frequently in Psalms to denote the writer's complete satisfaction in God (Pss 16:5; 73:26; 119:57). The idea is that the writer is content in God and desires nothing beyond him (House, 368; Bergant, 9; Berlin, 93–94).[40349] Such a sentiment is reasonable in light of the context. After all, the poet has proclaimed that God's goodness and mercy have not ended and are the only factors that will cause the exile to end. The poet has nothing left but God, and he is all that he needs.

[32407] The notion of "every morning" comes from the plural.

[33408] B. K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Cannonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 163.

[34409] Berlin sees having God as one's portion as submitting to God's sovereignty. The idea is arguably stronger than that.

This change of attitude surprises the reader. Before, the poet did not even name YHWH until v. 18 because of his sorrow. Now, he proclaims that he is completely satisfied in him. Verses 22–23 are truly transformative. Even the use of the phrase "says my soul" (אָמְרָה נַפְשִׁי) demonstrates that reversal of thought. The poet's "soul" or inner being had previously been bereft of peace (3:17) and bowed down to the dust (3:20). In this verse, the poet's inner being exclaims its contentment and joy.

The final hemistich of this tricolon sums up the theology of these three lines. The poet declares that he will hope in God (עַל־כֵּן אוֹחִיל לוֹ). The phrase refers back to v. 21, which proclaimed that the poet remembered "this" and thus had hope. This tricolon has defined the "this," and the latter half of this verse resumes that sentiment found in v. 21. The "therefore" refers to the entirety of vv. 22–24.[41350] "Hope" is an expectant waiting for God's work.[41361] Whereas before the poet was about to give up, here he finds the strength to persevere. This is not a vain hope or wishful thinking. Rather, it is rooted in the fact that the writer is determined to wait upon God (אוֹחִיל לוֹ).[41372] As defined in context, this is the God whose work continues as well as his goodwill. The depth or greatness of this divine work will fulfill all God's promises in a new covenant to bring an end to exile and make things new. Such a God is the only solution to the depth of the poet's despair and pain. Only such a God is capable of breaking through the exile and all its pain, thereby providing hope. Thus the writer hopes in him.

Biblical Theology Comments

This section is replete with different strands that relate to the single theme of the eschatological end of exile. For example, the poet's disposition of remembering echoes what Moses said needed to be manifest for the exile to end (Deut 30:1–2). Lamentations fills out what Moses announced in Deuteronomy. These are the words the remnant will speak to fulfill what Moses envisioned in Deuteronomy.

The poet also appeals to God's character. God's lovingkindness, compassion, and faithfulness are all mentioned in conjunction with the exodus. It appears that the forgiveness offered Israel when they worshiped the golden calf (Exod 32:1–25; 34:6–8) is the anchor for how the poet views a future forgiveness and resolution to exile. Along with other texts (cf. 1:2; Isa 43:16–20), this plays into a new exodus motif. God's character of deliverance and forgiveness that was on display in the first exodus compels and will be revealed in a greater event. By reflecting on God's character in these ways, the poet shows the surety of a glorious hope. Nothing (not even Israel's sin) will stop a new exodus from happening. God's lovingkindness will not end, and his compassion never falls short of his goal.

Intertwined with a new exodus is the very concept of "newness." As noted in the comments on v. 23, this does not merely refer to renewing or refreshing something, but rather probably intersects with God's activity in producing a new covenant and a new creation. The term "renew" both in Hebrew and Greek (see Rom 12:2) seems to link to that overarching reality.

[35410] This also makes sense, since everything in v. 24 is contingent on the prior verses. At least contextually, the "therefore" refers to those verses as well.

[36411] See *HALOT*, 1:407 and cf. 1 Sam 10:8; Pss 38:16; 42:6, 12; 103:5.

[37412] The impf. is volitional, denoting his willpower to wait.

Moses, in discussing how the exile would end, not only predicts the need for genuine repentance, but also how God would accomplish this: the radical transformation of the heart. That is entailed in a new covenant where the law would be placed upon the heart (Jer 31:31–33). Appropriately, in displaying the end of exile, the poet alludes to the workings surrounding the new covenant. God's mercies are new every morning, so as to make all things new. That, too, is part of his hope.

