

The *Hesed* and *Rahamim* of God as Resources of Hope in Contexts of Individual and Communal Loss: A Multi-dimensional Reading of Lamentations.

by

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## **Declaration**

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## Abstract

This dissertation argues for the existence of hope in the book of Lamentations. Although on the surface the picture presented seems to be that of gloom, an analysis of the literary features points to the central part of the book as the peak of the theology of Lamentations. In that central part four Hebrew words are used to express this hope. Once this ray of hope has been lit, it is not quenched by the incessant agony of suffering. It shines throughout the entire remaining laments.

This hope is based on a reflection of the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God. The *hesed* and *rahamim* of God, which are taken as resources for the generation of hope, are studied diachronically and synchronically. It is revealed in this study that the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God are social, active and enduring. This is then contrasted to the anger of God, which is temporal.

Through a multidimensional analysis of the text of Lamentations, it is also revealed in this dissertation that the book is *atemporal* and *ahistorical*. The *atemporal* and *ahistorical* nature of Lamentations enhances its portability to other contexts of suffering beyond that of its inception. However, in order to do this responsibly, the author advocates for an analogous reading that recognises the continuities and discontinuities within the various contexts. This work finally brings the Judean context of suffering into dialogue with the Zimbabwean context of suffering. Some useful parallels are then drawn with the aim of offering lasting hope, healing, and identity and dignity construction to victims of *Gukurahundi*, *Murambatsvina* and *Hondo yeminda*.

## Opsomming

Hierdie verhandeling voer aan dat daar hoop in die boek van Klaagliedere bestaan. Oppervlakkig gesien is die prentjie wat aangebied word dié van wanhoop, maar 'n ontleding van die literêre kenmerke dui aan dat die sentrale deel van die boek die hoogtepunt van die teologie van Klaagliedere is. In dié sentrale deel word vier Hebreeuse woorde gebruik om hoop uit te druk. Wanneer hierdie ligstraal van hoop eers begin flikker, word dit nie deur die gedurige lyding uitgedoof nie.

Die grondslag vir die hoop is 'n reflektiewe beskouing van die *hesed* en *rahamim* van God. Die *hesed* en *rahamim* van God wat as bronne vir die skep van hoop gesien word, word diachronies en sinchronies ondersoek. Volgens hierdie studie is die *hesed* en *rahamim* van God sosiaal, aktief en blywend. Dit word in teenstelling gestel met die gramskap van God, wat tydelik is.

Deur 'n meerdimensionele ontleding van die Klaagliedere-tekste argumenteer hierdie verhandeling ook dat die boek *atemporeel* en *ahistories* is. Die *atemporele* en *ahistoriese* aard van Klaagliedere versterk die draaglikheid daarvan vergeleke met ander lydingskontekste wat nie verby die oorsprong daarvan vorder nie. Om te verseker die proses vind op 'n verantwoordbare manier plaas, moedig die outeur 'n analoë lees aan wat die kontinuïteite en diskontinuïteite binne die onderskeie kontekste erken. Hierdie werk bring uiteindelik die Judese konteks van lyding in dialoog met die Zimbabwiese lydingskonteks. Daar word 'n paar nuttige parallele getrek met die doel om blywende hoop, genesing, identiteit, en waardigheid, aan die slagoffers van *Gukurahundi*, *Murambatsvina* en *Hondo yeminda* te verleen.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is especially dedicated to three groups of people who were greatly affected by *Gukurahundi*, Farm Invasions and Operation Restore Order: First, my cousin Edinah Ncube who lost her husband during the height of *Gukurahundi*, my words to you are: may the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God comfort you forever. Second, to Roy Bennet (Pachedu) and Sternly Louis (Ruwi), who all lost their farms during the time of farm invasion: I say, we are mindful of the valuable employment opportunities that you used to give to the greater Chimanmani district. Last, to my dear Rev. Manyumbu, who lost his potential shelter: I say, God still reigns and will remain the same yesterday, today and forever.

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## Abbreviations

CCJPZ	The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe
FTLRP	Fast Track Land Reform Program
JAG	Justice for Agriculture
KJV	King James Version
LDU	Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur
LDSU	Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur
LRF	The Legal Resource Foundation
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NET	New English Translation
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OAU	Organisation of African Union
PF ZAPU	Patriotic Front Zimbabwe African People's Union
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UANC	United African National Council
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army

ZANU PF Zimbabwe African Union People's Front

ZIPRA Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army



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## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction and Background

Hope plays a vital role in human existence. Chia rightly quotes theologians as saying, “Hope belongs to the very essence of human condition and is the presupposition and motivation of everything we do” (2006:25). Bauckham and Hart (1999:52) back this up by quoting an anonymous author as saying, “Hope comes close to being the very heart and centre of human being”. We wake up and do business because we hope to earn something from our labour. Bauckham and Hart have this to say, “from the simplest purposeful action (beginning with getting out of bed in the morning) to the most complex scientific, artistic or political engagement with the human condition, humanity lives not only by instinct and by desire but by hope” (1999:52). Therefore, hope becomes the motivation and stimulus of everything we do.

However, sometimes hope is surrendered when everything falls apart. Hopelessness then emerges. Chia (2006:12) says, “Hopelessness is a kind of death because it opens the door to fear and fear weakens and immobilizes”. Nothing fruitful can be done with a hopeless mind. It is demotivating; it is afraid of taking risks and quickly gives up anything started. So we agree with Bauckham and Hart (1999:58) when they say,

The perception that there is no exit, no way forward, nothing that can be done, may in the short term provoke a frenzied hyperactivity in which we seek to stave off our fears of what may be (about which nothing can be done) by immersing ourselves wholly in the pleasures, benefits and distractions which the present has to offer. This may take the form of sheer narcotic hedonism (indulging in sensory excess like there is no tomorrow) or a wholesale investment of our concern in artificial, contrived and illusory goals and projects. What is effectively a process of denial cannot last, however, and eventually gives way to a deeper and more lasting inertia and a sense of aimlessness and futility.

Dealing with loss of hope is therefore crucial for individuals and collectives, such as nations, alike.

Ancient Israel is a typical example of a nation that lost hope because of a series of exiles. The exiles reached their peak in the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. This became the severest blow, since Jerusalem served as one of the pillars of their religious system. One biblical book that depicts the situation vividly is Lamentations. The situation was so dire to them that everything around them was doom.

The author of Lamentations chose to reflect on this situation of hopelessness in an artful way. O'Connor (2002:8) outlines the formal features and poetic devices used in Lamentations such as: multiple poetic voices, a mixture of literary genres of complaint and mourning, acrostic and alphabetic structures, varied length of poems, personification of the city, and vibrant interwoven language and imagery.

All these literary devices are used to portray the direness of the situation. Salters (1994:67) sums it up in no better terms than to say, “the theme of the book is devoted to doom and gloom”. However, after some time, the situation changed and they were so hopeful. This is evidenced by the positive statement that concludes the book in chapter 5 verses 21-22: “Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may return; renew our days as of old unless you have utterly rejected us and are angry with us beyond measure” (NIV). Assis (2009:311) captures well that “in chapter 1 the feeling of despair is dominant, whereas in Chapter 5, despite the hardship and the deep sorrow, there is hope expressed in prayer to God”. So the book concludes with a positive prayer that anticipates restoration. The process in the movement from doom to dawn, from hopelessness to hopefulness, is worth investigating. What is it that triggers the change from gloom to hope? What is the catalyst that motivated the change from hopelessness to hopefulness? This investigation is paramount since hopelessness also occurs in many contemporary contexts. An analogical application of the biblical literature to these contexts may be valuable to find hope in these circumstances.

In Africa, and Zimbabwe in particular, many have lost hope due to the political instability, economic meltdown and maladministration of the post-colonial governments<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately the book of Lamentations has not been given scholarly attention in an African context. Our attention is drawn to three tragic events that happened in the history of Zimbabwe. The first one, which was fatal, is the *Gukurahundi*<sup>2</sup>. The term *Gukurahundi*, which refers to the first rain that washes

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<sup>1</sup> Although there is a lot of suffering in Africa (e.g. the Rwanda genocide, conflict in Sudan and the DRC wars), a reading of the book of Lamentations has not been seriously considered and undertaken. For the major part scholars, inspired by the Bruggemann's (1986) *The Costly Loss of Lament*, have concentrated on reading and applying Lamentations in Europe, the Balkans and America. Joyce and Lipton (2013:7) note this well and single out events, such as the Holocaust, 9/11 in the USA, the Vietnam War and the traumas of the Balkans in the 1990s. From Africa, Lamentations has featured only in South Africa (i.e. on issues of apartheid by Johanna Stiebert) and Zimbabwe (i.e. in a sculpture form of junk by Taurai Gondo at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe).

<sup>2</sup> Sisulu (2008) describes in detail the events leading up to *Gukurahundi*. More details about the *Gukurahundi* are found in the publication by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJPZ) and The Legal Resources

away the chaff before spring, came to be used metaphorically for the disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands during the 1980s. So disastrous was this event that a number of families are still traumatised by it even after twenty years of its occurrence. President Mugabe himself admits that this was one of the worst times in the history of the nation. He calls it “a moment of madness”, although he has not courageously taken a stand to apologise and take meaningful positive steps to rectify the situation<sup>3</sup>. Events culminating in the *Gukurahundi* started off with the major opposition party, Patriotic Front Zimbabwe African People’s Union (PF ZAPU), which was rejecting the outcome of the 1980 election results which tipped the ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), to win<sup>4</sup>. Since the voting took ethnic lines<sup>5</sup>, the resistance in turn took pronounced tribal lines along the Shona and Ndebele. The resistance entered the barracks<sup>6</sup>. In the barracks there was already a problem of integration and mistrust between ZIPRA and ZANLA forces, which goes back to pre-Independence times. Such mistrust led to the concealing of weapons (Breaking the Silence Building True Peace, 1997:28). Thus, eventually a battle broke out in November 1980 among ZIPRA and ZANLA forces awaiting integration into the National army. A major resistance was to come in February 1981, popularly known as the Entumbane battle. It should be mentioned that although the first resistance was confined to Entumbane, the second resistance did spread to barracks such as Connemara and Silalabuhwa<sup>7</sup>. This did not last long, as Joshua Nkomo, leader of the opposition, urged restraint from his military wing, ZIPRA, and all the supporters. The appeal for restraint was offered at

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foundation (LRF) (1997), 'Breaking the Silence Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands 1980-88'. This publication was followed by a summary published in 2001.

<sup>3</sup> See online. <http://nehandaradio.com/2012/09/21/gukurahundi> massacres memories drenched in blood [Access Date: 2014, April 27].

<sup>4</sup> Bourne (2011:95) notes well that, “the voting largely followed ethnic patterns, with the majority Shona overwhelmingly voting for ZANU and the Ndebele backing ZAPU which won 20 seats”.

<sup>5</sup> Although there were minority groups, such as the Ndau of Chipinge who stood with Ndabaningi Sithole, and the whites who favored Muzorehwa’s United African National Council (UANC), Blair (2002:12) is right in saying, “the cruel logic of African elections usually divided parties along tribal lines and awarded victory to whichever party represented the largest ethnic group. Mugabe was from the majority Shona people, comprising about 70 per cent of the population, whereas Nkomo’s constituency among the Ndebele was barely 20 per cent”.

<sup>6</sup> It is also noted in *Breaking the Silence Building True Peace* (1997:27) that the ZIPRA and ZANLA forces had long mistrusted each other even before Independence (for example, in 1970) to an extent that they would from time to time engage in battles against each other in training camps and on the battle front.

<sup>7</sup> *Breaking the Silence Building True Peace* (1997:32) and Blair (2002:30) clearly spell out that there were two battles, while Moorcraft (2012:99) sees it as one battle lasting two days.

times at the risk of his own life and that of his generals<sup>8</sup>. However, President Mugabe did not respond favourably to the gesture that was shown by Joshua Nkomo, as is expected in the *hesed* or *Ubuntu* concept. Instead, he used an attack on his official residence and the subsequent discovery of large arms caches<sup>9</sup> as evidence of rebellion and justification to unleash the North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade on the civilians of the entire Matabeleland and Midlands regions. So the atrocities began. The army then went on to kill indiscriminately the Matabeleland and Midlands civilians on the pretext<sup>10</sup> that they were hunting down dissidents<sup>11</sup>. Joshua Nkomo himself had to flee to Botswana and eventually into exile in Britain (Blair, 2002:29). Stories are told of civilians that were buried alive. Those that were shot at blank range were buried in mass graves. Others were stashed in caves, without proper burials. Some of the remains of these people are still unaccounted for. For those that are known to be lying in the caves, the process of giving them proper burial is still being resisted by the government<sup>12</sup>. As the crackdown continued, a number were forced to speak Shona, and if they failed, they were beaten or killed. Horrific stories of women being raped and forced to kill their own babies lie in the hearts of those that witnessed the atrocities. Bourne (2011:106-107) concurs, stating that

starting in January 1983 the Fifth Brigade was unleashed on Matabeleland, with orders to wipe out the dissidents. This they did with unparalleled ferocity, lumping together the bandits and ex-ZIPRA fighters with innocent Ndebele villagers, in a total onslaught. They beat, killed, raped, tortured and burnt homes. They sought to make Ndebele speakers talk in Shona. There were mass detentions and disappearances. Bodies were buried in mass graves. Horrified observers were unwilling to recognise that this was government policy, sanctioned by Mugabe himself. But it was. He brushed off protests.

So it may be legitimately asked, how can a reflection on the book of Lamentations provide consolation, comfort, healing and hope to the victims of *Gukurahundi*?

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, Moorcraft (2012:100) highlights that “Nkomo and his two key subordinates, Lookout Masuku and Dumiso Dabengwa, crisscrossed the combat zone by helicopter appealing to all sides, especially ZIPRA, to desist. There was a high risk that they might have been shot down by their own men in the heat of the moment, but these appeals played a vital role in calming things down”.

<sup>9</sup> Blair (2002:30).

<sup>10</sup> Although, as stated by Blair (2002:30), there were certainly isolated cases of dissidents (e.g. the murder of the six tourists in July 1982) these cases did not warrant unleashing a full battalion of trained and armed soldiers on a defenceless civilian population.

<sup>11</sup> Bourne (2011:107) notes that statistically the number of dissidents’ activities actually increased when the Fifth Brigade was unleashed. So instead of containing it, the *Gukurahundi* invasion into Matabeleland bolstered the activities of the dissidents.

<sup>12</sup> See Nyambabvu, G. 14-08-2011. Zanu PF must resolve Gukurahundi: Moyo. Also available online. WWW. Newzimbabwe.com/news-5814- Zanu PF must resolve Gukurahundi Moyo/news.aspx. [Access Date: 2014, April 27].



The second event was equally disastrous, as it reduced the entire country to beggars. This was the event of farm invasions<sup>13</sup>, which the perpetrators call the *second chimurenga* (second war of liberation) or *hondo yeminda* (war of fields). Chikanya (2012:20) traces the roots of this tragic event to the failure of the land reform program, which was based on a willing buyer-willing seller model. The failure of the willing buyer-willing seller model catapulted the war veterans to invade white-owned farms armed with guns, knives, spears and *pangas*. A number of white farmers were killed<sup>14</sup>, others were injured, and still others were abducted<sup>15</sup> to various unknown places (Another White Farmer killed, 2000:1). No intervention came from the government to help these defenceless civilians under attack. On the contrary, Pilosof (2012:44-45) notes that

there was substantial evidence that many were supported and co-ordinated by government and state officials ... Government officials supplied lists of farms. In addition, army personnel, members of the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) and police were directly involved in some occupations, while local politicians and their employees were often seen assisting ‘Settlers’ to remain on the land with food hand-outs and cash payments.

The silent failure of the government to respond was in a way an approval of the violent seizure of the farms. Eventually, most farming activities came to a halt, as the majority of food-producing farms were now under the siege of the war veterans. Production ceased and the entire country was turned to beggars. The once bread basket of Africa became a begging bowl. The result was the exodus of skilled human resources, and the majority of young and promising entrepreneurs preferred to be refugees in neighbouring countries than to starve in the homeland. For the white commercial farmers, Pilosof (2012:53) notes from the Justice For Agriculture report (JAG)<sup>16</sup> that for 147 farmers there were about 50 000 violations. “Most concerned political intimidation or coercion ... over 2 000 cases of assault, 2 000 death threats, 300 hostage situations, 32 murders and 800 cases of torture”. Those who survived the murder and were dispossessed of their farms, which they had occupied for generations, could not approach the local courts for redress since the government had just passed a constitutional amendment that allowed full control of land expropriated (Chikanya, 2012:20). Today they continue to plead hopelessly their

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<sup>13</sup> In certain circles it is called *Jambanja* because of the violence and chaotic nature of the operation whereas, others prefer a more decent description, such as Fast Tract Land Reform Program (FTLRP). The Zimbabwe We Want, 2006:37.

<sup>14</sup> The Independent (UK) 13 December 2000:1.

<sup>15</sup> The Daily News, 9 July 2001:1.

<sup>16</sup> 2008.

cases in foreign courts (Zimbabwe to ignore SA Court Ruling, 2013:1). So the question is: Can the book of Lamentations speak to their situation?

The third tragic event was the *Murambatsvina/Restore Order* movement. It created a humanitarian disaster to the extent that the United Nations was prompted to send an envoy to come and inspect the extent of the disaster<sup>17</sup>. In this event, bulldozers were sent to demolish people's homes. So disastrous was this event that people had to be sheltered at various church buildings because their homes had been pulled down. Extensive damage was done to urban dwellers who were suspected to be opposition supporters. The demolitions were done without any plan to provide alternative accommodation. The three tragic events<sup>18</sup> above left a nation in tears, grief-stricken, without identity, dignity and hope. A biblical book such as Lamentations, where a movement from hopelessness to hopefulness can be seen, will therefore be very relevant to speak into a context such as the Zimbabwean.

## 1.2 Problem Statement and Research Questions

As various churches in Zimbabwe grapple to bring confidence to the victims of such violence and to help reformulate their identity and dignity, one may ask whether biblical scholars can potentially assist in reshaping these people's lives. Can an exegetical analysis of the book of Lamentations providing a reflection on the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God, assist to rejuvenate hope through the reconstruction of identity and dignity to the victims of *Gukurahundi*, *Murambatsvina* and the so-called 3<sup>rd</sup> *Chimurenga*? Ryken's observation indicates that the timeless nature of Lamentations may indeed offer this opportunity:

The communal focus of Lamentations makes its message continually relevant for the Church and the world. The book of Lamentations helps people make sense of national disasters like famine, warfare, and genocide. For example, Lamentations is where the Jews turned for help and comfort when their temple was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. It is also where the American- Jewish composer Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990) turned for the text of the last movement of his first symphony, "Jeremiah", which was composed and performed during the Holocaust of the 1940s. In a world of overwhelming human suffering, Lamentations

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<sup>17</sup> See report by Tibaijuka, A. 2005 July 18. Report of the Fact Finding Mission to Zimbabwe to assess the Scope and Impact of Operation Murambatsvina by the UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe. Available online. [http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/zimbabwe/zimbabwe\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/zimbabwe/zimbabwe_rpt.pdf) [Access Date: 2014, April 28]

<sup>18</sup> The imagery and proverb used in the Xhosa, Zulu and Ndebele to describe such catastrophic events is of a big tree that has fallen (*Omuthi omukhulu owile*). The imagery and proverb used in Shona is that of a mountain that has fallen (*gomo rawa*). In Ndaou the imagery is that the storehouse has fallen (*tsapi yawa*) or *dzatiputsa* meaning the head of the family has fallen. When such a proverb is uttered, there is great anticipation for a dirge or funeral song.

gives voice to the deepest agonies of grief, with the hope that some comfort may come from crying out to the God of mercy.

Giffone (2012) also summarises the book as moving from time-bound to timeless. He specifically says in his conclusion, “the poetry of Lamentations has an *atemporal, ahistorical* quality that allows it to be appropriated in contexts beyond that of its composition” (2012:134).

The voice from Lamentation is coveted in Zimbabwe where a number of the Ndebele people killed during *Gukurahundi* lie in caves without a proper burial<sup>19</sup>, where people have resorted to being refugees in neighbouring countries because of terror at home, and where the entire nation has been turned into beggars although they were once the bread basket of Africa. Zimbabweans need to be given an opportunity to lament the post-colonial government. Once they have been given that opportunity to lament, only then will the healing process begin and hope be restored. This hope has “nothing to do with resignation but rests upon the unshakeable theological assumption of God’s benevolence and mercy” (Krasovec, 1992:231). Such a process can be informed by Israel’s own laments and history.

Therefore, since we have seen from the introduction above that hope is essential, our major problem statement stems from the need to have that sustainable hope. Can a reflection on the book of Lamentations generate hope to people who are hopeless, particularly in the Zimbabwean context? Generally speaking, in a spiritual community hope is sought from the supernatural being<sup>20</sup>. In the case of the nation of Israel, the conviction was that they were a covenant people, bound by this covenant with an all-powerful God. The covenant ideology can best be understood from the suzerain-vassal relationship. As a vassal would always seek protection from the suzerain, so Israel would seek deliverance from God their king.

Narrowing down to the book of Lamentations, Dorsey (1999:251) rightly observes from the chiasmic structure of Lamentations that the climax of the book is in 3:21-32 which is Yahweh’s great love<sup>21</sup>. In that analysis he observes that the unit opens and closes with the proclamation of Yahweh’s love *raham* (רַחֵם) and kindness *hesed* (חֶסֶד) (Dorsey, 1999:248). If we agree with

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<sup>19</sup> See Dube, P. 2012, August 4. “Police stop reburial of *Gukurahundi* victims” in the *Dailynews*. Available online. [Zimbabwesituation.com/aug5\\_2012.html#](http://Zimbabwesituation.com/aug5_2012.html#). [Access Date: 2014, April 29].

<sup>20</sup> Christians seek it in God, Muslims seek it from Allah, and Buddhists seek it from Buddhah.

<sup>21</sup> Boase (2008:39) also admits that in terms of theology, this section is often seen as the highpoint of the book.

Dorsey that this is the climax and turning point of Lamentations, a sub-question naturally follows: How did a reflection on the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God revive hope to the nation of Israel? Put in other words: What is the significance of the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God to a nation in turmoil? It is our conviction that there are some social and theological significance that are attached to these two words that helped in the revival of hope for the nation of Israel. Our task at hand is to unveil the significance of these two words to the nation of Israel. This is the stage where we will unveil some of the social and spiritual dynamics that the nation underwent in their quest for sustainable hope.

Lastly it can be asked: What are the universal and timeless principles gleaned from the nation of Israel's reflection on the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God which can be sought by the Churches in Zimbabwe in an endeavour to reconstruct identity and dignity, thereby generating hope to victims of violence in Zimbabwe? This question originates from the basic belief that exegesis and scholarship should not be ends in themselves, but should seek to affect people's lives. Texts are never written without an agenda. Texts are written to inform and to change social perspectives and behaviour. Biblical texts, also, were written in social contexts to inform and transform social behaviour. Conradie (2008:39) summarises well the definition of interpretation as, "the event in which we respond to the significance of signs, for us, today". He expands this and says,

Interpretation entails more than just a cognitive recognition of the implication of a text for a reader. Interpretation has not yet taken place if the text has not changed the life of the reader (even if this is ever so slightly). The meaning and significance of the sign has to be integrated within the world or horizon of the interpreter. Interpretation comprises more than a collection of information; it also includes the transformation of the life of the reader. This process of application plays a role in the process of interpretation from the very beginning.

However, in the process of application of the texts, care should be taken that we do not do the application randomly. Gorman (2001:129) calls this premature assimilation. He describes it as taking place when "readers jump into the application of a text without sufficient thought and without respect for the distance between the two horizons, between then and now" (Gorman, 2001:29). We have to set our text in its original context, and when we apply it we have to "understand the questions, needs and problems of such a (contemporary) context. These needs

have to be identified and analysed carefully” (Conradie, 2008:86).<sup>22</sup> These needs differ from religious, academic, political, and social to individual piety. A comparison and a contrast between the context then and now should be drawn. In the process of doing this, horizons are enlarged and new ones are created (Gorman, 2001:128). This result in what scholars generally call “a melting of horizons” (Kim, 2013:34).

### **1.3 Current State of Scholarship and Research Gaps on Lamentations.**

The book of Lamentations still remains a thorn in the flesh and scholars continue to battle over a number of grey areas. The grey areas range from historical and literary to theological issues. We begin our study with some discussion on the historical, move on to the literary, and then conclude with the theological issues.

The historical occasion of the book of Lamentations points to one of the deportations of Judah by the Babylonians. Though scholars are generally agreed that there were three deportations, there is no consensus as to the specifics. Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:2) identifies the three deportations as happening in 597, 586 or 582 B.C. He then asserts that “these poems probably emerge from a time relatively soon after the 586 BCE destruction of Jerusalem and are likely the product of the community of Judeans who remained in the land” (Dobbs-Allsopp, 2002:4). Mackay (2008:10) outlines the deportations as occurring in 605 and 597, with the last one being in 586 B.C. which saw the fall of Jerusalem. Three deportations have followed one after the other. This resulted in a number of men falling dead, leaving behind women and children. The last deportation, culminating in the fall of Jerusalem, came after two years of siege. That siege resulted in the storehouses being empty and a shortage of drinking water, since the Babylonians had blocked the canals that brought water into the city. This resulted in a humanitarian crisis, leaving people within the city resorting to drinking their own urine and feeding on their own filth. O'Connor (2008:27) says, “the 587 siege of the city was the worst and most decisive. The siege lasted two

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<sup>22</sup>Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:xi) provides some useful contextual uses of Lamentations with some observation that the book is known for its use in the month of Ab commemorating Jewish national calamities that include the destruction of the two temples (in 586 B.C. and A.D. 70 ). He then goes on to say that his own post-Holocaust reading is motivated by such a tradition. However, he is very careful and cognizant of the fact that these poems originated in Palestine. They have a different context than his. So the application is not just random. He carefully engages the book in its historical context and then takes the universal and timeless principles and applies them to his context.

years during which the young and elderly died of hunger and men died in battle”. In a desperate effort to survive, some people resorted to cannibalism.

Attached to the historical event is what is generally called the *Sitz im Leben*. Evaluating Hunter (1996:30), we come up with an interesting question in terms of the *Sitz im Leben* that still needs exploration. Was Lamentations written for the cult, or was it just used in the cult after its creation? Hunter (1996:30) says,

Many lament texts are considered to have their *Sitz im Leben* in the cult. But this makes an important difference in the interpretation of such a text. There seems to be a distinct difference in the interpretive approach to a text that was written for the cult and one that was only used in the cult after its creation.

Therefore, there is need to unlock the *Sitz im Leben* for us to be able to understand fully the intentions behind the laments.

Another bone of contention concerns who wrote the book. From the Jewish tradition it has been accepted without questioning that Jeremiah was the author of Lamentations. Parry (2010:3) clearly points out that scholars only started questioning Jeremianic authorship in the eighteenth century. He notes that in the LXX the book of Lamentations opens with the words, “and it came to pass after Israel had gone into captivity, and Jerusalem was laid to waste that Jeremiah sat weeping and composed this Lament over Jerusalem and said ...”. This introduction is also found in the Syriac, Targum and Vulgate.

However, Bergant (2003:22) suggests multiple authorship of the dirges. Bergant may have been influenced by Hermann von der Haart’s commentary published in 1712, which Parry (2010:4) says was instrumental in the total rejection of the belief that Jeremiah wrote Lamentations. Once the rejection of authorship by Jeremiah has been accepted, the dates of authorship are bound to be questionable too. Form critics favour a date around the second century B.C., in the Maccabean period (Mackay, 2008:12).

Roots that gave birth to the Jeremianic authorship are in 2 Chronicles 35:25<sup>23</sup>. Mackay (2008:12) says of this, “since the king is spoken of in very positive terms in 4:20, and Jeremiah commends Josiah’s character in Jeremiah 22:15-16, some have supposed that Chapter 4 is the dirge for Josiah mentioned in Chronicles”.

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<sup>23</sup> “Jeremiah composed laments for Josiah, and to this day all the men and women singers commemorate Josiah in the laments. These became a tradition in Israel and are written in the Laments” (NIV).

Taking 2 Chronicles 35:25 as affirmation of the Jeremianic authorship of Lamentation has met some resistance, with scholars such as Kalman (2009) and Gracia (2002) suggesting a pseudo-historical authorship<sup>24</sup>. Jonker (2012:186), in agreement with Kalman (2009), concludes that “the references to Jeremiah in Chronicles (particularly 2 Chronicles 35:25), as well as the superscript in the Septuagint version of Lamentations, were already available to the rabbis and those references bolstered their acceptance of Pseudo-historical Jeremianic authorship of Lamentations”.

So the area of authorship still needs to be unlocked, because it has a bearing on the way one will understand the entire book. The urgency and desperate need for this historical information is best captured by Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:4) when he says “the centrality of this kind of information to the interpretive process demands that we articulate just what we think we know about these matters”.

The other bone of contention has to do with the genre. Whereas there is general consensus among scholars that the laments take the form of a dirge, there is disagreement as to the existence of the *qinah* meter and how it is to be measured<sup>25</sup>. A number of scholars who subscribe to the *qinah meter* are influenced by Karl Budde<sup>26</sup> (1882:1-52). Gerstenberger (2001:471) says,

It was K. Budde who as early as 1882 discovered a specific uneven meter characteristic for dirges and laments over destroyed cities. Each line, he maintained, normally has five accents, the first colon featuring three, the second two stresses, thus creating a curtailed, limping, exasperated impression.

Gerstenberger (2001:471) in a discussion with H. Jahnou (1923:91-92) notes that, “the cadence of three and two emphases ‘sounds as if the wailing woman was unable to complete regularly the second part of the line because of her emotional involvement”.

Scholars, such as Bullock (1986) question the traditional approach of confining meter to mourning or lamentation. Bullock (1986:265) further argues that in essence, “Lamentations exhibits a balanced pattern (3+3) rather than the falling pattern”. Harrison (1973:199) on the other hand rejects totally the existence of the meter in ancient Hebrew poetry. Ever since her recent publications, Berlin seems to have adjusted her position. She says, “While Lamentations may be related to the *qinah* and to the communal lament, it transcends both those genres and

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<sup>24</sup> Jonker (2012:178) describes this notion as not referring to real authorship but a mental construct believed by an audience as the historical author.

<sup>25</sup> See Berlin, 1985:142.

<sup>26</sup> See Kaiser, 1982:39.



constitutes a new post- 586 type of lament which I call the Jerusalem lament” (Berlin, 2002:24-25). She goes on to say, “This ultimately has presented problems for form critics who like neat genre categorization for literary works” (Berlin, 2002:24).

Bullock (1986:265) refers to form critics, such as Gunkel (1929:1049-1052), proposing that poems 1, 2 and 4 were examples of the national funeral songs, poem 3 mainly an individual lament, and poem 5 a communal lament. Gottwald (1954:34) is of the view that national lament is the primary type, with some fused subtypes. It is clear from the above discussion that there is still a lot of work to be done in terms of the identification of the genre, type of meter and type of lament in Lamentations.

Linked to the genre is the origin of the laments. Some scholars see some links to the Mesopotamian city dirges. They then argue that, “Mesopotamian laments over ruined cities and their sanctuaries were the foundation for the poems in Lamentations” (Boda, 2008:401). Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:6) believes,

Although Lamentations draws on a variety of literary genres, conventions and traditions, the most important is the city-lament genre which has greatly influenced the overarching trajectory of the sequence as a whole as well as many of the individual poems’ prominent features, themes and motifs.

He then goes on to give the historical understanding and evaluation behind the city lament. He notes that the genre originated in Ancient Mesopotamia. It consists of five compositions (i.e Lamentations over the Destruction of Ur, Lamentations over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur, Nuppur Lament, Eridu Laments and Uruk Laments) which lament the fall of Sumer and other calamities during the period of Ur III and Isin. The destruction of the cities and their shrines is a result of a decision taken by the divine assembly despite the chief goddess’s protest. The destruction is then carried out by Enlil through an agent presented as a storm. The laments are directed to the patron deities to appease their anger and as a way of averting future calamities. The compositions end in celebration of the return of the gods and the restoration of the city/shrines.

Although Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:9) compares Lamentations to the Mesopotamia city lament, he is careful to conclude that, “Lamentations is no simple Mesopotamian city lament. Rather, it represents a thorough translation and adaptation of the genre in a Judean environment and is ultimately put to a significantly different use”.

Berlin (2002:27-28) says,



Whatever their historical relationship may be, Mesopotamian lament literature and the book of Lamentations obviously share similar motifs, themes and images. These range from general descriptions of destructions to specific images and phrases – lists of members of society who suffered, the physical and architectural structures destroyed, the ravages of famine and even cannibalism, the loss of temple and its rites, and the explanation of the catastrophe by the decision of the gods to abandon the city and to permit to conquer it.

Importantly, Berlin (2002:28) brings to our attention that, “pointing out these similarities allows us to see Lamentations in a larger literary context, and in some cases to grasp the imagery more clearly”.

Besides the genre and the origin of the laments, we should be cognizant of the fact that we are dealing with poetry. In poetry the unavoidable question has to do with parallelism. Is there parallelism in the book of Lamentations? If it is there, what kind of parallelism are we dealing with and what are its dynamics in the conveyance of the message? A brief history of parallelism will help guide our process. Berlin (1985:1) says, Lowth (1753) is credited with promoting parallelism to prominence in biblical studies, though some of his ideas are now being questioned by those coming from a linguistics point of view. Berlin (1985:7) also notes that from a linguistics point of view Jakobson (1966) is seen as the pillar in describing parallelism. He took parallelism from a mere correspondence of one verse or line to a global view finding equivalences<sup>27</sup> everywhere within a text. This is a welcome development, as this will enable scholars to look at parallelism beyond the verse to paragraph and discourse level. This eventually caters for things like inclusion (Berlin, 1985:3) and pragmatic arguments. In this research such developments enhance the analysis of Lamentations from a unified approach.

Dobbs-Allsopp (2008:18-19), on the other hand, argues vehemently that most of the couplets in Lamentations 1-4 are nonparallel in nature thereby rendering issues of verse invalid. He argues for what he calls *enjambing*. He describes it as “phenomena of continuation of syntax from one line to the next”. It is important to note that Dobbs-Allsopp is not totally dismissing parallelism from Lamentations; he is only saying it is not prominent in chapters 1-4, although it is mainly

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<sup>27</sup> Jakobson, 1968.

found in chapter 5<sup>28</sup>. So some work still needs to be done to authenticate or invalidate Dobbs-Allsopp's assertions.

Scholars do not sing in unison again when it comes to the number of voices in Lamentations. The failure to agree on the number of voices may be prompted by the failure to agree on authorship and the unity of the dirges. Berlin (2002:6), though not specific about the number of voices in Lamentations, cautions us against mistaking them for authors, witnesses or historical persons. Bergant (2003:15-16) argues for four voices, while Bullock believes this quandary can only be solved by an informed understanding of figurative speech. He argues that this is a case of personification (Bullock, 1986:266). It is our belief that such discord can be narrowed down by the participant tracking insights that emanate from a dialogue with linguistics.

The issue of the acrostics has also received the attention of scholars. There has been debate over the significance of the acrostics and the interchange of the *ayin-pei* alphabets. With regard to the significance of the acrostics, three proposals have been forwarded. The first proposal is that it aids memory. The second proposal is that "such a literary convention controlled the expression of profound grief" (Ellison, 1986:698). A third view is that "the use of the alphabet symbolizes that the completeness – 'the A to Z' – of grief is being expressed" (Ellison, 1986:698). Care must be taken to avoid thinking narrowly that these acrostics served one purpose. The acrostics could have been serving multiple functions within the dirges.

As for the interchange of the *ayin-pei*, Lee (2008:44) challenges us to move from seeing this as a literary technique<sup>29</sup> to an oral technique used for a different purpose, namely "to present a dissident singers and perhaps a scribe/redactor who in their rebelling against a simplistic retributive understanding of events, employ the acrostic structure to invert that order of justice with strategic inverting of the ayin and the pei".

One of the words that form the backbone to our research is *hesed* (חסד) which, admittedly, is difficult to translate. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that the word has been used over a

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<sup>28</sup> We still need to ascertain how many types of parallelism we have. Some scholars still maintain that there are three types, which are synonymous, synthetic and antithetic, while other scholars add emblematic, inverted/chiasmic, ellipsis, step and formal parallelism to the list. These are further divided under the rubric of complete and incomplete parallelism. Incomplete parallelism is further classified under incomplete parallelism with compensation against incomplete parallelism without compensation. Other scholars contend that chiasm and inclusion are stylistic features and not necessarily types of parallelism.

<sup>29</sup> Whereby we just posit from epigraphic evidence that there were merely different versions of the alphabetic order at times.

very long time, from the time of entering the Promised Land until post-exilic time. We know language is dynamic. It changes over time. With the cross-pollination that is there within languages, new meanings to old words are acquired. For us to do justice to this word, we need to study its origin, its various semantic values within the nation of Israel and the surrounding nations, and then its contextual meaning. So a methodology that combines the synchronic and diachronic approaches would be appropriate to yield the desired results.

The word *hesed* (חסד) has been translated variously by translators. All of the translations are striving to capture the theological import of the word. Renn (2005:633) says, “The right understanding of the term is bound up with its relationship to the divine covenant with Israel”. At the back of our minds it should register as we seek to understand this word that there were at least three covenants in the ancient Near East. These were the parity, the grant and the suzerain-vassal. All these treaties had some cognitive contribution to the society and its understanding of various concepts. Renn (2005:634) then goes on to say,

When applied to Yahweh, *chesed* is fundamentally the expression of his loyalty and devotion to the solemn promises attached to the covenant. It is most commonly applied to God but it is also used to describe a human quality as well as expressing human commitment to the covenant.

In light of this, Grogan (1996:702) conclude that the “meaning may be summed up as steadfast love on the basis of a covenant”.

In most instances *hesed* (חסד) has been translated as loving kindness<sup>30</sup>, loyal love<sup>31</sup>, unflinching love<sup>32</sup>, faithful love<sup>33</sup>, mercy<sup>34</sup>, loyal kindness<sup>35</sup>, and steadfast love<sup>36</sup>. Britt (2003) did some interesting work on the unexpected attachments of the word. He observes that the word is usually used in an inclusio structure. In Lamentations, specifically, he notes that the word appears in the middle of an acrostic poem and asserts that “the whole pericope forms a radical contrast to the rhetoric of lament that precedes it, and it appears to come about by means of an act of mental

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<sup>30</sup> NASB

<sup>31</sup> The Message.

<sup>32</sup> GNB

<sup>33</sup> NLT

<sup>34</sup> KJV and NJB

<sup>35</sup> NET

<sup>36</sup> RSV and NRSV.

will, as if the speaker is recalling and reciting a set liturgical formula: ‘the חסד of the Lord never ceases’” (Britt, 2003:289-307).

From Zobel (1986:45), we gather that the word *hesed* (חסד) is used 245 times in the Hebrew Bible. It is used 20 times from Genesis to Deuteronomy, 54 times, from Joshua to Esther, 140 times in Job, Psalms and Proverbs and 29 times in the Prophets. It appears twice in our specific book of research. From the distribution above, it is evident that the word is mostly used in the poetry sections.

Coming to its usage, it has both a secular and a religious usage. In the secular, it was used in interpersonal relationships. That means it was used between relatives, between sovereign and subjects and between parties inaugurated by an unusual act of kindness on the part of the other.

In terms of its demonstration, it could be demonstrated variously. It could be demonstrated by giving in marriage, by protecting one another from harm, offering each other decent burials, restoration of property and acting to protect near relatives their property (Zobel, 1986:46-47).

*Hesed* (חסד) was also reciprocal. One could receive *hesed* (חסד) as well as give *hesed* (חסד).

When one receives *hesed* (חסד) it was natural to expect one to give it back.

Zobel (1986:51) outlines three elements that constitute the concept of the *hesed* (חסד) of God: it is active, it is social and it is enduring.

Coming now to the religious, it is assumed that the religious borrowed from the secular (Zobel, 1986:62). It is noted that *hesed* (חסד) can have God as the subject and individuals being the recipient of the *hesed* (חסד) of God. There are still other times when God is the subject and the recipient is the nation of Israel as a whole. The *hesed* (חסד) of God can sometimes also be used in liturgical formulas, which we presume is the case in the book of Lamentations.

In summary, Zobel (1986:62) notes that, since there is borrowing from the secular to the religious,

There is agreement in the active and social nature of *hesed* as well as the permanence of divine kindness. Everything that is said focuses on what Yahweh does for Israel and the individual worshipper. The history of Yahweh’s people past, present and future, the life of the individual Israelite – in fact, the entire world – is the stage for the demonstration of Yahweh’s kindness, Yahweh has decided in favour of Israel, he has

promised life, care, alleviation of distress, and preservation – indeed he has filled the whole earth with his kindness. He has thus granted fellowship with him to his people, to all mankind, to the whole world. And this act, like the promise and assurance of future help and fellowship, is characterised by permanence, constancy and reliability. This is what Israel and the individual Israelite hear through Yahweh’s word, including his word spoken through the mouth of his prophets.

The second, equally important word in our title and research is *rahamim* (רחמים). In the context of Lamentations, it is found parallel to *hesed* (חסד). Consequently, the word shares some characterisation with *hesed* (חסד) in most translations. *Rahamim* (רחמים), which generally means ‘compassion’<sup>37</sup>, comes from the root *raham* (רחם). In most cases it is found in the plural, and it is rarely found in the singular. In the passages where it is used in the singular as *raham* (רחם), it refers to womb or soft parts<sup>38</sup>. The form *raham* (רחם) is also used once in 1Chronicles 2:44 as a proper name. In Leviticus 11:18 and Deuteronomy 14:17 the form is used to refer to a male and female carrion-vulture respectively<sup>39</sup>.

Renn (2005:634) says that *rahamim* (רחמים) is used approximately 60 times with the dominant sense of mercy mixed with elements of compassion. Dahmen (2004:438) says the root *raham* (רחם) is found in all Semitic languages. In its verbal form it means to be devoted, attached, loyal, loving, benevolent and merciful. It can also mean a female slave or servant, usually captured in war.

Dahmen (2004:438) goes on to say that *raham* (רחם) in Aramaic can also have a legal formula meaning a wish. It can also mean to love, or accept (someone), or to be thankful, or satisfied (with someone).

Apart from Lamentations, the word *rahamim* (רחמים) is used in conjunction with *hesed* (חסד) in Isaiah 54:8 and 60:10. In these passages it is contrasted to God’s wrath and hiding his face (Dahmen, 2004:441). Wan (2009:46) commenting on the words *hesed* (חסד), *rahamim* (רחמים) and their cognates says, “Grace and mercy along with steadfast love and faithfulness

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<sup>37</sup> Holladay, 1988:337.

<sup>38</sup> Holladay, 1988:137.

<sup>39</sup> Holladay, 1988:137.

are concrete expressions of God's covenantal election, through which Israel becomes a people (Isaiah 54:10). Accepting divine mercy means accepting this unequal relationship and the commandments stipulated therein". That means from grace, mercy, steadfast love and faithfulness, Israel found its identity and dignity.

Having looked at the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God, we conclude this section with a broad survey of the theology of Lamentations from various scholars. O'Connor (2008:3-31) sees a theology of witness. It is a form of literary seeing, a literary mirror, that honours voices of loss, anger, sorrow and protest. This is achieved by excluding the divine voice from the text and leaving the voices of Lament alone in the house. She then defines witness as the capacity to take in and see the enormity of suffering for what it is, in all its enormity and overwhelming power, and offer it back to the sufferer. In her conclusion she sees God as repetitively the source of human suffering. So the central motif of Lamentations lies in the form of being able to see contrasted with not being able to see and paying attention to suffering.

Lee (2008:39) believes the book's internal debate is about prophetic and divine justice. She connects the book of Lamentations, specifically the first voice, to Jeremiah 4, 8 and 10. It is discovered that, whereas in a communal dirge there is warning to a community that both idolatry and social injustice will lead to social collapse in Jeremiah and Lamentations, in Lamentations there is a movement from the singers' perspective of the justice of prophetic judgement, to compassion for the suffering city, to anger against God for unjust and excessive punishment and failure to protect the innocent, to a call for a lament prayer. Lee (2008:40) goes on to identify that "in Jeremiah 4, 8 and 10, Jeremiah expresses empathy toward the other voice/singer and the people, but he also conveys God's anger and judgement. This same perspective is expressed by the first lead singer in parts of Lamentations 1, 2, 3 and 4". The issue of suffering as allowed by God is highlighted. But this suffering and death involves innocent children. The critiquing of retributive justice (the wicked/unrighteous are punished and God hears, rescues and rewards only the good/righteous) goes on. In the end the text conveys no divine answer to the laments.

Mandolfo (2008:47-56), coming from a dialogic approach, argues for the contention of the didactic voice and the supplicant in the book of Job as well as the book of Lamentations. The argument is that the supplicant's theological point of view is based on experiential data that often posed a challenge to the exclusively justice-oriented understanding of God's interaction with his

human subjects. Mandolfo argues her approach leads to dialogic theology that provides humanity an avenue for speaking honestly to God about its experience of him. It is a theology that makes demands on God. It is a theology that suggests that “as surely as God authors us, we author God”. This calls for a God who is mutable and a God who is relational. This will then compel humanity to reflect on human to human interaction.

Boda (2008:81-101), through an analysis of penitence prayers, highlights that essential to this type of prayer is the admission of the sins of the community, both past and present, and their theological orientations. As to the theological orientations, he discovers that there is emphasis on the awesomeness and greatness of God. Secondly, there is emphasis on the faithful grace of God, one who keeps his covenant of faithfulness. He also highlights the importance of the law and the subsequent punishment that follows those who break it. Those who break the law are regarded as sinners and God judges them. He then calls this the prophetic tradition. Coming to the book of Lamentations, he observes that the prophetic tradition and penitential lament liturgies continue. In addition there is the Zion theology/tradition<sup>40</sup>. Boda (2008:87) says that the Zion theology is contended with in the book of Lamentations, since the king and his subjects have been exiled. In conclusion Boda (2008:97-98) says what we have in Lamentations is authentic confession of penitence with authentic expression of pain. He then calls for the communities of faith to afford an opportunity for expressing praise, pain and penitence as essential avenues of communal expression to God. He concludes by an observation that the transformation from lamentation to penitential is prompted not by a consideration of the wrath and discipline of God but rather by a consideration of the grace and salvation of God.

In his analysis, Kalman (2009:33) brings out that the rabbis’ assumption that Jeremiah wrote Lamentations and the connection to Deuteronomy helped to deal with the theology in Lamentations. It is then assumed that Jeremiah and Lamentations shared a common theology. Since the rabbis regarded Jeremiah as a second Moses, they could easily draw parallels between the prophetic book of Jeremiah and Deuteronomy. One important parallel would be the retributive theology<sup>41</sup>. Kalman (2009:38) then adds that reading Lamentations in connection with

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<sup>40</sup> A tradition that celebrates God’s election of Jerusalem and the temple as the unique place of rule and worship, and the choice of the Davidic line as vice-regent.

<sup>41</sup> Retributive theology has the basic idea that following God’s ways leads to reward, and sin leads to punishment Jonker, 2012:178.

the prophet Jeremiah would give rabbis the additional benefit of seeing future events in the laments. Commenting on the challenges posed by Lamentations 2:5, 20 and 5:20-22, Kalman (2009:49) concludes that,

The book of Lamentations, within the exegetical tradition, stands at a midpoint with the prophet – the point where God and Israel meet. Jeremiah's work is that of a mediator and Lamentations is a work of mediation. From the rabbinic perspective it served to remind Israel that her sins lead down the path of destruction at the hands of a just god; but it likewise sought to remind God that His justice must be tempered with mercy and that within the covenantal relationship atonement allows for redemption. As a result of the rabbinic presentation of Jeremiah, the reader should begin to see those troubling passages in Lamentations not as challenging divine justice but as aggressive pleading on the part of a committed advocate for sinful Israel. The dual tone of Lamentations parallels that of the book of Jeremiah. As a prophet, Jeremiah must announce the word of God and chastise Israel. As a communal leader<sup>42</sup> Jeremiah must act as Israel's advocate and fight the divine prosecution – just as Moses had done ... Since Jeremiah's purpose was to defend God before Israel and Israel before God, it was not necessary to blunt the particular statements. In perpetuating this perception of Jeremiah, the harsh statements he made in Lamentations had to remain harsh or their efficacy in defence of Israel would be blunted and Jeremiah's efforts weakened.

So Jonker (2012:187) concludes that,

The rabbis interpreted Lamentations in the aftermath of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D 70. It made theological sense in that context to read Lamentations through the lens of Jeremianic theology in order to interpret it as a message for their own time.

Boase (2008:32-44) does a wonderful work in drawing the characterisation of God in Lamentations. She observes that there are three portrayals of God in the book of Lamentations. God is portrayed as violent. Then he is portrayed as absent. Lastly he is portrayed as God of steadfast love and mercy. In order to vindicate God as righteous, five attributes are used to describe him. He is first described as *tsadik* (צַדִּיק) in chapter 1. Then in chapter 3 there are four attributes of God that are highlighted. The first one is that he is God of steadfast love (*hesed* חֶסֶד). The second is that he is God of mercy (*rahamim* רַחֲמִים). The third is that he is God of faithfulness (*emunah* אֱמוּנָה). Lastly he is said to be God who is good (*tob* טוֹב). These portrayals of God helped Israel deal decisively with their troubling situation.

### Summary of Literature Review

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<sup>42</sup> The assumption being that Jeremiah was both a prophet and a priest.



This literature review has revealed that while the book of Lamentations has aroused some interest among scholars, concentration has been exerted mostly in historical criticism. Specifically, scholarship dating from the twentieth century and the preceding years has been preoccupied with questions of origin, authorship, genre and the Mesopotamian links. It is only now in the twenty-first century that we experience a shift from form/literary criticism to interest in theological issues of the book. The theological issues that are beginning to draw attention of scholars have to do with the contending traditions in the book of Lamentations. For example, the Deuteronomistic traditions, Zionist tradition and the prophetic tradition seem to pose some challenges in the whole interpretation of the book of Lamentations. From this contention, scholars continue to debate the theology of the book of Lamentations. Some suggest it is about penitence, while others argue that it is about guilt. Of late the debate has now shifted to theodicy and antitheodicy rhetoric. Since attention has been devoted to the bigger picture of the various traditions that are contending with each other, less effort has been given to the study of the semantic significance of such key words as *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים). Zobel (1986) who does the analysis of *hesed* (חסד), without particular reference to the book of Lamentations alone, reveals that the concept of *hesed* is active, social and enduring. In the case of *rahamim* (רחמים), which means compassion, scholars have found that it is mainly used in reference to God. Both *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) are used to signify the covenant that exists between God and Israel. The book of Lamentations has not been given a significant analogous reading from an African perspective, although Lee (2002) has attempted it on Sarajevo. It is our hope that a book like Lamentations, which was instrumental in the rejuvenation of hope for ancient Israel, can be used in the reconstruction of identity and restoration of dignity in the continent of Africa, ravaged by tribal wars, racial discriminations, oppression and dictatorship.

## 1.4 Aim, Theoretical Point of Departure, Presuppositions and Hypothesis(es)

### 1.4.1 Aim

The main aim of this research is to investigate whether a reflection on the book of Lamentations can generate hope in hopeless contemporary audiences<sup>43</sup>. Since we assume that loss of hope is linked to loss of identity and dignity, we hope this research will be a voice in the reformulation of identity and dignity and consequently offer hope to victims of violence in Zimbabwe. This will be based on a proper understanding of the significance of the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God in the context of Lamentations.

### 1.4.2 Theoretical Point of Departure

Our research is going to dig into the literary, historical and theological features of the book of Lamentations in order to find out: first, whether there is hope in the book of Lamentations; second, the significance of the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God. Having identified the existence or non-existence of hope and the significance of these two important words, we then wish to draw out and apply some universal principles for a contemporary audience in their quest for identity, dignity, healing and hope. It is clear from our research questions and aims that a methodology of exclusivity, that is, in which only one methodological angle is chosen, will not be envisaged. Therefore, we have deliberately chosen a multidimensional approach, which is inclusive in nature, because it gives us an opportunity to deal with our text at hand from its historical formation to its contemporary usage. The methodology will offer an opportunity for dialogue between the diachronic and synchronic approaches. In this way, the full exploration of the text from its formation, transmission, reception, both ancient and contemporary usages will be catered for.

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<sup>43</sup> In terms of the contemporary audience, although we are well aware that there are a number of victims of natural disasters, this research will focus on Zimbabwe, specifically the victims of *Gukurahundi*. We will highlight in passing that *Gukurahundi* may not be the only catastrophic event in Zimbabwe; there were also the farm invasions and *Murambatsvina*. Our focus is drawn mainly to *Gukurahundi* because of its large-scale massacres and the effects thereafter.

### 1.4.3 Presuppositions/ Hypothesis

Reflecting on our main research question, we assume that a multidimensional analysis of the five dirges in the book of Lamentations will reveal that the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God were the main catalysts for the revival of hope in the nation of Israel.

Secondly, we assume that embedded within hopelessness are the sociological and spiritual issues of identity and dignity. When one's identity and dignity are affirmed, one has all the reasons to look for a better future. On the contrary when one's identity and dignity are constantly crushed then loss of hope cripples in. What eventually emerges is a survival mood rather than hope (Linafelt, 1997:38). Issues of civil strife, human displacement and massacres impinge heavily on human identity and dignity and subsequent loss of hope. As the nation of Israel succumbed to foreign domination, one hidden but obviously provoking question was, "Who are we as a people in these daunting circumstances?" The question becomes pertinent specifically at the backdrop of the Zionist tradition contrasted with the fall of Jerusalem.

Coming to contemporary audiences, the question of who we are in Zimbabwe is inevitable in the face of a government that unleashes an army upon a defenceless populace<sup>44</sup>, a government that does not intervene when armed bandits invade farms that people have occupied for generations, a government that sends armoury to demolish peoples' homes, which are their only hope of shelter, without any specific plan to provide alternative shelter. In all this, the victims suffer violence because of who they are<sup>45</sup>. In essence, it is their identity that has been destroyed. Consequently, the massacres and bloodshed show lack of respect for human sanctity. This heavily affects human dignity. We therefore assume that a thorough analysis of the book of Lamentations will create space for dialogue and eventually become a source of consolation, comfort and hope to the victims. On the other hand, it will serve as a condemnation to the victimiser or perpetrator of violence and open justice avenues. The analysis will help the victims find their identity and dignity from a similar scenario to that which Israel underwent. The

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<sup>44</sup> Loss of identity is more pronounced in Enos Nkala's infamous words "*Angazi ukuthi Amandebele anjani. Mina ngifuna ukuti ngigeziswe ukuba liNdebele*", which means, "I do not know what kind of people are the Ndebele. As for me I want to be cleansed from being a Ndebele". Note that Enos Nkala was the Minister of Defence during the *Gukurahundi* operation. Available online. <http://www.channelzim.net/news/12latestnews/489few> mourn *gukurahundi* architect Enos Nkala [Access Date: 2014, April 30].

<sup>45</sup> *Gukurahundi* victims were mainly the Ndebele minority group, victims of the farm invasions were mainly whites, and the victims of *Murambatsvina* were mainly opposition supporters in the urban areas.

perpetrator will seek forgiveness and reconciliation from the victims. This will then bring closure<sup>46</sup> to the sufferings perpetrated during the Mugabe led era.

We also assume that suffering and eventual loss of hope may be caused by different circumstances. The circumstances that might have led Israel into suffering may not necessarily be the same as those which led the Zimbabweans to suffer but the experience of pain is a shared reality. So there are some differences as well as some similarities between the *then* and the *now* audiences, which call for care and sensitivity in our application. An analogical hermeneutic, in which the differences between the biblical contexts are acknowledged, but simultaneously the continuities are explored, could provide a responsible way to bridge the gap between the then and the now.

#### 1.4.4 Delineation and Limitations

First, we want to make it clear that this is a research that aims to provide a responsible reading of the book of Lamentations in a context of suffering and hopelessness. Second, although the dirges in Lamentations are read holistically in the month of Ab in Jewish circles, this research will only investigate the relationship of each dirge to the third dirge, which is the centre of focus. A detailed analysis of chapter 3:19-33 will then commence, since this is the section that explicitly identifies the hope of the nation and introduces an inclusion that opens and closes with the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God. Third, although our reading is situated in Zimbabwe, this research's contribution is geared towards Biblical Studies scholarship.

#### 1.5 Methodology

The issue of methodology is critical in any research project. It is the tool that one uses to lead to solutions of the identified problem. Therefore the importance of finding an appropriate tool for the task at hand can never be over-emphasized. This process of finding a suitable methodology becomes cumbersome, especially, when dealing with such books as Lamentations. The book

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<sup>46</sup> Although some sections of the Zimbabwean society might see this as opening up old wounds which have the potential to divide the people rather than unite, it is also evident that these issues remain emotive and need to be given proper closure, as evidenced by Jonathan Moyo's quest to rebury his father (Manayiti, 2016:1) and Joyce Mujuru's desire to compensate white farmers (Mushava, 2016:1).

itself does not explicitly mention all the characters<sup>47</sup> in the book. As Berlin (2002:1) rightly puts it, “like much of biblical poetry, Lamentations tends to be nonspecific<sup>48</sup> about names, dates and places”. So the methodology that we are to choose has to be sensitive and address the non-specific historical challenges that are presented by the book.

Now when we come to biblical scholarship, exegetical methodologies have been subjects of big debate among scholars. That has seen the rise of those that argue for the authorial intent, others arguing for the text intent and still others arguing for the reader intent. Traditionally these approaches have been broadly labelled the diachronic and synchronic approaches to the text. “The historical-critical methods are normally categorized under the rubric ‘diachronical methods’, while many of the methodological reactions and criticisms against the historical-critical method are grouped together as ‘synchronical methods’” (Jonker, 2006:60). Jonker, however, argues that “methodological discussion should go beyond the traditional distinction of synchrony and diachrony” (2006:58). He asserts that, “synchrony and diachrony are rather complementary perspectives in the act of reading. One could say that synchrony and diachrony are the bifocal lenses through which we read biblical texts, through which we formulate our exegetical methods and strategies” (Jonker, 2006:63). It is plain here that Jonker is laying the ground to argue for multiplicity in the way we deal with texts.

The call for multiplicity in the way we deal with texts is supported by various scholars. Lee (2008:35) says, “textual understanding is most comprehensive when multiple approaches are engaged”. She warns, “the danger to be avoided is claiming that one method is best and all sufficient, universally trumping others” (Lee, 2008:35). The call for collaboration in methodologies is critical once one realises that texts are multi-layered, as argued by Conradie (2008:50). So we can agree with Conradie that the Bible being a “multi-levelled text also requires multi-levelled interpretation” (2008:50).

Having clarified the misconception of diachrony and synchrony, Jonker then argues for a multidimensional approach to dealing with texts. He describes a multidimensional approach as

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<sup>47</sup> Mackay (2008:8), in agreement, says, “Lamentation is written in the traditional style of Hebrew poetry naming no names and avoiding specific historical references even as it records very personal circumstances and unveils very personal and deeply felt emotions”

<sup>48</sup> Lamentations’ non-specification has led people such as Joyce (in Giffone, 2012:99) to search for an *ahistorical* methodology. The quest for such methodology, Joyce (in Giffone, 2012:99), says is aimed not to displace but to complement historical critical methodology.

an alternative attitude to doing exegesis. Alternatively, it can be called an approach. In the approach he clarifies that “the emphasis then falls on the attitude with which the interpreter regards texts and the process of interpretation on the communal human practice of gaining meaning from texts” (Jonker, 2006:65-66). It is crucial also to articulate what a multidimensional approach is not. “It is neither a new method that replaces previous ones, nor a super method that attempts to integrate all the good points of other methods” (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:235).

Jonker and Lawrie (2005:235-236) go on to clarify that, “a multidimensional approach does not render existing exegetical methods superfluous, but requires a specific perspective on the variety of methods”, which can be summarised as:

1. Methods are not seen as indispensable keys without which texts would remain meaningless. Instead they are seen as more or less useful formations of techniques we all apply in our daily practice.
2. This does not mean that we can dispense with specialised methods. Some texts, biblical texts for instance, are so complex that we need an array of methods, sometimes highly specialised ones, if we wish to do justice to them.
3. Moreover, the process of interpretation involves so many dimensions that no single theoretical construct can describe it adequately. A plurality of hermeneutical theories is fostered to remind us that we have no secure theoretical starting point.
4. Neither methods nor theories come into existence in isolation from human communicative practices. Interpretation and the reflection on it should therefore be practised with an attitude of communality and openness to dialogue.

A multidimensional approach takes into consideration the text before us, the context of origin, the reception of these texts in ancient times, the canonization process, the traditions of interpretations and the reception of these texts in contemporary contexts (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:238).

Conradie (2008:53) outlines seven guidelines that he deems adequate for interpretation. These are: reading the text itself<sup>49</sup>, reading behind the text<sup>50</sup>, reading in front of the text<sup>51</sup>, reading the contemporary context, investigating the role of interpretive strategies, investigating interpretation in its rhetorical context, and lastly investigating the world beneath the text<sup>52</sup>. This research will

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<sup>49</sup> Here one will be investigating the literary features of the text.

<sup>50</sup> Here one will be investigating the Historical background of the text.

<sup>51</sup> Here one will be investigating the role of tradition.

<sup>52</sup> Here the 'clean slate' mentality is discarded and a hermeneutic of suspicion is employed, positively identifying powers and presuppositions at play.

follow closely these guidelines as they will afford us an opportunity to investigate our text from literary, historical and theological perspectives.

Therefore our research will begin with literary analysis. The literary analysis will be employed in order to get the meaning of the individual dirges in relationship to one another. Specifically, we are more interested in the link of all the dirges to the third dirge, which we believe forms the hub of the entire book. This is done with the underlying belief that meaning is derived from an analysis of the relationship of the parts to one another and to the whole (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:70). So we need to understand all the five dirges before we can safely come to the centre of focus and see how it relates to the whole. In view of our main research question, this will enable us to understand the significance of the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God in their literary context. In other words, this will give us the functions within the context, a crucial element advocated by literary scholars (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:70).

Having established the meaning and relationship of all the dirges to the third dirge, we will then do a detailed analysis of chapter 3:21-32, which forms the central focus of the investigation.

After a detailed literary analysis of chapter 3:21-32, we will then try to reconstruct the historical context. This is done in respect of West's suggestion that pioneers of biblical scholarship always started with literary analysis before developing tools to deal with the difficulties that arose from the reading of the text (de Wit & West, 2009:220). So by having a literary analysis of the dirges and their relationship to the third dirge we hope to expose some of the bottlenecks that are associated with the historical context. These will then be dealt with under the rubric of historical analysis. The historical analysis will open up the historical background and the geopolitical world of the dirges. The historical background will help us set the laments in their original historical contexts. The result will be that the significance of the dirges, the central corpus, the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God will be analysed in their historical context.

Finally, we will then bring in the theological analysis under the rubric of rhetorical criticism. Thus, the rhetorical effects are interlocked with theological analysis. We may appreciate insights from rhetorical criticism once we understand their operational philosophy. Advocates of rhetorical criticism are persuaded by the underlying motive that when we are dealing with texts we are involved in communication. The communication model operates from the presupposition

that there is a sender who encodes a message, and that message is decoded by a receiver<sup>53</sup>. Tate (2006:323) puts it well that,

Given that the ancient emphasis of rhetoric was on persuasion, it is not surprising that rhetorical criticism focuses on the interaction between the author, the text, and the audience. Consequently, rhetorical criticism is interested in the product, the process and the effect of literary communication. It looks upon the text as an artistic object but also as a structured object of communication. So rhetorical criticism is interested not only in what the text is but in what it does as well.

Jonker and Lawrie have this to say: “a rhetorical act is effective when the audience is persuaded to change its opinions, actions or attitudes” (2005:229).

The rhetorical effect of the text and its reception to the audience are critical in light of our main research question, which demands a reflection on the book of Lamentation in order to generate hope. Our aim is to see persuasion from hopelessness to hopefulness. In other words, if Israel’s reflection on the book of Lamentations ignited hope, we then need to know how the process of reception happened so that we can translate it to a contemporary audience in a responsible manner. So an analogy will be made at this stage. The analogy will then highlight the continuities as well as the discontinuities. Having looked at the rhetorical effect of the texts we will then synthesise our discoveries. After that we will make our application followed by the conclusion and recommendations for further study.

## **1.6 Impact**

Conradie (2008:3) outlines the three contexts that are affected by the biblical texts as the Church, the Academy and the Society. This research will therefore pervade all these three contexts. First, the church will be motivated to read the laments with a different perspective. Second, scholars will appreciate the multidimensional methodology through its exposition of the historical background, literary and theological motifs. A responsible transition from the scientific exegesis to actualization is furthermore made by means of an analogous hermeneutic. The combination of a multi-dimensional exegetical method and an analogous hermeneutic will pave way for an African hermeneutic of lamentations. Third, this research will also impact the society, as it will lay the foundations for motivation to civil society and the church to champion issues of social

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<sup>53</sup> The main criticism of the shanon-weaver communication model is the assumption that the receiver is passive in the whole communication process as shown by the arrows pointing one direction. The truth is that the receiver is also as active as the sender.



justice and peace that have been suppressed over the years. We hope social perspectives, specifically the reconstruction of identity and dignity, will be enhanced to the victims of violence and injustice. We anticipate the research to be a voice of consolation to the victims of violence in Zimbabwe, while on the other hand a voice of condemnation to perpetrators of violence and afford them an opportunity to change. Thus, in so doing, space is created for dialogue, protest, justice, identity and dignity formation.

## 1.7 Research Outline

As we have already established, the first chapter is an introduction to the research. So the issues covered are: background to the research, problem statement, aim of research, presuppositions and the methodology. In the background to the research we outlined the need and essence of sustainable hope. We described the current state of the contemporary context that needs sustainable hope. We also described some key terms, *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים), which form the main resources for sustainable hope.

