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A CHOIR IN LAMENT:
THE DIALOGIC THEOLOGY OF INCESSANT INVOCATION IN LAMENTATIONS

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANE	Ancient Near East
ANET	Pritchard, James B. Ed. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
ANVIL	*Anglican Evangelical Journal for Theology and Mission*
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
BDB	F. Brown, S. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. Eds. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic: Coded with the Numbering System from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1906. *Thirteenth printing*, August 2010.
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
DJer	Daughter Jerusalem
DV	Didactic Voice
DZ	Daughter Zion
GKC	Gesensius, Wilhelm, A. E. Cowley, and E. Kautzsch. *Gesensius' Hebrew Grammar, as Edited and Enlarged by E. Kautzsch, Revised by A. E. Cowley*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910.
HB	Hebrew Bible
HBT	*Horizons in Biblical Theology*
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
IRT	Issues in Religion and Theology
JANESCU	*Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
KAT	Kommentar zum alten Testament

LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
LHB/OTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NCBC	The New Century Bible Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLSCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SOFS	Symbolae osloenses fasciculus suppletoris
SSN	Studia semittica neerlandica
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttetestamentliche Wissenschaft*

ABSTRACT

The book of Lamentations is comprised of five acrostic poems that relate to the tragedy of the Babylonian siege and destruction of the temple around 587 BCE. Many commentators and scholars of Lamentations speak of the competing voices that are to be found in the text. This reflects the fact that there are mixed messages present in Lamentations. The poems both accuse and vindicate God. Moreover, the text presents the calamity of the Israelites as the punishment for both the sins of the generation of Israelites at the time of the Babylonian captivity and that of Israel's ancestors. God does not will evil for those afflicted. Still, it is God who commands both good and evil. These are some examples of the varying ideas expressed in Lamentations. The presence of mixed messages in the text does not necessarily mean that the work contradicts itself, nor does it imply that there are multiple writers reflected therein. In using the methodological tools provided by speech-act theory, dialogical hermeneutics and Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of a polyphonic work, the present thesis looks to show how the nature of Lamentations is that of a question rather than an answer. The book is a question which finds its answer through the response of readers. Lamentations provokes and invites readers to join its mournful cry. It invites its audience to join a community ravaged by war in the incessant and urgent invocation of God for answers, respite, and ultimately, redemption.

INTRODUCTION

The following study began with an inquiry into the theology of OT laments. A striking feature of biblical lament literature is the overt expression of suffering and abandonment that they express. And, it is no secret as to whom these poems address: they are directed at God. Indeed, laments in the Bible often seem confrontational as the lamenter would boldly declare God's rejection of his people and his anger with them. Sometimes this declaration is expressed through a question, i.e. the opening verse of Ps. 13, "How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" (NRSV). And, at other times, it is a statement, or rather, an accusation. Such is the case in Ps. 60:1-4 where God is the source of the people's affliction. Though the affliction of these poets may be associated with punishment for transgression, laments often make no mention of any sin perpetrated by the sufferer to warrant their circumstances. However, we do see lamenters choosing to remain faithful to God despite the wrong that God had done against them, i.e. Ps. 44:17-19. In this case, God is the one not living up to his covenant relationship with Israel (cf. Ps. 74:20), or perhaps the community is overcoming a test of faith brought upon them by hardships. Nevertheless, most laments also present hope, praise, and an undying trust in the righteousness and mercies of God. The praise that these laments express toward God nicely counterbalances the misfortune and misery depicted elsewhere, making the lament poem a model example of reverent petition. But, sometimes this balance is absent. Some laments are just too depressing and lack any hope or praise whatsoever, i.e. Ps. 88. Meanwhile, others may express an all too brief word of praise that does little in affecting or redirecting the bleak tone of the poem. Such poems became the focus of my inquiry as I began to consider theodicy and the problem of evil in respect to OT theology. I decided to orient my efforts toward

the book of Lamentations which, in my opinion, provides a complete picture of the character of OT laments and the controversies and difficulties with their interpretation.

Theology in the OT is not always straightforward, and a number of diverse, and at times conflicting, ideas can be drawn from biblical texts, depending on the range of literature being examined. This fact is evident from the vastness of the scholarship present on any given topic of OT theology. The overarching theology of the OT will always be a subject of contention and is itself subject to interpretation. I mention this as a word of caution concerning my own theological insights in this study. They do not, and cannot, apply to the entirety of the body of texts found in biblical scripture. For the sake of economy and focus, the range of texts which I analyze is extremely limited. The following paper only provides an in depth look at the five poems of the book of Lamentations.

My inquiry into Lamentations began with a question concerning the presence of a theodicy in any of its five poems. Did praise and hope counterbalance the depressing atmosphere of Lamentations? The answer to that question was, put simply, “no”. A quick reading of Lamentations left me confused as to what the text was trying to communicate. In my opinion, its brief statements of hope, retributive justice, or the redemption of God were absolutely supplanted by the text’s relentless accusations against God and its bleak depiction of misery and affliction. Why would such a text be in the biblical canon? However, was Lamentations indeed irreconcilably depressing?

One thing to note concerning my *prima facie* reading of the book of Lamentations is that it left me with more questions than answers. This point would be key to the formulation of my thesis. I began to ponder the effect that confusion and questions could inspire in an individual.

And, prior to any in depth research on Lamentations, I postulated that an unfulfilled question produced in people a drive to continue their quest for an answer. Such is often the case with "cliff-hangers" in television dramas, for example. The effect of the cliff-hanger is to produce in viewers a worthwhile reason to continue watching in hope of some satisfying resolution to a question. Working off this point, I suggested that Lamentations invites its readers or listeners to continue their journey with and their pursuit of God, since only God could have the answers to the questions that Lamentations presents. And, as an added note, God himself never speaks in Lamentations and leaves everybody guessing as to his purpose and response to all the sufferings present in the text. After further research, I found a satisfying platform to pursue this discussion in the literary corpus of dialogism and speech-act theory. Taken together, these methodologies reflect a discussion on the effect of a text's contradictions and tensions upon readers. Where I failed in my pursuit of theodicy and a solution to the problem of evil in the book of Lamentations, I discovered a rich and powerful dimension to exploring lament literature in the biblical text.

The first chapter of the present study begins with foundational historical and literary information pertaining to Lamentations and its reception by different people in different contexts. Chapter 2 will outline my key arguments and delve into dialogism, reader-response criticism, and speech-act linguistic theory and how they pertain to biblical hermeneutics and Lamentations. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 will, in ascending order, provide an in-depth literary analysis of Lam. 1-2, 3, and 4-5 respectively. These chapters comprise the bulk of my work and deal with the complexities of the Hebrew text of Lamentations and its structuring, translation and interpretation. Finally, I will provide my concluding reflections on the book and its theology. In summary, I find the book of Lamentations to work effectively as a message of incessant

invocation: a message that implores readers to look toward God for the answers they seek through constant communication and prayer. Indeed, this communication will feel one-sided, and at times God does not make his answer clear. But the silence of God does not warrant the silence of the faithful. God must also be held accountable for his elusiveness and called upon to action.

Chapter 1

LAMENTATIONS: AN OVERVIEW

1. Introduction

Lately, the domain of biblical scholarship has demonstrated a renewed interest in the Book of Lamentations; and rightfully so. Pain and struggle, which are major themes in this literature, are universal experiences that connect all people across cultures and throughout history. Lamentations is a powerful work of art that may be recontextualized to apply to the turbulent character of our society today.

Truly, the past century has been colored by rapid technological developments and substantial advancements in scholarly research. However, from the First World War (1914) to the Iraqi Civil War (2014), it has arguably been one of the bloodiest periods in the history of humanity. This harsh reality challenges faith and brings many to question whether or not God has completely abandoned this world, leaving people to their own affairs. Perhaps it was an increase in chaos within social and religious spheres that accounts for the resurgence of Lamentations in biblical research. The text may provide much needed testimonies for believers on the perseverance of faith under less than ideal circumstances. But, before we can begin to appropriate the message of Lamentations for our generation, some background knowledge on the historical and literary context of Lamentations will help in understanding the book. Furthermore, the fact that Lamentations reflects multiple lament traditions is foundational to the understanding of its context and reception history. Historically, the Book of Lamentations was always read as a response to disaster.

2. Historical Context

a. Authorship, Date, and Composition

The author of Lamentations is anonymous and cannot be inferred from the original Hebrew text.[1] Most ancient translations of Lamentations assume the authorship of Jeremiah. This was due to a longstanding Hebrew tradition.[2] The *Antiquities of the Jews* of Josephus notes that Jeremiah composed an elegy for Josiah and wrote "a description of that destruction of our nation" (*Ant.* 10.5.). The Early Church Fathers also believed that Jeremiah wrote Lamentations (*Hist. eccl.*, 4.25.). The Septuagint (LXX), Targum, Syriac, and Vulgate texts of Lamentations all open with a reference to Jeremiah.[3] Consequently, we normally see ancient translated versions of the Bible situating Lamentations immediately after Jeremiah as an appendix.

[1] Early interpreters took the reference in 2 Ch. 35:25 as evidence for the authorship of Jeremiah: "Jeremiah also uttered a lament for Josiah; … they are recorded in the Laments" (NRSV).

[2] By the arrival of the LXX, Lamentations had already been accepted as part of the OT canon. Its canonicity and authority had not been challenged. In fact, the issue of authorship for classical Jewish sages was not so much about authority as it was about maintaining continuity with the ancient prophetic tradition of Israel. Moreover, it was a common practice among the rabbis of antiquity to attribute authors to scriptural writings. This practice would unlikely have contributed to the authority of Lamentations as Holy Scripture. Anthony Grafton argues that "In some periods and traditions writers have ascribed religious texts to divine or semidivine figures not because they were preoccupied with matters of authorship but because they wished to stress the continuity of their writings with an original tradition or an orthodox doctrine." See Anthony Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship*, vol. 31 (Princeton: Princeton University, 1990), 6.

[3] For example, the LXX opens with the line "Καὶ ἐγένετο μετὰ τὸ αἰχμαλωτισθῆναι τὸν Ἰσραήλ καὶ Ἰερουσαλήμ ἐρηνωθῆναι ἐκάθισεν Ἰερεμίας κλαίων καὶ ἐθρήνησεν τὸν θρῆνον τοῦτον ἐπὶ Ἰερουσαλήμ καὶ εἶπεν κ.τ.λ." So naturally, the ἀνὴρ in the opening lines of Lam. 3 would have been understood as a reference to Jeremiah.

The authorship of the exilic prophet went unchallenged until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[4] Today, modern biblical scholars have all but rejected the claim that Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations. Still others have gone so far as to question the historicity of Jeremiah.[5] Most of the scholarship on Lamentations holds an agnostic attitude on the subject of its authorship.

Some scholars present Jeremiah as the implied author of the text due to a perceived deliberate allusion to the book of Jeremiah in Lamentations.[6] An author, or multiple authors, may have chosen to write in the "style" of the prophet.[7] Internal textual evidence provides good reason to relate the two texts.[8] However, the best arguments for any relationship between Lamentations and the book of Jeremiah can only go so far as to suggest the possibility of shared authorship and this remains inconclusive.

One ought to clarify that the claim for the authorship of Jeremiah is not the same as that of the sole authorship of Lamentations. Although, the fact that Lamentations reflects a variety of

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[4] Rejection of Jeremian authorship in modern biblical scholarship began with the commentary of Herman von der Haardt in 1712. Cf. the discussion on authorship, date, and composition in the introduction of Robin A. Parry, *Lamentations*, The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 3-5.

[5] Robert P. Carroll wrote an exhaustive work on the book of Jeremiah. His redaction criticism challenged the popular *a priori* position among commentators that the book of Jeremiah reflects an accurate historical portrayal of a prophet bearing its name. See Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 33-37. I think that the work of Carroll unnecessarily severs the underlying tradition of the material in the Book of Jeremiah from the prophetic figure. But, he does provide invaluable information on the final redacted version of the text.

[6] Parry, *Lamentations*, 4.

[7] See Nancy C. Lee, *The Singers of Lamentations: Cities Under Siege, From Ur to Jerusalem to Sarajevo* (BIS, 60; Leiden: Brill, 2002). Also, Nancy C. Lee, "The Singers of Lamentations: (A)Scribing (De)Claiming Poets and Prophets," pages 33-46 in *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts*, ed. Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo, SBLSymS 43 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 33-34.

[8] For example, the metaphor of the nobles and leaders of Jerusalem as a deer or stag unable to find pasture is found exclusively in Jer. 14:3-6 and Lam. 1:6. Cf. Nancy C. Lee, "The Singers of Lamentations," 41.

voices, opinions, or writing styles does not conflict with either claim. Scholars who see Lamentations as the anonymous product of one mind argue for one of two positions: (1) that one individual crafted the distinct personae reflected in the text; or (2) although traditionally composed by different people, the multiple voices or singers of Lamentations were synthesized by an editor or scribe.[9]

The issue of the authorship of Lamentations is a prominent feature in the discussion of a literary unity in the text. Lam. 1, 2, and 4 are generally seen as the product of a single author due to their linguistic, thematic, and intertextual connection.[10] Lam. 5 may be placed in the same group as 1, 2, and 4. However, there are some characteristic differences in the fifth chapter that may suggest a different author.[11] Chapter 3 is the most distinct from the others due to the multiplicity of voices present therein. Scholars generally propose that Lam. 3 has the highest probability of having its own author.[12]

Another neglected possibility concerning the authorship of Lamentations has to do with the gender of the author. It is often taken for granted that Lamentations reflects the work of Jewish men in the royal court[13] or local prophetic circles. Few scholars note the possibility of a female

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[9] Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible*, vol. 1 (Oxford; London; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 557-56.

[10] This is the position of scholars such as Robert B. Salters in *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Lamentations* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2010), and Claus Westermann in *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); Also, see the introduction of Jill Middlemas in *The Templeless Age: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the "Exile*," (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

[11] For instance, the poem of Lam. 5 is the only one of the book in which any sort of dialogic interaction appears to be missing. Also, unlike the other poems, there is only one lament subgenre reflected in Lam. 5: The communal lament. See n. 8 in Parry, *Lamentations*, 4.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] Sawyer identifies two types of institutions in which prophets operated: Localized and Royal institutions. See John F. A. Sawyer, *Prophecy and the Biblical Prophet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 19-21.

author.[14] Nonetheless, research in anthropology demonstrates that dirges were normally sung by women throughout history and across cultures.[15] In addition, biblical evidence reinforces that this was true among the Israelites as well: Jer. 9:17-22; 2 Ch. 35:25; 1 Sam. 1:12. It may be the case that the women of the ANE, similarly to the men, were by-and-large illiterate. However, it is important to realize that the issue of the authorship of biblical texts does not exclusively refer to the individual who physically wrote the words on the scrolls, but also to the person who initially created the ideas. Scholarship on the authorship of biblical prophetic writings sheds some light on the issue. Some have explored the question of whether or not prophets actually wrote themselves. Writers, whether male or female, were definitely a minority group in the ANE. Only a small fraction (~1%) of people could read or write.[16] Others suggest that the prophets primarily spoke in poetry, and that the prosaic sections of their texts were the later writings of their

Local prophets such as Deborah and Balaam were freelancers who were officially consulted by political and military authorities. While other prophets such as Nathan at the court of David, worked under the protection of the palace on behalf of a monarch.

[14] Cf. Lee, "The Singers of Lamentations," 38-39. The authorship of women in the ancient world is not beyond the realm of possibility. In fact, literary and archeological evidences suggest that women did write. See I. Michael Plant, ed., *Women Writers of Ancient Greece and Rome: An Anthology* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004). For example, Greco-Roman women wrote letters, memoirs, and poetry.

[15] Lee, "The Singers of Lamentations," 38; Coogan, *The Oxford Encyclopedia*, 558. Prominent examples of relevant anthropological research include Ruth Finnegan in *Oral literature in Africa*. vol. 1, (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2012), and Gail Holst-Warhaft in *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002).

[16] The "1% claim" is challenged by some scholars in considering the varying degrees of literacy from one culture or nation to another, but it is difficult to prove a high literacy rate in the ANE. Moore presents a nice overview of the subject; see, James D. Moore, "Scribal Culture in the Ancient Near East," *Oxford Biblical Studies Online*, accessed on November 7, 2016, http://www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com/resource/scribal.xhtml.

disciples.[17] It may be a stretch to attribute the entire book to a woman of the ancient world, but some utterances of the text may indeed reflect the cries of real women experiencing real pain.[18]

Ultimately, in relation to Lamentations, there is "no external evidence about important issues such as date of composition, authorship, context, general provenance, or setting and nature of performance."[19] These facts simply cannot be ascertained beyond reasonable doubt. However, the possibility of multiple authors does not need to govern our interpretation of the text. The final redacted composition of Lamentations is deliberately structured. The position of this paper maintains that there is sufficient evidence in the text to infer a literary relationship and coherence between all the poems in Lamentations: "Even if some of the poems (or parts of them) had different origins, they have been crafted into a new literary whole, and it is that which is the primary focus for interpretation."[20] This relates to redaction criticism which regards the author of a text as an editor and compiler of their source materials. Hence, the author is the redactor of the final form of a text.

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[17] Cf. Hetty Lalleman-de Winkel, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition: An Examination of the Book of Jeremiah in the Light of Israel's Prophetic Traditions*, vol. 26 (Peeters Publishers, 2000), 12.

[18] Cf. Lee, "The Singers of Lamentations," 38-39.

[19] F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2002), 4.

[20] Parry, *Lamentations*, 4.

b. The Exilic Context

There is a near universal consensus among scholars that Lamentations reflects a reaction to the Babylonian siege and sacking of Jerusalem between 597-582 BCE (2 Kgs. 24:14; 25:11).[21] A few scholars argue against the exilic historical context of Lamentations and note how the text of Lamentations may be appropriate to other historical backdrops.[22] Dobbs-Allsopp demonstrates that the linguistic evidence of Lamentations is transitional between standard and late biblical Hebrew.[23] This further supports an exilic context. Scholarly work on the intertextual allusion between Lamentations, Isaiah 40-55, and Zechariah 1-2 certainly place Lamentations within the "literary family" of exilic writings.[24]

There is also the question of whether or not Lamentations was composed in Jerusalem and the provenance of the book. Parry asserts that Lamentations was written in Judah on the grounds that the viewpoint of the book is Jerusalem-focused.[25] Indeed, there are explicit references to Judah (Lam. 1:3), Jerusalem (Lam. 1:7), and the Holy Temple (Lam. 2:7). In addition, the detailed and harsh depictions of the demise of the city insist that whoever wrote Lamentations

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[21] After the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians and Assyrians at the battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE, they vassalized the king of Israel, Jehoiakim, forcing the Israelites to pay tribute. The eventual falling out of this agreement led to the demise of Jehoiakim and the destruction of Jerusalem after a lengthy siege. See 2 Kgs. 24.

[22] Iain Provan, *Lamentations*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 7-19.

[23] See the introduction of Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 1-48. Also, F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Linguistic Evidence for the Date of Lamentations," *JANESCU* 26 (1998): 1-36.

[24] Cf. Elizabeth Boase, *Fulfillment of Doom? The Dialogic Interaction between the Book of Lamentations and the Pre-exilic/Early Exilic Prophetic Literature*, LHB/OTS 437 (London ; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006); Christopher Seitz, *Word Without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 130-49; Benjamin Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 130; and Michael R. Stead, "Sustained Allusion in Zechariah 1-2," in *Tradition in Transition: Haggai and Zechariah 1-8 in the Trajectory of Hebrew Theology*, edited by Mark J. Boda and Michael H. Floyd, LHB/OTS 475 (London; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008), 144-70.

[25] Parry, *Lamentations*, 5.

must have been an eyewitness to the Babylonian siege (Lam. 2:19-22). Also, it seems logical that any encouragement or admonishment to be found in the text would be directed toward the people of Jerusalem at the time.

Kaiser portrays a historical reconstruction of events in relation to the intertextual evidence of 2 Kings, Jeremiah, and Lamentations.[26] All three texts present similar testimonies: there was famine in the city during the siege (2 Kgs. 1-2; Jer. 39:1-3; Lam. 2:20-22); the king and his army fled the city (2 Kgs. 25:4-7; Jer. 39:4-7; Lam. 1:6); invaders burned the temple, palace, and other city infrastructure (2 Kgs. 25: 8-9; Jer. 39:8; Lam. 2:3-5); many people were exiled (2 Kgs. 25:11-12; Jer. 33:4-5; Lam. 2:7-9); religious, political, and military leaders were executed in cold blood (2 Kgs. 25:18-21; Jer. 39:6; Lam. 1:15; 2:20; 5:12). The exilic context was a turbulent, chaotic, and confusing time in the history of ancient Israel.

There is much disagreement on the historical reconstruction of events surrounding the Babylonian siege and captivity, especially among those who maintain that the Babylonian deportation was not a severe cataclysmic event. Martin Noth wrote that the exile of 587/586 should be seen as "merely the conclusion of a long historical process" which saw the decline of the independent states of Israel and Judah in the Ancient Near East.[27] Barstad writes of the "myth of the empty land," and suggests that the claim of the dissolution of the Judahite culture due to the harsh militaristic exploits of the Babylonians is erroneous.[28] People who support this

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[26] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Grief and Pain in the Plan of God: Christian Assurance and the Book of Lamentations* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2004), 16. In addition, there are also similarities to be found in the curses of Deuteronomy 28 in terms of the language used to describe destruction.

[27] Martin Noth, *The History of Israel*, trans. P.R. Ackroyd, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 289.

[28] Cf. Hans Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah During the "Exilic"* Period, SOFS 28 (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996); Also see Niels Peter Lemche in *The Israelites in History and* Tradition, LAI (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), Philip R. Davies in *In Search of "Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. (London; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2003), and Thomas L. Thompson in *The*

argument often note that the exile according to Kings and Chronicles presents a primarily theological assessment rather than an historical one. Nevertheless, the testimony of the biblical text claims that the Babylonians "left behind some of the poorest people of the land to work the vineyards and fields" (2 Kgs. 25:12). This implies that Jerusalem was never left devoid of inhabitants during the exile.

Those who are in favor of the historical validity of a severe destruction claim that Israel may have lost over half of its population during the event.[29] My assessment of the literary evidence and of archeological reports leads me toward an understanding of the cataclysmic reality of the Babylonian exile. And, Lamentations would have been a reaction to a traumatic event of that sort.

The composition of Lamentations itself is normally dated anywhere between 587-519 BCE, although there are some discrepancies on the dating of particular poems. The intensity of Lam. 1-4 suggests immediacy and would have been written soon after the destruction of 587. Chapter 5, on the other hand, could refer to a time when the "sharp pains of defeat had chilled into the chronic ache of captivity."[30] However, it is the general consensus that Lam. 1, 2, 4, and 5 were written within the 6th century BCE.

Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel (London: Basic Books, 1999), who are proponents of this view.

[29] According to Albertz, "about 20,000 individuals were deported from Judah," and that, if we assume another 20,000 lost in the fight against the Babylonians, "Judah lost approximately half of its inhabitants between 600 and 580 BCE and was reduced to a population of some forty thousand. In truth, the exile meant a severe bloodletting for Judah." See quote in Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.*, Studies in Biblical Literature 3 (Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 90.

[30] William Sanford LaSor, et al., *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 617.

Many scholars propose a later date for the composition of Lam. 3. In particular, they identify Lam. 3:21-39 as a post-exilic insertion. Middlemas identifies the *Golah* as those responsible for the composition of Lam. 3:21-39.[31] She notes that they may have written the passage as a didactic response to Lam. 1-2, or that the post-exilic community may have written the rest of Lam. 3 in response to the Lam. 3:21-39 passage of the *Golah* group. Most of the issues with the dating and interpretation of Lamentations has to do with the third chapter. However, internal evidence strongly supports its literary cohesion with rest of Lamentations. This paper will argue in favor of the probability that Lam. 3 is an exilic Judahite text just as the other chapters.[32]

Paul M. Joyce argues in favor of a move away from reading Lamentations with primary reference to some historical context.[33] This position looks to read and interpret the text in light of contemporary intellectual and cultural contexts. While I agree that the lasting power of Lamentations in the Bible has to do with its interface with the personal struggle of readers, I think that an understanding of a text's historical context provides a richer and more complete interpretive experience. Furthermore, a strictly post-structural reading may view the evidence of the stereotypical language of grief in Lamentations as the grounds to refute any historical appropriation.[34] Christopher-Smith notes that while the stereotypical language of laments "may

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[31] The use of the term *Golah* is in reference to a Jewish diaspora community after the exile of the sixth century BCE. See Jill Middlemas, "Did Second Isaiah Write Lamentations iii?" *Vetus Testamentum* 56 (2006), 505-25.

[32] See Parry, *Lamentations*, 4-5. Also, Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "Geography and Textual Allusions: Interpreting Isaiah xl-lv and Lamentations as Judahite Texts," *VT* 57 (2007): 367-85. An unpopular alternative theory posits the Maccabean period as a context for the literature of Lamentations. See, M. Treves,"Conjectures sur les dates et les sujets des Lamentations," *Bulletin Renan* 95 (1963), 1-4.

[33] See Paul M. Joyce in "Sitting Loose to History: Reading the Book of Lamentations Without Primary Reference to Its Original Historical Setting," pages 246-62 in *In Search of True Wisdom: Essays in Old Testament Interpretation in Honour of Ronald E. Clements*, edited by Edward Ball (A&C Black, 1999).

[34] Parry, *Lamentations*, 12.

suggest creativity in the absence of an actual event," and "may be the culturally acceptable way to express precisely the emotional reactions to an actual catastrophic event," the use of stereotypical language in ancient literature does not indicate that a language "is not reacting to real trauma."[35] The fact is that ancient cultures simply did not express themselves in the same way that we do. Stereotypical language of suffering reflects real pain –the emotional, social, and religious impact of disaster. In addition, Christopher-Smith argues that reading Lamentations in the light of refugee studies, disaster studies, and the assumption of trauma "is once again to recover Lamentations as a measure of the psychological and spiritual crisis of the exile."[36]

c. Manuscript Evidence (LXX & Qumran)

There are ancient Greek, Syriac, and Latin translations of Lamentations.[37] This thesis will primarily refer to the LXX and Qumran scrolls. The LXX is important because it gives us insight into a Hebrew textual tradition that predates the MT. In the LXX, each strophe fails to correspond to the acrostic structure of Lamentations, though it was still present in the Hebrew text of ancient Greek translators since some LXX manuscripts indicate alphabetic strophe labels.[38] Details of this acrostic structure will be outlined later.

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[35] Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 103.

[36] *Ibid*, 104. See Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo, eds., *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts*, SBLSymS 43 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008) for insightful examples of such readings.

[37] Lamentations is not found in the Aquila and Theodotica Greek translations. The entire Greek text is only found in Symmachus and LXX. Only the first couple chapters of Lamentations are present in the Codex Sinaiticus.

[38] See Albert Pietersma, "The Acrostic Poems of Lamentations in Greek Translation," in *VIII Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies*, edited by Leonard Greenspoon and Olivier Munnich, SBLSCS (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995), 183-201. For LXX manuscript evidence see Joseph Ziegler, *Ieremias, Baruch, Threni, Epistula Jeremiae: Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Authoritate Societatis Litterarum Göttingensis editum*, vol. 15 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006; repr., 1957).

Four Hebrew manuscripts of Lamentations were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls: 3QLam (3Q3, *DJD* 3:95), 4QLam (4Q111, *DJD* 16:229-237), 5QLam[a] (5Q6, *DJD* 3:174-177), and 5QLam[b] (5Q7, *DJD* 3:178-179). There are no Qumran scrolls containing the complete text of Lamentations; we only have fragments. 3QLam contains fragments of Lam. 1:10-12; 3:53-62 and 4QLam covers Lam: 1-17, 18a; 2:5. 5QLam[a] and 5QLam[b] contain Lam. 4:5-8, 11-16, 19-22; 5:3-13, 16-17 and 4:17-19 respectively.[39] The Herodian script of these manuscripts suggests a mid to late 1st century BCE date (30-68 BCE).[40] Hillers maintains that the texts had been well preserved.[41] For the most part, scholars agree that MT Lamentations is consistent with its earlier renditions.

The MT is a reliable source for interpretation in that it can be inferred that it is in agreement with the underlying hypothetical Hebrew *Vorlage*. The MT will be an important reference for my translation of Lamentations. However, Kotze stresses that Qumran manuscripts are important for any textual and literary analysis of Lamentations as well.[42] These manuscripts may provide insights into earlier renditions of the Hebrew text. This is particularly helpful for understanding the ancient interpretations of the language and context of Lamentations and, which in turn provides further support that the literary intent and theological implications of the text has been

[39] For an in depth study on the Dead Sea Scrolls of Lamentations see Gideon R. Kotzé, *The Qumran Manuscripts of Lamentations: A Text-Critical Study*, SSN 61 (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

[40]The Herodian script was a style of writing used for Palestinian Aramaic during the 1st century BCE –so, around the time of Jesus, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and early Rabbinic Judaism. Cf. Peter W. Flint, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 28-35.

[41] Hillers, *Lamentations,* AB 7A (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972), 39.

[42] Gideon R. Kotzé, "Lamentations 1:8A in the Wordings of the Masoretic Text and 4QLam," *Scriptura* 110 (2012), 190-207.

consistent with its ancient literary traditions. This brings us to the interpretations of classical Jewish sages found in the body of literature known as the *Midrash*.

d. Midrashic Treatment of Lamentations

The *Midrash* is a term used to designate the genre of rabbinic literature that focuses on Biblical exegesis and interpretation. This body of literature, collectively known as the *Midrashim*, was the product of rabbinic schools beginning in the second century, though they were not edited until the fifth century CE and later.[43] The biblical exegesis of classical *Midrashim* did not entail the greater specificity and objectivity of biblical hermeneutics today. However, these Jewish sages did critically engage the text and tackled the difficult passages of the HB. The *Midrashim* were very much concerned with "filling in the gaps" of scripture.[44]

There are two kinds of midrashic literature: The *Midrash Halakah* and *Midrash Aggadah*. The *Midrash Halakah* focuses on putting Torah into practice. These texts were especially helpful in light of the destruction of the second temple by the Romans in 70 CE.[45] The Holy Temple of Jerusalem was integral to the religious life of the Jews and the practical application of Torah. The *Midrash Halakah* looked to make the Torah relevant in absence of the Temple.