In sum, this passage is a deep meditation and reflection on what Moses stated about the end of exile and how the prophets have developed this core idea. Whether it is remembering and repentance, God's lovingkindness and faithfulness, or newness and new covenant, the poet thinks upon God's person and plan, giving him a transforming conviction of hope. He knows his God is faithful and will work out a plan to end exile and make all things new. In this way, Lam 3:19–24 not only fleshes out the glorious transformation of the exile's end, but also the impetus behind it: God's new covenant work based upon his lovingkindness, and the human response of repentance.

Application and Devotional Implications

The entire book of Lamentations has been setting up for this text, with its stress on the travail of exile. It has forced the reader to ask tough questions about life in exile and provided only small glimpses into God's future plan (1:18–22; 2:20–22). What was hinted at before now comes into full view; the overwhelming glory of God's faithfulness and lovingkindness now becomes a critical part of the book.

The lesson that modern-day believers may take from this is that there is nothing wrong with asking the hard questions, but at the same time one's meditating must move, as the poet's did, to the unquestionable character of God and how that is worked out in his plan. One must deeply reflect upon the nature of God's lovingkindness, faithfulness, and compassion in times of distress. One can even go back to the exodus events to see demonstrations of that character, knowing full well that a greater exodus is to come. This directs one's eyes from the present to the eschatological, which is an important part of grief. One can certainly mourn, but not without hope (1 Thess 4:13). Hope, however, can only come from richly contemplating who God is and what he has done. Anything else is a superficial substitute.

The words of this section formulate the core of hope. Believers hope in a God whose character is good, faithful, and true, and who will never fail. They thereby have confidence that newness will come just as the morning arises. Hope involves not only a proactive expectation but also a lack of entanglement in worry. It entails a contented waiting for God's action as opposed to one's own intervention. In addition, this passage reminds us that hope needs to be fought for. Instead of being passive, we must consciously recall and focus our hearts on God's nature. While the rest of the chapter will flesh out confession, suffering, human responsibility, and God's character, Lam 3:19–24 provides the summary description of all those factors. It is the core of Christian hope in exile. Believers would do well to meditate on all the dynamics of hoping in God found in this text.[38]

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[38] Abner Chou, *Lamentations: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), La 3:22–24.

22 The speaker bases this renewed hope on "the infinite compassion of the Lord" (Keil, 413). Two key terms define God's character. The speaker affirms that "the LORD's (acts of) covenant mercy" (חסדי יהוה) "indeed" (an asseverative כי; Gordis, 179) "have not/never cease" (לא תמנו; see *Note* 22.b[39].). God's חסד, "covenant mercy," "describes the disposition and beneficent actions of God toward the faithful, Israel his people, and humanity in general" (*NIDOTT[40]E*, 2:211). Not even the coming of the day of the Lord against Jerusalem signals the end of God's covenant mercy. If this is true, then nothing can exhaust the divine impulse to act graciously. The speaker asserts that "indeed [a second asseverative כי] his (acts of) compassion never end." The term for "compassion" comes from רחם, a word that "signifies a warm compassion, a compassion which goes the second mile, which is ready to forgive sin, to replace judgment with grace" (*NIDOTT[41]E*, 3:1094). God's willingness to start fresh after this horrible period of sin followed by judgment is not in doubt, at least in the speaker's mind.

This confession coincides with at least two significant covenantal passages. In Exod 34:6–7, Yahweh states that he will renew the covenant that Israel broke through the golden calf incident because he is "compassionate and gracious" (רחום וחנון) "and full of mercy and faithfulness" (ורב חסד ואמת). In Deut 30:1–11, Moses promises that even though all the covenant consequences found in Deut 27–28 might befall Israel, if they turn back to Yahweh and obey him the Lord will have compassion (ורחמך) and restore them to the covenantal relationship as well as to the land. Joel 2:13–14 and Jonah 4:2 combine the elements of God's character found in Exod 34:6–7 with the possibility of repentance found in Deut 30:1–10. Like Lamentations, these texts occur in a context of judgment, though of the two only Joel 2:13–14 seems to presuppose the actual experiencing of disaster.

