

FROM OBJECTIVE OBSERVATION TO SUBJECTIVE  
PARTICIPATION: HOW THE SPEAKING VOICES IN  
LAMENTATIONS LEAD FROM SUFFERING TOWARD REDEMPTION

by

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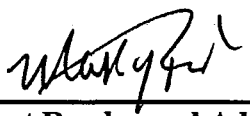
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## ABSTRACT

“From Objective Observation to Subjective Participation: How the Speaking Voices in Lamentations Lead from Suffering toward Redemption”

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Lamentations is analyzed using synchronic poetic analysis supplemented with intertextual and dialogic criticism. Lamentations is read as a literary whole, with a focus on its metaphoric language and the dialogical interaction among the voices. The interaction of Daughter Zion and the Speaker plays a significant role in leading the community through its suffering. Significant here is the Daughter Zion metaphor, which evokes contrasting responses of judgment and pity. The Speaker experiences these attitudes as he dialogues with Zion and moves through detachment, sympathy, and empathy. Ultimately he identifies with the suffering of Zion and her search for hope as the imagery moves from the corporate to the individual. He then leads the suffering community from within in their first steps toward redemption. Lamentations demonstrates movement from judgment to pity, from detachment to empathy, from suffering to hope, and from the corporate through the individual to the corporate perspective once more.

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## Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
BDB	Brown, Francis, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs. <i>Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i> . Electronic ed. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000.
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibOr	Biblica et Orientalia
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CurTM</i>	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
DBL	Swanson, James. <i>Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)</i> . Electronic ed. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997.
HALOT	Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson, and Johann Jakob Stamm. <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Vol. 1-4. Electronic ed. Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1999.
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HKB	Holladay, William Lee, Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner. <i>A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Leiden: Brill, 1971.
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IVP	InterVarsity Press
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
KHC	Kurzer Han-Commentar zum Alten Testament.

NCB	New Century Bible Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology.
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
TNIV	Today's New International Version
TWOT	Harris, R. Laird, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke. <i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i> . Electronic ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980, 1999.
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZBK	Zürcher Bibelkommentare



## Chapter One: History of Research and Methodology

### A. Introduction

In recent years there has been a flurry of attention focussed on the oft-neglected book of Lamentations, provoked by diverse factors ranging from the Holocaust to feminism to theodicy. Between the years 2000 and 2002 five significant works, by Tod Linafelt, F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, Nancy Lee, Adele Berlin, and Kathleen O'Connor, were published that offered new and challenging interpretations of this complex book and contested the conclusions of traditional criticism.<sup>1</sup> Recently, Carleen Mandolfo has added a provocative monograph from a postcolonial and feminist perspective.<sup>2</sup> The energetic interaction among these scholars makes revisiting the book of Lamentations a worthwhile endeavour.

### B. Pre-1990

As Nancy Lee points out, early scholarship on Lamentations focused primarily on two major issues, authorship and genre.<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah's authorship was generally contested, and considerable emphasis was placed on whether the dominant form was dirge or lament. Some attention, however, was given to the theological repercussions of the book, which usually focussed on suffering as punishment and the consequent need for repentance. Karl Budde (1898) and Max Lohr (1893, 1923) recognized the late insertion of ch. 3; according to Lohr this was a deliberate redactional choice in order to construct a penitential sermon.<sup>4</sup> Hedwig Jahnow (1923) published a comparative cross-cultural study

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<sup>1</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book*; Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*; Lee, *Singers of Lamentations: Cities under Siege, from Ur to Jerusalem to Sarajevo*; Berlin, *Lamentations*; O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*.

<sup>2</sup> Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations*.

<sup>3</sup> Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 11–12.

<sup>4</sup> The overview here is based in part on Westermann, *Lamentations*, 24–51.

of the dirge, but also drew significant conclusions about the key social role that women played in the mourning rituals of the ancient Near East.

Towards the middle of the past century, Wilhelm Rudolf (1939) and Max Haller (1940) continued the emphasis on affliction as Israel's deserved punishment, tempered by the hope of grace through patient suffering. Hans-Joachim Kraus (1956, 1983) attributed authorship to cult prophets or priests who composed the poems for liturgical use in order to convey a message of punishment and repentance and E. Cothenet (1967) similarly viewed the suffering of the people as judgment for wickedness and believed in the necessity of confession for restoration. However, some scholars gave a higher profile to the existence of paradox or conflict in the book. Norman Gottwald (1954, 1962) viewed the book as a tension between a theology of judgment and a theology of hope in the context of which repentance and submission were necessary. Bertil Albrektson (1963) studied the tension between the Zion tradition of inviolability and the Deuteronomistic doctrine of retribution as punishment for sin.

Although Artur Weiser (1958) played down the significance of the lament form as an expression of suffering, preferring to stress repentance, later scholars began to call attention to the reality of suffering itself. Delbert Hillers (1972) interpreted Lamentations as primarily an expression of pain, although that pain is God's judgment for sin and should be received with submissive acceptance. According to S. Paul Re'emi (1984) the primary function of Lamentations is to lament—to articulate the pain and suffering of God's discipline and to question how God could have allowed this to happen—and H. J. Boecker (1985) recognized the validity of lament even though it is a response to punishment for guilt.

In summary, scholarship before 1990 was mainly tradition-historical, and gave considerable attention to issues such as author, structural unity, and genre, as well as parallel literature in the ancient Near East. Most theological discussion centred on the Deuteronomistic teaching of retributive judgment for sin, and the need for repentance and submission as the basis for hope and deliverance. Attention was also given to the Zion tradition of the inviolability of YHWH's temple and the assured victory of his people. A few later studies (Hillers, Re'emi, Boecker) began to validate the psychological and spiritual need to express pain in the form of lament.

### **C. Post-1990**

A significant change occurred in Lamentations scholarship after 1990 when the traditional themes of suffering as punishment and the need for repentance began to be disputed. A more synchronic, literary approach to the final canonical form of the book developed which focussed on content and message; however, at the same time ideological criticism became prominent, and resulted in either a rejection of that content and message or its significant reinterpretation in light of current social and political values. Iain Provan (1991) challenged the traditional emphasis on Lamentations 3 which used hope as the hermeneutical key to the book.<sup>5</sup> Claus Westermann (1994) was one of the first scholars to validate lament for its own sake, but was later criticized by Tod Linafelt since "his own reading of chapters 1 and 2 is hardly less pious sounding and conciliatory toward God than those of previous scholars."<sup>6</sup> Linafelt (2000) characterized God as abusive and criticized what he deemed the male, Christian, and submissive biases of previous

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<sup>5</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentation*, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 14.

interpreters.<sup>7</sup> He interpreted the book in terms of the modern theory of survival literature. F. W. Dobbs-Alsopp (2002) questioned the significance of sin and guilt, and focused instead on the nature of lament for the suffering city. Lee (2002) built on the work of Hedwig Jahnow and viewed Lamentations as a deliberate balance of both dirge and lament which reflected a socio-rhetorical context in which the purpose of the dirge was to indict Yahweh as the abusive perpetrator of the tragedy and the function of the lament was to demand his intervention in the name of justice.<sup>8</sup> Kathleen O'Connor (2002) also saw a violent God in Lamentations who tended to throw tantrums: "[It] portrays an arbitrary God without ethical constraint who acts from on high with no regard for consequences."<sup>9</sup> Carleen Mandofo's recently released monograph (2007), which utilizes a dialogical analysis of voices, offered "a feminist challenge to biblical hegemony and patriarchy."<sup>10</sup>

#### **D. Purpose**

Scholarship prior to 1990 was often limited to technical issues such as authorship and unity, and when it did move into theological commentary tended to focus on the third chapter with its emphasis on hope, to the neglect of the suffering depicted more graphically in the other chapters. Recently, the work of Linafelt, Lee, O'Connor, and Mandofo in particular moved beyond questions of authorship and form to ideological criticism. They idealized Daughter Zion as a victim of male dominance and an unjust and abusive God. Although their approaches were insightful in many ways, they were problematic in others. They tended to read a modern feminist or socio-political audience

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<sup>7</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 5, 9, 55.

<sup>8</sup> Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 35–6.

<sup>9</sup> O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 139.

<sup>10</sup> Eisenbrauns, "Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets." Advertisement on-line. Accessed 13 September 2007. Online: [https://www.eisenbrauns.com/ECOM/\\_26H17L89C.HTM](https://www.eisenbrauns.com/ECOM/_26H17L89C.HTM)

and agenda anachronistically into the ancient text, and, therefore, saw in the book a reflection of their own society. They consistently privileged the voice of the lamenter over the narrator, the establishment, and God, and presupposed innocence rather than guilt.<sup>11</sup> They also interpreted from a modern western individualistic point of view that saw submission as dysfunctional. Finally, they tended to stress the literal surface meaning of the text at the expense of a more thorough literary analysis that takes the nature of metaphor into full consideration. Norman Holland, in a discussion of “defensive reading,” outlined the tendency for the reader or interpreter to read into a text his or her own world view and agenda:

The overarching principle is: identity re-creates itself, or, to put it another way, style—in the sense of personal style—creates itself. That is, all of us, as we read, use the literary work to symbolize and finally to replicate ourselves. We work out through the text our own characteristic patterns of desire and adaptation. ...The individual can accept the literary work only to the extent he exactly re-creates with it a verbal form of his particular pattern of defense mechanisms and, in a broader sense, the particular system of adaptive strategies that he keeps between himself and the world.<sup>12</sup>

Any interpreter, whether traditional, feminist, postmodern, or postcolonial, can fall into this interpretive trap. Close attention to both text and context is essential if the book is to be approached with integrity.

This study will propose another reading of the book of Lamentations. It will acknowledge that the individual chapters may have had different origins and authors, with ch. 3 possibly inserted later by the final redactor, but will focus on the final canonical form of the book which was designed as an attempt to find meaning in the events of the destruction of Jerusalem. This study will validate lament as an articulation of very real pain and suffering, while acknowledging the reality of sin and punishment and the need to

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 18, 92.

<sup>12</sup> Holland, “Unity Identity Text Self,” 816–17.

find a way forward. It will argue for a more commutual interaction of the genders, in which Daughter Zion and the unidentified male persona both play a significant role in leading the community through its suffering and along the first steps toward forgiveness and mercy, a process that will remain crucial for audiences of subsequent generations.

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that the structure and imagery of Lamentations, especially the commutual voices of the narrator, Daughter Zion and the suffering inhabitants, lead the implied reader to empathize with the anguish of the people, to personalize the need for confession and redemption, and to participate in the religious life of the wider community as they seek to find a way forward.

## **E. Methodology**

### **1. Introduction**

Although synchronic poetic analysis of the Hebrew text will dominate this study, it will be supplemented with intertextual and dialogic criticism. These techniques will be applied with sensitivity to genre and historical context. The book may well have originated as a collection of disparate poems related to the destruction of Jerusalem, but at some point the final redactor merged and edited the poems to form a thematic and structural unity, such that “[t]aken together, the poems that make up the book of Lamentations display a linguistic and conceptual power rarely seen even in biblical literature.”<sup>13</sup> By demonstrating a thematic progression in the book, supported by the poetic imagery and interaction of the voices, this thesis will argue for an overall unity of purpose in Lamentations. The poetic analysis will form the basis of theological

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<sup>13</sup> House, “Lamentations,” 279. See Moore (“Human Suffering in Lamentations,” 539–545) for an overview of attempts to demonstrate unity in Lamentations. Wiesmann’s theory, summarized on pp. 542–44, is the most meaningful. See also Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 5: “[B]iblical texts should be studied as wholes. This view of literary criticism contrasts with the approach of form criticism, for example, because the latter emphasizes the division of a text into its parts.”

conclusions, for as Berlin remarks, “God, sin, punishment, repentance, faith, hope—all of these are important concepts in Lamentations and all are the stuff from which a theology is made.”<sup>14</sup> Since a number of the primary commentators on Lamentations, such as Lee, Boase, and Mandolfo, rely on intertextual analysis in formulating their arguments, this thesis will also of necessity examine relevant passages in books such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. More importantly, this intertextuality is also inherent in the nature of the book of Lamentations itself. As Boase notes, “Through the personification motif, an intertextual link with the prophetic literature is immediately established.”<sup>15</sup> The Daughter Zion metaphor, which is central to an understanding of the book, can only be fully understood within its cultural and historical context, and this is only accessible through intertextual analysis.<sup>16</sup> Not only does the major metaphor of Daughter Zion link Lamentations to the prophets, however, minor figurative images, common vocabulary, and similar syntax also forge strong links, especially with Jeremiah.<sup>17</sup>

In any literature, three foci may be considered: the author (the world behind the text), the discourse (the world of the text), and the reader (the world in front of the text).<sup>18</sup> Although poetic analysis considers primarily the world of the text, it is not oblivious to the author and audience. Peterson and Richards provide an excellent overview of the three main theories of poetry. First, the expressive theory identifies poetry as “a form of discourse that expresses powerful or profound human emotions and feelings.”<sup>19</sup> The poet,

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<sup>14</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 17. Admittedly, no attempt is made in Lamentations itself to present a detailed theology of suffering or discipline, and it would be in error to base such a theology on this book in isolation. It does, however, suggest many important theological ideas.

<sup>15</sup> Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom*, 174.

<sup>16</sup> See below under E.3: “Interpretation of Metaphor.”

<sup>17</sup> See Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, *passim*; Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom*, *passim*.

<sup>18</sup> Möller. “Rhetorical Criticism,” 690. See also Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, *passim*; Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 19–45.

<sup>19</sup> Petersen and Richards, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry*, 8.

known or unknown, is prominent here, expressing either his or her own intense emotions or those of the community of which he or she is a part. Since Lamentations is not merely a moralistic lesson, but serves to articulate and validate suffering, this approach is significant to this study. Second, the mimetic theory sees poetry as an imitation of reality, and focuses on the text. “The poem is the copy, the mirror, the representation.”<sup>20</sup>

Lamentations is a representation of the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple and the aftermath of this devastation, and provides a mirror of the events as they happened into which all subsequent audiences may look. Current poetic analysis of Hebrew verse, however, moves beyond expression of emotion and representation of reality, no matter how well these aims are achieved. Finally, the goal-oriented theories of poetry “move beyond imitation to focus on the rhetorical effect of a poem’s persuasion and on the end to which a poem is directed.”<sup>21</sup> Lamentations has a *Sitz im Leben*, a message and function for the exilic Jews and, by extension, for the corresponding implicit readers of subsequent generations. As Dobbs-Allsopp notes, “Lamentations is perhaps known best from its use in the month of Ab services that commemorate Jewish national calamities, including the destruction of the First and Second Temples and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. My own post-Holocaust-inspired reading of these poems is meant to honor and to extend this tradition.”<sup>22</sup>

All cultures have used and continue to use language to express, to represent, and to influence thinking and behaviour. It would be anachronistic to deductively force those poetic forms and techniques that are exclusively modern onto the ancient book of

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<sup>20</sup> Petersen and Richards, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry*, 10. Note that the term “rhetoric/rhetorical” is often used in poetic analysis. For example, “rhetorical device” is a synonym for “literary device” or “poetic device.” The application of formal Greco-Roman rhetoric is not intended by the use of this terminology.

<sup>21</sup> Petersen and Richards, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, xi.



Lamentations; however, many others are shared by both contemporary and biblical poetry. Poetic analysis can also draw inductive conclusions from the use of uniquely Hebrew poetic forms and techniques. A number of scholars, such as Adele Berlin, Leland Ryken, Luis Alonso Schökel, and Wilfred G. E. Watson have completed insightful studies of the characteristics of Hebrew verse.<sup>23</sup> Some of their conclusions will be implemented in this study at the micro-level of poetic analysis in order that they might inform the interpretation of the various pericopae at the macro-level. Poetic analysis recognizes the literary strategy used by the text and its ultimate purpose, and thus avoids surface literalism that may lead to misinterpretation. The recognition of techniques such as hyperbole, irony and emotional appeal can suggest other interpretive possibilities. Other strategies such as structure, narrative perspective, diction, connotative vocabulary, metaphor, figures of speech, and tone contribute to an understanding of meaning. These techniques must not be considered in isolation, but related back to the purpose and meaning of the pericope as a whole.

## 2. Dialogic Voices

A particular focus of this study will be to identify and evaluate the dialogic voices within the poems, what Mandolfo calls “dialogic criticism.”<sup>24</sup> Interest in identifying the possible voices within biblical poetry and their impact on interpretation is relatively recent, although the germ of the idea can be traced back to Horsley’s work on the Psalms in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, much of the development of the idea of voicing has

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<sup>23</sup> See the bibliography below.

<sup>24</sup> Mandolfo, *God in the Dock*, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Horsley, *The Book of Psalms*; see Mandolfo, *God in the Dock*, 9–11.

focussed on the Psalter,<sup>26</sup> adding to the traditional understanding of the Psalms as vertical communication from people to God (prayer) and from God to people (revelation) the possibility of horizontal communication between two or more persons responding to each other (dialogue). Mandolfo gives a detailed and effective summary of this process, her own monograph providing one of the first examples of the role of dialogic voices in biblical poetry.<sup>27</sup> Her criteria for distinguishing voices include narrative perspective, content, and structure,<sup>28</sup> although she admits that these criteria are not totally objective and that voicing can be ambiguous.<sup>29</sup> A similar approach will be used in *Lamentations*, and although the delineation of voices may not always be definitive, it is nevertheless instructive.

Many have noted various voices in *Lamentations*, in particular that of Daughter Zion and what is often called “the narrator.” Booth clarifies the distinctions between different types of author and narrator.<sup>30</sup> The “author” or “poet” is the actual historical figure who wrote the work, whereas the “implied author/poet” is the author’s “second self ... an implicit picture of an author who stands behind the scenes” and mediates the text to the reader. If there is no “teller” in the story, there is no distinction between the implied author and the narrator; as soon as the teller refers to him/herself as “I,” however, there exists a “dramatized narrator” who may be fully characterized even if they are not characters who participate in the events. These narrators are usually authoritative and reliable. Finally, “[a]mong dramatized narrators there are mere observers ... and there are

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<sup>26</sup> Although Westermann (*Lamentations*, 139–40) comments briefly on the use of dialogic voices in *Lamentations*, he does not follow up on this observation in detail.

<sup>27</sup> Mandolfo, *God in the Dock*, 9–27.

<sup>28</sup> Mandolfo, *God in the Dock*, 37, 38, 43.

<sup>29</sup> Mandolfo, *God in the Dock*, 21.

<sup>30</sup> Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, 151–55.

narrator-agents, who produce some measurable effect on the course of events.”<sup>31</sup> At the receptive end of the text, the actual “reader” is the person hearing or reading the text, who may well be removed in time, space, and world-view from the “implied reader,” which is a hypothetical reader, a construct demanded by the nature of the work itself in order for the work to achieve its purpose.<sup>32</sup>

Dobbs-Allsopp identifies the first speaker in Lamentations as a narrator and remarks, “In both the Mesopotamian laments and Lamentations, the narrator is omniscient and reliable.”<sup>33</sup> This, however, is an oversimplification, for Lamentations differs in a number of respects from its Mesopotamian parallels.<sup>34</sup> First, it is important to differentiate here between the so-called “narrator” or first speaker and the implied, or actual, poet.<sup>35</sup> Authorship of the book in earlier traditional work and more recent intertextual treatments is often attributed to Jeremiah; nevertheless, even if this is true it is entirely possible that Jeremiah (or another unknown author) and the first speaker are not one and the same, and that the first speaker is not in fact the “author” or even the “implied author.” If the poet is capable of constructing a female persona, Daughter Zion, to represent one participant in the discourse, he is also capable of constructing another persona, that of the first voice, as her conversation partner.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, 153–54.

<sup>32</sup> See Holman and Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature*, 252–53.

<sup>33</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 33; see also O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 17.

<sup>34</sup> See also Dobbs-Allsopp, “Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology,” 33.

<sup>35</sup> As Miller notes: “[T]he so-called narrator, like Jerusalem, is a dramatic speaking voice that exists within the created world of the poem. Both speakers, in other words, are personifications, who are given their existence by the poet” (“Reading Voices,” 393). See also Provan, *Lamentations*, 18; Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 12–13.

<sup>36</sup> The fact that the Speaker is unnamed may have contributed to the tendency to regard him as reliable and omniscient and to identify him with the poet. There is another possible reason, however, for the lack of a name: to generalize the Speaker’s experience to a wider group. This will be discussed below.

Second, even though this second persona is commonly referred to in the literature by the term “narrator,” the text does not of necessity require that he be an omniscient narrator who is outside of the events, as the narrator tends to be in the historical books. He is perhaps closer to Booth’s narrator-agent; however, it is the contention of this thesis that he is not a “narrator” at all, as the term is generally used in prose narrative. He is reliable in his observations, but is nevertheless a construct of the poet who fills a role that is nearer to that of a character in a poetic drama. Since *Lamentations* is poetry, it uses artistically contrived conventions and techniques that in many cases differ from most historical prose narrative such as the Deuteronomistic history in which the narrator normally relates events without being personally involved in them. The first speaker in *Lamentations* exists within the world of the text and participates as a character in its events; thus, he can be informed or changed by these events—and by the words of another character.

If the male voice is not an omniscient external narrator, where is the normative voice in *Lamentations*? Although the book is primarily expressive in purpose and contains few assertions that can be construed as statements of propositional theological truth,<sup>37</sup> it does give rise to theological concepts. This truth, message, or theology arises directly out of the situation and imagery, and from the interaction between the various voices which may either reinforce or undermine each other, unmediated by a narrator. Dobbs-Allsopp highlights the lyric qualities of the book, characterized by “its lack of narrativizing devices, on the one hand, and on the other, its concomitant strong reliance on the naked properties of language as its basic resource for making meaning.”<sup>38</sup> This is

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<sup>37</sup> See Moore, “Human Suffering in *Lamentations*,” 537–38.

<sup>38</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 12.

also true in other poetic passages in the Hebrew Bible such as the Psalter and Song of Songs. Although his discussion relates primarily to narrators in fiction, Booth's insights are relevant here. It is commonly accepted that prose, including narrative, and poetry form a continuum and that the techniques they use cannot be totally discrete and compartmentalized.<sup>39</sup> Booth states that the implied author, who by his use of literary devices "carries the reader with him in judging the narrator," is the source of normativity.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the male persona in Lamentations is reliable to the extent that "he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms)."<sup>41</sup> Significantly, however, this rationale applies equally to Daughter Zion, who admits her guilt and the justice of YHWH's judgment. The fact that she is suffering, expresses that misery graphically, and seeks to be relieved from it does not require that what she says is automatically suspect or inherently unreliable; in fact, she will have a significant impact on the first speaker. The truth in Lamentations arises out of the interaction of these two voices, and also the third voice of the community.