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[43] Donald H. Juel, "Interpreting Israel's Scriptures in the New Testament," pages 283-303 in *A History of Biblical Interpretation, Volume 1: The Ancient Period*," ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 290.

[44] See Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Also, Hermann Leberecht Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1996).

[45] Cf. Hermann L. Strack and Gunter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. Markus Bockmuehl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992), 4-5; Shaye JD Cohen, "The Destruction: from Scripture to Midrash," *Prooftexts* 2 (1982), 18-39.

The *Midrash Aggadah* focuses on the non-legal portions of the Bible. There is a higher freedom of expression and exposition to be found in these works. They commonly employ the use of poetry or refer to the sayings of other prominent rabbi. The *Midrash Aggadah* is more philosophical and mystic in character than its counterpart.[46] Lamentations Rabbah falls into this category of *Midrash* and provides an important insight into textual transmission, and the reception history of Lamentations.[47] It will occasionally be referred to in the later exegetical portions of my thesis.

Our primary concern with the Lamentations Rabbah is the covenant relationship angle to approaching the theology of Lamentations. Neusner indicates that the relationship between God and Israel was the primary concern of the midrashic literature of the classical Jewish sages. The "stipulative covenant" of the Torah governs this relationship and everything that the nation of Israel experiences makes sense and is meaningful in light of this: "everything else proves secondary and derivative of the fundamental proposition that the destruction proves the enduring validity of the covenant, its ruler, and its promise of redemption."[48]

[46] For an overview on the interpretation of the Midrashic texts see Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, viii-xii.

[47] *Lamentations Rabbah* is an aggadic work probably composed between 300-500 CE making it one of the earliest of the Midrashic literature.

[48] Jacob Neusner, *Israel After Calamity: The Book of Lamentations* (Valley Forge: Trinity, 1995), 3.

e. Lamentations in the Canon

Throughout history Lamentations was intentionally placed beside different books. The LXX places Lamentations immediately after Jeremiah since the prophet was thought to be the author. The Christian canon normally follows the example of the LXX with few exceptions. This placement of Lamentations suggests that readers "read the book as a lament for the destruction of Jerusalem Jeremiah predicted would befall Jerusalem at the hands of Babylon."[49]

In modern versions of the HB, Lamentations is found in the *Kethuvim*. The *Kethuvim* is the third and final subdivision of the *Tanakh*.[50] It contains poetic, liturgical, and other writings of the Hebrew Scriptures. The designation "*Kethuvim*" emphasizes the general character of this section which has a variety of different genre of writings. Within this third subdivision there is a further classification of texts known as the five *megilloth* (scrolls).

The five *megilloth* contain books pertaining to prominent Jewish festivals: Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther.[51] The sequence of these texts is deliberate as it pertains to the chronological order of prominent festivals in the Jewish liturgical year. Song of Solomon is read on Passover (*Peskh)*, Ruth on Pentecost (*Shavuoth*), Lamentations on the Ninth of Ab (*Tisha b'Av*), Ecclesiastes during the feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkoth*), and Esther at Purim.[52]

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[49] Parry, *Lamentations*, 19.

[50] An acronym made using the first letters of the traditional Masoretic text's three subdivisions: ***T***a is from the *Torah*, the first five books of Moses; ***N***a is from the *Nevi'im*, which contains prophetic texts; ***K***h is from the *Kethuvim*, which comprise of the other historical and liturgical writings of the Hebrew Scriptures.

[51] For a detailed study on the *meggiloth* see Jerry A. Gladson, *The Five Exotic Scrolls of the Hebrew Bible: The Prominence, Literary Structure, and Liturgical Significance of the Megiloth*, (Lewiston; Queenston; Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009).

[52] Gladson, *The Five Exotic Scrolls,* 11-18. There is another arrangement of the *megilloth* that reflects ancient beliefs on the chronological order in which the five books were composed: Ruth, Songs of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and Esther. This order is reflected in the Codex Leningrad.

As Parry notes, there is also the presence of an overarching theme of exile and return in the HB grouping of the *megilloth*.[53] Evidently, each classification of Lamentations across biblical canons serves its own unique purpose.

3. Literary Context

a. Genre

A variety of genres are reflected in Lamentations and the poem defies "any form-critical category."[54] The genres found in Lamentations all relate to the lament, such as those found in the Psalms.[55] Among laments we find the genre of personal and communal laments, which are primarily invocative prayers calling on God to correct catastrophic circumstances. Westermann notes that psalms of lament typically demonstrate a dramatic movement from "petition" to "praise".[56] In their petition the poet reflects an intimate and personal relationship with God: "The complaint is not spoken by one who is a stranger to God, but one who has a long history of trustful interaction."[57] The shift to praise in laments assert that the prayer is heard and vindicates God of any absence or unresponsiveness. The movement from invocation to praise is evident in

[53] Parry, *Lamentations*, 19.

[54] Miriam J. Bier, '*Perhaps There is Hope': Reading Lamentations as a Polyphony of Pain, Penitence, and Protest* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 7.

[55] See Hermann Gunkel, "Klagelieder Jeremiae," pages 1049-52 in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*, ed. Hermann Gunkel and Leopold Zscharnack, 2d rev. ed., vol. 3 (Tübingen: Möhr, 1927), 1051.

[56] Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1981), 33-35.

[57] Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 54.

both personal, or individual laments (Ps. 13; 86; 35) and communal laments (Ps. 74; 79; 137). Lam. 3 closely reflects the individual lament with elements of communal prayer, while Lam. 5 is almost purely a communal lament, but without the typical turn to praise.[58] Praise is suppressed in Lamentations and arguably absent. With Lam. 1, 2, and 4 we see elements of the communal lament and dirge, which is a song lamenting the dead.[59] Generally, contemporary discussions on biblical genre go beyond Gunkel's form criticism and assert that texts "participate" in genres instead of explicitly belonging to one genre in particular:[60] Discussions on the genre of Lamentations should therefore avoid a rigid classification, but instead look into the participation of different genres "in terms of the rhetorical strategies of the text."[61] Lamentations echoes traditional forms, but also innovates them: "There is both continuity and discontinuity from established forms, contributing to the effect of uncertainty and unsettledness that is also expressed explicitly in the content of the poems."[62]

[58] Though, Lam. 5:19 could be considered as a brief word of praise as to the sovereignty of God. That said, the absolute sovereignty of God is also the basis on which the accusations throughout Lamentations are construed against God for his causing of Israel's suffering.

[59] Cf. Westermann, *Lamentations*, 6; Parry, *Lamentations*, 11.

[60] Cf. Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 7. Carol Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 12; See also Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, vol. 8 of *Theory and History of Literature*, ed. Caryl Emerson, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 106.

[61] Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 12. Cf. Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 8.

[62] Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 8.

b. Literary Structure

There are scholars who suggest that no pattern or progression is to be found linking the five poems of Lamentations.[63] Though many now reconsider whether there exists a logic behind the composition of the text as a complete literary unit.[64] Parry highlights several important features of the composition and progression of Lamentations: The unity of Lam.1-2, intertextuality between chapters, centrality of Lam. 3, progression toward hope at the end of Lam. 4, climactic nature of Lam. 5, and the ubiquitous absence of God at every turn.[65] Many note the unity between Lam. 1-2 and agree that both chapters express the same two voices, a narrator and the personified Jerusalem (Chapter 3). However, there are connections between all five chapters, and throughout this study, I will highlight the ways in which each of the chapters of Lamentations interact with one another. Generally, those who suggest a literary unity of Lamentations present either Lam. 3 or 5 as the climax of the book (Chapters 4 and 5). Parry counters those who suggest that Lamentations sinks into despair following Lam. 3 by highlighting the hopeful aspect of Lam. 4: "In ch. 4 a voice promises that YHWH will punish Zion's enemies and end her exile (answering Zion's prayer). The end of ch. 4 marks a clear advance in the book and counts against those who see a sinking into despair after ch. 3."[66] Finally, throughout Lamentations there is a concern about the absence and unresponsiveness of God. The text does not bring closure and none of the poems offer a satisfying conclusion – "by the end of the book YHWH has neither

[63] For example, Wilhelm Rudolph in *Das Buch Ruth, Das Hohe Lied, Die Klagelieder*, 2nd ed., KAT (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1962) and Hans-Joachim Kraus in *Klagelieder (Threni)*, 3rd ed., BKAT 20 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1968). Cf. Parry, *Lamentations*, 15.

[64] See Parry, *Lamentations*, 15.

[65] *Ibid*., 17.

[66] *Ibid*.

spoken nor redeemed his suffering people, and even the prayerful response in the fifth poem is very tentative and still full of lament."[67]

c. The Poetry of Lamentations

The idea of poetry in the HB is difficult to assess, especially when one wishes to distinguish prose literature from poetic literature. What makes Lamentations poetic, or a poem? Kugel notes that nowhere in the Hebrew scriptures do we find "any word to group individual genres into larger blocs corresponding to 'poetry' or 'prose.' […] Thus, to speak of 'poetry' at all in the Bible will be in some measure to impose a concept foreign to the biblical world."[68] Here, Kugel does not deny the presence of poetry in biblical texts, but cautiously advises readers not to superimpose Western or modern poetic models upon ancient Hebrew literature. Scholarship on biblical poetry generally focuses on meter and parallelism.[69] Meter relates to "a regular rhythm of phonological or linguistic events. That is, the ear perceives some sort of linguistic phenomenon occurring and reoccurring in a discernible pattern."[70] And parallelism refers to thematic or linguistic relationships to be found among successive bodies of text and connecting or extending ideas.[71] Though neither the presence of meter nor parallelism explicitly define a text

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[67] *Ibid*., 18.

[68] James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 69.

[69] Donald R. Vance, *The Question of Meter in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), 3.

[70] Vance, *The Question of Meter*, 15. For a detailed discussion on the question of meter in the HB, see *Ibid*., 11-40. If we presuppose the presence of Meter in biblical poetry, then in Lamentations, we find an instance of the Qinnah meter which will be further discussed below.

[71] Cf. Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 6.

as poetry,[72] both literary devices are integral to the poetic effect of Lamentations, along with parataxis, enjambment, and acrostics.

i. Parataxis

Parataxis denotes a sudden transition between clauses or phrases without coordinating words, such as a conjunction, to indicate that a transition had taken place: Bier writes that parataxis "contributes to the literary effect of Lamentations, opening up interpretive possibilities when successive lines abruptly change direction, abandon one perspective for another, or negate what directly precedes."[73] She uses the juxtaposition of Lam. 3:20 and 3:21 as an example of parataxis in which case two contradicting statements follow one another. In 3:20 a memory causes sadness, and in 3:21, a reminder gives hope. While some translations add a conjunction to smooth out parataxis, such linguistic markers are often absent in Lamentations. Parataxis and the general tendency of Lamentations to juxtapose conflicting ideas adds an effect of disorientation and confusion to the work. [74]

[72] Cf. Vance, *The Question of Meter*, 4-6.

[73] Bier, *'Perhaps There is Hope'*, 6.

[74] *Ibid*.

ii. The Qinah Meter

Karl Budde first identified the *qinah* meter in Lamentations.[75] He suggested that a formal unit or meter in Lamentations be comprised of a line divided into two cola,[76] and the *qinah* meter "is usually defined as a meter in which the A colon is longer than the B colon."[77] The title "*qinah*" is the Hebrew word for lament and relates to the characteristic use of the *qinah* meter in funeral laments.[78] However, the *qinah* structure is found elsewhere in biblical literature aside from laments or dirges.[79]

The table below illustrates the presence of the *qinah* meter in Lamentations. The ratios of the following table have three values, each corresponding to the amount of times, in any given chapter of Lamentations, that a particular relationship between two cola occurs: The first number corresponds to the amount of relationships in which A is greater than B; the second number to that in which A is less than B; and the third number to the amount of relationships in which A and B are equal. For example, Lam. 1 has a 31-12-24 ratio in the "Words" column, this means that there are 31 instances in Lam. 1 where colon A contains more words than colon B, 12 instances where colon B contains more, and 24 instances where colons A and B are equal:[80]

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[75] Karl Budde, "Das Hebraische Klagelied," *ZAW* 2 (1882): 1-52, 5-11.

[76] Cf. Hillers, *Lamentations*, xxxii. For a detailed discussion on the colon in biblical literature see J. P. Fokkelman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible at the Interface of Prosody and Structural Analysis*, vol. IV (Assen: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 2004), 7-18.

[77] Vance, *The Question of Meter*, 485.

[78] Cf. Hillers, *Lamentations*, xxxii.

[79] *Ibid*., xxxiii.

[80] Cf. the following table with those of Vance in *The Question of Meter*, 485-86.

Texts	Words	Syllables	Vocables	Accentual Units
Lam. 1	31-12-24	44-13-10	47-16-4	37-3-27
Lam. 2	41-10-16	55-7-5	57-9-1	45-4-18
Lam. 3	25-3-20	39-6-3	42-6-0	37-2-9
Lam. 4	23-5-16	26-7-11	30-8-6	25-5-14
Lam. 5	8-3-11	9-8-5	10-11-1	13-2-7
Total	128-33-87	173-41-34	186-50-12	157-16-75

It is evident above that a colon in Lamentations is characteristically followed by one which is shorter: "One can see that, regardless of what one counts (be it vocable units, syllables, words, or accentual units), there are almost three times as many lines with the A colon longer than the B colon than there are lines with the B colon longer than the A colon."[81] Though meter is usually measured using word stresses (accentual units).[82] Of all the theoretical instances of the *qinah* meter in the OT, it is the most pronounced in Lamentations.[83] I write 'theoretical' since the presence of a *qinah* meter in the HB, is tenuous and contested. Scholars such as Vance dismiss

[81] *Ibid*., 486.

[82] Cf. Parry, *Lamentations*, 9.

[83] Vance, *The Question of Meter*, 486.

the notion entirely due to its inconsistent application.[84] Nevertheless, scholars generally identify the presence of the *qinah* in Lamentations which produces a "peculiar limping rhythm"[85] whereby "each line dies away in a lamenting, sighing fashion, indicating associations with the dirge and death."[86]

iii. Enjambment

Enjambment is a recurring feature of the poetry of Lamentations and occurs when the syntax of one line of text continues into the next, or when one line or strophe of text continues an idea from the line or strophe prior: "Enjambment thus contributes to unifying the poetic structure, connecting theme, content, and thought across stanzas."[87] Typically in Hebrew poetry, lines consist of cola which parallel each other and each line of text completes an idea. This is the majority case in Lam. 5 which is nearly devoid of enjambment. However, with enjambment, an idea is completed over multiple lines of text. For instance, consider Lam. 1:10.[88]

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[84] *Ibid*., 487.

[85] Karl Budde, "Poetry (Hebrew)," in *A Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner's, 1902), 5.

[86] Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 7.

[87] *Ibid*., 6.

[88] Cf. Parry, *Lamentations*, 10.

ידו פרש צר על כל־מחמדיה כי־ראתה גוים באו מקדשה אשר צויתה לא־יבאו בקהל לך׃

That is,

The enemy laid hands
on all her treasures;
she saw pagan nations
enter her sanctuary—
those you had forbidden
to enter your assembly (NRSV).[89]

Here there are three lines and six cola which make up the entire strophe. All three lines are about the desecration of the Temple by foreign invaders. Enjambment also contributes to the connection and transition between different acrostic strophes. For example, in Lam. 3:12 the ד (*daleth*) strophe ends with the idea of God as an archer who aims his bow at the speaker of the passage. The next verse begins the ה (*heh*) strophe and illustrates God shooting his bow and arrow.[90] This brings us to the acrostic structure of Lamentations which will be further discussed below.

iv. The Acrostic Structure

The first four chapters of Lamentations follow an acrostic structure in which each strophe is associated with a particular letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in ascending order, by way of the first letter of the strophe's first word. This occurs several times in the HB, i.e. Ps. 119, Prov. 31:10-31; Nah. 1. Acrostic poems were also known in the broader ANE context.[91] The first letter of the first word in an acrostic strophe can also be referred to as the acrostic marker. There are subtle

[89] All translations in this study are taken from the NRSV, unless otherwise indicated.

[90] Cf. Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 6.

[91] Parry, *Lamentations*, 13.

differences in the use of the acrostic pattern among the poems of Lam. 1-4 as is evident in the table below.[92]

Lam. 1	**Lam. 2**	**Lam. 3**	**Lam. 4**	**Lam. 5**
Acrostic	Acrostic	Acrostic	Acrostic	No Acrostic
22 verses, each with 3 lines for an acrostic strophe	22 verses, each with 3 lines for an acrostic strophe	66 verses, each with 1 line; 3 verses for each acrostic strophe	22 verses, each with 2 lines for an acrostic strophe	22 verses 1 line = 1 verse
Each verse begins with an acrostic letter (One acrostic marker for every 3 lines)	Each verse begins with an acrostic letter (One acrostic marker for every 3 lines)	Each *line* begins with the acrostic letter (Each acrostic marker occurs 3 times)	Each verse begins with the acrostic letter (One acrostic marker for every 2 lines)	
66 lines total	66 lines total	66 lines total	44 lines total	22 lines total

A few things must be noted in correspondence with the table above. Lam. 1 and 2 are similarly structured. However, Lam. 2 reverses the order in which the ע and פ strophes occur in Lam. 1. As of yet, there is no consensus as why this occurs, but there may be no particular significance for the alternative ordering of Lam. 1. Renkema suggests that the strophes were reversed to distinguish Lam. 1 from Lam. 2 and reinforce the order in which they were to be read since the two were identically structured and prone to their scrolls being mixed up.[93] Lam. 3 and 4 follow the alphabetical order of Lam. 2. The intensity of the acrostic structure reaches its peak

[92] The following table is based on that of Robin Parry in *Ibid*., 13.

[93] Johan Renkema, *Lamentations*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 49.

at ch. 3 and begins to decline thereafter. Parry discusses four popular suggestions as to the reason behind Lamentations' use of the acrostic pattern: (1) to serve as a mnemonic device; (2) a stylistic choice; (3) an expression of pain; (4) an expression of chaos.[94] Option (1) suggests that Lamentations was written to be orally performed, and that the acrostic pattern would have aided the memorization of the poem. While option (2) chalks the acrostic up to a stylistic decision contributing to an emphasis on the beginning of a strophe, readability, or the aesthetic appeal of Lamentations.[95] With option (3), Gottwald suggested that the acrostic structure "play[ed] upon the collective grief of the community in every aspect, 'from *Aleph* to *Taw*', so that the people might experience an emotional catharsis."[96] O'Connor combines option (3) with option (4) and suggests that "the alphabetic devices embody struggles of survivors to contain and control the chaos of unstructured pain, and the variations among the poems reflect the processes of facing their deadening reality."[97] All of the ideas above may have some merit. Furthermore, the acrostic structure adds to the artistry and intricacy of Lamentations. Considering parataxis and enjambment, along with the acrostic structure, it is clear that the poem incorporates and balances many details in its structural composition. This fact is made more impressive if the poem adheres to a *qinah* meter. Bier notes how juxtapositional parataxis and the acrostic structure work tightly together and convey the intricate and intentional composition of the book of Lamentations: "The juxtaposition of opposing ideas contributes to the overall effect of disorientation, confusion, and

[94] See Parry, *Lamentations*, 14-15.

[95] Cf. Hillers, *Lamentations*, 27; Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 18; Heath Thomas, "Poetry and Theology in Lamentations: An Investigation of Lamentations 1-3 Using the Aesthetic Analysis of Umberto Eco" (Ph.D. diss., Gloucestershire, 2007), 104-8.

[96] Norman K. Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, 2nd ed., SBT 14 (London: SCM, 1954), 30.

[97] Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), Kindle edition, ch. 1, "Poetry of Loss: A Defense."

conflict in Lamentations, while the tight acrostic form indicates that the placement of these opposing ideas in succession from one another is intentional."[98]

[98] Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 6.

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY AND THESIS:
A THEOLOGY OF INCESSANT INVOCATION

1. Introduction

The following dissertation presents a literary and critical analysis of Lamentations. However, it is also interpretive and presents my thoughts on the themes and messages of the book. Prior to my discussion on the biblical text, I should like to establish a methodological precedent to my analysis and subsequent interpretation of Lamentations. I classify my method as a dialogical, or dialogic approach to biblical hermeneutics. This approach is also evident in the work of many scholars mentioned throughout this paper, such as Carleen Mandolfo or Miriam Bier. I find the theology of Lamentations to be polyphonic and cacophonic. It is polyphonic in that there are multiple voices in the text which present differing ideas concerning God and the suffering of Israel, and it is cacophonic in that the many voices of the text often contradict each other, causing a dialogic tension. In short, I think that the dialogic tension in Lamentations provokes, or invites readers to join the speakers of the text in lament and supplication, rather than discouraging communication with God. I essentially read Lamentation as a message of incessant invocation. That is, the polyphonic and cacophonic elements of the text have the effect of driving the reader to constantly seek God for assistance. To further elaborate on the aforementioned points, it would be appropriate to outline some methodological concerns. The argument of this study can be formulated as follows.

1. The book of Lamentations is *polyphonic* in that it presents multiple distinct, and at times contrasting, *voices*. This creates a *dialogic tension* in the book.
2. Each voice relates to a *speech-act* whereby the speaker(s) wish to inspire particular attitudes and responses in readers or listeners, i.e. anger, doubt, hope, repentance, etc.
3. The presence of multiple speech-acts leaves the literary intent and underlying *meaning* of the work ambiguous.
4. One, of perhaps many, logical extension to the ambiguity of Lamentations is the identification of the incessant invoking of God as an intended *perlocutionary* response to the dialogic tension in the book when Lamentations is read as a literary unit.

The book of Lamentations speaks to readers so as to say, "do not rely on me for answers, but God." The text itself provides multiple "answers" to the issue of God in relation to the destruction of the temple in 587 BCE—an issue which is, for some, fundamentally a question of theodicy. However, this only reinforces uncertainty, or doubt. Depending on how one wishes to interpret the last verse of Lamentations (Lam. 5:22), the work either ends with a question about, or resignation to, the perceived abandonment of God (Chapter 5). God himself does not at all speak, so all talk of him in the text can only be understood as perceptive rather than experiential knowledge—except, perhaps, in the case of Lam. 3:55-57 (Chapter 4). The message of the incessant invoking of God is not exclusively an inference. It is also explicitly expressed by voices present in Lamentations at various instances, e.g. Lam. 2:18-19 and Lam. 3:40-41. The "incessant" quality of the invoking that is to take place figuratively addresses a life-long process whereby the answers sought are never provided in absolute terms, whether by God, or otherwise. Rather, they are provisional.[99] Lamentations contributes to a broader theology of the OT whereby a faith relationship is a process of constant exchanges between believers and their God. This process emphasizes solidarity through communication. Lamentations provides an extreme example of how under no circumstances should the faithful stop this communication. The

[99] This point is further elaborated upon later in this chapter.

example is extreme due to its turbulent historical context. Nevertheless, Lamentations *as scripture* suggests that prayer and supplication are the correct disposition of the believer amidst chaos. They must trust that the "provisional" answer of God will come, in time.

The goal of this chapter is to outline the methodology, or, methodologies, that inform my reading of Lamentations. I will define and elaborate on vocabulary such as dialogic, polyphony, voices, and speech-act. In summary, I will speak of two established theories which are well rehearsed in academia: Dialogism and speech-act theory. Additionally, there are three scholars in particular to whom we must address when speaking of such theories: (1) Mikhail Bakhtin, who formulated the dialogic approach; (2) Martin Buber, who developed a distinct dialogic philosophy of religion; and (3) John Langshaw Austin, who provided the ground work for speech-act theory. Their contributions greatly inform my hermeneutical approach. I will begin my discussion with an overview of the life and works of Mikhail Bakhtin and the different dimensions of his literary theory. The purpose of my brief biography of Bakhtin is to call attention to the contextual influences that brought about the philosopher's literary theory. Next, this chapter will provide a clarification of the dialogic approach as it pertains to biblical hermeneutics and introduce the contributions of Buber. Finally, I will add reader-response criticism and Austin's speech-act theory to the discussion as I work toward the formulation of the agenda of this dissertation.

2. Mikhail Bakhtin: Dialogism, Polyphony, and Unfinalizability

a. Mikhail Bakhtin

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin was born in Orel, Moscow, on the 17th of November, 1895.[100] He was born to an old Russian family of nobility, the origin of which was traced back to the fourteenth century. From a young age, Bakhtin was educated on European culture and thought.[101] He attended Odessa University and Petrograd Imperial University where he would be exposed to studies on history, philology, and classics. Bakhtin was particularly impressed by classicist F. F. Zelinsky and Russian Symbolism. The intellectual and artistic symbolist movement and its proponents in Russia at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century shaped the direction of Bakhtin's scholarship:

> These symbolists believed in a kind of cognition that was beyond the scope of mundane positivism. To their mind, there was a higher reality which could not be known by objective means but to which the poet had access, for artistic intuition and imagination would succeed in this task where rationality had failed … The preoccupation of the Russian Symbolists with justifying their poetry in terms of a comprehensive 'philosophy of culture' also stimulated Bakhtin to work out a 'philosophical anthropology' of his own.[102]

Indeed, the work of Bakhtin would later elaborate on semiotics and the intricacies of meaning-making. As Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist demonstrate, there is much that can

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[100] Some sources date his birth to be on November 16, 1895. Cf. Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1984), 16.

[101] *Ibid.*

[102] *Ibid.*, 24-25.

be said on Bakhtin's early life, especially since he lived through an extremely turbulent time in Russian history.[103] His formative educational years at Petrograd university coincided with World War I and the two revolutions of Russia in 1917. In 1916, Bakhtin joined the Petersburg Religious-Philosophical Society where war-related issues concerning patriotism, internationalism, and pacifism were popular subjects for discourse.[104] He was also active in debates on aesthetics, culture, politics and literature during the 1920s, famously forming a group known as the Bakhtin Circle which consisted of likeminded individuals who shared Bakhtin's love for literary, religious, and political discussion.

The contribution of Bakhtin to literary theory and the discussion of meaningful communication is foundational to dialogic hermeneutics. It has become a standard among scholars who reference the dialogic method and its proponents to pay homage to the 20th century Russian philosopher and semiotician. The dialogism of Bakhtin has influenced a vast array of academic research across a variety of fields and disciplines.[105] It also boasts a profound effect on Western philosophy and influenced theoretical schools such as Marxism, Social constructionism, and Structuralism.[106] Interest in the religious dimension of the works of Bakhtin is, by and large, a recent development in scholarship.[107] And even more recent, are studies that relate the

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[103] *Ibid.*, 1-16.

[104] *Ibid.*, 30.

[105] A couple examples include the work of Lipset and Silverman in the field of Anthropology; see David Lipset and Eric K. Silverman, "Dialogics of the Body: The Moral and the Grotesque in Two Sepik River Societies," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 19 (2005): 17-52, and the work of scholars of Medieval Literature, such as Thomas J. Farrell, ed., *Bakhtin and Medieval Voices* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), 81-108, 141-58.

[106] Ruth Coates, *Christianity in Bakhtin: God and the Exiled Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

[107] *Ibid.*, 11.

philosopher's insights to the biblical text and the book of Lamentations. Walter Brueggemann hints at Bakhtin's increasing influence in the study of the "dialogical quality" of the OT: "I have no doubt that the work of Mikhail Bakhtin will be crucial for future work in this direction in Old Testament study."[108] Bakhtin himself was not particularly forthcoming on the issue of religion, though biographers note that he was interested in the subject.[109] Indeed, up until the biography of Clark and Holquist, biographers seldom payed attention to the religious aspects of his life and work.[110] From here on, I would like to briefly discuss concepts of Bakhtin's philosophy that are found in the three works of his bibliography which I think to be critical to the development of dialogic hermeneutics: *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics: Polyphony and Unfinalizability* (1972), *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975), and *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (1979).[111]

b. Unfinalizability and Polyphony in Dostoyevsky's Poetics

In *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin provides an in-depth study on the literature of the prominent 19th century Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Three major concepts explored in this work are unfinalizability, the relationship between the self and other, and idea of polyphony. Bakhtin begins his discussion by characterizing the polyphonic quality of Dostoyevsky's literature: "Any acquaintance with the voluminous literature on Dostoevsky leaves the

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[108] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 83.

[109] Ruth Coates, *Christianity in Bakhtin*, 11.

[110] Cf. *Ibid.* and the biography of Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*.

[111] These three publications reflect a collective body of writings produced by Mikhail Bakhtin over the course of thirty years. It would not be until the 1960s and 70s that Bakhtin would be rediscovered in the West and his works translated and published.

impression that one is dealing not with a *single* author-artist who wrote novels and stories, but with a number of philosophical statements by *several* author-thinkers."[112] According to Bakhtin, no character in Dostoyevsky's work can be definitively understood, and as such, reflects the state of "unfinalizability":

> They [the characters] all acutely sense their own inner unfinalizability, their capacity to outgrow, as it were, from within and to render *untrue* any externalization and finalizing definition of them. As long as a person is alive he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized, that he has not yet uttered his ultimate word.[113]

In the work of Dostoyevsky, Bakhtin finds characters who are in a constant battle with their own identity. Throughout his *Poetics*, he expresses a theory of the self which focuses on the interconnectedness of all people: "*I* [the self] remains the only one in the world. But a person's image is a path to the *I* of *another* […]."[114] The identity of an individual is inextricably linked to those of their peers. Consequently, no voice can convey a "pure" and "unadulterated" idea; all voices influence one another. The concept of polyphony was a phenomenon in literature where a work reflected a plethora of equally valid voices or viewpoints:

> The essence of polyphony lies precisely in the fact that the voices remain independent and, as such, are combined in a unity of a higher order than in homophony. If one is to talk about individual will, then it is precisely in polyphony that a combination of several individual wills takes place, that the boundaries of the individual will can in principle be exceeded. One could put it this way: the artistic will of polyphony is a will to combine many wills, a will to the event.[115]

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[112] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, vol. 8 of *Theory and History of Literature*, ed. Caryl Emerson, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 5. I get a similar impression from the book of Lamentations, particularly when reading the didactic or theodic voices of Lam. 3:22-39.

[113] *Ibid.*, 59.

[114] *Ibid.*, 294.

[115] *Ibid.*, 21.