Thus, Lam 3:22 agrees with one of the most extraordinary teachings in the OT. Though Israel sinned against God through idolatry, immorality, oppression, and other forms of long-term covenantal adultery to such an extent that he finally punishes severely, the Lord will still start over with penitent Israelites. In other words, God's determination to bless and heal is as thorough and unusual as his determination to punish, if not more so. The road back to covenantal relationship may well be long and difficult, especially given the level of sin and the depth of punishment. Nonetheless, it is possible to begin.

23 With this understanding of God's covenant mercy and compassion in mind, the speaker further confesses that "they" (either the plural חסדי, "[acts of] mercy," or the חסדי, "[acts of] mercy," and רחמיו, "[acts of] compassion," taken together) are "new every morning" (חדשים

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[39]22.b. This translation reads תמו with the Syr. and Aram. versions. See Gottlieb for a defense of this decision (*Study on the Text*, 45–46), and see Albrektson (*Studies in the Text and Theology*, 145–46) for a defense of MT.

[40]*NIDOTTE New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Ed. W.A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, MI, 1997.

[41]*NIDOTTE New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Ed. W.A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, MI, 1997.

לבקרים). As Reyburn (*Handbook*, 86) explains, the word "new" does not mean "something that never existed before, but rather a fresh renewal of what has been experienced before." Each new day the proofs of God's grace flow from his compassionate nature (Keil, 414). Each new day dawns with the possibility of covenant renewal for a punished people. This opportunity lasts as long as God lasts since it is grounded in his personal character.

At this point the speaker praises God directly by declaring "great is your faithfulness" (רבה אמונתך). Renkema (389) states that "faithfulness" expresses "a characteristic of God in relationship with a human person made manifest in his deeds. Characteristics of such fidelity are consistency, stability, truth, and permanence." God's covenantal fidelity and integrity remain intact no matter how things may seem. Human beings may not wish it were so, but judgment for sin as promised proves this faithfulness. Gratefully, so does God's promise to start anew with a terribly compromised covenant partner, and it is this facet of Yahweh's faithfulness that the speaker affirms here.

24 This verse completes the speaker's change of attitude from despair to nascent hope. The same soul that in 3:17 claims to reject peace claims here "The Lord is my portion" (חלקי יהוה). This confession leads to a reversal of 3:18, where the speaker claims his hope has perished, for he now claims that because God is his portion, "therefore [על כן] I will hope in him [אוחיל לו]." This last phrase coincides with the "therefore I will hope/have hope" (על כן אוחיל) in 3:21, so the repetition underscores the renewal of the once-lost hope.

This renewal stems from the speaker's beliefs about God's character in covenantal context stated in 3:20–23. It also stems from the speaker's willingness to let God be his portion, or his reward. Two passages illustrate this attitude. In Num 18:20 God tells the Levites that they have no inheritance or portion in the land but states, "I am your portion" (אני חלקך). The Levites had to abandon all other plans for inheritance. Similarly, in Ps 73:26, a psalm in which the poet confesses God's goodness (73:1) yet also the poet's own questions about that goodness, the poet confesses that God is "my portion" (וחלקי). So the psalmist no longer cares how the wicked prosper; instead, he focuses on the goodness of having God for a refuge. Simply stated, God is enough to satisfy the writer, and the same is apparently true of the speaker in Lam 3:24.

25–39 The speaker extends his discussion to include instances of what it is good for a person to do in the present circumstances, given that God is good (vv 25–30). He then proceeds to emphasize God's justice (vv 31–36) and sovereignty (vv 37–39). As he does so, the speaker continues to rebuild the assurance and hope declared lost in 3:1–18. He instructs his readers so that they may discover and share the truth he has learned.