Since he is a construct of the implied author/poet, a character in the drama with his own personality, the first speaking character will be termed simply "the Speaker."<sup>42</sup> Admittedly, it is impossible to state absolutely that the Speaker in Lamentations 1 and 2 is male, since groups of women traditionally took on the role of mourners in situations such

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<sup>39</sup> For example, prose narrative regularly uses metaphor and other figurative imagery that is typical of poetry, and poetry may use dialogue and narrative techniques more common in prose. See Kugel, *Idea of Biblical Poetry*, 302; Miller, "Meter, Parallelism and Tropes," 105–6; Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, 19.

<sup>40</sup> Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, 158. See pp. 159–60 for a discussion of supporting or correcting narrators.

<sup>41</sup> Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, 158. The fact that the narrator tends to reflect the implied author's norms does not mean that the two are necessarily one and the same. The narrator may be a character within the world of the literary work.

<sup>42</sup> He is not termed "Jeremiah," although he may be that prophet, since the determination of authorship is beyond the scope of this thesis. For a detailed discussion of the possibility of Jeremiah's authorship, see Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, *passim*.

as this. A woman would have had privileged access to the mourning rites and would be more likely to interact with Daughter Zion than a male outsider,<sup>43</sup> and there are no specific gendered references to the Speaker in the Hebrew grammar. However, it will be argued in ch. 4 that the Speaker is הַנָּבִיִּי of Lamentations 3, and therefore male pronouns will be used in reference to him.

### 3. Interpretation of Metaphor

A particular methodological difficulty arises in the attempt to interpret metaphors such as the key Daughter Zion metaphor complex in Lamentations. In prose, although a word may have a wide semantic range, there is normally one specific meaning that is applicable in a given historical, grammatical, and thematic context.<sup>44</sup> By their very nature, however, metaphors represent ideas (tenors) by interacting with other concepts or objects (vehicles) that are similar in some ways but different in others, and often exist in tension. Not only may a metaphor be used with a different intent or emphasis in differing contexts within the same poem, but it may also have multiple, though not unlimited, implications within one context. Since there is no rigid one-to-one correspondence between all aspects of the tenor and the vehicle, there is often flexibility or uncertainty in determining the relevant criteria to be compared in a given situation (the “ground” of the metaphor).<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the ground of the metaphor is sometimes indicated without the vehicle being

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<sup>43</sup> Pham, however, describes a mourning ceremony at which both the elders and the virgins of Jerusalem are present (Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East*, 110).

<sup>44</sup> See Carson (*Exegetical Fallacies*, 62) regarding illegitimate totality transfer, but compare pp. 55–56 regarding unwarranted semantic disjunctions and limitations. See also Nida, “Implications of Contemporary Linguistics,” 77: “Concern for language as a part of the total culture has also resulted in a greater emphasis upon the context of a word. The individual word is thus largely meaningless apart from context and it is only within the various contexts that the semantic structure of any word or semantic unit can and must be defined,” also pp. 86–87; Barr, “Semantics and Biblical Theology,” 14–17.

<sup>45</sup> For example, in comparing his love to a rose, is Robert Burns focusing on the beauty of the rose or its ability to inflict pain by means of its thorns as the ground of the metaphor?

specifically identified.<sup>46</sup> Both of these situations may result in uncertainty as to the intent of the metaphor, or they may indicate a “multivalent” or “polysemous metaphor” with several simultaneously correct interpretations.<sup>47</sup> Ceccarelli identifies several understandings of polysemy, one of which is “a rhetorical strategy employed by the calculating rhetor to bring different audiences, through different paths, to a point of convergence in the acceptance of a text.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, polysemy or multivalence may be a deliberate poetic technique used by the author of Lamentations to communicate meaning, rather than simply a misappropriation of meaning or an agenda driven use of meaning by the reader or interpreter, or a limitless indeterminacy of meaning. Such a technique is even more likely to be used in artfully constructed poetry than in narrative prose or didactic exposition.

It is in situations such as these, however, that some interpreters tend to fixate on their own preferred construal of a multivalent metaphor and attribute to it an almost “literal” consistency throughout the pericope and even the entire book, pursuing it

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<sup>46</sup> For example, the reference to Daughter Zion’s uncleanness may indicate that the vehicle is a prostitute, a menstruant, or a rape victim.

<sup>47</sup> See Ceccarelli (“Polysemy: Multiple Meanings”) for an excellent discussion of the topic, especially the section on Hermeneutic Depth (pp. 407–9). Although her study is not specifically focused on metaphor, but on language in general (she uses examples in which different elements of a single prose text deliberately create different meanings), by extension, the differing grounds of comparison in a poetic metaphor may also imply different correct interpretations. A classic example is in Browning’s “My Last Duchess” which includes the line “Though his fair daughter’s self, as I avowed / At starting, is my object.” The poet clearly intends several correct interpretations of the word “object” which could mean “goal,” “thing,” or “object d’art” in the context of the poem. The multiple meanings are a deliberate poetic technique used to characterize the Duke and to create irony.

The terms “polysemy” and “multivalence/polyvalence” are sometimes differentiated, but are also sometimes used synonymously. A major part of Ceccarelli’s purpose is to clarify contemporary use of these terms. She identifies “a distinction between the truly polysemous text, which contains more than one denotational meaning, and the [polyvalent] text that merely inspires different audiences to develop different attitudes toward it” (p. 399).

<sup>48</sup> Ceccarelli, “Polysemy: Multiple Meanings,” 396.

relentlessly to forced conclusions.<sup>49</sup> The Daughter Zion image complex is expressed in different contexts throughout Lamentations with differing nuances and emphases. As Richards points out in his discussion of the metaphoric nature of many words:

A word may be *simultaneously* both literal and metaphoric, just as it may simultaneously support many different metaphors, may serve to focus into one meaning many different meanings. This point is of some importance, since so much misinterpretation comes from supposing that if a word works one way it cannot simultaneously work in another and have simultaneously another meaning.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, metaphors may be semantically multivalent or polysemous, and one use of the metaphor in one context may indicate more than one interpretive possibility. This is definitely not to imply, however, that a specific metaphor may have an unlimited number of interpretations in a given situation; as Richards states above, the multivalency serves “to focus into one meaning many different meanings,” and as Ceccarelli remarks, “[P]olysemy represents multiple, but not limitless meaning.”<sup>51</sup> The historical context, the genre, the immediate textual context, the logical flow of thought in the pericope, as well as comparison to relevant parallel passages in the prophets give clues to the correct interpretation of a metaphor such as Daughter Zion. Also, metaphors serve to organize the audience’s understanding of the subject, attributing more significance to some elements of the metaphor than to others, which it suppresses.<sup>52</sup> Misinterpretation results when minor, subsidiary nuances of the metaphor are exaggerated in importance and dominate the interpretation.

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<sup>49</sup> Glucksberg and Haught conducted a study of metaphors and similes: “Overall, metaphors tended to be interpreted in this way, with many more non-literal, superordinate properties mentioned than literal, basic-level ones” (“Relation between Metaphor and Simile,” 364).

<sup>50</sup> Richards, *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 118–9.

<sup>51</sup> Ceccarelli, “Polysemy: Multiple Meanings,” 398. A rose in a song, for example, may very well represent a woman metaphorically as both beautiful and capable of inflicting pain (see note 37). In the historical context of Burns, within the genre of a love song, and in parallel with other related metaphors in the verses, however, this is unlikely.

<sup>52</sup> Black, “Metaphor,” 75, 78. To use Burns’ rose example once more, the phrase “red, red rose” indicates that the dominant aspect of the metaphor is appearance, not the ability to cause pain.



A misunderstanding of metaphor may result in a distorted, one-dimensional understanding of meaning. O'Connor, for example, allows the "femaleness" of the metaphor to dominate to the point where Daughter Zion seems to personify abused and dehumanized women as a gender *per se*, rather than the guilty inhabitants, both male and female, of the destroyed city:

Her words create a scene of domestic violence in which a powerful, angry man beats his wife, hurls her about, and leaves her for dead. The recognition that God is the batterer compounds her pain. ... Like a woman in an abusive relationship, she agrees that YHWH is justified in his treatment of her because she has "rebelled against his word" (1:18a).<sup>53</sup>

Women have doubtless, and unfortunately, been abused and assaulted throughout history and abuse may indeed be one facet of this complex metaphor, designed to evoke sympathy for Jerusalem or to emphasize YHWH's wrath at her behaviour; there is not, however, a rigid one-to-one correspondence between every aspect of domestic abuse and the relationship between Israel and YHWH. O'Connor's reading, however, relentlessly focuses on the abuse aspect of the marriage metaphor at the expense of other meaningful elements such as disloyalty and adultery. She consistently privileges the voice of Daughter Zion over the Speaker (at least in Lamentations 1 until Zion apparently converts him from a theology of retribution in Lamentations 2)<sup>54</sup> and the violent actions of a "male" God portrayed figuratively as her husband.<sup>55</sup> O'Connor also consciously strives to minimize Zion's guilt and present her as a relatively innocent victim of rape and battery.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 26–7.

<sup>54</sup> O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 18: "The immediacy of her speech as victim gives her the moral authority of the survivor and undermines the narrator's perspective." See also p. 21; Boda, "Lamentations," draft 10.

<sup>55</sup> O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 28: "God might change things, might comfort her, or at least, might stop attacking her and destroy her enemies." See also pp. 34, 43. O'Connor consistently uses loaded language about God (e.g., abuse, batterer, brutalizes, tantrums, anger) instead of more neutral words (e.g., discipline, consequences, indignation, wrath).

<sup>56</sup> O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 23, 39.

In so doing she interprets an ancient, multidimensional literary metaphor unidimensionally—almost “literally”— through the lens of a uniquely contemporary feminist agenda rather than consistent with the way it would have been understood by its original audience, which accepted the concepts of reparation and retribution.<sup>57</sup> Only when its original significance has been understood can the imagery be extrapolated using comparable contemporary terms. As Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard point out, “Any suggested explanation of a passage that would have been inconsistent with or inconceivable in the historical or cultural setting of the author and recipients cannot be valid.”<sup>58</sup> Black has applied this concept specifically to metaphor. He explains that in order for the metaphor to communicate effectively, the writer and the audience must share “a system of associated commonplaces. ... [T]he important thing for the metaphor’s effectiveness is not that the commonplaces shall be true, but that they should be readily

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<sup>57</sup> Lee interprets the metaphor in a similar way in *Singers of Lamentations*, 106: “Thus while Jeremiah has not denied that Jerusalem has sinned, in this specific context she is a victim of war—raped—and made impure (נדה). Once again, rather than portray Jerusalem as a prostitute, as YHWH had done in Jer 4:30 and elsewhere, Jeremiah describes her as a rape victim, in powerful and empathetic imagery.” See also p. 122: “As before with rape (1:8) and in line with the killing imagery above, Jeremiah implies the impurity is caused by *violence* against her.” There is ongoing evidence of bias against YHWH and in favour of Jeremiah/Jerusalem’s poet, including the repeated quotation of Jer 10:24, “Correct me YHWH, but with justice not *with your anger* (כאפך), lest you diminish me.” The way it is incorporated implies that Lee is supportive of the point of view that YHWH’s anger is unjust. There is regular use of italics for “anger” in this and other verses (e.g., p. 159), but no attempt to consider any justification of that anger, simply the frequent labeling of the anger as excessive or abusive. Lee’s repeated use of italics and exclamation marks emphasizes YHWH’s negative qualities (e.g., p. 160: “Jerusalem’s poet again stresses that *YHWH’s anger* is a cause of the suffering, and that YHWH *as enemy* has killed the *children* she reared. On this note Lam 2 comes to a close.”). This seems judgmental and sarcastic towards YHWH, but there is never implied criticism of the speakers, only approval (e.g., p. 147: “...her inner turmoil was linked to the need to voice her empathy for those suffering around her, to break the silence and lament to YHWH.”). Lee also repeatedly uses variations of the phrase “the long litany of YHWH’s destructive actions” (e.g., pp. 137, 139, 140, 143, 145, 146, 168) which has clearly negative connotations. Thus Lee consistently privileges Daughter Zion at the expense of a fair hearing for YHWH.

<sup>58</sup> Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 175; or more colloquially, “[A] text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or his or her readers” (Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 74). See also Carson (*Exegetical Fallacies*, 105) regarding world-view confusion. Ceccarelli identifies one use of polyphemy as “an inversion of typical power relationships; it signifies a moment when the subordinate audience members are able to resist the meanings of the dominant cultural forces by drawing out new meanings that better fit their own needs and desires” (“Polysemy: Multiple Meanings,” 396). Such an application of polysemy, however, does not give due consideration the historical, cultural, and canonical context.

and freely evoked. (Because this is so, a metaphor that works in one society may seem preposterous in another.)”<sup>59</sup> Therefore, the significance to the original audience (the Israelites) of Daughter Zion and her impurity must be investigated.<sup>60</sup>

#### 4. Historical Context

According to the mimetic theory of poetry, Lamentations is a graphic representation of a traumatic moment in the history of Israel: the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. Oded Lipschits attributes the cause of the destruction to the political manoeuvring of surrounding nations. Perceiving Egypt as an ongoing threat, Babylon’s Nebuchadrezzar determined to create a “buffer zone that consisted of devastated, impoverished provinces” between the two powers.<sup>61</sup> This policy also had the advantage of retaliating against Judah for Zedekiah’s revolt, with the brunt of the devastation focusing on Jerusalem. Theologically, however, many Israelites understood this tragedy as the disciplinary action of God. Linafelt disputes the appropriateness of divine judgment in Lamentations: “Claims that suffering is a punishment for sin or that a submissive spirit is more important than the voicing of pain and grief have become, at the end of the twentieth century ... increasingly untenable, if not patently indefensible.”<sup>62</sup> No claim is made here, however, that *all* suffering is YHWH’s punishment for sin, or that *all* suffering is purposeful and redemptive, but that the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. was, as Scripture claims. The Holocaust, 9/11, and other sources of radical suffering were certainly brought about by the acts and choices of human themselves, who are perfectly

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<sup>59</sup> Black, “Metaphor,” 74.

<sup>60</sup> See the “Paradigm of Impurity” and the “Political Paradigm” in ch. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Lipschits, *Fall and Rise of Jerusalem*, 68.

<sup>62</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 4.

capable of perpetrating their own “acts of mass atrocity.”<sup>63</sup> Also, the reality of judgment does not invalidate the expression of pain; indeed, the inclusion of numerous laments in the Bible, including those of Jesus himself over Jerusalem,<sup>64</sup> endorses the expression of suffering, however caused, in the human experience. Verse is the ideal medium for this according to the expressive theory of poetry. The city, with its temple representing the manifest presence of YHWH, was the spiritual and political centre of Israel and, with its destruction and the resulting “permanent and national denial of access to God,”<sup>65</sup> the “whole social fabric of the community [was] destroyed.”<sup>66</sup> Lamentations is indeed an expression of that suffering.

Although Dobbs-Allsopp remarks, “The role of the reporter ... constitutes the poet’s primary function in Lamentations,”<sup>67</sup> it would be a distortion to equate the literary role of poet with that of a modern reporter. In fact, due to a scarcity of specific names and dates and the ambiguity inherent in imagery and metaphor, there has been some question whether indeed the events of 586 B.C.E. are the subject of the poems.<sup>68</sup> Most scholars, however, believe that this is a reasonable assumption, and it is this theory that will be accepted as the basis of this analysis.

## 5. Summary of Method

In summary, a poetic analysis will be performed on Lamentations with an emphasis on the use of dialogic voices as a literary technique. Where relevant,

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<sup>63</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 4. One cannot deflect all blame for suffering to YHWH on the grounds that he allows it unless one denies the existence of any real human freedom to act independently.

<sup>64</sup> See Matt 23:37–8; Luke 13:34–5; 19:41–4.

<sup>65</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 17.

<sup>66</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 73. See also Salters, “Yahweh and His People in Lamentations,” 350.

<sup>67</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 33; see also Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 5.

<sup>68</sup> See for example Provan, *Lamentations*, 7–14. Provan argues, however, for a lack of definitive evidence rather than an outright denial of the historical association. See also Hillers, “History and Poetry in Lamentations,” 155–161.

intertextual analysis will be utilized, since the Daughter Zion metaphor links Lamentations with prophets such as Jeremiah and Isaiah. Although it is not universally acknowledged by scholars, Lee in particular presents a compelling argument for assuming an authorial and topical connection between Lamentations and Jeremiah.<sup>69</sup> The book of Lamentations will be viewed as a literary unit, although the five poems may well have had different origins and authors before being redactionally compiled into its present canonical form at some time in the exilic period.

Each chapter of Lamentations will first be divided into speakers based on a combination of criteria such as genre, grammatical point of view, content, and object of address. Some of the lengthier speeches may be further subdivided into pericopae based on content and form. Although it cannot be claimed that these divisions are always obvious and definitive, a rationale will be presented for the various pericopae that result.

Lamentations is poetry, and therefore a poetic analysis will be performed on each pericope; however, due to the use of dialogic voices which are more common in narrative, some narrative terminology will also be used. As noted above, it is commonly accepted that prose and poetry form a continuum and use overlapping techniques.<sup>70</sup> Even so, the term “narrator,” often used in commentaries on Lamentations, will be avoided in this thesis, and the term “Speaker” used instead, for reasons outlined above. Metaphor will be interpreted within the genre, the historical context, the immediate textual context, the logical flow of thought in the pericope, and comparison to relevant parallel passages in the prophets.

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<sup>69</sup> Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*. For example, the metaphor “life is a beach” may evoke the idea that life is fun, relaxing, or even hedonistic in modern Western culture, but imply that life is unpredictable and dangerous to a hard-working fishing community in Indonesia or seventeenth century England.

<sup>70</sup> Kugel, *Idea of Biblical Poetry*, 85: “To see biblical style through the split lens of prose or poetry is to distort the view...”; Peterson and Richards, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry*, 13.

Poetry also presents unique problems in attempting to determine the emotional state of the speaker without the aid of narrative description or stage directions. As creative actors can attest, the same simple statement may be read in tones as diverse as anger, submission, cynicism, or pleading. The most likely interpretation of tone must be inferred from the vocabulary, the historical context, the immediate textual context, the logical flow of thought in the pericope, the response and remarks of other speakers, and subsequent words and actions of the speaker.

In each pericope, after the poetic and dialogical analysis has been performed, and relevant passages in books such as Jeremiah have been considered, conclusions will be drawn about the theological implications of the poetry.

## Chapter Two: Establishing the Voices (Lamentations 1)

### A. Introduction

In this chapter a poetic analysis will be performed on Lamentations 1 in order to identify and characterize the speaking voices and their attitudes to their situation, to each other, and to God. It is immediately clear in reading ch. 1 that there is more than one perspective in the poem, although the precise number is debated. This thesis will argue that there are three main voices in the book: the Speaker (הַגָּבֵר), Daughter Zion (בִּתְּצִיּוֹן), and the community.<sup>1</sup>

The first chapter of Lamentations can be divided into two approximately equal parts, although there is some overlap when one of the speakers temporarily interrupts the other. Verses 1 to 11 describe the destroyed Jerusalem from the perspective of a relatively objective unnamed speaker,<sup>2</sup> and vv. 12 to 22 relate the suffering of personified Jerusalem herself. Although there is no compelling reason to assume that the first speaker is male, traditionally this has been assumed and has created a gender contrast between the two voices. Broadly speaking, this has resulted in two different approaches to interpretation.<sup>3</sup> The more traditional, male-dominated reading perceives Daughter Zion as a weak, promiscuous woman who is being punished for her sin of spiritual adultery, and

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<sup>1</sup> See Provan, *Lamentations*, 7. Note that there are also minor characters such as the passersby and Daughter Edom. Some commentators, such as Lee, argue that the poem is a compilation which grew out of an originally oral dialogue between two actual voices or dirge/lament singers: "Thus, it may be proposed that the so-called speakers in Lamentations indicate different poetic singers who performed their composed songs in response to one another. Of course, an oral poetic approach also allows the possibility that a single poet *wrote* the text from within and reflecting an oral poetic context" (Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 42). However, whether the voices originate from actual performance or from the mind of the poet has little impact on the poetic effect of these voices in the final composition.

<sup>2</sup> The use of the term "objective" here does not imply that the speaker is a narrator who is reliable and omniscient (see the discussion below) but merely detached from or unaffected by the suffering of Daughter Jerusalem, in contrast to her deeply subjective and personal portrayal of suffering.

<sup>3</sup> This is admittedly an over-simplification, and is only intended to address general trends in interpretation.

the first speaker as an omniscient, judgmental male observer who expects her repentance.<sup>4</sup> The emphasis is on theodicy and God's just punishment of her sin. Contemporary feminist interpreters have responded with a reading that perceives Daughter Zion as a victim of a tyrannical male God who refuses to forgive and comfort a suffering woman who has confessed her error,<sup>5</sup> and that YHWH's crimes are far worse than Zion's.<sup>6</sup> The emphasis is on God's abusive misuse of power. Both of these approaches oversimplify the issues, however. The relationships between the first speaker, Daughter Zion, and YHWH are far more complex and nuanced.

## **B. The Speaker Describes Jerusalem (Lam 1:1–9b, 10–11b, 17)**

### **1. Characteristics of the Speaker**

The poem opens with an unidentified voice who speaks of the destroyed Jerusalem and its inhabitants objectively in the third person, as “she,” “her,” and “they”. The Speaker's opening speech contains many elements of a traditional dirge, including contrast between former glory and the present tragic situation.<sup>7</sup> The striking contrast outlined immediately in v. 1 between the expectation of multitudes and the realization of solitude suggests an arriving visitor or a returning resident or perhaps a soldier, although the former is more likely based on the detached, albeit sympathetic, description. The opening אֵיכָה<sup>8</sup> demonstrates shock and disbelief: “How could this happen?” Jerusalem

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<sup>4</sup> See Linafelt's overview of this approach (*Surviving Lamentations*, 5–7).

<sup>5</sup> See for example Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*; Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*; Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*; O'Connor, *Tears of the World*.

<sup>6</sup> Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 97.

<sup>7</sup> See Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 36. Other elements are: the opening mournful cry, the summons to weep, and the description of the mourner's suffering. Regarding form, see also Boda, “Lamentations,” draft 3–5.