In *Poetics*, Bakhtin argues for Dostoyevsky as the pioneer of the presentation of *authentic polyphony* in literature: "Dostoyevsky is the creator of *authentic polyphony*, which, of course, did not and could not have existed in the Socratic dialogue, the ancient Menippean satire, the medieval mystery play, in Shakespeare and Cervantes, Voltaire, and Diderot, Balzac and Hugo."[116] In summary, the work of Dostoyevsky accurately illustrated the untenability of truth by a single mind. Contradiction or disagreements do no automatically present readers with an either-or dichotomy. All voices contribute to one overarching polyphonic truth.

c. Heteroglossia, Chronotope, and Dialogism in Bakhtin's Dialogic Imagination

The Dialogic Imagination is a collection of four essays related to linguistic theory and the literary genre of the novel. This work introduces *heteroglossia*, dialogism, and chronotope. The observations of Bakhtin in these essays demonstrated a distinct shift away from the structuralist linguistic insights of thinkers such as de Saussure, the work of whom was popular among the contemporary Russian scholars of Bakhtin. Unlike de Saussure's robust linguistic model which emphasized language as a series of independent signs working together to create meaning, Bakhtin emphasized the contextual impact on the meaning of a word. He coined the term *heteroglossia* to refer to this phenomenon:

[116] *Ibid*., 178. As an additional note, I would like to indicate that my characterization of Lamentations as polyphonic literature does not entirely relate to Bakhtin's classifications. I only look to use Bakhtin's literary theory as a starting point for identifying and communicating the polyphonic elements of Lamentations. The relationship between Bakhtin's original observations and their application to biblical literature would be further elaborated upon by many scholars represented in my thesis. Lamentations is a different kind of literature to those dealt with by Bakhtin, and it has an entirely different literary or artistic function. So, in essence, I am not arguing for an earlier instance of polyphonic literature that predates Dostoyevsky. Such an observation relates to a separate matter entirely and is not relevant for this work.

> Every utterance participates in the "unitary language" (in its centripetal forces and tendencies and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces) … Linguistics, stylistics and the philosophy of language that were born and shaped by the current of centralizing tendencies in the life of language have ignored this dialogized heteroglossia, in which is embodied the centrifugal forces in the life of language.[117]

Heteroglossia identifies an external meaning of a word which interacts and mingles with an internal meaning in the process of communication. Like polyphony, heteroglossia was a key feature of Bakhtin's philosophy of language and life "that was to become a cornerstone of his theories."[118] Building off Heteroglossia, Bakhtin elaborates on the nature of the dialogic, or dialogism. The dialogic work is in constant dialogue with other works and their authors: "Dialogism is the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole – there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others."[119] With this kind of dialogue, communication extends in both directions and both speakers continually inform and influence each other. Another concept central to the literary and philosophical theory of Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination* is chronotope. The word chronotope is derived from the Greek words χρόνος ("time") and τόπος ("space") and relates to the representation of time and space in literature:

> We will give the name *chronotope* (literally, 'time space') to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. […] What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time the

[117] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin; London: The University of Texas Press, 1981), 272-73.

[118] Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 22.

[119] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 426.

> fourth dimension of space). We understand the chronotope as a formally constitutive category of literature […].[120]

Bakhtin alludes to Einstein and notes a metaphorical connection between the literary theory of chronotope and the scientific theory of relativity.[121] In the words of Morson and Emerson, the concept of chronotope expresses "a way of understanding experience; it is a specific for-shaping ideology for understanding the nature of events."[122] Chronotope has been employed in biblical studies and Fuller presents the genealogy of the Matthean narrative as a "local chronotope within the First Gospel" which "foregrounds the relationship between Israel's guidance by God as a people, its connection to the land and the temple, and Jesus as the Messianic 'son of David'."[123] Bakhtin demonstrated how particular genres differed in their use of time and space and argued that chronotope played a vital role in determining said genre. Taken together, heteroglossia, dialogism, and chronotope were Bakhtin's unique ways of talking about literature.

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[120] *Ibid.*, 84.

[121] *Ibid.*

[122] Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990), 367.

[123] Christopher C. Fuller, "Matthew's Genealogy As Eschatological Satire: Bakhtin Meets Form Criticism," pages 119-132 in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, ed. Roland Boer (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature), 126.

d. *The Dialogic Philosophy of Bakhtin in Speech Genres*

Finally, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* presents six essays which look in depth at the nature of language and the forms it takes. Here, Bakhtin also elaborates on problems of methodology and the nature of culture. A key contribution of the essays in *Speech Genres* is its elaboration on the strengths and limitations of the dialogic methodology and its application in the stylistic and aesthetic analysis of literature. Bakhtin clarifies that a dialogic reading goes beyond identifying conflicting utterances and disagreements—including the reader in the dialogue of a work as a third party "who does not participate in the dialogue, but *understands* it."[124] He does not deny the presence of meaning, but demonstrates the dialogic nature of meaning itself. In summary, the dialogism propagated by Bakhtin is a philosophy of language that emphasizes the primacy of dialogue over monologue and the inadequacy of logical modes in understanding the variety and dynamics of meaning. For Bakhtin, truth was an expression in which all people could participate:

> Bakhtin's dialogism is essentially a philosophy of language. It is a 'translinguistics,' which constitutes a master optic for perceiving all categories rooted in language, and Bakhtin assumes that all aspects of human life are so rooted. His formulation of the traditional claim for a humanist territorial imperative, *Homo sum; humani nihil a me alieanum puto*, which usually translates, "I am a man, nothing human is foreign to me," might well read, "My life is an utterance, therefore nothing in discourse is foreign to me."[125]

Working off the language of Bakhtin's research, many biblical scholars identify such characterizations as dialogism, chronotope, heteroglossia, and polyphony in biblical literature.

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[124] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 125.

[125] Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 212.

There are certainly differences between the work of Bakhtin and the application of his literary terminology in the more contemporary dialogic biblical hermeneutics. The literature of the ANE presents a completely different cultural milieu from the literature dealt with by Bakhtin. Nevertheless, the scholarship of Mikhail Bakhtin paved a way for a unique take on biblical interpretation, especially when it comes to the interpretation of the particularly problematic works of biblical literature.

3. Dialogic Hermeneutics

a. Martin Buber and the I-Thou Distinction

Along with Bakhtin, the work of Martin Buber significantly impacts the direction of dialogic approaches to biblical hermeneutics. The Austrian-born Jewish scholar contributed to the discussion of religion and developed a distinct philosophy of dialogue. Buber understood "dialogue" to be an "existential encounter, meaningful exchange of selves, reciprocal revelation."[126] Buber saw the biblical text to be more of a *voice* in dialogue with God rather than a book.[127] He emphasized the relational dimension of an identity by using the terms *I-Thou* and *I-It* and writes that

[126] Steven Kepnes, *The Text as Thou: Martin Buber's Dialogical Hermeneutics and Narrative Theology* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 31, 69.

[127] Martin Buber, *Werke II*, vol. 2 of *Schriften zur Bibel* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1964), 869. N.B. that the dialogic may not be compatible with the entirety of the biblical text. Consider the reflections of Carleen Mandolfo in *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations*, Semeia Studies 58 (Atlanta: SBL, 2007), 2: "Buber seemed to attribute to the biblical discourse a more pure I-thou of divine interaction than I think can be supported. […] there are moments [in the Bible] when God and people seem to be missing one another entirely, talking past, over, and around the other. The prophetic texts that feature the marriage metaphor are particularly tragic examples of Buber's I-it encounter."

> To man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude. The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks. The primary words are not isolated words, but combined words. The one primary word is the combination *I-Thou*. The other primary word is the combination *I-It*; wherein, without a change in the primary word, one of the words *He* and *She* can replace *It*. Hence the *I* of man is also twofold. For the *I* of the primary word *I-Thou* is a different *I* from that of the primary word *I-It*.[128]

So, in the course of life, an individual fundamentally encounters two things: An *It* and a *Thou*. The *It* refers to an object or thing which can be used or experienced: it is the world as experienced by people and the realm of objects and things "which presupposes a single centre of consciousness, one subject, an *I* which experiences, arranges, and appropriates."[129] The *Thou* refers to a spiritual relationship, or connection that may exist amidst two beings. It is a relationship that is not subject to any description: "In other words, an I-thou relationship moves beyond mere explanation—which for Buber was the hallmark of the 'I-it' encounter—to empathy and understanding."[130] An encounter with God exemplifies the I-Thou relationship and it is the only way in which people truly experience God: "Though we may speak of God in the third person, the reality of His approach is constituted in the fulness [sic] of the relation of an *I* with a *Thou*."[131] It is in Buber's I-Thou philosophy that his work converges with that of Mikhail Bakhtin to inform the dialogic methodology: "Fundamental to both Buber and Bakhtin was an experiential ethic grounded in the face-to-face, or 'I-thou,' encounter. For them, in a 'thou'

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[128] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1958), 3.

[129] Ronald Gregor Smith, Introduction to *I and Thou*, by Martin Buber, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Scribner's Sons), vii.

[130] Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 2.

[131] Smith, introduction, vii.

relationship, the 'other' should be allowed to work on us, get inside us, alter us."[132] God is the "Eternal *Thou*,"[133] and the dialogic understanding of faith relationships highlights reciprocity.

b. Voice and Utterance

Voice and speaker are often taken to be interchangeable, but there are some subtle differences to be noted between the two terms that are important to this study. A voice relates to the underlying function and meaning of an utterance. The intent of a voice can be pinpointed and fundamentally described. On the other hand, a speaker facilitates the expression of an utterance and many voices can come from one speaker; the speaker possesses the quality of unfinalizability which corresponds to the complexity of people in general. These differences are tentative and do not reflect an official part of the dialogic schemata. They are simply a helpful way to organize the vocabulary of this study in reference to the speaker(s), or author(s) of Lamentations and the conflicting ideas present in the text. For example, הגבר, as the *speaker* of Lam. 3:1-24, expresses both a voice of hope and a voice of misery (Chapter 4).

Such a distinction between speaker and voice could serve as an argument in favor of a potential single-authorship of Lamentations despite the presence of conflicting point of views in the book. Lamentations may not be a narrative, the overarching genre with which Bakhtin's dialogic hermeneutics seems to be primarily concerned, but it certainly expresses different characters who each tell a different story.[134] It is not beyond the realm of possibility for these

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[132] Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 2; cf. Kepnes, *The Text as Thou*, 25.

[133] Cf. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 75.

[134] Cf. Epic Poetry such as Job or Gilgamesh. However, the story of Lamentations is subtler and relates to the different theological inferences brought about by each distinct voice.

characters to be the literary construction of one mind (Chapter 1). Moreover, similarly to the observations made by Bakhtin concerning the work of Dostoyevsky, a feature of Lamentations is that each of the characters expressed in the five poems are speakers, each of whom, at times, convey multiple voices. At this point, I wish to clarify that the *emphasis* of this study is the *tension* between differing voices.[135] Nevertheless, it can be said that there are many speakers who argue with each other in Lamentations. However, each speaker presents their own inner conflict.

Bakhtin's understanding of an utterance closely parallels that of the aforementioned voice and is crucial to the idea of a voice in dialogic hermeneutics. As noted earlier, Bakhtin disagreed with the popular and influential structuralist model of language systems pioneered by de Saussure.[136] Of his many objections, Bakhtin believed that the Saussurean distinction between *langue* and *parole* inadequately dealt with the concept of the utterance.[137] In traditional approaches, an utterance relates to units of language that combine to form words, sentences, and so forth. On the other hand, Bakhtin distinguished an utterance from a sentence. A sentence

[135] The Bakhtinian concept of a polyphonic voice which characteristically contradicts itself is nearly synonymous with that of a speaker expressing multiple voices. Both refer to an inner monologue bouncing different ideas back and forth.

[136] Ferdinand de Saussure identifies four distinctions to be made in his theory of language. First, he differentiates between the *signifier* and the *signified*. The signifier is the language used to express an object while the signified is the object itself. Both signifier and signified constitute a "sign." English scholars convey the second distinction in the original French designation of Saussure: *langue* and *parole*. The *langue* of a language relates to its constituent elements and the *parole* to its spoken representation. The third distinction highlights *syntagmatic* and *systematic* (paradigmatic) relationships. Syntagmatic relationships are evident among words that sequentially work together for the understanding of the meaning of a sentence. Systematic or paradigmatic relationships have to do with parts of speech that are interchangeable. For example, the different articles of the English language "the" and "a" are in a systematic relationship to each other. The Final distinction is between *diachrony* and *synchrony*. A diachronic study looks at the chronological and historical development of one particular sign. Synchrony on the other hand looks at relationships between a whole complex of signs and elements that originated in same time and context; see Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, eds. Parry Meisel and Haun Saussy, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 65-71.

[137] Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 126.

denotes no more than a syntagmatic word-structure: "Sentences are repeatable. Sentences are repeatable. They may coincide like congruent geometric forms. They or other linguistic elements may be quoted, or simply appear an indefinitely large number of times in diverse situations."[138] Although conversely, Bakhtin criticized linguists for taking sentences to be "in essence a kind of *hybrid* of the sentence (unit of language) and the utterance (unit of speech communication). […] One does not exchange sentences any more than one exchanges words (in the strict linguistic sense) or phrases."[139] Contrary to sentences, an utterance carries with it an intended meaning and "each utterance is by its very nature unrepeatable. Its context and reason for being differ from those of every other utterance, including those that are verbally identical to it."[140] The *meaning* of any two verbally identical utterances is different in so far as the context in which the utterances occur differ: "Context is never the same. Speaker and listener, writer and reader, also change."[141] In addition, an individual's personal response to any given utterance varies over repeated encounters of the same utterance.

[138] *Ibid*.; cf. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 75.

[139] Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 75.

[140] Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 126.

[141] *Ibid*.

c. The Didactic Voice

Carleen Mandolfo coined the phrase "Didactic Voice"[142] to refer to a characteristic feature of biblical laments whereby a third-person voice intervenes in a speech with a corrective or pedagogic comment concerning God:

> In many psalms of lament, particularly those usually referred to as "individual," a didactic voice that speaks of God in third-person descriptive terms is interjected into the supplicant's second-person discourse directed toward God—it speaks to the supplicant in the form of a command. This latter voice could be understood as revelatory insofar as it speaks as mouthpiece for, or in defense of, the deity.[143]

The presence of the DV adds a dialectic dimension to a biblical text whereby accusations or unfavorable claims about God are reproached, or, the questionable acts of God are reasserted and the absolute sovereignty of the deity maintained: "The interplay of the DV and the supplicant results in an ideologically tensive discourse that remains open-ended and unresolved throughout the Psalter."[144] Brueggemann makes a similar observation and notes the provisional nature of biblical resolutions to any given issue:

> Thus Israel's religious rhetoric does not intend to reach resolution or to achieve closure. This rhetoric, rather, is for the very long run, endlessly open-ended, sure to be taken up again for another episode of adjudication, which this time around may have a different—but again provisional—outcome.[145]

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[142] Hereafter "didactic voice" is abbreviated as DV.

[143] Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 60.

[144] *Ibid.*

[145] Brueggemann, *Theology of*, 83.

The DV adds a tension to the lament literature that illustrates a sort of theological dissonance taking place in the mind of their composers which essentially boils down to the issue of theodicy: "The dialogical-dialectical quality of the text that keeps God 'in the fray' brings one inevitably to the question of theodicy. Indeed, theodicy is the quintessential question of Jewish rhetoric. But Israel's text is not capable of, or willing to, give a resolution to that question."[146] In the dialogue between a supplicant and the DV, it is evident that the DV adds a counterbalance to the tone of a psalm and takes emphasis away from complaints. However, though the

> presence of the DV mitigates the force of complaint, in like manner the dialogic interaction of these two voices has a tampering effect on the DV, […]. These languages come to 'interanimate' one another, and the expressions of both experience (subjective) and dogma (objective) are altered in the process.[147]

Morson and Emerson also note the ambiguities that come with attempts to pinpoint the beliefs or values of a dialogic work with any precision: "[I]t becomes more difficult to take for granted the value system of a given language. Those values may still be felt to be right and the language may still seem adequate to its topic, but not indisputably so, because they have been, however cautiously, disputed."[148] Mandolfo notes the use of the DV in Lam. 1-2, whereby the DV anomalously sides with the supplicant rather than God.[149] Though in this study, the phrase is especially important to the literary structure of Lam. 3, in which Lam. 3:25-39 assumes the didactic function of the DV.

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[146] *Ibid*.

[147] Mandolfo, *God in the Dock: Dialogic Tension in the Psalms of Lament* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 178.

[148] Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 143.

[149] Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 60.

4. Speech-Act Dynamics

a. Reader-Response Criticism

Before I delve into speech-act theory, I should like to briefly discus reader-response criticism which lends nicely to my concern with speech-acts. Reader-response criticism can be defined as a literary theory focusing on the experiences of a text's audience or reader instead of its author or historical context. With this, the meaning of a work is made subjective rather than exclusively being an objective and discoverable literary intent. Reader-response criticism generally relates to the insights of "a loosely related set of critics who exerted a decisive influence on debates about critical methodology in the 1970s and early 1980s" such as, "David Bleich, Jonathan Culler, Umberto Eco, Stanley Fish, Norman Holland, Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauß, Gerald Prince, and Michael Rifaterre."[150] In general, these literary critics rejected the idea that a literary work was the sole object of literary study and "sought to recalibrate the conceptual apparatus of literary criticism so that it would no longer overlook the reader."[151] Naturally, reader-response criticism raises questions concerning the authenticity and or authority of interpretations: "If there are no determinate meanings, no intrinsically right or wrong interpretations, if the author, or the text cannot give validation to meanings, the only source for validity in interpretation has to lie in

[150] Ben De Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser: A Companion* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 97.

[151] *Ibid.*

'interpretive communities'."[152] These "interpretive communities" consist of groups of individuals who validate some meanings and disallow others.

Similarly to speech-act theory, reader-response places an emphasis on how a literary work impacts its readers, emphasizing what literature *does* over what it *means*. Wolfgang Iser, who is known for his reader-response criticism, argues against the presentation of meaning as an object to be unearthed from a text. Rather, meaning is an event which can only occur in the reader, whereby all the dimensions of a text and the concurrent psychological processes of reading and comprehension converge.[153] This brings us to the notion of a pure objectivism, to use the language of Ayn Rand,[154] which isolates consciousness from reality and argues in favor of the attainability of objective knowledge. Thinkers such as Gadamer, and Ricoeur rejected this Descartian ontology which separates consciousness from context: "All our concerns, as Gadamer and Collingwood argued, come from *questions with motivations*, not from fixed abstract 'problems'."[155] Jauss, who is notable for his contributions to reception history, continues in the direction of Gadamer and rejects "a false 'objectivity' and positivism, which either ignored time and history or regarded the past as 'closed'."[156] Relative to literary theory, Jauss argues that "[a]

[152] David J. A. Clines, "Contemporary Methods in Hebrew Bible Criticism," pages 149-169 in vol. 3, part 2 of *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, ed. Magne Saebø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 1.4:153.

[153] Cf. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 35-36.

[154] Cf. Andrew Bernstein, *Objectivism in One Lesson: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (Lanham: Hamilton Books, 2008), 47-48.

[155] Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009), 317.

[156] *Ibid*.

literary event can have an effect only if those who come after it […] respond to it."[157] Indeed, reader-response criticism reflects a sort of philosophical relativism in its process of meaning-making, but in conjunction with speech-act theory, it is a criticism which does not understate the influence of a text and its implied literary intent.

b. J. L. Austin and Performative Utterances

The speech-act linguistic theory of J. L. Austin reflects a counter-positivist philosophical stance and argues that there are more to sentences than constatives, which are truth-value assertions or descriptions. He introduces the notion of performative utterances, which denotes language intimately linked to the actions and responses the language elicits.[158] Consider the following example in which Austin uses the sentences, "he is running" and "I apologize," to exemplify his constative-performative distinction:

> We might say: in ordinary cases, for example running, it is the fact that he is running which makes the statement that he is running *true*; or again, that the truth of the constative utterance 'he is running' depends on his being running. Whereas in our case it is the happiness of the performative 'I apologize' which makes it the fact that I am apologizing: and my success in apologizing depends on the happiness of the performative utterance 'I apologize'. This is one way in which we might justify the 'performative-constative' distinction—the distinction between doing and saying.[159]

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[157] Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 22.

[158] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University 1955* (Oxford; New York; London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 4-7.

[159] *Ibid.*, 47.

Austin wants to illustrate that the performative utterance "I apologize" is "happy" in the context of an actual apologizing act, and "unhappy" otherwise.[160] The other statement, "he is running," is constative and simply a matter of fact. The key distinction between these examples is a question of relationship. An apology is a relational act which implicates at the very least two parties. Running, on the other hand, is an objective action to be carried out by one subject.

The speech-act model of Austin divides a performative utterance into three levels of communication: Locution, Illocution, and Perlocution.[161] Locution corresponds to the act of saying something and the fundamental linguistic features, i.e. phonetic, phatic, rhetic, syntactic, and semantic, of what is being said.[162] Illocution is the underlying intent or purpose of a speech: "For there are very numerous functions of or ways in which we use speech, and it makes a great difference to our act in some sense […]."[163] Perlocution is a performative utterance at the level of its responses. It reflects what "we bring about or achieve *by* saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading."[164] The failure of a perlocutionary response invalidates, or renders incomplete, this model of communication.

Speech-act theory is certainly applicable in biblical hermeneutics. Mieke Bal applies it in her feminist critical analysis of the book of Judges which, she argues, "provides many examples of powerful speech-acts, indeed, of the overwhelming power of speech."[165] Richard Briggs

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[160] Cf. *Ibid.*, 25-38.

[161] Cf. *Ibid.*, 101-02.

[162] *Ibid*., 94-98.

[163] *Ibid*., 99.

[164] *Ibid*., 108.

[165] Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago, 1988), 130.

provides multiple examples of the use of speech-act theory in biblical scholarship and notes some practical observations in the Christian tradition.

> Speech act theory itself is evidently not a theological enterprise, but many significant theological categories are carried by, or in Recanati's terms 'staged' by, speech acts. Confession, forgiveness and teaching are just three particular examples which occupy prominent places in Christian traditions.[166]

Briggs essentially presents speech-acts as relating to a hermeneutic of self-involvement: "The basic point about self-involvement is that the speaking subject invests him or herself in a state of affairs. Where self-involvement is most interesting and significant is in cases where the stance is logically (or 'grammatically') entailed by the utterance itself."[167] Taken together, speech-act theory and reader-response criticism provide different ways to emphasize the consideration of readers when speaking of the meaning or message of a literary work. They give us tools to articulate how literary intent connects with the reader, or ought to connect. Ideally, an author has an agenda they are trying to advance. And this agenda has to do with concrete actions, attitudes, and responses. What, then, are the responses elicited by a dialogic work which characteristically present us with a plethora of *meanings*? Also, where do the speech-acts of Lamentations lead its readers?

In conclusion, this work combines ideas behind reader-response, speech-acts, and dialogism to advance a message of incessant invocation. The philosophy of reader-response criticism is reflected in this study's fundamental concern for the way in which we, as critics, readers or a

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[166] Richard S. Briggs, *Words in Action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation* (Edinburgh; New York: T&T Clark, 2001), 295-96.

[167] *Ibid.*, 148; see also François Recanati, *Meaning and Force: The Pragmatics of Performative Utterances* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1987), 258-66.

faith-based community approaching Lamentations, should respond to and appropriate the message in the book. With speech-act theory, I look to show how language and literature naturally produces reactions and attitudes among its readers. This leads me to the question of what is evoked by conflicting messages. Naturally, the answer to such a question in relation to Lamentations is confusion, unless one wishes to emphasize an aspect of the book over others. My own emphasis is the incessant invocation of God expressed in Lam. 1-2 and exemplified throughout the work. Nevertheless, even the message of incessant invocation seems to itself be contradicted in passages such as Lam. 3:26 and Lam. 4, which does not feature any address toward God. Indeed, one ought to read Lam. 3:26 figuratively (Chapter 4) and infer a unity between Lam. 4 with Lam. 5 (Chapter 5) to maintain the category of an uncontradicted message of incessant invocation carrying throughout all five poems. Ultimately, this study is led toward dialogism and the concept of a dialogic theology which works off the presence of conflicting ideas in Lamentations to advance the message of incessant invocation.

5. Toward a Dialogic Theology

Mandolfo summarizes dialogic theology as "a theology that makes demands upon God."[168] She uses this concept to emphasize the prominence and importance of the "countervoices" in biblical literature.[169] These countervoices are at times antithetical to the central biblical voice belonging to God. They also reinforce the communication and exchange that is to take place in faith

[168] Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 19.

[169] Cf. *Ibid.*, *Daughter Zion*, 123.

relationships. The observation of Brueggemann concerning lament psalms aptly describes the dialogic theology of Mandolfo:

> [T]he lament psalms insist upon Israel's finding voice, a voice that tends to be abrasive and insistent. The lament psalm is a Jewish refusal of silence before God. … It is a Jewish understanding that an adequate relationship with God permits and requires a human voice that will speak out against every wrong perpetrated either on earth or by heaven. … I consider this matter of voice and violence not to be a theoretical issue but a concrete, practical, pastoral issue because we live in a violent, abusive society in which there is a terrible conspiracy in violence that can only be broken when the silence is broken by the lesser party."[170]

Mandolfo, who advances a more deconstructive hermeneutic of Lamentations, speaks of a mutable God and emphasizes the relational quality of the divine in preference to the static characterizations of God propagated by popular theologies: "A dialogic theology thus implies the radical notion that sometimes humans can and must be better than God by calling him to account; and it carries the expectation that God will hear and make the necessary adjustments, but without compromising his own integrity."[171] This idea relates to the dialogism of Bakhtin which emphasizes how two parties continue to inform and change one another through discourse. The central question for Mandolfo is not if God is "good" or "bad" in his being mutable, but rather, how a God "who models listening and openness" practically benefits divine-human relationships:

> A theology that insists on divine omnipotence does little good in today's world; if anything, it is more destructive than constructive, as imperfect humans try to model themselves on the God they *think* they know and understand. It sets up binaries of right

[170] Walter Brueggemann, "Voice as Counter to Violence," *Calvin Theological Journal* 36 (2001): 22-33, 22.

[171] Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 21. Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology of*, 453.

> and in human relations that further solidify insider and outsider identity constructions, which leads to violence. […] I am not a systematic theologian, so my job as I see it is to read the text closely, to read closely the god of the text and the divine-human relationship in it […]. A dialogic reading strategy […] might offer an answer to S. Jones's question of how we can 'affirm the otherness of and difference of God and persons without reinvoking destructive hierarchies.'[172]

Mandolfo is appealing to a reformation of moral and theological sensibilities toward those that understand God as one who is on his own journey and process which is constantly informed by his own relationship with the faith community: "If such a thinking were to become a part of a new, deeply embedded 'master narrative,' human self-righteousness might not disappear, but it would lose its divine mandate."[173] God can be violent, but is violence a part of a so-called divine perfection? Is violence a divine prerogative? If so, why, then, does the violence of God seem to be in response to prior violence perpetrated by man? These questions relate to Mandolfo's treatment of DZ in Lamentations. And, in essence, they relate to a fundamental question of biblical theology *in practice*. Dialogism, in light of the presence of Lamentations in canonical literature, shows that God is open to our petitions. The faith relationship is not meant to be tyrannical or one-sided. The dialogic theology of Mandolfo may certainly come across as radical. However, it is an interpretation to take seriously when contending the presence of contrasting voices and stark accusations against God in the biblical text: "The beauty of the text that many prize as 'sacred' is that it allows dissenting voices into the conversation; it is, then, our responsibility to attend to them."[174] Though there are instances in the OT where God certainly

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[172] Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 21-23.

[173] *Ibid.*, 23.

[174] *Ibid.*, 22.

asserts his staticity and immutability (cf. Mal. 3:6; Num. 23:19), the very presence of texts such as Lamentations brings those other passages into a conversation. It is this conversation I wish to emphasize. The conversation which Lamentations encourages readers to take part in.

Chapter 3

HEARING THE VOICE OF THE OPPRESSED: DAUGHTER ZION IN LAMENTATIONS 1 AND 2.

1. Literary Analysis of Daughter Zion

The methodology of my interpretation of Lamentations is primarily dialogical in that I use the subtle shifts in voicing to inform my understanding of the structure of the text. While dialogism often relates to intertextuality, and how various texts or literatures interface, my thesis emphasizes the plethora of ideas, or voices within the literary unit of the book of Lamentations. This is otherwise known as polyphony within the schemata of dialogic hermeneutics. The author of Lamentations presents multiple voices that are in dialogue with each other and, at other times, with God. The purpose of a dialogical structure is not necessarily to reconcile the contending voices in the text and, at times, conflicting views they each present. Rather, I look to evaluate each voice individually and in relation to the other voices around them. There are voices that speak with resentment toward God while other voices look for theodic resolutions to their circumstances. Some express hope while others express doubt. One could easily emphasize one theme of Lamentations over another depending on the biases of the reader or the message that the reader wishes to present. However, my thesis emphasizes how all the voices of Lamentations work together to illustrate a *tableau* (portrait) of the faith relationship with God which, for the Israelites, fundamentally revolved around covenant relationship. A key argument of my thesis is that the crux of the theology of Lamentations is the concept of incessant invocation and

communication with God. Whether God responds or remains silent, the duty of the faith community is to direct all prayer or protest to God regularly, urgently, and indefinitely.

This chapter will now consider the literary and theological function of DZ in Lamentations 1-2. I will begin my discussion with the linguistic character of DZ as an appositional genitive followed by arguments that connect DZ to biblical marriage motifs and how that connection relates to dialogic hermeneutics. Finally, I will look at the literary structure and theology of Lamentations 1-2 which will lead into my concluding reflections on the two chapters.

a. Daughter Zion as Appositional Genitive

The noun phrase בת ציון occurs in Ps. 9:15 [Eng. 9:14]; Lam. 1:6; 2:1, 4, 8, 10, 13, 18; 4:22; Isa. 1:8; 10:32; 16:1; 37:22 [2 Kgs. 19:21]; 52:2; 62:11; Jer. 4:31; 6:2, 23; Mic. 1:13; 4:8, 10, 13; Zeph. 3:14; Zech. 2:14 [Eng. 2:10]; and 9:9.[175] Its plural construct form בנות ציון is evident in Isa. 4:4, 16-17 and Sol. 3:11. The parallel phrase בת ירושלם ("daughter of Jerusalem") occurs in Lam. 2:13, 15; Isa. 37:22 [2 Kgs. 19:21]; Mic. 4:8; Zeph. 3:14; Zech. 9:9 and is always found in close proximity to בת ציון. There are also a few biblical occurrences of בני ציון ("sons of Zion") found in Ps. 149:2; Lam. 4:2; Joel 2:23 which may be similar to, or echo the use of בת ציון. A basic understanding of syntagmatic relationships in biblical Hebrew indicates that בת ציון is a construct phrase. Two nouns juxtaposed in Hebrew can form a construct phrase with the structure *construct + genitive* where the *genitive* modifies the *construct*; the genitive noun indicates the

[175] For a detailed list of construct phrases with "daughter" and "virgin daughter," see Magnar Kartveit, *Rejoice, Dear Zion!: Hebrew Construct Phrases with "Daughter" and "Virgin" as Nomen Regens*, vol. 447 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 114.