In chapter two we will focus on the literary analysis of the laments. Specifically, we are interested in showing how the different laments relate to each other and to the third lament, which forms the hub of the investigation. The literary styles<sup>54</sup> that bind the dirges together are going to be unveiled and their functions analysed in depth.

In chapter three we will then turn our focus to the central part of the investigation, which is Lamentations 3:21-32. We will do a detailed literary analysis of this central corpus, looking at the intra-textual relations, and show how the forms *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) are used. We will then show the significance of the forms *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) in their larger literary context.

In chapter four we will then turn to the historical analysis. In the historical analysis our main aim is to show that, although these dirges were adapted to fit to the context of the fall of Jerusalem, they emerge from a historical context and have a tradition of adaptation to fit new emerging contexts. So Giffone (2012) argues well that since Lamentations is *ahistorical* and *atemporal*; it

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<sup>54</sup> E.g. the **איכה**, the acrostics and the parallelism.

can be appropriated in different contexts beyond that of its origin. The historical analysis will not focus only on the historical context of origin but will move to the reception history of the text.

In chapter five we will then present the theological analysis. In the theological analysis we are interested in the various traditions (i.e the Deuteronomistic, the Zionist, the Wisdom and the Prophetic) that might have played an important role in shaping the book of Lamentations. Since we will have shown in chapter four that the dirges can be appropriated in different contexts we will then look at the rhetorical effects of the dirges which inform the theological understanding. Once the theological context of the dirges has been set we will then bring out the analogies with an exposition of the continuities and the discontinuities. This is the stage where we will have an overview of the significance of Lamentations within and beyond the Jewish communities. Specifically we will undertake to highlight the significance of the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God from pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic eras. We will also look at the significance of the book beyond the Jewish community, specifically the readings from the Christian community. Lee's (2000) comparative analysis of the use of Lamentations in Yugoslavia helps see how scholars are opening up the book for appropriation in different contexts. Having seen the significance within the Christian community, we will then turn our focus to the contemporary context of Zimbabwe. A detailed description of Zimbabweans' loss of hope, identity and dignity will commence. Thereafter, we will highlight the significance of the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God in Zimbabwe. We will also highlight the importance of the book in general in the contemporary context of Zimbabwe and how it is useful in the generation of hope, reconstruction of identity and dignity.

Chapter 6 will form our synthesis and conclusion. We will then give the summary of all our findings and outline the contribution of the study to biblical studies scholarship. Areas of potential further research will also be outlined.

## Chapter Two: Literary Analysis

The book of Lamentations pride itself on the many literary devices used to convey its message.

O'Connor (2002:4) expresses well that,

Lamentations is a potent work of art. To read it is to enter into a world apart, a world created by suggestion, image and metaphor. Because it is an imagined symbolic world, it can, like all good poetry, intermingle with our real worlds to reveal, mirror and challenge them. In this conversation between worlds, it can help us see our pain, and, by reflecting it back to us, however indirectly, it has the potential to affirm our human dignity in a first step toward healing.

Some of the literary devices serve to give coherence, while others are disjunctive. Still others serve both functions, as cohesive and as disjunctive. Most notable devices include the acrostics, the parallelism, the interchange of voices and the hendiadys. Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:12-19) suggests that Lamentations is written as lyric poetry. He then identifies the lyrics as metaphor, diction, wordplay, pun, euphony, alphabetic acrostic and enjambment. Berlin (2004:2-6) believes Lamentations achieves its *poeticalness* by the use of the *qinah meter*, aural features, linguistic style, grammatical tense, imagery, hendiadys, alphabetic acrostics, parataxis and cohesion and some speaking voices. All these devices ultimately aid in bringing terseness, which is a distinguishing factor in poetry. Although all these literary features are widely manifested some scholars<sup>1</sup> do not take time to show how the features unify the dirges. So our literary analysis is aimed at showing how these devices enhance unity, focus and meaning. Our discussion will begin with the acrostic which first opens the dirges.

### 2.1. Acrostics

The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2003:11) defines acrostic as, "a text, usually a poem, in which particular letters, such as the first letters of each line, spell a word or phrase".

The Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus (1994:12) understands acrostic as, "a number of lines of writing such as a poem, certain letters of which form a word, proverb". It further states that "a single acrostic is formed by the initial letters of the lines, a double acrostic by the initial and final letters, and a triple acrostic by the initial, middle and final letters". A surface glimpse of

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<sup>1</sup> Linafelt (2000:59) identifies well the ayekah appearing in Lamentation 1, 2 and 4. However, he does not suggest a reason why the ayekah is not used in Lamentations 3 and 5. He also identifies well the use of the acrostics in Lamentation 1, 2, 3 and 4 and then goes on to say the form is missing altogether in Lamentations 5, "though it seems reflected in the fact that there are twenty-two lines to the chapter" (Linafelt, 2000:59). His major weakness is again that he does not provide a good reason why the acrostic is different in Lamentations 3 and why it is missing in Lamentations 5 although it is reflected in the number of verses.

the word ‘acrostic’ reveals that it is a word formed from the Greek, *ἄκρος* (*akros*) which means pointed, first, top or at the end, and *στιχος* (*stichos*) which means a row, line or verse. Gardener-Smith (1955:52) says, it is “a term for a number of verses, the first letters of which follow some predetermined order, usually forming a word – most commonly a name – or a phrase or sentence”.

From the two above definitions of acrostic, it is apparent that there are two forms of acrostics. The first form has to do with a word, name, phrase, sentence or proverb spelt through the arrangement of the letters in a line. This kind of acrostic has not been proved to exist in ancient Hebrew literature, though there have been attempts to suggest that it is used in Psalm 2:1-4, Psalm 110:1-4 and Esther 1:20 (Smith, 1952:38). It has been suggested that the earliest examples of name and sentence acrostic are from Babylonian literature during the reigns of Ashurbanipal and Nebuchadnezzar II, respectively (Soll, 1992:58). Lambert (1960:67) singles out the Babylonian theodicy, which is dated around 1000 B.C. as a good example of Babylonian acrostics. Some of the Babylonian prayers incorporate both the acrostics and the *teletic*: “the terminal letters of each line read downward, also form a phrase” (Soll, 1992:59). Allen (1961:129), supporting the antiquity of acrostics, says, “the fancy for writing acrostics is of great antiquity, having been common among the Greeks of the Alexandrine period, as well as with the Latin writers since Ennius and Plautus”. In support of this, Gottwald (1962:28) cites the Greek *ichthys*, which means ‘Fish’, as an example of an early Christian acrostic for ‘Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Saviour’.

The second form is the alphabetic acrostic. Apart from the book of Lamentations, alphabetic acrostics are found in Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119 and 145, and Proverbs 31:10-31. Some<sup>2</sup> have seen mutilated, incomplete or broken acrostics in Nahum 1:2-8, Proverbs 24:1-12; 29:22-27. In the apocryphal literature, Sirach 51:13-30 is another example of the alphabetical acrostic. In this form, the lines or groups of lines have their initial consonants arranged according to the alphabet. The apportionment of an alphabet varies from a cola, bi-cola, tri-cola, and quad-cola to even higher levels. Some scholars prefer to see the bi-cola, tri-cola and quad-cola as lines. From this perspective, Smith (1952:38) shows that in Psalms 111-112 a line<sup>3</sup> has been allotted to

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<sup>2</sup> A good example is Brettler, 2006: 32.

<sup>3</sup> Ridderbos (1980:32) prefers to call this line a ‘cola’ since it does not have two clauses. He says “it is the cola themselves, not the lines that begin with successive letters of the alphabet”.

each alphabet letter, whereas in Psalm 34 two lines<sup>4</sup> have been apportioned to each alphabet letter, while still in Psalm 9 and 10, four lines have been allotted to each alphabet letter. In Psalm 119, sixteen lines<sup>5</sup> have been dedicated to each alphabet letter.

The earliest alphabetic acrostics seem to be those appearing in Psalms 9-10 and Nahum 1, which are roughly dated to the period of the Judean Monarchy. The rest are dated either in the exilic or post-exilic era (Soll, 1992:59).

Several theories have been proposed for the purposes of these acrostics. Some believe they are used in the OT as either pedagogic devices or mnemonic aids, whereas others believe that they were associated with magical powers<sup>6</sup>; still others affirm that they simply signified a sense of completeness. In that vein, Brettler<sup>7</sup> (2006:32) says,

Some scholars believe that they reflect a formal poetic technique, balancing a highly structured form with the creativity of poetry; others suggest that they facilitate memorization; some claim that acrostics reflect scribal training or pedagogical purposes, while others suggest that they express totality, or may even reflect ancient magical uses of the alphabet. Most likely, no single function explains all of the uses of acrostics, which developed into more diverse types in post-biblical Hebrew (including Ben Sirach and several compositions known from the Dead Sea Scrolls) and early Christian literature.

While it is admissible that these acrostics served multiple functions, the primary purpose should be derived from an understanding of the acrostics as a poetic device. In addition to the aesthetic intention, Ferris (2010:578) believes, “the other function of the alphabetic acrostic is certainly to delimit the composition. The alphabetic acrostic in the Hebrew text shows that each of our chapters in Lamentations is indeed a separate poem”. However, a careful inspection will also reveal that it is not only serving to delimit and signal closure but to show continuity as well. This is well captured by Dobbs-Allsopp (2000:14) when he says,

The acrostic is fundamentally a poetic form, and it functions in ways analogous to other poetic forms, such as providing an aesthetic constraint<sup>8</sup> on the poet’s composition and presenting a formal pattern of repetition, which may be manipulated to achieve various effects, including to build in coherence and dynamism and to signal closure.

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<sup>4</sup> This would translate to a ‘bi-cola’.

<sup>5</sup> Those scholars who see a line as composed of a bi-cola would see eight-line strophes here. An example is Soll (1992:59).

<sup>6</sup> Meek (1956:3) strongly believes that the acrostic was “originally used because of a belief in the magic power of the acrostic, but in due course of time the form became traditional, and it also functioned as an aid to memory”.

<sup>7</sup> See also Huey, Jr (1993:445).

<sup>8</sup> Ferris (2010:578) agrees that, “the alphabetic acrostic is primarily aesthetic in intent”.

The cohesive and disjunctive functions of the acrostics help us see the laments as individual units married neatly to the whole. Although unity, continuity and discontinuity are certainly signalled by the acrostics, one should be mindful of making this conclusion without the consideration of the part played by the enjambment. Whereas the acrostics create unity, continuity and discontinuity by its form, the enjambment destroys this by its content or meaning. Thus, there is tension in terms of form and meaning<sup>9</sup>. This seems to suggest that the tears of the poet spill over the territorial trajectories established by the acrostics<sup>10</sup>.

For us to appreciate the alphabetic acrostics in Lamentations, we will look at each individual lament and then observe how they correlate as a whole. In the first and second laments, O'Connor (2002:12) observes that there are 22 verses of three lines (with the exception of 1:7 and 2:19 which have four lines). The total number of lines is 67 for each of the two chapters. Each verse of three lines takes one letter of the Hebrew alphabet consecutively. The Hebrew alphabet letter is the first letter in the first line at the beginning of each verse.

In the third lament, there are 66 verses of one line each. Three lines or verses start with the same Hebrew alphabet. Grossberg (1989:84) says,

Chapter three is a more ambitious acrostic than the others. It is built on the triple employment of the alphabet. Instead of merely beginning each three-line stanza with a successive letter of the alphabet, the poet begins each of the three lines of each stanza with the appropriate letter.

That means each letter is repeated three times in three lines. This is different from the first and second laments because, in the first and second lament, the Hebrew letter is in the first position of the first line but the other two lines may take on different letters.

In the fourth lament there are 22 verses of two lines each. The total number of lines is 44. Each Hebrew alphabet letter takes two lines.

In the fifth lament, the alphabetic acrostic is not explicit as it is from the first dirge up to the fourth dirge. However, it is implied by the composition of 22 verses, in which one line forms a verse.

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<sup>9</sup> Tension is one of the major components of the book of Lamentations. So in this literary analysis there is tension in terms of the form and meaning, but as we will see later on in the theological analysis, there is also tension created by the contending traditions (i.e. the Zionist, the Deuteronomistic, the Wisdom and the Prophetic).

<sup>10</sup> This point is important, as it suggests that the poet deliberately goes beyond the traditionally established borders in the expression of agony. In other words he breaks the mutually agreed borders of expressing grief.

So in terms of lines we have a descending graph, starting with 67 lines in chapters 1-2, 66 lines in chapter 3, 44 lines in chapter 4, and 22 lines in chapter 5. Grossberg (1989:85) captures this when he says,

The make-up of each stanza also furthers the decrescendo. A triplet of bicola constitutes each stanza of chaps. 1, 2 and 3. Each stanza of chap. 4 carries a couplet of bi-cola. Chap. 5 exhibits a single bicolon in each stanza.

Though there is a clear descending graph in terms of the number of lines, we have a clear ascending and descending structure of the alphabetic acrostics. This ascending and descending structure of graph is reinforced by Grossberg (1989:85) when he says,

Crescendo and diminuendo mark this unity. The build-up of poetic forms begins in chap. 1 and 2 with the single alphabetic acrostics characterising their twenty-two stanzas. Chap. 3 is the acrostics showcase of the book, the centre of the text and the ideological focus of the work. Here a crescendo in form is reached with the threefold acrostic. A successive letter of the alphabet opens and adorns each of the three lines of each of the twenty-two stanzas. Following this tour de force, the poet modifies the alphabetic stratagem into a diminuendo of poetic power. Chap. 4 exhibits but a single alphabetic acrostic in a poem of only two stanzas. The decrescendo comes to its end in the 22 lines of chap. 5, where the mere suggestion of the alphabet is the ultimate in the gradual diminution of the acrostic device.

So in a nutshell the alphabetic acrostic affects all the five dirges and is concentrated in the third dirge more than any other.

One notable thing from the alphabetic acrostic in the first lament is that it follows the ordinary alphabet<sup>11</sup> starting with the ayin-pei which is reversed in the second, third and fourth laments. An overview of different locations of complete or unbroken acrostics seems to suggest that, apart from Lamentations 2, 3 and 4, the pei-ayin<sup>12</sup> is used only in Psalms 9-10. In all other instances in the books of Psalms and Proverbs 31, the ayin-pei is used. This may be the reason why Boda (2008:399) prefers to call this ‘the traditional order’<sup>13</sup> of the Hebrew alphabet. Though scholars have discovered that there is evidence from ancient abecedaries that reveals that both

<sup>11</sup> Boda (2008:399) says, “Lamentations 1 contains the traditional order of the Hebrew Alphabet, where the sixteenth and seventeenth letters are ordered ayin/pei. In contrast, Lamentations 2-4 contains the order pei/ayin”

<sup>12</sup> This general overview and the postulation that follows are based on the final text as we have it in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. We also take cognizance of Schafer’s (2004:118) remarks on the critical apparatus that the “alphabetical order of these verses in 4QLam is א-פ while the Masoretic has פ-א”. He goes on to say, “in 2:16-17, 3:46-51 and 4:16-17 also Masoretic has the order א-פ while the Lucianic Recension of the Old Greek and the Syriac transpose the verses and repeat the sequence פ-א”.

<sup>13</sup> Renkema (1998:48) is careful to remind us that the freedom for the interchange of the acrostics can be put down because the alphabetical order between the פ and א was not yet fixed.



arrangements of the alphabet were acceptable to Israel, Boda (2008:399) questions why a single person would use two different orders of something as basic as an alphabet? Scholars have not convincingly given an answer to this, opting for a settlement that these two forms existed side by side in the Ancient Near East. Boda (2008:399) suggests that “there is not a single genius behind the compositions, but rather that they represent poems used in a common liturgical setting over a period of time”. Thus, Boda seems to be advocating for the redaction of the book as it was continually being used. However, this is not a satisfactory solution as it still begs the question: Why, then, in the reception and redaction process did the communities not align the alphabet to one single form? It is clear that in the reception of these laments there was no effort to align the laments to one single form because the communities receiving them were content with the two forms running side by side.

Renkema (1998:48) is of the opinion that the interchange of the alphabetic acrostics was to avoid interchanging Lamentations 1 and 2 and dismisses the suggestion that there is a deeper significance. He says “by introducing a clear distinction between the first two songs, the poets were able to avoid confusion and interchange” (Renkema, 1998:48). However, this suggestion cannot withstand real pressure as it begs the question, why would they make the interchange down in the sixteenth and seventeenth letter positions? Surely if it was to avoid the confusion of the two laments, the interchange would have to be done to the beginning letters rather than the ones appearing almost halfway through.

In a general summary, it seems that the writer of Lamentations is deliberately interchanging the forms for some effect. This is one example of the variation that is created by the alphabetic acrostic. O’Connor (2002:12) suggests that such variations reflect the processes of the survivors facing their deadening reality. From this it is evident that the writer is using every communication device at his disposal to create variation and tension that effectively communicate the appalling nature of the disaster. Secondly, we understand from the background that different communities were scattered in Judah and Babylon. So the two varying forms could have been used in different locations of the survivors. In that case the writer is inviting all the different communities to join the national lament by the employment and incorporation of all the different forms of the alphabet letters. Apart from serving as an invitation to all communities, the use of the two forms could be a way of showing completeness like we have seen with the use of



the twenty-two alphabet letters. So the writer might be using all the forms to show the completeness of the devastation and extending an invitation to all the groups to lament<sup>14</sup>.

Thus, the writer is succinctly employing the variation of forms to create tension, emotional intensity and invitation to all survivors to come to terms with the abhorrent destruction that calls for national mourning.

Moving from the interchange of the forms, the alphabetic acrostic functions broadly in the book of Lamentations bringing together disparate lines, impressing them on the memory, showing the artist's ability to make many parts one artistic whole, balancing on the line between unity and diversity, blending the many and varied expressions of grief into one unified elegy (Grossberg, 1989:84-85). Overall the acrostic creates a chiasmic structure which looks like this:

A. Lamentation 1 (+) Acrostic

(-) פ-ע

B. Lamentation 2 (+) Acrostic

(+) פ-ע

C. Lamentation 3 (+) 3X Acrostic

(+) 3X פ-ע

B. Lamentation 4 (+) Acrostics

(+) פ-ע

A. Lamentation 5 (+) Implied Acrostic

(-) פ-ע

The analysis of the acrostic above is vital, as it dictates for us the centre of focus, which is Lamentations 3. This centre of focus will become the subject of our discussion in the next chapter.

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<sup>14</sup> This way there are the rhetorics of completeness, diversity and inclusivity.

## 2.2. How/Alas איכה

The second poetic feature is the **איכה** formulae. It is a word that forms the title of the book in Hebrew. This is in line with the rabbinic tradition of assigning the first words of the book as the title of that book<sup>15</sup>. **איכה** is found at the beginning of the first, second and fourth laments. In the fourth lament it is used twice (in the first verse and in the second verse). It is intentionally omitted (i.e possibly as a disjunctive tool) in the third and fifth laments. In the third lament **איכה** is replaced by the word **אני**, which introduces the man (**הגבר**). Huey (1993:441) explains that **איכה** is a “stereotyped opening word for a dirge in ancient times”. O’Connor (2002:10) in affirmation says, “Lamentations opens with a dirge”. “This cry of grief reflects the central concern of the book” (Grossberg, 1989:84). In terms of meaning, Koehler and Baumgartner (1998:37) offer ‘how, what, and in what manner’ as the general meanings of the word **איכה**. They cite Deuteronomy 12:30; 18:21; Judges 20:3; and 2 Kings 6:15 as the special cases where the word can be translated ‘how, what, and in what manner’. It is also translated as ‘where’ in Song of Songs 1:7 and 2 Kings 6:13. Besides it being an interrogative particle, ‘where’ is used as a rhetorical question. This is what is found in passages such as Deuteronomy 1:12; 7:17; 32:30 and Psalm 73:11. Apart from the book of Lamentations, **איכה** is used as an opening word for a dirge in Isaiah 1:21 and Jeremiah 48:17. Lee (2002:81) unveils that,

The particles **איכה** (and **אך**) appear more often in the book of Jeremiah than in any other prophetic book (18x), and are used most often by the voice of YHWH in judgment and communal dirges. However, in Lam 1:1 the poet uses **איכה** at the outset, not primarily to warn or condemn Jerusalem, or to proclaim her death, but to express sympathy by describing her distress in the aftermath.

In the case of Lamentations, O’Connor (2002:19) is of the opinion that,

With the alarming cry of a funeral dirge, the narrator demands our attention in the poem’s opening verse. ‘How lonely sits the city once great with people!’ The ‘how’ is a bitter declaration that death has occurred it also implies interrogation – ‘How could this happen to beloved Zion?’ How is it possible even to speak of this destruction?

In line with O’Connor, Thi Pham (1999:58) says,

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<sup>15</sup> Genesis is named **בראשית**, Exodus **שמות** ואלה, Leviticus **ויקרא**, Deuteronomy **אלה הדברים**, which are the first words of those books.

The word **אִיכָה** here, as in Lamentation 2:1 and 4:1, is an exclamation of grief at the striking change from the glorious past to the present state of humiliation. It may also have an interrogative nuance, that is, it can express human incomprehension in the face of the impossible: ‘How could it happen?’ ‘Why did it happen?’

So from the above, the **אִיכָה** is serving multiple functions, as an interrogation, as a declaration and expression of sympathy.

However, in terms of its general literary function in the book of Lamentations, it can be observed that, like the poetic device of acrostics, it functions to bind and to separate the laments. It is binding together the first, second and fourth laments as the laments that exhibit the intensity of the mourning. The essence is to highlight the common denominator of these laments which is desperation and agony. In the third and fifth laments, from which it is missing, the author intentionally omits it as a disruptive way of drawing attention to those laments as rays of hope. As will be seen later on in the in-depth analysis of Lamentations 3, there is a ray of hope shared between the third and the last laments. So in essence, the writer is saying that, although Lamentations 3 and 5 belong to the entire book of Lamentations, it is different in scope, focus and emphasis to Lamentations 1, 2 and 4. In Lamentations 1, 2 and 4, the author paints a horrific picture, but in 3 and 5 he says even in these circumstances there is still hope.

In summary, it can be noted that the **אִיכָה** is serving multiple functions like the acrostics. Chief among the many other functions is to introduce the dirges. It also serves as a cohesive and disjunctive literary device. In that sense, it brings the first, second and fourth laments together and sets apart the third and fifth laments.

Our discussion would also benefit immensely by engaging the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which is called the Septuagint. **אִיכָה** is translated in the Septuagint as *θρήνον*<sup>16</sup> which comes from *θρήνος*. So the title in the Septuagint is *θρήνοι*, which is the plural of *θρήνος*. This noun is derived from the verb *θρήνέω*, which means to express grief vocally or lament over some sad events, especially death (Muraoka, 2009:332). This translation is motivated by the first verse that appears in the Septuagint but is not found in the Hebrew: *καὶ ἐγένετο μετὰ τὸ αἰχμαλωτισθῆναι τὸν Ἰσραηλ καὶ Ἱερουσαλημ ἐρημωθῆναι ἐκάθισεν Ἱερεμίας*

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<sup>16</sup> *θρήνον* is an accusative, masculine, singular noun.

κλαίων καὶ ἐθρήνησεν τὸν θρήνον τοῦτον ἐπὶ Ἱερουσαλημ καὶ εἶπεν. This statement finds some linkage to 2 Chronicles 35:25 which in the Septuagint reads, καὶ ἐθρήνησεν Ἱερεμίας ἐπὶ Ἰωσιαν καὶ εἶπαν πάντες οἱ ἄρχοντες καὶ αἱ ἄρχουσαι θρήνον ἐπὶ Ἰωσιαν ἕως τῆς σήμερον καὶ ἔδωκαν αὐτὸν εἰς πρόσταγμα ἐπὶ Ἰσραηλ καὶ ἰδοὺ γέγραπται ἐπὶ τῶν θρήνων. This then obviously influenced the title in the Septuagint, and subsequently in the Latin Vulgate, which has *Liber Threnorum*, which means ‘the book of Lamentations’. The English word *threnody* means Lamentation or dirge (Price, 1990:695). In the Babylonian Talmud the book appears under the title קִינּוֹת (*Qinot*), which is a derivative of the Hebrew word קִינָה (*qinah*), which means to lament.<sup>17</sup> The word קִינָה came to be associated with the limping refrain that characterized most of the laments<sup>18</sup>. Scholars then coded it the קִינָה (*qinah*) meter.

From the analysis above, we draw three important words associated with the book of Lamentations. First, it was understood to be composed of dirges or elegies. This comes clearly with the word אִיכָה. Second, it was understood to be composed of laments. This comes in the form of the association done with the Greek words θρήνος, θρήνοι, θρήνον thereby forming the Greek title. This association might be influenced by the Rabbis’s linkage of the book to Jeremiah<sup>19</sup>. Third, it was understood to be composed of a *qinah* meter. This was obviously emanating from the Babylonian Talmud that employs the title<sup>20</sup> קִינּוֹת, which is a derivative of קִינָה.

The observation above underlines three important things that pertains to the book of Lamentations: First, if we are dealing with dirges or funeral songs<sup>21</sup> in the book of Lamentations, it then follows that the book needs to be stationed and understood in the wider context of the Ancient Near East dirges.

Second, if we are dealing with laments, it is imperative that we consult some of the studies done on the biblical laments in Israel and the city-laments of the Ancient Near East. It is enlightening

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<sup>17</sup> Holladay, 1988:318.

<sup>18</sup> Gerstenberger, 2001:471.

<sup>19</sup> Much discussion of this will follow in the ‘Historical Analysis’ in Chapter four.

<sup>20</sup> It should however be mentioned that scholars like Renkema objects to ‘Lamentations’ as a translation of the Hebrew word קִינּוֹת because he feels that it does not adequately describe the contents of the book (Salters, 2010:3).

<sup>21</sup> Boda (2008:400) singles out Gunkel, Jahnow and Lee as the scholars who would see the dirge as the key form of Lamentation.

to note again that even within the Biblical laments there are two sub-categories. One needs to differentiate between the individual lament and the communal lament. Boda (2008:4001) suggests that, “of the five poems, only Lamentations 1; 2; 4 are usually seen as reflecting strongly the genre of the city dirge, with Lamentations 3 dominated by individual lament with some communal lament, and Lamentations 5 comprising a communal lament”.

Third, we need to understand the issue of the *qinah* meter, which is also an essential component in the formation of these particular dirges. However, the *qinah* meter would be understood better in relation to parallelism. The background to the study of the *qinah* meter and parallelism calls for an integrated study of both, as Lemon and Strawn (2008:503) argue that,

The modern study of parallelism began in the eighteenth century with the lectures of R. Lowth (1710-1787). Prior to Lowth, scholars considered meter to be the hallmark of Hebrew verse, as in ancient Greek and Latin Poetry, both of which clearly influenced their perspective. But in his lectures on the sacred Poetry of the Hebrews, Lowth argued to the contrary, asserting that the laws governing Hebrew meter were largely unrecoverable, and turned his focus to the relationship of poetic lines.

That means that we will first define parallelism and its facets and then relate it with the *qinah* meter, since both have to do with comparison of equivalent clauses, whether in terms of measurement or pairing.

So in passing, we can assume that the book of Lamentations is composed of some elements from the dirge, from an individual and communal lament<sup>22</sup>. This is captured well by Salters (2010:12) when he says,

The four chapters of Lamentations fall into the category of mixed poems, since they exhibit or draw on elements from at least two recognizable types: the individual lament and the communal lament, but there is a considerable element of what we may call the קינה, the funeral song.

As a dirge, apart from the איכה<sup>23</sup> and its synonyms, it has such elements as the “statement of death, the name of the deceased, the contrast between ‘then’ and ‘now’ and the call to weep” (Salters, 2010:12). Whereas in the “lament proper, although it may have death as its occasion, it

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<sup>22</sup> Huey (1993:444) states that scholars differ as to the classification of the literary types found in Lamentations. Among the classifications suggested are individual lament, communal lament, funeral dirge, wisdom instruction and song of thanksgiving. In spite of all these suggestions there is consensus among scholars that the book is composed of a mixture. Berlin (2004:25) prefers to call it ‘the Jerusalem lament’ alongside Psalm 44; 69; 74; 79; 102 and 137. These stand in opposition to Zion songs which are Psalms 46; 48; 50; 76; 84; 87; 122 and 137:3.

<sup>23</sup> Salter (2010:12) believes איכה, איך, אהה and אה are all expressions or cries of shocked despair.

concentrates on life and is often in the form of a prayer to God, confessing sins, expressing trust and pleading for help” (Salters, 2010:12). Longman (2008:331) identifies Psalms 44, 60, 74, 80 and 137 as examples of lament psalms expressing despair after defeat in battle. The *ahistorical* or, as Longman (2008:331) puts it, ‘lack of historical precision’ is an important factor to link these Psalms to the book of Lamentations.

However, Ferris (2009:376-377) should be heeded when he says,

The five poems of Lamentations include features found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, such as funeral dirges, communal laments, and other expressions of grief. At the same time, the form and structure of these five poems are in some ways distinct from the communal laments found in the psalter.

Berlin (2004:25) then proposes that although “Lamentations may be related to the *qinah* and to the communal lament, it transcends both those genres and constitutes a new, post-586 B.C. type of lament which I call the Jerusalem lament”. Although we will not go into detail at this juncture, suffice it to say proper biblical lament poems (whether individual or communal) have three basic components. They normally start with an invocation of God’s name that signals that it is a prayer. Then there is normally a description of the distress and a petition. Lastly there are normally some expressions of trust that spell out confidence that God has heard the prayer. In certain cases the expression of trust is followed by a vow to praise God for deliverance. So it is commendable that Lee (2002:34) upholds that

Lament Psalms include the following variable elements: address of the deity, three-fold complaint (to/against the deity, against one’s enemies, and about one’s suffering), confession of trust in the deity, petition to the deity, assurance of being heard, vow of praise, and praise of the deity. Only the petition and the complaint to/against the deity are always present in a lament, while the other elements may vary.

Most of these components are found in the book of Lamentations, although there is debate over the expressions of trust<sup>24</sup> in the sense of hope. Even though the expression of trust is a debated phenomenon in Lamentations, it is clear that the last lament takes the form of a communal prayer. This is affirmed by Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:12) when he says,

The emotional peak reached in Lamentations 3 and the strong sense of closure effected by Lamentations 5 result chiefly from these poems’ employment of forms and motifs drawn from the tradition of individual and communal laments. And the predominantly sad and sorrowful tone that pervades this sequence of poems owes much to the strong accent that the funeral dirge receives in the first poem.

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<sup>24</sup> Linafelt (2000) specifically thinks there is nothing of ‘hope’ in the book. The book is all about survival.

Lee (2002:34-35) concludes well this study of Lamentations as a dirge or as a biblical lament when she suggests that,

the poets intentionally use both genres in Lamentations. They are held in tension, yet work together for certain purposes, and both reflect serious modifications from their occurrence elsewhere in biblical texts due to this context of extreme crisis.

Now looking at Lamentations in relation to other Near Eastern laments, Ferris (2009:375-376) highlights that there are two basic categories of the neo-Sumerian laments from 2000-1530 BC. These are the city lament and the dirge for the deified king Dumuzi (Tammuz).

The Sumerian city laments are composed of the lamentation over the destruction of Ur, the lamentation over the destruction of Sumer and Ur and the lamentation over the destruction of Nippur (Ferris, 2009:375-376). Recently, Ferris (2010:579) added the lamentation over the destruction of Eridu, the lamentation over the destruction of Uruk, lamentations over Nippur and Babylon, and the lamentation over *E-ki mar* to the list of Near Eastern laments that can be compared to Lamentations. He also says, “to some extent the Sumerian of Agade provides significant comparison as well”.

Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:7) explains that these

depict the destruction of particular cities and their most important shrines. The destruction, brought about as a result of the capricious decision of the divine assembly and the subsequent abandonment of the city by its chief gods, is typically carried out by the chief god Enlil through the agency of an attacking enemy, whose onslaught is sometimes represented mythopoetically as a horrendous storm. The chief goddess is usually the other major actor in these poems. She is portrayed as challenging the assembly’s decision and then bewailing the destruction of the city. It is generally assumed that these compositions were performed as part of the cultic ceremonies in which the foundations of the old sanctuaries were razed, just prior to the initiation of any restoration work. The laments were offered, at least in part, to the patron deities in order to appease their anger over the destruction of their temples and in order to ward off future catastrophes. Consequently, the classic city laments typically close by celebrating the return of the gods and depicting the restoration of the city and the temples.

Ferris (2009:276) when comparing them says,

these share the following characteristics: a literary treatment of the destruction of a significant city, the use of *emesal* (the dialect that seems to have been used virtually exclusively by the gala priests), the treatment of the destruction and restoration of a sanctuary, the treatment of decisions by deity(ies) that resulted in abandonment, and the treatment of efforts of the royal court to rebuild.

There is also another literature which is called the *balag*. The term originally meant a musical instrument, but later came to denote a song, probably a dirge, accompanied by the *balag* or instrument, as well as the one who plays the instrument. A distinction is drawn between the classic city lament, which had a single purpose, and the *balags*, which were put on ritual calendars, serving multiple purposes by implication (Ferris, 2009:276).

There was yet another subgenre of the lament, which was known as the *ersemma*. The meaning of this terminology is ‘wail of the *sem*- drum’. It is suggested that the name might be drawn from the practice of reciting with the accompaniment of semi-drum (Ferris, 2009:376).

Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:8) relays it that,

The *balags* and the *ersemmas* share many of the generic features of the classic laments, but present them in a mechanical, repetitive, and often unimaginative way. While these latter compositions were performed in sanctuary-razing ceremonies as well, they apparently were also used in numerous other circumstances, including as a part of the fixed monthly liturgy.

Ferris (2009:376) goes on to say, “the book of Lamentations displays some of the literary features that can be compared to the literature of its Mesopotamian counterparts. However, it does not follow the structure seen in the Mesopotamian laments”.

Thus, Ferris (2010:579-580) draws nine points of comparison and six points of contrast between Mesopotamian laments and the book of Lamentations. Points of comparison are: a focus on the power of the deity who caused the destruction; the deity seen as the cause of the destruction; the protector deity viewed as abandoning the city; God pictured as a mighty warrior; the wrath of God depicted; the divine word as bringing about the destruction; the deity called upon to view the destruction; a stylistic interchange of speakers (first-, second-, and third-person usage); and cries of woe throughout.

Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:9) summarizes the nine features held in common as:

1. Subject and mood
2. Structure and poetic technique
3. Divine abandonment
4. Assignment of responsibility
5. Divine agent of destruction
6. Destruction
7. Weeping goddess
8. Lamentation
9. Restoration of the city and return of the gods



Ferris (2010:579-580) then draws the points of contrast as:

1. The righteousness of Yahweh is seen as creating the necessity for the destruction, whereas in Mesopotamia the gods are simply carrying out what fates have decreed.
2. In Lamentations, the destruction is the sign of abandonment by the destroying deity, Yahweh, whereas in Mesopotamia, the city's patron deity leaves, while Enlil carries out the destruction.
3. Whereas in the Mesopotamian laments the goddess or consort views the destruction, in Lamentations, Jerusalem is personified and views the destruction.
4. The material in the book of Lamentations lacks these key elements present in Mesopotamian texts: a) arousal of the deity from sleep; b) pacification of the deity's liver; c) call for the deity to return to his city; d) plea for intercession to lesser gods; e) extensive lists (so characteristic of Mesopotamian laments) f) cultic use.
5. The book of Lamentations pays more attention to the human plight.
6. The book of Lamentations serves as a major piece of theology intrinsically connected to the covenant.

These differences are affirmed by Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:9) when he says,

Lamentations is no simple Mesopotamian city lament. Rather, it represents a thorough translation and adaptation of the genre in a Judean environment and is ultimately put to a significantly different use. Indeed, there is very little of the Mesopotamian genre that has been taken up (however mediated) wholly into Lamentations. Lamentations employs structural and rhetorical devices well known to Hebrew poetry. In Lamentations the people are held responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem because of their sin, whereas in the Mesopotamian laments the destruction is attributed to the capricious decision of the divine assembly. Yahweh, the God of Judah, imagined principally in the guise of the divine warrior, is cast as the divine agent of destruction instead of Enlil, who performs this role prototypically in Mesopotamia. In place of a weeping city goddess, whose presence would be anathema in a Yahwistic work like Lamentations, the city of Jerusalem is personified as a woman suffering and mourning the fate of her city and its inhabitants. Finally, Lamentations functions differently than the Mesopotamian city laments, swerving tragically away from the latter's more comic trajectory. For example, the motifs of the return of the gods and the restoration of the temples and city, integral to the Mesopotamian city laments, are completely absent in Lamentations.

Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:9) alludes to these differences to primary and secondary productivity. The Mesopotamian city laments exhibit primary productivity, whereas in Judah the city laments never enjoyed primary productivity. We will revisit the genre and origin of Lamentations when we come to the historical analysis. For now, suffice to say that the book of Lamentations exhibits some literary features from biblical laments, the dirge and the Ancient Near Eastern city laments as depicted by our analysis above.

### 2.3. Parallelism

So, having looked at the acrostic, the **איכה** and its relation to the genre, it is time we move then to the third poetic feature, which is parallelism. This analysis of parallelism will naturally lead us to the *qinah* meter, since we have already highlighted that their relatedness plays a pivotal role in the book of Lamentations.

Lowth is credited with being the god-father behind parallelism<sup>25</sup>. His definition therefore forms the basis of our discussion. Lowth (1868:6) says,

The correspondence of one verse, or line, with another I call parallelism. When a proposition is delivered and a second is subjoined to it, in sense; or similar to it in the form of grammatical construction; these I call Parallel Lines; and the words of phrases answering one to another in the corresponding lines parallel terms.

Kugel (1981) and Alter (1985) then took parallelism from Lowth's mere understanding of it as correspondence, synonymity or redundancy to a much higher level of difference<sup>26</sup>. Kugel (1981:1) defined parallelism as,

the recurrent use of a relatively short sentence-form that consists of two brief clauses. The clauses are regularly separated by a slight pause-slight because the second is a continuation of the first and not a wholly new beginning. By contrast, the second ends in a full pause. The structure might thus be schematized as

\_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ //

With the single slash representing the pause between the clauses (short) and the pair of slashes representing the final pause (long).

Kugel (1981:1) then goes on to say,

Often, the clauses have some element in common, so that the second half seems to echo, answer, or otherwise correspond to the first. The common element is sometimes a word or phrase that occurs in both halves, or the same syntactic structure or commonly paired concepts.

Kugel (1981:13) then coined the phrase 'A what's more B'<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> He is the one who 'coined the phrase *parallelismus membrorum* (the parallelism of the clauses) and established the general lines of modern critical approach to parallelism in the Bible' (Kugel, 1981:12).

<sup>26</sup> Kugel (1981:12-13) is critical of Lowth's synonymous parallelism as it leads to view that "B is essentially a restatement of A". The antithetical terminology would also lead to the fallacy that "A and B would become independent (opposites) versions of the same idea rather than a single statement". He further says "in none of Lowth's examples of antithetical parallelism did B differ from A by being a negative complement". In such examples as Deut 32:6; Psalm 119:60 he affirms "the negation does not create contrast but agreement. Here is nothing antithetical whatever" (Kugel, 1981:14).

<sup>27</sup> The A and B relation is taken from Kugel's (1981:1) background that the basic feature of poetry is the recurrent use of a relatively short sentence-form that consists of two brief clauses which are separated by a slight pause. The

Alter (1985:9) who focuses on semantic parallelism says,

There would seem to be some satisfying feeling of emphasis, for both the speaker and his audience, in stating the same thing twice, with nicely modulated variations. Like rhyme, regular meter, and alliteration in other poetic systems, it is a convention of linguistic ‘coupling’ that contributes to the special unity and to the memorability (literal and figurative) of the utterances, to the sense that they are an emphatic, balanced, and elevated kind of discourse.

He goes on to say,

What I should like to propose, and this is the one respect in which my own understanding of the phenomenon is close to James Kugel’s, is that a diametrically opposite description of the system – namely, an argument for dynamic movement from one verset to the next – would be much closer to the truth.

Thus, parallel lines could be viewed as adding new information, containing intensification or progression rather than just going over old material in new words (Berlin, 1992:155). Kugel and Alter are coming from a literary criticism background. Berlin (1992:156) says they “offer only the vaguest definitions of parallelism and do not provide the criteria for deeper analysis of its workings”.

Berlin (1985:3) gives credit to Jakobson (1960), who modified the correspondence of Lowth to equivalence. She highlights that the two may have been operating from different angles, since Lowth was coming from the side of biblical studies and Jakobson was from a linguistics background. According to Jakobson (1960:358), “the poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection onto the axis of combination. Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of sequence”. Berlin (1985:3) then outlines the advantages of *equivalence* as enabling one to see parallelism from a global view.

Jakobson’s view is preferable because it enables us to unify phenomena whose relationships have not been perceived. For instance, the device known as inclusion, in which the first and last lines of a text contain the same words or phrases, is actually a form of parallelism and should be recognised as such. (However, in actual practice, most of our examples of parallelism will come from adjacent lines, for that is where it is most manifest.) Furthermore, Jakobson’s approach allows us to see more readily that the parallelism touted as indicators of poetry are no different from the linguistic equivalence in prose texts. Certain linguistic

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slight pause introduces a continuation of the first and not a wholly new beginning. Kugel then gives the idea in a diagrammatic form as: \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_//.

usages, including systematic exploitation of equivalences, are a mark of biblical style as a whole. They are not limited to one genre, although they may be more prominent in the one usually called poetry.

Berlin (2009:379) then tries encompassing the correspondence of Lowth, and the equivalence of Jakobson, when she defines parallelism as:

The repetition of similar or related thought and/or grammatical structure in adjacent lines or verses. The repetition is rarely identical and, indeed, the seemingly infinite ways that one line may be paralleled with another is what makes parallelism so interesting.

From his definition of parallelism, Lowth had come up with three types of parallelism. First he identified synonymous parallelism and defines it as “expressing the same sense in different but equivalent terms; when a proposition is delivered, and is immediately repeated, in the whole or in part, the expression being varied, but the sense entirely or nearly the same” (Lowth, 1868:7).

The second one was the antithetic parallelism, which Lowth (1868:11) defines as,

Two lines correspond with one another by an opposition of terms and sentiments; when the second is contrasted with the first, sometimes in expressions, sometimes in sense only. Accordingly the degrees of antithesis are various; from an exact contraposition of word through the whole sentence, down to a general disparity, with something of a contrariety, in the two propositions.

The third one was the synthetic, formal<sup>28</sup> or constructive parallelism. In this, Lowth (1868:13) describes it as,

The parallelism consists only in similar form of construction; in which word does not answer to word, and sentence to sentence, as equivalent or opposite; but there is correspondence and equality between different propositions, in respect of the shape and turn of the whole sentence, and of the constructive parts- such as noun answering to noun, verb to verb, member to member, negative to negative, interrogative to interrogative.

He also says, “the sentences answer to each other not by the iteration of the same image or sentiment, or the opposition of their contraries but merely by the form of construction” (Lowth, 1839:211).

Lowth (1839:213) admits that the synthetic category is very loose when he says,

the variety in the form of this synthetic parallelism is very great, and the degrees of resemblance almost infinite: so that sometimes the scheme of parallelism is very subtle and obscure, and must be developed by

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<sup>28</sup> Ridderbos and Wolf (1986:893) prefer to take synthetic and formal parallelism separately since in formal parallelism the “two lines are really one run-on line (enjambment)”.

art and ability in distinguishing the different members of the sentences, and in distributing the points rather than by depending upon the obvious construction.

So, in short, anything that could not fit into synonymous or antithetic was then brought down to synthetic. The failure to properly delineate with precision the synthetic parallelism led to an outbreak of other categories.

Gray (1972:74) later added complete versus incomplete parallelism. The incomplete parallelism was subdivided again to form incomplete with compensation and incomplete without compensation. A further category is internal versus external parallelism. Ridderbos and Wolf (1986:893-894) give Psalm 27:1, Proverbs 23:15 and Lamentations 1:1 as examples of external parallelism in a chiasmic arrangement. Mainly all these additional types were driven by word order variation and ellipsis.

Berlin (1992:156-157) takes special effort to describe four additional types. These are chiasmic, staircase, emblematic and Janus parallelism. In the chiasmic, the order of the terms in the first line are reversed in the second line, yielding an AB//BA pattern.

In the staircase parallelism there is “a *steplike* pattern in which some elements from the first line are repeated verbatim in the second line and others are added to complete the thought” (Berlin, 1992:156). This parallelism is sometimes called climactic, repetitive or step.

In the emblematic parallelism, there is use of a simile or metaphor (Berlin, 1992:157).

In the Janus type, the “parallelism hinges on the use of a single word with two different meanings, one of which forms a parallel with what precedes and the other with what follows. Thus, by virtue of a double *entendre*, the parallelism faces both sides” (Berlin, 1992:157).

Taking from Jakobson, Berlin (1992:158) developed the linguistic model<sup>29</sup> of parallelism. She describes it as,

A linguistic phenomenon involving linguistic equivalences and or contrast that may occur on the level of the word, the line or larger areas of the text. Equivalence does not mean only identity, but a word or construction that, linguistically speaking, belongs to the same category or paradigm or to the same sequence or syntagm.

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<sup>29</sup> A number of scholars are now analyzing biblical poetry from a linguistic point of view. Structural and transformational grammar has given a lot of impetus to this. Among the most notable scholars are O'Connor, Greenstein, Pardee and Watson (Berlin, 1992:157).

In a later edition, Berlin (2004:2098-2099) tries to put some clarity to this definition when she says,

Parallelism is the pairing of a line (or part of a line) with one or more lines that are in some way linguistically equivalent. The equivalence is often grammatical ... both parts of the parallelism may have the same syntactic structure ... the meaning of the lines is somehow related ... But equivalence does not imply identity. The second line of parallelism rarely repeats exactly the same words or exactly the same thought as the first; it is more likely to echo, expand, or intensify the idea of the first line in any one of a number of ways.

On the basis of this definition, Berlin (1992:58) says parallelism can be activated on four categories: the phonological, the grammatical, the lexical and the semantic aspects.

In the phonological aspect there is activation of sound equivalences. Concentration is put on the same words or linguistically related consonants.

In the grammatical, concentration is put on equivalent syntax. That means that more often the deep and sometimes the surface structures are the same.

In the lexical, “the major aspect is the use of word pairs” (Lucas, 2003:71). These word pairs are the result of the wider phenomenon of word association which occurs in all cultures being activated by the poetic use of parallelism. An example is Psalm 115:16 where we find this association of *heaven* and *earth* (Lucas, 2003:71).

Lastly in the semantic aspect, concentration is put on the meaning of the parallel lines. Berlin (1992:159) highlights that this is the area that would involve the synonymous and synthetic forms which Lowth had first proposed. Working along the boundaries of “navigating between the Scylla of Lowth’s overly simplistic tripartite schema, on the one hand, and the Charybdis of falling prey to an ever-expanding taxonomy of subtypes that delivers diminishing returns at the end”, Lemon and Strawn (2008:511-512) draw up nine types of parallelism that capture the phonological, grammatical, lexical, syntactical and the semantic. These are the parallelism of morphological element, parallelism of number, staircase parallelism, ballast variant parallelism, positive-negative parallelism, gender-matched parallelism, nominal-pronominal parallelism, half-line or internal parallelism and macro- and micro-parallelism. Caution should be taken when people overdo it, especially on the macro-level to the extent of having theological parallelism.

Below we will highlight the definitions of these types of parallelism as given by Lemon and Strawn<sup>30</sup>.

In the parallelism of morphological elements, there will be “the repetition of the same (or semantically related verbal root but in different aspects”.

In the parallelism of number, there will be “consecutive lines that contain cardinal or ordinal numbers, with the number usually increasing from the first line to the second, often in an  $x/x+1$  pattern”.

In the staircase parallelism, “a thought is interrupted by an epithet or other element, only to have the thought resumed from the beginning and completed in the next line”.

In the ballast variant parallelism,<sup>31</sup>

The second line exhibits ellipsis ... It is when one element from the first line is left out in the next (reverse ellipsis is when an element from the second is left out of the first). In the ballast variant parallelism the second line is expanded, despite the ellipsis, so that the lines roughly correspond in length.

Positive-negative parallelism “occurs when the same or similar idea(s) is expressed first positively and then negatively”.

Gender-matched parallelism is when “a masculine noun in the first line is balanced in the second by a feminine noun”.

The nominal-pronominal parallelism occurs when “one line contains a proper noun and the second line replaces the noun with a pronoun”.

In a half-line or internal parallelism, the parallelism does not occur in a bi-cola or tri-cola but happens within a single line. It functions to “strengthen a structure otherwise lacking in cohesiveness”.

Lastly, macro- and micro-parallelism happen with large bodies of poetry not only bi-cola or tri-cola. This includes inclusions, chiasms and refrains.

Now coming to Lamentations, Reyburn (1992:5-8) identifies about 10 verses that are parallel. He begins with the easier ones that are single lines, to the most complex, that are triple lines. However, he does not elaborate to which category of parallelism they belong.

The first example that he gives comes from 3:15, which he says, is

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<sup>30</sup> 2008:511-512.

<sup>31</sup> This is what Gray had earlier on said its incomplete parallelism.

not only parallel in their word order, but each clause also says approximately the same thing. The second half-line matches the first in both form and meaning. The major difference is that the verb in the second half is more narrowly defined in meaning, with the sense make someone drink or ‘force someone to swallow’ ... the net effect in this example is that the second half line reproduces the meaning of the first half line in more dramatic, picturable terms and thus sharpens the impact.

The second example is taken from 5:11. Here Reyburn (1992:5) states that,

There is parallelism of structure in that in Hebrew **Women ... In Zion** is matched by **virgins in the towns of Judah**. The one verb **ravished** (equivalent to ‘raped’ in current English) serves for both halves and thus binds the two halves. **Virgins**, which is a specific class of ‘women’ matches **Women** and has the effect of sharpening the picture in the second part. However, **towns of Judah** is more general than **Zion**. In this way the poet has combined in the second line elements making the meaning both more particular and more general.

As he goes further it can be noticed that Reyburn’s examples are mainly operating from a two lines level. The only two examples of parallelism above two lines are drawn from 1:20 and 2:5, which he admits are more complex. In the example of 1:20 he highlights that

In the first unit the more general **distress** is matched by the Hebrew metaphor ‘my intestines ferment (**my soul is in tumult**). This clearly has the effect of shifting the whole unit to a higher emotional pitch. This is followed in the first half-line of the second unit with another less dramatic metaphor of emotion (literally ‘my heart is turned within me’). The second half-line does not match the first with a more forceful figure but simply gives the reason for it all. By the time we reach the third unit, the focus is no longer on the poet’s personal experience (I-me) but rather on the death. However, instead of placing the metaphor in the second half-line the poet places it in the first. The sword which is only the instrument in the hand of the killer becomes the focus of slaying, not of the poet but of the people generally. **In the streets** or ‘outdoors’ is matched in the final half-line by **in the house**, and these matching pairs together give the sense of ‘everywhere’.

From Reyburn’s analysis above, although he sometimes speaks of ‘matching’, it may be observed that he is dealing with meaning more than the syntax. Thus, he has moved from the syntactic analysis to the semantic analysis.

In 2:5 Reyburn (1992:7-8) goes on to say,

In the first unit the second half-line is metaphorical, with **destroyed Israel** (Hebrew ‘swallowed’) spelling out concretely what it means to **become like an enemy**. But more than this, the poet uses the next unit to say what it means in particular to destroy Israel. And so **palaces** are swallowed, and **strongholds**, or forts, are ruined. The two half-lines of the second unit are fully parallel in meaning, but their function is to carry further the thought of the first unit, **he has destroyed Israel**. The third unit serves the same purpose as the



second; however, here there is no parallelism between the two half-lines, and **mourning** and **lamentation** are again more general descriptions and effects of human destruction.

Again it is clear from the description above that Reyburn is seeing semantic parallelism in 2:5. For the analysis to be even clearer we will provide a few examples. The first one is from 1:1. The Hebrew reads:

איכה יִשְׁבֶּה בְּדָר הָעִיר רַבְתִּי עַם  
הִיְתָה כְּאַלְמָנָה רַבְתִּי בְּגוּיִם  
שָׂרְתִי בַמְדִינוֹת הִיְתָה לַמָּס

“How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she who once was great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave” (NIV).

From the Hebrew above, it can be seen that **יִשְׁבֶּה** in the first line, **הִיְתָה** in the second line and **הִיְתָה** in the third line are all verbs in the qal perfect 3<sup>rd</sup> feminine singular (qatal verbal forms). From this level of analysis alone, we can say they are grammatically parallel. Going a little further, we will discover that syntactically they are not parallel, since **הִיְתָה** in the third line comes in the second half of the line with **שָׂרְתִי בַמְדִינוֹת** having been fronted.

On another level, **רַבְתִּי** in the first line is repeated in the second line, and **שָׂרְתִי** is used in the third line. This creates some rhythmic pattern. In that case, the parallelism is seen from a phonological level. The phonological parallelism is also created by the *ah* sound from **יִשְׁבֶּה**, **הִיְתָה** and **הִיְתָה**. Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:16) prefers to call this ‘euphony’. Thi Pham (1999:51) labels this as ‘assonance’. He says the whole stanza is skillfully based on assonance involving *a* (24 times) and *i* (6 times).

On another level, we can also pair the first two lines as **יִשְׁבֶּה // הִיְתָה, רַבְתִּי // רַבְתִּי, הָעִיר // רַבְתִּי** and **כְּאַלְמָנָה** and **בְּגוּיִם // עַם**. In this way, the only constituent that does not have a word to match with is **בְּדָר**. Since there is no other word supplied to match with, it then becomes ellipsis. To be more specific, it will be incomplete parallelism without compensation.

Taking into consideration the third line will yield another scenario. **כאלמנה // שרתי** in the second line and **העיר** in the first line. **היתה // היתה** in the second line and **ישבה** in the first line, **בגוים // למס** in the second line and **עם** in the first line. It is evident, again, that in this way, **במדינות** should be paired with **רבתי** in the first and second line but because semantically they are different, **במדינות** becomes a compensatory constituent; in that case it becomes incomplete parallelism with a compensatory element.

בכו תבכה בלילה ודמעתה על לחיה  
 אין־לה מנחם מכל־אהביה  
 כל־רעיה בגדו בה היו לה לאיבים

“Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are on her cheeks. Among all her lovers there is no one to comfort her. All her friends have betrayed her, they have become her enemies” (NIV).

Again, there is an interesting use of the word **בכה** in the phrase **בכו תבכה**. Two words that come from the same root are used in order to make it intensive. There is also parallelism semantically between the phrase **בכו תבכה בלילה** (she weeps bitterly in the night) and **אהביה על לחיה ודמעתה על לחיה** (and her tears are on her cheeks). Again, semantically the phrase **אין־לה מנחם מכל** is parallel to **כל־רעיה בגדו בה היו לה לאיבים**. However, there is a special contrast that exists between the words **אהביה** and **לאיבים**. Again, there is repetition in the use of synonyms between **מכל־אהביה** and **כל־רעיה**

Commenting on the play on words here, Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:15) says,

the image of ‘lovers’ and ‘friends’... is complex and creatively ambiguous, playing on several of the different nuances attested for these words. Metaphorically and most basically, they conjure the family and friends of the mourning widow who neglect the social obligation of compassion and consolation owed to one in mourning. One of the standard complaints in laments is precisely that the sufferer has been abandoned just when he or she needs companionship most ... At a somewhat more literal level, they are Judah’s erstwhile political allies who do not only have neglected their political obligations owed to Judah, but even turned on her, becoming her enemies ... Finally the reference to ‘lovers’ and ‘friends’ may allude, as in some prophets ... to Zion as a faithless wife ... Such multivocality is a hallmark of lyric: there is no

need to choose between these alternate readings. All are allowed to play out and off one another. The image of Zion's unconsolated suffering and the empathy it evokes in readers dominates the stanza. That Judah's 'friends' and 'lovers' are understood at some level, albeit somewhat removed, to be her political allies is likely. And though I would not stress the possible allusion to Zion's faithlessness as much as some, neither would I deny its presence. It is there and hovers darkly in the background.

In 1:5 the Hebrew reads,

היו צריה לראש איביה שלו  
 כי-יהוה הוגה על רב-פשעיה  
 עולליה הלכו שבי לפני-צר

“Her foes have become her masters; her enemies are at ease. The LORD has brought her grief because of her many sins. Her children have gone into exile, captive before the foe”(NIV)

The repetition of the word צר in the first and last line makes it look like an inclusion. But, with the fronting of היו before צריה some would argue that it is not an inclusion. However, Thi Pham (1999:68) maintains it to be an inclusion. Again, in the first line, the verbs היו and שלו are interesting since they are qatal verbal forms (qal, perfect third person common plural) making it again an inclusion in the first colon. It can also be seen as a chiasm taking into account that the verbs היו and שלו will be paralleled and איביה and צריה are paralleled also. So the peak of the chiasm will be on לראש. Semantically, it can be seen as synonymous parallelism since איביה שלו can be viewed as synonymous in terms of meaning with היו צריה לראש. Since this analysis is only looking at one first line, it then falls into the internal parallelism. Joining together line two and three can best be understood as step or climactic parallelism, since more information is added that constitutes a cause-effect style. Sin caused captivity. The LORD (יהוה) has caused affliction, literally, he has grieved her (הוגה). Affliction came because of her many sin (על רב-פשעיה) and captivity (שבי) because of sin or in front/before the oppressor (לפני-צר).

ויצא (מן-בת-)[מבת-]ציון כל-הדרה  
 היו שריה כאילים לא-מצאו מרעה

## וילכו בלא-כח לפני רודף

“All the splendor has departed from Daughter Zion. Her Princes are like deer that find no pasture; in weakness they have fled before the pursuer” (NIV).

In verse 6, the most interesting thing is the normal word order that characterizes the verbs which begin each of the three lines. The first line begins with **ויצא** which is a wayyiqtol (qal waw consecutive 3<sup>rd</sup> person, masculine, singular). Line two begins with **היו** which is a qatal (qal perfect 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural). The third line begins with **וילכו** wayyiqtol (qal waw consecutive imperfect 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural). There is no spectacular thing about the movement from wayyiqtol, qatal to wayyiqtol but there is certainly parallelism in terms of the normal word order whereby you begin with the verb, subject to object. The other overall thing seen here is step/climactic parallelism.

Another climactic parallelism comes in verse 7 since the second line begins with the **אשר** clause that makes it a relative clause, dependent and adding more information to the first line.

Verse 8 reads:

חטא חטאה ירושלם על-כן לנידה היתה  
כל-מכבדיה הזילוה כיראו ערותה  
גם-היא נאנחה ותשב אחור

“Jerusalem has sinned greatly and so has become unclean. All who honored her despise her, for they have all seen her naked; she herself groans and turns away” (NIV).

**חטא חטאה** is yet another case of double use of the same root as we saw in verse 2 (**תבכה**), thereby creating rhythm. Line two and line three can be seen in terms of their use of the x qatal in (**כל-מכבדיה הזילוה**) and in (**גם-היא נאנחה**). Again this shows that we have formal parallelism, as line 2 and 3 are giving more information. The **כי** clause in the second half of the second line creates a cause-effect relationship. The *ah* sound is still felt in the **חטאה**, **היתה**, **נאנחה**, **לנידה**, **מכבדיה**, **הזילוה**, **ערותה** and **נאנחה**.

As can be seen from the verses already covered from the first chapter, it is evident that most of the verses fall into the category of formal/climactic parallelism. Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:18-19) prefers to call it enjambment: “a phenomenon in which the syntax and meaning carry over line ends without a significant pause, and either lack parallelism altogether or the sense of parallelism, when present, is not salient”. This trend of enjambment continues into chapter 2 and 3. For example, Reyburn (1992:6) gives 3:4, 46 and 48 as either making clarification, addition to or a continuation of the thought.

In chapter 4:1 the first line uses synonymous parallelism as the words **זֶהָב** and **כֶּתֶם** are used.

An antithetic parallelism comes in 4:3 where the jackals are contrasted with the heartless people.

An example of a refrain in Lamentations is the repeated phrase in chapter one. In 1:2 it is

אֵין־לָהּ מִנְחָם

“There is no one to comfort her” (NIV)

In 1:9 it phrased

אֵין מִנְחָם לָהּ

“There was no one to comfort her” (NIV).

In 1:17 it is phrased in exactly the same way it is in 1:9

אֵין מִנְחָם לָהּ

“There is no one to comfort her” (NIV).

As one comes to chapter 5, however, different kinds of parallelism become so evident since it is now a single line that is divided into two halves for each verse. Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:19) gives 5:13; 5:17 and 5:20 as examples that truly reflect parallelism. He argues that the lines “echo, mirror one another in a number of ways- semantically, formally or sonically” (Dobbs-Allsopp, 2002:19).

Importantly, Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:19) highlights that,

What is classically lyrical about Lamentations, however, is how it harnesses enjambment for meaning. The extensive use of enjambment- affecting over two-thirds of the couplets in these poems- like other formal features in Lamentations, provides a distinctive and unifying texture for these poems, compensating for the lack of more narrativizing devices for constructing coherence. The tug of syntax as it carries over from the first line of a couplet to the second gives these poems energy and a palpable sense of forward movement. The density of enjambed lines per poem moves from its highest mark in the first two poems, to a noticeably

decreased use of enjambment in Lamentations 3 and 4, to its near absence in Lamentations 5 (which is predominantly parallelistic in nature). This provides the sequence of poems with a distinct sense of directionality, a curve of movement.

By this, Dobbs-Allsopp establishes the functions of enjambment. Thus, enjambment is used productively in Lamentations to compensate for the missing narrativizing devices that enhances unity and coherence. In the end the enjambment produces a descending graph similar to one created by the number of lines in each dirge, as we saw earlier on. Though compensated by the enjambment, the lack of the more narrativizing devices creates an *atemporal* nature to the laments. This *atemporal* nature is important as it will open-up the laments to be appropriated in various contexts, including Zimbabwe, thereby giving us an opportunity to effectively deal with the research question. Thus, a smooth flow for an analogous reading is created by the *atemporal* nature of the laments.

## 2.4. Qinah Meter

Having highlighted the different kinds of parallelism and the functions in Lamentations, it is crucial to establish our position in terms of meter. Ridderbos & Wolf (1986:898) state categorically that “parallelism of thought – by whatever term it is called – is found in Hebrew poetry. Meter, whether described in classical form or by some method of syllable counting is not found”. But recent publications from scholars like Hillers (1992:139) acknowledge the presence of the *qinah* meter<sup>32</sup>. Although Salters (2010:16) has Kugel (1981:301) and Berlin (1996:308) as advocates for the abandonment of the quest for Hebrew meter, he is careful to suggest that “the rhythm engendered by parallelism is noticeable”. He goes on to say, “in spite of the fact that precise meter is absent, scholars often describe a line of poetry as comprising three stresses for each stich, sometimes four, sometimes two. This perceived balance is often broken and so we find 3:4, 4:3, 3:2, 2:3” (Salters, 2010:16). This unusual, unequal, unbalanced rhythm was first discovered by Budde in 1882. Gerstenberger (2001:471) in agreement with Budde reinforces that, “each line normally has five accents, the first colon featuring three, the second two stresses, thus creating a curtailed, limping, exasperated impression”. The above mentioned scholars then called this the *qinah* meter. The effect of this is the effective communication of the wailing

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<sup>32</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:54) also affirms the presence of the *qinah* meter when he said “the rhythmic frame of the *qinah* meter which begins in earnest in the second stanza and continues prominently throughout the rest of the poem, are all elements found in or associated with the Israelite dirge”.

woman who was unable to complete regularly the second part of the line because of her emotional involvement (Gerstenberger, 2001:471). Questions have been raised as to the designation of the *qinah* meter since this limping or unbalanced rhythm does not appear in other dirges or laments; on the other hand, appearing on other poetry that are neither dirges nor laments. Gerstenberger (2001:471) responds that the designation “does not preclude the use of this poetic configuration for other types of poetry at all. Nor does it prevent other arrangements, e.g. evenly balanced lines of 3+3 or 2+2 stresses to be employed in the book of Lamentations”. For example, 1:1-3 are not evenly balanced exhibiting a 3+2, but certainly in 1:4, the first line is evenly balanced with a 3+3 formation. Just like the enjambment, the purpose of the meter is to be understood as a constituent of lyric, that “without the benefit of narrative devices such as plot, argumentative structure, and fictional characters to help construct meaning and build in coherence and a sense of direction, lyric poems are forced to construct meaning through manipulation of language alone” (Dobbs-Allsopp, 2002:12). Langer (1953:259) adds, “lyric is the literary form that depends mostly directly on pure verbal resources – the sound and evocative power of words, meter, alliteration, rhyme and other rhythmic devices, associated images, repetitions, archaisms and grammatical twists”.

## 2.5. Figurative Speech/Images and Repetitions in Lamentations

The number of voices in the book can best be understood through participant tracking and an informed understanding of figures of speech. There are basically three figures of speech. The first one being figure of comparison, the second one being figure of substitution, and the third being figure of apparent deception. The figures of comparison are composed mainly of the metaphor, the simile and the synecdoche. In the figures of substitution we have metonym and synecdoche. In the figures of apparent deception we have irony, personification and apostrophe.