25 Vv 25–27 all begin with the word טוב, "good." This first verse offers the consistent biblical confession that "The Lord is good" (טוב יהוה), which is also found in such diverse texts as Pss 34:9 (E[42]T 34:8) and 86:5, Hos 3:5, and Neh 9:25 (see Keil, 414; Renkema, 392, for a discussion of these texts and God's goodness). Yet God's goodness has a specific focus here. God is good "to those who wait for him" (לקוו); God is good "to the soul who seeks him" (תדרשנו).

This assertion agrees with both prophetic and psalmic texts. Ps 34:9–11 (E[43]T 34:8–10) invites readers to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (34:9), asserts that "the man who takes refuge in him" is blessed (34:9), and concludes that "those who seek the Lord lack no good

[42]ET English translation

[43]ET English translation

thing" (34:11). The usage of "the LORD is good" (טוב יהוה), "the man" (לגבר), and "those who seek the LORD" (ודרשי יהוה), all of which have near equivalents in Lam 3:25–27, indicates that, even if one of the passages does not quote the other, they certainly share a common theology and vocabulary. They are also both evidently wisdom oriented. Amos 5:4 and 5:6 exhort readers to "seek the LORD" (דרשו את יהוה), and Amos 5:14 tells them to "seek good and not evil" (דרשו טוב ואל רע), which indicates that seeking the Lord and seeking good are synonymous. Those who truly desire the Lord enough to seek him diligently will receive good from the Lord.

26 Though the phrase "it is good to wait silently" (טוב ויחיל ודומם) is a rare construction in the OT (see Note 26.a[44].), the concept of waiting silently for God's deliverance certainly is not (see Pss 37:9; 62:2, 6 [E[45]T 62:1, 5]). Lam 2:10 describes the elders of Zion sitting in stupefied silence. This silence, however, seems to be one of expectation. Renkema (396) argues that this silence in 3:26 "ought to be understood as more than simply sitting in a sort of paralyzed amazement. The present text speaks rather of a tenacious intensification of 'being silent,' of a conscious option for remaining silent." In other words, this text transforms silence from a posture of the defeated to one of the soon-to-be delivered. Further, this silence does not preclude prayer, given 2:11–19 and 3:19–24. Thus, the silence heightens the waiting that will eventually be rewarded with "the salvation of the LORD" (לתשועת יהוה), though at this point the speaker does not specify what such salvation entails.[46]

22 If *this* in v. 21 looks forward, then it refers to what v. 22 says. *Commitment* (*ḥesed*) is a noun denoting the allegiance or self-giving that one person may show to another when there is no established basis for doing so, or the faithfulness or constancy that one person may show to another when the other person has forfeited any right to it because they have been unfaithful. The conventional English translations are "steadfast love" and "constant love." The noun comes hundreds of times in the singular, and it makes for yet another link with Pss 42:8[9]; 44:26[27], but it occurs less than a score of times in the plural to denote *acts of commitment* that give concrete expression to the quality (e.g., Pss 17:7; 25:6; 89:1[2]; 107:43). Here, in the parallelism, the man recalls Yahweh's *compassion* (*raḥămîm*), the infinite mercies of God that are a "cape of good hope."[5473] This word is also plural, and one might understand it to imply acts of compassion, but it is regularly plural to denote the quality it refers to. It is related to the term for a woman's womb, so that it can suggest the feelings a mother has for her child or that a child has for the other children who came from the same womb. The man's declaration, the *this*

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[44]26.a. The construction ויחיל ודומם, "and strength and silence," is very rare. Several emendations have been offered. See Albrektson, *Studies in the Text and Theology*, 146–48, for a thorough discussion.

[45]ET English translation

[46] Duane Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, vol. 23B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 2004), 414–416.