"owner" of the modified noun.[176] So, in the construct of בת (daughter) and ציון (Zion), the latter noun modifies the former to render the literal translation, "daughter [of] Zion" where "of" is supplied to indicate a genitival relationship. In the MT, a noun preceding its genitive ("pregenitive") is normally written with a vowel shortening which reflects a rhythmic and tonal link to its possessive modifier.

The work of William Stinespring in 1965 provided a foundational study on בת ציון which influenced the common rendering of "daughter Zion" rather than "daughter [of] Zion."[177] It does not suffice to say that בת ציון refers to daughters of a geographic entity, neither can it be said that בת ציון literally refers to a particular group of people. In all of its contexts, the phrase is used metaphorically whether or not it is translated as "daughter Zion" or "daughter [of] Zion." According to Dearman, the use of בת ציון could not parallel that of a text like "daughters [of] man" (בנות האדם) in Gen 6:2, for example: "Most of the references in the Hebrew bible to "daughters" of a geographic entity are gender specific and differentiated, explicitly or implicitly, from male counterparts in ways that DZ/DJer is not."[178] Stinespring argued that בת ציון was an "appositional genitive" in the majority of its occurrences.[179] This means that "daughter" is not a *product* of Zion, but rather, that Zion itself *is* a daughter, or a young woman. This reinforces the point that בת ציון is a metaphorical statement. In an article by Barbara Bakke Kaiser, she presents

[176] The issue of noun relationships in Hebrew, particularly those of genitive phrases or construct chains, contains many intricacies that go beyond the focus of this paper. However, they have been well rehearsed in the field of biblical text-linguistics; see Bruce K Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 136-60.

[177] W.F. Stinespring, "No Daughter of Zion: A Study of the Appositional Genitive in Hebrew Grammar," *Encounter* 26 (1965): 133-41.

[178] J. Andrew Dearman, "Daughter Zion and Her Place in God's Household," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 31 (2009): 144-59, 148. See also H.G.M. Williamson, *Isaiah 1-5* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 67.

[179] Stinespring, "No Daughter of Zion," 140-41.

Daughter Zion as a "literary persona" used by the authors of Jeremiah 4 and Lamentations 1-2 to express the pain of the community.[180] Kaiser argues that while the authors of these poems may have been men, the "distinctively female experience was regarded highly enough to function as the chief metaphor through which the poet expressed his own agony over Jerusalem's fate and encouraged community catharsis."[181] The concept of an intentional female persona is what guides Kaiser's preference of the translation "Daughter Zion" over "Daughter [of] Zion." In the work of Joseph Blenkinsopp on Isaiah, we see the characterization of בת ציון as an appositional genitive as well.[182] Similarly, Bernhard Duhm also identifies the appositional use of the construct "whereby Zion poetically is described as a young woman."[183] After a detailed linguistic analysis which cross-compared various renderings of other potential candidates of appositional interpretation in the HB, Kartveit concludes that "there is a possibility for "daughter (of) Zion" and the other construct phrases with the same structure to be understood as some scholars have suggested, as an appositional phrase where nomen regens describes nomen rectum."[184] However, a word of caution from Dobbs-Allsopp notes that "the appositional genitive in Semitic is relatively rare and fairly narrow in application, and in any event when the trope of the

[180] Barbara Bakke Kaiser, "Poet as 'Female Impersonator': The Image of Daughter Zion as Speaker in Biblical Poems of Suffering," *JR* 67 (1987): 164–82.

[181] Kaiser, "Female Impersonator," 182. For more on the representation of cities in the ANE and biblical text, see Mark S. Smith, *Where the Gods Are: Spatial Dimensions of Anthropomorphism in the Biblical World* (New Haven: Yale University, 2016), 99-107.

[182] Joseph Blenkinsopp, Isaiah *1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 183.

[183] Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 27.

[184] Kartveit, *Rejoice, Dear Zion*, 178.

personified city is at all developed [as in Lamentations], it is not the primary kinship-status designated by the term *bat* (i.e. daughter) that is ever chiefly in view."[185]

So, what exactly does Daughter Zion[186] represent? Generally, בת ציון is understood as the female personification of Jerusalem. Dobbs-Allsopp identifies a background in Mesopotamian city laments, where the goddess of a city termed "daughter of [the city]" laments and bewails her tragedy; the expressions of these ancient city laments, according to Dobbs-Allsopp, would be the historical-literary precursor for phrases such as "daughter Zion."[187] Christl Maier emphasizes Zion as the "divine abode" and adopts the terminology of French philosopher, Henri Lefebvre, in reference to the inseparable relationship between the actual topography of Jerusalem ("perceived space") and the ideology of sacred space ("conceived space").[188] In my interpretation of DZ, I would like to emphasize her connection to the marriage metaphor and covenant relationship.

[185] F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Daughter Zion," pages 125-34 in *Thus Says the LORD: Essays on the Former and Latter Prophets in Honor of Robert R. Wilson*, eds. John J. Ahn and Stephen L. Cook (New York; London; T&T Clark, 2009), 128.

[186] Hereafter "Daughter Zion" is abbreviated as DZ.

[187] F. W Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (Biblica et Orientalia 44; Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993. For an English translation of some Sumerian city laments, see *ANET*, 611-19; for more on the city lament genre, see Hillers, *Lamentations*, 32-39.

[188] Christl Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space, and the Sacred in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2008), 39-43; also, Kartveit, *Rejoice, Dear Zion*, 3.

b. Daughter Zion and the Marriage Motif

The work of Mandolfo is my chief source for the connection of the female personification of DZ in Lamentations to the literary tradition of the marriage metaphor evident in biblical literature.[189] A metaphor is a comparison that omits conjunctive expressions such as "like" or "as" and figuratively applies an idea or concept to an object to which they cannot be literally applicable: "Metaphors spin off associations, feelings, and ideas that lure us into the imagery and show us what we had not seen before."[190] The marriage metaphor in particular likens God to a "husband" and Israel to the "wife" of God. In *Daughter Zion Talks Back*, Mandolfo devotes an entire chapter to the marriage metaphor, and highlights its role in the construction of the literary figure of Daughter Zion and the dialogic interaction between Yahweh and his people: "… to read the relationship between God and the people through the lens of this female configuration, the prophetic texts most in need of deciphering are those that utilize the marriage metaphor as primary trope for the human/divine relationship."[191]

The hermeneutic of suspicion underlies Mandolfo's interpretation of the marriage metaphor in Lam. 1-2. She does not only consider *what* a text means, but also *how* a text means: "Asking 'how' assumes the text has an agenda, an assumption that leads to reading suspiciously. How are

[189] The origin of the marriage metaphor is contested in biblical scholarship; Phyllis Bird relates the metaphor to cultural assumptions inherent to Israelite patriarchal society in Phyllis Bird, "To Play the Harlot: An Inquiry into an Old Testament Metaphor," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, (ed. Peggy L. Day; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 75-94. Galambush traces the metaphor back to West Semitic mythological motifs that depicted cities as the consorts of their male patron Gods in Julie Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel: The City As Yahweh's Wife* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), 20-59. Keefe relates agricultural and sociopolitical concerns of ancient Israelite culture to the marriage metaphor in Alice A. Keefe, *Women's Body and the Social Body in Hosea*, JSOT 338 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 20-34.

[190] Kathleen M. O' Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2011), 35.

[191] Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 29-54 (esp. 29).

the binaries male/female, innocence/guilt, pure/impure, loyalty/disloyalty construed and normalized?"[192]

As I noted earlier, Kaiser presented the "female experience" as the chief metaphor through which the poet of Lamentations felt that they could express their own agony.[193] Contrary to Kaiser's interpretation on the female anthropomorphism of Zion in Lamentations, the marriage metaphor in the broader category of prophetic literature, according to Mandolfo, betrays certain anxieties of the elite male audience of Israel instead of a high esteem for the "female experience". From a socio-rhetorical perspective, she argues that the metaphor played on two key issues that mattered to the elite male audience of ancient Israel: (1) the issue of extramarital sexual intercourse as a threat to "the patrilineal and patriarchal imperatives of unambiguous ancestral lines";[194] and (2) the issue of the social dishonour brought to a husband by an adulterous wife due to "his inability to control and guard the sexual impulses of the female members of his house, something honorable men were expected to do."[195]

Sexuality was a major concern in ancient Israel that continually threatened "the fragile myth of kinship and solidarity that defined the nation."[196] Consequently, the issue of prostitution and the sexual relationships are a typical issue of contention in prophetic literature, i.e. Amos 2:7; Jer. 5:7; Hos. 1-3. Along with adultery, there was also the issue of syncretism where the Prophets

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[192] *Ibid.,* 30.

[193] Kaiser, "Poet as 'Female Impersonator'," 182.

[194] Mandolfo, *Daughter* Zion, 31.

[195] *Ibid.*

[196] Renita Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 71.

would condemn the people of Israel for the mixing and matching of conflicting traditions or beliefs. The Book of Hosea, commonly presented as the originator of the biblical marriage motif, shows a representation of the infidelity of the nation of Israel towards God through the life of the prophet Hosea. Hos. 1-3 describes the prophet's marriage to Gomer at the command of God, an indictment against Israel, and Hosea's purchase and remarriage to Gomer. Adultery is a major theme in Hosea and the marriage of Hosea and Gomer is used to make a theological point on the sin of syncretism as spiritual adultery. Gomer is the living metaphor in Hosea's life for the indictment of God toward Israel.

The aforementioned issues and anxieties of adultery and syncretism characterized the social chaos of Judah in the years preceding 587 BCE which likely resulted in a metaphor that related theological and national concerns and crisis to personal concerns and the issues of daily life in Ancient Israel: "If the prophets were successful, the audience would be compelled to acquit God of any suspicion of weakness or injustice that resulted in their destruction at the hands of the Assyrians or Babylonians."[197]

Richtsje Abma identifies three traditions in which the marriage metaphor occurs and their particular emphases. (1) the marriage metaphor of the tradition of Hosea and Jeremiah reflects a "special focus on the disloyalty and adultery of Israel [both Samaria and Jerusalem]." (2) the tradition of Isaiah 40-55 focuses on the special loving relationship between Zion and Yahweh "including a strong accent on the female personification of the city, following Lamentations." And (3) the tradition of Ezekiel 16 and 23 which is similar to the tradition of Hosea and Jeremiah in regards to themes of harlotry and the two sisters, Samaria and Jerusalem, but "exhibits a

[197] Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 31; also, Weems, *Battered Love*, 64.

unique emphasis on the female personification of both Samaria and Jerusalem."[198] Abma also considers the formal differences between the texts of the three traditions and notes how Ezekiel 16, 23 and Isaiah 50, 54 are different genres to Hosea 1-3 and Jeremiah 2-3.[199] In the tradition of Ezekiel and Isaiah 40-55, the metaphor occurs in the context of a more sophisticated poetry than that of its occurrence in Hosea and Jeremiah, which typically go back and forth between poetry and narrative.

When considering the marriage metaphor, we must also consider the covenant and Torah. Indeed, many scholars note how prophetic literature makes little sense without the covenant context, and I agree with Brueggemann that "[t]he prophets can only be understood in the context of the ancient historical and legal traditions of the Pentateuch."[200] Elaine J. Adler presents an intra-biblical analysis of the marriage metaphor in relation to the covenant and interprets the metaphor in light of Israel's unique covenant theology.[201] She argues that the concept of an exclusive amorous relationship between a nation and its deity in covenant theology has no parallel in the ANE:[202] "Thus, the origins of the metaphor of covenant as marriage should be sought primarily, or even only, in basic ideas peculiar to Israelite religion."[203] It is the precise notion of an exclusive relationship which is the motivation of Adler for relating covenant to the

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[198] Richtsje Abma, *Bonds of Love: Methodic Studies of Prophetic Texts with Marriage Imagery (Isaiah 50: 1-3 and 54: 1-10, Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2-3)* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1999), 25.

[199] *Ibid.*

[200] Walter Brueggemann, *Tradition for Crisis: A Study in Hosea* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1968), 13.

[201] Elaine J. Adler, *The Background of the Metaphor of Covenant in Marriage in the Hebrew Bible* (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, 1990), 93-111.

[202] *Ibid.*, 2-7.

[203] *Ibid.*, 411.

marriage metaphor. Adler outlines a few features of biblical covenant that make marriage a suitable metaphor for the covenant relationship between Israel and Yahweh: (1) the obligation of exclusive fidelity; (2) evidence of a commitment that goes beyond those of natural familial ties; and (3) the "emotional intensity" of Yahweh's relationship with Israel, which is characterized by language such as "love", "passion", and "jealousy".[204]

Relative to the connection of DZ to the marriage metaphor, it could be the case that we are simply reading too much into gender expressions such as "daughter" in biblical literature. Does the use of DZ in Lamentations make any significant point entailing the marriage metaphor? In any case, the use of gender in the biblical text ought to be elaborated upon, for linguistic and interpretive purposes, and not taken for granted.

Abma provides important insights from feminist Biblical criticism and argues that it is necessary that biblical hermeneutics expose these gender dynamics lest it runs the risk of "legitimizing or authorizing these asymmetrical gender patterns."[205] The marriage metaphor of the Bible is a popular subject of feminist scholarship which focuses on critical assessments on the way female characters are used in biblical literature. A fundamental assumption of feminist criticism is that "with respect to the construction of gender-relations there exists a certain continuity between social reality and the world which is described in literature."[206] This is why texts can tell us about the socio-historical contexts of past civilizations. Generally, feminist scholarship notes that the marriage metaphor reflects the asymmetrical gender relations that were

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[204] *Ibid*., 42-84.

[205] Abma, *Bonds of Love*, 25.

[206] Fokkelien Dijk-Hemmes, "The Imagination of Power and the Power of Imagination: An Intertextual Analysis of Two Biblical Love Songs, The Songs of Songs and Hosea 2," *JSOT* 44 (1989): 75-88, 76.

a part of the social hierarchy of Israel in the ANE: "Within this gender pattern Yhwh is depicted as the male and as the superior party and Israel as the female and as the inferior party."[207] Moreover, the marriage metaphors of prophetic literature were largely one-sided and the personified female cities were only ever the object of a discussion. This allows us to better appreciate a particularly unique feature of Lamentations in regards to how the author of the text gives a voice to the female configuration. DZ speaks for herself and addresses God.

Mandolfo's connection of the marriage motif to DZ in Lamentations is not without its opponents and has invited stark criticism from scholars such as Dearman and Floyd.[208] Consider the following excerpt from Dearman.

> Although the poignant accusatory voice is replete in Lam. 1-2, the marital imagery is at best implicit and subsumed, if it is there at all. DZ is a dejected daughter and a deposed princess/queen, not a wife. She may be involved in promiscuous activity (Lam. 1:19), but the language of adultery and divorce are not present in Lamentations as they are in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Note, furthermore that DZ does not occur in Jer 2-3, Ezek 16, 23, where the marriage and adultery metaphors are explicit in those texts the kinship imagery associated with DZ may be implicit and subsumed, if it is thee at all.… Mandolfo's paradigm would work better if the voice of DZ were seen more in response to judgment inflicted on the daughter of a household, rather than upon a spouse.[209]

The main issue of concern here for Dearman, and likewise Floyd, is that the marriage metaphor unnecessarily conflates the interpretation of Lamentations and the characterization of DZ therein: "[S]he conflates the role of the city herself and the role of בת־ציון into the single role

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[207] Abma, *Bonds of Love*, 25-26.

[208] Michael Floyd, "The Daughter of Zion Goes Fishing in Heaven," 177-209 in *Daughter Zion: Her Portrait, Her Response*, ed. Mark J. Boda, Carol J. Dempsey and LeAnn Snow Flesher (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature), 178-181.

[209] J. Andrew Dearman, "Daughter Zion and Her Place in God's Household," *HBT* 31 (2009):155-59, 156-57.

of daughter Zion, and then she conflates this characterization of daughter Zion with the prophetic characterization of the city of the unfaithful wife and prostitute."[210] For Floyd, the paralleling of DZ to the marriage metaphor and the adulterous and battered wife of prophetic literature is a false equivalency.

Though I take seriously the points made by Dearman and Floyd, I side with Mandolfo by suggesting that the literary trope of the marriage metaphor underlies the personification of DZ in Lamentations. I think Mandolfo's goal is not to take the experiences of the city in prophetic literature and pass it off as those of DZ, but rather to highlight how Lamentations undermines prophetic literary traditions and theodicies by giving voice to the female configuration.[211] Furthermore, she asks, "what does it mean, theologically, when the voice traditionally representing the divine position [the DV which, in the case of Lam. 1-2, is DZ], the voice of authority, speaks against its own interest and from the perspective of suffering humans?"[212] Mandolfo's focal concern is how DZ talks back to God, laments and pleads her case, and demands justice. Admittedly, the marriage metaphor and the likening of DZ to a wife are not explicit to the text of Lamentations. However, I think that these traditions are at the very least alluded.

[210] Floyd, "The Daughter of Zion," 179.

[211] Cf. Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 26-28.

[212] *Ibid*., 74.

2. The Voice of Daughter Zion in Lamentations 1 and 2

a. The Literary Unity and Structure of Lamentations 1 and 2

Similarly to Dearman, Mandolfo, Parry, Westermann and many more scholars of Lamentations, my reading of Lam. 1-2 is informed by the assumption that both chapters form a literary unit. The structure of Lam. 1-2 suggested below is based on various commentaries, and particularly those of Parry and Westermann, which are fairly similar to and in line with the majority of assessments in Lamentations scholarship.[213]

Lamentations 1:1-22
- a. Lam. 1:1-11b The Narrator Speaks of Daughter Zion (Jerusalem)
  - i. 1:1-6 The Misery of Daughter Zion
  - ii. 1:9c *Daughter Zion Interrupts*
  - iii. 7-11b The Sin and Humiliation of Daughter Zion
- b. Lam. 1:11c-22 Daughter Zion Speaks
  - i. 1:11c-16 Complaints and Accusations of Daughter Zion
  - ii. 1:17 *The Narrator Interrupts*
  - iii. 1:18-22 The Plea of Daughter Zion: מריתי ("I have rebelled!")

Lamentations 2:1-22
- c. Lam. 2:1-10 The Destructive Anger of God Against Daughter Zion
  - i. 2:1-5 Description of ביום אפו ("In The Day of His Anger")
  - ii. 2:6-10 The Violence of God Against The Temple, City, and People
- d. Lam. 2:11-19 The Narrator Reacts to The Destruction of Daughter Zion
  - i. 2:11-12 The Grief of The Narrator
  - ii. 2:13-17 The Narrator Speaks to Daughter Zion of Her Pain
  - iii. 2:18-19 The Narrator Calls to Daughter Zion to Cry out to YHWH
- e. Lam. 2:20-22 The Prayer and Protest of Daughter Zion

[213] Outline adapted and slightly modified from Parry, *Lamentations*. 40-41, 71. See also, Westermann, *Lamentations*, 119-40, 159-60.

This outline of Lam. 1-2 may suggest that the chapters are by and large different on the basis that DZ has fewer *lines* to speak in Lam. 2. Nevertheless, the two chapters are identically structured. In both Lam. 1 and Lam. 2, the voice of the poet, or the narrator, begins their speech with an exclamation indicated by the interrogative adverb איכה ("How!?"), and the cries of the personified city, DZ, are expressed. Moreover, Parry adds the fact that Lam. 1-2 deal with similar events, albeit from different perspectives in time: "Chapters 1 and 2 clearly belong together in that they follow the same poetic pattern and contain the same two voices (narrator and Lady Zion) addressing different aspects of the same basic situation in its present and past dimensions."[214] For Parry, the interplay between past and present dimensions contribute to an overarching chiastic structure of Lamentations where the *present* is the focus in Lam. 1 and 5, the *past* in Lam. 2 and 4, and Lam. 3 holds together *past*, *present*, and *future*.[215] Westermann also states that there are similarities between Lam. 2 and Lam. 1: "Even though at first glance the structure of Lam 2 appears to have little in common the structure of Lam 1, upon closer analysis the similarity is indeed considerable."[216] Lam. 1 and Lam. 2 are the only two poems in the book that employ the acrostic structure in the exact same manner save for the reversal of ע and פ (Chapter 2). Hillers suggests that the consistent use of the acrostic structure in the poems of Lamentations conveys a monotonous tone which complements the idea of an incessant cognitive rehearsal of past tragedies –people, "ever returning to the source of their anguish."[217]

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[214] Parry, *Lamentations*, 17.

[215] *Ibid*.

[216] Westermann, *Lamentations*, 147.

[217] Hillers, *Lamentations*, 18.

b. Lam. 1:1-11b

The form איכה of the interrogative איך occurs 17 times in the HB, 11 of which occur in Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and Lamentations: Deut. 1:12; 7:17; 12:30; 18:21; 32:30; Jer. 8:8; 48:17; Lam. 1:1; 2:1; 4:1, 2. The rest of the occurrences are found in Judg. 2:3, 2 Kgs. 6:15, Ps. 73:11, Sol. 1:7 (2 occ.), and Isa. 1:21. The interrogative איכה is normally translated into English as "how," except in Sol. 1:7 (here, איכה should be translated as "where"). In Lam. 1-2, איכה serves as a "mournful cry" which marks the beginning of the speech of the narrator.[218]

The walls of Jerusalem had been breached by the enemy and the city that was once "great among the nations" (1:1) sat in solitary (בדד) with only her memories for comfort: "Jerusalem remembers (זכרה), in the days of her affliction and wandering all the precious things that were hers in days of old" (Lam. 1:7). The language of the narrator concerning the actions of DZ expresses her sadness, lament, and shame: DZ weeps (בכו), sighs (נאנחה), and hides herself (ותשב) in humiliation. The narrator is writing from the perspective of an observer in Lam. 1. The opening verses of Lam. 1 provide an exposition and establish important background information (Lam. 1:3) that underlies the entire book. They set the stage for the work and outline the exile and the affliction of DZ. In v. 5 the narrator mentions that it is Yahweh who "grieves" DZ (כי־יהוה הוגה). This, in my opinion, is the first hint in the book at the devious and deadly role of God behind the misfortunes of DZ. The speech of the narrator is briefly interrupted by two short

[218] Westermann, *Lamentations*, 115.

invocative prayers of DZ at 9c and 11c, the second of which transitions into the speech of DZ: "Look, O Lord!" (ראה יהוה).

c. Lam. 1:11c-22

After the brief invocative prayer at 11c, DZ temporarily shifts her attention toward "all who pass by" (כל־עברי). The first chapter of Lamentations establishes a scene of destruction; the calling on those who "pass by" for help is a typical motif in such scenes, e.g. Zeph. 2:15.[219] In v. 12, DZ argues for the incomparability of her suffering and trauma. O' Connor writes that "such claims of incomparability and uniqueness do not function as equations of measurement," but rather, they "express the vastness of pain that overcomes individuals and groups. Suffering that defies containment, that blasts away at the imagination, that has no words to express its depths and totality."[220] In other words, DZ is at a loss at how her circumstances could be any worse. In both Lam. 1:5a and 1:12c we see the occurrence of the hiphil הוגה ("he causes to grieve") which communicates that it is Yahweh who is behind the plight of DZ. The accusation is *explicit* and carries on into v. 13. Parry states that it is at least *implied* that God has not acted appropriately.[221] The "fire" (אש) sent "from on high" (ממרום) in v. 13 possibly relates to "actual fires lit by Babylonians when they plundered Jerusalem, but from Jerusalem's perspective the Babylonian fires were lit by YHWH."[222] Still on the subject of God's hand in the demise of DZ, we see the

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[219] Adele Berlin, *Lamentations*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 57.

[220] O' Connor, *Tears of the World*, 26.

[221] Parry, *Lamentations*, 57.

[222] *Ibid*., 57-58.

image of God spreading a net or trap in the path of Zion in 13b which alludes to common motifs OT prophetic literature.[223] This image is evident in Jer. 50:24; Ezek. 12:13; 17:20; 32:3; and Hos. 7:12.

The narrator interrupts the speech of DZ at v. 17 and uses language that brutally articulates the depth of the humiliation of DZ: "Jerusalem has become a filthy (לנדה) thing among them" (Lam. 1:17). The use of the word לנדה here literally means "like a menstruous woman." From the perspective of the nations, or the traitors and ex-lovers of DZ, it would be ritually unclean to come into further contact with DZ; the language of Lam. 1:17 echoes the covenant and relates to Lev. 15:19-24.[224] None dare approach DZ in risk of defiling themselves. In Lam. 1:19 we see the theme of the failure of earthly kingdoms, or the former "lovers" (אהב) of DZ, as a reliable support for Israel. DZ calls (קראתי) for her lovers (למאהבי) but they do not respond.

Though the mistreatment of DZ by God seems to be a recurring theme in Lamentations, it must also be considered that DZ acknowledges that she is in the wrong, or rather, that "the Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled (מריתי) against his word" (Lam. 1:18). The expression "Yahweh is in the right" in v. 18 is an expression derived from biblical legal language and it relates to the formula for pronouncing a verdict, e.g. Exod. 9:27; 1 Sam. 24:17-18; 2 Kings 10:9; Ps. 119:137; Ezra. 9:15.[225] This pronouncement of guilt is generally completed by the other half of the expression, "… and I am in the wrong" (Neh. 9:33). DZ recognizes her offense, and her special relationship with God does not excuse her from punishment. However, along with the

[223] Hillers, *Lamentations*, 27.

[224] Parry, *Lamentations*, 61; also, Berlin, *Lamentation*, 58-59.

[225] Hillers, *Lamentations*, 28.

background of a covenant relationship, that same universal justice of God forms a ground of appeal for the call of DZ for vengeance at the end Lam. 1: "Let all their evil doing come before you; and deal with them as you have dealt with me because of all my transgressions (פשעי, Lam. 1:22).

d. Lam. 2:1-10

The first half of Lam. 2 illustrates the ביום אפו ("In the Day of His Anger") where God destroys "without mercy" (לא חמל). This chapter presents a controversial image of God as an enemy (אויב): "That a Judean poet could call God 'enemy' is a telling sign of the deep distress and unparalleled suffering brought on by the catastrophe."[226] Furthermore in v. 4, the poet makes it horrifyingly clear that people, and not only infrastructure, were destroyed by God.[227] Lam. 2:9 is a reference to the deportation of the political leaders of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Kgs. 24-25). Moreover, the narrator indicates the severity of the estrangement of DZ from God and states that even "her prophets obtain no vision from the Lord" (Lam. 2:9). The political and religious instability brought by the exile would have plunged the Israelites into a social and psychological chaos.

> The priests normally assumed the responsibility for making decisions relating to the religious aspects of the Torah, while the court officials and the king administered the civil law. For a community which professed to live by the Torah to be deprived of its normative basis of existence was as demoralizing spiritually as it was disabling socially.[228]

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[226] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 83.

[227] Parry, *Lamentations*, 75.

[228] R. K. Harrison, *Lamentations*, TOTC (London: Tyndale Press, 1973), 216.

Lam. 2 takes the accusation against God hinted in Lam. 1 even further and throughout the entire chapter the narrator emphasizes "that it was Yahweh himself who destroyed city and people, and the writer seldom strays very far from this idea."[229] Westermann presents the chapter as an "elaborately developed accusation against God … developed out of mournful reflection upon the devastating loss on occasions when the fall of Jerusalem was solemnly memorialized."[230]

e. Lam. 2:11-22

In Lam. 2:11 there is a shift from the third person voice to the first person voice; though commentators generally note that it is the same speaker who shifts from narrating to expressing their own personal grief: "The narrator has moved from a more detached observer role to a fully engaged one where he emotionally identifies with Jerusalem."[231] Nancy Lee identifies this voice with the 'weeping prophet', Jeremiah.[232] Her point could suggest that Jeremiah is the implied narrator of the Lamentations. Lee argues that the language of Lam. 2:11-12 reflects that of Jeremiah on the basis of three linguistic similarities: (1) The expression of "weeping" in Lam. 2:11 also occurs in Jer. 9:1; 13:17; and 14:17; (2) both texts employ the similar use of the words

[229] Hillers, *Lamentations*, 43.

[230] Westermann, *Lamentations*, 152.

[231] Parry, *Lamentations*, 80.

[232] Nancy C. Lee, *The Singers of Lamentations: Cities Under Siege, From Ur to Jerusalem to Sarajevo*. Biblical Interpretation 60 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 147.

"eyes" (עין), and "weep" (דמעות); and (3) the similar use of the expression "my inward parts" in both texts.[233]

The *leitmotif* of ביום אפו from vv. 1-8 reoccurs in the final couple verses and it reemphasizes a "guiding theme for the whole lament."[234] But, despite the gruesome depiction of the destructive anger of God in Lam.2, we see that it presents a more hopeful outlook for DZ through the narrator's relentless insistence that she continues to call upon God for help and justice in vv. 17-18: "[T]he distinctive feature of Lam. 2 is the intensity with which it juxtaposes, on the one hand, speech about the wrath of God—or the experiencing of the same—in vv. 1-8 with, on the other hand, a summons to lament, to pour out one's heart before God."[235] God had done "what he has purposed" (אשר זמם) and now, DZ "must set aside sleep and do whatever it takes to get the Lord's attention, and she must do it without ceasing."[236]

3. Concluding Reflections on Daughter Zion

Every year on Tisha B'Av, many of the Jewish faith fast and commemorate several disasters of Jewish history, including the Babylonian exile of 587. On this day, the plight of DZ is recited in the synagogue, and her chilling voice resonates in the hearts of many who identify with her pain.

