

INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 4, NUMBER 1

Welcome to Volume 4, Number 1 of the *Global South Theological Journal*. This issue features two papers adapted from the third annual Yonas Deressa Lecture Series, hosted by the Mekane Yesus Seminary in Addis Ababa on April 8-10, 2025. The speaker for this series was Dr. Reed Lessing of Concordia University in St. Paul. His lectures offered an exploration into the enduring relevance of the biblical book of Lamentations for contemporary Christian life, particularly in navigating grief, suffering, and trauma.

The overall theme uniting Dr. Lessing's lectures is the assertion that the book of Lamentations is not merely a relic of ancient history but a vital, transformative resource for believers today. He argues that embracing lamentation, as exemplified in the book, is essential for emotional and spiritual authenticity, a pathway to healing, and a necessary means of engaging with God and the world's pain. The sources highlight the danger of rejecting Lamentations in favor of superficial positivity, suggesting that this leads to a loss of the ability to confront injustice, express vulnerability, and engage deeply with God during times of suffering.

The first paper, "Lamentations for Today: Part 1," delves into the book's raw portrayal of grief, despair, and suffering following the destruction of Jerusalem. It emphasizes Lamentations' universal resonance with human pain and loss, despite its brutal imagery and accusations against God. The text begins and ends with sorrow, prompting questions about its place in the Bible due to its relentless brutality. Todd Linafelt describes it as "A more relentlessly brutal piece of writing is scarcely imaginable," affronting the reader with harsh and violent images. However, the paper argues that Lamentations offers a pathway to spiritual healing by encouraging honest expressions of sorrow and lament. It challenges the tendency in Western culture and Christian worship to suppress grief, arguing that lamenting is essential for emotional and spiritual authenticity. The book hangs on, sometimes precariously, to God's faithfulness, notably in Lamentations 3:23, which asserts, "Great is thy faithfulness," a verse that "bursts forth with hope" within the context of unspeakable despair. By omitting specific historical details and using conventional descriptions, the book adopts a "deliberately universalizing" style, allowing readers from any generation to relate to its chaos and disorder and make its prayers their own. Ultimately, Lamentations is Yahweh's "yes" to express grief and sorrow, inviting believers to place their shattered hearts into God's hands and face life's setbacks honestly, serving every successive generation of the suffering faithful.

The second paper, "Lamentations for Today: Part 2," focuses specifically on the book's relevance in addressing trauma and grief. It discusses the destructive impact of trauma, including PTSD, which can silence victims and trap them in pain. Trauma can destroy a person's capacity to tell their story, leaving them with fragmented memories but unable to combine them into a coherent narrative. The paper critiques linear models of grief like Kübler-Ross's stages, instead emphasizing the importance of lament as a transformative process for healing. Lamentations is identified as trauma literature, with its vivid depictions of famine, rape, and destruction mirroring the experiences of trauma survivors, offering them a voice. The author of Lamentations gives "words to replace silence, and he resurrects personal agency." Finding a language for pain is crucial for those afflicted. Verbalizing pain helps survivors integrate their experiences, reclaim agency, and reconnect with God and community. Denial is presented as a harmful response that dismisses pain and avoids naming it. Lamentations refuses to "whitewash what happened," encouraging readers to name their pain and lament their loss, which allows truth to surface and the past to loosen its grip. It helps traumatized people reconnect with God by providing a language of lament, a cry of pain. The paper underscores that the only healthy way to address pain is to go through it, as denial leads to negative consequences, and "Pain kept from speech pushed underground and denied, will turn and twist and tunnel like a ferret until it grows in those lightless spaces into a violent, unrecognizable monster." Lamentations helps in "reclaiming our humanity" and "breaking through our denial," offering a biblical framework for navigating grief and loss.

Together, these papers articulate why Lamentations remains a vital part of the Christian canon, challenging believers to confront suffering and trauma with honesty and faith. We are pleased to present them here.

The editors