We begin our analysis of the book of Lamentations with an interest in the personification or anthropomorphism. The city of Jerusalem is personified as **בת** (daughter) in the book of Lamentations. This personification of the city as a daughter binds all the dirges together since **בת** is found in most of the dirges that form the book of Lamentations. We find in 1:6; 2:1; 2:4; 2:10; 2:18 and 4:22 that Zion is personified as **בת־צִיּוֹן** (daughter Zion). In 1:15, Judah is personified as **לבתולת בת־יהודה** (virgin daughter Judah). However in 2:2 and 2:5 it is just

בת־יהודה (daughter Judah). In 2:13 and 2:15 Jerusalem is personified as הבת ירושלים (the daughter Jerusalem) and על־בת ירושלים (at daughter Jerusalem) respectively. We could also add בת־עמי in 2:11, 3:48, 4:3, 4:6 and 4:10 . The interchange from Zion, Judah to Jerusalem is not perplexing as it can be easily understood from metonymy and synecdoche<sup>33</sup> relations, which is a commonly used figure of substitution or association. However a more difficult question is how the personification of daughter is functioning. Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:50) says,

One of the consequences of the city lament genre having been transplanted to Israelite Judean soil was the metamorphosis of the city goddess into the personified city (presumably because of the theological pressures associated with ancient Israel and Judah's monolatrous cultures. The personified city-temple complex in Lamentations functions analogously to the sorrowful, tender and compassionate weeping goddess in the Mesopotamian laments, who so vividly and graphically realizes the agony and torment and distress that so assaulted the Sumerian psyche through the experience of the catastrophic close of the Ur III period. Like these weeping goddesses, the personified city and temple in Lamentations mourns the destruction of her city and temple and the suffering of her people ..., confronts God in his capacity as the divine agent of destruction ... , and is portrayed as mother ... who has become homeless and unable to find rest ... Moreover, she is even imbued with a series of epithets that all have good divine parallels: daughter of Zion ... Maiden Judah ... maiden daughter of Judah ... and daughter of my people.

However, Berlin (2004:11-12) argues against Dobbs-Allsopp and contends that the X בת should be understood as an appositional genitive. Thus, we should understand all the above as daughter Zion, daughter Judah and daughter Jerusalem rather than daughter of Zion, daughter of Judah and daughter of Jerusalem.

In terms of meaning, this is better understood as a connotation of emotional tenderness or protectiveness toward a female person of lesser power or authority. It is a term of endearment and functions like a diminutive 'dear little Zion' (Berlin, 2004:12)<sup>34</sup>.

The other terminology that ties the dirges together is the figure of comparison, coming in as a simile. The city is compared to an אֵלְמָנָה, which is translated as widow in most translations.

The word is used in 1:1 and in 5:3 thereby forming an inclusion. In 1:1 the narrator spoke of it in

<sup>33</sup> Beekman & Callow (1974:116-117) defines it as based on part-whole relations, it covers both direction, part for the whole or whole for the part.

<sup>34</sup> Recently Floyd (2012:181) argued that בת־ציון should not be understood appositionally but should be understood in terms of familial relation which is normally expressed with a construct phrase. But his argument is not sustainable, especially in the context of Lamentations, where בת־ציון has to be understood together with בת־עמי.



the third person and referred to the city as a widow. But in 5:3 he then turns to the first person and says our mothers have become like widows. Understanding this, as a figure of comparison helps to avoid unnecessary details such as the identity of the husband. What is critical is to locate the topic, the image and most importantly, the point of comparison. In 1:1 the topic is city and the image is the **אלמנה** and the point of comparison is vulnerability. As we come to 5:3, the image and the point of comparison is still the same; however, the topic has shifted a little bit since the narrator now identifies himself with the survivors. He then sees a double tragedy both to himself as a fatherless person and to his mother as a widow. So the topic now involves the children as fatherless and the mothers as widows. Both the children and the mothers share the point of comparison of vulnerability and shame.

The other figures of comparison which come in 1:1, 2:2 and 5:12 are that of a princess. The words **שרה** and **מט** form the images of 1:1. The word **שרה** means gentlewoman<sup>35</sup> thereby evoking a sense of honour, while **מט**<sup>36</sup> brings a sense of disgrace and servitude. So the personification of the city formerly being a queen and reduced to a slave is a strong figure that reinforces the picture of being reduced from a position of authority and honour to a place of disgrace and servitude. The word **שרה** comes again in 1:6 as a simile comparing the princes to a deer that finds no pasture. The picture painted by a deer that finds no pasture is that of a weak deer, that will eventually succumb to wild predators because it does not have the energy to run away. So in a nutshell it is vulnerable again to its foes. In 4:7 a synonym of **שרה** is used although versions like the NIV translate the word as ‘princes’. However, the Hebrew word is **נזיר** which basically means ‘consecrated one’ (Holladay, 1988:232). The important underlying message is that, those in position of authority (whether religious or political) that deserve respect are no longer respected in their various spheres of influence. Their social status has been reduced to levels of disgrace. This change of the status quo is not limited to **שרה** and **נזיר** but affects the **כהנים** and **זקנים** according to 4:16.

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<sup>35</sup> Holladay (1988:354)

<sup>36</sup> The word basically means ‘forced labour’(Koehler & Baumgartner,1998:540)

The image of the princes who have been reduced to slaves above resonates well with the image of the crown that has fallen in 5:16. The word עטרת is a feminine construct state from עטרה which means a crown or wreath (Holladay, 1988:271). Again the crown is a symbol of glory and honour. Berlin (2004:124) thinks that the falling of the crown signifies the end of the monarchy since crown can also be taken as a symbol for kingship. However, Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:147) thinks,

The reference to the crown ‘falling from our head’ is not simply symbolic language for honor and glory and festivity..., but a metaphor for the broken and collapsed walls of Jerusalem. The crenelated walls of Palestinian cities were often likened to a great crown that adorns the head of the city.

From the above it is clear that, though scholars may differ on the extension of the image, they are agreed on its base, that it is a representation of glory and honour.

The other personification comes in the form of ‘joy’ gone. The word translated for joy (משוש) by the NIV is found in 2:15 and 5:15. In 2:15 we read that the city was once called the perfection and beauty, the joy of the whole earth. However, all who pass by now shake their heads in disbelief. In 5:15 we read that ‘joy is gone from our hearts and our dancing has turned to mourning’. Berlin (2004:124) sees the cessation of temple worship when she connects the two passages well. She observes that,

The ‘joy of our heart’ refers to the Temple Mount, ‘the joy of the whole land’ (Lam 2:15; Ps 48:3). The word *mahol*, rejoicing is associated with dancing or instrumental music, and here refers to the festive celebrations at the temple, which have now been transformed into lamentations for its loss. Joy is not a state of the mind but a ritual experience performed in the presence of God, while mourning signals the absence of God.

Somehow, this joy that is missing in Judah is found in the enemies’ camp. This is clear from 1:21, where we read, ‘All my enemies have heard of my distress; they rejoice or exult (ששו) at what you have done’. The picture of the ‘joy’ in the camp of the enemy is fostered again in 4:21 where an irony is used: ‘rejoice and be glad, Daughter Edom’<sup>37</sup>. The irony is so forceful in the context that, whereas Judah is encouraged to mourn, the enemy is exhorted to rejoice and be glad. However, as the image unfolds further, we read, ‘But to you also the cup will be passed;

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<sup>37</sup> Verses 21-22 can also be seen as apostrophe which is “a figure of speech in which the Psalmist speaks directly to an absent person(s) or thing(s) as though actually present” (Tucker, 2008:589).

you will be drunk and stripped naked’. The phrase ‘stripped naked’ (ותתערי) is fundamental as it binds this chapter to 1:8, ‘All who honoured her despise her *for they have all seen her naked* (כִּי־רָאוּ עֲרוּתָהּ)’. Thi Pham (1999:74) observes that, the Hebrew word translated for ‘naked’ can refer to two different kinds of nakedness. It can describe a state of complete nakedness or it can mean poorly clothed. Judging from verse 9, Jerusalem is not completely naked, since she has a skirt on. Her nakedness must refer to her being girt with sackcloth from the hips down, laying bare the chest for beating as part of the mourning practice. Importantly, Thi Pham (1999:74) says,

Although Lady Jerusalem is in mourning garb, that is partly naked, her nakedness may also refer to the shameful experience of her warriors being led into captivity completely naked (see Isaiah 20:2-4). Her nakedness, thus, represents Jerusalem in sackcloth, mourning the defeat and exile of her people.

The image of ‘joy’ needs to be understood also alongside the repeated phrase ‘hearts are faint’. The phrase is found in 1:22 and 5:17. In 1:22 we read ולְבִי דוּי and in 5:17 הִיָּה דוּוּה לְבַנּוּ עַל־זֶה. Although there is the change from the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular to the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural and the inversion of the terms, the phrase essentially denotes “a sense of being hopeless, discouraged and defeated” (Reyburn, 1992:142). The word דוּי (faint) is used again in 1:13 alongside שְׁמֹמָה a word coming from שָׁמָּה which means ‘desolation’ (Holladay, 1988:376). Tying these images together, Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:147) is right to say, “there is a general equivalence in the images of Jerusalem that open and close Lamentations. Both stress aspects of Jerusalem’s ruined condition”.

Another image closely related to the ‘heart’ above is that of crying. We read in 2:18a ‘The hearts of the people cry out to the Lord’. In 2:18b we get the exhortation ‘let your tears flow like a river’. The phrase ‘your tears flow like a river’ is one example of a hyperbolic mixture. In this case, a hyperbole is co-joined to a simile. In 2c we have synonymous parallelism in ‘give yourself no relief, your eyes no rest’. Again the exhortation is to continue mourning. In 2:16 we read, ‘This is why I weep and my eyes overflow with tears’. ‘My eyes overflow with tears’ is another hyperbole emphasizing the deep emotional distress. In 2:11 we read, ‘my eyes fail from weeping I am in torment within, my heart is poured out on the ground because my people are destroyed, because children and infants faint (בַּעֲטָף) in the street of the city’. Then in 3:48-49

we read ‘streams of tears flow from my eyes because my people are destroyed. My eyes will flow unceasingly without relief’. This refrain goes back to 1:2 where we read ‘Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are on her cheeks’. It is evident that such refrains tie all the three (1, 2, 3) dirges together. In light of our research question, the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God is fully realized when one has been exhorted to cry physically, from within and without, and refusal to be silenced that gives birth to healing, peace and hope. O’Connor (2002:130) rightly observes this when she says,

tears of Lamentations are of loss and grief, abandonment and outrage. They are a flag, a sign, a revelation of injury and destruction, an expression of resistance to the world’s arrangements. They are also a release, an emptying, a cleansing of body and spirit. Lamentations validates tears. It has the power to gather bitter pain and bring tears to the surface. Then it accepts them. Tears can give watery birth to hope. They can wash out space once occupied by despair, fury, or sorrow, and in that space hope can emerge uninvited. Hope comes apart from human will, decision, or optimism. It comes as a gift out of despair, as it did for the strongman in the bottom of the pit (Lam 3). Tears need reverent, tender treatment, because they express what bodies know without words.

So we continue to argue, Zimbabweans need to be afforded the opportunity to mourn with tears that come from within and without for them to realize healing and then foster peace and hope.

The other metaphors used to describe Jerusalem’s state come in 4:1. A series of synonyms are used to portray the aspect of preciousness and sacredness. Jerusalem is compared to gold, fine gold and sacred gems. However, the gold has lost its luster, the fine gold has become dull and the sacred gems are now scattered at every street corner. Berlin (2004:104) observes that, “Gold is a symbol of great value and permanence, but here its value is diminished, its luster is dulled’. Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:130) responding to Hillers’s (1992:137) objection “that gold does not tarnish or grow dark in any striking way” says,

This is precisely to the point: the occurrence of the impossible pointedly underscores the severity of the situation. ‘Sacred stones’ refer most literally and simply to precious ‘jewels, gems,’ implying that what used to hold great value, gold and jewels, now has been rendered worthless. But the reference to ‘sacred stones’ certainly has the metaphorical capacity to refer as well to the now ‘scattered’ ‘costly stones’... originally used to build the temple.

The other repeated terminology that has some links phonetically to our key word *rahamim* (רחמים) which is found in chapter 3 is the word *menahem*. *menahem* comes from *naham* just as *rahamim* comes from *raham*. *naham* and *raham* are without doubt phonologically related. *naham* is mainly

translated as to have compassion if used in the hithpael. It means to comfort if it is used in the piel. As a participle, it means one who comforts or comforter (Koehler & Baumgartner, 1998:608-609). The word is used five times in Lamentations 1. It is used in 1:2, 9, 16, 17 and 21. This repetition might have influenced O'Connor (2002:17-29) to title chapter 1 as "There is no one to comfort you". However, the idea of one who comforts does not end in its explicit mention in chapter 1, but is implied<sup>38</sup> in 1:7 and 4:17 where synonyms are used in form of עוֹזֵר and עֲזָרָה respectively. The word נָחַם is used as a verb in 2:13 as the narrator seeks to comfort daughter Jerusalem. In 3:43 the word used is חָמַל which is again a synonym and can be translated as 'pity' (Holladay, 1988:108). The word is also used in 2:21. In the context under investigation, the idea brought forward by the repetitive use of נָחַם is that there is no one to comfort. God himself has caused the suffering without pity; therefore there is no one to turn to for help, comfort or pity. This thrust forms the foundation of our investigation and we will pick this up when we will do a detailed analysis of chapter 3 which is the heart of our research.

The recognition that it is God who has caused the suffering comes in unprecedented repetitions. In 1:5 it clearly stated

כִּי־יְהוָה הוֹגָה עַל רַב־פְּשָׁעֶיהָ

For the LORD caused grief against/because of her many sins. [Our own translation]

In 1:12 again it is stated

הַבִּיטוּ וּרְאוּ אִם־יֵשׁ מִכְאוֹב כַּמְכַאֲבֵי אֲשֶׁר עוֹלַל לִי אֲשֶׁר  
הוֹגָה יְהוָה בְּיוֹם חֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ ס

Look around and see if there is sorrow like my sorrow that was inserted/inflicted to me which the LORD caused grief on the day of anger/ of his anger (nose)/ great anger. [Our own translation]

In 1:13

מִמְרוֹם שְׁלַח־אֵשׁ בַּעֲצַמְתִּי וַיִּרְדְּנָה פֶּרֶשׁ רֶשֶׁת לַרְגְלֵי

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<sup>38</sup> This is also implied in the NIV's translation of the Hebrew phrase וְלֹא־חָלְוּ בָּהּ יָדַיִם (without a hand turned to help her) which is in 4:6. However, as Reyburn (1992:115) admits, the Hebrew is uncertain on this phrase. He goes on to say the translation from the NIV 'is an English idiom and not Hebrew usage'.

השיבני אחור נתנני שממה כל-היום דוה

From on high he sent fire, sent it down into my bones. He spread a net for my feet and turned me back. He made me desolate faint all the day long (NIV).

In 1:14

הכשיל כחי נתנני אדני בידי לא-אוכל קום

He has caused my strength to fall. The Lord has given me into the hands of those I cannot withstand (NIV).

1:15

סלה כל-אבירי אדני בקרבי קרא עלי מועד לשבר בחורי  
גת דרך אדני לבתולת בת-יהודה

The Lord has rejected all the warriors in my midst; he has summoned an army against me to crush my young men. In his winepress the lord has trampled Virgin Daughter Judah (NIV).

1:17

צוה יהוה ליעקב סביביו צריו

The Lord has decreed for Jacob that his neighbors become his foes (NIV).

In 2:1-8

איכה יעיב באפו אדני את-בת-ציון השליך משמים ארץ  
תפארת ישראל ולא-זכר הדם-רגליו ביום אפו

How the Lord has covered Daughter Zion with the cloud of his anger. He has hurled down the splendour of Israel from heaven to earth; he has not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger (NIV).

בלע אדני ולא חמל את כל-נאות יעקב

הרס בעברתו מבצרי בת-יהודה הגיע לארץ חלל  
ממלכה ושריה

Without pity the Lord has swallowed up all the dwellings of Jacob; in his wrath he has torn down the strongholds of Daughter Judah. He has brought her kingdom and its princes down to the ground in dishonour (NIV).

גדע בחרי-אף כל קרן ישראל

השיב אחור ימינו מפני אויב ויבער ביעקב כאש להבה

## אכלה סביב

In his fierce anger he has cut off every horn of Israel. He has withdrawn his right hand at the approach of the enemy. He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire that consumes everything around it (NIV).

דרך קשתו כאויב נצב ימינו כצר

ויהרג כל מחמדי-עין באהל בת-ציון שפך כאש חמתו

Like an enemy he has strung his bow; his right hand is ready. Like a foe he has slain all who were pleasing to the eye; he has poured out his wrath like fire on the tent of Daughter Zion (NIV).

היה אדני כאויב בלע ישראל

בלע כל-ארמנותיה שחת מבצריו וירב בבת-יהודה תאניה  
ואניה

The Lord is like an enemy; he has swallowed up Israel. He has swallowed up all her palaces and destroyed her strongholds. He has multiplied mourning and lamentation for Daughter Judah (NIV).

ויחמס כגן שכו שחת מועדו

שכה יהוה בציון מועד ושבת וינאץ בזעם-אפו מלך וכהן

He has laid waste his dwelling like a garden; he has destroyed his place of meeting. The Lord has made Zion forget her appointed festivals and her Sabbaths; in his fierce anger he has spurned both king and priest (NIV).

זנח אדני מזבחו נאר מקדשו

הסגיר ביד-אויב חומת ארמנותיה קול נתנו בבית-יהוה

כיום מועד ס

The Lord has rejected his altar and abandoned his sanctuary. He has given the walls of palaces into the hands of the enemy; they have raised a shout in the house of the LORD as on the day of an appointed festival (NIV).

חשב יהוה להשחית חומת בת־ציון  
נטה קו לא־השיב ידו מבלע ויאבל־חל וחומה יחדו  
אמללו

The LORD determined to tear down the wall around Daughter Zion. He stretched out a measuring line and did not withhold his hand from destroying. He made ramparts and walls lament; together they wasted away (NIV).

In 2:17

עשה יהוה אשר זמם בצע אמרתו אשר צוה מימי־קדם  
הרס ולא חמל וישמח עליך אויב הרים קרן צריך

The LORD has done what he planned; he has fulfilled his word which he decreed long ago. He has overthrown you without pity, he has let the enemy gloat over you, he has exalted the horn of your foes (NIV).

In 2:20-22

ראה יהוה והביטה למי עוללת כה  
אסתאכלנה נשים פרים עללי טפחים אס־יהרג במקדש  
אדני כהן ונביא ס

Look, LORD, and consider: Whom have you ever treated like this? Should women eat their offspring, the children they have cared for? Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord (NIV).

שכבו לארץ חוצות נער וזקן בתולתי ובחורי נפלו בחרב  
הרגת ביום אפך טבחת לא חמלת



Young and Old lie together in the dust of the streets; my young men and young women have fallen by the sword. You have slain them in the day of your anger; you have slaughtered them without pity (NIV).

תקרא כיום מועד מגורי מסביב

ולא היה ביום אף־יהוה פליט ושריד אשר־טפחתי ורביתי

איבי כלם

As you summon to a feast day, so you summoned against me terrors on every side. In the day of the LORD's anger no one escaped or survived; those I cared for and reared my enemy has destroyed (NIV).

The identification of God as the one behind the suffering comes also in 3:1-18. We will deal in depth with 3:1-18 in the next chapter when we will look at Lamentations 3 and its relationship to the rest of the laments. Suffice to say in the book of Lamentations, the poet identifies God as the main cause of the suffering. This identification of the perpetrator of the suffering, and laying it squarely on his table that He has caused enormous suffering is vital for healing and hope rejuvenation. Judah herself is not spared as she necessitated God to act this way because of her sins. Thus, there are some allusions to Judah to have provoked God to act this way. In line with our research question, it is also vital to reveal to the victim what necessitated the perpetrator to act the way they acted. What part did the victim play that necessitated the catastrophe?

In conclusion, since God is behind the enormous suffering, and there is no one to help or to offer comfort, it then becomes logical for the poet to turn to God to be the comforter and helper. God has caused the mess and therefore he should clean it up. He has caused enormous suffering therefore he is the only one who can console and comfort.

## 2.6 Voices in Lamentations

Moving from the various figures of speeches, and some repeated phrases used that give coherence to the five laments, we find that tracking the number of voices provides us with a literary structure that also enhances the relationship and unity of the dirges. An analysis of the first lament reveals that from verse 1 to verse 11b, the description of Jerusalem's condition is given in the third person. Thus, most of the verbal forms are in the third person feminine

singular. **ישבה**, **היתה**, **תבכה**, **גלתה**, **מצאה**, **זכרה**, **חטאה**, **ותשב** and **ותרר** serve as good examples of some of the verbal forms in the third person feminine singular. In addition to the verbal forms, most of the nouns are suffixed with the third person feminine particle. Examples include **רמעתה**, **לחיה**, **שעריה**, **כהניה** and **הדרה**. There are also some prepositions that attach the third person feminine singular particle to show it as reported speech. Examples are **לה** and **בה**.

The voice reporting Jerusalem as a female personified city changes at 1:11c. In 1:11c we have Jerusalem herself speaking. Thus, we begin to see a shift from the use of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person feminine singular to the use of the first person singular. For example, in 11c we have the verbal form **הייתי** which is *qal* perfect first common singular. The first person singular verbal forms occur from Lamentations 1:11c to the end of the chapter.

In Lamentations 2:1-10 there is again a switch to the voice that reported Jerusalem in the third person. Unlike the previous section in 1:1-11b, although littered with a number of third person verbal forms, in terms of gender there are not many feminine verbal forms. Most of the verbal forms are now masculine singular rather than feminine singular. This is necessitated by the change of the subject. In 1:1-11b the main subject was the feminine personified city of Jerusalem. However, in 2:1-10 the overall main subject<sup>39</sup> is **אדני**. So in that vein, whereas 1:1-11b focused on the city of Jerusalem, 2:1-10 focuses on God who has caused this great suffering. In the intervening verses of 1:11c to 22 the voice identifies itself with the suffering of the people and so uses the first person.

Chapter 2:11 starts off in the first person, then moves to the third person as the narrator focuses on the fate of children. The picture is graphically painted and concluded in verse 12 with the death of the children in the arms of their mothers.

From 2:13-22 there is a shift to the second person singular. Most of the verbal forms are in the second person singular (as imperatives, perfects or imperfects), or attached to a second person singular particle. First, examples of imperatives are found in verse 18 **הורידי**, and in verse 19

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<sup>39</sup> Verses 1-6a and 7 the main subject is **אדני** and in verses 6b-6c and 8, it is **יהוה**, in verse 9 the subject is **ציון** and in verse 10 the main subjects are the **בת ציון**, **זקני** and the **ירושלם**

we have **רני**, **קומי**, **שפכי** and **שאי**. In verse 20 we have **ראה** and **והביטה**. Second, examples of perfects are **חמלת**, **טבחת**, **הרגת**, **עוללת**. Some examples of particles attached to verbal forms include **ירפא־לך** and **ואנחמך**, **מה ארמה־לך**, **מה־אעידך**. Besides the verbal forms being in the second person singular or being attached to a second person singular particle, most of the nouns too, are attached to a second person particle. Examples include **עונך** **עולליך** and **כפיך**, **לבך**, **בת־עינך**, **צריך**, **עליך**, **שביתך**, **על**. This creates a vivid dialogue between the voice of the narrator and Jerusalem (13-19). From verse 20-22a the dialogue is now between the narrator and **יהוה**. The chapter concludes by noting the day of the LORD's anger, which the narrator says no one escaped as the enemy destroyed everyone.

In chapter 3, the main voice is that of the man (**הגבר**) who says he has seen affliction. From 3:1 to 24 the use of the first person singular occupies most of the verses save for verse 22, the heart of our research, which uses the first plural form in **כי לא־תמנו**. In fact, the transition to the first person singular starts in 2:22c. In most of the cases, the first person singular pronominal suffix is attached either to verbal forms or to nouns. Examples of attachments to verbal forms are **הכפישני** and **הרוני**, **השביעני**, **ויציבני**, **שמני**, **ויפשחני**, **הושיבני** and attachments to nouns include **נתיבתי**, **דרכי**, **תפלתי**, **נחשתי**, **עצמותי**, **עורי**, **בשרי** and **עמי**. Examples of the attachments to prepositions include **לי** and **עלי**, **בי**, **בעדי**. In some cases the verbs are used in the first person, as in the case of **הייתי**. The delineation of verses 25-38 poses some challenges and we will deal with it in depth when we come to chapter three of our analysis. The delineation becomes a challenge because, though the man who has seen affliction is still speaking in verses 19-24, it is also evident that from verses 19 to 38, the section deals with the exhortation to wait and hope in the Lord. There is no clear transition since it is the same man who has changed focus from desperation to hoping in the Lord.

In verses 39-42, we have a clear passage calling for confession. In it the man has switched to first person plural, which suggests that the man is calling for a communal type of confession rather than an individual one. This is out of a realization that the entire community has sinned.

Although one could say the first common plural that began in verse 39 goes through to verse 47, it is better to see verses 43-46 as focusing on God and what he has done. So even though the first common plural is used, there is switch to the second person, i.e. God. As one comes to verse 47 the voice uses the first person plural focusing on what he and the people of Judah have done.

Generally speaking, in verses 48-63 the voice has switched to the first person singular. Specifically, our attention is drawn to verses 55-63 where he is having a dialogue with God in the second person. That section is littered with the interchange between 'I' and 'you'. The voice bursts into the imprecatory section of verses 64-66. In these three last verses there is an interchange of the second person masculine singular with third person masculine plural. The voice is specifically calling God to judge his enemies.

Chapter 4 can be divided into three segments. The first segment covers 4:1-16 and the report is given in the third person. The second segment covers 4:17-20 and is marked by the use of first person plural. Hence a lot of 'our', 'we' and 'us' constitutes that section. The last segment covers 4:21-22 and is condensed with the use of second person; the speaker's address focuses on Edom. Besides this broader division that looks at the focus on the voice, verses 1-2 go together as they compare the children of Zion to precious and sacred minerals. Verses 3-4 go together as they contrast wild animals with the people's heartless treatment of infants. Verses 5-8 go together talking about the fate of influential people in the society (who eat delicacies, who were brought up in royal purple, princes). However, verse 6 seems to serve as an interjection<sup>40</sup>. Verses 9-10 pick up from verse 4 concluding the fate of the children left hanging previously. Verse 11 serves again as an interjection. Verses 12-16 focus on the fate of the political, religious and civil leaders (i.e. kings, prophets, priests and elders). Verse 16a seems to serve again as an interjection just as verse 11 does. From verses 17-20 the focus is on the fate of everyone, the narrator and the king included. Another interjection is found in 17b. Verses 21-22 focus on the fate of Edom who is a representative of the enemies of Judah.

Chapter 5 is interwoven by the use of the first person plural. Therefore, there is a lot of use of the personal pronouns such as 'we', 'us' and possessive pronouns such as 'our' because of the pronominal suffix of the first person plural (נַ) attached to most of the nouns. It starts off with an

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<sup>40</sup> This interjection, if perceived from musical circles, would serve like a *chorus*.

imperative זָכַר followed by the vocative יְהוָה which suggests that it is a prayer. Now, adding this to the pronouns and the possessives that take centre stage in the lament, ultimately we see that chapter 5 is indeed a communal prayer. The prayer outlines the general status quo from verses 2 to 18. From verses 19 to 22 there is the invocation of God's name and his attributes. The petition is so clear from verses 20-22. First, two successive rhetorical questions are forwarded. Then, two imperatives of request follow. Verse 22 serves as an assurance of the answered request.

To conclude this analysis, we therefore suggest that there are five voices in the book of Lamentations. The first voice addresses personified Jerusalem in the third person feminine. The second voice uses a lot of third person masculine mainly focusing on God. Mandolfo (2007:60) calls this “a Didactic Voice ... a third-person voice that speaks *of* and *for* rather than *to* God”. The third voice narrates in the first person singular and identifies himself as the man (הַגִּבּוֹר) who has seen affliction. The fourth voice uses the first person but, unlike the voice of the man (הַגִּבּוֹר) who has seen affliction, he uses the plural and takes much of chapter 5. The fifth voice is more dialogical with Jerusalem and in confrontation with God. The voice addresses Jerusalem and God directly in the second person. So many imperatives and second person particles are used. This voice is seen in some parts of Lamentations 2, 3, 4<sup>41</sup> and 5. Mandolfo (2007:62) calls this the supplicant's voice.

## 2.7 Summary

In this literary analysis we have gathered that the book of Lamentations utilizes literary features from the biblical laments, the dirges and the city laments from their neighbours. The book is also littered with a number of poetic devices that signal continuity as well as closure in the absence of more *narrativizing* devices. Giffone (2012:134<sup>42</sup>) says, this creates an atemporal nature, which eventually opens the book to be appropriated in various contexts. Such devices include the acrostics, the אִיכָה formulas, various figures of speech, parallelism, the *qinah* meter and speaking voices. In the acrostics, we saw that they primarily function as poetic devices of

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<sup>41</sup> In Lamentations 4 the voice addresses and focuses on Edom.

<sup>42</sup> Here Giffone (2013:134) was giving a summary of his chapter 4.

centripetal and centrifugal nature<sup>43</sup> but also serve other functions such as expressing completeness of grief. In the instances of אֵיכָה, we saw that it is a particle that introduces the dirges and expresses the magnitude of grief that follows. In the figures of speech, we saw that there are various metaphors, similes, personifications and irony that picture Jerusalem's former state of honour and the current state of grief and disgrace. In terms of parallelism, we saw that, although various kinds of parallelism are used, the bulk of it is predominantly enjambment which covers most parts of Lamentations 1 and 2. We then noted the use of refrains especially to express the fact that there is no one to comfort. In line with the refrain, we discovered that the poet unapologetically points to God as the source of the suffering. Alongside parallelism, we discovered that there is evidence of the *qinah* meter, as well as the balanced meter. Tracking the participants in the book revealed that there are five speaking voices, which should not be confused with authorship of the book. One voice personifies the city of Jerusalem as feminine and uses images such as queen and widow to describe her former and current state respectively. The other voice describes God mainly the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine. This voice is more didactic and apologetic, speaking mainly about God's attributes. The third voice is that of the man who has seen affliction and frequently uses the first person singular. The fourth voice embodies the use of second person particle. We found this voice to be confrontational and accusatory. The voice confronts Jerusalem with her sins and God with excessive punishment of Judah. It also confronts Edom, who is a representative of Judah's enemies, for rejoicing at the fall of Jerusalem. The last voice occupies the major part of chapter 5 which is a form of a communal prayer. This voice uses the first person plural, petitioning God to remember, see and most importantly, restore Judah to its former glory.

The discoveries of the literary analysis above help resolve our research question in that: First, we see that the book is neatly tied together by expressions of grief and agony that finds their climax in Lamentations 3. This then motivates us to deal with Lamentations 3 in detail in the next chapter. Second, various poetic devices are used to express the grief and to communicate that there is no one to comfort except God, who is the source of the suffering. This invites the question of the theodicy in relation to his *hesed* (חֶסֶד) and *rahamim* (רַחֲמִים). Third, since we are looking for an analogous reading, the exposure of these poetic devices is vital in seeking

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<sup>43</sup> These terminologies are used by Grossberg (1989).

equivalences in the contemporary contexts of grief and suffering that will bring healing, identity, dignity and hope.

## Chapter Three: An In-depth Analysis of Lamentations 3

### 3.1 Introduction

In this analysis we will, first of all, aim to highlight the relationship of Lamentations 3 to the rest of the book of Lamentations. Having done so, we will then endeavour to do a detailed analysis of verses 19 to 33 which arguably, as we will see in this chapter, is the heart of the book. Though Dorsey (1999:248) prefers to see the central passage as starting from 3:21-3:32, he admits that this section is difficult to delineate. He, however, settles for 3:21-3:32 because it opens and closes with the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God. But if one is to follow the delineation from the acrostics, it would be from 3:19-3:33 (i.e. from the ז to כ). This does not mean that the delineation from the acrostics is free from challenges. Basically, there is an interweaving of ideas across stanzas which makes it difficult to have a clear delineation. In the case of this study, even though our major focus will be on 3:21-3:32, we have deliberately decided to incorporate verse 19 because of the reflection that is brought from the root word זכר<sup>1</sup> (to remember) and יחל<sup>2</sup> (to hope). We have also decided to end at 3:33 because verses 31-33 are all starting with כ and extol the attributes of אדני.

In the detailed analysis, we will first of all give a translation followed by critical notes that take into account the textual variants from the various manuscripts. An exegetical section of verses 19-33 will then ensue to show how this special pericope fits together in the context of hope and its resources (i.e. *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God). Special attention will be devoted to study the components of the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) in an endeavour to show the quality of the resources to bring hope. We will then relate this central pericope to Lamentations 5, since there has been a lot of debate over whether the book of Lamentations ends with hope or not<sup>3</sup>.

This analysis is particularly important to the main research question, which seeks an analogous reading that would offer healing and hope in contexts of suffering, because: first, the text to be

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<sup>1</sup> The root is used three times in verses 19-20 alone.

<sup>2</sup> Although זכר does not occupy a prominent position in our research question it anchors the key word יחל.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Linafelt (2000) argues strongly that there is no hope in the book.



analysed happens to be the only section where hope is explicitly mentioned, as affirmed by O'Connor (2002:44). Therefore, it is important to relate it to the broader theme of the book. Second, it will be revealed that the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God are the indispensable resources of hope. Since it is only in this section that God's positive attributes are explicitly stated, therefore it is proper to relate them well to the brutality reminiscent of the book<sup>4</sup>. Third, there is a need to study the character and personality of the גבר, since the majority (if not all) of the verses in Lamentations 3 are uttered by the גבר. More importantly, will be to relate the strong gendered גבר to the feminine personification that is found in Lamentations 1-2. This is seen as inviting the rhetoric of inclusivity which is crucial in any meaningful effort to bring healing, dignity and peace in contemporary contexts of suffering.

## 3.2 Lamentations 3 in Relation to the Whole Book

### 3.2.1 The Position and the Literary Features

It has been argued by a number of scholars that Lamentations 3 occupies the heart of the book of Lamentations. Such scholars include Grossberg (1989:85), Gottwald<sup>5</sup>, Dorsey (1999:248), Hillers<sup>6</sup> and Renkema (1998:344). However, some scholars such as Linafelt (2000) have reacted negatively to the elevation of Lamentations 3 at the expense of other chapters. Linafelt (2000) argues that chapters 1 and 2 are the climax of the book of Lamentations. Parry (2010:92) on the other hand objectively observes and highlights that,

Chapter 3 has been taken by many past interpreters to be central for the interpretation of Lamentations as a whole. One current tendency is to react against this prioritizing of the third poem, but while this reaction has played a helpful role in redressing the balance, I think that it has often led to an unhelpful underplaying of chapter 3. The motivation for the current trend to downplay chapter 3 is the desire to make sense of Lamentations as a book of despair with no hope on the horizon. Chapter 3 seems much too positive and is felt to threaten the integrity of the protest against God.

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<sup>4</sup> In this way, we avoid the danger of focusing on the speech of orientation and not disorientation (Brueggemann, 1984:51-52)

<sup>5</sup> Gottwald argues that “the effect of the compilation has been to make everything lead up to the third poem and then flow away from it, thereby putting the climax in the middle” (1962:62)

<sup>6</sup> Hillers (1992:29) argues that “the acrostics and associated features are most concentrated in Chapter 3, so the book builds to a climax here”.

Since there is such a heated debate on Lamentations 3, it therefore warrants an individual analysis. This analysis should help tie Lamentations 3 to the rest of the book. But for us to do this exercise sufficiently, we need to revisit some of the centripetal and centrifugal devices that we highlighted earlier on in our literary analysis. From these centripetal and centrifugal devices the argument for Lamentations 3 being the anchor can be justified. Renkema (1998:344) discovers and maintains that, “from a structural perspective, the present literary twist constitutes the centre of the book of Lamentations.”

First, as in Lamentations 1, 2 and 4, the use of the acrostics is evident. Unlike the acrostics in Lamentations 1, 2 and 4, in Lamentations 3 “every single line of each block begins with the correct, consecutive letter of the alphabet, not just the first line” (Gerstenberger, 2001:492). Longman (2008:362) adds, “Unlike the previous chapters where each verse started with a successive letter of the alphabet, in chapter 3 each letter repeats at the start of three verses before going on to the next letter”. Dobbs- Allsopp (2002:105) summarises it well that

the formal patterns of repetition are noticeably intensified in the third poem (e.g. the acrostic now effects the first line of every couplet and the unbalanced rhythm and prominent enjambment of the *qinah* meter are pervasive), bringing the sequence to an emotional climax.

The effect of this is “a more rapid and insistent beat to the poem. Each succinct statement strikes hard” (Berlin, 2004:85). Inherently bonded with the acrostics is the fact that Lamentations 3 uses the *pei-ayin* form just like Lamentations 2 and 4, and unlike Lamentation 1 which uses the *ayin-pei*. This links Lamentations 3 more closely to its immediate laments.

The other noticeable missing feature is the **איכה**. Lamentations 3 and 5 do not start with the **איכה**, as do Lamentations 1, 2 and 4. Although Lamentations 3 uses the alternative form **אך** in verse 3, it is clear that the mood is different. Salters (2010:185) is commended for maintaining the argument that the mood is different in the midst of pressures from modern scholars who do not want this admission though it is apparent from the literary features. Berlin (2004:84) goes a step further in suggesting that by omitting the **איכה** Lamentation 3 “is not formally marked as a lament”. Taking it from our literary analysis above, where we have clearly made a distinction between a lament and a dirge, we would prefer to say that Lamentations 3 is not marked as proper dirge like Lamentations 1, 2 and 4. However, though the element of a dirge does not take prominence as it does in 1, 2 and 4, it is still there, since there is use of the alternative form **אך**

in verse 3. So the element of a dirge takes secondary position in Lamentations 3, unlike in Lamentations 1, 2 and 4, where it takes the primary position.

Moving from **אֵיכָה**, the other distinguishing, prominent feature in Lamentations 3 is the omission of names of places. This of course is in line with the *atemporal* nature of the entire book of Lamentations. Salters (2010:185) puts it well that in Lamentations 3 “we do not encounter the names of Jerusalem, Judah or Israel and there is little to suggest the actual aftermath of 586 BCE”. This is crucial because the third poem opens itself for appropriation in other contexts more than any of the other poems. This point is picked up well by Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:114-115) when he says that Lamentations 3 shows a stereotyped nature of language and as such it is pregnant with metaphorical and figurative language. So rather than question the authenticity and status, the poem opens avenues to move to other contexts. “The language remains open for different people to use and appropriate in accordance with whatever situation they find themselves” (Dobbs-Allsopp, 2002:115).

O’Connor (2002:44) also observes that, “the poem’s lines are shorter, it uses the *qinah* meter or limping meter more frequently, and Hebrew forms repeat and interweave more intricately across verses and stanzas”. Berlin (2004:85) concurs with O’Connor on the repetition of Hebrew forms and interweaving of verses and stanzas and then gives two examples. The first example comes in verses 12-13, the last of the *dalet* lines and the first of the *hey* lines. Verse 12 speaks of the bow and verse 13 continues with the arrows. The second example is taken from verses 48 and 49. In verse 48, the last of the *pei* lines, the image of ‘eyes streaming with water’ is carried over into 49 the first *ayin* lines. Berlin (2004:85-86) concludes that,

This enjambment of ideas and images across the alphabetical boundaries is a counterweight to the formal structuring of the acrostic. It keeps the poem moving forward and prevents the poem from breaking up into three-line sets. The poem thus keeps moving from one stanza to another and from one thought to another, in a manner that makes a neat subdivision of the chapter impossible. Moreover, the poem lacks a clear progression of ideas, preferring to alternate between despair and hope, as if the speaker wants to convey his changing feelings as he ponders the events and their implication.

So these literary features reinforce the point that Lamentations 3 not only occupies the central position of the book, but is the heart and climax of the book. In other words, the laments of chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5 find meaning when they are read in the context of Lamentations 3.

### 3.2.2 The Structure from the Voices

Besides the centripetal and centrifugal features that bind and open these Laments, the structure plays a crucial role in maintaining balance. The structure of Lamentations 3 can only be understood better from the interplay of voices.

So, just as there are a number of voices in the entire book of Lamentations, Lamentations 3 is no exception. Boda (2008:403) in conjunction with a number of other modern scholars<sup>7</sup> highlights the importance of being sensitive to the various voices that appear throughout the book. Boda, for example, (2008:403) reiterates that “no two poems are alike in the structuring of the voices. One needs to be alert to the impact that employing various voices has on the reading of the poem”. Boda (2008:403) then gives Lamentations 1 and 3 as examples. Whereas in Lamentations 1,

it would appear that emotional and psychological progress is realized in this poem as it moves from a more distant, descriptive 3<sup>rd</sup> person reporting in verses 1-11 to a more personal, private 1<sup>st</sup> person speech in verses 12-22. The poem begins with an external point of view, observing the pain of the personified city, only to give voice to the suffering woman who discloses her inner turmoil. In Lamentations 3 this inner turmoil is presented from the outset and is expressed not by the city personified as a woman but rather by a suffering man.

Therefore, an overview of the structure from the modulating voices will yield some insights into how the chapter fits into the whole picture.

As we have shown in our literary analysis there is an interchange between first person singular, third person masculine singular, second person masculine singular and first person common plural. Thus, verses 1, 8, 17-21, 24, 48-51 and 55 are in the first person singular. Some of the verses in this category articulate the horror the man has witnessed, whereas others are individual confession, petition and confidence of answered prayer.

In verses 2-7, 9-13 and 15-16 the subject is God, and the poet uses the third person masculine singular. God is the perpetrator and the man is the victim. Commenting on the whole section from verses 1 to 18, Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:110) says,

the section is shaped as one long complaint, a staple feature of individual laments, and is unified through a twofold pattern of pronominal repetition, first-person forms of the ‘everyman’ counterpointing third-person forms of God. References to the everyman as subject enfold the section as a whole ... otherwise God is

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<sup>7</sup> For example, Lee (2002) and Lanahan (1974).

mostly the author of the harmful actions depicted throughout and the man God's unwitting victim, marked in 3:2 by the same prosaic particle that identified Zion as the object at the beginning of the second poem (2:1a).

Longman (2008:363) concurs that, even though Lamentations 3 is a distinct poem, it was never meant to be read separately from the previous two, since the reference to 'his wrath' in 3:1 is provided for by the antecedent 'the LORD's anger' in 2:22.

In relation to God, Berlin (2004:88) makes a significant point that "just as this man is nameless and lacks all identification, so the 'he', the perpetrator of the suffering, is nameless until verse 18; before that verse God is referred to only indirectly ... by a third-person pronoun". O'Connor (2002:47) buttresses by saying,

an assailant attacks him violently, but he withholds the assailant's identity ... By leaving the enemy unnamed, he provokes curiosity, heightens tension, and leads readers into the tangled relationship between torturer and victim. His frequent use of first-person and third-person pronouns (I and he) suggests an intimacy between himself and his opponent and makes all the more dramatic the unspeakable betrayal that becomes evident only later in the poem.

Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:110) suggests that "the suppression of God's name until the section's very last word ensures that the naming of the LORD, when finally delivered, receives added emphasis". O'Connor's and Dobbs-Allsopp's suggestions are not mutually exclusive. In fact, curiosity, tension, intimacy and emphasis are all achieved by naming the perpetrator after a prolonged use of pronouns.

The didactic voice comes in verses 22-23, 25-26 and 31-38<sup>8</sup>. This didactic voice seems to rely heavily on the wisdom literature in its articulation of God's attributes. God's loving kindness and compassion are seen as abundant. The didactic voice also highlights the greatness of his faithfulness (*emet* אמת)<sup>9</sup>. And so, the conclusion is that God is good (*tob* טוב)<sup>10</sup>. Further in verse 31-38, the justice and sovereignty of God are highlighted.

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<sup>8</sup> In the categories of Brueggemann (1984:19-21) this section would fall under the Psalms of orientation.

<sup>9</sup> Although *emet* (אמת) is another resource that is useful for peace, healing and hope, we did not include it alongside *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים), since it is not repeated, as is done with the latter. So we assume that it is not taking a prominent position, like *hesed* חסד and *rahamim* (רחמים), but a subordinate position, supporting the elevated resources, i.e. *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים).

<sup>10</sup> The other attribute of God essential for peace, healing and hope is *tsadiq* צדיק, which is highlighted in Lamentations 1:18. Again, we did not include it alongside *rahamim* and *hesed* because it falls outside the central pericope (i.e. 3:19-33). However, it is important to note that *tsadiq* (צדיק), *emet* (אמת), *rahamim* (רחמים) and *hesed*

A switch to the enduring man comes in verses 27-30. In these verses total submission to God seems to be the main focus. This seems to go contrary to the encouragement to cry to God that we see in chapters 1 and 2. However, we suggest that this is calling for discipline in protest.

Verse 39 is in the third person masculine singular, though it is referring to mankind in general. This verse is building on from the justice and sovereignty of God. If God is such, man should not complain when God is executing his justice, even that of punishing for sins. If this verse is read from the wisdom literature point of view, it serves to highlight the need for punishment of sins in order to establish social cohesion. Besides the social cohesion aspect, the verse is also laying the ground for corporate confession that comes in 40-42.

Verses 40-42a are in the first person common plural and act as a confession. Gerstenberger (2001:494) notes well that this is the first time in Lamentations 3 that we encounter a collective statement. Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:123) adds, “the verbs ‘test’ and ‘examine’ occur frequently in wisdom material (e.g. Job 5:27; 28:3, 27 Proverbs 2:4; 20:27; Sirach 13:11; 42:18)”.

Verse 47 could easily be lumped together with verses 40-42a, but a closer look will warrant a separate treatment since it is retelling the horrific experience from a corporate point of view rather than individual. It is not so much a confession but rather a narration of what has happened.

From 42b-45 and 56-66 the poet switches to the second person masculine singular. The two passages turn out to be a dialogue between the poet and God<sup>11</sup>. So there is use of the ‘you’ and ‘us’ (43, 44, 45), ‘you’ and ‘my’ (56, 58, 59b), ‘you’ and ‘I’ (57), ‘you’ and ‘me’ (59a, 60, 61, 63). Although the person, gender and number in these passages do not cause a lot of problems, there has been a heated debate on how to translate the verbal forms. The debate has first centred

(יחיל) all play a central role when it comes to issues of peace and justice (נושפט) that will bring lasting hope (יחיל) as in Psalm 119:74-77 where all these attributes are clearly mentioned. These attributes constitute God to be declared good (טוב).

<sup>11</sup> A number of scholars see God as silent throughout the book of Lamentations; however a closer look at the experiences of the poet in 3:57 seems to suggest that God said only one word in Hebrew אל-חירא. Wright (2015:104) observes this and affirms that, “the same voice that claims to have lost all hope from the Lord, also reports that in his extremity God had spoken two words to him – the only words of God in the whole book – ‘Do not fear’”. However, one would still need to establish and locate the occasion of the utterance of these words (i.e. when exactly were these words uttered? Was it at the establishment of the covenant or the fall of Jerusalem? Or the poet is just meditating at the words which were said frequently in the entire history of Israel?)

on how to translate the verbal forms of verses 56-61. In Hebrew it is clear we are dealing with the perfects or *qatals*. However, the challenge is how to translate them since Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:126) says that, “they are used in prose narrative to render events in the past tense”. He goes on to admit that the “verb form itself is very flexible and can take on different nuances depending on context”. Although Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:126) settles for a precative use of the perfect, Parry (2010:120-124) argues well for a simple past tense in line with the Septuagint and the traditional view which most translations take.

The second problem comes in with the imperfects in verses 63-66. A glance at the NIV translation is misleading, since we are led to believe we have a series of imperatives from verses 63-66. However, a closer look at the Hebrew will reveal that, in verse 63, although ‘look’, which is a *hifil* imperative, is there, it is not fronted. What is actually fronted is ‘their seating and their rising’ (שבתם וקיימתם). Again in verses 64-66, although the NIV’s translation seems to suggest a series of imperatives, there is a series of imperfects (*yiqtol*s). Parry (2010:125) says the imperfects “may be understood as implicit imperatives making this a request . . ., or they may be expressions of confidence about what God will indeed do”. He then concludes well that it is better “to see them as expressions of confidence concerning how God will punish the enemies *and also* as implicit requests that God indeed act in this way” (Parry, 2010:125-126).

Verses 46 and 52-54 use the third person common plural in reference to the enemies. Before we can make a conclusion to the analysis of the voices it is imperative to point out that verses 59-66<sup>12</sup> should be treated with caution in an analogous reading. The danger is to see them as advocating for vengeance to the enemy and apply it literally. This would then lead to a cycle of violence<sup>13</sup> rather than healing and hope as is argued by this study through the analysis of *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God.

In a nutshell, all speaking voices that we have uncovered as playing a pivotal role in the book of Lamentations are represented in Lamentations 3, save for the third feminine voice, which is

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<sup>12</sup> The vengeance aspect can be seen extending to Lamentations 4:21-24, and specifically to Edom for rejoicing over the fall and suffering of Judah. But as will be argued later in Chapter 5 when we will be dealing with the theological/ rhetorical aspects of Lamentations, the stand that Edom takes over Judah should be critiqued since it perpetuates violence rather than peace. Those who advocate for peace should not rejoice when there is violence even in the camp of their enemies.

<sup>13</sup> The old saying “an eye for an eye will leave the nation blind” stands as the pillar of truth.



personified Jerusalem. So we can comfortably suggest that in Lamentations 3 there are four speaking voices.

Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:105-106) synthesizes this data structurally:

3:1-18, the man speaking in the first person singular (I) rehearses the horrors of his treatment at the hands of God. 3:19-24, the man asserts his resolve to hope. 3:25-39, the man contemplates reasons to hope in God in the face of adversity and suffering. 3:40-47, the section is set apart by its use of the first-person common plural voice (we). The speaker uses a hortatory plural and speaks as one among a large group. The section draws on traditions associated with the communal lament. 3:48-66, the (I) of the first-person singular return, though, it is more expansive and inclusive than that of 3:1-18. This final section moves from complaint and lament to supplication and imprecation.

So in a nutshell, a number of scholars<sup>14</sup> observe that the poem moves from individual to communal and back to individual again.

From this analysis, we find that Lamentations 3 has some components of an individual lament<sup>15</sup> and a communal lament<sup>16</sup> fronted. This has been the biggest motivation for us to line our research question as seeking to offer hope through the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) on two levels (i.e. an individual and communal level of loss). So the losses in the contemporary context where we seek an analogous reading are not experienced on the individual level only but also on the communal level, just as is the case in Lamentations 3.

This unearthing of the modulation of voices finds its significance in the words of Boda (2008:403) “The interplay of various voices provides more opportunities to express and experience the pain of the crisis”. So in line with our research question, this opening up of more opportunities to express and experience pain is fundamental not only in their original contexts but also in other contexts of suffering. Thus, an analysis of the modulation of voices has proven beyond doubt that Lamentations 3 can analogously and beneficially be read in a Zimbabwean context of suffering.

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<sup>14</sup> For example, Longman (2008:363) and Salters (2010:186).

<sup>15</sup> Gottwald (1962:61) suggests that “the imagery and mood of individual lament and funeral dirge have been joined to a national catastrophe in order to convey its deeply personal and tragic import”.

<sup>16</sup> It also have components of a dirge at the background as evidenced by its suppressed use of נא in verse 3. So we can comfortably say Lamentations 3 utilizes the components of the dirge, the individual and communal lament more than any of the laments in building up to the climax of the book.



### 3.2.3 The גבר as the Central Figure of Lamentations 3

Lamentations 3 sets off with a self-introduction of הגבר. This גבר then occupies most of the verses of this central lament. Since most of our research question's key words, that is *hesed* (חסד), *rahamim* (רחמים) and hope, are all uttered by the גבר, it is prudent to know what constitutes the גבר. Therefore the analysis of the word גבר will commence from context, root, going through the derivatives until we finally come to the usage as noun. We will then try to see the relationship of the גבר to the rest of the participants (e.g. בת־ציון in Lamentations 1) that are found within the book.

The word גבר is found in Aramaic, Akkadian and Hebrew with the sense of being 'strong'.

Kosmala (1977:367) expands this notion in this way,

In all occurrences, except in Ethiopic, where the word means 'to do, make,' the emphasis lies on power and strength, and frequently also on excellence and superiority, as well as on greater strength than in other cases, even if a comparative term is not always expressly mentioned. Thus, e.g., a *gebher*, and even more a *gibbor* (intensive form), has specific noteworthy characteristics that someone else has to a lesser degree or not at all. Thus, finally, we also find that certain word formations from this root are applied to God extensively.

Despite this background, most English versions do not bring out the nuance of 'strong', as the word is basically translated as 'man'<sup>17</sup>. In its basic *qal* verbal form, the word גבר means to be superior, prevail, succeed or increase<sup>18</sup>. Kosmala (1977:368) adds,

The verb not only has the simple positive meaning 'to be strong' but frequently, in fact originally, a comparative sense as well. This explains why it can be connected with the comparative particle *min* 'from' when comparisons are explicitly stated ... The verb has the meaning 'to be stronger than, exceed, be superior to, have the upper hand' (*al* over the enemy, *be* among one's brethren).

In the *piel*, the word echoes the idea of causing to be superior. For example, in Zechariah 10:6 the word is used in a context of war where God promises to strengthen Judah so that they

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<sup>17</sup> For example, the New King James, New American Standard Version, New Jerusalem Bible, Revised Standard Version all translate the word as 'man'

<sup>18</sup> Koehler & Baumgartner, 1998:167 .

overcome their enemy. The causative meaning also comes in Zechariah 10:12 where the idea is that of being strengthened in following Yahweh<sup>19</sup>.

In the *hifil* the idea of causation is still prevalent with some intensity. Two passages will suffice to illustrate this. First, the *hifil* is found in Psalm 12:4 where it clearly calls on God to silence those who boast and rely on their speech for defence and prevalence. Second, the *hifil* is used in Daniel 9:27. The King James Version translates this verse as ‘and he shall confirm (וְהִגְבִּיר) a covenant (בְּרִית) with many’. The basic idea is that of making a strong, firm agreement (Holladay, 1988:54). Kosmala (1977:368) correctly advises that,

Sometimes the verb must be translated freely, especially when it is used figuratively... but one must keep in mind in translating that the element of strength or superiority is always present. Thus *gbr* can mean to be prominent, to play a (the primary) role, to be important, to have significance, to be of use or to be distinguished, to exceed, to win the victory.

The word can also be found in the *hitpael*, where, interestingly, it means to raise oneself up defiantly against God, as in Job 15:25 and 36:9 (Kosmala, 1977:368). In Job 15:25 the New International Version (NIV) prefers to translate נָבַר as ‘vaunt’ which basically means to boast or brag<sup>20</sup>. In Job 36:9 the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) chooses to translate נָבַר as ‘arrogantly’. So Kosmala (1977:368) is correct in saying that the *hitpael* of *gbr* sometimes means to ‘make oneself greater than another, to boast, to be proud’ since he brings together all the concepts suggested by the NIV and the NRSV. Commenting on the *hitpael* appearing in the two passages in Job, Kosmala (1977:368) says “both of these passages in Job have to do with boasting against God. It should be noted in this connection that it is the *gebher* Job who behaves arrogantly toward God – a stylistic fine point of the author”.

Berlin (2004:85) picks this point up and says, “It is perhaps more than coincidental that Job, in his first speech (Job 3:3), also refers to himself as a *geber*”. She then draws some parallels between Job and the נָבַר of Lamentations 3 which are: being hunted by wild animals, being the target of God’s arrows, and being sated with bitterness, being cut off from accessing God. Further comparison is made in the reasoning that there is hope for the wretched, that it is good to

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<sup>19</sup> Kosmala (1977:368) highlights another reference which is Ecclesiastes 10:10. However, in this context, it is speaking about the application of more power when using blunt tools.

<sup>20</sup> The New American Heritage Dictionary, 1983:752 .

bear chastisement from God, that God causes hurt but brings healing, that God would not pervert justices, and that both good and bad come from God (Berlin, 2004:85). It is evident that Berlin has moved from the verbal to the noun usage. However, before moving into the unveiling of this word as a noun, it is important to highlight that there are four nouns that are derived from the verb. These are **גבורה**, **גבירה** or **גביר**, **גבור** and **גבר**.

**גבורה** appears in Psalm 147:10, Job 41:4 and Job 39:19. In all these, the basic idea is that of strength or power<sup>21</sup>. In Ecclesiastes 10:17 the idea is that of powerful men contrasted with a child king and the weak princess (Kosmala, 1977:369).

**גביר** is used in Genesis 27:29 and 37. Generally, both **גבורה** and **גביר** are translated as Lord<sup>22</sup> or master<sup>23</sup>. **גבירה** being feminine, normally then refers “to woman in contrast to a girl and indicates that she has some official position” (Kosmala, 1977:373). **גבירה** is used in Genesis 16:4,8,9; 2 Kings 5:3; Isaiah 24:2; Psalm 123:2; Proverbs 30:23. The word is used to refer to a queen, specifically, the wife of a king as in 1 Kings 11:19. It can also be used to refer to the mother of a king as it is used in 1 Kings 15:13 and 2 Kings 10:13. In Isaiah 47:5, 7 it is used to refer to Babylon as ‘mistress’ of the kingdoms (Kosmala, 1977:373).

**גבור** is used in Genesis 10:8 and has been translated variously. It has been translated as mighty one<sup>24</sup>, valiant warrior<sup>25</sup>, heroic warrior<sup>26</sup>, mighty warrior<sup>27</sup> and potentate<sup>28</sup>. Holladay (1988:54-55) suggests that the word means manly, vigorous, despot, hero (as in battle), champion or a mighty hero. He goes on to suggest that it can also be taken as a metaphor meaning someone influential or respected as used in Psalm 112:2. It is also used ironically in Isaiah 5:22 for those who are respected or influential, or for warriors in drinking wine.

Kosmala (1977:373) opines that **גבור**,

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<sup>21</sup> Kosmala, 1977:369 .

<sup>22</sup> KJV, NET, NRSV

<sup>23</sup> NLT.

<sup>24</sup> KJV, NASV.

<sup>25</sup> NET.

<sup>26</sup> NLT.

<sup>27</sup> RSV, NRSV, NIV.

<sup>28</sup> NJB.

with the doubling of the middle radical, is an intensive form and thus means a particularly strong or mighty person who carries out, can carry out, or has carried out great deeds, and surpasses others in doing so. Therefore, the usual translation is hero especially in military activities. But it can also be used in a broader sense to refer to any special degree of physical might, power, authority, and splendor.

Kosmala (1977:374) concludes that,

by far the most frequent use of the word *gibbor* occurs in connection with military activities, especially as a designation for a warrior, either a man who is eligible for military service or is able to bear arms, or one who has actually fought in combat who has already distinguished himself by performing heroic deeds.

Now moving on from גבור to גבר Kosmala (1977:377) says,

a *gebher* is less than a *gibbor*, which is indicated first of all formally in that *gebher* is simple, and not intensive, form. However, *gebher* does not mean simply a man like אדם or אָנוּשׁ, neither of which indicates a particular sex, nor does it mean man in general, for which the OT uses the Hebrew אִישׁ ... of course the word *gebher* also contains the element of strength especially in a general sense. A *gebher* without power is a self-contradiction and is as good as dead (Psalm 88:5f).

Brown, Driver and Briggs (2001:150) suggest that גבר is to be understood in terms of “man as strong, distinguished from women, children and non-combatants whom he is to defend”. Baker and Carpenter (2003:183) aver that גבר

is a masculine noun, meaning man, mighty (virile) man, warrior. It is used of man but often contains more than just a reference to gender by referring to the nature of a man, usually with overtones of spiritual strength or masculinity based on the verb *gabar*... meaning to be ‘mighty’. The word is used to contrast men with women and children ... and to denote warrior ability.

So from this we gather that not only is there the nuance of strong, warrior, defence, rising up defiantly, but the word is strongly gendered as masculine in contrast to feminine. In addition to this, there is also the spiritualization element that has been highlighted by Baker and Carpenter above.

Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:107) alongside Hillers (1972:64) prefers to see the גבר as ‘everyman’, thereby inducing the rhetoric of inclusivity. Certainly, the rhetoric of inclusivity is apparent; first, from the interchange of the forms of *pei-ayin* and *ayin-pei*, as we argued earlier on, and second, from the suggested interchange of female (chapter 1-2 – daughter Zion) to male (chapter 3 גבר).

So the argument of Hillers and Dobbs-Allsopp to translate גִּבּוֹר as ‘everyman’ is attractive, since it emanates from the analysis of the interchange of voices<sup>29</sup> in the chapter. However, from a lexical analysis of the word, the aspect of strong warrior is left out. Despite the omission of strong warrior, the inducement of the inclusive rhetoric is crucial in this study, since most of the suffering and loss of hope in contemporary contexts emanates from politics of exclusion<sup>30</sup>. Therefore the analogous reading will be much more beneficial if it incorporates the inclusivity avenues that offer balance on gender, such as is manifested in the gender balance<sup>31</sup> of the daughter of Zion (chapter 1-2) and the strong man (Chapter 3).

Summing it all up, the word גִּבּוֹר would mean a strong warrior, who defiantly and arrogantly stands up against God, as in Job 38:3. A strong warrior is not just a survivor, but one who undergoes suffering but refuses to break down as is the case with Job. Though the גִּבּוֹר is a warrior, who stands up defiantly, arrogantly or against all odds, it should be noted that in line with the wisdom literature teaching (Psalm 34:8; 40:4, Ecclesiastes 9:11) he also trusts in God<sup>32</sup>. The Wisdom literature always admonishes that those who are strong should not trust their strength otherwise they delude themselves<sup>33</sup>. In Jeremiah 17:5-7 the idea of trusting in man is condemned and an exhortation is given to trust in God. So the real גִּבּוֹר is strong in trusting God as well. Renkema (1998:351) puts it well that,

a גִּבּוֹר enjoyed a special relationship of faith and trust in God. The term would appear to suggest a sort of spiritualization of the physical: a man only becomes truly strong when he enjoys a close relationship with God and does what God asks of him with faith and reverence.

Such a description would fit well in the context of Lamentations, where God is seen as the perpetrator of violence and this survivor<sup>34</sup> stands up to question and plead for God’s loving

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<sup>29</sup> This is apparent from Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:107) when he argues that ‘the various modulation in voices in Lamentations 3 achieve similar rhetorical aims...The man’s experience, his sufferings as well as his hopes and longings are now our experiences...when the singular ‘I’ resumes ... it has become more inclusive’.

<sup>30</sup> In the Zimbabwean context, the politics of exclusion led to the *Gukurahundi* pitting Ndebele against Shona. Therefore it was clothed in tribal segregation. The politics of exclusion is what triggered the *Murambatsvina* on the pretext of ZANU PF versus MDC (Movement for Democratic Change). In the *farm invasion/ Hondo yeMinda*, the politics of exclusion was dressed up in racial discrimination of white against black.

<sup>31</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:105).

<sup>32</sup> Kosmala (1977:372).

<sup>33</sup> Hamilton (1996:816).

<sup>34</sup> He may indeed be a “regular guy whose chief distinction –his suffering and the accident of his survival –he shares in common with the other members of the post-destruction community” (Dobbs-Allsopp, 2002:109).

kindness and mercy. Lastly, the **גבר** is nameless, which means the reference is not bound with the historical context but is opened up to refer to any defending, spiritually strong man from anywhere, in any generation. So the suggestion by Hillers (1972:64) and Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:105) to refer to him as ‘everyman’ is commendable. In the case of this study, we would suggest it to be ‘every spiritually strong man’, though we are mindful of the criticism that it sounds too long. This ‘every spiritually strong man’ is credited with standing up in protest against God’s severe punishment, but also utters the most profound words that are key to this study, which are the *hesed* (**חסד**) and *rahamim* (**רחמים**) of God. In times of severe suffering, the ‘every spiritually strong man’ focuses on the suffering but also turns to the source of suffering (God) and the traditional teaching about the perpetrator of the suffering. In the end the **גבר** typifies those who cling “to God against God” (Thi Pham, 1999:147). For an analogous reading, the **גבר**’s character is worth emulating since in some contexts of suffering, spirituality is not measured with standing up for justice.

### 3.2.4 Relationship of the **גבר** to Other Participants in the Book

Besides the **גבר** we have already seen that the other character who occupies verses 2-18 is **יהוה**. Though mentioned at the end of the section, his role is significant in so far as understanding the entire section is concerned. The name used here to close this section and begin the next section is **יהוה**, his covenant name (McComiskey, 2001:507) as opposed to **אדני**<sup>35</sup>. This covenant name ends the first section (3:1-18) and begins the second (3:19-33), which is littered with covenant terms, for example **חסד**<sup>36</sup>. In the majority of the cases where God’s name is mentioned in Lamentations 3, the author prefers to refer to him as **יהוה**, although in a few

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<sup>35</sup> One could also argue that the name **אדני** is controlling the **כי** (verse 31-33), the **ל** (verse 34-36) [though there is an interruption by the use of **אליין** in verse 35] and the first line of the **ג** (verse 37) sections. In the second line of the **ג** (verse 38) section we have a transition back to **יהוה**. This transition is necessitated by the use of **אליין** (verse 38). The **יהוה** section that begins in verse 40 is then briefly interrupted by the use of **אל** in verse 41. However, it is also clear from the interruptions that the author is resisting a clear division based on the use of the names of God. But it is clear that verses 19-33 is the most theologically pregnant section that starts with the use of **אדני** in verse 31.

<sup>36</sup> Archer (2001:300) makes a crucial point that *hesed* (**חסד**) is often used in association with *berit* (**ברית**).

cases he chooses variations and uses אֲדֹנָי<sup>37</sup>, אֱלֹהִים<sup>38</sup> and עֲלִיּוֹן<sup>39</sup>. This of course excludes instances when God is referred to with pronouns. According to the distribution<sup>40</sup> of the use of the Lord's name, we find that in chapter 1, יְהוָה is used seven times, whereas אֲדֹנָי is used only once in verse 1. In chapter 2, יְהוָה is used seven times and אֲדֹנָי is used seven times as well. In both chapters 1 and 2 עֲלִיּוֹן is not used. In chapter 3 יְהוָה is used 12 times, אֲדֹנָי is used four times, עֲלִיּוֹן is used two times and אֱלֹהִים is used once. In chapter 4, יְהוָה is used three times. No other name of God is used in this chapter save for יְהוָה. In chapter 5, יְהוָה is used three times, and no other name of God is used.