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[233] *Ibid*., 147-48. NB further similarities between Lam. 2:11-22 and Jer 8:19-9:1. Lee also suggests that the phrase "daughter of my people" comes into play in both Lam. and Jer. in Lee, "The Singers of Lamentations," 45. Keil also notes how the phrase "the destruction of the daughter of my people" is found in Jer 6:14; 8:11, 21 in Carl F. Keil, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, Commentary on the Old Testament 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980; repr., 1872), 392.

[234] Westermann, *Lamentations*, 159.

[235] *Ibid*., 159.

[236] Parry, *Lamentations*, 84.

For the modern Jew, the concept of Zion has become a symbol of hope amidst affliction. In the Dead Sea Scroll, "Apostrophe to Zion" (11Q5 22.1-15 vv. 9-8), the Psalter reflects this hope and commemorates the plight of their ancestor: "How they have hoped for your salvation, your perfect ones have mourned for you. Your Hope does not perish, O Zion, nor is your longing forgotten" (cf. Isa. 65:18-19, 66:10).[237]

What then can we say of DZ in the book of Lamentations? Is she a "child" or "wife" of God? The latter of the two options may require more argumentation to substantiate. However, I think that both metaphors are applicable to Lamentations and lead to different, but equally valuable theological points. For Mandolfo, DZ is the "wife" of Yahweh who had been "narratively" constructed as a "whore" in the discourse of the prophets.[238] Moreover, DZ is the voice that looks to "reconstitute her identity" and plead her case before God in Lamentations.

It might be easy to be critical of DZ by highlighting her "rebellion" (מריתי, Lam. 1:18) and presenting her as a negative example for believers. However, my view is that DV demonstrates an exemplary faith that is characteristic to a strong relationship with God. In speaking of the lament psalms, Brueggemann states that "the use of these 'psalms of darkness' may be judged by the world to be *acts of unfaith and failure*, but for the trusting community, their use is an act of *bold faith*, albeit a transformed faith."[239] The faith of the lament psalmist is bold in that it faces

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[237] The "Apostrophe to Zion" is not a prayer addressed to God, but rather a love song for Zion which draws heavily from the style and vocabulary of Isaiah 54:1-8, 60:1-22, 62:1-8, and 66:10-11. See James H. Charlesworth et al., eds. *Pseudepigraphic and Non-Masoretic Psalms and Prayers*. Vol. 4A of *The Dead Sea scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 201-203.

[238] Carleen Mandolfo, "The Perseverance of Justice," pages 47-56 in *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts*, ed. Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo, SBLSymS 43 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 54.

[239] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 52. Emphasis is original.

the world as it really is and insists that "all such experiences of disorder are a proper subject for discourse with God."[240] It is a faith that does not need to hide anything from God and it exemplifies an ideal honest and trusting relationship. Similarly to the lament psalmist, DZ does not shy away from addressing God. She acknowledges her fault, and though she *questions* God, she also demonstrates her reliance on God by her demand for justice.

[240] *Ibid.*

Chapter 4

THE CONTENDING VOICES OF LAMENTATIONS 3: CACOPHONIC INTERLUDE OR HARMONY?

Cast your burdens on the Lord
and he will sustain you;
he will never permit
the righteous to be moved

(Psalm 55:22)

1. Introduction

There are a number of voices in the third acrostic which contend and debate with one another. There are even more interpretations as to how to decipher these voices and the contradictions they present. A man bewails his suffering and cries out to a God he knows will not answer (Lam. 3:8). A voice of wisdom declares a message of hope and asserts that one ought to "wait quietly" for the "salvation of the Lord" (Lam. 3:28). A community in crisis lashes out against a God who will simply not forgive (Lam. 3:42). A weeping prophet is redeemed from the clutches of persecution (Lam. 3:55-57). A curse echoes from the depths and appeals to the justice of God for vengeance (Lam. 3:64-66). What are we to make of this chapter? How does it relate to the other poems of Lamentations? And, can any harmony be salvaged among the diverse voices in this poetry?

This chapter will carefully outline and discuss the literary structure of Lam. 3 and the particular issues of interpretation that arise in the text. My intention is to examine the passage

from beginning to end with a focus on the dialogic tension inherent to Lam. 3. I will also reflect on the contribution of this passage to the overall message of incessant invocation that I think to be central to the message of Lamentations. In highlighting the conflicting utterances of Lam. 3 and how they affect the progress of the book, I will consult and present additional interpretations and issues discussed by various scholars. In summary, this chapter will look in detail at the literary persona of the primary speaker, הגבר, in Lam. 3:1-18. It will also discuss the issues of interpreting a transition to hope in Lam. 3:19-21, the issues of theodicy in vv. 22-39, of retributive justice in vv. 42-47, and of deliverance and vengeance in vv. 48-66. And finally, this chapter will present my concluding reflections on the overall place of Lam. 3 in the book as a whole.

2. The Literary Function of Lamentations 3

In following a dialogic methodology, it seems evident, at first, to divide Lam. 3 in accordance with its shift in voices: "Lamentations 3 can be separated into four sections according to voice: vv. 1-24 (first person), 25-39 (third), 40-47 (first plural), and 48-66 (first singular)."[241] Ideally, one would find that each of the four sections contain a core testimony or central message, a monologic assertion of sorts. This is not the case in Lam. 3. Within each section, we find inner turmoil and contradiction, as if the speaker is wrestling with what they are trying to say. Bakhtin emphasizes this phenomenon in his own work pertaining to dialogic literary theory: "Quite frequently within the boundaries of his own utterance the speaker (or writer) raises questions, answers them himself, raises objections to his own ideas, responds to his own objections and so

[241] Cornelius Houk, "Multiple Poets in Lamentations," *JSOT* 30 (2005): 111-125, 116.

on."[242] Indeed, there are direct contradictions which are explicitly expressed by a voice in Lam. 3; but there are also indirect ones which reveal themselves when trying to decipher the original Hebrew of the text. Consider the insights of Brueggemann in his *Theology of the Old Testament*:

> Israel's text, and therefore Israel and Israel's God, are always in the middle of an exchange, unable to come to ultimate resolution. There may be momentary or provisional resolution, but because both parties are intensely engaged and are so relentlessly verbal, we are always sure that there will be another speech, another challenge, another invitation, another petition, another argument, which will reopen the matter and expend the provisional settlement.[243]

Many attempt to synthesize conflicts and contradictions in biblical texts into one central message or idea. However, the presence of these textual tensions reflects, as Brueggemann suggests, the dynamic nature of covenant relationship according to the Jewish faith community of the ancient world. Traditionally, the third chapter of Lamentations is seen as the center or "heart" of the book, presenting the core testimony that the suffering of Israel is deserved, but that there is hope.[244] There is a reconciliation between the suffering and the love of God essentially grounded in retributive justice. Linafelt critiques the traditional readings that reconcile the turmoil of Lam. 3, and instead chooses to focus on the confrontational nature of the poem.[245]

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[242] Bakhtin, "Speech Genres," 72. The theme of inner discourse and conflict was present in ANE literature if we consider biblical texts such as Ecclesiastes and the ancient Egyptian writing, "Discourse of a Man with his Ba [Soul]." See Wim van den Dungen, *Ancient Egyptian Readings* [Braschaat, Belgium: Taurus Press, 2016], 163-74.

[243] Brueggemann, *Theology of*, 83.

[244] Hillers, *Lamentations*, 5-6, 119-123; Salters, *Lamentations*, 117; Gottwald, *Studies in the Book*, 91-111; Homer Heater, "Structure and Meaning in Lamentations," *BSac* 149 (1992): 304-315, 311; Jože Krašovec, "The Source of Hope in Lamentations," *VT* 42 (1992): 221–33.

[245] Tod Linafelt, "Zion's Cause: The Presentation of Pain in the Book of Lamentations," pages 267-290 in *Strange Fire: Reading the Bible after the Holocaust*, ed. Tod Linafelt, *The Biblical Seminar 71* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 268. We see a similar approach with respect to Michael V. Fox's work on Ecclesiastes. Where many sought to understand the apparent contradictions of Ecclesiastes through a closer inspection of the text, Fox maintained that "the message that a quick reading takes from a text belongs to its meaning no less than do the ideas extracted by closer readings. An author creates the surface as well as the depths of the work and knows that the surface will be seen first." See quote in Michael V. Fox, *Qoheletth and His Contradictions* (Decatur, GA: The

Similarly, Kelly M. Wilson writes that "by focusing myopically on Lamentations 3, the majority of interpreters have allowed its images of hope and conversion to eclipse the rest of the text and have effectively silenced those who are suffering."[246] While roughly one third of the poem can arguably be considered hopeful, what of the other two thirds? Should we stamp out the voices in lament in our search for reassurance? Furthermore, the message of hope is completely overwhelmed by despair and lament relative to the rest of Lamentations.

O'Connor writes that the hope in Lam. 3 functions as a brief repose from the depressive atmosphere of the book: "The hope in chapter three is but an interlude, a moment of respite in the midst of massive disruption, as if after two chapters of sorrow and fury, readers need a break, some solace, some reason to go forward in the book as well as in life."[247] Her language has been a source of inspiration for the title of this chapter and relates to the central question I ask in relation to the purpose of Lam. 3 when situated in its immediate literary context: Is the chapter a brief interlude or core testimony? Also, is this interlude or testimony *cacophonic*? That is, does it present a meaningless or discordant arrangement of messages which cannot be harmonized? It will soon be apparent that this study emphasizes a *cacophonic testimony* instead of O'Connor's

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Almond Press, 1989), 10. And for Fox, the *prima facie* message of Ecclesiastes was one of the ultimate absurdity of all things and the fear of God.

[246] Kelly M. Wilson, "Daughter Zion Speaks in Auschwitz: A Post-Holocaust Reading of Lamentations," JSOT 37 (2012): 93-108. A similar trend occurred with scholarship pertaining Ecclesiastes as well whereby its "joy statements" (Qoh. 2:24-25; 3:12-13, 22; 5:17-19; 8:15; 9:7-9; 11:8-9) contribute to the book's overarching message of joy. See Carl S. Knopf, "The Optimism of Koheleth," *JBL* 49 (1930):195-99, Graham S. Ogden, "Qoheleth's Use of the 'Nothing Is Better' Form," *JBL* 98 (1979): 339-50, and R. Norman Whybray, "Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy," *JSOT* 23 (1982):87-98. The work of William H. U. Anderson in *Scepticism and Ironic Correlations in the Joy Statements of Qoheleth* (Piscataway, NJ: Georgias Press, 2010) challenges such interpretations and holds the joy statements in creative tension with the rest of the work whereby Ecclesiastes is left open-ended and leaves readers guessing as to its true message or intentions.

[247] Kathleen M. O'Conner, "Voices Arguing About Meaning," in *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts*, eds. Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 29.

"interlude." Lam. 3 is itself full of mixed messages and presents both hope and misery. The chapter does not effectively give readers a rest from the chaotic atmosphere of the text. Rather, it intensifies the chaos.

Nevertheless, I contend that the voice of hope in Lam. 3 carries just as much weight as the voices of despair in the chapter. As Heaton suggests, all the voices in Lam. 3, whether optimistic or otherwise, contain a force that demands the reader's attention: "Chapter 3 reaches a crescendo of both despair and hope. The triple lines of the alphabet clang on the reader's ears, crying for him to see the agony of the writer and his people. At the same time, strong emphasis is placed on the mercy and the goodness of God…"[248] Furthermore, I suggest that the apparently faint presentation of hope in Lam. 3 has an emphatic effect on the seemingly positive aspects of Lamentations. Themes such as the love and mercy of God are rare enough in the text that they provide a certain appeal to readers when encountered. A faint light shines brightest in absolute darkness.[249]

3. The Literary Structure of Lamentations 3

There are a number of ways to read Lam. 3 and many scholars present a unique take on the literary structure of the chapter. One possibility could be to look to the acrostic poetic structure to inform our reading. However, the start of an acrostic strophe does not necessarily indicate the start of a new theme or idea. The writing of Lamentations does not restrict itself to its poetic

[248] Homer Heater, "Structure and Meaning," 312.

[249] The words of John 1:5 come to mind when I ponder the contrasting effect of hope in Lam. 3 with the rest of the book: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

structure. Parataxis, enjambment, acrostics, the *qinah*, parallelism, repetition, and other poetic devices do not compromise the fluidity of Lamentations. The author uses them colorfully and freely. Lamentations reads like a musical composition where notes and phrases characteristically carry over bars and measures.

Parry suggests that a progression of thought is taking place in Lam. 3.[250] He presents the chapter as the reflections of the speaker formally introduced as הגבר in v. 1.[251] The voice of הגבר continues to speak even when the first person plural voice is assumed in v. 42, it is ברהג who is leading the community in lament. For Parry, הגבר embodies the corporate affliction of the people. The voice of הגבר intimately relates with the suffering of the community, and consequently, to the oppression of DZ in Lam. 1-2. However, הגבר offers a different perspective which prompts him to the hopeful segments in Lam. 3. The literary structure below represents my understanding of the more common outlines of Lam. 3 and it follows the trend of separating Lam. 3 into four broad segments corresponding to shifts in voicing:[252]

Lamentations 3:1-66

a. Lam. 3:1-24 The Suffering and Hope of הגבר
   - 1-18 The Suffering of הגבר
   - 19-21 Suffering leads to Hope
   - 22-24 Affirmation of trust in YHWH: "His mercies never end!"

b. Lam. 3:25-39 Didactic Explication of the Suffering and Hope of הגבר
   - 25-30 How the sufferer should posture himself before YHWH
   - 31-33 Reason for hope: The Lovingkindness of YHWH
   - 34-39 Injustice and punishment does not elude the gaze of YHWH

c. Lam. 3:40-47 רהגב Calls for Repentance and Leads Communal Lament
   - 40-41 A call for corporate repentance
   - 42-47 הגבר leads a communal lament

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[250] Parry, *Lamentations*, 93.

[251] To clarify, I mention הגבר here to denote a speaker of Lam. 3. Details on the meaning and use of this word will be further discussed later in the chapter.

[252] Outline adapted and modified from Parry, *Lamentations*, 92-93. See also Westermann, *Lamentations*, 189-91.

d. Lam. 3:48-66 The Redemption of YHWH
   48-51 הגבר weeps at the suffering of his city
   52-54 הגבר is hunted and persecuted
   55-58 YHWH answers and rescues הגבר: "Do Not Fear"
   64-66 הגבר Calls for Vengeance

In accordance with the subtle distinction between a voice – that is, an utterance that has one clear tone and emphasis akin to a particular perspective or viewpoint – and a speaker, who may over the course of a speech-act express multiple voices (Chapter 2), I do not think it entirely problematic to attribute Lam. 3 to one underlying speaker, namely, הגבר: "While it is perfectly reasonable to read changes in perspective as indicative of new speakers, it is not necessary to do so."[253] As I mentioned earlier, dialogic tension is perfectly acceptable, and arguably natural, to the voices of one speaker. However, while I do intend to closely examine vv. 1-24 as the voice(s) of הגבר, I make distinctions in accordance to the characteristic of particular voices. So, the theodic message of vv. 25-33 represents a primarily didactic voice (DV) which starkly contrasts הגבר in vv.1-18.

4. Interpreting Lamentations 3

a. The Suffering and Hope of הגבר in Lam. 3:1-24

This first section is characterized by a complaint (Lam. 3:1-18), a transition to hope (Lam. 3:19-21), and a reaffirming declaration on hope in Yahweh (Lam. 3:22-24). הגבר introduces himself as one who is on the wrong end of the wrath (עברה) of God. He then proceeds to complain about his

[253] Miriam J. Bier, '*Perhaps there is Hope': Reading Lamentations as a Polyphony of Pain, Penitence, and Protest* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 107.

situation in vv. 2-18. Westermann aptly summarizes the opening verses as an accusation against God:

> The opening clause ("I am the one who experienced affliction under the rod of his anger…") forms an independent unit. The one who is going to speak in the following verses here appears before the audience as someone who has suffered under the wrath of God. The nature of this suffering is then described, which transforms the lament directed toward God into a description of misery intended to capture the hearers. Direct address of God is transformed into third person description ("He has done…"). As is shown in the last clause ("You cast out my soul from peace"), however, all of this is really meant as an accusation against God.[254]

Although God is spoken of by הגבר, he is not addressed directly. As Westermann indicates, הגבר is addressing his speech towards an unspecified audience, and probably, the community of Jerusalem at the onset of the destruction of the Temple in 587 BCE. The opening clause seems to indicate that הגבר is trying to relate to the suffering of Jerusalem, especially if it is read immediately after Lam. 1-2. The words of הגבר are in dialogue with the proclamation of DZ in Lam. 1:12, "Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow." The answer of הגבר is "yes!" Here is "the man" who has suffered just as bad, if not worse, as DZ. שבט in v. 1 is a symbol of authority and indicates that the same God who afflicted DZ afflicts הגבר: "The hand that strikes *geber* is the *same* hand that that earlier bound Jerusalem's sin into a yoke and laid them upon her (1:14) and which destroyed the wall of Daughter Zion (2:18), … linking his suffering to hers."[255]

In the past, שבט ("rod") has been a symbol of comfort and protection (cf. Ps. 23:4). However, now the protector, Yahweh, has turned against his people: "The reference to a 'rod' of anger may bring into mind images of the staff of a king (a symbol of his power, Ps 45:6; 125:3), the parent's

[254] Westermann, *Lamentations*, 170.

[255] Parry, *Lamentations*, 97.

rod to chastise children (Prov 22:15), or the shepherd's stave (Ps 23:4; Ezek 20:37; Mic 7:14)."[256] Crenshaw writes that

> [t]he fact that the image of Yahweh as the shepherd of the people is applied to the individual at a relatively early date and used in prayer as an expression of safety and security, points to a powerful conviction of the divine guidance of the individual, which is also expressed in personal names such as Jonathan, Joaida, and others."[257]

The image of שבט certainly evokes the concept of divine guidance which relates to the salvation of God. הגבר distorts the language of salvation to highlight the tragedy of his circumstances. Lam. 3:2 is especially controversial in that הגבר is being guided into the dark (חשך) rather than the light (אור; cf. Amos 5:18): "Deliverance from darkness is also salvation imagery, associated especially often with the new exodus. While light stands for all that is positive and good, it specifically connotes freedom in some cases, just as darkness is figurative for imprisonment."[258] The psalmist in Ps. 23 could rely on the "rod" and "staff" of God, הגבר on the other hand, is hurt by it "again and again, all day long" (Lam. 3:3). Van Hecke presents the opening verses of Lam. 3 as an "anti-Psalm 23," which further emphasizes an inverse relationship between the twenty-third psalm and vv. 1-3; God as the shepherd in Lam. 3 leads his sheep into darkness rather than deliverance.[259]

The tone of הגבר shifts for the worse in vv. 4-18 as he proceeds to give a gruesome depiction of his suffering. His "flesh" (בשר) and "skin" (עור) rot, and his "bones" (עצם) are

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[256] *Ibid.*

[257] James L. Crenshaw, "Introduction: The Shift from Theodicy to Anthropodicy," pages 1-16 in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, ed. James L. Crenshaw, *IRT* 4 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 19.

[258] Hillers, *Lamentations*, 66.

[259] Pierre J.P. Van Hecke, "Lamentations 3,1-6: An Anti-Psalm 23," *SJOT* 16 (2002): 264-82.

broken. הגבר presents God as a predator and proclaims God to be a "bear lying in wait" (ארב דב). Once again, we see the image of the killer archer in vv. 12-13 (cf. Lam. 2:4), as God strikes down הגבר. In v. 14, the complaint and accusation continues to depict the mockeries and insults that הגבר suffers from his peers. The strength (נצח) of הגבר fades and he can no longer bare to go on. The image of teeth (שן) being crushed (גרס) with gravel stone (בחצץ) in v. 16 is especially painful. Though הגבר is lashing out about his treatment by God, God is addressed in the third person. הגבר is speaking *about* God, not *to* God. The latter, and more provocative, second person address will occur in 42b-45. Still, a harsh characterization of God is evident in these opening verses. How then, does הגבר shift to praising God in v. 22? Is it simply that anything said about God is acceptable, so long as it includes a word of praise? This may be the foremost question that comes to mind when reading Lam. 3 as the progression of thought of one speaker. In fact, after a brief statement on hope, Lam. 3 aptly sinks right back into the lament and despair typical to the entire book. Of course, this phenomenon exemplifies the dialogic concept of an inner conflict in literature: "The changes in perspective through which the chapter moves can instead be understood as internal dialogic tension as the גבר progresses through various understandings of his situation."[260] It is certainly the case that a dialogue of ideas can be expressed externally between multiple speakers or internally among one speaker. Though we may conventionally speak of a dialogic tension, the question remains as to what God would have to say about that. Could a sovereign Lord of all nations truly be addressed in any manner, and so callously depicted? As v. 8 implies, God has *nothing* to say on the matter, at least not yet.

Nevertheless, there is a transition from accusation to praise that occurs in Lam. 3, and the hopeful message of vv. 22-33 is as bright as the misery of הגבר is dark in vv. 1-18. My reading of

[260] Bier, *'Perhaps There is Hope'*, 107.

Lamentations begins to identify DV in v. 22, and his voice carries the poem up until at least v. 36. That said, vv. 22-24 are a part of the broader section of vv. 1-24, since they seem to be an extension of the first-person singular speech of הגבר: "'The Lord is my portion,' says *my* soul, "therefore I will hope in him" (Lam. 3:24). Parry identifies a chiastic structure in v. 22.[261]

A_1: The **lovingkindness** (חסד) of Yhwh
  B_1: surely they are not **ended** (תמם)
  B_2: surely they are not **finished** (כלה)
A_2: his tender **mercies** (רחם)

This verse emphasizes the endurance of the love of God: "[A]t the heart of *ḥesed* is loving commitment within the context of a relationship. It represents both the attitude of loyalty and faithfulness to the related parties, and the corresponding kind and dutiful action, often expressed as help or deliverance, that arises from it."[262] Though Israel may have failed in their faithfulness toward God, God is not as a man who is led by his passions; he would not hold a grudge against his people for their disloyalty, and his redemption is immanent. However, the hope of vv. 22-24 still seems to be distant from הגבר, something that is "foreign" to him or the reality of his life: "One question is whether the man simply reminds himself of Israel's ancient traditions and confessions in the midst of his terrible situation *even though evidence of mercy is not to be seen*, or whether he actually sees signs of mercy in the midst of the horror."[263] The MT reading of v. 22, "for *we* are not ended," appears to suggest the latter option; but we cannot

[261] Parry, *Lamentations*, 101.

[262] Robin Routledge, "*Ḥesed* as Obligation: A Re-Examination," *TynBul* 46 (1995):179-96, 195-96. The link between חסד and covenant relationship points to intertextual allusion between Lam. 3 and Exodus 34:6-7.

[263] Parry, *Lamentations*, 102. Emphasis is original.

definitively know whether or not הגבר speaks of tangible signs of Yahweh's mercy. There is certainly a different voice that begins to manifest in the text, viz. the voice of DV.

i. Excursus 1: The Curious Case of הגבר

The third acrostic poem of Lamentations begins with the introduction of the unspecified הגבר, the identity of whom scholars often investigate:

> The man is never named, nor is he explicitly identified in terms of a specific role like king, prophet priest, or the like. The most important point to grasp is that the man, whoever he is, functions in the role of a *representative of the populace at large*. His suffering is a participation in their suffering, and thus his story becomes a model for them to emulate and a source of hope.[264]

Parry outlines ten suggestions as to the identity of הגבר.[265] The traditional Jewish and Christian position, and more recently, Wiesmann, identifies הגבר as the historical Jeremiah who is in turn behind the authorship and narration of the entire book.[266] Dobbs-Allsopp relates the presentation of הגבר אני to ANE royal inscriptions and thus presents הגבר as an archetypal Davidic king.[267] However, he maintains that the figure of הגבר still functions as a literary "everyman" whose suffering poetically encapsulates the suffering of the collective.[268] Some scholars note a continuity between DZ and הגבר suggesting that הגבר is Jerusalem, personified as

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[264] Parry, *Lamentations*, 95.

[265] Parry, *Lamentations*, 94-95.

[266] Hermann Wiesmann, *Die Klagelieder Übersetzt und Erklärt* (Frankfurt am Main: Philosophisch-theologische Hoschule Sankt Georgen, 1954), 44-84. See also Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 60; Gottwald, *Studies in the Book*, 37-46.

[267] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 108-9.

[268] See also Hillers, *Lamentations*, 119; Renkema, *Lamentations*, 350-51.

a male figure.[269] Still others relate הגבר to a Job-like figure who is a voice for those in exile.[270] The multitude of views demonstrate just how unsure scholars are on the matter. Linguistically, הגבר relates to the verbal √גבר meaning "to be strong" or "mighty," and the simple meaning of the noun גבר is "man," or "soldier."[271] It is certainly a more glorified term for "man" than a word akin to איש, for example. There is a precedent for the vocabulary of הגבר in the Psalms (cf. Ps. 34:9; Ps. 37:23; Ps. 40:5; Ps. 88:4) which may suggest that הגבר represents an ideal and model follower of Yahweh.[272] However, there is also contrary evidence to this idea of הגבר as role model (cf. Josh. 7:14-18; Judg. 5:30; Isa. 22:17; Jer. 17:5; 23:9; 30:6; Hab. 2:5; Ps. 52:9).

The identification of a particular speaker could be beneficial in that it provides an echo to sources outside of the poem or historical contexts. This could potentially infuse our understanding of the text with further insights and increased depth. However, as is continually emphasize throughout this thesis, I prefer to look at voices in contention and what they have to say for themselves within the literature. We will *listen* to what הגבר has to say and how it relates to the rest of the chapter.

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[269] See Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 502-3; Bertil Albrektson, *Studies in the Text and Theology of the Book of Lamentations*, Studia Theologica Lundensia 21 (Lund: Gleerup, 1963) 127-29.

[270] Berlin, *Lamentations*, 84-86. See also Westermann, *Lamentations*, 170. On a similar note, Heaton writes, "The author placed himself in the Jobian mold as one who had suffered at the hands of God (cf. Lam. 3:14 with Job 30:9 and Lam. 3:12 with Job 16:12). Yet, unlike Job, he did not protest his innocence (Lam. 3:39-40)." See Heaton, "Structure and Meaning," 308. However, I maintain that it is questionable whether or not the text actually attributes any guilt to הגבר.

[271] *BDB*, 149-50.

[272] Mark P. Stone, "'Whence This Evil?' A Critical Assessment of (Anti)Theodicy and Innocent Suffering in Lamentations 3," (M.A. Thesis, Seattle Pacific University, 2014), 77. N.B. the use of הגבר in Ps. 34 and 37 since they are acrostic poems as well.

The speech of הגבר contains many similarities to an individual lament.[273] "[U]nlike in the conventional accusation against God, this speaker does not address God himself but a human audience, transforming the accusation into a description of misery."[274] The text decenters on God and focuses on the experiences of "I," the voice of this unit. This has the effect of adding extra emphasis to the direct address to God when he is finally mentioned in v. 18.[275] Moreover, it can be said that the motif of God's anger carries over from Lam. 2 into Lam. 3. Just as DZ, הגבר feels as if the Lord is raging against him: "I am one who has seen affliction under the rod of God's wrath." (Lam. 3:1; cf. Lam. 2:1). Bier suggests that the imagery of vv. 1-6 reflects יהוה ביום ("The Day of the Lord"),[276] and according to House this indicates that "he [הגבר] and his hearers have experienced what the Lord threatened. Warnings were ignored and consequences have come."[277] Stone notes how the poetic structures of the opening verses illustrate a sense of chaos: "Of course, the man's present situation is miserable. Parataxis and enjambment are present in numerous places, giving the poem a feeling of jagged unrest."[278]

Clearly הגבר is suffering, but why? The same question also applies for all the voices in Lamentations. Is הגבר an innocent sufferer? Is DZ, as Mandolfo suggests, a battered housewife who must contend her mistreatment with her abusive husband? Devastation might be the divine response to human sin, but we must be careful with the concept of sin in this book, "for while sin

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[273] Westermann, *Lamentations*, 169-71.

[274] Parry, *Lamentations*, 96.

[275] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 110.

[276] Bier, '*Perhaps there is Hope'*, 112.

[277] Paul House, *Lamentations*, WBC 23B (Nashville: Nelson, 2004), 409.

[278] Stone, "Whence this evil," 77.

is occasionally mentioned in Lamentations, that sin is never specified."[279] Additionally, Gottwald writes, "[a]s to the specific sins which constitute the great iniquity of Judah, we are surprised that more detail is not given."[280] Many scholars note the lack of a confession of sin in vv. 1-20, whether by the גבר or others, "and nor is there any accusation or ascription of sin to them by a third party."[281] In light of Israel's covenant relationship with God, affliction proceeds out of transgression. Bier notes that, although the covenant context could "provide grounds for reading the passage theodically", the apparent absence of Israel's particular sin and the extreme violence of YHWH expressed in the text "provide grounds for reading for protest, even complaint."[282] My emphasis on the affliction of הגבר focuses on *attitude* and *response*. In reading Lam. 3:1-24, we should not dwell on the details of the sin committed, but instead how הגבר turns to none other than God in this moment of turmoil.

ii. Excursus 2: The Transition to Hope in vv. 19-21

An apparent shift in tone occurs in vv. 19-21 which many scholars summarize as a transition toward vv. 25-39. The ailing voice of complaint and accusation gives way for a voice of hope. For Parry, vv. 19-21 indicate a shift toward a hopeful outlook which ought to be modeled by the audience: "His [viz., הגבר] transition from despair to hope in 3:19-24 is presented as a model for the community as a whole: a call for them to remember YHWH's covenant mercies."[283] Mark P. Stone identifies the awkward nature of the shift toward hope in vv. 19-21

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[279] Ed Greenstein, "The Wrath of God in the Book of Lamentations," pages 29-42 in *The Problem of Evil and Its Symbols in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, eds. Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 34.

[280] Gottwald, *Studies in the Book*, 68. See also Renkema, *Lamentations*, 476.

[281] Bier, '*Perhaps there is Hope'*, 112.

[282] *Ibid*., 113.