[4753] Trapp, *Commentary*, on the verse.

that makes it possible to avoid giving in to final despair, is that actions that emerge from commitment have meant *we have not come to an end* and that compassion on Yahweh's part *has not become spent*. The logic of the comment is that the fact that we have not come to an end (which is obviously true, otherwise he and the people who read or listen to this poem would not be reading or listening) is evidence that Yahweh has not abandoned his commitment, that his compassion has not become spent. The man is not just making a bold statement of faith; he is making a logical inference from some facts (T[48]g's rendering, "Yahweh's commitments have not come to an end," likely has the same implication). The statement, along with the facts on which it is based, mitigates the doctrine of retribution[5494] and at the same time "agrees with one of the most extraordinary teachings in the OT,"[5505] expressed in Exod 34:6–7 at a moment of horrifying waywardness, horrifying chastisement, but manifest mercy. The man is haunted by the memory of this Yahweh,[5516] whose mercy here presupposed in Lamentations has paralleled that mercy.[5527] It is perhaps possible to make such affirmations too early, when one has not owned the despair-threatening nature of one's situation or has not allowed someone else to own it. While Yahweh *might* have been the subject of the statements in vv. 1–18, it is explicit that he is the subject here.[5538] Positive namings of Yahweh are now possible; the man is now okay about making Yahweh the subject of affirmative statements. He moves from concrete experiential images for pain to key theological concepts for comfort. Lamentations as a whole has certainly not rushed to make these affirmations of God's faithfulness; it has waited until chapter 3.[5549] And the development within Lam 3 parallels that within Job, where Yahweh's appearing to Job pulls him to submission by a different dynamic. In Lam 3, Yahweh does not appear; its testimony suggests that the faithful, if they are wise, will "with the one eye looke upon their owne miseries and with the other, upon the mercies of the Lord,"[6550] as Pss 42–43 model.

The way these lines have inspired hymns reflects the way Lamentations melds theology and spirituality. Among many examples is John Keble's:

> New every morning is the love
> Our wakening and uprising prove;
> Through sleep and darkness safely brought, Restored to life and power and thought.

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[48]Tg Targum, as printed in A. Sperber, *The Hagiographa*, vol. 4a of *The Bible in Aramaic* (Leiden: Brill, 1968)

[4954] V. F. Fernández, "Tiempo de llorar para seguir esperando: Lamentaciones 3 en su contexto," *Revista Teología* 45 (2008): 120.

[5055] House, *Lamentations*, 414.

[5156] See J. Gericke, "Spectres of Yhwh: Some Hauntological Remarks on Lamentations 3," *Scriptura* 110 (2012): 166–75.

[5257] But A. Lo emphasizes the much greater stress on wrath in Lamentations in "Exodus 32–34 and Lamentations: A Comparison of Sin Punishment, and Confession," in Melton and H. A. Thomas, *Reading Lamentations Intertextually*.

[5358] M. L. Mitchell, "Reading of the Imagery of Lamentations," 139.

[5459] R. R. Roberts, "Lamentations 3," *Int* 6 (2013): 198.

[5560] Toussaine, *Lamentations*, 115; cf. Tyler, *Jeremiah*, *Lamentations*, 486.

New mercies, each returning day,
Hover around us while we pray;
New perils past, new sins forgiven,
New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.

Lamentations is not just theory, and it is not concerned with theodicy—certainly not as a theoretical exercise—but neither is it just piety. As the poem melds theology and spirituality, it makes key theological statements about God. But part of its point in doing so is to lean on Yahweh to be himself.[6561]

23 The man restates the point by declaring that Yahweh's *truthfulness* (*ʾĕmûnâ*) *is great*; truthfulness implies reliability and steadfastness. Yahweh's threats through Jeremiah had been that darkness would fall and it would be the end; creation would be undone (Jer 4:23–28; 13:15–17; see also, classically, Amos 5:18–20). But actually, the sun still rises each day. Yahweh's commitment and compassion are *new each morning*. Each new day is like a new day of creation, manifesting Yahweh's faithfulness.[6572] Each morning there is a burst of new light.[6583] The affirmation makes for a nice contrast with the reference to darkness in v. 2.[6594] Perhaps more is implied by the word *new*. To put it in a superficially contradictory way, "God's new activity distinguishes itself radically from his old," like the new heavens, the new covenant, and the new mind (Isa 65:17; Jer 31:31; Ezek 18:31).[6605] *New* (*ḥādāš*) thus implies "something unique and special … a new and hitherto unheard of deed of Yhwh, for example, which gives rise to a new song … something unexpected and unanticipated."[6616] "His assured faithfulnesse, and constant veritie" are "the verie efficient cause of the renewing of the Church, and of the graces of the Lord."[6627]