From this analysis of the distribution of God's name, we find that יְהוָה, which is God's covenant name, is regularly used. It is concentrated more in chapter 3 than in any other chapter, which arguably makes chapter 3 unique in both structure, as argued earlier on, and now theology. Chapter 3 is mainly concerned with the גֹּבֵר as a singular, but also as a representative of the community. So in a number of verses in chapter 3 there is a switch from the גֹּבֵר to God and the community, whereas in chapters 1-2 there is the female personification of Zion and Jerusalem. In chapter 4 we then move to see a number of characters like the starving children, the heartless mothers, the dead warriors, the princes, the kings and the priests. Chapter 5 is a communal lament most probably taking a cue from chapter 3:40-47 which is also communal in nature<sup>41</sup>. In chapter 5 some of the characters are carried over from chapter 4. These include women of Zion, virgins of Judah, princes, elders, and young men. However, there are two nations that have been added to the list of enemies. In chapter 4 we were introduced to the Edomites as among the enemies, but now in chapter 5 we are told of the Assyrians and Egyptians. It seems to be clear that Egypt, Assyria and Edom cannot help the mothers, children, princes, kings, priests, young

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<sup>37</sup> For example, verses 31, 36 and 37

<sup>38</sup> For example, verse 41

<sup>39</sup> For example, verse 38

<sup>40</sup> This distribution is based on the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997.

<sup>41</sup> Berlin (2004:95) notes that from verses 40 to 44 there is a transition to a new discourse. The speaker now uses the plural 'we' instead of the singular 'I' and in which God is addressed directly as 'you' and not 'he'. Moreover, verse 40 makes a transition from wisdom to lament or penitential psalm. Although the penitential aspect is dominant, Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:123) notes that, words such as 'test' and 'examine' also occur frequently in wisdom literature.

men and the warriors. The only hope seems to come from the **גִּבּוֹר** who is standing up to call for God's mercy and loving kindness, which makes chapter 3 very special in terms of structure, theology and characters.

### 3.2.5 Figurative Language of Lamentations 3

We have established that the book of Lamentations is basically poetry. In poetry there is a lot of parallelism and figurative language. We have also established that in Lamentations 3, more than in any other lament, the language is terse. In terms of parallelism we have established that the enjambment is also concentrated in this third lament. Tied to the enjambment, alliteration and assonance are also found in Lamentations 3, which proves that the parallelism begins at the basic level (i.e. the phonological level). For example, Hillers (1988:73) and O'Connor (2002:54) note well that there is euphony in verses 47-48 with the words **הַשָּׂאֵת פָּחַת פָּחַר** and **הַשֹּׁבֵר** making the alliteration amplify the suffering. This alliteration is also seen with **שֹׁפֵטָה נוֹשֵׁפֵטִי** in verse 59. It continues with the **תָּם**'s that are found in verses 60, 61 and 63.

In terms of figurative language, Chapter 3 of Lamentations continues the trend that was begun earlier on. There is extensive use of metaphors and similes. The biggest image that we find is that of exile (Berlin, 2004:86). Breaking it down to its small constituents, we find that the first image is that of a sheep and a shepherd who is leading the sheep into darkness (Berlin, 2004:86). This comes clearly with the word 'rod' **שֹׁבֵט** in verse 1, which echoes Psalm 23. However, in Psalm 23, the word **שֹׁבֵט**, is used with the sense of comfort **נַחֵם**, whereas in Lamentations 3:1, it is associated with judgment. **עֲבָרָה** and **עֲנִי** are the two words used to picture the judgment in Lamentations 3:1

The other image that features strongly in Lamentations 3 is that of imprisonment. This image is found in verse 7 with words like **גִּדָּר** and **נִחְשֵׁת** forming its foundation. Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:112) sees this image as encompassing verses 5-9 and says

The images of 3:5-9 cluster around the ideas of isolation, abandonment, and encirclement. The series of verbs used in these lines (being besieged, enveloped, imprisoned, walled about, shut out and blocked) poignantly articulates the extreme helplessness, abandonment, and solitude that are among the chief burdens of suffering and for which there is no way out except from a beyond that stands outside the suffered experience.



Then from verses 10-13 the images painted are that of a god who has turned enemy. First, instead of being a defender of the **גבר** from wild animals, God has become the wild animal. So God is pictured like a bear and a lion (wild animals), and the **גבר** has become the prey. Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:113) opines that “In the Old Testament bears and lions commonly occur as the animal (non-human) embodiment of that which is mostly feared by human beings, and as such are commonly used as figurative representations of the enemy”. Longman (2008:365) suggests “the bear and the lion often appear together as harbingers of destruction and death”.

In verses 12-13 the weapons that are supposed to be used to defend are used to afflict the **גבר**. Three kinds of weapons are explicitly mentioned: ‘bow’ **קשת** ‘arrow’ **חיץ** and ‘quiver’ **אשפה**. Berlin (2004:91) observes some interchanges from verse 1-13. God is the shepherd, then the lion and bear, and then the hunter. The poet is the sheep, the prey and then the lion and bear. In a nutshell Berlin (2004:91) concludes well that “the images say that God is the poet’s natural enemy”.

Verses 14-18 are an antithesis of God’s provision. The antithesis seems to be a continuation from Psalm 23. In Psalm 23 the poet boasts that he lacks nothing, he has green pastures to feed on, he is led beside quiet waters for drinking, and then he concludes, **אך טוב וחסד ירדפוני**, ‘Surely goodness and loving kindness will pursue me’<sup>42</sup>. In Psalm 23 God has been shown to be the best provider. The antithesis comes in Lamentations 3:14-18 where the poet has become a (שחק) laughing stock, he has been fed (במרורים) with bitter herbs and (חצץ) gravel that broke<sup>43</sup> his teeth, he has been given (לענה) gall to drink instead of fresh water, he does not know (שלום<sup>44</sup>) peace and (טובה<sup>45</sup>) prosperity, which is the very opposite of Psalm 23 where we have the table prepared in the presence of enemies, signifying total security and peace<sup>46</sup>. Verse 18 concludes with a terrifying image. It states that ‘I said my splendor (נצח) is gone (אבד)’.

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<sup>42</sup> This is our own translation.

<sup>43</sup> The Hebrew root is **גרס** which means to crush or make someone’s teeth grind (Holladay, 1988:64)

<sup>44</sup> The word can also mean welfare or good health (Koehler & Baumgartner, 1998:979)

<sup>45</sup> This Hebrew word can also mean welfare or good in every variety of meaning: pleasant, useful, efficient, beautiful, kind, right, and morally good (Koehler & Baumgartner, 1998:349).

<sup>46</sup> Berlin (2004:91) says from verses 14-17 the poet utilizes the images of the mouth.

The Hebrew word נָצַח can mean shine, be illustrious, be victorious, be pure, eminence, glory. If it is used with glory it normally refers to God (Koehler & Baumgartner, 1998:630). The other Hebrew word אָבַד literally means to perish or die (Koehler & Baumgartner, 1998:2). Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:114) highlights that the word “אָבַד carries a special nuance of death and human mortality”. The image of death is also picked up by Berlin (2004:89) who explains that besides the comparison of captivity and death that comes in 3:6, death also signifies that the supplicant is distanced from God. So the whole image resonates well with the departure of God, the collapse of the cult and subsequent deportation and enslavement of the worshipper.

The image of exile and imprisonment is continued in verses 34-36. The underlying tone in these verses is that of maintaining justice to prisoners. Even though exiles were humiliated, Berlin (2004:87) points out that it was in the interest of the King that they arrive safely and, therefore, they had certain rights that protected them from abuse. In that same vein, the Most High is pictured as a King who is concerned about the abuse that prisoners suffer. It is worth to note that here, God is not referred to by his covenant name, but by עֲלִיּוֹן. This is a term that refers to the highest of kings<sup>47</sup> and was frequently applied to the Canaanite deity (Youngblood, 2011:34). The implication may be that these three verses were not confined to Israel but it may well have been a saying that was used even beyond the borders of Israel advocating for justice for prisoners. As hinted by Berlin (2004:94), the poet might be invoking commonly accepted ideas.

The other major images come in verses 43-44. The Hebrew root סָכַךְ occupies the beginning position for both verses 43 and 44. So there is clear repetition. Berlin (2004:96) notes that this word normally carries the positive connotation of protecting from danger. Berlin (2004:96) goes on to clarify that,

Its most frequent occurrences are in connection with the protecting wings of the cherubs and the *kapporet* of the ark ... The cherubs and the *kapporet* form a kind of a lid on top of the ark and they serve as a base for God's throne. This is the place where God is most immanent.

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<sup>47</sup> Especially in Psalm 89:28 (Koehler & Baumgartner, 1998:708).

The other verb that brings a picture of the war between God and his people is רדף (pursue). The Hebrew root is used again in verse 66. In verse 66 God is exhorted to pursue the enemy almost the same way he has pursued the גבר and his people.

Connected to סכך is another Hebrew word ענן (cloud). Hillers (1972:73) thinks that,

The reference to God wrapping himself in cloud (ענן) may be merely a picturesque metaphor, but more likely this is a reference to a permanent part of Yahweh's nature as Israel conceived it. He is enveloped by a radiant *anan*, through which he reveals himself, by which he overwhelms enemies, and in which he may hide himself. Similar conceptions of deities were held in Mesopotamia and Canaan.

Berlin (2004:96) narrows it down to the context of Israel when she says that, the ענן

figures in the exodus and the theophany at Sinai ... The cloud pillar in the wilderness leads the people to safety. Psalm 105:39 calls the cloud by which God led the Israelites a protective cover ... The *theophanous* cloud, like the ark ... has a dual role: it is the locus of God's revealing himself to the people, and at the same time it serves as a buffer that protects the people from direct contact with the divine, because contact with the divine is dangerous and can be fatal. It is to the cloud pillar and to the cloud of the theophany that vv. 43-44 allude, but with the opposite connotation. Rather than protecting the people as he did from the Egyptians, and leading them to safety, God pursues them and kills them. Rather than sheltering them from the numinous power of the divine, the cloud protects God from the people. The vehicle through which God reveals himself here becomes the means by which God keeps himself hidden.

The image found in verse 46 is a carried over from 2:16 where the enemy is pictured like a wild animal ready to pounce, kill and eat its prey.

If Berlin (2004:91) sees verses 14-17 as the image of the 'mouth' then verses 48-51 are images of the 'eyes'<sup>48</sup>. In fact the images of the eyes continue in verses 59, 60 and 63. Verses 48-49 allude to the fact that the גבר will continue to cry until the Lord sees (verse 50). Verse 51 seems to pose some challenges to a number of scholars. Berlin (2004:97) highlights that there are two ways of reading this verse. It may be taken comparatively that the speaker has wept more than the professional mourners, who are the daughters of Jerusalem. Or it can be taken as a cause for

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<sup>48</sup> Following this trend of thought, one can finally say the images of ears start from verses 55 to 58 and 61, with the interchange of the words 'call' and 'heard' forming the basis.

effect. In other words, what he sees happening to the women of the city brings grief and subsequent tears. However, a number of scholars and translations opt for the latter<sup>49</sup>.

Verses 52-55<sup>50</sup> build on the images of bird<sup>51</sup>, pit<sup>52</sup>, stones and water<sup>53</sup>. Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:126) suggests that all these images have to do with the netherworld, Sheol. Berlin (2004:97) adds that exilic literature often uses metaphors of confinement or prison as symbols of exile. So here we have “a nexus between exile and death” (Berlin, 2004:97). So, we can contend that “extreme life-threatening distress is in view” (Dobbs-Allsopp, 2002:126).

The last image of chapter 3 points to a judge, an accuser and an accused. The words ‘took up my case’, ‘you have seen the wrong done to me’ ‘uphold my cause’ and ‘pay them back’ from the NIV, form the basis for the court context. So Berlin (2004:97) is right in concluding that “the poet casts himself as a plaintiff in court, calling on God to act as judge in a case in which he is sure he is right and the enemy is wrong”.

The various images explored above clearly show the desperateness of the exilic situation even in Lamentations 3. God is clearly portrayed as the one behind the suffering. However there are also images that paint a picture of hope in the sovereignty and justices of God. Hence, there is admonition to cry out to him until he answers. This ‘crying out until he answers’ is premised on his *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים).

### 3.2.6 Repetition

Besides the general random repetition of words that occur everywhere, Lamentations 3 contains a specialised form of repetition. The repeated forms are lined at the beginning of every verse. For example, verses 7 and 9 all begin with גַּרְר, verses 11 and 12 all begin with רָרַךְ, verses 19 and

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<sup>49</sup> For example scholars such as Parry (2010:118), O’Connor (2002:54) and Longman (2008:374). Translations like the NIV, NRSV and KJV all suggest it as a cause for effect.

<sup>50</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:126) sees a turning point in verse 54 that is marked by the self-quotation marks. The turning point is from complaint to supplication. The same criterion is used to make a turning point in verse 18.

<sup>51</sup> The image of a bird seems to be a meditation on Psalm 124:7.

<sup>52</sup> The image of pit is common in the Psalms. For example Psalm 35:7-8, Psalm 7:15. Psalm 35:7-8 is uttered with an imprecatory tone whereas Psalm 7:15 takes a wisdom tone. From Job 18:8-9, which seems to have been uttered from a wisdom point of view the pit, trap and entanglement are the fate of the wicked. Those that devise them will fall into them themselves.

<sup>53</sup> The image of ‘waters’ and the tone of verses 55 to 57 brings to the fore the prayer of Jonah in Jonah 2. Comparatively, in Jonah 2:8 (9) the word *hesed* (חסד) is also used. This suggests that even in the deepest of the waters, where hope seems to fade away, hope comes as Jonah meditates on God’s *hesed* (חסד).

20 begin with זָכַר, verses 25 and 26 טוֹב, verses 29 and 30 יִתֵּן, verses 31-33 כִּי, verses 43 and 44 סִכּוּתָהּ, verses 49 and 51 עֵינַי, verses 59 and 60 רָאִיתָהּ.

Such kind of repetition is not found in Lamentations 1. In Lamentations 2 the closest resemblance to such kind of repetition comes in verse 13, with the interrogative particle מָה, and verse 20, with אֵם.

In Lamentations 4 we only find a similar repetition in verses 1 and 2 with אִיכָה and in verse 16 with פָּנֵי. In Lamentations 5 the closest resemblance that we find to such kind of repetition is in verses 17 and 18 with the use of עַל. The significance of such repetition lies in the emphasis brought by the fronting of such forms, occupying the very first position.

### Summary

The repetition of these forms serves to highlight areas of importance in the entire reading process. The writer, by employing all these various devices of showing focus and emphasis, is again indicating that the lamentations are open to various ways of expressing the protest, but on the other hand, the protests/laments are controlled just like the acrostics. It is not just emotional outburst, but it is controlled and uses variety. More importantly, this specialised way of repetition is putting the third lament on a different platform than all the other laments, since this form of repetition is concentrated in Lamentations 3. In conclusion we can say the centripetal and centrifugal features, the images or figurative speech, the covenant name of God, and the repetition, are highly condensed in Lamentation 3, thereby elevating Lamentations 3 to the pinnacle of the book. So, all the preceding chapters are supporting pillars in building the tension to its climax in chapter 3. Thereafter there is a notable recession.

## 3.3 A Focus on Hope and its Resources in their Literary Context

### 3.3.1 Text Boundaries

In line with our research question of seeking to establish hope in a contemporary context, Lamentations 3 is littered with expressions of hope more than any other chapter of the book of

Lamentations. Although in a number of verses the issues related to hope are implied<sup>54</sup>, verses 18-33 seem to have the most explicit statements about hope. In verse 18 the Hebrew uses ותוחלתִי, which basically comes from the root noun תוחלת. Most versions like the NRSV, NJV, NIV, NAB and the KJV translate this Hebrew word as ‘hope’. The RSV translates the word as ‘expectation’, which still retains the nuance of hope.

The other Hebrew term that has been translated as ‘hope’ in many translations<sup>55</sup> is אוחיל, which comes from יחל. Verses that have used this root include 21, 24 and 26. Basically, the root יחל means to stand or wait (Holladay, 1988:133).

Another Hebrew word, which has been translated as ‘wait’ in some versions (i.e. KJB, NAB), but as ‘hope’ (i.e. NIV) in some others, is the phrase לקוו. The phrase is found in verse 25. It is basically coming from the root קוה. NJB prefers to translate it as ‘trust’, which is again related to the basic idea of hope.

The last Hebrew word that has been translated as hope is תקוה. The word has basically two meanings, either hope<sup>56</sup> or cord (Holladay, 1988:394). It is used in verse 29.

The other words that determine the boundaries of our text found in the research question are *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים). These two words are the resources instrumental in the generation of hope. The two words are found in verses 22 and 32. So in line with Dorsey (1999:248) we discover that the section from 22-32 opens and closes with the *hesedim*<sup>57</sup> (חסדים) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God. However, because verses 31-33 are all joined together by the כִּי, the analysis inevitably has to include up to verse 33.

In summary, it has to be admitted that because of the enjambments that densely populate Lamentations 3, it is difficult to give a clear delineation. In our case we struggle with verses 18

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<sup>54</sup> For example, verses 50, 56-59 and the imprecatory passage from verses 64-66 all anticipate God listening and acting to the request.

<sup>55</sup> NAB, KJV, NIV, NRS, RSV, NJB.

<sup>56</sup> It can also mean ‘expectation’ (Holladay, 1988:394).

<sup>57</sup> Although Dorsey (1999:348) uses the singular, it is preferable to use the plural, since the text uses these key words in the plural.

and 19. For example, although the issue of hope starts from verse 18<sup>58</sup> with the use of תּוֹחַלַּת, verse 18 falls in the ה and not the ו category. So the issue of hope overlaps the boundaries set by the alphabetic acrostics. But, since the reflection on hope is strongly marked by the repetitive use of Hebrew words that find their origin in the root זכר, and on the basis of Dobbs-Allsopp's (2002:126) suggestion that "self-quotation marks are a turning point", our demarcation is going to be from verses 19 to 33. This demarcation offers an opportunity for us to deal with all our key words in the research question: thus hope and its resources, which are the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God.

### 3.3.2 Text Authentication and Translation

The textual analysis below is not intended to give a detailed textual criticism but to establish an acceptable text to work with. Therefore all the text-critical notes are discussed to authenticate the text but at the same time highlight other possible readings. Since our main interest is in 3:19-33, we will limit our discussion to this specific text. In terms of translation, although we have highlighted a number of translational options, Hulst (1960:188-189), who discusses in great detail Old Testament translational problems, finds no great challenges in Lamentations 3, save for verses 22 and 56. Since the aim of the research is to offer an analogous reading, the whole translation exercise is then aimed at establishing a working translation that can be used as the basis for such an analogous reading.

The remembrance <sup>59</sup> of my affliction and my restlessness, wormwood and gall.	19	זכר-עניי ומרודי לענה וראש
My soul <sup>60</sup> surely remembers and is humbled <sup>61</sup> within me.	20	זכור תזכור (ותשיח) [ותשוח] עלי נפשי

<sup>58</sup> Dorsey (1999:248) suggests that the issue of hope starts in verse 22, but he does not convincingly give any reason for the central unit to begin there.

<sup>59</sup> Although from the Masoretic it should be translated as an imperative, we have decided to make it a verbal noun so that the reading does not become awkward.

<sup>60</sup> This means that 'My Soul' is the subject of the first and second part of the verse.

<sup>61</sup> Although in English it seems to be passive, in Hebrew it is a normal *qal* stem.

This I recall to my heart, therefore I have hope <sup>62</sup>	21	זאת אשיב אל-לבי על-כן אוחיל
Surely <sup>63</sup> , the loving kindness of the LORD are not finished. Surely, his compassion are not finished <sup>64</sup> .	22	חסדי יהוה כי לא-תמנו כי לא-כלו רחמי
New for the mornings, Great your faithfulness.	23	חדשים לבקרים רבה אמונתך
The LORD is my portion, My soul said; therefore, I will wait for him <sup>65</sup> .	24	חלקי יהוה אמרה נפשי על-כן אוחיל לו
The LORD is good to the one who waits for him, to the soul that seeks him.	25	טוב יהוה לקו לנפש תדרשנו
It is good to hope and silently wait for the salvation of the LORD.	26	טוב ויחיל ודומם לתשועת יהוה
It is good for the strong <sup>66</sup> man that he carries the yoke from <sup>67</sup> his youth.	27	טוב לגבר כִּי־ישא על בנעוריו

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<sup>62</sup> Or 'Upon this I will wait'.

<sup>63</sup> We have taken the כִּי as asseverative, as suggested by Salters (2010:225).

<sup>64</sup> The second half of the verse is arranged in the normal word order, but looking at it holistically, *hesed* and *rahamim* are both emphasized because of the inclusion.

<sup>65</sup> Verses 22-24 does not appear in the LXX version



Let him sit alone and silently, for he has lifted upon him.	28	יֵשֵׁב בְּדָד וַיִּדְמֵם כִּי נִטַּל עָלָיו
Let him put to dust his mouth; perhaps there is hope.	29	יִתֵּן בַּעֲפֹר פִּיהוּ אֹלֵי יֵשׁ תְּקוּהָה
Let him give his cheek to one who smites him, Let him be filled with reproach.	30	יִתֵּן לְמַכְהוֹ לְחֵי יֵשֵׁבַע בַּחֲרָפָה
Surely the Lord will not reject forever.	31	כִּי לֹא יִזְנַח לְעוֹלָם אֲדָנִי
Although he causes grief, compassion and his loving kindness are like a multitude.	32	כִּי אִם־הוּגָה וּרְחָם כְּרַב (חֲסֵדוֹ) [חֲסֵדִיו]

<sup>66</sup> The adjective **טוב** is used predicatively. That is why we have to supply the 'to be' verb.

<sup>67</sup> Or 'in his youth'.

Surely he does not oppress <sup>68</sup> willingly <sup>69</sup> or afflict sons of man.	33	כי לא ענה מלבו ויגה בני-איש

### 3.3.3 Text Critical Notes

Verse 19 זכר־עניי. The Biblia Hebraica Kittel (1937:1236) suggests that, along the lines of the Septuagint's ἐμυθήσατο (aorist, passive, indicative) the Hebrew should be זכרתִי מעניי ומרדפי; however, Schafer (2004:125) maintains that the context prefers an imperatival understanding of the root זכר. Schafer (2004:125-126) also highlights that the Vulgate, Syriac and the Targums interpret זכר as an imperative according to frequent use. So we have decided to go along with the Masoretic Text, the Vulgate, Syriac and the Targums.

Verse 19 ומרודי. There is a suggestion that it should be ומרודי instead of ומרודי. The suggestion has some support from the Targum, however the Syriac supports the Masoretic. This confusion is apparently a misreading of the ד and the ר coupled with a misunderstanding of the roots רוד, רוד/רדה, מרר and מרר (Schafer, 2004:126). Salters (2010:58) prefers to see this “as an abstract plural noun from the root רוד which means to subdue (related to the root רדה meaning ‘oppression’). The verb is used at Isaiah 45:1 for the actions of Cyrus at Yahweh’s direction. Zion is surely subjugated”. Since the Syriac and the Masoretic are in agreement, we have decided to follow their suggestion.

Verse 20 זכור תזכור. זכור תזכור can be seen as 3<sup>rd</sup> feminine Singular or 2<sup>nd</sup> Masculine singular. The latter is adopted by most rabbinic exegetes although it is less likely than the former (Schafer, 2004:126).

Verse 20 ותשיח. The *qere* suggests that it should be ותשוח, which is from the root שחח meaning to ‘bow’ or ‘lay down’, ‘humbled’ (Koehler & Baumgartner, 1998:954) but Schafer (2004:126) advises that since ותשיח align with the Masoretic and the Septuagint, and is older and more difficult, therefore it is a much more preferable reading (according to the *lectio difficilior* rule).

Verse 20 נפשי. The *tiqqun sopherim* suggests that it should be 2<sup>nd</sup> person masculine suffix which would then read ‘your soul’ rather than ‘my soul’. In that case it is directly addressing God. That would mean that this verse would be connected to verse 18 where we have the issue of hope. But the problem would be the interruption brought by verse 19. Salters (2010:221-222) suggests that the second person masculine suffix is motivated by the hope that comes in verse 21 and therefore affected the reading of verse 20 as well. But, since the authenticity of the *tiqqun sopherim* is in doubt (Schafer, 2004:127), we suggest to take the 1<sup>st</sup> person suffix and make ‘my soul’ the subject of the sentence.

Verse 21 אשיב. There is a suggestion from the Septuagint that it should be אשיב in line with ἀξω, which comes from the Greek root ἀσσω, meaning to appoint or decide (Mounce, 1993:440). However we continue to hold on to the Masoretic because אשיב aligns the text well with the זכור of verse 20.

<sup>68</sup> The Hebrew word ענה can also mean to speak through the nose or to sing (Koehler & Baumgartner, 1998:719). This background might have influenced the New American Standard Bible to translate using ‘joy’

<sup>69</sup> Literally ‘oppress from his heart’.

Verse 22 **כִּי לֹא־תִמְנֹנוּ**. There are several suggestions to emend this verse mainly because of the length and the sudden appearance of an unsustainable 1<sup>st</sup> person plural. So the Peshitta and the Targums prefer a 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural (Salters, 2010:224). The form itself is an irregular 1<sup>st</sup> person Plural, the regular form being **תִּמְנֹנוּ** (Schafer, 2004:127). The Syriac and the Targums suggests it should be **תִּמְנוּ** which would mean ‘complete’ (Holladay, 1988:391). But, since the Septuagint does not have this verse we can only rely on the comparison of the Syriac, the Targums and the Masoretic text. Because of the unsustainability of the 1<sup>st</sup> person we have deliberately opted to have the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural.

Verse 23 **חֲדָשִׁים**. There is a suggestion that probably there needs to be inserted a 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural suffix **הֶם**. In that case the translation would be ‘their newness for the morning’. In terms of contextual meaning this suggestion is not plausible.

Verse 25 **לִקְוֹ**. There is a suggestion that it is a plural from the *qere*. This suggestion has subsequently motivated translations like the New Jerusalem Bible to translate the entire verse in the plural (i.e. Yahweh is good to *those who* trust him, to *all who* search for him). Other versions like the NIV, KJV, NRSV, RSV put the plural in the first colon but a singular in the second colon (i.e. the NIV says: The Lord is good to *those whose* hope is in him, to *the one who* seeks him). The New American Standard Version opts to maintain the singular throughout the first colon and the second colon. (i.e. Good is the LORD to one who waits for him, to the soul that seeks him). We have deliberately chosen to maintain the singular in our translation. This allows the parallelism to flow well from the first colon to the second, as suggested by Schafer (2004:127).

Verse 26 **טוֹב**. The adjectives **טוֹב**, **יָחַל** and the adverb **דּוֹמֵם** are all placed on the same level of focus by the use of the conjunctions.

Verse 26 **וַיַּחֵל**. Various emendations have been suggested here. First there is a suggestion that it probably should read **יַחֵל** (as conjunction joined to a participle rather than **וַיַּחֵל** a conjunction joined to an adjective) in line with the Septuagint’s **καὶ ὑπομενεῖ** (conjunction joined to an active, indicative future 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular). The second suggestion is that it should be **דּוֹמֵם יַחֵל** ‘that they should wait quietly’. The third suggestion is that it should be **הַחֵל וְדָמָם** ‘to tarry and be still’. This third suggestion is based on a Targum variant that uses the infinitive (Schafer, 2004:127). We have deliberately chosen to go with the Masoretic *Ketiv* **וַיַּחֵל** (a conjunction joined to an adjective) because it then opens up the reading of the verse not necessarily confining it to the previous clause of ‘one who seeks him’.

Verse 26 **וְדוֹמָם**. The Septuagint has **καὶ ἡσυχάζσει** (future active indicative 3<sup>rd</sup> singular from ἡσυχάζω), which means to be ‘calm inwardly’. There is also suggestion from the Syriac that it should be **וְדוֹמָם חֲסֵדוֹ** which means ‘and keep silent his loving kindness’ (Koehler & Baumgartner, 1998:213). We have chosen to go with the Masoretic Text, since the Syriac does not seem to have any other support. Again the Septuagint seems to be driven by the desire to align this clause with **καὶ ὑπομενεῖ**.

Verse 27 **בְּנִעוּרָיו**. Two readings have been proposed. First there is a suggestion to insert the preposition **בֵּן** rather than **ב**. Schafer (2004:127) believes this suggestion emanates from the Jewish influence that the “Torah is the yoke which one has to carry from childhood”. The suggestion of seeing the image as the Torah is interesting and a number of versions favour such a reading. We have deliberately decided to go along with this reading. The second suggestion proposes a plural suffix to be inserted, rather than a singular suffix. This suggestion is an effort to align this verse with the previous (verse 26), where it was suggested that it should read ‘that they should wait’. We deliberately opt for the singular since in 26 we have a singular.

Verse 29. This verse is missing in some manuscripts of the Septuagint. Since we do not have it in some of the Septuagint manuscripts, we rely on the Masoretic Text only.

Verse 32 **כִּי אִם־הִוַּגָה**. Schafer (2004:127) points out that there is a suggestion to render **הִוַּגָה** by **ἐπιγαγε** effectively pointing to the root **וָהַג**. This proposal is in line with an earlier suggestion to read **וָהַגָה** in 1:4 and 5 as associated with **וָהַגָה**. However, Schafer (2004:113) argues well that the Masoretic “is not only the *lectio difficilior*

but also fits perfectly in the context and the different Greek readings can be explained without presupposing a different Hebrew *Vorlage*".

Verse 32 **חסדו**. The *ketiv*, the Septuagint and the Targums suggest it should be **חסדו**; however, the *qere* and some Dead Sea Scrolls suggest that it should be **חסדיי**. Since in most cases **חסד** appears in the singular we have decided to follow the *ketiv*.

Verse 33 **יגה**. There is a suggestion that it might be a *hifil* rather than a *piel*. Schafer (2004:32) suggests it might be a mistake caused by the proximity to the **הגה** which is in verse 32, a form which occurs three times in Lamentations.

In that case it would be a change from the *piel* of the root **יגה** to a *hifil* of the same root. However there is further speculation that connects both verse 32 and 33 to verse 4 and 5 of chapter one. The connection is based on a suggestion that the root should be **נגה** rather than **יגה**. But according to the context **יגה** seems to fit better (Schafer, 2004:113).

### 3.3.4 Text-Translational Notes

The first Hebrew word that insinuates hope is **תוחלת** and is found in verse 18. This Hebrew word has been translated by the Septuagint with the basic form **ἐλπίζ**. The other synonym of hope in Hebrew is **תקוה**, which is found in verse 29. Unfortunately we do not have the translation of verse 29 in Greek, since the verse does not appear in the Septuagint. The other word that is sometimes translated as hope and sometimes as wait is **יחיל**. The Septuagint translates this word as **ὑπομένω** in verse 26.

The last word linked to hope is the Hebrew word **קוה** which is found in verse 25. The Septuagint translates it again as **ὑπομένω** just as is done for **יחיל**. This means that, for the four Hebrew words associated with hope, the Septuagint translates them with only two forms, **ἐλπίζ** and **ὑπομένω**. In our working translation we have decided to translate these words variously, according to the context.

The other important word for our discussion which forms the background for meditation comes from the root word **זכר**. We then have derivatives like **זכור** and **תזכור** in verse 20. The Septuagint has consistently translated these with Greek words coming from the root **μιμνήσκω** which means to ‘remember’<sup>70</sup>. We have tried to maintain the tone of ‘remembrance’.

Verse 19 **זכר־עניי**. The first impression for **זכר** would be to take it as a verb in the imperative joined with **עניי** by a *maqef*. However, there is a big debate in scholarly circles as to whether to

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<sup>70</sup> Robinson & House, 2012:238.

take it as an infinitive or an imperative. Being cognizant of this big debate, we have decided to translate it with the verbal noun ‘remembrance’. Thus, we have chosen to lean more to the infinitive than the imperative so that it aligns well with the previous verse.

Verse 19 **וראש**. The Hebrew literally means head, poisonous herb, bitter or venom (Koehler & Baumgartner, 1998:866). However, alongside other translations, we have opted to translate it as gall, in line with the Septuagint’s *χολή*. Salters (2010:221) believes **לענה** and **ראש** are proverbially associated with one another.

Verse 20. We have decided to put ‘surely’ because of the emphasis that is brought by the use of the infinitive absolute in the expression **זכור תזכור**

Verse 21. In a literal translation, it is better to put ‘heart’, since in Hebrew it is **אל-לבי**. But if one is translating for popular use, the understanding is that the heart is where the thinking is done, no wonder why a number of translations opt for ‘mind’ e.g. NIV, RSV, KJV.

Verse 21. The Hebrew word is **אוחיל**, which comes from **יחיל** and basically means to ‘wait’ if used in the *hifil* (Holladay, 1988:133). This word is important as far as its connection to verse 18 is concerned. In a number of translations **אוחיל** is translated as ‘hope’, the same way **ותוחלתי** is translated in 3:18. But it is wise to take cognizance of the distinction that **אוחיל** comes from the root **יחל** and **תוחלתי** comes from a feminine noun, **תוחלת**.

Verse 22. Though the Hebrew word *hesed* (**חסד**) is used in the plural here, we have decided to put our title in the singular, since in most cases *hesed* (**חסד**) appears in the singular. It appears in the plural only 18 times out of the 245 times that it appears in the Old Testament (Zobel, 1986:45).

Verse 22. In Hebrew *hesed* (**חסד**) of the LORD is fronted, thereby putting a lot of emphasis on it. Its synonym *rahamim* (**רחמים**) is put at the end, thereby creating an inclusion. This inclusion puts a lot of emphasis on the two words. It is difficult to capture this in the translation.

Verse 22. This verse is one of the two verses identified by Hulst (1960:188-189) as problematic in Lamentations 3. According to Salters (2010:224) the Peshitta and the Targum would then emend this to be a 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural. In this way the parallelism would run smoothly as:

כי לא כלו // כי לא תמנו and רחמיו // חסדי יהוה כי לא. If both **כי**'s are taken as asseveratives as suggested by Salters (2010:225) we then end up with the NJB's 'Surely Yahweh's mercies are not over, His deeds of faithful love not exhausted'. This is quite different from the NIV which would take it as 1<sup>st</sup> person plural and the **כי** as causative, resulting in 'Because of the LORD's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail'. Stephens-Hodge (1988:662) also affirms that "The Targum and Syriac have 'The lord's mercies, verily they cease not ...' 23 They are adapted to each day's requirements (cf. Dt. 33:25b-27)". In our translation we have opted to go with the Peshitta and the Targum. In this way the text is then opened up to various contexts, in line with the research argument.

Apart from the word 'hope', the other important word to our research is the word 'loving kindness'. The Hebrew word translated as loving kindness is **חסד**. It is translated by the Septuagint from the root *ἔλεος*. Alongside, the Hebrew word **רחמים**, is its counterpart **חסד**, which has been translated by the Septuagint with the basic form *οἰκτίρω*. Although these important words are found in verses 22 and 32 in Hebrew, we only find them in verse 32 in Septuagint.

Verse 22. **רחמים** is used here in the plural and we have deliberately chosen to put it in the plural in our topic to avoid ambiguity with its interchangeable, singular, reference to a womb.

Verse 25. The adjective **טוב** is used predicatively here, because the noun following it is a proper name (Pratico & Van Pelt, 2001:63). So we have supplied a 'to be' verb in the translation.

Verses 28-30. We have decided to translate **ישב** (verse 28), **יתן** (verse 29) and the other **יתן** (verse 30) as jussives. The jussive rendition is motivated by an understanding that the speaker is expressing a personal wish.

Verse 31. **כי** From an analysis of the various uses of **כי** by Follingstad (2001:20), we suggest that the first **כי** in verse 31 be translated as an asseverative, the second **כי** in verse 32 be

translated as a concessive and the last כִּי in verse 33 be translated as an asseverative. Thus, verses 31 and 33 exhibit the same construction. In that case the last verse of the central pericope ends in an affirmative. Such a reading is supported by Wright (2015:116), who says the poet is framing the “climactic central positive”.

### Summary

The text-critical analysis has revealed that the present Masoretic Text has been preserved fairly well. In the majority of the cases, it agrees with the Septuagint, the Syriac and the Targums. In a few cases where it was not clear, the comparison of the Septuagint, the Syriac and the Targums offered a reliable text to work with. The exercise has also unveiled the missing texts (verses 22-24 and verse 29) in the Septuagint. The omission of these verses in the Septuagint did not, however, pose great challenges, since our key words in those verses were derived from the Hebrew and not the Septuagint.

The text-translational notes have highlighted a number of words that can be translated as hope. These words that echo hope are necessary to be highlighted in order to maintain the argument that this central lament is anchored on hope. The various suggested emendations were crucial in opening up the text to be appropriated in various contexts of suffering. Above all, the translation exercise was necessary since it offered us a basic translation for an analogous reading that highlights the importance of meditating on the resources of hope [i.e. *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים)].

### 3.3.5 Synthesis of Critical Notes, Translation Notes and Semantic Relations of Lamentation 3:19-33

In this part of the study we will now turn our focus to the intra-textual analysis of verses 19-33 in order to find out their semantic relations. The main aim of this exercise is to establish the contextual meaning of the hope, *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים).

Verses 19-21 emphasize the issue of reflection. Three verbal forms are used to articulate this meditation. Two of the verbal forms come from the same root זכר, but are clearly arranged to show emphasis. One is put in the imperative (verse 19) and the other is put in the infinitive absolute (verse 20). The last verbal form that articulates the reflection is שׁוּב. The meditation

leads to two scenarios. The first scenario is that of being downcast. Then there is a notable movement from the downcast to hope in verse 21.

In verse 22 we are now given the resources that motivated hope. Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:117), commenting on the first Hebrew word of verse 21, **וְאֵל**, suggests that it “refers both retrospectively – back to the suffering (3:1-18) – and prospectively – forward to God’s steadfast love”. This suggestion has some merit, as it neatly ties the preceding section to the following one.

The NIV suggests a translation that begins with ‘because’ for verse 22 thereby proposing reason. We appreciate the NIV’s desire and struggle to translate the two **כִּי** that are in that verse. Most versions<sup>71</sup> ignore them. Taking the NIV’s suggestion of ‘because’ would create two scenarios of reading the text. It may be seen from the perspective that, the reason for not being consumed is because of God’s loving kindness and mercy. Or it can also be seen retrospectively, that is, the reason he has hope is because of God’s loving kindness and mercy. Grammatically, the former would get more support. However in terms of the meaning both the former and latter feed into each other and are mutually connected. The strong man has hope and has not been consumed because of God’s loving kindness and mercies. In as much as this suggestion is attractive, we have deliberately opted to emend the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural to the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural which then aligns the entire pericope to be driven by the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural. This emendation contributes significantly to the research question. It can then be in line with Dobbs-Allsopp’s (2002:122) note concerning the expansive voice, in which he says that,

these wisdom-inspired reflections are cast more broadly, as is typical of their genre, to reflect human experience in general, and thus, the speaking voice in this section becomes more expansive, more inclusive, though less personal – there are no first person references to the speaker ...The poet effects this more inclusive and expansive voice by presenting the reflections using third-person forms ( instead of first person forms 1-18) ... The net effect of these strategies is to broaden the poem’s perspective to include humanity in general, of which, of course, the audience is a part... The poem, ever so subtly, becomes our own discourse of pain and hope.

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<sup>71</sup> For example, NRSV, RSV and NLT ignore the **כִּי**, whereas the NJB tries to deal with the problem by using an emphatic ‘surely’. The thinking behind the NJB is followed by the KJV which inserts an ‘It is of’ to show emphasis, then translates the second **כִּי** as ‘because’. The net effect of this is a separation of loving kindness **חַסֵּד** and mercies **רַחֲמִים**. The emphatic use of **כִּי** is supported by Gerstenberger (2001:494) who argues that verses 22-23 all start with the deictic or emphatic *ki*, ‘yes’.



So by these 3<sup>rd</sup> person forms, our emendation included, the poem is opened up for appropriation in our own contemporary contexts of suffering and the inducement of hope.

Verse 23 serves to qualify the earlier statement about the loving kindness and the mercies of God. The phrase ‘they are new for the mornings’ is composed of the adjective ‘new’ and the noun ‘morning’, stressing the freshness, vitality and great expectation that comes with the dawn of a new day.

In verse 24 we have the direct speech that portrays an inner dialogue with oneself. The dialogue within the man’s inner self is centred on two choices: whether to continue trusting the Lord, or to totally abandon him. The same inner debate happened to Asaph in Psalm 73. We have almost the same scenario and conclusion in Psalm 73:26. So in Lamentations 3:24 the strong man makes a strong resolution to wait for the LORD. Hillers (1972:70) suggests that this dialogue is premised on the tradition of the division of the land, where the priests were not allocated land but God promised to be their portion. Therefore, the **גבר** declares that the LORD is his portion, which can be taken to mean that, “when every other support for life failed, Yahweh remained” (Hillers, 1972:70).

The NIV uses ‘therefore’ for the Hebrew **על-כן**, which suggests a result, purpose or conclusion. The words translated by the NIV as ‘I will wait’ are from the same Hebrew root **יחל** used for hope in verse 21. So, there is a repetition of the phrase **על-כן אוחיל** in verses 21 and 24. This means that the resolve to hope is affirmed twice with the refrain **על-כן אוחיל**. In between the affirmation lie the theologically pregnant words, ‘newness’ (**חדש**), faithfulness (**אמונה**) of God, loving kindness (**חסד**) of God and compassion (**רחמים**). Narrowing it down to the research question, we can affirmatively say that in the context of verses 21-24 the resolve to hope serves as an enclosure to the two key words, **רחמים** (*rahamim*) and **חסד** (*hesed*).

After the second resolve to hope, come verses 25-27, which all begin with **טוב**. Longman (2008:369) observes well that, “all three verses, not only begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet (*tet*), but the same very word *tob*, ‘good’”. It seems the meditation on the *hesed* (**חסד**) and *rahamim* (**רחמים**) did not only give reason to hope, but it also led to the outburst of

the word ‘good’ (טוֹב). O’Connor (2002:51) is of the opinion that, “the word good creates the impression that goodness requires repetition to become convincing”. However, it seems the good is not just repeated to convince, but is also projected to reflect on three angles: First, the ‘good’ points to God. Second, the ‘good’ points to the concept of hoping and waiting for salvation. Third, the ‘good’ points to the strong man’s bearing the yoke, which presumably is the ‘law’ (Berlin, 2004:94).

In terms of interpretation verses 26 and 27 have created problems for scholars. First, what does it mean to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD in the context of the whole book of Lamentations which seems to advocate protest (Parry, 2010:103)? Secondly what does it mean ‘to bear the yoke while he is young<sup>72</sup>’, as the NIV puts it.

In the case of verse 26, certainly, we cannot deny the fact that Lady Jerusalem was encouraged to protest in Lamentations 1 and 2. Neither is Lamentations 3 completely free from protest as Parry (2010:103) demonstrates. However, rather than seeing this in context of prayer and an attitude of expectant trust as advocated by Parry (2010:104) it is better to see this as a balanced protest<sup>73</sup>. In other words there is encouragement to protest with discipline. This would then find relevance in the contemporary contexts where protests seem to imply indiscipline and eventually lead to destruction and violence.

Coming to verse 27, Parry (2010:104) raises two possible ways of reading this verse. First, he suggests that maybe it is good to suffer because then one can learn from it. However, he disputes it on the basis that this notion is not supported anywhere in the book of Lamentations. Second, it is disputed on the basis of the grammar, since it would leave some constituents redundant (i.e. in his youth). Parry (2010:104) then goes on to advocate for the view of suffering when one is young. This view creates problems again, since suffering is not pleasant at any age. Therefore, we suggest that this verse be read within the context of the law as Berlin (2004:94) advises. In this way the three verses are read with their positive intentions. The LORD is good, disciplined waiting for the salvation of the LORD is good, and the law<sup>74</sup> of the LORD is good.

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<sup>72</sup> NJB says “It is good for someone to bear the yoke from a young age”.

<sup>73</sup> There is clear evidence of protest as well as clear evidence to be silent which means there is balance.

<sup>74</sup> The Law of the Lord is good because it gives an opportunity to meditate on it and be encouraged in times of suffering. This is quite contrary to others who see the Law as a burden as in Psalm 2:2-3.

The notion of protest with discipline spills down to verse 28. The notion is evident in the word **יָדַם**, which comes from **דָּמָם**, the same root word used in verse 26. Berlin (2004:94) concludes that the common thread in verses 28-30 is of ritual mourning.

The **אֱלֹהֵי** in verse 29 has created some problems for some scholars, and those who have been strongly arguing for doubt immediately pounce on it as evidence that the faith of the **גִּבּוֹר** is fragile<sup>75</sup>. However, Hillers (1988:70-71) defends this well when he says,

This phrase is not so much an expression of wavering faith as recognition that God is sovereign and free; it is the voice of piety, not doubt. Ancient Israelites rather often said ‘may be’ about the possibility that Yahweh will act favorably in a given case (Exod 32:30; Num 23:3, 27; Josh 14:12) or for similar reasons they say ‘who knows’ (2 Sam 12:22; Joel 2:14; Jonah 3:9).

Hillers’ reading is commendable, since it would be awkward to have a doubt in the midst of affirmations and resolutions to hope.

From verses 30-33 Berlin (2004:94) and Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:120) agree that this section is similar to Job. Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:120) specifically says this section,

propounds a general view about the proper conduct for a person in suffering, which teaches that suffering, like good fortune, comes from God<sup>76</sup> and therefore is to be borne in confidence that God will eventually restore wellbeing. Implicit in such a view is the rightness of God’s actions; God’s goodness and justice are axiomatic. As such the section shares the basic outlook of the friends in Job.

A closer look will reveal that verse 30 goes along the lines of Job 16:10 where the issue of submission to one who wants to strike is emphasized. In this context the reference to one who strikes is clearly God<sup>77</sup>. Furthermore, verse 33 seems to echo Elihu’s speech in Job 37:3. Thus, God does not willingly<sup>78</sup> bring suffering. In verse 31-32 the **גִּבּוֹר** is definitely thinking in terms of the Davidic covenant in Psalm 89 where God promised that he would never cut off the descendants of David. The Davidic dynasty would stand in spite of its failure. So he is convinced the present suffering is just for a moment. His loving kindness and compassion would eventually prevail. Wright (2015:116) observes that verses 31-33 forms the centre-point of the book as well

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<sup>75</sup> E.g. O’Connor (2002:51) even suggests that hope might be nonexistent.

<sup>76</sup> This comes out clearly in verse 38 which can be connected to Job 2:10.

<sup>77</sup> Taking in the whole context of the Babylonian invasion as will be shown in the Historical analysis, this submission to the invading Babylonians was something that Jeremiah was advising the Judeans to do in Jeremiah 38; 42-44.

<sup>78</sup> Hillers (1972:71) notes the Hebrew word literally means ‘from the heart’.

as the central pillar of the poet's theology<sup>79</sup>. Picking on the theology, Wright (2015:116) places some emphasis on the “central and eternal character of God – his compassion and faithful love – outweighs the effects of his reaction against sin and evil”.

### 3.3.6 The Resources

In the research question, we proposed the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God as the key resources of hope. Therefore the words *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) deserve special treatment since they form the backbone of the research question. This exercise will unveil the components of the resources, which in turn will help us appreciate the resources as essential in the generation of hope.

Our analysis of these two words will commence with *hesed* (חסד) first, and then proceed to *rahamim* (רחמים). The choice to begin the analysis with *hesed* (חסד) does not in any way suggest a privileged position of one over the other. On the contrary, what we observe from the text under consideration is an interchange of positions<sup>80</sup>, which means the two words receive a balanced treatment and an equal position. In terms of methodology, since we have established that synchrony or diachrony alone will not yield the desired results, therefore we will approach this analysis from a multi-dimensional approach.

#### 3.3.6.1 Hesed

The word *hesed* (חסד) appears 245 times in the Old Testament. According to the Masoretic Text, it appears in the singular more often than in the plural. Zobel (1986:45) highlights that the word is found only 18 times in the plural. From this we can easily deduce that out of the 245 times it occurs, 227 are given in the singular. However, in the central passage of Lamentations, the word appears in the plural in both instances where it is found. The word is found densely populated in the Psalms where it is used 127 times. For example, in Psalm 136 *hesed* (חסד) is

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<sup>79</sup> Wright (2015:116) outline three actions of God which portrays his true character: First, God rejects his people as an act of judgment – yes, but not forever (v.31); second, God brings grief when he acts in punishment – yes but he will show compassion in accordance with his abiding and abundant nature (v.32); third, God does indeed bring affliction and grief – yes, but it is not what his heart truly wants (v.33).

<sup>80</sup> In verse 22 *hesed* is fronted, occupying the first position of the sentence and *rahamim* is not fronted and is occupying the last position in the sentence. In verse 32 where the two words occur again, *rahamim* comes first and *hesed* comes last in the sentence.

used in each of the 26 verses. That means Psalm 136 contributes over one fifth of its occurrences in the Psalms. In the book of 1 and 2 Samuel it is used 16 times. Then in 1 and 2 Chronicles it is used 15 times. There are also some books that do not use the word at all<sup>81</sup>. Such books include Ezekiel, Haggai, Malachi and Amos<sup>82</sup>. Stoebe (2012:450) concludes that “the word is at home in the narrative literature and in Wisdom but especially in the diction of the Psalms. This distribution coincides to a degree, but not entirely, with its profane and religious usages respectively”. This analysis from Stoebe is significant for shaping the direction of our analysis so that we do not wander all over. Therefore, although we may refer to some narrative passages, this analysis will dwell more on the passages that are poetic, since the point of departure, which is the book of Lamentations, is poetry.

In terms of meaning on a broader level, Holladay (1988:111) gives three basically related meanings. First, it is obligation to the community. In such cases the preferred translation is faithfulness or loyalty. This loyalty or solidarity is shown between friends, relatives, guests, master and servants. The second meaning is faithfulness in respect of God to people or individuals. Sometimes this kind of *hesed* (חסד) is translated as grace, or kindness. The last meaning is related to the plural use, and is translated as godly deeds. These are the individual acts flowing from the solidarity of men and of God. These are evidences of grace as in Isaiah 55:33.

Stoebe (2012:449) brings to our attention that although kindness and grace dominate as the positive translations of *hesed* (חסד) there is also the negative translation. Negatively *hesed* (חסד) is translated as ‘shame’ and occurs in Leviticus 20:17, Proverbs 14:34, Proverbs 25:10, Sirach 14:2 and Psalm 52:3. In the case of Proverbs 25:10, Holladay (1988:111) suggests *hesed* (חסד) in that context means to ‘insult’. In spite of the negative appearance of the word, Stoebe (2012:449) affirms that the positive meaning dominates in the Hebrew and the negative meaning dominates in Syriac. The cause of this duality of the meaning is not known<sup>83</sup>.

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<sup>81</sup> Stoebe (2012:450) who follows the JEDP theory suggests that it is absent from P and subsides to a surprising degree in the Prophets.

<sup>82</sup> Zobel (1986:45) lists about 13 books where the word does not appear. Most of the books are in the Minor Prophets category, save for proto-Isaiah, Ezekiel, 2Kings, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs.

<sup>83</sup> Three speculations have been forwarded; first, it is proposed that it is as a result of linguistic influence (i.e. Hebrew and Aramaic); second, it is proposed that both Hebrew and Aramaic had all the two meanings running

Zobel (1986:44-64) who does an extensive work on *hesed* (חסד), divides the word's usage into two; the secular and the religious usage. Although we are concerned mainly with the religious usage, there is profit in visiting its secular usage as well, since the secular and the religious do inform one another.

*Hesed* (חסד) is used mostly in human interpersonal relationships. For example, between relatives<sup>84</sup>, host and guest<sup>85</sup>, friends<sup>86</sup>, sovereign and subjects<sup>87</sup>, two parties, inaugurated by an unusual act of kindness on the part of one<sup>88</sup> (Zobel, 1986:46-47).

From an analysis of the stories of Abraham and Abimelech in Genesis 21:23, Rahab in Joshua 2:12 and 14, Jonathan and David in 1 Samuel 20:8 and 14, Zobel (1986:47) points out that “the one who receives an act of *hesed* (חסד) responds with a similar act of *hesed* (חסד), or at least that the one who demonstrates *hesed* (חסד) is justified in expecting an equivalent act in return”.

It is also worthy to note that in most cases where *hesed* (חסד) was applied it was supposed to be accompanied with truthfulness. Zobel (1986:48) confirms this by highlighting the point that in Genesis 24:49; 47:29 and Joshua 2:14 there is also the use of the phrase חסד ואמת which is understood to be a hendiadys. In that case (אמת) *emet* emphasizes the permanence, certainty and validity.

Sometimes (חסד) *hesed* appears alongside (משפט) *mishpat*. Zobel (1986:49) says this happens in statements of God demanding ethical requirements from mankind. This is seen in Micah 6:8; Hosea 12:7; Isaiah 16:5 and Zechariah 7:9 where God demands justice to be done. From an

parallel from the beginning; third, it is assumed that there were divergent developments of meanings from the same root. Fourth, it is supposed that there were two different roots which were antonyms and coalesced (Jenni & Westermann, 1997:449).

<sup>84</sup> E.g. Sarah and Abraham in Genesis 20:13.

<sup>85</sup> E.g. in Genesis 21:23, it is shown between Abimelech and Abraham.

<sup>86</sup> E.g. the famous story of Jonathan and David in 1 Samuel 20:8.

<sup>87</sup> E.g. in 2 Samuel 3:8 *hesed* is shown between Abner (subject) and the house of Saul (lord or sovereign).

<sup>88</sup> E.g. Joseph and the prisoner in Genesis 40:14.

analysis of these verses, Zobel (1986:49) concludes that “iniquity can be atoned for through *hesed* and *emet*”.

In the stories of Esther (2:9,17) Ezra (7:28;9:9) and Daniel (1:9) Zobel (1986:49) suggests that “it is God or Yahweh who brought about the demonstration of *hesed* on the part of the authorities”. In addition, the stories of Ruth (3:10) and Nehemiah (13:14) are seen “as though God’s blessing functions as a substitute for human acts of *hesed* shown” (Zobel, 1986:50). Conversely, failure to exercise *hesed* (חסד) would bring the wrath of God as emphasized by the prophets<sup>89</sup>. This ideology spills into the Wisdom literature where Zobel (1986:50) categorically states that the ideology was to

the extent that the mutual exchange of *hesed* not only occupies an important place in their rules for the conduct of life by virtue of being made the principle by which life should be governed, but also viewed in relationship to God, thus becoming part of the common doctrine of retribution<sup>90</sup>.

So one’s understanding of the precepts of God would result in submission to God and the practice of *hesed* (חסד) to other people.

Summarizing the secular usage of *hesed* (חסד), Zobel (1986:51) concludes that there are three elements that constitute the *hesed* (חסד) concept. First, it is active. Being active therefore,

It is an act that preserves and promotes life. It is intervention on behalf of someone suffering misfortune or distress. It is a demonstration of friendship or piety. It pursues good and not what is evil. Thus the most appropriate translation of *hesed* is goodness, grace or kindness.

Second, it is social. On the social front, Zobel (1986:51) emphasizes that, “the concept lies in the realm of interpersonal relations... *hesed* belongs by nature to the realm of family, clan and society ... those who have formed a relationship based on unexpected acts of kindness”

Last, it is enduring. Here, Zobel (1986:51) emphasizes the fact that *hesed* (חסד) is found in combination with *emet* (אמת) because the

close and intimate society of the family requires enduring and reliable kindness as an essential element of its protective function. Kindness can most surely fulfill its function of preserving and promoting life, thus strengthening society when it follows and is explained by certain social norms such as those formulated in

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<sup>89</sup> Zechariah 7:9; Hosea 4:1; 6:6 and Micah 6:8.

<sup>90</sup> Zobel (1986:50) give examples of Proverbs 3:3; 16:6; 11:17; 14:22; 20:28; 21:21.

the *mispatim*. It follows almost automatically that the demonstration of kindness, like the *mispatim* is heard as a divine requirement. It thus becomes extended to the sphere of humanity as a whole and becomes a mark of faith.

Zobel (1986:52) goes on to defend that kindness frequently intends mutuality by the very fact that refusal to return an act of kindness is stigmatized as being reprehensible, because God requires such virtues toward one's neighbour and is ready to credit and reward the doer.

Stoebe (2012:451) summarizes Glueck's (1967:82-102) understanding of *hesed* (חסד) as not referring to

spontaneous, unmotivated kindness, but to a mode of behaviour that arises from a relationship defined by rights and obligation (husband – wife, parent – child, prince – subject). When *hesed* is attributed to God, it concerns the realization of promises inherent in the covenant. When *hesed* does assume connotations of kindness, it is the result of a secondary assimilation to *rahamim*.

Zobel (1986:52-53) disputes this legal notion of *hesed* (חסד) based on its association at times with the word *berit* (ברית). Besides its late linkage to the covenant, the refutation centres on the fact that it is done in a family or clan environment. Where it is done with outsiders, the *berit* (ברית) or covenant aspect comes in, not as a legal aspect, but to show commitment and faithfulness. Renkema (1998:385) and Salters (2010:225) argue, based on Lamentations, that the *geber* (גבר) who utters these words “does not build his hopes on covenant obligations but rather on the expressions of Yahweh's goodness to which he has no obligation, acts of kindness which he continues to reveal nevertheless”. So we can conclude that, rather than seeing it as an obligation, it is a virtue that knits and binds society together out of love.

Besides the secular usage, Zobel (1986:54-64) unveils in great detail the religious usage. However, some of the religious usages overlap with the secular usages. This proves that “the concept was borrowed from the secular sphere into the religious language of Israel” (Zobel, 1986:62). The overlap encompasses the active, social as well as the endurance or permanence of *hesed* (חסד).



In a number of texts where the word *hesed* (חסד) appears, God is the subject and human beings<sup>91</sup> are the recipients. The recipients include individuals, small groups or clans and Israel as a whole. These passages include Genesis 24:12, 14; Ruth 1:8; 2 Samuel 2:6; 2 Samuel 15:20; 1 Kings 3:6; 2 Chronicles 1:8; Job 10:12 (Zobel, 1986:54). In the first five passages cited above there is a petition for God to show *hesed* (חסד), thus, looking forward in prospect. In the other three passages there is a recount of *hesed* (חסד) that has been shown, thus, looking back in retrospect.

Besides showing *hesed* (חסד) in the past, present and future, God can also forsake *hesed* (חסד). Zobel (1986:54) cites Genesis 24:27; Ruth 2:20<sup>92</sup>; 1 Chronicles 17:13<sup>93</sup>; 2 Samuel 7:15; Psalm 66:20<sup>94</sup> as examples where *hesed* (חסד) appears alongside ‘forsake’. So in a nutshell these passages take God as the subject who can show *hesed* (חסד) in the present and future, who has shown *hesed* (חסד) in the past and who can also forsake *hesed* (חסד) at any time.

Zobel (1986:54) also cites a number of passages where God is the subject and *hesed* (חסד) the object<sup>95</sup>. In those passages a number of verb forms are used. Such verb forms include ‘gives’, ‘sends’, ‘bids’, ‘remembers’, ‘continues’, ‘shows’, ‘causes it to be heard’, ‘makes it great and wondrous’, ‘takes it away’, ‘commands it’, ‘keeps it for individuals and groups’, ‘surrounds’, ‘satisfies’, and ‘crowns’ (Zobel, 1986:54).

Later on, the *hesed* (חסד) of God was carried into the liturgy as a liturgical formula. Zobel (1986:57-58) gives Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; 1 Chronicles 16:34, 41; 2 Chronicles 5:13; 7:3, 6; 20:21; Psalm 86:15; 100:5; 103:8; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1-4, 29; 136:1; 145:8 Nehemiah 9:17; Ezra 3:11; Jeremiah 32:18; 33:11 as examples of the liturgical formulas where *hesed* (חסד) is found.

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<sup>91</sup> E.g. Abraham (Genesis 24), Jacob (Genesis 32), the men of Jabesh-Gilead (2 Samuel 2:5), the anointed of Yahweh (2 Samuel 22:51), David (2 Samuel 7:15), Job (Job 10:12) Ruth, Orpah and Boaz (Ruth 1:8; 2:20). The *hesed* can mean finding a bride, increase in possessions, and provision in the establishment of a dynasty or prosperity in general (Zobel, 1986:55).

<sup>92</sup> This passage suggests that God used Boaz as the agent to convey or show his *hesed*.

<sup>93</sup> The RSV translates it as ‘take away’ which would suggest that God gives *hesed* and he can take it away again.

<sup>94</sup> The RSV uses ‘remove’ for the same word as ‘forsake’.

<sup>95</sup> E.g. Micah 7:20, Jeremiah 31:3; 16:5; Psalm 90:14; 103:4.

In terms of the endurance of the *hesed* (חֶסֶד), Zobel (1986:58-59) deals extensively with 2 Chronicles 6:42 and Isaiah 55:3 as the two passages that associated David with *hesed* (חֶסֶד). In those texts David is taken as an objective genitive, that is, a beneficiary of Yahweh's acts of kindness. It is then highlighted that "these acts of kindness must be interpreted as referring to the promise given to King David by the prophet Nathan that the Davidic dynasty would endure forever" (Zobel, 1986:58). The concept of the endurance of God's *hesed* (חֶסֶד) in relation to the Davidic dynasty is also pronounced clearly in Psalm 89:1-4.

In terms of mutuality Zobel (1986:61) discards the notion that human beings can demonstrate *hesed* (חֶסֶד) toward God. On the contrary he maintains that in the passages like Jeremiah 2:2; Hosea 4:1; 6:4,6, texts which are mostly cited as examples of where mankind demonstrate *hesed* (חֶסֶד) toward God, it should be understood with a tone of kindness that should be shown to other human beings.

In summary, Zobel (1986:62) notes that there are some similarities and divergences between the secular use of *hesed* (חֶסֶד) and the religious use.

The agreement includes the active and social nature of *hesed* as well as the permanence of divine kindness. Everything that is said focuses on what Yahweh does for Israel and the individual worshipper. The history of Yahweh's people, past, present and future, the life of the individual Israelite – in fact, the entire world – is the stage for the demonstration of Yahweh's kindness. Yahweh has decided in favour of Israel; he has promised life, care, alleviation of distress, and preservation – indeed, he has filled the whole earth with his kindness. He has thus granted fellowship with him to his people, to all mankind, to the whole world. And this act, like the promise and assurance of future help and fellowship, is characterized by permanence, constancy and reliability. This is what Israel and the individual Israelite hear through Yahweh's word, including his word spoken through the mouth of his prophets. The community responds in worship, praising his kindness in hymns, confessing it, expressing their confidence and thanksgiving or pleading in laments for a new demonstration of this divine kindness.

On the divergences, Zobel (1986:63) identifies the expansion from family, clan, nation of Israel to the whole world. In the secular sphere, it is argued that *hesed* (חֶסֶד) is confined to the family, clan and society. But in the religious sphere, it expands to the nation of Israel and the whole world. It is further argued that in terms of mutuality, in the secular, it is rigid and confined to divine mercy, grace and forbearance, but in the religious, God's kindness finds

expression in his endless reconciling love, always ready to forgive. Humankind cannot show it to God, but when they receive it from God, they can model their relationship with one another accordingly. This eventually compels man to practise righteousness, mercy, justice, and kindness, and to seek peace with neighbour. “Thus, *hesed* shapes not only the relationship of Yahweh with human beings, but also that of human beings among themselves” (Zobel, 1986:63). Clark (1993:267) concludes by noting that *hesed* (חסד) “is a supreme human virtue, standing as the pinnacle of moral virtue”.

Looking at the word’s occurrence in the Psalms, besides Psalm 136 our attention is quickly drawn to Psalm 103, the main reason being that in the entire Psalm not only do we have the repetition of the forms *hesed* חסד (e.g. verses 4, 8, 11, 17) and *rahamim* רחמים (e.g. 4, 8, 13) but we also have the use of the word גבר<sup>96</sup> (verse 11), though in its verbal form. This Psalm begins and ends with the exhortation to praise God. In the middle, the reasons for praising God are then elaborated. More importantly, besides the synonymous use of *hesed* חסד and *raham* רחם (e.g. verse 4), *tsadiq* צדק and *mishpat* משפט (verse 6), *raham* רחם and *hanan* חנן /*hesed* חסד (verse 8) *raham* רחם and *raham* רחם (verse 13) *hesed* חסד and *tsadiq* צדק (verse 17), is the emphasis that God’s *hesed* חסד is great. The greatness of the *hesed* חסד of God is compared to the distance from the earth to the heavens. Similar comparisons are found in Psalm 57:10, 36:5<sup>97</sup>, 108:4. Such comparisons only serve to emphasize that God’s *hesed* חסד is beyond measure. This magnitude of God’s *hesed* חסד might have formed the background to the גבר in Lamentations.

The other Psalm that might have had some influence upon Lamentations 3 is Psalm 13:5, where there is confidence in the *hesed* (חסד) of God. In this specific verse the *hesed* (חסד) of God is related to salvation (ישועה). Therefore the psalmist says because of the confidence he has in the *hesed* (חסד) of God he rejoices in the salvation. In this vein there are a number

<sup>96</sup> Notwithstanding the critical note that suggests גבה

<sup>97</sup> Verse 7 almost takes the tone of Psalm 103 with the inclusion of צדק and משפט.

of Psalms that attach the **חסד** of God to **ישוע**. For example in Psalm 6:4; 31:16 the psalmists ask God to save on the basis of his **חסד**. Therefore this salvation “is a manifestation of Yahweh’s **חסד**” (Clark, 1993:158).