<sup>8</sup> *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: With Westminster Hebrew Morphology*, electronic ed. (Stuttgart; Glenside PA: German Bible Society; Westminster Seminary, 1996, c1925; morphology c1991), Lam 1:1. All subsequent Hebrew quotations are from this version unless otherwise noted.



was not only רַב־תִּי עַם (great of people), she was רַב־תִּי בְּגוֹיִם (great among the peoples) (Lam 1:2). There is no indication here that the Speaker “belongs” in Jerusalem and identifies with it, although he is probably Judahite. He sees and is surprised by the desperate state of Jerusalem, feels sorry for her, but perceives her suffering as external to himself for there is no expression of distress on his own behalf. He also implies by his exclusive focus on Daughter Zion that he himself is innocent and undeserving of punishment, and there are indications that his attitude to Zion is somewhat judgmental since he attributes her suffering to her sin. This may be explained by the fact that most of the destruction perpetrated by the Babylonians was concentrated on the immediate area of Jerusalem and some fortified cities in close proximity to the south. The archaeological evidence demonstrates that much of Judah was relatively undamaged.<sup>9</sup> As an outsider or visitor, the Speaker may not identify with the guilt of destroyed Jerusalem itself. This objectivity invites audiences of later generations who were not present at the destruction to identify with the Speaker and participate in his growing awareness of Zion’s suffering.

## 2. Characteristics of Daughter Zion

It would be incorrect to characterize this detachment and objectivity as coldness or even derision, however, as O’Connor has done.<sup>10</sup> The mere fact that the Speaker personifies the city as a woman, as Daughter Zion, imbues it with the capacity to feel and suffer, notwithstanding that such personification was common practice in the ancient Near East. The personification of the devastated city of Jerusalem is the dominant image in Lamentations, its pervasive power giving unity and direction to the book, and therefore the portrayal of the people of Jerusalem as “Daughter Zion” is pertinent to the theological

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<sup>9</sup> See Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 1; Lipschits, *Fall and Rise of Jerusalem*, 69.

<sup>10</sup> O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 21.

message of the book of Lamentations as a whole. As noted above in “Methodology,” Richards points out how meaning is a product of the interaction of the tenor (“the idea being expressed or the subject of the comparison”)<sup>11</sup> and the vehicle (“the image by which this idea is conveyed or the subject communicated”):<sup>12</sup>

[I]n many of the most important uses of metaphor, the co-presence of the vehicle and tenor results in a meaning (to be distinguished from the tenor) which is not attainable without their interaction. ... [T]he vehicle is not normally a mere embellishment of a tenor which is otherwise unchanged by it but ... vehicle and tenor in co-operation give a meaning of more varied powers than can be ascribed to either.<sup>13</sup>

It makes a tremendous difference whether the Zion metaphor indicates an adulteress, a victim, or a mourner in dialogue with the narrator and the community. Although all the references are in the context of judgement and destruction, Jerusalem is represented throughout Lamentations 1 in two contrasting ways: positively and sympathetically as a mother, a grieving woman, and an isolated widow who is a victim of rape and suffering, but also negatively and judgmentally as a promiscuous woman, an impure woman, and a rebellious sinner who is a deserving recipient of suffering.<sup>14</sup> These contrasting images are not contradictory and problematic but inherent in the nature of metaphor and integral to the overall message of Lamentations. It may be that the greatest potential for hope lies in the ambivalent portrayal of Daughter Zion as both sinner and sufferer, evoking judgment but also compassion.

As Dobbs-Allsopp rightly states, “By imbuing the city with personality and individuality, the poet gives his portrait of suffering the humanity and concreteness

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<sup>11</sup> Holman and Harmon, *Handbook to Literature*, 298.

<sup>12</sup> Holman and Harmon, *Handbook to Literature*, 298.

<sup>13</sup> Richards, *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 100. See also Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 166–68.

<sup>14</sup> See Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom*, 82, 90.

required to ring true to and to grip his audience.”<sup>15</sup> In Lamentations the complex of feminine images representing Jerusalem is varied in its semantic form. The personification encompasses both the physical city and its human inhabitants.<sup>16</sup> It appears in many guises and variations—explicitly as Daughter Zion (בת צִיּוֹן), as Daughter Judah (בת יהודה), as Daughter Jerusalem (בת ירוּשָׁלַם), and as the daughter of my people (בת עַמִּי),<sup>17</sup> but also implicitly in the use of related female imagery and feminine grammar.

Dobbs-Allsopp rightly recommends, “While there may well be an intended narrowing or enlarging of focus depending on the specific geographical term used in any one instance, we should not insist on distinguishing these figures too sharply.”<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Analysis of The Text

In Lam 1:1 the Speaker compares Jerusalem to a widow (כְּאַלְמָנָה), a term that immediately connotes some sympathy, even if not explicitly expressed. In addition, the comparison between her former status as princess (שְׂרָתִי) and her current state as a slave (לַמָּס) is an expression of shock rather than an act of gloating. Although the sentence in isolation could indicate mockery, sympathy is suggested later in v. 8 when he relates that

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<sup>15</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 51. This Daughter Zion image complex may be the uniquely monotheistic Israelite adaptation of the Mesopotamian “weeping goddess motif [which] portrays the city goddess grieving over the destruction of her city and temple and the killing, suffering, and dispersment of her people” (Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 75. Dobbs-Allsopp proceeds to give numerous parallels). Alternately, it may simply be part of a common ancient Near Eastern image pattern which represents cities as female, since its origins predate the destruction of Jerusalem (See Kim, “The Interpretation of Daughter Zion,” 6–10 for a discussion of the origins of the בת צִיּוֹן metaphor).

<sup>16</sup> Boase, *The Fulfilment of Doom*, 102.

<sup>17</sup> See further Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom*, 66–70, who analyzes the different nuances of בת צִיּוֹן and בת עַמִּי.

<sup>18</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 52.

“her adversaries looked at her and they laughed at her cessation.”<sup>19</sup> The verbs here are third person plural (רְאוּהָ צָרִים שְׂחָקוֹ), not first person plural, and imply that the Speaker does not count himself among those who oppose and deride Zion. There are numerous indications that he sees and is moved by her misery, for example, in v. 2:

בְּכֹו תִבְכֶּה בַּלַּיְלָה וְדַמְעָתָה עַל לִחְיָהּ  
 אֵין־לָהּ מְנַחֵם מִכָּל־אֲהָבָיָהּ  
 כָּל־רֵעִיהָ בָגְדוּ בָּהּ  
 הָיוּ לָהּ לְאֹיְבִים:

She continually weeps in the night and her tears are on her cheek.  
 There is no comforter for her from all her lovers.<sup>20</sup>  
 All her friends have acted treacherously against her;  
 They have become her enemies.

The opening emphatic use of the Infinitive Absolute stresses the extent of her wretchedness, and the specification in the second phrase from a generalized weeping to an awareness of the individual tears on her face indicates that the Speaker fully comprehends her anguish as representing each individual human person, not just a vague collective other. The repetition of כָּל in noting that all her lovers and all her friends have become enemies demonstrates an understanding of her helplessness. The use of the root בגד, meaning “act or deal treacherously, faithlessly, deceitfully,”<sup>21</sup> shows that he disapproves, rather than approves, of their actions. In this context, the repeated phrase “there is no comforter for her” (אֵין־לָהּ מְנַחֵם, also vv. 7, 9, 17 with variations) must be an expression of sympathy and regret.

<sup>19</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, the translations are my own.

<sup>20</sup> Or possibly “those who love her.” See Provan, *Lamentations*, 36; Dearman, *Jeremiah/Lamentations*, 443.

<sup>21</sup> BDB, 93.

The Speaker is fully cognizant of the fact that the suffering of Daughter Zion is the deserved consequence of sin.<sup>22</sup> His comment in v. 5, “Indeed, YHWH has afflicted her because of her many transgressions, her children have gone into captivity before the opponent,” is an acceptance of her culpability and its consequences. However, it is a brief statement of fact, not a harsh judgmental accusation; there is no lengthy enumeration of sins, no graphic depiction of their horror.<sup>23</sup> Guilt is a “given,” partly because the Speaker acknowledges that Daughter Zion has already experienced, and continues to experience, God’s discipline for her transgressions. He therefore can express sympathy without denying her responsibility for her faults; she is already paying the price of her sin. However, as Boase rightly points out, “The lack of specificity creates tension in understanding the extreme nature of Yahweh’s indictment of the city.”<sup>24</sup> It is this tension to which many commentators respond when they question the severity of Jerusalem’s punishment. References to Zion’s children in Lamentations are part of another multivalent metaphor which exacerbates this tension; whether the term refers figuratively to the general population of Jerusalem as Daughter Zion’s children, or whether it refers to literal children, the intent is once again to create sympathy for a mother bereft of those who are most precious to her.<sup>25</sup>

Admittedly, Daughter Zion’s sin is not minimized, and vv. 8–9 do expand on the initial statement “Jerusalem has sinned greatly” with imagery related to her “impurity” or

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<sup>22</sup> See Dobbs-Allsopp, “Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology,” 35; Krašovec, “The Source of Hope,” 223–25.

<sup>23</sup> Boase (*Fulfilment of Doom*, 172) has analyzed the prophetic literature and concludes “Broadly, the day of Yahweh texts are, on the whole, more concerned with the nature and impact of the day than on the naming of the sins that initiated the day.” Lamentations reflects this emphasis.

<sup>24</sup> Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom*, 175.

<sup>25</sup> See Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 20. Dobbs-Allsopp interprets the lack of specificity in relation to sins as a transfer responsibility from the community to Daughter Zion as a type of redeemer who suffers for her children, rather than her own sin. This seems to confuse the fact that Daughter Zion is a representation of the community (Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 62).

“uncleanness” (טִּיְוָה<sup>26</sup> and טִמְאָה). Although this attribution of uncleanness appears only in Lamentations 1, Daughter Zion’s lack of purity is central to an understanding of her role and her relationship with YHWH and the Speaker. Jerusalem’s uncleanness has been variously attributed to her status as idolater,<sup>27</sup> promiscuous woman,<sup>28</sup> menstruant woman,<sup>29</sup> rape victim,<sup>30</sup> and mourning widow.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the state of uncleanness may be moral or ritual.<sup>32</sup> For example Pham, who has focused her study on the rites associated with death, attributes the uncleanness of Daughter Zion primarily to her state of mourning,

Lady Jerusalem weeps, seated on the ground, presumably girded with a skirt of sackcloth around the hips (v. 9a), leaving her upper body bare, for her ‘nakedness’ is seen (v. 8b). Her skirt is filthy (v. 9a) from the dirt which she is sitting on and which possibly she has sprinkled on her head.<sup>33</sup>

Lee, after giving a detailed analysis of “double meanings,” arrives at the conclusion that “the ‘uncleanness’ (טִמְאָה) is a result of being raped”<sup>34</sup> and suggests that the sexual conquest is perpetrated by YHWH.<sup>35</sup> This is congruent with her portrayal of Jerusalem as primarily a victim who defies her oppressor. O’Connor states that in vv. 8–9 the Speaker

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<sup>26</sup> Some commentators relate טִיְוָה to the root נָוָה rather than נָדָה, indicating derision or wandering rather than impurity. See the discussions in Berlin (*Lamentations*, 53–4) and Lee (*Singers of Lamentations*, 104–6). Boase (*Fulfilment of Doom*, 176) argues against this interpretation. If the term is a play on words, however, all these meanings may be relevant.

<sup>27</sup> See Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 104.

<sup>28</sup> See O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 22.

<sup>29</sup> See Lev 15:19; O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 27; Hillers, *Lamentations*, 76.

<sup>30</sup> See Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 101–9; Berlin, *Lamentations*, 55.

<sup>31</sup> See Lev 21:1; Num 5:2–3, 6:6–7, 9:10, 19:16; Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East*, 49.

<sup>32</sup> טִיְוָה 1. bleeding, menstruation of a woman 2. separation, abomination, defilement Lam 18 → טִיְוָה (HALOT, 673); טִיְוָה = טִיְוָה impurity (as *abhorrent, shunned*); *impurity*: 1. of ceremonial impurity, as union with brother’s wife; especially of menstruation; of defilement contracted by contact with a corpse. 2. fig. (with allusion to cerem. usage), *impure thing*; of idolatry, immorality, etc. (BDB, 622); טִמְאָה state of ceremonial uncleanness (HALOT, 376); טִמְאָה uncleanness 1. sexual. 2. of a foul or filthy mass. 3. ethical and religious. 4. ritual, of men; of women; of meats. 5. local, of the nations (BDB, 380).

<sup>33</sup> Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East*, 49.

<sup>34</sup> Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 107.

<sup>35</sup> Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 102.

is making the scathing accusation of adultery,<sup>36</sup> and his later interruption in v. 17 shames her by referring to her menstrual impurity,<sup>37</sup> using “the female body as a medium of dishonor and accusation.”<sup>38</sup> As these examples illustrate, interpretations of the Daughter Zion metaphor reflect a wide spectrum of possibilities. However, Berlin wisely points out, “No sooner is one image conjured up than it fades into another. Metaphors are not always easy to grasp and may set in motion a chain of associations that cannot be easily articulated.”<sup>39</sup> The interpreter must rely on the historical and textual—both immediate and canonical—context in determining which is the primary one.

#### 4. The Paradigm of Purity

The ultimate significance of the impurity imagery lies in the crimes of adultery—figuratively representing idolatry—and rebellion against YHWH. Berlin gives a relevant summary of the elements of the Israelite world view that would have influenced their understanding of this imagery.<sup>40</sup> The “paradigm of purity,” as she terms it, recognizes two different types of impurity—ritual and moral. Ritual impurity is caused by discharges, diseases, or death and implies no sin, although the impure person is required to remain apart from anything holy for a varying length of time and perform purification rituals. The personified Jerusalem’s uncleanness due to her menstrual state and her contact with dead bodies is an example of this type of impurity. Admittedly, these states may themselves be metaphors for moral impurity, but this does not imply that mourning and menstruating are intrinsically sinful. Moral impurity, on the other hand, implies the

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<sup>36</sup> O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 22.

<sup>37</sup> O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 27. See, however, Berlin, *Lamentations*, 54–5.

<sup>38</sup> O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 22.

<sup>39</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 3. See also Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, 168–9; Kim, *Daughter Zion*, 20–21; Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom*, 83; and in connection with the multivocality of vocabulary, F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 16; Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, *passim*, especially chs. 3–4.

<sup>40</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 19–21, on which some of the following comments are based.

culpability of the impure person and is caused by transgressions such as immoral sexual acts and idolatry. “Moral impurity degrades the sinner and defiles the land of Israel. It has no expiating ritual; only punishment brings it to an end. The defiled land spews out its inhabitants, so if Israel defiles its land, the land itself will reject them.”<sup>41</sup> The result is exile. Jerusalem’s adultery, symbolizing idolatry in its violation of her covenantal relationship with YHWH, which is metaphorically represented as a marriage, demonstrates moral impurity.<sup>42</sup>

The interpretation that Zion’s uncleanness is a misogynistic reference to her menstrual state, inferred by the phrase “her uncleanness is on her skirts” (v. 9), is unlikely here since although menstruation results in ritual impurity, there is no guilt or moral culpability attached to it, and Daughter Zion’s femaleness as such is not in view.<sup>43</sup> It is also doubtful that the primary reference here is to rape.<sup>44</sup> According to Watson, metaphors imply by their context that the reader should either reinforce or neutralize the various parameters of the comparison:

Corresponding to the selection by the poet of a particular metaphor there is the correct interpretation by the listener (or reader). He can either select those properties of the expression in focus which are relevant to the context ... or he can establish the relationship between the two concepts involved.<sup>45</sup>

It more likely refers to her promiscuity, with the uncleanness “on her skirts” the result of adulterous sexual activity.<sup>46</sup> “Jerusalem has become as an unclean thing among them” by

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<sup>41</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 19.

<sup>42</sup> See Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman, *Biblical Imagery*, 39–40. See also below under “The Political Paradigm.”

<sup>43</sup> See Berlin, *Lamentations*, 54; contra Provan, *Lamentations*, 33, 44–45.

<sup>44</sup> Contra Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 107, 109 and Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 63–67.

<sup>45</sup> Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 265–6.

<sup>46</sup> See Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom*, 176–77. Contra Dobbs-Allsopp (*Lamentations*) who consistently denies that adultery is even in view in his analysis of Lamentations 1. He omits the possibility from the list of possible interpretations of the Zion metaphor (p. 49), translates the first use of לְאֵהָבָהּ as “those who love her” rather than “lovers” (p. 56) and omits reference to the second use in v. 19, and



committing the sin of adultery.<sup>47</sup> This is reinforced in this text by the phrase that follows, “and she was not mindful of the outcome,”<sup>48</sup> which indicates reckless behaviour, by references to her lovers in other parts of the chapter (vv. 2, 19), and by the cause-effect assertion in v. 8 that “Jerusalem has sinned greatly; therefore she has become unclean.”

In the broader conceptual world of the Hebrew Bible marriage imagery is common as a metaphor for the covenant relationship between Israel and YHWH; Israel’s continuing pursuit of foreign gods is equivalent to marital infidelity. Mandolfo, however, questions the equation of adultery with sin: “The woman’s crime is that she has asserted a right to independently choose her partners.”<sup>49</sup> She also undermines the significance of the metaphor by questioning the value of monotheism, stating, “Absent the imaginative world created by the metaphor, the ‘disloyalty’ of Israel is rendered morally ambiguous. Outside of rigid YHWHism, polytheism simply does not equal adultery.”<sup>50</sup> The metaphor, however, was created within the YHWHistic Israelite community, and must first be interpreted within that context and worldview before contemporary implications are drawn from it. This is not to imply, however, that other nuances, albeit secondary, of the Daughter Zion metaphor are not simultaneously suggested. Certainly Jerusalem’s state of deep mourning for the loss of her children, and the contact with their bodies, confers on her ritual

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explicitly denies that this implication is in the passage (p. 64). See also Jer 2:20 which identifies Zion’s sin as adultery and rebellion. Compare Ezekiel 16.

<sup>47</sup> DBL gives as its second meaning of נדה: “impurity, corruption, i.e., that which is a sin against a standard, implying defilement and uncleanness of an act. (Lev 20:21; Ezr 9:11b; Zec 13:1)” (DBL #5614). According to the TWOT, “Metaphorically, the concept of the ritual impurity of the menstrual period was used by Ezekiel to describe the nature of Israel’s sin (36:17). Basic to the metaphorical use of the term is the concept of abhorrence inherent in the physical origin of the term. It is used of useless currency cast into the streets like an abhorred thing (Ezk 7:19–20). It is applied to Israel’s most heinous sins (Zech 13:1; Ezr 9:11; II Chr 29:5)” (TWOT, 556). As noted above, BDB gives “fig. (with allusion to cerem. usage), *impure thing*, Ez 7:19, 20 (of gold), La 1:17 (of Jerus.); of idolatry, immorality, etc.” as a valid translation (BDB, 622).

<sup>48</sup> לֹא זָכְרָה אֶת־יָמֶיהָ: “...she took no thought for her future” (House, “Lamentations,” 332); “...she had no regard for her future” (Berlin, *Lamentations*, 43).

<sup>49</sup> Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 96.

<sup>50</sup> Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 76.

impurity which separates her from YHWH, and partly explains his silence.<sup>51</sup> There are also indications of rape in the text, which will be discussed further below. These aspects of Jerusalem's impurity encourage a more sympathetic attitude toward her in spite of her sin.<sup>52</sup> At all times, however, the Speaker refers to sin objectively as something that is characteristic of Daughter Zion, not as something in which he himself is in any way complicit.

It is after the Speaker recounts Zion's guilt that she interrupts and speaks for herself for the first time (v. 9c). Her interjection is an impassioned plea for YHWH to pay attention to her suffering at the hands of the enemy, but no response is forthcoming. A number of commentators think that the Speaker also ignores her,<sup>53</sup> and Miller even interprets v. 10 as an accusation of her treachery in allowing foreigners into YHWH's temple.<sup>54</sup> However, the Speaker's remarks in vv. 10–11 indicate that he has not only heard her, but is deeply moved by her pain. Although there may be suggestions of rape in earlier verses, the most poignant illustration of Daughter Zion's sexual exploitation appears in v. 10, in which the Speaker describes how the enemy "enters her sanctuary," violating her most intimate sacred space and effectively blending the sexual and religious imagery.<sup>55</sup> According to Dobbs-Allsopp, "What is most remarkable, however, is how the common subject matter and their [*sic*] immediate juxtaposition of 1:8–9 and 1:10 compel

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<sup>51</sup> See Num 5:2; 9:6–7, 10; 19:3.

<sup>52</sup> See Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom*, 177–78.

<sup>53</sup> O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 22.

<sup>54</sup> Miller, "Reading Voices," 399. Perhaps he interprets the ending of הַיָּמִינִי as a third feminine singular objective suffix, instead of a paragogical ה. Westminster 4.2 morphology does not identify this as an objective suffix, which normally contains a *mappiq*. See Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 302.

<sup>55</sup> The phrase "those whom you commanded should not enter into your congregation" may indicate that the invading armies exceeded the mandate given by YHWH to execute judgment on Zion, and therefore indict the foreign nations, rather than YHWH, for what many deem excessive punishment. See also Morrow, *Protest against God*, 113.

the reader to identify the two incidents...<sup>56</sup> He interprets both metaphors as rape and Jerusalem as victim. Juxtaposition, however, can also serve to emphasize contrast and tension.

Although Lamentations does not hesitate to assign guilt, it also acknowledges and validates the reality of suffering and evokes sympathy for the sufferer. Yes, Judah committed sin—spiritual adultery—and yes, her actions resulted after many warnings in severe discipline—the rape of her sanctuary by the enemy—but this does not imply that YHWH takes any pleasure in this discipline or is insensitive to the pain that the discipline brings with it.<sup>57</sup> The fact that both the sin and the discipline are represented by graphic sexual images underlines not only the serious nature of the sin and the serious consequences of sin, but also the heart wrenching misery of the sufferers, both YHWH and Zion. According to Frymer-Kensky:

When the prophet imagines the nation as a girl, he can go beyond anger to express love and sorrow. The marital metaphor of God and the Wife enables us to feel deeply the agony of God as God is betrayed by his beloved. ... The image of the young woman as victim focuses our attention on the vulnerability and perishability of the nation in God's eyes and allows the prophet and reader to express a sadness that goes beyond questions of justice.<sup>58</sup>

The tension between the two images in vv. 8–10 reflects the tension between YHWH's holiness and mercy. Finally, in v. 11, the narrator broadens his sympathetic view from the intimate personal suffering of Zion to the desperate situation of “all her people” who are fighting for their very existence.