[283] Parry, *Lamentations*, 93.

and prefers to view it as a resignation to hope relating to vv. 1-18 rather than a transition to vv. 22-24: "The syntax of v. 21 is where the issue lies, specifically the particle על־כן. It normally links with *previous* argumentation that gives grounds for a *present* conclusion, much the same way "therefore" functions in English syntax."[284] As a resignation toward hope, vv. 19-21 suggests that, with no other obvious solution to his problems, הגבר is forced to settle on a "hope" for a better future. For Middlemas, the juxtaposition of vv. 17-21 to vv. 22-39, and their combined total of twenty-two verses, is more than enough evidence that a transition is taking place:

> It seems best, therefore, to follow Hillers and Grossberg in viewing vv. 17-21 as a transition to hope marking out vv. 22-39, whose length equals exactly one third of the whole poem and which begins with the first appearance of the letter h rather than its second or third occurrence (vv. 23, 24).[285]

If a transition toward hope is in fact taking place, then it could support Parry's understanding of a progression of thought in Lam. 3 whereby הגבר changes his outlook for the better in vv. 17-39. The thought of a transition to hope in vv. 19-21 may not be as awkward as Stone notes. In my view, the ז strophe of vv. 19-21 works adequately as a transition toward the more theodic DV in vv. 22-33 particularly. This is because the strophe nicely ties together the suffering behind it with an anticipated hope.

The particular vocabulary of לענה ("wormwood") and ראש ("gall" or "poison") in v. 19 have a combined total of 20 occurrences in the HB. And, aside from Lam. 3:19, the words only appear in close succession in Deut. 29:18, Jer. 9:15 and Amos 6:12. In Amos 6:12, they are the "justice" which has been converted into "poison," and the "righteousness" reduced to

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[284] Mark P. Stone, "'Whence This Evil?'," 79.

[285] Jill Middlemas, "The Violent Storm in Lamentations," *JSOT* 29 (2004): 81-97, 88.

"wormwood." The weeping prophet uses them during his lament for the perversion of the people of Israel in Jer. 8-9. However, it is God who feeds the people "wormwood" and "poisonous water" (והשקיתים מי־ראש) in preparation for their exile (Jer. 9:15-16). Deuteronomy employs לענה and ראש in the context of God's renewed covenant with his people at Moab (Deut. 15), and relates those who may be "turning away from the Lord" as a "root sprouting poisonous and bitter growth" (שרש פרה ראש ולענה). Any of the aforementioned passages would add a layer of remorse and guilt to Lam. 3:19, and as much as I, and other readers alike, may want to maintain the category of innocent suffering for הגבר, he has tasted the bitter warnings of God, and a grave transgression seems to underlie his affliction.

Past suffering and future hope is the underlying point of vv. 19-21. All three verses of the ז strophe begin with an expression that relates to the faculty of one's memories. הגבר "remembers" and "thinks" (זכר) of his afflictions and "calls to mind" (אשיב אל־לבי) hope. Hope is the only way forward. Even if we end vv. 1-21 on a note of resignation, as Stone argues, the fact that v. 21 ends with the verb יחל ("to hope") sets the literature up for the moment of passion that follows in the inspired affirmation of the "Love of the Lord" (חסדי יהוה lit. "the kindness of Yahweh").

b. Didactic Explication of the Suffering and Hope of הגבר in Lam. 3:25-39

Hope does not end with vv. 21-24 and the DV begins to expand on that thought through vv. 25-39. These verses "serve as an extended elaboration of what the man calls to mind (3:21) and of why he settles on hope."[286] For Parry, this section marks a shift in the attitude of הגבר, as the

[286] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 120.

speaker begins to offer wisdom-like advice for dealing with difficulties: "The *geber* turns from narrating his own shift in attitude (3:1-24) towards providing general advice to his audience. The somewhat eclectic advice seems to have been inspired, in part, by Israel's wisdom traditions, although much of it is hard to place form-critically."[287] Each verse in the ט acrostic begins with טוב ("good"). This has the effect of emphasizing the poem's change in tone and the importance of what the DV has to say.

i. Excursus 3: The Issue of Silence in Lam. 3:25-30

The gist of what the DV communicates in vv. 25-30 is a message of patience: "It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam. 3:26). The ideal disposition of the faithful is to trust in God and *silently* endure what the Lord has "imposed" (נטל). But something seems amiss about the suggestion of the DV. According to the urgent petition expressed in Lam. 2:18, sitting in silence could not be further from the truth! There is a major problem with the recommendation to sit in silence since "patient silence is *not* the mode of response found in the rest of Lamentations."[288] This recommendation in vv. 25-30 certainly distinguishes DV from all the other speakers of Lamentations who do naught but complain and bewail. The response in vv. 25-39 is perhaps meant to represent a more "orthodox" position which is in line with the purpose of a DV in biblical literature. Or, it can be said that הגבר is presenting an inconsistency and is wavering between faith and despair. With either of these positions, "an irreconcilable conflict in viewpoints should be allowed to stand in the text."[289]

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[287] Parry, *Lamentations*, 102.

[288] Parry, *Lamentations*, 103.

[289] *Ibid*.

However, Parry suggests a particularly insightful interpretation of the "silence" advocated in Lam. 3:25-30 which involves a figurative reading of the text rather than a literal reading.

> An alternative response to the puzzle is to suggest that the "silence" advocated by the man must, given 2:11-19 and 3:19-24, be compatible with prayer. So it is not a *literal* silence that the man is recommending but an attitude of expectant trust. Extending this strategy, it may be that the advice of 3:25-39, *once nuanced by its context*, is fully compatible with lament and urgent prayer of the kind found in 3:30-51 (even if not with the kind found in 3:1-18. This is similar to the surprising way God sees Job's raging protest as compatible with reverence for YHWH.[290]

The parallel between Lamentations and Job is especially fitting since the category of the righteousness of the character, Job, is always maintained in the latter text. Job acknowledges both that the Lord "gives" and "takes" (cf. Job 1:21) and is not charged with any wrongdoing. Both Job and הגבר felt trapped by their unfortunate circumstances (cf. Lam. 3:7-9 and Job 3:23). Would God hold their complaints against them? I agree with Parry in this case and the interpretation of the DV in Lam. 25-30 should keep in mind the literary context of the book, which by-and-large encourages the message of the incessant invocation of God amidst affliction.

ii. Excursus 4: The Response of YHWH to Injustice in Lam. 3:34-39

If the DV is the underlying voice of vv. 25-39, then some other issues of interpretation should be clarified in the passage. There appears to be a contradiction between vv. 31-33 and 34-39. In the former, the כ strophe, God does not "willingly" (מלבו; *lit*., "From his heart") afflict. However, by vv. 37-39, God is the one who commands both "evil" (הרעות) and "good" (הטוב). In order to accurately present the passage as the "corrective" voice of the DV, the actual position of

[290] *Ibid*., 104. Emphasis is original.

DV should be clarified. That said, the tension that the two passages present works with the overall dialogic theology of Lamentations. The identification of DV as a speaker relates to the third person voicing of vv. 25-39. However, even within that section we hear conflicting voices which, in the language of O'Connor, are "arguing about meaning."[291]

Lam. 3:34-39 ought to be isolated and closely examined independently prior to its synthesis into the body of vv. 25-39. These verses present a number of interpretive issues, five of which I intend to further delineate. (1) Which verb governs the infinitive constructs of vv. 34-36? (2) Do vv. 34-36 refer to the actions of God or evil people? (3) Is v. 36b a statement or rhetorical question? (4) Is v. 37b a statement or rhetorical question? (5) Is v. 38 a statement or rhetorical question?[292] The resolution of the first few issues largely depend on the resolution of issue (1) for the most part. However, issue (4) and issue (5) which relate to vv. 37-38 carry implications for vv. 34-36, and subsequently, for vv. 34-39 as a whole.

The first issue that presents itself in the interpretation on vv. 34-39 is the subsequent use of the infinitive construct at the start of v. 34 (להטות), v. 35 (לדכא), and v. 36 (לעות). Infinitive constructs require a governing verb and there are two options that present themselves in the text: (1) ראה in v. 36b and ויגה in v. 33. The formulation ל + infinitive construct should *follow* its governing verb; this would make the option of using ויגה as the governing verb the more natural choice grammatically. This option is in line with the translation of Hillers who reads ראה לא אדני in v. 36 as a circumstantial clause, translating "without the Lord seeing."

[291] So, Lee in "Voices Arguing About Meaning."

[292] Many scholars identify and examine these critical interpretive issues and I am not unique in doing so. See Parry, *Lamentations*, 106-15.

Because he does not deliberately torment men
or afflict them
By crushing underfoot
all the prisoners of the earth
By denying a man justice
before the Most High
By twisting a man's case
without the Lord seeing[293]

The reading of Hillers relates to the accusatory characterization of Lam. 3 except with the didactic emphasis in v. 33 that the afflictions brought by God are not "from the heart" (מלבו) of God himself. However, the use of ויגה as the governing verb of the infinitive constructs of vv. 34-36 awkwardly makes God the subject of the clause. The awkward nature of this choice apparent in vv. 35-36 where Yahweh is "denying a man justice *before the Most High*," and "twisting a man's case *without the Lord* seeing." The translation of Hillers is informed by Lam. 2:20, 22 and Lam. 3:66 where Yahweh is both a subject *and* indirect object. However, in these verses Yahweh is being addressed in the second person rather than in the third person as in Lam. 3:34-36. Parry notes that a distinction ought to be made between "You do x in the presence of Yahweh" and "Yahweh does x in the presence of Yahweh."[294] Dobbs-Allsopp maintains that v. 36b ought to be read in a declarative sense: "The hyperbolic claim that God does not see (3.36) serves to point up all the places in Lamentations where God is requested to see and look upon the destruction (1.9c, 20a; 2.20a; 3.59-60, 63; 5.1)."[295]

[293] Hillers, *Lamentations*, 51.

[294] Parry, *Lamentations*, 109.

[295] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 121.

The first option of using ראה as the governing verb is in line with the NRSV and the more common interpretations of vv. 34-36.[296]

> When all the prisoners of the land
> are crushed under foot
> When human rights are perverted
> in the presence of the Most High
> When one's case is subverted
> does the Lord not see it?

This option is by no means radical when we consider the acrostic structure of Lamentations and the poetic nature of the book. As Parry observes, every strophe in Lamentations is complete and can stand independently as a grammatical unit: "Even though the opening ל + infinitive pattern in the ל strophe will strike them [readers] as unconventional, once they get to 3:36b and find a verb to govern the infinitives they will not need to look back to the previous strophe to find such a verb."[297] The observation of Hillers, on the other hand, would require that the preceding strophe of vv. 31-33 complete the meaning of vv. 34-36 which would be a unique case in the book of Lamentations as a whole. My interpretation of Lam. 3:34-36 utilizes the first option which subsequently resolves the second issue as to whom the actions of vv. 34-36 ought to be appropriated. These verses refer to the actions of evil men and that their works do not go unnoticed before God. The third issue is also resolved in that ראה לא אדני in v. 36b is now read as a rhetorical question instead of an indicative statement within a circumstantial clause: "Does the Lord not see it?"

[296] See also Berlin, *Lamentations*, 79. Cf. Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 36.3.3b.

[297] Parry, *Lamentations*, 109.

At the core of the interpretive difficulty of vv. 37-38 is the question of who ought to be held responsible for the mess wherein the Israelites find themselves. Who causes affliction? In considering Lam. 1-2 the answer might naturally appear to be Yahweh, but there are a few options for the translation of Lam. 3:37, especially if we consider the literary unit of vv. 25-39 to be a didactic response to prior complaints in the book. The three options of interpreting v. 37 are as follows.[298]

(a) Yahweh did not do this to us since from him comes good, not evil.[299]
(b) Yahweh did this to us, but from him comes good, not evil (implied is that this situation must really be good and not evil).
(c) Yahweh did this to us and from him comes both good and evil.

Option (a) is preferred if one translates vv. 37-38 as statements. Option (b) is the result of translating v. 37 as a rhetorical question and leaving v. 38 as a statement. Option (c) can be understood if both v. 37 and v. 38 are rendered as rhetorical questions.

Renkema defends option (a) but that option would stand in stark contrast to the majority view in Lamentations that God is the root cause of the affliction of Israel. This contrast of opinion is not a major issue in light of the internal dialogic tension that characterizes the book of Lamentations. Vv. 37-39 could possibly stand as a didactic statement on retributive justice—implying that Jerusalem merits their affliction and should not complain. Such a statement closely parallels that of v. 28.

Parry dismisses option (a) since he understands the speaker of v. 37 to be הגבר, who, like all the other voices in the text, understand a direct correlation between their sufferings and the

[298] *Ibid*., 112.

[299] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 421.

actions of God: "To suppose that the speaker has moved from admitting that YHWH is the cause of the affliction in 3:31-33 to now denying that he has anything to do with it (3:37-38) stretches plausibility beyond breaking-point."[300] Option (b) is possible and potentially relates to an overarching "good" plan of God similarly to that of NT verses such as Rom. 8:28 or the concept of the purifying fire of God. However, the mournful tone of Lamentations suggests that the calamity of Jerusalem was not thought of as something to be desired: "[T]he situation that the Lord has commanded (3:37) would surely be described as evil (i.e., calamity not moral evil) by all the speakers of Lamentations."[301] Option (c) is preferable over option (b) on the basis of a close parallel between v. 37 and v. 38:

> If 3:38 means, 'Do not both evil and good go forth from the mouth of the Most High?', then 3:37 *must* mean, 'Who is this that spoke and it came to pass? Did the Lord not command it?'. Otherwise, we end up with a contradiction between 3:37 and 3:38 … The parallel between 3:36b and 3:37b leads us to suppose that, if 3:37b is a rhetorical question, then so is 3:36b. In which case 3:34-36 are not a criticism of YHWH at all but a list of oppressive actions which the speaker assures people that the Lord sees.[302]

It is necessary to take note that with the third option, we are essentially interpreting phrases that are grammatically indicative statements to be rhetorical questions. Ultimately, vv. 34-39 proves to be a controversial passage, and it is questionable how the passage relates to vv. 31-33. It could be suggested that there are three DV's, so to speak, expressed in vv. 25-39, each presenting their own theology or theodic outlook: The DV which emphasizes the patient enduring of suffering and presents suffering in a beneficial light (vv. 25-30); the DV who

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[300] *Ibid*., 112.

[301] *Ibid*.

[302] *Ibid*., 113.

emphasizes a compassionate God who does not wish suffering for people (vv. 31-33); and, the DV which emphasizes injustice and retribution.

iii. Excursus 5: Theodicy and Antitheodicy in Lam. 3:25-39

G.W. Leibniz coined the term "theodicy" in 1710.[303] The expression is rooted in the Greek words Θεός ("God") and δίκη ("trial" or "justice"), and is concerned with the vindication of God from immoral conduct. Walther Eichrodt presents the question of theodicy in the OT as such: "[W]hether the distinctive character of OT faith in God necessarily leads to a concern with theodicy, or whether such a notion proves to be a foreign element which cannot be assimilated by the forces which gave rise to OT faith."[304]

Eichrodt writes that "theodicy is an express attempt to balance the present state of the world, with its physical and moral evils, with the all-inclusive government of a just and beneficent God, and thus to comprehend it as a rational and expedient order."[305] He goes on to suggests that theodic resolutions are based on the comprehension of the world "by which its contradictions can be mastered and its phenomena integrated into a coherent system."[306] However, Eichrodt adds that endeavors to establish a theodicy would have been "meaningless" in ancient Israel since the idea contradicts fundamental prophetic convictions.

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[303] G.W. Leibniz in *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God and the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil* (Chicago: Open Court, 1985).

[304] Walther Eichrodt, "Faith in Providence and Theodicy in the Old Testament," pages 17-41 in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, ed. James L. Crenshaw, *IRT* 4 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 17.

[305] *Ibid*., 27.

[306] *Ibid*.

> The prophetic proclamation of the coming God is ultimately grounded in the fact that this world has departed from God's rule. Its contradictions are of such an incurable nature that they threaten to bring about a final, radical confrontation between God and humanity in a judgement of annihilation. In view of this situation, it is obvious that there is no other solution to the claim of God's claim to authority and the present world than the dissolution of this earthly frame and the establishment of a new world order in which God's will for the world rules supreme.[307]

God boasts an unrivaled control over all things and the writers of exilic literature and Lamentations were "far from the dualism of Persian religion which the Israelites were now possibly meeting in Exile."[308] In Isaiah, God proclaims this absolute sovereignty: "I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do all these things" (Isa. 45:5-7). Lamentations largely agrees with this outlook, especially in the DV of vv. 25-39. The biblical text also tends to refer to earthly causes of Israel's suffering, such as the nations which neighbor Israel. However, even the nations must conform to the sovereignty of God and an overarching divine plan.[309] Still, the agency of the nations gives way for the theodic argument whereby God is "twice-removed" from evil since he uses others to execute his punishment. Another popular theodic phenomenon is the positive depiction of self-sacrifice which is evident throughout the OT: "The powerful idea of a suffering servant who voluntarily endures the afflictions of the larger society and becomes a means of redemption has been called the most profound solution offered by religion to the problem of evil."[310] The contributions of scholars such as James L. Crenshaw, Antti Laato, and Johannes C. de Moor have established the issue of theodicy as a

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[307] *Ibid.*

[308] G.A.F. Knight, *Esther, Song of Songs, Lamentations* (London; SCM Press, 1955), 134.

[309] Eichrodt, "Faith in Providence," 23-25.

[310] Crenshaw, "Introduction," 9.

serious and worthwhile discourse in the context of biblical and ANE studies.[311] Crenshaw identifies numerous instances in the biblical text where the "honor" of God is actively defended or questioned.[312] The question of theodicy is certainly paralleled in some utterances of Lamentations. However, it is questionable whether any theodic resolution can be drawn out from the text.

Some argue against any form of theodic endeavor to be found in Lamentations. For Renkema, theodicy is "a (self-)justification of YHWH's actions or aloofness in the context of (significant) human suffering."[313] This definition leads him to separate the disasters of Lamentations from the workings of God and he argues that the poets of Lamentations are not entirely convinced that God is behind the disaster.[314] For Renkema, theodicy relates to the presence of the divine voice in the literature providing an explanation for their actions. Such a voice is absent in Lamentations.[315]

Modern scholars such as Mandolfo and O'Connor do not let God off the hook so easily and bring to light a controversial antitheodic image of an abusive God: "We must be aware of a God who abuses because such an image has the potential to sanction oppressive human structures."[316] God is undoubtedly harsh in his punishment, but to what extent should people follow such an

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[311] So Crenshaw, ed., *Theodicy in The Old Testament*, IRT 4 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor (eds.), *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); James L. Crenshaw, *Defending God: Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[312] Crenshaw, "Introduction," 5-12.

[313] Johan Renkema, "Theodicy in Lamentations?" pages 410-428 in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, ed. Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor (Leiden: Brill), 410.

[314] Renkema, "Theodicy in Lamentations," 415.

[315] *Ibid*., 410.

[316] Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 127.

example? Should punishment be equal to or exceed the crime committed? Indeed, Mandolfo rightly notes how the dialogic structures in the biblical text which contend over meaning undermine any apparent sanctions for violence and abuse in the literature: "*The dialogic structure of the canon gives us sanction for resisting seemingly irresistible power in our own contexts*."[317] The voices of Lamentations both defend and accuse God and present both theodic and antitheodic outlooks: "While it would be wrong to argue that Lamentations is itself a theodicy, it is certainly the case that the book has both theodic and antitheodic elements."[318] But still, the issue at stake is concerned with God, and it will always be about God, even when he is not explicitly mentioned, even when he seems absent.

Stone identifies two theodic solutions expressed in Lamentations: (1) a retributive theodicy whereby affliction is rooted in merited punishment for sin, such as in covenant and prophetic traditions; and (2) an educative theodicy whereby one suffers for the purpose of self-edification and the acquisition of wisdom.[319] He argues that the presence of these theodic movements in Lamentations is a rhetorical movement that aims at critiquing the two theodic solutions.[320] Neither solution is entirely embraced in the text.

The section of vv. 25-39 need not be understood as an outlook that matures from the complaint of הגבר as he transitions from despair to hope. As I noted earlier, the *transition* of vv. 19-21 may have more to do with the poetic progression of the literature rather than an explicit

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[317] *Ibid*., 127. Emphasis is original.

[318] Stone, "'Whence This Evil'," 19.

[319] *Ibid*., 21.

[320] *Ibid*.

point on the mindset and attitude of הגבר. Antitheodic readings of this section note that the lack of "personal investment" in vv. 25-39, since it is written in the third person, indicates that

> no direct correlation to the immediacy of the גבר's situation, and no ownership, no personal conviction that the positive attributes of YHWH and the penitent approach to suffering applies directly to him. This may be authoritative discourse, but there is no evidence, as yet, that the גבר finds it to be internally persuasive.[321]

The pain of הגבר must not be understated. However, the theodic outlook in vv. 25-39 should not be drowned out by the overall bleak tone of Lamentations. The DV of vv. 25-39 should first and foremost be taken for what it is: a didactic outlook that stands in tension with the rest of the chapter. As Mandolfo notes, the DV in segment functions as a "normative voice" to "counter balance" vv. 1-21.[322]

Earlier we looked at 5 issues of translation that present themselves in the interpretation of vv. 25-39, and particularly, vv. 34-39. However, scholars have noted other issues with this passage such as the question of the speaker of vv. 25-39 and whether or not vv. 34-39 present a different speaker to that of vv. 25-33.[323] This question of the speaker(s) of vv. 25-39 appears to be the driving force behind attempts to reconcile the apparent contradictions in the text. That said, I have already established how dialogic readings allow for speakers to contradict themselves.

Antitheodic readings place the affirmation of YHWH's mercy in vv. 25-39 under suspect, and argue that it does not ring true. Such messages in the book of Lamentations are tentative, wavering, and plagued with doubt: "'Perhaps' there is hope (3:29) is not exactly a solid avowal

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[321] Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 123.

[322] Mandolfo, "Book of Lamentations," 1020.

[323] Parry, *Lamentations*, 108.

of confidence."[324] Dobbs-Allsopp reads the indicative in 3:36, and allows the verse to juxtapose the positive depiction of God in vv. 31-33.[325] The reading of "the Lord does not see" in v. 36 would certainly be far from reassuring. In contrast, G.A.F. Knight translates, "such the Lord approveth not."[326] His rendering still maintains the indicative sense of the text, but in a reassuring way.

Theodicy is an important issue with which Lam. 3 struggles. The question of theodicy is not simple or easily resolved. The poet of Lamentations reflects the ambiguities of theodic outlooks by presenting conflicting remarks in their own DV. This has the effect of slowing down readers as they are forced to struggle for a coherent theodicy amidst the chaos of Lamentations.

> Whatever we suppose the author's intentions to have been, one inevitable effect of the way he has expressed himself is to slow readers down so that they explore various ways of construing the text. Readers must wrestle to make sense of the advice, just as they must wrestle to make sense of their situations.[327]

c. הגבר Calls for Repentance and Leads Communal Lament in Lam. 3: 40-47

In this section, the poem transitions from the third person DV to the first person plural voice of the community. The transition is smooth. Having ended on a note of retributive justice in v. 39, the poem continues with theme of transgression and repentance in vv. 40-42a. It is as if the DV of the previous section convinced listeners to see themselves as the cause of their affliction rather

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[324] Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 124. See also Renkema, *Lamentations*, 403; O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, ch. 4, "Mercies New Every Day."

[325] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 121.

[326] G.A.F. Knight, *Esther, Song of Songs, Lamentations*, 134.

[327] Parry, *Lamentation*, 113.

than blame God. "The poet, who now identifies himself with his community, realises that the adversity experienced by him and others is due to the misbehavior of his people."[328] Here is the only time that חפש and חקר, Hebrew words for "search," occur together in the HB reinforcing each other and emphasizing the deep nature of the advised introspection.[329] However, all talk of punishment and self-examination is short lived and, in accordance with הגבר earlier, the community begins a barrage of accusations directly addressed to God.[330] The community joins הגבר in lament: "[T]he transition from the valiant man's own suffering to the suffering of the people in 3:40-51 reinforces the view that his sufferings are intended to be closely related to theirs."[331] According to Berlin, v. 42 undermines the "old theology" that if one were to repent, God would forgive.[332] The community may have rebelled against God, but their misery is too much to take. There is no sign of forgiveness, therefore another approach is necessary to attract the attention of God: "[A] sharp contrast occurs in v. 42b, which switches to an accusation against Yahweh, announcing Yahweh's abandonment of the people and failure to live up to community expectations that forgiveness follows repentance."[333]

Once again, the issues of theodicy and retributive justice take the stage in the discussion of vv. 40-47. Theodic readings of vv. 40-42 do not emphasize a contradiction between the repentance of vv. 40-42a and the accusation of v. 42b. They maintain that it is not evident in the

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[328] Salters, *Lamentations*, 248.

[329] These verbs frequently occur in wisdom literature. Cf. Job 5:27; 28:3, 27; Prov. 2:4; 20:27.

[330] Lamentation's use of word אל in reference to God is only found in Lam. 3:41.

[331] Parry, *Lamentations*, 94.

[332] Berlin, *Lamentations*, 96.

[333] Boase, *Fulfillment of Doom*, 194.

text that the community has repented: "From a theodic perspective, there need not be any conflict between the two parts of 3:42. The גבר on behalf of the people admits sin and rebellion. In a theodic understanding it is appropriate that if repentance has not yet been forthcoming, then YHWH has not yet forgiven."[334] Regardless of whether or not Lam. 3 attests to a repentant community—which it does, in my opinion, according to verses such as Lam. 3:20 and Lam. 3:40—the major theme of the lament of vv. 40-48 is the *deus absconditus*,[335] the hidden God who wraps himself "in a cloud so that no prayer can pass through" (Lam. 3:44): "God has made himself impervious to prayer by wrapping himself in a cloud so that prayers cannot reach him. Here the theophanic imagery is clear, but now the clouds represent not God's awesome presence with his people but his total inaccessibility."[336] In this respect, God is indifferent to the repentance of the people, he wants nothing to do with them. The community feels as if their accusations will be falling on empty ears; nevertheless, they do not hold back.

For Parry, a small resemblance of hope can be salvaged from the lament of vv. 43-47 if read in light of a broader speech of הגבר governing the progression of Lam. 3: "Israel's current experience feels like a divine *un*election. And yet, as such, the reader knows that things are not the way that God *wanted* them to be, and this also creates a space for hope. Nevertheless, at this point such hope is only seen in the silent spaces between the complaints."[337] In vv. 43-47 we see an antitheodic depiction of a God who kills without pity (v. 44) and brings devastating

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[334] Bier, '*Perhaps there is Hope*', 128.

[335] See Jerry A. Gladson, "Postmodernism and the Deus Absconditus in Lamentations 3," *Biblica* (2010): 321-334, 331-334.

[336] Parry, *Lamentations* 117. See also O'Connor, *Tears of The World*, 54.

[337] Parry, *Lamentations*, 117.

destruction upon his people (v. 47). But, should these verses be read theodically or antitheodically? Theodic readings have no other choice but to declare Israel "guilty" and concede that the people had it coming.

In the ancient Greek traditions of interpreting Lamentations, we see a tendency to distance God from all evil. The commentary of Origen on Lamentations argued that God was "*not* the cause" (μηδὲ αἴτιον εἶναι) of affliction on account of the "loving" and "upright" nature of divine "justice" (το γὰρ δίκαιον ἀγαπᾷ καὶ εὐθύ).[338] Historically, scholars of biblical literature by and large derived theodic resolutions to problematic texts such as Lamentations. However, God need not be defended if he was meting out just and righteous punishment. In the West, Augustine would argue that God was *not* the cause of *all* evil and he distinguishes between two kinds of evil, the evil carried out voluntarily, by choice, and evil that people suffer in retribution.

> [I]f we admit that God is just (and it is sacrilege to deny this), He assigns rewards to the righteous and punishments to the wicked – punishments that are indeed evil for those who suffer. Therefore, if no one suffers punishment unjustly (this too we must believe, since we believe that the universe is governed by divine providence), God is the cause of the second kind of evil, but not of the first done as a voluntary act by humans.[339]

An Augustinian resolution to the vv. 43-47 is understandable. However, while the text encourages self-examination and repentance, vv. 42b-47 are more naturally an antitheodic passage. O'Connor admits that the speaker "invites a collective examination of conscience" and "declares their sinfulness." However, she adds that "he attaches to this confession a stinging

[338] From fragment 79 of Origen's commentary on Lamentations. See Stone, "'Whence This Evil'," 78.

[339] Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. A. Benjamin and L. H. Hackstaff (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), 3.

accusation against Yahweh: 'We have sinned and rebelled/ and you have not forgiven.'"[340] Similarly, *Lam. Rab.* reads "*[w]e have been disobedient and have rebelled*, which is in accord with our nature. *You have not forgiven*. Is that in accord with your nature?"[341] The midrashic literature understands an underlying question of the goodness of God in the text. Furthermore, scholars such as Stone argue that "Lamentations 3 attempts to maintain the category of innocent suffering"[342] emphasizing the culpability of God, rather than the transgression of the people. Evidently, dialogic tension exists within the speech of the community and expresses both a voice of remorse or penitence and a voice of resentment and accusation. Furthermore, the transition to lament in vv. 40-47 juxtaposes the didactic outlook in vv. 25-39.

d. The Redemption of YHWH in Lam. 3:48-66

The final shift in voicing occurs in v. 48. A speaker, presumably הגבר, begins to speak of their own grief concerning the destruction of the city and the apparent absence of God. Provan identifies the speaker as the one who was leading the communal lament earlier in vv. 40-47: "It is as if the corporate attempt to rehearse the disaster before God has proved too much for him."[343] The leader of the communal lament is overwhelmed with emotion and begins to cry of

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[340] See Kathleen M. O'Connor, "Lamentations," *NIB* 6 (2001): 1011-72, 1053. Cf. Johanna Stiebert, "Human Suffering and Divine Abuse of Power in Lamentations: Reflections on Forgiveness in the Context of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Process," *Pacifica* 16 (2003), 195-215, 203. See also Bier, '*Perhaps there is Hope'*, 128. In the OT סלח is only used in relation to the forgiveness of God and never to that of people forgiving each other (cf. Ps. 86:5; 103:3; 130:4).

[341] Italicized text reflects the words from the original biblical text, while the rest of the passage reflects the extensions of *Lam. Rab*. See Phillip S. Alexander, *The Targum of Lamentations: Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes*, vol. 17B of *The Aramaic Bible*, ed. Phillip S. Alexander (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2008), 156.