24 Whence come the man's convictions? Two considerations come together. One is that fact that the end did not come, that Yahweh's bite was not as bad as his bark. The other is that alongside this fact and against his "internally persuasive experience of pain" the man sets "the authoritative discourse of religious tradition … to assert Yhwh's ongoing fidelity and integrity, seeking an antidote to his extreme experience to the contrary."[6638] It is, indeed, the dynamic in Yahweh's speeches in Job. The man has reminded himself that commitment, compassion, and truthfulness are just part of Yahweh's being Yahweh and part of the fact that Yahweh is his *share* (*ḥēleq).* In a down-to-earth sense, a share is one of the expressions for the tract of land allocated to a clan (e.g., Josh 18:5–10), but Israel is also referred to as Yahweh's "share" (Deut

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[5661] W. C. Bouzard, "Boxed by the Orthodox: The Function of Lamentations 3:22–39 in the Message of the Book," in *Why?… How Long? Studies on Voice(s) of Lamentation Rooted in Biblical Hebrew Poetry*, ed. L. S. Flesher, C. J. Dempsey, and M. J. Boda, LHBOTS 552 (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 68–82.

[5762] Cf. Alexander, *Targum of Lamentations*, 150.

[5863] Koenen, *Klagelieder*, 246.

[5964] Theodoret, *Thrēnoi*, PG 81:796.

[6065] Koenen, *Klagelieder*, 246.

[6166] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 388.

[6267] Toussaine, *Lamentations*, 119 (cf. Tyler, *Jeremiah*, *Lamentations*, 488).

[6368] Bier, " 'We Have Sinned'," 161; cf. Bier, *"Perhaps There Is Hope"*, 125.

32:9) and Yahweh as Israel's (Pss 16:5; 73:26; 119:57). The man's point is that Yahweh belongs to him as surely as his family's tract of land belongs to his family. That fact underlies Yahweh's not having given up on his commitment, compassion, and truthfulness and is the basis for knowing that Yahweh will not do so. The man has reminded himself of these facts—or as he puts it, his self (his *nepeš*) has so reminded him. The picture of him and his spirit in conversation again recalls Pss 42:5[6], 11[12]; 43:5. There he is talking to his spirit (here alone does someone's spirit "say" something to them), but in both contexts, the expressions presuppose the odd but familiar idea of our arguing with ourselves. Here, the comment is a neat, gutsy, assertive footnote to his words in v. 17 about Yahweh rejecting his spirit and a gutsy follow-up to his ambiguous comment about his spirit being mindful and bowed down in v. 20. His spirit's assertiveness issues in his now having the expectation that had perished in v. 18, and the declaration *as a result I have expectation* forms a frame around vv. 21–24.

tet [25]*Yahweh is good to the person who has hopes of him,*[64a]
to the individual who inquires of him,[65b]
[26]*Good, yes, to the one expectant*[66c] *and in stillness*[67d]
regarding Yahweh's deliverance,
[27]*Good to a man*
when he takes up the yoke in his youth.

25 The "I" now disappears until v. 49. While the poet might have the man speaking through vv. 25–39, the transition to speaking in the third person about *the person who has hopes of him* is pointed after the threefold *I*/*my* in v. 24, and the precedent of preceding poems suggests that the poet now has a different speaker uttering some generalizations on the basis of what the man has confessed. The transition parallels (in reverse) the move within Lam 1 between the more distanced reporting voice and the involved Ms. Zion voice. It is clearer than it was in v. 24 that we are hearing "the voice of tradition" here,[6689] that the voice of wisdom speaks.[7690] The poem turns from the narrative of a unique experience to an affirmation of teaching expressing