In an effort to try to retrieve the context of the Psalms that we have argued might have had an influence on Lamentations 3, we find that Psalms 6, 13, 31 and 103 are all related to David if the superscripts are given the benefit of the doubt. All these might then find a background in Psalm 89. Then, Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:118) is right in suggesting that “the references to ‘steadfast love’, ‘mercies’ and ‘faithfulness’ in 3:22-23 allude to God’s covenant loyalties as stipulated according the Davidic grant (e.g 2 Samuel 7:15; 1 Kings 8:23; Psalm 89:2, 14, 24-37; Isaiah 55:3)”. Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:118) goes on to affirm that the main difference between the Davidic and Mosaic covenants is the promissory nature of the Davidic covenant, that is, God makes an oath to establish and save the Davidic dynasty irrespective of Judah’s behaviour. So taking it from Dobbs-Allsopp we then need to understand the *hesed* (**חסד**) of God in most of the Davidic Psalms is forecast with the backdrop of Psalm 89. Since Psalm 89 is similar in context to Lamentations, the protest and argument of Lamentations becomes clear and understandable: LORD you promised your faithfulness in salvation in spite of my sin, please act according to your promise and character.

### 3.3.6.2 Rahamim

The other equally important word for our analysis is **רחמים** (*rahamim*). It is a plural word that comes from the root **רחם** (*raham*). Simian-Yofre (2004:438) highlights that the root is found in all Semitic languages (i.e Akkadian, Ugaritic, Aramaic and Arabic). In Akkadian, he says, the root has two meanings which are ‘compassion’ and ‘womb’. In Ugaritic the verb form basically means to show compassion or loving. In other texts where there is a context of conflict/dispute it may mean ‘female slave/servant’. A good example of this is Judges 5:30. The implication is that of a girl or two captured in a war context (Simian-Yofre, 2004:438).

In biblical Aramaic, the word is used in Daniel 2:18 and basically means mercy or pity. In Syriac it has the same meanings as in Aramaic, thus, to show compassion, love or wish. In Arabic it means to have mercy, pity, forgive, be tenderhearted (Simian-Yofre, 2004:438-439).

In terms of occurrences it appears more often as a verb than as a noun. Simian-Yofre (2004:439) mentions that, 49 times it appears in the Masoretic text, as a verb and about 39 times, it appears as a noun in the plural *rahamim* (רחמים). Stoebe (2012:12260) concurs that רחמים occurs 39 times in the Masoretic Text. In terms of the distribution<sup>98</sup> of the word, it is mainly concentrated in the Psalms where it appears 11 times. Simian-Yofre (2004:451) suggests that in texts where the verbal form *raham* (רחם) “appears only once, its weight is often augmented by emphatic constructions”. Bringing this down to Lamentations, three passages are bound with *raham* (רחם). The first is 3:22 where *rahamim* (רחמים) is used in chiasm, or in an inclusion with *hesed* (חסד). The second is 3:32 where it is used antithetically with יגה (to cause grief). The third is found in 4:10 where Stoebe (2012:1227) suggests that “*rahamani* probably means maternal feelings rather than weak hearted”.

The word *raham* (רחם) is very limited in its secular usage. It can only be questionably attested in Proverbs 28:13 where the *pual* form is used. That is the only place where it can refer to human mercy. In the majority of the cases *raham* (רחם) is associated with God, who is either showing it or withholding it. When God shows his *raham* (רחם) it may be directly or through human agents. So *raham* (רחם) is confined to religious language, although, rarely does it refer to human relationships (Simian-Yofre, 2004:451). Stoebe (2012:1227) reinforces this by saying “The OT always uses *raham* (רחם) of the superior in relation to the inferior, never of a person in relation to God. Unless it should be emended altogether *raham* (רחם) in Psalm 18:2 can be explained as an Aramaism”.

In summary Simian- Yofre (2004:451) suggests that,

*Raham* is a term associated with actions in the social realm, only rarely is its object a single individual<sup>99</sup>. The active nature of the root is best seen in the various combinations in which the verb occurs and in the consequences of *rahamim*. Concretely Yahweh’s compassion means ‘show mercy’, pardon, ‘forgive’, ‘comfort’, ‘spare’, ‘pity’, ‘strengthen’, ‘save’, ‘turn to’, and even more concretely ‘bring back’, ‘assemble’, ‘rebuild’, ‘elect’ ‘grant rest’ or (negatively) ‘not smite’, ‘not sadden’. But *raham* is not totally synonymous

<sup>98</sup> Five times in Nehemiah, two times in Genesis, two times in 1 Kings, once in Deuteronomy, once in Samuel, once in 1 and 2 Chronicles, once in Proverbs and once in Lamentations (Simian-Yofre, 2004:439).

<sup>99</sup> Some exceptions of Daniel, the upright person of Proverbs 28:13 and the Psalmists (Simian Yofre, 2004:451).

with any of these terms. The use of the verb in combination with other verbs shows that it needs to be given concrete meaning. In any case *raham* clearly suggests a fundamental attitude that takes effect in various actions. This fundamental attitude presupposes a situation of suffering, affliction, guilt, danger, weakness - but also the possibility of alleviating or even abolishing this situation.

Therefore *raham* (רחם) is a fundamental element of Yahweh's nature that is exclusively expressed by the verb *raham* (רחם) and differentiated more precisely by the standard theological terms *rahamim* (רחמים) and *rahum* (רחום) ( Simian-Yofre, 2004:452 ).

Though our central text of focus does not appear in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Dahmen (2004:453) commenting about the *rahamim* (רחמים) in them says “in most cases God's *rahamim* refers to God's compassionate treatment of the worshipper, ‘the sons of his pleasure’ or Israel, and the mighty acts in which God has come to their aid against the power of sin”. He concludes that “it is hard to define the concrete nature of these compassionate acts on God's part. What is clear ... is that God's salvific activity is already present here and now in the community”.

### 3.3.6.3 The Linkage of *hesed* and *rahamim*

Five passages are singled out by Simian-Yofre (2004:446) as having *rahamim* (רחמים) and *hesed* (חסד) used in parallel and in chiasm. These are: Psalm 40:12; Psalm 51:3; Psalm 69:17; Psalm 106:45-46 and Lamentations 3:22. However, Salters (2010:226) suggests more passages. He includes Psalm 25:6; 40:12; 51:3; 69:16; 103:4; Isaiah 63:7; Jeremiah 16:5; Daniel 1:9; Hosea 2:21; Zechariah 7:9 in the list. Nevertheless, he points out that only in Isaiah 63:7 and Psalm 25:6 is *hesed* (חסד) used in the plural, as in Lamentations.

Simian-Yofre (2004:452) suggests that, when *hesed* (חסד) and *raham* (רחם) are used together, they should be seen as complementing each other. “*Hesed* expresses the fundamental goodness of God, *raham* the special favor shown by God in the face of a situation of sin and affliction”.

Clark (1993:142) who does an intensive analysis of the word *hesed* (חסד) from a linguistic point of view, particularly using the synchronic method<sup>100</sup>, singles out Psalm 51:3, Psalm 69:17, Isaiah

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<sup>100</sup> Clark (1993:257) argues that a synchronic approach “is an essential prerequisite to any diachronic investigation of the same field”. He also admits that with such an approach “it is not possible to consider the development that has

63:7 and Lamentations 3:22 as specific texts where *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) are used in parallel. He also notes that besides their parallel usage, these two words are used more frequently in contiguity. Examples where they are used contiguously are Jeremiah 16:5; Hosea 2:21; Psalm 25:6 and Psalm 103:4. From his analysis of all these passages Clark (1993:147) concludes that, “the regions of the semantic field covered by *hesed* and *rahamim* overlap considerably but do not coincide”.

Dahmen (2004:441) is of the opinion that, apart from Lamentations, *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) are clearly used in conjunction with each other in Isaiah 54:8, 10 and 60:10.

Looking at these scholars it is clear that they are failing to really agree on the number of passages where the words *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) are used in parallel. This seems to be driven by an analysis on the level of single lines. But as we have argued that parallelism should be activated from phonology, morphology, syntax, semantic and even discourse levels, it is easy to see that all of the passages cited above are activating the parallelism or inclusion from different levels. So for example in Isaiah 54:8 the words *rahamim* (רחמים) and *hesed* (חסד) are used so closely in the same line. In Isaiah 54:10 the distance apart is enlarged although it is still the same verse. In Psalm 77:8-9 the parallelism is at two lines. So when we then come to Lamentations 3:22, the parallelism is, first of all, activated at one line level and then activated at the 11 lines level. Thus, all the 11 lines are enclosed by the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God.

A closer analysis of Isaiah 54:8 will reveal that the whole phrase **בשצף קצף הסתרתי** has been fronted for contrast with **עולם רחמתיך**. Clark (1993:148) is of the opinion that in the whole of Isaiah 54:7-8 *rahamim* (רחמים) “can be seen as a motivating force that leads to the expression of Yahweh’s *hesed*.” On the other hand, in Isaiah 54:10 *hesed* (חסד) and

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undoubtedly occurred in the concept during the compilation of the various documents which form the Hebrew Bible” (Clark, 1993:257-258).



*rahamim* (רחמים) are clearly used in an inclusion (i.e. *hesed* חסד being fronted for focus and *rahamim* רחמים a closure). So it can be concluded that *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) are very “closely associated and it is difficult to differentiate between them in many passages. They cover a common region in the semantic field, but their individual regions do not completely overlap” (Clark, 1993:148).

### Summary of the Resources

In this study, it has been shown that *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) are difficult concepts to translate. However, we settled for loving kindness for *hesed* (חסד) and compassion for *rahamim* (רחמים). *Hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) form a useful combination in an effort to offer healing and hope in contexts of suffering. First, as a resource, the study above has shown that *hesed* (חסד) is used in both secular and religious circles. This point is useful because the healing and hope will be offered inclusively, whether the context is religious or unreligious. Second, *hesed* (חסד) is used in association with *mishpat* (משפט) and *emet* (אמת), thereby invoking issues of peace, justice and truth - core issues in any endeavour to bring healing and hope. In the same vein, the study of *hesed* (חסד) has revealed the endurance, the social and active nature of the resources. In the end, *hesed* (חסד) was shown to be the pinnacle of human moral virtue that God expects us to show one to another.

At the same time, *rahamim* (רחמים) equally carries the weight of its counterpart, *hesed* (חסד). Although rarely explicitly found in the secular usage, its religious usage can be felt in the secular. Just like *hesed* (חסד), *rahamim* (רחמים) is active, social and enduring. In a number of passages where *rahamim* (רחמים) is used alongside *hesed* (חסד), it has been proven that in terms of their semantic domains they overlap but do not coincide. The study has proven that *rahamim* (רחמים) is God’s expression of his *hesed* (חסד). When God expresses it, he also expects people to show it to one another. Although *rahamim* (רחמים) covers a broad number of the acts of God, this study has shown most of it to be the salvific activity of God.



### 3.3.7 Linkage of Hope: Middle (Lamentations 3:19-33) versus Final (Lamentations 5)

There seems to be a general consensus among scholars that Lamentations 3:19-33<sup>101</sup> is explicit in its articulation of hope. But the biggest question has been whether the book of Lamentations ends in hope<sup>102</sup>. Taking our foundation from the agreement, we will try and show that Lamentations 5 draws in a number of areas from the hope passage of 3:19-33 and thus ends on a positive note.

First, in 3:19 there is emphasis on God to remember, the imperative taking the front position. In chapter 5 the imperative ‘remember’ also take the front position. In Chapter 3:19 God is called upon to remember my affliction (זכר עניי) by the גבר. In chapter 5 God is called upon to remember what has come upon us (זכר יהוה מה-היה לנו). This is then elaborated as ‘our reproach’ חרפתנו. Westermann (1981:179) discovers well that, communal laments lament the suffering as well as the disgrace or shame that comes with suffering. So there is no doubt that chapter 5 begins in a similar fashion as our central passage of focus i.e 3:19-33.

Before the announcement of the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God, there is an interesting use of the root שוב in Lamentations 3:19-33. This word is also used in chapter 5. In 3:19-33 שוב is used in the *hifil* as an expression of the גבר reflecting on the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God. But in chapter 5:21 שוב is used in the *hifil* imperative as an expression calling on God to return the community back to himself.

The third word that connects together chapter 3 to chapter 5 in the line of hope is the root word חרש. In 3:19-33, חרש is used in 3:23 as an adjective, in the plural. The adjective is used to describe the *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים) of God in relation to the adverbs of time (i.e. every morning). In chapter 5:21 חרש is used as an imperative, imploring God to renew the days of the community as in the former days.

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<sup>101</sup> Over 57% of Lamentations 3 can be seen to fall under hope. One can divide and add the verses according to this criterion: The hope section =16 verses (18-33), the justice of the LORD= three verses (34-36), the sovereignty of the Lord= two verses (37-38), the confession= four verses (39-42), supplication= nine verses (55-63), and imprecations verses=three verses (64-66). If we include verse 18 because of the difficult in delineation, since there is so much enjambment, this amounts to almost 25% of Lamentations 3 (verses 18-33) clearly committed to hope.

<sup>102</sup> On an overview of all the laments, Berlin (2004:97) observes well that 1-4 end with a note of vengeance.

Verse 19 of chapter 5 seems to be utterances from the didactic voice, a voice that extols the positive attributes of God. This is the same voice that we find in the hope section, 3:19-33. In the hope section of chapter 3, the voice extols the goodness, the loving kindness, the compassion and the faithfulness of God. In chapter 5 the didactic voice notes that the LORD is eternal (i.e. עולם). The Hebrew word can mean eternity past or eternity future (Koehler & Baumgartner, 1998:688-689). This analysis is very interesting when considering 3:31 and 5:19 where עולם is specifically mentioned. In 5:19 the LORD is from eternity to eternity and he sits on his throne ruling from generation to generation. In 3:31 the voice uses the alternate name for the LORD אדני and says he will not reject forever (עולם).

Another word that connects chapter 3:19-33 to chapter 5 is the use of the כִּי. The high pitch of the book of Lamentation (3:19-33), which we have said is the central passage of hope, ends with all the three verses beginning with כִּי. Chapter 5 also ends with verse 22 that begins with the כִּי phrase. The כִּי אֵם of Chapter 5:22 has generated a lot of discussion among scholars. Very few scholars are making any effort to connect the use of the כִּי אֵם to the hope passage. Though there are a number of כִּי phrases in the book of Lamentations, there are very few כִּי אֵם phrases. Therefore, the כִּי אֵם phrase of 5:22 should be read alongside its counterpart in 3:32.

Parry (2010:155-157) unveils four ways of reading the כִּי אֵם in 5:22. First there is the doubting conclusion whereby the כִּי אֵם is read as an ‘unless’. Parry (2010:155) disputes this reading on two fronts. First there are no parallel passages where כִּי אֵם is read ‘unless’. Second he disputes it on the basis of the meaning of the prayer, bearing in mind the contexts of anger and rejection that the prayer is given under.

Second, there is an open conclusion. Here the כִּי אֵם is read “as introducing a conditional statement that is left trailing off, leaving a protasis without an apodosis or an ‘if’ without a ‘then’” (Linafelt, 2000:60). Berlin (2004:350) refutes this well on the basis that it is motivated by the modern readers’ contexts rather than the original author’s context.

Third, there is the protesting conclusion whereby כִּי אֵם is read as ‘except’ or ‘instead’. This third reading is problematic since it does not give enough time for God to respond to the prayer. The prayer is given, and instantly there is a conclusion that they have been rejected.

Fourth, there is the hopeful conclusion, whereby the כִּי אֵם is understood from three different angles: a) drop the אֵם as not part of the original since the Septuagint and the Syriac do not translate it. Moreover, it is not attested in some medieval manuscripts; b) read כִּי אֵם as introducing a hypothetical situation which is known to be impossible; c) כִּי אֵם is read as ‘even though’. In this reading, 5:22 is subordinate to 5:21, which is the main clause.

Analysing all the above, the fourth view of a hopeful conclusion is more appealing, especially if we read כִּי אֵם as ‘even though’. Not only is it a consistent reading of the book of Lamentations that aligns well with the hope passage of 3:19-33, but it is in harmony with other כִּי אֵם passages<sup>103</sup> found elsewhere in the Bible. Parry (2010:157) adds that Psalm 89:50-51 can then be seen to provide a parallel to the syntactic structure of Lamentations 3:21-22.

To conclude this discussion there is more substance in translating כִּי אֵם as a concessive particle in both 3:32 and 5:22. In this way both passages begin the same way and end the same way. Thus, Chapter 5 closes with a prayerful tone of hope that dominates the central passage of focus 3:19-33. So Parry (2010:154) concludes well that,

The ending of Lamentations is not one of giving up on God, nor of the triumph of despair ... The book ends with a plea for restoration ... the bare fact of a cry to God is indicative of hope that prayer will be answered by the One who is able to do stuff.

Even Kotze (2015:147), who does an analysis of the Septuagint as a witness to the Masoretic Text says in his conclusion,

Concerning the hope in LXX Lam 5:19-22, the conjunction δε in v.19 explicitly states the contrast between the Lord, who dwells forever, and the symbol of his earthly abode, Mount Zion, which is destroyed and deserted (v.18). The two clauses of this verse in the Greek translation portray God as a sovereign Lord who remains unaffected by the disasters that have befallen the community and Zion. The speakers thereby confess that the Lord is in a position for them to pin their hopes on.

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<sup>103</sup> Jeremiah 51:14, Isaiah 10:22, Amos 5:22 (Parry, 2010:157).

Kotze (2015:147) then concludes in a similar fashion to Parry (2010:154), saying, “The fact that the speakers actually voice their pleas implies that they consider the hoped restoration and renewal to be realistic future possibilities”.

So we propose that, though there is evident protest in Lamentations 5, especially in verse 20, the beginning and conclusion imitate a number of features from the hope passages of Lamentations 3, thereby insinuating a positive end<sup>104</sup>. We are also mindful of the Jewish tradition that repeats verse 21 after verse 22 which has been taken by some scholars as intimating that the Jews considered the pericope to end on a negative note. To this we respond, this is rather a late development probably during the time of Rashi (A.D. 1040-1105) and could not have been the understanding from the beginning. Secondly, it is a belief confined to a certain portion of the Jewish community and not the entirety of them (Gregory, 2008:461). Most important, it is rather significant to take note of the entire tone of the chapter rather than to make conclusion based on a single verse<sup>105</sup>. So the entire book of Lamentations, if seen from this angle, is advocating for: a) meditation on the character of God<sup>106</sup>; b) peaceful, controlled<sup>107</sup>, disciplined protests<sup>108</sup> with a hopeful mind<sup>109</sup> in times of suffering. Such protests if applied in an analogous reading would allow for engagement<sup>110</sup> and ultimately lasting healing and hope.

### Summary

Our aim in this exercise has been to establish the link between the middle lament (specifically, the hope passage that occupies the centre of the third lament) and the concluding lament. In it we discovered some key words that tie the two laments together. These key words are **זָכַר**, **שׁוֹב**, **חַדָּשׁ**, **עוֹלָם** and **כִּי אִם**. An analysis of these words, (both in Lamentations 3 and 5) and the

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<sup>104</sup> This hopeful ending is also picked up by Klouda (2008:940) when he says that “the hopeful conclusion of the book anticipates the deliverance of the daughter of Zion from Captivity and envisions her restoration (Lam. 4:22)”.

<sup>105</sup> Boase (2006:236) provides a convincing outline of Chapter 5 that moves from misery to praise and concludes with restoration. However, she falls into the same trap of making a doubting conclusion based on verse 22. One then wonders how this restoration can be genuine without hope.

<sup>106</sup> Specifically his *hesed* and *rahamim*.

<sup>107</sup> This has been argued from the literary features of the book (e.g. the acrostics).

<sup>108</sup> This has been argued well on the exegetical analysis of verses 26-27 where there is encouragement to be silent. The encouragement to be silent is read in view of the encouragement from Lamentations 1-2 where Lady Jerusalem was also encouraged to weep (protest). So our conclusion was that this is a balance and so calls for disciplined protests.

<sup>109</sup> This has been argued clearly from the comparison of the hope passage of Lamentations 3:19-33 and 5:1-22.

<sup>110</sup> This engagement perhaps will be based on the ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ and not ‘It’ as Mandolfo (2007:2) puts it. It also includes authoring one another in the form of listening and responding to one another fairly (Mandolfo, 2007:12-13).

general tone of the prayer in Lamentations 5 have led us to conclude that the book of Lamentations as a whole ends on a positive note. This is not to deny that there are some negatives or protests interspersed here and there but an acknowledgement that the protests have been directed to the one who in the final end holds the hope of the people. His *rahamim* and *hesed* will bring lasting healing and hope.

## Chapter Four: Historical Analysis

So far, we have covered in chapter one, the introduction, where we spelt out the problem statement, the methodology and the aims of this study. In chapter two, we looked at the literary features of the book of Lamentations, thus establishing the literary context of the book of Lamentations. In chapter three we narrowed the analysis to the specific pericope that deals with the issue of hope and its resources (that is to say, the *hesed* חסד and the *rahamim* רחמים of God), and then went on to unveil how Lamentations 3 relates to all the other laments of the book. Now it is prudent for us to move to the historical analysis with the aim of establishing the historical contexts of the laments.

The value of historical context is brought to the fore by Parry (2010:2) when he bemoans the Christianisation of every Jewish text, thereby blurring all historical critical issues of Israel that gave birth to the sacred texts.

Modern readers should always bear it in their minds that biblical texts have a history of origin. For us to understand better and appreciate the significance of these texts we need to dig into the historical contexts and find out their original intentions and the background that gave birth to these texts. Otherwise we are not doing justice to the text when we just jump in and impose our world-view without first understanding the struggles and joys that are rooted in the historical context.

Coming specifically to the book of Lamentations, it should be taken into account that the book shares a number of features with other lament psalms. One of those features highlighted by Broyles (2008:384) is the generic or nonspecific. Thus, there is normally a lack of the specifics on the who, what, where and when? Broyles (2008:385) then concludes that, “since these model prayers are to be applicable to a wide variety of persons in a wide variety of circumstances, their language must be embracing rather than limiting”. Therefore there is a need to appeal to external evidences. Certainly as will be revealed in this study, the historical context of the book of Lamentations is not explicitly spelt out in the book and therefore we will rely on the inter-textual and extra-textual analysis for us to gather this information. In other words, the internal evidence alone is not sufficient to give adequate information about the historical context. However, in line with our research question, which seeks an analogous reading to a Zimbabwean context of suffering, this lack of internal evidence is proof that the book of Lamentations is *ahistorical* and thus it can relevantly be appropriated into the Zimbabwean context of suffering. The *ahistorical*

concept can thus be described as, “lack of historical references, whether intentional or unintentional, so that the book becomes applicable across many contexts as an expression of grief, anger and despair” (Giffone, 2012:99).

Tying it to the general trend of lament psalms Broyles (2008:385) says that

lament psalms are models of prayer composed for the generic needs of God’s people. In this respect, a lament psalm is not a mirror reflecting the composer’s experience; rather it provides worshippers a framework to interpret their own experiences and to guide their expressions of prayer ... a lament psalm should be read not autobiographically but rather liturgically.

In addition to the liturgy, Giffone (2012:99) identifies the psychological, literary and ideological as additional categories of *ahistorical* approaches.

## 4.1 Authorship

The question of who wrote the book of Lamentations continues to be a debatable issue among scholars. No consensus exists even to this day with two schools of thought taking centre stage in the debate. One school is pro-Jeremianic authorship while the other is anti-Jeremianic. The issue is made more complex by the fact that the Masoretic Text does not in any way explicitly state the author of the book. Even those that strongly believe in the Jeremianic authorship do so based not on the Masoretic Text, but on the Septuagint, the Targums and the Vulgate. The Septuagint, for example, begins with

καὶ ἐγένετο μετὰ τὸ αἰχμαλωτισθῆναι τὸν Ἰσραὴλ καὶ Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἐρημωθῆναι ἐκάθισεν Ἱερεμίας κλαίων καὶ ἐθρήνησεν τὸν θρῆνον τοῦτον ἐπὶ Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ εἶπεν

And it came to be after the exile of Israel, and Jerusalem was desolate, Jeremiah sat weeping and sung a dirge, this lament, over Jerusalem and said<sup>1</sup>:

The Targum also begins by saying, ‘Jeremiah the prophet and chief priest, said ...’.

The Vulgate has the title ‘Lamentations of Jeremiah’ and then begins the same way as the Septuagint, but adds ‘with a bitter spirit sighing and wailing’. The Peshitta has the superscript ‘The book of lamentations of Jeremiah the prophet’. The Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Bathra*, 14b-15a also noted that ‘Jeremiah wrote the book which bears his name, the book of Kings and Lamentations’ (Mackay, 2008:11).

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<sup>1</sup> This is our own translation.

The tradition of assigning Jeremiah to the authorship of Lamentations is based on 2 Chronicles 35:25 where it is written ‘Jeremiah composed some laments for Josiah, and to this day all the men and women singers commemorate Josiah in the laments’ (NIV). Even people like Jerome were heavily influenced by this reference prompting Calvin (1950:299) to openly object saying

Grossly mistaken was Jerome, who thought that it is the elegy which Jeremiah composed on the death of Josiah; for we see nothing here that is suitable to that event. There is indeed mention made in one place of a king but what is said there cannot be applied to Josiah; for he was never driven into exile, but was buried at Jerusalem with his fathers.

However, it should be emphasized here that Calvin objects to the attachment of the book of Lamentations with the laments composed for the death of Josiah but he did not object to the Jeremianic authorship. If anything, he endorses the Jeremianic authorship when he says, for example, “For Jeremiah here sets before the eyes of all those things which they knew as facts” (Calvin, 1950:299). That means we can establish with confidence that up until the time of the Reformation, it was generally accepted that Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations.

The tradition of assigning the book of Lamentations to Jeremiah was also pervasive during the Talmudic periods, such that some rabbinic passages from Lamentations are introduced by the formula ‘Jeremiah said ...’ The tradition continued into the Christian times, expedited by the Church fathers. The influence of this tradition is still felt in English versions such as the AV, RV, ASV, and RSV which still retain titles in the book of Lamentations pointing to Jeremiah (Soderlund, 1986:65).

Besides the introductions in the Septuagint, the Vulgate, the Peshitta and the Talmud that links Jeremiah to Lamentations, arguments for and against the Jeremianic authorship have concentrated on the language style and content of the book. For instance, some scholars contend that the book should be associated with the prophet Jeremiah since there are some close linguistic connections between the book of Lamentations and the book of Jeremiah. Examples being Lamentations 2:14 and Jeremiah 5:31; Lamentations 2:22 and Jeremiah 6:25; Lamentations 3:14 and Jeremiah 20:7; Lamentations 3:53 and Jeremiah 38:6; Lamentations 4:17 and Jeremiah 2:36 (Longman, 2008:328). Boda (2008:399) adds two more verses to the above references, thus, 3:15,19 with Jeremiah 9:14; 23:15 and Lamentations 3:48-51 with Jeremiah 14:17. On a counter note, in as much as there are some similarities, Fernandez (1998:1038) points out that there are some unusual differences as in Lamentations 2:9 and Jeremiah 42:4-22,



Lamentations 5:7 and Jeremiah 31:30, Lamentations 4:20 and Jeremiah 22:13-19. However, Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:5) explains that this “similar phraseology exhibited between Lamentations and the book of Jeremiah, is best explained as resulting from the fact that the two compositions originated in the same general historical period and thus likely reflect the same dialect of Biblical Hebrew”.

With the backing of the Septuagint, the Vulgate, the Targum, the Talmud, the Peshitta and now some similar phraseology, the Jeremianic authorship was never seriously questioned until the advent of Hermann von der Haardt in the eighteenth century (Parry, 2010:3-4). Hermann von der Haardt “proposed that the five poems were composed by Daniel, Shadrach, Mishach, Abednego, and King Jehoiachin respectively” (Gwaltney, 1999:45). This then opened up the debate on the authorship which led to serious analysis of the internal and external evidences. However, some scholars such as Soderlund (1986:66), and Gwaltney (1999:45), still concluded that the authorship could not be established based on the internal and external evidence, since the arguments for and against Jeremianic authorship are balanced. Therefore respect for the anonymity of the author should be maintained.

Hillers (1992:13) raises five texts in the book of Lamentations that seem incompatible with Jeremianic authorship. The first one is Lamentations 4:17 which seem to imply that the author together with the nation of Judah looked in vain for help from Egypt which would be at variance with Jeremiah’s advice to trust God rather than other nations<sup>2</sup>. The second one is Lamentations 1:10. The question being, could the words in 1:10 be spoken by Jeremiah who prophesied the destruction of the temple? The third text that Hillers questions, if it came from Jeremiah, is 4:20, which seems to put a lot of faith in Zedekiah, contrary to what Jeremiah prophesied in 37:17. The fourth text is 2:9 which seems to suggest that the prophets were not finding any vision from the LORD which would vilify Jeremiah himself as a prophet receiving vision from the LORD before, during and after the fall of Jerusalem. The last text is Lamentations 4:19 which seems to suggest that the author was part of the escape with Zedekiah which would not make sense since Jeremiah was in prison during that same time, according to Jeremiah 38:28. Soderlund (1986:65) adds,

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<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 2:8 and 37:5-10.

Would Jeremiah, who prophesied the destruction of the temple, have written about the enemies of Judah as ‘those whom thou didst forbid to enter thy congregation’ (1:10)? Would Jeremiah, who perceived the Babylonians as God’s agents of judgment, call down vengeance upon them (1:21)? ... Would Jeremiah, who had no love for Zedekiah, call the king ‘the breath of our nostrils’ and he of whom we said, ‘under his shadow he shall live among the nations’ (4:20)?

Even though, Soderlund (1986:65) tries to answer these questions, he eventually concludes that,

The best policy concerning the authorship of Lamentations is to respect the anonymity of the Hebrew text, while at the same time recognising the existence of a very ancient tradition - and surely not entirely impossible – tradition regarding the Jeremiaic authorship of the book.

This anonymity of the book is crucially picked up by Brady (2005:426) who highlights that,

In many ways it is this anonymity of the work that provides it with such great power, especially for today’s reader. It is not a work by a named and distant prophet; rather, it is a work by anyone/everyone who has gone through such tragedy and the reader is invited to identify with the author’s perspective.

The anonymity of Lamentations affects also its canonicity. Soderlund (1986:65) observes that,

In the standard twenty – four book Hebrew canon, Lamentations constitutes one of the Five Meggiloth or Scrolls found in the section of the Writings. The conventional position of Lamentation within the Meggiloth is third (following Canticles and Ruth), an arrangement based on the order in which the scrolls are read in the Ashkenazi (Eastern Europe) liturgical calendar. In some sources, however, including the Aleppo and Leningrad MSS (hence the HB), the Meggiloth are arranged chronologically according to the presumed date of composition, whence Lamentations appears in the fourth position, following Ruth, Canticles, and Ecclesiastes.

In agreement, Provan (1991:3) observes that,

In manuscripts and editions of the Hebrew Bible, the listing reflects Jewish liturgical practice. Lamentations is associated with Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes and Esther as one of the five scrolls (Meggiloth) read in public worship at important festivals. The position of the Meggiloth within the canon varies. They are most frequently to be found in the Writings, the third section of the Hebrew Bible, but they also appear between the Pentateuch and the Prophets and are even found interspersed among the books of the Pentateuch.

Provan (1991:3) goes on to explain that,

the order in which the five appear also varies, depending upon whether it is intended to reflect the order in which they were thought to have been composed (Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther) or the order in which the Jewish festivals occurred at which they were read: Song of Songs (Passover), Ruth (Weeks), Lamentations (9<sup>th</sup> of Ab), Ecclesiastes (Tabernacles), Esther (Purim).

It is clear from a thorough investigation of the position of Lamentations in both the Masoretic and the Hebrew traditions that there was variety in its positioning (O'Connor, 2001:1016). There was also variety in the order. Provan (1991:4) rightly points out that no order or positioning is the correct one or had authority over the other. So the book does not have a fixed place of abode. This failure to have a fixed position and order would significantly fuel the raging debate over the authorship, its anonymity and fluidity. The various traditions were not unanimous in their placement of the book of Lamentations in the canon. Further, Bergant (2003:20) is right in pointing out that "the placement of the book of Lamentations within the entire biblical corpus influences the way it is understood". So the various traditions at play were contending with each other in accordance with their liturgical use and interpretational traditions. That in turn means that the book itself refused to be bound by one tradition but was open to various traditions through its anonymity. Thus, there is flexibility in terms of its mobility, or as Giffone (2012:97) puts it, it is easily "portable".

In support of the anonymity of the book, Sellev (1993:419) says, "the position is significant testimony to the original anonymity of Lamentations, for it is difficult to see why the book was separated from that of Jeremiah if from the beginning it was understood to have been composed by the prophet". Though Ferris (2010:575) suggests that those who translated the Greek used a Hebrew manuscript that attributed Lamentations to Jeremiah, Meek (1956:4-5) argues that,

For one thing, if there had been any general belief when the prophetic books were canonized that Lamentations was written by Jeremiah, it would assuredly have been included with the prophets and not left for the writings which was the last portion of the Old Testament to be canonized. The fact that it was canonized so late shows that the tradition connecting it with Jeremiah was late. The Codex Vaticanus and certain other Greek manuscripts have the title simply as 'Lamentations', as against the later 'Lamentations of Jeremiah', and this must represent the original Septuagint because otherwise it would be difficult to explain the absence of Jeremiah's name from the title.

It is also highly unlikely that there were two versions of the Hebrew manuscripts in circulation, one attributing authorship to Jeremiah and the other one being anonymous.

Hillers (1992:12) opines that, once the anonymity of the authorship is thus accepted, we can then go on to "give a plausible account of how it could have come to be ascribed to Jeremiah and eventually to be placed after the book of Jeremiah".

As we have already noted, 2 Chronicles 35:25 played a crucial role in promoting the Jeremianic authorship. Boda (2008:399) notes well that "this note says nothing about the laments related to

the fall of Jerusalem”. Gottwald (1962:62) agrees, and says, “the chronicler hardly refers to the book of Lamentations, since it contains no lament over Josiah but only brief reference to Zedekiah”. He goes on to clarify that, with the reference to a lament by the Chronicler, “traditions have been set in motion with less justification and it is likely that the careful distinction of Chronicles was overlooked by later readers”. Unfortunately such readers who were swayed by the misinterpretation of the Chronicler included Jerome and his predecessor Josephus (Kroll, 1983:1525). The lament written by Jeremiah for the slain Josiah that is referred to in 2 Chronicles 35:25 might have gone missing<sup>3</sup> and was not included in the book of Lamentations (Fee & Hubbard, 2011:420).

Jonker (2012:178) and Kalman (2009:33) advocate for a pseudo-historical authorship as a starting point for a discussion of the connection of 2 Chronicles 35:25 and the book of Lamentations. Gracia (2002:180) describes Pseudo-historical authorship as “a mental construct that is believed by an audience – or constructed by someone (sometimes the historical author) to lead an audience to believe it – to be the historical author”. Thus, according to Kalman, the connection of Lamentations to 2 Chronicles 35:25 and the perpetuation of the Jeremianic authorship served to give the historical data<sup>4</sup> and to explain the theologically challenging verses in Lamentations. Some of these theologically challenging verses will be dealt with below in Chapter 5. Suffice to say it here that Jonker (2012:187) concludes that,

The rabbis interpreted Lamentations in the aftermath of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD. It made theological sense in that context to read Lamentations through the lens of Jeremianic theology in order to interpret it as a message for their own time.

Thus, since Jeremiah was a prophet, attaching Lamentations to Jeremiah would have enabled them to read Lamentations historically pointing to the destruction of the temple in 586 BC but also prophetically speaking to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Jonker is not alone, but Provan (1991:382) agrees and points out that the Jewish interpreters saw the book pointing beyond 586 BC, and he cites the Targum to Lamentations 1:19 as pointing to the destruction of

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<sup>3</sup> Lange (-:6) is also of the opinion that the lament composed on the death of Josiah is extant.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Kalman (2009:36) cites Lam. Rab. 3:1 as locating the composition of Lamentations in the book of Jeremiah. Kalman goes on to assert that “For the rabbis, the book of Jeremiah provided the historical details which explained how and when the book of Lamentation was recorded”. Jonker (2012:186) adds “the rabbis’ reception of Lamentations happened, so to speak, through the lens of the book of Jeremiah, which was closely associated and influenced by the deuteronomic tradition”. In this way the book of Lamentations could be read prophetically.

Jerusalem in 70 AD. That the Targum to Lamentation 1:19 points retrospectively to 586 BC and prospectively to 70 AD is undisputable since it reads,

Jerusalem said when she was delivered into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar: I called to my lovers, the sons of the nations, with whom I had made a covenant that they should help me, but they deceived me, and turned round to destroy me. (These are the Romans who went up with Titus and wicked Vespasian and built siege works against Jerusalem). And my priests and my elders fainted from hunger in the midst of the city, because they sought the sustenance of food for themselves to eat, so that they might preserve their souls<sup>5</sup>.

The conclusion by Jonker of the rabbis' reading of Jeremiah into Lamentations is still, however, in line with the anonymous reading of the book, for both arrive at dislocating the text from its historical context to other contexts of suffering.

There has been some effort from another section of scholars to also argue that the book was written by a number of authors. For instance, Gottwald (2000:579-580) is of the view that since the book exhibits different kinds of traditions (that is to say prophecy, deuteronomic, kingship<sup>6</sup>, priestly theology and wisdom teaching) it is the work of poets and pastoral leaders. Salters (2010:7) on the other hand, argues for multiple authorship based on the differences of order and style of the acrostics. Renkema (1998:53) suggests that these songs were a collective work of art, composed by temple singers under the supervision of the guild. However, Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:5) argues well that "the widely observed unity of form and point of view, rhythmic dominance of the *qinah* meter, and the general resemblance in linguistic detail throughout the sequence are broadly suggestive of the work of a single author".

In conclusion we have to respect the anonymity of a single author, which is a contributing factor to the *ahistorical* nature of the book. As an *ahistorical* book, the laments can be used liturgically. This is important as it opens up the laments not only to belong to Jeremiah but to all people of all generations. Thus, the failure of the book to have a fixed place of abode in the canon and its anonymity on authorship enables its portability, mobility and openness to various traditions and contexts for appropriation.

## Summary

This analysis of the authorship of Lamentations has revealed that there are two traditions in contention. The first tradition attaches authorship of the book to Jeremiah whereas the other

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<sup>5</sup> Translated by Alexander (2008:124-124).

<sup>6</sup> Davidic-Zion.

tradition advocates anonymity. The tradition that attaches the book to Jeremiah did it for two reasons. The first reason was to explain the theologically difficult verses in Lamentations. In this way it could explain the theology through the Deuteronomistic history. Second, the connection to Jeremiah would help the readers to appropriate the text beyond 587BC to any other suffering, since the text would be seen prophetically in line with Jeremiah who was a prophet. The other tradition that purports the book to be anonymous is also serving to connect the book to the Jewish liturgical feasts alongside Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and Ruth. In this case the book is *ahistorical*. Thus, this historical analysis is so significant because it shows us that the book of Lamentations originates from a specific historical context which is the fall of Jerusalem in 587BC. The book is also *ahistorical* and *atemporal* which helps in its portability. Hence, because of the book's *ahistorical*, *atemporal* nature, it can be dislodged from its historical context of inception to other contexts far beyond it. Therefore, from this historical analysis, the historical context, the *ahistorical*, *atemporal* nature of the book, and its portability have been unveiled. These are essential components that enable us to appropriate the book responsibly in other contexts of suffering such as the Zimbabwean one.

## 4.2 Date

Strictly speaking, the book itself does not explicitly mention in any way the date of its composition. All proposals for dating from scholars are as a result of an analysis of the content of the book and harmonising it with external evidences. In some extreme cases it is mere speculation. Dobbs- Allsopp (1998:5) captures this well when he says "Scholars have therefore been forced to rely almost solely on impressions of style, form, tone, authorial perspective and the like in order to make estimates about the date of composition". However, for our purposes this lack of information on dating is most appreciated. This is because, in addition to the anonymity of the authorship, the lack of information on dating is an additional ingredient to its *ahistorical* nature. This *ahistorical* nature will enable us, in line with our research question, to appropriate the book in contexts of suffering in Zimbabwe at any age and time.

As can be seen from the analysis of authorship above, there are various traditions that are at play. These traditions would in turn affect the understanding of the date of the book's authorship. Provan (1991:383) points out that one way of understanding the book is that it was Jeremiah's lament over Josiah after his death at Meggido. The other way of understanding it, is that it was

the lament over the destruction of Jerusalem in the time of Zedekiah. Though Lamentations 4:20 is key to the allusion of a king in disaster, unfortunately, the reference does not specify which king is being referred to. If for certain the passage is talking about King Josiah, then we know that he probably died in 609 BC when he tried to intercept the Egyptian army from giving assistance to the Assyrians according to 2 Chronicles 35:20-24. That would then argue for any date of writing, stretching further, even beyond 586 BC. But if the reference to the king in 4:20 is to Zedekiah at the fall of Jerusalem, then the date of writing should be anything after 586BC.

Secondly, the issue of authorship above greatly affects the date in that, if one does not see the laments as composed by Jeremiah, or one individual, but by multiple authors, then it is impossible to come up with one specific date at one specific location. One can sense the struggle in the analysis of Meek (1956:5),

The poems were put together in a single collection, not because of common authorship, but because of common theme and common use in the cultus. They came from different authors and different dates, but they were probably all composed in Palestine, although chs. 2 and 4 may be of Babylonian origin.

So for Meek it is clear that he sees different authors, different dates and different locations.

Even if one is convinced that the background to the dating issue is that of a siege of Jerusalem, one cannot be so certain which siege it was, as there were a number of sieges and destructions for Jerusalem between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC (Longman, 2008:329). This is the reason why some even suggest that this was a siege by Antiochus Epiphanes around 170-168 BC or by Pompey around 63 BC (Stephens-Hodge, 1970:659). Provan (1991:11) evaluates all arguments relating to authorship, *Sitz im Leben* and settles for agnosticism. His conclusion which affects the issue of dating is that,

the general conclusion to which we are forced at the end of this section, then, is that we simply have insufficient evidence, when the literary character of the poems in Lamentations is taken into account, to decide questions of authorship and place of composition ... therefore the book as a whole, may, with a degree of certainty, be dated between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries B.C.; but beyond this we may not go.

Boda (2008:400) argues for a date during the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC and that the poems are a product of those who were in Palestine rather than those in exile. Those who advocate for this view argue that the writer must have been an eyewitness. For example Price (1990:696) argues that,

the vividness of description argues for the book's having been composed at a time very close to the fall of Jerusalem by one who lived through that terrible catastrophe and wrote while his heart was still sore and



each horrible detail was still fresh in his mind ... The occasion for such a book is most assuredly the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in 586 BC. And therefore the date of the writing could not have been many months afterward.

Although Berlin (2004:33) advocates for a date after 586 BC and not anything earlier, she does not subscribe to the notion that the laments were written soon after the destruction by eyewitnesses, since the descriptions are so vivid<sup>7</sup>. She opines that “a good poet can convey immediacy even if he was not present”. She goes on to give ancient and modern day examples of literature that shows language of immediacy even though they were written later. Renkema (1998:56) agrees that there needs to be sometime between the ‘described’ and the ‘description’ to give “time to express their experiences with better considered words than a more elementary cry for help would have done”. But this of course opens the debate of how much later can this be allowed to stretch? Berlin (2004:33-34) analyses the connection of Lamentations to Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and Deuteronomy and concludes that the date should be before 538 BC<sup>8</sup>.

There is yet another school of thought that strives to attach the date with the function of the book. The crucial question in this school would be: was the book composed for the cult or after the cult? This school of thought would compare the usage of Lamentations to the city laments and argue that the book “may have been used as part of a razing or rededication ceremony at the site of the Jerusalem temple” (Giffone, 2012:76). However, caution should be taken when attaching the composition and the function since a number of literatures continue to function way beyond their date of composition. So the fact that the book might have been used at the rededication of the temple in 516 BC does not necessarily translate that it was composed in 516 BC.

Dobbs-Allsopp (1998:1) contends that the solution to the dating lies in an analysis of the language. He specifically picks the diachronic methodology as a methodology that yields good results. Based on a typological diachronic analysis of the Late Biblical Hebrew and Standard Biblical Hebrew, Dobbs-Allsopp (1998:34) suggests that the language of Lamentations precludes a pre-exilic date. On the other side, it also does not fit the late Persian and Maccabean periods. He then concludes that the language of Lamentations is transitional between Standard Biblical

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<sup>7</sup> Provan (1990:12) and Dobbs-Allsopp (1998:6) believes the freshness and vividness of a poem tells us much more about the creativity of the author than the date of composition and life of the author.

<sup>8</sup> A number of scholars including Parry (2010:5) settle for a date between 586 and 538BC.



Hebrew and Late Biblical Hebrew and then settles for a date between 587/6 and 520<sup>9</sup>BC (Dobbs-Allsopp, 1998:36<sup>10</sup>).

From an analysis of the content of Lamentations it would be difficult to settle for a date after 538 BC. First, Lamentations does not say anything about the rebuilding of the temple<sup>11</sup> which was the preoccupation of most of the literature written during that time after the decree of Cyrus. Second, the hope expressed in Lamentations 3<sup>12</sup> does not reflect the edict of Cyrus since the hope is induced retrospectively at God's past deliverances. Although these two reasons seem attractive at first sight, one has to note that these are arguments from silence which may not be able to stand the test of time. Last, as pointed out by Longman (2008:329) and Gerstenberger (2001:474) the reference to the Edomites in 4:21-22 should also be taken into account when discussing issues of dating. The Edomites rejoiced at the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC and the Babylonians are specifically mentioned by name in the corresponding Psalm 137. Dobbs-Allsopp (1998:10) also argues that although there were a number of invasions<sup>13</sup> of Jerusalem<sup>14</sup>, the magnitude of the devastation of Judah during 586 BC is unparalleled and seems to be the one reflected in the book of Lamentations. With this information one may be tempted to settle for dates ranging from 586 to 538BC. Having said that, we also have to respect and acknowledge that the text of Lamentations is silent on its date of composition. This is in line with its *ahistorical* nature.

Although from the analysis above, indications are that the book may be coming from the time frame of 586 to 538BC, it is also clear that the book refuses to be bound into that time frame. That means that although from the analysis of the content, style and language the book may be coming from the 586 to 538 BC it can be dislodged from this time frame to other time frames without suffering much damage since it does not explicitly state its date of authorship. The book survives the created boundaries of time and creates new horizons to be effected into. Giffone (2012) rightly observes this in the title of his thesis "From time bound to timeless". He drills this point down specifically when he says "Lamentations has quite easily stood outside of historical

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<sup>9</sup> At one time Dobbs-Allsopp suggested 516 B.C. which shows that he is also wavering.

<sup>10</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:4) reaffirms this again in the latest edition.

<sup>11</sup> We are, however, mindful that this is an argument from silence (Dobbs-Allsopp, 1998:9) which can thus be dismissed. But we think even if we are going to base our dating on language, language is shaped by the special concerns of that time.

<sup>12</sup> Others take the dearth of hope as a means of dating but Dobbs-Allsopp (1998:8) argues that this "totalizes and homogenise an entire age in a way that is plainly false".

<sup>13</sup> Such as those in 605 B.C., 597 B.C., 586 B.C., 582 B.C. and 70 A.D.

<sup>14</sup> Some scholars argue that the 597 BC destruction of Jerusalem is the one reflected in Lamentations.

place and time to speak to and for the faith communities” (Giffone, 2012:103). This is important in this research since it then opens the book to be appropriated in contexts of suffering, like the Zimbabwean one, at any age or time.

### Summary

The analysis of the date of authorship has revealed that the book of Lamentations is silent about its date of authorship. In other words, there is nowhere in the book where the date of authorship is explicitly mentioned. This is in line with its *ahistorical* nature. However, by looking at the language of Lamentations, it may be suggested that the language fits into the transitional period between the Standard Biblical Hebrew and the Late Biblical Hebrew. From an external analysis of the book it may be postulated that the events described in the book fit those of 586 BC and not before. The apparently missing national hope seems to suggest that the book was written before Cyrus’ decree in 539 BC. So, in conclusion we conjecture a tentative date after 586 BC and before 539 BC, although it is apparent that the book refuses to be locked into time frames because of its *ahistorical* nature. This refusal to be locked makes the book timeless and, hence, it can be dislodged from these original dates to speak to all times and ages. Thus the book is *ahistorical* and its silence on issues of dating enhances its portability to other contexts of suffering.

### 4.3 Historical Occasion

As we seek to understand the historical occasion of Lamentations, we first need to heed to Gerstenberger (2001:473) who cautions us against being preoccupied with the historical setting since the book is not a historical report but a liturgical book. He goes on to clarify that,

The nature and use of our texts are ceremonial, not at all historiographic. We simply should not expect too much information about historical events in liturgies. There is an inherent incompatibility of the two genres involved. While history writing must dedicate itself to unique details, liturgies have to serve the cultic continuum and the needs for group identification over longer periods of time. Therefore historical events cannot serve ceremonial needs and obligations.

While it is true that we should not be preoccupied with digging up the historical setting, but where the book or external sources furnish such, we should utilize it. Gerstenberger (2001:473) admits that Psalm 137 does provide some significant information, although Psalms 44, 74, 79 and 89 are vague. In Psalm 137 we are told that the enemies of Judah are the Babylonians and further details of the siege are then explained in Psalm 44, 74, 79 and 89.

Further insights for this event can be gleaned from 2 Kings 25:1-24; 2 Chronicles 36:17-21; Jeremiah 39:1-10 and 52:1-30. In these texts, although the Chronicler does not give details of dates, we learn first of all from the book of Kings and Jeremiah that the siege started on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month of the 9<sup>th</sup> year of Zedekiah's reign (2 Kings 25:1; Jeremiah 39:1; 52:4). Then the city walls were broken on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> month of Zedekiah's 11<sup>th</sup> year (2 Kings 25:3; Jeremiah 39:2; 52:6). That means that the siege lasted for almost 2 years.

Secondly, we hear that the siege was mounted by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. According to Jeremiah 52:12-13, the temple was set on fire on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month in the 19<sup>th</sup> year of Nebuchadnezzar. However, in 2 Kings 25:8-9 we read, 'On the seventh day of the fifth month in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, an official of the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem. He set fire to the temple of the LORD, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem' (NIV).

There seems to be a glaring discrepancy as to whether the temple was destroyed on the 7<sup>th</sup> or on the 10<sup>th</sup>. But the text from Kings can be taken to mean that the temple was set on fire either on or after the 7<sup>th</sup> of Ab. This suggests that the author of Kings was not specific. "Rabbinic scholars have concluded that the date given in Jeremiah was the most precise for the burning of the temple" (Gregory, 2008:460). This dreadful and devastating event laid the foundation for the fast of the ninth of Ab. Gregory (2008:460) argues that "the fast was observed on the ninth of Av, marking the beginning of the destruction of the temple, rather than on the tenth, when the majority of the destruction was done".

Coming back to the book of Lamentations, an overall analysis of the internal and external evidence will probably reveal that there are five main characters involved<sup>15</sup>. These are the Judeans, the Babylonians, the Edomites, the Egyptians and God. Out of these five characters, four (that is to say, the Judeans, the Edomites, the Egyptians and God) are explicitly mentioned in the book of Lamentations. The Babylonians are not explicitly mentioned in the book of Lamentations although they are mentioned in other books (such as Kings, Jeremiah and Isaiah). All these characters play some significant roles in the entire process of unveiling the book of Lamentations.

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<sup>15</sup> One could say they are six characters if we take Assyria which is mentioned in 5:6. However we have decided to omit Assyria since the role that Assyria plays is the same role that is played by Egypt. These are the major world powers from which Judah was hoping to get assistance but nothing came out of it.

First, the Judeans are said to have sinned according to the book of Lamentations. That is the main reason why there was suffering. Historically, these are the children of Jacob whose father was Isaac. Their grandfather was Abraham who had all the patriarchal promises of inheriting the land of Canaan. Now they are being dispossessed of the land of promise. In the course of their dispossession, there is a lot of suffering because of sin as stated above. However, the specific sin is not mentioned in the book of Lamentations. The suffering is a form of punishment. This punishment, according to Lamentations 4:6, exceeds that of Sodom<sup>16</sup>. The result of the punishment is a fragmented Judah. Giffone (2012:22) suggests that starting in 598 to 586 B.C. the fragmentation resulted in about five groups: the Judean *she'erit*; the *golah* community in Babylon; the diaspora community that remained in Babylon; the refugees in surrounding areas<sup>17</sup> of Judah; and the Egyptian diaspora community. In a nutshell Judah lost her independence, identity and dignity as she fragmented into five communities. She suffered guilty, shame and humiliation as a consequence of defeat from enemy hands.

Second, the Babylonians are portrayed as the agents used by God. Everything they do, they do it under the instruction of God. The notion of being agents is common especially from the exilic and post-exilic literature. For example in 2 Chronicles 36:23, Cyrus understands himself as appointed by God to build the temple in Jerusalem. Pharaoh Neco understands himself as carrying out God's mission when he goes to fight the Babylonians at Carchemish in 2 Chronicles 35:21. Again in Jeremiah 25:9 the author understands Nebuchadnezzar as an agent of God and uses the special phrase 'servant of God'. From these passages it seems apparent that the ideology that kings were servants and agents of God was prevalent. And, therefore, everything they did was sanctioned by God. This understanding seems to undergird the book of Lamentations in its portrayal of the Babylonians. One could therefore argue that since they are just God's agents, the author sees it fit to omit them in the book. However, there could be more to this than an omission based on the argument of them being agents.

The reason why they are not mentioned has not been fully explored by scholars. Giffone (2012:98-99) asks the question but rejects the notion of reprisal on the basis of Psalm 137.

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<sup>16</sup> The reference to Sodom underscores the suffering accompanied with long siege on the part of Judah as compared to instant destruction without long suffering on the part of Sodom. This is well captured by Berlin (2004:107) when she says that, "Sodom the archetypical image of corruption and destruction was destroyed instantaneously, with no suffering leading up to destruction".

<sup>17</sup> Those who fled and lived as refugees in Moab, Ammon and Edom according to Jeremiah 40:11.

However, it seems Giffone does not take into account the different dates of writing between Lamentations and Psalm 137 in his analysis. If Psalm 137 was written after 538 B.C., which seems to be the case<sup>18</sup>, then by this time Babylon was no longer a threat, as it would have been defeated by the Medes and the Persians. In that case, the writer of Psalm 137 would have no fear whatsoever of mentioning the Babylonians. His reference to the Babylonians<sup>19</sup> in Psalm 137:8-9 can then be seen as a taunt. At the same time, it would serve as an encouragement<sup>20</sup> to the incoming-masters (that is, the Medes and the Persians).

So, in a nutshell, the avoidance of mentioning the Babylonians in the book of Lamentations would certainly serve the liturgical aspect of being *ahistorical* as Giffone (2012:99) affirms, but at the same time it is done out of fear of reprisal, especially if we hold to the notion that the book was written before 538 B.C. when the Babylonians were still in charge. One could also argue that failure to mention the Babylonians and then overall lay the blame on God was a political tool of engaging with their oppressors. The Babylonians would never have allowed the Jews to do the commemorations<sup>21</sup> with literature that indicted them, since this would be viewed as igniting rebellion and uprising. So, in summary we can say, though the primary reason for not mentioning the Babylonians was fear, there are other multiple functions that were achieved by this. It is not uncommon for poetry to serve multiple functions.

Third, the Edomites<sup>22</sup> celebrate at the suffering and fall of their brother. We know from Genesis 25:30 that the Edomites came from Esau and the Judahites came from Jacob. So from this we can conclude that their relationship is that of brothers. Therefore, celebration at the fall and suffering of a brother is inconceivable. Youngblood and Stek (2011:1332) notes that the persistent hostility

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<sup>18</sup> For example, Stek (2011:1011) suggests that the Psalm is “a plaintive song of exile - of one who has recently returned from Babylon but in whose soul there lingers the bitter memory of years in foreign land and of the cruel events that led to that enforced stay”.

<sup>19</sup> The phrase ‘Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction’ (NIV) would certainly be a taunt to Babylon’s fall at the hands of the Medes and the Persians.

<sup>20</sup> The phrase ‘Happy is the one who repays you, ... Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks’ (NIV) would certainly serve to encourage the new Lords.

<sup>21</sup> It is clear that the commemorations of Lamentations created tension between the Jews and their masters. Attention is specifically drawn to the Romans with Rabbi Judah proposing that the fast of *Tishoh B’Ov* be abolished in order to normalise relations with their masters (Schauss, 1938:100). So even though the Babylonians were not mentioned by name, they would still feel the indictment brought by the recitations and commemorations.

<sup>22</sup> In Lamentations 4:21, the Edomites are said to live in the land of Uz. This land is mentioned in Job 1:1 and is located east of the Jordan Valley. It is described as inclusive of Edom in the South and Aram in the South (Smick & Youngblood, 2011:794).

of Edom towards Judah is often taken as a representative of all Judah's enemies in most Old Testament texts<sup>23</sup>.

The Edomites are explicitly mentioned in Lamentations 4:21-22. However, scholars are not agreed on whether the specific reference to the Edomites extends to Lamentations 4:17. Provan (1991:121) contends that all these verses (that is, 17, 21 and 22) refer to Edom. Whereas, Berlin (2004:112) is of the view that two nations are in sight. Thus, 4:17 implicitly refers to Egypt<sup>24</sup> while 4:22 explicitly refers to Edom. From a context of suffering both Egypt and Edom can be taken symbolically. Edom would stand for a brother who turned out to be an enemy, as argued above, whereas Egypt would be a representative of all who were expected to offer help but could not. This notion is carried over to Lamentations 5:6 where Egypt is explicitly mentioned in conjunction with Assyria. Youngblood & Stek (2011:1333) rightly suggest that the phrase, 'We submitted to Egypt and Assyria to get enough bread' in 5:6 is a "conventional way of referring to the great world powers to which the Israelites had often turned for protective alliance".

Last, we have God. In the book of Lamentations, God is clearly portrayed as the architect of the violence. We know it is God who chose Israel and promised David that he would establish an everlasting covenant with him according to 1 Chronicles 17. In other words, God would perpetuate the Davidic dynasty unconditionally, but now he is using the Babylonians to wipe out that generation. Again it is unthinkable for God to act with such violence against his own people and his own sanctuary. Calvin (2000:295) evaluates the situation and asks an all-important question when he says,

A place chosen for God to live in, the city Jerusalem was not only the royal throne of God but also his earthly sanctuary, as it were, and so the city might have been thought to be exempt from all danger. When the city fell, therefore and was uprooted from its foundations, when the temple was disgracefully plundered and then burnt by enemies, when the king was driven into exile, his children killed in his presence, and the people scattered - was this not a horrible and monstrous thing?

From Calvin's summary and the all-important question asked, the entire picture of the *Sitz im Leben* is painted graphically. It is a picture of severe suffering and humiliation. A people abandoned by the God whom they trusted to provide security.

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<sup>23</sup> Youngblood (2011:1332) cites Isaiah 13:1-6; 34:5; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Amos 9:12 as good examples.

<sup>24</sup> Scholars who see a reference to Egypt attach this text to Jeremiah 37:5-10. Berlin (2004:112) avers that "the reference to Egypt becomes even more likely if our verse is an allusion to Isaiah 30:7 which uses the word *hebel* ('for nought') together with *ezer* ('help') of Egypt."

## Summary

The analysis above has revealed that the specific occasion for the book of Lamentations is the siege of Jerusalem which eventually led to its fall. A number of Judah's warriors were killed including the king's sons. The burning of the temple, which signified the destruction of God's sanctuary and the cessation of the cult in Jerusalem, followed. God had shown himself to be a weak God, totally defeated to the extent that his sanctuary could be ravaged. This was subsequently followed by the deportation of a number of the Judahites including the king himself into Babylon. This is again an indication of total defeat and humiliation of the king and his warriors. The specific number of those who were deported cannot be verified. This deportation resulted in five groups emerging from fragmented Judah. These groups are the Judean *she'erit*; the *golah* community in Babylon; the diaspora community that remained in Babylon; the refugees in surrounding areas and the Egyptian diaspora community. This picture clearly portrays Judah's loss of independence, dignity and identity. There was shame, guilt and humiliation as a result of the defeat from enemy aggression. In a way all those who could give security were defeated (That is to say God, the king and the warriors were all defeated and humiliated). From an internal and external analysis of the text of Lamentations, it has been revealed that God, Egypt, Edom, Babylon and Judah are the main participants in the unfolding of the drama. Some of the participants play an active role while others play a passive role. Of the participants outlined, only Babylon is not explicitly mentioned in the text. The main reason could have been fear of reprisal. Judah is the victim. God is the architect of the violence. In a way God has betrayed his own people. Instead of giving protection to Judah, he has joined the enemy. The Babylonians are the agents sent by God to execute the violence. The Edomites rejoice at the fall of their brother. Egypt and Assyria epitomise those who were hoped to give assistance but failed. Although these are historical references to ancient characters, it can also be seen that the author is avoiding an inclusion of too many characters so that those who are mentioned can be taken symbolically. Once they are taken symbolically the book then can be imported without much difficulty to other contexts of suffering. The suffering painted in the book of Lamentations resembles to a greater extent the suffering that Zimbabweans have undergone; therefore an analogous reading is possible.



## 4.4 History of Interpretation

The history of interpretation should be seen from two perspectives: one along the Jewish line and the other along the Christian line. Even within the Christian line one could still divide it according to Protestant<sup>25</sup> and the Roman Catholic. However, for our purposes we will just have the two main divisions, that is the Jewish and the Christian.

### 4.4.1 Jewish

Pickut (2008:414-416) identifies three Jewish interpretive traditions, which are: the Targum, the Rabbinic Midrash and the Liturgical use. Here we will briefly discuss the Targum and the Rabbinic Midrash and reserve the liturgical use for the meantime. The liturgical use will be explored later when we discuss the historical function of the book.

We have already met some of the interpretive trends of the rabbis during the period of the Targum in the analysis of the authorship above. Basically scholars are agreed that in the Targums there is tendency to universalise and apply to present circumstances. For instance, Alexander (2008:24) says the Targumist,

Would have seen and clearly did see it as his duty, as a comforter of his people, to offer a theological explanation not only for the catastrophe of 587 but for the other disasters that have befallen the Jewish people. For him Lamentations is as much about the present as the past: he hears it speaking to the 'Congregation of Zion' (*Kenista de-Siyyon*), his standard translation for 'Daughter of Zion' ... that is to say to the Jews of his own day gathered in the synagogue on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Ab to hear the book of Lamentations read and translated. Lamentations for him has to offer the elements of a universal Jewish theology of catastrophe, a paradigmatic response to disaster and suffering, that will address as much the destruction of the second Temple and the 'exile of Edom' as the destruction of the first Temple and the Babylonian exile.

From his analysis of the Targum, Pickut (2008:415) also concludes that,

The author of the Targum Lamentations uses the basic hermeneutical principles ... to express what he perceives as the broader historical and theological significance of the Hebrew *Vorlage*: God's righteous anger over sin justifies the destruction of Jerusalem described in Lamentations, as well as the various struggles experienced by Yahweh's people throughout all of recorded history, for entirely interchangeable reasons.

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<sup>25</sup> Again this can be further divided into main line evangelicals against Pentecostals.



Narrowing down to Lamentations 3, where we find the central pericope that deals with hope and the resources [i.e. *hesed* (חסד) and *rahamim* (רחמים)], Alexander highlights that Targum Lamentations 3 has the least expansions compared to chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5. He concludes that,

it is no accident that chapter 3, which offers the most theologically orthodox understanding of the destruction of Jerusalem (in terms of sin, punishment and repentance), the view closest to that of the Targumist himself, is the most literal in the whole Targum, because it caused him the fewest problems, whereas chapters 1, 2 and to a lesser extent, 4 and 5 which are theologically more challenging, receive the bulk of the expansion. The broad purpose of these expansions can be seen as being to read the theology of chapter 3 into the rest of the book.

Hovering on the central pericope, which forms the basic foundation of this investigation, we find that several ambiguous expressions have been explicated in accordance with the theology of the Targumist. For example in verse 19 where the MT just says עניי 'my affliction' the Targumist added 'affliction of my soul'. In the same verse the Targumist felt it imperative to add 'my enemies' and also 'have made me drink'. 'Venom' is qualified by 'of serpents'. In verse 20 the Targumist found it useful to add 'on account of the misery' so that it is clear how the verb 'prays' ותשיח/ותשוה is to be predicated. In verse 21 not much is added except to qualify זאת with 'consolation'. From this context, Alexander (2008:149) suggests that the 'consolation' could be seen as referring to the prayer or to the Messiah. In verse 23 the Targumist adds in the front position 'bringing forth wonders' so that חרשים refers back to God's *hesedim* (חסדים) in verse 22 and not *rahamim* (רחמים). That way, God's *hesedim* (חסדים) can be renewed but his *rahamim* (רחמים) is constant (Alexander, 2008:150).

Another verse that has been clarified by the Targumist is verse 25. The Targumist found it necessary to add 'redemption' for קיו. This way, it would be natural for the Targumist to say, the 'Lord is good to those who **wait/hope** for the **redemption** of the Lord'. So, verse 25 is aligned well with verse 26 on the issue of redemption. The Targumist goes on to qualify the verb תדרש with 'instruction'. Alexander (2008:150) suggests that, this addition of 'instruction' may be the consequential influence of the Mishnaic Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic sense of the root

שֶׁרָשׁ, which basically has the notion of ‘expound’ or ‘interpret’ Scripture. This emanates from the basic notion that God has to be sought through the reading of Scripture.

In verse 27, the Targumist found it worthy to add ‘teach his soul to’ and then goes on to explain ‘yoke’. The ‘yoke’ refers to the commandments according to the Targumist.