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<sup>56</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 66.

<sup>57</sup> So similarly Lam 3:31–33.

<sup>58</sup> Frymer-Kensky, *Wake of the Goddesses*, 169.

## C. Daughter Zion (Lam 1:9c, 11c–16, 18–22)

### 1. Daughter Zion Laments

Although Daughter Zion first interrupts the Speaker in v. 9c, her lament takes over the dialogue in v. 11c and the intensification is striking. As Dobbs-Allsopp notes, “The shift from the narrator’s point of view to that of the city god or goddess gives these poems a real sense of pathos.”<sup>59</sup> The entry of Daughter Zion into the conversation also initiates a shift in emphasis from dirge to lament.<sup>60</sup> Whereas the Speaker focused on the finality of death and destruction, Zion focuses more on pleas to YHWH to see and alleviate the suffering of the living, and whereas the Speaker seems more accepting in his third person description of the situation—probably because of his lack of personal involvement—Zion addresses YHWH directly in order to change the situation. She uses her misery and grief as leverage in her attempt to move YHWH to relent. As Linafelt points out, “[T]he rhetoric of the poetry is concerned to move beyond description to persuasion.”<sup>61</sup>

In light of the destruction of Jerusalem, its temple, and many of its inhabitants, it is not surprising that “the first and most central theme of Lamentations is mourning.”<sup>62</sup> A number of interpreters have commented on the elements of both lament and dirge which appear in the book,<sup>63</sup> particularly in chs. 1 and 2 and perhaps 4, with ch. 3 being primarily an individual lament, and 5 an almost typical communal lament; there is, however, no consensus, for the typical forms have been adapted and modified, perhaps by redactors

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<sup>59</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 36.

<sup>60</sup> See Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 35–42; Morrow, *Protest against God*, 107–8.

<sup>61</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 35.

<sup>62</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 15.

<sup>63</sup> “[T]here is a consensus in form critical scholarship (in biblical studies) on the basic difference between these two genres—the dirge and the lament. While both genres deal with the general topic of suffering and loss, the lament prayer (modeled in many psalms) is essentially a plea addressed to the deity for intervention for help (thus it is characterized by second person speech). The dirge, on the other hand, forewarns against or commemorates the fact of a death and /or destruction (and usually employs third person speech)” (Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 33).

compiling earlier poems to fit the new tragedy.<sup>64</sup> A significant feature of mourning rites is the role of women who lead in the dirges, laments, and postures of grief.<sup>65</sup> The Hebrew Bible attests to the function of these women—perhaps professional—in a number of passages, including the book of Jeremiah:

This is what the Lord Almighty says:  
 “Consider now! Call for the wailing women to come;  
 send for the most skillful of them.  
 Let them come quickly  
 and wail over us  
 till our eyes overflow with tears  
 and water streams from our eyelids.  
 The sound of wailing is heard from Zion:  
 ‘How ruined we are!  
 How great is our shame!  
 We must leave our land  
 because our houses are in ruins.’”<sup>66</sup>

Although the emotional realization and expression of mourning often occur spontaneously, the rituals of mourning can also elicit such responses, acting in a causative/formative rather than a resultative fashion (“till our eyes overflow with tears”). Contrary to contemporary Western thinking, this does not necessarily undermine the authenticity of a response or manipulate an artificial outcome, but may serve to draw out a perfectly genuine one.<sup>67</sup> One has only to consider the contemporary power of music in this regard to illustrate the point. In *Lamentations Daughter Zion* fills this role of mourner, lamenter, and dirge singer and in so doing not only appeals to YHWH but also significantly impacts the Speaker.

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<sup>64</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 24; Provan, *Lamentations*, 5; Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 34–5.

<sup>65</sup> See Feldman, *Defilement and Mourning*, 134–7; Olyan, *Biblical Mourning*, 49–51; Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 18, 51; Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East*, 52.

<sup>66</sup> Jer 9:17–19 TNIV. See also 2 Sam 1:24; Ezek 32:16; 2 Chron 35:25.

<sup>67</sup> See Olyan, *Biblical Mourning*, 8, 33; Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, a Time to Dance*, 3–9 and 95–96.

Whereas the Speaker describes the scene before him from a third person narrative perspective, Daughter Zion uses first person speech addressed to specific audiences. She first cries out to God with the imperative “Look, O YHWH!” (v. 9c), interrupting the Speaker with her sense of pain and urgency. The plea is repeated after the Speaker concludes, but since no response is in view she next turns to “those who pass by on the road” (v. 12a). Although some commentators view the speeches of the Speaker and Zion as parallel, involving no direct interaction between the two,<sup>68</sup> the use of variations on the phrase “There is no comforter for her” in both speeches suggests that they hear and are responding to each other. The interweaving of their speech in vv. 9–11 reinforces this as the Speaker’s voice slows and stops while Daughter Zion’s voice assumes prominence. In vv. 12–22 Zion is obviously addressing someone with her impassioned speech, and since God does not respond, and the passersby ignore and mock her, the implication of v. 12a is that she is addressing the subsequent vivid description of her torment to the Speaker.

Daughter Zion is unapologetically subjective in her expression of suffering, forcing the Speaker and the travelers to see and even experience the pain from her perspective. Her request for a comforter and her repeated demands that both God and those who pass by look at her are more than a plea for notice—they are an impassioned appeal, imploring them to enter into her misery and to alleviate it (v. 12b). This was an expected role of a comforter in the Israelite culture—to sit with the mourner and to empathize with her by joining in her expression of anguish. As Anderson explains, “This verb ‘to comfort’ (*n-ḥ-m*) does not connote a simple act of emotional identification. Comfort can imply either the symbolic action of *assuming the state of mourning*

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<sup>68</sup> E. g., O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 22–27.

alongside the mourner, or it can have the nuance of *bringing about the cessation of mourning*.”<sup>69</sup> Only the absent YHWH can accomplish the latter for, as Zion states, he is “the one who restores my life” (v. 16b). Nevertheless Daughter Zion implores those around her to help her. She actively confronts the sympathetic but detached attitude of the Speaker and calls on him to participate in and assuage her sorrow, for YHWH is far from her.

A variety of poetic and semantic strategies are used in this passage along with the subjective perspective to generate sympathy for Daughter Zion. An example is v. 12b: “Look and see whether there is any pain like my pain which he has inflicted on me” (הִבִּיטוּ וּרְאוּ אִם־יֵשׁ מִכָּאֹב כְּמִכָּאֲבִי אֲשֶׁר עֻלְלָ לִּי). The importunate, repeated demand to “look!” (רְאוּ), here supplemented by for emphasis by “see!” (נִבִּיט), which implies “to take notice” or “to pay attention,”<sup>70</sup> compels the Speaker, and subsequent readers, to fix their eyes on her plight. The repetition of “pain” drives home its impact, but even more so, the addition of the first person singular suffix (מִכָּאֲבִי) shifts the accent to the sufferer, as in “pain like *my* pain.” The use of the term עֻלָּל, “to act arbitrarily or severely,”<sup>71</sup> suggests that the pain may be excessive or out of proportion to the transgression and evokes pity for Zion. Finally, the phrase לִּי, “on me,” once again focuses attention on the victim. Intense depictions of misery such as this do much to mitigate the tendency toward

<sup>69</sup> Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, a Time to Dance*, 84; see also 94.

<sup>70</sup> BDB, 613.

<sup>71</sup> BDB, 759.

judgmental condemnation of Daughter Zion, in spite of her confessions of sin that follow, beginning in v. 14.<sup>72</sup>

Daughter Zion's success in her efforts to reach out to the Speaker is evident in vv. 16–17. After summarizing YHWH's discipline, she laments:

Because of these things I am weeping; my eye, my eye flows with water,  
For my comforter, the one who restores my life, is far from me.  
My sons are desolated for the enemy has prevailed.

This time it is the Speaker who interrupts Zion, deeply moved by her distress:<sup>73</sup>

Zion spreads out her hands, for she does not have a comforter.  
YHWH commanded concerning Jacob that his enemies should be all around him.  
Jerusalem has become as an unclean thing among them.

The reference to Zion's gesture indicates that he sees her; the repetition of her key words “comforter” (מְנַחֵם) and “enemies” (אֹיְבִים) suggest that he hears her and responds to her.<sup>74</sup>

However the Speaker is helpless to effect any practical aid for Zion, for only YHWH can do that, and YHWH is the one who has imposed this discipline. It is significant here that the Speaker drops the female imagery for Israel and refers to it in male terms: “Jacob” and “his enemies.” This may be an indication that the Speaker has begun to realize that Daughter Zion's suffering is also his own.

There can be no doubt that Daughter Zion attributes her suffering to YHWH—she states this at the outset by calling attention to “my pain which he has inflicted on me” (v. 12b) and reiterates it throughout her lament. However, she, like the Speaker, acknowledges that this pain is the consequence of her sin—“The yoke of my

<sup>72</sup> See Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom*, 179.

<sup>73</sup> Contra Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 70: “But the only answer (which in fact is not to answer her at all!) is to command the enemy to surround her, thereby ostracizing her as a ‘menstruant.’” This implies that YHWH is continuing to take action against Jerusalem, although the verb is a Qal Perfect.

<sup>74</sup> See also Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 39, 51 for other examples of interrelated vocabulary.



transgression has been bound on by his hand” (v. 14a)—and God’s justified and long withheld wrath against that sin.<sup>75</sup>

## 2. The Political Paradigm

Three times in the chapter Daughter Zion uses the terminology of “rebellious”: “I have rebelled against his word” (בִּי פִּיהוּ מְרִיתִי, v. 18a), “for I have indeed been rebellious” (בִּי מְרוֹ מְרִיתִי, v. 20b), and “because of all my rebellion” (עַל כָּל-פִּשְׁעֵי, v. 22b).<sup>76</sup> Another aspect of the Israelite culture that would have influenced the original audience’s understanding of the imagery is what Berlin terms the “political paradigm.” Many scholars think that the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel is modeled on the ancient treaties between a suzerain and a vassal, in the context of which the “primary offence against the suzerain in the real world of the ancient Near East was rebellion, the attempt of the vassal country to break free of the suzerain’s control.”<sup>77</sup> According to Kalluveettil, “The word *pš’* expresses covenant disloyalty.”<sup>78</sup> Any form of idolatry within monotheistic Israelite culture was equated with rebellion and treaty violation.<sup>79</sup> The result would be deportation or destruction. Additionally, treaties between nations were often marriage alliances in the ancient Near East, and there are a number of examples of this in

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<sup>75</sup> Contra O’Connor, who describes God’s motive for the destruction as uncontrolled rage: “God is mad, out of control, swirling about in unbridled destruction” (*Tears of the World*, 33); “Although the narrator speaks of destructive divine rage akin to an uncontrolled tantrum, more shocking still is the narrator’s accusation that God acted out of calculated cruelty” (p. 34).

<sup>76</sup> HKB, 300: “rebellion” or “revolt”. Although BDB says “transgression”, “to rebel” is also given as a meaning of the corresponding verbal root (BDB, 833).

<sup>77</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 22.

<sup>78</sup> Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant*, 75; see also 64. Salters admits that covenant terminology is thin on the ground in Lamentations. However, he offers a number of reasons for this and argues that the relationship between Judah and YHWH is maintained throughout the book (“Yahweh and His People in Lamentations,” see especially 353: “Her reference to rebellion assumes a command and, although the word מְרִיתִי is not present, that Yahweh’s relationship to her was as ‘lord.’”).

<sup>79</sup> However, as mentioned above, adultery can be a metaphor for idolatry and therefore these two paradigms are closely interrelated.

the Hebrew Bible in which even ordinary marriage is referred to as a covenant (בְּרִית).<sup>80</sup>

Therefore the adulterous acts of Daughter Zion would in and of themselves be construed as treaty violation against YHWH.<sup>81</sup>

This is a significantly different perspective from that which is current in Western culture and which tends to view rebellion positively as a natural stage in a teenager's growth to maturity<sup>82</sup> or the justifiable response of a suppressed group, such as women, to their oppressors.<sup>83</sup> Daughter Zion's confession of deliberate rebellion against YHWH when understood in its original context is a different matter, representing Israel's absolute rejection of her covenant relationship with her lord and creator, and which therefore results in serious discipline.<sup>84</sup> Israel's defiance and rebellion brought judgment. The conclusion that Daughter Zion is the innocent victim of domestic violence in a patriarchal system overlooks the seriousness of the breach between Israel and YHWH caused by sin. This interpretation does not increase sympathy and respect for women *per se*, for women *per se* were never the subjects of the accusations, but only a particular woman, representing all Israel, who happened to be an adulteress (an idolater) and was

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<sup>80</sup> Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant*, 79–83.

<sup>81</sup> Some recent scholarship has challenged this emphasis on rebelling in a treaty violation context and has suggested that the natural family/clan contexts are more meaningful for the understanding of rebellion. However, whether the rebellion destroys the hierarchical relationship between vassal and overlord or between father and son or family and clan, the end result is similar. See Hugenberg, *Marriage as a Covenant*, especially 280–338; Cross, *Kinship and Covenant*; Sohn, "I Will Be Your God." However, compare Macumber, "Punishment of the Harlot."

<sup>82</sup> Although the covenant relationship may have had its origins in family structures (McKenzie, *Covenant*, 11–12), there are examples of vassal-overlord treaties portrayed as father-son relationships (Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant*, 98–99), and the father-son relationship between David and YHWH in 2 Sam 7:14 has "covenant implications" (Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant*, 130; see also 181), the modern western relationship between parent and child is often less authoritarian.

<sup>83</sup> See Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 91: "From an ancient Near Eastern perspective, the rebellion of a subservient party—often a vassal nation against the powers that be—might legitimately be met with harsh reprisals, but contemporary readers may naturally laud the struggles of the weak against the strong. In the same way that she does not deny taking lovers, Zion does not deny rebelling against God."

<sup>84</sup> Contra Lee (*Singers of Lamentations*, 123–5), who interprets Zion's rebellion as justifiably standing up to God's oppressive and excessive discipline.

consequently guilty of moral impurity and rebellion. Zion's confession of rebellion is in striking contrast to other ancient Near Eastern literature lamenting the destruction of cities. As Dobbs-Allsopp explains,

The Mesopotamian laments characteristically assign responsibility for the destruction of the cities to the divine assembly. ... Typically, no fault is found with the city, its ruler, its inhabitants, or its gods. The divine act is arbitrary. ... In Lamentations the divine act is not arbitrary. Rather, it is motivated by human transgression.<sup>85</sup>

As noted above, rebellion as a deliberate act of treaty violation against YHWH entailed severe consequences; the prophets had given Israel numerous opportunities to repent but the people had stubbornly not taken advantage of these.

Lee, however, explicates Daughter Zion's statements quite differently as direct defiance of YHWH rather than as confessions of guilt, and Dobbs-Allsopp interprets these acts as the assertion of human dignity in the face of an abusive God.<sup>86</sup> Lee renders v. 18 as:

Innocent (צדיק, righteous) is YHWH, but I rebel against his speech!

(צדיק הוא יהוה כי פיהו מריתי).

Hear, Now! All (you) peoples, and see my pain (מכאבי).<sup>87</sup>

She interprets the first phrase regarding God's "innocence" as a sarcastic remark.

Similarly, v. 20 becomes "Indeed(!) (כי) I certainly rebel (מרו מריתי) ..."<sup>88</sup> Lee identifies

the nature of YHWH's punishment as the cause of Zion's rebellion. Such an interpretation is unlikely, however, in light of the Hebrew verbs. In v. 18 מְרִיתִי is a Qal Perfect, first

<sup>85</sup> *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 52–3.

<sup>86</sup> See also Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 93: "[T]he Hebrew of v. 18 is ambiguous enough to warrant the suggestion that Zion is not admitting to 'rebellion' at all." She argues that the root of the word מרתי is מרר, "bitter." Boase (*Fulfilment of Doom*, 180) contests this interpretation, however, as does Hillers (see *Lamentations*, 77, 90).

<sup>87</sup> Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 123.

<sup>88</sup> Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 125.

person common singular, as is v. 20's מְרִיבִי מְרִיבִי, although in this instance it is preceded by a Qal Infinitive Absolute used emphatically. In the Qal stem מרה is stative (to be rebellious), and is better translated “I am (indeed) rebellious” than with the active “I (certainly) rebel,” which is more typical of the Hiphil stem (to behave rebelliously).<sup>89</sup>

Even if the verb is translated in a fientive sense, as it often is in modern versions, Hebrew focuses on aspects, rather than tense, and the perfect is usually only translated into the present in such cases as the gnomic perfective (habitual significance, therefore “I behave rebelliously” or “I am rebellious,” indicating a recurring situation) or in the perfective of resolve, which does not apply in the context here.<sup>90</sup> Admittedly, the perfect may also be translated into the English present in the case of an instantaneous perfective, “a situation occurring at the very instant the expression is being uttered. This use appears chiefly with *verba dicendi* (‘verbs of speaking,’ swearing, declaring, advising, etc.) or gestures associated with speaking.”<sup>91</sup> In the context, however, translation by the English past tense (the definite or “preterite” perfect: “YHWH is righteous for I have rebelled against his word”) follows much more naturally from the initial statement unless sarcasm is for some reason assumed.<sup>92</sup> In the light of Zion’s suffering, however, Lee’s claim of sarcasm is not compelling, and it is more likely that Daughter Zion is attempting by repeated confession to convince God to come to her assistance and assuage her punishment. Although O’Connor attempts to detract from Zion’s confession by

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<sup>89</sup> HALOT, 632.

<sup>90</sup> Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 485.

<sup>91</sup> Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 488.

<sup>92</sup> See also Boase (*Fulfilment of Doom*, 179) who notes the emphasis on the righteousness of God created by its initial position in the sentence.

suggesting that it is only the mechanical agreement of an abused and downtrodden wife,<sup>93</sup> the Deuteronomistic and Priestly traditions of sin, retributive justice, and reparation would have been quite acceptable to sixth century B.C.E. Israelites in exile.<sup>94</sup> Ironically, even if Lee were correct in interpreting Daughter Zion's words as "I rebel!" this would only confirm the seriousness of her sin, since rebellion is one of those deliberate sins that are not forgivable within the context of the priestly rituals.<sup>95</sup> YHWH's punishment does not cause Zion's rebellion; Zion's rebellion causes YHWH's punishment. Daughter Zion implicitly acknowledges this in the last verse as she calls for a similar justice to be executed on her enemies.

#### D. Conclusion

Lamentations 1 consists of a dialogue between an objectively detached Speaker and a subjectively suffering Daughter Zion who appear to be aware of and respond to each other. The Speaker begins the journey from a sympathetic but detached attitude towards Daughter Zion and her sin to a more compassionate understanding of her miserable situation as she confronts both YHWH and him with the reality and intensity of her suffering and cries out for comfort and relief. Daughter Zion herself is presented both negatively as a sinner and positively as a suffering woman. The significance of the impurity imagery lies in the crimes of adultery—figuratively representing idolatry—and rebellion, committed by a city traditionally personified as a woman. It bears restating that

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<sup>93</sup> O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 27.

<sup>94</sup> Contra F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp who states that he interprets "without recourse to romantic or nostalgic notions of the purposiveness or redemptive power of suffering" and believes in the "utterly harmful and irredeemable nature of human suffering" (*Lamentations*, 2; see also p. 26). Although he declares that Lamentations "highlights God's 'suffering'-causing acts, not God's punishment or righteous judgment" (p. 30) it is not clear how he would define punishment and judgment with no component of suffering at all. This also flies in the face of Priestly and Deuteronomistic teachings on retributive justice and reparation that must be considered in a canonical reading of Lamentations.

<sup>95</sup> See the discussion of impurity above.

although the image itself is female and its significance derives in large part from the traditional role of women in Israelite society, it metaphorically represents the city of Jerusalem and its male and female inhabitants.

Although the silence of YHWH in Lamentations 1 is unarguable, the paradoxical images of Zion as both sinner and sufferer and the contrapuntal speeches of the objective man and the subjective woman may reflect a tension in the heart of God that has been more clearly depicted in the prophets, often in passages using the marriage metaphor.<sup>96</sup> Israel's lack of repentance finally made the promised consequences unavoidable. In spite of YHWH's repeated warnings and pleas for repentance which indicated his reluctance to inflict judgment, Daughter Zion (Israel) persisted in her (their) sin. The point arrived, however, when he could no longer postpone the consequences of idolatry and rebellion that were in themselves destructive to Judah's wellbeing and mission. Jerusalem's uncleanness resulted in destruction and separation from a holy God—thus, YHWH's silence. Nevertheless, the complex and conflicting representation of Daughter Zion as sinner, and yet sufferer, may reflect both the holiness and mercy of God in dealing with his sinful and alienated people.

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<sup>96</sup> See Jer 12:15; 15:6; 31:20; Hosea 1–3; 11:8; Ezekiel 16; and pp. 54–55 below. This would be especially likely if the Speaker were indeed Jeremiah, as Lee (*Singers of Lamentations*) and Boda ("Priceless Gain") argue. However, an argument for Jeremiah's authorship is beyond the scope of this thesis.

## Chapter Three: Sympathy to Empathy (Lamentations 2)

### A. Introduction

Whereas the complacency of the Speaker was shaken in Lamentations 1, in the second chapter his whole attitude toward Daughter Zion undergoes a radical metamorphosis. It will be argued that the Speaker moves from an attitude of detached sympathy for Zion in ch. 1 to intense empathy in ch. 2. The significance of the disappearance of Daughter Zion will also be addressed.

The Speaker, the same voice as in ch. 1,<sup>1</sup> dominates the discourse of ch. 2. Beginning as he did in the previous chapter with the cry אֵיכָה, he speaks for nineteen verses whereas Daughter Zion has only three.<sup>2</sup> Verses 1 to 11 are a third person description of YHWH's actions, with the majority of cola beginning with perfect third person masculine singular active verbs, "He has...", as in וַיִּהְרֹג ... וַיִּבְעַר ... גָּדַע ... הָרַס ... בָּלַע ("He has swallowed up...broken down...cut down... burned... slain"). Dobbs-Allsopp points out the effect of these third person passages on the question of normative voice in poetry: "[B]y dint of grammatical implicature, [they] project a sense of objectivity that does not inhere neutrally in direct discourse."<sup>3</sup> In v. 11 the perspective changes to first person, causing some to suggest that vv. 11–12 are spoken by the personified Jerusalem. However, the phrase "because of the shattering of the daughter of my people" (v. 11) would sit uneasily in the speech of Zion herself. Also, first person is used immediately

<sup>1</sup> O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 31; Provan, *Lamentations*, 57; Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 51–52; Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 131, 160.