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[64a] I follow the *ketiv*'s *lqww*; the *qere* has *ləqōwāyw*, "the people who have hopes of him."
[65b] Or is it "to the woman who inquires of him," since the verb is feminine? See M. I. Gruber and S. Yona, "A Male Speaker's Obsession with the Feminine: The Strange Case of Lamentations 3," in Embry, *Megilloth Studies*, 74–75. One would then render the preceding colon "good to the man who"; masculine and feminine would complement each other.
[66c] *Ṭôb wəyāḥîl* (lit. "good and expectant"). As the *ṭ*-word, *good* has to come first, which generates an odd word order; one could see the colon as involving a quasi-extraposition. LXX, Vg, Tg imply "it is good that one should be expectant."
[67d] *Dûmām* is apparently a noun used adverbially; BDB and *HALOT* give two different explanations. The relationship between *dûm*, *dāmâ*, and *dāmam* is also "controversial" (*HALOT*, 216), but the meaning of each would overlap in practice. The colon as a whole is elliptically expressed, but no single emendation commends itself (see Koenen, *Klagelieder*, 194–95; GK 107q).
[6869] B. Savarikannu, "A Polyphonic Reading of Lamentations 3," *Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology* 20 (2016): 31.
[6970] Kraus, *Klagelieder*, 55–56.

generalizations that fit the narrative and make links with the man's recent experience. A further difference supporting the impression that we have a different speaker from vv. 1–24 is the way each of the following stanzas shows some consistency in the working of each of the three lines in a stanza. The form of expression as well as the content thus recalls Proverbs. First, each of the *tet* lines begins with *ṭôb*, the word *good* that the man put out of mind in v. 17. Far from allowing it to be put out of mind, the poem now says good, good, good. The statements thus also conflict with much of the rest of Lamentations.[7701] This is not to say that they are an illegitimate distortion of the real message of Lamentations, as if the very word "tradition" implied something illegitimate. The polyphonic nature of the scroll means it embraces the truths expressed in these verses without allowing them to silence its characteristic laments and protests—as the last part of this poem will indicate. Here, the stress on Yahweh's goodness following on the reference to his commitment suggests another resonance with Ps 23, [7712] of a more positive kind than the one evoked by vv. 1–3. The declarations about Yahweh's goodness also compare and contrast with the ones in the *tet* stanza of Ps 119, though there the stress lies on the link between goodness and Torah, whereas here the stress lies on Yahweh's goodness to the man who suffers but turns to him.[7723]

First, Yahweh is indeed *good to the person who has hopes of him* (*qāwâ*); indirectly, the commentator refers to the man who has been giving his testimony, confirming his comment and turning it into a generalization for the benefit of people listening to the poem. The generalization sums up something of key importance that Israel knows about Yahweh, which the man's words have now reconfirmed despite the experience with Yahweh that he has been going through. To speak of having hopes (*qāwâ*; cf. v. 29) is another way to describe having expectations (*yāḥal*, vv. 21, 24; cf. vv. 18, 26) and looking to Yahweh. Yet another way of describing such a person is as one *who inquires of him*. In the background here is perhaps the recognition that one of the failures that led to the catastrophe was that people made inquiry in other directions (e.g., Jer 10:21).

26 To put it that other way, Yahweh is good to the person who has this expectancy, which has become a key motif. In the circumstances, it had been hard for the man to be *expectant* for anything, let alone for Yahweh's deliverance, yet now he is being so expectant; again the commentator makes him an example. That expectancy goes along with stillness—a more positive stillness than the one to which 2:10 referred (see also 2:18), a positive quietism that issues from trust (though admittedly, "if the man had followed this advice, there would be no poem"[7734]). The silent waiting gains its dynamic through the clear focus on Yahweh's help[74]

[7071] Cf. Bier, *"Perhaps There Is Hope"*, 124.

[7172] P. van Hecke, "Lamentations 3,1–6: An Anti-Psalm 23," *SJOT* 16 (2002): 274–75.

[7273] Berges, *Klagelieder*, 201.

[7374] M. L. Mitchell, "Reading of the Imagery of Lamentations," 142.

[74] John Goldingay, *The Book of Lamentations*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2022), 137–142.