Verse 28 should have been the most difficult for the Targumist in the whole of the central pericope since it receives extensive treatment and explication. It is basically aligned so that it reads,

Let him sit alone and be silent, and bear the chastisements that come upon him, for the sake of the unity of the Name of the Lord, that are sent from him to exact punishment from him for the minor sin which he has committed in this world, until he has pity upon him and removes them from him and he shall receive a full recompense in the world to come.

Five major teachings seem to come from Alexander’s (2008:152) analysis of this verse. The first teaching seems to be the “*geber*’s patient acceptance of the chastisements he will inevitably suffer as a consequence of taking on himself the ‘yoke of the commandments” (Alexander, 2008:152). Second there is the issue of the unity of the name of the Lord. This is normally understood in Judaism as professing Judaism in the pagan world expressed through the recitation of the *Shema*. Thirdly, it is the rabbinic teaching that punishment (with repentance) atones for sin (that is to say, if one sins and humbly receives due punishment for that sin, then he/she has a clean slate). The Targumist is also of the opinion that the sins of the *geber* (גִּבּוֹר) are minor. This might be influenced by an underlying motive of comparing the *geber* (גִּבּוֹר) and the pagans. Lastly it is the teaching of reward. Scholars are not certain as to whether the Targumist is seeing the rewards eschatologically in the Messianic kingdom or the joy of the blessed ones in the celestial *Gan* of Eden. In spite of this lack of clarity as to when, the Targumist is certain that there will be reward. Convinced of this, the Targumist aligns verses 29-30 with total submission to suffering (that is to say, he inserts ‘and prostrate himself before his Maker (verse 29), and ‘for the sake of the fear of the Lord’ (verse 30) in order to emphasize the issue of submission). Verses 31-32 clearly portray the Targumist as vindicating God from abuse of his servant/righteous ones. In verse 33 the Targumist clearly lays the whole blame on man (that is to say, there is the cause and effect. Because there was no repentance – ‘for because no one afflicted his soul nor removed

pride from his heart’ therefore the consequences/effects are that ‘he caused destruction to come upon the sons of men’).

Having seen how the Targumist understood the book of Lamentations we can now move on to the Midrash.

On the Rabbinic Midrash, Pickut (2008:415) focuses on *Lamentations Rabbah*<sup>26</sup> and concludes that,

As with the Targum Lamentations, rabbinic Midrash relating to the MT of Lamentations reflects a deep desire to show the justice of God’s judgment against Jerusalem and to portray God’s wrath against sin as an on-going reality in the experience of his people. In the rabbinic exegesis of Lamentations, however, this agenda is accompanied by an increased emphasis on God’s corresponding compassion and mercy, as well as the opportunity for repentance and reconciliation in the aftermath of divine chastisement.

The equal emphasis on judgement and compassion/mercy is evident in *Lamentations Rabbati* LVI:1.14 where it is written, ‘when they sinned in double measure, they were smitten in double measure, but they were comforted in double measure’. Note should also be taken here of the desire of *Lamentations Rabbati* to connect to various scriptural references in order to support this reading. For example, Neusner, (2005:389) observes that, in the case of LVI:1.14, Isaiah 40:1-2 is also brought in to emphasize the equal measure of punishment *vis a vis* comfort.

C...they were smitten in double measure: ‘that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins’ (Isaiah 40:2). D ... but they were comforted in double measure: ‘comfort, comfort my people, says your God. [Speak tenderly to the heart of Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins]’.

Neusner (2005:390-400) goes on to elaborate that there are various propositions that are shared among *Pesiqta deRab Kahana*, *Genesis Rabbah*, *Song of Songs Rabbah*, *Leviticus Rabbah*, and *Lamentations Rabbati*. In the interest of this research that seeks an analogous reading based on the *rahamim* and *hesed* of God as resources of hope, our attention is drawn to the proposition of divine justice and mercy. Important here is Neusner’s (2005:393) elucidation that,

the demonstration that the events of 586 and 70 (and those that would follow through all times) reveal God’s justice. What has happened to Israel is fair and accords with reasonable rules. Nothing arbitrary has taken place. But that is the source of comfort. Just as God can be relied upon to punish sin so he can be depended upon to forgive the repentant sinner. God is just, therefore punishes sin ... The great issue of

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<sup>26</sup> “An exegetical compilation of interpretive statements made by various Jewish scholars of the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods (a time span of AD 200-600)” (Pickut, 2008:415)

Lamentations Rabbah involves theodicy: validating God's actions in calling upon the nations to destroy his temple and exile his people. That theodicy is wholly congruent with the theologies of the Torah and prophecy: When Israel sins it is punished, repents, atones, and is reconciled.

Another point of contrast, that will reveal the involvement of God, is the understanding of Lamentations 1:1, particularly the *Eikhah*. Alexander (2008:37) points out that the Midrash did not find it a problem in making God the subject. However, the Targumist is careful and casts it as,

How has it been decreed against Jerusalem and her people that they should be condemned to banishment and that Eikha should be pronounced over them in mourning, just as Adam and Eve were condemned, when they were banished from the Garden of Eden, and the Lord of the World pronounced Eikha over them in mourning.

Alexander (2008:37) concludes that,

The Targumist's more transcendent view of God, which sees God as communicating with his people through mediators ... would have made him uncomfortable with such extreme anthropomorphism. He has to find other ways of comforting the congregation of Israel than with the idea of a suffering God.

This analysis is important in several ways. On one hand, it shows the desire of the Rabbis to connect the text of Lamentations to other texts (that is to say, in this case the connection of **אִיכָה** in Genesis 3:9 with **אִיכָה** in Lamentations 1:1<sup>27</sup>). On the other hand, their underlying theological persuasions are guiding the entire process. Significantly, the Midrashic understanding helps to unlock the central pericope of Lamentations, especially verses 31-33. From the Midrashic point of view God suffers and cries with those in pain. Therefore he will not cast away forever nor willingly bring affliction and grief. Even when he brings grief he will bring **רַחֲמִים**.

## Summary

In the exercise above we noted that the Targumist realigned all the other laments according to Lamentations 3. In other words, Lamentations 3 became the focal point to realign all the other laments. We have also seen that the prophetic understanding of the book of Lamentations controlled the reading. Since Jeremiah was a prophet, the book would speak to the historical occasion of 586BC but would look prophetically beyond 586BC to other future sufferings including 70AD. We have also noted some differences in the way the Targumist understood the

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<sup>27</sup> Bakhos (2010:946) sees this as the unity and self-referential nature of scripture which was one of the Rabbis' underlying principle and hermeneutical method.

event as opposed to the Rabbinic Midrash. The Targumist emphasized the justice of God in relation to Judah's sin. However, the Rabbinic Midrash emphasized the compassion and mercy of God in times of suffering. God suffers with his people while the Targumist is of the view that God should be distanced from the sinful people. The theology of a suffering God has a lot of bearing on this research that seeks an analogous reading. This discussion will be picked up later in chapter 5 where we will be dealing with the theology of the book of Lamentations. Suffice to say in this investigation, we have seen how the rabbis were wrestling with the theology from the book of Lamentations in order to appropriate it in their own suffering. So Lamentations 3 was used as the base to align the reading.

#### **4.4.2 Christian**

Moving from the Jewish to the Christian traditions of interpretation, the book of Lamentations can be analysed from four different angles. These angles can be viewed as: the early Church, the medieval, the reformation and the enlightenment. The analysis from the early Church up to the Enlightenment (and even beyond) will reveal that the literal, the allegorical, historical/form criticism and theological methodologies have been used in the analysis of Lamentations. All these methodologies had various agendas but the dominant agenda has been to appropriate the text beyond its historical context to other contemporary contexts. For systemic and chronological reasons, we will begin this analysis with the Early Church, the Medieval period, the Reformation and conclude with the Enlightenment. The resolution to start with the early Church makes sense also from the point of view that there seem not to be a lot of quotations on the book of Lamentations by the New Testament writers. Once the Septuagint was translated and put in place, it had greater influence on Christian readings (Yarchin, 2004:4).

##### **4.4.2.1 Early Church**

From an early church perspective, Pickut (2008:416) points out that the most popular verse used is the Septuagint version of Lamentations 4:20 where it is understood to be a reference to Jesus Christ. Fernandez (1998:1039) adds, "the desires, the admiration, and the fervour that the Jews in the South felt for their king, 'the anointed' one who protected them and was central to their identity are now applied to Christ". This Christo-centric reading is applied even on passages like 3:34, 3:53. Parry (2010:2) suggests that Matthew 23:35 alludes to Lamentations 4:13 and Matthew 27:39 alludes to Lamentations 2:15. Webb (2000:79-80) includes Lamentations 1:5 as

alluded in Revelation 14:20 and 19:15. Lamentation 2:15 is alluded to again in Mark 15:29-30. Lamentations 3:15 is also alluded to in Acts 8:23. Lastly Lamentations 3:45 is alluded to in 1Corinthians 4:12.

Fernandez (1998:1039) concludes with an overview of the theological import of the book as a whole and says, “with respect to what is just and good about groaning and lamenting before God, it is worth remembering the words of Augustine: ‘the more holy and full of good desires a person is, so much the more will their prayer be full of tears’”.

So in summation one could say, although the literal technique of translation was used to translate the Septuagint, the allegorical interpretation of ancient texts was also highly favoured. Yarchin (2004:xii) observes that, “the meaning derived from allegorical readings of ancient stories was typically taken as the meaning intended by the ancient poet. If the poets were regarded as having been divinely inspired, then the allegorized meaning was the original inspired meaning”. But the whole idea behind the allegorical interpretation was to draw meaning from scriptures beyond their historical contexts. The interpreters wanted the ancient texts to speak to their present circumstances.

#### **4.4.2.2 Medieval**

During the medieval period, Pickut (2008:417) singles out Hrabanus Maurus and Paschius Radbertus<sup>28</sup> to be the most influential people. In line with the Medieval rabbis, Maurus connects the book of Lamentations to the prophetic book of Jeremiah<sup>29</sup>. This was done in order to appropriate the book beyond 586BC. Pickut (2008:417) suggests that,

Maurus tends to downplay the historical significance of the text in favour of a reading that can be applied in much broader terms, so that the city of Jerusalem represents the individual soul while the overall narrative of Lamentations portrays the soul’s confrontation with sin.

It is noteworthy to realise that Maurus is influenced by the allegorical interpretation of the medieval period<sup>30</sup>. For example, he contends that history requires mystery (De Lubac, 2000:84).

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<sup>28</sup> De Lubac (2009:148) in agreement says, “Paschasius Radbertus is surely one ‘of the most original commentators’ of the Carolingian period. He is ‘one of the greatest exegetes of the high Middle Ages both with reference to his learning and to his personal judgment’”.

<sup>29</sup> One of Maurus quotes is that, “For the historical sense is not only not enough for the readers of the divine books, but they must also consider what the prophetic speech intends to intimate” (De Lubac, 2000:84).

<sup>30</sup> The allegorical interpretation of scripture was dominant in St Jerome, St Augustine, St Ambrose and St Gregory. The emphasis was that after analyzing the historical (i.e. facts) reference of scripture there was need to move to the sense (i.e. mystery) of the scripture ( De Lubac, 2000:83-84).

On the other hand, Radbertus sees the book of Lamentations as “a description of the suffering brought about by God’s abandonment ... and explicates the book in terms of the past, present and future destruction of Jerusalem, the church and the individual soul” (Pickut, 2008:417). From this we see that biblical literature is seen as serving historical, present and future needs.

#### 4.4.2.3 Reformation (John Calvin)

It is widely accepted that Martin Luther and John Calvin form the backbone of the reformation period. For the sake of this research, we have decided to pick John Calvin as a representative of the general trend of interpretation of the book of Lamentations during this time.

Because of the scholastic influence in the medieval period, which might have reached its peak during the time of reformation, John Calvin seems to be one scholar who takes pains to explain the book of Lamentations in its historical setting. Pickut (2008:417) suggests that Aquinas might have laid the foundation for the shift from spiritual/theological interpretation to historical grammatical analysis which was being utilised by Calvin<sup>31</sup>. It is clear that Calvin saw the book of Lamentations as written by Jeremiah as asserted above<sup>32</sup>. Though he subscribes to the Jeremianic authorship, he rejects the notion that the book is prophetic<sup>33</sup>. Calvin (2000:293) notes that the book was not written to just mourn the fall of Jerusalem but “to show that even in such a disastrous state some benefit might be derived”. He singles out four teachings as highly significant in the book of Lamentations. First, God’s judgement; second, repentance; third, encouragement to hope in God; and last, the necessity of prayer which ultimately leads to God and his mercy in times of extremity. He then concludes by noting that all this was anchored on faith. Although all these teachings are spread throughout the book, Calvin sees the issue of penitence as occupying the major chunk of the book. This comes out clearly when Calvin (2000:293) outlines the purpose or aim as,

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<sup>31</sup> Schwobel (1990:100) avers and says, “Calvin understood language as the character mentis, the imprint of the mind, and therefore it is the supreme means of access to the author’s intention. In order to do justice to the mind of the writer, it is not only necessary to investigate the forms of expression as meticulously as possible, but also to pay careful attention to the historical circumstances of a given text ... and to the context of a passage”.

<sup>32</sup> Calvin (2000:293) constantly states Jeremiah as the author by the numerous references to Jeremiah, for instance, he says, “I now undertake to explain the lamentations of Jeremiah. Jeremiah sets ... There is no doubt that Jeremiah after the city of Jerusalem ... When Jeremiah saw that his teaching ... Now to a certain extent we understand the purpose behind Jeremiah’s writing ... So Jeremiah continued with his calling ... Jeremiah constructed ...”.

<sup>33</sup> The rejection of the prophetic book of Lamentation comes clearly when Calvin (1950:299) says, “Some think that Jeremiah, before this calamity happened historically described it and that he thus prophesied of what was future and yet unknown. But this is by no means probable”.



To show that, although nothing but desolation existed in the land, although the temple was destroyed and God's covenant seemed to have finished, and so all hope of salvation was at an end, yet hope still remained, provided that the people sought God in repentance and faith.

Focusing now on the central pericope (i.e. 3:19-33) Calvin raises several things that may warrant close attention. From verses 18-19 Calvin seems to discourage indulgence in despair as he sees it as a trial. He discourages again the issue of the soul being downcast as he believes the soul is vital for man's revival. As for hope he believes it comes when we recall our evils and how prone we are to despair. His constant reference to the conflict of the soul, evils and despair seems to be influenced by Medieval scholar Hrabanus Maurus who contends that the book of Lamentations portrays the confrontation of the soul and sin (Pickut, 2008:417). Thus, verses 19 to 23 are seen as forming the necessity of penitence.

Verse 24 is then viewed as advocating God's sufficiency and heritage which, in turn, gives endurance in times of adversity. Verse 26 is read alongside Colossians 3:3 and the emphasis is on happiness being found in God/Christ alone. As for the contentious issue of 'bearing the yoke when still young', Calvin sees obedience<sup>34</sup> to God as playing a central role. Thus, there is encouragement to surrender people's own judgements and affections and obey God. This, he says, can best be done when young, since in old age dispositions are difficult to change. Verse 28 is then seen as promoting perseverance and not yielding to evil. As for the other contentious clause 'there may yet be hope' Calvin sees several trials included. However, he asserts that, "the faithful should not doubt that God will give them hope". Verse 30 which seems to suggest passivism is seen by Calvin as advocating calmness as a fruit of patience. Verse 31 is connected to Romans 15:4. Of particular interest is the highlight of the co-dependence of patience (endurance), hope and comfort. In verse 32 Calvin believes when God is seen in his mercy (i.e. which is his eternal essence and divinity) and patience, there is, therefore, confidence and hope for salvation. In closing this central pericope Calvin (2000:310) notes that, "God does not delight in the evils and miseries of humankind". So in a way he exonerates God from unwarranted orchestration of suffering on mankind.

An overall analysis of Calvin's reading of Lamentations seems to suggest that, although he had moved to employing the historical grammatical interpretation of Lamentations, he was still

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<sup>34</sup> Calvin (1950:414) takes the word 'yoke' as signifying teaching (i.e. God's word) or the scourges of God. Thus ultimately there is submission to receiving doctrine and also correction.



heavily influenced by the scholasticism of the medieval period, particularly that of Bonaventure, which Fernandez (1998:1039), for example, says “had more than 230 explicit quotes, particularly related to the need for grace and mercy of God for doing good and to the value of accepting suffering humbly”. The influence of scholasticism, which emphasised the relation of faith and reason (Thijssen, 2008:596)<sup>35</sup> is also seen in his use of soul, patience, endurance and hope. One should also be careful in assuming that since he was utilizing the historical analysis he was not concerned about the theological/spiritual aspect. As Pickut (2008:418) points out, the theological/spiritual interest creeps in especially in his handling of Lamentations 4:20, where first of all he identifies the historical figure as Zedekiah and not Josiah and then goes on to view him as a type of Christ since he was in the Davidic line<sup>36</sup>.

As for the key words of this research, (i.e. *hesed* חֶסֶד and *rahamim* רַחֲמִים) Calvin (1950:407) translates them as mercies and compassions respectively. However, he does not take time to elaborate on the meaning of these two important words. It seems he lumps them together without due consideration of their divergence and their convergence. In verse 22 where these key words are particularly used he outlines two possible readings. The first view being that “it ought to be ascribed to God’s mercy that the faithful have not been often consumed. Hence a very useful doctrine is elicited – that God succours his own people, lest they should wholly perish”.

Introducing the second view Calvin (1950:407) then says,

But if we attend to the context, we shall see that another sense is more suitable, even that the mercies of God were not consumed, and that his compassions had not failed. The particle כִּי *ki* is inserted, but ought to be taken as an affirmative only, *surely the mercies of God are not consumed*; and then – *surely his compassions have not failed*.

It is also evident that, although Calvin is interested in the literal-grammatical analysis of the text and constantly goes to the historical context, he appropriates the text in his own contemporary context. For example, instead of locating the original audience of the book of Lamentations as

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<sup>35</sup> Clouse (1978:885) says, Peter Abelard was one figure of scholasticism who revolted “against tradition and insisted upon the right of the philosopher to use his own reason”.

<sup>36</sup> This comes out clearly when Calvin (1950:483-484) says, “As it was, then, God’s will that the posterity of David should represent Christ, Zedekiah is here rightly called *the Christ of Jehovah*, ... But David is properly called the Anointed of Jehovah together with his posterity. Hence he often used these words, look on thy Christ ... And when Hannah in her song spoke of the Christ of Jehovah, she had no doubt a regard to this idea ... And at length, our Lord was called the Christ of the Lord for Simeon called him (Luke ii.26)”.

fragmented Judah he substitutes them with what he calls the faithful or the Church<sup>37</sup>. Furthermore, he constantly uses the first person pronouns and possessives<sup>38</sup> clearly indicating that he is appropriating the text to his own context.

#### 4.4.2.4. Enlightenment.

The word that is normally used for this time in Germany is *Aufklärung* (Dictionary of the Christian Church, 1997:546). It is a time known for the promotion of human reason which characterised the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>39</sup>. So the Dictionary of the Christian Church (1997:546) spells it out well that, “its adherents distrusted all authority and tradition in matters of intellectual inquiry, and believed that truth could be attained only through reason, observation and experiment”. Although there were elements of combining reason and faith during the Medieval and Reformation period, the Enlightenment seems to reach the climax of the promotion of reason<sup>40</sup> often at the expense of faith. And so often “the thinkers of the enlightenment often came into conflict with the Church<sup>41</sup>” (Cross & Livingstone, 1997:547).

Narrowing down to the book of Lamentations, Pickut (2008:418) states that,

Critical scholarship treats the book of Lamentations as an essentially human text and is primarily concerned with questions of provenance and literary analysis. On theological matters, the critical interpretive tradition has very little to say about the extra-biblical significance of Lamentations and focuses instead on attempts to describe the historical and theological developments with Judah during the sixth century BC that might have given rise to the work.

Looking specifically at the enlightenment period it seems much of the debate centred on the authorship. As we have seen during the reformation efforts were done to locate the book in its historical context but there was general consensus that the book was written by Jeremiah. As we

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<sup>37</sup> For instance Calvin (1950:420) says, “we saw in the last lecture that the best and the only true remedy for sorrows is, when the faithful are convinced ... For this promise extends generally to the whole Church, ...”.

<sup>38</sup> For example, Calvin (1950:405-419) uses ‘us’, ‘we’, and possessive such as ‘our’.

<sup>39</sup> It will be seen in this investigation that some of the ideas that were central in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries are still felt in contemporary studies. Therefore sometimes it is difficult to give a clear delineation between the 20<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> century with the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century scholarship.

<sup>40</sup> For example, one of the rhetoric of this era is seeking the “path of absolute truth through ‘pure reason’”. (Detzler, 1978:344)

<sup>41</sup> Bautel (2008:464) postulates that, criticism was the key word for this period. He goes on to say, “In every area criticism questioned the certainty of supranaturalistic understanding of reality based on religious dogma and at the same time challenged the legitimation of ethical, religious, theological and philosophical norms through appeal to the authority of a tradition. Although the systematic and material ways in which critical reason was employed differed markedly, they all converged in the postulate of autonomous human thought able to criticize tradition”.

get to the enlightenment period with the advent of reason and criticism, historical and literary criticism now dominated the enquiry.

Lee (2002:3) postulates that the question of the authorship of Lamentations has occupied scholars for at least the last 300 years. It is only in the Enlightenment period that we have scholars engaging in a serious open criticism of the Jeremianic authorship. The first person to question this long standing tradition was H. von der Hardt in 1712 proposing, instead, that the book was written by Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach Abednego and King Jehoichin respectively (Hillers, 1992:XIX). From this it is evident that Hardt is not only rejecting the Jeremianic authorship but is also proposing multiple authorship of the book. So in a way the debate now turns to various directions (i.e. Jeremianic versus non Jeremianic; mono-authorship versus multiple-authorship). Historical criticism played a crucial role in opening the book of Lamentations to anonymity in terms of its authorship. In line with the demands of this research, we can say historical criticism played a critical role in understanding the *ahistorical* nature of Lamentations which is helpful for appropriation of the texts in other contexts of suffering without violating principles of exegesis.

Another major aspect of the literary criticism that has occupied the enlightenment and contemporary scholarship is form criticism. Form criticism has focused a lot on the type of genre in the book of Lamentations (Lee, 2002:3). In the enlightenment period the study of the genre was used either to support or to deny the Jeremianic authorship. For example, Lee (2002:12) notes that Robert Lowth in 1787 used the *qinah* meter in Lamentations to argue for the Jeremianic authorship. Overall form criticism has helped in distinguishing the dirge from the biblical lament.

Further studies saw the comparison of the biblical lament and the Mesopotamian city-laments. Initially the debates centred on whether there was a link. The debate then developed to the question of who borrowed from whom? And to what extent? In the end one can say the overall benefit of form criticism has been to identify the three genres in the book of Lamentations. These are the dirge, the biblical lament, and the city-lament. Further studies went on to reveal the connection with Isaiah 40-55 (Second Isaiah)<sup>42</sup> which are the Zionist Songs. The result of these

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<sup>42</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, 2002:11.

investigations is that we have a hybrid of genres in the book of Lamentations which enhances its adaptability to various contexts of suffering.

On the development of the theology, not much is found in the Enlightenment period. Significant contributions came in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when scholars began to seriously devote their works to the theology of Lamentations. For example, Gottwald (1954:50), who is seen as the main champion in steering the discussion of the book from historical/literary criticism to an analysis of its theology<sup>43</sup>, argues that what happens in Lamentations can best be accounted for against the backdrop of Deuteronomy. He goes on to suggest that “... the situational key to the theology of Lamentations *lies*<sup>44</sup> in the tension between Deuteronomistic faith and historical adversity”. In response to Gottwald, Albrektson (1963:219) contends that the focus should rather be on Jerusalem/Zion tradition. Renkema (1998:57-58), on the other hand, is doubtful of the influence of the Deuteronomistic school in the book of Lamentations, although he accepts the existence of the pre-exilic prophetic tradition, the psalm and the Zionist theologies at the fall of Jerusalem. He contends that Deuteronomistic reflection only got under way at a later date. He concludes that,

The assimilation of these theological traditions was preceded by a time of theological reflection, under pressure from the events of the downfall and the period thereafter, during which a process of selection took place. Thus doubts were raised in prayer as to the absolute character of the prophetic announcements of doom while at the same time distance had to be taken from the notion of Zion’s unconditional inviolability.

So in summation, we can say the enlightenment<sup>45</sup> period was instrumental to contemporary debates over the theological traditions in the book of Lamentations.

Thomas (2013:4-8) does a detailed analysis of the scholarship of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the study, two centres of focus on the theology of Lamentations emerge. The first centre derives its focus on Lamentations 3. The second centre derives its focus from any of the four laments but excludes Lamentations 3. According to Thomas (2013:4-6), those who emphasize Lamentations 3 as the nub of the book, their theological understanding culminates in theodicy<sup>46</sup>. On the other hand, those who exclude Lamentations 3 culminate in an anti-theodicy<sup>47</sup> stance. From this

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<sup>43</sup> One scholar who sees Gottwald as the champion is Boase (2006:7).

<sup>44</sup>This is our own addition.

<sup>45</sup> The Deuteronomistic view might have been a product of the 19<sup>th</sup> century scholar, Wellhausen (1844-1918 CE) who was heavily influenced by the Enlightenment scholar, Astruc (1684-1766 CE). Wellhausen is well known for his higher criticism (i.e. JEDP theory) (Oxford Dictionary of Christian Church, 1974:1465).

<sup>46</sup> Such scholars include Mintz (1996), Heater (1992:304-315) and Kaiser (2004).

<sup>47</sup> Scholars in this school include Westermann (1994), Linafelt (2000) and Mandolfo (2008).

perspective, issues of resistance and protest are fronted. Thomas (2013:8) concludes that, “no research at present observes how the whole of Lamentations presents its theology in concert, synthetically”. In his work, Thomas (2013) argues, therefore, for an ambiguous theology for the book of Lamentations. Thus, the theology in Lamentations neither justifies God nor exonerates the people from their sin. If the contending poles were *theodic* and *antitheodic*, then Thomas might be seen to be advocating for an *atheodic* position. We will explore in depth the theology of Lamentations in chapter five below. Suffice to say, in this section we were interested in tracing the trend of the history of interpretation, which we saw moving from a focus on literal<sup>48</sup>, spiritual<sup>49</sup>, historical /literary and finally theological. But the desire to have the book of Lamentations speak beyond its historical context to other contexts of suffering has been dominant.

### Summary

In this section we have focused our attention on the Christian historical interpretation of the book of Lamentations. We outlined four stages that are significant in the development of interpretation. These are; the Early Church, the Medieval, the Reformation and the Enlightenment. In the Early Church era, not much could be gleaned as to their understanding of the book since it is not quoted in the New Testament. However, moving further, there was acknowledgement in the translation of the Septuagint that, although the literal method of translation was followed, there were passages that were seen as referring to Christ (especially 4:20). In the Medieval period, we focused on Hrabanus Maurus who downplayed the historical significance in favour of a reading that would take the whole narrative symbolically (in other words, Jerusalem representing the individual soul) as the on-going struggle of the soul’s confrontation with sin. We also focused on Paschius Radbertus who read the book from the past, present and future. In the past, there is the destruction of Jerusalem which could be seen symbolically representing the Church and the individual soul. The Church can be seen in its present struggle with the world. The soul can be seen in its struggle with sin. These understandings are also taken into the eschaton. In the Reformation, attention was given to John Calvin, who brought in some historical details of the text but he was also heavily influenced by the spiritual interpretation. The urge to apply the text to his context is also portrayed in a number

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<sup>48</sup> The focus was on the methodology used in the translation of the Septuagint.

<sup>49</sup> The focus was on the allegorical interpretation that emphasized the mystery of the text.

of phrases that are linked to the first person pronouns and possessives. In the Enlightenment period, we saw a shift to investigating the historical context. This was a consequence of the advent of historical and form criticism. The historical and form criticism was instrumental in unveiling the *ahistorical* nature and the *hybrid* of genres in the book of Lamentations.

#### **4.5 Origin and Historical Links of Lamentations**

Having seen the history of interpretation of the book of Lamentations, we now move to its historical link with other Ancient Near East texts. The historical link will help us see the broader understanding of the laments and their origin in the Ancient Near East before we move to their functions. This broader historical link will be achieved by a comparison of the various lament poems of the Ancient Near East. It is important to realise that Israel did share a number of cultural and literary aspects with their neighbours. One of these shared literary genres is the lament genre. But before going into the details of the lament genre, it is important to highlight some of the cultural beliefs about the deity and the worship system that prevailed in the Ancient Near East. From a religious point of view, the Ancient Near East (of which Israel is a part), believed in temples and deities. Walton (2006:114) highlights that, from the standpoint of deity and the worshipper, the temple served as a residence for the deity. Thus, the earthly temple signified the heavenly temple where the deity would take residence and rest. The notion of rest would imply that the deity has dealt with his enemies and established security and order.

Walton (2006:115-118) goes on to elaborate that, with the agreement of the god as to its symbol (mainly in the form of an idol) and place of residence, rituals of transference of the deity from the spiritual world to the physical world would then be conducted. However, access to the image of the deity was a prerogative of the privileged ones, since there was need to protect the image from the profane. With this set up, Walton (2006:128) concludes that, “the temple existed as a fulcrum of mutual dependence. The gods had their needs met through the temple and their image was resident in its midst, and the people had their needs met by the beneficence of the contended deity”.

Having outlined the important facts about the deity and temples, we can now go on to the analysis of the laments in the Ancient Near East. In another edition, Walton (1989:146) articulates that the laments were a result of a conflict in relationship with the deity. These laments are generally called Mesopotamian city laments. They are inclusive of those “which

describe the destruction of Sumer at the end of the Ur III period and more local calamities in the following early Isin period” (Dobbs-Allsopp, 1993:13). The five laments that describe the destruction of Sumer are Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur, Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur, Nippur Lament, Eridu Lament and Uruk Lament. The second type of the laments is the *balag*. The third type is the *ersemma*. In order to appreciate these city laments better, a historical background of the notion of city in Mesopotamia is necessary. Walton (2006:276) notes that, “in both Mesopotamia and Egypt it was believed that cities existed before humans”. Importantly, Walton (2006:276) observes that often these cities were created by the gods for the gods. Some of the cities are believed to have been created even before the division of the heavens and the earth<sup>50</sup>. Owing to their link to the deity, these cities would be viewed as sacred. Eridu was viewed as the first city, but the most significant one was Uruk and third in importance was Nippur. Walton (2006:277) concludes by linking the cities to the deity and the temple and says that,

The most important aspects of the role of cities is to be found in their relationship to the temples and the gods. The patron deity of a city was typically considered the one who founded, built and sustained the city. So the prominence and the prosperity of the city and its god were intricably intertwined ... In Mesopotamia the gods were attached to cities, and temples were only in cities.

Now that we have seen the importance of the deity, the temple and the city in Mesopotamia and surrounding areas, we can move to the analysis of the city laments. Since this exercise aims to show some similarities and differences between the biblical book of Lamentations and the city laments, we deliberately choose to focus on Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur (LDU) and Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur (LDSU). The reason behind these choices is that scholars are generally agreed that LDSU “reflects the primary phase of the lament genre’s historical development, when the generic repertoire is in the process of being assembled” (Dobbs-Allsopp, 1993:19-20). We have also chosen LDU because the city-lament genre finds its definitive form in it (Dobbs-Allsopp, 1993:20). After all, an all-encompassing comparative analysis of the Mesopotamian laments (including all the five city laments, the *balags* and the *ersemma*) with the Biblical book of Lamentations has already been done by Dobbs-Allsopp. In that analysis, Dobbs-Allsopp (1993:31-96) outlines nine major generic features in the Biblical

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<sup>50</sup> Walton (2006:276) gives *En-uru-ul-la* as an example of an ancient city which bore the name of Enlil’s grand parent.



Book of Lamentations that can be compared and contrasted with the Mesopotamian laments.

These generic features are:

- 1) Subject and mood;
- 2) Structure and poetic technique;
- 3) Divine abandonment;
- 4) Assignment of responsibility;
- 5) Divine agent of destruction;
- 6) Destruction;
- 7) The weeping goddess;
- 8) Lamentation;
- 9) Restoration of the city and return of the gods;

Although this analysis will focus on the two Mesopotamian laments for illustrative purposes in accordance with the research question that seeks for an analogous reading of the book of Lamentations, some of the generic features outlined above will be evidently displayed. So in this case attention is drawn to the primary formation of the city laments.

We begin this comparative analysis with a focus on the LDU first, because we have already said the genre finds its definitive form in it. In this lament there is mourning over the city of Ur which was destroyed by the Elamites and Subarians between 2200-2100 BC<sup>51</sup> (Matthews & Benjamin, 1991:169). The lament is composed of 436 lines divided into 11 songs separated from one another by an antiphone<sup>52</sup> (ANET, 1955:455). In the first lament there is mention of various characters which include Enlil, Ninlil, Ninmah, Ninisinna, Inanna, Nanna, Sin, Ningal and Enki. All these characters have done one common thing. They have abandoned. What has been abandoned has been delivered to the wind. Matthews & Benjamin (1991:169) rightly point out that the song is a litany naming Enlil, Ninlil, Inanna, Sin, Ningal, Enki and all the other gods who have abandoned Ur, Kesh, Isin, Uruk, Eridu, Ummah, Lagash and all the other cities in the urban alliance which were then destroyed. Although, Arnold & Beyer (2002:222) conclude that this first lament is all about Ninlil, wife of Ur's city god Nanna who is pleading before the

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<sup>51</sup> Arnold & Beyer (2002:222) put it around 2000 B.C.

<sup>52</sup> The antiphon may be composed of two or three lines that go, for example, as 'wind blows through the gate of his stall, wind moans pitifully through its doors, the cow has fled the ban' (Matthews & Benjamin, 1991:169).



council of gods for the deliverance of her city, one can also note the issue of naming as playing a significant role in this first lament. For comparative purposes with the book of Lamentations, the naming becomes a focal point since, in the book of Lamentations, “each of the speakers in the first four chapters names Yahweh as the agent of destruction” (Williamson, 2008:71). From a different angle, in the LDU, it is portrayed as an act of abandonment by the gods (i.e. the gods did not give the protection that was expected of them) rather than being the agents of the destruction, whereas, in the book of Lamentations God<sup>53</sup> is clearly portrayed as having caused the destruction.

In the second lament of the LDU, the refrain ‘... bitter lament set up thy lament’ is common. This refrain seems to be an exhortation to mourn Ur which has been destroyed. So Matthews and Benjamin (1991:170) are right in saying that in the second song the “Divine Assembly order their sanctuaries to mourn the destruction of Ur”. For comparative purposes the exhortation to mourn finds some resemblance to Lamentations 2:18-19 where we read, ‘You walls of Daughter Zion let your tears flow like a river day and night; give yourself no relief, your eyes no rest. Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord. Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint from hunger at every street corner’ (NIV).

The third lament seems to be slightly different from the first two laments. Rather than having only one single refrain, there seems to be some change in focus. For example, in the first part of the lament, there is focus on the day Ur was destroyed. The most repeated word is ‘destruction’. Matthews & Benjamin (1991:170) say the key phrase is ‘the day of the storm’ which they find equivalent to the biblical ‘day of the Lord’ (Amos 5:18-20; Isaiah 24-27 and Zachariah 12:1-9). The lament then goes on to describe how Ningal is so concerned about her city but realises that its destruction is inevitable. And so the lament is described as ‘bitter’.

In the fourth lament, Ningal now intercedes on behalf of the city so that the divine assembly could reverse their decision. But the petition is rejected. On a broader level the intercessory role is taken up by the *Geber* in the biblical book of Lamentations. This becomes clear in 3:48-51. However, phrases like ‘To Anu the water of my eye verily I poured’ link with Lamentations 4:48

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<sup>53</sup> Williamson (2008:71-72) spells out that, Yahweh is depicted not as a benefactor but a scorned patron, divine avenger, divine destroyer, the agent of Israel’s pain and destruction and divine warrior.

‘Streams of tears flow from my eyes... My eyes will flow unceasingly without relief’. The phrase ‘The arms verily I stretched out’ connects well with Lamentations 1:17 ‘Zion stretches out her hands’. Lamentations 2:19 and 3:41 have the same echoes of lifting up hands to him. ‘Verily Anu changed not his word ... Verily Anu changed not his work’ would link ‘with Lamentations 1:17 ‘The Lord has decreed for Jacob 2:8 The Lord determined to tear down the wall around Daughter Zion’.

In the fifth lament, there is the figurative use of the storm. The storm is accompanied by wind, rushing torrent, fire and scorching heat. This weather pattern is contrasted with the fine bright sun and the good light. The activities are also contrasted. In this weather there is mourning as opposed to the good weather characterised by feasts and banquets<sup>54</sup>. It is emphasized several times that this storm was called by Enlil. Its destructiveness is expansive. It causes the inhabitants of Ur to mourn and groan. For comparative purposes, notions associated with wind, torrent fire and storm are widely used in the book of Lamentations. For example in 2:3 ‘He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire that consumes everything around it’. Again in 4:11 ‘He kindled a fire in Zion that consumed her foundations’. In 3:54 ‘The waters closed over my head’.

The sixth lament now focuses on the effects of the storm. The storm has subsided but the effects and the losses are now being felt. The first lines dwell on the state of the city, the temple, the walls, the gates and the market squares. Although the picture is painted horribly at the beginning with the people mourning and the bodies scattered everywhere, it becomes more graphic and focused as the lament progresses. The author focuses on the state of individual groups of people (i.e. the warriors, the judges, the wise, the mothers, the fathers, the women and the children). Such focus on individual groups is reminiscent of Lamentations chapter 4 which also names individual groups such as infants, princes, women, children, priests, elders and the Lord’s anointed one.

The seventh lament seems to focus on the change of fortunes. The city has been destroyed by fire which came from Enlil and Anu. The lament goes on to have an overview of the destruction. It recounts the destroyed houses on the outskirts of the city, the sudden change of life - no more shepherds, no more sheep, no more cattle, no more herdsmen, no produce from the fields. It also paints vividly the exile - possessions, precious stones and minerals, metals, birds and daughters

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<sup>54</sup> The image of feasts/banquet is also picked up in Lamentations 2:22.

have all been carried away. Matthews & Benjamin (1991:174) observe that after each item is mentioned the congregation chants 'Alas, Gone or Woe'. The city and the temple have been turned to ruins. As the poem progresses, it also paints a picture of new structures being erected probably by the invaders, which would suggest that as the exile is taking place, there is re-population of the city by other groups of people. The goddess, Ningal is also exiled alongside her population. The lament also sees the reversal of the worship system, in that offerings that were supposed to be offered are no longer being offered.

In the eighth lament, there is the constant refrain 'make thy heart like water'. This is in reference to Ningal. The other important phrase is 'how dost thou exist'. This phrase is again directed to Ningal. The bases of these phrases emanate from the notion that the goddess used to survive on offerings and now that the offerings have ceased, what should be Ningal's reaction, attitude, and means of survival? The lament ends by asking Enlil and Anu to restore the fortunes of Ur.

The ninth lament starts off with 'Alas' as with Lamentations 1, 2 and 4. However, it is also noticeable that the length of the lament begins to crumble. This ninth lament is the shortest of them all, though the tenth and eleventh are also shorter than the previous ones. (that is, the long laments ended in the 8<sup>th</sup> lament). This ninth lament is more like a summary describing the storm and its effects.

The tenth lament continues to describe the storm with specific reference to the various groups of people. The storm does not respect mothers, fathers, wives, children, sisters, the strong or the weak. Once finished with naming the various groups, there is a petition for Nanna to put the storm under control. The lament then turns to an imprecatory style, hurling curses on the storm. The imprecatory tone is similar to Lamentations 3:64-66.

The last lament starts off with a tone of confession and repentance from the inhabitants to Nanna. There is restoration of the city, offerings are now being given again and Nanna is asked to search the hearts of the people, bless them and to perpetuate its glory. There is also the praise that is going to Nanna from the restored city. So the lament ends on a positive note of praise. Although Lamentations 5 ends also with a prayer of restoration and hope, the difference is clear. In the LDU, there is praise because the restoration has already happened, whereas in Lamentations 5 the restoration is still anticipated.

To sum up this comparative analysis of the LDU and the Biblical book of Lamentations, it is evident that there are some similarities and also differences. The overall tone of the lament is similar but the conclusion is different. In the LDU, there is restoration and praise at the end, while in the biblical book of Lamentations the restoration is anticipated and premised on the sovereignty of God. Again in the LDU there are a number of gods (forming an assembly of gods) and the chief goddess pleading for the city but in the biblical book of Lamentations there is only one God and daughter Zion pleads her case before God. Even in the case of the *geber* (גבר) when he acts as an intermediary, the *geber* (גבר) is still part of the congregation of Zion, not a goddess.

Having noted a number of similarities and differences between the biblical book of Lamentations and the LDU, we can move to an analysis of yet another city lament, the LDSU. The LDSU is composed of five different *kirugu* or stanzas, of different lengths<sup>55</sup>.

The first twenty lines of the first *Kirugu* are somehow introductory. In the lines, the poet announces the impending turnover of things. The phrase that encloses everything in between is ‘law and order cease to exist’. This entails the city’s change of fortunes, characterised by destruction. This will result in change of leadership<sup>56</sup>, the justice system<sup>57</sup>, residence, relationships<sup>58</sup>, ownership, fertility and religious aspirations. The exilic picture of the leadership and the ruinous state of the city is also painted. In this first *kirugu* we also are introduced to a pantheon of gods. The next lines then go on to outline that the decision to destroy the city has been reached by the gods. The different names of the gods are then given. These include An, Enlil, Nintu, Enki, Inanna Ninhursag, Ningirsu, Nintu and Utu. The cities (Sumer and Ur) earmarked for destruction are also outlined in detail. All their various names are given. The invaders, the storm (sometimes called the Flood), Su people and the Elamites are also described and extensive details about the destruction are given. As the destruction is carried out the gods stand still and everyone is greatly terrified. The destruction affected every sphere of life (that is, relationships, justice delivery, land produce, domesticated animals and infrastructure).

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<sup>55</sup> The Ancient Near East Supplement Relating to the Old Testament, 1969:611.

<sup>56</sup> The key phrase describing this is ‘home of kingship be changed’.

<sup>57</sup> The key phrase describing this is ‘favorable reign be withheld’.

<sup>58</sup> Phrases such as ‘the mother care not for her children’ and ‘the father says not ‘oh my wife’ are descriptive of the dearth of sound relationship.

In the second *kirugu*, the female gods (i.e. mother Bau, Nintu, Ninmul) are portrayed as weeping after the male gods have abandoned the city. The poet then goes on to outline how the gods were also taken into exile. Further on, the lament describes how various people in Ur abandoned their responsibilities. Eventually the goddess also abandoned the city and fled leaving the maids in charge.

In the third *kirugu*, the poet picks up again the subject of abandoning responsibilities. The water and food suppliers have deserted their responsibilities. The dead bodies strewn in the streets are described horrendously. The affluence associated with palace life is no more. The storehouses are now empty. The king no longer has food. Celebrations have ceased. Sacrifices are pictured as having ceased at the shrine. The cult and religious life have changed. The gods no longer have anything to eat. At the end of this third *Kirugu*, Sin is seen weeping and pleading with Enlil his father to restore the cities of Nippur, Ur and Sumer.

In the fourth, *kirugu* Enlil answers his son Sin. In his answer, he basically points out that there is mourning in Ur and Sumer because of the verdict of the assembly. The kingship of the cities is temporary just as with any other reign. The lament then goes on to outline the predicament of the inhabitants of the cities. There is wailing as the inhabitants are killed. They are killed by arrows, bows, large stones and wild animals. Those that survived the weapons die of hunger and thirst (famine). Since inside the city they are killed by hunger and thirst and outside they killed by the Alamitos, the people inevitably surrender. A number of people are killed, others are taken into exile; even domesticated animals are also exiled. The shrine (dwelling house of Nanna) is destroyed. The sacred places are profaned. The sacred utensils are also taken into exile. Sin goes back to his father to plead for the city again. This time the request is granted. Enlil gives the blessing for the restoration of the city. On account of An and Enlil's words, the city is delivered and eventually the gods return again to the restored city.

The fifth *kirugu* is the shortest of them all. It takes the tone of a prayer. The first three lines recall the devastated state of the city and the lament that came from it. The other three successive lines admonish the invaders to return to their homeland. The other verses that follow are direct petitions for the storm (presumably the Elamites) to destroy other lands. The petition then turns imprecatory asking an evil wind and famine to be in those lands. The last lines take a benediction/blessing tone. The poet asks for the city of Ur to be blessed perpetually. It then concludes with praise for the city goddess, Nanna.

Now for an overall analysis, we find that, although there are some similarities between the biblical book of Lamentations and the LDSU there are also some differences. All of them lament the destruction of the city, the death of the inhabitants through enemy sword and famine. This leads the poet to compare the glorious past with the terrible present. Unlike in the biblical book of Lamentations where daughter Zion is the one specifically lamenting and pleading her cause before God, in the LDSU the lamentation is taken up by the goddess or the patron god's son (Sin) who then pleads for the city to the assembly of gods. One can note also that the feminine personification in the biblical book of Lamentations plays an important part just as the feminine goddess plays a crucial part in empathising with the city's predicament. Again, the concluding chapters of the city laments and the last chapter of the biblical book of Lamentations are shorter compared to the previous ones. However, the content of the conclusion is different in that, in the LDSU there is total restoration, with the gods coming back to occupy their original cities, whereas, in the book of Lamentations the lament ends with a hope of restoration based on the sovereignty of God.

Having noted the similarities and differences, one is inevitably confronted with the question of origin. Did Israel directly borrow from the Mesopotamia city-laments? As Berlin (2004:27) admits, this question continues to bother scholars and no definitive answer has been offered so far. Preliminary investigation seems to suggest that a number of scholars are of the opinion that the lament genre was already known and utilised in Israel by the time that the book of Lamentations was written. For example, Dobbs-Allsopp (1993:157) prefers to call it a *native Israelite city-lament*. He concludes that,

Lamentations contains nine of the major generic features commonly attributed to the Mesopotamian city laments, which fully justifies assigning the biblical book to a similar native Israelite city lament genre ... Further, various modal extensions of this genre occur frequently throughout the prophetic literature and even in some Psalms. Therefore one may plausibly conclude that knowledge of the city-lament genre is reflected in the Israelite literary record at least from the first half of the eighth century (Amos) to the middle of the sixth century (Second Isaiah), a period of approximately two hundred years.

On the other hand, Berlin (2004:25) prefers to call it a Jerusalem lament. She articulates that,

Rather than inquire further into the origin of Lamentations, or the degree of Mesopotamian influence on it, I prefer to take as a given the cultural context of which Lamentations is a part and in which it should be read. The nations of the Ancient Near East shared a general view of what happens when a people disobeyed its overlord/Lord. They constructed the punishment resulting from this breach in similar terms, picturing the

antithesis of what they valued as a society: family and its continuity through progeny and inheritance; peaceful life in one's own land; economic prosperity; physical well-being; and the ongoing observance of the proper religious rites.

Both Dobbs-Allsopp (1993:157-158) and Berlin (2004:28-30) emphasize that, though there are some similarities<sup>59</sup> from the culturally shared conventions, there are also some major differences<sup>60</sup>. The differences show that Lamentations embodies a good deal of generic mixtures (such as Zionist, the deuteronomic/prophetic literature, wisdom literature, the funeral dirge, the individual and communal laments) which are fruitfully used for a different and unique occasion. The generic mixture makes the origin of Lamentations an *indigenous hybrid* which can be appropriated and adapted to different contexts of suffering.

## 4.6 Historical Functions of Lamentations

In this section we now shift the analysis to the historical functions of the book of Lamentations. The aim of this is to establish its use in history, which will give us a firm foundation to analyse the continuities and discontinuities below (i.e. in chapter six under synthesis). The functions of the book of Lamentations can be analysed from three perspectives: The general Ancient Near Eastern function; the Jewish function and the Christian function.

### 4.6.1 Ancient Near Eastern Function

The book of Lamentations is part of the city lament genre of the Ancient Near East. As such any understanding of the book from an Ancient Near East perspective would need to take into account the broader usage of city lament genre. In general one can note various functions of lamenting across cultures. The functions vary from spiritual<sup>61</sup>, social<sup>62</sup>, psychological<sup>63</sup> and to

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<sup>59</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp (1993:158) concludes the “remarkable similarities can be explained as reflecting the Israelites and Mesopotamian city-laments’ wider generic relationship”.

<sup>60</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp (1993:157-158) argues that different concepts such as Israelite and/or Syro-Palestinian motifs, the divine warrior imagery, the day of Yahweh, the conception of Israel’s sin as breach of covenant, the *qinah* meter, Semitic and West Semitic divine epithets for personified cities, the taunt of passers-by and the Sodom and Gomorrah show that the city-genre was internalized in the Israelite literary tradition prior to the eighth century.

<sup>61</sup> The spiritual function of lamenting seeks to establish a proper relationship with the supernatural. Olyan’s (2004:34) suggestion that mourning can signal debasement would also fit the spiritual function.

<sup>62</sup> Mourning can serve to establish a relationship with the community and fellow mankind. Olyan (2004:10) opines that, weeping “serves a variety of social purposes including marking out social and hierarchical relationships at times, dissolving them at others, inviting or demanding specific social relationships, or marking/protesting the abrogation of social or moral constraints”.

<sup>63</sup> This function seeks to establish peace with oneself.



political<sup>64</sup>. Giffone (2012:53) suggests three historical functions of the ritual laments that are worth discussing because of their impact on this investigation. These are:

- 1) Aiding the bereaved and acceptance process of the mourner;
- 2) Protest;
- 3) Pre-emption of future tragedy.

On the aiding of the bereaved and the acceptance process of the mourner, Giffone (2012:53) explains that, “Some laments are meant to affect reconciliation with a deity, the mourner may need to perform some sort of propitiatory act to satisfy the deity and restore him to the god’s good graces”. Through the performance of the ritual, the mourner receives comfort from the community or individuals. These individuals act as the **מְנַחֵם**. Thi Pham (1999:28) articulates it well that,

the **מְנַחֵם** tries to comfort or mitigate the mourner’s grief in two main ways: first, by identifying with the mourner through participating in the mourning rites, and secondly, by speaking to the mourner, giving him or her advice on how to get over his or her pain.

The process of comforting aims to spur the mourner to accept the loss and move on into future difficulties (Giffone, 2012:53). Sometimes this goal is achieved and sometimes it is not achieved. On protest, Giffone (2012:53) explains that in this scenario, the mourner will be making “prominent in the public sphere the injustices of the tragedy and the transgression of the human or divine perpetrator”. He elaborates that, “the sentiment is: things are not as they should be, and it is the responsibility of the deity/royalty/community to change the status quo until justice is restored”. This may result in justice restored or protest suppressed. In any case, as Olyan (2004:27) argues, “petitioners or non-petitioners who are mourning a disaster such as the destruction of a sanctuary cease mourning at whatever point circumstances warrant it”. What is important is that the protest has been done and the perpetrator got to know, despite the response that come from the perpetrator. This brings healing and solace to the victim.

On the third point, which is pre-emption of future tragedy, Giffone (2012:53) explains that the performance of the ritual lament functions to inform “the gods and the human community that the tragedy has been accepted as a warning”. He cites the recitation of the *ersemmas* as examples

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<sup>64</sup> The political function of lamenting may serve to establish a relationship with those in authority.



“designed to prevent the anger of a god over sins of ignorance committed by the community”. Thus, the recitation of the laments at the dedicatory or razing ceremonies of temples, cities and walls served retrospectively and prospectively. Retrospectively, the mourner is given an opportunity to reflect on past mistakes or transgressions in order to avoid them in the future. Prospectively, the lament ritual would give the mourner an opportunity to make amends with the gods, forget the past and allow the gods to bless the future. In other words, one can sum this up as, retrospectively, the laments would give a proper closure to the past and prospectively opened up new glorious (i.e. because of the deity’s blessings) opportunities. We will revisit these functions in Chapter six below where we will discuss the discontinuity and continuity use of the book of Lamentations. For now it is sufficient to just note some of these functions as operating within the wider sphere of the Ancient Near East.

#### 4.6.2 Jewish Function

On the Jewish liturgical use, Pickut (2008:415-416) points out that there are some selections of the book of Lamentations that are read on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Ab commemorating<sup>65</sup> not only the destruction of the 6<sup>th</sup> century temple but also the second temple in 70<sup>66</sup> AD, “the end of the Bar Kokhba rebellion and the plowing over of Jerusalem by the Romans”. O’Connor (2001:1016) adds, “The liturgical atmosphere for the reading is like a public funeral, and the text may be chanted”. Zachariah 7:5 seems to intimate that the notion of fasting on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Ab was introduced soon after the destruction of the temple (Gregory, 2008:461). This would suggest that the liturgy would thus start with a fast, then read or chant<sup>67</sup> portions of the book of Lamentations in a sombre<sup>68</sup>, funeral-like atmosphere. As the liturgy developed Idelsohn (1960:253) notes that

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<sup>65</sup> Solomon (1998:139) suggests that the fast also included the commemoration of the decree that the Israelites of the Exodus would not enter the Promised Land (Numbers 14:21-24).

<sup>66</sup> Gregory (2008:461) says, “The fact that the destruction of the two temples culminated on the same day, accompanied by the fact that the last stronghold of the *Bar Kokhba* revolt, *Bethar*, fell on the ninth of Av in AD 135, led to the conclusion that the ninth of Av functioned as the day of disaster par excellence”.

<sup>67</sup> Idelsohn (1960:154) singles out Psalm 137 as one Psalm that was chanted in the evening. It was also recited alongside Psalm 79 and Jeremiah 14:19-22.

<sup>68</sup> Gregory (2008:461) opines that the somber atmosphere is reflected in the “dimming of lights and sitting on low benches or on the floor”. There is a further proposal from some scholars that only one light was lit to enable the reading.

it became one of the most important fast days<sup>69</sup> next to the Day of Atonement. The mourning extended to three weeks before the 9<sup>th</sup> of Ab.

Delving into the depth of the liturgy, Gregory (2008:641) first makes the crucial distinction that Lamentations is the only book among the Megilloth that is recited without a blessing either before or after the reading<sup>70</sup>. Second, he notes that, though there are some Torah readings in the morning or in the evening, the study of the Torah is discouraged since the Torah is seen as a source of joy. Instead, the texts of Lamentations (and Lamentations Rabbah<sup>71</sup>), Job, Leviticus 26, the more sombre chapters of Jeremiah, and the Talmudic passages concerning the destruction of Jerusalem are the only texts that are encouraged to be read during this special *Tish b' Ab* fast. With the extension of the mourning going back three weeks before the 9<sup>th</sup> of Ab, Idlesohn (1960:253) pinpoints that Jeremiah 1 was read on the first Sabbath, Jeremiah 2:4-28 and 4:1-2 was read on the second Sabbath, then Isaiah 1:1-27 was reserved for the third Sabbath. It should also be mentioned that some of the rituals would differ from one community<sup>72</sup> to the other.

Third, Gregory (2008:461) notes that the Jewish liturgical practice would repeat verse 21 after verse 22 in order to end on a hopeful note. He postulates that there also seems to exist a theological perception taught by the rabbis that the Messiah would be born on 9<sup>th</sup> day of Ab. The repetition of verse 21 combined with a perception of the birth of the Messiah were based on the theological principle that computed that, in the midst of suffering and mourning, God would begin his redemptive work. Putting this altogether, from a Jewish perspective one can note the binding together of society<sup>73</sup>, the identity reconstruction<sup>74</sup>, the restoration of dignity<sup>75</sup>, the consolation<sup>76</sup> and the hope<sup>77</sup> that would be instilled by the commemoration of this event.

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<sup>69</sup> Idelsohn (1960:253) observes that both the fast of *Yom Kippur* and *Tisha beav* lasted for twenty four hours while other fasts lasted twelve hours (i.e. from dawn to sunset of the same day).

<sup>70</sup> Idelsohn (1960:254) notes that in the Talmud there is mention of an insertion in the fourteenth benediction which asks for the compassion of God on the mourners of Zion, the despised and desolate city devoured by legions who killed the pious.

<sup>71</sup> Becker (2010:304) describes it as a midrashic exegesis “on the book of Lamentations, divided into over 30 proemia and five major sections. This verse-by-verse interpretation sometimes includes extensive narratives, especially concerning the destruction of Jerusalem”. He goes on to say it contains many quotations from the tannaitic sources but also parallels to the Talmud Yerushalmi as well as Josephus.

<sup>72</sup> Idelsohn (1960:254) mentions the difference in the Eshkenazic and the Serphadic and Yemenite rituals.

<sup>73</sup> The commemorations and the fasting would bring various Jewish groups together in solidarity with one another.

<sup>74</sup> Since most of the laments are associated with the razing and construction of temples, this is where the audiences would establish and confirm their identities in relation to the cult.

<sup>75</sup> This comes clear in the analysis done by Schauss (1938:101-105) of the *Tish Ab* event. Of particular interest is the drilling of this event that is done to the children through the readings of legendary stories from the Talmud and

### 4.6.3 Christian Function

In the Christian liturgy, Fernandez (1998:1039) points out that,

a considerable part of Lamentations is read in the Liturgy of the Hours, in the office of Readings for Holy Week (even years) when reference is made to the sufferings of Christ. This book also appears in other situations of great suffering: in the lectionary for funerals of children, in Masses at times of earthquake or hurricane, and in the Liturgy of the Hours when commemorating the Holy Innocents.

In a similar vein, O'Connor (2001:1017) says, "Christians use selections of Lamentations during the Holy Week services in the recitation of Tenebrae and Good Friday liturgies. Christians lament the death of Jesus, their own sins, and symbolically their own eventual deaths". Other references however, are used for reflections<sup>78</sup> on individual suffering (e.g. Lamentations 1:2, 4, 16, 20) and repentance (e.g. Lamentations 1:8) (Pickut, 2008:417). Witte (2012:622) is of the view that, Lamentations are primarily *literary* texts by a pious individual reeling from the effects and consequences of the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple; therefore, there is a dominance of exegesis of scripture and eschatological interpretation<sup>79</sup> of history. The eschatological interpretation of scripture is "evident in the juxtaposition of Jerusalem and the nations: Jerusalem's demise becomes the prelude to and the model for the final judgement. Yhwh who did not spare his own city, will not spare the nations either".

On Lamentations 4:4, Fernandez (1998:1039) points out that it is often cited for the meaning and imagery. He goes on to say, "many times this text is used with reference to the Word and the Eucharist, particularly when there is a need to explain to the faithful the mysteries of their faith".

Midrash. Schauss (1938:102) suggests that "as they listen to the legends and tales, everything becomes so real to them that they almost imagine that they are living in those woeful yet heroic times".

<sup>76</sup> The reflective nature of the commemorations, the kind of Scriptures read and their understanding of God's preservative character would bring healing and comfort.

<sup>77</sup> Their hope anchored on the understanding of the redemptive work of Messiah.

<sup>78</sup> Gregory (2008:461) proposes that Lamentations was read privately during the Talmudic times since literature pertaining to its public liturgical use only shows post-Talmudic periods.

<sup>79</sup> Witte (2012:623) suggests that since everyone is a sinner "the only option for a person is to trust that God's mercy is greater than his wrath and that his intention to preserve life is stronger than to destroy it (Lam. 3:22)". This understanding is associated with the Rabbinic Midrash.

Fernandez (1998:1039) also highlights that Lamentations 5:21 was used by “the Council of Trent which cites it in order to say ‘we are full of the grace of God<sup>80</sup>’. The Catechism of the Catholic Church cites it when it asserts that conversion is primarily the work of grace<sup>81</sup>”. To sum this up one can see that, from a Christian perspective, the book of Lamentations is useful for individual reflection, corporate and individual suffering (such as death), ordinances (such as Eucharist), assurance of salvation (such as its citation in relation to the grace of God) and fostering eschatological hope (when reference is done to the Word, which is Christ). The reflections, ordinances, assurance of salvation and eschatological hope are essential components that help individuals and communities to face difficulties in reference to the future as well as the present.

### Summary

This section has looked at the historical function of the book of Lamentations. Focus was given to three major communities: the Ancient Near East, the Jews and the Christians. In the Ancient Near East we found out that the book can be used in aiding the bereaved to accept the loss and move into the future. It is also used as a way of showing protest, thus, demanding that justice needs to be done. It is sometimes used as a warning (learning from past mistakes in order to avoid them in future). For the Jews, we found out that the book is used as a liturgy on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Ab, bringing together various Jewish communities in solidarity with one another. For the Christian community, we found out that the book is mostly used as a source of comfort in times of individual and communal suffering, catastrophic events (such as earthquakes), funerals, at the passion of Christ and in trying to instil eschatological hope. This analysis is crucial for this research in that it shapes the future direction<sup>82</sup> of how the book can be used in other contexts of suffering.

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<sup>80</sup> This is a clear example of the extended use of the *hesed* of God by the Christians beyond its historical context.

<sup>81</sup> Another appropriated use of the *hesed* of God by the Christians beyond its historical context.

<sup>82</sup> The principles derived from phrases like, ‘we navigate into the future through a proper understanding of history/ history shapes the future or we understand the future through reading the past’ can be used also in trying to establish the relevance of the historical functions of the book of Lamentations.

## Chapter Five: Theological Analysis

Up to this point our analysis has focused on the text and its historical context. We have shown how the various chapters relate to each other. We have also proved structurally that Lamentations three forms the heart of the book. This has led us to deal with the central pericope (3:19-33) and particularly how it fits into the whole book of Lamentations. We revealed how the issue of hope and its resources play a central role in the book. We have been able to trace the historical development of the book of Lamentations in general and the use of the key terms (hope, *hesed* and *rahamim*) in particular. This has enabled us to position the book in its historical context. The historical functions of the book have also been revealed. Importantly, in line with our aim of finding an analogous reading, we highlighted that the book is atemporal and ahistorical which enables it to be transferred to other contexts of suffering.

Now we move to the theological analysis of the text. We espouse to unveil the theology of the book in general and then see the central role that is played by hope in the context of suffering. Therefore the theological significance of *hesed* and *rahamim* will be understood in the broader context of Lamentations. For us to have a better grip of the arguments in scholarship, we will first of all survey the suggested purposes of the book of Lamentations. We presume that within the broad spectrum of the suggested themes and purposes of the book lay some contentious traditions. The contention of traditions is captured by Renkema (1998:57) who prefers to call them ‘cross-roads’. We will then do an in-depth analysis of these traditions which supposedly gave birth to the theology of the book. Lastly we will then harmonise the theology of Lamentations (i.e. the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God, hope, identity and dignity reconstruction) with the entire theology of the Old Testament.

### 5.1 Survey of Scholarship on Proposed Themes/Purpose of Lamentations

Berlin (2004:1) proposes that,

Lamentations is an expression of the suffering and grief associated with the calamity of destruction, but even more, it is a memorialization of that suffering and grief. It eternalizes the catastrophic moment and its aftermath, freezing it in time, probing it from various perspectives, and preserving it forever.

Provan (1991:24-25) acknowledges the basic tone of suffering, but he argues further that the book offers an invitation to participate, feel, debate, learn and empathise in the suffering. His argument is clearly manifested when he says that,

The key to its contemporary handling lies in the recognition that we are being drawn by it into the debate which it presents to us. We are being invited, along with the other onlookers described in the text (e.g. at 1:12) to empathise with the suffering people of the poems, to feel the sense of isolation and abandonment, frustration and anger, which suffering often brings. We are further being invited to learn from their experience, to participate in their attempt to relate their experience to the reality of God. The book reminds us in a forceful way of the challenge of suffering to faith, and invites us to feel and to ponder its significance ... it provokes questions rather than providing answers. The ‘correct’ resolution of the ‘problem of suffering’ is not given to us in the book.

He then concludes that the questions raised by the book can only be answered by the silent voice of God in the book.

Gottwald (1954:48) associates the book of Lamentations with the book of Job in its expression of suffering. However, he draws out the difference between the two books in that Lamentations is bound by the historical realities of 608 and 586 B.C. Thus, the survivors’ questions reflected on their past, present and future. Some of the questions may have included:

1. How are we to read these events in the light of our past?
2. What is our duty in the present?
3. Are we to look for deliverance and a new life?
4. Have the promises of Yahweh failed?
5. Is he powerless or does he no longer care?
6. What are we to make of God’s nature and purpose?

Gottwald (1954:48) then concludes that, “the answers of the believing community to these perplexities formed the warp and woof of exilic thought and eventually determined the fabric of Judaism”.

Certainly the answers to these questions bring in issues of sin, guilt, confession and redemption which form some of the components of Lamentations.

Although Salters (2010:28) is in agreement with other scholars that the book of Lamentations commemorates the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple and the suffering that ensues, he extends the purpose of the book to include issues of theodicy. This is clearly expressed when he concludes that,

The idea must be that Yahweh must be confronted with the affliction he has caused, not only in the fall of Jerusalem but in the on-going misery of the Babylonian yoke. Yahweh, it is assumed, will ultimately be

unable to ignore the presentation; the pouring out of the heart before Yahweh must somehow reach and soften the heart of the God, the authors still regard as their own.

The recognition by Salters that Yahweh will ultimately heed the pouring out of heart is certainly twisting the ladder towards the right direction. For now the audience is supposed to have confidence in the character of God for them to pour out their cry to him.

Renkema (1998:44) acknowledges the importance of the *Sitz im Leben* in unlocking the theology of the book of Lamentations. However, he proposes that, it should not be the suffering experienced in the city alone that should be of paramount importance, but the reflection generated thereof in the form of a question, why? He then goes on to posit that the theology generated, therefore, gave them an opportunity to look at the pre-exilic prophecy of doom, Psalm theology, Yahweh's essence, Yahweh's deeds and kingship and the tension created there from. Renkema's analysis would have been even better had he incorporated the Deuteronomistic and the Zionist traditions in the quest to find the reason for the 'why' question.