<sup>2</sup> See House, "Lamentations," 372–4 for an overview of the different interpretations of the number of speakers.

<sup>3</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 93.

afterward in v. 13 (“What will I compare to you, Daughter Jerusalem?”) where the speaker cannot be Zion herself, and the subsequent verses address her in the second person as “you.” It is more likely that the same voice is speaking throughout vv. 1 to 19 and that his enumeration of the destructive acts perpetrated on the city bring him to empathetic tears in v. 11. As House points out, “[S]cholars have suggested that the narrator may have become converted to the city’s point of view.”<sup>4</sup> Daughter Zion does speak for the final time, however, in vv. 20–22, beginning with her familiar appeal, “Look, YHWH...,” and creating a profound emotional impact.

## **B. The Speaker (Lam 2:1–19)**

### **1. Description of the Destruction (2:1–12)**

No interpreter can escape the lengthy description of the wrath of God in vv. 1 to 10. According to Provan, Lamentations 1 focuses on what happens to Zion, but in Lamentations 2 “the emphasis falls as much upon the *cause* of the calamity as upon the events themselves.”<sup>5</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp notes that whereas Lamentations 1 presents the city as a living and suffering persona, ch. 2 spotlights the devastation of its physical structures.<sup>6</sup> Berlin points out a recurring image in Lamentations 2, “There is an unmistakable sense of movement in this chapter from heaven to earth”<sup>7</sup> (vv. 1, 2, 9, 10, 21) as Jerusalem is brought low—physically, politically, emotionally and spiritually. O’Connor identifies the Speaker’s dominant emotion as anger directed at YHWH: “The verbs accumulate as if the narrator is overcome with his own fury. ... God is mad, out of

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<sup>4</sup> House, “Lamentations,” 373; see also O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 35–42.

<sup>5</sup> Provan, *Lamentations*, 57.

<sup>6</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 89.

<sup>7</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 67.



control, swirling about in unbridled destruction.”<sup>8</sup> Although anger is one possible interpretation of the narrator’s vehement outburst, she overstates her case, for there is no clear evidence that the Speaker considers God’s actions to be motivated by unjustifiable and abusive rage rather than justifiable disciplinary wrath, especially since tone of voice is lost in the written text. His distraught enumeration may also be motivated by shock, regret, anguish, and pity at Zion’s punishment.

No sustained attempt is made within the book itself to justify YHWH’s severe actions and Dobbs-Allsopp is correct when he concludes that “to read Lamentations as theodicy is finally to misread Lamentations”<sup>9</sup> if theodicy is the interpreter’s dominant purpose.<sup>10</sup> As has been noted above, Jerusalem’s sins are not specifically enumerated, but this is probably because they were already well known from prophecies such as that of Jeremiah: “People from many nations will pass by this city and will ask one another, ‘Why has the LORD done such a thing to this great city?’ And the answer will be: ‘Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God and have worshiped and served other gods’” (Jer 22:8–9 TNIV). Her crimes were not only acts of rebellion against YHWH, but also acts directed against her fellow humans by her violation of the ethical demands of the covenant, and for these she is being disciplined.

The fact that there is particularly scant reference to sin in Lamentations 2 compared to the first chapter, or indeed in the book as a whole, has caused some commentators to infer Daughter Zion’s relative innocence and YHWH’s unjustifiable and unethical fury. Indeed, the only reference to sin in this chapter is made by the Speaker in v. 14 and there is no evidence of confession or penitence in anything that Daughter Zion

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<sup>8</sup> O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 33; see also Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 116–17.

<sup>9</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 29.

<sup>10</sup> There are, however, clear elements of theodicy, especially in Lamentations 3.

herself says in Lam 2:20–22. Dobbs-Allsopp also remarks that “human sin is nowhere in view locally.”<sup>11</sup> However, he wisely warns against attributing too much weight to this in the context of poetry; especially when evaluating the negative metaphors for God; such as “enemy.” He advises a broader view that encompasses both the book and the canon:

The poem’s underlying lyric properties, especially its quintessential occasionalness and its nonlinear strategies of signification (i.e., the need of lyric poetry to be read prospectively and retrospectively, vertically and horizontally), further inhibit readers from over-interpreting the metaphor,”<sup>12</sup>

perhaps by assuming a one-to-one correspondence in all aspects of the tenor and vehicle.<sup>13</sup> Images such as “enemy” say more about the emotional perceptions of the people than about the ethical integrity of YHWH and the legal defensibility of his actions.

Lee, on the other hand, while admitting that Jerusalem has sinned, stresses that she has confessed and consequently wonders what else God could reasonably expect before relenting: “Whereas the figures of Jeremiah and Job are daring before YHWH in their claims of innocent suffering, Jerusalem’s poet is even bolder because she pleads for YHWH’s intervention, while admitting guilt of transgression. She has not claimed innocence, but is claiming forgiveness.”<sup>14</sup> This interpretation, however, is more typical of a modern western society permeated by an attitude of entitlement than the society in which the poetry was written. YHWH’s holiness and justice demands more. In his insightful analysis of sin and confession in Jeremiah, Boda explains:

Even confession of sin among the people is inadequate. The only hope had been a repentance in heart, word and deed, and when the people prove unable to do this, Yahweh eventually brings an end to the penitential and prophetic process by cutting off even the prophet and announcing his judgment. ... Cries which claim

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<sup>11</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 85.

<sup>12</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 85.

<sup>13</sup> See Salters, “Yahweh and His People in Lamentations,” 351–52, for an example of this in regard to the simile comparing Jerusalem to a widow.

<sup>14</sup> Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 111.

innocence are deemed inappropriate and those which confess guilt are deemed inadequate. ... God calls through the prophet for a repentance that involves the inner affections including shame and devotion, verbal expression including confession of sin, and practical action including turning from evil and turning to good.<sup>15</sup>

If these criteria are not met, discipline is imposed and must run its course. The lack of true confession and contrition in Lamentations 2, and the continuing tendency to blame YHWH rather than admit culpability, may be the reason that Daughter Zion fades from the book without ever reaching peace of mind and attaining hope. It may be that the role of the female voice of Zion is primarily to give voice to suffering and evoke sympathy, appealing to the mercy of God, whereas the male voice of the Speaker is intended to emphasize the need to accept responsibility for suffering and to find a way forward, propitiating the holy demands of God. Admittedly, in contemporary society this would appear as gender stereotyping; however, in the ancient world of the Israelites this would simply be an expression of their understanding of disparate male and female roles in a patriarchal system. The women were typically the mourners and the men were normally the religious leaders.<sup>16</sup>

In considering the severity of the discipline, one must either conclude that YHWH is indeed abusive,<sup>17</sup> or that the malignancy of the sin that provoked his judgment demanded drastic measures because the ultimate harm that would result from the sin was greater than the punishment that curtailed it.<sup>18</sup> Lee makes much of Jeremiah's plea,

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<sup>15</sup> Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, draft B13: 19–20; see also 12.

<sup>16</sup> See Olyan, *Biblical Mourning*, 49–51 for the dominant role of women as mourners, especially professionally. This does not of course preclude the participation of men. The prevalence of men as religious leaders is evident throughout the Hebrew Bible, although some female religious figures, such as Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14) are mentioned.

<sup>17</sup> As do Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 35–36; Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 55; O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 27, 33, 118; Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 82–84; Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 359–62.

<sup>18</sup> See Jer 30:14–15.

“Correct me YHWH, but with justice not *with your anger* (באפך), lest you diminish me”

(Jer 10:24),<sup>19</sup> applying it to Daughter Zion in Lamentations, but overlooks the numerous responses by the same prophet and by YHWH that her punishment fits her crime.<sup>20</sup> A third explanation for the apparently disproportionately severe punishment must also be considered, one that is obvious but often overlooked—Lamentations is poetry. Poetry as a genre is overtly expressive rather than merely mimetic, and has a persuasive goal.<sup>21</sup>

Hyperbole is a common and effective poetic device that assists in achieving these ends, and Provan correctly states that the language of Lamentations is “demonstrably hyperbolic.”<sup>22</sup> The recognition of hyperbole in no way trivializes the suffering of the people, but merely acknowledges the limitations of language in attempting to reproduce emotional reality for an audience removed by time and distance from the actual events. According to Linafelt, the poet’s task is to “attempt to translate into language the suffering he sees,” even though “no speech is adequate as an explanation of such suffering.”<sup>23</sup> The Speaker himself acknowledges this in v. 13: “What will I call as witness? What will I compare to you, Daughter Jerusalem? What will I liken to you and with what will I comfort you, virgin Daughter Zion?” Hence, he uses the graphic and

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<sup>19</sup> Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 133. Her translation. Note that Lee consistently takes the statements of Jeremiah and the Jerusalem poet at face value, privileging their perspectives. E.g., “For 18 lines he will give a litany of YHWH’s destructive actions, *all caused by anger*” (Lee 117). Note the emphatic italics, not “which he believes are motivated by anger” for example. Nowhere does she ever suggest that either voice might be biased or interpreting from their situation of guilt or attempting to justify themselves by condemning YHWH.

<sup>20</sup> See Jer 17:10; 21:14; 30:11; 32:19; 46:28: “I will discipline you but only in due measure.”

<sup>21</sup> Petersen and Richards, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry*, 8–11.

<sup>22</sup> Provan, *Lamentations*, 6. He points out that there is obvious hyperbole in v. 22—historical and archaeological evidence clearly shows that there was a surviving community in Jerusalem.

<sup>23</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 53; see also Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 96.

disturbing images and the pervasive hyperbole.<sup>24</sup> To interpret such passages with slavish literalness, however, ignores the poetic nature of the text. O'Connor remarks, "[Walter Brueggemann and David Blumenthal] correctly insist that the biblical God really is sometimes violent and abusive," and "If God abuses and cruelly and violently controls us, then it is surely fine for humans to be abusive and violently controlling as well."<sup>25</sup> However, to conclude on the basis of poetic hyperbole that YHWH is unethical and abusive, and further, to presume that humans are therefore justified in imitating such behaviour, is simplistic and misguided.

In vv. 1–5, YHWH's wrath is poured out on Jerusalem as a physical and political entity—he destroys her fortresses and citadels, her sovereignty and rulers; it is in this context that God is referred to several times as “like an enemy” (כְּאֹיֵב) or “as a foe” (כְּצֹר). Verses 6–7 recount the destruction of the city as a cultic and spiritual entity, of YHWH's “meeting place” (מוֹעֵדוֹ), “altar” (מִזְבֵּחוֹ), and “sanctuary” (מִקְדָּשׁוֹ). Finally, vv. 8–10 describe the destruction of both the physical structures that surrounded the city (walls, ramparts, gates) and the human inhabitants within it (king, leaders, prophets; elders, virgins). The effect of this inventory of destruction is to stress the comprehensiveness of the devastation: political and spiritual, rulers and citizens, physical and human, young and old, male and female.

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<sup>24</sup> See Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 316–20, who remarks, “[H]yperbole was practically part of everyday language.” See also Alonso Schökel, *Hebrew Poetics*, 168–9 who notes, “Hebrew poetry tends more to hyperbole than to sobriety.”

<sup>25</sup> O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 118; see also 110.

Based on vv. 8 and 17, O'Connor interprets these destructive acts either as an "uncontrolled tantrum" or, worse, as "calculated cruelty."<sup>26</sup> She sees them as evidence that YHWH is cold and abusive in his treatment of Daughter Zion—that he laid out his malicious actions in advance, fully knowing and desiring that she would suffer horribly. She refers to his "premeditated pitilessness."<sup>27</sup> In a similar vein, Lee translates v. 17 as "accomplished his word by violence ...,"<sup>28</sup> rather than as "YHWH has done what he planned; he has accomplished his word—That which he commanded from ancient days—he has destroyed and not shown mercy." However, YHWH can hardly be called cold and calculating when the very purpose of telling Judah of his intent so often beforehand was to encourage repentance and avoid the necessity for punishment and suffering.<sup>29</sup>

Lamentations and Jeremiah both deal extensively with the subject of judgement; however, YHWH says many things in Jeremiah that help to explain and compensate for his oft criticized silence in Lamentations.<sup>30</sup> The holiness of God requires him to discipline: "'You have rejected me,' declares the LORD. 'You keep on backsliding. So I will lay hands on you and destroy you; I can no longer show compassion (וְלֹאֲתִי הַחֲמִיד)'" (Jer 15:6 NIV).<sup>31</sup> Many recent commentators have censured the silence of YHWH, deeming it unfair and uncaring; however, God's silence is an expected part of his judgmental discipline.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 34.

<sup>27</sup> O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 40.

<sup>28</sup> Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 154. BDB does give *gain by violence* as a possible translation of *וְלֹאֲתִי*, but suggests *finish, complete, accomplish* for this particular verse (BDB, 130).

<sup>29</sup> E. g., "This is what the LORD says: Stand in the courtyard of the LORD's house and speak to all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the house of the LORD. Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word. Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from their evil ways. Then I will relent and not inflict on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done" (Jer 26:2–3 TNIV); see also Jer 36:3.

<sup>30</sup> See for example Jer 7:13; 17:23; 25:4.

<sup>31</sup> The NIV is used here because it translates the Hebrew better than the TNIV's "I am tired of holding back."

<sup>32</sup> Jer 14:11–12. See Boda, "Uttering Precious rather than Worthless Words," 6: "Whether

During this time of discipline, penitence rather than lament is the appropriate form of communication with God.<sup>33</sup> The grace and mercy of God, however, motivates him to limit this time of discipline: “But after I uproot them, I will again have compassion (וְרַחֲמֵתִים) and will bring each of them back to his own inheritance and his own country” (Jer 12:15 TNIV). This compassion, however, must await its appropriate time. Rather than proving YHWH to be uncaring and abusive, vv. 8 and 17 again illustrate his reluctance to bring judgment and the tension between his holiness and mercy.<sup>34</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp concludes, “[N]owhere in Lamentations 2 are we shown any sign of God’s felt pain or of God having been wronged. Thus, God’s anger, as shaped by the poem’s rhetoric, becomes noticeably one-dimensional, almost solely a source for hurtful action...” However, Lamentations must be considered in its canonical context. Although YHWH is justly silent in Lamentations, his words in Jeremiah sum this up clearly: “Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore my heart yearns for him (מָעֵי לֹא רָחַם); I have great compassion (אֲרַחֲמֵנִי) for him,’ declares the LORD” (Jer 31:20 TNIV). YHWH cares deeply for his people, is profoundly hurt by their rejection, is reluctant to punish, and anxious to bless again.

In light of the reality of Jerusalem’s current desolation, however, the Speaker’s transition from third person description to first person expression of grief in v. 11 is not surprising. The Speaker “moves also from one who elegizes Zion to one who laments in

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God’s judgment here is related to their lack of sincerity ... or whether it is related to the fact that time has finally run out, it is clear that the people’s fate is sealed.”

<sup>33</sup> See Boda, “From Complaint to Contrition,” 196–97; Boda, “Uttering Precious rather than Worthless Words,” 6–7; Boda, “Lamentations,” draft 14.

<sup>34</sup> See also Jer 5:1.

solidarity with her...”<sup>35</sup> It is significant that he expresses his pain in vocabulary, most obvious in the Hebrew, which closely resembles that of Daughter Zion in ch. 1: “Because of these things I am weeping ... my inward parts are burning (מעי חמרמרו). My heart is overturned in my inner self” (1:16, 20), as compared to “My eyes are spent with weeping; my entrails ferment (חמרמרו מעי). My liver has been poured out to the ground” (2:11).<sup>36</sup> It is clear that his interaction with Daughter Zion has influenced him significantly, causing him to move from sympathy to true empathy with her wretchedness—he no longer merely feels for her, he feels with her. Verses 1 to 10 focus on YHWH, with almost every colon beginning with the implied “he” of the Hebrew verbs, and refer to Jerusalem only in the third person, but v. 11 moves the focus inward toward the narrator. In v. 13, however, he addresses Daughter Zion directly for the first time in a vain attempt to comfort her.

## 2. Address to Zion (2:13–19)

The series of rhetorical questions in v. 13 demonstrates the Speaker’s helplessness when confronted with such pain, for no healer is in view. The prophets have failed Zion, the passersby mock her, and her enemies gloat over her defeat—even YHWH has shown no mercy. Although Jerusalem’s prophets are culpable in leading the people into captivity, she is also complicit for listening, for the Speaker identifies them as “your prophets” who saw “worthless visions,” indicating false prophets such as Hananiah of Jeremiah 28, rather than the true prophets of YHWH. The passersby are worse than unhelpful; they add insult to injury, for the people of Jerusalem would have easily recognized the quotation in v. 15 from Psalm 48:

<sup>35</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 51.

<sup>36</sup> See Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 52.



Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise,  
 in the city of our God, his holy mountain.  
 Beautiful in its loftiness,  
 the joy of the whole earth,  
 like the heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion,  
 the city of the Great King. (Ps 48:1–2 TNIV)

The bitter irony is inescapable. Similarly, the gloating of her enemies would also have been rendered more devastating by recalling the words of the same psalm,

When the kings joined forces,  
 when they advanced together,  
 they saw her and were astounded;  
 they fled in terror. (vv. 4–5)

Ultimately, however, since the psalm affirms that “God makes her [Zion] secure forever” (v. 8), the sense of shame, emotional pain, and abandonment by YHWH after the destruction would have equalled the physical suffering of the inhabitants. Deeply moved, but unable to help her, in v. 19 the Speaker himself urges Daughter Zion to continue crying out to YHWH for deliverance; he is motivated by his new empathy and perhaps his knowledge, implied from v. 17, that the God who planned to discipline also planned to restore and bless Jerusalem once more.<sup>37</sup>

### **C. Daughter Zion (Lam 2:20–22)**

Zion’s final address to YHWH that closes Lamentations 2 is most often characterized by commentators as expressing anger and defiance. Dobbs-Allsopp identifies these verses as “cold and pointed,”<sup>38</sup> and Mandolfo concludes that “Lamentations 2 ends with Zion’s unmitigated rage.”<sup>39</sup> Certainly, Daughter Zion’s lament in vv. 20–22 creates one of the most graphic, shocking, and poignant pictures of Jerusalem’s destruction in the entire book, and one that has provoked many critics to

<sup>37</sup> See also texts such as Exod 34:5–7 and Num 14:18.

<sup>38</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 99.

<sup>39</sup> Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 103.

further indict YHWH for his unjustifiable, abusive actions. The focus of their concern is usually the cannibalistic image of starving mothers eating their own innocent children.<sup>40</sup> They view this as excessive, even sadistic punishment for their crimes, and consequently see YHWH as the perpetrator and Zion as the victim of his brutality. With considerable understatement Greenstein remarks, "In general one can say that the images of God in Lamentations portray the deity in a rather unflattering light."<sup>41</sup> Verse 20 may be persuasive exaggeration; nevertheless, as discussed above, to discount it as mere overstatement would be unjust since the very use of hyperbole in literature is intended to convey the intense reality of an emotion or idea to an audience who is not present at the events, and who therefore might tend to underestimate the situation from a position of objective distance. It is also possible, of course, that the statement is literally true.

The curses invoked on those who break the covenant in Deuteronomy (28:53–57) forewarn of cannibalism, as does Jeremiah's prophecy (19:7–9). However, YHWH also clearly tells the inhabitants of Jerusalem through Jeremiah how to avoid this horrible state of affairs:

Furthermore, tell the people, 'This is what the LORD says: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague. But whoever goes out and surrenders to the Babylonians who are besieging you will live; they will escape with their lives'" (Jer 21:8–9 TNIV).

YHWH does plan a hope and a future for Judah after his judgment has run its course, but this plan involves those who are in exile in Babylon.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> See for example Greenstein, "The Wrath of God," 36.

<sup>41</sup> Greenstein, "The Wrath of God," 38.

<sup>42</sup> Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, draft B13, 23: "There in a prophetic sign act involving two baskets of figs, the prophet is shown that the future lies not with King Zedekiah and his 'survivors' who remained in the land, but rather with Jehoiachin and his 'exiles' who had been taken to Babylon."

Is Daughter Zion's emotion in vv. 20–22 unambiguous rage, however?

Lamentations does not give the reader the advantage of a narrative framework (“Look, YHWH,” screamed Daughter Zion, trembling with rage, “and consider whom you have treated this way...”) or stage directions (Daughter Zion [trembling with anger]: Look, YHWH, and consider whom you have treated this way...) to assist in interpretation. These words could equally well express desperation, anguish, or hopelessness; the tone could be one of pleading or pathos. Daughter Zion's outpouring to YHWH is an important illustration of the truth that all pain, anger and torment can be brought to the throne of God.<sup>43</sup> This may be a cry for mercy and relief, but even when the judgment is inevitable or the discipline already enforced, as in Lamentations, lament serves as a means to express, endure, and eventually survive the suffering. This is not, as Dobbs-Allsopp suggests, “an experience of liberation,”<sup>44</sup> not “heroic defiance” of YHWH that “enacts and recovers, however momentarily, human dignity.”<sup>45</sup> YHWH himself authorizes such lament, as Boda illustrates by giving an example of such endorsement in Jeremiah, “It is God then who must prompt lament in 9:17–21 as he calls the wailing women to perform their duties. Such lament is not to change the heart of God, but to express the pain of God's certain judgment.”<sup>46</sup>

#### **D. Conclusion**

These three verses are the last time that the audience hears directly from Daughter Zion in the book of Lamentations, and the tone is certainly not one of overwhelming hope, but of desperation and misery—and yet she continues to bring her situation to God,

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<sup>43</sup> Admittedly, there are some specific occasions when YHWH forbids lament for specific reasons, such as the presence of unconfessed sin. (See Joshua 7; Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, draft B13, 33–35; Boda, “Uttering Precious rather than Worthless Words,” 6–7).

<sup>44</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 103.

<sup>45</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 79.