[342] Stone, "'Whence this evil'," 134.

[343] Provan, *Lamentations*, 102.

their own inner turmoil. Once again, the image of the weeping prophet comes to mind in v. 49 just as it did in Lam. 2:11. Parry notes a close relationship between vv. 48-49 and Jer. 14:17 ("Let my eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease, for the virgin daughter of my people is destroyed with a great wound, with a very grievous blow") which relates הגבר to the weeping prophet and consequently, encourages the traditional reading of Lam. 3 as the words of Jeremiah.[344]

There seems to be a continuity between vv. 40-47 and vv. 48-54. Once again in Lam. 3, a smooth transition takes place since the poet shifts from the plural first person to singular without compromising the tone of the lament. In doing so, the poet sets up the hopeful message of vv. 55-58. In vv. 40-47 we saw a *deus absconditus*, but by v. 57 God appears to reveal himself in response to the cry of a lamenter. The phrase "do not fear" in v. 57 relates to a "formula of revelation," and it is often used as the opening clause of a priestly oracle.[345] The reassurance of v. 57 works due to the overall shift in voicing. God may not be responding to the community, but for some reason, he appears before the weeping lamenter from v. 48. Still, there are opposing voices in the text as to the absence of God. For many, God is nowhere to be seen; for others, the immanence of God is real and present.

The hope that occurs toward the end of the chapter does not necessarily present a theodic resolution. God is still very much the cause of the speaker's affliction: "The recovery of hope has not led him to deny that YHWH is the ultimate cause of his distress, but it has led him to a shift in emphasis. The focus now is on the *immediate* cause of his sorrow (his human enemies) and on

[344] Parry, *Lamentations*, 118.

[345] J. Begrich, "Das Priesterliche Heilsorakel," *ZAW* 52 (1934): 81-92; Gladson, "Postmodernism and," 329.

God as his saviour."[346] In vv. 59-63, it is evident that the lamenter is experiencing some sort of persecution whereby others are plotting against them and making a fool of the speaker of vv. 48-66: "The whispers and murmurs of my assailants are against me all day long" (Lam. 3:62). This persecution leads to a call for vengeance in vv. 64-66 which echoes those of DZ in Lam. 1-2. Consider the thoughts of Berlin on the call for vengeance at the end of the chapter:

> The argument is based on justice, not revenge. If, as the poet has argued, God is just, then he must punish those who have acted violently against Israel "for no cause." Our poet does not suggest at this point that the enemy is the vehicle for God's punishment. Rather, he implies that the enemy is no better than Israel and deserves as much punishment. The poet's sense of rightness in the world cannot allow the enemy to flourish.[347]

The language of the call for vengeance is reflected in many psalms[348] and, as Berlin implies, it is a language used to express the sovereignty and impassionate justice of God. It is also a statement on the trust and faith present when in relationship with God. The God of the Israelites has surely acted against them, but continually in Lamentations we see a voice insisting that the work of God will undoubtedly manifest in favor of Israel, a voice that will call the actions of the Babylonians into question and repay them in full.

i. Excursus 6: The Precative Perfect in Lam. 3:55-66

Many scholars attest to the rare use of the precative perfect in vv. 55-66.[349] The precative tense is an irreal use of the perfect tenses whereby the verb expresses a prayer or wish. The use

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[346] Parry, *Lamentations*, 119.

[347] Berlin, *Lamentations*, 98.

[348] Berlin, *Lamentations*, 97; Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 127; Hillers, *Lamentations*, 132-33.

[349] Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 494-95.

of the precative in vv. 55-66 is found in the translations of scholars such as Berlin, Dobbs-Allsopp, Hillers, and Provan.[350] The following translation of vv. 55-57 exemplifies this use.

I called [call] your name YHWH
from the deepest pit;
Hear my voice; Do not cover your ear
to my relief, to my cry of anguish!
Draw near in the day I call to you,
Say, "Do not fear."[351]

The precative tense reflects a call for help.[352] The speaker does not assert that God hears their voice, but rather, they wish it to be so. The precative tense is very rare in the HB and we must take caution in identifying its use. Its use in vv. 55-66 certainly has notable ramifications on the interpretation of the passage: "The major interpretive question here is contingent on how the perfect verbs are understood."[353] Consider the NRSV translation of vv. 55-57 which does not read the precative perfect:

I called on your name YHWH
from the depth of the pit;
you heard my plea, "Do not cover your ear
to my cry for help, but give me relief!"
You came near when I called on you;
you said, "Do not fear!"

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[350] Parry, *Lamentations*, 120.

[351] *Ibid*., 121.

[352] Iain W. Provan, "Past, Present, and Future in Lamentations 3:52-66: The Case for a Precative Perfect Re-Examined," *VT* 41 (1991): 164-75. Cf. Hans Gottlieb, *A Study on the Text of Lamentations*, Acta Jutlandika Teologisk Serie 12 (Arhus: Det Laerde Selskab, 1978), 118-19; Berlin, *Lamentations*, 97; Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations* (New York: Ktav, 1974), 187; Boase, *Fulfillment of Doom*, 194. Parry, *Lamentations*, 120-124; Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 127.

[353] Bier, '*Perhaps there is Hope'*, 131.

A straightforward reading of the perfect verbs of vv. 55-66 conveys "an assurance of help already given, providing hope for the present situation."[354] The idea would be that God, having helped the speaker in the past, would surely come to their aid again in the present or future.[355] Another understanding of the simple past tense suggests that God, who is aware of what the speaker's present suffering, has already begun his redemption which will soon be manifested.[356] According to this reading, the speaker attests to the reality and certainty of the saving grace of God. This is a message of manifested hope.

Provan argues against the straightforward reading, and prefers the use of the precative perfect. He zeroes in on the transition in vv. 58-59 where the speaker, according to the use of the past tense, goes from reflecting on the past redemption of God to a request for God to consider their persecutions. The central question here relates to which verbs to render in the past tense, and which to render as present. For Provan there is no obvious marker in the text that suggests the speaker goes from contemplating a past salvation event in v. 58 to the present: "[I]t is not a natural reading of the text to break it at this point, differentiating between 'You have taken up my cause' in v. 58 and 'You have seen the wrong done to me' in v. 59."[357] In this case, it is safer to express all verbs in the precative perfect, which nicely ties in with the ambiguities and doubts expressed throughout Lamentations. Furthermore, Provan argues that in the modes of thinking of the ancient Israelites, there is no difference between God seeing and God acting. If God has seen,

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[354] *Ibid*. See also House, *Lamentations*, 426; Salters, *Lamentations*, 266.

[355] Cf. Ps. 136. See House, *Lamentations*, 427; Salters, *Lamentations*, 272.

[356] Cf. Exod. 2:25; 3:7, 9; See Westermann, *Lamentations*, 186; Parry, *Lamentations*, 122.

[357] Provan, "Past, Present, and Future," 169.

then God has acted to deliver (cf. 3:50). He concludes that "only a future reference for the perfect verbs of *vv*. 56-61 really does them justice."[358] Parry objects to this remark and observes how the biblical evidence suggests otherwise.

> While there is an intimate link between God's seeing and his acting, it does not follow that the two are identical. To take one paradigmatic example: God could say that he had seen (ראה/ r'h) the suffering of his people in Egypt while their suffering was still ongoing (Exod. 2:25; 3:7, 9). God's seeing means that delivery is at hand, but it need not mean deliverance has yet occurred.[359]

Parry opts for the straightforward reading of the past tense verbs in vv. 55-66. The blatantly hopeful expression that this reading conveys seems to me an example of the dialogic tension in the first person singular section of vv. 48-66. I think that, the use of the past tenses in vv. 55-66 should be preferred over the precative perfect and that, as Parry argues, if the author wanted to convey a wish or desire, it would have been much easier and clearer to use the imperative: "It should give us pause for thought that, given the dire crisis faced by the speaker in this section, it would have been much more rhetorically effective for the poet to use the strong imperative form of the verbs (as in 3:59, 63) rather than the weaker precative perfect if it was requests he wanted to express."[360]

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[358] *Ibid*., 172.

[359] Parry, *Lamentations*, 122.

[360] *Ibid*., 124.

5. Summary Conclusion

Lam. 3 presents a cacophonic symphony of voices, each distinctly characterized by a particular response to the catastrophe of Israel. Some readers focus on the hopeful messages of the chapter, while others highlight antitheodicy and the abuse of God. However, no reader can deny the presence of dialogic tension in Lam. 3. Middlemas illustrates Lamentations as a "whirlwind," with Lam. 3 occupying the eye of the storm.

> [T]he form of the book is designed to elicit the effect of a whirlwind, as certain textual features suggest that this image informs the layout of the collection as a whole. The peaceful eye of a storm corresponds well with what is considered by some to be the climax of the book, its 'theological nub' or 'the ideological focus of the work', that is, the grand articulation of hope in the central verses of ch. 3, the middle chapter. Although opinions vary over the exact parameters for the central verses, a positive outlook serves as the primary indicator for delineation.[361]

The metaphor of Middlemas resonates well with the chaotic atmosphere of Lamentations and the brief moments of faith in its third poem. Indeed, Lam. 3 is as optimistic as the book gets. However, the DV in Lam. 3 is not entirely free from the influence of the chaos of its surrounding passages. The conflicting theodicies and mixed messages of the chapter act as a stumbling block for readers. One ought to wonder if the author(s) of Lamentations were aware of the interpretive nuances within their own work. Perhaps the DV in Lam. 3 presents an intentional *double entendre* which brings questions and doubts to readers even as they navigate through a didactic outlook. Nothing is for certain in the Lamentations. And, this is a good thing. Certainty arguably invites complacency. In the third chapter, the poets of the text continue to exemplify a theme that

[361] Jill Middlemas, "The Violent Storm," 88.

arguably links all of Lamentations: The incessant invoking of God. Nothing can truly be resolved until God himself answers. However, the silence of God does not warrant the silence of believers. They must continue to exclaim their pain. They must continue to lament, pray, and plead. And finally, they must continue to praise.

Chapter 5

SALVAGING SOLACE AMIDST DESOLATION: A COMMUNITY DEVASTATED AND THE VOICES OF HOPE AND DOUBT IN LAM. 4-5

1. Introduction

The final two poems of Lamentations get into the grim details of the Babylonian siege, destruction, and captivity. While the previous three poems did express the circumstances surrounding 587 BCE, they do not rival Lam. 4 and 5 in terms of the specifics of the city's devastation. Indeed, the final two chapters are almost exclusively a detailed eye-witness account of the state of Jerusalem before, during, and after the exile (Chapter 1).[362]

With Lam. 4, we see the return of the interrogative איכה ("how!?") from Lam. 1-2. As Bier notes, this chapter presents a barrage of impossible scenarios: "The impossible has happened and everything is the opposite of what it ought to be."[363] The speaker of Lam. 4 is asking "how?" How could the precious children of Zion be likened to the average pot of clay (4:2)? How could people be so cruel as to passively watch infants starve (4:3-4)? How could a prince go unrecognized in the streets (4:7-8)? How could mothers eat their own children (4:10)? The situation in Jerusalem is absolutely deplorable. Is it just the case that people, if pushed far enough, only concern themselves with their carnal inclinations and lack any sense of integrity or

[362] Cf. Lee, "The Singers of Lamentations," 38-39.

[363] Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 142.

shame? If so, why does Lamentations also reflect the voice of a remorseful community looking to reconcile with God (3:40-42; 5:19-22)? The situation in Lam. 4 does not simply reflect the wickedness of human nature. It is simply too insidious to be natural. Though it reflects a state in depravation of God, it is only God himself who could realize the impossibilities of the circumstances depicted in Lam. 4. The speaker of Lam. 4 declares that "The Lord gave full vent of his wrath" (Lam. 4:11, NIV). It is God who is behind the mess that Israel finds themselves in, but how, and why? Indeed, *all* things are possible with God (cf. Job 42:2; Jer. 32:27; Matt. 19:26), even the worse things imaginable.

The situation is no better in Lam. 5. Foreigners established as rulers over the land give the local populace a hard time (5:2-6). The princes were killed (5:12) and the women raped (5:11). The young men no longer sing their jovial songs (5:14). Evil is only met with more evil and sufferings and complaints pile on one another forming an endless heap of misery.[364] The lives of the Israelites are a mess and in utter despair. Though we may speak of an angry tone found throughout the book of Lamentations, in Lam. 4-5 the people have been battered and tossed around beyond what they can tolerate. Naturally, one would expect the community of Lam. 5 to be upset and enraged at God. But in the closing verses of the poem we find praise and a hopeful prayer for restoration. This expresses the futility of anger, or perhaps rebellion fueled by anger, toward God. A fight with God is not a fight that anyone could win, so why bother? Instead, the ideal attitude of the believer in the face of such deplorable conditions is to look toward God in praise and supplication. This message is to be found even within the bleak poetry of Lam. 4-5.

[364] Cf. Parry, *Lamentations*, 147.

Anger and sorrow are certainly acceptable expressions in divine-human communication, but the goal is to be drawn nearer to God rather than ceasing communication altogether.

2. The Literary Structure of Lam. 4-5

It is difficult to speak of continuity between Lam. 4 and 5 in the way that could be said of Lam. 1-2. Lam. 5, for the most part, reads like a typical communal lament; while Lam. 4 lacks any invocation or petition.[365] However, both chapters depict misery and formulate accusations against God.[366] Moreover, both chapters contain elements of a dirge.[367] Consider the following outline of Lam. 4-5.[368]

Lamentations 4:1-22
- e. Lam. 4:1-16 Punishment and Degradation within the City
  - 1-10 Unrecognizable Princes and Mothers Consuming their Children
  - 11-16 Failure and Punishment of the Priests and Elders
- f. Lam. 4:17-20 A Community Betrayed, Hunted, and Captured.
- g. Lam. 4:21-22 The Judgment of Edom and the Salvation of Zion

Lamentations 5:1-22
- a. Lam. 5:1-18 The Suffering of the Community
  - 1-10 Opening Plea and Complaint on Foreign Rule
  - 11-14 Social Humiliation of Different Groups
  - 15-18 The Sorrow of the Community
- b. Lam. 5:19-22 Praise and Sorrowful Appeal for Restoration

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[365] Westermann, *Lamentations*, 197, 211.

[366] *Ibid.*, 200, 212.

[367] *Ibid.*, 198, 211.

[368] Outline based on Parry, *Lamentations*, 133-34, 146-147. See also Westermann, *Lamentations*, 199, 212-213.

Both chapters reflect on the miserable circumstances of different people groups and the degradation of the community. Parry notes a parallel between Lam. 2 and Lam. 4, and between Lam. 1 and Lam. 5. In relation to Bakhtin's literary theory, these parallels relate to the chronotope of the text. Parry observes that both Lam. 2 and Lam. 4 convey past devastations, while Lam. 1 and Lam. 5 reflect the present situation of Israel.[369] Indeed, between Lam. 4-5 there is a progression from the past toward the (*uncertain*) future. Lam. 4 reflects on the situation leading up to the flight and capture of the King whom many think to be Zedekiah.[370] And, the community in Lam. 5:1b implore that God "look" (ראה) and "consider" (נבט) their present suffering as they guide their prayer toward a sorrowful plea for future restoration. However, there are subtle elements of the present in Lam. 4 (4:8) and the past in Lam. 5 (5:7). The governing voice of Lam. 4 seems to be that of the observer from Lam. 1-2, but without their personal intermission as was evident in Lam. 2:11-19. The voice of the community leads the lament of Lam. 5. The community of Lam. 5 may reflect the same community from Lam. 3:40-47, and even a combined voice of all the speakers in the book.[371] Of course, in relation to the voice-speaker distinction (Chapter 2), the Observer and the Community of Lam. 4-5 as speakers are not exempt from the dialogic tension which has persisted throughout Lamentations. They each express multiple voices corresponding to distinct ideas which may, at times, appear to contradict each other. Furthermore, the first-person voice of the community makes a brief appearance in Lam. 4:17-20, and the third-person voice of the observer finds its way into the communal lament in Lam. 5:11-14. Though it is not explicit or obvious, there is a literary

[369] Parry, *Lamentations*, 17.

[370] Cf. Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 237.

[371] Cf. Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 166-68.

connection between Lam. 4 and 5: "What is missing in Lamentations 4 is any direct prayer to God. For that we must await the next chapter, which is an extended prayer for salvation. Lamentations 4 should not be read in isolation."[372] Both chapters meld together forming a literary unit with each other and with the entire book of Lamentations.

3. Interpreting Lam. 4

Lam. 4 is basically a lament for the circumstances of Israel in the shape of an illustration of events. It, arguably, concludes on a note of retribution and hope. Though the Babylonians are not mentioned explicitly, Lam. 4 expresses a deep concern for the events surrounding the siege of 587 BCE: "Frequently, Lamentations 4 emphasizes the tragedy that has befallen the residents of Jerusalem by comparing how life was for them before and after the city's destruction."[373] While Lamentations may be recontextualized and applied in the lives of many across history, it is fundamentally a poem about a specific event concerning a particular people. It does not look to speak for the world.

This chapter is the only one in the book without petition. Contrary to the previous poems, the voices of Lam. 4 refrain from demands, prayers, or supplications: "Perhaps they are completely hopeless that God will ever see, act, or save, or perhaps this chapter serves as an introduction to the long petition of chapter 5, in which the people continue to speak."[374] One

[372] Parry, *Lamentations*, 134.

[373] John Martin Bracke, *Jeremiah 30-52 and Lamentations* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 226.

[374] Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, ch. 5, "Beaten Down."

could imagine a prolonged period of silence after the call for justice at the end of Lam. 3.[375] A piercing silence as it becomes increasingly clear that God will not be attending to any plea. The crescendo of Lam. 3 fades and an impassionate third-person voice takes the stage. The move from Lam. 3 to Lam. 4 reflects a depressing transition. O'Connor presents Lam. 4 as "a massive letdown" following the intensity of הגבר in Lam. 3: "Its two speakers, an unidentified narrator and the people, appear, exhausted and hopeless."[376] The decrease in intensity is reflected structurally. The acrostic form from Lam. 1-2 returns, but it is limited to two lines per strophe instead of three: "Everything about the poem—its tone, structures, and even its length—diminishes, grows smaller and less intense, even though the scenes are as vividly horrifying as anything in the book so far."[377] Lam. 4 is "often characterized as a dirge, that is, a song or poem that is used to express grief at the time of death."[378] Consider the following:

> Like the first two chapters, chapter 4 begins with the "How" (*'ēkāh*) of the funeral dirge, and it, too, restricts its acrostic to the first word of each stanza. The stanzas, however, contain only two lines rather than three, making a short forty-four line poem rather than the sixty-six-line poems of each of the first three chapters. The shortened form signals the content, a famine of food and of hope.[379]

Many note the similarities between the speaker of Lam. 4 and the narrator from Lam. 1-2: "The poem's principle speaker resembles the narrator in chapter 1. He is anonymous, and his

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[375] Cf. The dramatic pause after Ps. 88:12. See Walter Brueggemann in *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, 80.

[376] O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, ch. 5, "Beaten Down."

[377] *Ibid*.

[378] John Martin Bracke, *Jeremiah 30-52 and Lamentations*, 226.

[379] O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, ch. 5, "Beaten Down."

tone is observational and uninvolved." Unlike the observer of Lam. 1-2, this speaker is not given a first-person speech. Their voice is primarily an impassioned narration of the destruction of Jerusalem, "letting it speak for itself in its depravity and deprivation."[380] Though there is a hint that this speaker is a member of the community themselves in the first-person statement בת־עמי ("daughter of my people") found in the chapter: "[T]here is only an oblique indication of any first-person perspective in Lam. 4. This is found in the pronominal suffix of בת־עמי, 'Daughter *My* People,' in 4:3, 6, and 10. The majority of Lam. 4, however, is spoken descriptively, in the third person."[381] Moreover, as House notes, that the presence of "sympathy" in the tone of Lam. 4 "is hardly absent."[382]

a. Lam. 4:1-10

Lam. 4 opens with the line איכה יועם זהב ישנא הכתם הטוב (lit. "how is the gold darkened, the good gold changed?"). And, as many notice, this is an impossible phenomenon. Gold is a non-reactive metal which does not tarnish. This image at the beginning of Lam. 4 establishes the recurring theme of the chapter: the impossibility of the circumstances of Israel. This relates back to Bier's emphasis noted earlier. Hillers emends the text of v. 1 to translate, "How gold is despised! Good gold is hated!"[383] This is on account of the OT never referring to gold in relation to luminosity or

[380] *Ibid.*, ch. 5, "Beaten Down."

[381] Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 143.

[382] House, *Lamentations*, 442.

[383] Hillers, *Lamentations,* 75; Here, Hillers emends יועם ("is become dim") to יועב ("is despised") and reads ישנא as "it is hated" rather than the more common rendition, "it is changed," in Lam. 4:1. N.B. that the words of Hillers' emendation occur more often in the HB. Nevertheless, Bier in *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 144, that "[t]here is no textual witness" for the suggestion of Hillers.

color, but rather, its value.[384] Furthermore, Hillers' emendation looks to unite a theme of rejection in the first two verses:

> The first line of vs. 1 must fit with the second, and with vs. 2 as well, for the 'gold' image is resumed there, and explained as applying to the men of Zion. But with the stones of 1b and the men of vs. 2, the idea is that something happens from without, not that there is internal change.[385]

Some scholars, who reject the emendation of Hillers, suggest that it is dirt which darkens the gold.[386] It can be said that the gold accumulates dirt from being outside, or on the street (חוץ) as illustrated in v. 1b. This assumes a figurative relationship between זהב ("gold") and אבני־קדש ("sacred stones"). However, in line with the figurative nature of the poetry in Lam. 4, Bier indicates that a rational resolution to the "impossibility" of the opening verse is unnecessary: "These explanations, however, forget the basic premise of poetry, which uses figurative language and is not confined to the literal. In a series of images in which brightness, colour, and life drain away to blackness, dryness, and death, gold, too, is dimmed."[387] The images of Lam. 4, and indeed the poetry of the entire book, should be allowed to "remain rich with resonance."[388] For example, the אבני־קדש of v. 1b can refer to the architectural foundation of the temple, or gemstones stored within the temple.[389] In addition, Bier adds that these "sacred stones" allude to

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[384] Hiller, *Lamentations*, 78.

[385] *Ibid.*

[386] Berlin, *Lamentations*, 104. Cf. Phillip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope*, ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 759; Provan, *Lamentations*, 111.

[387] Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 144.

[388] *Ibid.*, 145.

[389] *Ibid*. For אבני־קדש as jewels or gemstones, see John A. Emerton, "The Meaning of אבני־קדש in Lamentations 4:1," *ZDAW* 79 (1967): 232-36, 233. For the temple-foundation interpretation, see Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 130; House, *Lamentations*, 437.

those fainting and dying in Lam. 2: "The sacred stones, moreover, are poured out 'at the head of every street' (בראש כל־חוצות, 4:1b), recalling the children fainting for hunger (2:19) both young and old lying in the streets (2:21)."[390]

In the verses that proceed, a series of contrasting images reinforce the senselessness of the situation in Jerusalem. Animals care more for their young than people (4:3-4) and in v. 5, those adorned in scarlet (תולע) are forced to live as the poor. Social norms and classes are torn asunder in the chaos preceding the exile: "Those described in verse 5 seem to be of an upper social and economic class. In the ancient Near East, the color purple (sometimes translated scarlet) was associated with royalty."[391] A dramatic reversal of fate had taken place among those well-off in Jerusalem and they were now among those who, as Hillers translates, "pick through the garbage."[392] What Israel was going through felt worse "than the punishment of Sodom" (4:6) and death on the battlefield would have been preferable to the war of attrition brought by the siege (4:9). The infamous biblical curse of parents eating their young comes up (Lev. 26:29; Ezek. 5:10; Jer. 19:9) as mothers, who ought to have been nurturing, devour their own children: "City woman Zion becomes a figure of cruelty in this poem rather than of pity, as she was in the first two chapters. She portrays the utter dehumanization of survivors, reduced to vicious behaviour against their own children […]"[393] The image of women eating their children represents an explicit allusion to the covenant and its curses from Deut. 28:53-57. Along with these curses comes the warnings which, we can infer, went unheeded by the Israelites. The

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[390] Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 145; cf. Isa. 51:20 and Nah. 3:10.

[391] Bracke, *Jeremiah-30-52 and Lamentations*, 229.

[392] Hillers, *Lamentations*, 75.

[393] O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, ch. 5, "Beaten Down."

notion of deserved punishment is scarce in Lamentations, but Lam. 4:10 implies a punishment carried out for transgression. The text presents an oxymoronic characterization of the cannibalistic mothers, who are referred to as נשים רחמניות ("compassionate women"). Nevertheless, Bergant indicts the mothers and refers to them as "callous."[394] For Trible, these women were "formerly" compassionate, but they are no longer.[395] That said, the reader need not ignore the characterization of these women as compassionate. Rather, the situation in v. 10 is yet another impossible image rhetorically used to express the despair and suffering brought by the Babylonian siege. Consider Bier who writes that

> [t]hroughout Lamentations conflicting images—the merciful YHWH, the angry YHWH; the protesting sufferer, the penitent sufferer—alternate. Here in Lam 4, incompatible images—precious children, abandoned as worthless in the streets; compassionate women, consuming the fruit of their womb—are given in the very same breath, increasing the intensity of disorientation. Rather than an indictment of the women then, the imagery graphically portrays the desperation of the situation: even a mother's compassion for her child is a sheer impossibility.[396]

In Bier's presentation of Lam. 4 as a juncture of the impossible and the possible, she writes that, instead of looking for literal or logical resolutions to v. 10, the text could be "understood as another in the barrage of impossibilities that populates the chapter. Compassionate women consuming their children simply cannot be." The impossibilities which are conveyed throughout the chapter, even the entire book, represent disorientation and

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[394] Dianne Bergant, *Lamentations*, AOTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 112.

[395] Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 54. Cf. Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 151.

[396] Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 151.

dissonance. The observer is at a loss for words at what is happening, and communicates the situation through ironies.

b. Lam. 4:11-20

The fiery images of God's anger, which pervaded Lam. 1-2, return in v. 11. The חמתו ("wrath") of God is meted out in full (cf. 2:4c), and his חרון אפו ("burning anger;" cf. 1:12) is "poured out" (שפך; cf. 2:4c, 11b, 12c, 19b; 4:1, 13) in Zion. Images of Yahweh kindling a fire (ויצת־אש, cf. 1:13; 2:3, 4) which consumes the foundations (ותאכל יסודתיה, cf. 2:3) of the city reflects another instance of an accusatory tone in Lamentations: "In a similar vein to the content and accusatory tone of 2:1-10, an accusation of YHWH could thus be read in 4:11."[397] Once again, Lamentations illustrates God as "the primary cause of Jerusalem's destruction and the people's suffering."[398] The pervading sense of the realization of the impossible is confirmed when the text states that "The kings of the earth did not believe, nor did any of the inhabitants of the world, that foe or enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem" (4:12). That Jerusalem, a glorious, holy, and impenetrable city, could be reduced to rubble was unbelievable.

The criticism of the priests and prophets of v. 13 could either be an accusation against them for murder, or a statement indicating that the religious authorities of Jerusalem ought to be held accountable for the lives lost: "It is unclear whether the accusation means the prophets and priests themselves have killed people directly, or whether they are culpable for the blood of the innocent because of a failure to warn people the errors of their ways, thus being responsible for

[397] *Ibid*., 152.

[398] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 132-33; cf. Westermann, *Lamentations*, 203; Parry, *Lamentations*, 138.

their downfall."[399] In any case, all that was sacred is no more. The prophets and priests are "defiled with blood" (4:14) and dishonorably discharged from their duties (4:16).

This third-person voice shifts to the first-person plural in v. 17 as the community begins to complain of their misery and express the flight and capture of the King. Bier suggests that this voice establishes a continuity between Lam. 4 and 5.

> [T]he first person plural in 4:17-20 anticipates Lam 5. … There is thus a progression in the merging of individual and collective, and metaphorical and literal. The poetry becomes increasingly porous to the point where Lam 5 will culminate by collecting everyone and everything in its plural pronouns. This gives momentum and cohesion to the book as a whole.[400]

Though the description of events in vv. 18-19 likely relate to actual events concerning Zedekiah after the city wall was breached (cf. 2 Kings 25), "it is generalized and poetic, allowing for wider applications."[401] Now, "The Lord's anointed" in v. 20, whether Zedekiah or not, refers to a Davidic King, which brings along its own significance. The death of the Davidic King and his posterity would certainly have been enough to eliminate any doubt as to the totality of God's abandonment of Israel. Renkema writes that

> [f]or Judah the Davidic King was visible theology. The prolonged continuity of Davidic monarchy was a sign that, in spite of the many failures and disobedience of their kings, YHWH still remained mercifully close by. Their present experience, however, appeared to be evidence that God's patience had reached its end.[402]

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[399] Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 155.

[400] *Ibid.*, 143.

[401] Parry, *Lamentations*, 141.

[402] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 557; cf. Parry, *Lamentations*, 142.

With the death of the King there were no more loose ends. The relationship between God and his people was completely severed. Swift pursuit led to bloody results, and if 2 Kgs. 25:7 is any indication of what transpired, the fate of "the anointed" of God was horrifying and brutal: "In the elegant literary hyperbole of verse 19 (*cf.* 2 Sa. I :23), the relentless nature of Babylonian pursuit of refugees was vividly described."[403] The Babylonians effectively crippled any theological solace that could have been salvaged from the situation.

c. Lam. 4:21-22

The text proceeds to tease the Edomites with a mocking desire for their contentment: "This is the first instance of second-person address in Lam 4, and, surprisingly, it is not an address to YHWH, as readers might have come to expect (based on 1:9c, 11c, 20-22; 2:20-22; 3:42-47, 55-66)."[404] Edom could be singled out as the "nation that could not save" from v. 17. A nation "standing by scornfully while Jerusalem suffers, or even participating in Zion's subjugation."[405] The punishment of Israel will end, and Edom would see their turn (4:21). But, does Lam. 4 really end on a hopeful note for Israel's future as the NRSV translation of vv. 21-22 suggests?

There are some ambiguities with תם־עונך in v. 22 since עונך could be referring to either iniquity or punishment.[406] Some scholars translate עונך as "sin," meaning that the sinful state of

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[403] Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 237.