Hillers (1992:4) proposes that we take note of two dimensions to the purpose of the book of Lamentations. First, there is the memorialization which includes the reciting of the horrendous suffering during and after the siege. This recital gave the survivors an opportunity to express their grief and to measure the effects thereafter. Second, there is the spiritual significance of the fall of Jerusalem which is to foster hope. However, this hope does not come by a quick and easy skirting of the present suffering. Rather, "the book offers, in its central chapter, the example of an unnamed man who has suffered under the hand of God ... From near despair, this man wins through to confidence that God's mercy is not at an end"(Hillers,1992:4).

A few things need to be highlighted from Hillers. First, we need to appreciate his overall understanding of the book. Second, while we appreciate his move to focus on the central part of the book, he did not give a motivation for this move. Neither does he connect this central part with the end of the book. Lastly, he identifies well the winning of confidence of the 'Everyman' but he does not seem to appreciate that this confidence or hope also came from a meditation on past deeds of God<sup>1</sup> in loving kindness and compassion. Therefore, this confidence or hope has some retrospective and prospective aspects.

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<sup>1</sup> Hillers (1992:5) seems to suggest that no hope came from looking in the past especially when he says "It does not encourage the remnant of Israel to take comfort in the fathers, or in the Exodus, or the land, or Zion, or the line of

Thomas (2013:242) suggests that,

Lamentations' poetry draws its readers to negotiate what it means to live before Yhwh on the threshold of death. This death affects the remaining populace of Judah in a post-war environment (Lamentations 1-4) and under foreign oppression (Lamentations 5). As such, it faces Yhwh in both hope and horror at the reality of this fragmented and disorienting existence. If life is to persist, it must be done facing Yhwh, who has abused his city and people in punishment. Life will persist by praying that God would act in salvation and restoration rather than judgment. And recurrent prayer in the book, indeed prayer that closes the book, opens up Lamentations to both God and his people.

A few things are worth highlighting from Thomas also, namely: life under the threshold of death; facing God in both hope and horror; and the recurring notion of prayer throughout the whole book. We can agree with Thomas that these motifs form much of the basis of Lamentations. Thomas (2013:247-247) then goes on to argue for an ambiguous theology of the book of Lamentations - a theology that neither justifies God nor exonerates God's people. In a way he argues for an open text. Thomas can easily be criticised for being non-committal, especially in a context where scholarship is polarised against antitheodicy and theodicy. However, his integrated approach to the analysis of the text is commendable. He did well also in bringing the concluding lament into perspective. However, we feel he did not dwell on the third chapter which forms the heart of the book structurally, as Hillers did.

This survey of scholarship on the theology of Lamentations reveals that there is a common thread of understanding from scholars that Lamentations is about intense suffering. This suffering probes the nation to question the fundamental teachings and promises of God from the Pentateuch, the Writings and to the Prophets. Thus, all the traditions, such as the Deuteronomistic, the Wisdom, the Zionist and the Prophetic, are subjected to serious scrutiny. The tears of the nation are constantly presented before God who is a silent character throughout the whole book. Finally three positions have been established so far in relation to the theology of the book, which are: theodicy, antitheodicy and ambiguity. It is important to note that these three

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David, or any of the old symbols of her status with God. The series of 'mighty acts of God' toward Israel had ended with an unmistakable act of judgment, so that the nation's history could be no source of hope".



positions are as a result of contending traditions in the book of Lamentations. Therefore, it is crucial for us to move into a thorough analysis of the traditions.

## 5.2 Theology of Lamentations in Relation to the Traditions

The theology of Lamentations can best be understood by unveiling some of the pillars that the book rests on. Longman (2008:341) points out that the greatest weakness of the works of O'Connor (2002) and Linafelt (2000) is failure to take into account these background traditions, especially the Deuteronomistic tradition. Although scholars are not agreed on the degree of influence, the most notable traditions in the book of Lamentations are the Deuteronomistic, the Prophetic, the Zionist<sup>2</sup>, the Wisdom and the Psalm traditions (Boase, 2006:243). The following analysis is meant to argue that the book of Lamentations is involved in a serious reflective dialogue with the Deuteronomistic, Prophetic, Zionist and Wisdom traditions in its endeavour to generate lasting and genuine hope. We propose that this dialogue is reflective mainly because these traditions are either during or before the exile. Focusing on the resources of hope (i.e. the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God), although we have argued in the literary analysis that they are mostly found in the Wisdom literature, it will be shown that these resources pervade throughout these traditions although at a lesser degree than they are in the Wisdom tradition. Thus, although the central pericope (i.e. 3:19-33) is justifiably mostly a wisdom literature pericope, because of its emphasis on the positive attributes of God, it will be seen later that it also has some Zionist tradition at the background.

### 5.2.1 The Deuteronomistic Tradition

The justification to explore the Deuteronomistic tradition comes from a string of similar references or fulfilments that connect the book of Lamentations with the book of Deuteronomy. For example, the defeat at the hands of enemies predicted in Deuteronomy 28:25 is the focus of the whole book of Lamentations. The violation of women in Deuteronomy 28:30 finds its fulfilment in Lamentations 5:10. The cannibalism that is predicted in 28:53-57 finds its fulfilment in Lamentations 4:10<sup>3</sup>. The connection being felt from these individual verses and

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<sup>2</sup> Some scholars like Boase (2006:243) maintain the Davidic tradition separately from the Zionist tradition. In this study we discuss the Davidic tradition under the rubric of the Zionist tradition.

<sup>3</sup> Although a lot of connections can be drawn between the Deuteronomistic history and the book of Lamentations, this does not mean that Lamentations is only connected to Deuteronomy. For example some connections can be felt

pericopes goes to a much broader level of the theology. From a theological level, Freedman (1976:227) notes that the Deuteronomistic history and the book of Deuteronomy,

are devoted to a handful of basic ideas, which are developed in an elaborate style and repeated in extended perorations. The most important of these are the graciousness of Yahweh's covenant, the evils of idolatry and a noncentralised cult and the inevitability of punishment and reward.

It is refreshing to note that issues of the graciousness of Yahweh and the inevitability of punishment and reward are also core issues in the book of Lamentations. This shows that the book of Lamentations is neatly woven with the book of Deuteronomy so much that one cannot fully understand it without a proper background analysis of the Deuteronomistic History.

When speaking of the theology of the book of Deuteronomy, scholars such as Noth (1981) have found some significant ties with the books proceeding from Deuteronomy. Therefore, in line with that thinking, we will explore the tradition emanating from the book of Deuteronomy stretching to other books beyond it. This is what came to be popularly known as the Deuteronomistic History.

In terms of definition, the Deuteronomistic tradition or history is a concept that attempts to unify biblical books from Deuteronomy to Kings through language, content, summaries, critical points in history, chronology and theology (Mayes, 1990:174). Later Mayes (1999:268) expounds that this theory's chief architect is Noth who was building on the literary and source criticism of Wellhausen. The main difference between Noth and Wellhausen being that the former saw the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings as a distinct entity from Genesis to Numbers while the latter maintained the Torah as an entity compiled through the JEDP sources by a redactor. The Deuteronomistic tradition believes that the account of Moses's death was shifted from its original position (at the end of Numbers) to the present location (at the end of Deuteronomy) by a redactor who wanted to argue for a Pentateuch/Torah compilation (McKenzie, 1992:160). This then leads to a comparison of the conclusions of the Deuteronomistic history which is identical to 2 Kings 25:27-30 thereby postulating that the date

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also with the book of Leviticus 26, the roads being deserted something highlighted in Lamentations 1:4, a concept borrowed from the Assyrian suzerainty treaties (Weinfeld, 1972:124).

of writing should be shortly after or around 560 BC after Jehoiachin's release from Babylonian prison (Römer, 2007:23-24).

McKenzie (1992:161) goes on to explain that,

The Deuteronomist selected those traditions that were appropriate for his purposes and unified them by means of a common structure and chronology. He divided the history of Israel into four major periods: the time of Moses, the settlement of Canaan under Joshua, the period of the judges, and the era of the monarchy.

Römer (2007:116) in agreement with the general division of the Deuteronomistic History adds that the centrality of the Deuteronomistic History anchored on land. He elaborates that,

the whole Deuteronomistic History maintains the assertion that the end of the monarchy, the destruction of Jerusalem and the loss of the land result from Yahweh's anger. The theme of the land is in the very centre of this History: the book of Deuteronomy constantly repeats Yahweh's promise to give the land; the book of Joshua relates the total conquest of the land, and the final chapters of Kings the loss of the land, which is announced in the Deuteronomistic speeches that structure the whole history.

Mayes (1990:174) notes that Noth (1981:4) had initially advocated for a single exilic editor or author of the work from Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel up to Kings. This is also captured by Römer (2007:25) when he says,

the Deuteronomistic History, which includes the books from Deuteronomy to Kings was written according to Noth during the Neo-Babylonian occupation of Judah, about 560 BCE. Dtr. was both an editor since he edited faithfully older documents and materials, but also an author, since he constructed a complex view of Israel's history, including a sequence of successive eras, in order to explain the final catastrophe.

However, subsequent scholars have argued for a 7<sup>th</sup> century writer with some redactions done by groups of Levites, scribes, prophets or priests (Wright, 1996:6-7). Scholars like Wright (1996:7) still maintain the Mosaic influence in the book, which would argue for an older document that might have existed before the seventh century. Wright (1996:7-8), however, admits that there could have been some redactors who adjusted the material in order to appropriate it to their context.

In terms of the redaction process, scholars are not agreed on how it was done. First, there are those who suggest that there were two redactions (i.e. dual redaction); "a major one by an apologist for the reform of Josiah (around 620 B.C) and a minor one during the exile which stresses the just judgement of God and brings the work up to date" (Fretheim, 1983:17).

A second group of scholars is of a view that the work underwent three stages of redactions. There is the work of the Deuteronomistic Historian (DtrH) that covers Joshua's successful complete conquest. The DtrH is followed by the Deuteronomistic nomistic redaction (DtrN) which supplements the DtrH by the phrase 'to this day'. In this understanding, the editor revised the work so that 'to this day' could add a conditional component that the conquest's success depended on obedience. Lastly, there was a redactor who added some prophetic components (DtrP) to the history (Mayes, 1990:174). Römer (2007:65) also sees three redactional stages to the Deuteronomistic History, however his stages are according to three distinct social, political and historical contexts (i.e. Neo-Assyrian, Neo Babylonian and Persian).

Another group of scholars proposes that there is tension because there are two themes that run through the Deuteronomistic History. "The Deuteronomistic History not only relates the judgement of the law but also contains a messianic motif which comes to expression in the positive evaluation of David as the standard by which his successors are judged" (Mayes, 1990:174).

Those who analyse according to theme go on to observe that there is tension between the themes of Jeroboam and Josiah. These two themes are articulated by Mayes (1990:174-175) as,

The sin of Jeroboam and his successors coming to a climax in the account of the fall of the northern kingdom in II Kings 17; the promise of grace to David, which reaches its climax in the story of Josiah's reform in II Kings 22-23. By relating Josiah's destruction of the remnants of the cult of Jeroboam and his attempt to restore the kingdom of David, this story brings together both themes in a work of propaganda issued to support Josiah's religious and political policies: he is the new David in whom is to be found true faithfulness.

For one to understand this tension well, one has to visit some of the key questions that the exiles were asking which manifest within the Deuteronomistic History. Such questions help understand the functions of the texts. Fretheim (1983:21) identifies Deuteronomy 29:24 and 1 Kings 9:8 as the foundation to the questions raised by the exiles - 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house'. The answers to this question are varied.

To some, it meant the unfaithfulness of God to keep his Davidic covenant. This is fuelled by the background that, since Josiah had undertaken some reforms, he was supposed to live longer and allow the prosperity of the nation to be a reality. But to their great amazement he died early and

young at the battle of Meggido. The question asked by Gottwald (1954:51) then becomes relevant for us and for Israel;

Here was a pious ruler, bending his energies upon the observance of the law. The Law book promises explicitly that prosperity and long life are the reward of obedience. Why then does Josiah die in the prime of life? Why does the nation suffer more than ever before immediately after its earnest attempt at reform?

So it was tempting to think that it was because of the reforms that Josiah had undertaken that the gods were angry, killed the reformer and drove the nation into captivity. Giffone (2012:34) captures this and suggests that one of the assumed neglected and consequential angry gods was the ‘queen of heaven’, possibly a fertility goddess Asherah, which was worshipped both before and after migration to Egypt. One has to take into account Jeremiah 22 and realise that when Jeremiah was prophesying against idolatry which would lead to captivity, there were other prophets who were prophesying the opposite. These are then taken as the false prophets.

To some, God remained faithful but the people were unfaithful. Thus, because of the people’s unfaithfulness these calamities had befallen them. Fretheim (1983:21) is of the view that the question is answered in the successive verses that follow, ‘Because they forsook the Lord their God who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshiped them and served them; therefore the Lord has brought all this evil upon them’. Fretheim (1983:21) continues to argue that,

the focus of the response is on unfaithfulness to God, manifested fundamentally in the worship of other gods. The present situation in exile is thus due, not to a God whose promises have proved to be unreliable, but to Israel’s failure to be faithful to the God who has made the promises.

Römer (2007:164) picks up on the understanding that the fall was in essence connected to God and postulates that the entire Deuteronomistic history was written in Babylon to show that “Yahweh still remains a mighty god, despite the Babylonian supremacy” He goes on to speculate that the Babylonians might have even encouraged this writing, since it taught the Judeans to accept that the King of Babylon and his army were acting on God’s directive and will in the capture of Jerusalem.

McKenzie (1992:161) concurs and says,

The Deuteronomist addressed his contemporaries in Babylonian exile, his purpose being entirely negative: to show them that their sufferings were the fully deserved consequences of centuries of decline in Israel’s loyalty to Yahweh. This loyalty was measured in terms of Israel’s obedience to the Deuteronomic law. Since Israel and Judah had failed to follow that law, their histories had ended in complete destruction in

accordance with the divine judgement envisaged by Deuteronomy. There was not the slightest glimmer of hope for the future.

It is also vital to note that this purpose did not go unchallenged. The first challenge came from Von Rad (1965:185-186) who argued for the existence of grace. Von Rad noticed that embedded within judgement were fresh acts of salvation. From the location of the story of Jehoiachin's release, he argued for a theological significance of hope. Thus, the Davidic line was not completely destroyed but was still very much active. This was reinforced by a number of Messianic conceptions that he found in passages such as 1 Kings 8:20, 25 and 9:5<sup>4</sup>.

Another contributor to the purpose of the Deuteronomistic history is Van Seters (1983). He argues that the history is a way of formulating and articulating issues of identity.

Important from the analysis of the Deuteronomistic History are issues of content and purpose which reveal sin, judgement, grace, hope, restoration, Mosaic and Davidic promises. For now it is crucial to shift our focus to some of these themes that are raised in the Deuteronomistic History. For us to cover well the first four aspects raised above (i.e. issues of judgement, grace, hope and restoration) we need to do a detailed analysis of retribution theology. The main reason being that, most of these themes (such as judgement, grace, hope, restoration) are all treated as sub themes in the rubric of retribution theology. For the sake of this research we will deal with the themes of sin, repentance and redemption on the same level with retribution theology. We have taken this route because sin, repentance and the anticipated redemption are visible themes in the book of Lamentations.

#### **5.2.1.1 Retribution Theology.**

For us to understand well retribution theology we need to revisit the significance of sin and obedience in the relationship between God and Israel. God viewed sin as one serious obstacle that compromises his relationship with Israel. Martens (2003:764) rightly observes that, "Sin is the violation of God's will and righteousness. It is disloyalty, disobedience, the breaching of a harmonious and just relationship with God, others, self and nature". Therefore, because of the serious effects that sin would have on the relationship with God, nature, others and self, God had to put in some mechanism to dissuade people from sinning. So the motivation to dissuade people from sinning and encourage obedience came in the form of retribution. Thus, sin would receive

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<sup>4</sup> Von Rad, 2005:162.

punishment in the form of suffering. Obedience would receive blessings in the form of prosperity. This prosperity may take the form of long life or fertility. The fertility could be of the womb or the land. Martens (2003:765) argues that, from the Deuteronomistic perspective, sin receives more extensive treatment than other subjects. This is evidenced by the number of terminologies that are used to describe it. Among some of the famous ones are: עוֹן, פֶּשַׁע and חַטָּאת<sup>5</sup>. Another word that can be added to the issue of sin is guilt. The Hebrew terminologies being רִשְׁעָה and אָשָׁם. The addition of guilt to discussions of sin and judgement is significant since Martens (2003:268) argues that guilt stands in between sin and judgement. So the formula is thus finished: when one sins, there is guilt and eventually punishment. And when one obeys, there is justification and blessing in the form of prosperity of the womb or the field.

Herion (1988:156) suggests that, when discussing retribution theology in the Deuteronomistic History, one must observe it from the prophetic as well as the proverbial perspectives.

Herion (1988:156) further divides the prophetic understanding of retribution into four categories. That is present adversity, past benevolence, future benevolence and present benevolence. The prophets leaned heavily on Deuteronomy 28 in their understanding of present adversities. Thus, Herion (1988:156) proposes that,

The warnings of the OT prophets to the sinful Israelites drew upon the covenant curses. The prophets viewed the historical adversities that afflicted the covenant people ... as God's punitive retribution, which sacrifice alone could not assuage... The positive purpose of this retribution was to draw the people back to faithful obedience to God.

Herion is supported by Levenson (1985:55) who says that,

The curses and blessings of the covenant formulary enables the prophets of Israel to provide a theology of history. Adversity – drought, famine, epidemic, defeat, or whatever – could be accounted for by reference to a violation of covenant obligation. Conversely, the prosperity and tranquillity of either the past or the coming age could be seen as a consequence of faithful partnership with God.

In terms of past benevolence, Levenson and Herion agree that according to Jeremiah 22:15 past prosperity is a reward for past faithful relationship with God. However, Herion (1988:156) is quick to caution that this should also be understood in the context of covenant prologue rather

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<sup>5</sup> These three Hebrew words are used together in Exodus 34:7



than covenant blessings, since there is also some element of undeserved favour which served to entice Israel to obedience.

In terms of future benevolence, Herion (1988:156) maintains that, “the prosperity of the future is rarely tied to the idea of reward”. On the contrary, “it is something unearned that God graciously showers on an undeserving people usually after a time of hardship” (Herion, 1988:156).

In terms of the present benevolence, Herion (1988:156) insists it should not be viewed as reward for previous righteousness, since it is God’s gift and no one is truly righteous. Herion (1988:156) concludes forcefully that,

A life without adversity must be viewed, then, not as a summary statement about a person’s status in God’s eyes, but as an introductory statement soliciting a grateful response to the favour received. Good fortune in history is not good reward for righteousness; it is God’s invitation to serve Him. It is to be associated not with the blessings that conclude the covenant, but with the prologue of grace that initiates it.

Moving into the proverbial view, Herion (1988:156) suggests that retribution is viewed differently to that of the prophets. In the Proverbs God is tied to prosperity. “Human actions determine the future...a good way will lead to a good end” (Herion, 1988:156). Historical rewards are as a result of faithful obedience to God’s precepts. This understanding of retribution from the proverbs will be dealt with again below under Wisdom tradition.

This then means that when we look at the Deuteronomistic understanding of the issue of retribution we need to balance the prophetic view with the proverbial view. So there is undeserved favour but there is also the aspect of reward for obedience.

### **5.2.1.2 Sin and Repentance**

If the retribution theology above focused on the grace of God and covenant obligations in the form of punishment for sin and prosperity for obedience, then we are pushed to see the cycle in the book of Judges. In the cycle of Judges, several stages are fronted. One could see them as sin, punishment, cry to God and deliverance<sup>6</sup>. Our main concern is the ‘cry to the Lord’ which normally comes after realising one’s guilt. For the sake of this research, we will just group guilt, penitence and confession under one rubric which broadly speaking is repentance.

The Deuteronomistic history took repentance as one crucial issue to Israel’s relationship with God. Although God would unleash his wrath on the nation, it is also noticeable that, once the

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<sup>6</sup> McKenzie (1992: 167) sees them as apostasy, oppression, repentance and deliverance.



nation repents, God would relent his anger. Healey (1992: 671) observes that, the Hebrew word used for repentance is **שׁוּב** which means to turn. He goes on to say, “it is a particularly instructive word because it reflects the notion of journeying and pilgrimage, which exemplifies in a very fundamental sense the attitude and relationship between Yahweh and Israel (Deut 26:5-11)”. Concentrating on Deuteronomy alone, Soza (2003:687) discovers that **שׁוּב** is used “more than thirty times and serves as its primary moral and responsive term”. He goes on to unveil that in Deut 1:45 the Israelites repented and wept before God but God did not recognize their repentance. This refusal to heed repentance is important as it links well with the sentiments echoed in Lamentations 3:42. However, if Lamentations 3:42 was a meditation of Deuteronomy 1:45, then there is hope since, later on, Soza (2003:687) points to Deut 4:29-31 as a solid promise to the new generation that God was going to be attentive to their genuine repentance. From the concentration of the use of **שׁוּב** in Deuteronomy 30, Soza (2003:687) suggests that the definition of **שׁוּב** is much more clarified. Thus, the returning or repentance of Israel in Deut 30:3,

demonstrates that the function of the blessings is to serve as a positive motivation and the function of the curses is to serve as a negative motivation in stimulating repentance. Therefore God actively works, even using painful means to bring about repentance – a repentance that has the aspects of love and obedience”.

This genuine repentance which has some components of love and obedience forms the beacon in Solomon’s prayer in 1 Kings 8:22-62. The prayer begins by recognizing the incomparability of Yahweh and his faithfulness in keeping his covenant of love. It then goes into the details of the election of David and the establishment of his dynasty which evokes the Zionist tradition that will be dealt with below. The prayer takes into account the injustices that could be done, the defeat at the hands of the enemy and the drought that could come. It then opens the door for the foreigners and asks for victory when Israel goes to war. Most important is verse 46 which anticipates that the people would sin. The most recurring refrain is that, ‘hear from heaven’. Which means basically the prayer is asking God to be attentive to their plea in times of national and individual crisis.

From this background, the litany of confessional/penitential verses found in the book of Lamentations should not surprise us, especially, knowing that the victims are suffering at the hands of God presumably from covenant breach. So their immediate reaction, in accordance with

the Deuteronomistic History, is to confess their sins with the hope that their repentance will be accepted by God. They knew from this history that the prerogative to forgive still lay with God. God may choose not to forgive as he did with the older generation in Deut 1:45 or he may choose to forgive in line with his promise in Deut 4:29-31. This then explains the seemingly underlying tension of certainty and uncertainty in the book of Lamentations. However, the uncertainty is greatly overshadowed by the certainty as evidenced with the positive presentations of the lament before the Sovereign Lord.

Although Jerusalem realises that her punishment is because of sin as clearly articulated in 1:5, 8, 14 in line with the Deuteronomistic tradition, the challenge is that there is lack of specification of the sin. The lack of specification of the sin can be used positively to refer to all sins in all generations, thus appropriating the book beyond its historical context. However, it can also create a problem if argued from the angle that lack of specification also portrays lack of knowledge. Thus, the people could not really pinpoint their exact sin just as Job could not. Renkema (1998:64) avers and points out from Lamentations 2:14 that the people did not recognise their injustices which led them to blame their prophets. Even when the people confess, they confess generically without specifying the sins. At another point (i.e. 5:7) they are not so sure whether it is their own sins or it is their forefather's sins<sup>7</sup>. So the people in Lamentations might be feeling guilty, but they might not know which sin and whose sin. One can also argue that the admission to sinning might have been compelled by a dialogue with Solomon's prayer, especially verse 46<sup>8</sup>, where he admits to the fact that all humanity is prone to sinning. Therefore even if they wanted to justify themselves as being innocent, the reading of the Deuteronomistic History would implicate them. The wisdom tradition, as we will see later, also held to this belief that everyone is a sinner<sup>9</sup>. Which, therefore, means if the audience of the book of Lamentations were involved in a dialogue with these two traditions, they had no basis to stand and defend their innocence. So in a way they are caught in between: on the one hand, they are forced to confess sin by the traditions that they are in dialogue with but, on the other hand, they are not sure of their specific sin. The end result is that they confess their own sin and their forefather's sin without specifying the type of sin. One could argue also that, since the sins were many, they did

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<sup>7</sup> One can conclude that because of this uncertainty, the confession is generic in terms of the sin and the sinner.

<sup>8</sup> Or it could be coming from the wisdom tradition, as will be seen below where we discuss the wisdom tradition's influence to the book of Lamentations.

<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 20:9. Job also admits that he is also a sinner 7:20-21.

not need to specify them. However, this lack of specification is also in line with the general character of the book of Lamentations as a liturgical book. So we conclude that the lack of specifics of the sins is crucial for this research which seeks an analogous reading in other contexts of suffering for it enables the book to be appropriated to any generation anywhere in connection with their own sins in their own context.

### 5.2.1.3 Redemption

In the Old Testament the concept of redemption was closely associated with kings. Heim (2005:616) captures this in the statement, “the almost universal conviction that the national deity would support a nation or people in warfare led to the belief that Yahweh could therefore guarantee military victory and prevent economic exploitation by foreigners”. Therefore, it was the king’s responsibility to give protection and to seek deliverance for his people. Since the kings were viewed to some extent as gods<sup>10</sup> or God’s representative, it was then easier to connect the deliverance from Israel’s enemies with God. When we come to the book of Lamentations, the first impression that one gets seems to be that there is no longer any glimpse of deliverance since, according to 4:20, the king is caught and the general impression of the book is that God has betrayed his own. The betrayal is a consequence of sin. Therefore, the logic is that, once the sin has been confessed and their repentance has been accepted, there should be a reversal of fortunes. This is again one of the core messages of the Deuteronomistic history in the books of Judges<sup>11</sup>, Samuel<sup>12</sup> and Kings<sup>13</sup>. If there is genuine confession and repentance there is deliverance.

On a parallel note, we need to heed Cross’s (1973:278-285) examination of the themes of judgement *vis a vis* grace and hope that run alongside each other in the Deuteronomistic history. Cross (1973:278-285) argues that, while the sin of Jeroboam comes to a climax in the judgement of the Northern nation, there is a theme of grace and hope that runs through the election of David and his incomparability until it reaches the climax in Josiah. Thus, Cross (1973:284) opines that,

the Deuteronomistic historian thus contrasted two themes, the sin of Jeroboam and the faithfulness of David and Josiah. Jeroboam led Israel into idolatry and ultimate destruction as all the prophets had warned. In

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<sup>10</sup> Seybold (1997: 265) avers and says “sacral majesty and even divinity were attributed to the king (sacral, divine kingship)”.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Judges 2:18

<sup>12</sup> Especially, 1Samuel 12:1-24

<sup>13</sup> Particularly, Solomon’s dedicatory prayer in 1 Kings 8:22-53.

Josiah who cleansed the sanctuary founded by David and brought a final end to the shrine founded by Jeroboam, in Josiah who sought Yahweh with all his heart, the promises to David were to be fulfilled. Punishment and salvation had indeed alternated in the history of Judah... as in the era of the Judges. Yahweh has afflicted Judah but will not forever.

Cross (1973:284) then goes on to argue that,

the two themes in the Deuteronomistic Book of Kings appear to reflect two theological stances, one stemming from the old Deuteronomic covenant theology which regarded destruction of dynasty and people as tied necessarily to apostasy, and a second, drawn from the royal ideology in Judah: the eternal promises to David. In the second instance, while chastisement has regularly come upon Judah in her seasons of apostasy, hope remains in the Davidic house to which Yahweh has fidelity for David's sake, and for Jerusalem, the city of God.

He then concludes that the juxtaposition of these themes laid the basis of Josianic reforms. Thus, the "Deuteronomistic history may be described as a propaganda work of the Josianic reformation and imperial program" (Cross, 1973:284).

Tying this analysis together, specifically with Cross (1973) and Von Rad (1962), we find out that, since judgement was a certainty in line with the prophetic oracles, restoration was also going to be a reality. Thus, alongside judgement there is salvation. Although there were covenant obligations to be fulfilled (e.g. genuine repentance) Israel knew that they were chosen by God's grace and the restoration depended again on his grace. This is the multifaceted picture of God which Holladay (1976:375-377) tries to explain in terms of God's grace and mercy *vis a vis* his justice. On the one end, God shows his undeserving mercy, while on the other end, he punishes sin and disobedience.

Furthermore, the cycle of events in the book of Judges that we discussed above shows that the people would sin and God would then hand them over to their enemies as a form of punishment. The people would then cry to God who would then raise up a judge who would deliver them. No doubt, according to the Deuteronomistic teaching, once there was repentance, redemption was the natural thing to expect. So, when Israel looked back in retrospect at the character of God and what he had done (specifically, the gracious election), they had hope that redemption was certain. At the same time, when they experience God's punishment, they were certain that comfort is also being rolled out.

Now bringing this to the book of Lamentations, if the audience were certainly involved in a dialogue with the Deuteronomistic tradition on the issue of redemption, they would be aware of

the fact that God had judged them. They had received their share for their sins. Therefore, they certainly hoped for restoration. The redemption would not just come in peace but would be inaugurated by the punishment of Judah's enemies. This suggests that, in the book of Lamentations, the hope of deliverance also comes in the form of the imprecatory sections (i.e. 1:21-22; 3:64-66; 4:21-22) which call for the punishment of Israel's enemies. Interestingly only Lamentations 2 and 5 do not end with imprecation. It is also important to note that, even though Lamentations 2 and 5 do not end with imprecation, they still end in a prayer form. In Lamentations 2, the prayer seems to be from verse 20-22. In the case of Lamentations 5, the whole of the lament takes a prayerful tone. Thus, although the laments express deep anguish and agony, they also offer some a redemptive tone.

### 5.2.2 The Prophetic Tradition

In this section it will be revealed that, in addition to the Deuteronomistic tradition, the book of Lamentations was involved in a reflective dialogue with the prophetic tradition. This then led to a fusion of theology between the Deuteronomistic and the Prophetic traditions.

A proper analysis of the Prophetic tradition should inherently begin with Moses, since he is believed to be the archetypical prophet used to judge all other prophets (Hayes, 1999:310). May be before even going further one needs to ask the crucial question, what makes prophetic literature prophetic. Put in other words, what are the components that make up the prophetic tradition? This question becomes critical in the process of differentiating the Torah, the Deuteronomistic history and the latter prophets. The process becomes complex taking into account that Moses is seen as the model of all prophets and the figurehead behind the Torah. From this angle, there seems to be a thin line that separates the Torah, the Deuteronomistic history and the latter prophets. For example, Freedman (1976:227-228) notes that,

One of the most important of Deuteronomy's 'anachronisms' is the treatment of Moses as the supreme prophet. Major attention is devoted to the charismatic ninth- and eighth-century prophets in DH, most obviously in the Elijah and Elisha cycles. The importance of prophetic thought in DH is also shown by the use of prediction-and-fulfilment schemata (II Sam. 7:12-13 and I Kings 8:20; I Kings 11:30-31 and 12:15-16; I Kings 14:7ff and 15:27-28; I Kings 16:1-4 and 16:9-14). DHEd's comments on the climactic moment of his history, the fall of Samaria (I Kings 17:7-18, 21-23; vss 19-20 are exilic insertions), focus on the warning Yahweh gave through his servants the prophets. A similar conception played a crucial part in the theology of the exilic compiler of the first edition of the prophetic corpus, who believed that the prophets who were proved right about the fall will be proved right about the return.

Therefore, this means that the theology of the Torah<sup>14</sup> and the Deuteronomistic history becomes foundational to the analysis of the prophetic tradition. Returning to the question of the components that make up the prophetic tradition, one can gain some insights by an analysis of the definitions given to prophecy. Petersen (2009:622) notes that, from a Greek etymological analysis of the word, ‘prophet’ means someone who “speaks on behalf of the deity to the people”. This then implies that all intermediators were prophets. Moreover, Petersen (2009:623-625) pinpoints that the Hebrew word נביא does include other titles, such as ‘seers’ and ‘man of God’, thereby suggesting a long historical development of the word culminating in performance diversity. Huffmon (1992:477) defines Ancient Near Eastern prophecy as “inspired speech at the initiative of a divine power, speech which is clear in itself and commonly directed to a third power”. From this definition it can be assumed that all canonical literature is prophecy since it is God’s word directed to Israel.

Huffmon (1992:477) provides three additional angles that prophecy can be viewed from when he says, “for some the prophet is the critic of society; for others, the prophet is the announcer of the future; for yet others, the prophet is the charismatically authorised messenger”. It is unfortunate that all these angles have received less attention at the expense of foregrounding the futuristic aspect of prophecy. Thus, the foretelling aspect of prophecy has received more attention than the forth telling, social critique and the mediatory. With respect to the book of Lamentations, the foretelling aspect of prophecy was used as a focal point to reading the book of Lamentations as discussed in the previous chapter. Since Jeremiah was considered a prophet, the book of Lamentations could be seen as foretelling future catastrophes beyond the historical destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. This is just one of the levels that show clearly that there was a serious dialogue with the prophetic tradition on the reception of Lamentations.

Moreover, if one is to take the suggestion from Buss (1962:694) that prophets usually “responded to declarations of a problem presenting an answer”, that would take the book of Lamentations to further discussions. Buss (1962:694) suggests that, “problems might be expressed in individual and collective laments, confronting deity with the present tension-filled

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<sup>14</sup> Since the book of Deuteronomy has a lot to tell us about the life of Moses, it then means that the Deuteronomistic history plays a pivotal role in the formation of the prophetic tradition. In addition, the Hebrew canon designates the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings as prophetic. Thus, it is not surprising that some of the discussion on the Deuteronomistic tradition will spill over into the prophetic tradition.

situation”. Schmitt (1992:484) offers some clarity of this form when he says “the judge’s court is one area which offered many such forms that prophets used to convey their own message: the summons of the judge, the charge of the prosecutor, the claim of the defendant, or the lament of those who were denied justice”. Buss (1962:694) goes on to say, “since the complaints typically include an accusation directed against divine action or inaction, the responses defend Yahweh, as in Micah 6:3”. In Micah 6:3ff the prophet clearly puts Yahweh on the defence as he narrates his deliverance, love and protection throughout the journey to the Promised Land. This observation is attractive in view of the book of Lamentations where there is confrontation with God for excessive punishment. One of the voices, as we have seen above, seems to take the role of defending God, particularly in Chapter 3. Thus, although the rabbis would read the book of Lamentations prophetically because of the association with Jeremiah, the employment of the judicial form is also a component of the prophetic tradition. Through the judicial form, questions of God’s love<sup>15</sup>, goodness<sup>16</sup>, faithfulness<sup>17</sup>, compassion<sup>18</sup>, justice<sup>19</sup> and sovereignty<sup>20</sup> are asked and defended in Lamentations 3.

The other component worth some discussion is the forth-telling aspect of prophecy. This component invariably involves the critiquing of the society’s adherence to declared and established norms to live by. In the case of Israel, the Torah specifically spelt out how they were to conduct their lives. As Schmitt (1992:484) puts it, “the reality of God demands that Israel worship Yahweh. Moreover, the right worship of God requires of a person the right treatment of one’s fellow human beings”. Thus, the prophet could easily announce what would happen,

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<sup>15</sup> The question may have been asked in view of the present suffering which seems to suggest abandonment; however, his love is then defended particularly in 3:22 and 32.

<sup>16</sup> Again this question might have been asked in the context of failure to provide security but God’s goodness is defended particularly in 3:25-26.

<sup>17</sup> God’s faithfulness might have been questioned in view of possible abrogation of the covenant but however, the faithfulness of God is defended in 3:23; thus affirming, possibly, that God’s faithfulness is always fresh like a new covenant.

<sup>18</sup> The question of God’s compassion might have been asked within the background of the asymmetry that is found in chapter 2 and four of the maternal mothers, the cannibalism and the starving and crying babies. However the compassion of the Lord is then defended in 3:22 and 3:32

<sup>19</sup> The justice of God is also brought under scrutiny may be from the context that the people felt the punishment the nation had received was not proportional to the sin. However, the justice of God is defended in view of Israel’s own oppression hinted in 3:34-36.

<sup>20</sup> The question of God’s sovereignty might have been raised in the context that the people were wondering if God was really there. This doubt of God’s existence might have been prompted by his silence in the face of their confession and plea to look and see. However, his sovereignty is again defended in 3:37-38, 41. The defense of God’s sovereignty also forms part of the closing assertions in 5:19.



judging by the way Israel adhered to the Torah, in the way they worshipped God and treated other fellow human beings. In cases where the society was violating the established norms in the Torah, the prophet would criticise and call the society to repentance, failure of which, the prophet would affirm the consequences of disobedience. This forms what Schmitt (1992:484) termed the “reproach and threat” form. This component forms the basis of most of the confessional passages found in the book of Lamentations. Some of the sins confessed are of the previous generations as well as the present generation. Thus, in passages like Lamentations 5:7 there is acknowledgement that the present predicament is as a result of the fore-fathers sins. However, the poet also realises that the present generation is equally guilty in 5:16. The resultant tension of the fore-father’s sins and the present generation’s sin could have been prompted by a dialogue with Jeremiah 31:29-31. In Jeremiah 31:29-31<sup>21</sup>, the writer was trying to set the record straight that everyone was responsible for their own sin. It could be that there were some people who were reading Exodus 20:6 and blame all their misfortunes on the previous generations. From this analysis of Exodus, Jeremiah and Lamentations, it is evident that the poet in Lamentations did not just accept without serious critiquing the established traditions. Thus, in their critique, they would affirm but sometimes oppose the previously held traditions as they made their assessment with the present adversity. Nevertheless, the important aspect of the reproach and threat form is that it induced repentance in the book of Lamentations which is expressed in the form of confession. However, as Barton (1992:490) notes according to the prophet Jeremiah, even if the repentance came, it would not avert the eminent judgement in the form of exile. Rather,

the repentance would thus consist more in recognising the justice and inevitability of the Babylonian invasion and victory, and in adjusting to the new state of affairs this would imply, than in reforming the national life so as to persuade Yahweh to alter the course of international events – the time when that might have been possible was already past.

Possibly, the Judeans did not understand the justice, inevitability of the invasion and victory, as they read their repentance in accordance with the Deuteronomistic history, where God had promised to forgive when his people repent. So, when they confessed but did not receive the seemingly positive Deuteronomistic results, they felt betrayed by God. This then forms their

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<sup>21</sup> Passages like Jeremiah 31:29-31 and Exodus 20:6 need to be handled with care in contexts of suffering (for example Zimbabwe) since the perpetrators use these to justify vengeance. On the other hand the victims accept every misfortune as a result of a generational curse for the sins of the fathers.



protest in 3:42 that they have confessed but God has not forgiven. Although, admittedly, the people in Lamentations felt betrayed by God, we should be careful not to read this as a surprise, since earlier on in 2:8 and 17 there is an element of acknowledgement that God was fulfilling what he had already promised and decreed. So it was too late to cry for the decree to be averted.

The other element so common in prophetic literature is that of prediction-and-fulfilment. This prediction-and-fulfilment element which sporadically characterises the Deuteronomistic History is also seen in the latter prophets. In the book of Lamentations, the prediction-and-fulfilment element is felt in 2:8 and 17 passages discussed above. From the latter prophets, Giffone (2012:33-38) specifically picks Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah<sup>22</sup>, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and argues that the prophets always predicted judgement and envisioned restoration. However, Barton (1992:490) notes that the judgement was excessive, specifically according to Isaiah 46-47 and Zechariah 1:15. The dialogue between the Deuteronomistic literature that emphasizes that God must punish sin with prophetic texts that outlined the excessiveness of the punishment might have led to the tension seen in Lamentations of accepting the punishment in silence and to protest against God's punishment.

In addition to the prediction-fulfilment element that shows the dialogue with the prophets, the book of Lamentations utilises some images which are reminiscent of the prophetic literature. However, one should be careful to confine the images to the prophetic tradition only, since some of them were commonly used in other Ancient Near East literature. For example, the female figure of Zion, the prostitute and the widow are all images that are used widely by the latter prophets but are also found in the Ancient Near Eastern literature. In the case of the female figure Zion, Gerstenberger (2001:476) affirms it has some allusions to the Ancient Near East female deities heading a city pantheon, a concept that features a lot in the prophetic books in the form of bride/wife and God being the husband (for example, this concept is readily seen in Hosea 2; Jeremiah 2:2; Isaiah 49:14; Isaiah 62:5 and Ezekiel 16:23 among other passages). Gerstenberger (2001:476) goes on to explain that,

although the image of a wife subject to her husband and punishable by him for alleged misbehaviour is offensive in our eyes, legitimately so under the present conditions of life and equality of sexes ... in the context of ancient Israel and its patriarchal society it was supposedly able to communicate a strong sense of allegiance between Yahweh and his people.

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<sup>22</sup> Deutero- Isaiah and Trito- Isaiah

Thus, such an image as this was intended to reinforce the importance of covenant keeping. Breaking a covenant was considered a serious offence. So when the people in Lamentations are convicted or found guilty, God is justified in punishing them. This exercise of punishment is considered being a part of the justice delivery system in line with the prophetic tradition. This might have moved the poet in Lamentations to accept his fate. However, it seems as if when he is almost at the verge of accepting the fate, he then observes those who are being used as the instrument of justice and find out that they are worse sinners than the Judeans. The poet is then compelled to ask the same question that Habakkuk asks. The connection to Habakkuk is made more explicit with the use of the Hebrew word בלע, which means to ‘swallow’. The word is used in Habakkuk 1:13. In Lamentations 2:5 it is repeated twice to show some special focus. In accordance with the word from Habakkuk that God would judge those used as God’s instrument of justice on Israel, the poet in Lamentations is consoled and therefore utters the imprecatory sections calling on God to exercise his justice holistically to all nations. In fact, the poet looks forward to that day with eagerness in the words of 1:21 ‘May you bring the day you have announced so they may become like me<sup>23</sup>’. The dialogue of Lamentations with Habakkuk is also attractive in other respects. Habakkuk is one prophet who picks on the use of one of the key resources for hope (*rahamim*). He appeals to God to remember compassion in 3:2. He also vividly portrays God as an angry enemy, utilizing terms like ‘bow’, ‘arrow’<sup>24</sup> and ‘the day of the Lord’ all of which are used in the book of Lamentations.

In the case of the image of a widow, although Schmitt (1992:485) affirms it to be a prophetic image, Hunter (1996:72) observes that this image is widely attested in Ancient Near Eastern literature of the Egyptians, the Assyrians and the Akkadians. As for the image of the prostitute found in Lamentations 1:2, the latter prophets extensively use this image to illustrate Israel’s waywardness. For example, Jeremiah uses this image in chapter 2 and 3 to show that, if there is divorce and remarriage, the land would be defiled. In Hosea 1-3, however, God shows his constant love as he goes after wayward Israel in spite of her unfaithfulness with many lovers<sup>25</sup>. In the book of Lamentations, Berlin (2004:47-48) suggests that the image of immorality is used

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<sup>23</sup> NIV.

<sup>24</sup> Habakkuk 3:9,11

<sup>25</sup> Hillers (1992:82) points out that this unfaithfulness of Israel with many lovers is regarded by the prophets “as the most serious kind of apostasy”. This is mainly because “only Yahweh was supposed to be Israel’s overlord and the one who protected her and fought her battles” (Hillers, 1992: 82).

to depict idolatry. Berlin (2004:50) goes on to point out that the image is also found in the Babylonian Poem of the Righteous Sufferer. This would then suggest that such images, although found in the prophetic tradition as affirmed by O'Connor (2002:20), were not originally from or confined to the prophetic tradition, and thus their use in the book of Lamentations should be taken contextually in relationship to the prophetic tradition at their disposal. This means that as an image in its own right, it was widely used within the Ancient Near East. It is only when one goes into the details of the context that one is able to affirm the prophetic tradition in the usage. The poems in the book of Lamentations, in this case, were simply utilising images that were at their disposal to a different and unique situation. In this different unique context of the Yahweh worshipping community, the use of the images suggests that the book of Lamentations was involved in serious reflective dialogue with the Prophetic tradition (especially the pre-exilic prophets) just as they did with the Deuteronomistic tradition in their quest to find answers to their predicament. For a proper and effective dialogue to ensure there are questions raised, affirmations exposed and disputations highlighted. For instance, Boase (2006) traces the dialogue of Lamentations with pre-exilic and exilic prophets and suggest that three motifs are put to serious scrutiny. First, there is the personification of Jerusalem in female terms<sup>26</sup>. Boase (2006) analyses the personification, particularly focusing on the term 'daughter' and observes that it is prevalent in Lamentations 1, 2 and 4. This term is also widely used in the prophetic literature of Isaiah 1-39 to refer to Jerusalem's inviolability. This then suggests that the prophetic literature in turn was in dialogue with the Zionist tradition as will be shown below.

In the book of Jeremiah, Boase (2006:62-77) argues that the personified city is frequently described in association with the judgement oracles in the form of military invasion, which would suggest that the prophetic literature was now in dialogue with the Deuteronomistic tradition. She also notes that, although the major part of Jeremiah is associated with the judgement oracles, there are some interspersed salvation oracles (for example 30:12-17). She then concludes that the more developed prophetic<sup>27</sup> literature utilized the lament device in order to communicate the inevitable judgement for sin (Boase, 2006:83). In comparing the use of the

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<sup>26</sup> We discussed this in detail above.

<sup>27</sup> The analysis of Boase on the feminine personification of Jerusalem mainly dwells on the books of Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah and Zephaniah.

feminine personification in the Prophetic tradition and the book of Lamentations, Boase (2006:101) observes some similarities and differences. On the differences, she posits that,

Lamentations uses the device for its own purpose, evoking some aspects of the tradition, but also modifying and shaping it to help portray the depth and horror of the suffering which occurred in the wake of the fall of Jerusalem. In contrast to the prophetic literature, Lamentations' use of the figure evokes audience sympathy for the city, an empathy largely absent in the prophetic literature.

Boase (2006:101-102) then notes a number of similarities which includes the movement from the personified city to the inhabitants of the city, and also from personified city to the physical city.

After the analysis of the feminine personification Boase (2006:105-139) shifts her attention to 'the day of the Lord' motif. The phrase and its associations are found several times in Lamentations which warrants some discussion. For instance, it appears in Lamentations 1:7, 12, 13, 21; 2:1, 7, 16, 21, 22 and 4:18. In the book of Lamentations, the people saw the phrase 'the day of the Lord' as referring to the fall of Jerusalem but also looked forward to a future day of the Lord when those used as an instrument of judgement on Israel would also be judged (Lamentations 1:21-22). The dialogue of Lamentations with the prophets is crystal clear in verbs such as 'may you bring the day you have *announced*' (Lamentations 1:21), the Lord has done what he *planned*; he has *fulfilled* his word which he *decreed* long ago (Lamentations 2:17). Even though the day of the Lord is a crucial event, specifically looking at Amos 5:18-20, scholars continue to debate over the exact nature of that day. Some suggest that it is militarily in the past, whereas others say it is militarily eschatological, yet others think it is an enthronement day (Boase, 2006:105-113). Boase (2006:114-127) goes into a detailed analysis of the day of the Lord in Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah Zephaniah and Ezekiel and concludes that, it is a day of terror, confusion, anguish and distress which would lead to an acknowledgement of the sovereignty of God. In aligning Lamentations with the prophetic literature Boase (2006:136) opines that,

the day of Yahweh as it is described in Lamentations has some affinity with the prophetic day of Yahweh descriptions that come from the late seventh and into the sixth century ... The day of Yahweh is described in terms of military warfare, is directed against both Israel /Judah and other nations, and is not viewed as a singular future event. In all texts, Yahweh is held responsible for the actions of the day, whether these be the direct actions of Yahweh, or through the agency of human armies.

Although there are these glaring similarities, Boase (2006:136-139) extracts some differences that include the increased impact, the localization of the day, the reference to past and future. So Boase (2006:138) concludes, "the similarities and differences between the use of the day of

Yahweh motif in the prophetic literature and Lamentations support there being a dialogic relationship between the two groups of texts”.

The last motif that Boase (2006:140-202) explores is the sin of the people and Yahweh’s response. The sin of the people can be extended to the abrogation of the covenant and God’s response, thereby raising issues of the Suzerain – Vassal treaty. That means the dialogue in Lamentations is not just a simple dialogue with one tradition but a complex one, since the various traditions<sup>28</sup> are in dialogue with each other.

Boase (2006:141) highlights that there are about sixteen verses in the book of Lamentations that talk about the sin of the people and the judgement which calls for the motif to be analysed. She observes that, when discussing about sin and judgement in the prophetic literature, it is tied to issues of God’s justice, righteousness and Lordship. Consequently the prophets condemned any form of idolatry based on the fact that God is the only one who should be given allegiance. After a detailed examination of texts in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zephaniah and Amos, Boase concludes that common in the prophetic texts is Yahweh’s activity in history, his use of nations in executing judgement whether on Judah or on other nations. The exercise of judgement is an expression of his righteousness and justice. The sins described encompass life holistically, from social, religious to political. In tying her analysis to the book of Lamentations, Boase observes some similarities as well as some differences. The similarities involve the invocation of sin in Lamentations 1, 2 and 4 which is reminiscent of the prophetic literature. However, the difference lies mainly in the lack of specification in Lamentations.

There is also a link between the misleading prophets and the book of Jeremiah. In Lamentations 2:14 the misleading prophets failed to expose the sin of the people and consequently avoid deportation. They were false prophets. These are the same prophets that we encounter in the book of Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 5:12, for instance, they categorically deny any possibility of harm on Judah.

Boase also looks at the extent of the punishment in the book of Lamentations which seems to contradict the prophetic literature which called for equal punishment to sin. The main concern

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<sup>28</sup> For example, the prophetic tradition is involved in a dialogue with the Deuteronomistic tradition when it employs the Suzerain vassal treaty. The prophetic tradition is also involved in dialogue with the Wisdom literature when exposing the justice of God. The book of Lamentations then goes to have a dialogue with all the various traditions concurrently. This then complicates any endeavor to apportion on single tradition in dialogue to a pericope in the book since all the dialogue is done simultaneously.

being that God has excessively punished Judah. So in the end Boase (2006:243) concludes that Lamentations “enters into a dialogic interaction, responding to words already spoken about the destruction, giving voice to some explanations, and exploring and expressing the pain and suffering from myriad perspectives”.

The analysis of Boase centred on the personification, the day of the Lord, sin and judgement, but there are other motifs that show the dialogue between the book of Lamentations and the prophetic tradition. For instance, Petersen (2009:646-647) notes that the vast majority of Old Testament prophets utilized the tradition that saw Yahweh as king who had established a covenant with Israel. The covenant may be illustrated in the Suzerain – Vassal treaty and marriage<sup>29</sup> agreements. All these agreements operate within some agreed framework. Thus, with the Suzerain – Vassal treaty there were these stipulations: obedience would bring blessings and disobedience would bring curses. In the case of marriage, fidelity or faithfulness was expected on the part of the woman and, in turn, she would receive providence and protection from the husband. Failure to abide by this would be considered a great betrayal and would warrant divorce. When in breach, the enactment of the promises gave hope that a new covenant was being put in place. Secondly, the prophets understood Zion as the chosen place of God’s name in accordance with the dialogue with the Zionist tradition. Therefore, its destruction and desecration also gave hope in that they looked forward to a better place for the name of God. Thus, the prophets could speak confidently of a future restoration. So we can safely say the dialogue of Lamentations with prophetic theology certainly helped in the formulation of a theology of hope in the book of Lamentations. The specific images used as a vehicle to communicate this may have been common in the Ancient Near East at the disposal of both the prophets and the poets. It is worth noting that Boase concentrates on the feminine personification, the judgement and the sin motifs and deliberately ignores the restoration motif that we know pervades most of the prophetic literature. For example, although Boase deals with Jeremiah in detail, she fails to take account that right at the outset of Jeremiah (1:1), there is both promise of judgement and restoration through the use of ‘pluck up and tear down’ ‘to build and to plant’ (Birch, Brueggemann, Freithem & Petersen, 1999: 350). Therefore, Birch, Brueggemann, Freithem & Petersen (1999:350) are justified when they say,

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<sup>29</sup> Mandolfo (2007:2) asserts that “the prophetic marriage metaphor figures the people Israel as woman, God’s wife, and even more specifically, an adulterous wife”.

One of the most remarkable features of the faith of the Old Testament is that the exile, the experience of historical disruption, displacement, and failure, produced not despair but hope. That is, the texts generated in the exile (which became part of the Old Testament) are characteristically assertions of new historical possibilities that are rooted in Yahweh's own good intention. These texts take the reality of exile, its defeat and dislocation, with great seriousness. They do not however accept that reality as the final outcome of Israel's historical destiny.

Another good example is the book of Habakkuk, which seem to speak directly about the fall of Jerusalem. The prophet in 3:2 says, "LORD I have heard of your fame, I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy"<sup>30</sup>. The deeds of the Lord are clearly then manifested in Lamentations in the form of judgement for both Judah and the other nations used as instruments in the judgement of Judah. This is where the wrath of God is manifested. As in Habakkuk after the judgement the prophet pleads for mercy, just as in Lamentations 5:20-21<sup>31</sup> there is plea for restoration.

The idea of restoration that features in 1:16 and 5:21<sup>32</sup> centres on the word **שוב**. This is echoed clearly in Jeremiah 31:18. The difference is that, in Jeremiah it is in singular, referring to Ephraim, while in Lamentations, it is used in plural, referring to the community of Judah. This would suggest that, in as much as the book of Lamentations is involved in a dialogue with the prophetic literature on personification, sin and judgement, as Boase (2006) suggests, it is also in dialogue with these various traditions in terms of hope of restoration. Parry (2010:160-168) also agrees on the dialogue of hope and provides Hosea 14:1<sup>33</sup>, Jeremiah 30-33 and Isaiah 40-55 as additional texts of hope and restoration that should gird the reading of Lamentations.

From the analysis above we have clearly shown that there was a serious reflective dialogue between the prophetic tradition and the book of Lamentations. This dialogue involves questioning, affirming and contesting established traditions. Out of such a dialogue, emerges a genuine and lasting hope. The dialogue is not a hopeless enterprise but a hopeful one that ends in acknowledging that God is the suzerain, still reigning, faithful, loving and compassionate. It is

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<sup>30</sup> NIV.

<sup>31</sup> Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim & Petersen (1999:347) state that this final poem ends with a vigorous doxological affirmation (5:19) and an expectant petition (5:21).

<sup>32</sup> The Hebrew word **שוב** is repeated twice in this verse. It is phrased the same way in Psalm 80:4, 8 and 20.

<sup>33</sup> The word **שוב** is repeatedly used. At first it is used with the idea of repentance but as the following verses reveal, sin has been the cause of the alienation between God and Israel and therefore there is an appeal for forgiveness and reception in peace (**שלום**)



only when such dialogue is allowed to flourish that meaningful answers are offered and lasting healing and hope are fostered in contexts of acute suffering.

### **5.2.3 The Zionist Tradition.**

Besides the Deuteronomistic and Prophetic traditions, the book of Lamentations is engaged in a dialogue with the Zionist tradition. Roberts (1976:985) describes the Zionist tradition as a complex of motifs used to glorify Zion/Jerusalem as Yahweh's royal city, God's earthly abode from whence he exercises his world-wide rule. Roberts elaborates (2009:987) that there are three main points that characterise this tradition: First, the Sovereign rule of Yahweh over the whole world and its inhabitants; second, Yahweh's election of the Davidic dynasty to be his earthly representative; third, Yahweh's election of Zion as his earthly dwelling place. Levenson (1992:1099), on the other hand, defines the Zionist tradition as evoking,

a whole range of concepts having to do with the kingship, might, justice, and faithfulness of Yahweh and the security and beatitude of those privileged to lodge in his sacred mountain in humility and faith and to witness his (re)enthronement upon it.

He goes on to give the major points of the tradition as enthronement after victory, the election of Zion and David, and the vision of peace (Levenson, 1992:1099-1101).

Tying all this together, one can say, when we talk about the Zionist tradition, we are talking about God's sovereign rule, his election of Zion and David, his place of abode and his plans for everything associated with his name.

In terms of scripture, Levenson (1992:1099) points out that the Psalms and Isaiah form the bulk of the Zionist tradition. In the book of Psalms the tradition features in Psalms 2, 46, 48, 65, 76, 84, 87, 95-99, 110, 122, 125, 128 and 132. In these Psalms, the universal rule of God is affirmed. With a special focus on Psalm 2, Roberts (2009:987) explains that God is seen as the 'Most High' and 'great King' evoking the Suzerain – Vassal notions. Anyone who dared to oppose God and David's rule would suffer severe consequences. In some of these Zionist Psalms, the centrality of Zion, Jerusalem and the temple to the cult are explicitly stated.

In the book of Isaiah Levenson (1992:1099) picks chapters 8, 17, 24, 25, 26, 30, 33, 37, 60-62 and 65 as the major sections that show the sovereign rule of God. God is shown as victorious in all the battles he engages. Since the assumption that God had chosen Zion/Jerusalem, in particular the temple, as his residence was prevalent, consequently there arose an ideology of the



inviolability of Zion. Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman (1998:980) trace the historical development of this ideology stating that,

In Isaiah's day, at the time of the eighth-century B.C. Assyrian crisis, the city was left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons (Is 1:8), totally surrounded but not captured. This led to the false ideology of the inviolability of Zion.

In some extreme instances this ideology enveloped the people to such an extent that they committed all kinds of sins and still proclaimed they were secure because of the location and their relationship with the house of God according to Jeremiah 7:4 and 10. So, when the poet in Lamentations 2:14 talks about the false and misleading prophecies, he might be referring to this false security which might be coming from the Zionist tradition.

In the book of Lamentations, the Zionist tradition is clearly attested in Lamentations 3 and 5. Although the specific term **צִיּוֹן** is not mentioned in the entire of Chapter 3, the notion of the Zionist tradition is expressed variably. First there is the use of 'city' in 3:51 which contextually refers to Jerusalem as an alternate term for Zion. There are also a number of terms that speak to God's character specifically from Chapter 3:22-39<sup>34</sup>. These include his loving kindness (22, 32), his compassion (22, 32), his great faithfulness (23), his goodness (25), his salvation (26), his judgement (28), his restoration (31), his sensitivity (33), his justice<sup>35</sup> (34-36, 39) and his sovereignty (37-38)<sup>36</sup>. The recognition of his kingship that is eternal also forms the background of 5:19, his restoration<sup>37</sup> and forgiveness serving as a conclusion to the laments.

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<sup>34</sup> Some scholars see the Zionist tradition as stretching from as 3:22-33, and then assign 3:34-39 to the Wisdom tradition.

<sup>35</sup> A point of interest is the use of the two Hebrew words **צַדִּיק** (1:18) and **נוֹשֵׁט** (3:35) normally translated as righteous and justice respectively. Levenson (1992:1099) who does an analysis of these two words in Psalm 137 from a context of the Zionist tradition concludes that **צַדִּיק** and **נוֹשֵׁט** are to be understood with the joy and exultation of Zion from a background of enthronement of a king. A decree would be normally issued that would set free and repatriate prisoners, cancel debts. Preuss also notes that in the context of the Psalms the righteousness of Yahweh is associated with the cult in his salvific acts for the individual and the community. He concludes that "according to the witness of the Psalms, the righteousness of Yahweh provides the worshipper both confidence and hope (Ps. 4:2)" (Preuss, 1995:175) If that is the case, the great anticipation fostered by the use of these words is at the background of the book of Lamentations. If God is righteous and just there is therefore great expectation and hope even though in the meantime they are mourning. Crucially in line with our research question, specifically in this chapter, that seeks the theological significance of the *hesed* and the *rahamim* of God is the affirmation made by Preuss (1995:175) that "if Yahweh is called righteous ... then this is interpreted further to mean that he is gracious and merciful, as well as one who provides succor"

<sup>36</sup> The term **עֲלֵינוּ**, being an example, showing that God is above everything and everyone.

<sup>37</sup> In 1:16 the poet had complained that there is no one to restore my spirit. However in 5:21 the poet is confident that God is the only one who can restore.

Our analysis of the Zionist tradition will commence with the enthronement concept. Von Rad (1975:363) states that the whole concept of enthronement, if studied from the psalmodic position, refers to those poems whose “main subject is the manifestation of Yahweh as king, and their most striking characteristic is the cultic shout ‘Jahweh has become king’ (מֶלֶךְ יְהוָה)”. In the same vein, Roberts (2009:987) provides other titles such as the most high (עֲלִיּוֹן<sup>38</sup>), the great king (מֶלֶךְ גָּדֹל<sup>39</sup>), and king of kings (מֶלֶךְ רַב<sup>40</sup>) that suggest a link to the suzerain concept. The suzerain concept would involve both human beings and divine. Thus, Yahweh as an extension could be viewed as an imperial deity who orders and seeks justice from vassal deities. Roberts (2009:987) specifically picks Psalm 82 as justifying this imperial ideology for Israel and concludes that, despite the imperialistic thrust brought by Psalm 82, “one should not discount the importance of the characterization of Yahweh as ‘lover of justice’ (Psalm 99:4) whose throne is founded on righteousness and justice (Psalm 89:14), who judges the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity (Psalm 98:9)”. Von Rad (1975:363) assumes that the enthronement was a festival that, “celebrated in dramatic form Yahweh’s rule over the world, and that it was a festival when joy was at its height”. Levenson (1992:1099) weighs in and point out that one of the key points of this theology is God’s beneficence (צַדִּיק) associated with joy and exultation of Zion and its country side towns. “Given the connection of Zion with enthronement, it is not surprising that joy, in turn, should be a prominent feature of the Zion tradition and that the mount itself could be termed joy of all the earth” (Levenson, 1992:1099).

We now turn our attention to the other component of the Zionist tradition which is the election of the Davidic dynasty. Passages that speak to the election of David include 2 Samuel 7:11-16<sup>41</sup>. Vannoy (2011:471) notes that this covenant with David was unconditional. Roberts (2009:987) adds that, “this covenant apparently reassured David that his dynastic line was secure, that one of his descendants would always sit on the Judean throne, even though God was free to punish or even remove particular Davidic kings if they rebelled against him”. So the punishment and

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<sup>38</sup> Lamentations 3:35, 38. Psalm 47:3

<sup>39</sup> Psalm 47:2

<sup>40</sup> Psalm 48:2

<sup>41</sup> In fact if one reads from 7:8-16 three significant things are promised to David. First it is the name that will be great, which evokes the idea of King of Kings intimated by Roberts in the titles Great King (מֶלֶךְ גָּדֹל), King of king (מֶלֶךְ רַב), secondly it is the land, peace and prosperity (10-11b) and lastly it is the dynasty (11b-16).

removal of particular kings would not temper with the eternity of the covenant. Roberts (2009:987) also brings out the idea that the titles given to David indicate some elevated status. He is sometimes called **עליון** (Psalm 89:27), a title normally reserved for God in terms of executing justice. He is also called God's son (Psalm 2) who is in charge of all the nations and all that is within the earth. Roberts (2009:987) therefore concludes that,

the elevation of the Davidic king was not just as privileged status; it was first and foremost to a task. The Davidic king shared in Yahweh's work of establishing stability and justice ... just as God brought stability and order to the world by his conquest of the primeval chaos of the sea and river (Ps 24:2), so David in the exercise of his rule shares in Yahweh's ongoing victory over chaos and disorder".

There are certainly a number of passages that show that God brought a chaotic world to order. These include Psalm 46, 48<sup>42</sup>, 65. Levenson (1992:1100) is of the view that the calming down of the raging waters and chaotic scenes signify his power to establish order and security to those who trust in God alone. Harmonizing Levenson (1992) and Roberts' (2009) views, one can say that stability, order, security, peace and justice were all realized in God's rule and were also expected in the Davidic rule. So Roberts (2009:987) is justified then to take the Zionist theology's ideal of a king as the basis that gave boldness to the prophets to demand justice from the kings.

The last component of the Zionist tradition is the election of Zion or Jerusalem as God's city. The choosing of a city for the gods is in line with the Ancient Near East concept that the gods needed a place where they live, rest, are served by their people, and ensure that their people have security, happiness and prosperity (Robertson, 1992:375). Robertson (1992: 375-376) concludes that, since the temple was not only the deity's place of abode but also his embodiment, all the ceremonial and ritual performance gave the community their only hope if not assurance, for its continued safety and prosperity. In the same vein, Roberts (2009:988) outlines three implications for the city with the residence of God in Jerusalem. First, it is secure and provided by God. Secondly, the inhabitants must be righteous since they live with God. This second implication is derived from the notion that God is a holy God and cannot tolerate wrong and, therefore, those who stay close to him should live according to the pattern of the deity. Lastly, all nations must go and pay homage and tribute to the patron deity and have their disputes

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<sup>42</sup> Hunter (1996:77) sees the Zionpsalms (e.g. Psalm 48:3 and Psalm 50:2) in Lamentations 2:15c.

settled. Roberts (2009:988) concludes that such imperial ideology became the ideal and was ignition of hope in the future. This ideology was also instrumental in the formation of an envisioned future kingdom of God, the Messiah and the heavenly Jerusalem.

We now move to relate this analysis to the book of Lamentations. That the book of Lamentations is involved in a dialogue with the Zionist tradition has been pointed out by a number of scholars. The only pitfall is that some scholars<sup>43</sup> doubt the degree of influence exerted by the other traditions. Thus, they have limited their discussion of Lamentations to the Zionist and the Deuteronomistic traditions, barely mentioning the prophetic and the Wisdom traditions. From the Zionist tradition we have noted that Yahweh is pictured as one who is Sovereign, loving, compassionate and just. However, as the dialogue takes place, Hunter (1996:82) points out that this understanding of the Zionist tradition was facing its greatest test since the nation was suffering too much. In other words, what the nation was experiencing was contrary to the being of God that they had learned from the Psalms. Secondly, Hunter points out that, God had been portrayed from the Zionist tradition as the one who had power over the forces of chaos, but again this ideology is put to test in the book of Lamentations, since Jerusalem (the city of God) has been invaded, the temple (the dwelling place of his name) has been profaned and the Davidic king (God's representative king on earth) has been killed. So the dialogue that is happening in the book of Lamentations will certainly produce healing and hope because it is not just affirming the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God but it is putting it to test in reality of the present adversity.