<sup>46</sup> Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, draft B13, 15. Jer 9:17–21 is cited above.

hanging on to the hope that he will not totally abandon her and her children, the people of Judah.<sup>47</sup> She is hardly exhibiting “noble and heroic stature”<sup>48</sup> in her defiance of YHWH, as Dobbs-Allsopp suggests, but is rather a pathetic figure who has yet to experience true hope for her future. Perhaps YHWH will yet have mercy when the time of discipline is completed—or when she demonstrates true contrition and repentance. She has at least accomplished one task; she has converted the Speaker from a detached, objective view of Zion’s pain to an empathetic view that causes him to suffer for and with Jerusalem. She has demonstrated to him the need to persist in crying out to YHWH for mercy. Her question “Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by on the road?” (1:12) has been answered, for the Speaker now knows that he cannot persist in mere sympathetic detachment. The last words of both Daughter Zion and the Speaker in vv. 19 and 22 refer to her children. Is it too much to suppose that the Speaker now views himself as one of those children, a Judahite who is part and parcel of the problem and who needs to cry out to YHWH for a solution? The focus is in the process of moving from the misery of Daughter Zion, representing all the people of Jerusalem and Judah, to the Speaker, one typical individual among the people, and his individual responsibility and response.

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<sup>47</sup> Westermann, *Lamentations*, 92–93, 159.

<sup>48</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 104.

## Chapter Four: Identity (Lamentations 3)

### A. Introduction

In this chapter a similar poetic analysis will be performed on Lamentations 3. It will be argued that the narrator moves from an attitude of sympathy for Zion in Lamentations 1 to empathy in ch. 2 and identity in ch. 3, finally turning to God for mercy and forgiveness, and finding redemption. The significance of the disappearance of Daughter Zion and the possibility of a communal voice will also be studied.

First person is also used by the Speaker in Lamentations 3. Although his use of the term *הַנָּבִיר*<sup>1</sup> to refer to himself has caused many to think that he is a new speaker,<sup>2</sup> this may be explained by the fact that he is now consciously applying the insights he has gained from Jerusalem to himself, identifying with her guilt and suffering, whereas previously he had only viewed Zion's suffering from a safe objective distance. Some consider that this man is a new poetic construct, a male personification of Jerusalem, balancing the female Daughter Zion metaphor in Lamentations 1 and 2.<sup>3</sup> Provan disagrees, however, for a number of reasons. Since in 3:48 and 51 he refers to the “daughter of my people” and the people of Jerusalem objectively as distinct from him it is

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<sup>1</sup> The TNIV translates this term generically: “I am the one who has seen affliction.” Although BDB emphasizes the maleness of the word: “man as strong, disting. from women, children, and non-combatants whom he is to defend” (p. 149), as does HKB: “young, strong man” (p. 55), and TWOT: “this word specifically relates to a male at the height of his powers” (p. 148), DBL identifies a more generic use: “human being, person, individual, i.e., one who may be a male or female” (#1505). In this case, the gender of the Speaker would be truly non-specific, permitting the interpretation that the Speaker is female, as outlined in ch. 2.

<sup>2</sup> House, “Lamentations,” 405–7 effectively summarizes the critical views on this topic. See also Berlin, *Lamentations*, 84; Hillers, *Lamentations*, 120–22.

<sup>3</sup> See Berlin, *Lamentations*, 84–85. Berlin also draws parallels between the male persona and Job, but insightfully notes, “This is not a poem about the suffering of the righteous; it is a poem about the suffering of the guilty” (p. 85). Boda interprets this speaker as a prophetic figure, possibly Jeremiah, in dialogue with the people (“Priceless Gain,” 65–66).

unlikely that he represents the people of Jerusalem collectively. The reference to “his wrath” in 3:1 with no mention of an antecedent links ch. 3 to the speaker in the previous chapter. Finally, the similarity between the content and imagery of 3:48 and 2:11b suggests a common speaker. He concludes that it “seems much more likely, then, that it is this narrator, whose voice has already dominated chs. 1 and 2, who himself is the speaker for most of chapter 3.”<sup>4</sup> Verses 40–47 contain the first person plural and indicate the possibility of a communal voice in dialogue with the narrator, although this voice will not become fully articulate until Lamentations 4.<sup>5</sup> These issues will be discussed more fully below.

## **B. The Speaker (Lam 3:1–42)**

### **1. Transition (3:1–24)**

In Lamentations 3 the Speaker has become totally involved with the suffering and fate of Jerusalem; he has moved from sympathy, through empathy, to total identity with its guilt and pain. Even if he had previously escaped the worst of the destruction and misery, as suggested above in ch. 2, and even if he thought he was innocent because he had not actively participated in the sins of Zion, he now understands that when Jerusalem suffers, he suffers, that when the temple is destroyed, his access to YHWH is severed, for he is a part of the people of God. He is no longer a detached observer of guilt and its consequences, but a person who realizes that he is part of the problem. Daughter Zion’s anguish has become his own.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, he begins this pericope with the statement

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<sup>4</sup> Provan, *Lamentations*, 81.

<sup>5</sup> Provan, *Lamentations*, 66: “The narrator may, to some extent, speak for others...”

<sup>6</sup> If, as Boda suggests, the Speaker is Jeremiah himself, it is interesting that he notes that the prophet laments in the book of Jeremiah because he totally identifies with the suffering of the people: “This inevitability prompts the lament of the prophet himself (4:10, 19–21) who takes up his role as representative sufferer for the people” (“Uttering Precious rather than Worthless Words,” 6).

“I am the man who has seen misery” (אֲנִי הַגִּבֹּר רֹאֶה עָנִי). The verb “to see” (רָאָה) can also mean “to experience,” and there may be a deliberate play on words here.<sup>7</sup> The speaker is not just an onlooker, but a participant. As Dobbs-Allsopp perceptively notes:

The result is that the aesthetic distance between the discourse of the poem and the reader’s experience of that discourse is suddenly collapsed. The use of the first person voice draws readers into the poem, makes them identify with the speaker, and invites them to experience vicariously the suffering and affliction that the poem figures.<sup>8</sup>

Lamentations is the record of the destruction of Jerusalem that would keep the events fresh in the minds of those who went into exile, and those who would follow in subsequent generations. Were it not for the Speaker’s empathy with Zion, it might have been possible for later Jews to dissociate themselves from the experience, claiming innocence or distance; however, when the detached Speaker so identifies with the destroyed city that its pain literally becomes his own he provides a model for corporate identity, responsibility, and commitment.

Lamentations’ goal-oriented poetic purpose is to memorialize the destruction and its victims and give expression to their suffering, and also to enable those separated by time and distance to learn from their experiences and to prevent such discipline from ever being necessary again. However, if it is necessary, it is also designed to give them a pattern for dealing with that situation. The Speaker’s identification of himself as “the man who has seen misery” poetically balances the feminine imagery of chs. 1 and 2 and, as mentioned above, may signify the transition from expressing and validating pain to dealing with pain as a consequence of guilt and finding a way to move forward. The use of first person and the constant repetition of “I,” “me,” and “my” individualizes and

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<sup>7</sup> See BDB, 907.

<sup>8</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 50.

personalizes emotions and events that were expressed more generally through Daughter Zion as a metaphor for the people as a whole. The effect is to make the book as widely but also as specifically applicable as possible.

The repeated syntactic pattern of perfect third person masculine singular active verbs, “He has...,” in reference to YHWH, as in *בָּנָה...שָׁבַר...בָּלָה...נָהַג* (“He has driven... worn out...broken ...built”), parallels the catalogue of destructive events in Lam 2:1–10 and links Lamentations 2 and 3 together as the Speaker expresses similar experiences of pain, mockery, and alienation from God. And yet the tone is different, more muted. The vocabulary is less graphic (for example, YHWH does not *בלע*, “swallow up” and is not *אֵיב* or *צַר*, an “enemy”) and the anger (*אָף*, *חֶמָּה*, *עֲבָרָה*) of YHWH, mentioned six times in 2:1–10, is mentioned only once in 3:1–24. The imagery in v. 7, “He has built a wall around me and I cannot go out. My bronze fetters weigh heavily” (*גִּדָּר בְּעָדַי וְלֹא אֶצְא הַכְּבִיד נִחֲשָׁתִי*), suggests that the battle is over and the Speaker is now a defeated prisoner. Berlin suggests that these verses represent the deportation of the conquered Judahites into exile.<sup>9</sup> This may explain the capacity in which the Speaker originally arrived in Jerusalem, although his detachment in Lamentations 1 and 2 argues against this; it may be a metaphorical imprisonment to his guilt or his suffering.

It is as if the Speaker’s emotions have been spent and he is exhausted (“He has destroyed my endurance” v. 18; he later advises his audience, “Let him sit alone and let him be silent” v. 28.); he realizes that the time for lament has passed and is seeking a way forward. This may explain the transition that occurs in vv. 18–20 from defeat to hope.

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<sup>9</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 87–88.



Usually, v. 18 is translated in a sense similar to the NASB indicating that both his strength and hope have perished: “So I say, ‘My strength has perished, And *so has* my hope from the Lord,’” which makes such a transformation seem unlikely.<sup>10</sup> However, as indicated by the italics, there is no verb in the second half of the bicolon in the Hebrew (וְאָמַר אֶבֶד נְצֻחִי וְתוֹחֲלִי מִיְהוָה) and the NASB assumes ellipsis. House translates this verse as “Indeed I said, ‘My endurance has perished, and my hope from the LORD,’” and he comments, “Here he begins to choose the former option [turning to YHWH] by mentioning God’s name for the first time, albeit by stating that ‘my endurance’ (נְצֻחִי) and ‘my hope’ (וְתוֹחֲלִי) have ‘perished’ (אֶבֶד) ‘from the Lord’ (מִיְהוָה).”<sup>11</sup> However, the verb אֶבֶד which he interprets as “have ‘perished’” is a third person masculine singular and does not necessarily include “my hope” as its subject.<sup>12</sup> It is possible to translate the second part of this verse as a typical verbless clause: “So I said, ‘He has destroyed my endurance, and/but my hope [is] from YHWH.’”<sup>13</sup> The implication would be that all his own resources have been expended and his only remaining hope is in the gracious character of YHWH. This would fit the context well, and prompt the expression of trust and hope that follows in vv. 22–23: “Because of the covenant love of YHWH we are not consumed. His compassions do not cease. They are new every morning—great is your faithfulness.”

<sup>10</sup> Hillers translates: “I thought, ‘My lasting hope in the Lord has perished.’” He explains, “Hebrew ‘my enduring and my hope’ is taken to be a hendiadys.” Although this is a possible reading, it is not obligatory, and the verbless clause makes more sense in context (Hillers, *Lamentations*, 110, 114).

<sup>11</sup> House, “Lamentations,” 413.

<sup>12</sup> Of the 22 occurrences of אֶבֶד (Qal) + מִן in the Hebrew Bible, in every case there is only one relevant subject noun, or the מִן is repeated, as in Jer 18:18, since the subject “perishes from” different objects of the preposition. Only in Lam 3:18 does this construction occur, with the מִן following the second noun after a conjunctive ו. Therefore there is no precedent for House’s translation, which assumes that the מִן is distributive over two nouns.

<sup>13</sup> Lam 1:2 illustrates a similar use of the ו + non-verb, in which there is a verbless clause following a verbal clause.

Dobbs-Allsopp highlights the significance of the vocabulary “steadfast love” (חסד), “mercies” (רחם), and “faithfulness” (אמונת), noting their covenant implications.<sup>14</sup> Boda goes beyond this to identify numerous examples from the lexical stock for grace in Lamentations 3, and outlines the relevance of Israel’s “character credo” in this context: “The source of hope for the afflicted man (vv. 1–20) in Lamentations 3 is clearly his consideration of the gracious character of God in vv. 21–33.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, the Speaker’s hope is more than wishful thinking or a vague expectation, but is grounded in the promises and gracious, forgiving character of YHWH expressed in passages such as Exod 34:6–7:

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”

As God has been gracious before, he can be trusted to be gracious again. Boda concludes, “Thus in this central poem it is a consideration of the grace of God that is to prompt an acceptance of the discipline of God and a refusal to complain in light of one’s culpability. It is this that leads to the key penitential invitation in v. 40.”<sup>16</sup> Berlin notes the abstract nature of these and the following verses, and likens them to an “intellectual essay” on the nature of God, a “kind of theodicy.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, these verses do call on various aspects of Israel’s wisdom tradition in an attempt to understand the causes of and remedies for suffering.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 118.

<sup>15</sup> Boda, “Lamentations,” draft 10.

<sup>16</sup> Boda, “Lamentations,” draft 10. See the discussion below.

<sup>17</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 92.

<sup>18</sup> See Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 119.

## 2. Exhortation to the Community (3:25–42)

O'Connor points out that Lamentations 3 is not a demonstration of unqualified hope: "Instead, the realities of suffering and death and of a God remembered rather than encountered repeatedly moderate and overcome hope."<sup>19</sup> However, she also draws attention to the repeated references to "waiting" in vv. 24, 25, and 26 and comments, "Good, good, good it is for the burdened and enslaved to wait, to anticipate, to long for, to be ready when God will save."<sup>20</sup> Although YHWH is at present hiding his face, the Speaker has a God who is not only remembered, but is also anticipated. Therefore, in the midst of suffering, frustration, and doubt, hope in the character and justice of YHWH remains.

In v. 25 the Speaker changes his discourse from first ("therefore I will wait for him") to third person ("YHWH is good to those who wait for him"),<sup>21</sup> and vv. 28–30 include a series of third person jussives, "Let him...", and in vv. 40–41 there are three first person cohortative verbs, "Let us... ." On the basis of these verb forms and the didactic content (for example: "Let him put his mouth in the dust," v. 29; "Because the Lord will not reject forever," v. 31) it is reasonable to assume that in this section the Speaker is instructing the community about his conclusions and exhorting them to collectively act on them by repenting.<sup>22</sup> The imagery used here is that of humility: "endure the yoke," "sit alone," "be silent," "put his mouth in the dust," and "give the cheek to the one who smites him."<sup>23</sup> Westermann explains the Speaker's call to be silent:

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<sup>19</sup> O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 45.

<sup>20</sup> O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 50.

<sup>21</sup> Krašovec, "The Source of Hope," 231: "The recommendation to bear suffering patiently has, of course, nothing to do with resignation, but rests upon the unshakeable theological assumption of God's benevolence and mercy."

<sup>22</sup> See Hillers, *Lamentations*, 129.

<sup>23</sup> See Berlin, *Lamentations*, 94.

“Now one is supposed to bear in silence the suffering imposed on one, not to engage in lamentation. In the place of lamentation comes self-examination. Here one is called on to turn away from one’s sins and turn toward Yahweh.”<sup>24</sup> Boda concurs that the need is to move from lamentation to penitence: “Through its didactic style it questions the dominance of lament over penitence, calling the community to a confessional penitence and providing a liturgical template for their communal response.”<sup>25</sup> Linafelt, however, criticizes the submissive bias that he identifies in many commentaries: “The third and more pervasive factor [in addition to male and Christian biases] is the preference for submission and reconciliation vis-à-vis God.”<sup>26</sup> Although he is right to criticize the frequent neglect of Lamentations 1 and 2, redress the perceived gender inequality between Daughter Zion and the Speaker in traditional interpretation, and reemphasize the expression of suffering for its own sake, his assessment of submission as dysfunctional flies in the face of the actual relationship between humans and YHWH portrayed in Scripture as created beings and creator, as finite and infinite, as fallen and transcendent, as sinful and righteous. The Speaker assures the people that just as YHWH has been faithful to his covenant in the past, so he will now have compassion on those who humble themselves, for “he does not oppress from his heart, does not grieve the children of humankind” (בִּי לֹא עָנָה מִלְּבָבוֹ וַיִּגָּה בְּנִי-אִישׁ, v. 33)—or as Boda translates the verse, “does

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<sup>24</sup> Westermann, *Lamentations*, 180.

<sup>25</sup> Boda, “Priceless Gain of Penitence,” 68.

<sup>26</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 9; see 9–13.

not afflict with delight”<sup>27</sup>—reflecting once again the tension between the justice of a holy God and the mercy of a loving God.<sup>28</sup>

The use of first person plural beginning in v. 40 does not necessarily imply a new collective voice. As House remarks, “Another problem with positing a new speaker every time the point of view seems to change is that the chapter’s first speaker could be part of the ‘we’ and ‘us’ portions of the chapter.”<sup>29</sup> This applies here in vv. 40–41 as the Speaker is taking a new leadership role and conveying his insights to the people; then, in v. 42, as O’Connor suggests, it is “as if the people have been listening, and, at his invitation, step into the poetry.”<sup>30</sup> After reiterating the faithfulness of YHWH, he encourages them: “Let us search out our ways and let us examine them and let us return to YHWH. Let us lift up our hearts along with our hands towards God in the heavens” (vv. 40–41). As already discussed, Boda offers a significant insight into the transformation process by remarking that, although sin brings divine discipline, “such transformation from Lamentations to Penitential Prayer is prompted not by a consideration of the wrath and discipline of God

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<sup>27</sup> Boda, “Priceless Gain of Penitence,” 67. See also Hillers: “Because he does not deliberately torment men” (Hillers, *Lamentations*, 111).

<sup>28</sup> Some commentators have extrapolated this conflict into a conundrum, especially in the light of v. 38: “From the mouth of the Most High does not prosperity and adversity go out?” O’Connor concludes, “The strongman never resolves his intellectual dilemma—that God causes both good and bad” (O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 57), and indeed the Hebrew can be translated that way, even as “good and evil” since the root רעה can mean “evil.” Although the origin of moral evil is an interesting theological question, it is not necessary to enter into it here, because the word can also mean “adversity,” “affliction,” and “misfortune” (BDB, 949) in the practical and concrete rather than the abstract and moral sense. The verse simply means that God causes good and bad things to happen. In Deut 28:1, 15 YHWH pronounces the blessings and curses that are the consequences of obedience and disobedience. Again, this is not to imply that all suffering is the result of disobedience; God does clearly state through the prophets, however, that the destruction of Jerusalem was the disciplinary consequence of Judah’s continual disobedience, and the voices in Lamentations accept this analysis (e.g., 1:22; 4:22).

<sup>29</sup> House, “Lamentations,” 404; see also Hillers, *Lamentations*, 123.

<sup>30</sup> O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 45.

... but rather by a reconsideration of the grace and salvation of God.”<sup>31</sup> It is this grace that provokes the community’s response.

### C. The Community Confesses and Laments (3:42–47)

In v. 42, the community does just this with the opening words of a prayer of repentance: “We have rebelled; we have been obstinate...” Dobbs-Allsopp concludes, “The confession of sin in 3:42 ... flows seamlessly from the preceding couplets. Indeed, it is just what might be expected in a penitential prayer of the kind that is called for as the logical conclusion of [the ‘wisdom inspired reflections’ of] 3:25–39.”<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, the Speaker and the community in vv. 40–42 seem to progress towards what Boda identifies as the three necessary components of repentance: “God calls through the prophet for a repentance that involves the inner affections including shame and devotion, verbal expression including confession of sin, and practical action including turning from evil and turning to good.”<sup>33</sup> The examining of their ways and the lifting up of their hearts indicate the inner affections, the admission of rebellion and obstinacy is a verbal confession of sin, and the determination to “return to YHWH” (וּנְשׁוּבָה עַד־יְהוָה) indicates at least the willingness to turn from evil to good. At this stage, however, the repentance is not actualized in practical action, although the intention to “turn” is indicated.

Suddenly, however, the tone seems to change, and many translations continue with English present perfect phrasing such as “...you have not forgiven.” From this Berlin concludes, “The old theology has proven to be false,”<sup>34</sup> and others conclude that

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<sup>31</sup> Boda, “Priceless Gain of Penitence,” 74.

<sup>32</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 122–23. Although *Lamentations* has many similarities to penitential prayer, it also has differences, and it is more likely a transitional form between lament and penitential prayer, especially in chapter 3. See Boda, “Priceless Gain of Penitence,” 60–62.

<sup>33</sup> Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, draft B13, 19–20.

<sup>34</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 96.

God is unjust. There is an alternative explanation, however.<sup>35</sup> It is indeed possible that the community is unable to respond completely to the call to repent, and falters part way into their attempt. In this case, the continuing discipline would not be unjust. Once again they dwell on the physical destruction (vv. 43, 47), the assault of the enemy (v. 52), the isolation from God (v. 44), and the scorn of the attackers (vv. 45–46). Perhaps YHWH's forgiveness awaits the practical evidence that this final "turning" of the people is authentic, or perhaps they are unable to repent because they have a "heart of stone"<sup>36</sup> and therefore must await the gracious initiative of God.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> It is also possible that the common translation of the verse needs reassessment. If the verbs are consistently translated by English present perfects as Berlin and others do, it tends to give the impression that all the actions continue into the present, and halfway through v. 42 bitterness floods in on the community and plunges them back into the depths of despair. An explanation is suggested in Waltke and O'Connor: "When the perfective form represents a situation that occurred in the recent past, English idiom often requires the use of the auxiliary 'has/have.' Though the form appears to be perfect, the idea is simple past ('recent perfective')." The example is given: "וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ עֲשֵׂהְךָ And he said, 'What have you done?' Gen 4:10." The English, however, gives the sense of the action being continued into the present, whereas 'What did you do?' would not (Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 486. See also note 45 below). However, if at least some of the verbs are translated as English simple past tenses, those which entail action which is completed rather than continuing, this pericope may not depict an abrupt swing from hope back to despair, but may simply be a recapitulation of the past experiences of the community—experiences whose repercussions are admittedly still being felt, hence the appropriateness of some present perfects when these effects are related (for example, I may recklessly break the speed limit and have an accident, and God may completely forgive me, but the consequences of my sin remain. My broken wrist does not immediately mend, and the pain continues until the healing process is complete. I may well continue to lament and pray for more rapid healing.)—a process not uncommon in laments. If the Qal Perfect in verse 42 (לֹא סָלַחְתָּ) is translated, "We rebelled; we were obstinate. You did not forgive....," it actually expresses a logical and continuous flow of thought, for after confessing their sin, they recall the consequences of that sin at the point when judgement became inevitable—the destruction of the city and temple and isolation from YHWH. Verses 43–47 continue with the recollection of the often ongoing effects of their judgement. Since the community is still experiencing many of the painful consequences of their sin, however, the prayer definitely takes on the tone of a lament, motivating YHWH to come to their relief now that they are repenting, hence the continuing overtones of frustration and bitterness.

<sup>36</sup> See Ezek 11:17–20.

<sup>37</sup> See Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, draft B14, 61, "The restoration passages [in Ezekiel] no longer trust the people to accomplish this, but rather envision a divine transformation that will create an internal orientation that will fulfill these external patterns. This is strikingly similar to the pattern seen in the book of Deuteronomy, which at first calls Israel to "circumcise your hearts" (10:16), but ultimately looks to a restoration age when Yahweh will "circumcise your hearts" (30:6). It also resonates with the progression in the book of Jeremiah which begins with the call to repentance, but ends with the hope for the new covenant heart."