[404] Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 159-60.

[405] *Ibid.*, 150. Cf. Ezek. 25:12; 35:3, 15; Ps. 137:7; Jer. 4:11; Mal. 1:2-5; Joel 3:19.

[406] *BDB*, 730.

Israel could not get any worse.[407] While others, in line with the NRSV, translate "punishment," indicating an immanent end to the suffering if Israel.[408] This option also implies that there is a shift toward hope in these final two verses of Lam. 4.[409] Still, there is the issue of when this completion of Israel's punishment was to take place: "If punishment, does this mean that the punishment is finished as of now and the dire circumstances will end, indeed *have* ended; or simple, that there will be no *new* punishment, though the consequences of prior punishment have yet to play out?"[410]

The ambiguity of v. 22 does not end with עונך, and the observation of a hopeful tone remains dubious even with the construction לא יוסיף (hiphil, "he will not cause to add"), which scholars normally understand to be referring to the end of Israel's exile: Does this indicate that there will be no more taking of Jerusalem's children into exile (but the exiles will stay there indefinitely)? Or is it that the current exile is over and her people will now come home?"[411] The work of Mary Louise Mitchell presents the former option,[412] while the NRSV translation, "he will keep you in exile no longer" (Lam. 4:22), suggests the latter. Generally, scholars agree that, if there is hope in v. 22, it is to take place in the future.[413] Parry suggests the prophetic use of the

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[407] Salters, *Lamentations*, 337.

[408] Cf. John L. Mackay, *Lamentations: Living in the Ruins*, Mentor Commentary (Fearn, UK: Mentor, 2008), 203.

[409] Cf. Parry, *Lamentations*, 142-44.

[410] Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 161.

[411] *Ibid*.

[412] Mary Louise Mitchell, "Reflecting on Catastrophe: Lamentations 4 as Historiography," pages 78-90 in *The Function of Ancient Historiography in Biblical and Cognate Studies*, ed. Patricia G. Kirkpatrick and Timothy D. Goltz, *LHB/OTS* 489 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 88.

[413] Cf. Hillers, *Lamentations*, 93; House, *Lamentations*, 434; Renkema, *Lamentations*, 564-69; Provan, *Lamentations*, 123; Boase, *Fulfillment of Doom*, 189; Salters, *Lamentations*, 338.

verb תם: "The perfect tense ('he completed') is best taken as a so-called prophetic perfect indicating a certain future ('he will complete')."[414] Bier rightly considers that "[g]iven the immediate context of ongoing suffering, Zion's punishment and exile cannot, in the poem-world, yet be 'complete' in any real sense."[415] In the terms of Freytag's pyramid for dramatic structures,[416] I think that Lam. 4 acts as a sort of *falling action* for the book of Lamentations as it heads toward the resolution of Lam. 4:21-22, whereby the end of the exile is hinted and anticipated. This would leave Lam. 5 as the *denouement* following said resolution and ending the work on an ambiguous or unfortunate note whereby the community lies in wait for want of the resolution promised by Lam. 4:22. However, there are many reasons to think that Lam. 5 itself ends on a positive note for the Israelites.

4. Interpreting Lam. 5

The final chapter of Lamentations focuses on prayer. The chapter begins with an invocation, moves toward a description of misery, and ends with praise and supplication. Indeed, prayer is the only fitting conclusion to a book as turbulent as Lamentations and it certainly advances the message of incessant invocation. Direct communication with God is the only avenue through which we may find the answer to our troubles, or through which we find closure. Both the

[414] Parry, *Lamentations*, 143.

[415] Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope'*, 161.

[416] Gustav Freytag divided a dramatic work into five sections: (1) introduction (exposition); (2) rising action; (3) climax; (4) falling action; (5) resolution or catastrophe (denouement). I think that this progression could be found in the book of Lamentations. That said, as I will note later, scholars such as Dobbs-Allsopp and Parry present Lam. 5 as the climax of the work. This interpretation also works. Cf. Merriam-Webster, Inc., *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, 1995), 434.

Mosaic and Davidic covenants are in shambles, past traditions are useless for the present sufferer. The only way forward is prayer. Dobbs-Alsopp reads Lam. 5 as the climax of the book: "In ch. 5 the poem's climax is finally reached. The community, that is, the audience and ultimately we, the readers, in its own voice articulates for itself its sense of grief and anger. It is to this end the poet has been moving all along."[417] Parry also understand Lam. 5 as a climax and presents it as the "response to the promise of salvation at the end of chapter 4: a promise of restoration followed by a final prayer for restoration."[418] Lam. 5 is the shortest chapter in the book and it is the only poem which does not feature the acrostic pattern. Scholars normally note that this chapter reflects the communal lament: "Lamentations 5 is structured according to the basic form of the communal lament: address to God (5:1), complaint or description of distress (5:2-18), and appeal for help (5:19-22)."[419] While the poem does not show explicit evidence of an acrostic structure, it does echo the structure because, similarly to Lam. 1, 2, and 4, it has 22 lines corresponding to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Heater identifies a "mini-acrostic" occurring at the end of Lam. 5:

> In 5:19-20 the writer carefully chose his words to summarize the teaching of the entire book, by using the split alphabet to convey it. Verse 19 embraces the first half of the alphabet by using an *aleph* word (אַתָּה, "you") to start the first half of the verse, and a *kaph* word (כִּסְאֲךָ, "throne") to start the second half. […] The writer turned in 5:20 to ask the pragmatic question, "Why dost Thou forget us forever; why dost Thou forsake us so long?" This is the *lamed* ("Why," לָמָּה) and the *tau* ("you forsake us," תַּעֲזְבֵנוּ) part of the acrostic. […] So there is an alphabetic device in chapter 5 in the very verses that combine two main themes running through the book: God is sovereign and just, but Zion's suffering is so great. The split alphabet is used here to make a point, as it is used in other

[417] Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology in The Book of Lamentations," *JSOT* 74 (1997): 29-60, 41.

[418] Parry, *Lamentations*, 147.

[419] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 142.

> chapters. One reason there is no full acrostic in chapter 5 may be that the writer wanted the emphasis to fall on these two verses near the conclusion of the book. In doing so, he has adroitly drawn attention to the only hope for people in despair.[420]

So basically, the first word of the four strophes that make up vv. 19-20 reflect an overview of the alphabet using the first letter, *aleph*, the middle two letters, *kaph* and *lamed*, and the final letter, *tau*. It is difficult to say if the "mini-acrostic" of v. 19-20 was an intentional feature of the poem. However, its identification among these verses in particular is curious. It is in v. 19 that the first word of praise between Lam. 4-5 occurs and it is soon contrasted by v. 20 which reflects the hardship of waiting so long for an answer from God. The poem's 22 lines coupled with Heater's min-acrostic in vv. 19-20 hint at a structural link between Lam. 5 and the other poems of the text. That said, Heater's suggestion appears tenuous and it is not explicit or clear in the poem.

a. Lam. 5:1-22

The chapter opens with an invocation imploring God to "look" (ראה) and "consider" (נבט) the plight of the people (5:1). Dobbs-Allsopp indicates the element of shame to be found in the first verse as the community admits their own reproach (חרפתנו): "Shame is a dimension of suffering that is often overlooked. But feelings of weakness and helplessness, especially before others, are themselves debilitating and corrosive as they erode the sufferers sense of dignity."[421] This relates to the guilt of the community in Lamentations and expresses a remorseful tone which carries on

[420] Heater, "Structure of," 310-311.

[421] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 143.

throughout the poem. Foreigners have assumed the inheritance of the people (5:2) and left orphaned without restitution. Bier suggests a literary relationship between the widowed mothers of v. 3 and DZ and writes that "the image of mothers 'like widows' alludes to personified Zion, sitting on the ground in her bereavement (cf. 1:1b). Shades of Mother Zion, then, appear in the backdrop to the poetry, even though she herself has disappeared, absorbed into the communal body."[422] For this community, foreign rule has proven to be oppressive and unjust. The native people of Jerusalem must pay for their own natural resources (5:4). They are persecuted and overworked (5:5), forced to rely on Egyptians and Assyrians for enough food (5:6).

The question of retributive justice returns in the text as the community reflects on the sins of their ancestors and states how they "bear their iniquities" (עונתיהם סבלנו, 5:7). Later, in v. 16, the community admits their own shortcomings and declare, חטאנו ("we have sinned!"). These may seem like contradictory statements if one seeks to find a specific transgression of the people responsible for their demise. However, Westermann demonstrates how both utterances are appropriate given the circumstances.

> This protest against the burdens of the forbears' guilt seems to stand in tension with the acknowledgment of guilt in v. 16b. In reality, however, both attitudes are appropriate for the lamenters. The guilt of the forbears is properly acknowledged as a component of the lamenters' own history. At the same time, they balk at the notion that they alone should bear the consequences of that guilt.[423]

Bier presents a polyphonic understanding of v. 7 which holds the text in dialogic tension with v. 16: "Both perspectives—our fathers sinned, we bear their guilt unjustly; and we ourselves

[422] Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope*', 169.

[423] Westermann, *Lamentations*, 215.

sinned, this is the cause of our woe—remain in the text. Reading the poem as a polyphony allows both perspectives to be voiced and heard in the ongoing dialogism of the idea."[424] A dialogic reading maintains both the theodic and antitheodic potential of these verses as the community wrestles with the severity of their punishment.

The fate of various groups of people is revealed in vv. 11-14: the women and maidens are raped (5:11); princes and elders are hung (5:12); young men and youths suffer from forced labor (5:13); the elders and young men depart the city and cease their joyful music respectively (5:14). Bier writes that the four pairs of people in vv. 11-14 are presented in poetic parallel.[425] The poem gets darker as a third-person voice echoing Lam. 4 returns to depict what happened to these people. Perhaps there is a relationship between some of those in vv. 11-14 and those mentioned in Lam. 4. So, it could be the cannibalistic women from Lam. 4 who end up being raped, and that the elders leaving the city gate in v. 14 reiterates the fate of the prophets and priests from Lam. 4:16. With this attitude, it would be difficult to feel sorry for the events that transpire against the community in Lam. 5. Furthermore, vv. 11-14 is soon followed by the admission of guilt in v. 16. In any case, the goal of Lam. 5 is not to try and make readers feels sorry for the situation in Israel at the time. Rather, it articulates the depths of the community's hopelessness and their desperate need for God. If anything, vv. 11-14 inspire introspection and remorse for how repulsing people can be.

In v. 19 the community declares their praise insisting that God's "throne endures to all generations." Yahweh transcends current circumstances and sees the bigger picture, so naturally, he is the one to approach for a true and definitive declaration of hope. The praise of v. 19 is

[424] Bier, *'Perhaps there is Hope*', 172.

[425] *Ibid*.

immediately followed by an accusation against God in v. 20 whereby the accused has forsaken the community. In vv. 21-22 the lament concludes with a prayer which I understand to be a sorrowful supplication. The community asks that God restore them to their former glory (v. 21), yet the poem can not help but conclude on a note of the rejection (מאס) and anger (קצפת) of God. Lamentations refuses to end happily, not after all that God has done to the people, after all the sorrow the community has suffered. The final verses of Lam. 5 combine hope, doubt, praise, and accusation to form a cacophonic ending that can not be easily interpreted. Parry presents vv. 19-22 as an "appeal for help": "In 5:1-18 the speakers have been drawing YHWH's attention to their reproach (5:1). Now they turn to make their appeal."[426] For Westermann, these final verses demonstrate how the community refuses to give up on God despite their question in v. 20: "Although the question reproaches God for having forgotten the speakers, at the same time the speakers are clinging to that God whom they have reproached, that God whose ways they no longer comprehend."[427] Indeed, it would not be accurate to suggest that God leaves the picture of the lives of the community entirely: "The ending of Lamentations is not one of giving up on God, nor of the triumph of despair. Equally, it is not one of resolution. The book ends with a plea for restoration in the face of ongoing divine anger, and any divine response to this prayer is agonizingly still future."[428] The ending of Lamentations is not satisfying if one is in search of closure or hope for the community. How could it be? Only an answer from God could provide any sort of satisfaction to a book as depressing as Lamentations, yet God remains elusive until the bitter end. Indeed, the only thing left to do for the community is to continue their plea.

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[426] Parry, *Lamentations*, 153.

[427] Westermann, *Lamentations*, 216.

[428] Parry, *Lamentations*, 154.

Silence is not an option endorsed by Lamentations. Lament and supplication must continue until God responds. However, this time the voice of the community in Lam. 5 becomes that of the reader or listener as they too wrestle with the silence of God. Lamentations models incessant invocation and, through an ambiguous or open-ended conclusion, invites its audiences to do the same.

b. Excursus: Lam. 5:22 and The Ending of Lamentations

The way the final verse of Lam. 5 is crucial for the interpretation of the text, and many scholars note its major contribution to how one interprets the book as a whole: "The closing verse in Lamentations is crucial for the meaning and spirit of the entire poem. In spite of the simplicity of its style and the familiarity of its vocabulary, it has long been a crux."[429] And similarly to the other supposed "crux" of Lamentations, that is, the DV in Lam. 3, its interpretation is by no means a straightforward task. Parry outlines four general interpretations of v. 22 in terms of the attitudes they provoke, which may be summarized as such: (1) Doubt; (2) Ambiguity; (3) Protest; (4) Hope. I will briefly discuss the issue at stake with each of the four interpretations. Consider the following Hebrew text of Lam. 5:22.

עד־מאד עלינו קצפת מאסתנו אם־מאס כי

[429] Robert Gordis, "The Conclusion of the Book of Lamentations (5:22)," *JBL* 93 (1974): 289-293, 289. Cf. Hillers, *Lamentations*, 100; Parry, *Lamentations*, 154.

The interpretive difficulty here is due to the words כי and אם at the beginning of the verse. Both words are common in the HB. The semantic range of כי is diverse, though כי is typically employed as a conjunction, i.e. and, for, but.[430] The conditional conjunction "if" is often used to translate אם.[431] Together, the combination אם כי (lit. "for if") likely indicates a conjunction, the interpretation of which carries significant ramifications for the meaning of the verse. A literal translation of אם כי would lead to a translation along the lines of "for if you have utterly rejected us, you are extremely angry with us," which does not make too much sense here since the dependant clause simply restates the conditional clause. Indeed, if that were the case here, one would expect the demonstrative הנה ("behold") or the conjunction ו ("and") to be present, unless this verse is yet another instance of parataxis.[432] Otherwise, the dependant clause should be communicating a consequence of the conditional clause.

The first suggestion for interpreting v. 22 renders אם כי as "unless."[433] This understanding of אם כי in v. 22 is evident in many biblical translations, including the NRSV. Considering vv. 21-22, translating אם כי as "unless" would communicate a request followed by an expression of doubt. The community, wishing to be restored to their former glory, are unsure as to the totality of their rejection by God. This expression of doubt has also been rendered as an interrogative, "[…] or have you completely rejected us?"[434] However, there are some doubts when it comes to reading "unless" for the conjunctions of v. 22. The use of אם כי as "unless" is normally followed

[430] Cf. *BDB*, 471-475.

[431] Cf. *BDB*, 49-50.

[432] Cf. Hillers, *Lamentations*, 100; Provan, *Lamentations*, 133.

[433] Cf. Albrektson, *Studies in the Text*, 206-7; Jill Middlemas, *The Troubles of Templeless Judah*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), 204; Westermann, *Lamentations*, 217-19.

[434] Cf. Westermann, *Lamentations*, 218-19; Renkema, *Lamentations*, 631-32; RSV.

by a negative statement in the HB (cf. Gen. 32:26-27; Lev. 22:6; Ruth 3:18; Isa. 55:10). The formula "not A *unless* B" allows for this translation of אם כי: "While 'unless' cannot be ruled out here, there is no exact parallel elsewhere to an 'A *unless* (אם כי/ *kî 'im*) B' structure, and so it must be treated with caution."[435] Moreover, Parry points out that "it would be very odd for the community to pray 'Restore us… *unless* you have deeply rejected," since the "anger of God and his rejection of Israel" is the reason the community prays "for restoration in the first place."[436]

Linafelt provides a unique reading of Lam. 5:22 which gives the effect of a cliff-hanger at the end of the Lamentations. He translates, "For if truly you have rejected, bitterly raged against us. …"[437] This option denotes an ambiguous future for the Israelites and relates to the unresponsiveness of God.

> The book is left opening out into the emptiness of God's nonresponse. By leaving a conditional statement dangling, the final verse leaves open the future of the ones lamenting. It is hardly a hopeful ending, for the missing but implied apodosis is surely negative, yet it does nevertheless defer the apodosis. And by arresting the movement from an "if" to a "then" the incomplete clause allows the reader, for a moment, to imagine the possibility of a different "then," and therefore a different future.[438]

Though the future looks bleak for Israel, it is a future which is unknown insofar as the state of the nation's relationship with God is unknown. Israel may or may not have damaged the

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[435] Parry, *Lamentations*, 155. Cf. Gordis, "The Conclusion of," 290; Tod Linafelt, "The Refusal of a Conclusion in the Book of Lamentations," *JBL* 120 (2001): 340-43, 341; Hillers, *Lamentations*, 100-1.

[436] Parry, *Lamentations*, 155.

[437] Tod Linafelt, "The Impossibility of Mourning: Lamentations after the Holocaust," pages 279-89 in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, eds., Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 281.

[438] Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 60-61.

relationship beyond repair; there may be hope, though it is unlikely. The unresolved conditional of Linafelt could also give the effect of a community speaking as to invite an interjection from God, but to no avail. The anticipated response is met with an awkward silence. However, Berlin and Parry note that Linafelt's interpretation reflects a literary convention too "modern" for ancient writers.[439] Whether or not the last verse communicates an ambiguous future after that of the translation of Linafelt, the dialogic tension of the book wrestles with the future of the community and refuses to passively accept the punishment of God. There is urgent and constant prayer for justice and redemption in the book, both hopeful and devastating outlooks expressed. The entire book of Lamentations *itself* communicates the ambiguity of the future of Israel.

The third option of translating v. 22 suggests that the poem ends on a note of complaint and renders אם כי as "instead."[440] This expresses a protest, an angry remark of resentment toward God's treatment of Israel. The use of אם כי as an adversative conjunction works grammatically (cf. 2 Sam. 13:33; Num. 24:22) but not necessarily contextually. Parry argues that the complaint is out of place in relation to the recent prayer for restoration in v. 21.

> No sooner have the speakers gotten out the request that God restore them than they complain, "instead [of restoring us] you completely reject us." But this feels out of place because YHWH will only have had a matter of moments to answer the prayer! One could imagine a prayer that went, "We asked you to restore us… [but] *instead* you completely rejected us," but that is not what we have. So this interpretation ought to be treated with caution.[441]

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[439] Berlin, *Lamentations*, 126; Parry, *Lamentations*, 155.

[440] Hillers, *Lamentations*, 96; Berlin, *Lamentations*, 125-26; GKC, 163b.

[441] Parry, *Lamentations*, 156.

Hillers maintains that this option does not contradict vv. 20-21, but rather expresses a matter of fact which is that "Israel does stand under God's severe judgement."[442] Similarly to the first two interpretations of v. 22, this option supports a sombre ending to the book of Lamentations. An ending which is reflected in Jewish liturgical practice whereby the readings of the text do not end on a depressing note but repeat the prayer of v. 21.[443]

Conversely, some scholars look to carry on the hopeful outlook of v. 21 into v. 22 and suggest that the poem ends on a positive note. One option is supported by the LXX and Syriac textual traditions of Lamentations and proposes that אם is not in the original Hebrew.[444] The LXX and Syriac only translate כי alone, which renders v. 22 as "Restore us YHWH… *for* [until now] you have 'completely' rejected us," and most medieval Hebrew manuscripts lack אם.[445] This reading indicates that v. 22 "provides the reason for the prayer of restoration."[446] Keil agrees with the translation "unless" for אם כי but suggests that v. 22 states an impossibility implying that God could not have abandoned Israel.[447] Another hopeful interpretation of v. 22 translates אם כי as "even though."[448] So, *even though* Yahweh had rejected Israel, they pray for a future restoration: "5:22 is, on this view, a subordinate clause and 5:21 is the main clause that ends the book."[449] This interpretation is often criticized on account of the lack of literary

[442] Hillers, *Lamentations*, 101.

[443] *Ibid*; cf. Gordis, "The Conclusion of," 290.

[444] Cf. Parry, *Lamentations*, 156.

[445] *Ibid*.

[446] *Ibid*.

[447] Keil, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 454; cf. Rudolph, *Die Klagelieder*, 258.

[448] Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations*, 198; House, *Lamentations*, 470-71.

[449] Parry, *Lamentations*, 156.

evidence in support of the use of the pluperfect in v. 22: "However, it is precisely taking the verbs as pluperfect that is objectionable. From the standpoint of those engaging in the lament, the display of Yahweh's wrath is hardly something in the past; it is still working itself out in their midst."[450] For Parry, "Lamentations ends with a prayer for salvation in the midst of ongoing suffering."[451] All of the aforementioned interpretations evidently lean toward a positive conclusion to a book filled with woe and turmoil. However, scholars such as O'Connor criticizes attempts at reading a "happy ending" to Lamentations and argues that such a result comes "only by distorting the Hebrew text."[452] Rather, she understands an unsettling conclusion which expresses doubt about God's plan for Israel: "It utters the unthinkable—that God has utterly and permanently rejected them, cast them off in unrelenting anger."[453] That said, as Parry notes, we should avoid the active pursuit of a negative conclusion to Lamentations.[454] In any case, even if the author of the poem intended for a hopeful conclusion to their poem, it is brief and does not present a theodicy as did Lam. 3. Considering the detailed depiction of the sufferings of the community in Lam. 5, the poet could be praying for mercy and release from a situation which could not get any worse. The community wishes to return to the days of old, the days when Yahweh was their God, and they were his people (Exod. 6:7).

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[450] Westermann, *Lamentations*, 218.

[451] Parry, *Lamentations*, 157.

[452] O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, ch. 6, "Plea from an Occupied Land."

[453] *Ibid.*

[454] Parry, *Lamentations*, 157.

5. Summary Conclusion

So, how do Lam. 4-5 work in relation to Lamentations' invitation to prayer? Does the idea of incessant invocation continue to play a part in these concluding chapters? In summary, it may seem as if Lam. 4 has nothing to do with the message of incessant invocation. But, the juxtaposition and unity of Lam. 4 with Lam. 5 suggests a progression toward prayer which begins in Lam. 4. The chapters do contrast each other. The third person depiction of misery in Lam. 4 lasts longer than usual, while the first person communal prayer, briefly featured in Lam. 3 and 4, gets an entire chapter for itself. Lam. 4 and 5 also resonate together through their presentation of each other's voices. Lam. 4 features the communal voice in 4:17-20 and Lam. 5 echoes the voice from Lam. 4 in 5:11-14.

The fourth poem of Lamentations provides a series of impossible imagery and presents a largely objective depiction of Israel's calamity and degradation. Nevertheless, Lam. 4 ends with hope. It is the last chapter which follows the acrostic pattern and, as Parry notes, its final ת strophe poetically expresses the anticipated end of Israel's exile: "The very last word in Lamentations that fits the acrostic pattern that runs through chapters 1 to 4 is תם/*tam* ('he completed'). In this way the poetic form itself portrays deliverance as the end of Zion's story."[455] Lam. 5 picks up on this note of hope and begins with an invocation of God followed by the traditional communal lament. The final chapter of Lamentations does indeed lament the circumstances of the local Judean population during foreign occupation at the onset of the Babylonian exile. However, it also includes praise (Lam. 5:19) and petition (Lam. 5:21-22). Consequently, the entire book of Lamentations itself arguably ends on a note of reverence and

[455] Parry, *Lamentations*, 143.

supplication. The structured chaos of Lam. 1-4 culminates with, an acrostic-free, unstructured order. Disorientation and confusion dissipates in Lam. 5 and the speakers of the book compose themselves. The initial shock and trauma of Israel's devastating reality is finally addressed in the traditional, and perhaps appropriate, manner. It is addressed through the invocation of God and through prayer which acknowledges God's sovereignty. And, as Jamie Grant suggests, such prayer "is indicative of hope that prayer will be answered by the One who is able to 'do stuff.'"[456]

[456] Jamie Grant, "Psalm 44 and a Christian Spirituality of Lament" (Unpublished Paper, Tyndale Old Testament Lecture, July 2007), 10. See Grant in Parry, *Lamentations*, 154.

CONCLUSION

Thus far, I have presented a literary analysis of Lam. 1-5 and a variety of issues concerning the text's interpretation. The present study has divided Lamentations into three literary units: (1) Lam. 1-2; (2) Lam. 3; and (3) Lam. 4-5. Nevertheless, these units resonate with one another, and the entire text provides a model of incessant invocation amid suffering. The idea of incessant invocation is evident in Lam. 1-2 where the narrator implores that DZ cry out "day and night" (Lam. 2:18) and "lift up" her hands for the lives of children dying from hunger (Lam. 2:19). DZ responds accordingly and cries out against the wrath of God (Lam. 2:21-22). Incessant invocation is evident in Lam. 3 when the community is challenged to "examine" themselves and "lift up" their "hearts" and "hands" toward "God in heaven" (Lam. 3:40-41). An entire chapter (Lam. 4) devoid of petition or a direct address to God is juxtaposed with a chapter which is almost exclusively an invocative prayer (Lam. 5). Lam. 4-5 show that it is not simply enough to contemplate affliction, but that also, one ought to call upon God for answers and for redemption.

The voices of this book present conflicting ideas concerning theodicy and the evil which Israel is experiencing. Lamentations is a polyphonic text in dialogic tension with itself, and perhaps even with other works among biblical literature: "Lamentations does not provide a ready-made theology. Instead, it consists of multiple voices, presenting multiple theological evaluations of the relationship between Zion's sin and her suffering."[457] In addition, "[t]here is conflict and disagreement both within chapters and utterances, and across chapter and utterance

[457] Bier, '*Perhaps There is Hope'*, 217.

boundaries."[458] Nevertheless, the voices in the text generally agree that God must be continually addressed throughout their plight.

To reiterate the present thesis, I think that Lamentations invites its readership to incessantly invoke God. Insights from reader-response, speech-act, and dialogic hermeneutics shed light on this interpretation and how it naturally proceeds from an engagement with Lamentations. This is especially applicable for those approaching the text as scripture and the divine Word of God, a Word which believers seek to internalize through devotion and practical application: "The conviction that the Bible is God's Word written invites us to explore ways in which that living and active Word might be rendered to us through the words of the text."[459]

Of course, the conclusion that readers ought to incessantly invoke God may not be an obvious interpretation of Lamentations. There are certainly other ways to interpret and understand the text. Briggs speaks of a bridge between reader and text and emphasizes the two-way traffic on said bridge.[460] Indeed, the works of philosophers such as Bakhtin and Buber highlight how each of the different parties partaking in a conversation have an impact on one another. In our "conversation" with Lamentations, we, and our contemporary context, impact the text just as much as it impacts us. I can scant imagine how different my understanding of Lamentations would be without the influence of reader-response and the speech-act model. This is one way how context shapes hermeneutics.

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[458] *Ibid*., 219.

[459] Richard S. Briggs, "Getting Involved: Speech Acts and Biblical Interpretation," *ANVIL* 20 (2003):25-34, 25.

[460] *Ibid*., 26.

My awareness of reader-response criticism and speech-act theory also challenged me to consider the potential perlocutionary effect of the language of Lamentations. The perlocutionary effect suggests how a reader could digest the entirety of the work without needing to identify a core principle or idea in Lamentations that the author may have wanted to communicate. With reader-response we see an emphasis on the "reader's role in the process of achieving meaning" and "the result of reading in terms of an effect upon the reader."[461] With speech-act theory we see speech, even when rendered through text, as a force with intent. Though my discussion of speech-act and reader-response is largely limited to that of the methodological concerns in Chapter 2, they were crucial to my exegesis which highlighted contradiction just as much as synthesis.

Of course, there is no shortage of mixed messages in Lamentations and it may seem nonsensical to think that people could *apply* contradiction. But, the book of Lamentations provides an emotional appeal reflecting how individuals can have conflicting feelings and further implies that people are *allowed to* approach God with such feelings. This is when dialogism enters the fray of interpreting Lamentations. The importance of dialogism in particular is that it highlights works within which contradiction can contribute to interpretation, such as in Lamentations. The contribution of speech-act and reader-response theories and methods demonstrate the value of the dialogic method when applied to Lamentations, which in turn, exposes a dialogic theology that is intrinsic to the book. Methodological pluralism, as found in this thesis, demonstrates the synergistic and heuristic value of such an approach on the book of Lamentations.

[461] Edgar V. McKnight, "Reader-Response Criticism," pages 230-46 in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, eds. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes, rev. and exp. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 236.

The message of incessant invocation which I highlight is not one which can serve as the monologic, or overarching, position of the book. But rather, it is a natural by-product, I think, of the polyphonic nature of Lamentations. Consider the following insights from Miriam Bier.

> And indeed, part of the inherently responsive and responding nature of the polyphonic text is the invitation to participate. The very variety of interpretations in the scholarly commentary, along with the long history of "survivals" of Lamentations, suggests a dialogue already taking place within and among readings of Lamentations. Whatever the final assessment of the text, almost all readings find that studying Lamentations is of value, either because of the hopeful perspective it expresses, or in spite of its lack of hope, giving voice to protest.[462]

So often, when confronted with hardship, affliction, or just plain brutality, people become disillusioned with God, or the idea of God. And though many are satisfied to simply use the free-will defence or some variation thereof for their theodic purposes, the biblical text often illustrates a God who intentionally and impassionately brings harm to individuals, even those who are deemed innocent or faithful. What are we to make of such passages and such accusations? What are we to make of the ugly realities of life? And so, people fall into their disillusionment with God. Lamentations contradicts itself in its vindication of God and trips on its own theodicies. The only thing we find for certain in this text is a people, choosing to continue believing in the reality of God. Perhaps it was not a choice, if the God's reality was the only paradigm known to the social context of the community which produced Lamentations. Still, they could have remained in rebellion and ceased their communication altogether with said God. But for the bereaved voices of Lamentations, such a position proved futile. God was their only hope. God, who could be relentlessly cruel, was their only hope for abundant mercy and restoration. In

[462] *Ibid*., 220.

Lamentations, God is incessantly invoked, because he is the only feasible source of hope and redemption.

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