#### **5.2.4 The Wisdom Tradition.**

One more tradition that should be taken into account when reading Lamentations is the wisdom tradition. When we talk about the wisdom tradition we are talking about a tradition that emanates from the books of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon (Murphy, 1992:920). The wisdom literature should be taken into account, especially the book of Job, because both Lamentations and Job are related to lament psalms; both Lamentations and Job focus on the issue of suffering; and both extensively use the content from the prophetic section of Isaiah 40-55 (Crenshaw, 1981:16). Furthermore, a number of scholars<sup>44</sup> posit that Lamentations 3:25-39 which forms part of the focal point of this analysis (3:19-33) is anchored on the wisdom

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<sup>43</sup> Hunter (1996:80-81) points out that Renkema (1983), (1988) and (1998:37) question the extent of Deuteronomistic and prophetic tradition although admitting that the Psalm theology plays a significant role.

<sup>44</sup> E.g. Parry (2010:102), Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:119) and Berlin (2004:92).

tradition. Focusing on 3:25-39 Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:120) suggests that there is a view drawn from the wisdom tradition which “teaches that suffering, like good fortune, comes from God and therefore is to be borne in confidence that God will eventually restore well-being. Implicit in such a view is the rightness of God’s actions; God’s goodness and justice are axiomatic”. Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:120) concludes that this same view is shared by Job<sup>45</sup> and his friends in the book that bears Job’s name.

Furthermore, reminiscent of the Deuteronomistic understanding of judgement for disobedience and prosperity for obedience<sup>46</sup> is the wisdom literature notion that “there is a clear and unequivocal relationship between deed and consequence” (Preuss, 1995:127). Murphy (1992:922) prefers to call it “destiny producing deed”<sup>47</sup>. Job’s friends appeal to this notion in their quest to lead Job to confession. Basically this notion is meant to bring cohesion in society through persuasion to good behaviour. So the sages would teach that what you are is a result of past actions. So, if you are suffering, it is because you were morally wrong in the past. If everything is going on well for you, it is because you have been morally good. In the book of Job the hint of this teaching comes right at the beginning, where Job is portrayed as a blameless, upright and fearer of God. Then the narrative goes on to unveil his possessions in line with the good deeds producing good life motif. In other Wisdom literature (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10) the fear of the Lord is seen as beginning of Wisdom. In Proverbs 8:13 to fear the Lord is equated with shunning evil. In the book of Job, Job refused to bow to this tradition. He insisted that he was not suffering because he had sinned; on the contrary he had kept God’s commandments (Job 23:12). This argument is supported further with the observation that not all those who do evil suffer (Job 21:7-13). However, in the book of Lamentations (1:8, 9, 20; 3:39 and 42), the poets assumed that their present adversity was because of sin although they did not specify the sin<sup>48</sup>. That means, to a certain extent, they appropriated this wisdom teaching to their present suffering.

The other element that suggests some wisdom influence in the book of Lamentations is the issue of order. Murphy (1992:922) argues that, “the sages held that there was a fundamental order in

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<sup>45</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, however, points out that Job and his friends’ perspective on suffering is radically different.

<sup>46</sup> Scholars continue to debate over the difference between the Deuteronomist understanding of retribution and the wisdom tradition of destiny-producing deed. Some have proposed that the Deuteronomistic understanding is anchored on God while the Wisdom literature is secular and there is no intervention of God (Murphy, 1992:923).

<sup>47</sup> Von Rad (1972:199) calls it the act-consequence relationship.

<sup>48</sup> In 4:13 they blamed the prophets. The specific sin is mentioned as the shedding of blood. In 5:7 they think it is because of their forefathers’ sin but do not specify the sin.

the world, discernible by experience, and the teachings were designed to bring about conformity with this order that had been determined by God”. However, when one comes to the book of Lamentations it seems there is complete anarchy. This anarchy is expressed in terms that show the unbridledness of nature. For example, God is pictured as a cloud of anger (2:1), he has burned like flaming fire (2:3) even the **גבר** in 3:54 is sinking in the waters. The anarchy is further shown through the image of the maternal mothers involved in cannibalism in 2:20. So while the sages seem to propose the view that God puts nature under control, the book of Lamentations on the contrary seems to suggest that nature is now uncontrollable because of God. God is behind nature’s going wild and berserk.

The other factor that shows that Lamentations has some dialogue with the wisdom literature is the acceptance and knowledge of limitations. Murphy (1992:923), working with Prov. 21:30 as his base, highlights that the statement therein, “points to the mystery over which the sages had no control: the activity of God”. Of great interest for our argument are the passages from Job 11:7-8 and 36:22-26. In these verses, Zophar and Elihu admit that man has some limitations in his knowledge. In the book of Lamentations the limitation of man is clearly shown in 3:37 where the poet uses a rhetorical question to emphasize the point that everything man does can fail if God does not sanction it. Berlin (2004:95) observes that verses 37-39 show that “God is all powerful and all things derive from him, including suffering<sup>49</sup>. The motif of God as creator is a common way to show God’s power over everything in the world.” Therefore, God is powerful and man is limited.

In the context of the central pericope (i.e. 3:19-33), a few verses need some attention to clearly show the dialogue that is happening with the Wisdom literature. First, the main speaker of the chapter introduces himself as **הגבר** in Lamentations 3:1. Berlin (2004:85) notes that Job calls himself a **גבר** in 3:3. This is the same title that Elihu compares and also gives to Job in 33:29 and 34:7, 9. Second, the figurative language for the divine punishment ‘rod of wrath’ that the **גבר** has seen is also said of Job in 9:34 and again picked up in 21:9 (Dobbs-Allsopp, 2002:111). Westermann (1994:170) argues that there are some features that show a dialogue of

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<sup>49</sup> Von Rad (1972:211) affirms that Job and his friends are agreed that “the suffering which has overwhelmed Job comes from Yahweh and it is saying something”. However, they then differ on the interpretation of what the suffering is saying and what is needed.

Lamentations with Job “in the fact that the accusation against God is transformed into a description of misery and that the sufferer recites this description in the presence of others - finds a parallel in the book of Job, particularly in its chapter 30”. Berlin (2004:85) observes other similarities between Job and the **גִּבּוֹר** such as being hunted by wild animals, being the target of God’s arrows, bitterness, closed access to God and being a recipient of enemy taunts<sup>50</sup>. Further similarities involve Job’s certainty that God does not pervert justice; he is the source of all things (i.e. bad and good) and man should humbly accept everything.

In Berlin’s (2004:85) comparison of Job’s friends and the poet of Lamentations 3, one can suggest that the wisdom tradition of beneficent training<sup>51</sup> crops up, especially, as both the poet of Lamentations<sup>52</sup> and Job’s friends argue that there is hope for those that suffer<sup>53</sup>, that it is good to humbly accept chastisement from God and that God may cause hurt but will also eventually bring restoration<sup>54</sup>. Von Rad (1972:201) suggests the training and eventual turning

presupposes that the life of the man in question was not in order ... the life of the man who accepts correction returns once more to God’s blessing; for if he is in a right relationship with God then every single adversity turns to good”.

However, looking at the two books’ conclusions side by side, we note that in Lamentations the restoration is not spelt explicitly (it is the hope of restoration that comes out clearly at the end of the book), while in the book of Job the restoration is spelt out explicitly<sup>55</sup>. So from this analysis it is clear that there is a reflective dialogue with the wisdom tradition. There is questioning of established traditions and affirmations of these traditions are also highlighted. Out of such a fruitful dialogue one can be sure that healing and hope can be established.

## Summary

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<sup>50</sup> Westermann (1994:170) also notes this in Lamentations 3:14 and Job 30:9.

<sup>51</sup> Von Rad (1972:200) sees this as a suffering that God secretly allows “but in the end clearly, pursuing the task of training men”. In the case of Job, he confess that such testing is good as at the end he will be like gold (Job 23:10)

<sup>52</sup> Lamentations 3:24-33.

<sup>53</sup> Job 13:15

<sup>54</sup> Job 5:17-18

<sup>55</sup> O’Connor (1990) who reads the book of Job as a representation of Israel after the captivity sees a clear restoration after the captivity. This clearly comes out when O’Connor (1990:112) says “the author of the book of Job attempted to make sense of this reality, why had Israel suffered?...However the book proclaims that God never abandoned them in their suffering, that their suffering had the effect of making them closer to their creator, a people of dignity, transformed and vindicated. The restored Job is the restored Israel, the tormented and demeaned community reestablished in its homeland, living in harmony and blessing and forgiveness”.



Throughout this analysis we have argued that the book of Lamentations has a serious reflective dialogue with the Deuteronomistic, Prophetic, Wisdom and Zionist traditions. In the Deuteronomistic tradition, we have shown that God entered into a covenant with Israel. Within the covenant, there were some stipulations that were binding to both parties. Israel was supposed to obey and God was supposed to provide for Israel's security and fertility. Failure by Israel to abide by these stipulations would bring judgement in the form of defeat by the enemy and loss of the land.

Turning to the book of Lamentations, because Israel did not keep the covenant obligations, God opened the gates for the enemy. There was no longer security; on the contrary God turned out an enemy. There were no provisions and the people starved because of hunger. However, there was also the emphasis that God would restore after judgement, especially if they repented.

In the prophetic tradition we saw that there was emphasis on the call for Israel to live by the Covenant stipulations or else judgement was inevitable. The image of the covenant was given in various images including the marriage metaphor. It is also clear from the prophets that although judgement was inevitable, God would never abandon Israel and so there are a number of passages that emphasize restoration which gave hope to the oracles.

In the Zionist tradition we have seen that it expounds the sovereignty of God, the election of the Davidic dynasty and the election of Jerusalem and the temple as God's place of abode. We also noted that the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God forms an enclosure to the Zionist tradition in Lamentation 3:22-32. It is a reflection on the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God that gave hope to Israel. The Zionist tradition extends to Lamentations 5 where the poet recognises that God is still ruling, thus emphasizing his sovereignty. As such, he is the suzerain, the king, who is able to reverse the situation. God has not been exiled or defeated when the fall happened. Instead he is in control and has allowed this to happen. So the poet concludes by a hopeful appeal to God for restoration.

In the Wisdom tradition we observed that it controls much of the central pericope of Lamentations. In that central pericope, the **נַבִּי** takes up a didactic role. His main teaching is that God's character remains the same despite the suffering that the people are undergoing. A number of terms expressing the anguish and God's character are similar to those used in the book of Job. The teaching from the sages that suffering is good for it is a form of training also



pervades Lamentations 3. The deeds-consequence schema from the sages combine with Deuteronomistic teaching of retribution making the book of Lamentations complex in form.

Therefore, from the analysis of the Deuteronomistic, the Prophetic, the Zionist and the Wisdom traditions, we propose that there is a serious reflective dialogue with the book of Lamentations. This dialogue, reminiscent of the dialogue of Job with his friends and God, produces a fusion of traditions. The fusion does not necessarily produce ambiguity. This is because ambiguity might mean that the text is saying everything and can be activated from any angle as suggested by Thomas (2013). The problem with ambiguity is that a text that says everything is a text that says nothing. Yet, from both the structure and content of the book of Lamentations, Lamentations 3 forms the pillar. In it the **גַּבֵּר**, who presumably is a representative of everyone, takes the stand to teach that, despite the catastrophe, God's character does not change. His *hesed* and *rahamim* are permanent and constant. In the same manner as the **גַּבֵּר**, the community confesses that God is seated on his throne in Lamentations 5. So the book as a whole is in a reflective dialogue with various traditions reminiscent of the dialogue of Job. In the fusion of the traditions that then takes place, God's sovereignty, justice and love emerge as the outstanding pillars. So the theodicy of God emerges strong in the book of Lamentations. That means, we admit there is catastrophe, lament and protest as Linafelt (2000) suggests, but we also see the issue of theodicy taking a prominent stand from both the content and structure of the book as a whole. Yes, we agree that there are two contending polemics, the antitheodic and theodic as Dobbs-Allsopp (2002) notes, but in the fusion that takes place God's character takes a prominent position in both the middle and the concluding poems. Although there is suffering, anguish and exile, God's *hesed* and *rahamim* remain constant. God is still in control, he is still the king for eternity and therefore there is hope that he will respond and bring lasting healing. So there is more reason to present the laments to him.

### **5.3 A Theology of Hope or Doom?**

Looking at the theology of Lamentations, scholars continue to argue as to whether this book has hope or there is no hope (doom). However, looking at all the laments holistically and in the perspective of Old Testament theology we propose that the book has hope. First, we propose that its historical and contemporary usage within the Jews and Christians in association with suffering and catastrophe is one indicator that the book gives hope to those who read it. Second,

from a literary analysis of the book, one can argue that the book itself is given as a form of prayer. There are a number of phrases that show the prayerful tone of the book of Lamentations. For instance, in the first lament, 1:9; 1:11; 1:20 there is the imperative **ראה** followed by **יהוה**. All these verses have rightly been captured as a vocative by the Septuagint and subsequent translations (such as the NIV and the King James). Thus, the NIV and the King James translates it as ‘Look, LORD’ or ‘Look Oh LORD’ and ‘See, Oh LORD’ respectively’. This is a clear indication that this is a prayer to God. So if the first lament is cast in a form of prayer, it then finds some analogy with the last lament that is also cast in a prayer form. The only difference is that, in the last lament the prayer is explicit, since the vocative is placed right at the beginning, while in the first lament the prayer is not explicit, since the vocatives are within the lament rather than at the beginning.

The second indicator of hope is the use of imprecations. The first, the third and the fourth laments all end with imprecations. Even Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:138) who doubts that hope is one of the major aspects of the book of Lamentations agrees that 4:22 is cast in the form of imprecations alongside 1:21-22 and 3:59-66. Taking a special focus on 4:22 as the starting point, it is evident that Lamentations 4:21-22 has a double focus. It uses the irony that Edom should rejoice but ultimately points to Edom’s forthcoming judgment while at the same time disclosing the deliverance of Zion. Such is the nature of imprecations; on the one hand, there will be judgment on the enemies and, on the other there will be deliverance for God’s people<sup>56</sup>.

Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:138) notes that a number of scholars are agreed that, “4:22 is frequently understood as pointing toward Jerusalem’s ultimate restoration. Commentators agree that the couplet provides one of the more prominent gestures of hope in Lamentations”. Even Provan (1991:22), who is a strong critic of adherents of hope in the book of Lamentations<sup>57</sup>, is quick to admit that of all chapters, “chapter 4 ends with a clear note of hope”. Having admitted to Lamentations’ echoes of hope in the form of imprecations, scholars, such as Provan, fail to align the imprecations together (i.e. 1:20-22, 3:59-66 and 4:22). Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:138) points out that there resonate some declarative forces behind the imprecations thereby reinforcing a strong

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<sup>56</sup> Although Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:29) is a strong advocate of antitheodicy of Lamentations, he admits that “the periodic calls for vengeance (1:21-22; 3:64-66; 4:21-22), though ugly, manifest a sure confidence in God’s future vitality”.

<sup>57</sup> Provan (1991:22) castigates Albrektson and Gottwald for their stress on the hopeful nature of Lamentations.

sense of closure. In addition, Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:138) connects well Lamentations 4:22 to Lamentations 1 and the Mesopotamian city laments when he says that,

the coincidence of the Hebrew verb *tam* meaning to be ‘complete, finished’ appearing at the head of the final (*taw*) stanza in the poem cannot be accidental ... Moreover 4:22a forms the mirror image of 1:3a, again underscoring the strong sense of closure. In the latter, personified Judah is portrayed as going into ‘exile’ (*galeta*) amid much ‘suffering’ (*meoni*) while in the former personified Zion’s (*bat-siyyon*) ‘punishment’ (*awonek*) is declared complete and her ‘exile’ (*lehaglotek*) to be discontinued. Finally, there is a strikingly similar interjection in several of the Mesopotamian city laments (‘enough! Have mercy!’), which signals the end of destruction and the onset of the restoration.

However, after such an insightful analysis, Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:138) retreats into a hopeless ending failing to take into account that Lamentations 5, although it is a communal lament, it is also offered in a prayerful tone with a conclusion that recognises that God is still ruling. When an analysis of the beginning and the ending of Lamentations are done, one is amazed by the common thread of the address of God in the form of prayer as seen with the vocative use as stated above. So Grant (2007:10) is right when he says, “the bare fact of a cry to God is indicative of hope that prayer will be answered by the One who is able to do stuff”. Thus, the mere fact of prayer and presentations before God means there is hope that the recipient of the prayers is able to respond and act accordingly. Therefore, although Lamentations 2 and 5 do not end with imprecations, they express their hope through the prayerful tone in the form of vocatives. Ellison (1986:698) is conscious of this fact when he says, “the laments are shot through with prayer; and prayer leads to hope in a situation in which hope appears meaningless” In addition to the prayerful tone Lamentations 1, 3 and 4 express their hope through the imprecations that signal the judgement of Judah’s enemies and restoration of Judah<sup>58</sup>. That means, by a careful study of all the endings of the laments, one can confidently conclude that all the laments end on a hopeful note. Sometimes this hopeful note is explicit, as in the case of Lamentations 4 and 5, whereas in other cases it is implicit, as in Lamentation 1, 2 and 3.

The other binding feature between the first lament with the last lament is the attribute of God. In the first lament God is said to be righteous (1:18) and Zion/Judah is sinful (1:5, 8, 9, 14, 22), while in the last lament God is said to be sovereign and eternal (5:19). These attributes of God are given extensive treatment in the central chapter of the book (3:19-33). These attributes foster

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<sup>58</sup> This is the argument that we have maintained throughout this analysis that the judgement of Judah’s enemies signal the deliverance of God’s people.

the notion that the prayer is being offered to a righteous, just, loving, compassionate, eternal and sovereign God. If that is the case, there is no way we can assume that it is a hopeless prayer but, rather, it is an affirmation that, from the beginning, the middle and up to the end of the poems, echoes of hope are pervasive.

#### **5.4 *Hesed* and *Rahamim* in the context of Suffering**

Having established the essence of hope in the book of Lamentations, we now move to the theological significance of the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God in the context of suffering. In line with the argument of this analysis, we assume that these are the resources<sup>59</sup> that gave birth to hope in the book of Lamentations. Brueggemann (1997:221) notes that a number of scholars<sup>60</sup> begin the investigation of the significance of the *hesed* of God by looking at Exodus 34:6-7. He also suggests that this pericope served as the focal point in a pastoral-theological crisis. Tying Lamentations 3:21-24 to Exodus 34:6-7 Brueggemann (1997:221-222) affirms that,

the poem moves from hopelessness in v.18 to hope in him in v.24. The move from hopelessness to hope, in a circumstance of utter defeat, comes in the remembering of Yahweh (v. 21)...And what Israel remembers in its moment of despair is centred in three great adjectives of Yahweh derived from the recital of Exodus 34:6-7: steadfast, merciful, faithful ... Israel can recall enough about Yahweh's characteristic fidelity so that Israel's confidence in Yahweh overrides the moment of despair.

Brueggemann (1997:222) goes on to harmonise Lamentations 3 to Isaiah 54:7-8 where the poet appeals to Yahweh's compassion as a base for life beyond abandonment. Brueggemann (1997:222) asserts, "the climactic promise made to Israel in the midst of the chaos revolves precisely around Yahweh's steadfast love and compassion, which issue a 'covenant of peace'".

However, Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:118) is of the view that the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God should be grounded within the Davidic grant (2 Samuel. 7:15; 1 Kings 8:23; Psalm 89:2, 14, 24-27; Isaiah 55:3). Dobbs-Allsopp (2002:119) states,

among the differences between the Davidic and Mosaic covenants, one stands out: the Davidic covenant is promissory in nature, an oath undertaken by God obligating God to Judah irrespective of the latter's behaviour ... It is this overt promissory aspect of the Davidic covenant that renders the man's hope more than a simple affirmation of confidence in God. By specifically grounding hope in the promises made to David, the man lays claim to those promises and places the onus on God to live up to God's covenantal obligations and to remedy the present situation of hurt.

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<sup>59</sup> Hillers (1992:128) observes this when he says the one cause for hope is the mercy of Yahweh.

<sup>60</sup> For example House (2004:414).

In as much as we appreciate the unconditionality of the Davidic covenant in the analysis of *hesed* above, we clearly noted that Zobel<sup>61</sup> (1986:63) discards the idea of obligation<sup>62</sup> since *hesed* is also practised in families. The idea of understanding *hesed* with obligation was promoted by Glueck (1967) who based his argument on the covenants such as the Hittite. He then compared these covenants to the covenant made by God with stipulations such as the Ten Commandments. So finally he defined *hesed* not as mercy but as loyalty in reference to the covenant obligations. However, subsequent scholars such as Zobel (1986:43-64), Harris (1980:698-700) and Sakenfeld (2008:495-496) have observed that *hesed* goes beyond the borders of obligation to voluntary and sacrificial deeds. Wan (2009:46) weighs in well that grace, mercy, steadfast love and faithfulness, “are concrete expressions of God’s covenantal election through which Israel becomes a people”. Thus, God elects out of love and he maintains that covenant of love out of his own volition.

Hillers (1992:128) adds, “this is not a passing phase in God, but an enduring part of his nature”. In an endeavour to differentiate the *hesed* of God and his anger, which subsequently results in judgement, Hillers (1992:129) says, “Not God’s love, but his anger is a passing phase”. Thus, we conclude with Wright (2015:116) observation that,

we should not equate God’s love and God’s anger, as if they were both eternally equivalent attributes of the deity. God’s anger against evil is a terrible reality. It is the negative outworking of God’s goodness in rejecting and repelling all that is contrary to his nature and will, but it is not eternally definitive of his character. God is love. God is not anger. On the contrary, God is slow to anger but abounding in love. The imbalance is a thousand to one ... That indeed is something that makes YHWH incomparable among other acclaimed deities.

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<sup>61</sup> Zobel (1986:63) states that “it is wrong to try to define as a legal obligation this kindness of Yahweh towards Israel that is expressed by *hesed* and the resulting mutual fellowship of the Israelites, interpreting it within the general framework of the *berit*. When *berit* appears in the semantic field of *hesed*, it takes second place after *hesed* and is used to express the permanence and constancy of Yahweh’s kindness, its inviolability and trustworthiness”

<sup>62</sup> Berlin (2004:93) also supports the notion of obligation in the meaning of *hesed*.

## 5.5 Identity and Dignity Reconstruction

It is evident from the laments that Judah's defeat brought with it exile. As they were exiled, besides issues of shame<sup>63</sup> that came with the defeat, there were issues of identity, specifically for the people who went to Babylon and Egypt. Römer (2007:110) hints to this when he says,

for Judaism, the exile remained a decisive issue during the following centuries, and, in a sense at least, until today. The exile became part of the construction of Jewish identity. It is clear that the events of 597 and 587 constituted a major crisis for the Judean elite, and especially for the Deuteronomistic school. This crisis led the Deuteronomists, who had experienced the fall of the Judean monarchy, to modify significantly their views of the origins of Israel and the Judean monarchy and to re-edit entirely the previous literary works of their predecessors from a Neo-Assyrian time.

Since the loss of identity and dignity are common in most contexts of suffering, it is crucial to take some moment to discuss them here. This is in line with aims and objectives of this research that seeks an analogous reading in other contexts of suffering beyond the historical context of Lamentations. Thus, identity and dignity reconstructions are major issues in an aftermath of defeat and exile.

Gerstenberger (2001:476) argues that,

taking into account the broader perspectives of life under foreign rule, we certainly cannot accuse the Yahweh congregation of lethargy, inactivity, fatalism, or like attitudes. On the contrary, the remnants of the populace of Judah, defeated by the Babylonians, dispersed and decapitated in terms of national independence, struggled to find a new identity within the debris of traditional values. The people had lost every sign that had once provided assurance and confidence in God. They had experienced a series of shaking of the foundations, but they proved to be surprisingly creative under extreme pressures in building up new concepts and structures for their lives as Yahweh followers. To celebrate observance of lamenting is one decisive action in the effort to consolidate the community and win back another identity in lieu of the lost one.

Mandolfo (2007:4) commenting on the biblical production and reception opines that, the bible is not only a religious document but it is a “political text written, collected, and redacted by male colonial elites in their attempts to rewrite and reconcile with history and to reconceptualise both individual and collective identities under the shadow of the empires”. Mandolfo (2007:15) continues to highlight that,

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<sup>63</sup> Davies (2008:813) captures this when he states that “even more distressing than the physical devastation at the hands of the enemies is the sense of shame and disgrace that this engenders as Jerusalem's conquerors gloat over the city's fate”.

the Bible as a whole, as well as its constituent parts, fits the definition of a master narrative. It lays out, in mythic proportions, a schema for human and human-divine interaction. It has for millennia determined the cultural contours of entire societies and moulded the identities of those who inhabit those societies. It determines social boundaries, empowering those on the inside of those boundaries and proscribing the agency of those on the outside.

Mandolfo's observation becomes critical when we come to the book of Lamentations that is written when the recipients are under foreign domination. They recall how they were led into exile, lost their independence, dignity and identity. So the decision to write these laments recalling everything that happened and subsequently turning these laments into a liturgy where they are recited is surely a process of redefining themselves as a people and reclaiming their identity and dignity. That means the book of Lamentations can be viewed as a means of protest against the colonisers, other nations that celebrated the colonization and ultimate protest to God who had sanctioned the colonization. It is also evident that the recitation of these poems was a means of reconstructing their shattered identity, dignity and to deal with the shame suffered through the defeat. Therefore, the construction and memorialization of these poems was not just a hopeless enterprise which was meant to open up old wounds without any alternative means of healing. But, on the contrary, they were conscious efforts by a people who had lived and witnessed suffering at its deepest moment and were trying to make a meaning and instil self-esteem out of it for themselves and the generations that would come later. Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim & Petersen (1999:347) put it right that,

in the reconstruction of paradigms for faith through literary imagination, the first work of the deportees was to express the rage, sadness, grief and deep sense of loss that permeated life. They had lost everything they valued and everything that gave life coherence.

Since Judah was a faith community, we have to also realise that Yahweh was their provider in terms of warfare and sustenance. So in a way their identity construction is still geared towards Yahwism; no wonder the emphasis on the theodicy (Yahweh is good, righteous, faithful, compassionate, loving and sovereign). However, there is also a sense of protest that the nations that have been used as an instrument of judgement have overdone it and, therefore, they deserve punishment from Yahweh. As the punishment is meted out to the enemies of Judah, God is proven just and there is anticipation of restoration which would effectively deal with their shame and regain their dignity. Thus, although the recitation of the poems did bring some healing and

restoration of dignity, the process of moving from shame to pride would be completely realised in the anticipated restoration.

## 5.6 Conclusion

So in conclusion, we maintain alongside a number of scholars that, theologically, the book of Lamentations is primarily a book about suffering just as the book of Job. Whereas the book of Job is concerned with suffering on an individual basis, the book of Lamentations can be activated from both an individual and communal suffering as posited in the title of this research. In the quest to find answers to this suffering, the book of Lamentations goes into a dialogue with the various traditions that were foundational in Judah's life. As the reflective dialogue ensues, the poems establish that God is seated on his throne and is still in control. They also realise that God's *hesed* and *rahamim* are constant and permanent. This then becomes a strong base for launching their hopeful petitions. In the presentation of the petitions, there are disciplined protests expressing deep feelings that things should not be as they are, but also seeking a way of reconstructing their shattered identity. As they memorialise these petitions, they are simultaneously dealing with the shame of defeat and building a sense of dignity as a people under foreign domination, both for themselves and for the future generation. This memorialisation, the articulation of the pain suffered and the appeal to God's *hesed* and *rahamim*, therefore, sets in motion a long lasting healing process. Such a reading is crucial in other contexts of suffering such as the Zimbabwean one.



## Chapter Six: Synthesis

In this chapter, we now move to synthesise this analysis. Thus, the first major task is to summarise the entire historical context of the suffering of Judah. Then we will analyse the rhetorical functions (i.e. the contemporary usage of the book of Lamentations picking up from the historical use of the book that we investigated in chapter four above). After the exploration of the rhetorical functions, we will then explain and propose an analogous reading of the text that avoids establishing haphazard direct relationships between the historical context and the contemporary context but draws some useful parallels. This analogous reading recognises the differences between the two contexts, but also the similarities. Thus, through the analogous reading, we will be able to appreciate the discontinuities and continuities and consequently highlight the contribution of this analysis in the Zimbabwean context responsibly. The exploration of the discontinuities and continuities should be done with utmost care, since we are dealing with two different contexts<sup>1</sup>.

Having done an analysis of the historical context, the rhetorical functions, and the proposed analogous reading, it will be a good opportunity to summarise the contemporary context where the analogous reading will be applied. Then the two contexts will be brought into dialogue with each other, thus forming a fusion of horizons and drawing some useful parallels. This will then lead to our conclusion and suggestions for further research.

### 6.1 Summary of the Historical context

The analysis of the Judean context centred on three stages. First we focused on the literary analysis in which we sought to unveil the literary devices used to express the anguish and suffering. We discovered that the author uses various literary devices to underscore the gravity and completeness of the suffering. These devices include acrostics, **איכה** formulas, *qinah* metre, parallelism, repetition, imagery, figurative speech and modulating of voices. These literary devices signal continuity and discontinuity in the absence of more narrativizing devices. They also create an *atemporal* nature of the text, which is helpful in terms of portability into other contexts of suffering. These devices have also directed us to Lamentations 3 as the point of focus. This then led us to an in-depth analysis of Lamentations 3.

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<sup>1</sup> Barton (1998:15) speaking about ancient Israel ethics and contemporary ethics, cautions that ethics today proceeds from the general to the specific, whereas in ancient Israel, it was from the specific to the general.

In the in-depth analysis of Lamentations 3, we found out that the **גבר** takes an important role as a spokesperson for the community. The strong gendered aspect of the **גבר** *vis à vis* the feminine concentration of Lamentations 1 and 2 was enough evidence to call for an inclusive rhetoric in the book of Lamentations. The **גבר**'s strong ambition, courage and character in the face of acute suffering are outstanding. His resolve to cry continuously before God was enough evidence that there is hope in God. The **גבר** utilises four words derived from different roots (such as **יחל**, **תוחלת**, **קוה** and **תקוה**) to express this solid hope in God. Although the concept of hope is centrally located in Lamentations 3, its rays permeate all the other chapters in Lamentations. It is subtly expressed in various forms (i.e. vocative, imprecatory and prayerful tone). In the central location the resolve to hope in God is motivated by a reflection on God's previous acts of *hesed* and *rahamim*. Although the laments certainly point to continuous pleading with God in the form of tears, we also noted that there is space created for silence, which consequently leads to disciplined protests<sup>2</sup>. This then led us to focus on the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God, which we found to be the resources that gave hope to the **גבר**.

The analysis of the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God, which are used in an inclusion in Lamentations 3, revealed that these words are mostly used in the wisdom literature. They have both a secular and a religious usage. This analysis revealed that the concept of *hesed* is active, social and enduring. The concept of *hesed* is reciprocal in human relationship. However, in the case where it involves the deity, it is only God who gives *hesed*, and man is the recipient. The reciprocity of *hesed* and *rahamim* is an important component in contexts of suffering as it offers social cohesion in society. It also offers solace to victims of violence and loss. Thus, it offers hope retrospectively as one reflects on God's past deeds of benevolence and, prospectively, on man's envisaged reciprocal acts of kindness to one another<sup>3</sup>. These two resources of hope are used extensively in association with the righteousness (**צדק**) and justice (**משפט**) of God, thereby invoking the issue of God's orderliness within the cosmic world.

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<sup>2</sup> The notion of disciplined protests came as a result of a balance created by a combination of a call to be silent and a call to cry out.

<sup>3</sup> This, in essence, fulfills the African spirit of *Ubuntu* and the proverbial *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (A human being is a human being because of other human beings or you are because we are) Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele, 2016: 364).

We then did a historical analysis of the book of Lamentations, with the aim of finding the dynamics of its production, reception and usage. The historical analysis revealed that, although the book of Lamentations emerged from the 587 B.C. crisis, it is *ahistorical* and has been subsequently used in other disasters beyond that of its inception. These include the destruction of the second temple in A.D. 70. and the fall of the *Bar Kokhba* rebellion in A.D. 135. The *ahistorical* nature greatly enhances its portability into other contexts of suffering. We also unveiled that, in Jewish and Christian circles, the book of Lamentations has been used liturgically as a source of comfort in times of tragedy. Thus, historically and contemporaneously, the book still continues to find relevance as an expression of protest, as a means of mitigation for future tragedy, and as a means of comfort and closure to the processes of bereavement.

From the historical analysis we moved to the theological analysis, where we revealed that the book of Lamentations is about suffering at the instigation of God. Such suffering consequently leads to a reflective dialogue with existing traditions, such as the Deuteronomistic, the Prophetic, the Zionist and the Wisdom traditions. The book finds itself at a crossroads with all these traditions. The scenario of standing at the crossroads results in the seemingly irreconcilable tension of the book (e.g. protest versus submission, hope versus doom). However, because of the centrality of Lamentations 3, the Wisdom tradition seems to overshadow these other traditions, thereby highlighting the importance of the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God as resources of comfort and hope. These resources become the foundation in the formation of identity and dignity.

## 6.2 Rhetorical Functions

For us to understand well the contemporary functioning of the book of Lamentations, we have to revisit some of the historical uses of the book. It is within these historical functions of the book that we get to understand some of the continuous rhetorical functions as well as the cessations. In chapter four we identified some of the historical functions of the book, such as aiding the bereaved and the acceptance process of the mourner, protest and the pre-emption of future tragedy. Certainly these historical functions find some relevance in contemporary contexts. Parry (2010:222-228) gives some elaboration and expansion on the above, noting the need to create space for silence, time for weeping, articulating the suffering, bearing witness to suffering, comforting the broken, remembering suffering, remembering God's covenant love, humble submission to God, repentance, resistance to suffering and opposition to the perpetrators of

suffering. Further discussion of these rhetorical functions resumes below, where we discuss the continuities and discontinuities in an analogous reading.

### 6.3 An Analogous Reading

Now we have come to the stage of moving over from the analysis to the actualization. This is a critical stage that sometimes creates tension between African scholars and their European counterparts. The European scholars have even gone to the extent of labelling the Africans as unexegetical/uncritical since their focus is mainly on actualization. On the other hand, African scholars battle the necessity of scholarship if it is not going to impact and change society. Although these two polemics have exhibited seemingly irreconcilable positions, it is encouraging to note that some strides have been made towards creating a dialogic platform. For example, de Wit and West (2009) have made some significant steps for the two polemics to find some common ground. But as this research has also proved, the historical critical method alone is not sufficient to address all the important questions needed for a responsible reading. It needs the literary and the theological aspects as well. In turn, the actualization process would be meaningless if it is not built on the historical, literary and theological analysis. This then shows that one methodological approach is insufficient, hence the call in this analysis for a multidimensional approach.

Moving from analysis to actualization can be a daunting task. One scholar who has tried to engage both the historical critical method and the actualization is Gerald West. West (2009:37) suggests that African biblical scholarship has been dominated by the comparative approach. In this comparative approach, life interests take precedence over interpretive interests. Holter (2002:88) further clarifies this when he defines the comparative approach as a methodology that,

facilitates a parallel interpretation of certain Old Testament texts or motifs and supposed African parallels, letting the two illuminate one another ... the Old Testament is approached from a perspective where African comparative material is the major dialogue partner and traditional exegetical methodology is subordinated to this perspective.

In spite of the strides that the comparative approach has made to incorporate the historical critical method, Jonker (forthcoming) maintains that many examples still exist of establishing direct relationship between the worlds constructed in biblical texts and African contexts, without taking into account those worlds within which the texts originated. These readings often do not make this distinction. Jonker (forthcoming) then goes on to suggest a comparative analogous

reading that would recognise the differences and similarities between the biblical world (that is, the world within which the texts originated and were communicated) and the African contexts. He assumes that there are analogies between the communication processes of these texts in ancient times, and those happening on account of the same texts in modern-day contexts.

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2009:54) defines analogy as “something that seems similar between two situations, processes”. This means that the two situations or processes can be compared and contrasted. Purkiser (1975:64) goes into the origin of the word ‘analogy’ and draws out that the word originally came from two Greek words: *ana*, which means ‘according to’, and *logos*, which means ‘proportion’ or ‘ratio’. Purkiser (1975:64) therefore defines analogy as “the relation of similarity or likeness between two objects of thought used as a basis for inferring other resemblances less obvious”. He specifically picks up on Hebrews 12:3 suggesting some resemblance between Christ’s suffering and that of his followers. Thus, there are some similarities but also some differences between the sufferings of Christ and that of his followers.

Barton (2003:47) who uses the term ‘analogous’ several times<sup>4</sup>, although focusing on Old Testament narrative, proposes three models of dealing with Old Testament ethics, that is, obedience to God’s declared will, natural law and imitation of God. Our attention is drawn to natural law, which Barton (2003:48) suggests finds relevance in the Wisdom literature. The interest in natural law and its operation within the wisdom literature is reinforced by the mere fact that the central pericope of this research is heavily influenced by the wisdom literature<sup>5</sup>. Barton (2003:48) defines natural law as “an accommodation of human action to principles seen as inherent in the way things are”. Thus, some ethical norms in their basic category were natural, but along the way they were then theologized (Barton, 2003:50). Besides the natural law, the imitation of God model is also attractive in this research because of the attributes of God (*hesed* and *rahamim*) which should be extended to other fellow beings. Barton (2003:51) explains that, within the model of the imitation of God, although reprehensible according to Genesis 3, “the task of human beings, and especially of the Israelites, is to do as God does: to take God’s

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<sup>4</sup> Barton (2003:34), for example, uses the term in reference to the obligation of the nations to God in comparison to the obligation Israel owes to God. Barton (2003:44) uses the term again in an effort to compare God with mankind’s justice.

<sup>5</sup> Though the central pericope is heavily influenced by and connected to wisdom tradition, we noted that the book of Lamentations as a whole is lyrical literature and falls under the Meggiloth.

character as the pattern of their character and God's deeds as the model of theirs". So in line with the resources of hope offered by this analysis, as God is loving/loyal (*hesed*) so human beings should be; as God is compassionate (*rahamim*) so humankind should be.

According to the definition and explanation above, it is clear that, in the quest for an analogous reading, there are some clear and less clear resemblances. This means that there are several layers where the resemblance can be activated. However, it is not the obvious resemblance that creates problems but the less obvious. This is so because in the less obvious, the differences outweigh that of similarities thereby creating some sort of hierarchy. Jonker (forthcoming) refers to the similarities and differences as the continuities and discontinuities respectively.

### 6.3.1 The Continuities

This research has a special focus on hope in contexts of suffering. Thus, we sought to highlight the suffering of Judah in the sixth century B.C. and beyond. Suffering is a continuous phenomenon, although the subjects, mode and agents may be different. Broadly speaking, suffering can be psychological, emotional and/or physical. Two things deserve special attention in the Judean context: first, it is the creation of space for different voices<sup>6</sup> to express their suffering in various ways; second, it is the creation of space for dialogue with various contentious traditions. Thus, the notion of creating spaces to express suffering and reflective dialogues should be seen as an ongoing exercise in almost all contexts of suffering. In light of the creation of space, Parry (2010:222-223) notes the need to have time for silence as well as time to weep. This, we concluded, creates a notion of disciplined protest.

In addition to the creation of space, the quest for hope is an on-going exercise in most contexts of suffering. However, this hope may be sought through various means. These means define whether the hope is going to last or it is just temporary. In the case of Judah, the hope was firmly anchored in the sovereignty, the *hesed* and *rahamim*, of God.

Furthermore, this analysis has attempted to show clearly that the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God are active, social and permanent. They endure from one generation to another. In terms of continuity, the *hesed* and *rahamim* as resources of hope should be viewed retrospectively and also prospectively. Thus, overall the nation of Judah got its healing from a retrospective

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<sup>6</sup> The unity in diversity notion is expressed variously within the laments. Thus the call for unity in diversity in the expression of laments should be seen as an ongoing exercise.

understanding of God's past deeds and prospectively from each individual's corporate responsibility to discharge the *hesed* and *rahamim* to one another.

In the same vein, we suggest the healing of the nation of Zimbabwe should intrinsically come from a retrospective and prospective reflection on the *hesed* and *rahamim* and their cognates (i.e. righteousness [צדק] and justice [משפט] of God) as perpetual phenomena). Thus, in the same way that the Judeans received, enjoyed and reciprocated the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God, contemporary contexts can do likewise.

Lastly, the issue of protest is an on-going exercise in any society in any age. It is a way of showing disapproval and dissatisfaction. However, the forms of protests may differ from one generation to another and from one context to another. In the case of Judah, it clearly evinces itself through the literature of lament. However, in some contemporary contexts, such as Zimbabwe, these protests are shown through songs and street marches. Closely linked to protest is the concept of memorialization. By making these laments a memorial and liturgy, the nation of Israel was affirming their identity and dignity as a people. Thus, in the contemporary context of Zimbabwe, the identity and dignity affirmations should not be confined to issues of identity cards or birth certificates<sup>7</sup> but should embrace the acceptance of all people without prejudicing them on the basis of racial, tribal or political affiliation. Such a holistic, inclusive<sup>8</sup> and memorialization approach to suffering is the essence of the book of Lamentations. We therefore see such a continuous reading as offering a better opportunity for identity and dignity construction, and ultimately healing and hope in a Zimbabwean context.

### 6.3.2 The Discontinuities

Among many other discontinuities in the historical context of suffering of Judah is the perpetrator of the suffering. As this study has revealed, there are a couple of levels of the agents of the suffering. From a high-level point of view, it is clear that the author of the laments viewed the main agent of the suffering of the Judeans as God. However, from a lower-level point of

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<sup>7</sup> Vice President Mphoko in his speech on the death of Cyril Ndebele seems to suggest that issues of obtaining birth certificates and identity cards for victims of *Gukurahundi* were the main priorities over and against apology and compensation from the perpetrators (Katongomara, 2016:2). In the process he seems to imply that all other sufferings, identity and dignity crises thereafter (i.e. the farm invasions, the operation restore order and the political violence of 2008) should not be put on the spotlight.

<sup>8</sup> The unity in diversity that is exhibited by the laments is something that should be emulated for an analogical reading.



view, it has been revealed from an extra- and inter-textual analysis that the Babylonians were used by God as God's instrument of judgement. Thus, the perpetrators of suffering from this lower-level point of view differ from one context to the other and from one generation to the other. For instance the perpetrators of the 586 B.C. conflict are different from the perpetrators of the A.D 70 suffering. Thus, it would be a gross error to draw from Lamentations a universal view that God is the agent of human suffering everywhere in every generation. Although generally agreed that God is in control of everything, some sections in the Zimbabwean context of suffering would strongly, and rightly so, resist the notion that their suffering was perpetrated by God. They would view their suffering as directly from the government led by President Robert Mugabe.

The other discontinuity emanates from the reason behind the suffering. Although contentious in the book of Lamentations, there is a view from the Deuteronomistic tradition that the suffering of Judah is a result of their sins. It would be tantamount to irresponsibility if one then assumes that all sufferings are as a result of sin.

Another discontinuity is the purpose of suffering. This is also closely related to the reason behind the suffering. The purpose of Judah's suffering in Lamentations was to produce repentance and confession. Although questions may be raised over God's silence in the face of Judah's repentance and confession, the Deuteronomistic tradition in the book seems to suggest that once Judah confessed and repented, God would relent his anger. Again, one cannot propagate a universal notion that all suffering is meant to produce repentance and confession. This comes out clearly in the case of Job, who suffered but had nothing to confess or repent, although his friends thought he had sinned.

The last point for our discussion in line with discontinuity and continuity pertains to the prayers of imprecation that we found in the book of Lamentations. It would be a gross error to read the imprecatory sections as calling for retribution. We need to take heed of the famous phrase '*an eye for an eye will leave the whole nation blind*'. Rather, it is better to read these imprecations along the lines of Parry (2010:234) who suggests that they are a call for justice and liberation.



## 6.4 Contemporary Context of Zimbabwean Suffering

In our introduction to this research (i.e. Chapter One) we particularly identified three post-independent Zimbabwean events<sup>9</sup> that left the people of Zimbabwe hopeless. These are the *Gukurahundi*, *Murambatsvina* and *hondo yeminda/Jambanja*. These events have really shown how a government can be so brutal against its own people and leave them hopeless. One of the ideals of the liberation war, which was freedom,<sup>10</sup> is now a shattered dream.

These events have to be evaluated against the document that the Churches in Zimbabwe collectively produced. The document is entitled “The Zimbabwe We Want” (2006). The document clearly spells out what the Church envisions in a free and democratic Zimbabwe. Of particular interest in this document are various references to the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God (e.g. reference is made to Micah 6:8<sup>11</sup>, Zechariah 7:9-10<sup>12</sup>, Hosea 6:6) in a quest for justice and lasting hope for Zimbabwe. In Micah 6:8 and Hosea 6:6<sup>13</sup> only the *hesed* of the Lord is highlighted, whereas in Zechariah 7:9-10 both *hesed* and *rahamim* take a central role. Thus, the Churches in Zimbabwe realise that, for an ideal Zimbabwe that is characterised by justice and hope to emerge, the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God should play a significant role.

In view of the analogous reading, we find that the Zimbabwean context of suffering is composed of people who do not have a covenant that entails land, a Davidic dynasty and Zion as the place of abode for God. Although the concept of a supreme being may be a shared one (i.e. in Judah the Supreme Being is God, whereas in Zimbabwe the Supreme Being is Mwari/Unkulunkulu), there are also some differences and similarities when we come to his character. According to the Ancient Near Eastern literature we have seen that the gods are supposed to offer protection to their subjects, which implies that they represent the good. However as we come to Lamentations,

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<sup>9</sup> We admit alongside other scholars that the crises in Zimbabwe need “to be understood historically, namely within the context of both colonial and post-colonial structural economic and political developments” (Chiumbu & Musemwa, 2012: xi). We do not, however, believe in the nationalist ideology that the Zimbabwean crises are a result of neo-colonialism. On the contrary, we believe the crises in Zimbabwe are because of the authoritarian rule inherited from the colonial rule characterised by repressive laws and brutality to any dissent (Chiumbu & Musemwa, 2012: xi-xiii).

<sup>10</sup> The Freedom involves voting, “freedom from oppression, freedom from racism, freedom from human indignity and violation, freedom from poverty and hunger” (The Zimbabwe We Want, 2006:5).

<sup>11</sup> The Zimbabwe We Want, 2006:26.

<sup>12</sup> The Zimbabwe We Want, 2006:27.

<sup>13</sup> De Andrado (2016:64) investigates the use of *hesed* in Hosea and maintains that, Hosea did not oppose cultic ritual at the expense of morality. Nor does he uphold ethics at the expense of sacrificial system. Rather, he appeals for an ideal “authentic cult that integrates ritual and ethics, in opposition to false worship that divorces ritual and ethics”.

there is horrific reversal with God turning to be an enemy and killing those whom he is supposed to protect. In essence he now represents the bad. Thus, the Judean poet came to believe that everything good and bad comes from God. Similarly to the Ancient Near Eastern notion of the gods and contrary to the book of Lamentations, in the Zimbabwean context, Mwari/Unkulunkulu is understood more often to represent the good but rarely the bad<sup>14</sup>. He is the creator and above everything. He offers protection to his people<sup>15</sup>. In the same vein, from the perspective of an African traditional belief system, catastrophes such as the *Gukurahundi*, *Murambatsvina* and *hondo yeminda* can also be interpreted as a result of people's sins against the ancestral spirits<sup>16</sup>. In this case, the ancestral spirits were angry and brought disaster instead of protection. Thus, in such times of tragedies there is need then to consult the ancestral spirit and also go and appease the spirit mediums at shrines like Njelele. It is also very common to interpret the tragedies with some spiritual connections. For example, it was common to hear people talk of *Murambatsvina* as a result of sin<sup>17</sup> of commission or omission. Although such connections can be made as people are involved in a serious reflective dialogue as to what went wrong in their quest to get the reasons behind the suffering, they need to be careful not to be dogmatic about it. The reasons remain open, as there are various contending traditions.

We have also seen in the historical analysis that the Judeans might have invoked God as the agent of suffering in order to avoid direct reference to the Babylonians, thereby mitigating potential reprisal from the Babylonians. Certainly this methodology differs from context to context (i.e. during the A.D 70 appropriation of the text of Lamentations, there were direct references to the Romans who were causing the suffering). This dynamic of direct or indirect confrontation with the agents of suffering is worth some exploration, particularly in the context of Zimbabwe where protests have been dealt with in a brutal way. It may be that in certain contexts oppressive regimes need to be confronted directly, whereas in others they should be

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<sup>14</sup> A case in point where Mwari is seen negatively is when he is sometimes seen as the cause behind the fall of both the Changamire dynasty and the Ndebele state. The former fell at the hands of the Ndebele, and the latter at the hands of the white colonial settlers (Beach, 1984:247-248).

<sup>15</sup> No wonder why when tragedy strikes, it is common to hear people crying *Mwari vatisiya tega* (God has left us alone).

<sup>16</sup> The ancestral spirits act as intermediaries between God and human beings. They also possess supernatural powers. They can exercise their powers with or without God's directives.

<sup>17</sup> Some would allege that the demolitions happened because the victims did not tithe to God; while others went further in suggesting that it was because most of the victims were thieves. On the issue of farm invasions, some people assume that the farm invasions happened because of mistreatment of farm workers. As a result of these abuses on the farms the Supreme Being was provoked to anger.

confronted indirectly. However, indirectly or directly the message of protest must be clearly sent by the oppressed to the oppressors in a clear and unequivocal voice and should be understood as such by the oppressors.

Another connection that can be drawn between the two contexts is the suffering of the innocent and vulnerable. In the book of Lamentations 2 and 4, we have the asymmetry that is formed with the maternal mothers and the children. In the normal rules of war<sup>18</sup> there is a need to protect the vulnerable, such as women and children. However, in the book of Lamentations these warfare rules seem to be violated as women are raped<sup>19</sup>, children starve to death and in some cases they are eaten by those that should protect them.

This suffering of innocent, vulnerable people is also evident in the contemporary context of Zimbabwe. In order to do justice to this research, which seeks to offer hope in a context of suffering in Zimbabwe, we will go into some of the details of one specific event (i.e. *Gukurahundi*) to show that we need to face the suffering and measure its dimensions, as proposed by Hillers (1992:4), before we can move to hope. A focus on *Gukurahundi* shows that innocent and vulnerable groups, such as women and children, suffered the most. Matshazi (2007:98) prefers to call it “a systematic elimination of ethnic minorities detestable to the leader”. Meredith (2007:67) concurs and concludes that, right from its inception, the *Gukurahundi* targeted civilian population. Matshazi (2007:75) goes further saying *Gukurahundi* “culminated into the worst genocidal episode, not only in Zimbabwe’s history but that of Southern Africa as a whole”. Within a space of just six weeks, two thousand civilians were dead. Reports from the CCJPZ and LRF reveal that women were tortured, raped<sup>20</sup>, and made to kill their own babies and eat them. The CCJPZ and LRF (1997:120), for example, report that

a four-month-old infant was axed three times, and the mother forced to eat the flesh of her dead child. An eighteen-year-old girl was raped by six soldiers and then killed. An eleven-year-old child had her vagina burnt with plastic and was later shot. Twin infants were buried alive.

The violation of women went as far as inserting objects<sup>21</sup> into their vaginas. For instance, the CCJPZ and LRF (1997:128) reports, that “a woman, her brother and 2 others were removed from

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<sup>18</sup> Barton (2003:27) argues that from a popular morality point of view all nations by nature are under “obligation to observe certain rules of conduct in warfare and eschew atrocities”.

<sup>19</sup> Lamentations 5:11.

<sup>20</sup> For instance 20 to 30 girls were raped by the Fifth Brigade and then ordered to have sex in front of the soldiers with some of the young boys from their school (CCJPZ, 1997:87).

their homes, beaten, taken to Bhalagwe, and the woman had sharp objects forced into her vagina, along with further beatings". Such inhuman treatments impinge heavily on their dignity. The suffering extended to toddlers<sup>22</sup> and even the unborn. For example, the CCJPZ and LRF (1997:52) records the beating of a pregnant woman who said,

they [the Fifth Brigade] then beat me very hard, even though I was pregnant. I told them I was pregnant and they told me I should not have children for the whole of Zimbabwe. My mother-in-law tried to plead with them, but they shouted insults at her. They hit me on the stomach with the butt of the gun. The unborn child broke into pieces in my stomach. The baby boy died inside. It was God's desire that I did not die too. The child was born afterwards, piece by piece. A head alone, then a leg, an arm, the body – piece by piece.

The cruelty to the unborn is also picked up by Matshazi (2007:83), who records an incident at Pumula Mission where there were mass beatings and shootings of two pregnant girls followed by their bayoneting to reveal the still-surviving foetuses.

It is further reported that there were a number of instances in which people were burnt alive. For example the CCJPZ (1997:87-88) reports some incidents in Solonkwe and Makhonyeni where innocent villagers were burnt alive. At Solonkwe, 22 villagers including women and children were burnt in a hut. At Makhonyeni, the entire community were forced to witness the burning to death of 26 innocent people including women and children. Nyarota (2006:137) also notes that women, children and the elderly suffered a lot. They were beaten, frog-marched, killed for trivial offences and forced to dig their own graves. Those who were killed were left to rot in public<sup>23</sup>. No funerals were to be conducted<sup>24</sup>. Government trucks would after some time come and collect the skeletons, which would be buried in mass graves or thrown into mine shafts. The most popular mine shafts were the Antelope and Legion mines. There are also stories of people being thrown alive and then dying in these mineshafts.

<sup>21</sup> CCJPZ and LRF, 1997:127.

<sup>22</sup> For example CCJPZ (1997:88-89) reports a year-old child who was kicked and broke his back. Another four-months-old baby was also beaten.

<sup>23</sup> CCJPZ (1997:86) reports an incident at Cawunajena where the Fifth Brigade shot some people and commanded that they should not be buried. They were buried only after a year; by that time the bones were already scattered.

<sup>24</sup> The refusal to mourn and give proper burial to victims has serious psychological effects to the surviving families. This is because from the perspective of African Traditional Religion there is a belief that failure to mourn and bury the dead means the spirits of the dead have not rested. The failure to rest of the spirits of the departed means they are roaming around bringing natural disasters and misfortune to the surviving families.

After the beatings, the victims who sustained injuries were not allowed to visit the hospital. Normally after the beatings, the Fifth Brigade would come back the following day to execute the badly injured and throw them into mineshafts (Matshazi, 2007:82).

It is reported that these mass shootings, beatings and the digging of mass graves were intended to instill fear to the victims. In addition to instilling fear, the Fifth Brigade used the tactic of humiliation. For example, school children were ordered to have sex in front of the soldiers<sup>25</sup>, men were forced to have sex with their relatives and donkeys<sup>26</sup>. Further sufferings came in the form of food embargo. Curfews were put in place so that no one was allowed in and out of their region. Meredith (2007:69) notes that government closed all stores, halted food deliveries and drought relief. CCJP (1997:118) reports that parents had to watch their children begging for food which they could not provide. A number of people died as a result of hunger. Those who dared to share their food with the starving villagers were beaten or killed. The message which came from the Fifth Brigade was that, “First you will eat your chickens, then your goats, then your cattle, then your donkeys. Then you will eat your children and finally you will eat the dissidents” (Meredith, 2007:70).

Besides the physical abuse and suffering these vulnerable groups suffered, one has to take into account the psychological trauma that they had to endure. For instance, we read in Lamentations 2:21 of dead bodies of young men and women scattered and lying in the streets. In the context of Zimbabwe, this psychological trauma is evident as victims witnessed some gruesome murders<sup>27</sup> of their beloved ones, the shooting of lined up groups of people as well as other atrocities. For instance, the introduction of the Fifth Brigade saw 55 men and women lined up and shot in cold blood at Ciwale River on 6 February 1983 (Meredith, 2007:67). Inhuman treatment of men and women, such as genital mutilation, has some effects that endure so much that one cannot just quickly brush them away. Some of the victims still complain of problems with erections and urination. Some suffered permanent damages to their reproductive systems and no longer have any expectations of giving birth.

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<sup>25</sup> CCJPZ, 1997:87

<sup>26</sup> CCJPZ, 1997:120.

<sup>27</sup> For example, the murder of David Stephens (Blair, 2002:103-105) and the murder of Phil Laing (Tracey, 2009:284) are typical examples of gruesome murders that are traumatic to the family, neighbours and witnesses.

For the women who were raped, the psychological trauma continues as they look at the children born out of such severe suffering struggling with identity issues. Some struggle to get identity documents as they do not have any parents to assist them getting such crucial documents. Vice President Mphoko notes the importance of such documents as they enable one to go to school, vote, open bank accounts and acquire passports (Netsianda, 2017:2). That a movement towards hope needs first to deal with the reality of the hurt caused is also evident in the communiqué of the Matobo Community Development<sup>28</sup> when they angrily protested against hosting the birthday celebrations of President Robert Mugabe. It clearly states that,

Our hearts are still in grief and awe. We have not yet been given an opportunity to mourn our loved ones ... who were murdered by Mugabe in cold blood and their remains eaten by dogs ... we have children whose fathers are unknown up to today, our daughters and sisters were raped by Mugabe's men.

What makes the Zimbabwean situation more complicated is that a number of those who committed the atrocities still occupy positions of influence. For instance Perence Shiri who was the leading commander of the Fifth Brigade was promoted and is now the Air Marshal and commander of the Zimbabwe Airforce. He is also a member of the Joint Operations Command (JOC) a very powerful department responsible for the security of the state. Secondly Emmerson Munangagwa who was the minister responsible for the Central intelligence was promoted to Vice President. Thus, although the Commission of National Healing and Reconciliation was set up by the Inclusive Government in 2009, it has not been empowered to do much since the perpetrators of the violence still occupy influential positions and would not allow anything that would implicate them to bring justice and closure to the atrocities. Bourne (2011:140) is of the opinion that “removal of violators from positions of authority and recovery of human remains was too embarrassing for the ZANU PF hierarchy to follow up”. In addition to the embarrassment that might come to ZANU PF, there is also the mistrust among the various groups who should champion the process. This mistrust, which includes fear of revenge, is a big impediment to the process of national healing and reconciliation. This may be the reason why Vice President Mphoko confines the programme to reburial of victims and acquisition of birth certificates, thereby avoiding a confrontational approach (Netsianda, 2017:2). However, indications are that there is strong resistance building up with the victims labelling the entire process a perpetuation of the genocide. The victims insist the entire process should take its

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<sup>28</sup> Online: [www.Newzimbabwe.com](http://www.Newzimbabwe.com) *Gukurahundist Mugabe Keep away*, 2017 [Access Date: 6 February 2017].

normal course rather than the government jumping to the finishing line. In the normal process, they argue, the whole programme should be initiated by the victims; perpetrators should be brought to justice, followed by rehabilitation and reconciliation (Mlotshwa, 2017: 1).

In such contexts of severe suffering, it is natural to look expectantly for outside help. In the case of the Judeans, they thought Egypt, Assyria or any of their neighbours would help them. However, no nation came to help them. Instead, such neighbours as Edom enjoyed the fall of Judah. In the Zimbabwean context, the suffering Zimbabweans looked expectantly for military intervention from the international community (especially the super powers such as Britain and America), but no military intervention came, although they sympathised with the suffering masses in Zimbabwe. As for the OAU and SADC, most Zimbabweans see these organisations as toothless bull-dogs, because they did not intervene at the most crucial time of their need.

The other principle worth noting in the analysis of the two contexts is that of invasion. In the Judean 587 B.C. context, it was a foreign army invading Judah, but in the Zimbabwean context it was their own tribes and countrymen invading their own private land<sup>29</sup>, farm<sup>30</sup> and territory<sup>31</sup>. One can also say that in both scenarios there was invasion of privacy sanctioned from an authority.

The question of why this has happened is found in both contexts. This then leads to a serious reflective dialogue of what went wrong. In the Judean context it led to a dialogue with the existing traditions (i.e. Deuteronomistic, Prophetic, Zionist and Wisdom), whereas in the Zimbabwean context, although there are elements of spirituality, the question centres mainly on modern-day democracy and individual rights. Thus, in the Zimbabwean contexts, issues of constitutionality come to the fore (i.e. the failure of the Lancaster House agreements, failure of the willing-buyer willing-seller model, failure to respect the constitution and the judiciary, failure to respect the international law on property rights, failure of the integration of liberation forces into one unit, and failure to professionalise the army).

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<sup>29</sup> In the case of *Murambatsvina*, it is the government officials invading your own private dwelling to demolish it.

<sup>30</sup> In the case of the farm invasions *Hondo yeminda*, it was the war veterans, who saw themselves as a reserve or extension of the army, invading people's farms.

<sup>31</sup> In the case of the *Gukurahundi*, it was the Fifth Brigade, a whole unit of the army, invading the territory of Matabeleland and Midlands province.



## 6.5 Conclusion

In this research we proposed three questions that would direct the analysis. The first question was whether there is hope in the book of Lamentations. The second question focused on the significance of *hesed* and *rahamim* in relation to hope. The third question centred on a proposal for an analogous reading of Lamentations that would foster healing, comfort, identity, dignity and hope in contexts of suffering such as Zimbabwe. In order to answer the above questions, we have proposed a multidimensional approach that recognises the need for literary, historical and theological analyses.

Tying this together, we can say we have consistently argued and sought to prove that the book of Lamentations is not all about doom but hope. The hope is generated by a reflection on the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God. The *hesed* and *rahamim* of God are resources of hope, mostly found within the wisdom literature which makes them applicable to both religious and secular environments. That is, they can be appropriated by both secular leadership and a religious environment. Therefore, the appeal to practically embrace and offer the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God is not confined to religious groups but should include secular groups such as the Zimbabwean government. Thus, the appeal goes to both perpetrator and victim. We also highlighted the fact that even though the book of Lamentations is mainly theodic in nature (as shown in the reading of the Rabbis<sup>32</sup>) it is also antitheodic, thereby offering an opportunity to protest against suffering. Thus, although Lamentations 3 is the focus and plays a central role in the book, one cannot fully understand it unless one unveils the foundational pillars (i.e Lamentations 1, 2, 4 and 5) that it is resting on. One cannot fully appreciate the declaration that the Lord is good (3:25) unless it is read alongside its anchor, the Lord is like an enemy/foe (2:4-5). One cannot fully understand the one word probably spoken by God (i.e אֱלֹהֵי תִירָא) “Do not fear” (3:57) unless it is read with the foundational words אֵין־לֶה מִנְחָם “there is no one to comfort” (1:2, 9, 17<sup>33</sup>). Therefore, the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God have to be read against the backdrop of his anger and acts of destruction. The hope that then emerges has to be evaluated against the background of tears shed. Such hope is not superficial or temporary, but enduring. It offers all due processes to be followed.

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<sup>32</sup> The Rabbis’ reading was highlighted in the Targums, the Rabbinic Midrash and the Theological analysis above.

<sup>33</sup> Similar expressions are also found in 1:7, 16 and 21.



The shedding of tears and protest are essential components in contexts of suffering, since in the process of protesting, healing is offered to victims of violence. On the other hand, clear messages for the call of justice are sent out to those in authority. Since the book of Lamentations is *atemporal* and *ahistorical*, it can be easily appropriated in other contexts of suffering such as the Zimbabwean one.

So the entire argument of this research is that the people of Zimbabwe should be given an opportunity to lament the post-independence era led by Mugabe<sup>34</sup>. This lament, which should take a form of a memorial/commemoration, should reflect on the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God. Such a lament, which eternalises the suffering, has the potential to send a strong message<sup>35</sup> that never again shall it be that a government should unleash an army on an unarmed civilian population; never again shall it be that a government should destroy human habitation without an alternative means of providing accommodation; never again shall it be that a government should sanction invasions on people's farms or properties without any means of compensation. Such an analogous reading has the potential to cement the already existing notions of *hesed* and *rahamim* in the *Ubuntu* concept, which has the potential to offer lasting healing, comfort and hope. Therefore, through a reflection on the significance of the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God, Lamentations becomes a word of hope in contexts of individual and communal loss.

## 6.6 Avenues for Further Research

This research has focused mainly on the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God as resources of hope in contexts of suffering. However, this does not mean that these are the only resources that can be used to generate hope. There are other resources that we have certainly not dealt with in detail such as צדיק, אמונה, טוב and חנן, which are all mentioned in the book of Lamentations. These will need further treatment, since they are not used in an inclusion in the way *hesed* and *rahamim* are used. Going further into the contexts of suffering, one can also notice from the amount of hurt and damage done that there is a need to do thorough research on issues of forgiveness, reconciliation and compensation. With the advent of reconstruction theology, one

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<sup>34</sup> We acknowledge that this kind of lament is beginning to emerge in the form of literature; however the lament has not been related to the biblical book of Lamentations. Furthermore the focus of the literatures coming out of the Zimbabwean crisis has not yet moved to the *hesed* and *rahamim* of God. Examples of such lament literature evinces in the works of Sachikonye (2011), Pilosof (2012), Tracey (2009), Todd (2007) and Bourne (2011).

<sup>35</sup> A strong message of this magnitude would be synonymous to the one that is communicated on the Youth Day of June 16 in South Africa, which condemns the massacre of innocent young students in the time of Apartheid.

would hope that scholars would pursue this route in an effort to build a better Zimbabwe in a post-Mugabe era. Although we have used the multi-dimensional approach as an exegetical method with an analogous reading as a hermeneutical lens, we propose that further research might explore the possibility of combining an analogous reading with a trauma hermeneutic.

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