## **D. The Speaker (3:48–66)**

### **1. The Speaker Empathizes and Identifies (3:48–54)**

Verse 48, “Channels of water go down from my eye because of the crushing of the daughter of my people” recalls 2:11: “My eyes are spent with weeping; my entrails ferment. My liver has been poured out to the ground because of the shattering of the daughter of my people.”<sup>38</sup> As the Speaker previously empathized with the suffering Daughter Zion, now he empathizes with the continuing suffering and frustration of the community that she represented, interceding on their behalf until YHWH looks down from heaven. He has not forgotten his own individual plight, however, and returns to recalling his own defeat by his enemies.<sup>39</sup>

### **2. The Speaker’s Address to YHWH (3:52–66)**

Some commentators have interpreted the Speaker’s contention in v. 52, “My enemies have certainly ensnared me as the birds, without cause,” as a claim of sinlessness that contradicts his conclusion in v. 39 that he is being punished for his sins. According to O’Connor, “He is innocent of anything that would bring this suffering upon him.”<sup>40</sup> This is not a foregone conclusion, however, for the reference in this context reflects the relationship between the Speaker and the enemy, not the speaker and YHWH. The enemy is the instrument of YHWH in the destruction of Jerusalem, and in that sense the city is indeed being punished for sin; however, Judah has done nothing to her enemies themselves to provoke their independent action against her. It is in this light that the

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<sup>38</sup> These similarities reinforce the fact that the speakers in Lamentations 2 and 3 are one and the same. Although O’Connor argues that the speaker in Lamentations 3 is a new speaker, she does admit that in v. 48 “he begins to sound like the narrator in chapter 2” (O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 54).

<sup>39</sup> The rhetoric and role of the Speaker here is typical of Jeremiah, and suggests that he may well be that prophet. See Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, draft B13; Boda, “From Complaint to Contrition;” Boda, “Uttering Precious rather than Worthless Words.”

<sup>40</sup> O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 55.



Speaker deems their cruelties and insults towards him to be inappropriate, since they are as—or more—sinful than the people of Zion, and asks YHWH to also treat them as their offences deserve (vv. 58–66).

Ironically, although this pericope seems to start off negatively with a reference to the oppression of enemies, it actually contains many of the elements of a psalm of thanksgiving, including the summary of the situation from which the psalmist has been delivered, a recalling of the time of need, a report of deliverance (I cried, he heard, he acted), and a statement of renewed confidence.<sup>41</sup>

The Speaker summarizes the assault of the enemy and recalls his moment of greatest need, when he found himself “in the pit” and concluded, “I am cut off” (נִגְזָרִי) vv. 53–54), for YHWH had not yet spoken. Although the Hebrew root גזר is often translated as “perish” as in the TNIV, it can also mean “cut off” as in the NASB, in the sense of “separated, excluded from.”<sup>42</sup> According to Berlin, “The poet faces a situation without precedent: the inability to communicate with God.”<sup>43</sup>

However, the Speaker has confessed, shown contrition, and repented.<sup>44</sup> He cried: “I have called your name, O YHWH, from the lowest pit.” YHWH heard: “You have heard my voice.” YHWH responded: “You drew near on the day I called out to you. You said, ‘Do not fear’” (vv. 55–57).<sup>45</sup> This is also reminiscent of a psalm of lament in which, even

<sup>41</sup> Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 103–104.

<sup>42</sup> BDB, 160. See Ps 31:23[22]; 88:6[5].

<sup>43</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 88.

<sup>44</sup> In vv. 40–42 as the Speaker initiates and then leads the community in prayer.

<sup>45</sup> Contra Provan, who argues that the verbs in vv. 52–66 are precative perfects, and require a future reference in this context (“Past, Present and Future in Lamentations III,” 172) and Dobbs-Allsopp, who also interprets them as precative perfects with the force of imperatives (*Lamentations*, 126–27). In *Lamentations*, 103–9, Provan translates the perfects as imperatives which make requests for the future. He argues (pp. 81–83) that to translate the verbs in the past tense would require them to refer back to some other unknown situation of distress from which the Speaker had been delivered, since the imperatives in vv.

though there is often no actual evidence in the psalm that the situation has changed, the psalmist may assert that God has heard his or her prayer (for example Pss 6:8–9, 28:6).<sup>46</sup> It may be that the pray-er has received an oracle, a sign, or a word from YHWH that moves him or her from lament to confidence. The Speaker asserts, “You have seen, O YHWH ... You have heard...” (vv. 59–61).<sup>47</sup> He is finally assured that YHWH has redeemed his life and that he can trust God to ultimately bring justice to him and judgment on the enemy (vv. 58–66). As Berlin rightly concludes, “[H]ere the argument is based on justice, not on revenge.”<sup>48</sup>

## E. Conclusion

In Lamentations 3 the transition begun in Lamentations 1 is completed; the Speaker has changed from an objective observer to a subjective participant, from mere sympathy through empathy to identity with the sinful and the suffering, from a judgmental attitude to a sense of personal culpability and responsibility. The poetry itself mirrors these contrasts by balancing the imagery and voices of the female, collective Daughter Zion with the male, individual Speaker. The movement of the focus from the

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56, 59, and 63 would refer to the present situation of destruction of Jerusalem. This is not necessary, however, since the past tenses could refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and the experiences of Daughter Zion and the Speaker in Lam 1:1–3:19 before he finds redemption and hope in 3:20–41, and the imperatives to his desire for the exile to end, the enemy to be punished, and the continuing suffering to be over.

This is another case where the “recent perfective” may also come into play. If the verse is translated “I called your name, O YHWH, from the lowest pit. You heard my voice; you will not cover your ear in regard to my relief, to my cry for help. You drew near on the day I called out to you. You said, ‘Do not fear,’” then the Speaker may well be recalling a previous time when God finally answered his prayer in order to give himself confidence to trust that the same thing will happen again. Interestingly, in vv. 42–47 most translations use the English present perfect, but in vv. 55–58 there is some variation between English simple past and past perfect. Of course, those who translate the Hebrew perfect more often as an English present perfect (particularly the NASB) may nevertheless be doing so with simple past implications (recent perfective).

<sup>46</sup> See Broyles, *Conflict of Faith and Experience*, 48.

<sup>47</sup> Often in psalms of lament past experiences of salvation are used as motivation for God to respond in the present. Here the Speaker is using his very recent past experience of assurance that he has been heard as motivation for God to respond and relieve his ongoing suffering in the present. “You have heard my voice; you will not cover your ear in regard to my relief, to my cry for help.”

<sup>48</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 97.

collective to the individual, and the establishment of the individual as leader of a collective voice, also serves to draw the audience into the poem so that they also experience the insights and emotions of the Speaker.

In general terms, whereas Daughter Zion emphasizes the embodiment and collective expression of suffering, the Speaker represents the necessary response to suffering: identifying with the problem and then moving forward to contrition, confession, and repentance. As noted above, in the Israelite culture the women were usually the mourners and dirge singers, and the men were normally the priests and prophets. According to Kaiser,

[W]omen's experiences, even the negative experience of labor pains, menstruation, and bereavement, are not disregarded or disparaged by the Hebrew poets. Nor do the writers adopt the metaphor of painful female experience in a judgmental way in order to expose the community's sin.<sup>49</sup> On the contrary, the Hebrew poet aesthetically identifies with the suffering woman when his poem reaches the level of greatest intensity.<sup>50</sup>

Ultimately, neither dominates; each fulfills a necessary and important role, and in their interaction each complements the other: the Speaker learns how to identify with suffering and express compassion and Daughter Zion is reminded that her suffering is the consequence of adultery and rebellion. Thus, we as the audience see once again the tension between justice and mercy in the heart of YHWH, and come to understand and experience it ourselves: although we are aware of Zion's sin we pity her, and although the Speaker achieves redemption, we recognize that he too is a sinner dependent on YHWH's mercy. Whether the community as a whole will also attain salvation is as yet uncertain and depends on their repentance and the gracious character of God.

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<sup>49</sup> The poetic metaphors judge Daughter Zion's sinful behaviours, not her normal female experiences.

<sup>50</sup> Kaiser, "Poet as 'Female Impersonator,'" 166.

## Chapter Five: From Individual to Community (Lamentations 4 and 5)

### A. Introduction

Lamentations 4 and 5 will be analyzed in regard to the apparent receding of individual voices and the rising significance of a communal voice of lament. It will be argued that the narrator leads the community to cry out to God corporately as he did individually. The overall movement of the book is from the corporate (Lamentations 1, 2: the collective voice of Daughter Zion, בַּת־צִיּוֹן, and the Speaker's response to this collective suffering) to the individual (Lamentations 3: the individual Speaker himself, הַנִּבְכֵּר, who then leads the community to repent) and back to the corporate (Lamentations 4, 5: the situation of the community and the communal lament). The suffering of the people achieves its ultimate expression in the persona of Daughter Zion who represents the physical city and its inhabitants; the Speaker internalizes that suffering as an individual who seeks a way through, forward, and back to YHWH; and the broader exilic community, the Daughter Zion of Lam 4:22, is then led from within by the Speaker along the first steps toward healing and reconciliation, although the ultimate realization of this goal remains in the future. It is ultimately this overall movement that justifies reading Lamentations as a literary whole; although the poems may originally have had significance on their own, the final canonical form enriches and extends that significance.

After the intensity of Lamentations 1 through 3, chs. 4 and 5 seem anticlimactic.<sup>1</sup> Daughter Zion's voice is no longer heard and even the Speaker's voice is gradually overtaken by that of the general community. In fact, the front-loading of the poetic

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<sup>1</sup> See O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 58; Provan, *Lamentations*, 110; House, "Lamentations," 434.

strategies in the book is so intense that many interpreters, including Linafelt and Mandolfo, give little or no attention to the latter part of Lamentations. This change in tone and style is not necessarily a bad thing, however, for Zion and the Speaker have accomplished their tasks, she in realizing and expressing the misery of the people and he in finding a way for them to move forward toward redemption. The community voice does not make for such vivid characterization and compelling dialogue, but it is where the literary imagery of the first three chapters transfers to everyday reality in the lives of the Judahite people.

Lamentations 4 consists of three sections which can be identified by the point of view expressed in them, as well as their content. In vv. 1–15 the Speaker gives a third person view of the aftermath of destruction, contrasting Jerusalem’s current pathetic state with her former glory. In vv. 16–20 the collective first person plural appears as the community seems to find its independent voice for the first time,<sup>2</sup> expressing its despondency at its failed hopes. Finally, in vv. 21–22 the Speaker responds by predicting justice and an end to suffering in a second person address to Daughter Edom and Daughter Zion. Lamentations 5 is a communal lament in which the people cry out to YHWH for mercy and forgiveness.

#### **B. The Speaker: Aftermath of Destruction (Lam 4:1–15)**

In Lamentations 4 the camera seems to draw back from a close up on the individual, the Speaker, as the necessary transition back to a corporate emphasis on the community is begun. He describes a wide angle view of the scene of destruction and famine, detailing the striking contrasts between her former prosperity and her present devastation. As Berlin remarks, “The main theme of this chapter is degradation:

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<sup>2</sup> See O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 59.

everything beautiful has been sullied...”<sup>3</sup> Precious things and precious people, once vivid in gold, scarlet, white, and sapphire, are now reduced to a dreary black. The children, precious as gold, have become clay; the people once clothed in scarlet cloth are covered in dung; the princes with milk-white skin are now shrivelled and blackened. Worst of all, once compassionate women cook their children for food. The final telling contrast in vv. 12–16 is between the honour and respect formerly shown to the prophets and priests and their current defilement, both moral and ritual, due to their complicity in the events that lead to the destruction of the city.<sup>4</sup> It is ironic that the prophets, whose very calling was to “see” visions and truth, are now wandering blindly in the streets.<sup>5</sup> For all the graphic detail, there is an aura of dreary remoteness over the scene, as if it is difficult to comprehend fully.

The occasional reference to Zion and the “daughter of my people”, combined with a smattering of feminine pronouns, recalls Daughter Zion from the first two chapters of the book, but now she does not speak. There is slippage in the metaphor, and the residual hints of her in the text suggest that she is wandering about among the destruction and the suffering, losing her identity as an individual, but merging with the population she once represented so vividly. The disintegration of the Daughter Zion metaphor and the switch of the Speaker from first to third person speech as he describes the people of Jerusalem prepare the audience for the move from individual to corporate speech that follows—the voice of the people which hesitantly began in Lamentations 3, continues in this chapter, and finds full expression in Lamentations 5.

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<sup>3</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 103.

<sup>4</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 110–11 interprets the verse as implying that the priests and prophets were guilty of idolatry. Boase (*Fulfilment of Doom*, 186–88), however, contests this and concludes that they failed in their religious duties to lead the people.

<sup>5</sup> Provan, *Lamentations*, 117.

### C. The Community: Vain Help (Lam 4:16–20)

Here, the people of Jerusalem recall the final days of the siege and the capture and deportation of the king. Whereas the Speaker focussed on the failure of the religious leaders, the priests and prophets, the community despondently remembers the failure of their political allies, perhaps from Egypt,<sup>6</sup> and leaders, including their own king, “the anointed one of YHWH” (v. 20) on whom they had depended. House explains the historical background:

According to 2 Kgs 25:4–7 and Jer 39:1–10 and 52:1–11, when Jerusalem was about to fall, the king and some of his officials attempted to escape by fleeing through a gate between two walls. They fled toward the desert but were overtaken by the Babylonians, who forced the king to watch them kill his sons and then blinded him.<sup>7</sup>

As destruction became inevitable, and the expected support did not arrive, the people of Jerusalem hung on to one last hope, that they could retain their identity as a nation by escaping with their king, possibly to regroup and one day regain their lost city, but even that hope was dashed in the most brutal way when the only armies to arrive were those of the enemy.

### D. The Speaker: Justice (Lam 4:21–22)

According to House, however, the prospect is not all unqualified dreariness and defeat. He concludes: “This chapter builds on chap. 3 by indicating that the people’s prayers have been heard, their punishment has ended, and their enemies will be punished [v. 21–22].”<sup>8</sup> The Speaker’s final contribution to the dialogue indeed offers hope.<sup>9</sup>

Although Edom’s exact role in the destruction of Jerusalem is unknown, she was a

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<sup>6</sup> House, “Lamentations,” 446. See also Lipschits, *Rise and Fall of Jerusalem*, 78–79.

<sup>7</sup> House, “Lamentations,” 448. See also Berlin, *Lamentations*, 112–13.

<sup>8</sup> House, “Lamentations,” 434. See also Provan, *Lamentations*, 123.

<sup>9</sup> Contra O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 77, who states that this prayer should be entitled “What God Should Do But Probably Will Not.”

traditional enemy of the Israelites and, as such, personifies the enemy here.<sup>10</sup> Having served as a disciplinary agent of YHWH, it is time for her to be held accountable for her own sins. The change in status is articulated fully in v. 22: Daughter Zion's sins have been paid for and her punishment will end; Daughter Edom's sins are now revealed and her punishment is about to begin.<sup>11</sup> These verses constitute a highly ironic use of the *Aufruf zur Freude* (Call to Joy) motif, which,

according to Crüsemann, has three basic elements: a) imperative address to an audience (city, land) personified as a woman; b) vocabulary drawn from the semantic range of celebratory shouts (רוע רנן גיל); c) a clause which delineates the reason for rejoicing (following the style of oracle of salvation rather than psalms).<sup>12</sup>

Edom is defiantly enjoined to enjoy her victory while she can, for her judgment is ultimately sure. These verses, the last reference to the Daughter Zion in Lamentations, effectively balance the opening chapter. Now the term "Daughter Zion" takes on a broader reference as it is applied to the remnant community emerging after the destruction of the physical city. Berlin summarizes, "The enemy is now the immoral woman while Zion's sins have been paid for and she is once again virtuous."<sup>13</sup> As O'Connor points out, the play on words between לְהַגְלוֹתָּהּ and גָּלָהּ, both from the same root, emphasizes the contrast: "God will not continue to exile (*gālah*) Zion; God will uncover (*gālah*) Edom's sins."<sup>14</sup> Just as justice was executed against Judah, now justice will serve her interests.

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<sup>10</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 113.

<sup>11</sup> See Krašovec, "The Source of Hope," 229–230.

<sup>12</sup> Boda, "The Daughter's Joy," draft 15; see Crüsemann, *Studien zur Formgeschichte von Hymnus und Danklied in Israel*, 55–65.

<sup>13</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 114.

<sup>14</sup> O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 68; see also Boase, *The Fulfilment of Doom*, 189.



## E. The Community Laments (Lam 5:1–22)

Finally, in Lamentations 5, the community follows the lead of the Speaker and turns to YHWH in extended prayer. As House remarks, “At this point the people pray together. There are no complementary or competing voices. Everyone wants the same thing.”<sup>15</sup> This chapter is a variation on a communal lament, including most of the usual components:

- A. Address
  - a) Introductory Petition (v. 1)
  - b) Reference to God’s Earlier Saving Deeds (possibly v. 21)
- B. Lament
  - a) God: “Thou” (v. 19–20)
  - b) The One Who Prays: “I” or “We” (vv. 3–16)
  - c) The Enemy: “They” (v. 2)
- C. Protest of Innocence or Plea for Forgiveness (possibly v. 21)
- D. Confessions of Trust (absent; doubt expressed in v. 22)
- E. Petition (v. 21)
- F. Assurance of Being Heard or Vow of Praise<sup>16</sup> (absent)

Indeed, it bears some similarity to Psalm 74, which is an exilic lament over the destruction of the temple. The most significant missing element, of course, is the assurance of being heard—as many have pointed out, the voice of God is conspicuously absent in the book. Neither is there a promise to offer praise, which would indicate some certainty that the prayer had been heard and would be answered.

There are, however, some of the components of true penitence.<sup>17</sup> The people verbally confess their transgressions, “Woe to us, for we have sinned!” (v. 16). Although it is not stated explicitly, there is also some indication that the prayer involves the inner affections in v. 15, “The exultation of our heart has ceased; our dance is turned into

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<sup>15</sup> House, “Lamentations,” 456.

<sup>16</sup> See Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 52–70; Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 54–57.

<sup>17</sup> Contra O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 78–79. See Berlin, *Lamentations*, 116: “It resembles in part the communal laments in the book of Psalms and shares some traits with penitential prayers of the Second Temple period.”

mourning.” Although this may merely be an emotional response to the destruction, it may also demonstrate a change in attitude towards their behaviour. The people also acknowledge the need for repentance, turning from evil to good, “Bring us back, O YHWH, to you, and we will return” (v. 20).<sup>18</sup> A tone of submission and dependence on God indicated by the request “Bring us back, O YHWH” may also show a change in the inner affections, for they demonstrate a reliance on the grace and mercy of God rather than their own self-righteous initiative.

However, the continuing silence of YHWH may indicate that their laments are not acceptable. This can occur when the people continue in sin, when repentance is inadequate or insincere, or when the option to repent has passed and the discipline must run its course. In these situations, lament serves only to express the pain of the discipline, not to avoid or alleviate it.<sup>19</sup> Referring to an example of rejected lament in Jeremiah, Boda explains that

such cries are deemed illegitimate if they do not recognize the justice of God (30:11) and culpability of the people (30:14–15) in this discipline. The exemplary cry is presented as that of Ephraim whose cries for restoration involve repentance, recognition and remorse over one’s sins.<sup>20</sup>

There is no way to know whether the community is truly repentant, and indeed the book ends on an uncertain note: “For if you indeed reject us, you will be angry against us to excess” (v. 22).<sup>21</sup> The confidence of the Judahites has been fundamentally shaken. They

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<sup>18</sup> O’Connor’s interpretation of this verse, “They ask for a turning around of God, for a conversion of God’s heart back to them. They want God to turn from abandoning and rejecting them. And they themselves want to return to God. ...But God’s turning is what matters, for they have been turning to God throughout the book,” is untenable based on the Hiphil in the Hebrew אָלֵינוּ יְהוָה אֵלֵינוּ which implies that YHWH is causing the people to turn back. In fact, O’Connor herself translates the verse as “Return us to yourself, YHWH, and we will return” (77).

<sup>19</sup> See Boda, “Uttering Precious rather than Worthless Words,” 1–8, especially 5–7.

<sup>20</sup> Boda, “Uttering Precious rather than Worthless Words,” 8.

<sup>21</sup> For possible translations of this contentious verse see House, “Lamentations,” 453–54; Gordis, “Conclusion of the Book,” 289–293; Linafelt, “Refusal of a Conclusion,” 340–43.

had believed that Zion was the inviolable earthly dwelling place of YHWH, and that he was totally on the side of his covenant people. They thought that nothing, not even their sin and rebellion, would cause YHWH to allow their enemies to triumph over them.<sup>22</sup>

Dearman notes,

The language of judgment and destruction in Lamentations is almost a mirror image, a tragic reversal, of the language of the Zion psalms. ... The function of this mirror image is to critique a theology of election as privilege and to underscore the necessity of responsibility."<sup>23</sup>

Having forgotten that the promised blessings of the covenant were contingent on obedience, they had hoped to take a free ride on YHWH's supremacy; their destruction and suffering has taken that certainty from them.

## **F. Conclusion**

In Lamentations 4 the Speaker leads the community to confront their current helpless state and failed dependence on foreign nations and to return to God for aid, and in Lamentations 5 the people themselves finally cry out to YHWH in prayer. Led by Daughter Zion, the suffering has been experienced and expressed, led by Zion and the Speaker, the hard questions about guilt and mercy have been asked, and led by the Speaker the movement towards contrition, confession, and repentance has been initiated, if not fully realized. Although the priests and prophets have been dishonoured and the temple has been destroyed, and the people's traditional means of communion with YHWH have been severed, they at least continue to reach out to him and strive to hear his voice. According to House, "This voice concludes that only God can bring relief from the pain

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<sup>22</sup> See Boda, "Lamentations," draft 13–14: "But the greatest hope in the book is not related to either the election theology of Zion or the retribution theology of Deuteronomism or Prophetism. Rather it is only with the abandonment of Zion theology in the central chapter that one is shown the way forward for the community."

<sup>23</sup> Dearman, *Jeremiah/Lamentations*, 452.

he has caused, and this voice is not content only to express pain, for it moves to the necessary ultimate goal of reconciliation between God and the nation.”<sup>24</sup>

A significant lesson that the Judahites must learn is that God is not limited to physical earthly structures and human representatives. Berlin concludes, in reference to vv. 18–19, “God remains enthroned forever even though his throne, the temple, is physically destroyed. God is not physically or spatially limited to his temple, and his existence does not depend on a physical structure.”<sup>25</sup> Salters expresses the situation well: “Yahweh’s relationship with his people did not consist of the paraphernalia of the cult, albeit dedicated to him (cf. Jer 7:22), for he himself had destroyed them. They were not the essence of the relationship: merely the props.”<sup>26</sup> It is true that even at the end of the book they seem to wait in vain for YHWH to speak, but perhaps they are still relying on the old lines of communication and consequently cannot hear. Perhaps YHWH is withholding his voice until the time of discipline is over. Perhaps he has been patiently leading the people towards an experience of true repentance.

O’Connor summarizes Lamentations 5: “In this final poem, God does not speak, the people do not acquire hope, and comfort eludes them.”<sup>27</sup> In its absolute sense, this is true, but the seeds of hope are planted. Only in prophecies such as those of Isaiah 61–62 do they reach full growth. Eventually the exile did end, the people were restored to the land, and communication with YHWH was restored. Admittedly, when the temple was rebuilt it never regained its former glory. Haggai relates the struggles of the post-exilic community to come to terms with this change in status. Not even Herod’s temple would

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<sup>24</sup> House, “Lamentations,” 457.

<sup>25</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 125.

<sup>26</sup> Salters, “Yahweh and His People in Lamentations,” 359.

<sup>27</sup> O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 70.

restore Israel to its former place on the world stage, and that itself would be destroyed in 70 C.E.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

### A. Conclusion

This thesis has argued that the structure and imagery of Lamentations, especially the communal voices of the narrator, Daughter Zion and the suffering inhabitants, lead the implied reader to empathize with the anguish of the people, to personalize the need for confession and redemption, and to participate in the religious life of the wider community as they seek to find a way forward. In the early chapters, the interaction of Daughter Zion and the Speaker plays a significant role in leading the community through its suffering and along the first steps toward forgiveness and mercy. Significant here is the Daughter Zion metaphor complex itself, which evokes contrasting responses of both judgment and pity. A primary purpose of Lamentations is to express and validate the suffering of Daughter Zion in spite of her sin as a personification of the Judahite people.<sup>1</sup> Frymer-Kensky puts it well:

The Wanton Wife and Zion-as-woman express two different aspects of the imagery of God and Israel. It is a bifurcated image, almost the classic 'whore' and 'virgin.' ...[W]e are angry at the 'whore' when she fails God, we are sorry for the maiden when she is punished. This image of the ruined-maiden victim enables the reader to empathize with the people, to forget the cause of the devastation and join in the sorrow.<sup>2</sup>

Too often Daughter Zion has been brushed off theologically, based on the view that she got what she deserved, and the reader is merely reinforced in his or her self-righteous attitude, but the essence of the multivalent Zion metaphor itself is to evoke *both* censure and sympathy in the audience. These attitudes are experienced by the Speaker as he

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<sup>1</sup> See Westermann, *Lamentations*, 81, 86.

<sup>2</sup> Frymer-Kensky, *Wake of the Goddesses*, 169.

dialogues with her and as he subsequently moves through detachment, sympathy, and empathy.

Ultimately the Speaker comes to identify personally with the suffering of Zion and her search for hope as the imagery moves from the corporate to the individual. Lamentations 3 is not so much the pinnacle of hope or the actualization of redemption as it is a watershed experience on the way toward hope and salvation.<sup>3</sup> Lamentations offers no facile answers or simplistic solutions, and many struggles and doubts are in store for the people, even after the exile ends, the temple is rebuilt, and the memory of the destruction of Jerusalem gradually fades from view. Having assimilated these insights, the Speaker is able in the final chapters to effectively lead the suffering community forward from within in their first steps toward redemption. Thus, through the use of structure, metaphor, and dialogue the book of Lamentations demonstrates movement from judgment to pity, from detachment to empathy, from suffering to hope, and from the corporate through the individual back to the corporate perspective once more.

Further study on the biblical use of metaphor and its interpretation would be meaningful in the light of the complex nuances of the Daughter Zion image in Lamentations. Also, continuing research into the political treaty and family-clan approaches to covenant would also give deeper insight into Daughter Zion's rebellion and its implications for her relationship with YHWH.

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<sup>3</sup> See Boda, "Priceless Gain of Penitence," 66: "Lamentations 3 represents an important theological milestone in Jewish liturgical expressions. In it we discover the theological emphases key to transitioning Judah from the bitterness of their lament to the expression of their penitence..."; Boda, "Lamentations," draft 8: "Therefore, overall flow of the book of Lamentations suggests an honest struggle in the midst of the darkness of the exile, even if it foreshadows the dominant solution that will be adopted within the community in the wake of the exile..."

The rereading of the book would serve a number of purposes for the readers of the future. It would lead them to identify with Daughter Zion, and through her the sinful people of Judah, rather than to stand in judgment over them, and it would impress on them the dangers of idolatry and rebellion and deter them from repeating such errors, for as Isaiah states, “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags” (Isa 64:6). It would remind them that YHWH is not dependent on temples for his existence, and that having YHWH’s presence among them is no guarantee of immunity from the consequences of their actions. It would enable future readers to identify with the suffering people of God and personalize the experience by confessing sin and experiencing redemption, both individually and as part of a wider believing community. It would give the Jewish people a means to work through their grief after the subsequent attacks on the temple in the time of Antiochus and by the Romans in 70 C.E. The “telescoping” of these events results in Jewish people using Lamentations to this day in their observance of the ninth of Ab ceremonies.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, lead by Daughter Zion and the Speaker who continually cry out to God after the temple, the symbol of his manifest presence among them, is destroyed, Lamentations would lead the people back toward a relationship with the living God, rather than a complacent reliance on the external symbols of their religion.<sup>5</sup> The reading of Lamentations even today can give the believer significant insight into the repercussions of sin, the experience of suffering, and the hope of redemption.

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<sup>4</sup> See Dearman, *Jeremiah/Lamentations*, 431.

<sup>5</sup> See Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 88–89; Provan, *Lamentations*, 21.



## Appendix

### Translation of Lamentations

#### Chapter 1

##### The Speaker Describes Jerusalem

1. How the city great of people lies in solitude.  
She has become like a widow. She was great among the peoples,  
Princess among the provinces, but she has become forced labour.
2. She continually weeps in the night and her tears are on her cheek.  
There is no comforter for her from all her lovers.  
All her friends act treacherously against her; they have become her enemies.
3. Judah has gone into exile because of her affliction and her overwhelming labour.  
She has dwelt among the nations, but she has not found a resting place.  
All her persecutors have overtaken her in the midst of her hardships.
4. The roads of Zion are mourning for lack of those who come to the appointed feasts.  
Her gates are deserted, her priests are groaning,  
Her young women are grieving, and in light of it, she has bitterness.
5. Her oppressors have become dominant and her enemies have peace.  
Indeed YHWH has afflicted her because of her many transgressions.  
Her children have gone into captivity before the adversary.
6. All her glory has gone out from Daughter Zion.  
Her rulers are like stags – they have not found pasture.  
They have walked without power before the persecutor.
7. Jerusalem has remembered the days of her affliction and restlessness  
And all her precious things that were from ancient days  
When her people fell into the hand of the enemy. There was no helper for her—  
Her adversaries looked at her and they laughed at her cessation.
8. Jerusalem has sinned greatly; therefore she has become unclean.  
All those who honoured her despise her for they have seen her nakedness.  
Indeed, she has groaned and turned away.
9. Her uncleanness is on her skirts and she is not mindful of the outcome.  
She has gone down astonishingly, and there is no comforter for her.

##### Daughter Zion Interrupts

Look, YHWH, at my affliction, for my enemy has magnified himself!

##### The Speaker Resumes

10. The opponent's hand has spread out over all her precious things.  
Indeed she has seen the nations; they have entered her sanctuary,  
Those whom you commanded her should not enter into your congregation.
11. All of her army are groaning and seeking bread;  
They have given away their treasures for food, to restore their life.

##### Daughter Zion Laments

Look, YHWH! Observe, for I am despised!

12. Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by on the road?  
Look and see whether there is any pain like my pain which he has inflicted on me,  
That YHWH caused on the day of his burning anger.
13. From on high he sent fire on my bones; it prevailed over it.  
He spread a net for my feet; he turned me away;  
He gave me over to desolation, and every day I am faint.
14. The yoke of my transgression has been bound on by his hand.  
They intertwined themselves and went up onto my neck—it makes my strength  
stumble.  
YHWH gave me into the hands of those whom I am not able to withstand.
15. YHWH has rejected all my mighty warriors in my midst.  
He proclaimed/called against me an appointed time/assembly to destroy my young  
men.  
YHWH has trodden down in his winepress the virgin daughter, Judah.
16. Because of these things I am weeping; my eye, my eye flows with water,  
For my comforter, the one who restores my life, is far from me.  
My sons are desolated for the enemy has prevailed.

### **The Speaker Interrupts**

17. Zion spreads out her hands, for she does not have a comforter.  
YHWH has commanded concerning Jacob that his enemies should be all around  
him.  
Jerusalem has become as an unclean thing among them.

### **Daughter Zion Resumes**

18. YHWH is righteous, for I have rebelled against his word.  
Hear, all people, and see my pain!  
My young women and my young men have gone into captivity.
19. I summoned my lovers, but they betrayed me.  
My priests and my elders in the city have perished,  
Even though they sought food for themselves so that they might preserve their  
life.
20. Look, YHWH, for I suffer distress; my inward parts are burning.  
My heart is overturned in my inner self for I have indeed been rebellious.  
Outside, the sword has made me childless; in the house it is like death.
21. They have heard, for I am groaning; I do not have a comforter.  
All my enemies have heard of my misery and they rejoice, for you caused it.  
Bring the day that you have summoned so they will be like me.
22. You will bring all their wickedness before you.  
Act severely to them as you acted severely to me because of all my rebellion.  
Indeed many are my groanings and my heart is faint.

## Chapter 2

### The Speaker's Description of Destruction

1. How the Lord covers Daughter Zion with clouds in his anger.  
He has thrown down from the heavens to earth the honour of Israel  
And he has not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger.
2. The Lord has swallowed up, he has not shown mercy to all the residences of Jacob.  
He has demolished in his wrath the fortresses of Daughter Judah.  
He has brought to the ground, he has defiled, her kingdom and her rulers.
3. He has cut down in his fierce anger every horn of Israel.  
He has pulled back his right hand from before the enemy.  
He has burned in Jacob like a blazing fire that has burned all around.
4. He has drawn his bow like an enemy; his right hand is standing as a foe.  
He has killed all the precious things of the eye.  
Into the tent of Daughter Zion he has poured out his anger as fire.
5. The Lord is like an enemy; he has devoured Israel.  
He has swallowed up all her citadels; he has ruined his fortifications.  
He has increased in Daughter Judah her grief and her groaning.
6. He has done violence to his dwelling as to a garden [dwelling]; he has ruined his meeting place.  
YHWH has caused to be forgotten his appointed feast and his Sabbath in Zion.  
In the indignation of his anger he has despised both king and priest.
7. The Lord has rejected his altar; he has renounced his sanctuary.  
He has delivered up the walls of her citadels into the hands of her enemy.  
They gave voice in the house of YHWH as on the day of an appointed feast.
8. YHWH determined to ruin the wall of Daughter Zion; he stretched out a measuring line.  
He did not hold back his hand from devouring.  
He caused the rampart and wall to mourn; together they languish.
9. Her gates have sunk into the ground; he has destroyed and shattered her bars.  
Her king and her leaders are among the nations; there is no law.  
Even her prophets do not find a vision from YHWH.
10. The elders of Daughter Zion are sitting on the ground; they are silent.  
They have thrown dust on their head; they have put on sackcloth.  
The virgins of Jerusalem bow down their head to the ground.
11. My eyes are spent with weeping; my entrails ferment.  
My liver has been poured out to the ground because of the shattering of the daughter of my people  
When a child and an infant faint in the public squares of the city.
12. They say to their mothers, "Where are grain and wine?"  
When they faint as the fatally wounded in the public squares of the city  
When pouring out their life on the lap of their mother.

### The Speaker's Address to Zion

13. What will I call as witness? What will I compare to you, Daughter Jerusalem?  
What will I liken to you and with what will I comfort you, virgin Daughter Zion?

- For as great as the sea is your wounding – who will heal you?
14. Your prophets saw empty, worthless visions for you,  
But they did not reveal your sin in order to turn away your captivity.  
They perceived for you worthless, deceiving oracles.
  15. They clap their hands against you, all passersby on the road;  
They hiss, they shake their head against Daughter Jerusalem,  
“This is the city that they were calling ‘complete in beauty’ and ‘a joy to all the earth’?”
  16. All your enemies open their mouth against you.  
They hiss and they grind their teeth; they say, “We have devoured [you]!  
Indeed this is the day that we had hoped for. We attained it! We saw it!
  17. YHWH has done what he planned; he has accomplished his word—  
That which he commanded from ancient days—he has destroyed and not shown  
mercy.  
The enemy has rejoiced over you; he has raised up the horn of your adversaries.
  18. Their heart cried out to the Lord,  
“O wall of Daughter Zion! Cause tears to flow down like a river by day and night.  
May you not give relief to yourself; may the daughter of your eyes not be silent!”
  19. Arise! Cry out in the night to the chief of the night watches.  
Pour out your heart as water before the face of the Lord.  
Lift up your hands to him concerning the life of your child, the weakened ones  
starving at the top of every street.

#### **Daughter Zion’s Address to YHWH**

20. Look, YHWH, and consider whom you have treated this way,  
Whether women should eat their offspring, their cared for children,  
Whether priest or prophet should be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord.
21. Old men and boys have lain down to the earth in the streets;  
My virgins and my young men have fallen by the sword.  
You killed in the day of your anger. You slaughtered; you did not show mercy.
22. You called, as to a day of festival, terrors from all around  
And there was not in the day of YHWH’s anger a fugitive or a survivor.  
Those which I bore and raised, the enemy has finished.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **The Speaker**

1. I am the man who has seen misery through the rod of his anger.
2. He has driven me away, and it became darkness and not light.
3. Surely he has turned against me; his hand has overturned all day.
4. He has allowed my flesh and my skin to waste away; he has shattered my bones.
5. He has built against me, and he has surrounded me with poison and trouble.
6. He has made me dwell in dark places, as those who die forever.
7. He has built a wall around me and I cannot go out. My bronze fetters weigh  
heavily.
8. Yes, I will indeed cry out and I will call for help, but he obstructs my prayer.
9. He has blocked my way with a stone; he has disturbed my course of life.

10. He is a bear lying in wait; he is to me a lion in concealed places.
11. He has caused my way to turn aside and he has torn me apart. He has placed me into desolation.
12. He has drawn his bow; he has set me up as the target for the arrow.
13. He has made the sons of his quiver come into my kidneys.
14. I am a laughingstock to all my people, their mocking song all day long.
15. He has filled me with bitter herbs; he has drenched me with bitterness.
16. He has caused my teeth to grind gravel; he has trampled me down in the dust.
17. He has excluded peace from my life; I have forgotten goodness,
18. So I said, "He has destroyed my endurance, and/but my hope [is] from YHWH."
19. Remember my affliction and my homelessness, bitterness and poison.
20. You will surely remember, and my soul is humbled within me.
21. This I cause to return to my heart; therefore I have hope.
22. Because of the covenant love of YHWH we are not consumed. His compassions do not cease.
23. They are new every morning—great is your faithfulness.
24. "YHWH is my portion," says my heart; therefore I will wait for him.

#### **The Speaker's Exhortation to the Community**

25. YHWH is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.
26. Good are silence and waiting for the deliverance of YHWH.
27. It is good for the man if he will endure the yoke in his youth.
28. Let him sit alone and let him be silent, for he has laid it on him.
29. Let him put his mouth in the dust—perhaps there is hope.
30. Let him give the cheek to the one who smites him; let him be filled with scorn.
31. Because the Lord will not reject forever.
32. For if he rejected, he will have compassion just as the abundance of his covenant faithfulness
33. Because he does not oppress from his heart, does not grieve the sons of men.
34. To crush beneath his feet all prisoners of the land,
35. To pervert the justice of man before the face of the Most High,
36. To subvert a man in his lawsuit—the Lord does not consider it.
37. Who said this and it happened if the Lord did not command?
38. From the mouth of the Most High does not prosperity and adversity go out?
39. Why would a living man complain, a young man, concerning his sins?
40. Let us search out our ways and let us examine them and let us return to YHWH.
41. Let us lift up our hearts and our hands towards God in the heavens.

#### **The Community Confesses and Laments**

42. We rebelled; we were obstinate. You did not forgive.
43. You have covered yourself in anger, you have persecuted us; you have killed; you have not shown mercy.
44. You have covered yourself in clouds away from one who passes through in prayer.
45. You have put us as refuse and scum in the midst of the peoples.
46. All our enemies have opened their mouth against us.

47. It was terror and calamity to us, the devastation and the collapse.

### **The Speaker Empathizes and Identifies**

48. Channels of water go down from my eye because of the crushing of the daughter  
of my people.

49. My eye has flowed and will not cease because there is no cessation

50. Until YHWH looks down and sees from the heavens.

51. My eye has dealt severely with my soul because of all the daughters of my city.

### **The Speaker's Address to YHWH**

52. My enemies have certainly ensnared me as the birds, without cause.

53. They have silenced my life in the pit; they have thrown stones against me.

54. The waters flood over my head; I have said, "I am cut off."

55. I have called your name, O YHWH, from the lowest pit.

56. You have heard my voice; you will not cover your ear in regard to my relief, to  
my cry for help.

57. You drew near on the day I called out to you. You said, "Do not fear."

58. You have defended, O Lord, disputes; you have redeemed my life.

59. You have seen, O YHWH, my oppression; judge my case.

60. You have seen all their vengeance, all their intentions towards me.

61. You have heard their scorn, O YHWH, all their plots concerning me,

62. The lips of those who rise up against me, their muttering all the day.

63. Look at their sitting and their rising up. I am their mocking song.

64. You will bring recompense to them, O YHWH, according to the work of their  
hands.

65. You will give a covering of the heart to them, your curse to them.

66. You will pursue in anger and exterminate them from under the heavens of YHWH.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Speaker: Aftermath of Destruction**

1. How the gold dims, the beautiful gold changes,

The stones of the temple lie poured out at the head of every street.

2. The children of Zion, the precious ones, the ones worth their weight in gold

How they are considered as jars of clay, the work of the hands of a potter.

3. Even jackals expose a breast; they suckle their cubs.

[But] the daughter of my people has become cruel, like ostriches in the  
wilderness.

4. The tongue of the nursing child sticks to the roof of his mouth in thirst;

Children ask for bread, but there is no one holding it out for them.

5. The ones who ate delicacies are made desolate in the public squares;

The ones brought up on scarlet cloth embrace dung piles.

6. The sin of the daughter of my people was greater than Sodom;

Her destruction occurred in a moment, and no hands turned against her.

7. Her princes were brighter than snow; they were whiter than milk.

[Their] bones were ruddier than coral, their shaping was as sapphire.

8. Their appearance has become blacker than soot; they are not recognized in the streets.  
Their skin shrivels on their bones; it has dried up and become like wood.
9. Better are those slain by the sword than those dead of famine  
Who fade away, slain far from the fruit of the field.
10. The hands of compassionate women roast their children.  
They are for their consumption during the destruction of the daughter of my people.
11. YHWH has completed his anger; he has poured out his burning wrath.  
He has set a fire in Zion and it has consumed her foundations.
12. The kings of the land and all those who dwell in the world did not believe  
That the adversary and the enemy had entered into the gates of Jerusalem.
13. Due to the sins of her prophets, the iniquities of her priests,  
Those who poured out in her midst the blood of the righteous,
14. They stagger blindly in the streets; they have been defiled by the blood  
And no one is able to touch their clothing.
15. "Go away! Unclean!" they call out to them. "Go away, go away! Do not touch!"  
because they wander and also stagger.  
They say among the peoples, "They cannot continue to sojourn [here]."

### **The Community: Vain Help**

16. The face of YHWH scatters them; he no longer endures to see them.  
No one holds in honour the faces of the priests, no one shows favour to the elders.
17. Yet our eyes have become weak [looking] for our vain help.  
In our watchtower we watched for a people who did not save.
18. They hunted our steps, [stopping us] from walking in our public squares.  
Our end drew near, our days were fulfilled, indeed our end came.
19. Our pursuers were swifter than eagles of the skies.  
On the mountains they were in hot pursuit; in the wilderness they lay in ambush for us.
20. The breath of our nostrils, the anointed one of YHWH, was captured in their pits,  
The one of whom we said, "In his protection we will live among the nations."

### **The Speaker: Justice**

21. Exult and rejoice, Daughter Edom, inhabitant of the land of Uz.  
Even to you the cup will pass; you will become drunk, you will strip yourself naked.
22. The punishment for your guilt is complete, Daughter Zion. He will not add to your exile.  
He counts your guilt, Daughter Edom. He reveals your sins.

## **Chapter 5**

### **The Community Laments**

1. Remember, O YHWH, what has happened to us! Look and see our disgrace.
2. Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our house to foreigners.
3. We have become orphans and there is no father; our mothers are like widows.

4. We have drunk our water in exchange for silver; our wood comes for a price.
5. Our pursuers are upon our necks; we grow weary – there is no rest for us.
6. [To] Egypt we went begging, and [to] Assyria, in order to be filled with bread.
7. Our ancestors sinned – they are no longer. We bear their offences.
8. Servants rule among us; there is no one rescuing [us] from their hand.
9. At the risk of our lives we bring in our bread, for fear of the sword of the desert.
10. Our skins shrivel up, as from an oven, because of the fever of famine.
11. Women are raped in Zion, virgins in the cities of Judah.
12. Princes are suspended by their hands; [the] faces of [the] elders are not honoured.
13. Strong young men bear the millstone, and youths stagger on account of [loads of] wood.
14. Elders have ceased from the gate, strong young men from their music.
15. The exultation of our heart has ceased; our dance is turned into mourning.
16. The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned!
17. On account of this our heart has become faint, because of these things our eyes grow dim.
18. On account of Mount Zion, which is desolate – foxes roam on it.
19. You, O YHWH, live forever, your throne from generation to generation.
20. Why do you forget us forever? Abandon us for so many days?
21. Bring us back, O YHWH, to you, and we will return. Renew our days as in ancient times.
22. For if you indeed reject us, you will be angry against us to excess.



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